



# *L'Art du Bonheur:* Rituals of Domesticity in *VideoSchetsboek*, Pink 1983

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In 2018 the Royal Antiquarian Society (Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap, hereafter KOG) in Amsterdam accepted the gift of a series of artworks titled *VideoSchetsboek* (*VideoSketchbook*) to add to its collection of post-war objects. Signed 'Pink' and dated 1983, this acquisition consists of a set of twelve colour photographs of interiors (figs. 1-12) along with thirteen videos that have been transferred on to DVDs. The colour photographs of the twelve different interiors, which each feature a portrait of a woman, a man and a child, measure 485 x 485 mm (705 x 695 mm in their frames) and correspond to twelve video recordings of the same interiors. In order to create this work, the Dutch artist Pink de Thierry lived with her husband and their daughter as 'the De Koning family', which is the impersonal alter ego of the artist with her husband and child, in a different house every day for twelve days. This happened in a row of twelve houses in Spaarnrijkstraat, a side street off Rijksstraatweg in Haarlem-Noord, built in the nineteen-twenties (fig. 13).<sup>1</sup> The photographer Henze Boekhout took the pictures and recorded the videos in each house.<sup>2</sup>

The series was shown in Middelburg, Arnhem, Rome, Edinburgh, Zagreb and elsewhere, but the perfect setting for this work proved to be the Vishal in Haarlem (at that time an annex of the

< Fig. 15

Frans Hals Museum/De Hallen), where it was shown under the title *At Home* in 1984 (fig. 14). The different components were installed as if along a street, with the videos on the left and the photographs of the same interiors opposite them. Visitors walked along the brick floor of the Vishal between the videos and the photographs to arrive at what actually seemed to be an official group portrait of 'the De Koning family' (perhaps referring to their chosen surname which translates as the King family). This video was projected as the thirteenth at the end of the street, a still image of which is reproduced here (fig. 15). The walk made the visitor an *actant*, a person who fulfils an integral role in the narrative of the performance, without which it is incomplete.<sup>3</sup> On the left, visitors were confronted with moving images, and on the right with a static interior image in a frame. Photographs and video images alternated and complemented one another. Frames around the photographs and the edges of the video screens acted as if they were the window frames that revealed interiors from the street, but at the same time framed life outside seen from the living rooms. Every window frame, after all, acts as a window on the assembled individual world that is the interior, as well as offering access from the domestic interior to the less controllable public world.



*Fig. 1*  
PINK, *Video-Schetsboek no. 1*, signed Pink '83. Photograph, 485 x 485 mm.

Photographer:  
Henze Boekhout.  
Amsterdam,  
Royal Antiquarian  
Society Collection,

inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-1,  
entrusted to the  
Rijksmuseum.  
The series KOG-ZG-  
IX-1-1 to 25 was gifted

to the KOG in 2017 by  
Chris van Eeghen.  
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Pictoright  
Amsterdam 2023



Fig. 2  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 2,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-2,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 3  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 3,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-3,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 4  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 4,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-4,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 5  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 5,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-5,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 6  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 6,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-6,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 7  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 7,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-7,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 8  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 8,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-8,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 9  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 9,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-9,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 10  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 10,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-10,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 11  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 11,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-11,  
for credit line see p. 6.



Fig. 12  
PINK, Video-  
Schetsboek no. 12,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-IX-1-12,  
for credit line see p. 6.

The visitors' positions made them become part of a performance with 'the De Koning family' at its heart. Videos and photographs invited viewers to discover that their own, apparently ordinary, daily lives were also plays full of rituals.

### *L'Art du Bonheur*

This series is part of a project that Pink called *L'Art du Bonheur*, 'the art of happiness'. The challenge for *Video-Schetsboek* lay in the uncompromising execution of her idea of living in a different house in the same street in Haarlem for twelve days within the conventions of an everyday domestic protocol. It was a street with a personal meaning for the artist, as she was born there. Pink wanted to stage-manage 'domestic happiness' with her performance. Twelve families in a row of houses were asked to participate on consecutive days. After thorough preparation, lots of cups of coffee, persuading residents to cooperate,

and convincing them yet again that they really were not tax inspectors, the family was able to embark on the twelve-day project. At eight o'clock in the morning 'the De Koning family' showed up on the doorstep to take over the house in question. They lived in each house for a day and at dinnertime it was returned to the rightful occupants. A short video recording them drinking coffee in the morning was filmed from outside through the window of each house while a photographic portrait of the young family was taken in the interior of each of the twelve houses.

'The De Koning family' made its debut during the 1981 Holland Festival when Pink staged the exhibition *Oost West Thuis Best* (There's No Place Like Home) in the Meervaart leisure centre in the Amsterdam suburb of Osdorp.<sup>4</sup> In the run-up to this presentation Pink researched how people lived in the Nieuw-West district of Amsterdam and had a completely standard flat constructed and furnished based on

Fig. 13  
Spaarnrijkstraat,  
a side street off  
Rijksstraatweg in  
Haarlem-Noord,  
built in the nineteen-  
twenties.  
© PINK de Thierry /  
Pictoright  
Amsterdam 2023



this inspiration. The De Bijenkorf department store sponsored its furnishing; Pink was allowed to pick out what she needed in the Amsterdam branch. It was the first manifestation of her *L'Art du Bonheur* project. For Pink, this period coincided with the birth of her daughter in 1980, a moment of great change in her life. It is important here not to understand happiness as a well-defined abstract fact, but as a complexity of patterns, expectations and projections that people in Dutch society share, and which are determined culturally by tradition, social group, upbringing, expectation or, conversely, the dissociation from them. A complex entity that we claim for ourselves, and experience individually and as part of a family or group at the same time.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Videoschetsboek as Disruptive**

The performance that is *VideoSchetsboek* works like a mirror. The videos present daily life as it happens in each house. As the members of 'the De Koning family' are not the original occupants – it's not *their* furniture, *their* houseplants, *their* coffee cups, *their* family photographs – the daily activities refer to each living room as an everyday stage. That room is the place of human actions of men, women and children, it reflects ownership and domesticity, offers a place for social intercourse, is a private space and a safe haven where visitors from outside are received. In her fundamental study of ritual, the religious studies scholar Catherine Bell includes the complex of recurring, everyday actions in a space.<sup>6</sup> She believes that repeated activities must be understood as rituals that show how the body not only moves through space and time during a day, but at the same time creates, organizes and gives meaning to that space as a ritual environment. Following Bell's view, Pink's videos with their vivid images appear to be real life; the portrait photographs, however, picture that world in a stylized way, in a theatrical form where

grouping and action are composed, revealing as it were the distinctive components of daily rituals. Looking at the photographs gives rise to an alienating, disruptive experience and an uncomfortable tension between the interior and the family's artificial pose. This is also evident from the uniform clothes that 'the De Koning family' wear all the time, except for a tie, a scarf or a piece of jewellery, which were apparently chosen anew every day. In the photographs the family seems to be constantly visiting, but the hosts are not visible. So, are they perhaps the residents after all? Are we seeing their individual and private life in these mirrors? Or is it precisely the unvarying, universal and continuous nature of domestic rituals that is expressed and reinforced through style, stereotypical poses and gestures in a theatrical composition?

The photographs can rightly be termed portraits. They formally capture what is moving in the videos – a transience which we can compare to a quick sketch (hence video *sketch* book).<sup>7</sup> The poses of the man, woman and child appear to be staged, as in a photographer's studio, with the big difference that these interiors are real, everyday surroundings that are an essential element of the portraits. They are not just add-ons, or scenery, their material presence, like the poses of 'the De Koning family', tells a story. In 1988, Derk Snoep, the director of the Frans Hals Museum, remarked that the portraits, like official portraits, had an unapproachable, inaccessible feeling that gives such portraits their essential added value. He wrote that 'whereas traditional painting uses additional elements that clarify social or hierarchical positions, Pink's portraits, despite all their displayed corporality, build up what may be an even greater distance. It is not easy to respond to the figures' hard stares. The art of video images and photography upstages the art of painting'.<sup>8</sup> This is why the portraits and videos are condensed messages:

not a portrait of individuals, but of the family in an interior as a metaphor for family life, connectedness and coexistence. The 'official portrait' in the video in the installation shows us that we ourselves could be the subject of *L'Art du Bonheur* (fig. 15). The poses and activities of the subjects are stylized, stereotypical representations of family togetherness. The three-year-old daughter is almost always the focus in the photographs, which could mean that the future is put before the past. It gives rise to the impression that the mother plays the lead role; she is the artist and the *mater familias*. Her pose is deliberately theatrical, that of a performer, judging by her facial expression which is sometimes stern, sometimes smiling or speaking. In some portraits she dominates the image, and the man stands behind her (figs. 1, 2). Her pose is more formal and more passive than the man's. He sometimes reads a book or a newspaper, sits at a desk or smokes a pipe. His attention is also often focused on the woman and

child together. More than once the man and the woman sit together, sometimes in conversation or in an affectionate pose (figs. 7, 8, 11). The more relaxed sitting is interspersed with standing in the room more formally, as if it is an official portrait (fig. 4). The child is often between them, sitting on a lap or busy alone in the room, and on one occasion in the garden (fig. 8). Interaction with the child only occurs twice: in a game of cards and in the offering of a piece of fruit (figs. 3, 5). In all these artificial poses, 'the De Koning family' presents itself as the epitome of middle-class family life. The living room is the symbol of that society, repeated twelve times as an *oikos*, which in its original, ancient Greek meaning refers to family and family property as well as to the home.<sup>9</sup> By implication, these twelve interiors are also the street and that street is the neighbourhood, just as a town is made up of neighbourhoods and society is composed of towns and cities with their streets and neighbourhoods.

Fig. 14  
VideoSchetsboek  
shown in the  
At Home exhibition  
in the Vishal  
(Annex of the  
Frans Hals Museum,  
Haarlem) 1984.  
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Pictoright  
Amsterdam 2023



The house is a cocoon, where everyone living in it is at home and is kept safe.

However, by repeatedly having the same family live in different interiors friction arises: what or who is interchangeable, what or who is unique? Are we individuals, or is that a relative fact? The parents in 'the De Koning family' did not belong in any of the interiors but, as in real life, alternated their role as husband, wife, parent, individual, housewife and employee with that of performer and artist in their temporary surroundings. In her relative innocence, the young child is the conspicuous mediator between reality and staged ideal because she appears to be able to play a far less conscious role. All the houses in the street are the same size and have the same façade, but they are unique because they are occupied by a particular family that gave their interior its own form and character. The fact that 'the De Koning family' repeatedly had morning coffee in all the houses did not so much emphasize the interchangeability of family life as it did the fact that the lives of families in a white middle-class district of a Dutch town or city are subject to patterns and rituals and within them people are very much alike. The interiors show this as well; everywhere there are variations of the same typology of furniture: the table, the chair, the sofa, the armchair, the candlestick, the television, the clock and the houseplant.

#### The Performance of 1984

In 1984 *VideoSchetsboek* was shown in Haarlem alongside a performance in the Grote Markt, the city's central square. In the shadow of St Bavo's church, a painted backdrop of a house that fulfilled all the stereotypes of a dream was put up. It had a red peaked roof, wooden shutters and a front garden with standard garden fences from a builder's merchant (fig. 16). 'The De Koning family' lived in this illusion, which refers to the title of



the exhibition *At Home*, for a hundred days and received guests, and was actually sleeping in a caravan behind the backdrop. Depending on the viewer's position, the perspective of the composition worked or failed. This shift from ideal image to the shattering of that dream image, obviously deliberately intended, was based on the many promotional, commercial housing brochures that Pink had collected, in which happiness was linked to a house with a garden. With this artwork, too, Pink was questioning dream and reality and the meaning of private and public. She tried to explore the border between the clichés of a fictional world, spread by mass media, and reality as a performance.

Why did Pink choose performance? She was one of the first artists to do so in the Netherlands, and that makes

Fig. 15  
PINK, *Official Portrait of 'the De Koning family'*, 1983.  
Photographer: Henze Boekhout.  
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Fig. 16  
PINK, *At Home*,  
performance in  
the Grote Markt  
of Haarlem next  
to the Vishal, 1984.  
Photographer:  
Henze Boekhout.  
© PINK de Thierry /  
Pictoright  
Amsterdam 2023

*VideoSchetsboek* stand out. Her roots lie in the experimental theatre in Belgium of the late nineteen-sixties. She attended acting classes at the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts in Brussels in 1964-65 and worked as an actress for a few years in Belgian theatre, film and television productions. Pink's interest in the visual arts was particularly stimulated by her personal encounter with Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976), the *grand seigneur* of Belgian conceptual art, whom she met in the Brussels alternative art circuit. She contributed, for instance, as a performer at the opening of Broodthaers's now legendary *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*. In 1969 Pink

joined forces with the artist/graphic designer/performance artist Raphaël Opstaele (1934-2018) and the architect Jef De Groote (?-?). De Groote had also been involved with the opening of Broodthaers's museum and had been active in the Cologne-based experimental art scene. Their collaboration resulted in the foundation of the *Mass Moving* collective, which brought about a number of participative interventions in public spaces between 1969 and 1976. They were looking for new places to experience art. For them, the street or the public domain meant much more than museums or art galleries. Their ambition was to work as collectively as possible. *Mass Moving* developed into a group that initiated all kinds of happenings, performances and installations. The intention was to remove the distinction between performer and audience by physically involving the viewer in the theatrical action.<sup>10</sup> In *VideoSchetsboek*, however, Pink shows that she returned to visual art, although the combination of video and photography, the arrangement with a street as the connecting element, invites active visitor participation. This newfound form of everyday theatricality was also the means in her other art projects to address essential aspects of daily social life and the socialization process, whereby we, consciously or unconsciously, acquire the values and norms of a group.

### **The KOG Atlas of Manners and Customs**

With its emphasis on the rituals of domesticity, this series found an appropriate home in the collections of the KOG, supplementing it with recent work, as part of a desired expansion of these collections with material from the later twentieth century. The KOG was founded in 1858 through an interest in archaeology and cultural heritage, and because of the desire to establish a National Museum of Dutch Antiquities. This was to promote

knowledge of antiquities, in particular as a source for history, art and industry that could illustrate the uniqueness of Dutch culture as opposed to foreign heritage.<sup>11</sup> The founders wanted to collect material objects from Dutch history, such as applied art and interior components. This interest was not based on their status as art but on their significance for cultural history, and also represented what we now might call an anthropological approach. At the end of 1875, co-founder Daniel Franken Dzn suggested compiling an atlas of manners and customs. This time it was not about material, three-dimensional objects but about images of everyday life. Franken wrote: 'It will thus be possible to obtain a history of the manners and customs, of sculpture and all ornamental arts in our fatherland.'<sup>12</sup> Collecting prints and drawings and having images made became a central activity, as art historian Irene de Groot has analyzed so well.<sup>13</sup> This is why a great deal of importance was attached to photography, and commissioning it, from the start. It was not until 1885 that the *Atlas of Manners and Customs (Atlas Zeden en Gewoonten)* came about. Yellow leather binders in which the collections were kept were ordered in 1888.

The classification scheme was printed in 1919, and in it we find 'Domestic and Societal Life in the Netherlands in Previous Centuries' (Huiselijk en maatschappelijk leven in Nederland in vroeger eeuwen) divided into:

- A. 'the beginning, middle and end of people' (birth to death)
- B. the clothes (traditional costume, jewellery)
- C. the dwelling (castle, country estate, landscaping, interior, household effects)
- D. games and entertainment (folk games, team games, ice-skating)
- E. stimulants (drinking, smoking)
- F. everyday life (home life, celebrations)<sup>14</sup>

The classification reflects the way the Atlas wanted to focus on life in all its interweaving throughout the country. From life cycle, place of residence, daily and seasonal activities, to feast days that call for special rituals, specific in appearance and occurrence, because they are locally different. The focus was on the history of the Dutch people, the well-to-do, the common people but also anonymous citizens.<sup>15</sup> We find in it illustrations of the interior of the restored hall in the Muiderslot – an example of the domestic quarters of the upper class in the Golden Age – but also in the Hindelooper and Zeeland rooms as emblems of national folk culture (fig. 17).

1885, the year the Atlas took shape, also saw the opening of the Rijksmuseum. The Nederlandsch Museum, founded in The Hague in 1875, was housed there as one of the three main departments of a museum of history and art. David van der Kellen was in charge. He was also the curator of the KOG, which was given its own exhibition room in the museum. The interest that underpinned the creation of the *Atlas of Manners and Customs* and the collection of material culture was visualized in a museum arrangement of period rooms in the Nederlandsch Museum, which Van der Kellen furnished together with Victor de Stuers and Pierre Cuyper. The stage-managed interior of the period rooms provided the architectural, spatial context for a cultural-historical cohesion of forms of living and life, as interior historian Barbara Laan has recently clearly demonstrated.<sup>16</sup> In this context the concept of 'oud-hollandsch' (old Dutch) also emerged, linking the style of these interiors to national identity. The need to connect residence and lifestyle by means of a seventeenth-century living room became evident in the *Oud-Hollandsche Kamer* (the Old Dutch room) in the yet to be completed Rijksmuseum, set up during the International Colonial and Export Exhibition of 1883.<sup>17</sup>

## Living and Domesticity in the Nineteenth Century

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the living room as showcased by the KOG and the Rijksmuseum had acquired a number of special meanings. As a symbol of domesticity – summed up in that typical Dutch word ‘gezelligheid’ (conviviality, warmth) – the interior of a house has to this day acquired a mythical status that symbolizes care for the home and the household and the value attached to a happy private life at home.<sup>18</sup> In his *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, published in 1987, the architect Witold Rybczynski paid tribute to the Netherlands as the culture in which domesticity was discovered.<sup>19</sup> As far back as 1789 the magazine *Bijdragen tot Menschelijk Geluk* (Contributions to Human Happiness) stated that ‘the greatest joy of mankind is to love and be loved: and – where can this take place more perfectly, better and more fervently, than under one and the same roof?’<sup>20</sup> There was a firm belief that domestic bliss was good for the development of the nation. Domesticity was linked above all else with the development of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, and also with family life and maternal love. Increasing domesticity is evident from the way the living room finally established itself in the nineteenth-century house plan with the suite of furniture – table and chairs, lighting, a stove, floor covering, decorations and houseplants – that went with it. The hall, kitchen and bedroom slowly gained their own typological place in the house with accompanying furniture and accessories.<sup>21</sup> As more and more people became convinced of the personal and public benefits of a cosy and homely family atmosphere, the need arose to convey that conviction to others. During the nineteenth century there were tireless attempts to elevate the population to what was considered to be ‘refinement’ through civilized behaviour.<sup>22</sup> This ‘civilization process’

consisted of the promotion of cleanliness and hygiene, the conscious raising and education of children, and the discouragement of the consumption of alcohol and gambling. Propagating the ideal of domesticity was seen as a catalyst in achieving this mission. In 1890, when a clergyman in Wormerveer was asked what he thought of ‘the desire to make the home pleasant’, he said that it was a virtue: ‘things that improve the house and make the little room cosy, I am not soon inclined to call such a vice.’<sup>23</sup> *De Maatschappij tot Nut van ’t Algemeen*, founded in 1784, regarded domestic bliss as medicine for all social ailments; since 1873 the organization *Floralia Vereenigingen tot Volksonwikkeling door het kweeken van planten* had been championing growing and cultivating one’s own houseplants as a means of promoting order, patience, cleanliness, health and home life.<sup>24</sup> Life’s misfortunes and calamities would be alleviated by domestic bliss. The woman of the house was given the central role here. In 1866 the popular *De huisvrouw* (The Housewife) by Henriette Davidis, translated from the German and dedicated to ‘Dutch women from all walks of life’, formulated the position of wife and mother thus: ‘And yet, the household is her true destiny; the peace and happiness of husband, children and servants depend to a great extent on the care she devotes to her management.’<sup>25</sup>

Nineteenth-century architects, writers and historians looked for models of this domesticity in the past. This could be the seventeenth-century bourgeoisie interior, or the folk art of the popular room from the Frisian fishing and merchant town of Hindeloopen. That room was even seen as a more accurate expression of national character than living rooms from middle-class culture (fig. 17).<sup>26</sup> We see a table, a chair, a fireplace and a family as the fixed ingredients. To a significant extent these orientations on household bliss and family life explain the KOG interest in the *Atlas of*



Fig. 17  
J.F.C. RECKLEBEN  
AFTER JAN  
REIJNDERS,  
*A Hindelooper  
Interior Room*,  
before 1879.  
Engraving,  
197 x 251 mm.  
Amsterdam,  
Royal Antiquarian  
Society Collection,  
*Atlas of Manners  
and Customs*,  
inv. no. KOG-ZG-1-25-6.

*Manners and Customs* and the interior as an important domestic context for central virtues and customs of the Dutch nation.

It now becomes clear why Pink's *VideoSchetsboek* as part of *L'Art du Bonheur* is such a fitting acquisition for the KOG's collections. In its turn, the context gained in the Atlas adds new cultural-historical meanings to *VideoSchetsboek* which enrich the status and significance of the work. After all, *VideoSchetsboek* was originally produced as an artwork, something that the KOG did not initially see as a collecting objective for the Atlas. In the Atlas, Pink's work is therefore a bridge between art and documentation and between representations of home life at the end of the nineteenth and at the end of the twentieth century.

### Living and Interior in the Twentieth Century

In the last century, the interior remained the focus of ideas surrounding upbringing and civil behaviour. Conversations about morals and customs became arguments about ways of life, respectability, individuality and taste. The furniture and interior designer Willem Penaat (1875-1957) set up his workshop *De Woning* in 1902.<sup>27</sup> In 1905 in collaboration with the Amsterdam-based society *Kunst aan het Volk* (Art to the People) he staged an exhibition of architecture and applied art. It compared different types of interiors from different times. This was to make it clear how hideous the nineteenth-century interior was by comparison to newer, contemporary, living rooms. Successive innovations in Dutch

modernism such as the *De Stijl* movement and *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* also attributed great instrumental value to the home interior. From 1946 to 1968 *Stichting Goed Wonen* in the Netherlands championed raising living culture to a higher level by improving home furnishings in the broadest sense of the word. Taste education became dominant; national identity no longer played a role. *Goed Wonen* promoted the production and distribution of furniture, soft furnishings and appliances, which had to comply with certain aesthetic, technical and social requirements. Oak Morris chairs and floral wallpaper were bad, rattan furniture, white walls and fresh tones were good good (fig. 18).<sup>28</sup> This established a clear link between the everyday living environment and morality. The way in which this was used in an ongoing debate about right and wrong, true and false, luxury and

faux luxury responded to the desire to establish standards of good taste. Ultimately this domestic ideology was determined by the desires of people themselves. With the increasing affluence in the second half of the twentieth century everyone got the opportunity to give positive shape to an individual world by furnishing their own interior within their own possibilities. At the same time, it became an important means of showing that you fit in. *VideoSchetsboek* shows a representation of this individualization and questions it.

When contextualizing Pink's *VideoSchetsboek* it becomes clear that the interior in its multiple meaning is of essential cultural-historical importance for understanding our everyday world. In his project *L'Invention du Quotidien* (The Practice of Everyday Life) from 1974 to 1980, which remarkably enough

Fig. 18  
Goed Wonen:  
een Nederlandse  
wooncultuur, 1946-  
1968 / Wonen-TA/BK.  
Tijdschrift voor  
huisvesting en  
omgeving 1979,  
no. 4/5, p. 23.



coincided with Pink's discovery of the performance and thematics of *L'Art du Bonheur*, the historian Michel de Certeau showed the relevance of the study of relationships that together and mutually determine the meaning of everyday life.<sup>39</sup> These relationships are spatial – how and where our life manifests itself, such as in the street, in the neighbourhood and in the interior of our home – and social – how we express our relationship with others, in invitations for tea and coffee, in greeting, choice of words, asking questions, holding a glass. They also relate to the relationship with ourselves, our attitude, behaviour and conduct, our clothes and our consumption, to the values that we attach to it which in turn determine our actions in the private and public areas of life. De Certeau stated that the home environment is the very first territory where we operate as human beings. It is the place we can retreat to ('come home') and where private values count. This environment offers a portrait of those who live there through the objects and their arrangement and the activities that they imply. Together they form a narrative in which the private space is at the same time the effective scenery and the operational theatre.

The photographs and videos from Pink's *VideoSchetsboek* show quite aptly and convincingly that the interior is both background and place of action. Table, chair and sofa form central points of activity; in every image they present themselves in their design, surface, material, colour and decoration; there are flowers, a *Story* magazine lies on the table, a book. In the nineteenth-century *Floralia* tradition, houseplants betray care and attention. A candlestick alludes to ambient lighting in the evenings and on special holidays. The tray with the coffee or tea set on it forms the midpoint of the more everyday ritual acts of receiving guests and the ritual of morning coffee

and afternoon tea. It is an activity that 'the De Koning family' performed deliberately and does not differ from the same ritual act that is performed by or for a real king or queen.<sup>30</sup> Sitting invites acts of affection, attention and togetherness, sometimes work. The child plays with a doll in traditional dress or copies her parents' work. There is the clock, a symbol of time and the life cycle, which indicates the moment of getting up, eating, going to bed, an appointment. We see the self-presentation through family photographs, which also indicate how important the photo portrait is as the visualization of generations. More often than the fireplace we see the television, that window through which the world beyond the street and neighbourhood can be brought inside (figs. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10). There are the indications of status: the car is parked visibly right in front of the door, sometimes there is a garden to be seen as an extension of the interior. The background of the street and the neighbourhood is continually implied through the repetition of twelve different interiors. The photographs, moreover, could also make the viewer aware that they do not show things that we actually experience in a home interior like the warmth of gas or central heating or the smell of food.

### Changing Values since the Nineteen-Eighties

Changing values form the context for Pink's work. Erving Goffman's sociological studies of everyday behaviour, for example, make clear that in order to be able to read and understand our social environment, we need knowledge of social conventions and a system of agreements with which we can evaluate one another – as shared values. In every society people use theatrical strategies, like decorum and codified behaviour, in order to present themselves in a way that appears favourable and is in line

with the chosen social role.<sup>31</sup> Domestic rituals and the arrangement of the interior can also be 'read' to understand in which social role the occupants present themselves. In the association with social values the interior is pre-eminently linked to change. This theory can also be applied to changes in values in the past: the moralizing view of Dutch domesticity of the nineteenth century and the domestic ideology of taste in the twentieth century are good examples.

Changes in values in the Netherlands have been recorded every five years since 1980. The *1980-2011 Socon Survey*, published in 2012, shows how from 1980 onwards the values of the Dutch population slowly moved towards a more calculating, economic middle-class mentality with an increasing predilection for consumptive hedonism, defined by the survey as 'without depth'.<sup>32</sup> The relatively long-standing, collective ideas and standards of the Dutch population about what is good, important and therefore worth striving for were examined: familial-civil values (the value of marriage and family), economic-civil values (the importance of working, advancement and financial security), socially critical values (the pursuit of more economic and political equality) and hedonistic values (enjoyment and pleasure). In the early nineteen-eighties, when Pink's *VideoSchetsboek* was created, the familial middle-class mentality was at the top of the values hierarchy. Children and family were the most important. The hedonistic orientation and the economic aims competed for second and third place in the ranking of values. The least important at that time were the socially critical values; on the threshold of the nineteen-eighties, social criticism was still at odds with familial middle-class mentality. This hierarchy changed in the period from the later nineteen-eighties onwards: the importance of occupation, advancement and financial security steadily increased, with

hedonism at all income levels surpassing the traditional home oriented middle-class mentality as the most important of values. Over the thirty years covered by the *Socon Survey*, the hedonistic orientation became in the end so important that individual self-realization became the central cultural value in Dutch society. Yet, even though since the nineteen-eighties the traditional middle-class values had gradually been losing position as fixed orientations, in 2011 they were still supported by a large part of the population, as the *1980-2011 Socon Survey* makes clear. In this field of tension, we may broaden the meaning of *VideoSchetsboek*: it offers a then not yet current critical snapshot from 1983 of *L'Art du Bonheur* in an average Dutch street, where interiors celebrate private family life, individuality and domesticity. The photographs and videos in *VideoSchetsboek* present and represent ever-changing taste, but always according to an established typology. 'The De Koning family' celebrates father, mother and child, which, despite the great variation in interiors from traditional to modern, portrays them as an unchanging middle-class family in their comings and goings. As the nucleus of domestic life, the staged reality of the photographs and videos at one and the same time questions the interior as the ideal mirror of family composition, happiness, life attitude and personal character. Were there then and are there now alternatives for this model? This critical, visual analysis can also be applied to the changes that interiors would continue to undergo as part of a larger social force field. For when we look at the present day, we can again see great changes: the increase in single-person households, discussions about social isolation, the role of home care and changes in gender composition of households, new Dutch citizens with very diverse origins and ways of life. All these things have affected traditional civil values, but not the need for a

home of one's own and the desire for home comforts, problematic enough because of a complex housing market.

When one looks at the recent attention devoted to interiors in, for example Thijs Wolzak's series *Binnenkijken* (Looking inside), published in *NRC Handelsblad* from September 2011 to January 2018, one is repeatedly shown a photograph with a comment and can see that individuality and hedonism do indeed triumph in an attempt to find a position in individual and social life.<sup>33</sup> From 2013 to 2021, *Spitsuur* (Rush Hour), a series of articles written by David Galjaard in the same newspaper, discussed the financial spending and daily programmes of cohabitants always in the ritual setting of their interiors. The activities of daily life are debated and evaluated in this environment: interiors are an expression of the quality of life.<sup>34</sup> Television programmes about houses full of clutter being cleared out by housekeeping coaches perpetuate the nineteenth-century moralism of middle-class tidiness and cleanliness within frameworks of good and bad. Interiors remain reflections of everyday existence, of our modern social manners and customs, of our self-chosen rituals.

Pink's *VideoSchetsboek* reminds us that these modern manners and customs are shared with those who live in the same street or neighbourhood. Interiors are theatrical spaces, in which the items we surround ourselves with, the activities we perform in them and the values we assign to them are determined by us and by our culture. Pink's ritual portraits mirror and document this long tradition of domesticity that is as historic as it is commonplace. They connect art with social history and anthropology. In conjunction with the older collections of the KOG, they also provide renewed insight into the relevance of our living culture and into the way everyday domesticity and ritual actions still express status, happiness and individuality. After all, every time we put the key in the front door of our house we step over a threshold, which in every theory of ritual signifies the meaningful transition from one world to another.<sup>35</sup> Coming from the public world outside into our private world we may be confused for a moment – where am I, how did I come to be standing here, who really am I – until it dawns on us: I'm home, in my own house, this is me, I'm standing in my own portrait.

#### ABSTRACT

This contribution analyses Pink's artwork *VideoSchetsboek* (1983), a performance part of the project *L'Art du Bonheur*, which shows the same 'De Koning family' repeatedly in different interiors within the same street by means of a series of photographs and videos. The emphasis on ritual and domesticity in this series explains its recent inclusion in the collection of the Royal Antiquarian Society (KOG). The ideals of the KOG after its foundation in 1858 reflected, for example through the *Atlas of Manners and Customs*, those of a nineteenth-century society in which an orderly interior was seen as a core value: domestic happiness was deemed to be good for the development of the nation. Those values changed after 1900 with discussions about individuality and a sense of taste. With the increasing prosperity in the second half of the twentieth century, it became possible for everyone to furnish a home interior as a reflection of their own identity. Pink's work questions this individualization. Since 1980, the values attributed to marriage and family have declined sharply and all kinds of alternative types of households and discussions about them have arisen. In conjunction with the KOG's older collections, Pink's work makes it possible to gain insight into this ever changing culture of living and its domestic rituals and provides context to discussions on their meaning.

- \* This article is based on a lecture given for the KOG on 17 December 2018 in the Rijksmuseum. I would like to thank Carina Greven and Helen Schretlen, who were of great assistance to me at the KOG in the preparations.
- 1 Pink de Thierry is the pseudonym of the artist Helena Scheerder (Haarlem, 1943). Together with her husband and child she formed the family unit mvk (*Man Vrouw Kind, Man Woman Child*) which appears often in her work. For the most comprehensive overview of her work (with documentation), see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PINK\\_de\\_Thierry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PINK_de_Thierry) (consulted 10 February 2022). The Frans Hals Museum will host a Pink retrospective between 7 July and 29 October 2023 (location Hal). A book on her work will be published by Sam Books, *PINK WORKS 1981-1994 – Performance Art-work & Portraiture*, in September 2023.
  - 2 Henze Boekhout (Haarlem, 1947) is an artist/photographer, who has been associated with the Utrecht School of Arts (HKU) since 2002. For a selection of his exhibitions, see [nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henze\\_Boekhout](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henze_Boekhout) (consulted 12 January 2022).
  - 3 Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, Minneapolis 1987, Ch. 'Actants, Actors, and Figures', pp. 106-20.
  - 4 Wikipedia page Pink de Thierry (note 1).
  - 5 Marjolein Bosman gave this definition of happiness in the CBS series *Statistische Trends*, in the article 'Geluk en persoonlijkheid', online publication 10 August 2020, see [www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2020/geluk-en-persoonlijkheid](http://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2020/geluk-en-persoonlijkheid) (consulted 9 January 2022).
  - 6 Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York/Oxford 1997, Part 6II.5 'Characteristics of Ritual-like Activities', pp. 138-73, and Part III 'Contexts: The Fabric of Ritual Life'.
  - 7 At that time video art was an up and coming medium, which began in 1965. See Jeroen Boomgaard and Bart Rutten, *De magnetische tijd: videokunst in Nederland 1970-1985*, Rotterdam 2003.
  - 8 '[Dat] waar de traditionele schilderkunst zich van toegevoegde elementen bedient die maatschappelijke of hiërarchische posities verduidelijken, Pinks portretten ondanks al hun betoende lijfelijkheid een zo mogelijk nog grotere distantie opbouwen. Het is niet gemakkelijk het harde staren van de figuranten te beantwoorden. Videobeeld en fotografie overmeesteren de schilderkunst.' See Derk Snoep, 'Introduction. Pink's unconscious consciousness', in *Pink Works*, Amsterdam 1988, unpaginated.
  - 9 John Davies, 'Society and Economy', in David Lewis et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Volume v: *The Fifth Century B.C.*, Cambridge 1992, p. 290.
  - 10 Catherine Leclercq and Virginie Devillez, *Mass Moving: Un aspect de l'art contemporain en Belgique*, Brussels 2004.
  - 11 Freek Heijbroek, 'Het Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap (1858-1995). Een historisch overzicht', in Freek Heijbroek (ed.), *Voor Nederland Bewaard: De verzamelingen van het Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap in het Rijksmuseum*, Baarn 1995 (*Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* vol. 10), pp. 9-33.
  - 12 'Men zal daardoor kunnen verkrijgen eene geschiedenis van de zeden en gewoonten, van de beeldhouw en alle ornamentele [sic] kunsten in ons vaderland'. See Irene M. de Groot, 'De Atlas Zeden & Gewoonten', in Heijbroek (ed.) 1995 (note 11), pp. 295-322, esp. p. 295.
  - 13 De Groot 1995 (note 12).
  - 14 A. 'des mensen begin midden en einde' (geboorte tot dood), B. de kleding (klederdracht, sieraden) C. de woning (kasteel, buitenplaats, tuinkunst, binnenhuis, huisraad) D. spel en vermaak (volkspelen, gezelschapspelen, ijsvermaak) E. genotmiddelen (drinken, roken) en F. volksleven (huiselijk leven, feesten). See *Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap te Amsterdam, Inhoudsopgave van den Atlas van Afbeeldingen Betreffende Zeden en Gewoonten*, 1919, available in the Rijksmuseum library (no. 73 A 50).
  - 15 Ad de Jong, *De dirigenten van de herinnering: Musealisering en nationalisering van de volkscultuur in Nederland 1815-1940*, Nijmegen 2001.
  - 16 Barbara Laan, 'Kunstnijverheid en interieur in het Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst in het Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Ontstaan en Opheffing van de Cultuurhistorische Presentatie 1875-1927', *Gentse Bijdragen* 39 (2014-2016), pp. 69-102.
  - 17 The western courtyard and a number of rooms in the south-western part of the building had been made available during the International Colonial and Export Exhibition staged in Amsterdam in 1883 in what is now called Museumplein.
  - 18 Barbara Laan, 'Hollands Binnenhuis. Nederlandse interieurarchitectuur als

- studieobject en inspiratiebron in de periode 1870-1920', *Bulletin KNOB* 117 (2018), no. 4, pp. 222-42, see doi.org/10.7480/knob.117.2018.4.3131.
- 19 Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, New York 1987, p. 75.
- 20 'Het grootste geluk van den Mensch is, te beminnen, en bemind te worden: en – waar kan dit zuiverder, beter en vuuriger plaats hebben, dan onder één en hetzelfde dak?' In 'Onder een en hetzelfde dak: huiselijk geluk in de 19e eeuw', *IsGeschiedenis*, online publicatie, see isgeschiedenis.nl/nieuws/onder-een-en-hetzelfde-dak-huiselijk-geluk-in-de-19e-eeuw (consulted 11 January 2022), and Ellen Krol, *De smaak der natie: Opvattingen over huiselijkheid in de Noord-Nederlandse poëzie van 1800 tot 1840*, Hilversum 1997.
- 21 Anton J. Schuurman, 'Is huiselijkheid typisch Nederlands? Over huiselijkheid en modernisering', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 107 (1992), no. 4, pp. 745-59.
- 22 Schuurman 1992 (note 21).
- 23 'de lust om de woning aangenaam te maken' ... 'zaken, die het huisje verbeteren en het kamertje gezellig maken, dan ben ik niet spoedig geneigd, zulk eene ondeugd te noemen.' See Schuurman 1992 (note 21), pp. 749-50.
- 24 John Helsloot, *Floralia in Nederland in het laatste kwart van de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1990.
- 25 'En toch, het huishouden is haar eigenlijke bestemming; de rust en het geluk van echtgenoot, kinderen en dienstboden, hangen voor een groot gedeelte af van de zorg die zij aan haar bestuur wijdt'. Quoted after Ruud Meijer, *Beroep huisvrouw: Geschiedenis van het Amersfoortse huishoudonderwijs*, Hilversum 2012, p. 18.
- 26 Laan 2014-2016 (note 16), p. 84.
- 27 Corrie van Adrichem, *Willem Pennaet. Meubelontwerper en organisator 1875|1957*, Rotterdam 1988.
- 28 *Goed Wonen. Een Nederlandse wooncultuur 1946-1968*, speciaal nummer *wonen-TA|BK* (1979), no. 4/5. Niek Hilkmann, 'Het begrip kitsch in Goed Wonen', *Design|| Geschiedenis*, online publication, see www.designhistory.nl/2011/het-begrip-kitsch-in-goed-wonen/ (consulted 10 January 2022).
- 29 Michel de Certeau, Luce Girard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Vol. 2: *Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis| London 1998, Ch. 9. 'Private Spaces', pp. 145-49.
- 30 See timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/food-news/queen-elizabeths-favourite-tea-includes-a-cuppa-of-assam-and-darjeeling/articleshow/78736885.cms (consulted 12 January 2022).
- 31 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York 1959.
- 32 Rob Eisinga, Peer Scheepers and Per Bles, 'Waardenverandering in Nederland: resultaten van de socon-enquête 1980-2011', CBS, online publication November 2012, see www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2012/45/waardenverandering-in-nederland-resultaten-van-de-socon-enquete-1980-2011 (consulted 10 January 2022). Every five years since 1979 Radboud University Nijmegen has been conducting a survey as part of the 'Sociaal-culturele ontwikkelingen in Nederland' research programme.
- 33 Published as by Thijs Wolzak et al., *Human Interior*, Eindhoven 2018.
- 34 David Galjaard in *NRC Handelsblad*, see www.nrc.nl/rubriek/spitsuur/ (consulted 12 January 2022).
- 35 Bell 1997 (note 6), Part II.5 'Characteristics of Ritual-like Activities', pp. 138-73, in particular 'Performance', pp. 159-64.