

# Unleash my becoming

## On the work of Gareth Moore

BOOM  
DRUMBEAT  
everything lies FLAT  
O\_\_\_\_\_O

First sentences of *Boem Paukeslag*, Paul Van Ostaijen, 1921

The sound of someone sleeping, a grandmother presumably (her dentures lying on a pink box). The sound of someone softly hitting a spade. Buzzing insects and a gas flame. This is more or less how a day progresses in the exhibition *A Burning Bag as a Smoke-Grey Lotus* by artist Gareth Moore. This tentative story is told through various objects and the sounds these hand-made and self-designed instruments make when at irregular intervals performers come into the exhibition and play Moore's instruments according to a "score". The score takes us in a fragmented way from dawn (the sound of a spoon in a breakfast bowl, gargling) to dusk (a single groan). The score reads like a poem and will remind some of the surreal, expressionist poems of the Belgian poet and writer Paul van Ostaijen.

Sometimes with humor, sometimes with an inimitable imagination, Moore made instruments from jerry cans, an eclectic assortment of lamps, cereal boxes or a plastic bag. On a large seashell, he attached the upper portion of a flute. A collection of lamps is called *Diogenes*, after the Greek god who praised the behaviour of dogs. It is hard to imagine what kind of sound these lamps would make. The instruments are arranged behind different types of chicken mesh and stand against the backdrop of large paintings made with oil, fish food and rat poison, their colours widely varying between the organic and synthetic. Without the performers, what we see is a rather static arrangement. It is up to us, as viewers, to try and piece things together. What sounds would a water hose make? Going between the printed score and the objects, you figure out this must be the part in the story that reads "Watering (Ablutions)".

### Objects and engagements

And this actually brings us to one of the many seeming disparities in Moore's work: the point is always more than formal and object-oriented installations. He creates settings, installation, objects and sculptures that might almost misleadingly have you think that this is it, this is the end point. A beautiful assortment of objects arranged in a pleasing way. Nothing wrong with that! But it is the starting point for Moore. These formally complex and aesthetically pleasing works are actually a kind of mediators for engagement between people, between art and audience, between man and nature, between the viewer and ideas. Returning to *A Burning Bag as a*

*Smoke-Grey Lotus* with this in mind, what you see are not simply instruments but inanimate “actors” waiting to start their performance, to be animated. By our imagination, if we can. By the performers if we are lucky to catch them. All of a sudden the air vibrates with potential, with energy waiting to be set loose. And this is the case with all works by Moore.

### **A third place**

Next to bringing objects and engagement, the static and the performative together, Moore also bridges more complicated dualities. Between the rational and the intuitive for example. *A Burning Bag as a Smoke-Grey Lotus* might give us at first glance the idea of walking into a museological display where animals, alive or stuffed, would traditionally be on view. Everything in this installation makes sense, visually, in terms of composition, references, yet despite this logic we are not submitting ourselves to a rational system. The instruments are indeed a study of sorts into the physical and symbolic functions and properties of sound. His instruments and sounds cover, for example, the three main categories of sound: geophony (the sounds produced by non-living entities like wind or water), biophony (sounds produced by non-human animals) and finally anthrophony (all those sounds made by humans and the many instruments they use). Or whoosh, meow, hey! and pling. The instruments Moore created are based on these various functions and sources of sound but the resulting installation is anything but a dry and exacting cataloging. On the contrary, your imagination is running wild. What happens to a self-made string instrument when you add fruit and vegetables to its hollowed body?

For the exhibition *Blocked Arch, Deferred Ceremony, Dawn Chorus, Tra-diddle da. Like a fly in slow suspense*, which was installed at Glasgow Sculpture Studios in 2014, Moore created a series of coloured boxes in which animals were placed at certain intervals, also according to a score. A cat or snake would sit in these boxes and either be completely silent or emit sounds that would be amplified. *Dawn Chorus* also testified to Moore’s fascination with sound and animals but in this case he was especially driven by a fascination with what is known as “critical flicker fusion frequency”. According to this theory, one measures how fast an eye - human or animal - can process a blink of light. The larger the animal, the slower it sees. Humans see in 16 blinks per second but small animals have a critical flicker fusion frequency that is much higher. This makes them see more than we do but also, in our terms, in slow-motion. These different speeds and temporalities with which we experience the world, shows us one of the many ways in which science tries to define, grasp and manage time.

But science is only one knowledge system that we can tap into. And this is maybe the key to trying to inhabit a middle ground, or if not middle ground, a third place between the rational and the intuitive.

Quite often, Moore’s works have a certain ritualistic quality to it, a gong and a scarecrow-like man lying on a table, hay sticking out from his trouser cuffs in the work *Deferred Ceremony*, a shrine in *A place – near the buried canal*, or instruments made for healing in *A Burning Bag as a Smoke-Grey Lotus*. These are only a few examples. Rituals are deeply embedded in his works and performances. But it is

not the religious potential in these ritualistic objects or gestures that Moore is after, rather the potential of rituals to open up spaces for interaction as well as individual experiences. And importantly, rituals are a “system of knowledge”, a form of believing and understanding that offers an alternative to the standard scientific dualism between body and mind, or maybe rather brain and spirit, heaven and earth, men and nature, animals and humans.

And Moore is looking for a way out of this constraint.

## **Becoming-animal**

When considering all these aspects, qualities and manifestations of Moore’s work, it makes sense to borrow from the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who developed in several of their texts the notion of “becoming-animal” as a movement away from the norm, from standards and stability. Becoming-animal is only one amongst many becomings they describe: becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-intense, becoming-mineral, becoming-molecular - and it is almost impossible to do justice to the poetics, the wildness and maybe slight craziness of their thinking on these transformative states. In becoming animal, we do not literally turn into an animal (although their use of the word sorcerer to describe themselves seems to hint that a certain transgressive, animalistic state would be something to aim for, if not in bodily terms, then certainly in mental terms) nor do we imitate. But we set ourselves and our systems of value, meaning and direction loose. We accept a position as minority, defy any form of definition, achieve a certain non-identity, which for Deleuze and Guattari is the condition of freedom. By turning away from the fixed, the norm, the standard, we become nomadic shape-shifters who are finally, blissfully free.

That art has the potential to create mental room and physical space for otherness, for non-conformity, heterogeneity, is maybe it’s most discussed quality and one of its key treasured values. Many people who feel drawn to the art world will consider themselves outsiders. Given this key characteristic of contemporary art, it is frustrating how hard it is to describe how this space for otherness comes about. Why do certain art works feel like generous embracing of our complicated humanity? Why do some feel like shelters for feelings and longings that make a u-turn away from the selfie-stick obsessed contemporary condition to a life in which there is actually a relationship with the real: sounds, animals, the rhythm of a normal day, uninterrupted by technology, deadlines and stress, the swooshing of leaves being turned this way and that by a balmy wind.

Next to this transgressive quality that is key to the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, Moore shares with these wild and free thinkers an anti-rationalist stance that does not directly lead away from a serious dedication, a research-based approach or a tendency to be thorough. This brings us back to this third place that is not rationalist, managerial, contained but not completely beyond reason either. In that third place the continuum between mind and body, between men and animal, between nature and culture are so evident that we need not to think about it. Of course!

There is another reason why it makes sense to look at Deleuze and Guattari in relation to the work of Moore. According to Deleuze and Guattari, music plays a key role in helping us “pass through doors and across thresholds”, in “unleashing these becomings”. Not only on the level of refrains as in nursery rhymes but also on the level of instrumentation, orchestration, the “lapping, wailing of molecular discordances”.<sup>1</sup> Music is often a key component of Moore’s work, he is fascinated by the healing powers of sound, the interaction between vibrations and body, but also by the different types of sounds that people, animals, machines and nature make. Every culture and language has its own sounds. No cat meows the same.

## Thinking and feeling

Because Moore unites different ends of spectrums, his work defy easy definitions. What might at first glance seem to be primarily a cognitive study into sound for example, turns with the single strike of a gong into a very corporeal experience. This puts him in line with recent post-Kantian philosophy, sometimes grouped under the header of speculative realism, in which the classical mind-body dualism is consciously avoided and men is no longer considered the center of thinking and knowing. As in the body of work developed by French philosopher Bruno Latour, there is no strong distinction between humans, non-humans, objects and nature; they all stand on the same footing. Importantly, philosophers like Quentin Meillassoux ascertain that what we do *not* see or know, is not “nothing”. The answer to the philosophical thought experiment “if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” would be answered with a firm yes by speculative realists. How arrogant of men to even think that sounds only exist when heard by human ears!

It is this continuum between living and not-living, between visible and invisible, between what is knowable and that which resides in the area of the hypothetical, which runs like a red thread through the work of Moore. And maybe this is where the ability comes from for art works to embrace, to make us feel at home, to be inclusive rather than exclusive. It doesn’t matter, so to speak, if we come as animal, vegetable, a molecule or a birdsong. Settlements large and small are a recurring form Moore works with. His works give also shelter in a literal sense. To himself, to animals, to visitors, to the dead and the living, to engagements between people, animals and nature.

In an essay on the importance of the unknown and the hypothetical, German philosopher Hans-Christian Dany writes: “What is at stake is opening oneself up to the idea that there is something beyond the thinkable. Even if man is not capable of thinking this something, he can incorporate it hypothetically, as a blind spot that remains blind, embarking on the adventure of a speculative love of the unthinkable in order to leave the confines of his thought and its limited relation to people and

---

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1987, p. 272.

things.”<sup>2</sup> Loving the unthinkable might be the hardest thing to do. But it is an important exercise if we want to free up mental space for the not yet known, the hard to define, the animals inside.

— Maaïke Lauwaert

---

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Christian Dany, *Tomorrow I will be a Painter* in Social Factory, 10th Shanghai Biennale 2014, pp. 361-374.