



# Getting the world back - about working in Hotel Pro Forma's gravitational field

*By Morten Søndergaard*

It happened again. You came to visit me, and the universe divided itself into two. One where you came to visit me, and one where you did not come to visit me. Afterwards we sat in my kitchen for a little while we talked about how marvellous it is that the universe splits in two all the time, and we drank a cup of tea in the universe where you had come to visit me.

*Pro forma*: It shall be sent in advance. *Pro forma*: Legal; a letter, a document, a text sent in advance, before the goods arrive. *Pro forma*: The potential, the preliminary, the possible, that which regards form. What if *pro forma* worked like words, we say the words, and we expect the contents to arrive a little later.

We hope that the contents that the words express, will reach the recipient. We entrust the words. We burst into words: Yes. We'll forward. We'll meet over there.

Yes. We are in safe hands and we lean back in our seats ready to be moved. For form's sake. No. For our own sake. Something's coming, something will come. It will come. We are in no hurry. It is not there yet. It's about to come. Becoming. It is on its way.

I have written lyrics for Hotel Pro Forma three times. I thought it was only possible to inhabit the hotel once. But I have gone through the back door and sat in the lobby and waited for a good chance. And it came. First in the performance called *Site Seeing Zoom*, then with *Ellen* and then *Cosmos +*. I wrote and I worked with Kirsten Dehlholm. I wrote the texts in short intense periods, and then was gently asked to shut up again. I wrote a lot. I gave everything I had. Because that's how it is when you walk into Hotel Pro Forma: you give everything you have. That's just how it is. It's all about life and death, no, actually there are far more important things at stake. It's about putting everything at stake. It's about getting everything back.

That's how I see a collaboration with Kirsten Dehlholm and all the other wonderful people who work at Hotel Pro Forma. Probably, it is in the steam rising from the big pot of magical soup cooked by Kirsten Dehlholm that spreads all over the place, but it is also in all the amazing young (and old) elves and demons who frequent this alluring gravitational field, which represents Hotel Pro Forma.

You want to give your life to be there and you do it. Because you get something back.

You get yourself back in a new way. You glance into a soft troll mirror, and you get wiser.

*Site Seeing Zoom 2001 (Roberto Fortuna)*

Because here they are working on the most important things; in the storerooms, at the desks, in the laboratories, at the lighting consoles and at the mixers – in the cosmos kitchen. You learn something about everything – and then about the rest.

And what is it that you learn as a writer by being in this strange gravitational field at Hotel Pro Forma, Strandlodsvej 6B, 2300 Copenhagen S? I can only speak for myself, so I will do that. I have experienced that I get my words back in ways I could not have imagined.

*Pro Forma:* Something is sent in advance. I think about it in the same way as sending drones and probes into these areas of reality that would otherwise not have been accessible. Something is out of reach, and something can only be explored using experiments, studies, instruments, and prostheses, because we don't yet have the language or the knowledge needed to be able to map these areas.

That's what art is: Precise and careful formulations of the not yet formulated. When I think of my texts inside this magical crystal ball that is Hotel Pro Forma, then I think of my texts as something originating from the world, the world I know and have experienced. I get my words from others. That's how it is with words. I have experienced others using the words or I have them read, or otherwise, I intercept them. I've overheard them from the world. And now I get them back again – in a different way.

When the texts appear in the performances, it's like the words have been sent in advance. They have been sent into a space I do not know, and they come back charged with a refreshing strangeness. They have become part of rituals that seem obvious, but also strange. The audience and I arrive a little later, but it is as if we arrive exactly on time. We are displaced to the right place.

It is as if the words make sense in the moment, they are spoken by the performers or the children, or by strange voices on recordings made entirely elsewhere in the world (as was the case in *Site Seeing Zoom*).

We arrive at the words again. The words sound like future echoes. The words are sent into the future and have returned to us in the same way, as an echo when it bounces off a surface. We have gotten the world back again. But the words are now a little bit foreign to us, they have lost their innocence. What happened to them? How do the words sound now?

It's a great experience for a writer to hear another person say his or her words. How do they sound in someone else's mouth? What happened to them? Can they withstand the distance – the distance between the author and another human being?

The same happens in a translation, a strangeness creeps in, the words sound different and take place in the space in a different way. The translation adds and subtracts at the same time. But the most intricate occurrence with translation is that your words have been through another person, another person has considered every word, each has been through his or her mind and body, and they have received a new life. They are the same and alien at the same time.

The actor or performer is a translator. A translator of text and of words and of meaning. As an author, you are curious: How does it sound now? What happened to my text? How does it sound inside the future?

It's Christmas. I am in Milan. I am walking on the street. I'm in my own thoughts. Suddenly I hear a desperate cry coming from above me. Someone shouts: *Attenzione, attenzione!* Beware, beware! I look up and take a quick step to the side. Seconds later, a flowerpot with a poinsettia smashes onto the asphalt right where I would have taken my next step. What an unfair death: to have the skull crushed by a poinsettia! And I just hate poinsettias ...

I wrote that experience into the text of *Site Seeing Zoom* and had forgotten about it until the evening of the premiere. We were a standing audience watching the performance. At a particular instance, a technician discreetly guided me away from the spot where I was standing. And the scene repeated itself: A poinsettia drops down onto the floor right where I had been standing before. A small mechanism on the ceiling of the venue had triggered four identical poinsettias simultaneously. What a wonderful *déjà vu*. Kirsten Dehlholm, and her team behind the show, had made my little everyday story come into being in the middle of the performance.

That is how I imagine what is constantly going on. That is the core of *Hotel Pro Forma*: The specific is made abstract and the abstract is made specific, so we get to understand the world. So that we can perceive the world in a different way. Words and thoughts and images have been sent in advance, and as the audience, we have now arrived at what the world could also be.

We are sent in advance.

*Translation Anna Maria Orrù and Morten Søndergaard*