

# ODE TO AN INDETERMINATE LANDSCAPE

Koen Deprez

THREE EXERCISES IN INDETERMINATION



THIS VOLUME brings together three texts that emerged at different moments in my life. They differ in time, form, and perspective, yet share a common inner tension. Each text retains its original contours, as if it were the imprint of a specific state of thought — fixed in language, yet fragile and still permeable to interpretation.

The first text takes the form of a travelogue and bears the title *Ode to an Indeterminate Landscape*. It recounts a journey without a predetermined destination, an experiment I undertook at the end of 2011 for Lokaal 01 in Breda under the title *The Indeterminate Journey*. This journey was both a physical displacement and an inquiry into the potential of purposelessness: what emerges when direction is relinquished and only movement itself remains?

The second text, *Ode to an Indeterminate Construction*, is connected to an installation I realised between 2023 and 2024 at Foundation Verbeke in Kemzeke. During its development, the idea arose to construct a fictional dialogue between art collector, entrepreneur, and museum director Geert Verbeke (1948–) and artist, composer, entrepreneur, and gallery owner E.L.T. Mesens (1903–1971) — two figures whose paths never crossed, yet who, through the project and through time, were placed opposite one another in an imagined, almost semi-architectural space. Their conversation constitutes a construction in itself: a structure of ideas situated somewhere between reality, entrepreneurship, art, and projection.

The third text, *Ode to an Indeterminate Woman*, is more recent. It departs from a concrete event in Bruges involving Sofia Speybrouck (1970–) and myself, and it moves within a border zone where the personal and the reflective overlap — much like sliding two coloured sheets of cellophane over one another, only discovering the depth of life in the resulting colour. Here, indeterminacy is no longer examined as a method but experienced as a phase of life that presents itself and demands form. In this third confrontation, titled *Ode to an Indeterminate Woman*, I came to realise that indeterminacy might also signify a *modus vivendi*.

What binds these three texts together is the concept of indeterminacy. Not as a synonym for vagueness, but as an intentional openness: a space in which meaning can emerge without a predetermined form. Over the years, this indeterminacy has become a constant in my way of seeing, living, and working — a willingness to embrace the provisional, to allow the unfinished to exist, and to admit the unexpected. Indeterminacy is not a lack but a method; not a weakness but an attitude.

This attitude forms the underlying structure of the volume. The texts function less as closed narratives than as three rooms within the same house — connected by passages that are not always visible yet are nonetheless tangible. In these interstitial spaces, indeterminacy takes shape: as an invitation to wander, to interpret, and to keep moving.

Guidecca, February 2026

DEZE BUNDEL verenigt drie teksten die op verschillende momenten in het leven van Koen Deprez tot stand kwamen. Ze verschillen in tijd, vorm en invalshoek, maar worden gedragen door eenzelfde onderstroom. Elke tekst behoudt haar oorspronkelijke contouren — als een momentopname van een denken in beweging: vastgelegd in taal, maar niet vastgezet in betekenis.

De eerste tekst, *Ode aan een onbestemd landschap*, ontstond uit *De onbestemde reis*, een experiment dat hij eind 2011 ondernam voor *Lokaal 01* in Breda. Het was een tocht zonder bestemming, een verplaatsing die geen aankomst verlangde. De beweging zelf werd het uitgangspunt. Zoals een roeier die over een onbekend kanaal glijdt, volgt het pad zich pas in het gaan. Onbestemdheid verschijnt hier als daad: de keuze om het kader niet vooraf te tekenen.

De tweede tekst, *Ode aan een onbestemde constructie*, vond haar oorsprong in een installatie gerealiseerd tussen 2023 en 2024 in de Verbeke Foundation. Tijdens het ontstaansproces groeide het idee om een denkbeeldige ontmoeting te ensceneren tussen Geert Verbeke en E.L.T. Mesens — twee figuren die elkaar nooit hebben ontmoet maar hier in een semi-architecturale ruimte tegenover elkaar worden geplaatst. Hun gesprek is geen reconstructie maar een constructie: een denkruimte waarin ondernemerschap en verbeelding, verleden en projectie elkaar kruisen. Zoals water dat door smalle gangen van een stad stroomt, vindt betekenis zich langs onverwachte bochten. Wat wordt gebouwd, is niet alleen een installatie, maar een mogelijkheid.

De derde tekst, Ode aan de onbestemde vrouw, vertrekt vanuit een ontmoeting in Brugge met beeldhouwster Sofia Speybrouck. Hier verschuift het register. Het onbestemde wordt niet langer opgezocht als methode maar wordt ondergaan als ervaring. Het persoonlijke en het reflectieve schuiven over elkaar heen als transparante lagen; in hun overlapping ontstaat diepte. Zoals licht dat weerkaatst op water wordt duidelijk dat onbestemdheid geen tussenfase hoeft te zijn, maar een manier van leven – een *modus vivendi*.

Wat deze drie teksten verbindt, is niet hun onderwerp maar hun houding. Onbestemdheid verschijnt niet als vaagheid of tekort, maar als intentionele openheid: een ruimte waarin betekenis zich kan vormen zonder vooraf bepaalde bestemming. Doorheen de jaren is die openheid een constante geworden in Koens manier van kijken, werken en zich verhouden tot de wereld. Het voorlopige mag blijven bestaan. Het onafgewerkte krijgt recht van spreken. Het onverwachte wordt niet geweerd maar ontvangen.

In deze bundel functioneren de teksten als drie kamers binnen één huis in een stad van water. Hun onderlinge volgorde ligt niet vast. Kamers kunnen telkens opnieuw worden betreden, herschikt, anders geordend. Wat in de ene configuratie als oorsprong verschijnt, wordt elders gevolgd; wat afsluit, kan openen. Niet de inhoud verschuift, maar het standpunt vanwaaruit zij wordt gelezen.

Betekenis ontstaat hier niet alleen uit wat er staat, maar ook uit de plaats die het inneemt. Zoals een boot haar route vindt tussen architectuur en haar fundamenteën, beweegt de lezer door de tekst, geleid door stroming, niet door verplichting. De ordening wordt instrument, de volgorde een stille regie.

Zo tekent zich het scenario af van één boek in drie mogelijke configuraties – een constructie waarin onbestemdheid niet wordt opgelost maar bewoond.

Guidecca, februari 2026



THE EXHIBITION *The Indeterminate Journey* also consisted of three components: a floor plan of a bus milled into a wooden floor; eighteen full-scale reproductions of works by the Flemish landscape painter Joachim Patinir; and a six-hour Norwegian film on YouTube, shot from the cabin of a moving locomotive, comparable to the monotonous train images that were broadcast on television for hours on end two decades ago.

## Room 01 Breda

The floor of the exhibition space was built up of multiple layers. Milling it out produced a bas-relief, a topographical model that simultaneously evoked a stratified landscape. These layers functioned as geological strata — carriers of memories that seemed to settle ever more deeply into the terrain. What particularly strikes me in Patinir's work is the way he painted the landscape himself, while assistants added the figures. Without prior agreements, the figures appeared wherever the assistants chose to place them. This generates a remarkable tension: the viewer can read the landscape but not the figures themselves. They are, as it were, hermits — present, yet without overview. They know their immediate surroundings but lack the whole. Patinir's concept is both simple and radical: a pronounced contrast between the panoramic vision of the spectator and the limited gaze of the figures.

This thought brought me back to an exercise during my military service. We were given an assignment, along with a compass and a staff map whose centre had been burned

away. The only way to complete the task was to walk straight ahead until we had left the burned-out area behind us. For the exhibition, I had a hole burned into a map, which Frederik Vergaert, artistic director of Lokaal 01, reproduced as a post-card.

The culmination of the exhibition was a bus journey with an unknown destination. Only during an indeterminate journey – without direction or expectation – can the landscape truly be experienced. Once the destination is known, attention ceases. Like Patinir's figures, we were absorbed by the experience itself.

The indeterminate journey has nothing to do with risk-driven “high adventure travelling,” in which danger is engineered as a stimulus. The essence of reading a landscape lies precisely in the absence of expectation.

The journey began at the exhibition, which provided a framework without fixing anything. Previous experiences, including travels to Sarajevo and Iceland, had taught me that the absence of assignments or objectives is essential. When students later recounted what they had seen during the day, the observations were so diverse that no imposed task could ever have produced such richness.

This experience seamlessly aligned with personal travels: the unplanned return from Spain, or an impulsive journey to Venice, where constant disorientation led to unexpected places, insights, and imagination. I realised more than ever that distraction is necessary – not only to wander, but to truly see.

During the actual bus journey, we first travelled as quickly as possible from one place to another, steadily heading north. We did not linger anywhere. This was a conscious choice: the travellers were not allowed to settle, so that they were continually forced to invent new mental and practical constructions in order to move. At the end of the journey, it was

decided that each participant would draw a mental map, which would then be overlaid with the others. I assumed that everyone would draw a different map, and that their superimposition would form a kind of bas-relief, like the milled-out floor plan of the bus in the exhibition.

The aim of the journey was not to build memories, but to create voids — zones without direction, without foothold — precisely those voids that continue to haunt an experience.

At our departure from Breda, we used an outdated map on which a large yellow area was marked. We tried to remain largely within that yellow zone. As we continued, it began to snow ever more heavily. Eventually, we had no choice but to keep driving: the snow prevented us from leaving the motorway. It was bitterly cold, biting. When we woke up after a night in the minibus, we found ourselves in a village where the inhabitants were already outside early in the morning. We bought bread, drank coffee. The participants washed and changed in the snow — outdoors, without any shelter. Every sense of privacy had completely vanished.

We were briefly in Prague, but the place was so emphatically determined that we left immediately. In another town, I lodged the participants in a guesthouse, while I slept in the bus, in the parking lot of a supermarket.

After that, we took the train to an extreme northern destination: Gdańsk, because the travellers wanted to see the sea. The sea turned out to be frozen. We returned to the station, and there I saw — for the second time on that journey — the name Białystok on a sign. The word evoked something in me, though I did not yet know exactly what. We bought tickets again and departed. In Białystok, we discovered that we had arrived in Narodowy, a region Simon Schama describes in *Landscape and Memory* as the realm of the Lithuanian bison. A place where a kind of primaevial forest still exists, in which

branches, roots, and plants intertwine in compact, almost sculptural layers – like milling work, like geological sediments, like maps laid over one another. At that moment, we knew we had reached our final destination.

We made soup from wild mushrooms, took a handful of earth with us, and then returned home.



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De  
onbestemde  
reis

7 DECEMBER  
T/M 23 DECEMBER

KOEN DEPREZ  
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