

Godless banister falsehood

## **Axelborg's free fall entices both the onlooker and Hotel Pro Forma down into the deep of an Arabian Dehlholm**

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*By Anne Middelboe Christensen, Information, 14 February 2006*

Strange just how physical Kirsten Dehlholm can make her abstract thoughts – even the Arabian ones! When, as an onlooker, one is hanging out over the banisters at Axelborg gazing down into the deep of Dehlholm, one's balance nerve is, at any rate, constantly being challenged. Ooh, insistent vertigo: One is unable to look over the edge and focus at the same time on the films on the floor four storeys below – or seven. It's like reading a book on a bus: Shift of focus + bending movement = nausea.

Axelborg, though, is a phenomenal venue for theatre. A find of a tower with enchanting galleries on each floor, a return to an aesthetic of the year 1918, with a grandiose column of air at its centre – and then that dome. It is just like Kirsten Dehlholm to insist on using a monumental structure for a performance about perspectives and relativity. For the performance *The Algebra of Place* apparently wishes to examine what precisely this location can reflect if combined with a figurative narrative about Arabian singularities: Axelborg + Arabian images = Ursa Major seen, as it were, diagonally from above.

### **Razor and bazaar**

Physically, Axelborg is transformed into an Arabian hotel. Here, the onlooker becomes a guest who checks in and makes use of the hotel's exotic facilities. But no. Not a word about the Koran – and absolutely nothing about illustrations. This film performance is only abstract art, although the relation to the Arabian world is its tower-foundation. But, godless or not, religion does appear in the form of images each time a woman shrouded in black flutters across the surface of the picture like a black spectre in broad daylight: Scarf – video camera = fictional distortion.

The subtleties of the Arabian narrative tradition are incessantly in action. Nothing is as it appears. The female receptionist with swept-back hair and naked skin shaves herself smoother than smooth under the arms in a juicy zoom. The images coalesce. A film glides across the floor, while an upright film-screen on a circular base catches snatches of pictures in flight. Time is erased. Virtuality is exactly what it wants to be: Dane + narrative logic = bazaar delusion.

The film-maker Joachim Hamou has been to the weirdest crannies of the Arab world. He sees things that resemble authentic reporting – as when he grotesquely points his camera at six sisters sitting on the beach round a plastic table, waiting to be served food. And, conversely, he creates fiction out of the most drab aspects of reality – as when he lets the film run during a stretch of road with petrol-fumed swaying palms in a corresponding infinity: Stasis + beauty of images = falsehood.

### **Petrol fumes and DJ pop**

*The Algebra of Place* is a performance that is more installation than film – and an installation that is more film than performance. Despite the woman who sprawls on the floor, right on the edge of a beach you would like to walk along at sunset (if it had not been for the nausea, of course). And then, constantly changing music by DJ Ishtar, who presents Arabian pop music with hard female hand and soft voice – and, on rare occasions, a relief-minimalistic synthesizer. The Arabic chrrr sounds and dj-dj-dj sounds pervade the room like incense. But alas: Incense + head nod = queasy stomach.

### **Sultriness and lies**

The images are just as precise as they are false: When the woman lies on the floor reaching out for her own shadow, the shadow also reaches out for

her. But she does not catch it. Arabian life cannot be grasped as simply as that. And the lying light forms beautifully geometric patterns as from a magic kaleidoscope: White + grey = gold.

In terms of dramaturgy, however, there is not very much Arabian Nights magic. The narrative disappears into patterns and images. The hotel setting pales. And even though the performer Aino Junka has a captivating intensity in her beautiful arms, as she lies there throwing dice upwards and sideways. The minutes silt up,

and reflection is weakened, while the hotel day is on the wane. Not even the sultry escort girl can be dispensed with. The intensity of the programme's fine words cannot immediately be recognised.

Even so, a wordless, Arabian feeling has insinuated itself into one's body. Strangely physical. The elementary algebra has been magnified: Axelborg + Arabian = Dehlholm-magical.

Translated by John Irons