

*on I and we / different approaches to shaping reality / radical subjectivity /  
surrendering to unstable memories by influencing them together / in between reality and dialogue /  
collective traces / looking at the world with your own eyes / honesty / agreeing for a we / focusing on the I /  
dissolving individuality for the common good*

with **Tim Bongardt**  
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*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Tim Bongardt, Matteo Zoccolo – 25 april 2021  
matteozoccolo.net/on\_listening/conversations.html*

**MZ:** Ok, where do we start? What do you think it's a good starting point?

**TB:** To recollect our thoughts? Maybe we can start with our different approaches to art, like you are coming from photography and I'm trying to write. And then we are facing the same problem, the problem of describing a reality not playing God and not changing it too drastically by tracing it. Maybe we can start there.

**MZ:** I remember we had two very different approaches to do that, to solve this problem of shaping reality through producing a trace of it. Um, so first, what is the problem for you? Do you have any examples?

**TB:** So, in my last few years, I recognized that when I write, next time I try to remember the actual event, the actual memory, I don't. I don't get there anymore. I just get to the point of the text, what I've written. So, by deciding what I write down, I change my future memory, my future, myself. And that felt to me like quite a big responsibility, that it is important what I will write down because in two years I will only remember that. And it changes who I think I am, who I think the person I met was, and all the relationships. That had an impact also on me writing fictionally, not only about my personal biographical stuff. I think this demonstrates we are completely subjective. Everything in our memory, being, and thinking is so, so much subjective. It's projecting our own thoughts onto others, on their actions. And we only interpret it in our own manners and our own structures. I came to this conclusion, if I want to write fiction, I want to write a story, it cannot be from the bird-eye perspective. It cannot be written using 'he', 'she' or 'it'.

**MZ:** Interesting.

**TB:** I think it is possible to reach my goal with that form of writing, but I don't want it. I think it's more difficult. I don't want to have a book about an author or from an author feeling like God, saying how this is, how the world is, how wisdom is, how wise he or she is. And so, I try to write in a radically subjective manner how I felt, how I really felt. Not some form I want to present. Like, what could be expected to be read, what could be expected to be good, what could be sold, what others want to hear. But really how I felt, maybe not directly in a biography, like I said, in a rather fictional story, telling the same real feeling. Yeah. So, this is my way of trying to avoid going too much into that God perspective, that is when you create something and shape reality, by just being completely honest and showing my inner, subjective version of myself. That's where we differ in our approach, we face the problem in an opposite, or actually just different form.

**MZ:** Yeah, I think I approach this issue of shaping and modifying reality by saying, first of all, that we can accept

it. We can surrender to the fact that reality is constantly shaped by our actions. One action also keeps a memory of something, of a feeling, an encounter, an experience. First, we have to accept that this is happening.

For example, right now we are shaping our memories about the talk that we had a few days ago about this topic. And there is also the layer of having a recorder with us, which puts pressure and expectations, shaping what we are saying. So, I see the point of radically being subjective, because in this way you can justify what you say in an honest way, and you cannot be attacked for what you say because that's you, and that's your opinion, that's the way you shape your reality and the reality of the people around you. For me it's more effective, for what I do, to approach the problem saying that reality is always in-between two people, and therefore it can be shaped by those two people discussing the way it is possible to do that, together.

**TB:** Um...

**MZ:** For me, it's not about being radically subjective, but being radically interested in the interaction between people and how this interaction is shaping the reality in between those two people. And by saying two people, I don't mean only two people, this can also happen in a group of people. Maybe this can also happen within the same person, if this person is in a sort of dialogue with themselves, self-reflecting what they think about a certain situation. But generally, this reality is always in-between, and that's why I am more and more interested in those forms of art that involve more people and that are radically open to the possibilities of togetherness. Always listening to the necessities and the ideas of others, even if they clash with your own ideas. I think this is an empathic way to produce a trace, our trace, and not the trace of my reality. Yeah.

**TB:** When I think about our approaches, I see that they are quite alike. When I try to be radically subjective, there's always a dialogue, there's always an inner reflection, like an in-between state within one person. But if I imagine how it is with more people, then a lot of problems come up to me directly. Because you can either just document how the interaction was, like with recording or a video or someone writing. But even that changes, and it's subjective. And by holding your camera, you are shaping the interaction that is happening. So, the one recording, writing, or filming is having an influence on the interaction. And it's not the actual interaction shown, but that perspective from the one making it. And that's a big problem for me to be honest there, because that's another one's perspective on it. You cannot show the real interaction. I think it's very, very hard to show that in-between state as it really is.

When I listen to you, I think about, "Why do you go to that interpersonal approach? Why do you go to the dialogue, and I'm going to the subjective part, focusing only on myself?" Then I realize that it probably has something to do with the fact that my art, or what I try to do, is also a

way of processing what I've experienced. For a long time, I have experienced feeling disconnected and feeling alone and having not a good connection to anyone around me. In some phases, not all the time, luckily. But I have felt that disconnection a lot. I think that's why I want to be honest and try like this, to show it. And it might be that after I've done it, it changes because I am now luckily experiencing other feelings, feeling very connected and accepted. Maybe I will become a very Zen writer, I don't know. But at the moment, I just want to show how I felt, how I look at the world, how I look at other people through my own eyes and making clear that it is my own eyes and not the eyes of a judge.

**MZ:** Why do you think this is problematic? This looking at situations with a critical eye, or as you said before, from a 'bird-eye perspective'?

**TB:** Because I think it's utopian, it's an idea. You can't. You're always stuck in your own head. Even though you try to be objective, you always have parallel thoughts, you are now itching your thumb. I don't know. There's a lot of things processing, and you can't have that objective, bird-eye perspective.

You can try it. And, as I said, some people can do it better or worse. But I think, because my main intention is to make honest, authentic art, I don't want that at the moment.

**MZ:** Do you see it applying also to life in general?

**TB:** Yes, of course, we are often trying to generalize and finding a truth that can explain more than just our own actions. We want to understand all the actions and all the feelings. That often goes along by devaluing it by judging if it is good or bad.

I think both processes, generalizing and judging, are not ways to live a healthy relationship with yourself and others. It's common knowledge, it's not a really wise thought, but if you just formulate in 'I' phrases and stay at your own feelings, then it is way more open, honest, and real. You show yourself as you are, I think it's not wise to understand everything in the world but to show that you can feel connected with yourself and make that accessible to others. That's the way of feeling harmonious. Or how do you always say? Harmonious and responsibility? I think that's it, yeah. That's the way to get close to that.

**MZ:** I'm thinking now that also in the 'we' form, there is an 'I'. It's not erased. That's why I prefer the 'we'. I know that it's always about me. It's about what's happening inside myself and it's about how I perceive things. And if I call myself an artist, then people around me are expecting me to narrate and tell my point of view. I'm just now thinking, maybe it could be *our* point of view.

**TB:** But then is it really ours? Why not make clear it is your point of view from a situation, from a conversation that we had, but it's

still just you. And not saying, “OK, this is what we thought.” I think that’s very risky.

**MZ:** And what if the people agree for a ‘we’? Let’s say, a group of people meet, write a manifesto, and then sign it.

**TB:** Um...

**MZ:** This group of people agreed that there is a ‘we’, first of all, and this ‘we’ is composed of many ‘I’ that have different opinions and different lives, but they come together and they agree for this ‘we’ and then they feel part of it. And then they start to work under that ‘we’ and not ‘I’

**TB:** Sure, that’s a very beautiful thing if that happens. If many people really share the same thought, the same ideal, the same vision, definitely. That’s what I would like to be a part of. But it’s still a different thing with the expression of your own personal artistic feelings. To me, that’s more like a group project, like the Communists did, or like every revolution did. For me, the inner artistic process, in a way, is not to start a group process or a group ideal, but really to dive into one’s own way. Otherwise I’d call it a movement.

And that is also why often artists are very egocentric and just feel disconnected from everyone, living in their own world. In Germany they say ‘the ivory tower’. Yeah, it’s not only in German, I guess.

**MZ:** I guess in Italian too.

**TB:** So yeah, of course, that’s a big, big danger just focusing on your own. But I think that form focusing in a good manner on yourself, you also have a good view of others. I think that’s the step that comes directly after it. Just from hearing what you really feel, there are always others included, of course, because no one is living alone, for most of the time.

**MZ:** I think this can teach me something, I do feel sometimes this ‘we’ is problematic. Um... I think it’s safer to say ‘I’, we have to figure out if...

**TB:** But you can also hide in the ‘we’. “It’s not just me saying it...” So that it’s not too personal. And, “Look, it was all of us...”

**MZ:** Do you think the concept of taking responsibility is also included in this?

**TB:** Yeah, my main responsibility in life is to care about myself and if I respect that in a good way, focusing on my subjective feelings, my surroundings, what influences me, of course, you feel connected to others and feel a responsibility to others too. It’s not a really big thought, but the focus on my own subjective being should be the main one. As a 22-year... 23, right, I got older! As a 23-year-old human being, I want to focus on the ‘I’. Maybe in 10 years I will want to take care of a ‘we’, I will maybe be a father, I don’t know, or take responsibility in a company... No, I don’t think I’ll work in a company...

**MZ:** Fair. You were also there during our last meeting in the hör-raum. How was it for you? Do you have some reflections about ‘I’ and ‘we’ related to that? If you think of that experience, were you feeling part of a group or were you still feeling this... Let’s call it ‘healthy individuality’?

**TB:** Yeah, I think both. I think there was a really good atmosphere. When I introduced myself, I had no feeling of, “OK, be careful! They will judge you,” or something. I just said who I am and I felt respected, everyone was nice. So, also in the meditation we did, I felt a lot into my human being and my physical body, what I’ve been hearing, listening or feeling.

But I also felt connected. I felt that everyone was sitting around. I heard that someone was putting up a lighter even though he was smoking. I felt an in-between connection. The highlight of it was that I somehow felt that the gong which would end the silence would come. And it was exactly 10 seconds after it actually came. Yeah. If something like this happens, you feel that there’s harmony and you feel connected. Your own subjective person can somehow dissolve a little bit and be open and accessible in a good space. That was also the case when we presented what we had written. Even though there, again, I felt a very strong subjective character. Because everyone uses different words, different languages, different... And you see how they experienced the same happening very differently. So, by presenting what we wrote, I felt more the subjective individual aspects again.

But yeah, I think your hörraum project is a very good space for feeling that process of... Um... Of losing individuality for a greater good, for the common good, for being together.