



Amanda Tetraut:
Phil and Me

Trolley Books, London, 2004.
160 pages, ISBN 1-904563-04-X

When Amanda Tetraut was three, her father Phil tried to commit suicide by wandering around naked in the snow. Afterward his toes had to be amputated because of frostbite. Ever since, the young Canadian photographer has struggled with the anxiety, shame and guilt that the relatives of schizophrenics inevitably experience. In her moving debut work *Phil and Me* Tetraut makes no attempt to hide the fact that these feelings have sometimes overshadowed her love for her father, who was divorced at an early stage from her mother.

In the book she depicts her meetings with the vulnerable Phil unsentimentally and in a formally assured pictorial idiom. Besides being mentally ill and in some periods deeply alcoholic, Phil lives as a homeless man on the streets of Montreal. The account is thus situated in a tense no-man's-land between socially committed documentary and personally subjective photography. For although one of the intentions was to promote a subtler view of those marginalized by society, it has also very much been about Tetraut's own survival – a process where the camera came to function as a shield. For, as she puts it in an open, raw-nerved letter to her father, «Taking photographs of us was, and continued to be, the only way for me to stay sane or meet you at all when you were sick and drunk».

And we are in no doubt that Phil is something of a handful after studying the picture material in the book – his sometimes grotesque facial expressions and gestures

can have an overwhelming, even frightening effect. It is clear that – as an unmedicated schizophrenic – he lives in a different reality, something that the photographer tries to visualize among other ways through the many shots of Phil with his back turned, hurrying away from the camera. In other pictures his face is hidden behind a flicker of park foliage, which gives the surreal impression a strange poetry.

Phil and Me begins with a series of photo-booth portraits that span almost 30 years. But while such family-on-the-town snapshots often give the impression of good-humoured fooling around, these have a much more serious undertone. Certainly, father and daughter laugh and make faces, but most of all they look as if they are imitating the typical photo-booth behaviour for taking unpretentious souvenir photos.

Particularly moving is one of the early portraits where Phil and Amanda Tetraut (then around six years old) have gone into the photo booth together. They pose concentratedly for the camera, but it is hard for the observer to abstract from the sadness that seems to surround both of them. In this sense the picture, like many of the others, speaks clearly of the stigmatization that surrounds not only the mentally ill but also their relatives.

Bima Marianne Kleivan



D. Navarro & N. Strauss:
Don't Try This at Home

Harper Collins, New York, 2004.
256 pages, ISBN 0-06-039368-8

Walter Einenkel (ed.):
MTV Photobooth

Universe Publishing, New York, 2002.
222 pages, ISBN 0-7893-0800-2

Don't Try This at Home is the admonitory title of Dave Navarro and Neil Strauss' long-anticipated depiction of a turbulent year in the life of a rock star. And the expectations of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll a-plenty are not disappointed in either text or pictures; but most of all the book paints a depressing picture of a damaged, narcissistic personality whose insatiable craving for admiration and confirmation is accompanied by cynicism and a decided distrust of his surroundings.

"The only people who stay in your life are the ones you pay" was Navarro's Thesis # 1, in the summer of 1998 when he had a photobooth and various items of electronic surveillance equipment installed in his home in Hollywood Hills with the aim of documenting everyone who came visiting for the next year. Shortly before this the American guitarist had been obliged to leave the successful group Red Hot Chili Peppers, which didn't exactly improve his mood or reduce his drug abuse.

Instead Navarro took the stage in the photobooth, understanding like