

Anwesenheit. Was ihre Fotografien auszeichnet, ist ein diffuses, subjektives Erinnerungsmoment, das sie immer wieder konkret ins Bild setzt. Damit lässt sie ihre Bilder zu sozialen Schauplätzen werden, deren authentische Wirkung gerade daraus resultiert, dass sie die Grenzen zwischen Original und Kopie auflösen.

Der Titel »AHNEN. Neue Porträts« deutet in diesem Sinne auf einen Prozess des Erinnerns, der das eigene, aktuelle Selbstbild als Rückblick auf die eigene Geschichte in Szene setzt. Dieser ist nie eindeutig nachweisbar, sondern verändert sich konstant und ist abhängig davon, welche Beziehungen wir eingehen und für uns als wesentlich erachten. Er lässt sich nur erahnen; als eine nie sichtbare Beziehung zum Bild, die das leblose Dokument mit persönlicher Erinnerung verzahnt und so zu neuen Bildern einer Persönlichkeit führt.

In Zailers Arbeit wird »Echtheit« so zur individuellen Auslegung. Sie besteht nicht im genetischen Code oder im Fotonegativ, sondern im Einmaligen, das jeder Wiederholung innewohnt.

Agnieszka Roguski lebt als freischaffende Autorin und Kuratorin in Berlin. Im Rahmen ihrer Promotion an der Freien Universität Berlin untersucht sie ein »Self on Display«, d. h. Repräsentationsweisen des Selbst unter postdigitalen Bedingungen. Sie war assoziiertes Mitglied des DFG-Graduiertenkollegs »Das fotografische Dispositiv« an der Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig. Ihre Arbeiten wurden u. a. gezeigt im KV – Kunstverein Leipzig, im HKW Berlin und in der Torrance Shipman Gallery New York und veröffentlicht von Tectum, Kerber, Peter Lang, Broken Dimanche, Revolver, Spike Art Magazine, Camera Austria, Eikon, Springerin und Texte zur Kunst.

Precision and Bottomless Depth *Hans-Joachim Gögl*

The Israeli photographer Orly Zailer recreates photographs from family albums by photographing descendants of family members with as much precision as possible. She reconstructs decades-old photographs by photographing daughters, sons, grandchildren or great-grandchildren, who for a brief moment slip into the role of their forebears, thereby producing images of alleged doppelgängers who possess an almost magical charisma.

One's initial response is surprise: for an instant you think you are seeing the same photograph twice. But then you spot differences, minor ones, sometimes significantly different objects, clothes, rooms, or landscapes. At that point the process of looking becomes intensive, as you hunt down similarities, and find them – but not exact matches. The feeling is of looking, rather than seeing. Viewing an Orly Zailer work transports you inwards into your own personal experience of being a certain way, yet different.

Consider the question of family resemblance: so often, children are informed of a striking facial resemblance with their uncle when he was their age, or with family members on their mother's rather than their father's side, or are told have their aunt's eyes, or hands... or, surprisingly, that they do not resemble anyone in the family at all. Orly Zailer's photographs seize upon things which in daily life cause us only fleeting concern, minor irritations which we do not pursue any further: the somewhat amused remark of a friend, an encounter with a relative

at a family gathering, the feeling of surprise upon glancing at a photo album... The vague suddenly becomes the obvious. Suspicions become revelations, on the basis of compelling evidence of the type which only photography can provide.

Photography's specific strength is that it can reproduce reality. Therein also lies its weakness, however: sometimes a print can no longer show us things we have already seen too often. Some argue that photography in certain instances merely shows reality, not truth (for example when you find yourself leafing impatiently through a photo album; or pacing up and down at an exhibition with the slightly baffling realisation that with your first, seemingly cursory, glance you have actually taken in the entirety of a photograph; or the feeling of being in an emotional and intellectual wasteland, as though looking at a set of pictograms).

Orly Zailer's photographs, by contrast, engender an impression of entering a labyrinth (in contrast to a maze, a labyrinth, of course, leads to a centre). You find yourself engrossed, ruminating on medium and portrait, on relationships between society, family and individual, culture and history, and on your own personal history – though in fact you are just standing there gazing at a photo of a young man in an early 20th-century interior who looks remarkably like his great-grandfather, who is wearing the uniform of an Imperial and Royal Navy sailor.

For a curious, timeless moment, the great-grandson steps into the essence of the century-old photograph, though we know perfectly well that immediately afterwards he will go and change his clothes and check WhatsApp on his smartphone... What we perceive are connections that call to mind our own attachments. And as we do so, a wide range of questions are addressed with great precision, and the works themselves at the same time possess a poetic bottomlessness.

INN SITU

– twenty new portraits created in Tyrol and Vorarlberg

Orly Zailer began the series of works entitled «The Time Elapsed Between Two Frames» in 2012, with photographs from her own family album and images of friends and neighbours. The works have been exhibited in London and Tel Aviv, but until now not in continental Europe. Orly Zailer has appeared in TV documentaries on ARTE and 3sat, and her works have been covered in various print media articles. For INN SITU, we invited her to continue that project, on this occasion outside

Israel for the first time, in preparation for a full-scale exhibition at BTV Stadtforum.

For the project, following an open call for participants in Tyrol and Vorarlberg, numerous families began taking an interest. Zailer selected suitable album photos from among those received, and arranged meetings with the descendants to get to know them personally.

Scouting out suitable shooting locations and conducting painstaking research into clothing, furniture and other objects in the historic photos took around ten months. One of the reasons was that Zailer stays as close as possible to the original photograph and carefully avoids any manipulation of the physical reconstruction of the images, retouching, or use of digital methods to integrate items into the photographs.

The resulting discourse within families, their engagement with their own past, and some unique moments (such as when a young woman for a brief moment transformed herself into an image of her deceased mother) have created an invisible social sculpture which exerts influence on the exhibition.

Twenty new works involving Tyrol and Vorarlberg residents were created for the INN SITU project, thereby doubling the total number of works in the series. The present publication is the first time the series has been documented comprehensively.

The more local, the more global

One of the goals of the INN SITU series is to use photographic and musical methods to attempt to organize artistic perceptions of the region, for the region's sake. We look for art photography approaches where the process of establishing contacts and relationships and the *in situ* «execution» of the photographs have synchronous importance along with the end product (the resulting photographs themselves).

At the start of the development process for the Orly Zailer project – which is the second in the INN SITU series – an open call was held in the region, asking for family photographs and photos of descendants who closely resemble forebears in family photographs.

One photo shoot in Innsbruck was featured on regional television: the extensive report focused on the project itself and the participating families, and prompted discussions among viewers, as an organic outgrowth of the artistic work itself.

It is worth noting in this context that when Maria Rørbye Rønn, head of public broadcasting in Denmark, was asked to account for the worldwide success of the political drama series *Borgen*,

she replied: «The more local, the more global.» Her implication was that getting to the heart of local reality can be an effective way to achieve broader relevance and stimulate interest in the wider world.

The work of Orly Zailer is paradigmatic of that idea. At first glance, Zailer is concerned with family history and remains consistently in the private sphere, in terms of content as well as aesthetics, staying as close as possible to the original family album photos. However, the viewer never has the reductive sense of merely looking at someone else's family, with little relevance for his or her own life. Instead, looking closely at a region stimulates precise questions about one's own living space, wherever that may be. The profoundly private in Zailer's works opens up the labyrinth of the private per se.

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at BTV Stadtforum;
developed the «INN SITU
– Photography, Music,
Dialogue» series for BTV
Stadtforum.

Unique Repetitions *Agnieszka Roguski*

*Family photos as photographic remembrance in Orly Zailer's
«ANCESTORS. New Portraits».*

Sometimes photos function like lubricant, freeing up the stuck gears of the family system. At Christmas dinner, for example, decades-old photos are sometimes passed round to show what certain family members at the table looked like as children, or during their exuberant teenage years. It's a way to get through awkward pauses in the conversation, or to end difficult discussions by supplying precisely that which sometimes goes missing in everyday life: remembrance. In such contexts, photographs serve as more than mere documentations of the past. They furnish proof for one's own memory, illustrating past moments and bringing them back to life in a peculiar way. Analogue photographs are in fact inherently a form of remembrance, a medium representing earlier eras when images were not sent back and forth digitally and did not reach millions instantly in real time. Analogue photos embody the passing of time and asynchronous moments, having always had to be developed in a lab between being taken and being viewed.

That underlying sense of a chronological interval does not create distance, however. Quite the opposite: it engenders a sense of closeness. Photos from the family album – perhaps passed round in situations where a cup of coffee is not quite enough to establish common ground – can lend the lustre of shared history to any family get-together. Whether or not one's parents

look different now is irrelevant: the past is pictorially brought to mind, and though that past may have occurred before one was born, it is an existential part of one's life. The photos tell the story.

Relationships take centre stage

Such moments of connection are at the heart of Orly Zailer's work. An artist working mainly in the medium of photography, Zailer focuses on what photography constitutes technologically and socially – namely a way to conceptualise the passing of time. She does more than just look back from the present on an imagined past: taking the past as her point of departure, she hunts down references to similar moments in the present. «ANCESTORS. New Portraits» is part of the series «The Time Elapsed Between Two Frames», which she began in 2012. On view for the first time at BTV Stadtforum is a comprehensive exhibition in which twenty new works created *in situ* in the Tyrol and Vorarlberg region mingle with existing works created in Zailer's home country of Israel. Featured first in the exhibition are pairs of photos resembling a spot-the-difference challenge in a newspaper. The differences lie not merely in the time elapsed between the photos – though indisputably that is one of the major differences. The photographs are portraits from family albums, and positioned next to them are their doppelgangers. To create the twenty new works, an open call was held among Tyrol and Vorarlberg residents to find people with a striking resemblance to their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. Her goal was not just to find similar faces, but to embed those faces in backgrounds similar to those in the family albums. The resulting similarities go well beyond the immediately evident: they lie somewhere in a nebulous in-between that involves similarities of body, gesture, setting, and overall image.

In order to apply her photographer's viewpoint to family relationships, Zailer started by looking for images among her own stock of photos. A self-portrait with her partner was the starting point for the multi-year project, which has now been transferred from Zailer's home in Israel to Austria. That image is a re-enactment of a photo of Zailer's parents, in which the two of them are laughing towards the camera, in a beige-toned 1970s interior. Zailer and her partner performed the re-enactment forty years later, recreating the effect of a snapshot. What is particularly striking, along with the artist's precise handling of detail, is the image print. Here, in the form of an earlier

generation, something implied by the word «similarity» and yet intangible is being expressed: the principle of dramatic re-enactment of photos within a family, which is Zailer's definitive method. Is it accurate to say her approach essentially consists of displaying so-called originals alongside remarkably similar copies?

In actuality, Zailer's pairs of photos give rise to a sort of magical confusion. That confusion derives mainly from the sense of tension between the images, a tension that cannot be reduced to mere temporal juxtaposition. In the case of some of these photos, it would be hard to distinguish the contemporary photo from the earlier one, were it not for subtle hints at specific chronological context, e.g. the current issue of a magazine lying on a sofa cushion, or the dental braces of a young girl smiling shyly in a photographer's studio. In other words, Zailer's staged productions are deliberately not meant to be «exact» reproductions. Instead, they align the present with a shared expression, conveyed through the medium of photography. And although the images are so obviously staged, the effect is remarkably direct, perhaps precisely because the non-direct is the assumption underlying analogue photography, in which every photo must be developed prior to becoming visible. Yet it really does not matter whether the camera has recorded a moment using light that is not transferred onto paper until it reaches the lab, or whether human memory is establishing reference points which transform that visibility into personal history – in all cases the photos serve as jumping-off points from the present into another era. The instant of taking a photo also, of course, always points to the future, to the moment when the photo will be viewed. Zailer's photographs emphasize precisely those connections between different times and different people, connections which are intangible because they arise in the viewer's emotions. To that fleeting, perhaps subjectively tinted and indefinable presence of the past, Zailer subtly adds physical, perfectly staged photos. What arises between the pairs of images, and creates the aforementioned sense of tension, is a feeling of authenticity. But how is that authenticity established, given that the images are so obviously staged?

Photography as setting

«The Time Elapsed Between Two Frames» takes as its point of departure situations which are framed by the process of photography. To define that frame, Zailer must herself play a

variety of different roles: the re-enactments require compositional precision, but they also call for a kind of theatrical staging, in which Zailer handles the tasks of a theatrical director who moves scenery around while at the same time performing the work of photographer, concentrating on composition and the task of capturing the image. In addition, she also fulfils the function of researcher, conducting searches in image archives and family histories and analysing family constellations. In doing so she also becomes a participant in scenes which took place generations earlier. In Austria, Zailer additionally had to «write in a new key signature», as she was an outsider as well as photographer, theatrical director, researcher and participant. That challenge was subtly incorporated into her work. Initially the recreated images were similar to the family scenes she worked on in Israel, and precisely because of that connection to Israeli companion pieces, her view of the different – namely the social and cultural context – is apparent. One of the obvious, authentic characteristics of private family photos is that they also display local customs and culture such as Alpine scenery and traditional costume, thereby also creating scope for personal approaches. In such contexts, authenticity is less a question of purely individual faithfulness than of specific connections evoked by the image – connections with the cultural context in which the families play out their lives. Therein lies the essence of Zailer's approach: the idea of *correlation*. The images which she uses as her point of departure become an interface with an entire network of interconnections between the camera, the people in front of it and the person behind it, and the viewer. As a result, rather than merely doing what conventional photography does – reproducing a given moment – she creates a setting in which a network of relationships opens up. That setting poetically deconstructs what has historically always been ascribed to (though not always expected of) photography since its beginnings: the ability to tell true stories.

Fictitious truths

The question therefore arises: are there actually any originals in these works? Surely it could be argued that in terms of quality and origin, the reproductions are just as genuine and authentic? In all cases Zailer pressed the shutter release at precisely the moment when the new subjects were best able to link their self-perception to their memory of the person in the picture, i.e. when they could directly picture themselves reminiscing.

It is also important to realise that some of the subjects, for example children, have never seen their forebears and therefore lack personal memories of time spent together. They therefore bring to life various fictional excerpts from family memory – everything ever said about someone is reproduced in the subject's expression, in a very personal way.

In these photographs, memory is a construction which does not assemble itself until captured in the photo itself; truth and fiction mix at the instant when the photo is taken. This blurring of the categories of original and fake means the photos are similar, yet also explicitly different. For example, in the photos in which digital figures on the edge indicate the actual date, they contribute to an aesthetic which is truthful for every photographic moment, thereby also drawing attention to the fictional moment of recollection which reside in memory. This moment can be found *between* the images.

To ensure that her dramatic stagings render that authenticity perceptible, Zailer proceeds in the manner of a restorer with a sharp eye: she arranges the scenery – including the backdrop, clothing and pose – with tremendous precision and attention to detail. The tiniest movement or positioning holds significance. At the same time, Zailer gives free rein to intuition and through conversation tries to build relationships between herself, the subjects, and the forebears in the photos. This approach releases emotions and allows the artist to function almost like a therapist. And indeed this photographic project aroused Zailer's deep interest in the field of photography therapy, in which photography is used to initiate therapeutic processes, and lead her to study and complete a professional training in phototherapy. Her expertise is evident in her emotional, conversation-based approach and the energy which she generates and mobilises through the photographs. It is as if by re-enacting specific scenes, she brings about a kind of oscillation between internal and external perception, despite the fact that she is not actually aiming to process the past or family relationships. The photos become a projection screen for new moments of self-perception which are initiated by the very process of remembering, and which become evident through conversations and an intuitive approach to closeness.

What happens is that the authentic, which – inexplicably – is in fact evoked by these staged pairs of photos, transforms itself from «the true» or «the unique» into an effect of plausible recreation. These photos do not in any way constitute physical evidence or documented truth. Instead, they create invisible

relationships which one can only guess at. They give voice to the invisible that lies beyond the content of the images themselves. And they really do create a form of unreal poetry which focusses not on the excavator in the background, but on those very personal moments of recollection that an excavator in the background can trigger.

In the space of the family album

It is not from nostalgia that Zailer has opted to use family albums as her visual resource. The family album is a particular form of narrative, consisting of selected photos presented in a specific sequence, organized by year or event, accompanied by commentary. Family albums are private; they archive a family's history through photos. Stories are created through the photos themselves, but also through the relationships into which the photos enter – relationships with each other and with the viewer. With each added photo pasted into the album, a feeling arises of belonging to a steadily growing context that is moving forwards in time, and with each added photo comes the opportunity to reflect on that forward movement.

This exhibition paradoxically brings tangibility not only to the carefully preserved and immortal, but also to the ephemeral. The pairs of photos amaze and fascinate, but they also create a humorous, somewhat eerie mood. Sometimes there is a sense of déjà vu, an indefinable familiarity that does not derive from any actual reference points. Zailer employs the characteristic family album form – which consists of narration, compilation, and mood – to project that feeling into the exhibition hall. Just as in photo albums, in which it sometimes takes several pages before a connection becomes clear, Zailer creates visual axes and references beyond mere juxtaposition on a white wall. In doing so, she follows an intuitive logic involving relaxed playfulness and complex interplay. Viewers in the exhibition hall may construe it as a special kind of puzzle, or as a playful jumping back and forth between different eras. But what ultimately underlies these photographs is contextualisation: it is the spatial and personal relationships that imbue them with meaning.

Thanks to that emphasis on spatial and narrative reference, one's attention comes arcing back to the basis of Zailer's work: the medium of photography. Since photography is a process involving reproduction, it is, as a matter of principle, associated with the interplay of different time planes. Photographs always draw attention to incalculable concurrences of chance

and intention, and that is certainly the case in Zailer's skillfully staged reproductions. Photography, in its capacity as a technical medium, reflects social relations which are never reproducible through purely technical methods, or in fact may not be reproducible at all. Those interconnections lie beyond the physical photograph and the technical process of image capture, and are always proportionate to the practices of collecting, archiving and of narration and remembrance. In other words, establishing relationships is inherent to the medium of photography, and it is therefore no coincidence that Zailer has chosen this medium for her chosen subject matter, family. Arguably that subject matter is paradigmatically at the heart of all relationships, and is the point of departure for being here on the planet at all. Whenever the question comes up as to how an authentic visual effect can actually even arise, that question always has to orient itself to another question, namely «What constitutes a «genuine» relationship?» Purely physical or technical connections? Or closely related aspects which are conveyed through feelings and which render the connections vague or perhaps even fictional?

Zailer establishes connections between memory, the past and the present, thereby incorporating them into an imagined presence. Her photographs are characterised by diffuse, subjective moments of memory which she repeatedly inserts in concrete form into her images. Her images become social arenas, where the authenticity results from the fact that she breaks down the boundaries between original and copy.

The title «ANCESTORS. New Portraits» points towards the process of remembering, in which one's own current self-image, in the form of memories of one's own history, occupies centre stage. It is a process that can never be demonstratively proven, as it is subject to ongoing change and depends on the relationships which we enter into and consider important. Moreover, it is a process one can only guess at, as it forms invisible connections with images, linking lifeless documents to one's own personal memories, and it creates new images of personality as a result. In Zailer's work, «authenticity» becomes an individual interpretation, which is contained not in genetic code or photographic negatives but in the unique, which is inherent to all repetition.

Agnieszka Roguski is a Berlin-based freelance writer and curator. She is currently studying for a doctorate at the Free University of Berlin, with a doctoral thesis entitled «The Self on Display – Visual Performances in the Digital Society». She is a former associate member of the DFG (German Research Foundation) Research Training Group «The Photographic Dispositive» at Braunschweig University of Art. Her work has been exhibited at Kunstverein Leipzig (art club in Leipzig), HKW Berlin (House of World Cultures Berlin), the Torrance Shipman Gallery New York and elsewhere, and has been published by Tectum, Kerber, Peter Lang, Broken Dimanche, Revolver, Spike Art Magazine, Camera Austria, Eikon, Springer-in and Texte zur Kunst.