

Philosophy of Enthusiasm with Lukas Pairon and guests
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Philosophy of Enthusiasm Reflections

With writing this, I was presented by a challenge of noting down thoughts on enthusiasm, the problem arising not from lack of material and ideas, but, simply, from feeling that it seems to be unfair to captivate the movement, élan, agility, the vibrant spark that represents, or at least in my experience is supposed to represent, enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm: great interest, inspiration, motivation, drive, eagerness, passion.

I come from a place where people easily come across as festive and loud, yet, with all the emotional outbursts, unusually pessimistic and without enthusiasm. Working with optimism and enthusiasm were definitively two things that brought me where I am now. I like to believe they were always part of me, of my way of thinking and being, but I can pinpoint two defining moments when I sensed and became aware of importance of presence of that kind of thinking. Both of these two, separate, yet close events painted a picture of how grim one can get if forgets that our inner actuator can help and take us places, only if the energy within it is regularly replenished with a bit of enthusiasm. One of the events was my own experience of hearing, from a person dear to me whose opinion mattered, “You know... that eternal enthusiasm and optimism of yours is quite annoying”. The second event occurred when I heard that the friend’s mark at his final thesis concert exam was made lower, with an explanation that “He is too enthusiastic. It is not good”.

While stressful, both of these events made me value even more the presence of enthusiasm in my inner being. At the same time, I have understood that, enthusiasm that I thought comes naturally, is much more complex creature and that, in order to utilize it better, I need to understand it better. In this sense, the timing of discovery of the course entitled precisely “Philosophy of Enthusiasm” could not have been timelier. Not solely because it presented the opportunity to hear and meet people who realized the importance of enthusiasm, but also to see how far they have gone on the road of fulfilling and building their dreams by channeling their inner drive. And how they still embrace that journey with joy, however hard it might be, however endless it might seem. That kind of stories and thoughts I wanted to hear, thinking that listening, experiencing and exchanging thoughts in this environment would be encouraging, inspiring and educational. And this course was that, and even more.

These lectures and each of the guest speakers provided the insight into keeping the drive, finding yourself, your voice, to staying true to yourself and being brave to take a leap (into the uncomfortable zone where innovation happens). Starting with Mr. Pairon who opened the first session with the words: “Promise to yourself. Promise to your idea.” Words that can as well be the summing up at the end.

Already the first guest speakers, Philip Aguirre and Benjamin Verdonck, immediately set the high standard of what these lectures would bring. Although coming from more or less the same field of work, both of their paths and stories were

unique, giving proof that there is space, time and context for versatile ways of approaching to and realizing one's potential. Among many interesting remarks, a few stood out as particularly relevant to me. The words of Philip Aguirre that perseverance and hard work are ultimately the way to reach the fulfillment and recognition and well as to stay motivated. Benjamin Verdonck had additional, important, advice that was quite concise but resonated loudly: "Have fun. Work." Especially in his stories and experience there was an important, yet sometimes overlooked aspect in expressing and achieving ones goals - chance encounters. This turned out to be a recurring thought connecting the lectures of most of the guest speakers, either mentioned casually, or stressed as important, but certainly experienced widely. The notion of the chance encounter gave the whole new meaning to the thought of networking, speaking about your work and socializing greater importance. It also made me realize how much of improvement comes from socializing the knowledge one has. Summing up what is to be expected and how one would find its way, both speakers joined forces and stated how "making art is the way of living".

The speakers that followed, Elvis Peeters and Nedda El Asmar, brought their own unique experience, continuing where the first session left of. Listening about the remarkable creative, working and living relationship between Elvis Peeters and Nicole van Bael, that is both professional and romantic is most definitively one of the unique situations that would be difficult to grasp without having a privilege to hear about it first hand. Both the fascinating aspect of finding a way how such a unique and unusual way of working can also become the way of living, and about the things that make such a relationship also are integral to keeping the will, inspiration and enthusiasm (always) in its peek. How to avoid going to the "black hole", as Peeters named the moment just after the process of creation is finished and we feel the part of us has departed. The subject that has never ceased to interest artists – both creating and performing, always confronted with the feeling that with every creation and/or performance a little piece of artist's soul is given away. The constant proximity of creators in exchange, that comes from combining the professional and romantic relationship that Peeters described, exchange of ideas and motivation, bridges the moment of "black hole" and transforms it into a moment of new beginning. Another very interesting point Elvis Peeters stressed was the importance of learning how to say no. Importance of accepting that time does have limit, and, in order to be able to give best and be satisfied with one's work, one must inquire to detail on projects and proposals and make insightful decision on whether to do or not do something. Accepting that sometimes saying no is a better choice. It was most inspiring to listen to Nedda El Asmar speak on how you must bravely step out, present your work, keep open mind and go everywhere and anywhere where you think you might find environment that you believe will help and develop your work, your creativity, a place that will allow you to develop as artist. She as well spoke about exchange of inspiration and forming seemingly nonconventional bonds in collaborations, but ones that ultimately deliver the quality of work you expect of yourself.

Margot Vanderstraeten and Sam Touzani, guest lectures of the next session, opened questions of importance of following your own voice, even if it sometimes means failing and being presented with more difficulties. A question of the social (and peer) pressure of making a choice and meeting expectations of the others versus arriving to her own experience, in which "my life is to break even" – accepting not

only the upsides, but also the downsides of having a freedom to be your own boss, in a creative sense. As well as making and providing yourself with a creative workspace, not only physical space but space in the mind. A question of creativity and the miracle how each one of us adds to the world that did not exist before and it would not exist if you were not here. Leading to the importance that any act of art that you do must have sense and be true to yourself, because only then will it make sense to others.

The following session gave us a glimpse into the interesting life of Peter Missotten bringing, once again, the “chance encounters” and “happy accidents” to the discussion table provocatively starting with the statement that “there is no school of arts”. The experience of the ever changing world and how “young” will always bring intuition and something difficult to repeat is what, for him, possesses the features of the “true” school of art. Followed by stories of his own experiences of unexpected results that came after planning something, often resulting in change in expectations from a project and an idea – a path that can make us even forget where did we start from, but nevertheless lead us to the place of happiness because ultimately we arrive to “it worked” moment. Missotten shun the light on the “making of things”, importance of not exactly knowing what the final product of making is, but discovering along the way, adjusting your goals in accordance with the information and experience you collect along the way and how it is impossible to make just for the sake of provoking appreciation. As, ultimately, it cannot be known for sure what the audience would like or even predict who the targeted audience would be. The lecture took the different route from the previous ones, but came back to the same set consisting of chance encounters, developing own psychology of perception and importance of support system, without which the recognition and feedback of your work is less likely to happen.

The importance of communication and support system was exactly what Johan Leysen and Guy Cassiers stressed at the seventh session. As an actor, John Leysen addressed aspects of his practice as performing artist, revealing how each participant in the process, even if considered “only” a performer becomes part of the creation of art, without whom, there would not be any work of art. He went on to express the importance of finding and searching for people that interest you, being brave to not do things that will not satisfy you and being brave to go for things that might not end up being perfect, yet becoming exactly that because of the experience the very imperfection brings. Finding the means to make what you want to make while being clever and cautious with your energy, eagerness, and stubbornness – all part of creativity, talent and artistry. The experiences of Guy Cassiers, spoke loudly of finding new ways and new language in which your ideas can be best (re)presented. Starting from something small, from the basics that will inevitably develop, with time, into the larger projects with higher demands, but stay true and sincere to the initial drive and approach. Cassiers insisted on the importance of incorporating dialogue into creation, dialogue with different mediums of expression, as well as, not limiting yourself with the fear of uncommon. This was all summed up in a question that one should always ask oneself “Who is there and how can we communicate?” Through those dialogues and development of projects we must listen and notice what is going on and how do we go further, ultimately reaching a point where we have a strong project with good presentation, a project that leaves an impression which cannot be resisted.

As a finale came the lecture with Gie Baguet and Gerda Dendoovens, conversations filled with moments of education/knowledge transfer. Given that Gie

Baguet is someone who helps art to come to life, it was very interesting and informational to hear his thoughts, especially as his own approach to his work turned out to be quite artistic. Starting with how he started to work in this field and the sentence “I had a lot of fun. If I didn’t like it, I’ll stop”, that prevailed, both as a statement and as a way of thinking until now. The eagerness to “have fun” showed the importance of approaching every day with freshness, and regarding every new professional task full of things and possibilities to be discovered. Once again, the importance of starting small and developing step by step was singled out as a proof that results come through thorough work and patience. That thought did not connect Baguet only with the previous speakers, but it was boiled down to the core in few sentences following lecturer, Gerda Dendoovens, said “hard work: work, work, work!” As well as importance of understanding and articulating what it is that you do not want, which for her was not to become the conventional artist part of the conventional “art gallery” scene that ultimately led her to finding her way of expression, her medium, or rather mediums, to work with. Another, for me, very interesting point was the notion of “the circle”, the initial desire and idea which can seem to be very far, at certain stages of artistic development, just to come back, seemingly out of blue, when the circle of a experiences is completed. Creating like that the perfect mixture and pallet of possibilities with which we can express the best and to the fullest. It was most interesting to listen on importance of sincerity and loyalty when collaborating with others as something that helps a collaboration and artwork grow, develop and makes working environment more pleasant and how focusing on the content and the final goal, the artwork, helps avoid the clashes of egos. All of these comes together in importance of surrounding yourself with people who support you, believe in you, what will make you believe in yourself more and apart from that you just need to give time and work. Not to rationalize a lot “why” you believe and think it is the right way so that you do not lose the conviction of your message, but rather to trust the gut feeling, have openness to see what is happening but trust yourself and expose yourself. People will like it or not like it, but you will give your best and you will go further from there.

This experience of listening and speaking with notable artists from different fields is not valuable because only "success" speaks about enthusiasm. More because understanding that success is a balanced mixture of tries and fails, but fails after which you have to continue trying - and that for me is enthusiasm. As Beckett puts it “Fail again. Fail harder.” Understanding that nothing is impossible, unless you give up. Adjusting and arranging your ways and goals with information and input you get along the way, all in order to reach and fulfill to the fullest and closest your ideas and thoughts.

What also came across as important and valuable lesson for me was that the bad moments and performances should be understood and scrutinized, but not dwelled upon allowing them to define us. In order for them to become a momentary obstacle that is there only to show us how strong we are, how much and how we have to go on with what we want, we need to take them seriously, but not fatalistically. Those challenges are good, as they make you re-think, re-evaluate your thoughts and plans and sometimes, through that thinking we find better ways or even modify our goal, perfect and crystallize them.

It is both important and liberating to understand that one and one’s work are not entitled to recognition and success by default, but that they are earned with

complete dedication (to work) and sincerity (to oneself), although sometimes recognition and success might come in surprising ways. But in the meantime, in the “dark moments” one must always remind self of what do you see your life to be and how do you see the world should be – everything that challenges you have to take it and overcome it. You build your path, your road, one challenge at the time, while not losing the far sight – happiness of being yourself, not what it is expected or how “it should be”. Especially if that, for you, means settling and not being truly in touch with yourself and being happy.

You are the one that ultimately has and makes choices, the choice to go your own way or to choose somebody else way. Choosing you own way might be harder, longer and slower path, but it therefore becomes more rewarding in soul preserving and fulfillment of your original ideas. The “somebody else” way might bring challenges that ask you for compromises that ultimately to the core shake the foundation to what you are and what you want to be. But compromising is not always a bad thing nor is choosing one of these roads for short period of time in your development. What seems to come out as important is that when opting for them and when making compromises, you must be clear what do we make them for – is it for ultimately reaching your happiness, you goal or out of vanity and because it seems easier. This is a question that one should always question oneself with complete honesty and truthfulness. Then comes the part of recognizing and accepting own choice, what ever it may be or might have been, not as something you “had to” but something you chose to. Whether the result of your choice in that moment was good or bad, owning and taking responsibility of making the choice is what ultimately gives you back the power and putting you on top of the situation, from where you can then be the one to redirect or continue. Making any previous decision just another step on your way, no matter how it seems to others.

We are explorers. We seek, search, find, lose, seek, search, discover, and share... We have to take each defeat only as a new adventure towards our goal, as a new challenge that we are going to overcome. One way or another, it will teach us how to see or understand something better. How to understand ourselves better. Our idea. And with that knowledge help us refine and crystallize how are we going to express and present our thoughts and ideas.