

IN CONVERSATION WITH CAMILLA EEG-TVERBAKK

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These words are transcribed from a 49-minute recorded conversation with Camilla Eeg-Tvebakk, in a coffee shop in the city of Oslo on Friday the 2nd of February 2018. This conversation has been edited for use on this website.

[...]

(Starting with Stephen Wright's notion of "usership")

C.E-T: Is that concept talking to you somehow?

R.G: Spectatorship —as opposed to "usership" — is something that does really make a distance between myself, my work and the *other* that is engaging with my practice. I see participants and myself as "care-holders." It's very much about bonding and trying to build some level of trust. To care about the *other*.

C.E-T: I think of the Italian philosopher Silvia Benso, who has developed this concept of *tenderness* which relates to patience, humility, and a sort of waiting for the other to make a move. My impression is that you also try to open a space for exchange, relation, conversation.

R.G: Also, confrontation.

C.E-T: Relation is not always nice. I think you mentioned, somewhere in your thesis, about stepping a little back from the ego.

R.G: It's really about these open spaces that can be seen also as a rupture sometimes. Or a break...a pause...and I'm not particularly interested in controlling what's going on in that space, "babysitting the rupture." Taking care of the process in which we are more mindful in how we approach each other. I become a facilitator in the way that I try to connect people's stories by giving them a platform to share. It's their own version of the story, not mine.

C.E-T: I think what you do is say, "hey wait a minute," and in doing that there is an opening in time and space. Since you are familiar with meditation practice, it's that moment (Camilla claps her hands), the gap, [the moment] in between, you know. [...] I understand those kinds of moments as almost getting out of the constructed idea of time.

R.G: Chronological time, let's say.

C.E-T: I believe this became political in our time because everything goes fast. It connects to money and production, so to slow down, I think it's a political action. This is not going to produce anything that we can buy or sell, but it produces maybe something on a different level, and I think that's interesting.

R.G: [...] that moment is ephemeral. It's a pause that has an expiration date. I'm not imposing a time frame around these moments, I'm leaving them to live organically. Could be two minutes or an hour. Leaving time to show us...

C.E-T: But, you're also as an artist depending on your collaborators. This is also interesting in the world of art, especially visual arts— to let go of control. Then you also let go of the idea of quality and *perfection*.

R.G: Which is what I experienced before, as a sculptor. I was so obsessed with the material, with every single detail of those sculptural forms. I did that for 8 years, and at some point, I thought, "no, no, no. I need a pause."

C.E-T: I'm very curious if you could talk about how this experience plays into your present work. You talked about volume and void, and how you use that knowledge into what you are doing now.

R.G: I always have been an experimental individual. I've never wanted to focus on a single way of doing things. I know what my limitations with the material are, but still...I always try to do things that I don't know how to do. What is more complex than the material that I've been working with? I started to think about the human body as a sculpture in motion. The empty space, the void. How to actually draw the silhouette or draw the borders of objects and bodies. I can translate that to our human interaction as well. Our body talks even if we don't want our body to talk. Our body language, gestures, the distance between each other. That's the composition of bodies.

C.E-T: As a sculptor, you freeze the moment.

R.G: Exactly. But this —the moment— is constantly shaping and transforming. I'm just fascinated about that. [I refer to the artist Theaster Gates and his shift from clay to the social sphere]

C.E-T: Could we say what you are sculpting also public space through how bodies move and relate? That you frame the space in different ways?

R.G: (The table bounces) Definitely. These gestures are real of course, but it has a small touch of fiction too. Fiction in the sense that I'm changing what is predictable, what is usual and common. I'm just putting it in a different setting. The theatricality of everyday life somehow.

C.E-T: You propose something which I don't know if it's fiction, but it's introducing something else into our everyday reality. A thought: by proposing a flower...the flower isn't fiction, the flower is real, *very real*; it's your thought of what that flower might do.

R.G: I think that is somehow constructing a reality within another reality. It's an alternative way.

C.E-T: Reorganizing by very small gestures, I like that. How do you manage with documentation? That's really difficult in relation to those kinds of works. As I've seen, for instance, with Eleonora Fabião's work as well. She has someone mingling in the outskirts of the actions taking pictures. There is for me a point about sharing or spreading these ideas. Even if you can't be there and experience them, ideas are very beautiful. I see a very close parallel with your work.

R.G: I think the nature of these projects was to bridge the distance between people in general, through creative gestures. I believe a lot in the face-to-face, in putting yourself on the side for a

minute, apart from any other distraction. I also believe you can document by oral tradition, by retelling the story; but of course, memory is tricky and fragile. It's always transforming, that kind of not accurate retelling of the story in itself is very interesting for my practice.

C.E-T: So, the document becomes another artwork in many ways.

R.G: Yes. For example, the *swing-bench* is a way of bringing people together in a closer, one-to-one talk. An intimate way of transferring not only thoughts but experiences and feelings as well. And by doing that, new conversations may arise as well, based on the previous experience of the participants.

C.E-T: And that is documented again?

R.G: I don't like this notion of archive storing. I don't want to bring more material, *material*, to this world that is already full of things. I think these thoughts can be the matter somehow. That's also something that interests me: how to make your practice sustainable. Sustainable but not in the way of how you make a living.

C.E-T: So, your work as an artist is also about figuring out what is needed in a specific place. I think you are right by saying that in Oslo, what is needed is not more stuff or sculptures that we can look at, but it's actual interaction, these "breaks" in a way. In a place like New York, where I used to live, or Lima, it is perhaps much easier to have that kind of interaction, so you get these little moments of break.

R.G: Lima is a highly regulated city in terms of access to public space. When I came to Oslo everything seemed so open and free, however, Norwegians seem less spontaneous in public than Peruvians.

C.E-T: I think there are very many reasons for Norwegians being this way. (laughs)

R.G: Of course. I'm not trying to critique or change, I don't think I'll ever understand that, and that's alright.

C.E-T: It might be interesting for you to go to other places and react to those places. If you think of a location as space, what would be generative or constructive to add to that space?

R.G: [...] it makes me curious to see how these projects could potentially trigger something different if they are reenacted somewhere else in the world.

C.E-T: Are you still interested in working with these ideas? Let's say thinking people and bodies as materials, shaping the void if you like. As I would say, framing the space or framing with bodies, interactions, and relations.

R.G: This is a very early stage in this new way of working for me. Now, these 3 projects are new pieces...I think this is just the first step in what I want to be a long-term practice.

C.E-T: I'm also curious, the gestures are very small, or careful. I think that's beautiful at the same time. Would you want to keep it small like that, or would you experiment with different sizes/scales of gestures?

R.G: I think the gesture will remain small, but no doubt the scale will change at some point. The reason why I don't do community-based art is that I want the acknowledgment involved in working with a small group of people, passers-by or strangers; I can get to know them and somehow get into their thoughts and make a connection. When I'm working with a bigger group of people it's just really hard to get that...

C.E-T: It's very hard. I think that is very smart. I think also there is a problem as you know with the whole idea of community-based art, framing people into a group. It seems you are interested in individual encounters. I'm also curious about another thing that you wrote about in one of your art-books, you are going into a romantic relationship with one of your collaborators.

R.G: Yep...

C.E-T: There are some ethics involved. (chuckles) What do you think about that? Because you talked last time a lot about making people feel safe, right?

R.G: That's an invitation, I'm inviting you to be part of this. I can be responsible for a portion of that experience, but not held entirely responsible for that. It's a joined thing.

C.E-T: There is risk involved in all encounters. To go into a relationship means to dare to articulate, to open up. It's about a reciprocal idea of caring for the life of the other. That doesn't mean to always be nice, but it means to check in with yourself constantly. (Bird sounds, a bird enters flying into the space of the cafe) It's interesting because it is where your gesture starts. There is, in any relation, always some kind of distribution of power. That is simply an interesting area to go into your work, which can potentially be developed.

R.G: That's true... coming back to these ethical issues. It was quite a crazy experience. I didn't see that coming, that's the point of these projects; at the end of the day, you never know. So, when I got this message from this person, I said, 'are you sure you want this?' and she replied, 'yes I want that.' [...] So, I had to negotiate not only with her but negotiate with myself: the person and the artist.

C.E-T: Of course. That's a question that comes back to power and what are you doing, and what kind of space you are creating. Power isn't negative in itself, but it gives you a certain power to instigate something. I'm not judging!

R.G: No, no, no. It's totally fine. I get you. It's something that. Still, nowadays I think about.

C.E-T: You work so closely between art and life. Who is Rodrigo the private person, and who is Rodrigo the artist; are they completely the same? We live in a world that used to separate between personal and professional. I think it is an interesting connection to public and private space; these things are really shifting.

R.G: Those are kind of interesting questions that are always here (I touched my head), probably I will never find an answer to it. But I think that as long as I keep these questions circulating, that would make me, hopefully, improve the way I work.

C.E-T: I think so because you keep discussing and testing art in different ways. I think it's important to keep them. [...] I have some stuff that might be interesting for you to read, André Lepecki writes a

lot on dance and the poetics of movement. [*Exhausting Dance, Performance and The Politics of Movement*, by André Lepecki]

R.G: [...] At some point I needed to find something that is not performance, nor sculpture.

C.E-T: I think you should stay with the idea of yourself as a sculptor because that's an interesting entry point into what you are doing. You shouldn't become a performance artist. That makes you frame and problematize what you do in a specific way. I think that's interesting.

R.G: It's a different way of shaping, that's my work. Connections, situations, relations.

C.E-T: You have both for sure, tacit knowledge or physical knowledge from your experience of sculpting. To understand sculpting as movement...material is moving, but moving much slower, right? Everything is decomposing, you know this!

R.G: I do! I really enjoyed our conversation!

C.E-T: Thank you, me too. I think we have to go now...