

*on just doing what you want to do / useless art / listening as active decision to be passive /
interaction vs collectivity / connecting people*

with **Lea Felicitas Blachfellner**

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*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Lea Felicitas Blachfellner, Matteo Zoccolo – 10 June 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on_listening/conversations.html*

MZ: So, what were we talking about before?

LFB: Creativity, right? And why we do what we do.
Wow... There's an airplane with stripes in the sky!

MZ: Where? Oh, I see it!

LFB: And also, your professor was telling you, that you have to find the motivation in yourself, and that you don't need other people to evaluate you. You need to find a reason yourself why you do what you do.

MZ: That's true. And then we also spoke about the fact, that we are all into an education system that is based on evaluation. And also in our families, it's also probably all based on evaluation, on capitalism the same.

LFB: Yeah, I think it's quite hard to get out of this. But it's nice to have people around that tell you to do so from time to time. Also this one professor of the Kunst University in Linz, Jan Köchermann, says that you should just do what you love, and that's enough. Basically his whole course is about that. You don't need other people to tell you, that it's good or bad what you do.

MZ: True, but what happens when you have a voice inside your brain? We are so trained in evaluating things that we cannot avoid it. A sort of self-judgment of what you do, based on criteria you don't really like.

LFB: I don't know, the only way to get over is to just think about what you really want and love to do. And then just do that. When you really enjoy what you do, then it maybe doesn't matter anymore. Then maybe that voice coming out from time to time might stop. I also have that voice, but yeah, I think we're all on the way.

MZ: It's a journey...

LFB: It's a journey. But is it important for you that you have something in the end, like an end result or something? What's the aim? Do you need to have it printed in a book, or is it enough that you just talk to somebody?

MZ: Wait, are you speaking about the 1+1=3 magazine or this thing we are doing with the microphone?

LFB: Does it make a difference?

MZ: No, it doesn't, actually.

LFB: Great!

MZ: I mean, I think it's nice when you work with people to set a common aim. So, I would say, it's not my personal aim, but it is a common aim that we share. It's nice to work keeping that in mind, so that you don't feel like you are

doing something useless. Which is still in this scheme of productivity and evaluation, because if you have a common aim, then you can decide if you reached it, you can say how you reached it, if it was worth it, or if you could have done better. Which is a way of thinking I am trying to avoid, even though I maybe realize the impossibility of doing it.

LFB: That's all right. But now that you're meeting people, is it the first thing to find an aim, or do you just meet them and see what happens?

MZ: I guess I bring my own interest of listening to what happens between us.

LFB: And with that, there's already an aim, kind of. Because this is your interest.

MZ: Yes, but I always try to be open to the interests of other people, so that there is a sort of intersection between my and their interests. Then a discussion happens.

LFB: But then there's no real goal. You cannot evaluate and say if it's good or bad, or if you could have done it better. Then it's just like everybody has their own interests, you meet, you share and you can't really evaluate that because it's just happening in the moment and everybody has their interests.

MZ: Definitely. I guess it's still another provocation, saying that there is no aim. It's like saying that 'Kunst ist überflüssig', like it was written in documenta 5.

LFB: Like in the exhibition 'Kunst Geil Sinnlos'.

MZ: And of course, it's a provocation to say that art is useless.

LFB: Because you spend so much time doing that, you dedicate yourself to it, it can't be really useless.

MZ: Of course there is an aim. Of course there is a meaning. Of course I do it, because I like it, because I think it might create a social change, because I think it might make people think. And that's what I'm interested in. But saying that it's useless and there is no aim, is to free yourself from the system of evaluation by provocation, to kind of challenge the system of evaluation itself and think of ways to dismantle it. Even though, in the end, we still apply it. And maybe, as Italo just said, it's not about erasing it. Our brain still works evaluating thing.

LFB: But to find your own scale.

MZ: Genau. Your own way to evaluate things. And if you work with people, find it with the people you work with. It's a very painful and long process, especially because we

constantly have this pressure of producing and of being evaluated by different kind of systems that we have like work, school, friends, family, partners...

LFB: Is there an environment where you don't feel evaluated? Like somebody you talk to and they are not evaluating what you say? For example, I kind of feel it with Theresia, we just share ideas without the feeling of something being wrong. Even if the idea is stupid, I don't feel stupid after sharing it.

MZ: I think it's very difficult to reach that level of enlightenment in which you are able to live without judging.

LFB: Yeah.

MZ: And, by consequence, without feeling judged. I'm happy for you that you have such an enlightened friend.

LFB: I'm happy for me too!

MZ: And I think it's also about listening, right? This weird action that...

LFB: Makes you feel you're listened to? That you're not evaluated, that you can feel free to say something while somebody is listening.

MZ: Exactly, that's what I would call listening. Otherwise, it's just filtering what other people say through your criteria, evaluating how good their ideas are.

LFB: Yes.

MZ: I would say that listening is the active decision to be passive.

LFB: Wow... How long did it take to come to this definition?

MZ: Months, for sure! Finally, maybe, I found it!

LFB: It's a nice thing that you took out of it. Did you reach your goal?

MZ: There is no end point.

LFB: No, no, there's no end point. But it's something nice that you took out of it, something that no evaluation can take from you.

MZ: Thanks :)

LFB: But how does it work for you to listen to people? I don't know, the whole thing you're talking about all the time. Does it work for yourself?

MZ: I mean, I don't know if I do it well. I guess I try my best to leave space and to actively listen. Which entails a passive act in itself. Here we have to define what is active and passive...

LFB: Is it something you love to do yourself, is it something that you do with passion? Or is it something that you would love other people to do more? Do you want to encourage others to listen?

MZ: I guess it's both. I would put a third one, in which my ego is also involved. Also I would like to be listened more. So, I guess, I enjoy doing it because I feel like I'm learning a bunch of stuff, listening to people. I want to encourage people to do it more, because it's a nice way to learn new stuff and it's a good skill for basic human interaction based on care, honesty and love. Not romantic love, but love as a harmony between things. Love as care, love as...

LFB: Accepting the other?

MZ: Yes. And inclusion. And I also hope that it will come back, right? As a sort of Karma theory in which I do good and I hope people will do good with me in the future.

LFB: [laughing]

MZ: But it works! Actually, this kind of research I'm doing, is also a great way to keep in contact with people and to actually discover very interesting people, to broaden my network, you know of interesting human beings around me.

LFB: Yeah. So, are the people around you now different from the people you were surrounding yourself with before you started? I think the people around you reflect you in some way...

MZ: Yeah, I agree. I would take it a bit more broad, what you're saying. It doesn't come with what I am doing now, specifically. But since I started to study arts and to kind of get into this way of thinking, many things changed. I was a fucking nerd before, staying all the time at home in front of video games. I guess many things changed, and the people around me changed a lot too. And now, actually, I'm very glad I'm surrounded by beautiful people. And that we have very interesting connections. I'm very glad. And you?

LFB: And me what?!

MZ: Do you listen?

LFB: If I listen? To what you say?

MZ: No, to the world, to everyone... In general. Do you think you're able to?

LFB: I'm definitely able to, I would say. But it's not always easy. I really feel like there are these kind of days, when you're just within yourself, and you don't see what's happening outside. And you walk through the streets and there's nothing cool really happening, because you're just so focused on the step before you that you can't look up. And then there are other days where you just see everything, suddenly there's somebody smiling at you and then something crazy happens and you end up somewhere else. So, yeah, listening is the main point there. Not just to the people, but to the actions around you. In order to see the beautiful things. And actually, some people told me that I'm quite a good listener.

MZ: Honest.

LFB: I like to hear that, of course! But, yeah, I'm not always a good listener, for sure not. It always depends on the state of mind as well. Yeah.

MZ: There is no sun anymore.

LFB: I know, the whole sky got dark.

MZ: Was it our fault?

LFB: But still, it's lovely somehow. The reflections in the windows changed as well... But did you ever... Because now you're doing things that are very interactive, and that basically live of the moment, right? Meeting people and sharing something.

MZ: I don't like the word 'interactive' too much, but maybe it's OK to use it now.

LFB: Why not? What do you want to use instead?

MZ: I would say 'collective', or...

LFB: Because it's not just active?

MZ: You always interact with something. And when you speak about interaction in art, you usually think about those works, in which the artist creates an opportunity for an audience to interact with an object or with a situation. But then, to me, it seems that the audience is kind of instrumentalized to be part of the interactive artwork. I don't know. I kind of have this view, maybe it's not accurate.

LFB: Like when the artist already created the situation and defined what should happen?

MZ: Yeah, when the artists construct something and then they need people to participate in the work, otherwise the work doesn't work.

LFB: Ok, but that's the same in your work. If there's no

people, it doesn't work.

MZ: Yes. But the aim is different.

LFB: You want it to come from the people, you want to connect them.

MZ: I would like to think of it as an open possibility, that I often call 'space'. Then, the free will of people will do the rest. I am setting as few boundaries as possible, and making those boundaries flexible and changeable, so that people, if they want to take responsibility, they can actually change the rules of the game.

LFB: Yeah.

MZ: This is to initiate something without any clear aim of how it will end, if it will end. To put the first brick and then, if people want to join, if they will feel like it, they will put the second and the third. It will feel good for people to join, and it will feel good for me to continue doing it. If it will not feel good to continue doing it, then I will stop it. But if other people feel like continuing it, they can. Because it's not my project, that's the idea.

LFB: I like that. That's cool! Actually, that meant 'interactive' for me. But maybe, 'collective' is still a better word.

MZ: And do you do something like this?

LFB: I really love to see what happens. I love the situation in groups, when you just meet and one thing comes after the other, the atmosphere that builds up, how people react to each other... What is possible within the group, that you will not reach by yourself. I tried to work with that a bit, but I didn't really find my way to use that in my artworks yet.

MZ: Maybe it's time to build a kitchen van and go around the world.

LFB: Yeah, maybe. Cooking always brings people together. But actually, I'm just not sure if I want to spend my whole day cooking. I would actually prefer to sit or dance around the campfire and sing. That would be my part in it, I think!

MZ: It's a necessary one. I guess cooking is just an excuse to bring people together. And if a fire and dancing is another excuse, then, I guess, they are things that can coexist.

LFB: Yes. I just don't want to stick to the excuse, you know. If we find somebody that loves to do the excuse. I also would love to cook sometimes. If we find people that are passionate with cooking and the combination of different flavors... But if we stick to the excuse and don't come to what is really interesting to us, then, you know, it would

be a failure for me.

MZ: Um...

LFB: I don't judge it. I'm just saying that I want to do what I love, and that I want to feel good with doing what I do.

MZ: I guess it's good to open up possibilities. And then, when people join, they will also bring new ideas, new vibes and energies. And the thing will definitely change the shape of what it is, what we actually do.

LFB: Yeah.

MZ: But in the end, we do have an aim, I think. And this connects to the beginning of the conversation, about having goals and aims. If I had an aim in this thing... it is to connect people.

LFB: So, do you need an aim? That's what I'm saying. My aim would be to do what I love. But maybe you love to connect people...

MZ: I guess so. Maybe it's my thing.

LFB: Yeah, I also love that.