

## Episode 2

### Writing with Emotions & the Inconvenience of Other People | Ida Bencke | Part One | Academic Feelings

*Rosa Marie Frang:*

Voiceover by Rosa:

Ida Bencke:

*We are sitting in my apartment living room in the kind of center of Copenhagen. We, that's Ida Bencke and I, and we're sitting on the floor with our backs against the sofa.*

Welcome to Academic Feelings. My name is Rosa Marie Frang. I'm a Danish artist and documentarist, and what you're listening to right now, this Academic Feelings podcast, is one of my artworks.

*And outside there's a copper stone street, so that means there's quite a lot of sound coming through the window, like bikes riding by. There'll be some background sound.*

The podcast is created for a center called PASS, Center for Practice-Based Art Studies, at the University of Copenhagen.

*Ida, can you start by just presenting yourself?*

I'm really curious about what feelings the artists, curators, and academics working in the field of practice-based art studies have. And like your background from like PhD and all that? Yeah.

And before PhD?

*Whatever you find relevant, necessary, interesting.*

Because if art is ultimately all about sensing, sensibility, and sensitivity, can sharing what we really feel be a counteract to a society soaked in worshipping competition, performativity, and a never-ending acceleration of speed? Creating inhumane systems and cultures of isolation and insensitivity.

So my name is Ida Bencke. It's funny, I always identify as a curator before I identify as a PhD student, so I'll do that also now. I'm a curator with something called the Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, and we're a little self-organized curatorial platform. And we have worked in the intersections between art and ecology and activism for the past 10, 12 years. And then I'm also a PhD student at the University of Copenhagen, where I'm part of this larger research project called OIKAS, Climate Crisis and Care Crisis in the 21st Century.

In this episode, you'll hear a conversation based on three rules of engagement. 1. I want to give space for the unpredictable. So, without any prior coordination, the guest and I equally decide the topics for the conversation. 2. I want to create a space where it's OK not to be pitch perfect. Therefore, the conversations are published as unedited as possible. 3. I want to include the irrational. Therefore, I've placed the background music using a system of randomness, enhancing totally coincidental parts of the conversation.

I am trying to finalize my PhD, in which I write about this exhibition project that I've been working on for the past three years, and it's called Hosting Lands. It's about figuring out how to smartly and strategically utilize art world infrastructure and also, in some sense, academic infrastructure in order to relocate resources. And resources can be money, but it's also knowledge and prestige, privilege, etc. We distribute resources in order to support selforganized initiatives that do their very best to create these spaces beyond capitalism.

*And the Hosting Lands project, just to say very short, you're working on buying a piece of land? Yes, yes. Amongst other things.*

One last thing. If you're wondering about the sound, this is recorded using my portable field recorder, meaning I'm holding one microphone in my hand and pointing it back and forth between us. This is why it might sound a little bit different from what you usually hear in podcasts recorded in a studio.

So with this project or this exhibition, we were like, what if instead of putting a lot of money, because we won this generous exhibition award from the B. Kuben Foundation, what if instead of building this super fancy art exhibition and then we have it for a few months and then we're on to the next, what if instead we try to invest the money in actually supporting these initiatives that I was talking about earlier. And so part of that, and it's not all we do, but part of that is that we are buying a piece of farmland and we're kind of thinking about that land as an exhibition space, but as an exhibition space that will kind of live on for the hopefully decades to come as an alternative space.

*I'm waving my hand to say stop, stop, because there's so much to say about these projects. But let's... Thank you for introducing yourself.*

*I'm just cutting you off here, a little bit impolite.*

Please do it.

*So you said the word pre-interview and I thought it might be kind of relevant to give a short backstory to why we're sitting here in my living room, the two of us. This is the third time that we meet each other. The first time we met in physical bodies was when I did an interview with you in my old studio.*

*It was for my previous concept that I discarded. That was the first time I met you. Second time I met you was also in my studio where we sat down and listened to the episode that I had done with you because you felt a little bit anxious about listening to it alone and then I offered we could sit together.*

*And I just have to say you were fine with all the content.*

And it was really nice of you to offer.

*I get it. It can be pretty going over your borders to listen to yourself if you're not used to it. So I get it. And then now the third time.*

*And the reason why we're sitting here now and you can hear, I think, maybe the sirens through the window. The reason why we're sitting here now is because before we did the interview in my studio I phoned you and did what I call a pre-interview that I recorded but just for my own use and maybe to use small quotes from it or something like that. But it was just kind of like I'll just record it, whatever.*

*And then I listened to it a week ago and I thought hey, that's actually a really nice conversation. Like it has sort of bad sound quality because it's recorded over the phone. It was not meant to be published.*

*And then I phoned you and asked hey, is it okay if I use this material? And then you listened to it and you were totally fine and then we were talking on the phone and you asked like but what happened to the previous concept and why did you discard it? And what are you doing now?*

*And I told you about this new concept academic feelings that we're recording for now and how I decided to ask academics about their feelings and how I was going to try to document my own feelings meanwhile doing this project and you said hey, shit, that's like kind of the same that I'm doing with my PhD now. I'm going to try and write with emotions, you said. And then we agreed that hey maybe it could actually be really cool to do a third interview about writing with feelings.*

*And on that note I can feel on my breathing that I'm so nervous. It's so irritating because I don't feel nervous about you. Is this a thought about other people listening to me?*

*I mean if we're this recording for you and me and I wasn't going to play it for anybody I would be totally chill. So I was just thinking maybe we could like it might be a little bit pathetic but can we maybe start out by doing a little like I just need to breathe a little bit. Let's do it.*

I also feel a little nervous.

*Is it about the same thought?*

It's totally the same. Because you know how you and I speak when we just speak amongst ourselves. And now I also feel a little selfconscious because I know that I'm prone to oversharing and also because your invitation is about talking about our feelings.

And that does make me feel a little bit nervous but I also want to say that I'm really grateful for this invitation because I really feel that it comes at a perfect time in my practice where I have started to think more and more about what it means to write with emotions. And I'm also taking this as a I told myself that I would take this as an opportunity to think with you instead of like trying to prove something. You know?

*That's really good. Let's stay with that maybe. Yeah, there's nothing to prove here.*

*We're just trying to like put words on what we're doing. Let's try and just like breathe a little bit for a moment. And we can just*

*breathe in our own pace but I can kind of feel like my air is not coming in and out freely.*

*So I don't know if I should do like a I also get this eye twitch. I'm really nervous.*

I know that. Do you feel better?

*Yeah, I actually do. It's a good way to like for me it's a good way to like feel how am I doing?*

*I can use it to calm myself a little bit down. So for me I think it's important for me to tell you why I contracted you from the very beginning like the very first time. It was because in the previous concept my angle was to find curators and artists and so on who were working on artistic research who had a political angle to their work or I wanted to look for a political angle somewhat directly or indirectly.*

*And I read somewhere that you had the wording in your curatorial group you used the word anti-capitalism or anticapitalistic whatever and that made me really happy. So that was actually like okay, yes, go. Here we go.*

*And also another thing that I think also is important is to know that the other times that I talked to you you didn't really want to talk about your PhD. And I totally respected that because I thought that you were probably a place where talking about it can sort of fuck one up. That's at least how I feel sometimes about projects.*

*So you want to talk about it now, right? So you told me on the phone let's talk about your PhD. It's practice-based, you're a curator.*

*Maybe just for people who don't know how do you do a curatorial practice-based artistic research PhD? I mean, how do you do it? Because people know of PhD when people are writing but you're doing physical, practical stuff.*

I think the short answer to that very big question at least for me very big question but we'll get to that. But I think the short answer is that my exhibition is somehow and I really say somehow because I feel it's very difficult to define exactly how but it is somehow a part of my research, right? And I think when you say that I didn't want to talk about my PhD

like I don't think I ever told you that but I think you were right.

But I think the reason why I didn't want to talk about it was because I didn't know how to talk about it because I never really knew how to kind of separate the curatorial practice from the research practice, right? And I guess when you do a practice-based PhD you don't have to at least that's the kind of starting point, right? That practice and theory or research intersect but I do feel that that's easier said than done, you know?

And I'll probably but you'll see when you speak to other practice-based PhDs maybe you'll find the same answer in different variations. But for me it was very difficult and it still is but it's become maybe more and more clear to me than what it is that I'm doing in my dissertation because of course I have to write something and for a very long time it was very unclear to me what it was that I wanted or needed to write because there's also a lot of freedom, you know? Because and I feel like this is a blessing and a curse of a practice-based PhD for me at least is that it is so free and there are very few kind of formal expectations.

I mean of course I think if you read the legal documents of what a PhD should be there's a lot of formal expectations but then when you talk to people to your supervisor and to people who hold authority at the university they will give you a lot of freedom to experiment and I also feel that there's a kind of an excitement about practice-based experimentation with academia but there's very little there are very little guidelines you kind of have to come up with your own way of doing it which for me has been great because I love to come up with my own way of doing things but it's also been quite confusing because everything was possible basically.

*I think that's the worst case actually. No but sometimes it can be actually really hardcore when you're when you can like do anything. I always make like very I spend a lot of time on making*

*up like very strict rules for like you have to do a project within this frame because otherwise I feel it becomes really bad and I don't know what I'm doing because you can and I get like paralyzed and I get a lot more creative when I have strict frame like this like the concept right now like I need to know precisely why am I sitting here with you now or else we could talk about like basically anything. But so just to break it down so you have the research like the practical research is carried out through the hosting lens and then you're writing a dissertation at the same time and the dissertation you can you have pretty free what do you say hands and then recently you decided to change your approach into writing about your like correct me okay I don't know if I'm using the right words like writing with emotions or writing with feelings or like yeah and is that right? Understood?*

I mean I don't think that I so I'm not I'm not like you Rosa I know a lot of people who work like you that need these kinds of like rules and regiments for how to do things right and that actually opens a lot of space for creativity for them and I can also sometimes be really jealous of people who work like that because I'm much messy I'm much more messy you know and I kind of tend to really stick with the process and then I have a lot of trust in the process and sometimes that is great and sometimes it's not so great right? So I think actually I never had like a very clear idea what my PhD should be because I was trusting the process for a very long time but then when it also became a little bit more urgent to actually produce text I started freaking out a little bit right?

And so I think my initial idea was that my dissertation would be kind of like maybe like an extended exhibition catalog something that would analyze the artworks that I had been curating and kind of like bringing in a theoretical and analytical framework to look at these artworks but then I was like but actually for me the most interesting and difficult and complex and also like joyous and enriching thing for me in this whole project has been the collaborative processes and it has been like all of the relationships that have been built all of the things that have been kind of learned and unlearned in those processes all of the encounters and all of the negotiations that have also sometimes been like

quite painful and quite like difficult but they have also been you know like amazing and beautiful and so many friendships and alliances have been built and so I started just like really being really interested in kind of tracing and tracking those relational processes that are kind of behind the scenes of the curatorial end result right? So usually you see an exhibition and you see these artworks and you can kind of like read them in different ways but I wanted to stay with those internal negotiations that happened behind the scenes before the artworks were produced or you know before the like big fancy curatorial concepts were you know presented or whatever

*So you're writing now more about like the all the different kinds of relations that you have experienced and is experiencing with people? Yes?*

Yep. And I'm writing a lot about my own like affect or emotion and how I have come to understand a lot about myself and my own positionality through these processes and kind of like just being really curious about I call it sometimes the like emotional engine room you know the emotional engine behind artistic processes or projects because there are just so many emotions and I've just I think I've just become really curious because I feel like they hold so much knowledge right and they're so shared and usually they're just side they're sidetracked it's something we speak about you know in the breaks or after we had a meeting or but it's and they mean so much in how we do things and how we relate to things that we do and they mean so much in terms of what is actually possible and what is not possible but I just feel like at least I didn't really have a language for it or I don't really have a language for it and I'm trying now to find that language in my PhD. Okay Does that make sense?

*Totally makes sense Okay Good Yes So I asked you before we met well no one second I'll say this again I didn't ask you I told you that I would I would really like this to be more like a conversation and less of an interview because one of the reasons why I threw the previous concept in the trash was because I felt like I ended up becoming like a culture journalist or something like that like just*

*asking like what are you doing and why are you doing it and so on and then saying oh thank you very much goodbye and I kind of want to I guess maybe in extension of what you said I'm very interested in like how do we talk together and how can we exchange and how can we like I don't know be humans together rather than just like me sitting and asking questions like how can we be together in some way so because it's not like an interview interview I haven't prepared like a whole bunch of questions now I told you on an SMS I think it was yesterday evening that it was I thought of this as a talk about writing with emotions and then I asked you to bring along like keywords of things you would like to talk about so I thought maybe we could share like what do you want to talk about and what do I want to talk about and let's see if we are meeting somewhere or if we're like totally in a different space yeah great so should I share first or do you want to share first?*

I can go first okay you have caught me at a time where I'm like in deep affect in some way you know and that's not a bad thing but I've just like been going through really a lot of like pretty emotional stuff but that's related to my work

*Can I just jump in and say affect the word affect for the Danish listeners that's like another word for emotions or feelings and it's a long academic one to tell precisely what's different but it's just so that's a word for feelings okay so you had a lot of affect recently?*

I had a lot of feelings and so I brought some of those feelings and I thought maybe we could talk about some of them maybe they resonate with you and the first one I brought it's inconvenience because that has become a really important part of my of my writing I've been thinking a lot about writing with inconvenience that which feels inconvenient let's start with inconvenience it's a little easier for me to talk about less personal in a way so I'll really try to not do this but I have to do I have to make a theoretic I have to make a reference once one I'll do it I'll try to not I'll try to only do it this time is that I read this book by affect theorist Lauren Berland and it's called The Inconvenience of Other People and I thought that that was so interesting because that whole book is about tracking inconvenience and taking inconvenience the feeling of being

inconvenient as a body in a space or the feeling of encountering inconvenience from other bodies or other situations like that feeling of this is actually really annoying or it's inconvenient or it's like disorienting or it's confusing and kind of that whole book is about thinking through what kind of knowledge does this experience of inconvenience actually hold and I thought that that was so cool and I'll tell you why it's because my whole exhibition project slash PhD project is about creating common spaces and in a way like fostering collectivity like this is also a desire that I have right like a political desire and a personal desire but I just experienced that there's so much inconvenience happening in those processes of trying to come together because you know people are inconvenient to each other and because we hold different positions we have different experiences sometimes we use the same words but we mean different things and just like this question of coming together and building something together across difference in my experience became like a process of also encountering inconvenience and working through inconvenience.

*And so you're feeling of inconvenience or?*

Also other people of me being inconvenient to them you know and me trying to understand why is it that this for example you know this invitation that I'm giving you I'm a curator you're an artist I'm inviting you into something why is it that this is not like a great invitation for you for example and that would make me reflect upon the spaces I'm inviting people into the kind of unwritten rules that are defining those spaces for example and how that you know might feel different to other people than it does to me and so I was just like so excited about this proposal of thinking with inconvenience and in a way that resonates like I'm like brought up in this you know eco-feminist tradition of reading Donna Haraway and she's like always talking about staying with the trouble right so it's a little bit similar to that but I also do I also felt that the trouble this idea of staying with the trouble it became to me a little too convenient that every time something was difficult

you would just say oh but this is just us staying with the trouble you know and I was like no but what is the trouble actually and like how are we also responsible for that trouble and to work through that trouble together instead of just diagnosing it and saying oh this is the trouble right and then we kind of carry on I've just been so interested in kind of dissecting that trouble or that inconvenience and kind of committing to that.

*So when you encounter some kind of inconvenience then you sit down and you write a lot about this situation and what happened and what you felt and you try to analyze the situation or like what do you do what do you do you mean in my writing process now yeah and your approach like if the inconvenience is a big driver in your whole project then what do you do?*

So on a practical level and of course now like practice and theory kind of becomes quite intermingled but on a practical level in our exhibition project we have just been like doing a lot a lot of internal work you know we have been also asking a lot of people for help in mediating between us because we are a very we're a crowd of people who have very very different experiences in this world we live in different parts..yeah, you want to say something?

*Yeah I wanted to jump in and say what you're saying now; that you come like you're four people in the group.*

We're four curators in the group it's me it's Dea Antonsen who's my Danish colleague and then it's Poojita Guha who is based in the US and is originally from India and then it's Sisa Hamal who is based in Tunisia and kind of the idea with setting this group up was also exactly this to like learn how to collaborate across those differences that sometimes define us as like someone who is racialized in a certain way someone who you know has institutional kind of safety or even just like the safety of living in a welfare society in Europe in Scandinavia et cetera and someone who does not hold that kind of security in their lives right and so that was the starting point was kind of curiosity towards what does it mean to develop a

collaborative practice where we figure out meaningful ways of working together across these like very different positions and of course that is also a venture into a lot of really difficult and painful conversations you know like what for example like for example understanding all of the way all of the different ways that privilege works all of the different ways that white privilege works all of the different ways that being a person who enjoys the benefits of living in the global north how that works and how that affects like little micro stuff you know not just I mean it's really become like in a sense an exploration into these like very often very unspoken things that circulate.

*What for example small where does it come in small situations if you give like a concrete what's the last time where you encountered like oh fuck wow?*

There's so many but I think something that is oh there's music on the street like for example and I I think that my colleague Aziza would allow me to speak about this because she has also spoken publicly about this but for example what it means for someone like her who lives in Tunisia under very different kind of like social and political and economical context than I do to come to the Danish countryside and be a kind of a curatorial host to a space and a site and a context that is not just foreign to her because it's normal that you know places that we don't know so well are foreign but that also represents a kind of oppression in her life if you know what I mean in a sense maybe we could say that these inconveniences are often bred from this like post-colonial condition of the different positions between the colonizer and the colonized and even though we might think about this as something that belongs to the past it very very much affects how we navigate still emotionally and financially and politically and how we make sense of the world and what we see when we go to places right?

*Can I ask you to be even more concrete? So what like very low-key like what happens?*

So for example an example would be that we have this exhibition site on Møn and it's like this place that Danish people would think about as like really beautiful nature and there's like this whole like super romanticized notion of our countryside and this kind of pristine you know idyllic landscape that is like inviting us to rest or to contemplate you know? And this is what I see you know when I go there I see this but when she goes there she might feel excluded she might feel a little off because she's the only brown person in the room she might also feel that this particular way of romanticizing landscape and nature is very very different from how she would perceive of nature from her kind of cultural perspective right? And she might see like a lot of white people that are just like running around and being very happy in their own like dream about what community looks like for example but in a very narrow sense and something that can feel quite alienating you know?

And so I think working with or trying to stay with these questions of like you are alienated like I'm actually alienating you by inviting you into my space what would it take for us to kind of counter that alienation and of course we cannot like remove it because those are also structures that we cannot change you know? But how can we in our group in our friendship in our commitment to each other ease that alienation?

*So what do you do in a situation like that? Like again very low key like how what do you do?*

Well I think like on a personal level there has been a lot of like pain because I cannot define my artworks because they they are the result of so many different stories of all the people that were part of them she does like a lot of like very socially engaged art and public art projects but she said what I can do is that I can offer my story and as long as I just make sure that to make it very clear that this is just my story and kind of like open the possibility of other stories to join in then I'm good like I'm okay you know I have my story and that's mine and so I've been trying to

go with that and that means that when I write I write from my own perspective like really my own and it's really like I'm sitting here feeling like this why is it that I feel like this you know and that is also sometimes a little bit like overwhelming because it feels really self-centered and it feels really self indulgent and maybe that's also something that you and I can talk about.

*Yeah and also the insecurity for my case also unlike is this even relevant for anybody like and then also comes what I'm sitting with is also the feeling that yeah okay so I might feel very I might be writing about being super nervous about something but of course you know when one hour later I might be feeling super confident about another situation I mean like I guess that's part of that that even in my story there's a lot of stories I mean and it's very difficult to write about all the different nuances of being a person because then it would just be like you know you would be writing a hundred thousand pages right so it kind of becomes I feel a little bit inconvenient I guess about this that I kind of have to narrow it down to like okay in this episode I will only write about this one situation this one feeling and then I just really hope that people know that I also contain a lot of other things this is not the one and only truth this is not the single story this is a little part of it and then like how to deal with that yeah but you want to say something?*

No just I would just yeah that really just resonates a lot with me because I've been also thinking a lot about sometimes I get so annoyed by something you know and I get like so or I get so excited about something and then that is the feeling I write with but then as you say maybe tomorrow or in a week or in a month I feel totally different but maybe those maybe those like emotional fluctuations also hold some knowledge like I don't know I think that that's also interesting that we kind of change the way that we see and experience things along the way yeah it's crazy yeah because why is that that it changes is it because all of a sudden you feel more comfortable you know doing this do I feel all of a sudden maybe I feel more comfortable doing a PhD than I did two years ago for example maybe all of a sudden I feel less bothered by the world and I can meet people with more like patience and grace than I could last

month because I was like fucking depressed and you know?

*Oh definitely yeah so definitely when I'm like when I have money problems I'm much more what do you say yeah I have I get I like other people a lot less I can just say it like that because I get I'm so much more stressed and you know that yeah but I don't know if that even is an interesting thing to say and if anybody's listening to this and thinking like right now I'm going into like now I'm also like not interesting oh fuck yeah.*

Okay but can I just add to that because now because I know that you're someone who's always been very interested in thinking with the infrastructures of the art world right and also the economic infrastructures so in a way I would say that that is also politicizing your emotional response it's like okay you are in money trouble why is it that I mean that has political dimension to it that is a political conversation to have and it's a structural conversation right and maybe this is also where our emotions hold a kind of um a kind of potential to also I mean I would of course say that that the personal is political.

Dear you this was part one of the conversation with art curator and PhD fellow Ida Bingen if you press subscribe on your podcast app you'll get a notification when part two is out and if you have any comments remember I put up an academic feelings answering machine give it a call nothing's too small stupid weird or off topic I would just be really really happy to hear from you the number is 0045 35 32 02 47. Yes it is also in the podcast description.

Yours sincerely Rosa