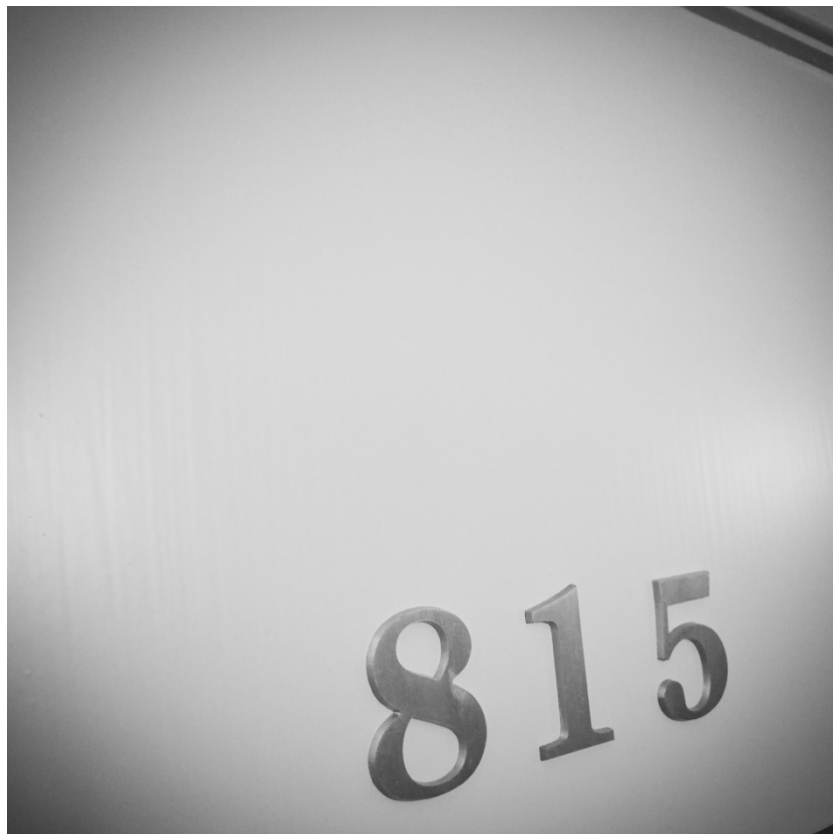


Hotel Room Encounters

A laboratory for transformative pedagogy

GIORGIO CONVERTITO



ABSTRACT

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<p>In this thesis I look at some of the ethical issues involved in one-to-one practices, observing how they offer a uniquely compress example of dialogical, experiential and transformative pedagogy, providing the most obvious representation of the meeting with the Other and with the otherness within oneself. I look in particular at the idea of 'perceived obligation', the way we respond to a situation as we think we are expected to by an authority figure. Another crucial concept of this research is that of safe space / brave space, a space where risks are acceptable and even welcome, and where a transformative experience can take place. I use Van Manen, Antila and Arao&Clemens to advocate that a safe space cannot be just a container for rules and that there are no universal procedures that can guarantee safety, suggesting instead a dialogical approach. The proposal is that a caring approach to ethics, combined with the integrity, insight, generosity and sensitivity of the practitioner, and a mutual interest and respect for the material, are the ingredients that create a safe environment for learning through transformation.</p> <p>I use my artistic project "Hotel Room Encounters" as a laboratory where the issues mentioned above can be observed and studied. Most of this research is based on observing my own personal experience, but also on comments made by the participants during the encounters as well as in the notes they wrote and left to me after the encounter. The project aims to create a situation favourable to the meeting with the unknown and to a transformative experience. In accordance with Rancière's and Biesta's idea that in order to learn and grow, one has to move out of one's comfort zone, I tried to create the conditions for a safe discomfort and for a gentle push of boundaries; a move into the risk zone designed to set the conditions for an unusual experience and potential for learning something about oneself. I also look at the "Hotel Room Encounter" as improvisational and somatic practice, using my experience in such practices to guide me through the experience of meeting the unknown, especially within the format of one-to-one participatory performance, with what I had no previous experience as a practitioner. I also briefly link this work to my experience of somatic practices and eventually reflect on my positioning as a middle-aged white man in society.</p>			
ENTER KEYWORDS HERE 1-1 (one with one) performance, performance art, intimacy, hotel room, safe space, brave space, participatory performance, perceived obligation, transformative pedagogy, dialogical pedagogy, experiential pedagogy, improvisation, somatic practices			

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Research

This written thesis work focuses its attention on my final artistic pedagogical project “Hotel Room Encounters” (HRE), but it is in effect a reflection on a process that spans over the whole two years of the Dance Pedagogy Master program. The first ideas and concepts for HRE were born within a workshop that took place in the autumn of 2019, an experience I am describing in chapter 2. The pedagogical ideas and approach that are HRE’s intellectual base come from the discourse carried out throughout the various courses offered by the program and are presented in chapter 4. The research on the concept of safe space/brave space, also described in chapter 4, was part of group project within the Dialogical Pedagogy course in the spring of 2019, that led to the first reflections about the impossibility to establish universal procedures that guarantee a safe space and therefore the necessity to apply an alternative approach based on dialogue. The process of reflection and study during the development of HRE resulted in aesthetic that turned out to be instrumental in identifying the ethical issues involved in one-to-one performances. Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to analysing those ethical issues to articulate the reasoning behind the aesthetic choices with the intention to reveal, both to myself and to the reader, the larger picture behind the controversial façade of the project.

The findings I present in this thesis work, are the result of personal reflections collected throughout the study of the issues and problematics that emerged during the process, and of the analysis of the work I have done post-event. Along the way an artistic adventure into an unknown territory has transformed into a laboratory for dialogical, experiential and emancipatory pedagogy. The term laboratory aptly describes the experimental nature of the project, as I went into the first tests and later into the more mature version, with more questions than certainties. I intend to analyse the ramifications and the connections of the encounters in the realm of pedagogical practices, but also briefly entering the somatic practices realm and the socio-political realm, observing the ethical issues especially related to the **one-to-one** dynamic. In terms of post-event findings, I will describe my observations on phenomena that

manifested during the encounters, such as perceived obligation and the internal dialogue the visitor experiences while in the room.

1.2. Preamble

Previously to this thesis project, I only had experience of participatory and one-to-one performances as an audience member, and although I always found one-to-one dynamics extremely intriguing, I never had the opportunity to explore or study this form of performance art. I reckon the lack of previous experience had a fundamental role in the choice I made for my thesis work: after over twenty years of career in the dance field, I really wanted to create a situation where I could meet the unknown and create the opportunity for myself to learn something radically new. The project started from a rather raw idea and, through several phases of study and reflection, took the shape and form of an encounter in a hotel room. In a very natural way, the self-explanatory Hotel Room Encounters became the title of the work.

HRE is a one-with-one “performance”, and I place the word performance in quotation marks often throughout this writing because, although it still utilizes some of the stipulations of a performer/audience contract, the collaborative nature of the work makes it divert quite a bit from the idea of a show or a presentation. I am adopting Petros Konnaris’ term ‘one-with-one’, also referred to as 1-1, rather than one-on-one or one-to-one. Konnaris (2017) analyses the semantic relevance in the use of different prepositions, and how it affects the hierarchical power relation between the two subjects: “A nail *on* the wall. A nail *to* the wall. A nail *with* the wall” (p.35). According to Konnaris (2017) the preposition *with* suggests a relationship of mutual exchange and collaboration, as well as a multi-dimensionality, as opposed to a single direction as the prepositions *to* or *on* indicate. One-with-one in my opinion better describes the interaction taking place in the HRE, collaborative more than participatory, multi-dimensional rather than mono-directional, proposing that the exchange between the two agents happens in the space in between them, appreciating that there is more at play than the couple of subjects involved.

As this research focuses on interaction between two subjects in an isolated environment, and projects its problematics and findings beyond the realm of performance into the pedagogical, I will often interchange the terms used to identify said subjects:

Host – Visitor

Performer – Audience

Practitioner – Participant

Teacher – Pupil

while keeping in mind that in this project the separation between the roles is often vague, and the two subjects take on those roles on different level, interchange them, feedback on them, blur them.

1.3. Introduction to the artistic project

“Hotel room encounters” are one-with-one encounters that happen inside a large fancy hotel room, where the host, who wears a white bathrobe and slippers, is meeting one visitor at the time. Each encounter has an approximate max duration of one hour, but the participant is free to leave the room at any moment. For the duration of their stay the visitor gets to decide what happens during the encounter. The following was the text used to announce the event on the Uniarts website and on social medias:

“Hotel room encounters” are one-to-one encounters that happen inside an actual hotel room. This project explores the meeting with the other and with the otherness within oneself. The practice of an unknown encounter makes us deal with expectations, surprises, tension and the negotiation of power and boundaries. It also ultimately gives us a chance to meet ourselves in an unusual way and possibly learn something new about ourselves. These encounters are metaphors or compress examples of pedagogical practice. The project is Giorgio Convertito’s thesis work for his master’s degree in dance pedagogy. Each encounter is with one participant at the time, who has an active role in the creation of the encounter.

The interested participants signed up for their time slot and consequently received an email with the following text:

You are receiving this message as you have chosen to participate in “Hotel Room Encounters”. Please come at the time of your booking to the Sokos Original Hotel Helsinki in Kluuvikatu 8 and ask at the reception to see Giorgio Convertito. Once you are given the room number and the key card to access the lifts, proceed to the room floor and knock at the door.

At this point the participant had very little information on the type of event they signed up for, nor the duration of the encounter was specified. Few moments after they knocked at the door of my room, I would open and ask them if they would like to come in. I then would invite them to leave their coats, bags and shoes in the room entrance, while trying to ease them in by making a relaxed conversation, for example asking them about their experience of coming to the hotel and interacting with the receptionists. Afterwards I would proceed to introduce the room to them, showing all the different features and amenities, to eventually ask them to choose a place where they wanted to sit down. Once the visitor was comfortably seated and settled, I would introduce the rules of the encounter, with some kind of variation of the following lines:

As you chose to enter the room, you may also choose to leave at any point. After an hour, the hotel phone will ring, which means the time for the encounter is up. For as long as you choose to stay, the room is yours to do as you please. I am also here at your service to satisfy your wishes. I will though take care of my own boundaries, as well as the boundaries of the room. Anything that happens in here will remain confidential, unless I have your consent to refer to the events of the encounter for the purpose of my research, always anonymously. Whatever happens from now on is up to you.

The encounters progressed with different dynamics, forms and events, and some of them continued a while longer after the phone rang. At the end of the encounter, upon saying goodbye, the participants were given a card and an envelope for them to write down their afterthoughts or comments. This was an optional task and they had the possibility to share those thoughts with me by leaving the envelope at the reception desk, but with no obligation to do so.

1.4. About documentation

I recall that the main topic of conversation of one of the encounters was the challenge of documenting a project like this one. It is in a way unfortunate that there is no record of what happened during the encounters, except in the memories of the one who participated. Because of the intimate and sensitive nature of these encounters, I decided not to have any audio or video documentation, as I thought the presence of any recording device would introduce a voyeuristic and/or exhibitionistic element to the dynamic of the encounter. For this reason, the only thing close to a documentation of HRE is this thesis work.

In the preparation of the project I was made aware of the importance to provide some kind of aftercare for the participants, some ways for them to process their experiences and possibly communicate it to someone else. At first, I considered having an assistant, somebody who would welcome the guests and accompany them to the room, possibly giving them the rules of the room. The same assistant could have provided an aftercare by picking up the guest after the encounter and giving them a chance to discuss and comment on the events that had occurred. Pretty soon I realized I discarded this idea for several reasons, primarily the fact that the guest would have had to establish two different relationships, one with the host and one with the assistant, that way almost splitting the experience in two. I also anticipated it would create a hierarchy with the assistant becoming the middle tier. Finally, I chose instead to hand to each of the participants, upon saying goodbye, a card and an envelope for them to write down their afterthoughts. I told them this was something they could do if they wanted and they could share those thoughts with me if they felt like. I emphasised they were under no obligation to do so. These cards, originally designed as a form of aftercare and post encounter reflection, became the residues of the encounters and also the only form of physical documentation. Out of the total of 28 encounters, between the October and the January ones, I got back 15 cards, some were left at the reception of the hotel and some were handed to me later on. These comments can be found in their entirety as an appendix to this written work.

2. THE ORIGIN OF AND MOTIVATIONS FOR THE HRE PROJECT

“There is no mutual understanding and no intention without attention” (Bernhard Waldenfels).

In the autumn of 2019, I took part in the workshop led by Irene Kajo, “The Unknown, body, The Other and art pedagogy”. The aim of the workshop was to look at whether the unknown can be the starting point for an artistic work and what factors, circumstances, or skills does one need in order to face and encounter the unknown. As a theoretical background to this exploration into the unknown, we looked at the thinking of German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels (Waldenfels, Kozin, & Stähler, 2011), by which the unknown is thought to be something outside the circle of knowledge, reason and analysis, a guest experience, one where normal experience breaks down and a fracture is generated. Waldenfels talks about the encounter with a stranger, the otherness, the unknown and the alienness within oneself; a pathetic experience that catches us by surprise, disturbs us, it touches us as we come into contact: this is the HRE in a nutshell.

In this workshop the group was encouraged to consider the body as an important starting point for an unknown review, seeing that the experience of the unknown is uniquely and unavoidably physical. In the works we developed, the issues of responsibility and ethics were to be considered in relation to artistic-pedagogical thinking. I will discuss in the next chapter how I see the HRE as an improvisational score, and how stepping into the unknown has been a curiosity and a drive for me throughout my career as a dancer and a dance teacher. The offered elements of otherness, corporeality and ethics strongly influenced my thinking, my process and eventually the aesthetic choices I made for the HRE.

Yet it was another experience of working within that group that strongly led me in the direction I eventually took for the project. There were 11 people in the group, 12 including the facilitator, and I was the only male identified person in that group. As a dancer I have had plenty of experiences of being the only male in a group, in a classroom or in a dance company, and this has never really been a problem in the past.

This time though I was surprisingly affected by this aspect. For instance, I found myself being unusually quiet during discussion, noticing at times how my participation in the conversation, whether in agreement or disagreement, seemed to be take more space than anticipated and would sometime be received by others with a touch of antagonism. Although it is irrelevant to argue whether this was real or just my own projection, I think the important aspect to look at is how it made me reflect on my gendered presence in the group. One episode in particular impacted on me in a special way: a guest lecturer came to present her work, a rather controversial project that had received plenty of criticism and had resulted in strong personal attacks towards her, in her words, mostly by men. I was again the only man in the room. At some point towards the end of the presentation I raised my hand to ask a question and the lecturer seemed, in my perception, rather unsettled and thrown off and she responded by asking me to let her finish the presentation before asking questions. I then waited for her permission to ask a clarification on the meaning of a word she had used, while in the meantime two more people interrupted her with questions which were immediately answered. I can't emphasize enough that all of this is a very subjective observation and I also acknowledge the possibility of having misunderstood the events. I find it is nevertheless relevant at this point to share this because of the thinking and the conversation it subsequently triggered, within the context of the workshop. I was led to reflect on my positioning as a middle-aged white male and the way I am possibly at times perceived and assessed. The #MeToo movement has brought up a very important and much needed conversation on male behaviours and has created a valuable crisis around masculinity. In the context of a society that is becoming increasingly polarised, also this conversation has polarised and in a lot of the discourse going on, the middle-aged white man has become the epitome of aggressive patriarchy, reactionary conservatism and preservation of privilege, the villain, the enemy. As much as this perception is well deserved, I found myself uneasy and uncomfortable being identified as such, wishing to be allowed to another role: to be honest, I was rather sad and angered by the situation. I found myself being placed in a box, caught inside a shell created as an effect of the perception of what I represent. There I was, experiencing a reality in fact common to anyone else who is not a white heterosexual man, to anyone given an identity or a role they can't leave. Placed inside the shell of a woman, a person of colour, a gender diverse individual, they find themselves unable to shake off that role and the way they

are perceived, resulted in limited or no choice in how they get to experience their lives. From that place we have a choice to either reinforce and harden the surface of the shell we find ourselves in, resisting and defending who we think we are or what we represent, against external attacks. Or we can acknowledge preconceptions and imperfections, and attempt to reach out from within the shell, make its surface permeable, connect with the environment around us and make space for an exchange. Can we acknowledge our positioning without being overly identified by it? It was in this context of reflection that I chose to inhabit the representation of the shell of the evil man in the white robe, not with the intention of excusing or normalising unacceptable behaviours, nor aspiring to atone for the sins of male-kind.

As a dance artist I draw from my somatic dance practice to find strategies to communicate through thick layers of perception and prejudice. In my practice I explore spatial and movement perceptions in layers, starting from the skeleton, the architectural supporting structure of the body, and moving out through the connective tissue and the muscle system, to the skin proper, to the second skin, or the layer of perception just outside the physical border of our body, and into the kinesphere, or third skin, a sort of 'bubble' surrounding our body, contracting and expanding according to the circumstances and to our momentary predisposition. As the attention moves from one layer to the next, outward and inward, different movement qualities emerge as well as different ways to perceive and interact with the environment. Depending on which layer of perception our attention focuses, we experience the situation differently, even with different emotions, and we obviously send out different signal and information into the surrounding environment. The more we move our attention further outward from our bodies, the more we get to touch what is around us, the space, the people. I remember Nita Little demonstrating during a lecture at a Side Step festival how to touch somebody else's nose by waiving a finger several meters away: the tingling sensation on the tip of one's nose was vivid. I thought how simple it was: if I, as a performer, can touch the audience this way, then the audience will be 'touched'. It is the same principles of this practices, this way of touching and being touched, that I aimed to apply to the 1-1 encounters. We can move outward from the core of the shells, even the shell of the evil man in the white bathrobe, through layer after layer; we can make our shells soft and permeable, communicating into the space around us and initiate interactions and

connections that have potential to transform perception, and with it the discourse and the environment itself. The HRE invites or encourages not to solidify some stagnating beliefs or stereotypes about the ideas of one shell, but rather open to the possibility of these shells to become permeable and everchanging layers of perception and communication.

The HRE project, born from the desire to place myself in an unknown situation, became also a way to explore my positioning as a middle-aged white man in society. Being this an artistic project, I believed the best way to create tension charged with meaningful potential was to place myself in the most challenging place possible, taking the most triggering and at the same time the most vulnerable role, being convinced that the transformative experience I was after could take place only under some hazardous conditions (I will explain this further in chapter 4). This was a choice that caused challenging debates each time I presented my idea in the context of the workshop and later in the thesis seminars and it was often hard not to become defensive. In chapter 5 I will get further into the doubts and fears this project generated.

2.1. Masculinity

In conversation with other men in the hotel room, the issues of masculinity, vulnerability and shame came up a lot. Most men have to some degree been educated, or one could say conditioned, out of vulnerability, by means of shaming and social pressure, urged to fulfil a normalized image of man. Competitiveness, self-assertions, high productivity, society praises the go-getters and forgives a president of the United States of America who says that if you are a successful man “you can grab them by the pussy”. Consideration and care for the other, sensitivity and vulnerability are more often than not seen as weaknesses, not allowed to the successful man. One man wrote in his post-encounter note:

“I’ve been searching for myself, I think for all my life. I did not realize how vulnerable I am. Being in that room with you touched me. You got me relaxed and I danced, I put myself in a vulnerable position, and nothing happened!”

What he meant was that nothing bad happened to him. He danced, an activity associated with the feminine, something men like him can't do, should be ashamed of or only do at the risk of giving up their masculinity. Another man told me about the burnout he suffered after working in marketing for several years, forced to show increasingly higher results and fulfil quotas, losing himself bit by bit in the process, stifling his curiosity for life and for exploring. I told him my story, how I suffered a burnout, without knowing it was one, quit my engineering studies on the finishing line, fought the resistance of parents and society to instead pursue a dancing career, full of uncertainties and obstacles, but true to myself and my desires. I shared with him how curiosity is the essential attitude that allows me to keep going and deal with precariousness, the curiosity to learn and grow and heal. He wrote in his card: "Thank you for showing me the power of curiosity. May yours never fade." Neither one of these men I had met before our encounter in the hotel room.

Through my upbringing, in school and more generally in a rather conservative, catholic and patriarchal society, I have established patterns to define masculinity which I have later on in my life strongly felt the need to criticise and dismantle. Men learn as boys that they need to be independent and self-sufficient, that they cannot show weakness in front of each other out of a fear that this could be used against them by other men in the competitive relations of masculinity (Seidler, 2006). They also learn not to be soft, emotional, dependent, which basically means not being a woman (Seidler, 2006), as woman is nothing but a 'wrong' inferior version of man. Especially after the #MeToo movement, reinventing or transforming masculinity has become an urgent matter and I would be extremely interested in getting deeper into masculinity studies, especially around the issues of shame, vulnerability and social pressure. As this thesis work focuses primarily on the pedagogical laboratory, I chose to leave these investigations to future further studies.

3. KAIROS MOMENT

Throughout my career as a dance artist, improvisation has been my main interest, as a performer, teacher and curator. I reckon the fascination towards improvisation is strongly connected with a desire to explore the unknown, the unexpected, which in Latin ‘improvisa’.

Van Manen (2005) writes about Kairos moments as “pure, perfect, unpredictable and uncontrollable moments that possess possibility”, moments that “force us to be absolutely present to ourselves and to the meaning and significance of what we are facing” (p.52). He writes of these moments as yielding potential for transformation, if we are able to seize the opportunity, to respond to the situation, to grab Kairos by his front lock of hair.

The ancient Greeks had two words (and two gods) for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. The former refers to chronological or sequential time, while the latter signifies a proper or opportune time for action. While *chronos* is quantitative, *kairos* has a qualitative nature. In talking about improvisation, the term ‘being in the moment’ is often used, referring to the ability to be present and to respond to the current experience. This is considered a fundamental skill in the art of improvising, necessary to deal with not knowing what is going to happen next. It was immediately evident to me that there were strong similarities between the qualities or skills involved in performing improvisation with the ones I needed to apply in the HRE. These similarities led me to approach the encounters as a particular improvisational task.

3.1. The six phases in the dramaturgy of the encounter...

During the first try-out runs of the work, I observed six phases in the dramaturgy of the encounter. This observation is based on my own personal experience, but also on comments made by the participants during the first round of try-out encounters as well as in the notes they left to me. In the timeline of the encounter, the first four phases are concentrated in the pre-event, approximately the first few minutes of the encounter. The

transformation phase might actually not happen at all, and the last one, the residue, seems to have a very variable duration. The phases are:

- Expectations
- Strangeness
- Surprise
- Tension
- Transformation
- Residue

Expectations begin to build the moment the participant signs up for the event and receives the instruction email. As the information is minimal, they start thinking about the nature of the “performance” and what it is possibly going to happen inside the room. On a more unconscious level, they might relate to previous experiences, which might affect the image that begins to build up in their minds. There is something unknown awaiting them and they begin to experience some kind of anxiety, not necessarily in a negative way: they might be also thrilled or curious, in most cases excited, expecting some kind of unusual experience.

Strangeness is the sensation characterizing the approach to the room. Not many people consider hotels familiar and there is something out of the ordinary in the hotel environment. It is for most an unusual experience to speak with the reception people, walk the hotel corridor, knock at the door with a number on it, instead of a name, and finally the door being opened by a man wearing a bathrobe. At this point the prevalent feeling is

Surprise, especially after the “rules” are given to them: not quite what they had expected! As the information is absorbed, surprise turns into

Tension: new expectations emerge, and possibly a sense of perceived obligation. The mind of the participant is racing, projecting what it might be expected of them and wondering what to do next. Desire or pressure to please can be experienced. Tension is also building as they find themselves with such a vast array of options, possibilities, desires, fears and doubts, and in general conflicting emotions and thoughts. The participant is finding themselves in a somehow atypical situation, as well as possibly

facing part of themselves not usually met. This tension and discomfort are the conditions that open the door for a potential

Transformation, which usually involves an internal dialogue, a verbally processing of their current experience, and often taking some kind of action the moment the participant decides what to do. This is a little transformative experience, during which they might possibly learn something about themselves. This can be playful or introspective, always somehow intimate as the host and the visitor come into contact and the host becomes sort of a mirror for the participant. At the end of the encounter something is left: it is what I call a

Residue, an element of the experience that continues to exist for some time. Some of those residues are entrusted to the notes they write, some are carried on for a while, some leave a more permanent sense of change in perspective and perception of the self.

3.2. ... and Dewey's five steps of reflection

I subsequently discovered that these six phases have some kind of correspondence in Dewey's five steps of reflection. According to Dewey (1933, as cited in Van Manen, 2015) reflective thinking takes time and requires one to engage in several different "phases" or "aspects" of reflective thought:

1. Perplexity: confusion, doubt connected to the situation in which one finds oneself.
2. Elaboration: referring to past experiences, anticipation and interpretation.
3. Hypotheses: examination, exploration, analysis, trying to define and clarify the situation.
4. Comparing hypotheses: finding some coherence within these hypotheses
5. Taking action: deciding on a plan of action and doing something about a desired result.

When these steps are compressed in a short time span, to the point of coinciding in time, we have a situation where reflection and action happen at the same time. I have experienced this condition extensively in practicing and performing dance improvisation and my experience as an improviser has been an invaluable source from where to draw for tools and strategies to approach the HRE. Listening, responding, staying present and connected are essential in being able to deal with an unknown

situation. Curiosity and acceptance are the necessary attitudes to be present and available to the moment, not only to survive the situation and respond to unexpected challenges, but to ultimately grab Kairos by his front lock of hair, to take full advantage of a unique opportunity. Painter Edward Hopper once said, “More of me comes out when I improvise” and I have often experienced myself the sensation of being ‘more than what I know’ when I improvise. It has to do with listening, responding, staying present and connected, as I mention above, and with turning my attention to ‘the space in between’, the space outside me, the space in between me and the audience, the space in between moments in time. It is in that in-between space that movement happens, the interaction existing in the gap in between the two agents. The embodied listening and attention given to the space in between, that is a fundamental element in the practice of improvisation, opens up the opportunity to get in touch with something that is beyond ourselves, transcendental and uniquely in time.

4. ONE-WITH-ONE PRACTICES AS A COMPRESSED INSTANCE OF DIALOGICAL PEDAGOGY.

“Because the encountering comprises a surprising, transient element, there are no ready-made formulas to ensure its success. However, the responsibility for the other remains. This is how our ethical thinking is translated into concrete. It does not unfold in the way I am talking about teaching... it shows in the way I am silent, in my eyes’ movement, in my body’s initiatives. It passes through practical activity and is only revealed there.” (Kauppila, lecture on dialogical encountering, 2.12.2019 at Teak).

The hypothesis for this artistic research is that one-with-one practices offer a uniquely compressed example of dialogical and experiential pedagogy, as a 1-1 encounter provides the most obvious representation of meeting with the Other and with the otherness within oneself. I here use the Other with a capital letter in direct reference to Levinas’ ethics of the Other. According to Levinas is the Other that gives birth to the idea of ‘something beyond’ that is transcendental and infinite. The Other represent alterity and otherness with which the I can never become completely acquainted (Tuohimaa, 2001). In this transcendence and otherness, the potential for learning is to be found. Levinas reverses the idea of knowledge as a limited object to be accumulated, but rather something that is created and shaped in human interaction, as the knowing I needs to let go of some of its conceptions and change them when interacting with other people, with the Other (Tuohimaa, 2001). In the same way Biesta (Naughton, Naughton, Biesta, & Cole, 2017), reflecting on the uniqueness of art pedagogy, states that art is a “never-ending exploration of the encounter with what and who is other, the ongoing and never-ending exploration of what it might mean to exist in and with the world. The ambition there is not to master or domesticate (...) but to come into dialogue, to establish dialogue, to stay in dialogue” (p.17). Exchange, dialogue, interaction and the physical, somatic quality of the encounter emerged quite soon as key concepts to the project, linking the artistic effort with the pedagogical discourse carried out throughout the master program.

4.1. The pedagogy

The path the master program put me in, allowed me to reflect on my identity as an art teacher and elaborate on the pedagogical principles and ideas I stand for. As a dance

teacher I aim towards a teaching practice that doesn't rely on predefined aesthetics and forms, removed from dogmas, a practice that allows for each individual do find out what their body can do and how. In this model the teacher offers their experience and knowledge base, and that of other masters, as a support for the individual discovery journey. The teacher does not position themselves on a higher hierarchical place than the student: the teacher is not a model to imitate, but rather a guide, and needs to be able to keep questioning his/her/their own acquired knowledge and experience. In this model of teaching "authority becomes authorized" (Biesta, 2017b, p.42) as teacher and students establish a relationship based on mutual trust, respect and interest for the practice. The ultimate goal is for the student to become autonomous, to find their own voice, so to speak, or their own way of dancing and thinking about dance. I absorbed this idea of pedagogy during my studies at the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam during the mid-90's and since then elaborated on it and strived to keep it at the base of my teaching. I realized the HRE presented the opportunity to apply this pedagogy to a "performance" event in the most interesting way: a pedagogy based on mutual respect, trust and the creation of a set of conditions that created the potential for learning for both the subjects involved. The outcome of the process is unknown: what will be learned, if anything, is subjective and not predetermined, and knowledge is created rather than transmitted. The practitioner is here Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster, "a teacher who teaches without transmitting any knowledge" (Bingham, Biesta, & Rancière, 2010, p.2). This teacher instigates learning and acts to create a space or a situation where an experience can happen, and that experience is the gateway to the creation of new knowledge. The shape or form this new knowledge might take is not necessarily predefined and the process is open to the unexpected. The important aspect of this pedagogical approach is the process of stepping into the unknown. According to Rancière emancipation entails "a rupture in the order of things" (Bingham, Biesta, & Rancière, 2010, p.39) and the task of the teacher is to provide that rupture and support the student through the process of emancipation, with the awareness that emancipation is something people do for themselves (p.38). In this scenario the teacher-student relationship premises on an 'equality of intelligences' (Bingham, Biesta, & Rancière, 2010, p.40), removing the power hierarchy usually present in so called traditional pedagogy, based on a teacher who has the knowledge and a student who doesn't yet.

Similarly, for Illeris (Alheit et al., 2009) the teacher needs not only to cope with but even inspire mental resistance in the students (p.16). This mental resistance is a common occurring reaction when meeting with the unknown. In this meeting and in the transformation required in redefining one's knowledge and therefore oneself, is where learning happens. This process is what Illeris defines as transformative learning. In the same standpoint is Jarvis (Alheit et al., 2009) when he states that transformative learning begins with a disjuncture, and it is fundamental to accept that what we know is always reshaping and remodelled (p.27).

This model proposes that learning not as an accumulative gathering of knowledge, but rather as a nonlinear movement ignited by re-discussing one's established knowledge in a moment of induced crisis. Gert Biesta (2019) states that in order to learn and grow, one has to move out of one's comfort zone, where one feels safe and in control, into the 'fear zone'. In this zone one experiences lack of self-confidence, self-consciousness, resistances and pressure. Pushing into those boundaries though, according to Biesta (2019), leads us into the learning zone and finally into the growth zone. This is obviously a very vulnerable place, where one can easily loose sense of one's own boundaries and leading a student through this process can be very risky. In art education, the rhetoric of risk taking for the sake of art as produced many monsters and many traumas. During the HRE's phase of research and study it was immediately clear that the ethical issues were at the very centre of the work: I was to be extremely aware of the potential risks involved in being alone in a hotel room with an audience member, and I needed to have the outmost attention and consideration.

4.2. Safe space – Brave space

"It's about creating a safe space" (Adrian Howells)

If a disjuncture and some level of discomfort, confusion and mental resistance, are the conditions for transformative learning, if moving out of one's comfort zone and into a risk zone is the passage towards learning something new about oneself, it becomes paramount responsibility of the teacher, or in the case of the HRE of the host, to guarantee a safe space where the experience can take place. A situation of risk and discomfort is acceptable only if contained within a safe environment, in which even past traumas can be faced, but without creating new ones or reopening wound in a hurtful

manner. In the context of the HRE the potential for triggering past traumas is definitely present and my top priority for the encounter was to create a safe environment to the best of my abilities.

A space where discomfort is acceptable, or possibly even welcomed in order to foster learning, is often referred to as a “brave space”. It is a space where risks can be taken and the contents that move us towards the edge of our comfort zone can be addressed and explored. In the accelerated intimacy situation of the hotel room, the host and the participant come into close contact, and they enter “a constant dynamic and reversible process of touching and being touched.” (Van Manen, 2005, p103). In order to take responsibility of the wellbeing of the participant, the contact has to be tactful, literally full of touch. Touch here doesn’t mean just the physical skin to skin contact, but a wider sense of touching and being touched or as Van Manen writes “We touch each other with our eyes, our voices, our hands, our presence and absence; these are transivities of significance from one to the other” (2005, p.104). It is a full embodied presence that is required in order to create a safe and meaningful connection. The role of the body here is central, as it is a physical experience in the broader sense.

So, the next question is: what else is contributing to the creation of such a safe/brave space? In many contexts detailed lists of rules are written down in order to lay down a common ground and a shared understanding. Nevertheless, these rules are often incomplete, when not altogether counterproductive and creating further discriminations. For instance, Arao and Clemens (Landreman, 2013) present five common rules used in the attempt of creating a safe space:

1. Agree to disagree
2. Don’t take things personally
3. Challenge by choice
4. Respect
5. No attacks

and proceed to explain how “unexamined, these common ground rules may contribute to the conflation of safety and comfort and restrict participant engagement and learning” (p.143). Easily agreed upon rules, such as ‘respect one another’ become problematic

without a discussion on how respect is demonstrated: I think of a generation of men like my father, for whom respect was shown through unquestioning obedience.

A safe space cannot be merely a container of rules, but the creation of a safe/brave space requires more sophisticated approach and methods, especially when facing an unknown and ever-changing situation. To this same advice are also Anttila (2019) and Van Manen (2005):

"There is no universal procedure to guarantee safety: instead you can encounter the other, be present, stay connected" (Anttila, 2019).

"There are no specific rules that will ensure the right kind of thoughtfulness, sensitivity, and tact. Pedagogical sensitivity is sustained by a certain kind of seeing, listening, and responding (...) in an ever-changing situation." (Van Manen, 2005, p.35)

4.3. Caring approach to ethics

"Thank you for being present, making the situation feel safe and letting me be myself" (HRE participant)

In 'Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education' Nel Noddings proposes an ethics of care, a relational approach 'rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness' (Heddon, Heddon, & Johnson, 2016, p.191). This reflects Van Manen's tactful approach, additionally providing a method for that approach, preferable to relying on predefined or established procedures to guarantee a safe and ethical interaction between practitioner and participant. Noddings (2013) makes a distinction between caring-for and caring-about: "Caring-for describes an encounter or set of encounters characterized by direct attention and response. It requires the establishment of a caring relation, person-to-person contact of some sort. Caring-about expresses some concern but does not guarantee a response to one who needs care" (p.11). Direct attention and response are the key elements towards ethical caring. She also contrasts empathy, originally defined as projective and cognitive, with the receptive feeling—sympathy—associated with caring. Sympathy suggests a desire for the other's well-

being based on attention, receptivity and connection, a shared feeling, a point of contact that again brings us back to Van Manen's tactfulness.

In HRE the practitioner applies their integrity, insight and sensitivity, their improvisational skills, their listening and ability to respond to an unknown situation, in order to create a safe environment for the participant to meet their limits, limitations and boundaries. Adding generosity and care to the list shows how in HRE the practitioner is not unlike a carer for the participant. It is perhaps important to acknowledge that the participant is also inspired to apply the same skills and qualities during the encounter. As I mentioned earlier, the two roles often intertwine. One participant wrote:

“Unusual encounter in the hotel room fills me with gratitude. There are human beings who consider and care and are curious. I think you are one of them.”

5. PERCEIVED OBLIGATION

We are not separate being, nor independent or autonomous in our decisions and while we can never have a complete knowledge of the other, our decisions are always mutually affected. In a one-with-one performance this become immediately evident, as the power dynamic between the host and the visitor, the performer and the audience member, the practitioner and the participant, is constantly shifting and negotiated: ultimately neither one can ever have complete decisional autonomy. This is in my opinion what makes this format so rich in potential for stimulating findings also on a pedagogical level. One of the most interesting aspects I came across in my experience of the HRE is the particular kind of loop that is created between the two subjects. The participant becomes highly aware and perceptive of how their responses impact on the practitioner, making them self-conscious of how they are ‘performing’ and what might be expected of them. As a matter of fact, several times I was asked, often with some level of concern, what I expected to happen as the visitor tried to figure out what was their role in the “performance”. One of the participants wrote:

“We become also performers. At some point the expectations of the audience member (the other person in the room?) intrudes the space. Even if we try to cut it and to get rid of it, it is there, so I tried to fight against it and just followed my instincts and my needs at the time.”

Another one:

“Throughout our experience I often felt I was not doing enough, I worried I wasn’t providing interesting content for your research”.

And another:

“I tend to think how can I help this person? What is needed to make the situation flow (...) Maybe then I get good feedback of myself? Oh, the need of feeling valuable!”

In any participatory performance the participant experiences a degree of pressure to make something happen, to be a good audience. Van Manen (2015) writes about the

desire to impress or please a parent or a teacher, recognizing that often there is a perceived obligation towards a figure of power or authority who is supposed to approve and validate our actions. That obligation makes us respond to a situation as we think we are expected to by that authority figure and often motivates our choices accordingly. This is a similar mechanism to what is experienced by an audience attending a performance, like for instance when one is feeling obliged to sit through an upsetting show, not to make a scene or disrupt the performers' or other spectators' experience. This happens even more intensely so in immersive participatory performances, especially a 1-1 situation. This type of pressure is experienced in a classroom situation as well, manifested in the desire to please the teacher and be a 'good student', or in the anxiety to ruin the experience for other students in the class. For example, after one of the classes I taught in Zodiak -Centre for New Dance, in the spring of 2019, one of the students shared with me the difficulty they often experience in pair work: as much as they found the work important and very useful, they would suffer high level of stress as it brought up feelings of inadequacy and the fear of "spoiling the experience" for the partner.

5.1. The encounter's ethical issues and solutions

One-with-one performances create the condition for a particular ethical relationship. Adrian Howells once said: "It's really important that they [audience-participants] have agency, because even more in a One to One show people feel that they have to go along with things in case they sabotage the piece" (Heddon and Johnson, 2016, p.201). This brings me to one of the most important questions that was posed to me in the preparation phase of this project: how I would take care of my own boundaries, and even more importantly of the boundaries of the participant? Taking care that I would not do anything that I didn't want to do was one important step to guarantee my safety and my own well-being. But how would I guarantee the safety and well-being of the visitor? According to Levinas, responsibility is the subject's first and foremost relationship to the Other (Tuohimaa, 2001), so how would I take that responsibility? I decided that the fundamental element of the encounter dramaturgy was that the visitor had to have agency and decided what was to happen during the encounter. I would never propose any activity or subject of conversation, to avoid sending mixed signals and to keep at all time clear that the participant would decide what happened next. To

that same purpose the room was presented to the participant exactly as one would find it as they enter it for the first time. I added nothing and I hid any of my personal belongings or any sign of my staying there. Another measure I took was to tell them that I would take care of my own boundaries, so letting them know that whatever I agreed to do was consensual on my part. This was done in order to prevent the participant to later experience guilt for putting me in an unwanted situation. The other was to tell them they had the choice to leave the room at any time if they so wished. However, giving them permission to leave and them taking that active choice are two very different things. Agency, even when given, still needs to be exercised, which is a completely different action and responsibility. Telling somebody they can say no at any time still leaves the ultimate responsibility to them: this is, in my opinion, not enough to make sure they have full agency and ultimately guarantee their safety. At this level the concern was to prevent the participant to do something they would later regret. This could happen in the spur of the moment but also due to the type of pressure/perceived obligation I describe above. It was for me paramount to make clear at any time that I had no specific expectation of what it was to happen. For that I tried to prevent sending out any signal or action that might suggest otherwise, intentionally suppressing, as much as possible, my own wishes and desires. Whenever the participant suggested something that would push against some boundaries, I would pause and reflect on the motivations of that choice, giving time to the participant to reflect as well and possibly reconsider that idea. A conversation would normally arise considering motivations and implications on possible actions.

In the post-event reflection, I have questioned my choice to hide my own desires, first of all understanding that the suppression of desires and wishes is some kind of impossible task. I have also wondered if it makes the visitor experience more challenging, or somehow creates an unbalance in the conversation. As my supervisor Gesa Piper pointed out in one of our conversations, it can be even harder for the other person to deal with unexpressed desires, as so much excessive energy might go into figuring out where and why those desires are hiding. Hidden desires might feel way creepier than expressed ones, as well as it might be harder to connect to one's own preferences when the other one is suppressing their own and one again might be busier trying to figure out where the other's preferences are than sensing into one's own. Also

taking the pedagogical perspective, one could question whether it is necessary or preferable for the educator to suppress their desires, their biases, their personal preferences, their sexuality; whether the ideal educator should be this neutral entity, stripped of longing and desires, genderless and asexual.

5.2. Fear of the other

As the practitioner in this one-with-one encounter I am neither a martyr like Adrian Howells would see himself, nor a victim like Yoko Ono or Marina Abramovich. Yoko Ono in her 'Cut Piece' sat alone on a stage, dressed in a black suit, with a pair of scissors in front of her. The audience had been instructed that they could take turns approaching her and use the scissors to cut off a small piece of her clothing, which was theirs to keep. Incidentally I sometime wonder if one could trace the inception of HRE even all the way back to the selection days, where we were asked to watch, reflect and discuss on an excerpt video of 'Cut Piece' (Albert Maysles & David Maysles, 1965). Marina Abramović in 'Rhythm 0' stood passively while the audience was invited to utilise assorted objects, some of them soothing, others potentially harming, on her body. Both Ono and Abramović placed themselves in the role of the victim, representing and denouncing the objectification of women – although this was not Abramović main intention for that piece. As a white man, typically not the victim but the aggressor, proposing myself as the victim would be most likely read as a voluntary choice, motivated by the desire to realize some secret erotic fantasy of being dominated. A sadomasochistic exploit was never my objective, my interest instead being in setting up a situation favourable to the meeting with the unknown, to the transformative experience described in chapter 4. My curiosity was in placing the visitor and myself at the edges of our comfort zone and then see what happens. Nick Cave describes what it takes to write a song: "Song writing is about counterpoint. Counterpoint is the key, (...) like leading a child in the same room with a Mongolian psychopath, and just sitting back and seeing what happens" (Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard, 2014). It is a simple idea: fabricate tension in order to create the potential for surprise and for the unexpected to happen.

This is a situation that can spark anxiety and in the preparation phase of this project I noticed two main areas of fear arising in people with whom I discuss the project. The

first one was concerning my own personal safety: what will happen to me? what if I get hit/stabbed/killed/ or in any way placed in some harmful situation? Marina Abramović had a gun pointed at her head and almost got killed in that gallery in Naples, didn't she? While I did recognize the potential for discomfort and awkward interactions, I never considered the possibility of being physically or psychologically hurt. I could blame this on a level of naiveté and to the blindness brought by drive and commitment to a project, but I believe there is more to it and it has to do with the trust in being able to create a safe and caring space, like described in the previous chapter. In trying to understand where these fears come from, I've come across a writing about Derrida's concept of hospitality. "Derrida argued that hospitality is conditional in the sense that the outsider or foreigner has to meet the criteria of the a priori 'other', implying that hospitality is not given to a guest who is absolutely unknown or anonymous because the host has no idea of how they will respond." (O'Gorman, 2006, p.52). In Derrida's view hospitality is always conditional:

“ ‘Make yourself at home’, this is a self-limiting invitation... it means: please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property” (Caputo, 2002, in O'Gorman, 2006, p.51). Unconditional or absolute hospitality is for Derrida an impossible ideal that can never be accomplished, but one that attracts people to strive for: “The ideal of hospitality, like all ideals, presents itself as joyful rather than onerous, and provides the inspiration for the pursuit of the virtue or virtues of hospitableness” (Telfer, 1996, in O'Gorman, 2006, p.51)

I am aware I am far from offering unconditional hospitality to my guests: I set the rules of the place and I reserve the option to stop or refuse something that crosses my boundaries, in other word I have the map of the situation while the visitor walks into the room fairly in the darkness of what is expecting them. One participant wrote:

“I felt that even though this can be a ‘neutral’ space, it’s still your room somehow and I felt I was in your territory”

Nevertheless, I give the visitors permission to do as they please with the room and with me, and this triggers fears and resistance towards the stranger, fear that the guest will

‘take advantage’ of the situation and possibly harm me if they have a chance. This is the same anti-immigration rhetoric nationalist campaigners use to raise fear and impose isolationist policies.

Another strong concern brought up to me was the possibility that somebody might get triggered, or possibly offended, and previous traumas might emerge as a result of the environment and situation of the encounter. For instance, one of the visitors mentioned at some point in our conversation that he feared it was just a matter of time before someone filed a complaint, reporting I made them uncomfortable. I mentioned in the previous chapter that the close contact between the host and the visitor creates an accelerated intimacy or accelerated friendship (Heddon and Johnson, 2016). I hypothesize that the idea of intimacy itself raises fears, possibly fear of one’s own vulnerability, but also fears connected with the preponderant sexualization of intimacy and demonization of sexuality. Intimacy between strangers evokes and combines two powerful sources of fear. Acknowledging these fears, I still chose to trust and have “faith in power of intimate encounters” (Heddon and Johnson, 2016, p.29). I chose to trust the audience and trust the integrity, insight and sensitivity of the practitioner, create a safe space through caring and engage the participants in an ethics of mutual responsibility.

6. THE AESTHETIC CHOICES

6.1. The hotel room

I have spent some time researching a legacy of performance events happening in hotel room, to contextualise my work also in connection with the particular location I chose for it to take place. In order to do that I posted on Facebook a request to send me info and links about performances that took place in hotel room. A Google search on ‘hotel room performances’ typically returns results on Hospitality Key Performance Indicators: not helpful. The Facebook community responded splendidly with several examples of performances and even links to entire festivals taking places in hotels, like the On Hospitality_NU Performance Festival (Stamer, 2011), which happened at the Sokos Hotel Viru in Tallin in 2011, or the PAB OPEN 2019 (Contemporary Performance Network, 2019) that took place at Grand Hotel Terminus Bergen, Norway, of which unfortunately I was unable to find any documentation except for the open call. I selected a few examples to report here, to get a sense of what the hotel room setting brings to the work in terms of undertones and associative connections. In the majority of these project the privacy and intimacy of the hotel room is the main element in play. For instance, in ‘Hotel Project™’ by Ana Mărgineanu, “3-9 playwright and director teams are assembled and commissioned to create a 20-minute performance inspired by the character and history of the hotel. Each is performed in a separate room of that hotel and given for a single spectator at a time, creating an immersive theatrical experience. The spectator is given the opportunity to view a set of three rooms in an evening. Once keys are chosen, the spectator is invited to enter the corresponding rooms alone. Inside, the play begins to unfold, and the spectator becomes the proverbial ‘fly on the wall;’ an invisible witness to a unique and intimate story” (Hotel Project - Ana Mărgineanu.2011).

Similarly, the 2019 ‘Hotelli H’ by 00100 ensemble gives the audience the opportunity to take “a peek into the sixth-floor occupants of the hotel and the worlds of their occupied rooms - and what happens there? Behind the doors of Hotel H, you can discover completely new worlds as realism and fantasy mix” (No Fear Agency & Promotion Oy, 2019).

In the 2004 'Chamber Made' by David Bolger and Katie Read (CoisCéim Dance Theatre, 2004), three stories of couples and their ever-changing stages of love unfold and overlap in the same hotel room.

In all these examples the audience is a silent spectator peeking into the private life of the hotel room. The visitors, alone or in a group, enter a private space and get to witness a story up close and personal, usually having a very limited agency. The separation between performer and audience is clear and when the visitor is but a spectator to a story presented to them in the intimacy of the hotel room, the experience clearly becomes a voyeuristic one.

Also in the 2019 Biladurang by Joel Bray (Bray, 2019), the voyeuristic element is predominant, even though the audience gets to interact more with performer, wearing bathrobes, drinking champagne, dancing.

All these projects are described as 'immersive theatre', which indicate a theatrical work where the audience is immersed in the space where the performance happens, sharing physical proximity and possibly some level of interaction with the performers.

The first example of hotel room performance events people pointed out to in response to my Facebook request was the 1969 John Lennon's and Yoko Ono's Bed-Ins for Peace (Wikipedia, 2020). In this celebrated piece of protest-art the couple invited press and guests into their intimate space, welcoming them while lying in bed dressed in white pyjamas. The idea is derived from a "sit-in", in which a group of protesters seats down in front of or inside an establishment until they are evicted, arrested, or their demands are met, although one might argue that none of the disturbance typically created by a sit-in was an element in an event where two celebrities lay down in bed in a luxury hotel room. In this case the hotel room becomes a public space, bringing the intimacy and secrecy out into the public eye. I argue that the voyeuristic element is still present in this work.

On a fairly different register it is worth mentioning the 1971 Disappearing by artist Chris Burden (McFadden, 2019), where the hotel room is the hiding place for the artist who decided to vanish for three days, questioning his own existence and what his disappearance meant. In this case the private space remains extremely private and the intimacy is not at all shared.

The common element of these examples and of my own experience of spending a week in a hotel room for the HRE is the liminality of that space. The hotel room is a transitional space, one removed from, away from. When staying in the hotel one is away from home and usually from the hometown, away from daily routines, often away from family and friends. When meeting a clandestine lover one is away from the partner. This being removed from opens up to possibilities which are outside of the ordinary. Hotel rooms are trying to maximize comfort: the room I was in had two sofas, a full minibar, a bathtub with bubble bath sachets, bathrobes and fluffy towels, a kettle with complimentary tea bags, TV and a very soft King size bed. At the same time, they remain impersonal and anonymous, sterile, somehow the opposite of cosy. The hotel room is fundamentally a bedroom, a place used mostly for resting and sleeping, or for sexual encounters. It is easy to see how inviting a guest to one's hotel room creates a situation of immediate intimacy, possibly more than inviting them to one's own home.

The hotel provides a service to its customers and there is an organization of people, cleaners, designers, receptionists, managers, who ensure that your stay is the most comfortable possible. Often these people remain invisible as for example when one leaves the room for breakfast and returns to a tidied room with fresh towels. As a performer in the hotel room, I think I became somehow part of this ecology, in a way providing yet another service to the visitor/customer, placing myself at their service and somehow caring for them.

In spending six nights in the hotel another aspect emerged that I had not foreseen: the project became for me a durational performance. I chose to spend also the nights in the hotel room and eventually I ended up leaving the hotel just once a day for a short walk and to get food. During the six days I met no one else but the visitors and the hotel staff. This is not something I had planned in advance, but it rather happened naturally and intuitively. As the days passed it became evident why it had to be that way. By remaining removed from my 'normal' life, I was placing also myself in an experiential situation and becoming more and more part of the liminal space of the hotel. At the same time, I was establishing a relationship and a history with the room, an invisible yet perceivable history. One person visiting the room on the fifth day commented that, in

spite of the lack of any physical evidence, they could sense there was history in the room, residues from the previous encounter and from my inhabiting the room.

6.2. The bathrobe

I stated earlier that a hotel room, although anonymous and impersonal, is a very intimate space, obviously due to the dominant presence of the bed, a most intimate and personal place to be. During the events of the HRE I observed that most of the guests looked at the bed but did not approach it. The spaciousness and logistic of the room offered alternatives, which was an important element not to turn the sexual undertone into the main theme of the encounter. All the visitors chose to begin the interaction sitting on one of the sofas, where they often spent the largest part or even the entirety of the time of the encounter. Only a few of them eventually chose to use the bed.

Hotel rooms are places for sexual encounters, often fleeting clandestine ones. I believe this connotation is strongly contributing in creating that sense of risky intimacy that makes the HRE space uncanny. I acknowledged this quality and use it to create tension, but chose not to make it the central theme of the project. I nevertheless chose to accentuate it by wearing one of the hotel bathrobes during the encounters. I mention in chapter 2 why I chose to inhabit the shell of the evil middle-aged white male, and the perfect aesthetical representation of it is offered by the Harvey Weinstein's case, the case that sparked the #MeToo movement. Harvey Weinstein would invite young actresses to his hotel room, the only time and space he claimed had available for a meeting in his very busy schedule. The women would accept the invitation carrying the hope and the promise of possibly getting casted by the most powerful movie producer in Hollywood; they thought they had to play along, play the game to avoid getting themselves in danger, but also because they thought they were expected to do that (the perceived obligation I discuss in chapter 4). Weinstein would welcome them partially or totally naked, or wearing nothing but a bathrobe and would ask the women to massage him or to take a bath with him (Ursula Macfarlane, 2019). Wearing the bathrobe creates a shift in the overtone of the encounter. The objective is still to setup a space and a situation that are comfortable, gentle and safe, yet suggestive and at first slightly uneasy and uncanny. I thought wearing my regular clothes would have been 'too normal', too easy. The choice of 'costume' is supposed to make the visitor look at me in a different

way they would normally do, especially the ones who already knew me. One participant wrote:

“I was wondering why you wear a bath robe... I guess normal clothes would define you too much as yourself. Bathrobe gives an impression of a masseuse, or a person in service occupation.”

Several participants expressed curiosity towards the choice of clothing, even asking directly if I was wearing anything underneath the robe. A few of them instead chose to wear the second robe available or at least thought about doing so. One participant wrote:

“In retrospect I should have also gotten into a bathrobe so as to further hold up the mirror of the chance encounter.”

So, we have a white middle-aged man inviting you to his hotel room for a private encounter and who welcomes you wearing a bathrobe, and this spells danger for many. I know for a fact that not everybody felt comfortable with this proposition and this without doubt created a selection in the audience who chose to participate, even when they didn't know about the bathrobe yet. In his work Adrian Howells often directed the interaction between performer and participant towards situations that were exposing vulnerability and might have been somehow intimidating. “Howells’ one-to-one performances requires personal agency on the part of the performer and audience-participant, clear boundaries, consent, and the co-creation and mutual management of ‘a place of vulnerability’, in which one may be challenged, exposed (...) and even embarrassed. The risks, Howell asserts, are worthwhile when intelligently designed and held, and can be coped with by even the most exposed of participants. The rhetoric of ‘risk’ can tend to become overblown in writing and thinking about performance” (Heddon and Johnson, 2016, p.31). In my ‘performance’, I do not ask or in any way pressure the visitor to do anything they don't want to do, quite the opposite I leave freedom of choice to what they want to happen during the encounter. I am nevertheless aware, as I earlier acknowledged, that nobody has ever complete freedom of choice and that the performer is still fully responsible for the well-being of the audience. The

tension present in the room is intended to move us both towards the borders of the comfort zone and gently push into the boundaries of what is familiar, allowed, desirable. I believe that in this perspective the risks involved are acceptable and even desirable, provided, as I explained earlier, such risks are approached with sensitivity, mutual care and respect, so to create a safe space of interaction.

7. THE ENCOUNTER

7.1. The arrival

The first try-outs of this project took place in October 2019, announced with the title “Would you like to come in?”. Over one and half day, eight people visited me in room 815 of the Sokos Original Hotel Helsinki, in the city centre. The presentation for the event was the following:

“Would you like to come in?” is a one-to-one participatory work that happens inside a hotel room. The curiosity for this project is to explore meeting the other and the otherness within oneself. The practice of an unknown encounter makes us deal with surprises and unpredictability, and the negotiation of power and boundaries. The project is part of Giorgio Convertito's MA research and in a try-out phase of development.

In spite of the fact that the word participatory was right at the top of the description and the word performance was not present at all, two of the participants declared they expected to be a passive audience in some kind of site-specific performance. I observed in the previous chapter the predominance of the form of immersive theatre where the spectator visits ‘a story’ in an intimate space and this might have affected the expectations of these two people, as well as my reputation as a dance performer: as I said at the start, I had never done anything like this before. I nevertheless decided I needed to be clearer and more direct in the presentation of the event, so I modified the description for the January event, emphasising the word encounter and trying to make it clearer that the audience member would play an active role in the encounter. The title was changed to “Hotel Room Encounters”, and the event was then presented with the following description:

“Hotel Room Encounters” are one-to-one encounters that happen inside an actual hotel room. This project explores the meeting with the other and with the otherness within oneself. The practice of an unknown encounter makes us deal with expectations, surprises, tension and the negotiation of power and boundaries. It also ultimately gives us a chance to meet ourselves in an unusual way and possibly learn something new

about ourselves. These encounters become metaphors or compress examples of pedagogical practice. The project is Giorgio Convertito's thesis work for his master's degree in dance pedagogy.

Each encounter is with one participant at the time, who has an active role in the creation of the encounter.

During this second round I had twenty encounters over a six day stay at the hotel. Three of the visitors I did not know before and they did not know me either. Two I had crossed path before but never talked to them. The rest ranged from acquaintances, to people belonging to my work circle, to long-time friends. The participants had to sign up through the Theatreschool reservation website and choose an available time slot. Upon registering to the event, they would receive an email with the following text:

You are receiving this message as you have chosen to participate in "Hotel Room Encounters". Please come at the time of your booking to the Sokos Original Hotel Helsinki in Kluuvikatu 8 and ask at the reception to see Giorgio Convertito. Once you are given the room number and the key card to access the lifts, proceed to the room floor and knock at the door.

At this point the participant had very little information on the type of event they signed up for, neither the duration of the encounter was specified. Several of the visitors shared with me that in the days before the event they had been thinking about what could possibly happen inside the room, with curiosity (or otherwise I guess they would have not chosen to participate), but also some level of anxiety.

Few moments after they knocked at the door I would open and asked them if they would like to come in. I would then invite them to leave their coats, bags and shoes in the room entrance, while making small talk about their experience of coming to the hotel and interacting with the receptionists. Afterwards I would proceed to introduce the room to them, showing all the different features and amenities, the bathroom with the tub and the robes, the sofas, the minibar, the tea and coffee making facilities, the desk and chair, the bed, the view, to eventually ask them to choose a place where they wanted to sit down. This introduction phase was not part of the first try-outs, but it

became increasingly more important in the January version of the work. First of all, it would give the visitor time to arrive in the room, before being confronted with the ‘task’ ahead. I believe this transition phase helped them getting a bit more comfortable being in the room as well as giving us time to establish a rapport. Another reason for which I found introducing the room to the visitor was important is that it opened up the focus to the environment and away from just the personal interaction with the man in the bathrobe. I became a bit more part of the room ecology and a bit less of the main character, making the room and the situation, rather than the subjects, the main focus of the encounter.

Once the visitor was comfortably seated and settled, I would introduce the rules of the encounter, roughly as follow:

As you chose to enter the room, you may also choose to leave at any point. After an hour, the hotel phone will ring, which means the time for the encounter is up. For as long as you choose to stay, the room is yours to do as you please. I am also here at your service to satisfy your wishes. I will though take care of my own boundaries, as well as the boundaries of the room. Anything that happens in here will remain confidential, unless I have your consent to refer to the events of the encounter for the purpose of my research, always anonymously. Whatever happens from now on is up to you.

In the first try-out encounters I had used a different wording of the ‘rules’: I would say something along the lines of “The room is yours and you can do anything you want. You can also do anything you wish to me or ask me anything you desire.” I found that this was again focussing excessively on the physical interaction, was a somehow more ‘violent’ proposal. For the second version I decided for a softer approach, which I believe helped reducing the initial surprise and anxiety to a more workable level.

7.2. The internal dialogue

I already mentioned how the specific setup, aesthetic choices and dramaturgy are instrumental to create an uncanny feeling: the place is comfortable and safe, yet suggestive and risky. The host is friendly, attentive and caring, yet slightly off-putting in his white bathrobe. The wide array of potential actions is exciting, yet a bit

disorienting and somehow challenging. I noticed already in the first encounters that, as a result of this tension, an internal dialogue was taking place in the head of the visitor, who is trying to resolve the conflicts and to figure out a way to exist in that context. It is a mix of curiosity, self-awareness, self-consciousness, as the participants ask themselves in random order: What do I want to do? What am I expected to do? What can I do? What wishes I dare to express? Pretty soon it was clear to me that the most interesting part of the encounter was this meeting with oneself. Some of the written comments illustrate this uncanny feeling and the internal dialogue that emerges:

“Sitting in the hotel room with you was familiar yet strange”

“I think this confronted me with the question ¿What do I want now? And having the possibility of doing was overwhelming in a good sense. Now I’m feeling that I had what I wanted even if I didn’t know it”

“Asking for something from another person always bring a lot of questions to the table”

“Given a lot of freedom makes things sometimes challenging, but on the other hand brings up the awareness of oneself and the possibilities of being with other people”

“I felt my weakness in not knowing. I felt I need to go through it and not grab your ankles. I felt like ok, now I fucking will feel this weakness, because I can”

“How hard it can be to purely receive (...) without feeling exploitative”

A very interesting report of internal dialogue can be found in the following note:

“While in the space and time offered by this experiment I noticed I created three different parallel places:

- 1. The one where I am actually present, participating in real time following the care of the other and myself at the same time, allowing when possible and accepting the events to take place*

2. *The one where things become possible in my mind mixed with 'could' and 'would', but not allowing myself to freely experiment on them, a place where I can almost realize my thoughts, my urges and desires, but allowing the feeling of appropriate to be present somewhat*
3. *The one where the imagination is running wild, where every desire is fulfilled and I don't think about consequences or if it is actually possible"*

7.3. The transformation

This internal dialogue is really at the essence of the experience. At times I observed some of the participants, especially the ones with more experience in one-to-one performances, expecting, even seeking for some kind of event to happen, some intensity. One of the participants commented during the conversation: "it's an intimate space, something intimate has to happen". And yet, the situation was already intimate without having to make it so, perhaps though not as eventful or intense as one would expect in most immersive theatre or one-to-one performances. Rather the intensity was introspective, more of a process than an event. As the internal dialogue goes on and the internal conflicts are addressed, a space is opened for something unusual to take place, the space for a transformative experience. This transformation can take very different forms: self-realization, struggle, revelation, emotion... I often could sense that transformation but also was glad to read descriptions of such transformations in the cards left for me after the encounters. Here are some examples:

"Usually many words and tales are shared between friends, but thanks to the hotel room a new situation was born. Why don't people share more often the simple act of seating together and listening? I just now that I was very tired before I entered the room and recharged when I exited it."

This last note was written by a very good friend of mine, with whom we share a level of familiarity. It is not uncommon for me to visit her place or for her to visit mine, and we often chat, make jokes and laugh a lot. During her visit in the room we ended up having a 20-minute silent meditation, something, we both commented afterwards, would have never happened in a million years under usual conditions.

“Very interesting, strange and scary also at the beginning. For a person like me being socially a bit insecure and having had some violent experiences in the past, come alone to a hotel room, was a bit worrying... but I chose to come and I’m glad I did. I felt very comfortable and not at all reserved at the end. I somehow became a child for a while there. People rarely play with me like that, or are there for me to do silly things and listen to my silly thoughts. It’s funny how it affected me. You were my babysitter!”

“I came to you not knowing what to suspect. I left with almost a religious experience. I’ve been searching for myself, I think for all my life. I did not realize how vulnerable I am. Being in that room with you touched me. You got me relaxed and I danced, I put myself in a vulnerable position, and nothing happened! I left the room laughing out loud. It was the emotion of joy coming out of me. Now I sit here writing this and I want to cry. You made me feel safe and warm.”

All the 15 notes are available as an appendix to this written work. I think they are best presented in their entirety and unedited, as the only document of what the encounters have been, a testimony of the visitors’ experiences but also a tribute to the visitors’ contribution to this work. I choose to give the notes their own space, to leave them uncommented and let them speak for themselves.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout my career as a stage performer, which spans over almost 25 years, I can hardly remember any situation where I experienced the level of pre-show anxiety and nervous tension I have experienced before each and every single knock at the door of room 815. I have performed a lot of improvisation, blind dates with dancers and musicians I had never met before, even jumped into a set choreography without previously rehearsing it. Yet I always felt like I kind of knew what was going to happen and I wasn't nervous as I knew what to do. In this project I was truly confronted with not knowing what was going to happen and not being sure I would know what to do, and that made me nervous and uneasy even when I knew I was going to meet a long-time friend. In terms of creating the conditions to meet the unknown, the experiment was a success.

The goal of my artistic work was to meet the unknown, meet the Other, explore the concept of otherness and otherness within oneself, as well as exploring new territories in performing art. This work led me to face the ethical issues involved in one-with-one participatory performance, realizing that ultimately these are the same ethical issues involved in pedagogical practices. In investigating the feedback loop that happens between host and visitor, it became evident that a pupil in a classroom experiences the same type of perceived obligation that the visitor did in the hotel room, and it is the teacher's responsibility to handle this with extreme care. The HRE laboratory gave me the opportunity to experiment with solutions to address those ethical issues and to practice creating a safe space in a risky situation. Using Van Manen, Antila and Arao & Clemens I advocate in this thesis that a safe space cannot be just a container for rules and that there are no universal procedures that can guarantee safety, proposing instead a dialogical approach to safe space creation. I suggest that a caring approach to ethics, combined with the integrity, insight, generosity and sensitivity of the practitioner, and a mutual interest and respect for the material, are the ingredients that best give us the chance to create a safe environment for learning through transformation.

What was also very interesting to follow during my research was the impact the location and the choice of 'costume' had on shifting the tones of the encounter. It is quite clear

that a different choice of location and outfit would have had completely different repercussions on the transformative potential of the meeting.

In the future I would very much like to continue working with one-with-one and participatory performances, and I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to bring HRE to another location: the project has in fact been invited to the Kehä Festival that will take place in Oulu, Finland, in September 2020. The most exciting part of this opportunity is that, visiting another city, I expect to meet mostly strangers, people I have never met before, which gives possibly the ideal conditions for the meeting with the unknown and with the Other. One of the visitors I had, somebody I knew beforehand, commented that whatever secret was revealed during the encounter, it could not then be untold. Most of the time it is easier to open up to a stranger, like when traveling on a train or a plane, knowing that you will most likely never meet this person again.

Another reason for which I would like to continue working on this type of project is the wish to further research intimate participatory performance. I think this type of work is extremely important and valuable especially within a society that is moving us further and further apart from each other, towards separation and isolation. I think the more we become isolated in our daily habits and routines, the more we are in need of nourishing, intimate experiences of closeness, touch, eye-to-eye, skin-to-skin, flesh-to-flesh contact. I am writing this in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic crises (or maybe it is just the beginning), and, in the middle of the prescribed physical distancing we are practicing in order to take care of each other, I sense even stronger the importance of physical contact. I think how HRE would be nearly impossible to put on during this time and even wonder how different it will be next time I try it.

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Appendix 1

The written notes

The following are the notes the participants wrote on the cards. They were handwritten and I have transcribed them to the best of my ability, trying to leave them unchanged and unedited.

The October notes

Lovely lightness, interspersed deep revelations and moments of realizations. More when we meet. Care... yes! Enjoy the rest of this journey. Looking forward for the foam castle play together

So what happened? I am a server, am I? Voluntarily and sometimes I haven't chosen that, at all. Am I choosing it here? I tend to think how can I help this person. What is needed to make the situation flow, as a friend, co-worker, lover, stranger... Here. That he would be more in contact with himself. Maybe then I get good feedback of myself? Oh, the need of feeling valuable.

I felt like my brother. Having to be, glad to be in this position of deciding. I felt secrecy. I felt my weakness in not knowing. I felt I need to go through it and not grab your ankles. I felt like ok, now I fucking will feel this weakness, because I can. The world is ruled by scared people. What is mutuality? Meet in a way that both are glad. What is a sexy consideration? Lately I have felt while being with myself, in the nature especially that I am releasing something which my mom, grandmothers have encountered. Boundaries which men have crossed. And I have had to allow this in myself. And be the woman I want to be.

I am grateful for all the kind and strong eyes I have looked into and with whom I have exchanged openness and bravery, to care and forgive. You are one of them.

The tree is holding the bird. Strange softness is leaking to the bold tallness. When we get bald, we will be able to go and dance to the place for big bald people. We will never know what the surprise was. Remember that the bird's nostrils are on its beak?

Very interesting, strange and scary also at the beginning. For a person like me being socially a bit insecure and having had some violent experiences in the past, come alone to a hotel room, was a bit worrying... but I chose to come and I'm glad I did (of course knowing that it's safe with you, but sometime traumas can make you react abruptly). I felt very comfortable and not at all reserved at the end. I somehow became a child for a while there. People rarely play with me like that, or are there for me to do silly things and listen to my silly thoughts. It's funny how it affected me. You were my babysitter!

Thank you for your softness and presence. I wish you all the best with your further research and process on this work.

Well... hmm, I think this confronted me with the question ¿What do I want now? And having the possibility of doing was overwhelming in a good sense. Now I'm feeling that I had what I wanted even if I didn't know it. Maybe my desires are very simple, drinking wine, talking and a foot massage is all I need. About power... I felt that even though this can be a 'neutral' space, it's still your room somehow and I felt I was in your territory in a good way I mean, and I'm wondering what would be the thing that would make me feel that I have the power... and do I want to feel more power? Not really, I'm confused. It was nice and thanks for the company.

While in the space and time offered by this experiment, I noticed I created three different parallel places:

1. The one where I am actually present, participating in real time following the care of the other and myself at the same time, allowing when possible and accepting the events to take place
2. The one where things become possible in my mind mixed with 'could' and 'would', but not allowing myself to freely experiment on them, a place where I can almost realize my thoughts, my urges and desires, but allowing the feeling of appropriate to be present somewhat
3. The one where the imagination is running wild, where every desire is fulfilled and I don't think about consequences or if it is actually possible.

Hotel freedom of kinds of expression.

The January notes

Thank you for showing me the power of curiosity. May yours never fade.

Sitting in the hotel room with you was familiar yet strange. Familiar because I had seen you around at Teak, and strange because I didn't know the sound of your voice. Interesting how sometimes we need to register in a Lyyti form and meet someone in a random hotel room just to see someone we encounter in passing on an almost daily basis. Throughout our experience I often felt I was not doing enough, I worried I wasn't providing interesting content for your research. Perhaps there is something to learn from my inactivity or lack of engagement with the situation? Was I supposed to be a teacher or a student? In retrospect I should have also gotten into a bathrobe so as to further hold up the mirror of the chance encounter. Thanks for your warmth and the Pepsi.

Thank you for the shared silence in room 815! Usually many words and tales are shared between friends, but thanks to the hotel room a new situation was born. Why don't people share more often the simple act of seating together and listening? I just now that I was very tired before I entered the room and recharged when I exited it.

I came to you not knowing what to suspect. I left with almost a religious experience. I've been searching for myself, I think for all my life. I did not realize how vulnerable I am. Being in that room with you touched me. You got me relaxed and I danced, I put myself in a vulnerable position, and nothing happened! I left the room laughing out loud. It was the emotion of joy coming out of me. Now I sit here writing this and I want to cry. You made me feel safe and warm. You have a gift. Thank you.
P.S. Watching you dance, and us dancing together was beautiful and intimate. I will never forget it.

Thank you for being present, making the situation feel safe and letting me be myself.

Asking for something from another person always bring a lot of questions to the table... especially when there are no professional roles present so much, but rather just two people. Made me think, what the other people have chosen? I was wondering why you wear a bath robe... I guess normal clothes would define you too much as yourself. Bathrobe gives an impression of a masseuse, or a person in service occupation. I think it's heart-warming that people, you, want to make this kind of encounters, although they are always a bit exciting also. We know each other and I felt comfortable. Given a lot of freedom makes things sometimes challenging, but on the other hand brings up the awareness of oneself and the possibilities of being with other people. Hotels are in-between places, no man's land... somehow hotels suggest doing things one wouldn't normally do, like drink champagne in the morning. I felt quite nice in the room and feel quite calm after. For me it was a nice experience, unique. And now it's over. I will continue my day, perhaps go shopping, happy about stretched muscles.

Falling, just falling, holding nothing. And nothing else needed to happen. Thank you so much! A lot of realization in that fall. How hard it can be to purely receive in that fall without feeling exploitative. We human adults are so odd...

Unusual encounter in the hotel room fills me with gratitude. There are human beings who consider and care and are curious. I think you are one of them. I was reading about the death of Jörn Donner looking his photography. He is looking at me with bush baby eyes from the page of Iltasanomaat. He was controversial cultural person in Finland. Rip and (...). Thank you Giorgio that I was included in your project. My whole body thanks you, my feet thank you and I am curious to know more about your research. Good winds to you.

Thanks for the experience, I felt that I had more knowledge about the structure and the event in general to transform the whole experience. I was not thinking about gender

or age power structure in the room (I definitely did in the elevator where I had an everyday power structured encounter). I did think about intersectionality, about the fact that it is a hotel, a place that is far from my sociocultural background in its reality, but close in its fiction (novels, the whole literature history describes hotels as somehow liminal places). I tried not to think before, not to plan, not use my knowledge. But finally what happened was that I just did what I needed the most at that particular moment: I just had a discussion with a friend in a way that had a personal importance for me. My father's rebel's act is to drink alcohol from a mug, it is someone's rebel act who worked in restaurant service in his entire life, so I quoted him using this metaphorical language, making the room more personal? Rebel? Reflecting on the situation socially? There is an Hungarian short story about János Kiss, written by Zsigmond Móricz, in this short story János Kis

(I am not sure whether it is one or two 's') is a servant. He is very poor and when he has a chance to be a guest on his landlord's wedding and eat for free, he decides to "eat him out of his property". He eats too much and dies. So when I started to drink I had this strong feeling being as János. And I just realised that I have a strong feeling against hotel structures. They are somehow the symbols of class oppression, even though I know that it is not so simple.

When I left the hotel and I was walking on the street I was really happy. I've found funny that the people staring at me had no idea about the wine I drunk and the hotel. So, even if you do what you do also outside the hotel room, there is this secrecy. A liminal space. And another secrecy, the performative one. Because we, as participants, cannot forget the fact that it is a performance. We become also performers. At some point the expectations of the audience member (the other person in the room?) intrudes the space. Even if we try to cut it and to get rid of it, it is there, so I tried to fight against it and just followed my instincts and my needs at the time.

What comes to my mind is the language, it is my personal question to myself. What would change my mother tongue on this experience? Would I react, behave differently? I was also really interested in the other visitors, the social layers of being in a hotel. Contact with other human beings who know nothing about this performance, just so on the corridors in a weird way.

Well, thanks again, if you need help to figure out my handwriting, tell me. See you soon!
