

*on defining a thesis project / sharing for sharing /
art as justification / starting from three spaces*

with **Jianan Qu**
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*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with Jianan Qu, Matteo Zoccolo – 14 april 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on_listening/conversations.html*

MZ: I am definitely interested in sound as an element that can connect people and tell us something about how a group works. Yeah, collective research... On something. This is still the question.

JQ: Yeah, on something.

MZ: Could also be more than one thing, could be that we have different projects and different groups of people coming. One could be about the possibilities of radio, another project could be about acousmatic, field recordings and organized excursions with recorders...

JQ: Before, you were mainly talking about ‘not participating’ in your project.

But when you define the setting of the space, when you define what you want from the setting of the space, we get a frame. You can change the setting of the space, but then, each time you change, you are slightly changing the frame. This is what I meant from the very beginning of our meeting. What do you want? What’s the frame?

This can happen. That can happen. Everything can happen. Is it sharing for sharing?

MZ: That’s an issue for me. Every time I put my decisions in the play of group dynamics, a red light in my brain starts to beep, “Take a step back and let the people decide. You are the one who provides the space. You are not the one who sets a direction.” But maybe that’s not something bad. This is our space and we want to go in that direction together. And then we can decide how to go. I cannot ignore that I initiated the space and made it in a way to encourage a certain direction. I agree that there should be a clear one.

JQ: You see, you have a bit of fear in saying/deciding what you want, you prefer to let people do what they want. But that’s your project. And I think your presence needs to be there with your goals, you can also guide the experience indirectly.

Please don’t lose the presence of yourself, otherwise, how do we identify that it’s you and your project?

MZ: Um, I agree.

JQ: Could this project be done by a social worker who opens his living room?

How do you justify the existence of this project as a piece of art?

MZ: Here we go back to my big question, that is: do I really want it to be relevant from the point of view of art? This is something I ask myself. It brings pros and cons I still have to figure out. Of course, there is a part of me that would really like it to be relevant for the art world and discourse. I would really like to speak about this project in some very cool magazine, exhibition, get recognition for what I do, and, you know, to make it something relevant.

And on the other hand, there is another part of me that wants to do it because it's just life and not because it's art. Because we want to be together. Why is it more in the social, activist side, and less in the...?

It pisses me off that there has to be this aura of art project. You know, it's bringing something. "I'm participating in a community-based project by this given artist who is maybe famous or not..." It pisses me off. I would really like to be outside of this. But at the same time, I realize that I do call myself an artist, even though I'm still not sure. Art just seems a nice opportunity that gives you tools to do something that otherwise would just look weird or useless. If you say it's an art project, then suddenly the people say, "OK, interesting. What are you talking about?" And so on. If I say it's just a meeting between friends and we want to sit and stay fifteen minutes in silence, then, of course, people feel weird. And the people who are actually able to say, "Yes, I will stay fifteen minutes in silence," are those who already have an interest in art, or are inside the art bubble, or are art students who are already open to the possibility of meeting people and do something weird, you know? Otherwise, if you want to attract people from the street, you have to justify it, saying like, "We are here because we want to have fun and there will be a concert tonight." Of course, I would like to involve those people who are interested in this kind of openness.

JQ: What you just said, has a few different topics.

First of all, how do you want the project to make sense socially? Second, do you need to justify yourself as an artist, to justify your project as an art project?

Can you do something that you think makes sense, but still graduating from an art university as an artist?

MZ: This is a personal research. How do I call myself? Do I say to the others that I'm an organizer, an artist, a relational artist? I don't know. For me, it's a big question also about the art market and art system. How do I define my position within the art system? Do I really want to be inside an art system? Maybe not. Maybe I don't care about being famous or getting money from what I do. Those are personal questions. Where can I start from?

JQ: Maybe from your interests?

MZ: I did many projects, we did an online radio, we did this paper and we have a room. What about this third physical space? My curiosity is to see how people modify the space and how this space can create a feeling of togetherness between the people who frequent it. What does this space enable? How can we feel part of a group that meets regularly in this space?

I also have the wish that the final product of my thesis can be a product on its own. That it's not connected to my education as an art student. First of all, I want to trace back three processes that are basically, in my point of view, three different possibilities that I found out talking with

other people and collaborating with them, to provide three different kinds of spaces. One is a physical space, one is an auditory online space, and the other is a space on paper. Those are three different ways to encourage community sharing in three different kinds of spaces.

JQ: That's the relation between your projects!

Three different kinds of space for communication. As one of the artists, as the initiator of these projects, you are important because you brought your questions there, your concerns, therefore you do these three projects with such a humble approach in three different kinds of spaces, the printed one, the one online and the actual physical space. You are discovering the possibilities of exchange, sharing, and communication.