



Good Intentions  
Judging the Art of Encounter

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# Foreword

In early Spring 2003, Lex ter Braak, director of the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture known in The Netherlands as Fonds BKVB, asked me to consider a follow-up to my article 'Leegte als hoorn des overvloeds' (Emptiness a Horn of Plenty, *de Volkskrant*, 1999). On the basis of conversations with Roé Cerpac, Alicia Framis and Suchan Kinoshita, I had placed the art of encounter in the tradition of iconoclasm. 'Form? Form just sits in the way of art', Framis declared. At that time, her clear and categorical reply had led me to call Framis and the other 'encounter artists' 'morfo-clasts'. Now, I was no longer satisfied with this characterization. It turned out there was not so much dislike of form after all among the artists who entered into encounters with the public. It wasn't about a fusion between art and life either. But what then did these encounters entail? This was a question which continued to occupy my mind. At last, commissioned by the Fonds BKVB, I could start looking for an answer.

I am indebted to Lex ter Braak for his patience and constructive criticism. I would also like to thank artists Roé Cerpac, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Hans Christiaan Klasema and Wally Walter Stevens for their cooperation, and Christine de Baan, Ilse Bulhof, Rob van Gerwen and Ad van Rosmalen for their discerning comments. And finally, I would like to thank my husband Albert, without whose stimulus and support this essay would never have come about.

Erik Hagoort

# Introduction

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions”, or so I was told when I announced I was going to write an essay about judging the art of encounter. Granted, the artists who had organized all those meetings, meals, walks, trips, community parties and activities in recent years may have meant well, but the outcome left a lot to be desired, to say the least. Besides, the art of encounter had had its day anyway, my companion went on. It was characteristic of the frivolous 1990s. In the new millennium, a harsher era called for more ‘explicit’ art.

Judgment passed, the art of encounter passé: the discussion seemed closed. But the phrase only brushed the subject matter. It warns that you have to act on your intentions, or you are likely to fall into sin. Or, less pedantically, it implies that good intentions are not enough. But if one thing is clear, it’s that the artists who have applied themselves to the art of encounter, have definitely acted on their intentions. There have been countless ‘meetings’. Nevertheless, many people still regard this art form as inadequate, as if the artists aren’t making good their promises. However, what exactly is left to be desired, remains hazy. More and more, it is starting to seem that the actual judgment of the art of encounter is flawed.

There is a myriad of opinions. Whether it involves low-key lounging or more ambitious, socially engaged encounters, art critics have assuredly said their piece. The first art form, known as relational aesthetics, has often been branded elitist and naive, or rather magnanimous in its naiveté, sometimes even revolutionary. The other, social commitment, has frequently been dismissed as the exploitation of ‘the man in the street’, or extolled as a token of solidarity in a society riddled with cynicism. But this diversity of opinions has not been able to mask a certain uneasiness where the art of encounter is concerned.

In my view, the fact that the art of encounter does not involve any concrete objects, concepts or performances only partly explains this uneasiness. The elusiveness of encounters

does not make determining how to merit them as works of art any easier. But that shouldn't be an excuse for not trying. Of course, not all artists succeed in expressing their reasons articulately, but some have voiced their objectives in plain language: solidarity, perseverance, loyalty, responsibility, susceptibility, submission, curiosity, courage, friendship, intimacy, sometimes even love. It is significant that most art critics at best merely draw attention to these concepts, without actually inquiring into their meaning, and prefer to maintain an abstract discourse about relational aesthetics and engagement.

In the art of encounter moral reasons are at play. And it is exactly that incentive that Dutch art critics are struggling with, as the collection of essays *Nieuw engagement* (New Commitment)<sup>1</sup> recently illustrated. Art does not lend itself to commitment, is the general feeling. Artists wishing to use art as a vehicle for moral dispositions, are bound to be disappointed, is the preconceived opinion. According to art critic Hans den Hartog Jager, 'the best artists (...) stand aloof from society', which is fairly emblematic of the consensus that in Western civilisation art enjoys the privilege of being able to thrive at a distance from the responsibilities of everyday life, and that it should stay that way.<sup>2</sup>

'Jenseits von Gut und Böse' holds true for a lot of art, even art that is passed off as the art of encounter. But it doesn't apply to the artwork of a small group of individual artists who work with moral dispositions, dealing with them freely, in a manner which seems completely natural to themselves and their kindred spirits. I propose that we take a closer look at these artists – with appropriate reservations. Not because artists are on slippery ground when it comes to morality, and certainly not because artists shouldn't be allowed to explore that field in their work. We must however bear in mind that others have already led the way, and that morality has all the earmarks of a well-ploughed field, or one struck by catastrophe, where every

building stone lies in disarray, to use Alasdair MacIntyre's famous characterization of the state of contemporary thought and dialogue on morality.<sup>3</sup> In art as well as in morality, there are no clear judgment criteria, which explains why the art critics have so many reservations about drawing in morality in their judgment. But it's simply a case of cold feet.

MacIntyre, and with him philosophers such as Michel de Certeau, Martha Nussbaum and Ilse Bulhof argue that the quality of moral dispositions is at issue, and not just in art. It is their view that even in a pluralistic society, where no definite normative concept prevails, we still strive to do good and to develop moral dispositions which are in keeping with this striving, generating new moral dispositions, perhaps even new alternative virtues. In their bid to interpret and find ways to judge these dispositions, these philosophers have drawn inspiration from the arts, notably from the performing arts, an art form in which dispositions are often presented, sometimes even represented.

The art of encounter demonstrates affinity with the performing arts, an art form which has aroused the interest of philosophers. It therefore seems a good idea to take a closer look at their findings. It will show that the art of encounter isn't that hazy at all. It will demonstrate that it's not at all impossible to determine its merits. Especially contemporary virtue ethics can offer a starting point for judging the art of encounter. However, as will become clear, this essay will have to take a close look at the judgment of the art of encounter as well: in judging the encounters, the critic's disposition comes into play.

Which leaves us the remark that the art of encounter has had its day. It certainly does seem that the heydays are over. As *Metropolis M* editor-in-chief Domeniek Ruyters recently remarked, 'In the art world, the number of meetings has dropped significantly.' But it assuredly wasn't Ruyters's intention to

bury the art of encounter in the mausoleum of history with this remark. In fact, in his opinion, the scope of possibilities has actually broadened.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, he rightly argues that the personally motivated commitment shown by the artists, demonstrates a 'common desire to give shape to a world which is not riddled with cynicism'.<sup>5</sup>

All the more reason to take a close look at the artwork of those artists who continue to apply themselves to the art of encounter and to work on dispositions which are in accordance with a desire for good. What exactly is implied by 'good', remains to be seen. One thing's for sure: the artists who feature in this essay all mean well. They all plan on holding on to their beliefs. And they certainly don't just rely on their good intentions. There is a strong desire to gain a deeper insight; some of the artists are even developing a new perspective for determining their positions. The judgment of the art of encounter has only just begun.

# 01

Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija got small thanks for his pains when he called a meeting at the New York Gallery 303 in 1991.<sup>6</sup> One of the visitors threw an egg. Then the other visitors followed suit, and before you could say 'omelette', egg white was dripping from the walls. Tiravanija had supplied twelve egg cartons for the occasion. But these eggs were not for throwing; the visitors were supposed to boil and eat them. The gallery had been fitted out with kettles, egg timers, salt and pepper, chairs and a table.

It could have been such a pleasant encounter: striking up a conversation whilst preparing the food, listening to the kettle singing and the timers whistling, looking into each other's eyes whilst peeling and eating the eggs. An encounter without reason, or purpose. But those present weren't really in the mood. Perhaps they didn't understand what was expected of them, or maybe they were just a boisterous lot. Be it as it may, the artist did not intervene. Tiravanija did not try to direct the audience, or put them in their place. Nor did he slink off with his tail between his legs. He just looked on idly. Of course Tiravanija had hoped that the visitors would have boiled the eggs instead of pelting them at the walls. Of course he cared. However, contrary to what you'd expect, he didn't consider the gathering baptized in egg-white a washout. He had been the one to set the conditions. But he didn't want to influence the actual events. He didn't want to be in control. The audience didn't have to carry out what he bore in mind. The artist wanted to avoid laying down the law to the audience, hoping instead that it would ease itself away from a conventional, detached attitude towards art. Any interference from his end would put a blot on the picture. Dropping a hint by boiling a couple of eggs himself, was the farthest he would go. The possibility that the audience might misbehave, was a risk he was willing to take.

At about the same time as Tiravanija's event *True to Life* took place in New York, preparations were being made in Chicago

for a mega project entitled *Culture in Action*. In the summer of 1993, after two years of intensive preparations under the auspices of non-profit art organisation *Sculpture Chicago* and directed by curator Mary Jane Jacob, a dozen artists finally got to work on their project. For months, they joined forces with communities in Chicago which they had either chosen themselves or which had been assigned to them by the organisation. Like Tiravanija, they anticipated 'a more intimate and meaningful relationship between the artist and the audience',<sup>7</sup> but contrary to Tiravanija, the objectives of the various projects had been clearly defined. As a 'new genre public art', *Culture in Action* was to raise issues that touched 'the hearts of the man in the street': employee participation, poverty, homelessness, aids, the environment. Through art, the communities would obtain tools to forge solidarity and to combat social injustice.

*Culture in Action* aimed to have a direct impact on social life. Tenants living in ghetto areas organised a multi-ethnic neighbourhood parade, sweet factory workers designed and produced a new candy bar, they laid out a vegetable garden for hiv and aids patients, and teenagers living on the streets founded a video-cooperative. Curator Mary Jane Jacob trumpeted forth the fundamental shift which in her view was playing out: a shift 'from promoting aesthetic quality to contributing to the quality of life, from enriching lives to saving lives'.<sup>8</sup>

In retrospect, *True to Life* and *Culture in Action* marked the breakthrough of the art of encounter. Despite his gathering being baptized in egg white, Tiravanija was soon to proceed on a triumphal procession through the international art world. Many a biennale and well-known art gallery and exhibition space invited him to come and cook Thai food with an audience. The select company generally accepted his invitation obediently. In the 1990s, more artists went on to set the conditions for encounters, with Tiravanija's approach as their beacon. *Culture in Action* also was a breakthrough: it served as a model

for a whole range of socially engaged art projects. Elements of *Culture in Action* can still be found in art projects organised by artists in disadvantaged city areas to this very day.

And so recent art history has developed two more off-shoots. One representing low-key, lounge-type gatherings, the other large-scale socially engaged activities. Various terms have come into use: relational aesthetics or new naïveté, and at the other end of the spectrum: socially engaged art. One shoot embraced intimacy as its principle, the other commitment. Both shoots seemingly developed independent of each other. Each could boast its own circle of fans.

But from the outset it was also evident that both shoots had something very important in common: whether it involved a nice chat in private or socially engaged activities, the audience was expected to take part, to 'interact'. Within the framework set by the artist, the public was to throw off its allegedly passive, consumptive attitude by eating, strolling, dancing and talking. The encounter was the essence, not looking at an art object or attending a performance. Lacking proper form and elusive by nature, the encounter didn't fall under the category of social sculpture either.

As early as 1986, Arthur Danto had argued that, ever since Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* had made asking questions about art more important than its production, art had turned into philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Conceptual artists had already demonstrated that an idea or text which expressed this notion, could by itself be potent enough to be appreciated as a work of art. Joseph Beuys's democratization projects had already shown that the public could throw off its passive attitude and start to play an active role in art. And the idea that the process of working together could be more important than the final result, had been tried and tested years ago by social artist groups such as John Latham and Barbara Stevini's *English Artists' Placement Group* (1966 - 1989). The evanescent quality of art of encounter therefore was not so sensational as one might think.

Nevertheless, the encounters made the art critics feel uncomfortable. Perhaps more so because art criticism itself, instead of the art work, was becoming evanescent. In the case of *True to Life*, for example, every random outcome seemed valuable. And as far as *Culture in Action* goes, the work was so embedded in the social structures, that to render an aesthetic judgment seemed preposterous. In both cases, criticism and appreciation were kept floating in the air.



## 02

French curator Nicolas Bourriaud is known as a fervent adherent of relational aesthetics. He has made a strong case for the idea that art can be viewed as an invitation to share the world. In Bourriaud's view, all artwork has relational aspects because it aims at interaction. Art binds, art is a bonding agent, art is 'agglutination' (a sort of 'social glue'), Bourriaud argues<sup>10</sup> – aspects which, as Bourriaud rightly remarks, aren't exactly subject to aesthetic criteria. How we should then merit the various forms of the art of encounter, is an issue which Bourriaud has nevertheless failed to address. His enthusiasm has resulted in wonderful but extremely vague definitions, such as the untranslatable 'l'inframince social' for the ephemeral 'social interstice' where relational art professedly subsides. And, as if to divert one's attention from his shadowy line of reasoning, he makes play with the subversive nature of relational aesthetics. According to Bourriaud, relational aesthetics are just about the last enclave of interhuman contact, amidst growing superficiality in a consumer society. His activist style is supposed to charm us out of raising difficult, discerning questions about the art of encounter.

Bourriaud has found an ally in curator Jens Hoffmann, who has written illuminating articles on the art-historical backgrounds of relational aesthetics and the artists' motives. Hoffmann, however, has such a high opinion of this art form that it's almost impossible for an artist to meet his high standards. His assertion that these artists 'develop and effect strong social ties',<sup>11</sup> is more or less an open invitation to art critics to look for examples of the contrary within his own writings. Art critic Anna Tilroe, for one, had a field day with Italian artist Patrick Tuttofuoco's bike project *Velodream* (2001). Tuttofuoco invited visitors to do laps around a racecourse in brightly decorated go-carts – hardly the epitome of 'developing strong social ties'. Less convincing, however, is Tilroe's conclusion that Hoffman's commitment as a curator therefore amounts to next

to nothing.<sup>12</sup> Tilroe, too, has failed to address the issue how to judge projects bearing the seeds of social engagement, projects which also feature in Hoffmann's work as a curator.<sup>13</sup>

Art critic Cornel Bierens's cynical review of the art of encounter echoes the same uneasiness, steamrolling over just about every contemporary artwork that doesn't require proper craftsmanship. His call for artists to produce excellent work is commendable, but he fails to examine whether and how the conditions for an encounter could entail artistry, something which, in his view, is out of the question as far as a conversation, or a meal, or a stroll is concerned.<sup>14</sup>

A more elaborate, informative and inquisitive approach can be found in Rutger Pontzen's *Nice! Over nieuw engagement in de hedendaagse kunst* (Nice! New Commitment in Contemporary Art).<sup>15</sup> Pontzen has painted a rosy picture of this art genre in the Low Countries, warning us not to over-exaggerate the artists's commitment. Micro commitment has its own merits. All the artists are out for, according to Pontzen, is to give a small audience a nice experience. Pontzen's tongue-in-cheek-tone often coaxes a smile and can have a sobering effect, but he too fails to address the issue how to judge this form of art.

In reviewing the art of encounter, theorists have had a slightly easier task than art critics and curators: they don't have to choose sides. Nevertheless, they too seem slightly uncomfortable when it comes to the art of encounter. According to art theorist Camiel van Winkel, the artists' endeavours to enter into more intense relationships with daily reality can be seen as a reaction to minimalism's endeavours to banish the personal and the intimate in the confrontation with the art work. As a reaction to the overriding public nature of art, artists began to feel the desire for privacy, seclusion, intimacy and exclusivity.<sup>16</sup> This would explain why some artists started organizing encounters, and their desire to shield them from onlookers

as much as possible. An interesting theory, but Van Winkel has avoided the obvious issue of how to appreciate these encounters, failing to scrutinize the intimacy of these encounters. Which is strange. Just because the artists shield off the encounters, it doesn't necessarily mean that they shouldn't evoke interest among art critics.

Art historian Jeroen Boomgaard has knocked the bottom out of a few myths, including the idea that the art of encounter is about 'micro commitment', about creating a micro-utopia. On the contrary, it has nothing to do with commitment in the traditional sense, whether on a smaller or larger scale. According to Boomgaard, the encounters organized by artists, albeit meals, walks or protected dreams, are a celebration of a state of insouciance. Although there are certain merits to this 'new naiveté', Boomgaard is not specific as to what these merits are. But for Boomgaard, that's not really an issue; in his view, it doesn't go beyond an 'adolescent dream anyway.'<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, Boomgaard has pointed out the risks involved in these kinds of mega art projects initiated by the government, such as Jeanne van Heeswijk's community project *De Strip* (The Strip). In his opinion, projects such as these are too clear-cut; the artists' commitment is easily hedged in by bureaucracy.<sup>18</sup> Artists should be free to do as they please. Boomgaard subsequently calls on them to continue to create their own platforms. However, he doesn't address the issue of how to create and protect the freedom of encounters.

The time has now come for a considered review of the art of encounter. 'Instead of broad condemnation, a more detailed analysis is called for, taking into account all its contradictions and weaknesses, but keeping in mind its possibilities', as Sven Lütticken rightly stated.<sup>19</sup> Art historian Lütticken calls for further review, and raises the question which elements of this art form are worthy of further development, therefore implying common ground at the basis of such a judgment. But there

is no common ground. It still remains unclear how we should judge encounters, let alone how we can determine what is worthy of further development.

# 03

If you visited the exhibition *Commitment* in May 2002 in Rotterdam, chances are that you ran into a tall, young man whilst looking at the more than one hundred and twenty artworks by Fonds BKVB-funded artists. Perhaps he deliberately kept apart from the others, or timidly imposed his company on you. He wasn't wearing a coat, and could often be seen chatting to the attendants at the front desk, therefore giving the impression that he was involved with the exhibition in some way. How exactly, only became clear once he had invited you to step inside his consultation room. It was a separate wooden building, just big enough for two chairs and a small worktop. On the walls were bits of paper covered with handwriting. There, over a cup of coffee or tea, you could talk about art in general or about the works in the exhibition, or about anything which sprang to mind.

For sixteen days, during opening hours, art historian Arne Henderiks worked from his office as a kind of exhibition animator, albeit a very discrete animator. He didn't seem to be set upon entertaining the visitors. A conversation in his consultation room was not necessarily his intention. There was no systematic approach, or sophisticated discussion technique. When asked about his role in the exhibition, he stumbled around for words – in truth, he wasn't quite sure himself. 'He was there' for the visitors, that much was certain. He regularly conferred by telephone with Roé Cerpac, the artist who had invited him. Having recently become a father, Cerpac wasn't present at the exhibition, although the Fonds BKVB had actually invited him, and not Henderiks, to contribute. Seeing that he would not be able to attend the exhibition, Cerpac had enlisted Henderiks's help. The preparations for the project had been a joint effort.

At the time, Cerpac had already made his mark as an artist who shows a sense of involvement with other artists and scholars. He mostly kept them company for the duration of a project, or even longer, the objective being to offer them support,

and not to act as kind of mental coach and certainly not in order to leave his own mark on the project. His contribution to *Commitment* was no different. Henderiks was present at the exhibition every day. However, we mustn't think that he was acting as a substitute for Cerpac. That was besides the point. Amidst a profusion of shapes and images at the exhibition, Cerpac and Henderiks took on the task of creating space for what was, as yet, without form or shape. Space for meeting, Henderiks explained, space for whatever comes along, for spontaneous developments. Rather than to determine what happened at the meetings, the idea was to leave everything open. The stammering, the awkward pauses, the discomfort, the anticipation: it was all part of the game.

It sounded familiar. In the 1990s, artists had often enough entered into conversations with visitors, encouraging them to shake off their role as a visitor and to participate in the art. But with Henderiks and Cerpac, the visitors were allowed to remain visitors. The audience did not have to participate at all. As long as Henderiks, and through him Cerpac, were involved with the public.

During a conversation with Henderiks, in his consultation room, he intimated that it was tougher than expected.<sup>20</sup> After building up the exhibition and the initial excitement, his enthusiasm had begun to waver. But then, remembering how they had worked together, Henderiks got second wind, leaving his office to mingle with the crowd, in the hope of experiencing the same sense of wonder he had clearly felt during the run-up with Cerpac. A sense of wonder, he explained, at the inspiring effects of working together. Because that was what made his encounters with Cerpac special: the run-up to the exhibition was like spending time with a good friend, Henderiks went on to explain. Perhaps he wanted to hold on to, to reexperience the elusive, shared intimacy.

Seeing Henderiks at work, it was evident that his undertaking was an incursion on the intimacy experienced when

viewing art. For those quietly taking in the art works, the animating art historian's presence could be experienced as a rude intrusion. But Henderiks argued that he only wanted to offer the visitors the opportunity to catch their breath, to step outside the cocoon of viewing art, to just for a moment exchange the intimacy experienced when viewing art for another kind of shared intimacy. In order to realize such a transformation, Henderiks in an almost Aristotelian manner constantly endeavoured to improve his behaviour, the friendly, correct way in which he approached the visitors, so as to heighten their receptivity to the intimacy that he wanted to share with them.

At about the same time as Henderiks was trying to be on his best behaviour at the *Commitment* exhibition, Kirsten Leenaars was undertaking a similar project in a block of flats in Westwijk area of Vlaardingen. The shopping arcade on the ground floor was vacant, and it would take at least a couple of years before the renovation of the flats above got underway. In the meanwhile, on the initiative and under the guidance of Jeanne van Heeswijk, the shopping arcade was to become a 'dynamic cultural zone', titled *De Strip*.<sup>21</sup> Museum Boijmans van Beuningen opened a second facility there, Showroom Mama organized a project space and artist Peter Westenberg initiated the *Uit + Thuis videomagazijn* (Home + Away Video Store). Several spaces were reserved for socio-cultural purposes and two former shop spaces were to serve as artists-in-residence studios. Again, Kirsten Leenaars's contribution to *De Strip* was at the invitation of Van Heeswijk. Firstly, together with artist Peter Westenberg, Leenaars made a film portrait of twelve families in the apartment block: *Bij ons in de familie* (Our Family). Subsequently, in Autumn 2002, she took up residency in one of the guest studios.

Leenaars transformed the former shop into a photo studio, which was to act as a meeting place for the neighbourhood, or at least that was the idea. Taking photographs was a way for

Leenaars to meet with local residents. The studio was to serve as a refuge, the camera as an excuse or catalyser for having a heart-to-heart or real contact with the residents. Unfortunately, however, the residents weren't all that interested. It was mostly children who took up the invitation to come round and have their photograph taken 'looking their very best'. In her account *Looks of Love*, Leenaars explains how it started to eat away at her: 'Why occupy yourself with people who haven't asked for your interference, under the pretext of art? What does social engagement mean, if there is no basis for trust?'

Elsewhere in her account, Leenaars states that she was looking for 'love as a motivating force'. Not love in the usual sense of the word, but as a specific way of looking. In her view, art could function as a specific kind of love, of consideration for others, a simulated friendly encounter, which, although recognized as art, could just as well be genuine. In Leenaars's opinion, this artificial love could come into being through taking photographs. And this artificial love should form the basis of her social commitment.

Henderiks's and Leenaars's undertakings are strongly reminiscent of the art work of Tiravanija and the *Culture in Action* artists. In both cases, it involves meetings, whether transient, fleeting and within the context of art, or for longer standing periods, more purposeful and outside the context of art. There are, however, disparities between Henderiks's and Leenaars's recent interactions and the encounters which took place more than a decade ago. Compared to their predecessors, Henderiks's and Leenaars's endeavours to meet seem less constrained, the audience less hedged in by the conditions set by the artist, with more space to be itself. The desire for intimacy less obligatory, the social involvement less hasty; their approach more normal, simpler, more personal, more basal. It is difficult to still be able to make out the two different offshoots in the art of encounter, one highly personal, one purely

activist. In each and every case, intimacy is a prerequisite for distinct social engagement.

Judging the art of encounter hasn't exactly become easier as a result of this recent development. We can judge purposive social actions by the measure of their effectiveness, but what if trust, intimacy, friendship and even love are in play? What is meant by this kind of artificial loyalty, friendship, intimacy and love? Are they a prerequisite for or an objective of an encounter? Can friendship be an aesthetical experience? Can intimacy entice and mobilize people, and to what end? Can art effect love, and use it to its advantage? Can art even interfere with the deepest stirrings of the soul?

# 04

There is a lot of confusion within the discussion about intimacy, especially about intimacy as an art form. As it turns out, the insights of philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven in the activist seventies are still surprisingly relevant to our times. According to Verhoeven, he often witnessed 'assaults on intimacy' taking place. However, Verhoeven was not referring to an invasion of our privacy by the government, industry, the media or the public. Nor was he referring to a violation of our alleged right to intimacy. After all, according to Verhoeven, you can only lay claim to specific things; it is impossible to lay claim to the uncontrollable, such as love, friendship or intimacy.

Verhoeven focuses his criticism mainly on 'the tendency to endeavour, by taking an active stand, to raise the intimate and the fundamental to an active, rational and publishable zone of existence.'<sup>22</sup> 'Within the sphere of intimacy,' he goes on to explain, 'talking, listening and acknowledging are the highest imaginable forms of activity. Anything else amounts to an action which, by its own nature, is an assault on intimacy, by presenting itself as a right, choice or possession.' It is possible, however, to 'share in an intimacy which occurs in a passive zone of existence in which one does not produce oneself, but rather finds oneself in a state of dependency.' In other words, we often imagine taking on an active role in matters which can in effect only be experienced passively: intimacy, friendship, love, happiness.

Verhoeven is sceptical of western culture's activist nature, which takes a dim view of passivity. According to Verhoeven, passivity is the biggest taboo in our society,<sup>23</sup> making it practically inconceivable that 'in the relationship between man and the world, purely passive observation or, at the very most, consideration of possible action, could play a far greater role than active, inciting activity.'<sup>24</sup> Verhoeven subsequently defined a contemplative or passive disposition as 'a deferment of action, as a result of a sense of marvel or incapacity'.<sup>25</sup>

The relation with art is clear. Art depends on marvel, and a sense of marvel suspends further action. It is art's passivity which makes art free from interference, and which is central to the autonomy of art. Still, Verhoeven had little faith in art. On a despondent note, he concluded: 'The aesthetics of our time have been corrupted by an ideology of action all too often to be a trustworthy ally in trying to protect intimacy.' According to Verhoeven, as soon as the artists try to bring about intimacy with their artwork, then the intimacy transforms 'from something existing at the heart of your inner being (in the literal sense), into something taken out of its normal environment, like a fish out of water; from then on, it has become a public matter, and completely immune to intimacy.'<sup>26</sup>

So does what Verhoeven say make sense? Is he right in saying that in their attempt to create intimacy by programming meetings, artists are actually violating intimacy? Do they actually underestimate the importance of the passive zone of life? If so, then according to Verhoeven's line of thought, their endeavours are both violent and doomed to failure.

It is true that in the 1990s, the art of encounter was inter-larded with activist rhetoric. It was all about mobilisation, participation, whether it involved low-key lounging or projects on a more ambitious scale. Over and over again, artists hammered away at the idea that the audience needed prodding, needed to be freed from its apathy. From their lips, passivity sounded like something dirty. In the same breath, they argued that the art world, museums in particular, did little more than reconfirm the public's consumer status. It was time to awaken the public from its slumber. This art form therefore seemed to share in the prevailing contempt for passivity, to its own detriment.

But let's not get too carried away by Verhoeven's apt, though somewhat quirky analysis. By no means all of the encounters correspond to his stereotype of activism. Admittedly, the public had to cross a threshold, to undertake action in order to allow

the encounter. A pleasant atmosphere or a noble cause could help things along. After having taken the first step, there could easily be room for passivity, for marvel. Naturally, success also depended on the readiness of those involved to adopt a receptive attitude, to wonder what was going to happen next. The less the artist interfered with the meeting's proceedings, the more room there was for what presented itself. The danger that a meeting could spin out of control was a risk that some artists, such as Tiravanija, were willing to take. He would sooner take that risk than mould the fresh 'passive zone' to his will. But it could also happen that the artist took on the role of bewildered participant, as was the case with Renée Kool's workshop at the Strasburg art academy in 1995. In the capacity of guest tutor, Kool allowed herself to learn from her students. Among other things, she learnt how to tango and was taught the trick of how to break a sugar cube in half with your fingers. The film that she made documents her sense of marvel and the pleasure she found in learning something.

Sure enough, artists started to 'program' intimacy, but by no means did this automatically lead to the proverbial 'fish out of water'. By screening off the intimacy, it was as if they were taking Verhoeven's admonishment to heart. Suchan Kinoshita went to extreme lengths. Those who registered at her travel agency in 1995, stood the chance of winning a 24-hour trip to an unknown destination in the company of the artist. There was no plan or schedule. Kinoshita's travel companion had to agree not to reveal any information about the trip. Kinoshita went on the trip a total of five times, without disclosing any details about the shared intimacy between the artist and travel companion, at least not within the art world. The exclusivity and, of course, the fact that the encounter had not been planned beforehand, were to guarantee the encounter's authenticity.

How completely different was Alicia Framis's work, who is generally considered to be an exponent of the intimate offshoot

of the art of encounter. In 1998 she gained general recognition by performing the role of *Dreamkeeper* during a number of night watches in the homes of volunteers, keeping watch over her host at the foot of the bed. She refused to discuss what had happened or was said during the encounter. Nevertheless, Framis had a preconceived plan, and she made no attempts to disguise it. The nightly encounters were part of a bigger project, *Loneliness in the City*. By spending the night with people, Framis said, she wanted to offer a remedy for the loneliness of the city dwellers. Dressed for the occasion, she swathed herself in an angelic white gown, seemingly appointing herself the role of a benevolent Florence Nightingale. Rather than constituting an encounter, *Dreamkeeper* resembled a suggestion or model of an encounter. Framis became proficient in appealing to the 'passive' zone of life, without actually putting it to the test.

Many artists have applied themselves to these kinds of pseudo-meetings, appealing to and suggesting intimacy, creating, as Rutger Pontzen put it, 'welcome intimacy', which usually boiled down to creating a nice ambiance. Pontzen: 'I am referring to active attempts to make a small group of people feel extremely comfortable. Why shouldn't they?'<sup>27</sup> But Pontzen's rhetorical question is a striking illustration of the noncommittal specificity of these kinds of encounters. This genre of encounters can be measured by the degree in which it manages to create a welcome feeling of intimacy among the participants – not a very exciting criterion in judging the art of encounter. We will, therefore, here leave aside this genre within the art of encounter.

Nor does Verhoeven's admonishment, 'a fish out of water', always hold for encounters with a noble social cause. To be sure, in this art form activist rhetoric played a far greater role than in its smaller, intimate counterpart; saving lives was more important than enriching lives, was a common sound at *Culture*



*in Action*. However, there was room for Verhoeven's passivity. And that didn't go unnoticed, even though it was seen as a point of negative criticism at first.

According to art critic Grant Kester, socially engaged art in general, and the project *Culture in Action* in particular, were guilty of 'aesthetical evangelicalism'.<sup>28</sup> The term seemed to hit the mark, given that in *Culture in Action* mental change was the key to improving the participants's position within the community and in society. Inviting individuals from fringe groups to actively participate in the artistic process, *Culture in Action* believed, would free them of their feeling of dejection. An ideology which, according to Kester, was a conformation of the idea that people only had themselves to blame for their marginal position in society, and that they could wrest themselves from this position by adopting a different attitude. And all this could be brought about by art.

However, art historian Miwon Kwon has argued that Kester has done *Culture in Action* wrong. Every now and then, a project did effect a personal, ethical transformation among participants, which could not be brushed aside as paternalistic 'aesthetic evangelicalism'. Together with fifteen street children in a Latino neighbourhood in Chicago, artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, for example, set up a video workshop. Youngsters could document their own lives in their own way. When *Culture in Action* was over, the artist continued to devote himself to the collective. In 2002, it was still running under the name *Street-Level Youth Media*. Kwon has stressed how much the project's success depended on the readiness of all those involved to spend time together for such a long period.<sup>29</sup> It was extremely important that the artist lived in the same neighbourhood, knew the residents well, and shared the same history. And that the artist was willing to spend time with the collective day in day out, for weeks, months, years, past the project's official closing date. A lot of circumstances were completely beyond the artist's control, as they were the collective's. A noble cause

served as a catalyst. Afterwards, it became an exercise in loyalty, and friendship, and inquisitiveness, and perseverance.

An adventure which art critics, to date, haven't really acknowledged. The question, which role loyalty, friendship and perseverance plays in the art of encounter, is a question most art critics prefer not to address. It could be that, like Verhoeven, they are of the opinion that moral dispositions such as these are intimate, and that they should therefore leave them well alone. But art criticism has never really voiced such concern. It is my opinion that art critics prefer to steer well clear of the problem regarding the role of moral values in the art of encounter because even raising the issue would suggest that artists can enter the field of morality in their artwork. This is taking it a step too far, even for those art critics who are favourably disposed towards meeting, such as Rutger Pontzen. His readiness stretches only so far as the encounters have an informal, 'feel good' character. And even those who feel less hesitant about artists operating within the field of morality, such as Sven Lütticken, hold onto the notional distinction between intimacy and engagement. Lütticken prefers to concentrate on 'explicitly political or social engagement', rather than relational aesthetics' 'feel-good ideology',<sup>30</sup> therefore restricting his examination to the issue whether or not art can bring about social change, and if so, in what way. But the artists who endeavour to meet, make no distinction between intimacy and commitment, instead making moral dispositions the vehicle of their art – so it's time for us to acknowledge the facts and stop beating about the bush.

## 05

Art is free from morality, or so we are often told. Works of art can be judged good or bad, but such classifications usually do not imply a moral value judgment. 'Art has been relegated to imagery, imagination and illustration, at the same time mapping out her impotence in regard to real life', artist Q.S. Serafijn stated.<sup>31</sup> In other words: so long as art sticks to her specialty, representation, then morality is not an issue. Representations, in any form whatsoever, are powerless and cannot therefore be held responsible for their undertakings, Serafijn argues. Which makes art free, placing her 'beyond good and evil'.

As a consequence, it is not customary to identify the artist with his or her art work. Just as a writer should not be judged by the behaviour of the main character in his or her novel, so the artist's disposition should not be measured by the themes in his or her work. Philosopher Rob van Gerwen has argued that even when it's hard to draw a distinction, as is the case with performance art for example, we still distinguish between the artist as a person and the artist as a 'persona'. We generally regard the latter to be morally exempt, making the person in question free of responsibility. A good example, according to Van Gerwen, is the famous incident of Marina Abramovic's performance *Rhythm 5* in 1975, in which Abramovic lay down naked in a circle of fire in front of an audience. Unfortunately, however, she started to suffer from lack of oxygen, and was too weak to get up again. Abramovic was choking to death, yet nobody stepped in. A doctor in the audience saved Abramovic's life only in the nick of time. Van Gerwen: 'In saving the person Abramovic, he had to destroy her artistic 'persona'. The doctor performed a moral act; to do so, he had to cast off his aesthetic position as a viewer of art'.<sup>32</sup> A clear proof, says Van Gerwen, of our tendency to distinguish between two domains, or rather between two dispositions: together, artist and audience switch over, cross over from one disposition to another, from moral responsibility to moral exemption, from person to 'persona'. Even if the artist's performance so closely resembles reality

that it is almost impossible to make a distinction, still the moral exemption remains in effect. Then the artist can bring harm to himself without anyone stepping in, as the Abramovic incident illustrates. Then a naked Oleg Kulik can bite unsuspecting passers-by in their shins, like a rabid dog, without being arrested. Or to give a more cheerful example, then Joseph Beuys can call for democratizing action using poignant symbols, without being taken seriously.

But the simple fact that a large number of people *did* take Beuys's appeal seriously, drew their own moral conclusions and gave shape to his appeal, each in their own way, suggests that the distinction between a moral and an artistic domain, or the switch from a person to a persona, does not always hold true. Of course we cannot hold representations – all those images, sculptures, installations, texts, concepts and performances which represent something – responsible for their moral consequences, as Serafijn rightly remarks, but that doesn't necessarily mean that art has no moral power. It is equally true, as Serafijn has demonstrated, that we automatically change our disposition the moment we are confronted with an artistic performance. However, not every viewer is ready to make the switch.

Political or religious fanatics, for example, often like to take pokes at the distinction between art and morality. In their view, any form of art that represents unwholesome matters is inherently pernicious.<sup>33</sup> *Their* disapproval people generally accept; they even tend to show compassion for their hurt feelings. Art isn't completely independent; but what's important is that it usually does not result in the art works being vandalized or artists being threatened or their lives endangered. Recently, however, Van Gerwen sounded the alarm, warning about tampering with art's moral exemption. According to Van Gerwen, even some experts in the field of aesthetics are not entirely free of blame, expounding the idea that art which depicts reprehensible behaviour, is aesthetically reprehensible. Van Gerwen has

alerted us to the fact that an important attainment is increasingly under pressure: art's power to let us experience something without having to respond in an active manner.<sup>34</sup>

Van Gerwen and Serafijn rightly contended that it is through works of art and artists that we often enjoy experiences or undergo feelings, or come to new ideas. We should be able to undergo these experiences without disturbance or interference, even if we find them offensive. Insofar as the readiness to suspend action is concerned, artwork and artist enjoy the privilege of existing beyond the realm of normal everyday responsibilities.

Granted, at times artists readily take advantage of this privilege, playing the holy innocent if their lack of appreciation of this privilege causes a commotion. The Amsterdam City Council, for example, described a project by Martijn Engelbregt as 'inappropriate'. In December 2003, Engelbregt distributed a survey among households in Amsterdam which gave the impression that the government was calling on people to turn in illegal immigrants. It stirred up a lot of fuss, the reason being that for a lot of people it wasn't clear that it was art.<sup>35</sup> Engelbregt had to justify his actions in numerous public debates and make his apologies.

However, there are artists for whom it is not about crossing the imaginary boundary between the moral and artistic domain. For them, the boundary does not even exist. Nor do they strive to ensue that they and the viewer switch between person and 'persona'. For these artists, art does not exist in a realm beyond morality. It is these artists, albeit few in number, who apply themselves to the art of encounter.

The concept of morality has several shades of meaning. It refers to a peremptory system of rules regarding good and evil, which are implicitly or explicitly bestowed or imposed upon people. It also refers to man's behaviour with regards to these

rules. In addition, as Michel Foucault demonstrated,<sup>36</sup> morality points to the manner in which we pay heed to the quality of our moral behaviour in everyday life. Other philosophers besides Foucault, including Ilse Bulhof, Michel de Certeau, Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum, have also contemplated this aspect of morality. They share a fascination for man's predilection to strive for the best, and on a daily basis, not just when a tricky problem or delicate situation arises. It is a personal disposition in which the focus is on the ethical quality of our daily lives. Subsequently, the way in which you do something, is just as important as what you do. With this view, these philosophers have given classical virtue ethics a new dimension.

These philosophical views are instrumental to the discourse on the art of encounter, since they draw in the quality of the presentation. The manner in which someone presents himself, has a quality of its own. We can experience the quality of the presentation; we can see it and hear it, and perhaps even feel it. We can try to make a qualitative distinction between the various ways in which positions are presented. And that is nicely in keeping with what's happening in the art of encounter. In the art of encounter, there are no objects, concepts or performances. We have to make do with what those involved present us with then and there at the meeting, or 'make present', to quote philosopher Ilse Bulhof. On a visible and perceptible level of meeting – the level of presentation, not representation – Van Gerwen's distinction between a person and a 'persona', or Serafijn's division between a moral and an artistic domain, seem less relevant, even untenable.

This opens up new perspectives. No longer do we have to fixate – to no avail – on an imaginary dividing line between art and morality. And the question whether moral dispositions can be art, is immaterial. It all revolves around what is presented in the art of encounter, and how to judge the presentation. Not that the art of encounter is an illustration of philosophical

ethics and vice versa. Nor have philosophers presented us with an instant touchstone by which we can judge this art form, let alone a list of criteria that art critics can apply directly. Philosophers and artists generally live in a world unto themselves. Nevertheless, a number of views within philosophical ethics can be instrumental to developing an alternative view of the 'what' and 'how' of the art of encounter.

## 06

Taking a moral disposition in hand presupposes the freedom to do so. The question is, how much room for manoeuvring people have. Michel de Certeau's contribution to this problem is noteworthy. In his essays, first published in a collection titled *Arts de faire* in 1974, former Jesuit and homo universalis De Certeau examines such issues as 'ways in which users proceed'.<sup>37</sup> The way in which we use recipes, household appliances or public roads, or apply rules of conduct, is not always in line with what we are supposed to do. We are wont to interpret prescribed procedures as we will, gently bending them to our will. At first, De Certeau took up a neutral position in his examination of forms of appropriation. In keeping with structural philosophy of the early 1970s, he looked for structures in everyday practices of appropriation. In later research, he focused more on the ethical effects of these practices, labelling them an ancient art form. An art form which in his view forms an analogy with the tactics used by fish, plants and insects to survive and to appropriate the new environment in which they find themselves.<sup>38</sup> The same applies to human beings: freedom manifests itself in tactical interpretation, however marginal. De Certeau examines how we give our lives direction using this marginal freedom.

Meetings follow set patterns; we are all aware of their unwritten prescripts. In daily life, we allow ourselves a marginal freedom to interpret these prescripts adroitly, to appropriate them, take advantage of them, play about with them, to change them slightly. Perhaps we could say that the art of encounter is a strategy for creating unforeseen liberties in art. However, there is a snag: according to De Certeau's definition, tactics are not synonymous with a strategy; instead, they are constantly changing, even for those who employ them. We cannot manipulate them. Any attempt to isolate these tactics or to use them strategically, immediately takes away their unforeseen, matter-of-course nature. And it is precisely in the unforeseen, that freedom exists, De Certeau argues.

We can, however, develop an eye for this kind of freedom; we can pay heed to it, prepare ourselves for situations in which these tactics might be employed. In his essays, De Certeau has himself attempted to concentrate, reflect and meditate upon this kind of freedom, to get a taste of it, if you will. In the same manner, he alludes to the possibility of developing an anticipatory disposition, which he has dubbed ‘faire avec’,<sup>39</sup> conveying that encounters always yield unforeseen preconditions for freedom. Preconditions which cannot be created, dictated, directed. However, we can anticipate and contemplate these preconditions, so as to recognize the freedom when it manifests or presents itself, so as to enjoy it and make use of it.

It is this ‘faire avec’ that some artists in the Netherlands have focused on in their meetings: Wally Walter Stevens, Roé Cerpac and Hans Christiaan Klasema. The meetings organized by these artists are nothing out of the ordinary. Wally Walter Stevens meets with friends, acquaintances and strangers on a daily basis: at home, on the streets and in the supermarket. Roé Cerpac has weekly one-on-one conversations with colleagues about ideas, projects and exhibitions, about the meaning of life, but also about the weather, in fact about anything which springs to mind. And Hans Christiaan Klasema lives together under one roof with a companion whom he is quite fond of. Stevens does not behave any differently than usual, Cerpac doesn’t employ any notable conversation techniques, Klasema does the washing-up together with his companion, just like anybody else. On the surface, their projects are fresh attempts to level the alleged gap between art and life. But with De Certeau in mind, we can begin to recognize what it’s really about: developing a disposition of ‘faire avec’.

For Stevens, every encounter is potentially both a pitfall and a source of freedom. In his view, an encounter is never ‘nor-

mal’. Indeed, for those who are at variance with the standard, ‘normal’ is never matter-of-course, as Stevens himself has experienced. If day in day out you are made to understand well and true that you are ‘different’, then there comes a moment when you’re completely fed-up with all the sniggering in the tram, pub or supermarket. Then it’s tempting to act out or to check yourself, in order to put an end to all the fuss. Stevens however prefers not to be led by somebody else’s reaction. He *simply* wants to be different. For more than thirty years now, he has dedicated his artistic life to creating this kind of freedom. At first, Stevens mostly addressed the issue of how to portray this kind of freedom. Later on, he started to focus on how to behave accordingly.

Stevens, of Dutch East-Indian descent, grew up in Jakarta. In 1948, he emigrated to the Netherlands. He started his career as a freelance typographer and graphic designer. At the beginning of the 1970s, he started to take photographs of himself as a transvestite. Stevens’s artwork gained recognition when Willem de Ridder published the self-portraits in his famous music magazine *Aloha*. In 1976, curator Wies Smals invited Stevens to contribute to a photo exhibition and performances at contemporary art centre De Appel in Amsterdam. Stevens appeared before an audience dressed as a sadomasochistic homosexual. According to Stevens, his aim was not to cause outrage. He *simply* wanted to be *different*. For the most part the viewers, however, took it as a sham performance by an eccentric gay, so he stopped performing. There followed a period in which he took portrait photographs of others. The portraits were exhibited at the Arnhem Museum for Modern Art in 1996.

With his recent project *Elke dag een antiperformance* (Every Day An Anti-performance, 2004), Stevens has taken an unusual step.<sup>40</sup> At the onset of the project, which lasted for a year, he made his intentions known to the press. Stevens: ‘What’s unique about this project, is that I don’t have to do anything,

don't have to make anything; all I have to do is be myself.' In his exposé, the artist points out the fact that anomalies in the social structure can have a creative function. People who are different, go against the accepted norms and therefore create space for freedom. By characterizing himself a 'born anomaly', according to this line of reasoning 'being yourself' fits in with 'being an anomaly', which, in turn, tallies with 'adopting a creative role in society'.

What's characteristic of Stevens's line of thought, is that a way of being (being an anomaly) transforms into a way of behaviour (adopting a creative role) almost without notice. In order to press home this idea, Stevens has appointed himself 'defender of the freedom to be anomalous'. Of course he is aware that the freedom to be 'anomalous' cannot be taken for granted. 'Time and time again, you have to fight for your freedom', Stevens says. Stevens characterizes his anti-performance as a quest for 'a balance between non-conformity and conformity': without acting out and without restraining oneself either. It is impossible to determine beforehand what kind of behaviour it may engender in daily life. Each time can be different, depending on the encounters experienced by the artist.

The fact that in applying this tactic, the naturalness referred to by De Certeau is not lost, has to do with the fact that Stevens's regard for his behaviour comes naturally to him. According to Stevens, he is just being himself. That's why he can claim he does not have to *do* anything for his project. But it ignores the fact that 'doing nothing' entails a permanent anticipation of the possibility offered by a meeting to 'simply be different' and therefore oneself. Anticipating this kind of freedom is like running the gauntlet; a certain amount of dexterity is called for. It requires a paradoxical demeanour, manoeuvring between calculation and carelessness, between cunning and 'laissez-faire'.

Ever since he graduated from the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 1995, Roé Cerpac has gained recognition in a small circle as an artist who, on invitation and in exchange for financial compensation, shows 'involvement' with artists and scholars. He also shows 'involvement' – without financial compensation – with people met by chance in his neighbourhood. At first, his behaviour seemed to resemble that of a mental coach who is so involved with his 'clients' that they start to consider him their friend. In fact, Cerpac became so involved that neither he nor his clients were willing to say anything about their encounters. It was 'too intimate'. To be able to say anything about it, you had to have been there. But this approach gave rise to misunderstanding and Cerpac felt obliged to issue a written statement in which he stated that his work had nothing to do with mental coaching;<sup>41</sup> instead, it should be considered 'an act of seeing together'.

Cerpac has been 'involved' with artist Jeroen Kooijmans for a number of years now, sometimes even on a weekly basis. Kooijmans: 'Cerpac keeps you company, becomes involved, helps you get started, opens your eyes to unforeseen possibilities. But you still do everything by yourself. He's just there. I suppose it is rather strange. You can become addicted to Cerpac. He sees through your eyes. It is like taking drugs, that you can only work under his influence. On the other hand, it's not that exceptional. It holds true of any person you become fond of, with whom you spend a lot of time. It's always difficult to pinpoint how you are influenced by a friend.'<sup>42</sup> Arne Henderiks too, explains that working together with Cerpac is no different from spending time with a friend. He too finds it an elusive situation, as if 'trying to look directly at the sun, although you are aware that you can only glance at it sideways'.<sup>43</sup>

"It is a feeling", Cerpac recently explained to me, "a temporary feeling, that you usually experience together. That is my reward. It is an addiction. Not that it's like a trip. You can't

experience a trip together. But you can experience this feeling together. It is what I thrive on.” However, Cerpac has more in view than simply to ‘experience a trip together’; he wants to use the experience tactically. Cerpac claims to aspire to force ‘a breakthrough, a kind of mental leap or an explosion of possibilities’. Words which he chooses carefully. Cerpac is trying to discover what art and more specifically the art of encounter can entail, besides being a social sculpture.

Ever since Joseph Beuys’s performance, the term social sculpture has become such a dominant metaphor that any attempt to shape new encounters in art automatically turns to this old metaphor. New encounters are associated with creating forms, with keeping together, filling in. But in doing so, art is imposing restrictions on itself, limiting its own freedom, according to Cerpac. In his view, there is another way to give shape to encounters in art. In the invitation he sends to people who want to work with him, he writes: ‘Less to force, less to organize, less to manipulate’. Subsequently, Cerpac employs a terminology which avoids associations with the sculptural; a terminology which he is constantly developing through and during his encounters. In conversation with him, it is striking how many metaphors he uses to answer the simplest of questions: electricity explosions, perspective changes, lenses, spectrum, leap, transformation, transversing black holes. The ‘breakthroughs’ which he experiences with other artists or scholars, can ‘crystallize’ in their work – he never uses the term ‘take shape’.

Cerpac’s imagery is not always lucid. However, it is crystal clear that he, by constantly employing certain metaphors, anticipates that the encounters that he enters into, are no longer modelled on what is generally known as a social structure. Cerpac: “For me, art has to do with so many things. Art can give second wind to things which seem to have completely fizzled out. Art means continuity, but in a completely different sense than usual. It’s just like seeing: if you’re completely lock-

ed up inside yourself, it offers you fresh opportunities to see the space around you.”

As with Stevens, Cerpac tries to avoid setting things up deliberately. Strategies are the deathblow. Cerpac prefers to determine less, in order to see more. He cannot force a ‘breakthrough’ or ‘leap’, or determine the ‘crystallization’. But he can anticipate the ‘breakthroughs’, which, for example, can take place in a shared experience of friendship.

According to Hans Christiaan Klasema, ‘art is freedom of space and artists are the perpetually free’. As he explains to me: “There is always an empty space to beckon and challenge the artist, which he can besiege with a vengeance or enter hesitantly. Artists enjoy the privilege of lingering.” However, Klasema is not happy with this position. He enjoys the freedom, but it’s not enough. As a theatre maker it is not enough for him to simply work on stage. And as a visual artist, he doesn’t just want to exhibit in galleries. He wants to nestle down among his audience, not just in order to let them share in his exempted position, but so as to reach out together, to anticipate yet another level of freedom.

In 1989, Klasema participated in the final round of the Dutch Prix de Rome award for theatre and the visual arts. The outcome was undecided. With the shared prize money, he took his retreat in a set of outbuildings belonging to a farm in the Frisian countryside. After a few months, he did something extraordinary. He dug a large, deep pit in a barn. At the bottom of the pit he placed a chair. Sitting on the chair, all he could see was the clay wall in front of his nose. It sufficed as a free space, somewhere he could withdraw from everything and everybody. A freedom far away from the public, which could peer at him over the edge of the pit. There was no contact. The ground water started to rise. The empty space was filled up.

Through this experience Klasema came to the decision to let the audience share in his freedom in the future. He gave



up everything he owned, including his house, and went to Amsterdam. He took up residency in a utility room under the stage floor of theatre group Mugmetdegoudentand's rehearsal space. Klasema had already worked together with the group, and now he nestled down there. Klasema's presence in the rehearsal space changed the work situation. "It made the building warm, the radical nature of my decision was inspirational to the work process, influenced the themes of the theatre productions", Klasema explains. "Autonomy became heteronomy. In the end, the others determined my stay. Which was fine by me, it was what I had in mind anyway. But it turned out to be untenable. Rehearsals were held during the day, in the evenings and sometimes even at night. And all the time I was involved with people and processes. It was too much."

Klasema decided to go back to square one and become a monk, a childhood dream. For five years, from 1995 till 2000, he tended to the garden in the Benedictine abbey of Vaals. Life in the monastery was, contrary to his expectations, full of encounters. "More than 30 people around you all the time, in close contact. And then there were all the guests. (...) A difference was that the heteronomy transformed into theonomy. I was sculpted from within. (...) Every inch of my life as a monk was stylized."

However, when the moment came to make his eternal profession, Klasema left the monastery, feeling daunted by the idea of no longer being exempted as an artist.

Back in Amsterdam, Klasema took on yet another free space, the utopia of *De straat* (The Street). Earlier, he had already discussed his plans with members of Mugmetdegoudentand. Now, together with them and others, he began to realize his plans. It was to become a housing block on the new housing estate in IJburg, near Amsterdam. Housing, work, care and spirituality would all come together. The Council and the housing corporations were enthusiastic. More than a hundred people were willing to live 'semi-public' lives. There, Klasema's idea

of sharing free space was to become reality. For three years, he dedicated himself to the project. But it became increasingly clear that yet again, the free space was going to be filled up and planned out, long before the first spade struck the earth.

The dynamics seem inevitable. Klasema doesn't feel embittered about it. "As an artist you can make use of the freedom that other people offer you. There is a great need for free space. People are very obliging, there is a strong desire to feel a new zest. In the meantime, however, the artist casts off his wings, loses his muse, becomes a real estate developer. As an artist you are likely to recognize free space, and to jump right in. But you should really only pass through a free space. That's enough for other people to make use of it. As soon as you start residing in the space, it will devour you; you've sold your soul. Then it's time to move on."

Since last year, Klasema has been living in the country near Groningen, on the Oosterhouw estate, together with the owner, a horticulturalist. "We became acquainted through mutual friends. I wrote him a letter. About the desire for intimacy. It struck the right chord. It was quite a risky enterprise, approaching him in such a manner. Impertinent yet precarious. I have been here ever since, much to my pleasure. The Street was getting on top of me, I wanted out. It means new freedom, more low-key and more intimate."

The projects by Stevens, Cerpac and Klasema display a careful, day-to-day consideration of the act of anticipation, of reaching out to a freedom which will emerge and subsequently disappear behind the horizon. The artists are consistently working at this 'faire avec', developing the 'faire avec' as a moral disposition. Every step that Stevens takes, has to come as naturally as possible, yet without obscuring his 'anomalousness', therefore hopefully creating space to be 'anomalous'. Cerpac has developed metaphors which not only do justice to his 'breakthroughs' with his companions, but also to the expect-

tation that the 'breakthroughs' will occur again. And Klasema impertinently annexes space for his utopian community spirit. Under everchanging circumstances, he lets people share in his free position. Each time he tries to endure the shared freedom, until the freedom 'is filled up' with reality and it's time to look out for new freedom.

In short, these artists exercise a paradoxal position: they anticipate an objective that cannot be determined. It is a matter of open intentions: taking it no further than having good intentions. The artists refuse to, and are unable to, forcibly realize or accomplish their objectives. If so, then the naturalness would disappear, their good intentions would transform into objectives, their tactics into strategies. Giving careful consideration to good intentions, that's what it's about, in the hope – or, for some, like Cerpac, in the conviction – that good will naturally come about.

No wonder that some art critics felt uncomfortable. In order to be a success, intentions have to be visible in a concrete, visible artwork or a clear, preconceived concept. In art, intentions alone are not enough, is the general opinion. Which is understandable, if 'good intentions' are supposed to make up for the fact that a project has failed. However, if the artist has specialized in good intentions, and gives careful consideration to the development of an anticipatory position, then we must take him seriously and try to develop ways to discuss the quality of this position.

# 07

In her collection of essays *Van inhoud naar houding* (From Substance to Disposition, 1995), Ilse Bulhof works towards a method for distinguishing between quality in a pluralistic society. The starting point for Bulhof is what she calls 'the art of resumption', which is understood to mean the active execution of a repertoire, of something which already exists. Examples are the performing arts, such as music and theatre. She calls it performative resumption, because the quality of the musician's or actor's performance only starts to 'excel' in the actual performance, in the execution or presentation of the given repertoire.<sup>44</sup>

In Bulhof's view, in our society this kind of resumption happens in all kinds of forms and on all kinds of levels. Events, situations, things and people are resumed, and these resumptions reappear at different times and different places: on stage, in literature, in art and in life itself.<sup>45</sup> The same thing goes for contemporary modern art. Since the 1980s the emphasis has been less on innovation and originality; it has become accepted that images are recycled and appropriated. Even performances have been restaged, regardless of the fact that they are strongly tied in with the artist and the specific situation. In *A Little Bit of History Repeated* (2001) at Kunst-Werke in Berlin, for example, young artists compared themselves to predecessors such as Vito Acconci, Laurie Anderson and Dan Graham.<sup>46</sup> But these re-enactments are all about comparing the new performances with the original, whereas Bulhof's resumptions are about comparing the resumptions with each other. According to Bulhof, it takes constant observance, practice and training in order to be able to make a distinction in quality between all the resumptions.<sup>47</sup> Only then can one develop the power of discernment.

For a clear understanding of Bulhof's 'resumption', it is important to stress that resumption in her view is not a re-enactment of a performance or the recycling or appropriation of the original. "Resumptions make things present", Bulhof

explained to me. The resumption's existence is dependent on whatever is resumed, but the actual resumption 'only' exists on a direct level of presentation, 'making present'. A resumption can be represented, it can be recorded or turned into a photograph or painting. But the actual resumption remains on a level which precedes the representation, the level of the direct performance, of 'making present'. It is on this level that the disposition of the person who 'makes present' matters. And it's the level on which the art of encounter takes place.

Artists such as Cerpac, Klasema and Stevens make encounters present. Encounters which are familiar to us, from our day-to-day lives or from novels, films and plays. The artists resume the encounters. Not, however, with a view to presenting something; they hardly direct or give shape to the meetings, the meetings are not supposed to express or symbolize anything. In doing so, they retain a large degree of unpredictability, of openness. Subsequently, all kinds of things start to bubble up. As a result, the emphasis is not so much on the content as on the disposition. By resuming encounters, the artists look closely at their own disposition and that of the participants.

Klasema's actions are somewhat comparable to that of the main character in Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968). In the novel, a young stranger drops into the lives of a Roman bourgeois family. He is just as impertinent and sensitive as Klasema. He introduces a freedom into the family which remains undefined, putting the relationships within the family to the test. Klasema's actions could also be likened to that of other unknown surprise guests in novels, plays and in daily life who put the dispositions of bystanders to the test. And the manner in which Roé Cerpac aims to achieve 'breakthroughs' with his colleagues, could be interpreted as 'making present' that special kind of friendship or love which is mentioned in Dutch novelist's Annie M.G. Schmidt work:<sup>48</sup> a kind of love which has got nothing to do with butterflies in the stomach, or desiring somebody, but a

positive intimacy among colleagues, as a result of a collective enterprise. The colleagues don't have to be the best of friends outside office hours, but when at work they are dedicated colleagues. Together they are committed to their enterprise, which can take great steps forward at a time, be raised to a higher level. It's that kind of breakthrough that Cerpac anticipates.

Bulhof's point of view puts artist Jeanne van Heeswijk's oeuvre, usually associated with social commitment, in a different light as well. Van Heeswijk's project *Langs de lijn van de toekomst* (On the Edge of the Future) in Gorkum could be defined as the resumption of all kinds of sports, 'made present' in a game of comparison and competition. During the tournament, Van Heeswijk slightly altered the rules and forms of all kinds of existing and folkloric sports and games, so that the participants of different cultures were not forced to do things 'the proper way'. The teams and individual athletes were able to excel in their own unique interpretation and performance. Attention was focused on the attitude during the games, not on the scoreboard.

Perhaps that is what some art critics are so afraid about: that in their judgment they can only fall back on criteria which in their estimation are vague, such as dispositions. Indeed, the power of discernment propagated by Bulhof, focuses more on people's dispositions in 'presenting' and not on the actual contents. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the judgment should elude us. It is possible to judge a disposition. The problem is how. Bulhof doesn't address this issue. But as far the judgment goes, she has put us in the right direction in determining what the art of encounter is all about.

If we want to comment on the quality of Stevens's, Klasema's and Cerpac's actions, or the athletes who participated in Van Heeswijk's tournament, then it's only natural to employ ethical

qualifications. Positive or negative qualifications: sensible or naive, courageous or cowardly, careful or careless, openminded or bigoted, concerned or inattentive, magnanimous or narrow-minded. In all different kinds of gradations. Certainly not noncommittal qualifications of noncommittal dispositions. These moral qualifications automatically bring us into the field of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics can be identified as the judgment of dispositions. Having good intentions, testing good intentions, judging good intentions, are the focus of this approach in ethics. Now that the judgments themselves have become a topic in recent virtue ethics, there's all the more reason to take a closer look.

## 08

For many, the concept of virtue conjures up notions of mediocrity and obedience. Generations of moral philosophers have contributed to these notions by equating virtuousness with adherence to social conventions. In recent years however, philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum have shown that virtuousness has got nothing to do with mediocrity, and everything to do with an extremely conscientious and adventurous individual attitude and disposition. Their approach goes back to Aristotle's ethics, who described virtue as a disposition for choosing the middle position when contemplating action.

Immanuel Kant's ethics of duty and Jeremy Bentham's ethics of utility judge an action's rightness by a standard irrespective of time and situation. In Aristotle's virtue ethics, however, time and situation are pivotal. It's not a calculated decision, then, but a matter of weighing up different factors within a field of force. For each individual, the decision will turn out differently. What defines virtuous actions within a given situation, remains a relative notion. In Aristotle's virtue ethics, therefore, it is more about disposition than about action.

Virtue is a disposition which can be learned through practice, through a constant desire to behave in the right manner in various different situations. For example, by displaying courage time and time again, in ever-changing contexts – according to Aristotle, the mean between recklessness and cowardice. Or by repeatedly displaying honest indignation, a virtue which stands midway between envy and unholy glee. Each time, there are different reasons for displaying courage or indignation, and each time courage and indignation will take on a different 'shape'. Moreover, as philosopher Paul van Tongeren underlines, in virtue ethics the virtues are not specified. In different times and different cultures, different virtues apply.<sup>49</sup>

The renewed interest in Aristotle's virtue ethics in our times comes as no small surprise. These ethics seem ideal as an

alternative for the redundant moral systems of both Kantists, utilitarians and emotivists, and cynical, inordinate postmodern relativism. Virtue ethics, after all, argues that regardless of our disparate notions of the good life, we nevertheless have to make do with each other. In virtue ethics, this can, to a certain extent, be achieved without lapsing into naiveté. Virtue ethics even offers us something substantial: to gain progress in virtuous behaviour by a process of trial and error and constant practice.

However, there is a catch: why should we strive for the good, for just and excellent actions? Why should we weigh up and judge our actions and those of others? And more to the point: why now, in our day and age, in a society without any firm ground for making such judgments, a society in which we, according to most philosophers, are in a state of incoherency? Shouldn't we be celebrating the lack of coherency, shouldn't we endeavor to prolong the state of purposelessness, sample the fleetingness of the moment? Shouldn't we recognize that we are currently in a state of disorientation, that we are like 'foam', to quote philosopher Peter Sloterdijk?<sup>50</sup>

Alasdair MacIntyre's answer is striking in its simplicity. People just can't help themselves, he asserts prosaically. Even if there is no direction or goal or final orientation point, we still strive for goodness. The reason being that, according to MacIntyre, we apply a narrative structure to every inch of our daily lives. We are constantly asking ourselves which story and stories we are part of, or want to be part of. We can't help ourselves, it's just the way we are. 'We are stories', MacIntyre says. 'We live stories, minor and major stories, which in turn are interwoven with other people's stories.'<sup>51</sup>

Inherent to this 'life of stories', are the considerations that we weigh up. Considerations such as what to tell and what to leave out, our choice of words, the way in which we use them, and when to remain silent. And in turn all these considerations trigger the judgment of our objectives, our actions and

our dispositions. In short, even, or perhaps, especially in our society – a society in which stories are in shards, resumptions are either stunning or tedious, our existence bubbles up like foam, only to evaporate – we will continue to strive for the best possible actions and to feel the need to judge them. After all, we are just like stories, living stories, with a beginning and an end. On that point, MacIntyre is very firm: 'And to someone who says that in life there are no endings, or that final partings take place only in stories, one is tempted to reply, "But have you never heard of death?"'<sup>52</sup>

For MacIntyre, life and narrative are so closely related that they are overlapping. MacIntyre is convinced that we can no longer judge a life's story normatively, as would a deontologist or a utilitarian. On the other hand, a complete return to Aristotle's and Thomas of Aquino's virtue ethics seems out of the question. In their theories, an open, situational judgment was still determined by notions of what is good. The polis or Christian belief shared these notions. So how are we, in the absence of a shared notion of the good life, to judge the quality of our actions? Again, MacIntyre's answer to this problem is somewhat prosaic: we should no longer simply focus on the consequences of our actions, but on our disposition for striving for the good. A life dedicated to a quest for the good, merits the qualification of being the good life in the current state of disorientation. Today, virtues are forever changing; for MacIntyre, virtues have everything to do with a quest for different, alternative, as of yet unknown notions of the good life.<sup>53</sup>

In this context, we must mention philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Her contribution is relevant to us insofar as that she, contrary to Bulhof and more so than MacIntyre, attaches importance to the representation of the quest for what the good life could further entail. Bulhof focuses all her attention on the immediate level of presentation. MacIntyre, in addition,

attaches importance to the story in retrospect, a story that follows life closely, so that narrative and life coincide. Nussbaum, however, focuses all her attention on the narrative, on literature. And even though Cerpac, Klasema, Stevens and Van Heeswijk did not include literature in their encounters, nevertheless Nussbaum's theory helps us to gain insight in the way in which artists, besides 'making encounters present', also make room for the representation.

Nussbaum developed her position at the beginning of the 1980s, in a reaction to the concept of textuality, which then dominated literary theory. Emphasizing the interrelationships of texts, this notion was widely acknowledged as the prevailing dogma. Literature seemed only to refer to other literature, not to people's lives. For Nussbaum, however, literature is full of life, so to speak. In fact, according to Nussbaum, but for literature, we would not know how to live, how to cope with life's fragility and inconstancy. Through literature, we sample each and every word, feeling, event, whereas much of our daily lives slips by in a state of numbness. In this sense, Nussbaum argues somewhat exaggeratingly, our daily lives are less intense than our thoughts and fantasies when reading. Literature therefore does justice to the complexity of daily life; literary stylistic devices help us to sharpen our moral perception, to make nuances, to contemplate and to judge, therefore helping us to gain insight in the morally relevant in life.

Nussbaum's argument in favour of the importance of literature seems rather sermonic. What's interesting is the premise that representations, in her case literary stylistic devices, can play a role in our daily lives, can help us to weigh up factors.

On the face of it, it appears that representations do not play a role in the art of encounter. On the contrary, we have already determined that representations are absent. It's all about making present, not about representing. The encounters of Stevens, Cerpac, Klasema and Van Heeswijk follow a normal

pattern, prosaically, without any frills. Stylistic devices are not forced upon the participants; they are not expected to behave differently, to wear different clothes, express themselves differently. The artists don't either.

However, the artists have not abandoned representations all together. Van Heeswijk attaches great weight to the recognizability of the locations where she stages her encounters, marking them with garish, aesthetical, representative demarcations. In conversation, Cerpac is strong on a limited number of metaphors, which he uses consistently. On entering the public arena, Stevens focuses on his posture and his garments, right down to the very last 'anomalous' detail. And in the case of Klasema, the representation creeps into his actions, so to speak; in the Dom van der Laan-manner in which he arranges the dishes when doing the washing-up, or in the eremitical interior of his utility room under the stage-floor of theatre group Mugmetdegoudentand.

All these demarcations, metaphors and apparel can hardly be labeled representations of meetings. We can however interpret them as markings, as articulations of dispositions, perhaps as signs that sometimes literally indicate to passers-by that people are meeting. Especially in Jeanne van Heeswijk's artwork, these markings play a remarkable role.

## 09

Jeanne van Heeswijk's projects are often subject to the same model:<sup>54</sup> a marked-off space where people can meet during a certain period of time, under various circumstances: through presentations, manifestations, discussions, lectures, quizzes, games, courses, workshops etc. The participants are free to give their own interpretation to the various different activities. This makes for more instead of less complexity, with room for confusion and misunderstandings, for unforeseen events and, more importantly, for the participants themselves to act. Van Heeswijk makes it perfectly clear that it's all for a good cause, which she labels 'agglutination', the same term used by Nicolas Bourriaud. However, Bourriaud employs this term in relation to an aesthetical or pleasant experience, whereas Van Heeswijk uses it in regard to a moral disposition which participants in her projects can develop and test: 'Working on a new moral disposition embracing multiformity, without lapsing into relativism or fundamentalism.'<sup>55</sup> This 'agglutination' can result in a pleasant encounter, although this does not necessarily have to be the case. It can also result in strong confrontations, challenging forms of solidarity.

Bearing in mind what MacIntyre has said, we can interpret Van Heeswijk's 'agglutination' as an evolving virtue, as a modern striving for what the good life could further entail. This striving is not free of obligations. Virtue ethics sets certain preconditions. The striving has to be implemented and has to result in certain actions by those involved within various situations, which subsequently leads to a weighing up the factors and a renewed striving – yet another of virtue ethics's preconditions: that there is room for the adjustment of ambitions.

As a result of the complexity involved in Van Heeswijk's projects, intentions are not always in step. From the viewpoint of virtue ethics, this discrepancy makes Van Heeswijk's projects all the more interesting, as long as the freedom to adjust ambitions and to gear intentions to one another remains intact. This is not always an easy matter. Invitations, flyers, posters,



websites, flags, demarcations: Van Heeswijk often makes much of the striving for ‘agglutination’, creating the impression of a new and fresh zest, which is to have an appealing effect on viewers. It can, however, put pressure on the participants and can result in that the discrepancies are suppressed, instead of being seized upon as a starting point for working on moral dispositions.

It can’t have been easy for Kirsten Leenaars when it turned out that there was a huge gulf between her intentions and the expectations of the residents of *De Strip*, whom she wanted to meet and photograph. At the onset, her involvement with the residents was met with incomprehension and indifference. She writes: ‘More than once, parents brought their children to the studio for me to baby-sit, informing me that they were going shopping and that they come and collect children in a couple of hours time. To be sure, they thanked me for the beautiful photos of their offspring. However, I was disappointed that they did not respond to my invitation to visit the studio themselves. For my project to be taken seriously, it was necessary that the adults became involved. Otherwise my studio would simply be a nursery in disguise. What was I to do?’<sup>56</sup>

Leenaars adjusted her ambitions. She adopted a different attitude, and tried to interest herself in the persons in her flat building. She accepted invitations to visit flat residents in *their* homes. This also led to her taking photographs, but these were no longer a starting point. The starting point was now the working on a disposition of curiosity, both for Leenaars and for some residents of *De Strip*.

Of course, outsiders cannot experience these changes in disposition, which I have just presented as a merit of Van Heeswijk’s projects. For many, this is seen as an objection. Logical, but for the fact that this objection presupposes that the experience is pivotal to the art of encounter. Which it isn’t. Encounters are never about experiencing, not for Van Heeswijk,

Stevens, Cerpac, or Klasema. In their projects, the encounters are not so much about experiencing as they are about practicing. However, this does not mean to say that participants cannot enjoy a new experience. Moreover, the objection that you ‘had to have been there’ certainly does not apply to Van Heeswijk. In various different ways, she endeavors to inform the public about the goings-on in her projects, and to give insight in any advances.

Van Heeswijk’s projects, which can run for a number of years, are fragmented: at regular intervals, previews, presentations and other manifestations take place, either of the whole project or of separate parts. Participants present their plans, deliver presentations, stories, videos, photos and performances, bringing all kinds of good intentions to light, and enabling the public to keep track of any advances in the striving for ‘agglutination’. The actual concrete marks designed by other artists under the authority of Van Heeswijk, are striking and often serve as demarcations or orientation points for the work space. The demarcations attract attention; in Van Heeswijk’s view, there is no harm in furnishing the striving for agglutination with these kinds of exclamation marks. For the *Face-Your-World* project in Columbus, Ohio (2002), Atelier Van Lieshout made three large, duck face-like brightly colored polyester pillars. In various areas in the city, the pillars marked the places where the *Face-Your-World* bus stopped, which transported school children. The bus was fitted out with computers, on which the children could play the game *The Interactor*. With this computer game, which Van Heeswijk had developed together with V2\_lab and philosopher Maaïke van Engelen, the children could create their own virtual city surroundings. They were not given free rein however. In their designs they had to take into account the other children’s wishes. Virtual character Max Moore confronted them with possible conflicting consequences of their designs, and acted as an intermediary. The designs were sent to the bus stops digitally, where they

could be viewed by everybody. Whether or not the computer collages were aesthetic, was beside the point. The collages reflected not so much the children's individual wishes, as the outcome of their actions during the game. The creation of an image was intrinsically linked to an appeal on the moral dispositions of the players. The collages formed the results of these dispositions. Perhaps these computer collages can even reveal who showed generosity in dealing with the other children's wishes, who imposed their own views, who were good negotiators and who tried to strive for 'agglutination'.

In Van Heeswijk's projects, the emphasis lies now on the presentation of moral dispositions, now on the representation of the self-image of participants. It is important to keep this distinction in mind, especially where a complex project, such as *De Strip* in Vlaardingen, is involved. And so it came to pass that during a manifestation, a performance by a Turkish male choir and a quiz about the Westwijk were held simultaneously. Tags by Rotterdam graffiti artists could be admired next to an exhibition of objects produced exclusively in Vlaardingen; and then there was the viewing of videos made by local residents next to the *Westwijk Clothes Line*. It would be wrong to tell moral dispositions, let alone advances in the striving for 'agglutination', from the performance by the male choir or the collection of products from Vlaardingen. But it would be equally wrong to refrain from doing so in respect to artist Peter Westenberg's videos in the *Uit + Thuis Videomagazijn*. After all, the production of the videos depended on the local residents' readiness to explore the neighbourhood with a camera in hand, to pay each other visits and interview perfect strangers. The videos are the result of this readiness to work at new forms of solidarity. Any advances in their strivings were visible in the videos. Just as in the *Face-Your-World* computer collages, the videos gave testimony of the makers' boldness, curiosity, anticipation or shyness, and the kind of agglutination it led to.

It turns out Van Heeswijk's oeuvre is full of unforeseen presentations of dispositions and other representations. These presentations and representations offer interested viewers and art critics insights in the participants' encounters. It is harder for outsiders to gain insight into the more low-key encounters of Stevens, Cerpac and Klasema. But for the curious, it is not impossible.

For his anti-performance, Stevens submitted an application for project funding from the Fonds BKVB. In his application, Stevens revealed his highly personal intentions. Issued as a press release, the wording of his application was meant to be judged by and to provoke curiosity and discussion among art critics. Stevens has no qualms about explaining what the anti-performance means to him, by giving an account of the quest for the mean between conformity and non-conformity, and of the curious fact that in his unique personal situation, this entails not having to do or contemplate anything out of the ordinary for him. We will have to take his word for it – nobody else can testify for him. Stevens, after all, does not involve the people he meets on his adventures. In this respect, his art of encounter is wonderfully solipsistic.

Cerpac has increasingly started to focus on the communication towards a wider audience. His initial reluctance to bring out into the open his intentions was so great that his status as an artist was at risk. After all, his motto 'less to force, less to organize, less to manipulate' implied that his involvement more or less merged into the work and artistic development of the artists whom he cooperated with; therefore rendering his contribution to the work of other artists almost invisible, especially if Cerpac's involvement was completely hushed up. It turns out that his reluctance to be forthcoming with the public had to do with screening off work in progress. Cerpac believed that his budding metaphors and work method would not be able to stand up to the publicly dominant metaphor of social sculpture. Recently, Dutch artist Jennifer Tee invited Cerpac to

allow his involvement with her work to crystallize in her exhibition in the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven. During a public presentation, the question was raised of how Cerpac's contribution had 'crystallized', and whether the 'pure' Tee still existed. As a result, Cerpac had to clarify his metaphors. Again, it became clear that Cerpac would not yield to the public's desire to reduce his contribution to Tee's work to the visible plastic arts.

For Klasema, sharing his intentions with others is of the utmost importance. As a result, accounts of his actions circulate easily. *De Straat* can be found in archives, foundations and work plans of artists, theatre groups and housing corporations. His living-intervention under the stage floor and his entry into a monastery has left a mark on theatre and television productions by Mugmetdegoudentand, among others in the VPRO television series *Hertenkamp*. In recent years, Klasema has been working on a collection of letters to his loved ones. These letters certainly should not be labeled as mail-art; they are semi-public documents, offering a detailed picture of Klasema's intentions as an artist. Thus, for all these artists, representations of their good intentions can be found.

## Conclusion

‘Faire avec’, ‘making present’ and ‘a disposition of striving’: art critics can surely benefit from these philosophical concepts. They can be instrumental to understanding and assessing the artists’ good intentions. However, there remains a drawback: in attaching so much importance to the rendition, in attaching greater importance to the ‘how’ than the ‘what’, the quality of the actual rendition can disappear from sight. It is for that reason that Ilse Bulhof has raised an important objection to her own plea for learning to distinguish between the quality of dispositions: “We live in an era and a society where people can compose their own repertoire. Sometimes the results are interesting, sometimes they are boring or even dangerous. The ideas which I have developed in *Van inhoud naar houding* therefore no longer suffice, at least not entirely. Indeed, it is still possible to compare the quality of one rendition with another. It’s not completely noncommittal. But it is always extremely subjectivistic.”<sup>57</sup>

It is only to a certain extent that the art of encounter circumvents this non-committal trait. It is true that more people determine the encounter, making the ‘excelling’ a complex and exciting combined action. However, the collective ‘making present’ can have a boring, stupid or even dangerous result. Bulhof has since taken a remarkable step to solve this discrepancy. She has stopped searching for a standard by which to curb this non-committal trait. She has taken it a step further, abandoning her quest for making distinctions all together. She has opted for relinquishing the readiness to judge, in order to ‘break loose from all those interpretations and judgments. A decreation, run-down, to become empty and open’.<sup>58</sup>

For Bulhof, the concept that there is no final truth is carried to its ultimate conclusion. This is not always an option however. We do not have to follow Bulhof’s line of thought all the way to its conclusion and completely break loose from interpretations. The art of encounter gives us no cause to break loose; instead, it incites us to interpret things differently. As we

have already seen, good judgments call for a careful weighing up of all factors. And there are sufficient points of departure for weighing up the factors, in the shape of presentations and representations of good intentions.

We have also seen a remarkable shift in Alasdair MacIntyre’s position. He puts the pursuit of other good intentions, of unforeseen concepts of ‘the good life’, before the actual attainment. Because we no longer have a univocal concept of the good that we strive for, he focuses attention on the disposition of striving for the good – which comes across as a subterfuge. It could well be a subterfuge, but one with exciting consequences. In MacIntyre’s theory, everything is immersed in a striving disposition. If we carry his line of thought further, then judging itself is dominated by the pursuit of further quality, of further excellence, and fresh approaches to judging. MacIntyre, like Bulhof, invites us to work on a different disposition in regard to judging.

This is the direction we should take. Then judgment is focused more on a search for and less on the measurement of quality. Then it can happen that the judgment, virtually disappearing in the background, completely merges into the search for quality. In fact, it is not that extraordinary – it is already commonplace in some art critiques, including critiques on genres other than the art of encounter. To do so, art critics have to take a different approach in writing, look for a new approach in art critique. For example, by yielding, even if just for a moment, their critical stance and immersing in the art of encounter, as Arne Henderiks did.

Then art criticism is expanded with the assessment of good intentions. But in adding a new dimension – of weighing up – to the judgment of the art of encounter, another one disappears, a dimension on which we have already expended unnecessary time and energy: the will to pass judgment.

- <sup>1</sup> *Nieuw engagement, in architectuur, kunst en vormgeving*, NAi publishers, Rotterdam 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> 'This is, of course, spot on. The best artists, those who are really involved with their art and with society, stand aloof from society.' Hans den Hartog Jager, 'Altijd op afstand. Over de grenzen van het engagement', in: *Nieuw engagement in architectuur, kunst en vormgeving*, NAi publishers, Rotterdam 2003, p. 123.
- <sup>3</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*. Second Edition with Postscript 1985, Duckworth London 1981, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Domeniek Ruyters, 'Doe iets' in: *Metropolis M* 4, 2004, p. 69-72.
- <sup>5</sup> Domeniek Ruyters, in: 'Horen en Zien' in: *de Volkskrant*, 27-11-2003, p. 14.
- <sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Peyton, 'Rirkrit Tirabunng' in: *Supermarket*, ed. Rirkrit Tiravanija, Frank Hyde-Antwi, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich 1998, p. 77.
- <sup>7</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, The MIT Press 2002, p. 109.
- <sup>8</sup> Kwon 2002, p. 111.
- <sup>9</sup> Arthur C. Danto, 'The End of Art' in: *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York 1986, p. 81-115.
- <sup>10</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, translation 2002 of Esthétique Relationnelle, Presse du réel 1998, p. 20-21.
- <sup>11</sup> Jens Hoffmann, 'Over relaties, toe-eigeningen en andere zorgen', in: *Archis* 3, 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> Anna Tilroe, 'De kunst, de curator en de grote schoonmaak', in: *Nieuw engagement, in architectuur, kunst en vormgeving*, NAi publishers, Rotterdam 2003, p. 128-136.
- <sup>13</sup> Among others, Jens Hoffmann draws attention to the influence of the artwork of Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica on the artwork of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Carsten Höller. In the 1960s and 1970s, Clark and Oiticica used objects to induce the audience to communicate and take socially engaged actions in a public space. Hoffmann, 'Over relaties, toe-eigeningen en andere zorgen', in: *Archis* 3, 2003.
- <sup>14</sup> Cornel Bierens, 'De beeldende kunst moet onderduiken', in *Cultureel Supplement NRC Handelsblad*, 19-5-2000.
- <sup>15</sup> Rutger Pontzen, *Nice! Over nieuw engagement in de hedendaagse kunst*, NAi publishers, Rotterdam 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> Camiel van Winkel, *Moderne Leegte. Over kunst en openbaarheid*, SUN, Nijmegen 1999, p. 77.
- <sup>17</sup> Jeroen Boomgaard, 'De utopie van de argeloosheid. Een korte cursus engagement' in: *De Witte Raaf* 77, 1999, p. 23-25
- <sup>18</sup> Jeroen Boomgaard, 'Het podium van de betrokkenheid', p. 106 in: *Nieuw engagement in architectuur, kunst en vormgeving*, Nai publishers, Rotterdam 2003, p. 98-108.
- <sup>19</sup> Sven Lütticken, 'Iedereen geëngageerd', in: *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin* 2, 2004, p. 19-24.
- <sup>20</sup> Drenth & Hagoort, *ThRu* (Theoretische Ruimte), no. 8.01, Lokaal 01, Antwerp-Breda 2002.
- <sup>21</sup> De Strip was part of Van Heeswijk's project *Until we meet again*. Objective of this ten-year project, commissioned by housing corporation Waterweg Wonen and the Vlaardingse City Council, was among others to involve local residents in the significant changes which were to take place in the neighbourhood in 2005.
- <sup>22</sup> Cornelis Verhoeven, *Merg en been. Polemische overwegingen over intimiteit*, Ambo, Baarn 1981, p. 12.
- <sup>23</sup> Cornelis Verhoeven, *Alleen maar kijken. Essays over de mens als toeschouwer*, Ambo, Baarn 1992, p. 83.
- <sup>24</sup> Verhoeven, 1981, p. 49.
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- <sup>49</sup> *ThRu* no. 3.01, p. 7.
- <sup>50</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III, Schäume*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2004.
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- <sup>52</sup> MacIntyre, 1981, p. 212.
- <sup>53</sup> 'The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is.' MacIntyre, 1981, p. 219
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- <sup>55</sup> 'Jeanne van Heeswijk, Fleeting Images of Community', in: Annette Balkema and Henk Slager (ed.), 'Exploding Aesthetics', *Lier en Boog* 16 (Rodolphi, Atlanta-Amsterdam 2001), p. 175-178
- <sup>56</sup> Leenaars writes this in her account of her project.
- <sup>57</sup> Bulhof & Hagoort, *ThRu* (Theoretische Ruimte), no. 3.01, December 2001, Lokaal 01, Antwerp-Breda 2001, p. 5.
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