

Bird's-eye view

Bird's-eye view 1

The eye of God

Gompie

Bird's-eye view 2

Graffiti 1

Graffiti 2

Bird's-eye view 3

Neither fish nor fowl

Fellow-travellers 1

Fellow-travellers 2

Nature

Bird's-eye view 4

The following stories I wrote for a catalogue of my colleague Gerhard Lentink, published by the Museum Beelden aan Zee in Scheveningen, Holland. September 1999

Bird's-eye view 1

Lapland, 8 September 1995

In the twilight, where everything seems velvety soft, I walk along the edge of a wood, which is losing its leaves, is transparent. A wide colourless green plain lies next to me, in which marsh fluffs light up in strange white. It is dead silent and cold, but because it is windless, it feels mild. I feel as light as a feather walking on the mossy path, through which I am immersed in one of those rare moments of bliss. Suddenly a dark shadow dives towards my head. In a reflex I protect myself by waving my arms in the air. It makes fluttering movements, but I cannot see what it is. It looks like a large brown headless bird and its crosswise attacks on me seem ponderous and frightened. It soon becomes apparent that its swoops are feigned attacks, so just to be safe I pick up a stick before standing straight again. I try to get a better look at my way layer, but against the clear twilight it remains an unclear stubby profile, so I decide to walk into the wood. My attacker flies past and alights on a low branch ahead. A pair of pitch-black eyes stares at me.

On the branch, only a few metres from me, sits a big owl. I try to break the tension by talking to my companion, as the stick falls from my clenched up hand to the ground. It continues to stare with its enormous eyes, motionless, while I slowly walk on, getting ever closer.

I carefully walk past the branch and speak quiet incantations, as if I have to settle it, realising that I am actually reassuring myself, not the bird. We continue to watch each other closely, while I go further into the wood. After about ten metres it suddenly flies up again and settles on a next branch a few metres in front of me, again at eye level. I walk on less carefully, but continue to speak to it, frightened to break the spell. In this way we cover three kilometres and caution turns to companionship.

In the distance the white contour of the bus emerges between the trees: the mobile workplace of Gerhard and me and a trusted home while working here, so far from civilisation. I quicken towards it to inform Gerhard of my special meeting. When I turn around the bird has disappeared.

The eye of God

Deventer, September 1994

Extremely tired and in the middle of the night we climb down the scaffold. It is hanging free. Tomorrow we will clean up the mess, although there is hardly any point in driving up and down to Gerhard's sister's house to sleep there. We will be back again in around four hours. There is still a huge amount of work to do and the opening of the exhibition is in three days. This design is the most exhausting one we have ever done. When we switch off the lights in the immense space we glance at each other with a knowing look in our eyes. It's about those enormously heavy 16th century chandeliers, which hang from 20 metres high pointing down to the natural stone floor. We will also remove them. Nobody seems worried about the value

and storage of these antiquities. The organisation does not seem worried about our condition either. If we are to be worn out, we might as well be totally worn out.

We have been busy hanging up the 'Volans' sculpture on the arched roof of the Bergkerk for two days now. We have attached the pale blue giant feet to an enormous platform and painted the whole as if the feet are part of it. It has been a trapeze task hanging up this much to heavy sculpture in the free space at 15 metres. Without a safety net of course. There was nobody available to help think about that problem, so we started searching for points of suspension and a solution to the weight distribution challenge. We could have caused irreparable damage, but because of our natural respect for this ancient building we worked carefully. We actually also didn't want to take a fatal crash ourselves. If something happens at that height on a wobbly scaffolding there is nothing much you can do. Before hoisting the sculpture into position we went to look above the arches of the church. A small spiral staircase led us up through one of the towers. The stone stairs stopped at a certain height and it seemed as if we had arrived in a hayloft. Startled by pigeons fluttering about we set foot on a rickety wooden ladder, where the howling wind through the open belfry windows gave us the feeling that we were unprotected in the open air. The ladder led to a crawl hole in front of which a hatch was attached with two reels, which I had to manoeuvre in diagonally while balancing on the steep wooden ladder. While I looked inside, I saw Gerhard's tensing face. He regularly had to overcome his fear of heights to get his work into he right place. Away from the daylight we crawled through the narrow opening and could hardly see anything in the sudden, still, mysterious shrouded half-light. Slowly a strange landscape of grey and lightened bumps appeared, which looked soft and animal like. The room was crossed by wooden gangplanks, which disappeared like a labyrinth in the dark. The bumps rose up high on one side and a bit lower in front of us. "Ah! they're the tops of the round arches, skimmed with grey cement," said Gerhard, "Those there belong to the nave". The picture was so stunning, that for a moment we forgot where we were. We hesitantly entered the space and saw that the support rods of the chandeliers always came up in the middle of the arch through a hatch, and were attached to the wooden beams of the enormous roof at the end. This suggested to us that nothing could be attached to the arches themselves. We walked towards the large bump in the nave lying there like a giant dromedary. When we crawled up the ladder that led to the top. I felt it could start moving at any moment. Laying next to each other we carefully pushed a round hatch aside and both instinctively shrank back; the hole suddenly let through a bright light from a dizzy gaping depth before us. Only after a while did we dare look down through it and things required a few moments before we felt stable. Was the hole moving or were we moving with regard to the space below us?

Downstairs, while walking among the monumental sculptures, which have been set up in the church, I look up searching for the arch and the hole from which we had looked down. I remember the insignificant shapes, which were visible to us from above. Nothing remained of them. They had not been made for God.

Stoically he storms up the stairs when I enter the dark house, which smells like old people, for the first time, to take a look at his room. As if she had been waiting there his landlady stands strategically at the beginning of the stairs, curious about the visitor which he has brought along. She fires all kinds of questions, which at the most are waved aside with an irritated grunt. I remain hesitantly at the bottom of the stairs, uncertain if it is not terribly rude not to greet her, just out of politeness. When I arrive upstairs Gerhard tells me to take no notice of her. She is terribly curious, deaf and can hardly walk. She has probably not been upstairs in years and that is why he does not have to worry about how he lives and who he takes up. Her voice still sounds below, but dies away as we climb another stair to the attic rooms; accommodation for Gerhard and another student who I recognise as photography student from a lower class: Reinouth van den Bergh. An enormous heap of different types of shoes lie there. It is raw material about which they made a book together. Photos of different situations, in which rows of shoes were set up in all kinds of ways, on the beach and in busy shopping streets, in which the shoes sometimes change into a surprising abstraction of a land-art type of shape. Gerhard shows me his atelier on the in-between floor. A small room which houses a painter's easel and a worktable. There are all kinds of small format paintings, which have a finely painted technique, and very realistically show pictures not devoid of humour. Now I understand why he never works at the academy ateliers, where his fellow students fill canvas after canvas with abstract colour compositions, using firm strokes, urged on by a teacher of the post Cobra tradition. While we are putting on the kettle for tea in the tiny kitchen next to his atelier, a tawny man stumbles up the stairs, in a perfect racing cyclist outfit while hauling up a lightweight-racing bike on his neck. It turns out to be miss Elmer's lover, a roguish looking small lady who appears from another door. "They have been having a secret affair for years, he is married", Gerhard explains. And a little later singer Willy Alberti sounds from probably an equally small room, sung along at the top of his voice by this man, who has supposedly ridden many kilometres on his racing bike over the past years.

I look round in Gerhard's atelier and apart from the paintings I find all kinds of small wooden Mathematical shapes, which he makes at the academy as part of his monumental study. They strongly reminds me of images of spatial representations of molecules, which I remember from secondary school. My eye notices a pile of cushions on the floor and chuckling I remember the story of Maaïke Vonk, our best girl friend, who prematurely left the academy and through whom I met Gerhard. Now and then she comes to paint with him, bringing her portable easel along. I can picture them sitting next to each other, holding their breath, with a brush with three hairs on it, both sharing an interest in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. She is usually fed up after three days and leaves with the easel under her arm. "We sit there painting, usually with the BBC on", she told me. "We share a certain kind of humour, so sometimes we roar with laughter while at work. Now and then miss Elmer suddenly walks in and plops down two cups of tea, full of sugar and a biscuit, and disappears just as quickly. One day the music was on loud in her room, 'chips with... mayonnaise', sung along loudly by the illegal lovers, where I can picture both of them jumping on the bed. At the end of the day we usually eat mash, after which, we doze off on the floor neatly each at one end of the room with a cushion under our heads. But one day, thank God we were both painting, the door was suddenly opened. To our surprise Gompie stood on the doorstep".

Gerhard's landlady had not been able to suppress her curiosity, so she had dragged herself up the stairs. What she saw must have come to an enormous shock. The room which had been let semi-furnished, equipped as a shabby atelier, probably totally wept out her reason to come upstairs.

Bird's-eye view 2

Mezalocha, December 1985

It is pitch dark as the alarm goes off. It is six in the morning. We get up shivering in the unheated apartment. We quickly eat breakfast and prepare slices of bread for the journey. The bus station is not far and huddled in our coats we walk through the waking streets of Zaragoza. There is already plenty of activity at the station. It looks very un-Dutch and I enjoy the commotion, the smell of warm churros, the language and the different types of people. We find our stop and stand among the waiting travellers. The journey takes place in the dark, so we look around at the women talking loudly and gesticulating, some of them with enormous packages and collections of bags around them. One hour later we get off by the side of the road and walk. The sky is now brightening and starts to fill with the most amazing colours of the rising sun. Against this the wide, rocky landscape stands out razor-sharp. We walk the last 10 kilometres, gazing at the ever-changing light, until the outlined sun fills the landscape with endlessly long ghostly shadows. We are alone in the world. From the bus stop the road leads us to no man's land, a gravel like path, which finally ends at a dam. An extremely small trickle of water seeps down somewhere and barren landscape lies behind the dam, with thorn-bushes and long grass-stalks. It is one of those pointless reservoirs constructed back in the days when Franco thought that he could build up an independent economic system in Spain. There is simply no water in these dry areas. We only pass some muddy pools after continuing our journey across the dry bottom.

We come here to this remote area to visit the first landscape project, which Gerhard carried out here in the autumn of 1984. So the work, recorded back then on photos, has had the opportunity to lie here untouched for a long time. At the site the grass that has sprung up hides the 149 clay moulds from view. Amorphous hills are the result of nearly two years of influence from the elements. It strikes us that there is no trace of harmful effects, which is so typical for the presence of people. Only tufts of wool on the bushes reveal the presence of shepherds passing by with their herds.

The bottom of the reservoir, where we are standing, is surrounded by steep rock walls many metres high. We decide to climb to the top to have a better overview. When we finally reach the top we lie on the ground away from the edge and carefully crawl towards it on our stomachs. We look down a vertical wall straight into the depths below. The picture that we see is a huge surprise. The perfect contours of the clay figures lie in a dark red earth colour in the bright green grass. The clay used for the impressions was extracted from the small river further away. It turns out to a poor substrate for the growth, which occurs over the rest of the reservoir bottom. Seen from above the work has not lost any of its expressive power.

The atmosphere is somewhat ominous in this dead silence. When I look at the opposite cliff face I see a white vertical stripe running down across the entire length. Gerhard tells me that they are droppings from two large condors, who observed Gerhard and Reinout while working here together for weeks, now and then breaking the silence with their shrill yells.

Graffiti 1

Vlissingen/Dordrecht, 1992

“It was extremely cheap supermarket latex, you would never expect it to still be there, but it looked perfect on the television”, Gerhard explains to me on the telephone. Nature is merciless there, it is exposed to the wind, it looks like a type of moon landscape in black volcanic sand. We were more or less sandblasted when we stood on those ladders to paint the letters; it was enough to drive you crazy.

Five years ago he carried out a project on Iceland whose origins are in the Edda, the Icelandic version of the Nibelungenlied, with photographer Reinout van der Bergh. Here the sculptor is the ideal designer. The story of lifelines and intrigues of the different characters has ingeniously been transformed into a street plan of a non-existent city. A far-reaching abstraction, which is still readable. His fascination with ground plans and maps comes up clearly here. It is a need for clarity and overview and also attraction on the graphic quality of this ‘language’. This readability is also expressed in the working drawings for his sculptures. The graphic shape and the use of contour lines in those drawings could be read as a map of a non-existent world. The ‘city’ that he created in Iceland had already been engulfed by the ice cold rising water of a black river during his stay, but the genealogy of names painted on a monumental basalt wall remained in this landscape. I had never been there, but I’ve always tried to imagine what it would be like for a naturalist who suddenly stumbles onto this puzzle. “A humourless journalist reported it under the guise of breaking the environment law. Above all he saw a great story in it, through which he could awaken the outrage of the island inhabitants”. A book was published on the project, a copy of which Gerhard occasionally gave to ‘Iceland travellers’, so in the journalist’s search for the source of this illegal wall painting, he discovered his address. Iceland television programme makers called Gerhard and tried to persuade him to do a ‘live’ interview. He was wise enough not to do this. A possible fine and cleanup cost would have been disastrous. “I wrote a letter to the politician responsible, in which I explained as clearly as possible that the painting was part of a project I made out of respect and admiration for the Icelandic culture and that it would have been just as ridiculous to consider the cave drawings in Lascaux as graffiti.

This time the Fates were favourably disposed towards our hero. After all Siegfried was a king’s son who originated from the Netherlands

Graffiti 2

Vlissingen/Malmö, 1997

“So you see, you should be grateful for museum directors! She has turned like a leaf on a tree. End of story”. A telephone call from Lund, a beautiful mediaeval town in the shadow of Malmö, built around a university campus which looks almost English. Jan has his photo studio on a nice inner courtyard and we visited him there on our journey up north. Jan lived with us in Rijsbergen for a while and after the academy he went back to Sweden. It was a wonderful start to our journey. We spent this beautiful summer evening in languid warmth reminiscing about the good old days until late in the evening. We agreed that he would try with our documentation to contact people for a possible exhibition, or at least a presentation of the future Scandinavian project.

A large art gallery in Malmö showed interest. Our documentation lay there for quite some time. When Jan thought it was time to talk about it again, it turned out to be a dead end. “She picked up your books and gave them back to me, pointing to the book on the Iceland project”. “Scandalous story, I saw it on television. He should be prosecuted”. The director of the art gallery was Icelandic.

Bird's-eye view 3

Breda, June 1979

We live in a primitive ragbag of three houses in a row in Rijsbergen, ten kilometres south of Breda. Five photography students, I was one of them, once had an initiative to exchange our shabby yet expensive rooms for this dwelling, combining our belongings to a working whole. In the course of time the composition of the residents changed to a diverse company with children. Gerhard was the last to join, cautiously manoeuvring between the demands the company sets him. Obligations such as cooking, washing-up, looking after the children and financial housekeeping effect him in such a way that he increasingly retires to his room. Eventually he works the whole day and night at the academy. He lives on bread and cheese and trudges from one floor to another, spreading his presence thinly.

It is near to the end of our fourth year and a wonderful spring. Our spacious but dilapidated premises offer opportunities to bring our working area outside. While I work on my final assignment every day Gerhard brings mysterious things home, which he has made at the woodwork room at the academy recently. A strange rack-like cart, the wheels of which are placed in such a way that it can only describe a circular motion; a bird mask and a human mask with an ominous expression; a ladder, getting narrower the higher it goes in perspective distortion and much work is put into sewing two large wings, as the children look on with interest. There is something going on. In the evening outside Gerhard and I deliberate on how we can use the attributes made by him in a sort of ritual. It is the time that also Breda is confronted with the phenomenon performance. A year earlier I opened a twin exhibition between Antwerp and Breda in such a form. Gerhard's classmates have exercised great pressure on him recently, as he does not care much for the prevailing developments in the group. The performance is a reply to the critique in relation to his elusive attitude and, typically for him, is to be presented in a stylised manner: packed in and hidden behind all sorts of things, ultimately just as elusive. The half overgrown terrace becomes a practice site

for a couple of days, where we decide on the choreography, under the amused glances of the rest of the 'family'. I am given the role of stooge, sometimes a kind of executioner, whose job it is to lead Gerhard to the highest point, from where he will undertake his 'first attempt at flying'.

In the auditorium of the academy we even hang lights, which can be controlled from the corridor at various intensities. On the day of the performance a handful of people came in, seating themselves in the specially provided chairs. As this is part of Gerhard's final assessment the public is chiefly made up of classmates and teachers. It is always difficult to generate the interest of the academy in special occasions. They prefer to stay in their own department. I am always disappointed that there is not a greater curiosity in community, where you would expect dazzling things – now and again.

It begins with my entrance with a heavy concrete block, into which an iron pin has been cast. This is the centre of our playing field, from which I describe a perfect circle with a rope, with a piece of chalk like a compass. Much care is demanded, as our auditorium is more like a large living room and I am not allowed to damage the parquet, typical of our academy. I lead the blindfolded Gerhard into the circle, remove the blindfold and we embrace. There are stocks with a self-portrait of Gerhard on top of them and I hand him some tomatoes one by one from a bowl hanging from the ceiling, which he aims at his painted likeness. There follows a procession with the cart, now functioning as a rack, with on both sides the two wings and above the bird mask. After a number of rounds I adorn him with the wings and the mask, take him on my shoulders and begin to climb a three-step stepladder. At the top I step to the side onto a plateau, which is a step lower and then step back onto the ground. This procedure is repeated several times, symbolising a long ladder. Much sooner than planned I put him on his feet on the plateau, as the tension makes him seem ten times heavier than he was during our rehearsals in the garden. And it is the first time he has worn the wings and the beak. My own mask hinders my view of my own feet and I realise that he will break his neck if I drop him. Released of my burden I walk to the 'perspective' ladder placed beside him, place a painting of clouds behind it and peer at the top of the ladder, above which hangs a small wad of cotton wool. In the meantime Gerhard begins to flap his wings frightfully, balancing on the 30 centimetres high platform. In a last-ditch effort to break free he plummets down.

Neither fish nor fowl

Maasvlakte, 9 July 1995

We drive through the prosaic landscape of Europoort to the Maasvlakte, the harbour area of Rotterdam. It is oppressively warm and the stench from the industry surrounding us is unbearable. It is not the ideal place to get a taste of what we can expect on our next journey. The choice had been based on practical considerations, so we try to see the poetry in it: a sign shows 'Harbours 2000-3000' to the left. I always think of 'Bachwerken Verzeichnis' when I see this. I also look for that oil storage tank between the others, painted as an old fashioned hatbox. Preparations are in full swing. We depart in two weeks. I have been working on the practical details of the journey for weeks in Vlissingen. I bought an old van, which has been completely adapted inside and outside for the purpose it is to fulfil. A friend and I have invested a lot of time on the engine, which has proved to be a real crash course in car mechanics. Anything can go wrong on the road after all, and we cannot expect any help from the reindeer. There is a roof rack reminiscent of a helicopter platform. Behind the driver's seat there is a kitchenette and sleeping compartment. Outside the windows every possible hole has

been provided with mosquito netting and we even have curtains. It will not get dark there at night. Through the back you access the workplace and the storage. Rakes, shovels, trowels, tools, a barrow, an enormous store cupboard with food, a bicycle, reels of rope, overalls, rain clothing and anything 'handy to have around'. The front part of the cabin can be converted into a café with a table between our seats, and there is a huge collection of tapes in all kinds of compartments and shelves, representing just about the complete history of classical music. The roof holds around 100 kilos of plastic moulds, which Gerhard has made, and with which we can determine the contours of the patterns in the landscapes. The legs of an almost solid iron tripod, which I made to help us take photos even in the worst of conditions, are anchored like cutlery in a cutlery drawer. Gerhard was working on the project at the time. Nothing was left to chance. Not only through the experience gained on his previous projects, but most notably through his own special working method: The form is determined in advance, so it can be implemented 'en place' as exactly as possible. There is little room for improvisation at the site.

I realise that I am completely involved in this project. It began with the photo sessions for the drawings, in which I modelled for the male dancer and was responsible for the recording technique. I would also be responsible for the success of the photography in Lapland and for the printing when we got back. Today was the dress rehearsal. We saw the Maasvlakte as a place where we could find a location which was not polluted too much, but it was not easy. Everything was either closed off or so impassable that we kept on driving until we found ourselves behind a dike, with a small plain, bordering the Nieuwe Waterweg, the canal that connects Rotterdam with the sea. Along the dike there are a number of campers and caravans, which have brought people deformed by excessive consumption. They are our audience, but fortunately do not take the trouble to arise from their deck chairs. We are here to make a drawing according to the protocol which before long we will have to keep for a couple of months.

On our precisely projected circle across Lapland we will make 21 drawings, at equal distances. The crosses on the map again are in a small circle with a diameter of fifteen kilometres. Within this circle we will have to find a suitable location where we can start. Everything is so precise and I notice that I really have to adjust to that. I recognise the methods we use, but I am used to recognising an accumulation of 'mistakes' as essential in the process in which my work is formed. However, I see that it does not work for him, as his work is really the result of great precision. Everything is pulled out: spirit level, plumb line, tape measures, survey equipment, squares and while I step out a distance of three metres, he dashes forward with his flexible steel rule and jokes 'to measure is to know!'

On top of an aluminium household stepladder I prepare to take the photos, while Gerhard removes some weeds with a pair of scissors. I must not take too much notice of that, I think; a window-dresser in the middle of nature.

I sit on one of the beds in the van to put in a new film out of the bright sun and I smell a sickly whiff of fish. I hope it will disappear soon. I have used every type of cleaner there is to re-move the horrific stench which pervaded the van when I bought it. It was a fish van. When I thought I had succeeded I gave it the name. 'Neither fish nor fowl'.

Fellow-travellers 1

Vlissingen, May 1988

In the enormous hall of the former forge of 'De Schelde' shipyard a chaotic activity prevails. Work is going on in various corners on an extensive exhibition of the work of the three of us: Gerhard, Rien Halters and myself. We graduated together in Breda in 1980. Eight years later we decided to hold a review of our work. We chose to exhibit the work in such a way that it formed a labyrinth, in which the public could wander. Our exhibition is the final curtain for the impressive industrial hall, with its arched facade and fifteen 'waterstaatsramen' precisely on the axis of the former slipway, where the bow of an enormous sea-going vessel once towered high above the roof to be seen from every part of the town. Unimaginative property developers will eventually build a ten-a-penny shopping centre on this spot.

We have been giving carte blanche by the municipality to arrange the exhibition as we see fit. In the corner is a maquette with scale models of our pieces in their intended places. Rien's work will traverse the hall like a connecting road: eight sculptures on an equal-sized surface of over two square metres, varying from almost flat to two metres high. A fascinating series, which he calls 'Squares'. Gerhard's sculptures will be housed in a large open space. They have left his cramped atelier on the first floor of his house in Dordrecht for the first time. It was a real operation to get the figures, packed in crates and weighing hundreds of kilos, through the window and into the truck with the help of a hired crane. In this respect Rien and I are a lot more practical. Our work is built up as 'flat pack' so it is a lot more transport-friendly. Here I have the opportunity in peace to build up a figure developed over a number of years, part of which is under the floor. At the moment a sophisticated technical plan is worked out, which is expected to imitate the tides metres in the air. At another place in the hall there are a couple of large tables which Jan Vonk, our designer, is using to work on our catalogue, which we are more or less producing ourselves. There are photos and slides everywhere, which we have made in this hall over the past few weeks. Every sculpture is placed and spotlighted separately in the hall. A titanic job: set down, put away, build up and dismantle to give every sculpture the space it deserves. Throughout long nights we check printer's proofs of the texts recently sent to us by four writers, sometimes from back to front, picking out mistakes. The whole process seems to take place in harmony, until Rien expresses an objection to the order in which we present our work, which came into being naturally. He sees a hierarchy in it that Gerhard and I do not. He himself is the starter, Gerhard the main course and I am the dessert. It is naturally an insoluble dilemma, but with a sour face he eventually accepts the prospect of he and I having the honour of sharing a book with Gerhard, once Gerhard has achieved his predestined greatness, although ours will only be supporting roles. The future of the book is saved, although an invisible meaning has crept in, hidden in the title 'Fellow-travellers'.

Fellow-travellers 2

Etten-Leur, 29 may 1999

Finally I get around to visiting Rien. It has been gnawing at me for a while. I am very busy and I am not used to concentrating on more than one thing at the same time. I am just back from a week in Amsterdam to rehearse a dance, with which I am to open an exhibition. I am

also adding to this writing every day and the silk-screen I have been wrestling with for the last two months is a lot of work.

When Gerhard rang me to tell what was going on, it all merged with my work and how I am daily occupied with him. So it was logical for me to dedicate the silk-screen to Rien. The working title is 'Wondering'. In a natural process the word 'Wounding' was added. Until now I have only spoken to him by telephone. Two-hour discussions, which were really monologues. A waterfall of words, expressing fear, anger and opposition. Gerhard, who often visits him, prepared me for the shift in his condition since he returned home. I park my van by the farmhouse and as I walk between the outhouses propped full of work the realisation of a confrontation with the end of a life suddenly hits me head on. "The radiation treatment has been stopped," Gerhard tells me on the phone. "I think that means that the doctors have given up hope." I find him in bed, almost unrecognisable and with a vacant expression. When I enter his glance changes for a moment and he mumbles my name almost silently. This visit is little more than a presence. Every few minutes he sinks into sleep. With his wife and children I walk through the maze of workrooms, in search of two sculptures that I will soon be transporting for an exhibition. Sorrow overtakes me in a room with an unfinished work, in full development, with tools on top of and around the sculpture. As I drive back his strange vacant face appears before me and remember his hyperactive conversations on the telephone. Once there was a question between his monologues," We will always be fellow-travellers, will we?"

Nature

North Cape, August 1995

Stunned, I awaken from a deep sleep; a book has fallen from my hand beside me. I look around the cabin of the van. All sorts of stuff are strewn around after an afternoon inside. A teapot, the inevitable packet of biscuits, books of every sort, discarded clothing. The window-panes are completely steamed up. The rain lashes against them. Gerhard is not there. I glide out of the top bunk and wrap myself in clothes for a walk. A not too attractive prospect, but I do not think much of staying in the bleak van either. This morning we were working on a drawing, but the weather just became too severe and we decided to do some shopping in the nearby village – biscuits – and take the afternoon off. I wipe the steamed-up window clean and look at the view we have been treated to for the past few days. We knew as soon as we came. It was to be the décor for the meeting of the two dancers. The impressive fjord cuts into the landscape with its overwhelming form, magnifying every subtle change in light, with almost theatrical effect.

This is the northernmost point in our journey and on the mainland, although the North Cape lies on Magerøya, an island its name more than worth: before we crossed to this island, we had still seen some stubborn efforts of birch grow, of a bonsai size, but here only grass and moss grow, accompanied by a single bloom - '*Barren Island*' -

The journey here led us through the expansive infertile area of Finnmark, now and then interspersed with a folkloric junk shop of primitive wigwam-like tents, with all kinds of Lappish nicknackery and heaps of reindeer antlers. The proprietors themselves live in tumbledown huts and caravans, covered with ugly flapping strips of plastic, representing the

new folklore and poignantly exhibiting their second-class citizenship. Leaving the plain we drove into the fjord landscape again, now on the northern side of the endless, always peopled coast. Along a layered, fragmented slate rocky coast, through funky single lane tunnels, with a bay every 20 metres to allow an oncoming car to pass, which totally blinded us with its headlights in the pitch-dark, soaking, glowing interior, we finally reached the ferry to our destination. Honningsvåg is the sweetly named place in the lee of the south tip of the island where we moored.

I have to keep hold of the door against the hard wind as I go outside and slip into the back of the van to put on my waterproofs and boots, still wet from this morning. Finally to the fjord I resolve and start off along the slow decline. Any moment I expect to meet a someone in green waterproofs. Gerhard probably had the same plan and will be on his way back. The fjord proves to be much farther than I thought. Every time I reach a plateau the landscape plunges into infinity before me, without me coming any nearer. I pass the three-metre high legs of the tripod, in front of which the ten-metre drawing is laid out. One moment I am up to my ankles in the squelchy quicksand, the next I have to watch out for sudden fissures which guide the inexplicable quantities of water downwards. For almost an hour I make my way down in an almost straight line. I realise that I have not yet met that slightly stooping figure, wrapped in thoughts, hands behind his back. It befits the treacherous whimsicalness of this, at first sight, slight slope.

A few metres before I reach the water I am overcome by a pleasant mildness. The wind dies down and the streaming rain has become a friendly drizzle. I am standing on a little sharp sand beach. Everywhere the streams seek a path to the dark, still water from which the pitch-black rocks reach straight into the sky. The fjord is somehow threatening and yet it has an irresistible attraction on me. I take off my clothes and carefully roll them in my waterproofs, so that they will stay dry and enter the freezing water. Once I grow accustomed to the cold and know from experience that it will release a salutary feeling for a while, I float on my back to allow the deathly silence wash over me, disturbed only by the lively murmur of the brooklets. Besides the feeling of blissful unity I am also fully alert of the presence of danger, the realisation of an overwhelming power and my own fragility. As the cold returns I dry myself on my underwear and quickly dress. I begin the journey back, languid, looking back at the darker and darker water now and again. After a while I am seized by a light anxiety when I turn as dark steadily falls and see that I can only make out the contours of the fjord due to rising mist. Instinctively I draw a line from the water in the direction of where the van should be, in the knowledge that I will not have a single visual orientation point from now on. Five minutes later I cannot see past my own nose and I blindly follow the imaginary line which should bring me home.

A slight panic overcomes me as I lose all track of time and begin to wonder if I have walked for an hour yet. The idea that I am walking uphill and just have to follow it is treacherous. Sometimes I feel that I have not been going uphill for quiet some time and imagine that I have taken a turn and am now on a parallel path to the one I should be on and so will never find my way back. I silently hope I will find the tripod and did think I saw it once. Much later I sat on a stone to consider my situation. Perhaps Gerhard is waiting worried, dinner long ready. He, who has a rock-solid confidence in my sense of direction and does not even know where he is headed in clear daylight. At that moment there is a noise and right above my head a car rushes

past. I jump up. Two metres further on is the four-metre high dike, with the road on it. I run up, overpowered by relief. Up, there is a new choice for me: left or right. I choose left and begin happily follow the road, not recognising anything that confirms that I am going the right direction. After two kilometres I decide to turn back, when I judge that I could never have gone so far off course. Twenty or thirty metres from the place where I found the road I find the trusty old van, spreading a dim light through the steamed up windows. As I open the door the sound of music and warm steam of cooking greet me. "Dinner's almost ready. I was expecting you. I've been back for a while, but I got lost on the way back. Not that that would ever happen to you!"

Bird's-eye view 4

Saint-Setiers, Haute-Corrèze, France, August 1997

In a hellish noise and with unbelievable bumping of the wheels on the concrete I sit uncomfortably propped up in the back seat, belted up and surrounded by countless cameras. The change is sudden and remarkable – the speed, the noise, the rattling and the shaking disappear and everything goes weightless. We are flying. I didn't feel completely at ease as I had approached the unsightly little aircraft with the elderly, genial pilot. The closer it came the smaller it grew. The pilot felt the propeller, one hand in his pocket, and repositioned the aircraft in one single movement. This is an aeroplane with the wings above the windows, especially suitable for photography purposes. And the windows open too. The likeness is complete: they are precisely the same windows as the 2CV ugly duckling has. We are in France.

Clear skies this morning, not a cloud in sight. The night's last dew in the hazy distance. Under us the sloping landscape of wood, farmlands and small villages. The excessively winding railway line shows me the real contours of the ground. It takes around fifteen minutes before we reach our destination and I nervously check my cameras for the umpteenth time. The fact that I must not make any mistake makes me insecure. The aviator turns to me and asks for the exact place we are headed for, just to be certain, but soon I hear different noise from the driving seat. "Oh, la la, incroyable, merveilleux. C'est là, la nageuse. Comment est-ce possible. Je suis dans les airs tous les jours et je ne l'ai jamais vue!" With a sharp turn he circles the plane and flies as low as possible. She lies there in bright white lines on the deep green field. A mysterious image. Slowly she revolves as the landscape below us turns. Somewhere in a corner of the field I see a minuscule speck: it's the creator of the work. Made for the birds.

Gertjan Evenhuis

Vlissingen, June 1999