

THEATRE BOOK An inspiring, pictorially-striking and uncalculated book about Hotel Pro Forma

Head-spinning journey through space

'WOW!' You feel a bit self-conscious. It is a truly superb book that the Danish Architectural Press has published about Hotel Pro Forma's theatrically trail-blazing career over two decades. That was only to be expected, for there has always been a certain style and razor-sharp consistency about the Hotel's exploration of the boundaries of what theatre can be. 'Dust wow! Dust' was the typical title of a Pro Forma performance, created by the hotel's manager, director and performance pioneer Kirsten Dehlholm. Nothing less than the first omnimax theatre on offer here in Denmark.

Here a man and a woman are hung upside down under the dome of the Planetarium, each in a gleaming glass box. On their lift-shuttle through the universe, from dust to dust, accompanied by the words 'Someone else dreamt me'.

Hotel Pro Forma's highly diverse forms of performance theatre thus make up a head-spinning journey through space and universes, visions and realities. And with a visual power that is unrivalled anywhere in Danish theatre, as documented here by Roberto Fortuna's incomparable photographs, suffused with magic. Right from the stairwell of the Copenhagen Business School, where the spectators had earth and sky turned upside-down in 'Why Does Night Come, Mother' to the oblong interior of The Ark, set in motion by rows of rowers with magically luminous oars, to the Church of St. Nikolaj, where 'jesus_c_odd_size' unfolded like a motley sacral market.

THE ENTIRE vast journey through space has the former drama critic and brilliant pen-pusher Per Theil as our guide. He takes us in a knowledgeable and stimulating way from a vignette of Dehlholm as the great collector of threatened species – objects, people, texts – for her museum. Occasionally, the text is a bit too insidely loyal, but the grand gestures also apply to Professor Lars Qvortrup's thought-provoking and wide-ranging perspectivalising of Hotel Pro Forma's activities. This goes in a direct line from Einstein to Dehlholm.

One thing, however, is clear – having enjoyed, leafed through and read the book. There is hardly anything

which Hotel Pro Forma is not: a caring place for form, a laboratory that breaks new ground, a journey through space and time, a popular art theatre, a wonderful refuge for threatened objects and species, a central location in 20th century attempts to understand a new cosmological order, etc. At times, it becomes too airy-fairy and lacks substance. There is too little concrete analysis that would enable something succinct to be said.

It is a brilliant touch when Theil describes the Hotel as a collectors' museum, but what, more precisely, does the collection comprise – what figures, what spaces manifest themselves for an overall, retrospective look? In the same way, Qvortrup characterises the works on the basis of an 'aesthetics of interference' – a neatly schizophrenic wish to create order and see patterns. Dehlholm is indeed a divinely inspired 'patternist', but what, more exactly, are the patterns that emerge from the performances?

It is inspiring – and justified – when theatre is let out of its cage. But controversies are lacking. Hotel Pro Forma has not been the only player – it could perhaps have been appropriate to place it within an international performance and theatrical context.

In the same way, Pro Forma as being precisely a hotel is somewhat underexposed – for each performance emerges out of a cooperation with invited artists, even though Kirsten Dehlholm is the unifying, innovative and impetual force. That she is a wise woman is something you get a strong impression of when reading her own account of the works, which is somewhat redundant, seeing that Theil has already done the rounds – and without the mental squirming and the concrete observation that Dehlholm is otherwise able to exhibit. We are not invited into the artistic cuisine.

On the other hand, we really get around in this book, which – for better or for worse – has the touch of a *festschrift*. And there is plenty to celebrate. It is both affirmative for life and for art how Hotel Pro Forma has been consistently able over the years to challenge our senses, thoughts and visions

BY MONNA DITHMER