

Vienna, 24/11/2024

In Spring 2024, I was invited by Bert Gstettner, the artistic director of Tanz\*Hotel, to collaborate on the AAR24 Term as a co-mentor. Intrigued and honoured by the invitation, I eagerly accepted. After a selection process curated by Bert and Imani (the other co-mentor), the three artists-in-residence were announced: Matthias Mollner, Yuwol June C., and Luigi Guerrieri. In our discussions with Bert, it was decided that I would work alongside Luigi on his project, *Poor Guy*, a work exploring the concept of narcissism.

The opportunity to mentor Luigi, an experienced performance artist living in Vienna, brought with it a mix of excitement and apprehension. What does it mean to mentor? This question became a guiding thread throughout the residency, and my answers evolved with each day in the studio. Observing Luigi's try-outs and improvisatory exercises, I found myself continually reflecting on the delicate balance between offering guidance and respecting his vision.

As Luigi said to an audience member and friend after his three-day showing, "I think Alberto and I clicked." I couldn't agree more. Our connection was forged in the studio as I listened to his thought processes—his questions, concerns, and his firm drive to stage material that resonated deeply with him. There was a palpable tension between his desire to express himself fully and his fears about how his work might be perceived: Is it politically correct? Too personal? Too absurd? Too funny?

The truth is, Luigi is an explosion of creativity. *Poor Guy* centres on textual material drawn from his biography, transformed into a self-referential yet universally resonant performance. In this work, Luigi appears as a naked figure, speaking to himself—and thus to the audience—in an almost delirious act of storytelling. His songs, both from his past and newly created, intertwine with his words, blurring the boundaries between text and music. Luigi has an extraordinary ability to invite us into his world while simultaneously protecting us from the full force of its tragicomedy. "I speak about myself so I cannot hurt anybody," he says, yet his words call for compassion, eliciting both childlike laughter and a profound emotional connection.

The emotional landscape of Luigi's work is at once intricate and rooted in the everyday. It evokes the absurdity of Beckett's *Watt* and the concept of *risus purus*:

"It is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs—silence please—at that which is unhappy."

I am deeply grateful to Bert for giving me the opportunity to engage with Luigi's work up close. My journey as a mentor felt akin to being a resonance chamber, where Luigi's creative waves met and interacted with mine, creating new patterns—sometimes reinforcing, sometimes modifying, sometimes erasing. I listened carefully, questioning whether my personal tastes influenced the feedback I offered, and how much of myself I should bring into the process without overshadowing his vision. I allowed myself moments of vulnerability, sharing my own experiences. This mutual openness fostered a sense of trust between us: *You undress, I undress. Let's search for the human condition in all its discomforts, fragilities, and imperfections.*

What a journey!

Thank you, Bert, for orchestrating this process—curating, discussing, supporting, and even cooking for us. Thank you, Claudia, for your invaluable assistance; Alex, for the seamless tech support; Imani, for the inspiring conversations; and June and Matthias, for your generous showings.

And, of course, thank you, Luigi.

Thank you, Tanz\*Hotel, for bringing me back in this new role. This experience has been profoundly meaningful to me, both personally and artistically. I look forward to continuing the conversation on how we can share, exchange, and learn together—through movement, presence, and the alchemy of the studio.

Alberto Cissello