

Hotel Pro Forma: Nomadic Theatre Without Borders?

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ABSTRACT: This article investigates the relationship between different art genres that merge in the innovative aesthetics of the Danish performance collective Hotel Pro Forma. According to the artistic director Kirsten Dehlholm, the collective's performances present a triple staging: partly of space, partly of performance—finally of theatre as a genre. Four performances will provide examples of their working method: *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor?* (1989) [Why Does the Night Come, Mother?], *Operation: Orpheus* (1993), *Snehvides billede* (1994) [The Picture of Snow White], and *Dobbeltøkesens Hus/XX* (1998) [The House of the Double Axe/ XX]. Each of these performances introduces distinctive artistic ideas based on meticulously planned spatial, visual and musical arrangements, which challenge the ways we see and experience the world. Using the notion of nomadic theatre offered by the Danish critic Erik Exe Christoffersen, this article argues that Hotel Pro Forma is constantly exploring the border between art and life.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article examine les liens entre les différents genres artistiques que la troupe Danoise Hotel Pro Forma entremêle en une recherche esthétique novatrice. Selon le directeur artistique, Kirsten Dehlholm, les représentations du collectif proposent une mise en scène qui comporte trois aspects particuliers : celui de l'espace, celui de la performance/production, et finalement, celui du théâtre en tant que genre distinct. Les exemples illustrant leur méthode de travail sont tirés de quatre représentations : *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor?* (1989) [Maman, pourquoi la nuit tombe-t-elle?] *Operation: Orpheus* (1993), *Snehvides billede* (1994) [Le portrait de Blanche Neige], and *Dobbeltøkesens Hus/XX* (1998) [La maison à double hache/ XX]. Chacune de ces représentations propose des choix artistiques distincts basés sur des utilisations pensées de l'espace, des éléments visuels et des arrangements musicaux, et qui, à leur tour, transforment notre façon de voir et de percevoir le monde. Cet article utilise la notion du théâtre nomade proposé par le critique Danois, Erik Exe Christoffersen, pour soutenir l'idée que Hotel Pro Forma explore constamment la frontière entre l'art et la réalité.

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he independent Danish performance group Hotel Pro Forma has stood out as a unique phenomenon within Scandinavian theatrical life since its establishment in 1985. Its artistic director and founder Kirsten Dehlholm has been internationally recognized for her innovative approach to theatrical performance. Moving away from conventional text-oriented performance, she has developed a unique spatial and visual theatrical style on the basis of her previous experience as an actress and co-director of the artistic group Billedstofteater [Theatre of Material Images] that performed tableaux-based spectacles outside the institutional theatre between 1977 and 1985. The Danish critics Eric Exe Christoffersen and Per Theil place Hotel Pro Forma in the avant-garde tradition of Craig, Artaud, Grotowski, Kantor and Wilson, artists famous for their criticism of western, psychologically oriented “realistic” theatre in favour of displacement, site specific and environmental theatre (Christoffersen 1998a 13, Theil 15).

The very name of the group alludes to a temporal place and thus to the idea of shifting aesthetic principles for each performance. As Dehlholm points out, “I don’t have an ensemble, a repertoire or a permanent stage ... I am a hotel keeper in the sense that I offer my guests the facilities of the building and a framework for their stay—and I tidy the place up afterwards to make room for new projects, new visits” (1996 69). “Hotel” in this context can be seen as the opposite of “home” that represents stability and security. Christoffersen points out that Hotel Pro Forma’s performances deal with the lack of home, and, eventually, the lack of fixed identity, truth, meaning and centre, and thus he defines Hotel Pro Forma’s performances as nomadic theatre where the artist constantly chooses different perspectives, locations and proportions instead of rigid self-centred dramatic concepts (1998b 68). “Pro Forma” in turn questions theatrical form, expresses a search for new forms, and refers to the formal limitations (themes and their enactment) that Dehlholm sets anew for every project. Theatre scholar Lars Qvortup calls Hotel Pro Forma a “formens laboratorium” [laboratory of form], explaining that since Billedstofteater Dehlholm has focused on an exploration of formal conventions and conditions that create the aesthetics of a performance. In particular, he stresses that the orientation towards spatial experiments help Hotel Pro Forma undermine apparently innocent self-positioning and understanding of theatrical space (179).

This article explores the notion that Hotel Pro Forma is—to borrow the word of Christoffersen—nomadic theatre. More specifically I will focus on the role of borders and transgression: what borders Hotel Pro Forma crosses, whether there is a limit to transgression, and how their artistic identity is created. Four performances will provide examples of their working method: *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor?* (1989) [Why Does the Night Come, Mother?], *Operation: Orpheus* (1993), *Snehvides billede* (1994) [The Picture of Snow White], and *Dobbeltøkesens Hus/ XX*

(1998) [The House of the Double Axe/ XX]. These performances question how spatial structures influence the formation of aesthetic experience and self-orientation in the world. In searching for an answer, Hotel Pro Forma focuses on the sensual perception of a place, redefining and overstepping conventional ways of seeing, breaking down central perspectives and playing with optical illusions.

According to Dehlholm, her work can be described as “en tredobbelt iscenesættelse, dels af rummet, dels af forestillingen—og endelig af teater som begreb” [a triple staging, partly of space, partly of performance—and finally of theatre as a genre] (2003 99). Questioning these three major concepts allows Hotel Pro Forma to explore existing theatrical norms and search for new aesthetic expressions. It constantly travels on a journey of discovery never lingering too long in any place, constantly exploring new themes and artistic concepts. Their performances take place on traditional stages, but also in museums, open spaces, planetariums, and buildings with balconies—not to mention on stairs, ceilings and roofs. Being an independent group, Hotel Pro Forma is free to decide where and how the performances will take place. In this way it probes the border between institutional and independent theatre, as well as the border between art and non-art.

The notion of nomadic theatre implies on the one hand constantly shifting geographical and architectonic spaces for performances, physical traveling from one location to another. On the other hand, Hotel Pro Forma creates nomadic art by avoiding fixed theatrical frameworks and rigid boundaries between genres, popular culture, and science. Their performances establish new relationships between the dramatic text and the body, music, light, and space. Moreover, the projects are always somewhat related to traveling through space and time in historical, literary, aesthetic and philosophical contexts. That is why it is so difficult to define Hotel Pro Forma’s artistic identity. Theirs is a journey that always involves change, whether the physical shifting of architectural landscape, or the destabilization of experiences, beliefs, tastes and habits. Nomadic theatre distrusts the existence of universal and timeless aesthetic truths and prefers the experience of temporality and change. Therefore Hotel Pro Forma’s identity is always in a state of transition and transformation.

Dehlholm points out that her project is “at lave et teater der overskrider, skaber passager mellem det meget konkrete og det meget abstrakte, det synlige og det glemte, det skjulte, mellem den autentiske virkelighed og den kunstneriske autoritet” [to create a theatre that trespasses, creating passages between the very concrete and the very abstract, the visible and the hidden or forgotten, between authentic reality and artistic authority] (2005 1). Movement, transgression of boundaries, and a constant oscillation between binary oppositions are essential principles that are repeated in every Hotel Pro Forma performance. The staging of transgression, however, does not completely reject theatrical traditions—it is

always the space-in-between that matters. Instead of overthrowing old aesthetic norms, Dehlholm uses them as a foundation for the renewal of theatre aesthetics. Theatrical traditions provide Hotel Pro Forma with material that can be modified, refreshed or combined with other genres, science, technology and popular culture.

Dehlholm's working method recalls Michel Foucault's thoughts on limits and transgression. In his famous essay "A Preface to Transgression" the French thinker describes their relationship as a flash of lightning in the dark:

Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral that no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies; which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity. The flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity.

(446)

From Foucault's perspective, transgression creates a temporary movement through space, which encompasses old and new territories existing side by side. In the same way, Hotel Pro Forma's nomadic theatre destabilizes the hierarchy of theatrical traditions and aesthetic conventions which are, nevertheless, necessary for the transgression to happen in the first place.

Since the notions of borders and transgression are interrelated, transgressing accepted aesthetic norms and conventional ways of experiencing theatrical performance inevitably involves creating new borders or perhaps pushing the old ones further. Every Hotel Pro Forma project starts with a concept and a set of defining rules that are strictly followed throughout the performance. In fact, Dehlholm has repeatedly emphasized how important it is to create a clear framework for new ideas:

Jeg arbejder altid ud fra et sæt spilleregler, som jeg sætter for mig selv. I princippet kan alt jo lade sig gøre, men det er fundamentalt vigtigt at have en begrænsning, en ramme, at spille med og imod. De forskellige rum giver i sig selv et sæt spilleregler i kraft af deres arkitektoniske indhold.

[I always start working from a set of game rules that I set for myself. In principle everything can be done, but it is fundamentally important to have a limitation, a frame to play with and against. Different spaces provide themselves a set of playing rules based on their architectonic content.]

(qtd. in Christoffersen, 1998a 19)

Transgression in Dehlholm's work not only looks back towards theatrical conventions, but also creates concrete limits grounded in the physical and architectural characteristics of a performance location, its function, and historical context. Paradoxically, precisely this strictly defined framework opens up space for the flight of artistic imagination. Limits provoke and inspire Hotel Pro Forma's creativity. The physical location serves as the basis both for the birth of the artistic concept and for the choice of performers, music and multimedia. Every project is a new interpretation of space and performance aesthetics comprised of sculpture, music, dance and poetry.

One of the earlier performances, *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor* [Why Does the Night Come, Mother] incorporates singing and dancing that dissolve any narrative-centred staging and create a spectacle of simultaneous action rather than a story. The title of the piece is taken from the children's song *Solen er så rød, mor* [The sun is so red, mother] composed by Karl Aage Rasmussen. The song forms one of three independent artistic layers in the performance, the other two being four dancers and poems by Søren Ulrik Thomsen delivered as a voice-over. The layers collide, pass and fold onto each other forming a particular mystical atmosphere. Dehlholm points out that when the songs are sung and the performance starts, the town hall with its closed offices and empty hallways is transformed into a cathedral (2003 114). This proves that there is a reciprocal relationship between the artistic concept and the location since the performance also has the power to transform the normal identity of the place. It presents local metaphysical optics for a spectator where everyday objects and places lose their ordinary characteristics and become a part of the artwork. As Erik Christoffersen notes, location is an artist's self-portrait: "værkene repræsenterer subjektive valg af regler, som retrospektivt forandrer de rum og objekter, som reglene bringes i anvendelse på, og giver dem en særlig historie og identitet ... Denne virkning er resultat af processens valg og fravalg og en form for selvportræt." [the works represent subjective selections of rules that retrospectively change space and objects to which the rules are applied, and provide them with a specific history and identity ... This effect is a result of the selection and rejection process and a form of a self-portrait] (1998a 19). The nomadic concept, therefore, shows how Hotel Pro Forma utilizes the physical, cultural and historical characteristics of the place in order to create a new transitory identity of performance space.

The performance *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor* not only transforms the identity of the place but also the audience's self-positioning in it. Hotel Pro Forma turns the traditional horizontal viewing of the stage head over heels offering a vertiginous bird's eye perspective. The spectators observe the performance from the balconies of Århus Town Hall, a five-storey-tall building. They look down to the bottom of a constructed shaft where the performers walk, sit or lie in a white light that eliminates any perception of depth. When the actors lie on the floor, the effect is of a graphic drawing, but when they sit down or start walking, the

illusion is created of actors swinging in the air, hence invalidating the laws of gravity. Dehlholm outlines two main ideas that shaped this work: the abolition of gravity, and the shift from depth to surface and from a two-dimensional illusion of space to three-dimensional constellations. In her article “Overskridelse af yderlige og inderlige rom” she explains this process the following way:

Øjet danner et to-dimensionalt billede (R2) men hjernen korrigerer, og vi sanser tre-dimensionalt (R3). Midt imellem findes et stadie (R2.5) hvor formen foreligger som en mellemting mellem flade og rum, et reliefstadie som synes mere åbent og afsøgende. Her findes betydningen svarende til en ufærdig, en mindre stabil, mere uafgjort og mere tænkende fase i sansningen. Her befinder forestillingen sig.

[The eye creates a two-dimensional image (R2) but the brain corrects it, and we perceive a three-dimensional image (R3). In between there is a stage (R2.5) where the form appears as a middle thing between flat and space, a liberating stage which seems to be more open and searching. Meaning that corresponds to an unfinished, less stable, more undecided and more thinking phase of perception, is found here. Here is where the performance is located.]

(2)

All Hotel Pro Forma’s other works can be situated in such “a no man’s land.” It is the space in between all possible borders of perception where the performers and spectators are positioned. In this non-fixed environment they are forced to reconstitute their personal identities, constantly transforming them each time the perspective and perception of dimensions shifts. By applying a scientific explanation of visual perception, Dehlholm suggests that the aesthetics of performance are created at the intersection of various genres and scientific disciplines.

Examples of this interaction of art and science can be found in all Hotel Pro Forma’s performances. In *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor*, theatre scholars Britta Timm Knudsen and Bodil Marie Thomsen have noted both the recognition and abolition of scientific laws. They draw particular attention to images of two chairs that are used during the performance. One of them is a real physical object, a transparent inflated chair seen by the spectators from above. In the beginning of the performance it looks like a flat spot on the bottom of the shaft and it takes twenty minutes till the chair is fully inflated and achieves its final form. The other object is a constructed, black, two-dimensional image of a chair whose vertical and horizontal lines are constantly shortened and lengthened throughout the performance. It distorts the traditional perspective from above and creates an optical illusion that the chair is hanging vertically in the white space. According to the Danish scholars, the presence of a flat object in a three-dimensional space distorts our perception of depth, which normally occurs when we look at physical objects. Therefore, the two-dimensional image of a chair complicates our judgment

as to whether we are looking at a flat picture or a real object in a three-dimensional space.

Knudsen and Thomsen point out that the chairs helped to maintain the theatrical principle of destabilized relationship between the two and three dimensions, and vertical and horizontal planes (3).

Hotel Pro Forma plays with the laws of optics destabilizing the visual field and making this process into an aesthetic experience. From being a passive organ the eye is transformed into an active participant in the theatre of illusions where knowledge of physical reality becomes relative. The spectacle undermines the typical understanding of the bird's-eye view and disorients the spectator to the point of dizziness. Objective perception is replaced by a subjective attempt to grasp the images and locate them in space. The act of looking downwards usually implies the superiority of the observer, and the balconies in the town hall indeed provide a kind of panoptical gaze from a tower as Dehlholm describes it: "rummets panoptiske udformning indbyder umiddelbart til at placere sig på øverste etage og tage rummet i øjesyn med et svimlende fugleperspektivistisk blik. Geografien opfordrer til at skabe en forestilling, der i sig selv er perspektiv og tyngdekraft med perceptionen som omdrejningspunkt" [the panoptical formation of space immediately invites positioning oneself on the top floor and observing the space with a gaze from a dizzying bird's eye perspective. The geography urges the creation of a conception, which in itself is a perspective and gravity with perception as the focal point] (2003 114). Likewise, Knudsen and Thomsen compare the Town Hall with its rectangular hall, whose walls are fitted with five balcony landings, connected by stairways to a "classic modern prison interior" evoking the image of Jeremy Bentham's panoptical prison outlined by Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish*.

Foucault analyzes a surveillance society and the privilege of the gaze by describing the development of the prison and its architecture based on Bentham's drawings of the Panopticon where one prison guard is able to keep control of hundreds of prisoners due to the specific architectonic structure of the prison: a tower in the centre where a guard can observe prisoners located in individual cells of a narrow circular building where all the cells have two door openings allowing the light to fall on the prisoners so that they are clearly visible to the guard. Control and discipline of the prisoners depends upon their awareness of being constantly watched. Foucault uses the Panopticon as a metaphorical model to define power structures in contemporary society and its fields of activities including art. Here a central perspective has dominated literature, painting and stage design since its discovery in the Renaissance. *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor* opposes this conventional perception of surroundings and openly challenges the transparency of the panoptical gaze.

In a similar way, Hotel Pro Forma transgresses conventional viewing of a performance on a proscenium stage, offering new ways of perception for the

audience. The theatre is one of the most culturally and historically loaded places, with traditions and conventions that have been formed and transformed throughout the centuries. The conventions make the performance framework extremely rigid and especially difficult to break. After staging the performance *Operation: Orpheus* that takes place on the Main Stage of The Music House in Århus, Dehlholm writes:

Jeg er gået ind i sansningens rum og her bliver jeg lidt endnu. Sansningen skal hjælpe mig igennem det rum, der venter: teaterrummet eller kukkassen. Et belastet rum fyldt med konventioner og forventninger om underholdende svar på små og store spørgsmål. I alle disse år har jeg undveget kukkassen, prosceniumsteatret med de faste publikumspladser.

[I have entered perception's space and I will stay there a little longer. Perception will help me through the space that lies before me: the theatrical space or the black box. A loaded space filled with conventions and expectations about entertaining answers to small and large questions. In all these years I have avoided the black box, the proscenium theatre with its fixed audience seating.]
(2005 2)

Between 1993 and 1999 *Operation: Orpheus* was performed in—among other places—Sydney Opera House in Australia and The Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York. The performance is composed according to the dimensions of the stage and the audience's perspective. Thirteen singers and a dancer move up and down on a large staircase that—with the help of laser light—is transformed from a three to a two dimensional structure. In this way the framed staircase shifts back and forth from an illusion of infinite space to an absolutely flat, depth-less surface, and the performance acquires the characteristics of a painting displayed in front of the audience. The spectators are seated in such a way that everyone can view the stage from a sixty-degree angle, so that no matter where a spectator is sitting, the view of the stage is equally unobstructed. The central perspective is completely undermined because there are no central or peripheral seats for the audience. *Operation: Orpheus* somewhat repeats the principle of non-hierarchical vision used in *Hvorfor bli'r det natt, mor*, only here, instead of the vertical view, Hotel Pro Forma attempts to change the traditional horizontal perspective of theatre seating. Right from the beginning of the performance the spectators are made aware that the usual seating model and view of the stage as the living room without the fourth wall do not exhaust all the possibilities of theatrical staging. *Operation: Orpheus* both transforms the physical gaze and forces the audience to question what makes the show they are seeing a theatrical event.

This project redefines not only conventional theatrical space, but also revalues the limits of theatre performance in general. The text-based linear narrative in *Operation: Orpheus* is displaced by the introduction of operatic elements

and emphasis on visual effects including dance. Music plays an important role in a performance that also tries to redefine the opera genre—a strategy hinted at in the performance title. The word “operation” alludes both to opera and to the surgical procedure that in this project could be described as being performed on the operatic genre itself. The traditional conventions of opera singing are broken by silent pauses filled with choreographic movement and changing light. Dehlholm notes, “det visuelle gestiske element i fremførelsen er lige så vigtig som lydene, sideordnet, men ikke synkroniseret” [the visual element of gesture is equally as important as sounds, parallel, but not synchronized] (2003 118).

Unlike the traditional drama or opera, *Operation: Orpheus* does not focus on the narration of the actual story, but instead creates a spectacle around it. Dehlholm further explains that the performance is “et syngende billede i langsom forandring, der indirekte rummer de store spørgsmål om live, død, og genfødsel. Ikke en historie, men netop en bevægelse” [a slowly transforming singing picture, which indirectly poses the big questions of life, death, and rebirth. Not a story, but in fact a movement] (ibid.). As Theil has pointed out, the poetics of a Hotel Pro Forma work is the poetics of representing the non-representable, the sublime: “Det handler jo for både Orfeus og publikum om at se det Andet i øjnene: Døden som den ruller frem og tilbage på trappen. Transcendensen, som den åbenbares mellem lys og skygge” [Both for Orpheus and the audience it is about looking the Other in the eye: Death as it is rolling back and forth on the stairs. The transcendence that it exposes between light and shadow] (24). To open up this in-between position the performance relies on expressing the verbally inexpressible experience through song, movement and light. Hotel Pro Forma does not tell the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, but rather uses it to access the universal themes of life and death.

Traveling from life to death and back emphasizes the nomadic theatrical concept here reinterpreted in three segments representing Orpheus’s descent to Hell (twenty minutes in the dark); Orpheus’s ascent with Eurydice (twenty minutes in half light) followed by the remembering of the loved one (forty minutes in the light). Each segment offers a different visual perception for the audience and sends it on an exploratory journey. Dehlholm stresses that all the performers wear the same costumes so that any one of them can become either of the mythical figures during the performance. By this device the audience’s sense of the identity of the characters is constantly fractured. At the end of the performance laser beams are directed from the stage into the audience creating waves that literally drown both the singers and the audience in a blue light. As Dehlholm explains, “således hentydes til mytens slutning, der siger at Orfeus’ krop bliver sønderrevet af de vilde Mænader, hans krop bliver kastet i floden, men hans hoved flyder syngende på vandet” [in this way the allusion is made to the end of the myth that says that Orpheus’ body is torn apart by the wild Maenads and thrown into the river while his head floats singing on the water] (2005 3). From a theatrical point

of view, the border between the audience and the actors also becomes fluid, particularly at the end when the blue laser is directed at the theatre hall from the stage. Christoffersen interprets it as the gaze of Orpheus directed towards the audience (1998b 86). The roles become reversed, and the audience now becomes the actor. Hotel Pro Forma displaces the conventional understanding of theatre as a representational space in favour of a phenomenological space where the identity of the audience and theatrical conventions are redefined throughout the creative process of the performance. All this puts into question where the theatrical experience takes place.

In its exploration of the line between art and non-art, *Snehvides billede* [The Picture of Snow White], which is also set in the black box (Kanonhallen, Copenhagen) focuses on the fusion of fantasy and reality, authenticity and a mask. The appearances of the performers raise the question of how identity is related to normality and what constitutes accepted definitions of beauty. According to Dehlholm, the main goal is to confront the traditional understanding of what theatrical space should be and to blur the line between theatre and reality by using the Brechtian “Verfremdungseffekt” [alienation effect] (2003 105).

The performance unsettles the audience from the very beginning because the dwarfs are played by midgets, Snow White is a woman who was abused by her stepmother, the hunters are soldiers, the prince is an opera singer, and the stepmother has a split identity which is made apparent to the audience by her being played by twins, one of whom represents her, the other her mirror image. The performers all present their own understanding of beauty and its importance in their own lives. All these subjective perspectives establish a network of different identities that function both within and outside the theatre walls.

The magic tale is both enacted and disrupted when the dwarfs step on the stage. The audience has numerous moments to reflect upon their perspective on life and on conventional notions of physical beauty. When the dwarfs talk about their own attitudes towards their small size and the way of life that it occasions, they are very positive and open. While they perform, the stage, the props, and the media are used to accentuate or underplay the importance of their size, so there is always a comparison between the physical scales. One example of this is an orange curtain adjusted to the height of the dwarfs in the beginning of the show, making only the lower half of the Snow White visible. Other examples include a big red ball on which a dwarf is balancing, and a video clip of Billy Idol shown in the background while one of the dwarfs is performing his song. At some point Billy Idol’s image in the clip is replaced by the singing dwarf in the same style, so the identity of the singer becomes split between the media image and the live performer. There is also a dwarf watering decorative garden dwarfs that other dwarfs are carrying in small carriages, and a dwarf playing a children’s game, which associates him with childhood. The falseness of this association between small size and childhood becomes apparent when the dwarfs attempt

to peek under Snow White's skirt, unbutton her dress or pretend to suck her breast. The line between the erotic and the childish is blurred along with that between the normal and abnormal.

Theatrical illusion is even more emphasized in the performance of the twins, who are identical and yet different. They develop the theme of images reflected in a mirror, invoking the theatrical mimesis of reality that Dehlholm has always tried to avoid. For her, a mirror motif is "en opmåler af identifikation og som en optisk illusion" [a measure of identification and like an optical illusion] (2005 1). According to Christoffersen, a mirror image does not belong to reality but creates its own world with its own values that are valid only within its limits, which is the world of fiction and deceit (1998b 98).

The performance, by reinterpreting the magic tale, calls into question conventional construction of believable characters. Instead of a single and coherent story line it presents fragmented stories performed by each character about his or her own self which are reminiscent of but distinct from the original tale. Therefore, the performance creates a double space of theatre and reality within which the characters move back and forth. Christoffersen points out that the performance comprises a double staging: the audience experiences the magic of the show from each character's perspective, but its voyeuristic gaze is also observed and reflected by the performers (1998b 97). There is, however, a third theatrical dimension—the spectators gazing at each other across the stage, since they are seated in two long rows mirroring each other with a stage between them. The audience becomes a part of the staging, which reminds us that people enter roles and create their desired images through the performances of everyday life, thus expanding the notion of theatre beyond the conventional theatre house.

If *Snehvides billede* is occupied with theatrical illusion and exploration of subjectivity, the project *Dobbeltøkstens Hus/ XX* [The House of the Double Axe/ XX] explores in more detail an aspect of gender and the historical shift of aesthetic norms in the Middle Ages and contemporary pop-culture. The title of the play is another name for the labyrinth, the female realm representing the way in and out of the womb according to mythological interpretations (Cippola 18-19). The double "x" defines both an axe and the female chromosome. Therefore, the main spatial structure of the performance is a labyrinth projected on the floor. The audience is seated on an elevated platform in order to observe the performance from above, but not from the dizzying heights of the balconies in Århus Town Hall. This is a good example how Hotel Pro Forma uses the same space as *Snehvides billede*, the black box (in Kanonhallen, Copenhagen), to accentuate different perspectives. *Dobbeltøkstens Hus/ XX* stresses the contrast between the flat horizontal surface and the vertical axis of the performers that enter and exit the labyrinth.

Dehlholm explains that the labyrinth is a moving principle for the Danish singer Dicte and the seven female dancers. The image of the labyrinth also refers

to the horizontal image of the world in the Middle Ages. Seven performance scenes represent the seven days during which God created the world. Each scene is based on the combinatorial principle, which refers to the medieval conception of the planets, heavens and hells, magic numbers, days of the week, geometry and insanity (Hotel Pro Forma 1998b 8). Flashes of contemporary life, like bar codes and the performance of Latin texts by Dicte, underline the commonality of societies past and present. The images from our life today are made mysterious and seem to become a part of the medieval realm, and vice versa. The labyrinth becomes a space in which to reflect on history and our shifting perception of the universe. Dehlholm comments that in this performance she attempts to be aware of the postmodern world today where the central perspective loses its privilege to multiple horizons and fragmented levels of meaning. The space becomes disorienting like a labyrinth. She explains that we have entered into the century of cyberspace and digital media and this opens new opportunities to artists:

Men et nyt—og gammelt—rum åbner nu dørene for os. Det gamle rum er universet, det nye er cyberspace. Uden universet, ingen cyberspace. Det nye rum har ingen vægge, gulv eller loft. Ingen arkitektoniske dimensioner eller historiske traditioner at forholde sig til. Her findes ikke længere ét sted, samfundets eller verdens centrum, hvorfra det suveræne menneske kan iagttage sin omverden. Samfundet—og teknologien—har skubbet mennesket ud i periferien, hvorfra det kan springe fra iagttagelsesposition til iagttagelsesposition. Kan bevæge sig uhindret rundt i et dynamisk rum, hvor enhver er bruger og betragter og selv bestemmer over det næste skridt. Hvor adgang til rummet er et IT-kort. Jo flere kort på hånden du har, jo flere rum kan du åbne. Hele verdensrum får du adgang til.

[But a new—and old—space opens its doors to us now. The old space is the universe; the new one is cyberspace. There is no cyberspace without the universe. The new space has no walls, floor or ceiling. It has no architectonic dimensions or historical traditions to relate to. Here there is no longer one place, the centre of society or of the world, from where the sovereign human being can observe the surrounding world. Society—and technology—have pushed human beings out to the periphery, from where they can jump from observation point to observation point. They can move around unhindered in dynamic space, where everyone is user and observer and independently decides the next step to take; where the entry to space is an electronic card. The more cards you have in hand, the more spaces you can open. You have admission to the whole world's space.]
(2005 4)

In *Dobbeltøksens Hus/ XX* the labyrinth is a space that links the medieval understanding of the world—which was very clearly defined and categorized into planets, heavens and hells, sins and virtues—to contemporary cyberspace, a space so overwhelming that comprehending its totality becomes impossible. The labyrinth also introduces the notion of the mystical feminine since all the

performers are women, and the labyrinth is guarded by an eighth female dancer dressed in armor, representing the guardian of the labyrinth. The Performance Program (by Dehlholm) points out that the mystery of sex and power emerges clearly and threateningly when the other sex is excluded for a short moment (Hotel Pro Forma 1998b 7). The labyrinth, then, also refers to the limits of female space, yet its confusing passages are not always visible to the audience and can only be guessed at from the stylized movements of the performers. Their movements create a labyrinth on the floor, but most of the time the labyrinthine paths are repeatedly covered by white and black patterns projected on the same spot by a double-scroller. They change into labyrinthine city maps, bar codes, and building plans. The difficulty in discerning the pattern of paths, due to the shimmering lines—quite apart from the bewilderment inherent in the labyrinth—creates the experience of confusion and lack of total perspective, leaving the audience to wander in the labyrinthine meanings of the images.

All four Hotel Pro Forma projects present original artistic concepts that explore spatial possibilities from both the performers' and the audience's perspective. Thus the nomadic principle applied by Hotel Pro Forma is double-sided: on one hand it defines the shifting relationship between aesthetics, theatricality and space, and on the other between the spectacle and the spectator. Conventional perceptions of art and self-understanding are therefore transgressed and tested in each performance. Thus Hotel Pro Forma assumes an in-between position offering new ways of experiencing the body in space without completely rejecting traditional ways of staging.

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