

*on talking with friends after a long time /
drawing a parallel between sonic waves and society /
moving towards tangibility / an organism of its own /
shifting responsibility and enthusiasm / visions for a project*

with **Kaja Boudewijn**
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*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with **Kaja Boudewijn, Matteo Zoccolo** – 15 april 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on_listening/conversations.html*

MZ: Here is my coffee. Sorry, what were you saying?

KB: Is it OK if I close the camera? Because there's too much sunlight anyway, I can't even see you.

MZ: Sure, sure.

KB: I was thinking that if you call back people that you haven't spoken with for a long time, that's actually a really interesting conversation to think of in the context of listening, because if you haven't seen someone for a long time, that's like the ultimate moment to listen how they're doing and to their story, and to pay attention to them. So, you should record those. Or just like write them down in some way.

MZ: Yeah, when you don't speak to someone for so long, you automatically make a selection of what you are going to tell, you know, because you cannot tell everything that happened in the past five months or so. So, you automatically select what is important, not only what is important for you, but also considering the kind of relationship you have with that person. So it's more the mix of interests that you have.

KB: Yeah, that's a good one. And it's also a way of listening to yourself. I'm not sure, not always, but I think in longer conversations, when you also have the opportunity to talk a bit about how your last months have been. Yeah. You select what you want to tell, but you also listen carefully to what you want to say. You know?

MZ: What did you say?

KB: Sorry, one second, there is too much wind. I see people walking backward! Maybe I should go back to school, so that you can hear me better.

MZ: Now I hear you, actually. If you hear me, then it's fine.

KB: Ok, good. Yeah. What about your thesis?

MZ: I'm just checking all the possibilities of what it means to create a space for doing things in a group. It can be a physical space, like in the case of the hörraum. It can be a hybrid space of people meeting online and, in the end, producing a space on paper, which is the $1+1=3$ collective. And it can be another kind of space, entirely online, which is the first project, radiosq. And somehow all three spaces have something to do with listening, on different levels.

KB: Is it really about listening, or is it more about paying attention to what other people want to communicate? Because in the case of the $1+1=3$ paper, it's not at all about actively listening, it's more about giving people the opportunity to talk, basically.

MZ: Hmm. I don't have this understanding of listening as something close to what you hear with your ears.

KB: So, you already see it much broader.

MZ: Yeah, definitely. For me, listening is more connected to empathy than hearing. Even though I think there is an interesting connection between sound and empathy, between sound and "How does a group work? What are the dynamics in a group or society?" I think there is an interesting parallel between what's happening with sound, how it moves, how it's difficult to grasp, how it's difficult to describe... And society.

KB: It's constant responses. Sound bounces on things like people constantly reply to one another, responding with small movements to one another, but then on a bigger scale, this creates waves that can be much more impactful.

MZ: What do you mean by waves? How do you see those waves?

KB: Oh, I think I just use the word 'wave' because it reminds me of a sound wave. I think I understand the connection between how sound moves through space and how a society is forming itself. All these little people are all replying to one another in a small manner, but then, on a bigger scale, they create movements, moving from one place to the next. All these little tiny communications, all these tiny little bounces. I'm just babbling...

MZ: I also don't know exactly how to talk about it, how to draw this parallel between sound waves and a group of people doing things. But I guess it's also something that I would really like to experiment with the hörraum project. I definitely see it as a sort of topic for that space, and for my research in general.

KB: Cool. And then also, you have these three different levels of communicating. So, the radio, which is sound, the magazine, which is reading and visual, and then the physical space, which is all of them combined. It's kind of different levels of tangibility. I would kind of like to say that it's one-dimensional, two-dimensional, and then three-dimensional. But that's not really the case. It's more moving towards something tangible, valuing the benefit of having something not tangible. It's also very much about being interconnected when you can't physically be present to one another.

MZ: Exactly.

KB: It seems you are moving towards something tangible, but then you're also constantly being pushed back, and you have to resort to something that's not tangible, something that's not physical in the sense we are talking about now, you know? You want to make something real, a room

where people can actually meet with all the circumstances of physicality.

MZ: Definitely, that's actually what we were striving for since the radiosuq project. We were in a strict lockdown and both me and my friend Luisa wanted to do things with people. But there was no physical opportunity to meet. There was mostly fear in meeting other people at the time. So, we said, "OK, let's really think about the possibility of having this space in a form that allows it to happen now." Because it was urgent for us to create this possibility for other people and for us to work together, to produce something together or even not, just to be together. In the case of radiosuq it was more towards producing, I have to say. So, it was more like, "OK, we do a broadcast, we produce an audio piece, we advertise it, and then we broadcast it." We were telling all our friends when and how, they would connect and they would listen to our thing, a piece we did in collaboration with someone else, every time with a different collaborator. But with the paper, it's actually something different. Um...

KB: Also, because now you left the organization part, leaving things to be, to evolve by itself.

MZ: Yeah, as Elnatan said once... I don't remember exactly his words. He was speaking about this organism of its own. This paper is becoming an organism that is freely evolving without anyone who's forcing it like a puppet. I am super, super happy that you and Elnatan are taking care of it now.

KB: I really hope it works. I really hope that other people will also take care of it. It's not about responsibility. It's more about enthusiasm, I think. Yes. I really loved having those conversations at the beginning of this year, in January. The few calls we had over Zoom, just really helped me. They really just made me feel very, very happy. So, for now, I just want to give that back by organizing this. And I kind of also enjoy the organizing part of it. I like thinking about how to get these people together. I hope other people also see the qualities of that, and that they will take over at some point. Because if it could grow like an organism, that would be fantastic. I'm not sure how that works. I'm not sure if it's possible. But, yeah, it would be super cool if people would eventually take over by themselves, so that you don't have to call them, and you don't have to get them back together all the time. What do you think? Do you think it will be possible?

MZ: I think it would be great, but difficult. Something like this requires people to take responsibility. When you take the responsibility for something, you feel part of that something. You feel you have the power, ability and possibility to make it your thing. Or, in the case of the 1+1=3 paper, our thing.

KB: Yeah, exactly,

MZ: Because the responsibility is shared.

KB: I'm really struggling with that. You remember that project I did with the tiles, inviting other people to make tiles?

MZ: Yeah.

KB: I did it together with a girl who also did a few other sculptures, which are kind of connected by the same theme. But because she did way more work than I did, and she kind of came up with the idea, I don't really feel like I can take any responsibility for it. I can take responsibility, but I can't take any freedom in it, I can't make important decisions because I feel that the right belongs to her. Then she also asks me to participate and to take matters into my own hands. But it's difficult to be in this in-between space.

MZ: I do believe it's very difficult for you to take the courage and say, "OK, I will take the freedom." Because maybe you don't feel like you should, the idea was not yours in the beginning. Yeah, but it's also difficult for your friend who probably really wants to work with you now, who probably wants to hear your opinion and see that you also take responsibilities and take action to develop this project. It's probably difficult for her to make you understand that she really wants it.

KB: But it's also difficult for her to give it away, more or less, you know? With the magazine, it's maybe a bit different because there is a starting point, but there's not a very clear theoretical concept behind it. Do you understand?

MZ: Um.

KB: Would you agree? It's more like a guidebook, it's like a starting point from which a lot of themes and a lot of theories and work can develop. But there is not like a central theme or something around which should evolve.

MZ: I agree that there is no central theme. But I'm not sure that there is no direction, or no conceptual shared aim underneath.

KB: Yeah, that's true, actually. There is.

MZ: At least, in the beginning, Bibi and I were wondering whether we should give a clear direction, or whether we should make it so open that it can develop in any direction. In the end, we took decisions that kind of guided the project towards something which was our initial idea of having a space that had specific characteristics: open, non-regulated, horizontal, inclusive, and so on. We took decisions and those decisions are still shaping it.

KB: Yeah, exactly.

MZ: But now it's up to you and Elnatan to challenge them, and to think, "OK, do we really want those elements in this project? Do we want to turn it into something else? And if we want to do that, how do we communicate it with people? Or maybe do we want the people to decide where this project should go?" And for me, this would be the best option.

KB: Yeah, I think so too.

MZ: Ideally, in a hypothetical utopia, I would see every single member of this growing group being able to make decisions, able to send an email to everyone else saying, "Hey people, I have an idea! And for the next issue, let's do like this and not like that." And everyone else takes the time to think about this new idea and responds to this person saying, "It's bullshit" or, "I also really like it." Will it be something that people feel deeply connected to? I think there is the element of care. I think that the care should be something really...

KB: People really have to feel that, but that's also something that comes and goes. It's a tension that you sometimes really feel, sometimes you feel very strongly connected and you care a lot, but then the next moment something else takes your response, your attention, and it kind of shifts and you feel less connected to it. But then, later on, it changes again. That way it keeps flowing.

MZ: That's how to deal with people, it's not only you. You are definitely dependent on other people's decisions and energies.

KB: That's good. For example, I am really happy with how my work eventually ended up in the 1+1=3 magazine, even though I didn't like it in the beginning. But that's really thanks to other people's work.

MZ: What do you mean?

KB: It becomes way better if my images are placed next to a poem that someone else wrote. Because of the randomness of it. It's pure chance. I couldn't have done it by myself, simply because I'm too straightforward for it. It's the possibility that comes up when you place two of these things together, that is good about it.

KB: Yeah...

MZ: I'm sorry, I'm having a bit of a weird day.

KB: Oh, why?

MZ: Nothing special, just a slow start, and then I don't get anything done. I'm only talking and calling the entire day.

MZ: But sometimes it's also good to be unproductive.

KB: Yeah, that's true. Were you productive today?

MZ: Not really... but I got a second-hand guitar.

KB: Nice! Electric?

MZ: No, no... But a very cute one.