

## **Distant Thoughts – Reflective Interview with Emma – Full Transcribed Interview**

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Jolien Akkerman: So, I wanted to ask you how did you come to this performance? Why did you participate in Distant Thoughts?

Emma: I think the most important thing to say is that I actually work for the national theatre. I work there as a... I don't know how that is called in English, but I sell programs and work with the costumers who come to see the performances. So I work with the visitors.

Jolien Akkerman: Ah, like at the front desk situation?

Emma: Well, actually in the theatre, in the building, when the people come to see the show, I come to help them to find their seat, find the toilet and stuff like that. So, I heard about this program from one of my bosses, who was like do - because I do theatre myself, like amateur theatre. And she was like, this might interest you, so give it a look. And I thought it looked very interesting so I thought, yes let's do this. So that is how I came across it.

Jolien Akkerman: That is really nice. I did a similar job in the city where I live. I also worked with the visitors.

Emma: O, yeah.

Jolien Akkerman: But that was a long time ago of course, because the theatres are now closed. But yes, so it was really a personal interest?

Emma: Yes, very much.

Jolien Akkerman: Really good.

Emma: And when Covid came here, we had to stop performing with our amateur group of the people from the theatre and we weren't able to attend theatre at all. So I was really interested because I was just sitting at home, studying from home, doing everything from home and I was like, this might be a really interesting thing to do this evening, something unusual, something I haven't experienced before.

Jolien Akkerman: Ah yes, I had a similar feeling. Before I did my internship I also did Distant Thoughts and also had this idea of 'I need to experience some theatre! Let me do this!'

Emma: Exactly! That was exactly what I felt.

Jolien Akkerman: And what did you expect from this, of what was going to happen?

Emma: I actually did not know what to expect. I was kind of nervous at first, because I was like, who am I going to call? And who will be the person on the other line? And will it be okay? And will it be boring? What is going to happen? But as soon as the lady called me - yes, I think she was the one who was calling - I immediately felt okay and she was really nice. And I felt really great after the performance, because it was really interesting and I connected with her on so many other levels than just, you know, talking to each other. So I didn't know what to expect and it came out really amazing.

Jolien Akkerman: You so didn't expect to connect with her that way? And what do you think made that connection possible?

Emma: I think it was... yes, I think it was mostly her, because she had similar hobbies like I do. And I work with children and she has got her own children so that was something we could connect through. And the way she was talking and the way - she sounded like a person like - you know - she was very calm and someone I could easily talk to even though I didn't know what she looked like and even though

I didn't know her at all. I felt that we could really talk about basically anything because we kind of connected.

*[Phone call]*

Jolien Akkerman: So you didn't really expect anything beforehand, you went really open in to it, basically?

Emma: Exactly.

Jolien Akkerman: And then this person called you. And is there any moments that stood out for you that you would like to share?

Emma: I don't know if there was anything really special about the conversation, because the whole conversation was very special, actually. Because we were talking about really nice stuff and she was telling me her stories, I was telling her mine. And it was just a genuine conversation between two people that I felt like the whole experience was kind of special.

Jolien Akkerman: It stood out as a whole.

Emma: Yes.

Jolien Akkerman: And what place did you two give to the script? Did you follow the script or went off it or?

Emma: Yes, we actually followed it quite strictly, because I believe, from the conversation, that we both were kind of organized, strict people when it comes to organization and stuff like that. So we stuck to it quite a lot. I think we were going off it a little bit during the parts where you were supposed to off. But we carried on following the script.

Jolien Akkerman: So where would you think the performative, performance part was positioned?

Emma: Hmm, do you mean like if I felt like I was playing a character?

Jolien Akkerman: Yes, or did you feel like the performance is the form and we are moving freely in it as normal people or the performance is the script and that is there and we are...?

Emma: Okay, yes. I feel like it kind of connected. One part was that we followed the script and we were telling each other stories. But still we kind of had like the mask, because we don't know each other. And even though it felt really genuine and stuff, I felt like it was not a normal conversation. It's like a performance. Even though it was really nice and everything, I kind of felt like it was not a conversation I would have with someone if I didn't have the script. But now, after having the script, I actually might have a conversation like this with someone. Maybe someone who I know. Because it was really nice just to tell each other nice stories that happened to us and some things that have had a really good impact on us. So, I feel like it kind of motivated me to listen and talk to people more. But then not like a performance.

Jolien Akkerman: Yes, it is really quite something that you - I did it and I was really nervous beforehand and I was supposed to be the one calling. And I was so nervous. But then this person answered and everything was gone, all my nerves were gone, and it was just really beautiful. And I never talk to strangers, I'm a really introvert person and really shy. And in this moment that was not there. So it was maybe for me a character. Because it was so unlike me to do that.

Emma: Yes, I shared a quite similar experience like you are describing.

Jolien Akkerman: Yes, it is really interesting what that does.

Emma: Yes, definitely.

Jolien Akkerman: And also the script that is there to hang on to or to fall back to, but is not necessary - you don't have to follow it. You can just call each other and say let's leave this script alone.

Emma: And let's just talk, yeah.

Jolien Akkerman: Was there this negotiation between you two, if you were going to follow the script, or was it that you picked up the phone and you said your lines and they said there lines - more like that?

Emma: We followed the script more intuitively. When we picked up the phone we immediately started saying the things that were in the script. And we automatically followed it throughout the whole conversation and we didn't have to talk about it. I believe. I don't remember whether we were talking about it, but I think we just followed it from the start to the very end.

Jolien Akkerman: I think with my conversation, the person answering the phone asked 'am I A or am I B?'

Emma: Oo!

Jolien Akkerman: And it was written in the script of course, like B is answering and A is calling or something like that. So for me, the script was sometimes also a little bit awkward. That you had to say 'okay, now let's go back to the script'.

Emma: Yes, haha. I felt kind of awkward, that's right.

Jolien Akkerman: Okay, so next is a little bit of an abstract concept but if I were to say like what was your role in this conversation? So how do you relate to the conversation that you had?

Emma: I felt like everything that happened in the conversation was meant to happen. And I strongly felt that I was at the right place when I was having the conversation. Like I was supposed to be talking to her and I was supposed to share my experiences and my stories with her and that - it is like something that might help me maybe to think more about talking to my friends and family. And that it would teach me something, maybe to listen more or maybe to talk more.

Or maybe to be more open minded, because I am very organized and I really like hanging out with people I know and sometimes I'm very reserved when it comes to meeting new people and I am kind of shy as well. Even though people don't usually think I am shy, that I have problems with talking to people, I don't know. So it was also like stepping out of my comfort zone a little bit, but in a good way. I wasn't pushed to do that. I voluntarily decided to do that. To do that for myself. Maybe to **divel** up a little bit in this, so I feel like it happened just the way it should have happened and I am really satisfied with the way the conversation went.

Jolien Akkerman:

Can you maybe explain what you mean by that it was meant to be?

Emma:

That might be kind of hard. But I kind of don't believe in coincidences. I believe that everything in the world for a reason and that every person I meet or every comfortable or uncomfortable situation I am put into, I just should experience that or I should meet a person, just to get something from that. And as I said before, I believe I should have had the conversation with this lady because it kind of helped me to **divel** up as a person. And that is probably what I mean by saying it was meant to be or supposed to happen. Am I answering it correctly?

Jolien Akkerman:

Yes, really beautiful. I don't know if I think about it like that. It really creates like magic around this encounter.

Emma:

Yes kind of.

Jolien Akkerman:

Really nice.

Emma:

You know, when I have this believe, I really feel like I have a kind of control over my life or my life decisions and stuff like that. Because sometimes people can get really - not confident about their lives or their path of life - or how to say that. So believing in the fact that things are supposed to happen and I am supposed to meet certain people, that kind

of gives me a feeling of having control over my life is good for me.

Jolien Akkerman: But that is also a little contradictory, right? Because it is supposed to happen, so you don't have control over it.

Emma: Yes!

Jolien Akkerman: But it gives you the feeling that you do.

Emma: Yes, exactly.

Jolien Akkerman: And so, what did this experience - you may have already said it - but what did it provoke for you?

Emma: Yes, I think I know what you mean. It certainly told me that I should be more open minded and I should listen to people more. Even though I think I am a great listener, I still think that, sometimes, I could listen to people more. And that I could talk to people more about, maybe even stuff that I am not pleasant - such as why my parents got divorced and stuff like that. So sometime people should talk about stuff, just because it clears the air between them. But sharing really good experiences and good stories sometime doesn't happen, you know, enough. I feel like we have lots of negativity in the world right now and that is understandable. Lots of people are experiencing really bad things thanks to Covid. So this might be a could way to, you know, lift our moods a little bit. Just to talk about nice stuff that happened to us. And to, you know, improvise sometimes. Everything is so organized, in my head and even in my life, and to improvise sometimes is a really good way to let things go and how to not over think. And yes, that is maybe what it gave me.

Jolien Akkerman: And what do you mean by improvise?

Emma: Well, sometimes people... I feel like sometimes when people talk, they only talk about the main things. Like what happened at school and what happened at work and how

many children does someone have, and stuff like that. But sometimes, when you are courages enough and you take the lead, you can kind of improvise. Maybe it is not the right word I use, but sometimes you can provoke the other person to talk about something deeper or something more important. Or something that you can actually learn from what a person is telling you. That is probably what I meant by improvising, even though it is not the right word.

Jolien Akkerman:

I think it is a good word. It is also because you are asked a really provocative question. A different kind of question that you normally would never ask someone or never think about. But that also helps of course.

Emma:

And even when the script was that we should tell each other about some nice experience that happened to us, I have actually never thought of asking this question to anyone. Even though it is really basic and there are so many good things that happen in life, that I was kind of surprised that I hadn't asked anyone this. And now I really want to ask my friends also, you know, what were really good things that happened in their lives that helped them and stuff.

Jolien Akkerman:

I think if I would have been asked that question again now, what is a impressive encounter with a stranger, I think I would describe Distant Thoughts.

Emma:

Yes. Probably.

Jolien Akkerman:

And of course all these answers change all the time.

Emma:

Yes, of course.

Jolien Akkerman:

And what place does this experience have now in your mind? Do you think about it often, or never think about it, and what things do you think then?

Emma:

I was thinking about it a lot after the conversation ended and I remember the next day I told my mom and told her

about this experience. Actually, my boyfriend who is just next door was having the conversation as well. And we both participated, each in a different room. And one of my friends from the theatre was experiencing that as well. So we immediately after shared our stories and the experiences we just had and I remember that it had a really big impact on me, right after the conversation ended. And I had a beautiful evening and I felt so good after that. And everytime I remember that experience, and it doesn't happen much, because it has been quite a long time ago.

Jolien Akkerman: A few months yes.

Emma: Yes. It still lights my mood a little, because it was so nice and genuine experience. That I believe I will always remember that, because it was something so unexpected and something so untraditional, I would say. So I don't think I will ever forget that.

Jolien Akkerman: And what did your boyfriend and your friend think? Did they have a similar experience?

Emma: Neither of them. My boyfriend was talking to some girl and they were talking for twenty minutes and then they stopped it because they just - you know, they just had their time. I was talking for more than an hour and they were talking for only twenty minutes, that was just how their conversation went. And I know that my friend... she also had a good experience, but she wasn't so interested and she wasn't so happy about it as I was. So each experience was different. But both of them had good experiences and I think that they will remember them for the rest of their lives, but it didn't have as much of an impact of them as it did on me.

Jolien Akkerman: And what is the difference then? That it had such an impact on you?

Emma: I don't know. Maybe it was because I was so open minded during that evening. I really tried to calm myself down. I was sitting in a room that wasn't full of light, I had only

two candles lit, and it was such a nice place to be at and I just really focused on the conversation. My full mind was focused. And I wasn't thinking about anything else. I wasn't even looking at the clock. I just didn't care about how much time we spend there. But I think my boyfriend wasn't that into it in that moment. I don't know about my friend, I would have to talk to her about it again. But I was trying to concentrate myself fully on that one task I had. So that is probably why it really had such a big impact on it.

*[Unstable connection]*

Jolien Akkerman: I think I heard everything you said. Because Zoom slows down your speech, so I could still understand. So you were saying that you really created an atmosphere for yourself to experience this in.

Emma: Yes, exactly and I concentrated.

Jolien Akkerman: And what made you do this?

Emma: I don't know, I just felt like - it was written in the script that we should calm ourselves down and to focus on the conversation. But I also felt like it was a good thing to do. Because usually my mind - I usually over think a lot. And I think a lot and I stress out about many things. And I was like, no I am doing this because I want to and I will calm myself down and focus on this thing, so I really should do everything - do my best to actually concentrate and focus on this stuff.

Jolien Akkerman: Yes. Also to fully experience it maybe. I feel like that always helps.

Emma: Yes, exactly.

Jolien Akkerman: So that is then maybe also a really important part - your mindset going into it, how that can really influence the experience that you have.

Emma: Yes, exactly.

Jolien Akkerman: Yes. I am just looking at the time. I feel like the questions I have left are really big questions.

Emma: That is alright. The person was calling me, so that was maybe my fault that I messed up a little bit of the schedule. It is really fine.

Jolien Akkerman: Okay, so, if we were to talk about responsibility in relation to this performance, can you relate that to each other?

Emma: I am not quite sure I know what you mean.

Jolien Akkerman: Is there - let me think about how to explain this - do you feel like that there was a responsibility there, that that was part of this conversation? A certain sense of responsibility?

Emma: You mean like if I felt responsible for the things that I was saying?

Jolien Akkerman: Yes if you felt that way, or if that feeling was not present, that is also a possibility?

Emma: No, I felt like it was just a genuine conversation between two people who were just talking. Yes, I felt kind of awkward from time to time because of the script, because I actually wasn't sure how much I should be following the script. But I didn't feel any responsibility towards the other person, when it comes to asking questions and stuff like that. Because I was really interested in her story, and when she was asking, she was really interested in mine. So I felt like it was just genuine.

Jolien Akkerman: And with genuine - that is really interesting that you say genuine, because I think you mean normal with that? Easy?

Emma: Yes.

Jolien Akkerman: Which is actually was not of course, it was not a normal conversation.

Emma: Yes, exactly! It wasn't. It was completely two strangers who never met, and probably will never meet in our lives, but it just felt like talking to a person I know and who I am connected to on so many levels. So, yes, that just happened. It was so easy and so nice.

Jolien Akkerman: Yes, you might have had a really good friend in her would you have known her.

Emma: Yes.

Jolien Akkerman: And what - this is the last question — what makes Distant Thoughts, apart from the script - like, we see each other now and we are also strangers.

Emma: Yes, that's right.

Jolien Akkerman: How do you think - if you would have seen her too, would that have influenced it?

Emma: Yes, definitely it would. Because I believe that because we didn't see each other we - or at least I - didn't feel intimidated and felt like I could basically share anything. Because when you are anonymous, even though you have the name of the other person, you still can - or maybe people aren't that afraid to tell more if they were sitting in front of each other and talking. Maybe even when we are talking right now. So maybe I wasn't that nervous when we started talking, because I didn't see her. And it actually felt like theatre, like a performance from time to time. So I didn't feel like I should hold back or have any secrets or - you know what I mean.

Jolien Akkerman: Which is crazy to me! Because in any normal situation you would always hide something of yourself and for something it is a stranger on the phone and you let everything go.

Emma:

Yes, that is very strange actually, when you think about it like that.

*[Unstable connection]*

Jolien Akkerman:

I think we covered a lot and I think we said a lot of interesting things. So thank you so much!