

ODE TO AN INDETERMINATE CONSTRUCTION

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

Introduction / Factual Context

It is late in the afternoon when the owner, Geert Verbeke (1953–, hereafter G.V.), walks across the parking lot of the Verbeke Foundation. The light is low. A white steel construction catches the sun and reflects it without warmth. The air is clear but not sharp. There is hardly any wind.

The immense structure under construction has stood there since 2023, yet it seems to continually reposition itself in time in relation to its surroundings. Not through displacement, but through a shift in meaning in relation to Time. It is not finished, yet neither is it unfinished. It suggests use without dictating it. It is present without imposing itself.

G.V. slows his pace. He knows this terrain better than anyone. And yet this object continues to keep him at a distance. As if it refuses to be possessed — even by the one who houses it.

Construction

According to visual artist Koen Deprez (1961–, hereafter K.D.), who completed the project, “construction” should not be read or understood here in its technical or architectural sense. This is not about load-bearing capacity, stability, or calculation. It is about a mental operation: bringing elements together without a predetermined outcome.

Koen Deprez

“The indeterminate construction does not offer a solution but a condition. It is the result of a decision not to decide. To allow form without finality. To allow structure without narrative. What is constructed is not the object but the possibility of meaning.”

Mr. Reverse Air Machine, as the construction is called, follows on from a project K.D. realised years earlier for Lokaal 01 in Breda in 2012.

Over the years, G.V. has become not only an entrepreneur, but also an exceptional collector of collages. He owns more than 7,000 collages and assemblages by countless artists. Of the collage work of the surrealist artist, composer, poet, writer, and gallery owner Édouard Léon Théodore Mesens (1903–1971, hereafter ELT.M.), he owns more than thirty collages, all numbered.

Through his engagement and museum-oriented collecting practice at the Verbeke Foundation, the groundwork was laid for a virtual encounter with E.L.T. Mesens in the Foundation’s parking lot.

In order to give this virtual encounter tangible form, this text makes use of a *priem* — a literary device, as Viktor Shklovsky would call it — which blends historical sources with factual elements in order to bring about a dialogue. This dialogue brings together the thoughts, visions, and insights of both entrepreneurs, without any physical conversation ever having taken place. It forms an artistic and intellectual construct that explores the relationship between entrepreneur-collector G.V. and collage artist ELT.M., and the way Mr. Reverse Air Machine functions as a binding object.

Mr. Reverse Air Machine reached completion at the end of 2024, after all white metal components had been gathered

and K.D. had made choices regarding their nature, position, and composition. The project is the result of a prolonged process of collecting, directing, and assembling autonomous objects into a polyphony of iron.

In this sense, the work is neither a machine nor a sculpture, but rather an indeterminate construction: an assembly without a predetermined function, in which components with divergent histories temporarily converge and generate meaning through their mutual tension.

The virtual encounter between G.V. and ELT.M. took place at the foot of Mr. Reverse Air Machine. Koen Deprez himself was not present that afternoon.

Dialogue between G.V. & ELT.M.

G.V.

“Edouard, you must not read it as a machine. That doesn’t work. It is an accumulation of lives, a polyphony of iron. Each part breathes its own past.”

ELT.M.

“Exactement. Des objets jetés, des pièces de machines... But tell me, how and when were all these voices brought together?”

G.V.

“Between 2023 and 2024. Through donations, auctions, sometimes pure coincidence. Each component brought its own rhythm — creaking, heavy metal, silent resistance.”

ELT.M.

“And the artist? Who determined how these elements relate to one another?”

G.V.

“Koen Deprez, a visual artist with a background in architecture, decided everything: the nature of the assembly, the

position of each object. My role was limited to gathering the components, making them available — ready to meet one another.”

ELT.M.

“Fascinating. You collect, he directs, and yet each object remains autonomous.”

G.V.

“Yes. They only meet here. An aircraft fuselage from TU Delft next to a hijacked El Al landing gear from Lufthansa, silos beside a bulk freight truck, turbines. No shared past.”

Ting... dull steel... a delayed collision.

ELT.M.

“A cadavre exquis in metal. Each element follows its own grammar, and only in this composition does meaning arise.”

G.V.

“Exactly. Like the cadavre exquis of words, but in steel and bolts. It grinds, it collides — abrasive sounds, forcefully fixed — and yet a coherence emerges.”

ELT.M.

“Every voice remains audible. None dominates. The history of each component resonates through the whole.”

G.V.

“It moves against its former rhythm. Slow... heavy... recalcitrant. Contradictory and harmonious at the same time.”

ELT.M.

“It is almost alive. Not a machine, not an object, but a constellation of stories and times — an indeterminate construction that sustains itself.”

G.V.

“What does not belong together can nevertheless coexist. And in that coexistence, something emerges that is greater than the sum of its parts.”

ELT.M.

“So each component actively contributes to the whole?”

G.V.

“Through its history. Each object brings weight, time, and presence. Deprez places them, but their voices remain autonomous. Together they form a choir – metal on metal, breathing steel – visible and tangible.”

ELT.M.

“Mr. Reverse Air Machine is simultaneously work, being, and polyphony. Each component a voice, each metal a memory.”

G.V.

“A machine that does not function as a machine, but that exists.”

Closing / Special Note

The Verbeke site also contains a second segment of Mr. Reverse Air Machine. It consists of a section of a train that appears to float in the air. This burgundy railway carriage bears the subtitle Mr. Reverse Air Machine, The Immersive Experience.

ELT.M. notes that this title refers to a painting by René Magritte that he once sold at The London Gallery in London. This makes the addition not only a spatial and physical experience, but also a conceptual echo of the surrealist tradition that Mesens helped sustain as both gallerist and artist.

G.V. adds that the name Mr. Reverse originates from an alias Koen Deprez used during his conflict with the Order of Architects. The name marks a reversal, a strategy of displacement and resistance, closely aligned with the character of both the designer and the construction. According to G.V., Mr. Reverse Air Machine is a self-portrait.



