

Gothenburg, June 30, 2017

Dear Kim,

Since we talked yesterday I can't stop thinking about whales.

You told me that you had wished to see a whale ever since you were a child. And a couple of years ago, in Sri Lanka, you saw a whale at last, as it surfaced to breathe. You told me that you were happy to have seen it, but for some reason also disappointed. Later, you realized why: you had seen the whale, but the whale hadn't seen you. You and the whale didn't meet!

To meet someone is a different thing from encountering something. To meet is an act of mutual recognition. When two persons recognize each other, they create a "we" in which they are equal, and free to be who they are as individuals. For Hegel, this is the foundation of love and friendship, as well as society.

Is it possible to meet a whale in this sense? The whale is, after all, a mysterious being that we know very little about. We don't even inhabit the same element as the whale.

But once we did.

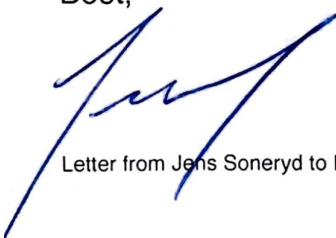
As I watch the imprints of your body on your paintings, I wonder if our hands and arms somehow can remember that once they were fins. Do they miss the oceans they left millions of years ago, when our precursors hoisted themselves out of the water and onto land?

It fascinates me to think about this crucial event and about the vast number of species that evolved from the first four-legged terrestrial beings. Many of them remained on land where they improved their skills. Some developed thumbs, and bigger brains, which they used to invent writing, maps, capitalism, artificial intelligence, and other technologies mainly used for domination and exploitation.

For some strange reason, a terrestrial tetrapod called Pakicetus, the being that would become a whale, decided to return to its lost home under water. Eventually, it got rid of its limbs, and learned how to sing.

We don't know much about whales. They chose to return to the ocean, and we chose to stay on the ground. But once, we were alike. I think our bodies still miss the oceans. It's too late for us to go back, but at least we can meet those who did.

Best,



Letter from Jens Soneryd to Kim Nekarda. 1 July–3 July, 2017. Åplus, Berlin.