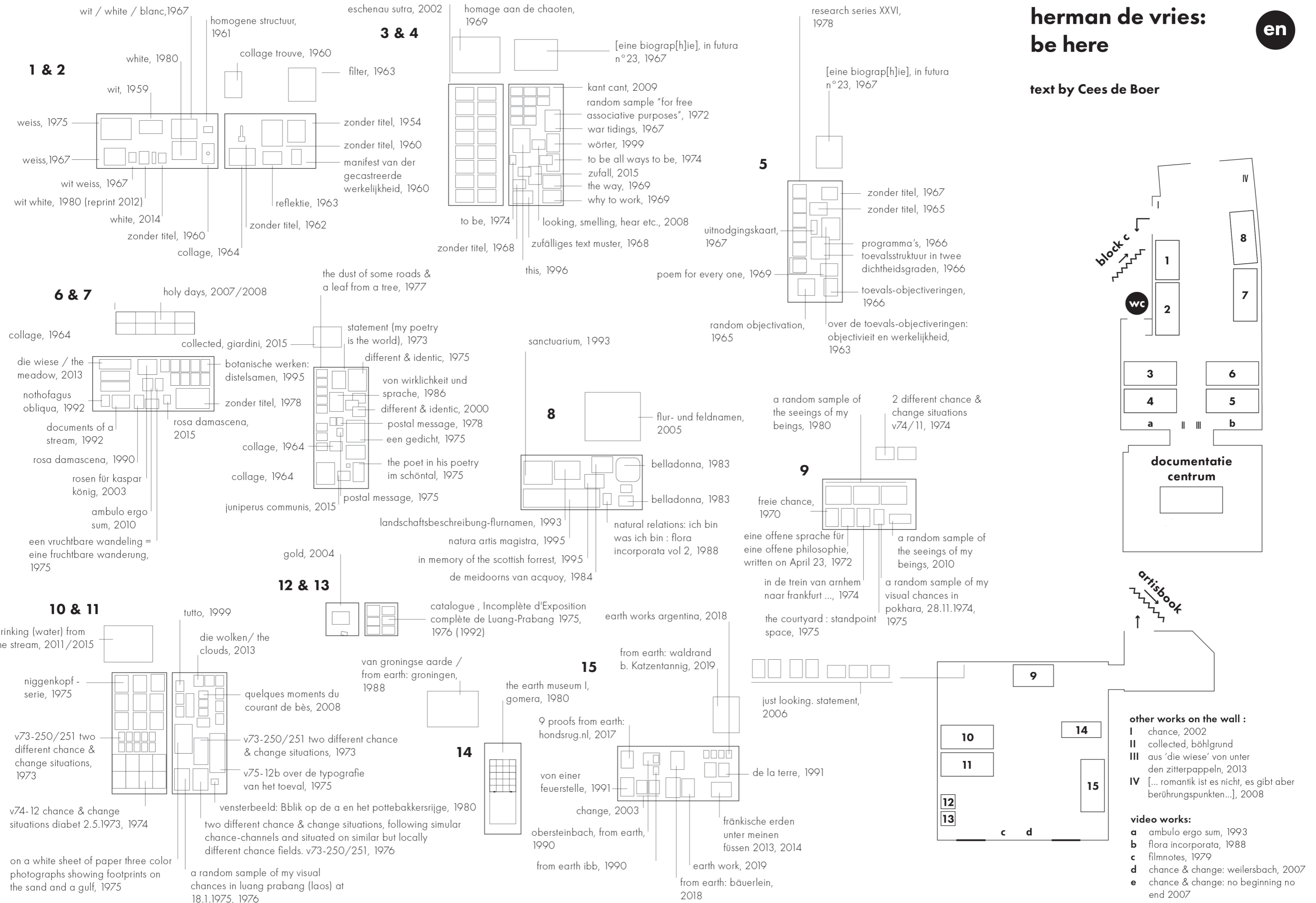


# herman de vries: be here

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text by Cees de Boer



# herman de vries: be here

Cees de Boer

The exhibition **be here** presents a thematically arranged overview of texts by herman de vries and of his contributions to publications, magazines and catalogs. These concern both commentaries on his own works, as well as artist's statements, which can take many different forms: a single word on a page, a poem, a photo image or material from nature with a title, a sound recording. The transition from *statement* to work of art is often fluid in de vries's oeuvre, and on closer inspection the artist often focusses on small but essential shifts like these.

The title **be here** is in itself already a brief *statement*. It is an invitation, addressed by the artist to each of us, to enter into something, as de vries often says: to enter into things, into nature, into place and space, into situation and experience. The invitation is simple and direct. What is being invited to, on the other hand, has many dimensions and is usually experienced as infinitely complex. Or are we perhaps unnecessarily complicating **be here** by conceiving of **to be** and **here** as texts with a complex logic? Is accepting perhaps simpler than we think? Why do we find the invitation to **be here** so difficult to accept?

The texts accompanying de vries's art are always clear and direct; de vries never tries to say what cannot be said. He shares with the philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein the insight that language creates a reality alongside reality. de vries's conclusion is therefore that every text must be *to the point*.

de vries and Wittgenstein also share the view that language not only says, but also shows, in other words it has a visual, presentational capacity. de vries has made use of this quality of language in a variety of ways: by treating language as material, by fragmenting texts, by undermining language through its paradoxical properties.

In this respect, too, de vries is always *to the point* when he places a golden dot at more or less random locations in a landscape. This silent gesture, this pointing at something (always unique), the leaving behind of a trace in time and space that can be perceived (or not...) by a hiker - this is a point that does not mark the end of a text, but is an invitation to the hiker to experience **this** as the center (one of many...)

of the world. herman de vries presents a clue as to how you can open up your own field of experience in which language, text and stories play a subordinate role.

Such a trace left by the artist is at once physical and open; *open* is often the word de vries prefers to use instead of the word abstract. It is also alright if the encounter does not take place, if the invitation is not followed, if the clue is not noticed, if it is simply for itself a bright golden point that catches and reflects a ray of sunshine.

When de vries bestows the title of a **poem** on a tuft of meadow grass (*Poa annua*), he involves art (poetry) and nature with each other's domain in such a way that reality leaves its traces in language, and language in reality. Moreover, he relates art (poetry) and nature to each other. Perspectives are exchanged. Thus language, nature and art no longer speak about each other, but speak against, with, through, parallel to, for each other.

**be here** is an invitation to the viewer, is an index for the reader who, in addition to looking and reading, can also listen, taste, smell, touch. For herman de vries an indication very often literally consists of the act of pointing out. Not a suggestion, an idea, a concept, something abstract and certainly not something metaphysical that needs to be written with a capital letter. It is a finger pointing, an act of almost or total touching, a pointing to **this**, touching **this** without the need for language, a silent but nonetheless significant gesture.

Such gestures with the finger, hand or eye (but also with the ear, with the tongue, with the nose) are gestures with the body that precedes language, the body that cannot be replaced by language. An important tendency within Western philosophy of the 20th century is to transform the body into a story, to make it readable as a text. herman de vries's plea, on the other hand, is to go somewhere by tasting, smelling, listening, looking, reading and being aware with the naked skin. In short, a corporeality that precedes language, that makes *physics* and *metaphysics* equivalent, as a text from 1994-1995 puts it.

**be here** - as a title and as an index - invites us to engage with reality - especially with the reality of nature as art, and of nature as an ecological model for human existence. Today we have regrettably become accustomed to a stream of subtitles that continually translate and comment on our direct experience of nature. herman de vries calls for us to experience nature and existence not metaphorically,

not symbolically, not as standing-for-something-else, and to perceive it as not-speaking-about-something-else. The oeuvre of herman de vries is an exercise in perception (touching, tasting, smelling, hearing, seeing, being aware) so that your whole body becomes part of the field in which you find yourself.

**be here** or **to be** or **this** or **joy** or **infinity** are traces that herman de vries inserts into reality here and there. They "are minimal texts, which I leave behind in a beloved landscape. philo-sophical fragments - fragmentary philosophy. no system! that would be a prison. freedom is a precondition for knowledge. relations are there to be discovered, to be created by a free reader her/himself. it is not without reason that these texts are to be found in nature, in the woods: there are relationships from place to place everywhere [or: all over]. the woods as a suitable space, biotope, for contemplation. walking, moving, searching, finding as a way of getting to know and perhaps along the way you discover something more important than what you are looking for."

By their open-ended nature, such philosophical fragments foil the possibility of being woven into the endless chains of interpretations, annotations, and metaphysical conjectures that characterize the history of nearly 3,000 years of Western philosophy. His plea - in words, images and actions - for what touches the naked body gives de vries' work a unique position that is ultimately not limited to art or to philosophy.

Similarly, herman de vries is only indirectly interested in the coordinates that define Western science: time, space, causality, efficiency, truth, repeatability. He draws attention to the extraordinary phenomenon that nature consists exclusively of individuals, of individual and unique creations of evolution that, through collaboration, by touching each other, make connections and thereby change.

**be here** invites us to be aware. **be here** points to *this* - *this* at the market, in the city, by a tree, in a stone, on a wall, with a book, during a journey, after a walk, in running water. herman de vries therefore does not have to cause anything, does not have to add anything to a reality that already has a hard enough time emerging from behind all our texts, stories and other networks.

## colofon

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