

Extract of the dialogue with performer Tora Balslev, Daily Fiction,
Tales of becoming – autoethnographical notes from Becoming Sheep 2015
(Translation from Danish into English by Charlotte Grum, January 2019)

Re: Resonance chamber 1

26. Sep. 2015 10.09

Dear Tora.

I have placed myself in the sun – I try to make the heat of the sun thaw out and wake up my brain cells. It is cold on the heath. My body takes form after the surroundings. It has caught a cold and is not used to the life conditions of the heath. The nose of No. 2 is running too now. Maybe this is how it is to be a heath body?

I read your mail and notice your question whether my ‘mind-body’ works as my microphone in this project. Maybe it is a performative microphone the sheep and I make together? Microphones are pleasing others. More, I think that we are transformation apparatuses or exchange apparatuses.

I thought myself that a way to document the becoming process would be to measure our blood pressure, the amount of parasites in our stomachs etc.

I am still occupied with how and whether the project should be documented in photos and video. It is as if photos only capture and freeze tiny parts of the process and satisfies the needs from a visually saturated, medialized society – nice suit, nice sheep, great landscape. I have been thinking; How do we capture the tenderness of the heart, the more cuddly side of the sheep, the animal smell from me? Can the work only live by being documented? This is a paradox indeed! As it does have a very multi sensorial/bodily existence while it lasts.

Is performance artist Marina Abramowitz’ work *The Artist is Present* the filmed meeting presented in the documentary or the intrasubjective relationship which she and others gestalted physically over time in a particular space? Why do we only document the visual gestalts? Where are the affective gestalts then?? “Becoming Sheep” becomes “Becoming Media Star with Sheep”, “Becoming Mediated Sheep” or “Mediated Becoming Sheep”! It certainly is a paradox. So, for the moment I collect a collage of different recordings, photos and written documents.

In the Kunstpakhus, now different photos of the sheep, weather forecasts of the days I have walked and the mail exchanges between myself and you and Donna can be seen. This is another way of presenting the project. It feels meaningful.

You ask me about the dialogue with other people.

Yesterday I had a very nice experience. An older couple came dragging their bikes. They had read about the project in the paper and went out to see if they could find us. And they brought a packed lunch for us in case they found us. The sheep ate the carrot and the slice of bread. They didn’t take photos of us – they participated with food for the sheep.

Do you see what I mean?

Kind and chilly heath thoughts from Charlotte

Re: Resonance chamber 2

2. okt. 2015 09.24

Dear Tora.

Thank you with all my heart for your echo! It is a great gift being reflected by you! Yesterday I was invited to the School of Conservation in order to be used as a case. Today, conservators have to deal with contemporary art works who's conceptual and ephemeral expressions have to be communicated in correlation to the intention of the artist.

It turned out to be a very worthwhile dialogue about which forms of documentation would be meaningful in correlation to my intention. One person did exactly say that our mail dialogues, perhaps together with the one photo, which I think shows affect, was sufficient.

However, this doesn't change my arrangement with a photographer with a great eye to take photos once a week exactly to try to capture the relational, the emerging/the becoming.

I think my challenge is that I work conceptual-material, that is, there is a very large conceptual/philosophical element in my practice. At the same time, I gestalt it installatorily, as a figuration in time and space. This applies to my former "STAIR BODY". It applies to "Not Quite Other, Not Quite The Same."

Apart from the conceptual and material in this project, also, there is – or the project IS – a social, relational element.

Maybe, this is also about the context I work in. Public Space. I weave myself into the situated socio-material reality and here, I take on form and color from the meaning I am ascribed. Feeling well met by the locals, experiencing parallels to the life of Jomfru Rist, being a woman with animals on the heath activates a certain kind of care among the passing human animals. Therefore, I want to give back. I want to 'stand up'.

Meeting the conservation students made me realize that my documentation considerations partly is due to my idea of the art field demanding professional documentation – when we apply for funding, stipends etc. However, it is also due to my artistic research into which methods are most suited to capture posthumanist performative situations.

That is, I am exploring how I can communicate poly-perspectives and intra-actions both in form and in content.

For example, yesterday, on the heath two (male) journalists from Ikast avisen and Herning folkeblad (two Danish local papers) respectively came with pen and camera. The four of us had a meaningful exchange and performed 'artist with sheep is being interviewed by the local media'. Next week it is going to be interesting to see how this meeting is being re-presented in the different newspapers.

I like your thought about giving the power back to the performance and the sheep. Already, I have experienced that people having to put on their rubber boots, stretch their ordinary habitus.

Some, even the journalists-felt like taking the car down the almost abandoned heath road in order to localize us. As they said: We didn't know how far it was.

I'll bring that with me today. POWER TO THE SHEEP!

Kind and grateful thoughts from Charlotte

Resonance chamber 3

15. Oct. 2015 08.58

Dear Tora.

For the time being, I am very occupied with the parallel process going on in my project. That is, the re-production, the re-construction, the re-presentation in the local media – a very particular activity being activated by my project, and then living its own life.

As I wrote Donna recently it has become visible that my project is about Othering, the process in which we categorize others and other as precisely something qualitatively other, something secondary to ourselves.

I was aware that I indeed wanted to present another story than the tale of the isolated lonely Jomfru Rist. But the media's handling my project is in itself an othering process - we (the sheep and I) are categorized as odd, incomprehensible, silly, not art funding worthy etc. In a quirky way, a process the name of the sheep "No. 2" already signifies.

This Sunday, a photographer from Jyllandsposten (a Danish newspaper) followed us around for 1 ½ hour. He noticed himself that the harness between the sheep and I seemed central.

It is so interesting what people notice. Some notice the 'silly' sheep, some notice 'the space suit', some notice the 'umbilical cord'...

The suit, my thickened skin shell, my extra layer against weather and wind is an extension of myself. Or a slight displacement of myself... a dis-placement. It 'dis-places' me because it points out a radius of movement: to here and not any longer (the thick woolen felt was not as flexible as I had thought). No kneeling, no extreme stretching, but densified, centered. It takes shape after my use of it and it takes color from meeting moss, mud and the rust of the stable.

I continuously contemplate how it adds to the project. How it participates in Becoming (With) Sheep. It challenges the human subject in me. I take on 'the animal'. I shift skin. I make a creative obstruction to my usual being in the world, force myself to transgress my human skin and allow other ways of being in the world, other ways of being with the world.

The suit is an extra layer of skin, as porous as skin, I can breathe through it, and the wind penetrates me. It keeps me upright and perhaps it adds to a heightened awareness of my own body.

A woman asked me why it wasn't soft enough for me to lay down when the sheep lied down. But I have never wanted to mime the sheep, to become a sheep. I have wanted to de-subjectify myself and explore which forms of being would arise in the interplay between the sheep and I over time. Ephemeral gestalten. With potentials.