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"I." Or *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S.* by Josef Strau

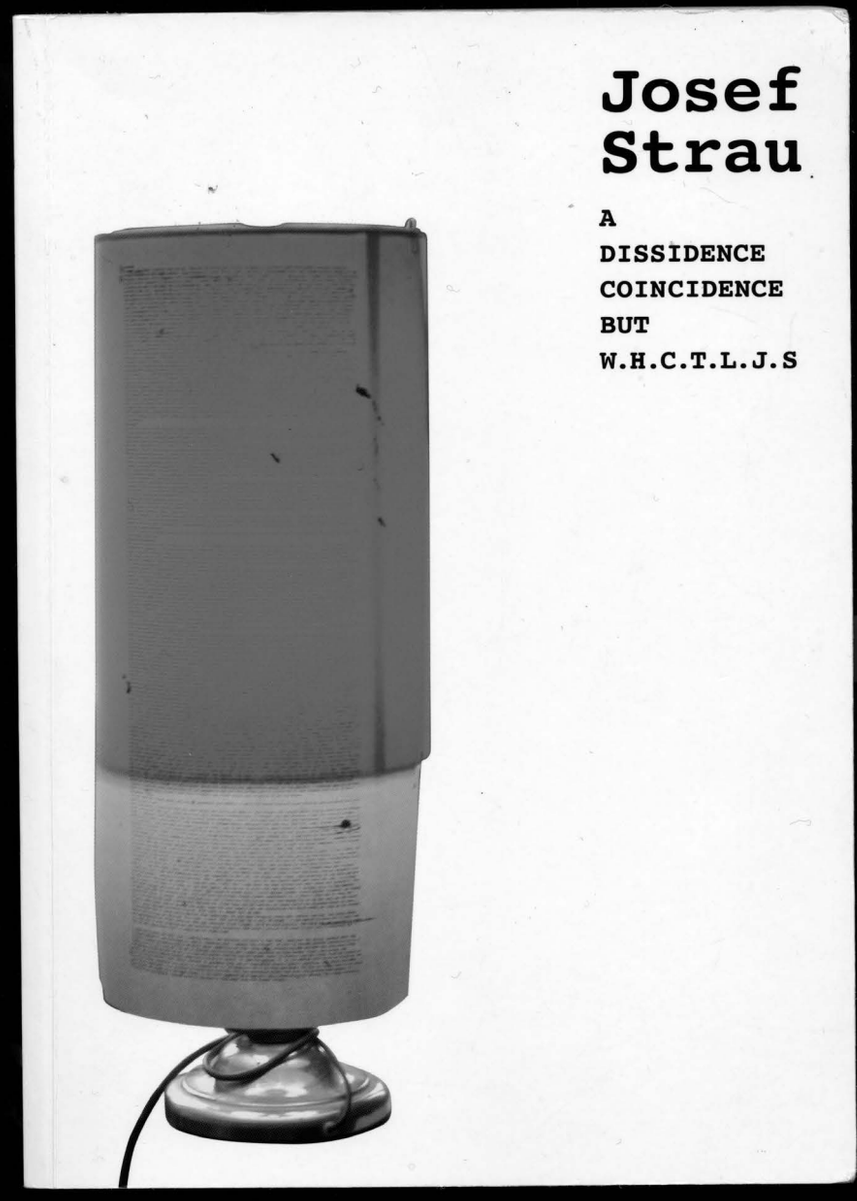

fig 3.1
Josef Strau, *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S.*, 2008. Cover.

Introduction

The writing can only be read if you turn the book upside down. The text is a calligram, its layout visually expressing the content of its sentences. In "the tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz" Josef Strau discusses the tradition of the tabernacle and its many social, cultural, and historical references. The collective undertaking of building a tabernacle is underscored, its quick organization as a place for meeting.[222] Due to the shelter's practical function, the tabernacle is adverse to aesthetic considerations, "or even worse [to] considerations of taste." The tabernacle rather formulates "iconoclast theoretical implications," a connotation winked at by the calligrammatic text, its formal layout seemingly contradicting the iconoclast tendencies the tabernacle might articulate. Strau conveys his own involvement with the nomadic hut or non-building, both space and not space. Yet the collaboration required to manufacture the tabernacle, at once exploring alternative social situations and structures, is paradoxically communicated through the singular subject "I".

The tabernacle text is not unique in its use of the "I", the first person singular being common to artists' writings and contemporary autobiographical work in general. But if Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S.* in which the above story figures appears to be a catalogue with multiple authors, all texts are by Strau. Even the interview that opens the book simulates that it is with himself. It is made to read not like a "secondhand experience," a report on an exhibition, nor does it "bastardize or distort" an art that depends on its physical presence to be appreciated. *A Dissidence Coincidence* is "primary information" or rather, primary matter.[223]

The preceding chapter studied the form *of*, *in*, and *through* the artists' writing, focusing on Dora García's *The Inadequate* for its fragmentary form. I adopted the self-reflexive lens of metafiction, as it allows for the creation of a context (the words on the page) and a text (that which is communicated through those words), to examine how this form is a literature that becomes manifest to itself and thereby exposes a relationship between fragmentation and consciousness. German Romanticism endows the fragmentary form with urgency, naming it not ruin but seed. The fragment both enabled and performed auto-production that did not only concern the production of the text, but also pointed to the formation of the subject: the infinite capacity of the creating, poetic "I". *The Inadequate* is an assemblage in which "there is no individual enunciation. There is not even a subject of enunciation".[224] García is all but absent in the artists' writing, however, her presence simultaneously concealed and revealed. The artists' text with its multiplicity of voices has author play architect, organizing the text-as-constellation and project of

which it formed part. This interlacing of ideas, intellectual impudence, and fragmentary performance can be found in Romanticism as in Surrealism. Guy Debord took Surrealist André Breton as an example when leading the Situationist Internationale, sharing a "doctrine of *Geselligkeit*" as a means to unify the members of their respective collectives, as Fredric Jameson stresses.[225] A myth of communion does not contradict the figure of the isolated hero as the one who makes the community commune.

The question from this last chapter to be addressed in the current one is then how this strange, chameleonic auctorial presence relates to what seems like a more visible author's role in the artists' text. Strau's name dominates *A Dissidence Coincidence* and the writing is composed from the perspective "I". So how does the obstinate performance of the "I" function in the artists' text? Does it correlate with the author's position? Can it be conceived otherwise? Do the subject and the question of the subject resurface in *A Dissidence Coincidence*? The current chapter therefore taps into what was neglected in the last: the question of the subject, of subjectification.

I, the Author Contested

Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence* is chosen as case study given the prominent position taken by the author and his being cast in the first person singular. Strau's work in general is determined by the use of language and text. Use of the "I" in artists' writings is often controversial (and not only in artists' texts) given it insinuates that a reading of the work can only be realized through a "purely" auctorial point of view, contradicting the collective venture of the writing as with *The Inadequate*. The first person singular suggests that the reader is confronted with a genuine account, the "I" inviting the reader to associate the speaker or narrator with the author. It is precisely the psychology of production vis-à-vis the "objective" aesthetic judgment of the work and its communication that is discussed in Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence*. The "I" surges forth in the artists' text, Conceptual Art's and post-structuralism's advocacy of the neuter notwithstanding, regardless of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's understanding of the book as an assemblage that "as such is unattributable".[226]

The (re)appearance of the "I" "after" its ominous and multiple deaths, calls for inquiry into its guises and functioning in the artists' text that seems to reevaluate what literary theorist W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and philosopher of art M. C. Beardsley write of the intentional fallacy as the

"*fault* of writing the personal as if it were poetic" [emphasis added].[227] But the artists' writing also reconsiders structuralist linguist Emile Benveniste's statement that the "I" refers to the instance of discourse, wherein subjectivity is inherent in the very use of language. Subjectivity is the capacity of the speaker to posit herself as a subject through language. "'Ego' is the one who *says* 'ego.' That is where we see the foundation of 'subjectivity,' which is determined by the linguistic status of 'person'" (emphasis in original). Like indicators of *deixis* (this, here, now), personal pronouns do not refer to a concept nor to an individual.[228]

This reexamination of the "I" hovering between the neutral linguistic given as formulated by Benveniste and romantic manifestation of expression, is necessary, especially once the artists' writing is approached from an epistemological point of view. Part and parcel of artistic research participating in an increasingly discursive field, is the delineation of the potential and pitfalls of the author in the artists' text. This need to investigate the author anew, after it has been neutralized (declared dead even) by structuralist conceptions like Benveniste's, is corroborated by responses to recurring uses of fiction in artists' texts. Thus whereas curator Brian Wallis hails the use of fiction as a means of a singular resistance against reigning orders and an access to and acquisition of new forms of knowledge,[229] art historian Katherine Stiles wonders what it means to fictionalize the artists' thoughts. What does it mean "to deny the authenticity of the artist as subject of his or her own discourse," she asks, the intentional fallacy notwithstanding. Stiles continues: what does it mean to flatten out the difference between a text's linearity, its narrative, its argumentative structure, and the synchronicity of its pictorial representation? "When," she argues, "theory by artists becomes art, emotion is read to triumph over reason and knowledge".[230] That an argument can be built in a non-linear fashion as well has been conveniently forgotten here; that theory and fiction function as all but opposing realms as well. And since when can art be equated with emotion? Other relations between image and text, "emotion" and "reason and knowledge" can be considered. The preceding chapters tried to demonstrate as much through the writings of Keren Cytter and Dora García. Reconsidering the role of the author in Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence*, I seek to perceive the alliances forged between the artists' writing and the writer.

Researching the author's functioning in the artists' text I read Strau's work against the autobiography, investigating the latter's contradistinction to autofiction. Comparing *A Dissidence Coincidence* to autobiography and autofiction illuminates questions about the author and/as subject and individual regarding subjectification and individuation, self (*soi*) or selves, and the "I" in the artists' text. The heated debate between autobiography and autofiction is interesting for its sharpening of an understanding of fiction as seeping through the artists' text and the increasingly confusing effects of this, as the Stiles/Wallis discussion underscores.

Autobiography must be understood not as a finite product in *A Dissidence Coincidence*, but as a process. Many studies have been dedicated to what, due to the processual character of the artists' writing, can best be termed the autobiographical. What seems of importance to me regarding the artists' text, Strau's in particular, is that the autobiographical is: 1) a narrative unfolding from the now of the exhibition (and the construction thereof) toward the past and the future comprehending time as multilayered; and 2) a retrospective account and constructive and communicative report simultaneously that links the psychical subject composing the work to the social individual relating "it" to a group, if one wants to hold on to the distinction between the psychology of production of a work and its analytical so-called objective interpretation made by Wimsatt and Beardsley;[231] the processes of construction and evaluation are all but strictly divided in the artists' text, let alone in opposition to each other; 3) in the artists' writing, the autobiographical is an ongoing process, unfinished; and 4) the autobiographical is transdisciplinary in character. For analytical purposes my typologies of the artists' text-as-autobiography, or rather, the artists' writing as autobiographical, serve as entries into this investigation, overlapping and repeating themselves. But before getting into my research, I offer a brief description of Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence*.

A Dissidence Coincidence

At first glance *A Dissidence Coincidence* is a traditional monograph. While it is published on the occasion of an exhibition, the colophon reveals it also presents works from 2006 and 2007 exhibitions. Images of the artist's visual work are interspersed with texts. The first is presented as an ordinary interview, typically introducing the artist. But there is more to both this interview and *A Dissidence Coincidence* as a whole. Since contrary to a conventional interview in a catalogue (it even has a catalogue number) it is masked as, or understood as, a self-interview. The other texts are all forms of life writing,[232] that on closer inspection are excerpts resembling diary entries juxtaposed with psychoanalytical exercises, personal notes, and a part-historical part-autobiographical essay pivoting around questions of identity. Along with these forms of life writing, the images are not "regular" representations: they are cutouts from photographic representations of Strau's sculptural installations of

lamps; representations of representations (of representations), the lamps are flattened out. Rather than mimicking the three-dimensional stature of the sculptures, the pasted in pictures tend to become "textual" in this way.[233] And vice versa: the aforementioned essay presented as a calligram, for instance, the psychoanalytical performances experimenting with fonts, personal notes remaining unedited, inserting typos and orthographical errors. This diminished distance between text and image is underlined by the images' use of the borders of the book: paper edges cut off parts of the depicted sculptures, or the amputated lamp installations (cords dangling off the pages, switches divided in two) suggest they continue on the next page, or that lights might be turned on and off at will, beyond the limits of the physical book.

fig 3.2
Josef Strau, *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S.,* 2008. Lamp installations.

A Dissidence Coincidence can thus be understood as a personal journal, a scrapbook, an object to be used, unpaginated. The roughly cut-and-pasted photographs of the sculptures are reminiscent of cherished pictures collected in a diary. And if a general narrative can be distinguished in the otherwise fragmented text, it is one of soliloquies with the monologue as its subject, flows of thoughts and/as material,

ruminations on the construction of the exhibition (Strau's) and its consequences as the author experiences them. *A Dissidence Coincidence* performatively accounts for and is constitutive of the exhibition. As such, it is an autobiographical work, simultaneously reflecting on the autobiographical and its constructive tools, that is, the author or "I", writing and language, life.

Time, or from Now to Past and Future

At the time of the installation of the exhibition—Strau calls it a period of preparation and research—four books lie on the author's living room table. Page one of the book that precedes the interview explains: "The Dissident: A Novel by Nell Freudenberger; The Bible; Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 1) by Michel Foucault; Die Krankheit zum Tode by Søren Kierkegaard (written under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus)." Together the titles make up the heading of the first text of the volume, "The Dissident Bible of Ethics, Die Krankheit zum Tode—An Interview." The conspicuous montage within the title correlates with the build-up of the exhibition and the interview itself, for which it serves as caption. It also blends in with the construction of the "I", or the realization that the "I" is multiple and constructed, as Strau presents it in *A Dissidence Coincidence*.

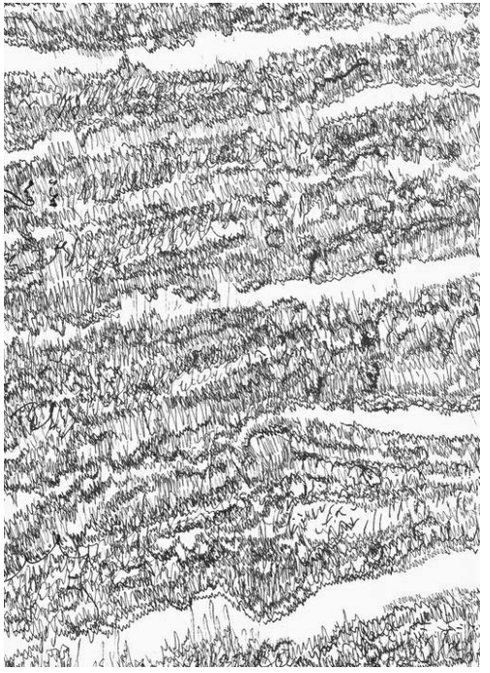

fig 3.3
Henri Michaux, *Dessin Mescalinien*, 1956. Drawing

The dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee is composed of questions and answers taken from a recorded interview, an e-mail exchange, and a discussion via SMS with curator Jacob Fabricius. The introductory lines warn the reader that the possibly confused text in which the edit results represents the author's way of talking and thinking, his stream of consciousness. In

the conversation Strau's discovery of the Surrealists' *écriture automatique* is referred to as a source of inspiration, next to the importance for Strau of poet Henri Michaux known for his psychedelic writings and sketches in which words and their (hand)writing form an insoluble whole.

These influences are mentioned alongside Strau's "failed" attempts to write a substantial theoretical text, efforts resulting in what looks like the record of an oral piece: "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." Reflecting on this, he continues in the interview: "So from that moment on I thought, okay this is a really strange phenomenon actually: What is this person who writes the text? Who is that? Who is able to write that? I mean, it's definitely somehow me and myself, but actually it is not …"

This episode becomes crucial in exploring other methods of text production, reminiscent of the Surrealists and Michaux: "automatic voices or inner voices of these almost schizophrenic situations"; the "sphere of theological writing"; "this 'speaking-tongue'—tradition [in which] the writer is only a messenger." Strau reads (Kafka, Kierkegaard), does research, and tests different forms of writing, literally in exploring handwriting and the movements of graphic lines, comparable to Michaux's *écriture automatique*; or in using Hebrew letters. His interest in forms of writing, as both matter and not matter, are motivated aesthetically, politically, and biographically. In the case of the Hebrew letters, for instance, Strau explains his aesthetic preference for the Hebrew snail-like *Lamed* over what he refers to as "the Modernist cold L." From a political point of view, the rationality of the Latin letters reminds the writer of the Roman Empire, and stories "which explain extreme evil power structures the society produced, which as well produced these most successful letter systems." The actual reason for his choice of Hebrew, however, results from what Roland Barthes would call the "biosphere".[234] It "was born … during the day of attending my father's funeral," when his older sisters told Strau that his father had learned Hebrew at a young age. The Hebrew letters became "a kind of after-image of my father's story." Both the visual letters and the story of the father they allude to are appropriated and transformed: "at home in Berlin just then Bernadette decided to start making serious steps to learn the German language," leading to the conclusion "to make parallel efforts to learn 'my' language soon" [emphasis in original].

The construction of the exhibition coincides with a growing understanding of the character of the "I" as a composite figure. The historical fuses with the biographical and artistic (the arrangement of the exhibition), alternating between an understanding of language as both *langue* and *parole*, all the while seeing the coming-of-age of the "I" carry on in parallel to the show's build-up. This genesis of the "I" is intimately linked with its social function, testified to by the form of the interview, in which Strau's interlocutor acts as the author's necessary other, which I discuss later. The "I" is a social individual, but also sees "its" individuality radicalized in becoming multiple in the artists' text.

The interview continues focusing on the title of the exhibition: the plurality of motivations behind the employment of languages and textual strategies in the exhibition is grounded in the coincidence: "a mysterious starting point." The coincidence is a method "to avoid the classic authorship." Strau explains, referring to the title of the book, *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S.*: "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." The "I" isn't discarded, but presented as if it were suffused with what surrounds it, be it historical material, sculptural (from language to lamps), or the fleeting normalcy of daily life. What is striking, however, in reading and rereading the aforementioned extract of the interview is that the "I" as a person seems to disappear. Impossible to pinpoint "I" as a spatiotemporal being, to delineate its human form to which consciousness and agency can be ascribed, and attach a meaning to it.[235] The "I" metamorphosizes in the exhibition or said reality, contaminated by the situation in which it finds itself. A hybrid, the "I" changes as the story progresses.

Momentarily positing the "I" as hybrid, a reading of *A Dissidence Coincidence* as autobiographical becomes problematic. In relation to the artists' text the autobiographical has to be understood as a process, from the now of the exhibition to the past, linking it to the future in a non-linear fashion; it is a retrospective chronicle, but also a constructive and communicative tale; as a process it is ongoing; the artists' text as autobiographical is transdisciplinary; it concerns writing of and as life, its constellation of moments and figures.

And yet, as a reader of *A Dissidence Coincidence* I am confronted with the writing as a writing. The question thus remains how this "I" as hybrid can (also) be textually constituted (Ricoeur) or produced (Foucault). For Foucault reflecting on the relationship between subjectivity and truth in "The Ethics as a Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," this what we now conceive as a multiplicity of the self in the artists' text fits with

what he termed care of oneself, expressed in "the arts of oneself" in the Greco-Roman culture of the first two centuries of the empire. Writing is then understood as an ascetic practice, an "exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being".[236] *Askesis* leading to the "fashioning of accepted discourses, recognized as true, into rational principles of action," writing as an element of self-training takes on an ethopoietic function: "Self Writing" argues it is an "agent of the transformation of truth into *ethos*," into that which has to be thought.[237] Perceived in this manner, taking care of oneself does not solely do away with the governing principle and its danger of dominating others, thinking of oneself here also implies that one thinks of others.[238] Referring to Greco-Roman thought, Foucault argues that the care of the self cannot tend toward an exaggerated form of self-love that neglects others or abuses one's power over others. Encountering the limits of life and/as society's coercive power formation(s), the other enables a process of recognition and formation of the self (ethopoiesis). Within the context of the construction of the "I" and/as text in the artists' work, it is important to note that the writing of self does not necessarily reject life nor is it a solipsistic activity. Or in the words of Deleuze commenting on the theme of the double as an interiorization of the outside, figuring in the later writings of Foucault: "It is not the emanation of an 'I', but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self".[239]

Further spelling out the (partly) textual construction of the "I" it is important to recognize the narrative, that mingling of consequence and consecution. The interview as a form seems to dismiss or at least endanger this idea, as does the appropriation of psychoanalytical discourse later in the book—or the poetic form of the calligram, for that matter. Without fully endorsing his hermeneutic approach, philosopher Paul Ricoeur's study of narrative identity might be fruitful in attempting to grasp the constitution of "I" or self (selves) in, through, or as text in Strau's writing. It also opens up an understanding of the function of time in the artists' work.

For Ricoeur, the constitution of narrative identity is closely linked to a theory of action: "Action is that aspect of human doing that calls for narration. And it is the function of narration, in its turn, to determine the 'who of action'".[240] Picking up on the notion formulated by John Locke in the seventeenth century of a dynamic identity and the temporal dimension of the self as well as of actions, Ricoeur states that while actions are projected onto characters in a narrative, it is the notion of emplotment (i.e., the construction of a plot) that produces a dialectics of a person's character as self (*ipse*, "one and the same" or selfhood, *ipséité*)

and same (in the sense of identical, or *idem*, sameness or *mêmeté*). The context for these two senses of identity, permanence in time argues that narration functions as a middle ground between action as descriptive and prescriptive.[241] Further, the "interconnection of events in emplotment allows us to integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, instability." This correlation between action and character functions as a "*poetic reply* provided by the notion of narrative identity to the aporias of ascription".[242] It also forms a transition between the ascription of identity to an agent who has the capacity to act and the imputation of identity to an agent who has the obligation to act (Ricoeur's theory of action and his ethical theory).

In *A Dissidence Coincidence*, the appropriation of other narratives, such as biblical ones, enables examination of the very possibility (or the necessity) of the convergence of lives, actions, and practices for the author/narrator initiating these narratives: "real experience obviously [is] a matter of lesser interest, as long as it does not become part of some work or a matter of discussing opinions." In Ricoeur's terminology, Strau's story would function as poetic reply to a lived and living constellation of practices, moments, figures, and forces, and their immanent question: "Who acts?" The overlap, possible relocation of fate awaiting Strau is not taken into account in Ricoeur's textual approach, however, the text being understood as separate and enclosed, having its horizon within itself. Ricoeur proposes an interconnectedness of events in narrative that dispel the variability of sameness-identity. In *A Dissidence Coincidence* different temporalities are combined: alluding to memories and dreams, Strau writes "and I dreamt 'there are many first times, when someone is in a difficult period,'" linking them to his uncle and father, to Schnitzler and Kierkegaard, his own childhood and his life. These experiences of time collide and diverge in the author's varied roles. He becomes a character in which history has contracted, redeployed through narrative. Strau is an author quasi-indistinguishable from the narrator and protagonist of the text.

In *A Dissidence Coincidence*, otherness isn't necessarily the negative other of selfhood, nor is sameness selfhood's dialectic counterpart, as Ricoeur holds.[243] No effort is made to assert a self-identical "I", uninterrupted by a discontinuous time (e.g., changes in mood, or other developments). The artists' text doesn't reestablish the much criticized sovereign subject in that sense. Rather, the narratological instance of the author is strategically used in order to scrutinize its limits and implications for the constitution of "the" author, negating its possibility as being complete. Investigating the conditions that allow the author to produce and be produced, an understanding of the author moves swiftly between a Ricoeurian

hermeneutic view on narrative's role in the constitution of the author and a Foucauldian genealogical practice that heeds details unnoticed in a linear conception of time. In both cases, encountering the limits of life (Foucault) and/or text (Ricoeur), the other, be it life or language as *parole* enabling the subject to take responsibility for his life, enables a process of recognition of the self. Or that is the claim. The other is constitutive of the formation of the self: a poiesis, or an ethopoiesis.

Two not unrelated questions result: 1) if the transfer takes place at all through an interaction with the author or its other, how are these transactions between entities that seem to share only a name, as in the case of the artists' text, handled?; and 2) furthermore, what are the conditions for this transmission? The "I" in Strau's writing is construed through its communication outside of the text: a confrontation with life as biographical, social, economical, and culturally given. It is my thesis that life influences "I" and its formation in the artists' text, the "I" being not exclusive nor developing in an exclusive way. "Its" genesis and history constitute a reciprocal process, born of complicity with life. Life, the borderline between text and their surroundings turn out to be malleable, flexible, and fluent.

The "I" is reconstituted time and again. Venturing into the "I" and the search for "it," encountering culturally recognized forms channeling personal events, Strau comes up with the questions: "What is this person who writes the text? Who is that? Who is able to write that? I mean, it's definitely somehow me and myself, but actually it is not …." This thinking out loud is reminiscent of how we recount life experiences. Telling stories is a daily activity,[244] a "babble" that underscores this common and trivial aspect of narration.[245] But the incessant stream of words encapsulating and emphasizing the idleness of talk, presents an unrestricted chatter that incessantly returns to itself, instead of being bound to outside forms and things. Perceiving the artists' text's use of language this way, *A Dissidence Coincidence* reformulates Conceptual Art's legacy of language as enabling conscious articulation of a concept. Strau's flux of sentences seem far removed from an aesthetics of administration[246] or that informational, documentary idiom providing a vehicle for ideas obscured by formal considerations.[247]

Language as non-referential and vacuous, repetitive, fleeting, and ordinary could be said to generate a blur in Strau's writing between its conditions and its production, the individual and the social, talk and action. And yet, a strict demarcation between so-called opposites cannot be drawn. The artists' writing is rather defined by what philosopher of language J. L. Austin terms the performative, something that is *at the moment of uttering being done by the person uttering*.[248] The speech-situation is made explicit; the use of the first person singular, in combination with a present, indicative, and active tense, also frequently used in *A Dissidence Coincidence*, further facilitates this: the text *does* what it *says*. And it says: I speak.

The conditions for language and its production are intricately interlinked, to the point of becoming indistinguishable. But their interlacing does not mean that what philosopher Paolo Virno termed background noise isn't appreciated, valued, even required in the socio-economical sense. Non-referential, idle talk has a utopian aspect to it.[249] Requiring no external legitimization, it resembles the simulacrum, omnipresent in capitalist society, participating in a (this) spectacular world. Due to its simulacral character idle talk is autonomous, Virno stresses. Within post-Fordist production, idle talk is "flexible, capable of confronting the most diverse possibilities (along with a good dose of *opportunism*, however)" [emphasis in original].[250] Recent debates on the valuation and legitimization of art have highlighted the importance of idle talk, "time spent in bars," for artists as entrepreneurs acting in their own material interest. Next to their education, idle talk generates knowledge, Diedrich Diederichsen states, providing for art's *constant capital*, the seasonal production containing art's *variable capital*:

> They [artists as entrepreneurs] create *Mehrwert* to the extent that, as self-employed cultural workers, they are able to take unpaid extra time and often informal extra knowledge away from other daily activities … and invest them in the conception, development, and production of artworks. The more of this extra time is invested the better. … The more they develop a type of artwork that calls for them to be present as continuously as possible, often in a performative capacity, the larger the amount of *Mehrwert* they create …. [251]

These are the consequences of an ugly synthesis (Diederichsen) of capitalism and an art that is said to be in need of discursive legitimization since Duchamp. Every work must create its own justification, being singular, urgent, and exceptional in and of itself. This is what the external legitimization (Diederichsen calls it art's punch line) entails. Strau's work could be read as an ironic comment or critique on idle talk as investment and legitimization. The prominent "I" in the questions above could then be comprehended as the intention of the artist that, besides the exceptional status of the artwork and advertisement strategies selling it as such, justifies the piece. However, the intentional fallacy looms large. The "I" is not a single individual, but a composite, an assemblage. And as Virno's less cynical reading of informal communication, grounded in a

re-evaluation of the spectacle attests,[252] idle talk points to the potential of language. In babble, it is not the *parole* but the *langue* that is mobilized, "the very faculty of language," Virno points out, "not any of its specific applications".[253] Without completely dismissing, or disagreeing with Diederichsen's analysis of surplus value in art, within the framework of the current research language understood as potentiality seems to apply: its obscured niches and margins, the possibility to subvert reigning laws, to coin (new) terms and rules. These procedures potentiality enable one to grasp the artists' text as simultaneously active (poiesis), political action (praxis), and life of the mind. Language as (symbolic) economic transaction and financial flow, all but absent from this constellation, the variability immanent in it prevents language from being integrated into a unilateral relationship between capital and art.

Virno refers to computer language as an example of the empirical importance of this faculty of language: what counts is "not so much 'what is said,' as much as the pure and simple 'ability to say'".[254] The capacity to say underlies (parts of) Strau's performative utterances recurring in the interview. Irony isn't absent from this simple capability to say. But what is interesting is that, as in computer language, the machine generating the flow of language participates in the indomitable stream of sentences and words. In *A Dissidence Coincidence*. the interview is composed of a recorded interview (at Café Voss, Berlin), an e-mail interview, and a series of SMS questions and answers (Malmö). Along with that, a set of rules has to be observed in the game played between the interviewer and interviewee: the e-mail interview has a response time of maximum five minutes per question; the SMS questions have to be answered within four hours. The machines and the way they are handled, making them obey the rules, mold the interview. Text is the material that is given shape through the devices, the interlocutors all but subservient to the machines (computers) that intervene in the process of the interview to allow for the cascade of language as material. The cultural codes and forms that structure life events are connected with machinic codes and their inventions. It is the degree to which they are technically (re)invented that produces the artists' text's singularity. Singularity: I wouldn't characterize the artists' text as autonomous writing (contra Virno), since it is brought about concomitantly through the machine and its invention, through the cultural codes and their (re)creation. But also through the individual ("I") and the social to (in) which the "I" is redirected each time and again. Questions concerning the agency of the artists' text point to these four directions simultaneously: "I" versus the social, culture versus technique. Responding to fears of walking into the trap of the intentional illusion (Stiles, Wallis) in the artists' writing, I contend it is not only the I that is hybrid and fluid in Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence*, but that its hybrid nature, its fluidity unveils itself if, and only if one adopts a transversal reading of the artists' text, taking into account the traversal of the different domains (both psyche and socius, both culture and technique) constituting it.

Retrospective, Constructive, Communicative

The composed character of the "I" and its polyvalent structure, the transversal reading "it" dictates, is conspicuous in the text entitled "the tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz." Strau traces the importance of the earlier described lampshades incorporated in his sculptures back to his earliest memories, in which the inside of the lamp meant the "comfort of still living with just a few objects and giving to them too many qualities in my imagination." The writer describes the impractical position of the floor lamp behind his bed; he explains how he used to attach a green ribbon to the little metal chain that switched the light on and off. The decision to tie a piece of string to the chain was not a practical one, but an "effort to create a physical relation between me and the mysterious space within the lampshade, to make a kind of imaginary, but still physical ladder to this in between space of dream and reality." Strau's current choice to create lamps implies here an imperative to return to, or a recreation of that "mysterious space." The lamps constitute an incitement to revisit "the earliest pre-language state" in which an object could "stand in for the universe as a whole." This phase "in the middle of total irrationality" generates stories and new beginnings or laws. In Strau's argument this period of a dawning but not yet crystallized literacy is equated with an "awareness of the radical possibilities of … independence and freedom."

Strau's position is an ambiguous one. The potential and power of language are celebrated, the lamps symbolizing the "qualities of both written laws and written stories" in which the first stories and laws developed. But the installations also tend to seal and safeguard that both physical and imaginary "mysterious space," the "earliest pre-language state" governed by 'mere' sensory perceptions and unarticulated sounds. The "the tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz" can be comprehended as an attempt to situate the individual "between" biological being and social individual. A double bind is inherent in the artists' text and the lamps: an oscillation takes place between "I" and the social, between psychic construction and objective evaluation. I propose to read the artists' writing not as an indelible option of either/or, but to conceive it as what Deleuze and Guattari termed a writing of "and".[255] The artists' text as calligram inserting the architectonic structure (tabernacle) and the

cultural tradition it describes (Sukkot, Feast of Tabernacles), supports this reading, reformulating the Romantic division between the sensible and reason: no return to nature is needed to heal the tension. In *A Dissidence Coincidence* bare life is not sealed off by instrumental reason, as Strau's apparent babble demonstrates—it is inclusive.

Strau's motivations for choosing lamps as material are multiple. His experiences of the lamp as a shelter align with the symbolical and practical function of the tabernacle in Judaism, central as it is to the feasts of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the celebration a week later Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). The coincidental overlap of these memorial days with those of Strau's exhibition encouraged him to forge the connection. Besides its religious meaning, Sukkot is of cultural importance, Strau stresses, picking up on the meaning of religion as a *religare*. Sukkot celebrates the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. In his retelling Strau puts emphasis on the Egyptians' obsession with architecture leading to social developments that caused the Jews, on which the Egyptians were dependent for the construction of their buildings, to be enslaved and oppressed. Fleeing from Egypt thus meant living without architecture and oppression. The exodus impelled the Jewish population to write a simple text applying to everyone equally and enabling them to regulate their society (laws). The flight also led to the first literary texts: they were histories describing events and containing dialogues, and reflecting "the difficulties the described characters sometimes have, when confronted with decisions and situations," Strau explains. To celebrate Sukkot entails leaving your house and other belongings for a tent or other temporary structure. But it also includes telling stories. Celebrating Sukkot commemorates the free and independent state, an alternative form of living together begun by the Jewish people. The members of this new society were told that the veneration of architecture but also of art objects could lead only to oppression and primitivism in social relations, Strau remarks.

The lamps made of cheap objects and texts can thus be read as an attempt to circumvent the politically and economically problematic status of the art object. Strau's installations introduce a comprehension of language and handling of text less explanatory or illustrative than Diederichsen's analysis presumes: text doesn't comment on or frame a visual art practice in the artists' text. (Re)inventing the calligram in *A Dissidence Coincidence* causing image and text to coincide, likening writing with reading in the lamp installations, as much as objects with writing, another state is sought for, perhaps less "*in* between" (things), but marking an incessant "between." One only has to "read" the hut-like structure echoing the tabernacle of which "the tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz" speaks to experience the difference (between versus *in* between). As it goes with calligrams, the writing can only be apprehended once the book is turned around. And regardless of attempts to separate them, discern them as distinct entities, image and text are jumbled. So how can "representation" be delineated at all, what does it entail, and where is "it" localized vis-à-vis its conditions? In the calligram the break representation traditionally generates is obscured: the break inaugurating representation and the thresholds between various phases of representation: the sensible and its rules for creating the sensible. "The tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz" accepts the consequences of schematic reasoning turning its rules inside out. It reformulates, even jokes about the scissions traditionally construing representation, and as a consequence of human consciousness as a "power to frame representations of things".[256]

Books and writing, like image and text, énoncé and enunciation, even lamps and texts in the case of Strau participate in the indomitable flux of the artists' text. "The tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz" partakes in the profusion of fluxes *A Dissidence Coincidence* compounds. A comparison with the practices of Pierre Huyghe and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster can help situate that swift "liquid" functioning of the artists' writing, justified somewhat poorly as Strau's "trail of thinking" and "interrupted stream of consciousness." Once again, the words in *A Dissidence Coincidence* tangle easily and seem to undermine Conceptual Art's comprehension of language as documentation of idea. New (historical) models have to be found in order to grasp the complex understanding and use of language in the artists' text. It is necessary to think through Strau's interlaced sentences modeled after a machinic functioning and an "ability to say" (Virno) language thereby turning into poiesis, action, and life of the mind.

As with *A Dissidence Coincidence*, borders between installations are renegotiated in the practices of Huyghe and Gonzalez-Foerster. A recent exhibition of Huyghe (2014) saw walls removed and displaced, the radical interference with the architecture sharing in the show, deploying alternative spatial constellations and affecting the visitor in unexpected ways. It was unclear where the presentation started or ended. This indeterminacy was extended, for instance, in a wall text written by the artist himself in the form of a narrative fiction. Or through the use of perishable and living materials causing the installations to gradually disappear (*Untitled (Liegender Frauenakt)*, 2012). Gaps between traditional categorical distinctions have to be filled out, or imagined by the visitor herself. Separate works start to make sense when connected with each other. This leads to a need for speculations pervading the exhibition and directing the visitor's routes, a commitment enhanced by Edgar

Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837) put on a pedestal: not only the status of the only novel written by Poe figuring in Huyghe's exhibition seemed unresolved, *Pym* also ends on a mysterious, obscure note stimulating "exciting conjunctures."

The work of Gonzalez-Foerster too can best be appreciated as a continuous work in progress, a readjustment and traversal of traditional limits of projects. Her performances are described as *apparitions*, designating ghostlike creatures, haunting specters resurging from (long) forgotten pasts: she stages inhabitations of roles from Bob Dylan to Vera Nabokov to Marilyn Monroe to Fitzcarraldo to Emily Brontë. In the films drawing on these stagings time, as well as space, is reconfigured, constantly contracting and expanding.[257] [258]

fig 3.4
Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Véra (*M.2062*), 2014.

Interestingly, and varying on the comprehension of the works of Huyghe and Gonzalez-Foerster in terms of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud), the artistic strategies and procedures of Gonzalez-Foerster especially are indebted to an exhibition exploring the relationships between art and *technology* (instead of Bourriaud's socius) some twenty years prior to Virno's investigations: *Les Immatériaux* (1985) conceived in 1985 by Jean-François Lyotard.[259] *Les Immatériaux* started from the premise that technological developments had led to a changed sensibility, an increasing impalpability, the feeling that so-called reality could not be controlled directly anymore: things had grown more complex. Reality had turned into a message, an image; you suddenly had to be able to handle a machine in order to function in life; matter turned out to be a specific, ingenuous, and specialized scientific formula; information appeared in digitized form composed of ones and zeros, it lacked any visible relationship to life. Lyotard's exhibition questioned the Modernist project of human emancipation. What made the exhibition unusual was its free floor plan where the visitor had to choose her own path (note the resemblance to Huyghe's approach). The catalogue or *Inventaire* consisted of a set of sheets the visitor could move around, forcing her to experience a more rhizomatic reading. Next to the book lay *Épreuves d'écriture*, composed of the notes by about thirty authors—a laboratory in which sociologists and lawyers participated, psychiatrists and philosophers, novelists and visual artists—reacting to each other's remarks regarding the conceptual starting points of *Les Immatériaux*, the then relative new invention of the word processor mediating the collective writing experience. In both catalogue and exhibition, as in the oeuvres of Huyghe and Gonzalez-Foerster, a liquid universe appeared, asserting and researching the consequences and effects, and the potential of what since *Les Immatériaux* has developed into an open and globalized, digitized realm. The exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, with its many and variegated interactions, and in which writing and text took such prominent places, seems to offer a precious model to comprehend not only the intricate exhibitions of Huyghe and Gonzalez-Foerster, but also the complexity of the artists' text.

Accordingly, the artists' text demonstrates less an attempt to steer the reader between a traditional understanding of the writing as the product of a unique, creative genius, and anti-individualistic collective demands. It must rather be understood as a fluid principle, holding a position of "and." The tabernacle is both building and not building. When asked how Galerie Meerrettich "was often formulated" and "what it really is" Strau's said he had the ambiguous structural state of the tabernacle in mind. I said, "it is as simple as that, meerrettich is a galerie, but at the same time meerrettich for sure is not a galerie." The situation worsened, however,

fig 3.5
Épreuves d'écriture, publication developed at the occasion of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, 1985.

Strau continues, since those same people then inquired into his own position: "so what are you, are you a gallerist or are you an artist?" An "obsession with identity, or of clean definitions, or simply a demand for purity?" Strau suggests somewhat surprised. Regardless of different relationships and "new sensibilities" provided for by technological developments, a nineteenth-century conception of the Author (still) circulates. Strau's work must rather be comprehended as a "between," a writing of "and," an articulation and actualization of language's potential, a confluence of domains.

Leiris and Process, Ongoing

Both in the interview and in "the tabernacle on rosa-luxemburg-platz" different temporalities coalesce into new combinations, the texts returning to memories and dreams—"… and I dreamt there are many first times, when someone is in a difficult period"—linking them to the lives of Strau's uncle and father, to Schnitzler and Kierkegaard, to the author's own childhood and adult life. *A Dissidence Coincidence* not only looks back at the author's life, but it underscores that his individual life is a construction as well, the texts mimicking the constructive aspect of his past placing emphasis on the textual creation in turn. The other is needed in order for the "I" to come into existence. "I" conceived of as participating in multifarious life, instead of as an atomized, punctual individual, the individual distinguishes itself more sharply only in correspondence with the other with whom he lives. Confronted with the other, the "I" is led back to a pre-individual phase (consisting of a biological basis and of language, according to Simondon) or a virtual stage ("réel sans être actuel, idéel sans être abstrait."[260]) forcing the "I" to articulate itself. And denying itself as one. The "I" grows; this unceasing development is a process with new situations presenting themselves. His (in this case) is a process of individuation. For Strau this necessary other is both the exhibition on which he works and the sociopolitical and economical issues confronted with during install; the other is the machinic intervention and reinvention, besides psychical ruminations. The other is the interlocutor in the interview, the visitors to Gallerie Meerrettich, the machinic devices involved in the dialogue, and it is the text in which the exchange results. All affecting the "I" and its constitution, they cannot be reduced to any one position. The impetus s plural could even be said to be *not* "other" as the polar opposite of "I", but rather *all* contributing to both "it" and each other.

Such an approach seems to contest a psychoanalytical view that argues in terms of *the* unconscious. Discussing the unconscious presupposes that *I* still exists—its plurality notwithstanding, *A Dissidence Coincidence* does seem to explore the efficacies of psychoanalytical methods, however, testified to by the psychoanalytical exercises inserted in the artists' text. The question is: how can they be comprehended? What does the psychoanalytical "work" in *A Dissidence Coincidence* entail? How does it function in the artists' text, which was not expressly predicated on Conceptual Art's understanding of language indebted to a post-structuralist approach, the latter's conception of writing in turn steeped in psychoanalytic apprehensions of the trace?

A series of texts is embedded in *A Dissidence Coincidence*, each one starting with the phrase "Once my therapist suggested that it was not so good for me to completely neglect any religious idea and narrative, since i seemed to be quite influenced by them from childhood. … i vaguely remembered that i had in fact loved some of the stories as a child, particularly the almost biographical story of the man who was patron to my name." These repeated preliminary remarks are set in the same font every time. Within the narrative, they function as incantations. The lines are followed by a recounting of the biblical story of Josef, the preferred descendent of Jacob, thrown in a well by his jealous, older, bullying brothers and sold to Midjanitic merchants, who resell him to Potifar, a courtier to the Pharaoh of Egypt (Genesis 37:1). Every rediscovery and translation of the biblical narrative—"i could, she suggested, just rediscover them, without necessarily believing in them. she herself was a non-believer"—is printed in another typeface, often on mottled pages, alluding to the publication as scrapbook, quickly filled with thoughts and jotted down insights. Compared to the analyst's repetitive suggestion for the "I" to revisit the Bible, the different fonts of the rereads correlate with the variety of stories in which they result. The speckled pages on which the texts are printed and the erratic writing—"Sorry, for the wrong letters"—after using Hebrew characters instead of roman type; deliberately filled in vowels; darker and lighter printed lines; padestrians instead of pedestrians, findin instead of finding, parfume instead of perfume—underline not only the materiality of the book, or the irreconcilable temporalities of living and writing autobiographical writing struggles with. Presented as mistakes, they refer to a materiality of the text, instead of the book. They paradoxically solidify the artists' text as multiplicity. The flaws account for an unstoppable spoken word, mediating the writing as babble or idle talk. The faults can simultaneously be read as consistent with an awareness of the rereads and translations corresponding with the Bible as we know it today, also a translation notably of the Old Testament from which the fragment from Genesis is taken. Thus the Hebrew letters are reminiscent of the original language of the Old Testament, the open forms of the vowels are filled up with ink, reminding us of their being

added to the text in the Greek translation (the old Hebrew alphabet consisted only of consonants); misspellings like "findin" bring to mind the popular languages in which the Bible was translated in order to expand its readership.[261] None of the biblical versions is certain, however, nor can the translations be relied upon. Perceived as chatter the text is untrustworthy. The artists' writing divulges an employment of language as premise it seems, its mode being ambivalent.

Although it is unclear whether the "therapist" is a psychoanalyst, the act of writing the different versions of the biblical narrative could be comprehended as the psychoanalytic task the text itself introduces. The exercises could be viewed as transcriptions of a psychoanalytic lesson (the indictment not to neglect religious ideas and narratives), duplicating the analyst's response to or explanation of the patient's demand. In that case, the writing would have a certain documentary intent: it reproduces the analytic gesture; the translation is used as a vehicle analogous to the psychoanalytic session. The artists' writing is neither referential nor innocent, however. Whereas it seems to seek (or pretends to seek) knowledge of the self, the question is whether it aims to know the *truth* about the self.[262] The artists' text seems less a copy doubly removed from the psychoanalytic session that aims at sincerity and veracity than a musing, erring thought. These ponderings manifest themselves in highly personal[263] reflections and remarks; they surface in grammatical faults, wrongly set letters and printing errors; they take the form of colored lettering. They are articulated as implicit or explicit comments on either the biblical narrative ("… let's try to be commentators"), the therapeutic session ("And so on:") or the text. What I call comments relate to the raw material, the fabula, or the text (Bal). Within a linguistic frame these would be said to concern the state of affairs (denotation or indication), the instance uttering the proposition, which is the domain of speech/parole (manifestation), and universal or general concepts, or the domain of language/langue (signification).

Autobiography Versus Autofiction

These reflections on the constitution of the "I", and the role psychoanalysis plays in this, are systematically inserted in Philippe Lejeune's discussion of autobiography in *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975). The operative force of psychoanalysis has been contested in the fierce debate that followed the rise of what became known as autofictional works.[264] These opposed themselves to Lejeune's graphic scheme of autobiography, distinguishing it from biography as well as from the novel. Autobiography, Lejeune states, is a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality".[265] The table he dresses is grounded in two criteria: the relation between the name of the protagonist and the name of the author, and the nature of the concluded pact, be it autobiographical or novelistic. The debate over the status of autofiction reacts to this scheme and the empty box the diagram leaves suggesting that the name of the author can impossibly be identical to the protagonist, the pact concluded simultaneously being novelistic: "Le héros d'un roman déclaré tel, peut-il avoir le même nom que l'auteur? Rien n'empêcherait la chose d'exister, et c'est peut-être une contradiction interne dont on peut tirer des effets intérressants. Mais, dans la pratique, aucun exemple ne se présente à l'esprit d'une telle recherche".[266]

Referring to his own novel *Fils* (1977), Serge Doubrovsky locates his work precisely in this gap in the diagram. The book is autobiographical in the sense that not only author and protagonist share their identity, but the narrator as well.[267] However, the cover indicating that *Fils* is a novel, also necessarily signs a novelistic pact with the reader, in Lejeune's terminology. A fictitious account of Doubrovsky's own life, *Fils* pertains to the place Lejeune judges a practical impossibility.

Doubrovsky gives two reasons for distinguishing his book as autofiction. Since he is a nobody, "l'homme quelconque que je suis," the life of whom is of no importance, he has to attract the reader's interest in another manner: the humble ones are not allowed to partake in history, but they can take refuge in the novel. "[l]es humbles, qui n'ont pas droit à l'histoire ont droit au roman." The second reason is on the level of the writing, Doubrovsky explains, since if one abandons logical, chronological discourse in favor of poetical detours, opting for wandering words, that is, which seem to precede things as they start to mingle with things, one automatically falls outside realist narration, tumbling into a fictional realm. "si l'on délaisse le discours chronologico-logique au profit d'une divagation poétique, d'un verbe vadrouilleur, où les mots ont préséance sur les choses, se prennent pour les choses, on bascule automatiquement hors narration réaliste dans l'univers de la fiction."[268]

Whereas the discussion concerning autofiction's position seems to pivot around the question of genre or "domain," an important and less visible part of it is centered on the role of psychoanalysis and its implications. *Fils* is in part a result of the psychoanalytic sessions Doubrovsky underwent. The novel allocates the analyst's role to the narrator. The distorted position enables the realization of the formation or invention of a life, as Doubrovsky states: if one looks at oneself in an analytical mirror, the so-called biography the cure unleashes is the "fiction" the subject

will gradually read as the "history of her life." That is what analytical construction entails: *fingere*, "giving form," fiction, which the subject incorporates.

It is precisely this twisted state of the instances and the ensuing fictional character of the writing that is interesting with respect to *A Dissidence Coincidence*. In the artists' text, what Lejeune would typify as the structural absurdity of the protagonist and author sharing a name is done away with through a more or less fluid connection among several layers. Thus the multiple experiences of time collide and diverge in the instance of the author who inhabits his role in various manners: son at the funeral of his father and artist composing an exhibition, gallerist of Meerrettich and writer of text. Strau becomes a character or a persona, in which history has condensed. Narrative redeploys this abridged story, be it in a fragmentary fashion, its pieces dispersed and coalescing in the work. As mentioned previously, Strau resurfaces as an author quasi-indistinguishable from the narrator and the protagonist of the artists' text. Due to this structural indeterminacy or what seems like a transient situation, the reader is never sure which position is true and sincere, which utterance she can rely on. Like other figures—the interviewer sharing his name with the Jacob who surfaces as a character in the biblical story—Strau as a unified person is dislocated and mixed up with others and is in the end a fiction. The single "I" reveals the psychical composition of the work as remedy and response to the still prevalent tendency to uncover the inner motivation of a work of art, its "truth" and hidden source. Simultaneously evaluating the psychoanalytical method as too stringent, forced, and forged, thus unreliable, the transcription of the "I" sessions in *A Dissidence Coincidence* verges on parody, answering Wimsatt and Beardsley's writing on intentional fallacy by combining composition and critique.[269]

For Doubrovsky, psychoanalysis enables him to think through this incessant shifting and confluence of roles. Like Lejeune in his analysis, Doubrovsky relies on the work of French Surrealist poet, ethnographer, and member of the Collège de Sociologie Michel Leiris, notably his *L'Âge d'homme* (1939), for which Leiris wrote a preface in 1946 entitled "De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie." Lejeune and Doubrovsky come to divergent conclusions, however. What Leiris aimed for, according to Doubrovsky, was to clarify obscurities psychoanalysis had pointed out to Leiris before, when he underwent a cure as a patient.[270] The act of writing Leiris proposed can be formulated as starting from the psychoanalytical experience, but only to pursue that experience, possibly to exceed it. The experience of the spoken word (*parole*) becomes experience of (autonomous) writing: "[E]lle se situe non dans le cadre, mais dans un au-delà d'une expérience de parole, devenue expérience (autonome) d'écriture".[271]

Leiris's work is markedly post-analytical, holds Doubrovsky. It testifies to the many metonymic splits of the "I". In contrast, Lejeune's argument posits that the text and the author remain strictly separate. There is a prominent disparity between poetry's mystical perspective and autobiography's aim to outline the appearance of an individual according to Lejeune. It is difficult to imagine the poet converting and applying his poetical discoveries, theories, and techniques to autobiographical aims. Poetry can be a subject like any other, but it cannot dictate the production of a text. Either poets write their autobiography, them being deprived of means like musicians and painters on such occasions, or they don't write an autobiography at all.[272] The resources common to poetry and autobiography in the elegy or the confession, for instance are to no avail, Lejeune continues: although the first person singular, the retrospective account and the pact with the reader can be traced in autobiography, the universal subjectivity of lyrical poetry differs from the one in autobiographical discourse: in most of the cases the "I" of poems is an "I" without reference, a position that can be occupied by anyone: "c'est le 'prêt-à-porter' de l'émotion".[273] In Leiris's work psychoanalysis, like ethnography, is the scientific element allowing for a twinning of poetry and autobiography, as Lejeune maintains.

Whereas psychoanalysis enables the metamorphosis of the author, which is multiple, in the case of autofiction, as later defenders of the genre advocated,[274] it becomes a stumbling block for the constitution of the autobiographical "I" for Lejeune. *A Dissidence Coincidence* rather uses psychoanalysis as a model. Psychoanalysis is a method enabling one to visualize the author's multiple roles and functions, (implicitly and explicitly) reflected in the textual forms. As with Strau's psychoanalytical exercises, they seem to allow for experimentations with what linguist Roman Jakobson termed literariness, the techniques and strategies effectuating the transformations of the word into the poetic work. Consider the following passage, taken from the psychoanalytical exercises, reflecting on the opening words of Genesis 37:1, "Jacob dwelt":

> "Jacob dwelled" means that if you want to tell a great story, you have to tell it quick, like automatique, but you have to bring up some fact on the beginning like "Jacob dwelt" and then the whole space of telling opens to you, like here the story that the whole space of the josef story opens to Jacob and after the real thing of "Jacob dwelt" it is turning into some stranger greyer space, which could be fiction or true.

The remark contains a poetic observation of the construction of the artists' text. It reflects on "Jacob dwelt" as a technical strategic device, a trope, part of a highly constructed fabulation, and the capacity of this same formula to become a concrete mise-en-scène in which Jacob is a character. It thus thinks through the specificity of the formula as a rhetorical strategy and narrative enactment, a double disposition to which the writer seeks to relate. Strau's text continues: "Or like Jacob came to the door and he brought a chocolate bar and just started trying to write, that I remembered that Kierkegaard wrote many things and that he wrote with different names, like for example 'Fear and Tremblin'."

The implicit reflection on Jacob transformed into a character seems to correlate with an implicit reflection on the author's relationship to action and creation: with textual mediality, comprehended as performative. The writer acts out and tests the borders and possibilities of "the whole space of the josef story," asking after the limits and the agency of the text. The non-hierarchical juxtaposition of the phrases, connected through the word "and," demonstrates the simultaneity of the acts. This leveling of sentences facilitates a strategic gliding of perspectives, although the exact relationship between the points of view remains unstable and obscure: they overlap and leak into the other, becoming diffuse. Following Deleuze, Strau's sentences "stutter" or "stammer." Different elements are arranged in varied constellations.[275] *A Dissidence Coincidence* thereby refers to itself. Thus Jacob transforms from a full-fledged character in the biblical story into a so-called person knocking at the door just when "I" starts to write. Narrative levels are transgressed. What Gérard Genette termed a "narrative metalepsis" takes place, a "taking hold of (telling) by changing level".[276] While the transcription of the analysis starts with a general remark on textual beginnings, it gradually moves to the "concrete" situation of the author setting off to work on that transcription. The relationship between the levels of narration obscures, making us wonder which layer contains which: the frame of the analytical session seems to disintegrate, the characters in the biblical narrative acting on a level identical to the author's who was supposed to study them. As a reader of Strau's text you lose sight of the hierarchy of Genette's levels that assert "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed." Levels are inverted in the artists' text, suggesting "if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious," in Jorge Luis Borges's words.[277]

Writing and Transdisciplinarity

The continuous shifting of levels demonstrates that the shaping of the autobiographical process as ongoing, unsure, and unsecured, is reflected in the form of the artists' writing. Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence* takes the shape of a diary, a personal scribbling, as the speckled pages and typos show. It babbles. Daily parlance determines the textual pace for reader and writer alike. But Strau's writing as autobiographical is also transdisciplinary: the lamp installations are integrated in the text, diminishing distance between text and image, making strict distinction obsolete. This intermingling of categories is further elaborated on in the position Strau takes as both author and reader, narrator, and narratee. In the final part of the text describing his reading of Kierkegaard, for instance, Strau recounts how the philosopher rewrote the biblical story of Abraham offering his son:

> After four times I decided that this must be the whole book now. … I closed the book and gave up. But I thought about it permanently and I thought I understood, why Kierkegaard is so great, and why so much admired by some of his fans and followers. But he did not tell it again and again, he did it just until when I closed the book. All together repeated the same story in different versions just four times to express his obsession probably.

The passage echoes Strau's own rewrites. It also lingers on the ambiguity of the *act* of writing and the author's position. While Kierkegaard might be the important author, the reader—the one who closes the book—is the performer of the text. On the one hand, the artists' writing adheres to "traditional criticism," if we turn to Barthes, explaining the work through its author ("to express his obsession probably"). On the other, it explicitly points to the reader as where the multiplicity of the writing finds its place: the reader disentangles it (instead of deciphering as a structuralist approach to traditional criticism would have it) adhering now to Barthes's second "new criticism," declaring the death of the author.[278]

In *A Dissidence Coincidence*, the reader is "life and kicking," as is the writer, circumventing traditional authorship. The ambiguity is expanded on in the observation with which the sixth rewrite ends. The paragraph is added onto (or so it pretends) the core part of the text ("Later, when already working on the exhibition … I read some commentaries on Josefs story … saying: …"). Strau quotes the "rashi commentary" (the comments on the Torah by the French medieval rabbi Rashi) on scripture's extensive elaboration of certain settlements in favor of other communities. The

artists' text seeks to offer a historical reason for the text's insistence on "Jacob and his generations," next to a reading of the Bible as a construction of figures and tropes. The commentary Strau cites compares the preference for and apparent importance of a repetitious return of Jacob in the Bible to "a pearl that falls into the sand": "A person searches in the sand and sifts it with a sieve until he finds the pearl, and when he finds it, he casts away the pebbles from his hand and keeps the pearl." He continues: "But I must say, when I read this, I had already all the pearls on the strings, had already fixed some on the lamp shades, but did not really find the reasons for what I was doing. So the better for me, better for the objects as well." The "I" opening up the text to multiple readings rewrites and overwrites them, leading to what presents itself as a quasi-allegorical text.[279] But it also, once again, draws a connection between positions and spaces the author himself characterizes as "mysterious," and which I have termed under-researched and obscured in relation to the artists' text in general: a world *between*, or an intra-active realm.

This particular area "between" is activated in the artists' writing, using psychoanalysis as a model, or rather, a testing ground. *A Dissidence Coincidence* lures the reader into a psychoanalytic comprehension of the book, appropriating an interpretation of the author or Author in a traditional sense of the term, planting the origin of the work in his mind. Strau's recourse to psychoanalysis can be read back in the prevalent references to the therapist. The sessions with her, transcribed into textual regressions structured as a *mise en abyme*, lead to childhood memories, dreams, and reconsiderations of parental relationships—essential psychoanalytic themes. The sheer repetition of rewrites of the biblical narrative of Jacob referred to above could be distinguished as compulsive behavior, a manifestation of the power of the repressed, thus of the unconscious, from a Freudian perspective.[280] The rewrites' repetitive pattern could be said to hark back to a Surrealist-inspired *écriture automatique*, strongly influenced by Freud's theories.[281] But if it is true that the artists' text is mostly interested in psychoanalysis as a *technique* for the writing of the self, rather than in the analytical aim to arrive at, thus to "produce" a clear-cut and "true" image of the self, how does it distinguish itself from a Derridean conception of writing, based on an analysis of Freud's observations? If the machinic prevails in the artists' text, why does *A Dissidence Coincidence* stick to the "I", thereby alluding to a person endowed with consciousness and agency that Derrida's concept argues against?

In *A Dissidence Coincidence* psychoanalysis enables reflection on what I would mark as the "impossible possibility" of a constitution of a self. And of the Author, by extension. Or as it is pointed out in the double

negation in the earlier referenced passage of the interview:

> *JF*[282]: *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….

The repeated denial of a purely subjective or inner source of the writings ("It doesn't mean, that it cannot be autobiographical," "doesn't not come from me"), thus re-marking the subject simultaneously undoing "it" as the sole unified, sovereign, total, and true self, is intertwined with the persistent allusion to (and quest for) an outside or an other likewise multiple as "the" self. This ongoing and discontinuous inward and outward movement, from and towards an "I" creates a riddle that *A Dissidence Coincidence* seems determined to resolve or "resolve," tongue-in-cheek: if a single atomized "I" does not exist the search for "it" is vain, and fictitious at that.

Like the fluctuating perspectives and roles, the double negation ("It doesn't mean, that it cannot be autobiographical," "doesn't not come from me") could be read as the impossibility of reducing the voice to what (the one who) utters it. It sustains a distance, which Blanchot terms a narrative voice or the neutral: "for the neutral is … the greatest distance governed by dissymmetry and without one or another of its terms being privileged." The narrative voice does not reveal, nor does it conceal in an optical manner, thus remaining "outside the light-shadow reference that seems to be the ultimate reference for all knowledge and all communication." The narrative voice suspends the attributive structure of language as well, "the relation to being, implicit or explicit, that is immediately posed in language as soon as something is said".[283] However, if the neutrality of the voice is inscribed in *A Dissidence Coincidence*, the question arises as to why it has recourse to the "I", instead of, as Blanchot proposes, a third person singular, a *he*. Pertaining to the first person singular, the artists' text asserts, as with Blanchot, the equivalence between the narrative act and the transparency of a consciousness, firstly. Secondly, holding onto the "I", Strau's writing maintains the "primacy of an individual consciousness that could only in the second place, and even secondarily, be a speaking consciousness".[284] The question must be asked whether the implementation of the "I" signals a re-appropriation of the presence of experience, which, theoretically, is negated by "the letter." Another option would be that the "I" does not act out an attempt to rejoin a lost presence, but that it rather varies with the neutrality of writing Blanchot

termed the voice. The artists' writing would probe, question, revoke, and reinvent the textual neutrality as a distance, thereby putting into doubt whether the text is the place where reader and writer meet only to part ways. Reinserting the "I" while maintaining a textual distance, the "I" referring to an integral and integrated "I", the transparent, atomized "I", has to be redefined. It would need redefinition in terms of a composed subject and social individual.

Strau squares the circle of what will temporarily be described as the simultaneous constitution and destruction of the "I" having recourse to psychoanalytic sessions. This is done not in order to reconstruct a clear-cut image of a self, as was said in the above. The meetings with the therapist are among the many occasions that provide instruments forging liaisons between instances, domains, or worlds, due to the metalaptic narrative never arriving at what Lacan would call the Real. In the artists' writing, psychoanalytic technique, underlining, with Lacan, the importance of speech, demonstrates and puts into play the very construction that a person is. The text wittily "materializes" the presumed false question of the "I", and thus of authorship. The fluency of the textual materialization, its processual character implicated and underlined, the "I"'s relationship to the outside is brought to the fore. Witness the questionnaire as a mode, a model exemplifying speech and communication. Think also of the awkwardness of the "supposed situation" the analytic session entails, the analyst facing the analysand, the interview mimicking that same one-on-one relationship.

From a more textual perspective, the textual procrastination or what Derrida called *différance*, poses the question of the status of the text within a broader world, a Lacanian Real, or, in linguistic terminology, regarding a state of affairs. The question is prompted by the absence of a centralized perspective, conspicuous in the title of the interview. The interviewer Jacob plays a double role as a character in the biblical narrative; the borders between texts, instances, and representational strata are transgressed. Withdrawing from a sharp distinction between instances, *A Dissidence Coincidence* performs an overlap of instances and levels, resulting in what could be comprehended as a condensed or overdetermined text. The question remains where, exactly, to locate this text "without borders," in which the difference between foreground and background tends to disappear. Or, with Derrida and prior to the former question, it should be asked whether "the" artists' text could be localized at all. And if so, where can "the" author or Author be situated, where is the "I"?

A redefinition of the "I" results in the intertwining of a composed subject and a social individual it seems. What is formulated anew is not

so much the first person singular, as a consequence, but the notions of difference and distance instead. Remember that Derrida, deconstructing consciousness and presence, posited a deferral or *Nachträglichkeit* operative at the level of writing. Derrida's early texts notably observe writing's implicit difference, or a différance, the well known a of différance articulating the initial spatial and temporal distance writing always already possesses, according to Derrida. Derrida's now famous remarks on representation being always already deferred, draw on an analysis of Freud's observations. In his early text "Freud and the Scene of Writing" (1967), for instance, Derrida reads into Freud's conclusions that horizontal translations of dreams and vertical translations of the unconscious can impossibly be made; he takes seriously Freud's attempt to construe a machine that both describes the psychical content and is an element in the machine. Derrida thinks through the relationship between psyche, writing, and spacing in order for the metaphor of writing that Freud introduces to work as an unmantling of consciousness and a deconstruction of presence that he himself undertakes. Derrida borrows from Freud the concept of the trace [*Spur*], and radicalizes it.[285] For Freud, it is pathbreaking [*Bahnung*] in enabling a supplementary delay and a reconstitution of meaning. The trace is an impression never perceived or consciously lived. The Freudian trace and (in Derrida's radicalized version) the archi-trace allow for a deconstitution of what Derrida sees as the philosophical closure of an experience in which "the word [*mot*] is lived as the elementary and undecomposable unity of the signified and the voice, of the concept and a transparent substance of expression".[286] The trace borrowed from Freud, then, is "the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat of anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of the disappearance." Consequently, the "subject" of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is "a *system* of relations between strata" instead [emphasis in original].[287]

Deducing from the analogy of the functioning of perceptual and psychic apparatus with the mystic writing-pad, offering both a perpetually available innocent surface and an infinite reserve of traces, Derrida (after Freud) comes to perceive writing as a machine. What is opened up here is the question of technology in relation to writing. For Derrida "writing… is *techne* as the relation between life and death, between present and representation, between the two apparatuses. … In this sense writing is the stage of history and the play of the world." Freud, then, "*performed for us the scene of writing*" [emphasis in original], Derrida meaning by "scene" the "scene/stage of the world." In this sense writing goes on all the time, independent of its linguistic articulations. However, like the mystic writing pad, the machine does not run by itself: "abandoned to itself,

the multiplicity of layered surfaces of the apparatus is a dead complexity without depth." The machine, then, "is death and finitude *within* the psyche" [emphasis in original]. This dead time within the presence of the living present is what is called arche-writing.[288]

Whereas the metaphor of writing as a machine seems to comply with *A Dissidence Coincidence*, its derivation from Freud's concept of the trace does not. The current artists' text's machine is predicated on a digital device and unrelenting open source, multidimensional, work in process, it never closing down, but *without* its being dead. What is lacking in the artists' text is a Derridean distance, and a difference between polarities: the artists' writing conceived as a multiplicity does not inhabit a dual world shuttling between life and death, presence and absence. Unfolding, redistributing an "and," it is both: reading and writing immanent in publication and/as lamp (and vice versa); the artists' text is not posited *in* between, it *is between*. And incessantly so. As a consequence, "I" does not pull out of the "system of relations" the artists' writing compounds. "I" is transparent, not in the idealist sense of the term, but in its ability to articulate and generate ever new liaisons. The connections do not designate a one-way street, they comprise multilateral relationships (plural), intimately linked with their surroundings, be they historical or personal, political, social or economical, technical or cultural. This is what composes the ecology (or rather: ecosophy[289]) of the artists' text. Or in Strau's words: "I want somehow the reality which my works refer to, doesn't not come from me, but from the outside by coincidence."

Derrida's conception of writing similarly falls short of explaining the insistence, persistence or survival of the "I" in the artists' writing. Both *A Dissidence Coincidence*—exhibition, publication—and "I" entail processes of individuation, rather than writing only creating connections of exchange and redistribution between what is "always already." Testing its productive force, *A Dissidence Coincidence* both realizes and poses the question of its realization in the face of and through the author's position and role. While Jacob/Josef was thrown in a pit by his brothers who despised his stories and interpretations of dreams, the stories and dreams still survived. In the artists' text, not only the stories and dreams continued to live, but also Jacob/Josef.

Conclusion

In *A Dissidence Coincidence* the "I" is produced time and again: in every new situation, aspects, be they social or technical, political or cultural, combine and collaborate in the construal of the "I". The "I" is not a starting point, but a confluence of domains and question marks. As writing, the artists' text partakes in the mechanism of production: it is no neutral force, it leaves an imprint much like the typewriter, stamping each letter. Designating the artists' text as *writing* an important proviso must be made: although the term is tainted by its Derridean employment, the concept of *writing* has to be enlarged in the context of the artists' text. Deducing writing from a psychoanalytical method, after Derrida, the term connotes a reduction of social facts to psychological mechanisms. This reduction is absent from the artists' text, however—Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence* in particular. A more transversal reading intermingles the biographical with the cultural, the political with the technical without the artists' text being drastically framed or curtailed. The "I" of the artists' text reveals itself as polyphonic, heterogeneous, and collective in the end. The "I" cannot be regrouped and put in a linguistic, universal grid; the artists' text doesn't concern a linguistic "I". Strau's "I" is affected differently. A writing *with*, the "I" is shared.