

*on collectivity / purification / body as interface / intimacy / interpreting information / knowledge and energy /
intra-acting / semi-permeable membrane / a peacock dancing in the forest /
audience / attachment / dropping egos*

with **Jaskaran Anand**

08 may 2021 [1]

*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with **Jaskaran Anand, Matteo Zoccolo** – 08 may 2021
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MZ: What is collectivity for you?

JA: I think it depends on which layer of collectivity you're talking about. It takes place on different layers - considering where you mark the border/boundary of the body, for eg: is it 'my' body, is it the 'space I am in', is it the city, country, continent, globe or universe one is considering it to be!? I suspect it is something that is contained, but not in any form or shape that we wish to see it in, or it could have been imagined in. It is in the togetherness of finding a role in a certain situation whether physically alone or with people. It could be on a meta-level, it may be collectivity within you related with different body feelings that you're going through which are in turn influenced by the environment, weather, society, politics and culture. It may be with people you are inter/intra-acting with, or it's with the space : around you or including terrestrial bodies etc; because it always exists. It's just about realizing the spectrum and dimensions on which we talk about collectivity. It's very hard to answer what exactly collectivity is. It's something that exists at every instance.

Collectivities are every time there, you just pick a streak of that thing and say, "Oh, this is what I think is collective." But this is just a sub-collective particle of the collectiveness that you're talking about. Collectivity is a very broad topic...

MZ: So, if we want to restrict a bit and put some boundaries, how do you see collectivity regarding your artistic practice?

JA: Collectivity, in my own artistic works, is re-formed via the unraveling of the different factors related with the topic which seem to have an effect on different conscious levels - of mine and of people. I would say it's always inside out, thereby my research begins with what is going-on in my own body, through myself, what are my own feelings w.r.t. acquiring/-ed knowledge that I am perceiving regarding the topic. I focus on bringing in clarity for myself of what all connects to the point I really want to say or put forward in public, hoping that it is without an ego of thinking, "That's the only point I am concerned about, would express it at an autobiographical level and that's it." For eg: is it only 'my concern' or is it something that happens on a structural or socio-political level which affects a broader range of society than the ones that are said to be the 'minor'? Conceptually, when it comes to certain things, the main point is that there is a multi directionality in the existence of any particular topic, so, I look forward to re-defining the cause(s) of the topic. I do so by conducting surveys, having personal talks with strangers and researching current global news concerning the topics. Also, when more people get on board with the topic - we research what are their perceptions, which helps to focus on multi-layered factors to what it may actually be. This then re-forms the desire to execute the artistic work and adds a certain collectivity to it.

When it comes to artworks, I look forward to ‘purifying’ what kind of form it wishes to be executed in, whether it is an open format that allows changes in the art work or it’s rigid in its structure... And this is choosing on different layers. I focus on the non-verbal languages like music, dance, video, drawing, clay-making etc. to express what the body of the performers/participants have while researching and developing an artistic language around the work. As soon as you get into productions, especially when the music is played through electronic interfaces, it’s already collective on a visible layer. The layers keep adding: someone has made the music, someone has built the interface, someone designed this recorder that you’re using. So, it is already collective.

MZ: Um...

JA: Understanding collectivity on the core-self or proto-self is where I would say dance, theater and meditative practices come in, where you are trained to listen to different impulses that your body is giving, and not only the one at the higher self-conscious level. Higher not in terms of intelligent or less intelligent, but the first accessible, which is the autobiographical level. There is also a proto-level, core-level of the self, or it’s even going deeper in the emotionality of the self where you don’t know where exactly it is triggering you from, and how you translate that into movement. So, there is always this finding a new collectiveness in what’s going on with you and within the environment. And then you can get into partner dancing or choreography, where you still have to live your moment being coordinated. It’s a lot going on.

MZ: What do you mean when you say ‘purify’?

JA: Your body is always an interface. There is no other way a person can ever, at least now, reinterpret what’s going on inside the feeling of their own body. You are connecting with the energy that’s flowing through the body, which is the medium. And by purifying I mean this energy connection that we keep talking about, that we feel in every moving particle or however you want to call it. When the self comes to the mind at different conscious levels, you’re thinking and interpreting it in a way you can translate it and interpret it, and this is where the verbal-nonverbal that we were talking about comes in. Words are coming at a very different level of consciousness. And by purifying, I mostly mean... What’s that feeling of energy when achieving certain trance-like states? Or are you using your learned seductions for your own self, to manipulate... No, manipulate is not the right word, but to give a justifiable interpretation to yourself or others of this energy that you’re feeling at that moment. Thereby, the process of purification points towards un-re-learning what you know about the particular kinds of emotion(s) or the way that you deal with feelings. And not justifying yourself by saying, “This is the right way, and that is the wrong way.”

MZ: Do you have an example?

JA: We have been talking about intimacy a lot. So, when you are with someone, there is a certain border or mind-trap that I know this thing I perceive and it may be the binding truth. For example, we have talked about sexuality and gender. Whichever kind of love you deal with (brother, sister, mother, father, fucking buddy, best friend...) you learn a certain way to share your energy with them. The purification happens when egos and learned seductions are dropped, at first, and second, when you allow yourself to understand that the interpretation of what’s going on is still yours - even when you have verbally expressed and exchanged the feelings of the emotions. The purification comes when you drop these learnings that you had in your life and achieve a state of trance in which your ‘me’ interferes with your ‘I’, the ‘I’ of the other and the collective self that is being formed at a meta-level while you are experiencing it.

MZ: How do you think this connects to preconceived knowledge?

JA: I suspect you will always be knowledgeable because you may learn something due to the experiences, past thoughts, and future plans. You only ignore. For example, you may have knowledge of your reaction when you fidget with your beard - either it’s a way of thinking for you or it’s a way of... I don’t know. You don’t even know what this is... But if someone asks, “What is that?” You’d be like, “Yeah, it’s my thinking thing.” But maybe this outer expression takes over what is actually going on inside you and this, I would say, is a certain ignorance towards the actual state of the observant that s/he/they could be in, and it may not really mean what you think it does.

Sometimes I have to clarify with the people I start to work with, especially when they are choreographers or directors, that I often have a certain facial expression where people think I’m lost around somewhere, or that I’m totally judging them. But actually, I’m in a phase in which I’m picturing everything this person is saying, with all the possibilities that I know I could connect with. So, I had to explain this to them before because a lot of people came to me and said, “You’re completely uninterested.” I was like, “No, no!” If you see me with this face, it’s not that I’m angry, or that I don’t know what the fuck you’re saying. I am actually imagining. But this awareness comes because of a reflection of what people told me. I would never think of it because I’m lost in a trance moment.

MZ: I don’t know if the only way to learn things is with people, but I think the learning process always happens in between you and something else. In between you and people, you and a book, in between you and a group. I don’t know how much you can learn when you don’t have external stimuli.

JA: There are always external stimuli. How can you think there are no external stimuli? We've got used to a certain way of getting stimulated. And this is what I was thinking by dropping your borders. First, the stimulus intensity. Second, the layer of interpretation of what that means to you at your autobiographical level, core-level, proto-level or whichever level you want to say it in neuroscientific terms. And then, the energy that you are sharing, which I'm sharing too. Maybe the intensity is a bit different, or in a different dimension. If you can't feel it, there are ways of tuning it in. So, it's all inside because you're feeling it from inside, wherever it is. It's your medium, it's all inside out, and you have to drop that. If my knee is in pain and if I don't have this energetic understanding, I would say it's because my pelvis is probably twisted, which is half the truth, or maybe a percentage of the truth. It can also be the energy flow, which is related to the re-construction of the body structure. But why don't you find the way how the structure works in the 'now' and how you can make the energy flow through the present state? This is where your body starts adjusting, and this is why you see all the changes in the body. Your body is telling you everything, anyway. We just don't have the knowledge of interpreting it. Actually, we do have a knowledge of interpreting it. But by the time you're understanding what your energy state is, it changes. And there is a lot of interpretation involved. When an information is getting triggered in your mind, it means something at that moment. What if it doesn't? Maybe it's only your certain understanding/knowledge of the instance, which may or may not be the factual reality at the moment.

MZ: Yeah, I think it's very difficult to be so relative. In daily life, it's difficult not to have those certainties, that there is an action and there is a consequence. That's how it works, you know?

JA: That's how we think it works. You confuse that with how it works.

MZ: Yeah. But that's how it's simplified. That's how we face our daily life in a simplified mode, in which I think that if I do something... I know that if I drop this glass, it goes to the ground. This is a direct consequence.

JA: What do you think are the reasons for that?

MZ: I'm used to the gravity force. And I learned it. My body learned that things drop and don't go up to the ceiling. The problem is when you expect something from people, and maybe this is the tricky thing that you're saying. When you imply that to a certain action, there will be a certain reaction, speaking in the context of collectivity. That doesn't really work with people.

JA: Partly yes, I would rather say. There is an action and there is a reaction, but mostly they are all re-actions. You

don't know who made the action. You don't know what the action is. You are just reacting.

If you really want to draw borders, because I suspect we love drawing borders a lot, you can always draw a line between conscious mind, knowledge, learning and the way of speaking. There are a lot of triggers on the connective plane you're in. The information, even if it's at a physical-distance, it's still inside you. You got a physical representation of that, in a way that you can register it in yourself from the outside, and then you can say "This person acted this way, this is why I reacted that way." But you may not know what the actual cause of the action was, because in collectivity, it's all about interacting, or as Karen Barred would say, intra-acting.

It's reacting within each other. Now, imagine I am moving my shoulder, and by consequence you move your shoulder in a dance performance. It's about intensity, how close you are, how far you are. Physicality plays a very important role. And this is the physicality we're talking about. It's two separately seen physical structures/bodies. If there was no physical structure, you could drop this glass and it may not crash before it reaches the floor. There is a certain intensity when two physical surfaces meet. But when we talk about human bodies, it's multidirectional. For example, you don't know what's going on in other people's family, you're not connected with their mother or father, or their close relationships. Not considering only conscious-encounters/experiences you had, but also imagine the information you exchange when people you've met on the road - what you/they/space unconsciously saw, what you unconsciously felt, what you unconsciously heard. This may make us aware that it is mostly reacting.

You don't know what you are acting upon. And you're always acting upon something, to the always existing collectivity. Especially now, I'm dealing a lot with human bodies. Is it a moving body? Is it a moving body in the media? Is it just a video installation with different information inside the media? There are these multi-layers.

MZ: But I think that something special happens when the artist says that the artistic value of what she or he does lies in the connections, in this very collectivity. You can say you can work through collectivity, and you can produce an artwork that needs collectivity. In that case, first there is the artwork as a priority, and then people come, who either form the artwork or are needed for the artwork. But in my understanding, there is another way of seeing these dynamics, which might be power dynamics. When you, first of all, think of how the collectivity is structured, and only then you are open to any form this can take in an artwork. And then the question for me is, "Do we still need to call it art?" But maybe, as we said before, it's not whether it's art or not. Can people meeting and drinking coffee be art? Maybe I am not clear.

JA: No, you are, it just triggers a lot of thoughts in my mind, and I'm just thinking where to start. The moment

you structure an artwork in the concept or in the execution, there is already a certain, let's say, semi-permeable membrane around it. And that semi-permeable membrane already has limiting factors.

MZ: Like a filter.

JA: One can say so. And what happens between that filter is sometimes rather more interesting, because it affects what's inside the semi-permeable membrane, or vice versa, what's inside the semi-permeable membrane is affecting what's out of it. Like UV light. It's dark, and this is why it glows. Now, you can always say it's because of the external factor, but you can also say that things only function when the condition is matched to the way that the semi-permeable membrane accepts to show itself in a physical form.

And the same is when you get into artworks or when you talk about collectivity in organization. Again, the point that comes is that you've already set a limit, and this is normal because you can't talk about everything every time. It's impossible for you, it's impossible for others. It is impossible, generally, to talk about everything. But that membrane that you've created has that everything that's influencing every decision that's been made inside and outside. And when it comes to artworks, I would say it's never non-collective. Unless you're dancing, which is also, in a certain way, collective because you learned those movements somewhere, somehow.

MZ: Why? What is the difference between everything and dance?

JA: It's still your body. You're not using anyone else's body to do that. As soon as cameras come in, anything comes in. You use something that is not yours directly. Here ownership jumps in, which is another whole story. You can talk about collectivity in that ownership. When you move, you don't need anybody, if you are clear with your instrument to transmit the energy state that you're going through. I need an audience, obviously. But if I have to create an artwork in that understanding, in the first place, I don't need anything else but my own self, and I can do it anywhere.

MZ: So, you do need an audience.

JA: Yeah, sure. But that comes with the concept of selling the artwork. There is a phrase coming to my mind, in Hindi it is, ' जंगल में मोर नाचा, कसिने देखा ', which translates into, "Who saw the peacock dancing in the forest?" It doesn't mean that the peacock stops dancing in the jungle. I mean, who the fuck knows what the peacock is thinking? In a presumption, it will still open the wings and will still do the dance.

MZ: Even if people don't see the peacock.

JA: Yeah, because this is just you registering the fact that the peacock is dancing.

MZ: It's the same story of the tree falling, and nobody knows.

JA: Exactly. It is like Schrödinger's cat story. You can only interpret it. For eg: when people look and say, "I understand what you're trying to say when you move." This is a process of justification for the human conscious-mind to say, "I know it works like that." But you don't know what the peacock is actually thinking.

MZ: Yeah. But we still need approval from people around us. So, we need people who look at us when we dance.

JA: Sure. But I'm saying, to explore and re-produce that thing in the first place, you don't need people. Actually, at a certain minimal level, you do need them (as mentioned above). When I'm moving my body, it is collective when it comes to showing it to an audience. And this is the same for acting because you're using your own resource, which is very dear to you. If it wasn't, then in the present Corona-situation we all would be fearlessly hugging each other. There is a certain ownership to the bodies, which is questionable in its own way when we get into interaction. It's always collective, you can't break that. Whenever you say an art piece is made in a collective way, you're just looking at an external factorization of that fact.

There is a certain re-purification going on. And at that level, the information exists, and you can even sense it, somehow. Since when you produce an artwork there is always a lot of information that everyone around is receiving, where is the collectivity not present? You can also clarify this concept in an artistic language. That that concept is coming from one mind, is again questionable. The atom remains the same. Your way of looking at that atom may change, and this is why, maybe, what's inside the atom may change. You know, a lot of things are going on even at that level, scientifically speaking, but we don't want to go there.

MZ: As you wish.

MZ: You are definitely more dependent on other people when you decide to make this collectivity explicit. When you explicitly decide to work within a collective of people, for example. It's definitely a risk.

JA: That's the interesting part. I would still say the initiator plays a very important role. You also have to learn that, as an initiator. When it's not related to you anymore, how do you still get attached? Because there is often a tendency of leaving processes because you thought it was important at the time, but now things have changed, and you leave. This is where the collectiveness then comes in, when people join and leave the production.

MZ: But I believe that as an initiator, it is more difficult to leave.

JA: It's very difficult, because it's your baby.

MZ: That's what I am actually experiencing, with the 1+1=3 paper. During the past two months, my colleague Bibi and I were busy and with very low energies, so we decided to stop organizing it. And since we are the ones who initiated the idea, put together the people, established this group and organized it establishing all these connections, people were expecting us to keep organize something.

JA: Sometimes people need constant stimuli from the external environment.

MZ: Not really! Something nice happened: two of these people, Elnatan from Jerusalem and Kaja from the Netherlands, called me more or less the same days, and they were like, "Hey, what's happening? If you want, I can take care of it if you and Bibi don't have the energy." And now, they are still working at it with us. I don't know if I can say that it's still my project. I mean, I initiated it, but now it's taking its own life.

JA: Yeah, there are different kinds of works that you can segregate yourself from, and sometimes you cannot. Also, when you're directing the scene, it's a bit different. So, what's your role in the concept of collectivity? And that's on different levels. Yes, if someone says something about your artwork, you may have a certain attachment to it, but when someone comments on your body, which is a very close instrument to be commented upon, you have to form a certain separation in yourself.

MZ: Otherwise, you may get hurt.

JA: Yes. And I think what you're talking about is selectivity, based on certain circumstances and factors of forming a concept which is dependent on an environmental, social, cultural, political, personal, emotional level... A lot of factors. And it keeps changing.
Are your thoughts going towards the mediation with an audience?

MZ: I don't think so. First of all, my attention is on the level of what's happening in the space, whatever the space is. What's happening between the people who are considered part of this... Let's call it a project. People who have a sort of agency in the project, who can take decisions and have responsibilities. So, first, how to deal with different agencies inside the group, and second, how to deal with the fact that I still call myself an artist and I maybe still feel responsibility for that, especially when it comes to creating a documentation of what's happening and to letting other people know what we are doing. I'm really struggling to find a way in which I can give up myself, I can leave my

ego to the decisions of the group. The important thing is that something is happening. It's not important what is happening.

JA: Maybe if you see it as art, but for you, it's still important.

MZ: Yeah, but not as an artist, as a person. I have my own preoccupations, sure. I'm just trying to find a way out between ego and letting go.

JA: You decide to draw your borders between the art and your life.

MZ: It's always a process.

JA: But there is also a line in collectivity, as I understood from my experience, in which there has to be a certain agency of the people involved, as you say. And then a pedagogical aspect comes. If you really have to lead such things, you have to be clear with what you are connecting yourself with, because it will change a lot on your personal level. Forget 'art', there is no separation between artistic and personal level.

MZ: This sounds good.

JA: But you can mark the difference between effecting or not effecting, based on a certain knowledge, learning, patience, meditation... I don't know, whatever X, Y, Z factors you want to put in. This is a very long process. I remember Katie Duck, an Amsterdam based choreographer-performer-improvisation teacher, said something that got stuck with me for quite some time, "You know, it's great if you like your work, the audience likes your work and the people who are in your work like it. The problem is when you don't like what happened, but people like it." So, there is a certain agency and ownership that comes in. When do you drop that? How do you drop that? Are you ready to drop that? Are you clear with yourself? Because this is infatuation, and illusive reality and honesty working on different things/layers. When the people who are involved are infatuated towards the concept, the role of agency changes. This is why I say that it is always multilayered. People may be infatuated, someone might think they know or understand what you're saying. And this goes hand in hand when it comes to collectivity, to the concept of togetherness. It's a multilayered and intense process.
And this is why I say there is no difference between personal and artistic level. In art, you have to really broadly understand what's going on with your own self being placed here and the others being placed there. The things you did are always changing, for you and for the others, depending on time, space, situation, context and all these unseen factors that we've been talking about in the last hour.