

*on understanding transformative processes / learning from thermodynamics and Quantum physics /
bearers of transformation within a context / a methodology for collective processes of change /
how art can change life and society / Co-Creation Methodology / interpreting and framing transformative
processes by looking at traces / artist as external observer / artis as activator of collective potential energy /
working on being human / ethics by intuition / creativity and love / problem-solving approach /
sustainability and resilience / the function of listening / vocations*

with **Filippo Fabbrica**
05 June 2021 [e]

*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Filippo Fabbrica, Matteo Zoccolo – 05 June 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on_listening/conversations.html*

MZ: Let's start from the middle. I think you were speaking about *transformative processes*. What is it?

FF: At university, we often talked about it with the historian Luigi Zanzi. He told us that in the ancient world, the concept of transformation has long been on the sidelines of the form of life proposed to man. The main author of this conception was Plato. Plato chose some geometric shapes as fundamental, in particular the square and polygons, for their geometric regularity. Plato hoped for a world that was permanently square-shaped and polygonal, without transformation.

On the contrary, Heraclitus proposed to consider the world in terms of various, multiple, different forms which contrasted with each other, and generated a process of transformation.

In the confrontation between Plato and Heraclitus, Plato prevailed, and for a long time the Platonic conception ended up despising the world of the formless, the world of disorder, thinking that man should only select order and the perfect form.

As a plus, this view did not regard the passage from disorder to order, from informal to formal, as a positive and naturally acceptable process; in fact, it deemed man with his ideas – and not nature – to be the only bearer of the order. So, we obtained a scientific development model which excluded transformation from its studies. Transformation was merely considered something dealing with history: a narrative of incidental events not giving rise to structures.

It seems incredible, but only in the 19th century with the study of thermodynamics it was possible to think in scientific terms of transformation. In fact, it is only with the study of the transformation of energy into work, from heat to work, that the problem of transformation has become the subject of scientific research.

It was not until the middle and the end of the 20th century that the human being returned to study the transformation processes in a scientific way, discovering the way in which in nature it was possible that structures of order would derive from processes of flow, and of disorder.

The form actually arising as a structure from a process is the consequence of an unpredictable fact which, therefore, must be historically reconstructed in order to be understood.

Human beings, reflecting on the natural processes of formation of structures, need to understand that there is a continuity of thermodynamic flow that goes towards an increase in entropy, allowing – from time to time – a decrease in entropy, and the formation of structures.

MZ: ...

FF: Now, a performance must always become a process of self-organization; I would say: the fundamental self-organization is that of several individuals, who come together socially, who participate in a transformation, who become the bearers of this transformation...

Biologist Stuart Kauffman is carrying out extremely interesting research on these topics, for example in 'Investigations' (2000).

MZ: Wow.

FF: The physicist Fritjof Capra wrote 'The Tao of Physics' in 1975, connecting the organicist, "ecological", world views of Eastern philosophies with the research of Quantum physics and the new vision of reality that follow. A natural world emerges that is of infinite variety and complexity, a multidimensional world that contains neither straight lines nor perfectly regular shapes, in which things happen in succession but all at the same time, a world in which – as modern physics teaches us – even empty space has a curvature. It is clear that our abstract system of conceptual thought will never be able to describe or understand this reality in its complexity.

MZ: And what about processes in art?

FF: After the twentieth century revolution of the transformation paradigm, we know that our view of the context, the subject and the process being transformed is extremely partial.

We know that we have the possibility to observe a frame and to historically understand part of it. Considering that we are part of context, we can act the transformation bringing information of transformation into the context, we can become the bearers of a transformation.

MZ: Cool.

FF: Since 2003 I started working as a project manager of Love Difference at Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto, doing research on methods and processes in art. During several meetings I was inviting different artists to share their public art project and their process of change. Then in 2010, together with artway of thinking and with the support of the EU, we organized the 5th edition of 'Methods - processes of change' International Residential Workshop. In its previous editions, Methods focused mainly on the art-society relationship, investigating methodologies used in collective creative processes, meant for 'responsible social transformation' and generated mainly by individuals or groups of artists.

In its 5th edition, Methods opens a first comparison between disciplines and professions that are considered to affect social change, with the aim of exchanging knowledge, approaches, tools and results.

MZ: And what were you investigating?

FF: Many things, like:

Human beings - Where does the transformation input start in the human being?

Social System - The natural and spontaneous aspect of

transformation.

How can we cooperate and coplan in order to transform?
When can transformation be sustainable? When can transformation be considered metabolized?

When can transformation be sustainable? When can transformation be considered metabolized?

Which characteristics should a process of change have, in order to achieve common good?

The questions are still valid, you can find some answers on the website

<https://methodsprocessesofchange.wordpress.com/>

MZ: Do you believe art can change the world?

FF: Michelangelo Pistoletto chose me to work in his team in 2003. He told me that art is at the center of a responsible transformation of society. Pistoletto's vision resonated with me. I had the opportunity to transform into actions what I had studied and felt belonged to me. And I asked Pistoletto, "How can art change life and society?" Fortunately he didn't tell me exactly how, in which way... Pistoletto, like a great master, talks to me about his personal art research, the mirror, the 'lateral approach'...

I spent a few years studying all the work of Pistoletto from the 'Zoo' to 'Creative collaboration'... But for me it was not enough, I was looking for a methodology. I met Anna Detheridge, who's a curator working on public art in Italy, and who created an exhibition in Fondazione Pistoletto, 'Arte pubblica in Italia: lo spazio delle relazioni'. Thanks to her I met 'artway of thinking', which is an art collective created by Stefania Mantovani, Federica Thiene and Valter Tronchin. An open, flexible multidisciplinary collective, bringing together Italian and foreign professionals, in the search of a creative and collaborative methodology. The aim of the artway of thinking research is to facilitate cultural, social and urban processes of transformation.

Creativity, systems and interrelationships, trans-discipline, co-working, weconomy are the main paradigms explored in the research, which has led to the definition of Co-Creation Methodology. Artway of thinking activated 60 co-generation processes in Italy and abroad, and has developed 6 models of workshops aimed at increasing the ability to collaborate, co-create new realities and develop a new "aesthetic of doing".

Since 2005 I have chosen to engage myself in the artway of thinking's projects and research. I suggest you Matteo to interview Federica and Stefania soon!

MZ: I will, it seems so interesting!

FF: To come back to your question, transformation is a process where environment, community and the self are involved. It's a process without ownership, it's a process that we cannot understand during the process, we can be part of it, and we can understand the transformation only after the transformation is realized. The artist works with the creative potential of the community and the environment.

MZ: Do you think there is a sort of open-endedness involved? Ideally, is the artist going there with a clear idea or with an intention, and then other people will be in the process, making it open-ended, open to different possibilities?

FF: We must not forget what has been said about transformation processes. We can just act like historians, reading some traces and creating a frame of interpretation.

The artist is the bearer of creative energy. The artist is attentive to the creative (expressed or potential) energy of the environment, context, group, community.

The artist is an external observer.

We can plan some processes, but just like a kind of intuition (more than an hypothesis), an idea about something that can happen, and we never know exactly what is going on.

The role of the artist is to be able to understand the potential this energy has, and to activate groups to make this potential come out.

MZ: Alright.

FF: The community is made up of individualities in relation. The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in 1996 talks about Being Singular Plural.

What unites us? Non-dual spirituality speaks of Unity, energy, love... Call it whatever you like, Matteo. It is the great everything that at least once in their life any human being, even for distraction, has experienced.

Unity or universal love as this big energy that makes plants grow, unites us with affections, makes us grow, makes us realize dreams. So, for this reason, it is very important to work on being human, to work on yourself, to work on who you are, which are your values, which are the values of the community, in which values you recognize yourself. Yes. Life gives you the opportunity to be here now. So, I wonder, what is my vocation now? What do I have to do to grow as a human being, in harmony with this context? By following this vocation I can contribute to the common good.

Psychiatrist Carl Jung speaks of the collective unconscious. We have no space and time to talk about it...

But does the innovative human being manage to overcome the conservative human being and admit that change is possible?

A transformation process changes the actors, the participants, the bearers of the transformation itself.

You need to make peace with these experiences as a human being and understand what your contribution to the context can be.

MZ: For what is this contribution?

FF: The contribution depends on your being, your values, your feeling about the common good. This is why who you discover you are during the transformation process is so important, it determines what you will bring to the new that we create together.

MZ: But then it's an ethical problem to define what is a common good.

FF: Yeah, of course.

MZ: Then, as an artist, you have the responsibility to provide ethics.

FF: Ok, we go back to the observation. Observation is basically processed, observation and self-listening. If you go deep into yourself, you know what is good.

MZ: But I know what is good for myself, not for society...

FF: To know what is good for society you can use data analysis, research, hypotheses, interdisciplinary visions... And this is fundamental for the construction of projects, I did it with Love Difference, I do it with artwork of thinking...

But from my experience, the human being is an antenna that has the ability to accommodate powerful creative intuitions.

In 1978 Pistoletto wrote on a wall in a performance, "Is there God? Yes I'm here." I've always found it a fun action... Let's not bother Sufi mystics, St. Francis or universal knowledge and Quantum physics... The human being has the opportunity to access great knowledge.

Creativity is a function that does not involve only a logical process. Of course, creativity selects and combines, uses meta-skills but goes beyond languages and spaces... the journalist Anna Maria Testa discusses them extensively in her articles. In Jungian terms we say that creativity comes from the unconscious, therefore from the irrational.

Creation is coming from a connection with some energy that is bigger than the human being. Is it love?

MZ: Um...

FF: Of course, intellectual processes can help us to get it. But we don't know where these ideas come out. You cannot plan creativity. Today neuroscience is only at the beginning of discovering the relationship between creative thinking and the 'conscious' brain...

MZ: So, before you said that what you try to achieve is social transformation, right?

FF: Yeah.

MZ: This means that there are some problems now in society, right? Otherwise, we would not need transformation.

FF: As human beings, we are now able to feel some urgency. We are able to read something like... Sorry, a storm is coming, I go and close the windows!

MZ: Sure!

FF: Here I am. Coming back to your question, what is the problem? The human being is part of nature, is part of a world that is continually changing. We try to change our behaviors to respond to common needs...

MZ: You know, sometimes I'm a bit suspicious about this problem-solving approach, that is maybe closer to this social design field, in which there are people who have knowledge and tools and a small community that is facing a problem. But we are the ones in a position of privilege. We have the tools to create this social change. And I ask myself, "Why then do all those processes have to fit into the art system?" You know, I think it's very easy to fall into the trap of exploitation and paternalism.

FF: If you take the Mechanical philosophy vision of Descartes, if the machine is broken, we have to know how to fix it. Alright, we agree that this approach is not working anymore. But of course, this is inside our way of looking into reality, because we grew up with this idea. But now we live in a reality in which this vision is not valid, we are in a process in which we are trying to bring in a new vision, new possibilities. I was born in '75, and I grew up in a society that was based on this mechanical vision... Then we discovered thermodynamics processes and Quantum physics... I don't know exactly what the form of the solution will be. But I can try to read this transformation. Artists can help communities to be part of this process.

MZ: They're like facilitating something.

FF: It's more like an enzyme. It's like a virus?! We all know very well how a virus is working... bad example... To move it from Descartes' mechanical vision to Heraclitus' vision we need to explore more the concept of sustainability and resilience.

MZ: Um... interesting.

FF: Sustainability is the ability to affect the system, on a small and at the same time global scale. While working with a community in an art process, I look to a sustainable process.

We live in a reality with limited resources. With water access problems... this is undoubted.

There is no limit of trust, there is no limit of love. Limited resources are connected with the point of view of the community, and there is always a possibility to use these limits to create something new. How can we, as a community, create something going beyond these limits?

MZ: Tricky. And what about resilience?

FF: Resilience is the ability to react in the face of trauma. Every day we work with resilience as an attitude. For example, we discovered our capacity to transform ourselves in the last 2 years, since we could not do any more of our

daily activities by the pandemic era. We have been in contact with pain and frustration...

Is it true that sometimes you have to arrive at a point of stress, to come out of the comfort zone?! If you don't get out of your comfort zone, you cannot transform a system. Some environments will maybe reach a transformation point in the future. Maybe Today they are not ready to take a new form. Resilience comes out of a process. You know, often the human being is very conservative and feels that the change is not possible.

MZ: It's pretty hard to work with people.

FF: It's a journey.

So, what about your research? Is it about listening? How observation, questioning and the dialogic interaction can make some changes?

MZ: Actually, if we are speaking about this thing that we are doing, I would say it's more an exploration of what is listening, also connected to social and relational practices.

FF: And how to define listening?

MZ: I don't know... In which context?

FF: So, what is the function of listening?

MZ: I would say listening is the basic element for communication. And it can be used as a tool to achieve something. It has a lot to do with love and human interaction in general. It's very difficult to give a definition, you know. It's very layered, it entails many different elements. There is an element of vulnerability, there is an element of strength, there are elements of activity and passivity. I would like to understand listening as an active decision that comes from the free will of people, institutions or different levels of organization.

FF: Yeah. If we move it from an emotional point of view, you know, it is to open your heart and feel it, feel yourself, feel the other. Listening is also very connected to empathy: ecstasy and suffering of the human being.

MZ: I would say listening is also a tool to establish new communities, right? Until now we are speaking about getting into already established communities and trying to initiate or facilitate a sort of change. But what about creating new communities? I think that initiating the community itself, and connecting people, can be done through listening.

FF: We talked at length about the external observer, the historian... Listening can always be deeper, it depends on the listener's ability.

When you are doing something in a community, when you perform, you have to listen to your body and the bodies around you. It's like a group dance, you have to be able to

listen to the body of the community. You have to lose yourself. Are you ready to do it?

Yeah, but then we move to another kind of listening. How can you listen to your vocation? Do you know your vocation, Matteo? Why are you here in this world? What is your mission?

MZ: Um... I'd say to also contribute to a kind of social change.

FF: Great. Of course, it's something that makes an agreement between body, heart and mind. It's like when you are in love, everything is aligned and it's just one clear voice that says, "Yes, do this!" You know that it is the truth. It comes from this big knowledge that the human being has, what Quantum physicists or spiritual masters called 'Unity'. When you go to a community, you have to bring this idea, you have to be open to listen. It's very difficult if you are limited by labels and stereotypes, preconceived visions. The deep listening is already part of the change.

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MZ: And what is your vocation?

FF: My vocation is to discover together with you the beauty and the complexity of everything around us. We are on the way to wonderland... Can you see?!