

Daniel Hahn

**Studio Detlef –
Variations on the Joie de Vivre**

(The steam engine)

The other day, my friend Daniel came by to my house. “Could you lend me your old leather jacket?” “Sure, no problem.” “And your dad’s velvet hat?” “Of course.” “And your grandmother’s swimming cap?” “But what in heaven’s name do you need all that for?” That’s when he said: “You’ll see”.

And as a matter of fact, when Daniel comes by a few months later to show me his new photographs, I rediscover all these items, and a few others as well, worn by the same person, a man around sixty, always photographed in the same way: His dad.

For some time now, these two have joined forces in a unique artistic enterprise. One strikes the pose, the other one directs. Or is it the other way round?

You could say the son dresses up his dad and through the masks he offers him, the other one takes on different roles that lead him to discover new sides of his identity. But it is also true the other way round. These role plays include the photograph as well as his model. We are facing a father and his son: The conveying always happens in two directions.

So you try to feel the limits, but there doesn’t seem to be any. These two are on the road to the core of the absurd, determined not to stop on their way and never to take themselves too seriously. One thing is sure: We are witnessing a situation where the father and the son could not do without one another.

All this reminds me of this strange dialogue written by Gregory Bateson that I recently read:

The Son: “Do fathers always know more than sons?”

The Father: “Yes.”

The Son: “Daddy, who invented the steam engine?”

The Father: “James Watt.”

The Son: “But why didn’t James Watt’s father invent it?”¹

¹ Extract from: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, by Gregory Bateson New York: Chandler, 1972