

*on the value of time / learning from the pandemic /
crisis and precariousness / family and stability*

with **Stefano Riba**

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an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Stefano Riba, Matteo Zoccolo – 28 may 2021
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SR: I would like to reflect on the pandemic and what it taught me in the past twelve or fourteen months – the value of time.

MZ: Alright, let's go.

SR: This pandemic happened when my kids were still very young, one is one and a half years old, and the other one is four. So, I actually used Covid as an opportunity to spend a lot of time with them, which was really, really nice and enriching. And it also led me to reflect on the time we dedicate to work, to leisure, to travel, to play sports, to enjoy little things or to enjoy big things. And now that, apparently, the pandemic is over, I noticed that I'm again in stress for commissions and people asking me to work and do things. I'm a little struggling. On one hand, working is also important to earn money, and I'm lucky because I do what I like... But on the other hand, in the past year and two months I have done very little. I'm struggling on how to manage my time. This also happened when I turned 40 years old, which is basically the middle of my life. I'm starting now to deal with existential topics. But I would also like to hear from you, Matteo, since you have half of my years, how did you live the pandemic, and how did you use your time? How did you feel, what did you do?

MZ: So, for me, the pandemic was not really a bad experience, I would say. It was a beautiful opportunity for traveling all around during the first wave in Israel and Palestine. It gave me the possibility to really discover Jerusalem without tourists, which has probably not happened since the time of Jesus. It was a very special thing which gave me beautiful memories. I also struggled when I was there, because sometimes we could just move in an area of 100 meters around our house, even though we always went far beyond 100 meters and the police always stopped us. Actually, the time slowed down a lot. But this is actually something good, because I found time to work on some projects that made me connect to a lot of people, close and far from me. We started this online radio, 'radiusuq', with Luisa Pisetta. I was living with a lovely family, which made my time in Jerusalem amazing during the pandemic. Now it's kind of hard to start working again. But I think we learned a lot of things thanks to the social distancing. It personally was the thing that kicked my ass and gave me a very collaborative thrive. Since the pandemic, I'm not doing anything alone, art wise. Yeah, sorry, we didn't want to speak about art...

SR: Yes, that's ok. Also my family and I had the opportunity to travel. It's funny, my partner and I are both freelancers, and freelancers were actually the only ones allowed to travel through the different regions in Italy. The only thing you needed was a kind of working motivation, and it was quite easy to find working motivations where our family are based, in Piemonte and Rome. We managed to travel quite a lot and to spend time with our family. As

you said, big cities without tourists changed quite a lot. And this is also something which makes me reflect on the fact that, in a way, humankind is exploiting every aspect of life, not only the environment and the surplus of production, but also cities. How do they change without tourism? It was good to see things from a different perspective, I also enjoyed it. Working wise, everything was very slow. The kindergarten and schools were closed. We decided to go somewhere else, taking a break from our routines. That's it.

MZ: Sounds good.

SR: How do you see the future?

MZ: As I told you before, I don't see myself in one place only. I see myself traveling in the next few years, going around and meeting new people, taking opportunities where I find them. I don't have any clear idea. I know it's a bit cliché to say that, but it's true, the pandemic made us really used to this unpredictability. It's something I learned, the ability to feel comfortable when you're not sure if something will work. And this is not a reason to stop dreaming. I still have my wishes and dreams, plans with my friends... But I know that after this experience, I am more open for the plans to change. And I will take it easier. And what about you? What are your plans in the middle of your life?

SR: I find resonance in what you say. Yes, I am forty, I am in the middle of my life, but since I was twenty, I have been living in an eternal crisis. I mean, the pandemic is just, probably, the last crisis I have experienced. I turned twenty in the year 2001, the Twin Towers' attack. The crisis of democracy with all the wars in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. I also lived through the economic crisis of Lira at the end of 2000, before the Euro. Then there was the crisis in 2008, the financial credit crunch, and then again... I've lived my adult life in a perennial state of crisis. I've also entered the working field in the age of precariousness. I feel like you, I'm open to possibilities, I like it this way. I do many things at the same time, I never wanted to specialize. And yes, I take the possibilities around me, which is always a good way to be open to new things. I'm not looking for stability, this is what I have learned in the past twenty years. I mean, working stability, like a fixed job and this kind of stuff.

MZ: To me, it sounds pretty unusual for someone who has a family. Are you really not searching for this kind of stability, to have a job and settle down in one place? How do you manage to have this kind of openness towards possibilities?

SR: Probably I'm also saying this because I'm in a relatively stable position, actually. I'm a freelancer, but I have stable collaborations. Even though I don't have contracts,

I know that these collaborations will last because I've built strong connections with the people I work with. So, I can say that, in a way, I feel unstable and I like instability, even though I have stable collaborations. Of course, I was born in a Western country, in a quite rich area. My parents belong to a middle class which manages to support their kids when they are in difficulty. It's not happening anymore to me, but I know that if I would be in difficulty, probably they could still help me. I know that If I was born in other countries I wouldn't speak like this, but since I am a middle-class Italian, I can say I enjoy instability.

MZ: And what about your family?

SR: It's kind of normal that you start building a family when you start thinking that things are OK. Also in a subconscious way, when we had our first kid, I knew it was the right time to do so. And, of course, I'm a little scared about the future of my kids. Probably, in twenty years, the economic and environmental situation will be worse. But these are not strong enough reasons not to build a family... Do you want to add something more?

MZ: No, no. I'm still too young for kids.