

Reflection of Final Project

Master's in Dance

2021

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**THE PROCESS OF CREATING *R E S P A C E***

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OSLO NATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE ARTS



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## 1 CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*R E S P A C E*

2.–5.3.2021, Stage 5

Oslo National Academy of the Arts

’27 minutes

link to work: <https://vimeo.com/547913275>

password: *anulaiho2021*

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Sound Design – Petter Wiik with Anu Laiho

Light Design – Martin Myrvold

Costume Design – Karianne Caspara Haag with Anu Laiho

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External Supervisor – Janne-Camilla Lyster

Internal Supervisors – Torunn Robstad & Bojana Cvejic

Recording Engineer for Text – Andrew Graham

Stage Management & Production Assistance – Kjetil Skåret, Linda Marie Magnussen & Ragnar Berntsson

*“The room is dimly lit, but you can see that it is not empty.*

*The room is not empty, but you can see that it is dimly lit.*

*The room is dimly empty, but you can.*

*The room is not empty, but dimly.”*

## 2 DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

*R E S P A C E* is part of my Master's Degree at Oslo National Academy of the Arts and acts as the final project of the studies. The piece plays with the ideas of overwriting a stage space with an imaginary room, using movement, sound and light to trigger physical sensations and memories in the audience. The experience of space is approached as a delicate, personal sensation for both the performer and the audience members – placing the audience on all four sides of the performance space brings the audience inside of the experience, creating an individual point of view for each spectator. The piece attempts to evoke a feeling of a lively, ever-changing space through imagery of familiar objects.

The piece is heavily inspired by Henri Lefebvre, Bernard Tschumi and Nick Kaye's writings about the real, the ideal and the virtual space, trying to bring together realms of the reality and the imagined in a solo performance. *R E S P A C E* approaches the imaginary through establishing something recognisable and familiar, and deconstructing it in order to create a shift in perception of the rooms and spaces presented in front of the audience. The reality of the stage space is introduced in the beginning, but soon left behind, allowing the performance to happen somewhere in between the stage and the imagined room.

My work investigates what makes a space recognisable for the audience, and what kind of expectations and images arise when certain words are used to describe familiar objects, and how the movements of the performer can resonate in the audience and enhance their imaginations. This imagined room is physically explored and transformed by the performer through movements inspired by the shapes, functions and sensations related to the room. Sound and light design further support this establishment and disruption of spaces, allowing the imaginary to first crystallise and then expand into a surreal mixture of what it once was.

“*R E S P A C E* observes the way spaces are constructed through our imaginations and physical experiences – the memories loaded into certain words, images, or movements. Layering different expectations and experiences by building and deconstructing a room, the audience is invited to open their imagination to the transformation of spaces. To replace oneself within the space. To arrive at a performance space but find oneself in a room filled with familiar objects. To travel through this room and transform it with every step taken, every surface touched. Slipping into another realm of reality.” (Excerpt from the program note)

*“The dark wooden floor is covered with a big, dark green rug. It looks soft. Like if you would step on it with your bare feet, the rug would radiate warmth into your body.*

*The floor is covered with a big rug. It looks soft. Like if you would step on it with your bare feet, the rug would radiate warmth into your body.*

*The floor with a rug. soft.  
step on it with your bare feet, radiate warmth into your body.”*

### 3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROCESS

Developing this project into a performance happened between Autumn 2019 and Spring 2021. The research phase included three periods of intense work with the physicality of the piece, and two periods in which I focused on the theory and references. After these periods, the development moved into the final phase of creating the performance. The main questions that required solving through-out the physical and theoretical research phases, were how space and the imaginary could be worked together in this piece, and how concretely will this imaginary be portrayed in the final performance.

#### 3.1 Spaces to rooms to homes to rooms to spaces

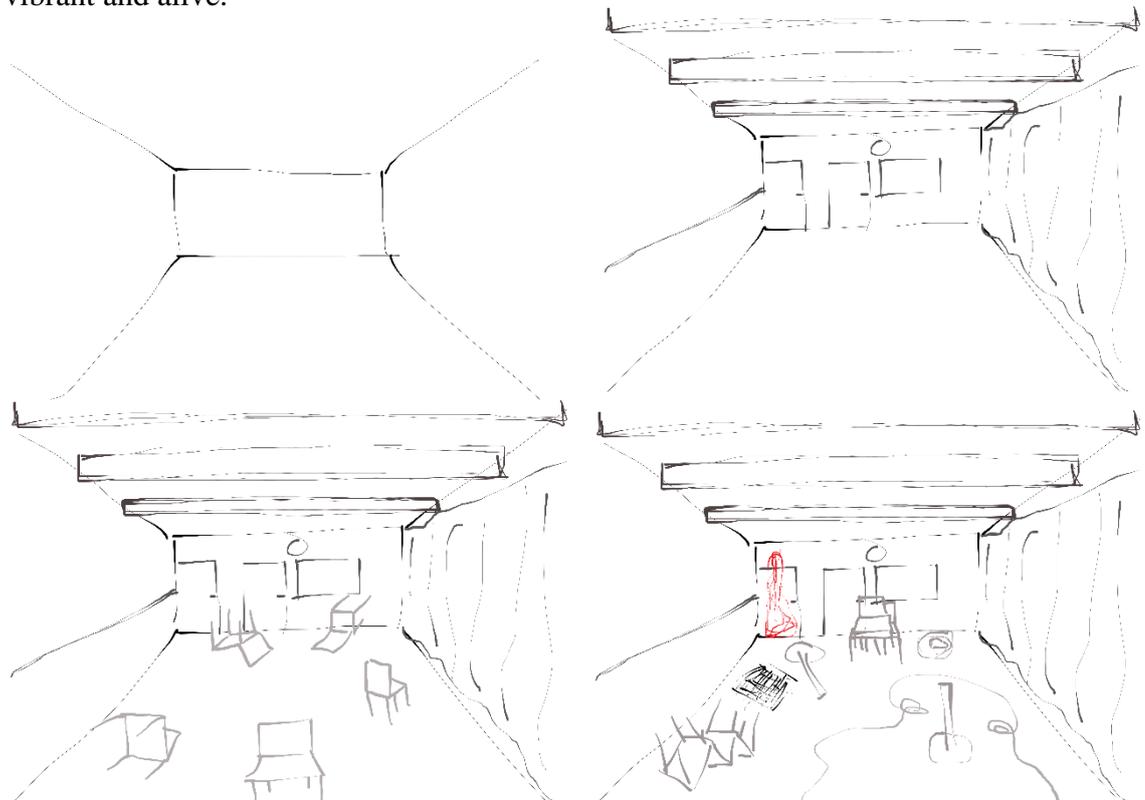
The original interest to make my final project about space came to me after observing my own relationship to the homes I have had in my life. Home to me has always been a very private place: a place where I find rest and comfort but also where a lot of anxieties and fears might find a place to hide in plain sight. Inside a home one might find solace when the outside world seems too intimidating, but it may turn against oneself, trapping and forcefully containing. Once a comfortable bed seems like a prison that cannot be escaped from, the walls that a day before reflected beautiful spring light into the room are now closing in, and the door safely keeping the outside world away is now not letting one go. In reality, nothing ever changes: The furniture sits unmoved, the light is the same, the air is as light as the day before, but the interpretation and the experience have shifted.

I found these changing relationships to the objects and features in my home intriguing, but as I do not really have any interest in making a piece about my personal anxieties, I wanted to aim my research towards space in a more general manner. I started by getting books, searching online, and asking my peers to find definitions of the words *space*, *place* and *site*, to try and understand the different nuances of these words. Some of these definitions were included in the first process sharing in December 2019 and got titled by my tutors and colleagues as “*Quotations by Old, White Men*” – as the names presented with the definitions were such as Plato, Descartes, Heidegger, Kant, Aristotle, Augé and de Certeau. Although this definition hunt turned out to be effective in getting more in depth with the terminology, and settled that *space* is the correct word to use in this project, there seemed to always be new threads to be pulled faster than the old ones could be solved. There did not seem to be any one clear truth in defining space that could be followed and the project needed to find something else to hold onto.

After tearing my interests wide open into this endless concept of space, I started to slowly find my way back into a more concise idea that I could utilise better in my physical explorations. My focus went into rooms – walls, floors, roofs, different functions of rooms and different objects that could occupy these rooms. My approaches varied from realistic

depictions of rooms we live in, abstract collections of objects in dance studios, trying to build meaning and trying to just disrupt the normal order already present in the rooms I worked in. Eventually the research returned to the idea of homes once more with an urge to have something recognisable to work with. Working with ‘just’ rooms seemed too vague on its own and using homes as an emotional and physical memory to trigger the audience offered seemingly more playground relevant for making this piece.

In the last weeks of the process, I had a call with my supervisor Bojana Cvejic. I was somehow plateauing in my work’s last meters and while discussing this matter of rooms and homes, Cvejic pointed out that the notion of home is tied to a cultural meaning. My experience of homes is based on mainly the small apartments, often studio apartments, I have lived in in Finland and Norway. This image of a home does not necessarily correlate with someone outside of the Nordic region of Europe. I finally found a satisfactory way of describing what the piece is attempting to create – a recognisable concept of a room within a performance space. The recognisability of features within the lived spaces in our homes, like the bedroom, the living room or the kitchen, triggering physical memories and shifting the sense of the performance space within both the performer and the audience member. By making the image of the room barer and simpler, it opened more space to be filled with the spectator’s own imagination and so the space could be more vibrant and alive.



*Image 1: Sketches from studio work, January 2020.*

### 3.2 Letting go of the concrete

As the work flowed from different spatial approaches to another, the question of how concrete this imaginary space in the performance should be came up again and again. In the early stages of the research one imagined room was created physically with multiple layers of installations. The installations worked with the same room very concretely: the same outlines of the room and its furniture were repeated in all three installations, and the movement explorations were strongly connected to the function of these features. The approach was very insisting on the audience members to receive the exact same image of the imaginary room, which I later found to be unnecessary for the performance to be effective.

After leaving the installations behind, the approach was heavily shifted towards the real physical spaces. Working within a dance studio and transforming it with a selection of objects like chairs, fabrics and cables, the focus was more on the changes of a real room and how they shift the body's relations as more and more changes are implemented. In retrospect, I find this part of the research important for the development of the process as a whole, but it was far too 'on the nose' with the idea of transforming space. This period opened the research to the changing sensations of the body within a space depending on where its attention is directed but failed to find a sensible doorway into a performative format.

When thinking of how the research could eventually build into a performance on stage, different scenographic ideas from metal frames to fairy-light decorations were thrown in the air. In the end, trusting the power of the imaginary in recreating this recognisable lived room – and accepting that the room in each audience member's mind will be different – helped letting go of a lot of extra material. In letting go of the concrete, I found how little was needed to trigger the audience's experiences: The stage was left empty with the sound score functioning as the builder of the imaginary, so that the body could work as the catalyst for transforming both the imaginary room and the stage space.



*Image 2: Trial sketch with fairy-lights, June 2020.*

*“You walk across the room, and find a white table, covered with a yellow tablecloth.  
You are certain that the table could carry your weight if you sat on top of it.*

*Across the room, a table, covered with a tablecloth. You are certain that the table could  
carry your weight if you sat on top of it.*

*table, with a tablecloth.  
the table could carry your weight if you sat on top of it.”*

## 4 REFERENCES, INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

In developing *R E S P A C E*, there were some crucial references that helped crystallising the themes and approaches. The references include literature, other performances, and choreographers I met in workshops during the Master's Program. Moving from theories about space to examples of the performativity of space and to the methods of working, these references have inspired and defined the work in different parts of the research.

### 4.1 Theories and thinkers

The main theory to inspire *R E S P A C E* was French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre's (1901–1991) idea of real and ideal space from his book *Production of Space* (1992), originally published as *La Production de l'espace* in 1974. In his research, Lefebvre recognises the difficulty to define one “truth of space”, as the understanding of space transforms based on the historical, cultural and social situations. What he offers to solve this dilemma is separating the concept of space into two – the real and the ideal space. The real space is comprised of the physical space of the concrete and the social space of human interaction within the physical. The ideal space on the other hand is made of the mental aspects of space, the theories and ways of thinking about space, and the stereotypes and images of possible physical spaces in our minds. (Lefebvre, 1992, p.p. 1–5, 9–11, 21–23.) Dividing the definition of space in this way leaves it open for historical changes, transformations and differences of societies, and the various eras of thinkers.

At the time of researching this theory, my work moved from trying to insist on an imaginary room to appear in the performance space, to seeing them separately – the performance space as the real space and the imagined room as the ideal space. The real and ideal spaces exist simultaneously, but do not meet each other, creating a gap between the mind and the concrete. (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 14) Architect Bernard Tschumi discusses this gap in his essay *Architectural Paradox* from 1975. He takes Lefebvre's theory and extends it to his understanding of architecture. Tschumi sees that when considering space, a clash of sensation and reason is created. On one hand, one can prioritise mind over matter. This approach is called *The Pyramid*: The ideal space, the dematerialised concepts are seen more powerful than the physical construction of space. On the other hand, the materiality of the physical space and the human body can be seen as the most important thing, which Tschumi calls *The Labyrinth*: Social practices and relations of the body distinguishing the space in multiple possible ways. (Tschumi, 1996, p.p. 29, 33–35, 38–43).

The paradox created by the two approaches is that neither of them takes in consideration the wholeness of space – the mental, the social and the physical. The Pyramid’s issue is that it leaves the line between architecture and something else too vague – it claims that materiality of space itself is not architecture, but that it is found in the ideas and concepts of the architects. What then could or could not be architecture? On the other side of the paradox, The Labyrinth does define space through its materiality, but at the expense of neglecting the mental aspects of it. (Tschumi, 1996, p.p. 34–36, 40–43.) Tschumi further explains that:

“To restate my point, the paradox is not about the impossibility of perceiving both architectural concept (the six faces of the cube) and real space at the same time but about the impossibility of questioning the nature of space and at the same time making or experiencing a real space. Unless we search for an escape from architecture into the general organization of building processes, the paradox persists: [...] Indeed, architecture constitutes the reality of experience while this reality gets in the way of the overall vision. Architecture constitutes the abstraction of absolute truth, while this very truth gets in the way of feeling. We cannot both experience and think that we experience. "The concept of dog does not bark"; the concept of space is not in space.” (Tschumi, 1996, p.p. 47– 48)

For *R E S P A C E*, understanding that the piece’s ideal and real spaces are different and need to be thought separately was crucial. Both the stage space and the imaginary room required to be defined and worked with on their own as they would have different functions for the audience and the performer in the performance. The two spaces were equalised: I truly believed in the existence of both and worked in the gap created between them.

The piece needs both the imaginary room and the stage to exist for it to function and be effective, but what is being presented in front of the audience happens in what Nick Kaye calls a “virtual space”. Kaye presented this concept of the virtual space in his book *Site-Specific Art – Performance, place and documentation* (2000). He directs his interest in the gap both Lefebvre and Tschumi recognise in the division of real and ideal space but approaches it from the point of view of the arts. As the ideal space attempts to meet the real space, a virtual space appears. The disruption from the overlapping shifts the real space, creating an opening to a virtual realm inside of it. This is seen as the space of the art piece. (Kaye, 2000, p. 29–33.) In my performance, the audience is invited to arrive into a stage space and directed to observe it and themselves in it. After some time, the stage space is overlapped with an audio description of another room which is then mirrored and obstructed by the dancer’s body. The collapse of the real and the ideal spaces provide an opportunity for the audience member’s perception to be triggered by both the stage space and the imagined room

During the research process, I wrote the essay *Negotiating Space Through the Real and the Ideal* as an assignment for the Master Program's theory course with Bojana Cvejic. The essay elaborated more in-depth the theories and ideas by Lefebvre, Tschumi and Kaye presented here. Focusing on these theories and ways of understanding space very clearly defined the direction of my performance in the last phases. Not hanging in the definitions, but embracing the fluidity and temporality of spaces, guided the work away from imaginary space alone, but rather into the middle of colliding spaces.

## 4.2 Performances about space

One of the most influential performances for my work has been Mette Edvardsen's *Black* (2011). On stage, Edvardsen approaches different parts of the space and, while relating to something invisible with her body, repeats words in a quick tempo. These words and movements slowly make a room appear: A room filled with furniture, the telephone ringing and someone knocking on the door. Edvardsen's way to create an image of a room using only repeated words, mimicked movements and direct connection to the audience in *Black* is fascinating in its simplicity. The power of imagination in the audience is harnessed by insisting on clear parameters and giving different sections time to be established, creating a realistic, moving and breathing space. Edvardsen's performance is so close to what I was working with, that it was suggested to me by all three of my supervisors. Although my work ended up taking a more abstract form in the end, *Black* inspired the ways of establishing an imaginary room with the audience. Some of Edvardsen's movement language also partially influenced the more practical movement tasks and explorations in the studio.

Ingrid Liavaag's *in the act of love* (2019) work in progress showing at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts as part of her Master's in Theatre studies, has also accompanied me in my research. In the performance, two actors explore different phases of a relationship while the audience stands around, free to move in the edges of the space. The performers are mainly inside two set pieces that frame the centre of the performance space as a room, creating a beautiful, layered tension between them and the audience. When the actors occasionally leave the framed room, moving in the space between the set and the audience, or sometimes even within the audience, the sense of the inside and outside space is blurred. At points, the audience feels like they are merely peeping into someone else's life through a window, only for the dynamic to shift and rearrange almost as if they are inside of the intimate meeting of the two characters. Experiencing these shifts of my agency as an audience member left a clear mark on me. When setting *R E S P A C E* into the performance space in the end of the process, the audience member's perception of both the stage space and the imagined room were greatly considered. Together with my external supervisor Janne-Camilla Lyster, we experimented with different lengths of gazes to use in the performance, to set the edges of the imaginary room, and to see how

that affected the audience's sense of space. We noticed that letting the gaze go far into the distance when being in close proximity to an audience member, made the imagined space's borders much larger than the stage space, leaving the audience outside of the experience as they are bound by the walls of the stage. Playing with the distance of the gaze within the edges of the surrounding audience and never directing the gaze directly at any of them, could create a sense of the audience being inside the space with the performer but still not dragging them fully into the performer's reality. The performer's and each of the audience member's experience of the imaginary room is their own, but they are overlapping with each other within the stage.

In creating the sound design for my project, I found using text with describing both the arrival to the stage and the emerging of the imaginary room the most effective. In Eivind Seljeseth's *Alt nå* (2019) individual audio cues were used through headphones for each audience member to get a personal sense of space. Highlighting the specific section where the audience member was sitting and inviting them to observe the space from that position, activated the sense of spectatorship in Seljeseth's piece at the same time it separated the audience from each other by hooking them into individual headphones hanging from the roof. In *R E S P A C E*, the text activates the audience by talking directly to them. The text encourages the audience members to imagine themselves moving, observing and interacting with objects in the real space of the stage and the ideal space of the imagined space. As the audience is seated around the space, the things they see and imagine are differently laid out and everyone's experience is their own. Only after this activation has been established, the dancers body emerges into the space and starts to facilitate a series of transformations.

### 4.3 Workshops and guest lecturers

During the Master's Program, we had many workshops with guest lecturers sharing their methods and practices with us. The workshops with Janne-Camilla Lyster and Rosalind Goldberg had a direct influence on my project. Although these workshops were different in their length and content, they both affected the developing of the methods used in creating *R E S P A C E*.

With Lyster, we worked for five weeks with her written score, creating solo performances as interpretations of it. During these weeks we had meetings with Lyster together and individually, where we discussed different forms of scores and how to approach them. Working with images and text as scores was fairly new for me, and I found that these approaches worked with the way I process artistic creation and movement in my mind. My collaboration with Lyster ended up being so seamless and successful, that she was later invited to be the external supervisor for my final project.

Goldberg's workshop was a one-week quick dive into different methodologies and choreographic approaches as a semester starter. We were encouraged to look at the ways we have worked with our research processes and prepare a presentation where we introduced one clearly articulated method. Hearing Goldberg's and my colleague's ways of working helped defining my own, and during this week I started to find the frames for what I later would call the TASK-WRITE-REVISE method, which played a large role in the movement development in my project.

*“You continue walking and next to the wall on the other side of the room, there’s a bed with a knitted blanket on top, filled with colourful pillows. You feel the desire to crawl under the pillows and covers, feeling the different textures on your skin.*

*next to the wall, there is a bed with a blanket on top, filled with pillows. You feel the desire to crawl under the pillows and covers, feeling the different textures on your skin.*

*a bed a blanket on top, filled with pillows.  
the desire to crawl under the pillows and covers, feeling the textures on your skin.”*

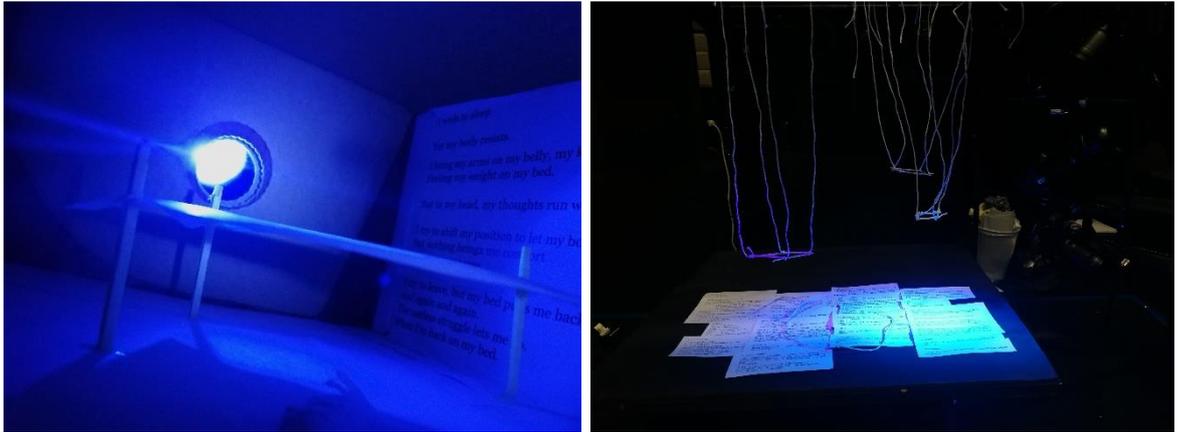
## 5 METHODS AND PRACTICES

As my topic for the final project was more or less clear to me from the beginning, I could direct my attention to different methods and practices for working with imagined space. Some methods were for researching different approaches, some for accumulating movement and some for creating compositions that could be worked into the choreography. As I had the entire Master's Program to work with the project, I insisted on not starting to build choreography before the final process sharing in the Autumn of 2020. In this way, different opportunities could be found and exhausted in order to find what works and what needs to be left behind. This way of working made possible for the choreographic choices to feel straightforward when they were to be made in the end.

### 5.1 Installations

One of the early ways of creating spaces in my research was building installations picturing the first version of the imaginary room in various scales. These installations were presented in the first process showing in 2019. The smallest installation was made with cardboard, paper, wood, flashlights and coloured filters, and pictured a doll house like room with printed writing on the walls. The second, medium sized installation was built on a stage model table with lights, strings, wood and paper. It had wooden frames of the same furniture as in the smallest installation, hanging with strings from the top of the table with definitions of space placed on the bottom. The final and largest installation was built during the presentation. It consisted of a large tape rectangle, pieces of clothing marking places of the furniture and the dancer's body interacting with these pieces of invisible furniture. All three installations were placed in the same space, revealed by light one by one, and left to the viewers to explore simultaneously at their own pace.

The goal of building these installations was to map out different outlines of objects and their functionalities in different forms, and to replicate the same imaginary room multiple times within one space. As mentioned before, this approach turned out to be far too concrete to be carried out further and insisted too strongly on one interpretation of the imagined room. Perhaps it could be said that this approach leaned too heavily on Tschumi's Labyrinth way of thinking about space, and it needed more of the Pyramid to be balanced out. The only thing I hold onto and developed further in the oncoming research phases was the image of the room. During these first explorations of space through building installations, the imaginary room found a sense of concreteness in my own mind that could be utilised later.



*Image 3: Installation 1, December 2019.*

*Image 4: Installation 2, December 2019.*

## 5.2 TASK–WRITE–REVISE

Continuously writing notes was an important part of my process from the beginning to the end. Instead of trying to log exact movement patterns or sequences, the focus was on capturing the mental and physical experience of each exploration. From these writings, a kind of poetic narration emerged. Henri Lefebvre discussed language as the coding of space, a way to understand and deconstruct produced spaces. This language is produced through social contexts and practices, and creates local and universal understandings of space. (Lefebvre, 1992, p.p. 16–18.) I see my writing practice as building a personal code – connecting experiences of the real space with the explorations of the ideal space through movement in the virtual realm. These poetic narrations are the language of the piece, through which a specific sensation, experience or pattern can be retrieved effectively. To be able to hold onto these occurrences, it was not productive to document exact decisions or movements made in the moment, but to trust that flow-state writing without too much editing or judgement could capture important information.

This practice of writing developed into a method of accumulating movement and tasks during the process. I call this method TASK-WRITE-REVISE, and I used it to effectively create and re-create tasks exploring the realm of the imagined room. The method works in a cyclical manner: First a task is decided and executed, instantly after that a short writing session is had and finally the original task is revised based on the experiences that emerged. The first tasks were very simple, for example working with the sensation of standing on a rug, but through accumulation they would build into more complex explorations, such as getting charged with electricity through the rug. The tasks revolved around exploring possible pieces of furniture in the room, the imagined room as a whole and possible physical approaches to them. The final furniture selection was a rug, a table, a bed and a mirror, and they were experienced in three task levels: the practical, the experienced and the surreal.

These parameters were defined for the final process sharing and used afterwards as a base for creating scores and eventually the final choreography of the piece. The method itself was left behind at this point, as it served beautifully as a research method and a way of accumulating movement, but at least for this project, lacked the potentiality to work as a way to compose sequences. When I presented the early formulation of this method in the workshop with Rosalind Goldberg, she asked me “When does the accumulation end and what happens then?”, and that already made me see it as a tool for the development phase.

<p><b>The Practical</b></p> <p><i>Rug:</i> Standing on the rug</p> <p><i>Table:</i> Leaning on the table</p> <p><i>Bed:</i> Laying on the bed</p> <p><i>Mirror:</i> Tracing the frame's edges</p>	<p><b>The Experienced</b></p> <p><i>Rug:</i> Reaching for the edges</p> <p><i>Table:</i> Feeling the corners</p> <p><i>Bed:</i> Crawling under the covers</p> <p><i>Mirror:</i> Inspecting the reflection</p>	<p><b>The Surreal</b></p> <p><i>Rug:</i> Charging with electricity</p> <p><i>Table:</i> Being the table</p> <p><i>Bed:</i> Levitating above ground</p> <p><i>Mirror:</i> Bleeding in the surreal</p>
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Image 5: Collected tasks, November 2020.

### 5.3 Score Mapping

After the project moved from research into constructing a performance, I started to create maps and scores in different forms to play with the chronology and dramaturgy of the piece. As writing was so important in the creation of the movement tasks, it did not feel like the optimal approach in making these scores. The score mapping took more of a visual shape, inspired by many discussions with my supervisor Janne-Camilla Lyster. Lyster provided me with many books about notation and scores in the arts, of which Theresa Sauer's *Notations 21* (2009) worked as an influence for developing my score maps. This book featured illustrated notations for music in various forms, offering examples on how to diversify my note taking and ways of planning choreography.

The first score was a simple organising of the tasks accumulated through the TASK-WRITE-REVISE method: The tasks were laid out on a large piece of paper, put in sections and connected with lines. This score was used in the final process sharing and in the Master's in Dance student's open showing *Lunch in Progress* in October 2020, creating a 10-minute composition. The next scores were drawings, poetic narrations put inside graphs, colours and shapes, and they were in both digital and paper formats. The scores worked as a way to play with the order of sections, a way to chart the different levels of transformations within the imagined room and to observe the flow of the piece. Some scores were purposefully left unfinished and some of them were defined multiple times during the last phase of the project.



Not seeing myself moving was at points difficult, but I was determined to stick with my decision. Another way of seeing the tasks and movements at work was to invite other dancers in. Magdalene Solli, Putli Hellesen and Hanna Våge Skjeggstad all joined different rehearsals with me, doing my tasks and watching me. Together we discussed the experience of executing these tasks and what type of associations or sensations were present when watching another person moving in the parameters of my work. With Solli, we also worked simultaneously with the first score in the same space. Inviting other dancers into my work during the movement research, is the only thing I see to have been cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My supervising sessions with Lyster were at times also focusing on hearing her experience as a viewer, connecting my intentions with her, and figuring out how the work could *work* better. Personal feedback letters collected from the process sharing sessions with the students and lecturers in Master's in Dance and Choreography were also incredibly useful in mapping how the work is viewed from the outside. With this, I could focus on having clarity in the tasks and scores in my body, and fine tuning them to correlate with the intentions of the piece so that the attempted effects are achieved.

*“A mirror hangs on the back wall of the room. Its frame is painted gold. You run your fingers on the cold surface and inspect your face.*

*A mirror on the back wall. Its frame is painted. You run your fingers on the cold surface and inspect your face.*

*A mirror. painted.  
your fingers on the cold surface and inspect your face.”*

## 6 PHYSICALITY AND STRUCTURE OF THE PIECE

The following phases ensued in the last months of my process: the development of the movement language, defining the imagined room and its transformations, and forming the final score of the work. These happened together with the sound and light design, aiming to create a performance in which the space can be sensed on multiple levels. At this point the piece started to live and have needs that spoke for themselves, and although it was not always easy, I could trust the process to find itself in time for the final performances.

### 6.1 Physicality in macro and micro scales

The movement material for *R E S P A C E* was developed together with the scores and tasks. The physical expression of the first score was more mimicking and in connection to the practical tasks defined in the earlier parts of the process. Returning to the project after a short break in January 2021, I could sense that the work had grown past this practical movement material. As the sound score made by Petter Wiik started to get shape and work together with the body, I no longer felt the need for the body to be so obvious in its expression. The focus turned more on how sensations from the imagined space could be manifested in the body and the movement material, and less on how clear and recognisable interactions could be portrayed.

Where the original movement material had clear lines and was based on the actions related to the features of the imagined room, like an arm bending to lean on a table, the movement language of the final piece took a more delicate and minimal form. The practical movements were left as short traces throughout the piece, often in the beginnings of larger sections. The moments of the performer touching her face and moving her head as if looking into a mirror, or moving her toes as if feeling a rug underneath it, work as brief anchors for the audience to recognise something familiar. This also offers the possibility for the audience to occasionally reconnect with what has been presented in the text segment of the sound design, as the movement shifts more and more into the surreal.

What came to be on the centre of the piece's movement material, was the different levels of sensing – the moving body is an extension of the sensations appearing inside the imagined space for both the performer and the audience. My aim is not to recreate all that is suggested in the text or to guess what the audience is imagining exactly, but to extract sensations and vibrations that flow from the ideal space into the realm of the virtual space. For example, compared to the rehearsals I had alone, having first the light and sound designers, then supervisors and finally the audience seeing the piece, significantly changed the intensity and focus of the movement each time I performed. The virtual space of the piece becomes more vibrant and alive the more spectators are tuned into it. I believe

this to be possible because the body's focus is on the micro levels of movement. The movements are formulated through very localised and clear intentions: Weight pouring down from inside of the shoulder, needle sized impulses rushing in the joints, or travelling with the tips of one's toes.

Scaling down the movements to this level of intricate sensations and using more of the experienced and surreal levels of my tasks, were part of trusting in how little is really needed to create connections, associations and experiences. This was important so that the imagined room can be alive for both me and the audience during the performance. The movements are connected to a specific score and task, but still vague enough for the audience to construct their own narrative or understanding of how the imagined room is built, transformed and deconstructed.



*Image 10: Picture by Martin Myrvold, February 2021.*

## **6.2 The transforming room**

Arriving at the real space of the stage, overlapping it with the imagined space and establishing the virtual space are together the first layer of transformations in the performance. As the audience is invited into the bare stage space, nothing is hidden in the room – the technical desks, unused stage elements and cables are all tucked on the sides but still visible. Bright lights point to the roof, revealing its structures. The soundtrack is already running, inviting the people to sit down and observe the room. Eventually they are instructed to close their eyes and the imagined room is described: A dark green rug, a white table with a yellow tablecloth, a bed with colourful pillows and covers, and a mirror with a golden frame spread around in it. The objects offer different textures and sensations to the imagined room. As the audience opens their eyes, the room is dimly lit with a spotlight and the performer now stands there, eyes closed and slowly moving her feet. Lights slowly reveal more of the room, as the text decreases in detail – first losing colours,

then directions and finally the physical experiences connected to each piece of furniture – until only detached words are left and a soundscape swallows the room. Excerpts of the text used in the performance are presented as poems in between the chapters of this reflection thesis.

From here, the choreography is composed of four arcs of transformation, which aim to shift and deconstruct the room. The first one travels in space between the imagined pieces of furniture, exploring the physical sensations related to the rug and the table. The movements are simple and slow at first but increase in intensity until the imagined bed is reached. Here the second arc begins, cutting the first arc before it can fully peak. The movements are taken back to something familiar, showing different ways to lay on a bed, before shifting to an awkward-looking run around the space. The third arc explores the final piece of furniture in the imagined room: The mirror. In the research phases, I found that the mirror worked as a gateway into the surreal. In its imaginary reflection, the shifts of the room became magnified. Exploring the impulses in the body caused by this reflection, the physicality of the piece finds its peak, exploding from intensity before falling into a tensed rest. The fourth and last arc revisits movement material from different parts of the piece, now deconstructed and reshaped with new intentions – the table collapses, the bed is contorted, and the details of different sections simultaneously overtake the body. Janne-Camilla Lyster described the ending as a black hole: The shifting motions, together with the gaze traveling from near to far and around the room, create a feeling of the body sucking in the imagined room and tearing it apart before the lights fade.

Through-out the piece, Wiik's sound design follows the different arcs of the choreography, combining clear beats to other-worldly ambience and increasing in complexity. The sound starts to peak together with the highest intensity of the movement, but eventually washes over it to become the largest feature in the room as the performer's body lays still. In the end, the soundscape mellows down to support the movement's rebirth in a new form. Together with the light designer Martin Myrvold, we discussed different options to further indicate the transformations, but decided that what the piece needs is for the lights to work as an anchor. While the movement and the sound design push for the surreal in the piece to arrive, the light design offers more subtle shifts, using darkness to hide and reveal different parts of the room and using more durational changes. The interaction of the movement, the sound and the light play with perceptions and shifts on a wide scale, creating a virtual space which is alive equally, no matter what angle the audience member is watching the piece from.

### **6.3 Uneasiness of flatness**

Coming closer to the performance period of the process, I started to question the structure of the piece. Different sections and movements develop over time rather than with sharp

changes and even though there is a definite peak, it is only visited briefly. As a choreographer, I have never naturally gravitated towards high intensities, but the level of flatness in this piece started to make me very uneasy. I talked about this separately with both Lyster and my third supervisor Torunn Robstad. With Robstad, we discussed of enriching the existing material by exploring scales of awareness in the whole body, and how this can work to further the details and complexity of what the audience sees without adding unnecessary decorations. With Lyster we opened up the movement language of the piece and how the choreography works on a scale within that language. We concluded that the research phase was extensive and through that the piece can now speaking for itself – I should not try to intervene it with my own pre-set expectation for what the structure of a performance should be. Adding anything outside of my piece’s specific scale of movement was unnecessary.

In the end, I figured that what I am offering on-stage needs time to be established and experienced by the audience and rushing or adding something that does not naturally appear is only intervening with the effects of the performance. In the arc of the entire piece, what is show is not the beginning nor the ending: The virtual space containing the real and the ideal spaces is already there as the audience arrives and continues to exist as the lights fade away. The performance is a moment in the colliding of these spaces, presented in front of the audience.



*Image 11: Picture by Martin Myrvold, February 2021.*

*“floor rug. soft.  
your bare feet, warmth into your body.  
table, tablecloth.  
carry your weight  
a bed a blanket, pillows  
the desire to crawl textures on your skin.  
A mirror your fingers  
the cold surface inspect your face.”*

## 7 FUTURE (OF THE WORK)

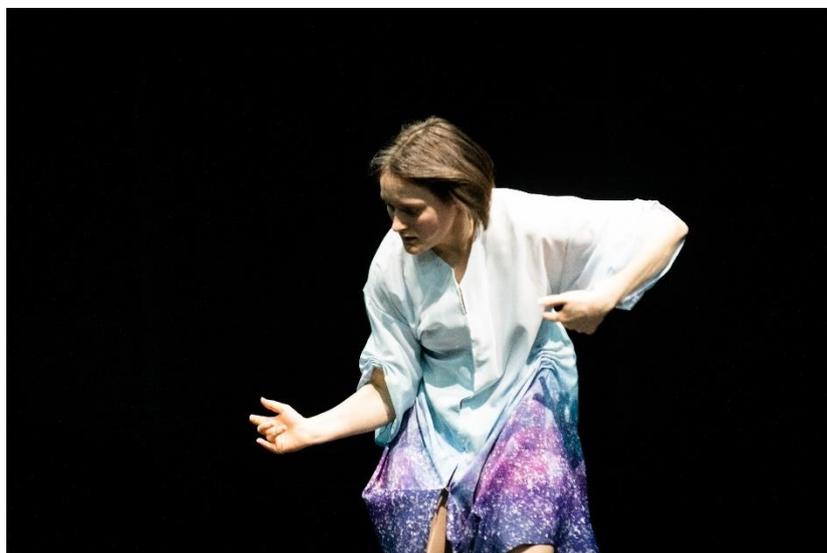
Concluding this reflection of my final project, I can state that the process was successful as a whole and reached the result I had hoped for. I managed to strengthen my already existing approaches to creative working, but also expanded my knowledge and created new methods. The topic chosen kept my interest and inspired me through the entire process, from early research phases until the performances. Seeing this general interest in space turn into a crystallised idea realised as a solo performance during the Master's Program was a fulfilling experience. The process allowed me to try many directions, let things run their course and be left behind if they did not seem to fit. Creating *R E S P A C E* has left an imprint in my practises both as a dancer and a choreographer, and will surely affect any future projects that may be ahead.

### 7.1 Leftovers from the process

Although the process was certainly completed to a level that I was more than pleased with, some parts that were intended to be in the final product did not have time to be fully realised. The most significant cut was the costume design made by the designer Karianne Caspara Haag. The collaboration with Haag started already in August 2020, but due to scheduling clashes and issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2021, the beautiful garment made by her was cut after the general rehearsal. The costume was fitted and finished in the last days leading up to the premiere and it did not have enough time to be worked together with the movement material and light design. The light-coloured costume did not sit naturally in the dark and industrial setting of the stage and lessened the sense of disappearing we had built with the light design. The costume's loose fit also swallowed some of the more intricate movements. The decision to cut the costume was very last minute, but in the end, I believe it to have been the right course of action. Together with Haag we negotiated a new, darker and more tight-fitting costume from already existing clothing for the premiere.

Together with the sound designer, we had also discussed using more text in the sound design. The text used in the final design is only in the beginning and has a very clear structure that is deconstructed and then left behind. There was an idea of bringing in more of the abstract writings accumulated from my TASK-WRITE-REVISE sessions towards the end of the performance to further imply the transformations of the imagined room and the arrival of the surreal. Eventually, the sound design took another direction as the intensity of the soundscape and the movement material felt to be enough. Still, playing with the idea of how different the perception and interpretation of the piece could have been by using more of the text, is quite compelling.

It is harder to predict how the performance would have changed, if the current pandemic would have allowed me to invite more people into the research. My wish was not to be so isolated in the process as I was. I managed to have a few rehearsals with my colleagues, but I see huge potential in exchanging experiences with external eyes and bodies. Especially in between November 2020 and the premiere in March 2021, I felt quite alone in my process, which also showed as some disconnection with my supervisors. There could be long periods of time, sometimes even months, between my supervisors seeing the work progressing. This sometimes led to older research phases of the work still being strongly in my supervisors' minds as they joined rehearsals and made explaining the current state of the work time consuming. Especially since I had made the decision to build the choreography and establish the movement material after the last process showing, I did not find it effective to have my choreographic choices compared with movement material presented in early research phases.



*Image 12: Haag's costume design. Picture by Yaniv Cohen, February 2021.*

## **7.2 Views into the future development**

I have a strong desire to further develop *R E S P A C E*. For example, I am curious about the virtual spaces that can emerge if the real space of the performance is changed. What would happen if the piece was rebuilt in a small, white room instead of a large, high ceiling black box? If the audience arrived to see the performance somewhere else than a large art institution? I see that introducing these changes can result in different, vibrant experiences than the ones that emerged in the original performances, perhaps even making an opening for Haag's costume design to reappear in the work.

I was also approached by another dance artist after one performance, who showed interest in the future development of the work. With her, we were humouring the idea of turning

the piece into a duet and see what would surface in the clashing of two dancers within the virtual space. This is something I would be interested to unravel in the future, but doing so would most likely include doing more research together and building a new piece based on the parameters of the performance, rather than just reworking the existing choreography.

### **7.3 Ripples into future works**

The methods and materials found during this process have clarified to me how I want to continue working as a dance artist in the future. Using writing and drawing for mapping movements and scores, and extending my choreographic understanding by these means, has been an important development in my artistic practice. After the performances of *R E S P A C E*, I have already started to use the Score Mapping method in developing improvisational scores for another performance. I am also currently shaping the Score Mapping and TASK-WRITE-REVISE methods into workshop formats I can use in my work as a dance teacher.

I have also observed that working alone, even when making a solo piece, is not ideal for me. I crave the exchange and discovery that is possible in collaboration with other people. In any possible future projects, I wish to have tighter collaboration with sound design, light design and costume design, so that they can define the choreography and each other even more in the creation process. My interest as an artist does not solely lie in working with movement, but in the possibilities that come out of interdisciplinary collaborations. I find the moments of intertwining between different aspects of the performance, and the exchange between artists from different fields in projects like *R E S P A C E* thrilling and exciting.

*“floor  
bare warmth body.  
table,  
carry  
bed  
desire crawl skin.  
mirror  
fingers surface face.”*

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