

**RINEKE DIJKSTRA**

***The Buzzclub, Liverpool, UK /Mysteryworld, Zaandam, NL***

Video installation

From June 12<sup>th</sup> to September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999

The images for this video installation were taken during 1996 and 1997 in the dance clubs *The Buzzclub*, in Liverpool (England) and *Mysteryworld*, in Zaandam (Holland), by the Dutch photographic artist Rineke Dijkstra (Sittard, 1959). The artist made a series of video portraits of the young people who regularly frequent these places of entertainment and contact, inviting them to pose for her camera in an improvised studio inside the club itself, against a neutral background.

On two adjacent screens the video installation shows randomly selected representatives of various forms of youth culture which are in the process of becoming more and more generalized and widespread. It is this generic quality which the artist gives to the representation of these individuals that causes the images to cross and transcend the political frontiers of their respective countries of origin. They dance, they socialize or simply look at the camera while moving freely within the confines of a previously agreed space. The twin screening is only accompanied by a soundtrack of snatches of techno and dance music of the kind listened to by the members of this generation in clubs and discotheques all around the world.

Dijkstra's interest in youth culture, its rites and forms of expression is not primarily oriented towards revealing intimate aspects of the private lives of the people portrayed, or in directing a voyeuristic gaze at the subjects she approaches. Instead, she sets out to explore the way that a young person's identity is socially constructed, the way they are defined in the adult world and how they regard themselves. The entire corpus of the artist's work is a successful attempt at updating the traditional notion of the photographic portrait, initially established in the 19th century and in continuous evolution up to our own time.

Dijkstra's images configure a kind of collective portrait of anonymous and in many cases vulnerable human beings whose bodies bear witness to the process of physical change and cultural adaptation in which they find themselves. They belong to the modest but culturally productive of the ordinary, the everyday and the introverted, in which group behaviour is more important than social success. They have been caught in moments of transition, just before or just after carrying out some activity or engaging in some occupation: adolescents on the beach, bullfighters, women who have just given birth, or —as in the present video installation— teenagers expectantly looking towards a future that the camera itself seems to announce to them. The images reveal that each one of them has something, some characteristic, which distinguishes him or her and constitutes a possible index of personal strength and autonomy.

*The Buzzclub, Liverpool, UK /Mysteryworld, Zaandam, NL* is produced by the  
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For Andy Warhol, writing in his book of personal and artistic philosophy, *From A To B And Back Again* (1975), there was never any doubt that the recorded image of both anonymous sitters and mass-media superstars could and should be a ubiquitous process which would put us all within the exhilarating and wholly invisible inverted commas of celebrity. That, if anything, was Warhol's mission as an artist and credo as a modern citizen. With the customary ambiguity and double-edged candour in which he enshrined his seemingly throwaway pronouncements on life and art, Warhol devoted a chapter to his thoughts on 'Beauty': 'For a year once it was in all the magazines that my next model was going to be "The Beauties". The publicity for it was great, but then I could never decide who should be in it. So I had to back out on the beds of beauty. It was all wrong.'

Eventually, Warhol would get around his problem of not knowing who ought to be in a film by him called 'The Beauties' by simply increasing the number of people's images he recorded to the maximum possible — while continuing to celebrate his love of the American work ethos by charging his subjects a fixed rate for the price of fame and even offering a slight reduction for those who ordered multiple copies of themselves. From the point of defining an artistic position, however, which has remained unadvanced in the years since Warhol's death, his belief in the ubiquity and potency of the photographic portrait has proved prophetic. Now, at the close of the twentieth century, there is a culture beyond the white cube of the gallery which takes Warhol's basic attitude towards the relationship between self-concept and photography as the heart and spine of its existence. As Warhol's *Screen Tests*, no less than his society portraits, threw into high relief the psychological algebra which is worked out in public between the sitter's identity and sense of self-consciousness before the camera, so we live in a contemporary culture which thrives upon the process and practice of ubiquitous surveillance.

In a world prophesied by Warhol, there is a sense in which we have all become the extras in an endless movie which we are watching all the time. Thus, the shift from supporting to starring roles becomes encoded in daily behaviour and sews itself into the fabric of our lives within the advanced capitalism of democratic consumerism.

The importance and potency of Rineke Dijkstra's work in photography and video derives in part from her specific return to a selective eye, while responding to a culture which lives in partial ease with the ubiquity of recorded images of people. Every generation, in its own way, believes that it has rediscovered the glamour of the commonplace and invested it with new meaning. For the screenwriter Ted Willis, writing about British cinema in 1959, this rediscovery was essentially political. 'This marvellous world of the ordinary', for Willis, was a portal to social realism which was more relevant to the modern age than cocktail bars and cruise liners. Then, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the reinvention of the commonplace through pop and television, from dirty realist cop shows to punk rock, was a means of exposing an amoral society, out of step with its expansion.

By the time of the Style Press in Britain, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a move towards photographing young people in their street clothes and revealing them to be living in the costume of their assumed characters — the Byronic undead and Weimar mannequins, palely loitering — such was the brief charter of British New Romanticism as a hot-housed hybrid of pop and fashion. In the 1990s, as the generational perspective on consumer lifestyle and personal politics goes into a fresh acceleration, Dijkstra's most recent photographs and video portraits of young clubbers in Amsterdam and Liverpool, no less than her acclaimed portraits of teenagers on beaches, show the depth of a new ordinariness in which youth are submerged and slightly concussed — their pores wide open, so to speak, to the impact of corporate cultural materialism. These are the children of the video-wall in the High Street megastore, now that the revolution has been replaced by the blipvert.

Stark and free of irony, Dijkstra's photographs are not obscured by the tell-tale presence of the artist herself. The inverted commas of self-consciousness, which Warhol took such glee in recording, have been replaced just beneath the surface of the image, to be seen no longer celebrated as an end in themselves. Thus, Dijkstra returns to the naturalism of the nineteenth century, which insisted that the artist, like God, should be 'nowhere seen but present everywhere'. She works with the infinitely malleable surface of the commonplace, but leaves no fingerprints on the wet clay of its substance.

There is a classicism at the heart of Dijkstra's photography which achieves the seemingly paradoxical ability to mix the purely mimetic process of recording an image with the suggestion of romance. This classicism, in terms of both its form and content, was defined by the photographs in her *Beaches* series, taken between 1992 and 1996 in Poland, Croatia, the Ukraine, Belgium, England and America. Portraits of teenagers dressed in their swimming costumes, who have been encountered playing by or in the sea and then called to attention or self-consciousness by the process of being photographed, these images assume a grandeur which their simplicity might deny.

As a whole, *Beaches* becomes an international portrait of youth, communicating that condition of age through a visual esperanto which is eloquent in the attitudes of Dijkstra's young subjects to their exposure, vulnerability and suddenly elevated status. In Warholian terms, the mere act of being photographed has raised the teenagers from supporting to starring roles, and this presents a spectrum of facial and bodily responses which in turn selects its own uniformity. The human glide from innocence to experience can be discerned in the collected faces of the teenagers, while their social and economic position — from the 'Bay Watch' opulence, honeyed and well-groomed, of the young Americans to the less styled appearance of their East European counterparts — is all too evident in the diversity of swimwear as much as their reaction to the camera.

The formality of these photographs is held in place by both the gaze of the subjects — expressionless, enigmatic, yet all defiant within the exposed locality of themselves — and the horizon line between sea and sky which marks the lower half or third of each image. The young people seem to offer themselves, with obedience, resignation, feigned boredom, assurance or nervous bewilderment, to the camera's authority. Thus these portraits become a recorded moment of collision between youth and authority, awkwardness and ease, or a transaction carried out between the photographer and her subject with the inconsequential yet potent setting of the beach — traditional venue for holiday snaps. A young girl on a Polish beach becomes a contemporary of Botticelli's *Venus Rising From The Waves*, with the bodily awkwardness of adolescence set in stark contrast to the lime-green satinette of her swimming costume; two black boys, seemingly secure within their graceful physique, defy the photographer to steal their composure.

In these photographs, each one of which presents a short story in the invisible masks which the subjects seem to have put on, there is a trigger to our sense of empathy and our simultaneous translation of a stranger's experience into our own. The act of empathy, which enables us to inhabit the settings and characters in the external world around us—to imagine ourselves elsewhere, in another's circumstances—is empowered in Dijkstra's photography by her absence as a controlling director of the subjects whom she records. She creates a photographic situation in which the subject must reveal themselves, totally, through her seeming removal of instructions. The inverted commas of self-consciousness, therefore, fade in and out of our response to the images—as much as the sitters' response to being photographed—like the electrical current on a weak rural circuit.

This process, of empathy unleashed on the two-way street between subject and viewer, is wholly in evidence in Dijkstra's videos and video-stills of young clubbers at the Buzz Club in Liverpool and Mysteryworld, in Zaandam, the Netherlands. A project commenced in 1996, these videos and stills can be seen as a generational and social shift for the subjects of *Beaches*; they take the teenagers exposed in the bodily awkwardness of their swimming costumes and barely adolescent self-consciousness and advance

them to the heavily styled and highly tribal rituals of going out to clubs and diving head first in to the recreational, sexually charged and potentially intoxicating world of adult pleasures. Striking poses which are difficult to maintain in the isolation of portraiture, dressed up in the clothes which best express their chosen identities—free, ironically, of social surveillance—the clubbers at Buzz Club and Mysteryworld reflect back the ubiquity of surveillance. They reveal themselves beneath their assumed personae; their club fashions and cosmetics become costumes and stage make-up, yet transparent to the actors beneath; their dances, away from the dance floor, become a virtual act of displacement therapy to counter the trauma or unreality of being recorded—however willingly the transaction between subject and photographer was initially entered into.

And yet there is neither voyeurism nor the superiority of artistic irony in Dijkstra's recording of these young people. Rather, her camera becomes a conduit for shared empathy, in which an exchange of compassion reveals the frailty and pride within us all as we try, as F. Scott Fitzgerald described, 'to offer the best version of ourselves to the light.'

The young people become articulate of a culture in which TV dating shows, 'real life dramas', video-diary advertising, security cameras in every store and station and the expansion of TV media into a myriad digital channels can put us all on record, all of the time. Dijkstra's act as an artist is to return the formality and sense of event to a culture in which the photographic record is commonplace. Her technique, of prolonged but uninvolved scrutiny, allows a moment of insight between what the poet T.S. Eliot described in 'the faces we prepare for the faces we meet'. Her subjects, caught fresh from their particular activities—bathing or dancing—are shown with their emotions unclothed.

Observing the human condition as though its stages were events for the press, but with an insight beyond the truisms of irony or social realism, Dijkstra's photographs of women who have recently given birth stress the immediacy of experience which she is seeking in her subjects. From these images—literally raw in their impact—it becomes clear that she has located a moment of self-composure in her subjects which is as close to shock as it is reflexive to the process of being photographed.

The mothers, photographed against a whiteness which heightens the process of birth—as much as the horizon line between sea and sky isolates the experience of being on a beach—display the physiological results of giving birth while regarding the camera with an obedience, or generosity, which is seen as though through glass. As it has become a common practice for artists and photographers to convert the private experience into the public spectacle, Dijkstra retains an empathetic distance between the intimate and the objective regard of the camera. In this way, she allows the subjects to reveal themselves within the bewilderment or psychic self-defence of their studied private worlds.

As her photographs of mothers describe the strengths and traumas of maternity, so her photographs of bullfighters (taken in 1994) who have just left the ring become revelatory as studies of guilt, defiance or shock. These pictures, in many ways, are the answering male images to the feminine depictions of birth. Both deal with the thin line between life and death, with their subjects as the survivors of a particular bout; and the bullfighters become reminiscent of Andy Warhol's *Most Wanted Men in America*, with their faces open to an empathetic response most surely because they are trying to deny the camera's authority.

In this much, the elderly cliché about 'eyes are the windows on the soul' assumes new truth when applied to those of Dijkstra's subjects who, in an allegory of the human condition, are left to face themselves with no clear instructions from a higher power.

Ultimately, it is in her self-portrait—dressed in a swimming costume, with raised goggles and rubberised cap, standing in the disturbingly surgical shower room—that Dijkstra submits herself to her own process of self-scrutiny. Her attitude and expression, unlike those of many of her sitters, is alert and enquiring of the process of being photographed. There is a look in her eyes which is defiant and slightly abashed, as though she is aware that she has tried to look into the souls of her fellow human beings, armed with a technology which disarms her subject and revealing their common emotions as naked, has nothing to offer but compassion.

'Is not the immediate comprehension of Being developed entirely from a primordial but self-evident projection of Being relative to time? Is it not then true that from the first this struggle for Being takes place within the horizon of time?' (Heidegger)<sup>1</sup>

#### Intimacy

Against a whitewashed brick wall in a corridor of the Buzz Club, Liverpool, a young girl gazes at the video camera. In an important sense her expression is both instantly recognisable and totally unfathomable: she is at once confrontational, uncertain, insolent, shy, posed, relaxed. The intimacy of this strange confined space of video-time that we share for these few minutes is similar to that private intimacy we share with our reflection in the mirror. The uncanny otherness of being. She begins to dance, moving vaguely to the music, her movements at once theatrical and absorbed as she performs to the absent and unknown spectator who will watch her some time in the future.

Then she becomes drawn into the performance itself and absorbed by it. For these few minutes in time we are caught in the tension between the private and the public, the intimate and the distant, between estrangement and sympathy. And it is surely this fine thread of ambiguity running through the relationship between interiority and exteriority which defines the problem of the 'self' in the modern world. It is along this fissure of visibility that the subject is both formed and known.

There is something about this candid use of video to reveal both the specificity and the insubstantiality of the person that compels us: the public intimacy of the medium is inscribed within a reconfiguration of time and space which makes impossible the kind of distance or separation we feel in front of a picture; it makes us feel very close, existentially linked by a kind of 'care' or 'concern', a state which the German philosopher Heidegger suggested represented a primordial state of being. It is the simplicity of this relationship, one which is in some way taken for granted, a relationship which lacks intensity or narrative and which is even therefore somewhat 'disinterested', that is the clue to our understanding of this work, for it taps into a very modern sense of anxiety about the boundaries of identity and society.

Rineke Dijkstra's video recordings of young people dancing at clubs in Liverpool and the Netherlands are, like her photographs, spartan in their simplicity. But why, given their ordinariness, are these moments of recorded time so compelling? What is it about them that draws us into this peculiar state of intimacy with the people who perform for us in them? What is it about looking at a person on video in this way that is so different from the way we look at a picture?

#### Pictorial Space

The art historian Michael Fried has described how painting in the eighteenth century became increasingly concerned with the representation of states of absorption; these seemed to facilitate the drawing of the spectator into the pictorial space of the image.<sup>2</sup> He has pointed out that at the same time writers like the French philosopher Diderot, who believed in the transcendent possibilities of history painting as a genre that could reveal essential truths about the human condition, were concerned with establishing the pictorial space of the painting as a kind of theatrical space.

This was a space in which the coherence of the composition would have the effect upon the beholder of making him completely forget his own presence and in that moment of estrangement become absorbed by the image itself. What Diderot was primarily concerned with was the way in which our mode of identification with the subjects within a picture was controlled by the very geometry of pictorial form. The eighteenth-century obsession with the representation of self-absorption was an indication of the limitations of vision within the geometry of pictorial space. This implied that the boundaries between notions of the public and the private, between self and other, between distance and identification, were themselves products of a discourse of visibility that was dependent upon the presence of the spectator outside the frame.

Nowadays we recognise that if new technologies have achieved anything it has been the dismantling of the spatial geometries within which pre-modernist identity was inscribed. Photography, cinema, television, have all played their role in the imploding geographies of our century, collapsing distances, fragmenting spaces, subverting the precarious relationships between vision and the body, between eye and mind.

In the era of communication technology it is precisely the pre-eminence of the pictorial frame that has been put into question and with its disappearance has vanished our certainty about how to map the co-ordinates of identity and subjecthood. The technology of video is party to this destabilisation of the pictorial frame.

#### Video Space

The space described by Rineke Dijkstra's video pieces resists geometry. The featureless wall against which these adolescent dancers act out their identities gives no hint of the spaces which they inhabit. There is no distance, no vanishing point, no territory for us to survey or master. Indeed it is difficult to distinguish this wall from one in a parallel recording made in a club in the Netherlands: geography is suppressed. The recordings take place in an abstracted space whose parameters are formed not only by the four sides of the framed image but more pervasively by a kind of abstract time. Despite the specificity of its reference — *The Buzz Club* (1997) — the video recording in a curious way dislocates time from its social and historical context,

revealing it as a kind of duration, a continuous experience which the spectator shares and in which she is complicit. Video time seems to press upon these subjects existentially; we see them making time, pushing forward into it. It is the medium through which they make themselves.

In using video in this way Dijkstra is exploiting its cultural meaning. Video is the ontological medium of our era: contemporary televisual culture is studded with video confessions. We have become accustomed to the interventions of everyday voices and everyday time into the seamless flow of broadcast television. Video has become the technological space in which we feel compelled to speak authentically, to tell our story, to make ourselves for each other. It has become synonymous with a curiously public form of subjectivity, a space for the production of the self.

If this space of video then lies beyond the pictorial frame described by Diderot, where does it reside? How can we describe this suspended place/time in which so little happens and so much seems to be at stake, a place in which our own subjectivity is mimicked back to us in moments that prompt an uncanny form of recognition, in which we recognise our being alongside the other?

### The Everyday

The fragile banality of this space bears some resemblance to the description that Heidegger offered of the 'everyday'. The idea of 'everydayness' was an attempt to provide a phenomenology of being, an analysis of what it meant to inhabit the world.

'Being' was not an abstract or metaphysical condition, it was always a kind of 'being there'—in the concrete, literal, daily world. Heidegger continues by describing us as being 'thrown' into the world, a world that we share with others. We are always alongside others in a world that is held together by a web of idle discourse, chatter, gossip, a kind of disinterested curiosity which constitutes our being-in-time. In invoking this sense of the everyday Heidegger is crucially concerned with the concept of time and presentness. The essence of human being is temporality and, whilst we exist within the horizons described by our past and our future, we can only make sense of ourselves in the present. But this is a sense of presentness that we experience through the presentness of other beings.

Because we are thrown among others in this way we become seduced by the everyday and we begin to live by reference to each other, forgetting the possibility of 'authentic' being: we become caught up in the fascination of the facticity of the world. Every now and then we experience a feeling of loss, of a kind of existential angst, and the ordinary familiarity of the everyday suddenly seems uncanny and unstable; it falls apart, bringing us face to face with the freedom of being. For Heidegger this sense of the uncanny, an alien sense of the bareness of being, of being 'not-at-home' in the world, is fundamental to our sense of the everyday even though we are normally turned away from it. The everyday is a form of presentness which in a sense tranquillises us and conceals from us our authentic experience of being in the world. It is also, paradoxically, the place in which that uncanny sense of its loss is most close to us.

### The Uncanny

The sense of a shared presentness that Dijkstra's video recordings offer to us is compelling precisely because it is situated within the spatio-temporal horizons of Heidegger's everyday. There is a triviality to the basic curiosity that these shared passages of time inspire in us, while there is simultaneously a sense that behind that curiosity lies a complicity.

The spareness of these people's presence exposes the feeling that we somehow all share in this being-in-time together. And the sense of the uncanny that this confrontation with the everyday evokes is always there.

Heidegger's use of the concept of the uncanny bears some relationship to Freud's use of the term. It is based on the recognition of the existence of some knowledge that has been repressed and that we desire to return to. In his essay 'The Uncanny' (1919) Freud emphasised the particularity of the double and of repetition, phenomena which threaten to revisit a primary infantile narcissism and over-projection of the self into the world that the ego has subsequently suppressed. The sense of the uncanny is one which also haunts the history of the photographic image, which has its own disturbing capacity to double the world. In *Camera Lucida*, considering the experience of looking at a photograph of himself, Roland Barthes describes the fundamental uncanniness of the doubleness of photography in terms that echo the fundamental crisis of identity described by Freud: 'For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity. Even odder: it was before Photography that men had the most to say about the vision of the double... But today it is as if we repressed the profound madness of

Photography: it reminds us of its mythic heritage only by that faint uneasiness which seizes me when I look at "myself" on a piece of paper.'<sup>1</sup>

The dizzying sense of his own death that Barthes experiences when he looks at the photograph of himself, the failure of recognition and the loss of self that is consequent upon that failure parallels precisely Heidegger's description of the irruption of the uncanny into the everyday, an awareness that is linked fundamentally to a recognition of our ultimate nothingness, our being-toward-death.

### Being-in-time

For Barthes, however, this awareness of death, which is central to his understanding of the still photograph, is traumatic and apocalyptic: it represents a loss for which he cannot be consoled. It is, moreover, that which separates for him absolutely the still image from the moving image, from cinema. Cinema, he argues, assumes duration: it assumes the endless movement of time. Photography, however, is tethered to the past, to the real, to the indexicality of time marked and measured and broken. The photograph has no future. In emphasising this ontological melancholy of the still image Barthes invokes a spectator in anguish, tormented by the violence of time. Yet for Heidegger this recognition of our being-toward-death is the fundamental premise of our freedom.

Being is always a 'being-towards', reaching into the future. From such a perspective we can read the still image less as an image that is engorged by the past, as Barthes would have it, and more as an enduring mark of presentness, a relationship to the everyday, an intervention into time that shares with video that potential for suddenly revealing the inalienability of being.

Dijkstra's photographic portraits are never melancholy. They are not tethered by historical time. The people who show themselves to us in her pictures are always rather in some kind of liminal time, a time that stands outside society, an in-between time poised between changing social identities and spaces: she gives us adolescents on the brink of adulthood, new mothers stained by birth, young matadors shaken by violence. There is a formlessness to these liminal moments that escapes social definition, in which we recognise the presence of something else. And these photographs share in that same oddly evacuated space/time produced by the video work. The titles that describe their date and location find no answering resonance in the empty beaches which seem to extend from one continent to another or in the characterless corridors and bare rooms in institutional spaces. There is

no geometry or personal history to fix our distance from the people we encounter here, only this uncanny presence of the here and the now, a sense of closeness, of being alongside: the presentiment of being.

Video and photography share in their capacity to double the world, to provoke the uncanny. Through this they throw into confusion our most basic conceptions about the foundations of self and the boundaries between self and other. In a peculiar way they monitor the boundaries of our being-in-the-world, producing a space in which we recognise and reach out to an identification with others but in which we also experience an uncanny sense of loss of self, of vertigo. In this sense they exist beyond the geometry of vision, within the horizon of time.

1 Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Indiana University Press, 1962.

2 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, University of California Press, 1980.

3 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Hill and Wang, 1981, pp.12–13.

Want to give these photos in public that they're socially, you feel there is remarkably consent. This is partly to do with your characteristic way of working but also with your choice of people. How do you make your choice?

I have a preference for introverted people because I feel an affinity with them and therefore I can look at them longer than I do at exuberant people, who are very much focused on their surroundings. I like a particular kind of face, very classical and therefore timeless—the girl in the green swim suit in Kolobrzeg, for example. It's about a particular kind of beauty that other people might find ugly, but it's a kind of ugliness that I find beautiful.

Taking the photographs is time-consuming and you were working with a conspicuously large format camera on beaches that were sometimes very crowded. This is an artificial situation which reinforces the feeling of being observed.

Yes, it takes a long time. I hardly give any directions and I demand a concentration that is decisive for the photographs. I demand this concentration of myself but also from them. I have to sustain their attention which means the contact is very close. On Coney Island, for instance, there was a little boy with a broken arm who was playing by himself. He was completely absorbed in jumping over the waves or kicking stones. I wanted to photograph him but when he came over, I still had to set everything up. My assistant tried to keep him busy: she asked him where he lived, if he had any brothers and sisters, but the little boy went on looking straight into the camera and didn't answer. He kept looking and took it very seriously, which is necessary. If you take twenty photos there will always be one that is good, but that's not how I work. I always take three or four and then it remains to be seen.

The photographs are portraits, although you keep anything that might refer to somebody's personal history or local situation out of the image. Is it true you focused on something they all had in common?

I think I was looking for a kind of vulnerability, the awkwardness of that age group, not knowing what sort of pose they should strike, this feeling of loneliness. This I understand. Your own situation is always familiar but this feeling can be found everywhere: in schools, at nightclubs. It works really well to stand back because you look at things differently.

In 1994 you went to Liverpool to photograph children in schools. You ended up in a night club called the 'Buzz'.

I went to Liverpool to photograph school children in their uniforms, wanting to look for individual differences within this uniformity. We had been there a couple of days and on the last evening we wanted to go out. A taxi driver dropped us at the Buzz. It was November, it was snowing and there was an enormous queue outside. It was mainly girls who were standing there, in revealing dresses, chatting and smoking. They wore no coats. Later, I asked why they didn't wear coats and it turned out that they thought the cloakroom was too expensive. Inside it certainly wasn't hip, with wall to wall carpeting and the dance floor inside a kind of arena with

seats. The girls were very dressed up, whereas all the guys just wore checked shirts—you could hardly tell them apart. They weren't very interesting anyway—it was the girls who were completely in charge. The DJs start the evening with a stirring introduction, like 'This is the Buzz!!' They call out birthdays with 'Happy birthday to Kelly' and once 'Sarah Palmer to the front door please!' Her father was waiting. To me this revealed a great concern. Now and then fights broke out, so there were surveillance cameras everywhere. They kept an eye on everything, even outside. When they watch the tapes the next day, they see couples having sex. Obviously these young people are not allowed to spend the night together at home. I really lost my heart to the whole atmosphere.

What went back to take photos. How did you go about it?

When we arrived I didn't know how I was going to do it—it was impossible to do it in the club itself. In the crowd you totally lose the intimacy. I prefer to work in a simple space but at the same time I wanted to maintain the atmosphere of the club and to use as much of the original setting as possible. Eventually I used a tiny room in which the staff spend their breaks and didn't alter anything. I had planned to photograph people full-length, but with my camera pressed against the wall I only just managed to photograph half-length, which turned out well.

How did you approach the young people you wanted to photograph?

It was hard to approach them with the music at full blast—we tried to explain what we were doing but they didn't quite understand. Eventually the DJ mentioned us and it became easier. I took a lot of photos and spent a long time selecting them. I used three of the photographs, which form the series *Buzz Club* (1995). What I like about this series is that the young women are all blonde and dressed in black but they are still totally different. Within the given situation and a uniform way of dressing, they distinguish themselves by a certain look or by what they do with their hands.

It is very important in these photographs to capture a specific characteristic of the people.

Later you started filming. Why? I took my photos to Gerald van der Kaap, a Dutch artist who works with photography and video, because I wasn't sure about the selection. I was hoping he would be able to give me advice. It became clear to me that I missed the music and movements of the clubbers. He asked why I didn't film them, so we experimented together by making a film at the club Roxy in Amsterdam. Later, I went back to the Buzz, because of my fascination for the club and their music, which is full of desire for love and ecstasy. A lot of people think that the music is dreadful but I love it. I also enjoyed listening while I was busy when Hedy who was assisting me, talked to the girls. When I spoke to the girl in the white dress she told me that she already had a child and was pregnant again. She was seventeen. She didn't want to go on the pill because it would make her fat. Lots of these girls have children and many of the songs played dealt with this issue—they serve as a warning!

Hipsimé Visser (photography curator at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) once wrote that you were searching in certain works for the coalescence of a documentary moment and a psychological portrait. In the video there certainly is more space for the documentary element because you show much more of the context. The choice of music and clothes are primary factors with which to shape your identity during puberty. It is about the interaction between what they chose to reveal and what they reveal in spite of themselves. I give them space to express themselves. I must say there has been a moment when I wondered whether the beach photos reflected my projection of puberty or whether these young people were really like that. When I was working on a commission of portraits of writers and actors for NRC Handelsblad [a daily newspaper], I realised that it was no longer about me, but about these people and I had to try to extract that character with the limited means I was using.

The first video *Buzz* (1996) strongly relates to the photographs. The adolescents are more or less standing still, and the music is fairly abstract and seems to be in the distance. In *Buzz Club* and *Mysteryworld* (both 1997), you show people dancing and you use the music that played that particular evening, including the DJs chattering. If you distort the sound, you create some distance and as a spectator you soon become aware of the fact that you are looking at someone who is dancing. Some people find the first video voyeuristic.

But you're not spying, it's just this inward glance that is so typical. When I am filming I have this contact, but it disappears when the work is shown and the setting is no longer apparent. I feel vulnerable too but I can relate to it. I don't find it voyeuristic. Nevertheless, I did want to reduce the distance, to enable the viewer to get involved, so that he or she has the same urge to dance. When you hear the original sound of the club you can place yourself in the actual situation more easily. Perhaps this makes the gap smaller between these young people and the viewers. In the second video I have tried to tell more of a story and to show the build-up of a typical evening at the Buzz.

In *Mysteryworld* (1997) you show an entirely different world. How did you get to film there? The Nederlands Foto Instituut in Rotterdam invited me to do something for their project called *PhotoWork(s) in Progress/Constructing Identity*. They wanted me to work in the Netherlands, but I was so happy with this place in Liverpool that I wanted to do more there. Then I saw a group of 'gabbers' on the train. 'Gabbers' are young people who all dress the same — they wear the same sort of tracksuits, known as 'aussies', the same sort of shoes and they have shaved heads. Girls wear their hair in extremely tight pony-tails. And they all listen to fast techno music. It is striking to see such a group with their own customs and lifestyle. I just wanted to see where they went out and when I asked them they just gave me a startled, trapped look. When I asked if I might film them they said that their mums absolutely must not know about it.

The first time I went to Mysteryworld, an isolated sports hall on the outskirts of Zaandam, I immediately loved it. The camera allows you into places you would not normally visit. I believe Diane Arbus once called it a ticket to other worlds — that's the way I experience it too. At that moment, I became aware that I had entered a world that I didn't know and was to become part of. Of course, I can identify more with the girls in Liverpool than with these 'gabbers' because 'gabbers' is more of a guys' thing, but I found it a nice contrast.

In their vocabulary dancing is 'hakkuh' and they have more terms like that, their own idioms. Song titles in Liverpool are 'I Want to Fall in Love', that sort of thing, but with the 'gabbers' it's 'Reject to the Slow Movers' and 'Dirty Bitch'. If you look at Liverpool, the situation for the young people is much worse than in the Netherlands, but it is striking that this Dutch 'gabber' culture is much more extreme. I have noticed, however, that the 'gabbers' are not as extreme as they first appear.

There are two long close-ups of one of these boys, Fred. I thought that he had a beautiful, intelligent face. He was a bit stoned, but not too much. Now and then he opened his eyes and became totally absorbed in the music. And then suddenly he became very aware of the camera. I loved the alternation. It came to a point when he got fed up with it, and you can see that very clearly — he gives me such a reproachful look.

Did you say anything?

No. I thought, just let it continue, if I say something it will disturb the concentration. I had made a mistake while setting the video camera and it turned out too blue. I wanted to redo it because it was so good, so I phoned him up. His dad kept answering the phone. Every time Fred had 'just left', even when I phoned just before or just after dinner. He was home for fifteen minutes only, to have dinner and then he would go out again. The first time I filmed him his hand was in plaster. He'd had a row with his dad and smashed his hand through a door. When I finally spoke to him he said he wanted to live on his own and that he worked in a crisps factory. The second time I saw him he no longer worked there. When the film was finished I phoned him again to tell him that he was in it and ask him if he wanted to come to the opening in Rotterdam.

He thought that was 'cool' and asked if he could bring a couple of friends.

And did he show up?

No. Pity. The 'gabber' girl who at a certain point can be seen on both screens did show up. She now lives with her boyfriend in Almere and she's grown her hair back. She's not a 'gabber' anymore.



## rineke dijkstra

1959 Born in Sittard

1981-1986 Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam

Lives and works in Amsterdam

### solo exhibitions

- 1984 Paradiso Portraits, **de Moor, Amsterdam**
- 1988 The Creation of Form, **de Moor, Amsterdam**
- 1994 Art Encouragement Award Amstelveen, **Aemstelle, Amstelveen**
- 1995 **Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam**  
(with Tom Claassen)  
Time Festival, Rineke Dijkstra, **Museum of Contemporary Art, Gent, Belgium** (with Hugo Delbaere)
- 1996 **Le Consortium, Dijon**  
**Galerie Sabine Schmidt, Köln**  
**Galerie Bob van Orsouw, Zürich**  
**Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam**

### group exhibitions

- 1987 Municipal Art Acquisitions Amsterdam 1987, **Museum Fodor, Amsterdam**
- 1993 The Power of the Present, **Loods 6, Amsterdam**  
Photo Festival Naarden, **Naarden**  
Every Child is Made of Marble, **Beurs van Berlage/Bloom Gallery, Amsterdam**
- 1994 De ander, der Andere, l'autre, **Het Domein, Sittard** and **Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen**

- 1995 Wim Janssen, Rineke Dijkstra, Jan Koster, **Galerie Paul Andriesse, Amsterdam**  
A Europa e o Mar, **Encontros da Imagem, Braga, Portugal**  
Vlinderslag, **Beeldende Kunst in het Zuiderbad, Amsterdam**  
The European Face, **Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh**  
Rineke Dijkstra/Jacob Molenhuis, **Fotomanifestatie Noorderlicht, Kunstcentrum Niggendijker, Groningen**  
A pressing Engagement, **Centrum Beeldende Kunst, Leiden**
- 1996 **Gemeente Aankopen 96, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam**  
Colorealismo: Rineke Dijkstra, Wolfgang Tillmans, Inez van Lamsweerde, Nan Goldin, **Galleria Photology, Milano**  
Gynaika, **Cultureel Centrum Knokke-Heist, Knokke, Belgium**  
**Prospect 96, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt a. M.**  
**Fotofiktion, Kasseler Kunstverein, Kassel**  
Contemporary Dutch Photography, **Galerie Nei Licht, Ville de Dudelange (L)**  
Aufnahmen der Normalität/Shots of Normality, **Schwaz Kunstverein, Schwaz Austria**  
Le printemps de Cahors, **Cahors and Portalen Koge Bugt Kulturhus, Copenhagen**

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Architecture, May
- Catalogue Fotofestival Naarden, May
- 1994      Steenbergen R.: Eenzaamheid vastgelegd in  
een moment voor de camera, NRC  
Handelsblad, July 18
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December
- Koemans M.: Lachen is niet interessant, Het  
Parool, December 17
- Haveman M.: Het bijzondere van het gewone,  
Vrij Nederland, no. 51-52, December 24
- Berg M.v.d. & Wallroth T.: Rineke Dijkstra,  
Ruimte, 3/4
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no. 6, February 11
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Zeitgenössische Fotokunst aus den Niederlanden, NBK,  
Berlin and Badischer Kunstverein Karlsruhe
- 1997      Zeitgenössische Fotokunst aus den Niederlanden,  
Hallescher Kunstverein, Halle

## awards

- 1987      Kodak Award Nederland
- 1990      Nomination for Young European Photographers
- 1991      Epica Award for Best European Advertising Photography
- 1993      Art Encouragement Award Amstelveen
- 1994      Werner Mantz Award