

### Episode 3

#### Is Writing with Emotions Dangerous | Ida Bencke | Part Two | Academic Feelings

*Rosa Marie Frang:*

Voiceover by Rosa:

Ida Bencke:

*We are sitting here on the floor and we're drinking coffee and water and smoking cigarettes.*

Welcome to Academic Feelings.

*So I will light a cigarette.*

My name is Rosa Marie Frang. I'm a Danish artist and documentarist. And what you're listening to right now,

*I also need something for my hand and the mic and the microphone. This is my documentary microphone. So I'm holding it in my hand.*

This Academic Feelings podcast is one of my artworks. The podcast is created for a center called PASS, Center for Practice-Based Art Studies at the University of Copenhagen.

*Yeah, I think I'll just take this one because the pillows are like half finished.*

But they are very beautiful.

*Thank you.*

I'm really curious about what feelings the artists, curators, and academics working in the field of practice-based art studies have.

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?

*My one keyword is, why is it dangerous to write with emotions in academia? Why is that? Because in the telephone conversation we had the other day, you said how not using people's experience and emotions can also be like a way for power to keep status quo?*

*Why? What is going on here?*

I mean, that is a very big and very important question, I think. And I think there are many ways of answering that question. I mean, for me, I think it feels dangerous because maybe the same way that it feels dangerous for you, because it feels very vulnerable, because I feel like I'm always, as I said, risking becoming super self-centered and assuming that my feelings are interesting for other people.

That's one way of answering that question. And then another way of answering that question would be like on a more structural level, maybe like why is it like, and maybe in a more positive way, like why could it be dangerous? Also in like a little bit of a subversive way to insist on emotions in academia.

And I think that the reason why it can seem also dangerous from a less personal and more political perspective is, of course, because we are cultivating this idea of research and knowledge as something that happens up here, kind of, you know.

*So in your head or up where?*

In my head, in the more like, let's say, the realm of ideas.

I mean, now we're kind of entering into a critique of, you know, enlightenment and how we think of knowledge and what kind of knowledge we accept as legitimate and real. And I think that there's like a big epistemological, political battle in insisting on other kinds of knowledges.

*Epistemological, what do you say?*

Epistemological, it just means things that are related to knowledge, right? What, again, what do we, what is knowledge? What do we mean when we say knowledge?

And I feel, I feel again, that we live in a time with so much emotion, like, oh my God, you know, so much exhaustion, so much disbelief and disorientation. We live in a world, and now I'm becoming dramatic, sorry, but you have invited this.

*Go go.*

But we live in a world that we know cannot go on because we know that we are actively and rapidly destroying the very foundations of life as we know it.

*I don't even think that's dramatic. I think that's like a fact.*

It is stating the fact, but it seems dramatic to say it because it's like we know it, but we don't really want to, I mean, how to deal with that, right? But I think that we all know this deep down in our like deep psyches, that things are wrong in a very, very fundamental way. And I think that opening spaces that allow for the articulation of that disbelief, and that maybe that anger, or that sorrow, that grief, all of those things that come with living in this condition, this really like intense fucked up condition we're in right now.

I think that we need to create spaces for each other where we can talk about this, because otherwise I feel that we will continue with business as usual. And that's maybe where I hope, but I don't know, but I hope that introducing emotion also in an academic knowledge, I mean, who cares about academia? And I know a lot of people do, but also a lot of people don't really care about it.

But I'm more interested in this idea of what kind of knowledge do we accept as like,

*Valid.*

valid and authoritative. And I'm also really interested in like, what is the knowledge that we're passing on to generations? What is it that we think that our young people, for example, should learn to navigate in this world?

And I think we need to really rethink that in a very, very deep way. And I think that having those conversations about emotions is a part of that. I don't think it's all of that, but I think it's a necessary step, because I think a lot of people feel extremely isolated and don't know how to go on with, again, business as usual when the world is burning like it is.

And I think that's a heavy, no, I think that, yeah, that's a heavy, but it's also a healthy reaction, because why should we?

I think right now, as we're talking, it might change tomorrow or something, but right now I kind of feel like I'm a part of the band playing on the Titanic.

Yeah.

*I feel like I just picked up the violin and now I'm just going to play that violin like, fuck, because the ship is going down and I'm going to play this tune like I'm going to die in a moment.*

*That's how I'm living my life right now. So I mean, it is kind of like having the thought of the breakdown present, but at the same time, I still feel like I can't do anything else than just play the fucking violin, because there's no saving. So I just jump in.*

*But can I be the devil's advocate for a moment?*

Sure. But then I also have a question for you after.

*Okay.*

Yeah.

*Because one thing that I'm discussing a lot with myself is when you say, and now I'm not talking about necessarily in an academic setting only, but when it's like using emotions in general as a part of your professional life, and you said we live in a very emotional time and social media influencers, self-made political figures that use emotional, mostly fear, just like we're talking about, the fear of the fucking global climate breakdown and so on.*

*That's my fear. I also have others, but that's the biggest one. I think we're also living in a performative, presumed or pretended authenticity, emotional manipulation setting, where everybody's just maxing it out to get this parasocial connection, and then you get more listeners or viewers or likes or whatever you're doing by sharing your emotions.*

*And I think I have this trouble, because on the one hand, I've been working as an artist, I've been working with this issue of using myself in my life and my emotions in my work for many years. And I've always been very interested in the very banal question of what is sincere, what is honesty, when is one performing, when is it for real, when are you dishonest, when are you honest, what can it do, what can it not do? Dual thing.*

*And then, because I've been working with this for, I don't know, 15 plus years, more even, now it's just a whole different setting of using those things. And I'm just thinking, is this approach of throwing the authenticity card on the table also coming into academia now? Because it is also a way where people, they identify with you, you can get away with more, because you say, oh no, but I'm so afraid, I'm just like a poor me, you know.*

*And then you're like, oh okay, well then of course it's cool that she's like critical, because it's also, oh that little poor woman, you know, or whatever. Do you understand what I mean? There's also a lot of potential manipulation in it.*

*Like I'm doing *The Devil's Advocate*, because that's what I'm also discussing with myself when I'm doing this podcast. Like what the fuck, like how to even get, I'm trying some kind of sincerity, but at the same time constantly questioning like, is that actually manipulative? Like is that actually sincere, like what the fuck?*

*What are you thinking?*

Is it because it feels sometimes performative, or you risk becoming performative and kind of selling out, or like using your authenticity in order to build a career or gather cultural capital or whatever?

*Yeah, and I think it's, yes, and I think it's kind of, in previous projects I've done, it kind of baffled me, or not kind of, but it really fucking baffled me, that people thought that what I was doing was, well okay, it was the truth, but it was of course not the whole truth. It is not the whole truth, come on guys. I am editing, I am, you know, like lining up and I'm discarding and I'm deleting and organizing all the material.*

*Of course I am. It is the truth, but it's not the whole truth. I guess it's back to the question of like there's always many stories, and you can't like get all the nuances, so why is one choosing to bring forward that emotion and not that emotion?*

*And you know, do you think maybe that this influence, like very banal question, do you think the influencer emotional public realm is sneaking into academia when bringing in the question of emotions as a part of a research project?*

That is a great question I've never thought about. I don't know, and I also don't know if it's like a thing to, you know, like of course it is becoming a thing to challenge normative academia, but it has also been a thing for many, I mean, let's be real, it's not something that like I came up with or you came up with. It's like, and I think maybe the other story to that is that that is

something that has come from queer theory, it has come from decolonial theory, it has come from feminist theory.

So I also feel like that is important that there is a historical trajectory of introducing the more situated, not always the super emotional, but the more situated embodied knowledge into academia has always been a kind of protest.

*What does it mean to say situated? What does that mean?*

That means that instead of thinking, and I'm quoting Donna Haraway, because she wrote this seminal text, *Situated Knowledges*, instead of thinking from above, which is like from everywhere and nowhere at once, and that would be like the free floating mind that looks down upon the like messy material world and have thoughts about it, thoughts that are true, you know, instead of that you have these like partial perspectives.

And what is really important is that those are not less true, but they're just not the entire truth, kind of like what we're talking about with the many stories. So Donna Haraway and that whole tradition of like feminist science critique and feminist science theory, they were never about like disowning truth, but they were always just about saying, listen, there are situated truths that are situated from a particular position in the world, and you need to kind of take into account, for example, I am a white cisgendered woman in Denmark, and when I sit and look at the world, I see certain things. And it doesn't mean that they're not true, but it also means that they're not true for everyone, you know? I think that's how I would.

But anyways, going back to your question. So first of all, there's that. And I'm not saying that I think it's an interesting question that you're saying, but I also think it's just important to notice that this is has always been a kind of a protest to the white male academic way of producing knowledge, right?

Introducing situated knowledge, introducing effect. But what I also felt like saying when you asked me that question is that for me, and maybe this is an ideal world, and I hope that I can achieve this, I'm not sure.

But for me, maybe my own emotions are not the most interesting thing.

But what I really hope to do is to offer tools to navigate these tricky, inconvenient, painful, and also very joyous and very beautiful collaborations. Because I feel like, and again, this is also coming from this like feminist, eco-feminist tradition, we need to collaborate, otherwise we're done. Like it's a done deal.

This is our only chance of survival. And in order maybe to be able to collaborate in an efficient and ethical way that do not reproduce all of these really extractivist ways that we tend to approach the world, we need to maybe talk about how we feel so that we can collaborate better. Maybe this is what I'm mostly interested in, actually.

*You also said, oh, I have to switch the microphone up. You also said in the phone that you also used, you mentioned this thing of this approach when you're working in a group where you have an assembly of people, like if one person has a problem, everybody has a problem. And yeah, I was just thinking of, I guess that's the same approach of like we have to work together.*

*And also what I hear you saying is that validating your own emotions and experiences is also a way to speak to power, right? Yeah, it comes both from like feminist, queer, decolonial theory. Yeah?*

Yes.

*That's what you're saying.*

*And that's what I find so slippery, sloppery...*

Three rules of engagement:

One; Without any prior coordination, the guest and I equally decide the topics for the conversation.

Two; The conversations are published as unedited as possible.

Three; I've placed the background music using a system of randomness, enhancing totally coincidental parts of the conversation.

*Yes, I'm on that. But at the same time, I also see like, you know, basically, yeah, social media and the whole question of attention*

*economy and so on. But I guess maybe that's more for me because I'm a bit more of an independent artist doing this project.*

*So I'm a bit more also depending on getting my stuff out in that fucking world, which I really hate. Yeah.*

Yeah, that makes sense. But is it maybe also because when emotions become so individualized, they also lose that political potency, I think. And I think maybe this is like the trap of emotions, right?

I mean, so in this research group, I mean, we work a lot with care and we look at like care practices and how imaginaries of care is also presented in the arts and literature, etc. And I always find care so tricky because it is so easily individualized. It is something that is so easily moves from caring for a collective or for a group.

And in that case, maybe the better word is solidarity and not care. I'm not sure. But it so quickly becomes a question of caring for yourself, you know?

*What do you mean? How?*

Because we just live in a society that's so individualized that, if I want to care for myself, then I take a break or I do yoga or I go to the spa, you know?

And I don't know about how efficient that kind of care is. That feels to me more like just taking a break in order to be able to be producing again, you know? And I feel like what I desire in this world is a care that's collectivized in a way that we make care possible for each other, you know?

But I feel like we have zero infrastructure for this, you know? And I think that would be another way for me to talk about my work is that I'm really interested in building infrastructure, alternative infrastructure, because this is a feeling that I sit with. And again, it's my feeling, but I also do feel that that is something that's shared across many of my peers and colleagues is that we have a lot of ideologies and a lot of dreams about doing things differently, but we really lack the infrastructure for doing so.

And I think when you lack infrastructure for caring, for example, or for expressing emotions in a collective

way, it just becomes your own private project. And maybe, but then, sorry, I'm rambling now a little bit,

*No, No.*

but because then what I would say to you is that I understand that it does feel tricky to sell yourself like this. I'm not sure you would use those words, but I feel sometimes that I'm selling myself also by talking about all of this emotional luggage in my project.

And it also feels sometimes really problematic because I also feel that I'm building a career and gathering cultural and financial capital, whatever, by doing this. But I also will say that I think that there's solidarity in, and we spoke about this in our last conversation, there's a solidarity in being vulnerable openly, because I think a lot of people see that as encouraging for them to also be able to express vulnerability. And that is maybe...

*Yeah. But that's my experience also from other things I've done, that by showing my, in very strong quotations, weaknesses, it kind of healed other people. But I also got a bit surprised, I've gotten a bit surprised that very clever, intelligent people don't, that have listened to my previous stuff, don't understand that, yes, I mean, that's part of me, but that's not the whole of me. So it's like, oh, the poor little you.*

*And I'm like, yeah, I have these issues. Yeah, I'm struggling with these things. But hey, yo, I also do know what I'm doing.*

*I'm also, in quotation, strong, and not completely stupid. And it kind of,*

You are not.

*thank you, but that kind of, yeah, it kind of surprised me, actually. I guess it's, yeah, I don't know.*

*I think it's a difficult thing to work with it, because it's also, as I only bring forward those emotions in my work that I think can have a somewhat indirectly or direct political, when you say impact, you know, I'm not talking lengthily about like, how happy I am writing my back home when the sun is shining, you know, I don't spend like, 30 minutes, this, you know, what do you say? Yeah, writing in detail in every little second minute. Yeah, of that situation.*

*But listen, that's,*

Yeah, I'm just really curious, can I ask you?

*Yeah?*

Because I see and I hear what you're saying. And I feel like that's also something that I've been thinking a lot about. And it's a weird thing is to be, again, making your career with something that is also like your political vision.

And you're, I mean, there's a lot of, because again, we're like part of these infrastructures and these structures that we, I think, often disagree with, or that are very problematic, and may seem violent to us. But we also have to play that game in order to, you know, and I think that's very fair. But I'm just really curious, like, because now, you're doing this podcast project on emotions in academia, even though you feel like this, you know, so I'm just curious, what is it that makes you want to do this podcast?

What is it that has kind of changed your mind about how you thought you wanted to do it? And then now how you want to emphasize emotions in academia? Because I suspect that it also has to do with what you have kind of experienced at the university, and maybe the inconvenience, or I'm not sure if that's the right word that you have been through, or found yourself in.

So I'm just, I'm just so curious, because now you've spent, I don't know what, a year at the university, and you came up with this. So you must have a very good reason.

*Yeah, a year, but only half time employed. So half a year, it's kind of tricky, tricky thing with these half time employments, because you kind of think, oh, I've been there a year, but actually, I've only been there half a year. So arghh*

Yeah.

*But why, why, why? Well, there's like many reasons.*

*I think the most present one was that I kind of felt that there was a disconnection between the saying and the doing. Because there are a lot of like, when I read about things, I'm like, Oh, my fucking God, that is so fantastic. Like, I guess.*

Radical.

*Yeah, I get like, I get like, I get like, literally high on like, fuck, this is so interesting. Like, wow, this is so amazing. Wow.*

*Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, I get so high. And then when I'm in the physical rooms with the other physical bodies, then I just see something else play out than what is written or said.*

What do you see play out?

*I see a lot of, I see a lot of positioning, competition, networking, power play, uncaring insecurities, a lot of stuff that I think is going on many places.*

*I mean, definitely also in the art world, absolutely. And probably also in many other contexts, companies, whatever, I don't know, I could imagine. But it's just that when you say that you want to do one thing, I see something else happening.*

*That's where I get very sad. Like, I get really, really sad, and then I get very pissed off. And then that's kind of what happens, that I got very sad, and then I got very pissed off.*

*I got this emotional reaction of being very sad that I wanted to be very cheap, but all of a sudden, I just like, I don't want to give.*

You don't want to share.

*I don't want to share. I'm not going to be generous with myself. I'm not going to be with my thoughts, my emotions, my approach, because like meeting people in the podcast, like talking with people and interviewing and researching, and I mean, I'm here together with you.*

*I'm generous with myself by being here with you right now. And all of a sudden, I just lost that lust for being generous, and I just hit a wall. And then I thought, well, I guess it's like you said, what is going on with this inconvenience that I'm feeling?*

*So I thought maybe I should do something about this inconvenience that I'm feeling. And I haven't encountered anybody that I think are like bad human beings. So there's no assholes.*

*I think it's a matter of, you know, like, a lot of people are insecure about their positions, both like very literally, like, will I get an extension or a new grant or whatever, but also like there's a lot of insecurities on am I okay? Am I clever enough? Am I doing okay work?*

*And so on. And that whole setting just brings out like, I direct or indirectly like competition in positioning oneself for not having*

*like getting stressed out or anxious or all kinds of bad things.  
That's like the opposite of a healthy, good environment.*

*And then I'm just thinking that, hey, how am I gonna be here?  
Then I'm also like, what do you say, like, drawn into this tornado  
of like a stormy wind of what the fuck's going on. So I thought  
maybe I can just do something about that.*

*And then also, there's also a radio element that I don't care much  
for doing stuff where I don't feel there's something at risk.*

Right.

*Then I could go and get an ordinary job. So that doesn't really  
interest me.*

*I mean, I want to talk about do something where it's actually  
there's something at stake. So doing the academic feelings  
approach. Yeah.*

*What else? And it's also a way of, I'm very interested in writing.  
So it's also a way of trying to see if I can do something else by  
writing and then I record it afterwards.*

*So there's like lots of things at the same time. Was that an answer?*

That's a very good answer. Can I respond to that?

*Yeah, totally.*

Because there's so many things I want to say, like, first of all, I've had this feeling for I have also felt really sad and really anxious and really like insecure and then also sometimes quite angry with university for exactly the same reason that you also mentioned. And I've been thinking a lot about how I mean, I also love the university because this is where I read these things that you talk about, these like beautiful and radical ideas about how life could be different, you know, and it has opened my horizon and it's still opening my horizon so many ways. I'm learning so much, but then exactly hitting that wall.

And it's like, if we who sit here and we like literally are paid to read all of this amazing stuff, we have no idea what to do with it, how to like implement that. That makes me feel very sad, you know, because it's like, if we can't do it, then, you know, what's the point?

*But I think it's very much about having a feeling of underlying unsafe environment. As a lot not feeling sure that you are okay in the group, not feeling sure if you're intelligent enough and like some kind of underlying insecurity, which I think is very, it's also very difficult to dismantle because there is also a very low practical matter of employment.*

Right.

*I mean, like so many people are only temporarily employed and then what happens?*

*And so there's this weird, yeah, it's just, I mean, if like imagine that you made like a magic spell and then ding-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling, everybody was like, they could be on lifetime employment from one moment to the next. Let's see, like, how would that change the whole setting?*