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TOM LICHT – DAHEIM

TRACES OF HOME

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It's probably Wilhelminian Style, late 19th century. Parts of the ornamentation have been lost and in places the wood is chipped or has been glued back on by untrained hands. Here and there scratches and stains adorn the surface yet it carries the hard-earned patina well. After all, this aging closet has been taken apart and put back together many times; it has been shipped across the country and banished into dark basements; it has been set up in Berlin and in Hausen an der Möhlin, in Bremen, Hamburg and Munich. It has accommodated tape recorders and television sets, coats and hats, diaries hidden behind clothes, and secrets. You could say this closet is part of the family. It witnessed the parents getting to know each other and moving in together and the kids' moving out and moving on. It knows the process of discovering, adapting and letting go; it is a quiet companion in different chapters and stages of life; it is a witness to our family's history. This closet is *heimat*—or at least a part of it. It is a piece of *heimat* “to go” that has been uprooted from its original location at home but that stills carries the feeling of home within its wooden frame—familiarity, safety and a close emotional tie. It is part of a *heimat* that lives on in objects even if their location or their context has changed.

Tom Licht reflects on these “traces of home,” as he uses the familiar items to approach his parents' house, the place of his upbringing, a village in southern Thuringia. Starting with old photographs from his family's photo album he went looking for remnants of his childhood and their current whereabouts: the ornate couch pillow which after all these years still receives its obligatory fold right down the middle via a pat with the hand; the staircase where everyone gathered for the family photo, that now sits empty and orphaned; a vase and a small decorative figurine have changed their location but seem to cling together inseparably.

Taking stock on a matter-of-fact way, Tom Licht documents his former home with all its permanence and transformations: typical and significant things that have lasted through the years, such as ingrain wallpaper and facades covered in slate; old toys that wait for better times in the attic; the rural landscape that quietly and patiently endures the changing times. More than two decades after moving out

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and finding independence, two decades in which the house has been renovated and continuously patched up, in which fashion and furniture have changed and in which the country Tom Licht grew up in was dissolved, his view onto those things has shifted. It is distanced and analytical, devoid of people and of the liveliness and color of those childhood years.

Yet still notable is the distinct atmosphere, which might be familiar to all those who have moved away, in which feelings and memories are being recalled through small details that close the gap between now and then. This former home has shaped us—it was here that we discovered the world and started to create our own. We roamed the streets as undercover secret agents; we chased villains and adventures. We had secret hiding places in which we shared our first kiss or smoked our first cigarette. Lying in bed we pictured the world upside down and envisioned faraway places. We invented stories and dreamt up fairy tales. We took this place, these surroundings and objects and made them our own by giving them a new purpose, a new meaning.

Looking back, the place we hail from awakens feelings both of nurture and alienation, of yearning and separation. Home is a part of us. It offers guidance, it shapes the image of one's self and conveys feelings of attachment. But it also always lies behind us; it is tied to the past, to moving on and to ephemerality. The examination of the childhood home and its belongings is therefore also (self-)assurance—an investigation into the dynamic nature of one's identity, a search for both the durability and reliability of certain influences and worldviews—and also the emancipation from them. It is an attempt to get to the bottom of this inexplicable and intangible feeling. The feeling that lives on in a wooden closet or in dusty boxes filled top to bottom with treasures from old playrooms. It's a flicker in a familiar landscape, in an old photograph or in a floral coffee cup. It's back home or always within us—in any case it's here to stay even if the once so familiar world, the circumstances or the inner self have changed.