

*on the language of representation / peaceful pioneering / binding lights /
wishing for a new language / 4 levels of listening*

with **Hava Langer**
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an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Hava Langer, Matteo Zoccolo – 18 may 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on_listening/conversations.html

MZ: So, what I do is to create some spaces that people can use, let's say, to connect with each other and to do things. What's interesting for me are the relations that are between the people who take part in those projects. Those spaces can be more or less material, for example, in the case of the 1+1=3 paper you can consider the space as 2D space on paper, or you can also consider all the environment of group chats, calls, emails as a space in which people can interact. But not only interact, I feel it's a term that doesn't properly describe what's happening.

HL: Alright.

MZ: Now I want to use my thesis as another space. So, instead of just talking about other spaces we built in the past, I rather want to use this opportunity to speak with people that are more or less connected to the projects I've been working on, and give a stage to people so that we can find together something new. We can start from a point, and we can go somewhere together.

HL: I've tried it in different ways, many times. I love to turn these assignments, especially in creative art, into experimental processes. So, I wish you the best of luck for this. You know, to explore the academy and the system and to stop having them ask us to do all the work that regurgitates that. I really wish that you can be accepted, that they learn from that, and then you learn from them. Yeah, that works.

MZ: Thank you. That's what I'm trying to do, as a little challenge.

HL: Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. You know, school is there for a reason, to try to push the limits. So hopefully you're doing your job.

MZ: Yeah!

HL: You know, what I told Elnatan about your community is how everyone trained in art school is actually trained in representation. You know that language, and you know what needs to be done to document a process, in order to create something. And then what happens?

MZ: I like to call it 'language of representation', and I think that this language of representation comes from... Or maybe it doesn't come from anything, but it's something that is there because we need to sell something.

HL: Exactly, exactly. It comes back to the beginning of a conversation. So, you have to sell yourself in some way, or you sell a thing, or you have to sell a magazine, an object. It's true, all of these tools are in order to objectify. Yeah.

MZ: Yeah. And what I would like to avoid is to have a sort of commodification of what's happening here and now,

which are collaborative processes. To avoid not only commodifying this participation, but also exploiting the people I'm working with, as part of my work.

HL: For sure, exactly.

MZ: That's why I don't like to represent, and I don't like to create evidence for what's happening. But at the same time, I feel the need to do it because. Because of course, it's good to have a record of what's happening. Of course, you want other people to know.

HL: Right. I mean, that's the conundrum of having this ego which you absolutely cannot escape it. And not only you cannot avoid having it, but we feed ourselves with it, literally. I don't know. I mean, keep going. I don't know. I mean, also with social media, it's amazing that everyone has access, but we have lost so much of... Just being.

MZ: The right to opacity.

HL: Yeah. I can connect it to my practice. My work is really about processes, and it's about connecting. And my friend, Marty Spellerberg of Half Empty Magazine and Spellerberg Projects, always encouraged me to document the process along the way. Because I had these crazy experiences and encounters. And he's like, "You know, you have to document it, because this process is your art, your art is this encounter." And I resisted it because I was so in it! I would have these crazy ideas and meet CEOs of crazy companies, and then, when it didn't happen or fell apart, years later, he's like, "How do you even think it was going to get there?" Like he wanted to see that the creative happening was the meeting that I had. It even got that far, to the point in which the document was the artifact. And I understand that it is a contribution that an artistic practice makes to the world. Process as art. That's my experience, to not be afraid of having different hats, but to be able to put that hat on and take it off.

MZ: The hat of what?

HL: The hat of "I am a scientist now." So, documenting things, keeping these records. These are my parameters. These are my photographs. This is what I'm going to do. This is what I set. How do you let people know? Like any ethnographer, any anthropologists which would go to study a certain tribe, but their being there disturbs the tribe. So, it becomes a difficult assignment. Or you can just be, and maybe someone else will have that role. Just see how that feels...

MZ: Thank you so much Hava!

HL: Yeah, it's great. I'm looking forward to seeing how it progresses, of course. Yeah. And about the Binding Light thing... I'm happy to do it with you all, the $1+1=3$ seems

like an interesting community to try it on. Because you value the individuals, and you're doing something as a group. I think it would have the ability to also bring up things on an emotional response, which would bring interesting conversations.

MZ: Yeah, let's bring it to the group. I'm very curious, I'd really like to try to do this binding thing.

HL: Amazing.

MZ: I also called you because I really like the way you take things, and the language you.

HL: Thank You. I mean, I used it for a long time. You know, when you're trying to push consciousness, you don't necessarily get... You only find this in life. People will tell you this, that until you start to live it, you don't realize it. The pioneers that are pushing the boundaries are kind of sometimes beyond recognition. What's nice is then, as you keep going, you start to attract other people from different places that are feeling that same spirit of pioneers. But we are not trying to conquer new land anymore. We're just trying to say, "I'm going to stay exactly where I am, and I'm going to have radical peace, creative integrity." It's a sort of pioneering in a peaceful way.

MZ: Yeah, I get you. I hope I can be one of those pioneers.

HL: I appreciate the experiment that $1+1=3$. And what we feel in the calls is the heart with which everybody is coming to it. You know, everyone really wants to crack the code on true collaboration. Before our brains are all hooked up to a cloud and we don't know what your thoughts are and my thoughts are, we're now trying to figure out many things. What is consent? What does it mean that we thought of this together? Who is the 'I'? What do I put my name on? And to understand that our energy affects each other's thoughts. Forget what we do! How do we take credit and offer credit? And why is credit important? We are not motivated by money, we don't need credit so we can get more money. We just want to give this paper to our friends.

MZ: Definitely.

HL: It's this very funny dynamic. And I just love anyone that's trying, really. So, that's what I feel about the community. And I certainly feel your energy in this project. And then it's interesting to know Elnatan and speak about what he's doing for it. And so, you have two, three, four or five different people that are of a similar mind, coming to this experiment with their individual integrity and with this hope to create authentic collaboration, where no one single person claims it for themselves. In art, Salvador Dali is a representative of the Surrealist movement, and other people gathered around his influence. Or Andy Warhol in the

factory. We know that that creative hub happened with everyone mixing together. However, he was such an expert at commercializing with no trouble with his own ego, here in New York, that ultimately it brought up a dark side. forgive the language of light and dark, but it's like that. It's putting forward ideas to serve oneself. It's not for the greater good, it's just for the greater good of individual life.

MZ: Alright.

HL: And so, what I'm really appreciating and sensing here is that everyone's so careful about their egos. It's like the feminine energy, everyone respecting each other. And you guys are just delicately like, "Oh, I'd really like to have this magazine published." And then it's kicking in, and everyone just has such an awareness, with the tension to heal the ego-mania that rules the art world. I would say.

MZ: Yeah, we're trying!

HL: There's so much that we, who take creative tools, can change by pushing messages out. And of course, everyone is an artist, everyone is a creator, and everyone is created. If we have to sell ourselves going into the system, the message is compromised.

MZ: Thank you for your beautiful words. Have you found other places like the 1+1=3 throughout your life? Or had similar collective experiences?

HL: You know, it's funny to say, but it mostly reminds me of spiritual communities. Spiritual seekers also have their own problems, to claim that you have no ego is also a problem. Especially when I was living and working in New York for a long time, which is a very expensive city, I found out that those who follow a spiritual path can face exactly the same problems as artists. You see people going through the same steps as artists do, they would happen to really promote themselves, to sell themselves or, you know, to put it out in that way. When someone is selling something clearly, like in a business world or that kind of dynamic, you know what their motivation is. I really just admire finance people because they love money, they work on money, they're evaluated by money. It just seems so clean.

MZ: Yeah.

HL: You know, the person's self in a collective, since we live in a social world, is always in a dynamic relation with other people. There's kind of no way around these things. I guess the closest thing that reminds me of our project would be the Buddhists community.

MZ: Crazy.

HL: Sure. There, silence is a part of the meditation, and

you guys are really incredible, just sitting on Zoom... Quietly. Because if you don't have a personality leading, then there's this waiting happening...

MZ: Glad to hear that! What about meditation connected to your artistic practice? Your project seems to have elements of silence and listening too, right?

HL: For sure! So, the project I was working on the last couple of months is called 'Binding Light'. I'm in Jerusalem, which is a very religious city. The question is: what essence do you call upon when you want to focus your energy? When you connect into that place, it's really something I'm going to call your 'light'. When you go and meditate, when you let go and you step into that oneness or whatever it is, you activate your light. When you are in a group and a hum happens, and everyone starts to speak with each other and understand each other, there's something I'm going to call, I'd say for the lack of a better word, your light. So, then you can write your request, what you want for your life, asking the universe, the spirit or things, whatever it is, to make that happen. That's writing down your light. When you wish for peace in the world, when you're radically ready to just surrender everything to everyone. That's your light and other people's light that come together. So, I work with notes which are bound together. Wishes for yourself, wishes for another, wishes for the world or prayers, tied together. So that you have a chain of the pieces of light you carry, tied together, with no difference between the prayer, wish or the goodness I hope for myself and another. All kind of tied together. And we do this binding in groups.

MZ: That's pretty interesting.

HL: It really came to me during Corona as a way to tie people together, but within individual meditations. And they're hanging there. So, I can be in silence, but I know they can sing. I also know that, when I'm doing it in a group, somewhere out there, someone else's light is also hanging, and there's a kind of, you know...

MZ: Sense of belonging?

HL: Right. So, there is conceptual beauty and there is an individual object. There are lots of ways that we can hold and share each other's light. And one of the reasons that I moved to Jerusalem during this time is to create massive sculptures of that, where anyone can come with a kind of fearlessness. Whatever you're praying for, whatever you are wishing for, I tie into my own prayers and wishes. There's no separation between what you're hoping for, and what I'm hoping for. I want to literally tie ourselves together

MZ: That's beautiful! So now you do it online?

HL: Yes, also. And during that 45 minutes when I threw it over Zoom with a group, you know, what's great is that half of it is in silence. Most of it is your own work for yourself.

MZ: And do you actually meet with people?

HL: When I started this last summer, I had a gallery space in Jerusalem, people were actually able to come by and we had just like hundreds of strings hanging, people could hang their prayers. I'm playing the concept, and that's what the project is.

MZ: Yeah, I like that you can feel connected to a group of people while doing it. It's not an individual action, when it becomes collective you maybe can feel very connected, also to what you write.

HL: Right. It's been most powerful with groups that are already tied together with some kind of intention. So, at the beginning everyone thinks about what they're bringing to it. And it's been a very powerful thing to throw words or phrases together. So, everyone talks about things like creativity, collaborations... You know, easy words to start off with, and we see what kind of language people want to bring out through that.

MZ: Exactly, it's also interesting to think about the language that you use in a group. One of my questions is that. How to build a shared vocabulary? How to agree on concepts and how to understand each other in a group?

HL: Absolutely.

MZ: I think it's a very difficult task if you bring together such a number of people who come from different backgrounds, and yet don't share any specific vocabulary.

HL: For sure. And also, you know, within any language there's so many meanings that are contributing to every word. So, you and I, in this conversation, maybe are lucky if we understand 1% from each other. You're using your sign system, your languages and your associations. If I were to say the prayer that I have for this situation, in the land that I'm situated on right now, it's for new language, new stories and new ways of approaching that. Because as soon as you enter into the old language, and old dialogue, we are divided. That's the danger in picking signs and narratives that come before us. We have a desperate need for something new.

MZ: Can feel you. And so, we spoke about listening, we spoke about vocabulary and togetherness... Is there something else that's important for you to bring up?

HL: What about listening?

MZ: It was just like bringing up the topic and then seeing where it goes. I'm trying to understand how you can understand listening not as something that means just sound through the years.

HL: I see.

MZ: I mean, it's not about the distinction between listening and hearing. This is something clear, I guess. It's more how to translate the concept of listening in the context of togetherness. So, how to understand listening as a social act, as the basis for human interaction. And then we can bring it to art, saying that listening is a tool to create communities in participatory projects.

HL: I mean, listen. I don't need to tell you, it sounds like you grasped it. Listening is a full-body sense. You're listening to cues, you're listening to your feelings. Listening is a full-being experience, if it goes well. With that, what does it mean to communicate? Of course, this is the essence, starting point and finishing point of all collaborations. And silence plays a big role. That's probably why in the Buddhist community they stay silent until someone speaks out. To wait until you speak. You're listening within, deep listening, and with that listening within you're listening to a higher communication. And you're incorporating all the listening that is happening around you.

MZ: It's getting spiritual here.

HL: Oh yeah. Well, from my perspective, it's never not. It's never not visible, it's never not emotional and it's never not mental. All those worlds are always coexisting. It's just where we put our attention, and where we put our listening. The trick, or the goal, is to listen on multiple levels, at the same time. That's very, very hard to do.

MZ: Definitely.

HL: And listening is happening on four levels at the same time. It's happening on the physical level, you're listening to your sensors, your physical senses. Am I hungry? Does my stomach hurt? Then there is an emotional listening. Did someone hurt my feelings? Do I feel nervous? Do I feel shy? Am I talking too much? Where is my ego? Am I cool with that? There's mental listening, which is coming up with experience, so to speak. You're kind of in that meta-mode in which you're thinking about the actual concept of listening, and make mental sense out of it. Or when you're speaking, and I'm literally deciphering in my mind your language. And last, you can listen on a spiritual level. Am I getting a message right now? Or do I have an impulse that's coming from another dimension? A dimension of myself that I can't explain. The spiritual manifests in the mental ideas, in the emotional feelings, and in the physical form. If you can do that, great! This is also what makes you an excellent interviewer, because you're listening,

engaging with as many of your senses as possible. A great interviewer is a great listener, you have to be really present with the answers that are coming up.

MZ: That's nice to hear! I'm happy you think so, actually sometimes I don't feel like being a good listener, somehow. I mean, now it's particularly difficult because all the body communication is very limited through a video call. But I definitely like to listen to people and I like to create spaces where people can meet and listen to each other. And I really like that you can relate to this topic through a sort of spiritual understanding, even though that's not what I have. I don't really have these spiritual layers, that's what you're bringing now. I think we're speaking about the same thing, call it how you want.

HL: Exactly. And just to amplify this last point, what makes you a good listener is that you are paying attention to the way you listen, being self-critical. I would guess you're self-critical when you think, "Oh, I didn't listen well enough." And it's probably something you notice as one of the greatest barriers to peace in our world. We're just bad listeners. And if we really listen, we could just enjoy the silence of coexistence.