

Episode 4

Writing with Emotions & the Question of Trust | Ida Bencke | Part Three | Academic Feelings

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You're listening to part three of the conversation with Ida Pinke, PhD fellow and curator.

And then I also brought guilt or shame.

Welcome to Academic Feelings. My name is Rose 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.

Because that's something that has been so present in my work recently. Sorry. And then I thought, in order to not go like total dark today.

Why not? Why not?

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

My last word is trust. Because I'm really, I'm really wondering a lot about, I really crave trust in my personal, but also in my professional life.

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

Because I've often just been thinking about like how amazing we could think together in these spaces at the university if we trusted each other and ourselves more, you know?

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?

Yeah. And what about, can you find, yeah, I agree with you. But it also takes a lot of, yeah, when you say like trusting oneself, right?

It's also, it goes into the question of self-esteem. And at the moment, I am very much looking at my own big problems with self-esteem, because I have so much performance anxiety. It's just like fucking overwhelming.

It's really hardcore for me. And I've been looking at like, oh, childhood traumas and bad upbringing and all kinds of stuff. But then I kind of realized, hey, maybe that's not the key.

Maybe the key is like, how can I build self-esteem? And I've always been very reluctant to going into that question of self-esteem, because for me, it's always been connected to be a more productive, better unit in the capitalist world, and how to boost yourself so you can be better than everybody else, and going into the question of competition and positioning and hierarchies, and also in a Buddhist sense, the ego and all kinds of bad things. So I've always been very like, I'm not going into that self-esteem thing.

That is just bad. But then I'm starting to realize now, looking more into it, that self-esteem doesn't have to be a matter of me trying to be better than anybody else. It's a matter of like, hey, I am who I am.

It's okay. I'm not better. I'm not worse.

I'm just allowed to exist and take space and talk and be in the world, which I have troubles with. So I don't know. Do you understand the question of the connection between trust and self-esteem?

It takes a lot of self-esteem to dare to take space in a setting like that, where you could change things.

But do you think if you had an environment that was based in trust, where you felt held by your colleagues, where you felt that you were not in competition with your colleagues, and that you were all genuinely excited about each other's ideas and perspectives, and you collectively held those as, like we were saying before, as a collective concern, your perspective, your feeling is a collective concern. It's not just yours, because it matters to whatever group you're in.

Do you think that that would change your anxiety? Because that's what I mean with trust. When I say trust, I don't mean trust yourself enough to go out there and be strong.

And that's not what I mean. I mean, in order for me to think and do important stuff, I need to feel that someone has my back. It's very banal, you know?

But what does it mean to have each other's back? What does that actually take? And that's maybe something we know from our friendships, hopefully, and from family.

But I also feel in our professional lives, I don't know. I want to have my friends' and my colleagues' backs, because I want to make it possible for us to change stuff.

It's also a way of - now again, there's a difficult word, extractivism. - It's also a way of getting out of the,

Extractivist

extractivist way that the work field is put up today, where you're put in, and then the place can just take the gold out of that one goldmine person, and then discard that person afterwards. And then you're just standing on the street, like, what the fuck just happened?

And that sort of goes into that whole capitalist setting of using people, right? Where the one that you're talking about now is a more humane way of being in life. But I think for my...

I used to play a lot of music, and I used to play in some different rock bands when I was very young. That's so cool, I didn't know that. Yeah, and I think one of the settings where I actually experienced this was playing in bands, which I've been thinking quite a lot about recently, because that's where you have your different instruments, so you're not battling about the bass guitar, because everybody knows that this is the bass player, so period.

And you're all working on the same overall aim, and of course there's discussions about whether we should use that chorus, or blah blah blah, it's a good song, bad song, I don't want to play it, I like it, I don't like it, so on. But most of the time you have this trust, we're all contributing, we're all vibing together, we're building this, and this music, and the sound, and that's like, holy motherfucker, fantastic. But I think I've never really experienced it continuously in other settings than that.

I mean, periodically of course, in personal life, but yeah.

In this episode you'll hear a conversation based on three rules of engagement:

1. Without any prior coordination, the guest and I equally decide the topics for the conversation.
2. The conversations are published as unedited as possible.
3. I've placed the background music using a system of randomness, enhancing totally coincidental parts of the conversation.

So just add to that, because I think this question of extractivist relationships is so important, right? Because this is also a wall that I've been running against all the time, is that the art world and academia is basically built upon such extractivist principles, and it's very very difficult to not reproduce them when you go about working inside of those institutions and with that, with those institutional logics.

So for example for me as a curator, I'm extracting a lot from the artists I work with. I'm extracting a lot from the communities or sites, like it's basically a practice of extraction, right? So like how to, and I think I have learned or I'm trying to learn that purity politics will not get us anywhere.

What is purity politics?

It's like pretending or like striving for the pure and good goal where you are not acting from, you know, any kind of like selfish desire or where you're not part of some really fucked up toxic institutions or violent systems. Like we are and we reproduce them all the time whether we want it or not. So and I think I think there's a lot of purity politics in the art world.

I think there's a lot of like, and I have also certainly been part of that, like trying to, you know, make myself look good or whatever, have the right ideas or the right...

Opinions?

Exactly. Thank you.

But I think it's so much more interesting to be like, no, this is really fucked up. You know, we are also hurting each other and we're stealing and taking from each other. But like again, we need to say that out loud, I think, in order to change things, you

know, I think we need to kind of and that's again where I feel like emotions can have a political also potency.

It's like, let's be real about how we use each other. And this is also something we spoke about in our last interview where I said something about pragmatic friendship or strategic friendship, right? And you were like, this sounds so cold.

Cold. And I was like, yes, but I mean, this goes into what I also brought with me today. This question of guilt and shame, because I've been very shameful of all of my privileges.

I'm such a fucking privileged person in this world and I felt so shameful for it. And I also felt really shameful for being at the university, like fuck, you know, because all of my colleagues and my friends were not like cashing in that check every month. And, you know, I felt like I was letting them down and I was stealing from them also.

And now I'm really been trying and then I really experienced that nothing good came from my shame and guilt. It was just like immobilizing me and it was not creating anything like good between me and my friends and peers. And so we're like really trying to think of privilege as a resource that can be shared.

So something that we don't have to be afraid of or feel shameful for. But something that we can share and use. And so maybe when you say the university takes a lot from me and then they kick me out.

Yes, they do that. But you can also take from the university, you know? And I think that's what I was trying to think with this exhibition project and also the PhD.

It's like, okay, now I momentarily have a very privileged position and I'm like acknowledged by these institutions and they give me money. And like, how can I use that not just for my own benefit, but for the benefit of my group, my people? It's like just like trying to turn that thinking a little bit around.

So you don't feel that you owe so much to those institutions, but you can also, there are various like, there's various smart ways that you can also take what you need.

It can be really problematic if the good intentions become so big that they stand in the way of doing anything, because you can't be good all the way. And I mean, it's also, I think, yeah, I get it. It's also, yeah, I've also been like so, I've been so stressed out about having been given this assignment because, you know, just like getting the, as you said, like getting this paycheck every month.

It's like, in the art context, it's like winning the fucking lottery. And I'm, and then I'm just like, what? You're so slow.

Also, you are so fucking slow. Like, what the fuck are you doing? And I'm like having this like devil thought, like other people just like, what the fuck?

And she's hired at that center and nothing's coming out and she's just sitting there and, you know, smoking big cigars and drinking whiskey and like, fuck the world. Stress, totally stressed out. So I get it.

Yeah. But I think we're going towards the end now. Am I...? Are you?

Let's look at you. I feel like we spoke about what I brought, but did we manage to cover what you brought with you today?

Yeah, I only, oh, I only have like, two things. Like, the one thing was, how do you do, like very specifically, like, I'm just wondering, like, how do you, how do you, like, how often do you sit down and write? Like, how do you start?

Do you write like a diary? Do you have a theme? Do you have a situation?

Do you add, like, how often do you write? How do you just write and then you just put it into a document and then you're going to edit it later on? Or do you edit so it's finished and like, how do you very low key practically do?

So for me, as I think for many people, writing is so painful and it keeps baffling me because I also love it and I also hate it at the same time. Like, it's really hard for me to start writing.

And why? How painful? Why is it painful?

I don't know.

What is painful?

It is just extremely painful. I think it's painful because when I write, I think, but then I also reach the limitations of my own intellectual capabilities all the time. It's like meeting a wall, meeting a wall, and then, you know, the good process, of course, you go beyond.

But not, that doesn't, at least for me, doesn't happen all the time.

So, like, hitting the wall is like you lose the overview or you don't understand what you're trying to say or like what happens?

Do you know this feeling that as you write, you're thinking with your text? Like, I never know exactly what I'm going to write before I write it. It's, for me, it's an intellectual process.

It's not just like documenting. And in that process, I encounter a lot of limitations in my own, like, intellectual capabilities. But anyways, that's just, that is just to say that for me, it's difficult, right?

But then I will say, I mean, I have an amazing supervisor who has really, I think, understood how I work. And I think he also really understands what I need in order to be able to write and I need hard deadlines.

Okay.

So he's giving me deadlines because I can only write with a deadline.

So I have monthly deadlines. And in the best possible world, I would write a little bit every day. That's always what I tell myself I'm going to do next week.

And then sadly, I end up feverishly, desperately writing the very last days before I should hand in my draft. And this is how I've always been.

And how...? Do you have...

You look so happy.

I recognize. But how do you...yes, the more you're struggling, the more happy I am. No, because I recognize. But how do you have an agreement on how many pages you should give?

No, no.

A theme?

No, that's totally up to me. I mean, I'm trying to organize my thoughts and I keep revising my plan. I think this is how a lot of people work.

And I often, but I wouldn't recommend this, but I often just start somewhere and then I see where it takes me. And then I allow myself to also sometimes write really shitty texts because I always find it easier to go back and do better than to start from scratch. And I really try to let go of my perfectionism because that is my biggest enemy in my work.

So I really, really try. And that's also something my supervisor has taught me. And he says you can always read more, but you have to start somewhere.

And if you keep thinking that I need to read this book before I can write or I need to understand this concept, then it will never end and you have to start from somewhere. So please start. And I really try and do that.

So the things that you hand in, do they have like topics or like a title and then there's like a text called, I don't know, the Interaction in... I don't know what to say. Like some kind of...So you have like titles on the different texts?

I kind of just decide, for example now I'm writing about this commoning process of buying that land and figuring out what the hell is a commoning, you

know? What does that mean and for whom and for whom not and all those things.

And then I just know that this is what I need to write about and then I allow myself to write what I know and then I also allow myself to go back and add and edit many times.

And where does the emotions come in when you're writing about commoning a land?

It's that I write from my own perspective.

I write from this. I am doing this and this happens to me and this person has this reaction and I am like, what? And then I understand it.

Basically I write with storytelling. I'm allowing myself to tell my own story and I'm thinking a lot about storytelling as a way of communicating the knowledge that I hold.

Okay. Well, I mean it's very different what I do, but it's maybe a little bit similar. So one thing that I've found out is that I write very well in the morning. Like I'm I'm the cleverest, most clever and like I begin on the top when I wake up and then it just goes down.

And then I'm the most like unclever in the evening. So I and I I really enjoy writing like the first two or three hours of my day, preferably like straight up in the morning. And then my brain can't do more.

So like if I get like if I get like three hours of concentration, that's like a really good day, but like two hours one hour is cool. And then I I'm very strategic about these precious clear mind hours. So I plan them.

It's not always that I can get it in and then I like doing this podcast. I I have like a overall narrative lined up because, you know, there's also the narrative of presenting myself as a person. So I have like a theme that I try to write around.

But I mean, I of course don't have this you know, like academic overlaying as I don't read books and do references to anything. I just try to put words on myself in the setting. So that's a big difference, right?

Yeah, interesting. And maybe should we should we stop finish off with like, do you have any inspirations? Like where do you find like where do you get high on like this question of like writing with emotions or yeah.

Yeah, I can share my main inspiration these days. I mean in general, I'm just so inspired by all of the people who are, you know, generously sharing their time and efforts with me. So I'm just like so lucky to have really fucking amazing colleagues and so that first of all but this year I've been part of this research program called DAS and DAS stands for Decolonizing Art and Architecture Studies.

And it's this like really cool and I guess quite radical research program that takes place in Sharjah and that's in the Arabic, United Arab Emirates. So it's a completely different context. And for me it was like the first time actually that I've placed my professional life in a context that's so different from what I know.

It was the first time that I was like the only white person in the space and the only one who had this like departed from a very European context. And it really made me think a lot about how I tend to just assume that my experiences and my emotions are so fucking universal. And then being in that highly intellectual but very non-traditionally academic space has like blown my mind in so many ways.

But I will say the one way and because we don't have so much time is that this whole program is about learning how to connect your thinking and your doing. Also from exactly what this from exactly this disconnect that you were just diagnosing like why is it that we're so good and engaging at a very theoretical level with all of these like radical ideas, but we have zero tools in implementing them in our lives. And this is exactly like the starting point of this program.

And what they have invited us to do and we're like 10 practitioners from the art world and from academia and we come from all over the world, but mostly from the Middle East and North Africa. And then as I said, I'm the only European person who's taking part in this program. The invitation is to kind of state very clearly and very honestly, why is it that we're here?

Why have I as a Danish curator taken the journey to Sharjah in order to learn how to decolonize my practice? And not from like a theoretical perspective, but from the perspective of my life trajectory. What has made me come here?

And they ask all of us that. And by doing that they really the people who facilitate this program, they create a totally different conversation so it starts from who we are and how we feel actually. And it starts from all of the inconvenience and also all of the trauma and the anger of living in this world and being part of these really violent structures or suffering from the violence of colonialism, capitalism, etc.

And I think their idea is if I were to ask them, why do you do this? Then they would say because in order to connect our doing with our thinking, we need to open these conversations about who we are and why we're here. And we need to give each other the space and the courage and the trust also to share.

And that takes a lot of time. So this is my other like this is the thing is that this is not something that's like done in a symposium that takes three hours at a university space. This is a continual conversation that takes place over a whole year of people meeting each other in real life and also in digital spaces and just like sharing stuff that's really hard.

Sometimes, sometimes it's not hard, but and challenging ourselves and each other. But never with the goal of like trying to be the smartest in the space. But more with like this, this is my story.

I give this to you and I trust that you will hold it and we'll figure something out together. And this has for me been revolutionary. Okay, because I've never been in these kinds of let's say academic and now I say academic with the how do you call these quotation spaces.

And that has changed my life, I think. I mean that's dramatic.

That's fantastic.

Yeah. And that has given me also the courage to to write with emotion.

Jealousy is a very, very ugly feeling.

You can come with me. I'm going back in a few weeks.

That sounds really amazing. You're the second practice-based PhD who talks about being a part of a research group where people come together and share in a trusting environment. And people come from all kinds of different places.

And I am so jealous every time. I want a group of 10 people that I can do this with.

So we have to make that happen here because that's always also what I've been thinking. Why don't we have spaces like this? Here.

I'm too shy.

Yeah?

Yeah. I've been thinking about it. I've been dreaming about it in my new studio space if I should try and do something like that, but I'm also very shy. Oh, I'm working on it.

Self-esteem. Lack of self-esteem. Yeah, I'm working on it. Yeah.

But you're sitting here with me and you're sharing all of these things. yeah. I don't know. You don't seem shy to me.

No. That's the weird thing.

Yeah.

Yeah. That's the weird thing.

Yeah. How do you feel about this conversation?

I think it's really nice because I feel a bit knocked off my feet, but in a good way. Okay. I don't feel that I've been totally on safe ground, but I like that.

Okay.

And that's really nice because that's not very rare. I mean, that's very rare that that happens. And because usually I'm like somewhat in control kind of like I feel like a I I managed a little bit to not be performing, which is really nice.

Yeah. If that makes sense. As you know, like not like not just doing my job. So that's really nice.

But isn't that also what you wanted with this conversation?

Yes, it is. Yeah, it's just very difficult. Because I'm also holding the microphone and taking time, you know, and the notes and Oh, what should I ask?

And so on. So I also have this like I'm on duty. Yeah.

No, but I think it's a very nice conversation. I'm very happy about. I'm very happy that we we did it.

Yeah. Hey, let's say cut. Also, you need to go in like 15 minutes.

Ida Bencke, the official, thank you very much, Ida Bencke, curator.

Thank you so much.

*And practice based PhD.
One question:*

What's that?

Do you have a title for the PhD now?

No. No.

Okay. That will come. That will come up.

Sorry.

No, no, no, you don't... It will come when it comes.

Yeah.

Okay.

Hey, thank you so much, Rosa. I really appreciate this. I really, really do.

It's not so often that we get to sit and have these conversations as part of a research process, as part of an artistic process. And even though there are all these like obstacles and things that feel risky and difficult and problematic, I still think that it holds some kind of importance of value. So let's hope that. But I'm really grateful that you invited me to speak to you.

Of course. Thank you. I'm pressing the stop button now.

Okay.

Stop.