

Distant Thoughts (Reflective interview with Jolien Akkerman/ pilot)

ENTIRE TRANSCRIPT

Start recording...

A: So, you are being recorded right now... ok... so hello Jolien, we are going to talk about your Distant Thoughts experience...

Can you describe what was about and what happened?

J: Yes. Beforehand I was sent an email with a telephone number and a script, so I had to call someone at 7 o'clock in the evening and then I should follow the script. So, that's what happened. In the beginning you were unsure if this person would immediately start following the script, because the script really starts when you are answering the phone, but the person I was talking to first just said hi, which am I A or B in the script, just to get a little comfortable, and then we actually started following the script.

A: So, you decided who is going to be A and B in your conversation?

J: It was already established, because in the script it said B is the one calling and that was me. A is the one answering the phone.

A: So, you already had a role, that you will be telling your story next.

J: Yes. So, then we had to start following the script. Then, I had to ask her about an encounter with a stranger and she would just tell me this experience, and I would ask questions, and then you go back to the script for a little bit, to ask more follow up questions that are actually in the script. After that you switch roles, and she would ask me about the encounter with a stranger, and I would tell her and she would ask me follow up questions. We would go back to the script for more questions. Then, you follow the script to say goodbye and that was it actually.

A: When you attended the performance what did you expect? I mean what were your feelings for attending this performance?

J: I was really nervous, and I don't know why... well I know why, because of my personality, but there is nothing to be nervous about. I always get nervous when I talk

to strangers. So, actually there is no need to be nervous, because there was a script, so I wouldn't have to worry about what I would say or what I didn't know what to say, because it was already in the script. But still, I was really nervous.

A: Why were you feeling nervous? What was the most stressed thing that you found?

J: I think for me, but I think that is just a personal thing, that is just in my personality. When I have an appointment at a certain time with someone I don't know, I just get really nervous, I don't know. This anticipation of that specific time I am going to do this and I don't know what is going to happen. So, it is knowing the unknown.

A: The unknown is nervous or more like suspense?

J: Yes, I think it is both. It is the suspense of not knowing what is going to happen at 7 o'clock.

A: The suspense is there because you had to talk to someone? For example, if the performance was only the other person talking and you didn't have to talk, would you still feel that you were going to be nervous?

J: Maybe less. But at the same time, it wouldn't matter, because there is a script. So, it doesn't matter. If I would not feel like talking, coming up with sentences myself, I would just follow the script and that would also be fine. That would be the same and that I could also participate.

A: Do you feel like an actual connection with the person you were talking to? I mean did you find common things, similar stories?

J: Yeah, we actually had very similar experiences that we shared. So, we were asked to talk about a memorable or inspiring encounter with a stranger, and we both talked about meeting someone while traveling. So, that was a coincidence, but it was actually really similar.

A: Did you think beforehand how you wanted to express this specific encounter with the stranger? Or were you influenced by the story that the other person on the line told you first?

J: Both. When you receive the email before the performance you are asked to think about an encounter with a stranger, and I thought of a couple and didn't really pick one and thought that this is the one that I am going to tell. A couple of experiences

popped into my head, the one story that I was thinking about traveling was more personal, and I didn't know if I wanted to tell that, because it was the first thing that popped into my head, when I read the assignment so to say. But then, I thought that is a little bit too much maybe. She shared a really personal experience, even more personal than mine, so then I chose to tell that one, the more personal one.

A: So, since she shared a really personal story, you felt that you should go along and choose to tell the more personal story that you thought about? Because she somehow exposed herself to you, you felt the need also to expose a part of yourself to her. So, you were influenced, right?

J: Yes, I was a little bit influenced.

A: Did you expect that you would hear something personal from a stranger calling from the other line?

J: No, it really took me by surprise. I thought wow this is really intense.

A: What did you feel during the time she was telling this personal story of hers to you?

J: I actually felt really nice. It took away all of my nerves that I had, because I felt immediately that this person really trusts me with this story. So, I really liked that she shared that with me.

A: What if you had started the conversation first?

J: Then it would be completely different. I would have told another experience, I think.

A: That is really interesting, because we are sometimes influenced by the people that we are talking to, and not being able to see each other only hear them, can probably lead to telling someone a more personal story. If in this performance you were asked to see each other how different do you think that this conversation would be? Would you feel more uncomfortable to share an encounter with a stranger?

J: I think it would still depend on what she would share. But I think that the fact that I couldn't see her made me share the experience that I told her now. I don't know if I would have said that if I saw her. Even though she started the conversation with this personal experience, I think the fact that I didn't see her and the fact that she shared this personal experience with me, made me share my personal experience with her.

But if I saw her or If I started first then it wouldn't be the same, I would have said something else.

A: So, you did feel that during that conversation you built an intimate relationship between each other, accentuated by the fact that you had similar experiences?

J: Yes... I actually didn't think of this before. If I would have started first with an experience, then I would have shared something less personal, which maybe would have made her share something less personal too. And then, maybe that connection would not have been there.

A: She was willing to offer herself from the beginning, her personal story then. This also led you to share your personal story to her because you felt so, or it was also kind of an obligation to her? To balance the conversation in a way?

J: Yes indeed. Because I said if I am going to share something basic like, for example I saw someone at the supermarket, then it would really kill the connection immediately.

A: Like kill the mood, and the connection that you had started building with each other.

J: Yes, exactly.

A: Is there anything that you felt like wow this is really amazing and I would remember it? Something that stood out to you?

J: So, we both shared an experience about encountering strangers while traveling, so we both traveled through Asia for a period of time. And that was coincidence, but immediately became a shared experience, that was very similar. We talked about your attitude towards strangers when you are travelling. How you have a more open attitude towards meeting new people, because you feel alone, or really different from the people that are there. So, you are drawn into strangers that are also travelling, like local people also. And then we talked about that feeling that completely goes away the moment that you step off the plane, cause then you are just back home, and the attitude is gone. And I remember thinking that this attitude is there again now in this phone call. So, that was a thought that I thought about after the call also and is valuable to me.

A: That is because you feel like when you are in another country that you don't really mind getting embarrassed or asking people about things, in contrast when you are in your own country. You feel more liberated.

J: Yeah, you also want to have contact with people that are going through the same things, the same experience, so other people that are also traveling. And you really need that somehow when you are.

A: It is really interesting that you said that this feeling, when you travel and meet up strangers, came up again during the performance, the phone call. So, you felt liberating again during that phone call?

J: Yeah. And when you hang up the phone you have this strange feeling, like this bitter- sweet feeling that I know this person now, but at the same time I don't know them. We had this really personal, intimate half an hour talk with each other, and then it is just gone forever. I don't know what she even looks like. That also made it really special. This really bitter-sweet feeling is the right word to describe this.

A: Is there something else you want to share or something that provoked you after the conversation?

J: This bitter-sweet feeling I had it for a long time actually, that I kept thinking. This was so special to have shared something with someone I don't know, and knowing that there is someone right now on the globe that knows this story about me, and I know a story about them. I was talking to my boyfriend afterwards and he said, well can't you look her up, and I said no because I wanted to remain a stranger. Because nowadays with social media the first thing that you think about is looking someone up on these platforms, since it is so easy to do so, I thought that I don't want that. I want this person to remain a stranger.

A: You will always carry your personal story and she will always carry yours.

J: Yes.

A: Have your thoughts on how we communicate through telephone changed after your talk with this stranger?

J: I think my attitude towards talking to a stranger changed in a sense that I realize it is really easy to connect with someone if you open up. It is actually a shame if you are really guarded all the time, because then you block that connection from

happening, you do not allow that connection to be created. This is really beautiful; I don't know if I am going to apply it in my real life...

A: So, you think that opening up to each other and leaving room and space to one another to do that, makes it easier to create a friendship?

J: Yes, because it is actually really easy.

A: Yes, that is not that hard, but we tend to overthink it and overreact about these kinds of situations, when they are actually simple to happen.

J: Yeah, definitely for us introverted people. But It took me half an hour to have these intimate connections with that person, thus is not that hard.

A: Did you think that way because you and the other stranger on the phone had similar experiences?

J: Yes, I think so. I think it was also really about trust. She trusted me with her experience and I trusted her with mine. So, trust was a really big part of the conversation.

A; So, you would say that you were both feeling this same feeling of trust with each other, even though you could see one another, you didn't know each other, you felt that you could trust this person.

J: Yes, and she initiated that by starting to share in the first place. Now what you are making me think about is that I wouldn't have done that if I was to share my experience first. What changed now is that if I would do it again, and I would have started with sharing, then I would share something personal. So, that is what I think is changed.

A: Do you reflect a little bit on yourself, while thinking Distant thoughts? I mean, are you reflecting on how you react when meeting new people?

J: Yeah... yeah. Because now I know what was needed to make that connection, to establish trust between us. Now that I know that, I know what is necessary to do is to open up, this open attitude towards the other. Uhm... I wouldn't have done that in the first place, but now I think I would.

A: So, then if you are going to participate in the next performative conversation are you willing from the beginning to be more personal?

J: Yes, I think so. What would also be interesting is if there was a person that I didn't feel that connection with... what would happen then in the conversation.

A: Yes, as if you shared a personal story and the other person shared a more kind of like basic story.

J: I think I would feel really disappointed then...

A: Yes, but I think the story we choose to tell to the other person is part of our personality, and it is really a choice what you will share to the stranger on the phone.

J: Yes.

A: Aren't we also influenced by our emotions during the time that this conversation is occurring?

J: Yeah... because I was really nervous and she really changed that.

A: So, you would say that overall, you didn't expect your experience to go from the awkwardness and anxious feeling at the start to be reversed at the end?

J: No, definitely, because if it would have been up to me to begin, I would just call that person, follow the script and hang the phone up as quickly as possible.

A: So, you did really get by accident a really good matchup, that you felt trusted and opened up to.

J: Yes.

A: Then it is based a little bit on luck or accident?

J: Yes! Definitely.

A: Did speaking on a line phone made you feel a little bit nostalgic, since you know we are living in the social media age?

J: Uhm... that wasn't really the case for me. It was more the other way around. I use the telephone a lot, I call people really often just with a phone call... so no video I mean. So, it was actually using a very familiar medium for me that I use to talk to the people that are really close to me most often...so my sister and my mother for example. Using that very familiar medium to talk to a stranger was actually weird. So, it is actually reversed from what you described.

A: What is your term for stranger now? Because we tend to believe that a stranger is someone that you meet in person by walking on the streets... but you can actually meet a stranger by a phone call. Does meeting a stranger or who is a stranger have changed for you based on that conversation that you had?

J: Yeah... maybe a stranger is someone that you still have the chance to meet or to know...

A: Actually, are we really all strangers? I mean we share the same experiences; we use the same media for example... we share the same need to experience a phone call and to participate in a performative conversation... So, do we really are strangers or just people where our distant thoughts are connected somehow?

J: Yeah, it kind of takes away the negative connotation that the word stranger has... it can also be someone, because you don't know and they are stranger, that you can connect very easily and very easily share something personal, exactly because you don't know them.

A: Do you think because the other person on the line was a girl that influenced you...? I mean the gender?

J: Hmm. yeah, I think so, yeah because we also shared a similar experience. Because I got the feeling, she was really like me... which is as I say it out loud a huge assumption... I don't know if she is like me...is only based on the fact that she is also a girl, she also went to Asia for a period of time...

A: So, when she was telling her story to you, you were seeing yourself also... reliving the experience...somehow your experiences met with each other...like a Hollywood movie. If it was then it would have flashbacks and you would walk on the same train station...etc.

J: Yeah... what she told me was like, as if she told a story about a character, like the main character in that story that could have been either one of us...and the other way around.

A: Ok...I think I've got enough... thank you for this!

J: You're welcome.

End of recording...