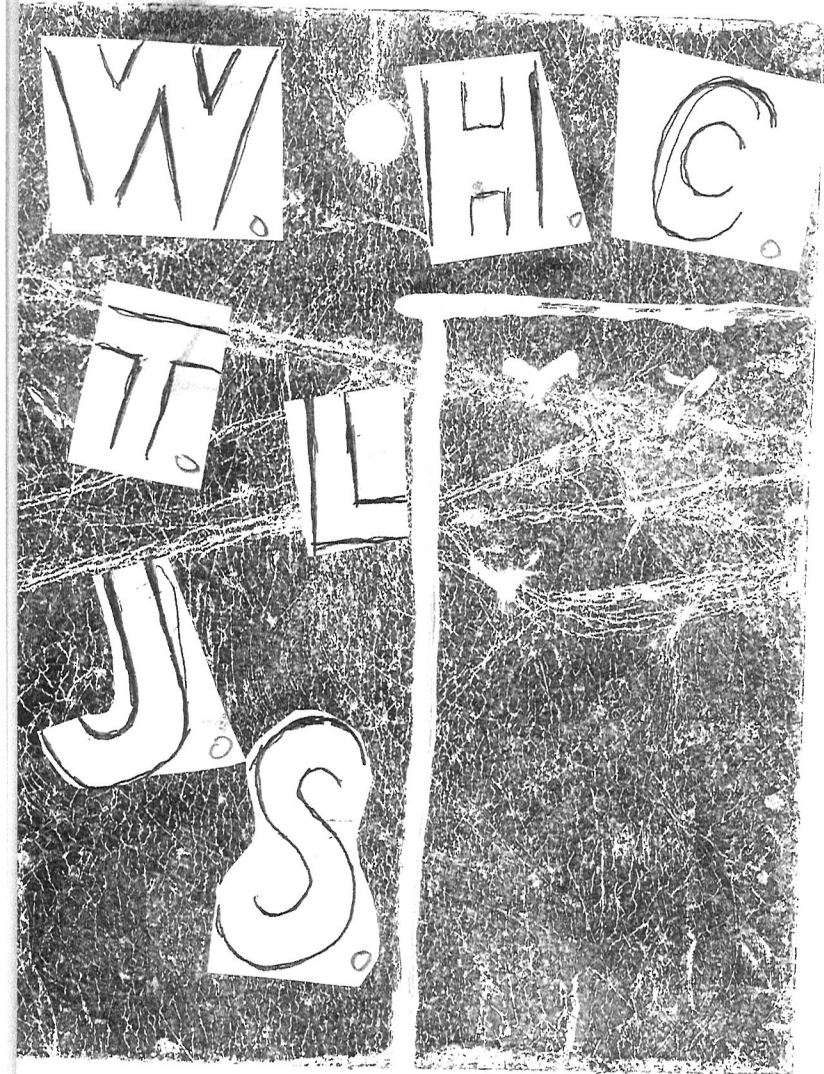


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# THE WHCTLJS DISSIDENCE COINCIDENCE



W H C T L J S  
D I S S I D E N C E  
C O I N C I D E N C E

## The Dissident Bible of Ethics, Die Krankheit zum Tode – An Interview

The following interview was conducted in three parts during spring 2008. One recorded interview took place at Café Voss, Berlin, an email interview with a response time of max 5 minutes intervals per question and finally a series of SMS questions answered within 4 hours in Malmö. The 3 sessions have been edited and mixed with each other so they do not appear in any chronological order.

The interviews were made to force Josef Strau to think and answer differently, consider the length in his answers. The edited answers may appear fragmented, even confusing, but this was an attempt to recreate and present Strau's way of thinking, trail of talking and the interrupted stream of consciousness.

The title of the interview refers to 4 books that were lying in a pile on Strau's living room table whilst living in the Malmö. When asked Strau said, that they were part of his preparation and research for the exhibition at Malmö Konsthall. The 4 books were:

The Dissident: A Novel by Nell Freudenberger

The Bible

Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1) by Michel Foucault

Die Krankheit zum Tode by Søren Kierkegaard (written under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus)

*Jacob Fabricius: How do you see 'coincidence' in your work?*

Josef Strau: It is almost a theological question actually, that 'the coincidence' is the moment where narratives often begin. I'm thinking of examples now.... The thing is, that I have to start somewhere, and it often becomes coincidences, which decide this starting point these are also the best texts. The more I work intentionally, the worse the texts become. The more the texts were written on coincidences, the more the texts kept developing. So the coincidence is like the mysterious starting point.

*JF: But also when you look at your installations, it seems like something has happened by coincidence...*

JS: I try to avoid the classic authorship, and this also is relatively similar to older art works I made.... It doesn't mean, that it cannot be autobiographical, but I want somehow the reality which my works refer to, doesn't not come from me, but from the outside by coincidence...

*JF: When we talked yesterday, we were looking at one of your lamps, which was not perfect, you said that it was falling apart and you were worried about it.*

JS: For some years I didn't really work as an artist, almost giving up, but then I did Galerie Meerrettich, and then, for many reasons I suddenly became interested in making and producing again, more than I was ever before. There was this writing phenomenon, that I really wanted to focus on. Galerie Meerrettich was a coincidence as well, when Christoph Gurk and the Volksbühne asked me to do something in this space, I thought, maybe I should try...and then it created this thing, - I'm afraid in a kind of slightly humorous way - about art and economy, dealing with the realities like, that art has a very different economy than writing - you cannot sell text objects as you can sell an art object immediately. I suddenly realized, that I had to look more into this business side of the whole thing as well. So I started participating for instance in little art fairs as a gallerist, and I made a bit dealing there and there, it was not like super successful as we know, but it kind of helped the whole thing, for I had actually no money left suddenly. I started saying, that I have a post-industrial biography almost; educated in a very academic context as a young person, then you become rebellious by becoming an artist, then you take that serious, but after 20 years you find yourself having this quite poor flea market dealer life. It was not THE great idea, but the subtext to this thing was that I bought the lamps at the flea market, and transformed, painted them, or put a mp3-player with a voice on them. In this way I turned the cheapest thing from a flea market into something of high-value.

I wanted to have a really perfect thing you could have in your apartment forever and be proud of. They should still display this economy of the flea market dealer, a should be academic that turned flea market dealer lost in a post industrial period or something...

*JF: When did you first become interested in art and what do you consider your first artwork?*

JS: When I was 20 years old, I started to make drawings and made it after a few months into the art school, more because I did not know what else to do and I met Peter Weibel who gave a seminar each Wednesday afternoon. He told us about écriture automatique and asked us to make drawings automatique. He said the main concern is not the work but we should turn into a weird uncontrolled mood and make a long line on paper. I tried very hard to become strange for a week and then made the drawing and showed it to Peter Weibel. He said maybe I should get still more strange, and then the lines will be more abstract, just as they should be.

*JF: So Weibel and early Vienna Actionism inspired you? How was it growing up in Austria?*

JS: No, I did not like the actionism-side, its main presence then was Nitsch who did weekend performances at his dirty castle. Friends of mine participated but I did not like it. But Weibel was the first to tell me about surrealism and the weird drawing was more a Michaux influence. Before art school I went by chance to a performance by Mike Hentz. I did not know anything about contemporary art and I was shocked and excited. He chose me out of the audience to participate and I did shyly. That brought me first to art and it was very exciting unlike sad Viennese art actions.

*JF: Why did it shock you? Did you come from a bourgeoisie or working class background?*

JS: I guess, mother was a doctor and father one of the high federal judges with limousine and chauffeur, so I had to get revolutionary instead and loose their path at the age of 16 or 17. I went to the flea market where the revolutionary subculture met then. The Mühl commune had a big booth at the flea market every Saturday. They were many and very aggressive and I sometimes tried to sell there too to find some rebellious contacts into the underground. They were many and asked me each time if I had had sex in the morning that day and I should come over later. I did not dare following but I was interested. I had no idea that was art, but Mike Hentz instead was very articulate and I was particularly shocked about his performance where he forced the audience to be imprisoned. It had for me much of a holocaust reference, which was my main kind of political

concern. And I was not sure if he did the right thing. I was not shocked by the actionist anti bourgeois attitude of it. That was nice actually.

*JF: How has Mike Hentz influenced your art? Was it the element of performance? Was it the radical approach that opened your eyes or his way of using performance as force?*

JS: No, no, no, first of all what could be called influence always comes out as influence much later. In my case, all the early influences come out maybe 40 years later. But Mike Hentz was important, because I was someone, who absolutely did not know about art and if someone had mentioned art I would have snobbishly put it aside. If you are interested in politics or in literature as alternative to bourgeois life, art does not matter much and I still think it does not. It is either handicraft luxury and idolatry, or narcissism or something like that. Therefore uninteresting. Without having the same terms, but that was what I thought until meeting Mike Hentz. It did not seem to have formal elements like film or books. I liked it therefore. As a direct way to communicate some important message without escape to the audience. Raising up these post Nazi questions for example, but at this point I had problems too.... it should be added, that I sold old lamps and similar things at the flea market when I was 16 years old.

*JF: Where did you get the lamps? What is it about flea markets that you like? Is that why you are using lamps in your text installations today? You could have chosen any other second hand item, but you have used the lamps quite a few times now, so is there a connection?*

JS: I just remembered now the first time. I sold a few other old objects too. I looked at the cellars of the family and other people helped me too, knowing my enterprise. I just angrily thought two years ago, that I turned not only metaphorically into a flea market dealer now after all the years in the frustrating successful art professional experiences. Galerie Meerrettich was a kind of good flea market instead.

*JF: A flea market but hardly any sales, right!?*

JS: Meerrettich? No, but a bit at the end. I was not supposed to have a selling gallery there; it was a Volk Bühne art space enterprise. It should not be commercial, but I desperately needed money for expenses, so I did it in a kind of flea market mode, but my own work was like that too. Selling it in my own gallery. Buying cheap, the lamps, selling them for flea market values extremely higher after a few modifications and after turning it into a reading lamp with adding a short story to it, the actual value, the actual lights in

the whole work being the text. So it was an economy of how to be a writer but not being able to sell the pure text.

*JF: That seems like impossible with the ridiculous fees that writers get for writing texts and reviews for magazines and newspapers? It must have been a struggle...*

JS: Yes, it is impossible and therefore I wanted to use this problem in order to make new art objects, kind of fictionalize its publication. The problem of having been an artist and an art space organizer etc too long, and then suddenly or finally wanting to do the writing as a serious mode of production, facing as well the economic problem, trying to make this problem itself into an economic procedure, this was the plan to do for a transition time. It is always a transition time. Following the attitude, that art today can be used for all possible aims. And I liked that the text does not cost, the printed text can be carried home and read somewhere else, but the object of the text is expensive.

*JF: Did you see this Viennese revolutionary subculture as bohemian and therefore appealing? Was it a reaction to your upbringing?*

JS: Yes, only a reaction. Especially to the entire old-fashioned obsession with discipline etc. and the flea market at this time was the only place for me to get contact to the bohemian life there. Viennese subculture was actually only bohemian then. Bohemian style, nothing more. No post 68 political movement. Just zero.

*JF: When did you get involved in the left wing or political activity?*

JS: Around the flea market time I tried to be away from the home as much as possible and went to communist party pupil meetings for a year. There were not many and I became one of the three spokespersons of the nationwide communist pupil organization. But I loved reading classic novels too and I started to make a Kafka discussion, since Kafka was forbidden in the east block we discussed it a lot and me and two others decided to leave as result. It was very sad, because an old man, an antifascist fighter of the Spanish civil war, was our mentor and we left him alone in support of Kafka. Then I participated in the anti nuclear movement, but that didn't have much revolutionary spirit and so I turned bourgeois and loved poetry instead.

*JF: So you went the Baudelaire way. Have anyone ever told you that you look like the reincarnation of Charles Pierre Baudelaire? How does it feel to step in the footsteps of Les Fleurs du mal? Do you?*



JS: I was told that I do. Since it was so late in my life that I finally started to activate the writers persona maybe three years ago, I was already observing what other writers had achieved in the same age. I found out that Baudelaire died almost the same day as I started counting how many days he had lived, and compared it to how many days I had lived and what I had achieved. I resigned and thought, I only can translate these things in art context projects. So I decided to make a Baudelaire day project, when the day of his death is equivalent to my age. To make a big Meerrettich art project involving many artists, but for practical reasons and because of laziness I just did a lamp, dedicated to what I called 'the Baudelaire day' and showed it at the group show at Daniel Buchholz, the first lamp to be shown in a gallery, without text but with the memory of this master at least.

*JF: I recently visited artist and writer David Robbins in Milwaukee, and he spoke about how the suburb was the new frontier for bohemian life. What is your thought on that?*

JS: Oh, I have many thoughts about this suburb thing, since I did the long time research and art project The Nazis of Suburbia. But that is not exactly about the same idea, but bohemia is so much bigger but so much more open today, I guess, comparisons are difficult. And I lost the suburb 30 years ago and now I am not even a visitor. Anyway, there is probably more to say about it.

*JF: How would you define bohemian life today? Is it a style? Is it romanticized?*

JS: From what I see for sure it is less outsiderish then in the seventies when I encountered it the first time. But probably that was Viennese too. I went as much as possible to Germany and Italy and saw a much broader variety of movements and more focused. But still very different from today. Like I lived in Kreuzberg 1981 and that was political and bohemian. With incredible energy and outsiderishness. I don't want to compare that with today. In a certain age one perceives everything as an exciting movement, which changes everything.

*JF: I'm sitting here with Josef at the Café Voss, it's the 18th of April, and we're going to talk a little bit about the show in Malmö, and your thoughts about that. We talked yesterday about how you thought you wanted to involve language, and to involve a novel in a different way than a regular novel. Could you say anything about how you will be presenting this novel?*

JS: The whole exhibition should be like ... the text should be more central problem, more than it was before, which means more fragmented texts, which means words, which

means letters. Because earlier the texts were always a kind of narrative text, longer texts, which I would like to still do there. But I would like to split it up in objects, which are text stills themselves, creating these spaces which are letters or words, where you go in, and actually these letters function as dividing the narratives in the exhibition.

I would very much like to fulfill this old dream, to be writing this long narrative, which is in between realistic documentary and fiction, and always moving on these borders. But I think that these exhibition problems are really not art problems, but problems of images. It's very interesting to transform that, making the texts in a way so they are almost images, or that they are printed as posters, which people can carry with them back home, and read it there. Actually the perception of the exhibition object is not happening, for the audience, during the exhibition, it happens later when they read the text. So it's actually split in the perception, between space, text and perception.

*JF: So you use the poster as a way of distributing your work, so that the exhibition has another physicality?*

JS: Yes, this is what I need to do in fact, to extend that physical side of it. It was always a bit funny that I worked a lot on these texts, and made these posters, short stories and documentary narratives, and then I made these posters and booklets and connected them to the objects, but then in the end, it happened very often, that when I looked at the galleries' webpage, I always forgot to include the texts. So people were asking me: 'so how was your last exhibition, do you still do lamps?' And I said: 'No, I still do texts.' In some ways I wanted to underestimate or play the texts really down, because it is often a big disappointment for the audience when they come and they have to read all this stuff. They want to see things, not read. This time I want to include it in spatial situations by letter objects, which are more like letters space departments or something...

*[JF: laughs...]*

JS: ...because earlier I sometimes wrote these half theoretical texts or art critical texts for art magazines, but some years ago I suddenly developed this thing by chance, like from one day to the other, to write some story about something that happened to me. I wrote about some experiences I had with other people and one night I had to write this catalogue text, and it was supposed to be a theoretical text about photography, you know, with lots of quotes of Roland Barthes, but then I couldn't really do it. I was never a good theory writer. I was almost brain-handicapped in that respect, so I decided to do something else: I just write anything down, I write down what happens to me that day, what happened yesterday... So I started writing down the story that I was at a party the

day before, and that I looked into a mirror and suddenly saw a very different face of myself. This happens very often when you become older but that day it was a really special thing. I looked suddenly not only older, but I also saw what other people see in me, the art scene bohemian or something. I always thought to myself, I'm not at all like that, I'm actually more like a person who should have studied law or something, and that I'm really this kind of very rational person and not this art bohemian. But doing this role for many years one really turns into that, whatever... So I kind of thought, okay I just write anything, and then suddenly I developed this story about the mirror, and then I wrote about my cat, about cat food, about drunkenness, about all these stupid things. I wrote it very quickly, and in half an hour I had this 4 page long text. I reread the text, and I realized that this text is already written in somewhere, stealing this problem of image as Roland Barthes actually described it in his theory: that photography is a kind of mirror image of a certain moment, that it always displaces time. So I realized that actually this text, subconsciously included as a subtext, is kind of a theoretical problem, but in this quick diary way I wrote, I was not at all intending that. I also realized that there is some kind of second person within me which is capable of telling these stories very quickly, and actually very perfectly. The grammar and everything was really perfect, while all my theory texts always had to be edited, to much actually.

So from that moment on I thought, okay this is a really strange phenomenon actually: What is this person who writes this text? Who is that? Who is able to write that? I mean, it's definitely somehow me and myself, but actually it is not, because for 20 years I couldn't achieve that. So, even if the text is quite stupid, it was still somehow a kind of reality of expression suddenly for me, and since I was an artist quite long before, I decided to continue working on that. So it started off as an experiment with that, and started with a stupid thing: I looked at a cigarette package, and I thought about memory. So I sat down and wrote about looking at the package, and having some memory about the package, and quickly I took about three objects. I started with that, and then I observed myself writing a whole story with that material. And I thought to myself that finally I got to a point where I was able to create some expression, but in a kind of narrative way. I also realized that I couldn't use it for the art world, that they wouldn't be interested in that. Then I slowly tried more and more, made these booklets and posters and so on, so that was for me the central thing I wanted to work on. But on the other hand I still used these objects. So what I want to say is that for now I've decided for Malmö to become an important experience for me, because I want to put the text production in the center, and I actually want to even reflect on it a little bit. Like for example I called it 'écriture automatique' what happened to me, but when you look at the surrealist's 'écriture automatique' it's very different, and a very different thing, so then I looked at these writers who have inner voices, and who write down their inner voices, like for example the Swe-

dish writer Swedenborg, who, by the way, was one of the favorites of Baudelaire as well. I started liking him very much as well, and he is writing in the 18th century, and he had one day where he was a bit older than me actually, 55, when he was sitting in a restaurant and he went home to his hotel in London where he was on a business trip, when suddenly a ghost appeared in his room and said to him: 'Well, you have to change your life a bit, you have to write things down', and then the ghost disappeared, and so he thought: 'Well, what is this about, I don't know', and the next night he was very scared, because the ghost reappeared and said: 'In the future you will start writing, and all that you will write will be a kind of display of another reality.' And so he started writing down, and suddenly he sensed that he had absolutely this kind of motoric inner voice which told him endless inner stories, so he wrote many books, mostly about the spiritual worlds, the world of the dead people, heaven and hell, and he described these things a lot, and I liked him very much. And there are other examples like that as well, so actually I want to include a bit this kind of methodology of automatic voices or inner voices of these almost schizophrenic situations. Also, I don't say that I'm so far out as Swedenborg, I write not at all about experiences like that, but I would like to.

*JF: So it's like creating a fictional space that people can take home and expand?*

*JS: Yes, absolutely. But the thing is, I'm really unsure about the meaning of the term 'fictional'...*

*JF: So semi-documentary, like a mixture?*

*JS: Yes, because the funny thing is, that when you read Swedenborg for example, you really believe in him after a while, and in the beginning you think it's very weird what he is writing about – about meeting these ghosts and so on... and the endless universes where you can meet these people. But actually, the way he writes, you wouldn't call it fiction, you almost start believing him: Maybe there is something, maybe it's true, maybe there is another world and so on.... It began with this automatic narrative, but then I started more and more to use this sphere of theological writing. I turned to Kierkegaard, who is actually not 'écriture automatique' at all, but this kind of sphere of theological writing. I still haven't finished, but I would like to include one or two little stories of Kierkegaard as well. So the interesting thing was, that I started with this 'écriture automatique' and then I realized this 'speaking in tongues', for example I found this book from the 18th century with stories, this kind of east-European religious texts, where they come into ecstasy and suddenly some people or voices speak through them. For example let's say Moses' or King David's soul speaks through somebody while they are sitting together*

and reading the Talmud, and there are one or two sentences they don't understand. then Moses appears in the voice of a child and explains by telling a story. I was actually interested in that in a functional way in the beginning, as a phenomenon, but I also recognized that it's not really fictional text. I want to open up the kind of narrative texts I'm writing myself by referring to this kind of writings of real 'écriture automatique' or real 'speaking-in-tongues'.

*JF: Is that why you do the 'speaking lamp' works?*

JS: Na ja, I did a bit of performances too with a computer voice. The first time I was performing it, while I was in Antwerp for some kind of art fair project, there was a friend of mine, Jay Sanders from New York, and he asked me to do a reading with him. But I cannot read my own texts. I just can't do it. It's almost like I'm not sure whether these texts are my own or somebody else's, so I don't know what the voice of it should be. But then he said: 'but maybe you can do it with a computer?' And then we tried, and I realized that it's a great combination with the computer. It's very easy; I put a computer on and it reads the text out loud, and actually very well. It was a little bit...well, when I started doing this thing with the computer voice and the speaking lamps, it was like I gave it back. It's not me who have written it, so therefore it's not me who is reading it. In this 'speaking-tongue'-tradition the writer is only a messenger – something goes through from the 'real' writer to the real audience, and you are just nothing in that process. I like this very much...

*JF: When I first read your booklets and your texts I also had the impression that it was written down very fast. We may have talked about them a bit. I want to talk more about time, lost time... because during your stay in Malmö you seem to have been behind work. You did the drawing for the Manifesta catalogue 5 min before it was scanned and emailed, the same thing with the text. What does pressure do to your work?*

JS: You got a very wrong up side down impression. And you make me feel bad. I did everything perfectly in time. You should ask: 'How come? I looked at you, you are working really hard. Alas, all these works in the last week, almost done at the same time, you seem to operate on different time levels, like operating from 5th or any other dimension.' That's how I see it sometimes. Many years ago I used to be working or better not working a lot with the concept of lost time, keeping work free from subjective failure. But on the day when my father's body was buried, I decided it's time to change quite a few things in life. Such decisions usually never work, but then, it was just the moment when I have not even fully thought this idea through, I got immediately some help from outside. It

was a very special sunny early April day, when my sisters told me, that, when we were little children, my mother used to say, whenever I was not in the same room, that I was always talking too much and just so much, that it seemed to her, that the only advantage from all this big pile of nonsense eventually could be, that only in case you listen to me the whole time, there might be a few true or intelligent things left after some hours, but compared to other family members, who speak less, there is always something worth listening to. According to that I decided the same day to adjust my whole production way fundamentally into this very original personal mode of childhood days, I was obviously born just from that day on almost, I really started loving nasty pressures and started feeling happy, when experiencing similar horrible modes of human life, that many people just avoid most of the time. Especially in Germany. I told myself I should include subjective or other brain failures into my earlier rational concepts, although honestly, it is an inclusion that actually sometimes still creates lots of serious angst situations.

*JF: You mentioned that you lived too healthy here in Malmö; you needed to get out of balance (with alcohol?) to finish pieces. What do alcohol and drugs do to your way of working? Does the quiet everyday mess up you or your work?*

JS: These are external modes of subjective failure, one is of course sometimes thinking of when things go too quickly in one time. I sometimes just feel that my environment runs in another time and I was expressing that for some stupid moments. Because I was longing to be back to my usual environment of speedy Rosenthaler Platz, which during all the last years turned into a perfect figure of all the pressures, but as well all the beautiful advantages of the so called post-industrial city changes. Although it feels like my figurative nemesis sometimes, my longing for the social fabric of Rosenthaler Platz that same day, you just mentioned, was a great surprise.

*JF: Now you are planning 6-8 'letter walls.' Could you describe them and their meaning?*

JS: Since operating with too much work now, I sometimes have to determine the results slightly rationally and give it some order. I thought I'll need different rooms for the work and as well wanted to make an exhibition, which is in every sense, so as well in a spatial sense, dedicated to text production. The shape of these distinct spaces should be part of the text. Getting the shape of letters. I have done it once like ten years ago a bit already in the art space of Gunnar Reski in Berlin, Schillerstrasse. We talked critically about the town planning of Berlin then. Looked at its plans and models, and during our critical conversations I sometimes, although disgusted, felt secretly some envy about these soulless architects. I imagined how they place, probably one night with a comple-



tely arbitrary gesture, some bricks or similar reduced forms into the middle of the city model, but into the middle of the social fabric of many people's lives. In their freezing cold and alienated desires of their soul, these architects start loving awful forms and in a masochistic reaction the representatives of the many lives obey to these dark desires. My favourite film then, was the one where Ronald Reagan plays an architect and evil town planner, who is chased by fantastic great Lee Marvin, who later starts wanting to kill him, and the whole film you just wish, he really finally does. The Killers by Don Siegel is a great lecture for many reasons, but its most educational feature is, that when you have finished watching the film you remember the way architects and town planners are portrayed as the worst, most boring and most evil corrupt-beyond-everything people they basically are. Reagan plays this figure, whose human interior is filled with the uncanny void of hell. It should be told that in the film he is the antithesis to a guy played by John Cassavetes, who is an ex-racing car champion who turned his life into being a teacher for blind children! Fantastic! No? Starting with the racing track atmosphere, it stays the whole film so grey, cold and depressive in these modernist environments, which usually in other films always appear as exciting and fancy. The film creates a special modern negative taste effect of the mundane environments. During the mid nineties everyone was discussing town planning critically in Berlin, I had that film in mind and how Ronald Reagan puts together these stupid types of big architecture in his model. I thought he represents the utmost desire fulfilled for some artists. That it represents their actually corrupt highest achievement they want to go for in their lives, the absolutely eternally utmost wrong thing to me but still, the role of Reagan made me envious a bit, so I wanted to destroy this desire, fulfill it by once, manipulating the lives of others as well with some arbitrary form. At the time I was asked by Gunnar Reski to do something in his art space. The openings were always a place to meet many from a certain critical artist scene, which actually was a very unique scene of critical people, who mostly shared an attitude of a certain political blasé-ness towards real art objects. They would never really talk about them. It was standing as much detached as possible from the sometimes presented art objects. It was a then so-called meeting place, displaying a kind of more quiet and reasonable talking to each other atmosphere, showing socially positive expressions. So for my exhibition I chose to get – for once and never again – into the Ronald Reagan town planning artist attitude. I decided to put my initials J and S in form of walls like a disturbing uncanny piece of modernist nonsense piece into the space, in a way one could not enter most of the space. You could only walk up and down the interior of my personal letter S to just find the J in the back and the famous refrigerator with the beer and basically having to go out to the street again. The space became a walk, only a walk through space, you never feel like standing with someone and having a talk. The walls had a few of my empty house black and white photographs on it. So this was my silly role

transformation and the first attempt to use letters. The technique to build round shapes at least I will transfer to Malmö Konsthall.

One of the other magic stories about The Killers is, that Reagan played the town planner and as well the boyfriend of a woman played by Emily Dickinson. They actually of course don't care about love, but just to use and manipulate people, so she is successfully trying to harm the good non-evil racing car champion played by Cassavetes, by making him fall in love with her. Dickinson was the real then-lover of the then president John F. Kennedy. While they worked together on the set of The Killers, Kennedy was killed and Ronald Reagan made final decisions to go into politics instead of acting and decided to never act in any film any more in order to become a president in the future form of a kind of negative JFK instead, to kind of kill ultimately and irreversibly a few years later the politics JFK at least stood for...

..... and after Cassavetes turned into a film-maker genius.

*JF: Why a Jewish letter in the installation?*

*JS: There is a lot of modern rationality in the Latin letters. But whenever I think of the Roman Empire, I remember stories, which explain extreme evil power structures, the society produced, which as well produced these most successful letter systems. I have never thought about that before and so this was in fact not ever before now the reason for me to once interrupt using them. But I wanted at least to use one letter from another alphabet system. I just liked these Hebrew letters for different reasons, but actually the reason was born again during the day of attending my father's funeral. I told you before, that my elder sisters were obviously eager that day, to tell the youngest one something he did not know before, and something that eventually could change his life. Which it really did. So they were telling me this story that my father learned Hebrew when he was younger. We were standing in the house of my sister in the room with a nice view into her garden. It was slightly spring then, just a few blossoms on the empty branches of the trees outside, but inside I kept remembering some Hebrew letterforms, which by then I did not understand, kind of after image of my father's story. While looking outside, these letters mingled with the branches and the blossoms and I remembered as well that at home in Berlin just then Bernadette decided to start making serious steps to learn the German language. So I clearly knew, what all these impressions should mean to me, that I should finally learn the meaning of these Hebrew letters in my mind and learn their language too, alone to help in some ways Bernadette learning 'her' language and to make parallel efforts to learn 'my' language soon.*

*So at last I started it and while learning them I started making drawings of them, just for*

learning reasons, while slowly these abstract forms incorporated meaning. This is always a great moment of language learning, when the meaningless sounds of language, abstract sounds, slowly begin to develop small pieces of meaning. It is a strong feeling when language starts to throw little pieces of meaning into your brain, but the experience is even stronger, when you are learning new letters. Anyway, I thought another letter than just Latin letters should be in a 'letter exhibition' even if it has no function than turning it into something else, like the internal subjective failure factor, I mentioned before and I like the lamed, the Hebrew L a lot and the Latin L is in the whole exhibition so much anyway. The Latin L is so architectural, so modernist cold, especially if one has to walk through it, like in this super early experimental short story of Peter Handke, called something like 'the interior world of the exterior world of the interior world' – my translation – where he describes a difficult situation of someone who gets trapped in an L space. The Hebrew loomed L is like a long snail with many broader and closer parts instead, you can have a nice leisure-time walk through with someone else, sometimes staying in bigger spaces and keep walking in the smaller round spaces.

