

Extract of

A PLAY BETWEEN EYE AND SPACE

Reflections on Hotel Pro Forma's *The Algebra of Place*

by Christian Pagh

Two things fill my mind with ever-renewed and ever-increasing admiration and awe the more frequently and persistently I think about them: the starry sky above me and the moral law within me. For both it applies that I am not to seek them outside my field of vision and make them the object of speculations, as if they were enclosed in darkness or situate them in the transcendental; I see them immediately before me with the awareness of my existence.

Immanuel Kant

To become adult is to relearn how to play with the seriousness of the child.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The performance declares itself to be like a hotel: a kind of interspace where the experience of location is annulled. But at Hotel Pro Forma one is set to reflect on the experience of location. So one has to experience waiting. Rather than expect to experience. For it is a question of the *algebra of place*.

Thought can try out possibilities in the tension between the world of images and one's own world, from which one's concepts of the Arabian have their origin. *It is there – but what is it really?* The performance offers room for this playing with notions.

The algebra of place is a performance about the structural experience of location. A presentation of the factors that come prior to sight. The architecture of sight stretched out by time and space – as a form, in its constant formation enabling human experience.

Again and again, one meets a perpetually compelling surface. That behind the one surface there is another does not, however, remain an old postmodern point where one finds oneself trapped in a hopeless play of superficiality.

The central thing in Hotel Pro Forma's universe is the relation between surface and the specific space. The surface is constantly playing with the three dimensions of the space. The play is set in motion when the woman makes a cut in the surface of the floor en route. Or when the white cupola of the ceiling is projected onto the floor. Or most tellingly: when the woman is raised, apparently slowly, magically, from the floor – until her shadow goes its own way and ends by holding its thrower in its hand. The optical illusion is, however, not just a ruse. It is something that draws attention to how the surface of the images exerts an influence on three-dimensional space. When we ascend the staircase to the topmost balconies, we look down on the other audiences that look down into this strange *laterna magica*. We see the emergence of a staged, superficial representation of 'the Arabian'. At the same time, though, we are reminded of how this surface exerts an influence on our own reality. And that the Arabian world also really exists behind the performance.

The Algebra of Place gives way to an abandonment to the texture of surface. But it thereby precisely insists on the fact that it has not yet been decided how we are to interpret it.

The Algebra of Place becomes a tribute to the play between eye and space. A tribute to the performance and the notion: to what we physically imagine we can see – such as a performance, for example – and to the power of the human faculty of the imagination. The basic structure that enables man to grasp the world with the senses and at the same time see further. In short: the play that opens up in the encounter with time and space.

Towards the end of the performance the surface of the images takes us down a staircase to a deserted corridor where a small boy, dressed as an adult, is just as quietly and seriously building with bricks – a tall, fine construction. His abandonment to the process of building is complete, serious. When the work collapses, he doggedly starts all over again. The sound track is an Arabian-inspired version of *It is a man's world*, where it is said that 'a man is lost in the wilderness'. The performance allows the onlooker to stand *lost in the wilderness* and assigns the task: play along seriously. But do so without fear. As it says in the programme. *Don't be afraid – I don't know either.*

The Algebra of Place insists on creating a playful universe totally engrossed in the serious, fearless playing with the wilderness of the performance. Thus, in Kantian style, the political-ethical and the aesthetic-sensual are held apart as two separate domains. The

aesthetic experience of the performance is allowed to be an experience in its own right. By virtue of its form, the play resists being put in its place by the moral requirement of usefulness or that of science of truth. It points – as in Kant – to the potential in the free, playful nature of the performance. In this lies a togetherness that comes prior to agreement or disagreement about how reality is to be interpreted. In this lies an experience of the common conditions of possibility that predate our subjectivity: time and space.

But the two spaces in Hotel Pro Forma – and Kant – are definitely separate. At the same time, they already always stand in relation to each other. Like a recurring challenge to be able to differentiate between various ways of relating. A challenge to *look* time and time again – without automatically knowing what the seen means or involves. And time and time again, *afterwards*, to relate – with Kant's term – *in adult fashion* – to existence. To assume personal responsibility for how the experience of the aesthetic is to be transformed into interpretation, action.

The Algebra of Place, as all performances by Hotel Pro Forma, deals with oneself taking a close *look* at sight. About time and time again being obliged to take the trouble to investigate the many possible combinations between man and materiality, between notion and reality. About the fact that the whole world has not yet been decided. About looking with the meticulous fascination that typify the child and the researcher: about the world constantly having to be rediscovered.