

Mapping the contemporary historiography of the artist interview as a literary and critical genre: a critical introduction

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This issue documents and expands on a session we convened at the Association for Art History's (AAH) 2019 annual conference called 'The Artist Interview: An interdisciplinary approach to its history, process and dissemination'. The session aimed to revisit issues explored in a session at the 2006 AAH conference, titled 'The Artist Interview: contents and contentions in oral history/art history', evaluating how the field has developed over the past years and unpacking the relationship between oral history and artist interviews. The 2019 session began with a paper by Reva Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', charting the historiography of the artist interview since the 1990s, and acknowledging the 'impediment' of writing a history of such a 'slippery' subject with its 'sheer quantity of material' and 'constellation of associations' with other histories.¹

Recognition for the artist interview has indeed grown significantly since the 1990s. In the USA, where Wolf is based, the College Art Association included a session on the artist interview as part of its 1996 conference. In 2005, a special issue of the *Art Journal* was dedicated to the artist interview, based again on a panel at the College Art Association the previous year. Furthermore, a visit to the bookshop for the PS1 contemporary art institute in New York (a branch of the Museum of Modern Art) in 2019, for example, revealed two shelves devoted to 'interviews' – although one of these was dominated by anthologies of Hans Ulrich Obrist's conversations. In 2017, London's Whitechapel Gallery displayed a selection of interviews from its own archive for the exhibition *Q&A: Artists in Conversation*. In the past three years alone, a substantial range of interview anthologies edited by art magazines, art critics and/or focused on specific artists and places such as artists' studios has been published.²

Wolf observes in her paper that new 'first interviews' are continually being discovered,³ and that there has been no sustained collaborative effort, as of yet, to

¹ Reva Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 1.

² For example, anthologies of interviews from *Art Monthly*, *Impulse* and *Brooklyn Rail* magazines; and the collections of interviews by art critic and curator Robert Storr (*Interviews on Art*, London: Heni Publishing, 2017) and artist Ray Johnson (Julie J. Thomson, editor, *That Was the Answer: Interviews with Ray Johnson*, Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2018). Other recent anthologies have taken a more anthropological approach, such as *Los Angeles Studio Conversations: Part II* (Berlin: The Green Box, 2019); *What it Means to Write About Art: Interviews with Art Critics* (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018); and the New York organisation ART21's *Being An Artist* (2018).

³ Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', 10.

share research on the origins and history of the artist interview.⁴ As she wryly notes, the introductions to both the 1996 College Art Association panel and the 2019 Association for Art History session make 'the very same observation' that there has been no history of the artist interview as a critical genre in its own right.⁵ The eagerness to examine the artist interview as an emerging genre is not therefore new. So, what are the real impediments to defining the artist interview as a literary and/or as a critical genre?

One of the central reasons for the under-theorisation of the artist interview is surely its connection with that 'low' cultural form, journalism, in contrast with art's apparently 'high' cultural status. American journalist Melvin Lasky, editor of *Encounter* magazine, remarks that in 1886 the *Pall Mall Gazette* called the interview the 'worst feature of the new system; it is degrading to the interviewer, disgusting to the interviewee, and tiresome to the public'.⁶ Scholar Rebecca Roach notes an equivalent attitude towards the author interview:

Given the central reputation of "high" modernist writers ... in literary studies across the twentieth century, the interview form's association with the Other of modernism – celebrity, journalistic, and mass culture – has had significant negative consequences for its critical evaluation.⁷

Roach's book *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* makes a clear case for establishing a 'history of the author interview', as she terms it. She notes that there has been 'remarkably little cross-fertilization between theoretical work in literary studies and art history', and thus little opportunity to compare the function and status of the interview in both disciplines.⁸

The interview was not always so devalued or considered a sub-journalistic form. Lasky reminds us of the French origins of the term 'interview', which, between the early sixteenth and late nineteenth centuries, had 'nothing to do with journalism, and referred to a formal meeting (*entrevue*) of great persons'.⁹ The modern meaning of 'interview' (which Lasky describes as a 'bastardised version of a dialogue or a conversation which appears in our newspapers and our television screens')¹⁰ only became popularised in the latter half of the nineteenth century – when it was immediately attacked and parodied.

In a recent paper titled 'The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre', the criteria by which the author interview might be considered a distinct subgenre of the 'personal interview' has been critically debated in relation

⁴ For example, a German-language book on the artist interview, *Das Interview* (2013), has yet to be translated.

⁵ Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', 17.

⁶ Melvin Lasky, 'The Art of the Interview', *Encounter*, March 1989, 61.

⁷ Rebecca Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 91.

⁸ Anneleen Masschelein and Rebecca Roach, 'Putting Things Together: To Interviewing as Creative Practice', *Biography*, 41: 2, Spring 2018, 172.

⁹ Lasky, 'The Art of the Interview', 61.

¹⁰ Lasky, 'The Art of the Interview', 61.

to a series of open questions:¹¹ [Does the interview's distinctiveness lie in] 'the position and status of the interviewee (or the interviewer)? The type of interaction in the interview? The content and the form of the interview; the final, edited report; or the emergence of a specific form of 'interview literature'?¹² These are useful starting points for discussing the establishment of a distinct genre for the artist interview. The depth and scope of Roach's scholarly research, and the other recent studies mentioned here, make it possible to test the potential for a common methodological approach to studying interviews, such as assessing the impact on interviews of the growing mediatisation of artists and authors, and the changing psychological perceptions of the 'self'. The material conditions of the interview (how it has been produced, published and disseminated), especially in relation to the passage from oral account into written form and its audiovisual equivalent, is another important factor to be considered in the development of the artist interview. For example, one might track both artist and author interviews in relation to developments in sound, recording and other 'inscription' technologies. One might consider how improvements in microphone sensitivity gave radio broadcasters the confidence to develop more natural, longer forms of dialogue – and even cultivated a new type of speaking voice.¹³ Likewise, developments in printing technology in the 1960s and 1970s allowed for cheaper printing on home machines, making possible the surge in DIY and 'little' underground magazines. The history of the interview published in alternative art magazines seems particularly important in terms of contemporary historiography.

For example, in the United States, *The Tiger's Eye* (1947–49) and *It Is* (1958–65), as well as *Scrap* (1960–62), the in-house publication of the Artists' Club, rejected third-party criticism such as exhibition reviews in favour of experimental artists' writing. These little magazines paved the way for a raft of artist-led interview magazines, published in Downtown New York from the 1960s to the 1990s, such as Andy Warhol's *Interview* (which started as a film magazine), *Avalanche*, *BOMB* and *index*. Parallel experiments were being conducted by artists and avant-garde filmmakers in slice-of-life, 'verité' documentary-making, that eschewed narration and commentary.¹⁴

As Clare M. Holdsworth addresses in her paper in this issue, 'Vocal acts: video art and the artist's voice', the use of recording and video technologies in the 1970s allowed new narratives as well as new forms of critical practice to develop.¹⁵

¹¹ Anneleen Masschelein, Christophe Meurée, David Martens and Stéphanie Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre', *Poetics Today*, 35: 1–2, Spring-Summer 2014.

¹² Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 3–4.

¹³ See Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice: The Story of a Remarkable Talent*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, 240.

¹⁴ Warhol's films, begun in 1963, are key examples, as is the influential *Painter's Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940–1970* (1972), directed by Emile de Antonio, featuring footage of artists talking directly to camera.

¹⁵ The notion of critical practice within the context of art (both in terms of academic curriculum and creative practice itself) is far from being an unanimously agreed term. It could refer, for example, to an artwork that is self-reflective (as in Holdsworth's paper) as well as to a wider understanding of practice-based research as a practice of reflection.

A key example of this phenomena is the establishment of *Audio Arts* in 1973, the first magazine on cassette tape dedicated to contemporary art in the UK.¹⁶ Established by artist William Furlong and curator Barry Barker, *Audio Arts* focused on artists' voices and sound works, going beyond the traditional scope of a printed magazine to establish an alternative art space in itself. Alongside the regular publication of artists' interviews and conversations on tape cassette (its main focus from 1973 to 2007), the magazine acted as a multifaceted art practice, fostering collaborations between artists in the co-production of sound works, including self-interviews, performative readings, lecture-performances, slide-tape interviews and also the documentation of artist talks and symposia. As Furlong highlighted in the 1970s, the distribution on audio cassette allowed the establishment of a new form of communication based on the possibility of retaining speech as an acoustic event:

The audio cassette offers a method of recording and distributing information over a wide area not defined by constraints often associated with printed media ... As a method for the exchange of ideas, attitudes and information based on the primary activity of most human beings, (recorded) speech offers close contact with original sources on an intimate kind of 'pre-literate' society basis. Coded methods of communications, as in the case of printed text, are absent and the receiver is brought into close proximity with the information source.¹⁷

The possibility of reproducing and disseminating recorded speech as a primary aural account was particularly relevant in a publishing context dominated by formalism. As art historian Gwen Allen observes, many artists' magazines developed in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, especially in the USA, were 'oppositional sites' which directly reacted against certain types of mainstream media, in particular to formalist criticism promoted by art magazines such as *Artforum* and art critics like Clement Greenberg.¹⁸ Focusing on the object at the expense of the subject, Greenberg's call for painting's purity and autonomy took formalism to its extreme. His insistence that art contain its own self-criticism, and his impatience with what

However, in the context of dialogic practices and collaborative artistic frameworks (such as self-organised models of education) the term can be also applied as an exploration of modes of co-constructed knowledge that implies, besides critical reflection, critical organisational structure and decision-making. See, for example, Marsha Bradfield, 'Ordinary extraordinary: the para/pata: institutionalism of Critical Practice', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 19: 1, 2020, 38–52.

¹⁶ All the sections of this article on *Audio Arts* are either citations or material reworked by Lucia Farinati from *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, PhD, Kingston University, Dep. of Critical and Historical Studies, July 2020. Accessible at: <https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/46708/>.

¹⁷ William Furlong, *Workshop Project Audio: Information distribution on Audio Cassette*, typescript report, (n.d.), Tate Archive, TGA 200414/2/2/2.

¹⁸ Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011, 7.

he saw as the 'lag' in art criticism and art history with regards to modernist art,¹⁹ had the effect of prompting artists to rebel and create vehicles to present their own excluded voices. While the alternative magazines became an important new site of artistic practice for dematerialised practices of conceptual art, following and expanding the example of *Studio International* in developing the page as a new kind of artistic medium,²⁰ they also acted as radical media practices through which artists negotiated publishing criticism and constructed their identity. In this context alternative magazines like *Avalanche* embraced the artist interview both as a strategy of self-representation as well as a form of 'anti-criticism' (as Allen terms it).

This taking of criticism into artists' own hands through the media of publishing was not always well received.²¹ Art historian Michel Diers recalls that the British critic Lawrence Alloway, writing in *Artforum* in April 1974, was sceptical of the popularity of the artist peer-to-peer interview, which he believed threatened the independence of the interviewer and lacked contextualisation.²² The history of modernist art criticism, in particular formalism and its literary counterpart New Criticism, creates therefore a specific context for the study of artist interviews and its affirmation as an autonomous critical form. As critic J. J. Charlesworth argues in his research on British art criticism, the issue of who has the authority to write about art, the artist or the critic, became one leitmotif of this period.²³

In 1971 art historian and critic Charles Harrison decided to resign from his role as assistant editor of *Studio International* to become editor of *Art-Language*. The 'uncomfortable but unjustifiable' circumstances of the time, in which it seemed hard 'to dissociate the practice of criticism – and a fortiori the role of the entrepreneur – from the self-critical practice of art', was one of the relevant factors behind his decision.²⁴ If this is a symptomatic example of how artists and critics active in the

¹⁹ See Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 1960, in John O'Brain, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 85–93.

²⁰ Under the new direction of Peter Townsend in 1969, *Studio International* became one of the most important points of reference for conceptual art and new criticism. Embracing the idea of printed media both as information and artwork, the magazine provided one of the most experimental frameworks for artists, art critics, cultural producers and editors. It notably hosted the project *July/August 1970* by the dealer Seth Siegelau, which consisted of an exhibition that took place solely in the magazine and featured works made expressly for the page.

²¹ The recent studies by Joanna Melvin on Peter Townsend's papers and J. J. Charlesworth on art criticism in Britain in particular have pointed out the pivotal role of artists' writings and artists' pages that featured in a mainstream magazine such as *Studio International* as one of the important factors in the development of new forms of critical practice. Joanna Melvin, *Studio International Magazine: Tales from Peter Townsend's editorial papers 1965–1975*, PhD, London: University College London, 2013; J. J. Charlesworth, *Art Criticism: The Mediation of Art in Britain 1968–76*, PhD, London: Royal College of Art, 2016.

²² Diers, 'Infinite Conversation', 15.

²³ Charlesworth, *Art Criticism: The Mediation of Art in Britain 1968–76*, 9.

²⁴ Another reason behind this choice was that the practice of Art & Language as discursive practice of art 'appeared to promise an exemplary if not possibly sufficient place of work, even if the "work" in question could not be all "art"'. Charles Harrison, 'A Crisis of Modernism', in *Blast to Freeze, British Art in the 20th Century*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz,

1960s and 1970s seriously considered the divide between criticism and practice a key issue in relation to the 'crisis of Modernism', for the following generations the interplay between criticism, curatorial and art practice become *ipso facto* a *new modus operandi*. It is in conjunction with the curatorial turn of the following decades and what has been framed by art historian Julian Stallabrass as 'the decline and fall of art criticism', that the conversational model of Furlong as creative critical practice became recognised although not always directly acknowledged by his protagonists.²⁵ In his introduction to the anthology *Das Interview* historian Michael Diers writes:

... Heidi Grundmann sets out – and deservedly so – Furlong's historical achievement when she writes: "Furlong has introduced the figure of the mass-media influenced interviewer, well-equipped with recording technology, to the arts, and transformed him (sic) into an insightful, open – not always aiming for certain answers – trustworthy, conversation partner." If this characterization also applies to the interview and dialogue praxis of Hans Ulrich Obrist, then, whether you like it or not, the latter's model can be found in Furlong's *Audio Arts*.²⁶

From the vast production of Obrist's interviews, sometimes presented live as part of his curatorial practice, to the development of many 'platforms for discussion' widespread in 1990s art and after, the dialogic and conversational approach of *Audio Arts* can be seen as a precursor, and an example of the discursive and curatorial turn of the 1990s often associated with the conviviality of 'relational aesthetics' on the one hand and the figure of the curator as author/producer on the other.²⁷

2002, 224. Harrison argues that the distinction of criticism from practice was symptomatic of a problem within modernism.

²⁵ According to Stallabrass with the rise of Young British Art (and in contrast to academic art theory) there are no longer any British art critics who have a credible intellectual presence both within and without the art world. Far from being intellectuals, Stallabrass regards art critics such as Matthew Collings, Sarah Kent and Brian Sewell as 'figures of fun'. See Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: The Rise and the Fall of Young British Art*, London: Verso, 2006, 271.

²⁶ '... und Heidi Grundmann stellt vollkommen zu Recht Furlongs historische Leistung heraus, wenn sie schreibt: "Furlong hat die von den Massenmedien geprägte Figur des mit Aufnahmetechnologie ausgerüsteten Interviewers in die Kunst eingeführt und in die Kunstfigur des einfühlsamen, offenen, nicht schon von vornherein auf bestimmte Antworten abzielenden, vertrauenswürdigen Gesprächspartner verwandelt." Wenn diese Charakterisierung auch auf die Interview- und Gesprächs-Praxis von Hans Ulrich Obrist zutrifft, dann findet letztere nolens volens ihr Modell in Furlong's *Audio Arts*.' From Lars Blunck and Michael Diers, *The Point of Interview. Zur Einführung*, in *Das interview: Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, Philo Fine Arts, 2013, 18, translation by Lucia Farinati.

²⁷ Irigit Rogoff argues that 'in the wake of Documenta X and Documenta 11, it became clear that one of the most significant contributions that the art world had made to the culture at large had been the emergence of the conversational mode that it hosted', in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds, *Curating and The Educational Turn*, Open Editions/de Appel, 2010, 43. The term was coined by curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002. Aspects of conviviality related to the 'conversational mode' have been analysed by Alexandra C. M. Ross in her PhD *Continuous Curatorial Conversations, An*

Challenging the biographical paradigm: from the life of the artist to the life of the interview

Since the publication of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of artists* (1550 and 1568), narrating the lives of artists has become a historiographical *topos* and not simply a method of writing art history.²⁸ But while there is evidence that Vasari talked to the artists of his time and drew information from oral history written in vernacular language (Tuscan), many recent studies have proved that most of the encounters and conversations he refers to, including the exchange with Michelangelo, were the result of a purely literary (and rhetorical) artifice.²⁹ The issue of authenticity in relation to the artist's voice, and its impact on how the practice of art history has changed, represents one recurrent theme in the contributions included in this issue.

Predicated on the authenticity of the artist's voice, the artist interview has often been considered within the context of oral history, as evidenced in the AAH conference session in 2006. In particular it has raised awareness of the importance of capturing living artists' voices, and in so doing promoted greater interest in very recent art history. As Cathy Courtney, project director of the *Artists' Lives* oral history project, quipped in a recent conference, 'people used to like their artists dead and silent even until the 1970s'.³⁰ In his paper for this issue 'Both sides of the microphone' Clive Phillpot gives an account of his experience of interviewing Gustav Metzger and recollects his surprise and disappointment when he realised the extent of the then-elderly artist's memory loss – a reminder to appreciate living memory and to concede the challenges of memory-recall in interview situations.³¹ Phillpot's account of being both an interviewer and an interviewee for the *Artists' Lives* project is particularly rich in the way it complements the information included

Exploration of the Role of Conversation within the Writing of a Supplementary History of the Curatorial, University of Dundee, 2014.

²⁸ The biographical method of art history addresses the work of art in relation to the artist's life and personality. While this can be ascribed to an approach that was in use since antiquity (see Pliny's accounts of the Greek and Roman artists and the hagiographic tradition), a reappraisal of the method in the context of Renaissance art in Italy can be seen with Lorenzo Ghiberti's *I commentari* (*The Commentaries*, c. 1447) and subsequently by Vasari's *Lives*. In both biographies the artists included their own autobiography. The biographical method pursued in this period was based on the evolutionary principle of life from childhood to youth and adulthood, relating artists to god as in the mythical tradition.

²⁹ The only artist who was still alive and active while Vasari wrote *Le Vite* was Michelangelo. See, for example, Michael Hirst, 'Michelangelo and his First Biographers', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 94, 1997, 63–84.

³⁰ See *The Voice of the Artist*, conference, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2016. The conference was co-organised with *Artists' Lives* and Tate.

³¹ Clive Phillpot, 'Both sides of the microphone', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020.

in the audio documents preserved at The British Library as part of National Life Stories.³²

Formerly known as the National Life Stories Collection, the project was established in 1987, 'its mission ... to record first-hand experiences of as wide a cross-section of society as possible, to preserve the recordings, to make them publicly available and encourage their use'.³³ Its key focus and expertise has been oral history fieldwork, including in-depth interviews that cover, through several-hours-long sessions, family background, childhood, education, work, leisure and later life. *Artists' Lives* is part of an active interviewing programme which also includes *Crafts Lives*, *Architects' Lives*, *Authors' Lives*, among others. As in other oral history collections, the remit of the *Artists' Lives* project is therefore to collect the life stories of artists through audio recordings and preserve them as sound documents in the archive. Particular importance is placed on preserving the recordings in their integrity (often unedited) and to offer a content summary to assist users.

Since the foundation of the oral history discipline, libraries and archives have been the dedicated places for cataloguing and preserving oral/aural interviews. The recordings, however, have often been considered by historians as oral sources for the history of the social sciences rather than documents of history in themselves. The assumption that oral history is a practice of gathering documents and not a practice of reflection was, and to some extent still is, ingrained in the history of these collections. However, from the 1960s in conjunction with the emergence of radical social movements, oral history became a central tool for community history projects.³⁴ In this new emerging social context, the claims for an 'objective' history, as well as the distinct separation between the role of the interviewer from that of the interviewee, started to be dismantled.³⁵

Oral historian Alessandro Portelli, who was particularly active in collecting the memories of anti-fascism and the Resistance movement in Italy, as well as the student movement in the 1970s, challenged the discipline by going beyond that pioneering stage of primary field work that Italian historian Gianni Bosio used to call 'hermetic discovery'. According to Portelli, oral history is primarily a *listening art*:

³² See Interview with Gustav Metzger by Clive Phillpot, 'Clive Phillpot talking to Gustav Metzger', typescripts, 5 February 2016 and 19 February 2016. Deposited with *Artists' Lives* at the British Library. The audio recordings for these interviews can be listened to at the British Library. Permanent catalogue entries:

<http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7229341>;

<http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY6086775>; and

<http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7982908>.

See also Clive Phillpot interviewed by Cathy Courtney, for *Artist's Lives*. British Library shelfmark: C466/363.

³³ See The British Library website: <https://www.bl.uk/projects/national-life-stories>.

³⁴ In the 1960s, oral history became a tool for community history projects breaking social/class divisions between intellectual workers and others, promoting community cohesion and ethnic diversity. See David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, eds, *Oral History Anthology: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Lanham: AltaMira Press, 1996.

³⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of the Valle Giulia. Oral history and the art of dialogue*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, xii–xiv.

As opposed to the majority of historical documents oral sources are not *found*, but *co-created* by the historian. They would not exist in this form without the presence, and stimulation, the active role of the historian in the field interview. Oral sources are generated in a dialogic exchange – *an interview* – literally a looking at each other, an exchange of gazes.³⁶

In oral history meaning and practice are for Portelli inseparable. He notes that ‘the interpretation begins at the moment of collection, and all presentations – including the most ‘objective’ one – are interpretations’.³⁷

Drawing from Portelli’s notion of oral history as a co-constructed narrative between the interviewer and the interviewee, oral historian Lisa Sandino has further widened the discipline by making a comparison with the arts and the ‘multivalent, diverse, co-constructed practices that challenge conventional autonomous production and identities’.³⁸ For Sandino, writing in the co-edited publication *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, a ‘key example of an interview functioning as historical archive and arts practice’ is *Audio Arts*.³⁹ Indeed, the cover of the book reproduces a work by Furlong, *Anthem*, a multi-channel sound installation originally commissioned by the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea in 2009. The work consists of a monumental wall of loudspeakers projecting a cacophony of voices. As in previous work, Furlong explored the relationship between voices and places by using vox pop interviews as a tool for gathering material *in situ*, interacting mainly with passers-by.

In the introduction of the book, Sandino argues that ‘in keeping with the ethos of oral history’ *Audio Arts* has more recently shifted away from the focus on famous artists, or as she put it, on ‘elites’.⁴⁰ While Sandino’s rationale for the study of oral history in the visual arts embraced a wide perspective which includes art practice and not simply the field work by oral historians and archivists,⁴¹ her argument might be misleading for two reasons. Contrary to her opinion, *Audio Arts* interviews were never dictated by the achieved status of an artist. As emerged from a series of interviews with Furlong and in-depth archival research,⁴² the artist was

³⁶ Alessandro Portelli, ‘A Dialogical Relationship: An Approach to Oral History’, *Expressions Annual*, 14, 2005, 1–8. <https://pdf4pro.com/fullscreen/a-dialogical-relationship-an-approach-to-oral-1ecfc5.html>

³⁷ Portelli, *The Battle of the Valle Giulia*, xiii.

³⁸ Lisa Sandino, ‘Introduction: Oral History in and about Art, Craft, and Design’, in Matthew Partington, Lisa Sandino, eds, *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, 2.

³⁹ Sandino, in *Oral history in the Visual Arts*, 3.

⁴⁰ Sandino refers to the work *Anthem* (2009) in which Furlong interviewed residents at the seaside in Bexhill-on-Sea as part of his commission by the De La Warr Pavilion. Partington and Sandino, *Oral History in the Visual Arts*.

⁴¹ Sandino’s rationale draws from Alessandro Portelli’s categories of ‘performance-oriented narrative, content-oriented document, subject-oriented life story, and theme-oriented testimony’, Partington and Sandino, *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, 2.

⁴² See the interviews by Lucia Farinati with William Furlong and former collaborators of *Audio Arts*, in *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*:

always attracted by the particular energy and significance of a certain artist who had something to say in a very specific moment and/or context.⁴³ Secondly, the process of recording local residents on specific locations, such as the beach of Bexhill, was informed by the same recording practice which began in the 1970s and fully developed in the 1980s in collaboration with critic Michael Archer (at that time interviewer and editorial assistant of *Audio Arts*) and is not, as Sandino argued, a recent development. A body of sound works simply called 'Audio Arts Sound Works' were made, for example, from recordings gathered in the streets of London's East End, in Brixton prison or Derry in Northern Ireland.⁴⁴ In what way, therefore, can *Audio Arts* be seen through the lens of oral history?

Similar to an oral historian Furlong privileges aural over written accounts. Moreover, the audio recording is considered the actual trace of a primary source (or what Furlong terms 'actuality'). Yet Furlong considers the relationship with oral history 'purely incidental'.⁴⁵ As critic Mel Gooding, former collaborator of *Audio Arts* explained, Furlong's premise comes from a very different angle and critical perspective.⁴⁶ If we take for example *Artists' Lives*, the project started in 1990 by looking at 'the individual artist's life as opposed to the individual artist's art. Since the art was part of a life it subsequently becomes part of the recording.'⁴⁷ According to Gooding, *Audio Arts* is instead 'all about the art'.⁴⁸ Compared to the thirty-hour-long unedited interview process of *Artists' Lives*, the *Audio Arts* interviews are more focused. They are critical in their origination and practice as Furlong consciously decided whom to interview, when and how to conduct the interview and finally how to edit it. There is no prescriptive model to follow or any particular restriction.

Although the emphasis on the authenticity of the artist's voice can be regarded as another point in common between *Audio Arts* and oral history, the non-intermediation of the written text was a choice made in direct response to the debate fuelled by art magazines such as *Studio International* in the 1970s and the result of

<https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/46708/2/Farinati-L-46708-Chapter-3.1.mp3> and
<https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/46708/3/Farinati-L-46708-Chapter-3.2.mp3>.

⁴³ For example, Furlong began to interview the notorious Young British Artist Tracey Emin when she was at the beginning of her career. In a similar manner he recorded the German artist Joseph Beuys at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1974 where the artist decided to be present for the whole duration of the show *Art in Society, Society into Art*. When both artists reached international fame Furlong kept interviewing them as the result of an established dialogue.

⁴⁴ Audio Arts Sound Works were co-produced by Furlong and Archer between 1983 and 1987, including a series of tapes, vinyl records, radio broadcasts, live multi-media events, performances and exhibitions in the context of various galleries and art festivals in the UK: the Hayward Annual (London), Orchard Gallery (Derry), Interim Art (London), the National Garden Festival at Stoke-on-Trent, Projects UK (Newcastle Upon Tyne) and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London). See Lucia Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*.

⁴⁵ See the audio interviews with Furlong by Lucia Farinati, 17 March 2016 and 2 December 2005.

⁴⁶ See the audio interview by Lucia Farinati with Mel Gooding, 13 December 2018 in *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, 145.

⁴⁷ Farinati with Mel Gooding, 13 December 2018.

⁴⁸ Farinati with Mel Gooding, 13 December 2018.

the expanded field and the social sculpture of the 1970s, rather than the influence of oral history protocols and its democratic ethos. Furlong has always preferred to define his own interviews as conversations precisely because the focus of his recordings is the creative exploration of ideas through speech. According to him a conversation is a vivid, creative moment of social interaction and not a prescriptive process based on a set of fixed questions.⁴⁹ Subsuming the artist interview within the field of oral history might therefore restrict opportunities for interpretation and minimise its performative and creative aspect.

This issue pushes the boundaries further by rethinking the function of the artist interview in the archive, in particular in relation to art practices and performativity (discussed later in this introduction). It also proposes a consideration of what might be thought of as the biography of an interview. In looking at the life, and afterlife of the interview (as Holdsworth terms it in her paper for this issue) this framework foregrounds the material conditions of the interview, as well as the social relations it engenders. It proposes a shift from a historical paradigm centred on an artist's life to the life of the interview itself and provides an insight into how art history written from interviews is often co-constructed or in some cases distorted. Charting interviews chronologically makes it easier to track shifts in language and perspectives on art and the art world, in levels of formality and in societal mores over the course of time, such as whether an artist feels able to allude to their sexuality.⁵⁰ Tracking the biography of an interview makes visible the process by which it becomes a notable text in an artist's career bibliography, or even a canonical art-historical reference – or not.

As anthropologist Igor Kopytoff proposes, in his seminal paper 'The cultural biography of things', a biography of a thing might 'ask questions similar to those one asks about people', in that one 'can draw an analogy between the way societies construct individuals and the way they construct things'.⁵¹ Following Kopytoff, one could argue that the artist interview is a perfect example of that conflict between, on the one hand, the individual and cultural desire for singularity, and on the other,

⁴⁹ 'What distinguishes *Audio Arts* from other art magazines is that it inhabited the media by transforming the form and the scope of a traditional magazine into a medialised form in itself. Whether or not the *Audio Arts* interviews can be considered a new form of criticism (or anti-criticism) does need therefore to be addressed in relation to the history of the audio interview and its entanglement with broadcasting and radio, media and intermedia art in general and not simply in relation to the history of conceptual art and oral history in the visual arts. The question at stake here is again all historiographical: how has the practice of art history and art criticism been impacted by the introduction of the interview as method and/or as artistic methodology? How has the interview challenged its assumptions, constraints and language?' See Lucia Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, 147.

⁵⁰ See Jennifer Sichel's 'Do you think Pop Art's queer? Gene Swenson and Andy Warhol', *Oxford Art Journal*, 41: 1, 2008, 1–23, for a detailed analysis of how queer references made by Warhol to interviewer Gene Swenson were expunged from the published interview in *ARTnews*.

⁵¹ Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 89.

the tendency in complex societies for 'commoditization and monetization to invade almost every aspect of existence'.⁵²

Mediatization and media reception

In the introduction to their co-edited volume *The Mediatization of the Artist*, Rachel Esner and Sandra Kisters describe how since the late eighteenth century, 'diminishing patronage, the rise of the middle classes, and the increasing dominance of the market in both the production and circulation of art objects' has made it 'something of a necessity' for artists to 'build their own persona in the promotion of their art'.⁵³ That necessity increased dramatically from the second half of the twentieth century, with pressure growing on artists to build themselves as recognisable brands in the art market. In her paper, Wolf repeatedly highlights the 1950s as a 'key decade' for the rise of both the author and artist interview (both types heavily influenced by the style and importance given to the interview form by the literary magazine *The Paris Review*, established in 1953). She stresses the significance of developments in sociology in the 1950s, particularly Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), which examined the variety of performative roles we all play in different public contexts.⁵⁴

The staged nature of the interview situation makes it an especially attractive arena in which to try out a performative role, and many artists have taken advantage of this, as with the examples of Kevin Atherton and Catherine Elwes discussed in Holdsworth's paper. While literary critic and writer Jérôme Meizoz uses the term 'authorial posture' in relation to author interviews,⁵⁵ social scientists Michael Myers and Michael Newman build on Goffman's dramaturgical model. They describe the interview as 'a drama with a stage, props, actors, an audience, a script, and a performance', and propose to judge the 'quality of performance' in qualitative interviews as good or bad.⁵⁶

In 1964 the artist Alan Kaprow wrote an article for *ARTNews* asking 'Should the Artist Be a Man of the World?' – to which his own answer was yes. Commenting on the article, in his memoir of the New York art world in that era, Irving Sandler wrote: 'The [Jackson] Pollockian image of the heroic yet pathetic, rebellious, drunken visionary had been replaced by the [Andy] Warholian image of the artist as socially adept celebrity and businessman.'⁵⁷ Does it follow that contemporary artists who prefer not to engage in media interviews – to present a public persona – are necessarily at a disadvantage? Is there dignity in not speaking publicly? As Jean Wainwright observes in her paper, 'Small lies? Authenticity and the artist's interview', giving an interview can reveal elements that are impossible for a person

⁵² Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things', 87–88.

⁵³ Rachel Esner and Sandra Kisters, 'Introduction', in Esner and Kisters, eds, *The Mediatization of the Artist*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, 3.

⁵⁴ Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', 14.

⁵⁵ See Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 34.

⁵⁶ Michael Myers and Michael Newman, 'The qualitative interview in IS research: Examining the craft', *Information and Organization*, 2007, issue 17, 11.

⁵⁷ Irving Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2004, 244–5.

to control, however media-savvy. She notes: 'You hear accent and age, you hear whether the person on the recording has a cold or is tired or is nervous, whether they are fully engaged and interested.'⁵⁸

Poppy Sfakianaki's paper, 'From "Portraits d'artistes" to the interviewer's portrait: interviews of modern artists by Jacques Guenne in *L'art vivant* (1925–1930)', goes back to a time when artist interview series were just beginning to appear in the French media and interviews were still transcribed by hand, before personal tape-recorders were made more generally available in the 1960s. She examines the role of interviews in the French newspaper supplement *L'art vivant* in the 1920s in shaping the public figure of the artist and critic – their professional reputations and selling power. For Sfakianaki, these interviews are complex and evoke a web of influence and power, as well as helping to bolster national pride in the visual arts. They are both a 'media event' and a form of mediation or (borrowing Philippe Lejeune's term) 'mediated autobiography'.⁵⁹

Indeed, the most canonical artist interviews (such as those between Francis Bacon and David Sylvester, and the many undertaken by Andy Warhol) continue to hold popular interest beyond any time-sensitive media context of promoting a specific event. The original interview might well fall into the category cynically described by Daniel Boorstin as a 'pseudo-event' – as Wolf summarises, 'an event created solely for the purpose of being reported'⁶⁰ – but the original impetus for the interview often becomes less relevant over time. Instead, great interest lies in such elements as the personal dynamic and power play between the speakers; the particular language with which the artists describe their work and working practices; and the attitudes of the artists at that moment towards any number of topics, including how they view their own celebrity, their peers, and confront others' interpretations of their work. It is for these reasons that anthologies of such artists as Bacon and Warhol continue to be published, sometimes years after any media event – if indeed there was one.

Nonetheless, media recognition of artists compared to authors seems unbalanced. It is important to recognise that modern and contemporary literature has enjoyed a wider reception in the popular media and thus greater public visibility than its artistic equivalent. If we take (arguably) the most famous BBC radio interview programme 'Desert Island Discs', launched in 1942, for example, no visual artists appeared at all in its first decade.⁶¹ The first professional artist 'castaway' was Michael Ayrton in 1955. In 2009, Midge Gillies noted the popularity of literary biographies over those of other public figures: around half the winners of Costa Book Awards' Biography Award are biographies of writers (the remainder

⁵⁸ Jean Wainwright, 'Small lies? Authenticity and the artist's interview', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 4.

⁵⁹ Poppy Sfakianaki, 'From "Portraits d'artistes" to the interviewer's portrait: interviews of modern artists by Jacques Guenne in *L'art vivant* (1925–1930)', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 14–15.

⁶⁰ Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', 16.

⁶¹ Other than Sir Peter Scott (in 1951), the ornithologist and conservationist (and son of Antarctic explorer Sir Robert Scott), who listed painting among his many interests. Writers and journalists, however, were interviewed during this decade, albeit in smaller numbers than actors and singers.

being of 'politicians, artists, painters, composers and other historical figures').⁶² With a few notable exceptions, such as Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí, artists in the high modernist period of the 1950s and 1960s, when interviews were at their height of popularity, were extremely reticent to speak to the mainstream media about their work and lives. In the main, artists today still are.

The suspicion is mutual: newspapers and Sunday supplements feature far fewer artists than writers, musicians or actors. As Lynn Barber said of her time as an interviewer for the *Sunday Express* in the 1980s: 'There was no question of interviewing artists ... Our readers were determinedly philistine and still made jokes about Picassos with two noses, or Henry Moores with holes in them.'⁶³ She acknowledges that artists now get more media coverage 'than they did twenty years ago, but even if you count the column inches devoted to, say, Lucian Freud over his entire lifetime versus the column inches devoted to, say, Victoria Beckham ... you will find that Lucian Freud counts as practically unknown'.⁶⁴ It is for this reason, Barber observes appreciatively, that artists rarely 'come laden with PRs', and are, for her, more enjoyable to interview.⁶⁵

The issue of definition: from interview to conversation, from paratext to deparatextualisation

Putting forward a credible case for a history of the artist interview requires attempting to define this term more concretely. Just what is an artist interview, then? Does a degree of ambiguity in its definition impede the argument for a specific history?

An artist interview might be described as a premeditated conversation between an artist and at least one interlocutor addressed to a third party or an audience generally not also present.⁶⁶ The artificiality of the situation is captured by Lynn Barber when she writes: 'The interview is an odd transaction ... It looks like an intimate tête-à-tête but you know that it's "on the record", intended for publication. On the other hand you don't *speak* as if to an audience.'⁶⁷

This definition still leaves scope as to the identity of the interlocutor (who might be an art critic, art historian, journalist, fellow artist or arts practitioner, among other possibilities) and the size and location of the audience. It also leaves open the nature of the encounter (live, video call or phone call, or written correspondence by post or email), the specifics of the commissioning process, the interview's duration (including whether it took place over more than one encounter), location, whether or not it was recorded, and its published form and platform (such as the popular Q&A format in magazines), as well as its purpose.

⁶² Midge Gillies, *Writing Lives: Literary Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 52.

⁶³ Lynn Barber, *A Curious Career*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, 163.

⁶⁴ Barber, *A Curious Career*, 162.

⁶⁵ Barber, *A Curious Career*, 163.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Roach argues that this tripartite speech situation gives the interview its uniqueness. Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 10.

⁶⁷ Barber, *A Curious Career*, 40.

The interview may or may not be recorded, transcribed (by the interviewer or a third party), or be approved by the interviewee prior to publication. The interviewer's questions may be pre-prepared or not, structured or open-ended – in the latter's case, the interview might be termed a 'conversation', as used by artist William Furlong and subsequently by Hans Ulrich Obrist. This loose definition also allows for the many subgenres of artist interviews that Reva Wolf catalogues in her paper: from published interviews, as found in newspapers, periodicals and interview collections; to sound-recorded interviews; to the more unusual, such as the auto-interview, silent interview and photographic interview.

The term 'inter-view' (formerly also 'entrevue(e)', from the French *entrevue*, from *entrevoir*: 'have a glimpse of', and *s'entrevoir*, 'see each other')⁶⁸ implies a relation to seeing, as well as a sense of between-ness. Certainly, many theorists have seen the interview as a hybrid form, that implicates speech and writing, listening and reading. For Rebecca Roach, the 'tension the word expresses between concept and physical object also parallels the tension inherent to studying interviews in the cultural imaginary, since they are understood as both a media object and a methodology, a form and a practice'.⁶⁹

For Roach, interviews are not just ambiguous but 'leaky'.⁷⁰ She writes, 'interviews often become the excess, the foil, or the leak in the structural definitions of literary culture and production'.⁷¹ How might this notion of leakiness work to undermine definitions of art and its production? By contrast, Johanna Burton and Lisa Pasquariello, in their essay for the special issue of the *Art Journal*, describe the artist interview in terms of what it is not: 'not quite document, not quite literature, not quite propaganda, not quite staged voyeurism, not quite entertainment, not quite verifiable fact'.⁷² Masschelein likewise argues that the interview's ambiguity warrants it being termed an 'unconcept'.⁷³

Resisting the temptation to smooth over all these ambiguities is important in granting the artist interview autonomous status. The ambiguity makes it harder to reduce the interview to the subordinate, instrumental role of the 'paratext', as described by literary theorist Gérard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. As epitexts (the subgenre of paratexts that exist outside the text), the function of artist interviews would be to support the presentation, reception and consumption of the art object, even if their unofficial or semiofficial status means that the artist or

⁶⁸ T. F. Hoad, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford University Press, online version, 2003.

⁶⁹ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 11. Roach favours the noun 'form' over 'genre', the latter seeming, to her, too 'immaterial' and invoking 'hierarchical taxonomies around literariness and canonicity', as in the denigrated term 'genre-literature', 10.

⁷⁰ Roach explains that she has borrowed the term 'leakiness' from computational culture, specifically computer programmer Joel Spolsky's *Law of Leaky Abstractions*: 'All non-trivial abstractions, to some degree, are leaky.' Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 26.

⁷¹ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 27.

⁷² Johanna Burton and Lisa Pasquariello, "'Ask Somebody Else Something Else": Analyzing the Artist Interview', *Art Journal*, Fall 2005, 46.

⁷³ Masschelein and Roach, 'Putting Things Together', 173.

critic 'can more or less disclaim [responsibility] with denials of the type "That's not what I said" ...'.⁷⁴

In opposition to Genette's ideas, current scholarship on the literary interview is intent on establishing a more equal relationship between an author interview and the literary object (such as a novel by that author) – which could be extended to apply to artist interviews and the art object. Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten borrow Torsten Hoffmann's useful term 'deparatextualisation' to describe this bid to destabilise old hierarchies.⁷⁵ One might likewise apply Jacques Derrida's related concept (after Kant) of the *parergon* in relation to the interview, as a more nuanced variation on the paratext. Derrida describes *parerga* as 'hors d'oeuvres' or supplements: 'that which *should not* become, by distinguishing itself, the principle subject' (the *ergon*) – the most obvious example in art being the picture frame. Nonetheless, *parerga* should not be dismissed as extrinsic to the work. Instead, they often can't be so easily extricated from the work; 'they touch upon it, put pressure on it, press against it, seek contact, exert pressure at the boundary'.⁷⁶

The artist's voice

Shifting from the realm of writing and its textual affiliations to oral accounts, a phrase often used to define the field of the artist interview – already several times in this introduction – is the 'artist's voice'.⁷⁷ From the essay *The Grain of the Voice* by Roland Barthes to more recent theorisations, it has been argued by many authors that voice is both language and body.⁷⁸ Its cultural appreciation includes, alongside the study of phonetics and linguistic acts, the vocal and physiological dimension of voice as an acoustic and body phenomena per se.⁷⁹ But as philosopher Adriana Cavarero argues in her book *For More Than One Voice – Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, despite the fact that voice is sound, speech is its natural destination and as such it tends to be subsumed within written language. According to Cavarero, the devaluation of the vocalic part of *logos* within Western philosophy goes hand in hand with the subordination of speech to thought and written text.⁸⁰ Cavarero proposes to pay special attention to vocal expression (or 'vocality') as the cipher of embodied uniqueness. She notes that 'since the maternal scene onward voice

⁷⁴ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 10.

⁷⁵ Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 4.

⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens (trans.), 'The Parergon', *October*, vol. 9, Summer 1979, 20.

⁷⁷ See *The Voice of the Artist*, conference, 2016.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia*, Wesleyan University Press, 2002. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006. Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice, Phenomenologies of Sound*, New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007.

⁸⁰ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

manifests the *unique being* of each human being'. Voice, she argues, is a 'sonorous relation' which is expressed by a mouth, by a unique singular living person who cannot be universalised.⁸¹

In widening interpretations of voice beyond the linguistic, these recent readings can offer an understanding of the subject, and subsequently of the artist's voice, as a complex 'speech event'. As Wolf proposes in her paper, the definition of the artist interview as a 'speech event' (borrowed from the linguist Dell H. Heymes) implies an acknowledgement of the context of its making and its editing. Prior to being recorded and or transcribed, a speech event appears in this sense as a situated event regardless of the fact that it happened in a real context or is merely the site of fiction (as for example in Vasari's *Lives*). However, since the possibility of recording and reproducing the human voice, the illusion of depicting a real moment in time is something that has been widely exploited both by mainstream media as well as by artists. As William Furlong notes:

The attraction for the artist of working with recorded sound no doubt resided in its characteristic of maintaining an integrity with regard to the relationship between the moment of recording and the subsequent hearing. The psychophysical and acoustic nature of the recordings itself is structurally re-entered in real time by a listener on subsequent occasions. The distancing process and 'filters' associated with other media are absent and the artist can therefore utilise this sense of the original experience when the work is presented.⁸²

As Furlong describes here, the very powerful aspect of recorded sound is the ability to create a 'here and now'. A displaced time and space can be re-entered in the present moment of the playback, in the act of listening back to a recorded voice.

An alternative perspective introduced by sound-reproduction technology, amply discussed in the field of sonic studies as well as in the history of ventriloquism, is the split condition of the voice. The idea that recorded technologies have the power to separate a sound from its source (acousmatic sound), and as such have a negative impact on the listener, is an idea that has dominated the literature on auditory culture for a number of years. Much has been written on the disorientation produced in the listener in the absence of face-to-face communication, about radio as a fearful medium, as well as about the uncanny feelings of listening to disembodied voices.⁸³ Steven Connor's study of the

⁸¹ Whereas the notion of the authentic voice is often connected to the realm of identity politics, which neglects uniqueness, Cavarero's theorisation of voice embraces instead acoustic vibration and relationality as key factors in rethinking the relationship between *logos* and politics. She terms this the 'vocal ontology of uniqueness'.

⁸² William Furlong, 'Sound in Recent Art', in *Audio Arts: Beunruhigende Versuche Zur Genauigkeit*, Leipzig: Reclam, 1992, 286.

⁸³ 'That is the first thing to remember about radio. It is a fearful medium because we cannot see who or what produces the sound: an invisible excitement for the nerves. This is why I call it schizophonic (split sound) and also why McLuhan called it a "hot" medium.' From R. Murray Schafer, 'Radical Radio', in Neil Strauss and Dave Mandl, eds, *Radiotext (e)*, vol. 6, Autonomedia, 1993, 292. A wide literature has also developed since the theorisation of

ventriloquial voice has also shown that the power of the dissociated voice has a long cultural history which began with the practice of divination and Greek and Roman oracles. The development of 'technologies for synthesising, augmenting, extending, reproducing, and transforming the voice' can be seen, therefore, as a recent chapter of how 'the dissociated voice of ventriloquial fantasy mediates between the body and language, which is to say also between the body and culture'.⁸⁴ In her paper, Holdsworth employs Connor's theory of voice and ventriloquism to analyse the work of contemporary artists Kevin Atherton and Catherine Elwes. In particular she analyses how their techniques of splitting, repeating or doubling their own voices create a 'schizophonic' effect.⁸⁵

Style and form of the artist interview

Artist interviews are published across a variety of platforms, from audiovisual broadcasts on television to written texts in magazines and anthologies. In the case of written formats, what is transcribed, and how, are vital components in the examination of an artist interview, as is all the peritextual information (the title, introduction, pull-quotes, asides).⁸⁶ One would expect to pay closer attention to changes in style and form in the artist interview over the course of time than in oral history, such as when the straight Q&A format of transcription began to compete in popularity with the prose style of embedded or indirect quotes, as discussed in Poppy Sfakianaki's paper. Moreover, curator Iwona Blazwick has commented on the aesthetics of the Q&A format, 'The layout of type on the page is itself seductive. Instead of seamless and impenetrable blocks of type, Q&A transcripts exhibit an inviting textual rhythm, punctuated by white space where the eye can rest...'⁸⁷

Unlike unrehearsed oral history interviews, BBC radio interviews before the 1960s were generally scripted (often based on edited transcriptions of an unrehearsed meeting) and then read out as if they were natural speech. In oral history, editing (of the recording and transcript) is usually limited to fact-checking and the possible redaction of sensitive material. However, artist interviews are very often subject to significant editorial revision, as much for stylistic purposes as for content, and may migrate from one platform to another (such as from live radio broadcast to a transcript adapted for magazine publishing to a further edited version included in a later book anthology). This potential for migration challenges the idea that an artist interview resides in a singular document, and instead recognises the individual significance of variant formats. A number of these variants

acousmatic listening by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer. See, for example, David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener*, New York, London: Continuum, 2010.

⁸⁴ Steven Connor, notes on *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, <http://stevenconnor.com/dumbstruck.html>

⁸⁵ Claire Holdsworth, 'Vocal acts: video art and the artist's voice', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 'Vocal acts', 12.

⁸⁶ The peritext refers to paratextual information within the printed version itself. See Genette, *Paratexts*, 5.

⁸⁷ Iwona Blazwick, 'The Anatomy of the Interview', in Patricia Bickers and Andrew Wilson, eds, *Talking Art: Volume 1: Art Monthly interviews with artists since 1976*, London: Ridinghouse, 2013, 27.

may exist in one archive (as variant drafts of transcripts, say); some variants may have been lost or be inaccessible. In this way, research into artist interviews is comparable to the challenges faced in the field of textual philology – especially when trying to reconstruct missing variants through existing documents.

Can one nonetheless identify an original or ‘Ur-’interview among the variants: the live encounter, the broadcast – or the scripted texts that were read out on air? These scripts (and the in-house transcriptions of a rehearsed meeting they were often based on) might be the only surviving form of an interview, especially in the first decade of the BBC’s radio service when programmes were not recorded,⁸⁸ and in subsequent years when only the most prestigious programmes were deemed worthy of documenting for posterity. Are artist interviews that have been approved by the interviewer and/or interviewee more valuable than those that aren’t? Consider a memo, held in the BBC Written Archives Centre, written on behalf of Henry Moore demanding the destruction of all ‘original’ recordings of an interview between him and David Sylvester in 1958, although ‘though he would not mind further use of the edited versions’. The BBC obliged: the memo notes details of three original recordings to be destroyed, as well as two edited versions (presumably to be kept).⁸⁹ What is the status of these edited versions now?

These questions are especially timely as libraries and archives battle to save their audiovisual material, whose physical carriers face continual degradation and obsolescence. The British Library estimates that it holds seven million recordings across forty different formats made between the 1880s and now.⁹⁰ Constraints on time and money, as well as copyright concerns, mean that many will not be saved, including interview recordings. In these cases, no audio or audiovisual version of an interview will exist, and any scripts and transcripts will be the only record.

Marxist historian Raphael Samuel considered the oral historian to be the custodian ‘of priceless information which would otherwise be lost’, and who is duty-bound to preserve it in its ‘original integrity’ without imposing her or his own research interests on it.⁹¹ Those principles of integrity of the material and objectivity of the interviewer are generally less strictly observed by artists who developed the artist interview as a creative practice. As Holdsworth demonstrates in her study of Kevin Atherton’s self-interview, exploiting the existence of variant formats of the ‘same’ interview can be an effective artistic device for building new narratives.

The issue of transcription

In contemporary oral history, listening to a voice recording is ‘paramount’ and written transcripts, if indeed they are produced at all, are seen as ‘secondary’.⁹²

⁸⁸ The first BBC radio recording is dated 1931.

⁸⁹ Memo from Rosemary Jellis, ‘Interview with Mr Henry Moore, 20 August 1958, BBC Written Archive.

⁹⁰ As claimed by British Library curators Sally Jennings and Will Prentice at a British Library ‘Save our Sounds’ talk, 17 September 2018.

⁹¹ Raphael Samuel, ‘The Perils of the Transcript’, *Oral History*, 1971, 1: 2, 22.

⁹² Cathy Courtney, ‘National Life Stories’ in Lisa Le Feuvre, ed., ‘Artists’ Lives’, *Essays on Sculpture*, Henry Moore Institute, vol. 69, January 2014, 6–7.

Samuel's 'The Perils of the Transcript' (1971), in which he complains that the 'spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page' continues to be influential in oral history.⁹³ In her paper for this issue, Jean Wainwright sees the recorded voice as already a form of mediation – in contradistinction to Furlong's earlier quoted position – and 'that the actual is also the *being there* in front of the artist, the intimacy of two people and the recording device'. Wainwright describes listening to a recording as the 'memory of that experience'.⁹⁴ Likewise, in her paper, Poppy Sfakianaki references philosopher and art critic Louis Marin's claim that 'tout entretien écrit est la fiction d'un entretien oral' [all written interviews are a fiction of oral interviews].⁹⁵ Roland Barthes proposed that transcriptions should not even be termed 'writing' but rather a form of inscription he called 'scription'.⁹⁶ He lamented the loss through scription of what he saw as the immediacy, danger and innocence embedded in speech;⁹⁷ all the idiosyncratic features that make up the 'grain of the voice'.⁹⁸ Furthermore, by tidying up sentences, such as getting rid of repetitions or contradictions, we also erase the way we expose our thought patterns in speech.⁹⁹ Barthes went as far as to argue 'what is lost in transcription is simply the body'.¹⁰⁰ But listening to a voice is not a neutral activity. Might one be tempted to dismiss an inarticulate speaker, or one with a heavily inflected voice (through accent, class, speech impediment), but react in a less prejudiced manner when reading a transcript of their speech?¹⁰¹ Should one not ask what one gains – as well as loses – in transcription? There are many examples in archives of artist-interview transcripts that contain supplementary comments, diagrams and drawings that *only* exist in those specific documents.¹⁰²

As part of the biography of the interview, then, it is vital to consider the degree to which an interview has been edited: whether abridged, revised, corrected or redacted in the case of transcripts, and all the pre- and post-production aspects of broadcasting. There is no such thing as a 100% verbatim interview transcript, even for court reports. (The passing grade for the Audio Transcription certification exam set by the International Alliance of Professional Reporters and Transcribers is 98%; for the Transcription Society it is 99% – very high but not absolute accuracy.)¹⁰³

⁹³ Samuel, 'The Perils of the Transcript', 19.

⁹⁴ Wainwright, 'Small lies?', 18.

⁹⁵ Louis Marin, 'De l'entretien', *El Guía*, March 1994, 32.

⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980*, London: Vintage Books, 3.

⁹⁷ Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 4.

⁹⁸ Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 183.

⁹⁹ Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 5.

¹⁰¹ The move to anonymous marking and scholarship application processes in academia presumes similar issues regarding assumptions and bias (including race, gender, name, sexuality). Thank you to Susannah Thompson for making this point. The point about transcripts being advantageous to inarticulate artists was made by the British artist Richard Wentworth in *The Voice of the Artist*, conference, 2016.

¹⁰² See, for example, the doodles on the William Wegman interview transcripts in the *Avalanche* magazine archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁰³ <https://www.iaprt.org/certification>

From incidents of mishearing to the more extreme phenomenon known as auditory pareidolia (in which one hears phantom words), psychological, social and physiological factors will affect how something is said and what is heard at a given time. Even if the same words are transcribed, people tend to impose different levels of punctuation and choose a particular format to indicate the turn-taking of the interlocutors. Transcribers may 'correct' non-linear sentences or censor expletives, creating what Jean Wainwright calls 'a seamlessness which is often not there'.¹⁰⁴ They must decide how to indicate accent, prosodic variations (length of pauses, changes in pitch, tempo or volume) and non-verbal effects such as background noises, laughter or coughing, interruptions or talking over another – or choose to ignore them.¹⁰⁵ The 'orthography' used by discourse or conversational analysts to transcribe these extra-verbal effects – using such symbols as arrows for significant changes in pitch, or underscore to indicate stress (in pitch or amplitude) – are not commonly used for artist interviews.¹⁰⁶ Attempts to capture what these analysts call 'visible conduct' – such as mapping visual orientation of the gaze through symbols, introducing a timeline, or presenting photographs of participants like a film strip alongside transcription – are typically less precise or detailed in published artist interviews.¹⁰⁷ (A more creative attempt at capturing visible conduct, the photographic interview *Dalí's Mustache* of 1954, is discussed by Reva Wolf in her paper.) Nonetheless, magazines may print a portrait of the artist to accompany an interview, and some artist interviews will also include asides in which the interlocutor remarks on a particularly salient non-verbal incident, such as an interview being interrupted by a phone call, pet or a crying baby.

Social scientists might supplement recordings with copious field notes that might capture emotion, a sense of power hierarchies, and what Wainwright calls the 'acoustic resonance of an interview location'.¹⁰⁸ Such notes are not a formal part of artist interviews, though some of these impressions might be found in the introduction to a published transcript, say.

Transcription agencies even acknowledge the different levels of 'verbatim' required in transcription. Transcription agencies often differentiate 'strict' verbatim (with all the ums and ahs included to reflect spoken language) from the more common 'standard' or 'intelligent' verbatim, which is lightly edited to remove such tics and hesitations, and therefore resembles written language. Agencies also make allowances for the recording quality (from broadcast quality to faint or very faint) and whether or not the interlocutors are native speakers.¹⁰⁹ Writing in the journal *Social Forces*, Daniel Oliver, Julianne Serovich and Tina Mason split approaches to

¹⁰⁴ Wainwright, 'Small lies?', 4.

¹⁰⁵ See Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, and other Vocalizations*, London: Reaktion Books, 2014, for a discussion of how these effects produce meaning.

¹⁰⁶ See Gail Jefferson, 'Glossary of Transcription Symbols with an introduction', in Gene H. Lerner, *Conversation Analysis: Studies from the first generation*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004, 24–31.

¹⁰⁷ For examples of such mapping experiments, see Paul Luff and Christian Heath, 'Transcribing Embodied Action', in Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, eds, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, vol. 1, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Wainwright, 'Small lies?', 3.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, www.transcriptdivas.com

transcription into two dominant modes: naturalised (reflecting a belief that 'language represents the real world') and denaturalised (suggesting 'that within speech are meanings and perceptions that construct our reality').¹¹⁰

The *Avalanche* magazine archives at MoMA contain transcripts of the original audio recordings commissioned by the museum archive itself. When one compares the audio with the transcript, one discovers a number of errors, such as 'Barnet' Newman instead of Barnett. The transcripts are not strict verbatim: they do not capture all the hesitations, interruptions and speech tics. What is particularly fascinating is that these transcripts have been subsequently commented upon and corrected by the magazine's co-founder Liza Béar. For example, she answers the transcriber's query 'Oppenheimer or Oppenheim?' (regarding Dennis Oppenheim). As Wainwright explores in her paper, even the most seemingly literal interview transcripts, as exemplified by Warhol's *a: A novel*, contain 'small lies'.¹¹¹ She asks, to what extent should the reader be aware of this, and crucially: does it matter? Does it matter that Wainwright's published interview with the artist Morten Viskum was not the result of one seamless conversation, 'but the result of repeating questions in different ways, sometimes on different occasions; that there is no indication in the text that a conversation about a body of work might be the result of editing together two conversations in different cities'?¹¹²

The fields of experimental music and choreography have made use of creative experiments in transcribing speech and used speech to create graphic scores. Partly influenced by composer John Cage and Fluxus performances, these include for example the 'event scores' first realised by the artist La Monte Young, a student of Cage; and the graphic dance notations used by Yvonne Rainer.¹¹³ The period between the 1960s and early 1970s saw the emergence of sound poetry both as a development from concrete poetry as well as in conjunction with electro-acoustic approaches in the field of literature and experimental music.¹¹⁴ Musician Larry Wendt frames this engagement with electronic music and poetry as 'electro-acoustic literature'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Daniel Oliver, Julianne Serovich and Tina Mason, *Social Forces*, 84: 2, December 2005, 1274.

¹¹¹ Wainwright, 'Small lies?', 2.

¹¹² Wainwright, 'Small lies?', 9–10.

¹¹³ See Liz Kotz, 'Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the "Event" Score', *October* 95, 2001, 55–89.

¹¹⁴ The term 'concrete poetry' was devised in 1955 by Eugen Gomringer. Whereas traditional poetry operates on a conceptual level, concrete poetry is based on perception. According to Stephen Bann 'it can appropriately be considered a visual art, though it is also a literary one'. See Stephen Bann, *Concrete Poetry*, 2003.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T018996>. See also Stephen Bann, *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology*, 1967; and Willard Bohn, *Reading Visual Poetry*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010.

¹¹⁵ Within this cross-disciplinary field Wendt has included the text-sound compositions of intermedia artists Bengt Emil Johnson and Lars-Gunnar Bodin from Sweden; the work of European poets such as François Dufrêne, Henri Chopin, Bernard Heidsieck and Paul de Vree, and also American poets such as Jackson MacLow, Charles Amirkhanian and John Giorno. Wendt also considers the work of English poets Brion Gysin, Ernst Jandl, Clive Fencott and Bob Cobbing as examples of experimentation with the non-semantic, *concrete* dimension of language.

While these music, dance and poetry experiments can be seen within a wider art context in which a discursive and a conceptual approach developed into expanded creative practices, the question of how the expanded field has directly influenced a new generation of art critics and art historians in changing their mode of writing remains a less explored terrain. The challenge in terms of art historiography is to understand how this process, and indeed the 'failure' or limits of transcription, offered opportunities for experimenting with new forms of critical writing. The ability to translate or 'transduce' (to use a term from sound reproduction technology) the artist's voice has a direct bearing on art historians and critics who rely on the artist interview as a primary source. How did the invention of such talking machines as the telephone, the phonograph and the portable recorder stimulate new forms of dialogic writing? How, then, can these new forms of creative writing be recognised as critical contributions within the field of art history?

As Roach points out, for many literary authors, the interview itself could be seen as 'contiguous' with their own oeuvre, given that both are based on the writer's own words. Some authors have used this to their advantage, becoming what Masschelein et al call 'interview authors', who incorporate interviews into their own work.¹¹⁶ They offer as examples Karl Kraus's (1912) 'biting satire on the press, "Interview mit einem sterbenden Kind" ("Interview with a Dying Child")', as well as André Gide's 1942 *Interviews Imaginaires (Imaginary Interviews)*.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, this conflation of the writer's written words in their oeuvre and the transcription of their spoken words from an interview situation is precisely the reason many writers dislike interviews. Roland Barthes was explicit about his aversion towards interviews (despite regularly submitting to them as a necessary evil), explaining: 'I'm always uneasy when speech is used somehow to repeat writing, because then I have the impression of uselessness. I could not say what I want to say any better than by writing it, and to repeat it by talking about it tends to diminish it.'¹¹⁸

In visual art, the issue has of course tended to be just the opposite: that is, that visual information cannot be mapped or translated neatly into speech or written language. The British art historian Michael Baxendall argued that 'direct descriptive terms can cover very little of the interest one wishes to indicate', and that one must therefore expect the hearer to 'supply a great deal in the way of mental comparison with other works of art, of experience of the previous use of such words in art criticism, and of general interpretative fact'.¹¹⁹

Artist interviews by women and dialogic feminist practices

Since the introduction of the portable recorder in the late 1960s, the praxis of interviewing artists spread among women artists, curators and art historians, both in Europe and the US. However, only a few anthologies edited by American women

¹¹⁶ Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 2–3.

¹¹⁷ Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 38–39.

¹¹⁸ Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 322.

¹¹⁹ Michael Baxendall, 'The Language of Art History', *New Literary History*, 10: 3, Spring 1979, 456.

have been (re)published in recent years, as for example Katharine Kuh's *The artist's voice: talks with seventeen artists*, Cindy Nemser's *Art talk: Conversations with 15 women artists* and Patricia Norvell's *Recording Conceptual Art*.¹²⁰ Alongside many other recordings split between many archives, the body of tapes made, for example, by art critic Barbara Reise, one of the most prominent voices of *Studio International* in the 1970s, remains today largely unstudied. The gender imbalance in the context of Conceptual art in 1960s is well recalled by Norvell in the introduction of her book:

The roles of female interviewer and male interviewee reflected the sexual politics of the 1960s. Unfortunately, as was the norm prior to the women's movement, there were few *recognised* women artists, much less any renowned female Conceptual artists. While it is now clear that men dominated the Conceptual art movement, women were actively involved from the beginning.¹²¹

The gender imbalance becomes even more striking when we enter the context of African American art. In this issue Lauren Cross' paper 'Artist interviews and revisionist art history: women of African descent, critical practice and methods of rewriting dominant narratives' addresses the question of how the intersection of gender and colour, in regard to the history of women artists of African descent, has been excluded from Western art historiographies.¹²² Her process of making video interviews with women artists working in the context of textile art covers a gap in the main institutional American archives. Cross argues for the potential to use artist interviews as a tool to widen the feminist perspective, strengthen the field of art history, and ultimately push the field forward. How is this possible within the existent institutional frameworks?

In looking back at the establishment of the Association for Art History (where the papers of this issue were originally presented) and also at the emergence of feminist interventions between 1974 and 1990 in the UK (see Victoria Horne's article in a previous issue of this journal),¹²³ it is possible to observe how in the 1970s and 1980s feminism's impact in changing the discipline of art history depended upon working successfully across both central and decentralised discursive arenas. While feminist participation in the annual conferences of the Association for Art History was evident from the outset, and acted as a site of disciplinary legitimation, other independent initiatives such as reading groups, women's art journals,

¹²⁰ Katharine Kuh, *The artist's voice: talks with seventeen modern artists*, New York: Harper and Row, 1962; Cindy Nemser, *Art talk: Conversations with 15 women artists*, New York: HarperCollins, 1975; and Alexander Alberro, ed., *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelau, Smithson, and Weiner by Patricia Norvell*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

¹²¹ Patricia Norvell, 'Preface' in Alberro, *Recording Conceptual Art*, xiv.

¹²² Lauren Cross, 'Artist interviews and revisionist art history: women of African descent, critical practice and methods of rewriting dominant narratives', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020.

¹²³ Victoria Horne, "'Our project is not to add to art history as we know it, but to change it.'" The establishment of the Association of Art Historians and the emergence of feminist interventions, 1974–1990', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 18, June 2018.

collectives and consciousness-raising groups were crucial in this period in order to keep the debate about the professionalisation of art as open and as critical as possible.

As Horne and Amy Tobin have noted, one issue that remains unresolved within the debate of art historiography today is how, besides the academic and institutional legitimisation of feminism as an accepted methodology, it can also be embraced as a field of knowledge per se. Questions of terminology, narrative and methodology recur frequently in the literature, beginning with dissatisfaction with the term 'feminist art history'. In order to subvert or widen the canon of art history a radical transformation of its own structures and institutions needs to occur. Horne and Tobin suggest that a reflection on how to write 'feminist art history' is something that needs to be examined in depth, above all in relation to past experiences of consciousness-raising, and the praxis of co-authoring and co-writing texts. Collective knowledge production that come from a rich history of feminist collectives in the UK is one possible model. This, they suggest, is not simply an alternative to mainstream organisations but it needs to be understood as a 'complex intersecting instantiation of (feminist) form and content'.¹²⁴

One of the most debated examples of the use of artists' interviews in the context of feminist art historiography is the book *Autoritratto* (self-portrait) by Italian art critic and feminist Carla Lonzi (1931–82).¹²⁵ Published in 1969, the book consists in a free montage of conversations with fourteen artists.¹²⁶ Arranged as an imaginary 'convivio' (gathering) – as art historian Laura Iamurri suggests – Lonzi constructs a long (fictional) conversation in which each interlocutor is exposed to another through the reciprocal communication of the voices.

¹²⁴ Victoria Horne, Amy Tobin, 'An unfinished revolution in art historiography, or how to write a feminist art history', *feminist review* 107, no. 1, 2014, 75–83.

¹²⁵ The book was originally published in 1969 by De Donato. *Autoritratto* did not have the impact Lonzi was hoping for, at least in the 1970s. A review by Paolo Fossati on *NAC* (15 December 1969) critiques *Autoritratto* as 'too emotionally easy' in its 'autobiographical visceralism' (see Laura Iamurri, *Un margine che sfugge: Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955–1970*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 211). However, an appraisal of her work, since the re-publication of the book in 2010 by the publishing house et. al edited by Laura Iamurri, has ascribed to *Autoritratto* a significant place in Italian art historiography. See in particular the studies: L. Iamurri, 'Intorno a *Autoritratto*: fonti, ipotesi, riflessioni', in Lara Conte, Vinzia Fiorino, Vanessa Martini, ed., *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità*, Pisa: ETS, 2011, 67–86; 2016; Francesco Ventrella, 'Carla Lonzi's Artwriting and the Resonance of Separatism', in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21: 4, 2014, 83–100; Teresa Kittler, *Living art and the art of living: remaking home in Italy in the 1960s*, PhD, London: University College London, 2014; Giovanna Zapperi, 'Challenging feminist art history: Carla Lonzi's divergent paths', in Vicky Horne and Lara Perry, eds, *Feminism and Art History Now*, Bristol: Intellect, 2016. See also the translations: Carla Lonzi, *Autoportrait*, ed. Giovanna Zapperi, French translation, Paris-Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2012; Carla Lonzi, *Selbstbildnis: zur Situation der italienischen Kunst um 1967*, ed. Dieter Schwarz, German translation, Gachnang & Springer, 2000.

¹²⁶ The interviews were originally recorded by Lonzi between 1965 and 1969 and subsequently transcribed for the book. The artists included are Carla Accardi, Getulio Alviani, Enrico Castellani, Pietro Consagra, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Nigro, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Mimmo Rotella, Salvatore Scarpitta, Giulio Turcato, Cy Twombly.

The key characteristic of *Autoritratto* lies in the inscription of the voice into text, a process that Lonzi describes as a passage ‘from sounds to punctuation, to a script, to finding a page which is not a page which is already written’.¹²⁷ It is from the ‘condensation of sound into sign’, through the passage from recorded sound to the inscription onto the written page, that a new form of writing seems to emerge. Here, particular attention has been given to the vocal quality of words and utterances, a palette of sound that includes phatic expressions such as laughter, exclamations, ums and ahs. But as Lonzi underlines in the preface the ‘registration technique in itself is not enough to produce a transformation in the critic’. For Lonzi the ‘truly critical act is the one which is part of the artistic creation. The artist is naturally critical, implicitly critical for his/her own creative structure’.¹²⁸ As she boldly declares in the preface, the scope of the book was not to promote a ‘fetishism of the artist’ but rather to deny the role and the power of the critic as the manifestation of a ‘repressive control over art and the artists’.¹²⁹ While the dialogic form adopted in the book has a long tradition in literature and philosophical discourse (thinking of Plato), Lonzi’s polyvocal conversation exploits the immediacy of colloquial language and the use of the montage to create a work of fiction that powerfully unmasks the way in which the relationship between artist and critic is established, and how this could eventually be subverted on the written page. In doing so, *Autoritratto* disrupts the traditional canon of art history, especially the glorification of the myth of the artist promoted by commentators such as Vasari. *Autoritratto* can be read in this sense as the emancipation of art writing as critical practice, in which the emphasis is placed on conversations as the core of human communication but also as Lonzi underlines as ‘a possibility of an encounter’.¹³⁰ The written orchestration of the artists’ voices prompts the reader to engage with an acoustic dialogue in which ‘logos is oriented toward resonance, rather than towards understanding’, as Cavarero would say. To use her metaphor, *Autoritratto* can be read and heard as ‘a song for more than one voice ... whose melodic principle is the reciprocal distinction of the unmistakable timbre of each’.¹³¹ One of the key characteristics of voice, Cavarero explains, is not speaking in order to hear the self. Voice is deeply relational and bound up with the Other. Speaking means, ‘to

¹²⁷ ‘Poter passare da dei suoni a una pagina, a uno scritto, trovare una pagina che non sia una pagina scritta’, Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, Milano: et. al. Edizioni, with a preface by Laura Iamurri, 29. Translation by Lucia Farinati.

¹²⁸ ‘L’atto critico completo e verificabile è quello che fa parte della creazione artistica’... l’artista è naturalmente critico, implicitamente critico, proprio per la sua struttura creativa.’ Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, 4. Translation by Lucia Farinati.

¹²⁹ ‘Questo libro non intende proporre un feticismo dell’artista, ma richiamarlo in un altro rapporto con la società, negando il ruolo, e perciò il potere, del critico in quanto controllo repressivo sull’arte e gli artisti.’ Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, 4. Translation by Lucia Farinati.

¹³⁰ ‘This book was born from the collection and editing of conversations made with some artists. But the conversations were not born as materials for a book: they respond less to the need to understand than to the need to entertain each other in a communicative and humanly satisfying way. At some point the artwork was felt by me as a possibility of an encounter, as an invitation addressed by the artists directly to each of us.’ Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, 3. Translation by Lucia Farinati.

¹³¹ Cavarero, *For more than one voice*, 201.

communicate oneself to others in the plurality of voices'.¹³² And by stressing 'plurality', instead of 'pluralism', she means 'human plurality as the paradoxical plurality of unique beings'.¹³³ She writes:

In the voice – which is always the voice of someone, essentially destined to speech, and which resonates according to the musical and relational law of the echo – it is not Woman who makes herself heard; rather it is the embodied uniqueness of the speaker and his or her convocation of another voice. The antipatriarchal valence of the vocalic already lies in this simple recognition, which demands that the political essence of speech is rooted in the corporeal uniqueness of the speakers and in their reciprocal invocation.¹³⁴

The epistemological and ontological shift proposed by Cavarero by moving from speech to voice, as well as from authenticity to uniqueness (voice as the cipher of embodied uniqueness), opens the possibility to reassess the parameters for which issues of gender and identity have been hotly discussed between feminists since the 1960s. This is particularly vital for understanding the legacy of feminist political practices, in particular consciousness-raising, in terms of dialogic relational practices.¹³⁵ The intersection between the practice of consciousness-raising with the organisation of feminist reading groups, writing workshops, libraries and archives and exhibition spaces for women artists has been very important for re-articulating the canon of art history through a feminist perspective. While the history of these collectives is partly documented,¹³⁶ what seems less explored in terms of feminist art historiography is precisely how the practice of recording conversations between women artists, critics and art historians has been informed by feminist dialogic political practices and vice-versa.¹³⁷ Alongside the example of Lonzi's work and her involvement in co-writing and publishing the texts of the collective Rivolta

¹³² Cavarero, *For more than one voice*, 13.

¹³³ Cavarero borrows the notion of plurality from Arendt. See Hannah Arendt, 'Action', in *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago, Press, 1958, 176.

¹³⁴ Cavarero, *For more than one voice*, 207–208.

¹³⁵ For a reflection on the practice of consciousness-raising as a dialogic practice and its legacy in contemporary listening practices, see Lucia Farinati, Claudia Firth, *The Force of Listening*, Errant Bodies, 2017.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–85*, London: Pandora, 1987.

¹³⁷ Various feminist reading groups and collaborative art projects have been exploring the process of performative reading and re-enactment from archival material. See, for example, the project facilitated by artist Angela Marzullo, *Living (in) the archives of radical feminism*, focused on the transcription of the conversations recorded during the meetings of Rivolta Femminile (1971–72), the project by artist Alex Martinis Roe, *To Becoming Two* (2014–17), and the establishment of the Women's Audio Archive by artist Marysia Lewandowska (1985–90). www.marysialewandowska.com/waa/inventory.html. See also the British Library's oral history project dedicated to feminism, *Sisterhood and after*.

<https://www.bl.uk/sisterhood/about-the-project>.

Femminile,¹³⁸ this seems an important subject for re-thinking the parameter of art history as co-constructed, situated knowledge.

Performativity and archives

Since 1998 Furlong has created a new body of sound works by re-visiting some of the artists' interviews published in *Audio Arts* in the context of new spatial exhibition settings.¹³⁹ Furlong's activation of his own archive is not, however, an isolated practice. Many other contemporary artists have developed the archive as creative practice or use archival material for the creation of new work.¹⁴⁰ The work *In Two Minds* (1978, 1976–2006) by artist Kevin Atherton, discussed by Holdsworth in this issue, is a good example of how the after-life of an interview is not simply that of becoming an oral document in the archive, but material for the construction of new performative works.

In the past decade a re-examination of the very concepts of 'performativity' and 'affect' have resulted in key terms for rethinking the function and meaning of the archive.¹⁴¹ The term 'performativity' was coined in 1955 by British philosopher J. L. Austin.¹⁴² In his book *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin argues that words are not purely reflective linguistic acts, they do not simply reflect a world but speech actually has the power to make a world. In brief: 'words do something in the world ... the promises, assertions, bets, threats and thanks that we offer one another are not linguistic descriptions of non-linguistic actions – they are actions in themselves, actions of a distinctively linguistic kind'.¹⁴³

These statements constitute the very premises of the speech act theory inaugurated by Austin in the late 1950s, a theory which was subsequently

¹³⁸ In the late 1960s Lonzi resigned from her profession of art critic to establish with artist Carla Accardi and writer Elvira Banotti the feminist collective Rivolta Femminile. The collective combined the practice of 'autocoscienza' (consciousness-raising) with the publishing of manifestos and collective texts through the establishment of the publishing house Scritti di Rivolta Femminile (1970–74). A collection of texts both authored by Rivolta Femminile and Lonzi, including *Let's Spit on Hegel* (Sputiamo su Hegel 1970), was published by Rivolta in 1974 and since then translated into Spanish, German and English. See Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti*, with a preface by Maria Luisa Boccia, Milano: et. al., 2010.

¹³⁹ The first work to inaugurate this practice is *Conversation Piece*, a constructed conversation between Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol. See Lucia Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, 125.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Sue Breakell, 'Archival Practices and the Practice of Archives in the Visual Arts', *Archives and Records*, 36: 1, 2015, 15; Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, vol. 110, 2004, 3–22.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, Bristol: Intellect, 2012; Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, eds, *Performance Archives/Archives of Performance*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2013; Giulia Palladini and Marco Pustianaz, eds, *Lexicon for an Affective Archive*, Bristol: Intellect, 2017.

¹⁴² J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

¹⁴³ Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2.

developed in the work of John Searle and later revised by Jacques Derrida.¹⁴⁴ In more recent years the term has largely been discussed in the field of performance and gender studies following the work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁴⁵ Although the notion of performativity is today widely applied in the context of art, especially to live art and performance art, this does not necessarily designate a live event or correspond to the act of performing in front of an audience. Equally, performativity is not anchored to a specific medium, nor has it been considered as a medium per se, distinguished for example from painting and sculpture. In brief, 'performativity' does not refer to what an artwork is made of (e.g. a body action), nor to a specific artistic trend or movement (e.g. Happenings).¹⁴⁶ Certain objects such as a photograph of a performance can also be classified 'performative' in the way they capture or manipulate an event. As scholar Philip Auslander has cogently addressed in his essay 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such.¹⁴⁷

Since the work of Butler and Kosofsky Sedgwick the contribution of feminist thought to revisiting the notion of performativity in relation to issues of gender, embodiment and affect has also found fertile terrain in the fields of art history and archive studies. The reflections of Amelia Jones on performativity and critical writing, the notion of the 'virtual feminist museum' by Griselda Pollock, alongside Maria Tamboukou's reflection on 'feeling narrative in the archive' and Judit Vidiella's 'embodied archives as contact zones' constitute a few examples of feminist methodologies involving the archive.¹⁴⁸ In deconstructing the patriarchal notion of the archive as 'domiciliation'¹⁴⁹ in contrast to the ephemerality of performance, Rebecca Schneider's seminal essay 'Performance Remains' seems particularly helpful for rethinking the relationships between document and archive.¹⁵⁰ In this essay she discusses the notion of disappearance in Western culture and its

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 1969; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 1978.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1999; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ See the extensive research project on performance and performativity led by Tate. Here the term performativity has been employed beyond the strict terrain of performance art and the act of performing the body. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/performance-and-performativity> and <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/performance-art/introduction-performance-art>

¹⁴⁷ Philip Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28: 3, 2006, 1–10.

¹⁴⁸ Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds, *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, London, New York: Routledge, 1999; Griselda Pollock, *Virtual Feminist Museum. Time, space and archive*, London, New York: Routledge, 2007; Judit Vidiella, 'Archivos encarnados como zonas de contacto' (*Embodied archives as contact zones*), *Efímera Revista*, 5: 6, 2015, 16–23; Maria Tamboukou, 'Feeling Narrative in the Archive: The Question of Serendipity', *Qualitative Research*, 16: 2, 2016, 151–66.

¹⁴⁹ The term refers to the meaning of the word archive from the Greek *arkheion*, initially a house, a domicile of the *archons*.

¹⁵⁰ Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', *Performance Research*, 6: 2, 2001, 100–8.

relationship with the idea of remains. Performance, as understood predominantly in performance studies and art history, is too often equated with disappearance and 'thus reiterates performance as necessarily a matter of loss, even annihilation'.¹⁵¹ In contrast to this, she observes, the archive logic in modernity came to value the document over event, especially in the context of colonial archives. Against this logic she proposes to rethink the notion of the 'remains', not simply as an isolated document, an object, a bone. Schneider argues that history is not limited to the imperial domain of the document (the bones). The body becomes for Schneider a kind of archive that hosts a collective memory.¹⁵² Through 'body-to-body transmission', or in other words, through the 'idea that flesh memory might remain', the conventional notion of the archive can be radically challenged.¹⁵³

The notion of performativity in this context translates into an inter-subjective exploration of the materiality of the archive through a body interface: acts of showing, telling and listening. Examples of performative embodied strategies might include here storytelling, oral transmissions and live acting, rituals and ethno-texts, embodied repertoires, and verbal strategies such as the anecdotal, gossip, parody or ekphrasis.

A concrete example of the application of performative/embodied strategies is the exhibition *Group Show* curated in 2012 by the Performance Re-enactment Society at the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol (UK). Paul Clark, one of the participant artists, describes it as 'an intangible exhibition, displayed through performance, with all four galleries empty of objects and the walls left white'.¹⁵⁴ For this exhibition Clark decided to work with the slide collection and paper records from Arnolfini archive to recreate works of art in words, depicting them in figurative language. His performative intervention consisted in turning the pictures into words and the written texts into oral history accounts disseminated face-to-face. In doing so he collaborated with a number of stewards who had invigilated Arnolfini's exhibitions in the past and were keen to draw from their own memories and experiences in performing the works. As Clarke notes, 'their acts of speaking the art were performative, making these absent works appear, remade differently as images in each listener's imagination'.¹⁵⁵ This exercise in ekphrasis is one of the many examples of what might be termed a 'performative affective archive':

This is an archive able to produce relations and stories alongside historical documents. It is an archive which does not simply provide the primary sources for unpacking and writing the multi-layered history of [a specific collection] but it is equally a dialogic space for enhancing its archival

¹⁵¹ Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', in Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, Bristol: Intellect, 2012, 139.

¹⁵² Schneider, 'Performance Remains', 2012, 142.

¹⁵³ Schneider, 'Performance Remains', 2012, 146.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Clark, *Steward*, in Giulia Palladini and Marco Pustianaz, eds, *Lexicon for an Affective Archive*, Bristol: Intellect, 2017, 105. See also Paul Clark, *Performing the Archive: The Future of the Past*, in Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, eds, *Performance Archives/Archives of Performance*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2013, 363–385.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Clark, *Steward*, 106–7.

material and opening up new possibilities for its dissemination. In other words: an active archive.¹⁵⁶

How are these new approaches in the archive relevant for the study and the historiography of the artist interview? In its hybrid nature of being oral/aural source, written transcript, fictional dialogue, artwork, the artist interview calls attention to the way in which is treated as special document in the archive. Its dialogic intrinsic form requires it to be recognised as a special kind of speech event: a linguistic event as well as body event. The material history of the artist interview, as argued in this article, encompasses how it was recorded and transcribed but also co-constructed and re-enacted.

In the context of the AAH 2019 conference a workshop dedicated to the specific issue of editing and transcription as key processes for the dissemination and use of recorded artists' interviews was organised (by Farinati and Thatcher) as an integral part of 'The Artist Interview' session. The workshop was structured around four different types of transcription including true verbatim transcript (word-for-word), edited transcript (fully or lightly edited), affective verbatim/transcript, and embodied transcript. While the first two methods focused on the linguistic component of the interview, for the affective and embodied transcripts participants were asked to pay attention to the vocal and affective aspects of speech. The affective transcript focused on the grain of the voice, including accent, intonation, tone pitch, modulation and rhythm, finding a way to notate the mood embodied in the speech (such as enthusiasm, passion, hesitation, boredom, disappointment, cynicism, irritability and discomfort). For the embodied transcript participants were asked to avoid any form of written transcription, but rather invited to bodily memorise the words and find a way to re-perform or re-enact them without the aid of a script.

This experiment helped participants, mostly art historians, to compare the different methods of transcription as well as to reflect on how the process of reproducing an artist interview is not an impartial object business. While Portelli suggests that 'interpretation begins at the moment of collection' of a narrative, the argument here is that interpretation also continues in the process of its reproduction and dissemination. The challenges introduced by a performative, affective approach compared to traditional methodologies is that the theatrical, evocative, mediated, and interactive qualities of the performative are not anchored to a specific time/space but rather stress the interrelation between bodies and subjects in space and time.

According to Amelia Jones the new performative strategies of *de-manifesting* and *un-framing* art have been effective and consistent in 'de-containing' art from modernist formalism. Jones argues for the potential for performance, and by extension of those art practices that rely on the manifestation of 'unpredictable temporalities', to de-construct the aesthetic ideology of modernism: 'the fully contained and framed' of the artwork theorised by the art critic and art historian Michael Fried. On the other hand, performance and performativity seem to ask the writer, the scholar, the art historian to pay attention to the way history is written

¹⁵⁶ Lucia Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, 9.

and contextualised. Jones writes: 'the point is to activate and *become activated* by the traces of past performative works, all the while retaining an awareness of how these processes of activation are occurring'.¹⁵⁷ The embodied reception (or the bodily strategies) are there to remind the art historian, the art critic, as well as the artist and the activist where and how they position and frame themselves into the picture.

Conclusion: a partial truth

In this issue the parameters within which the historiography of the artist interview might be critically contextualised have been explored. How the theoretical understanding of the artist interview as an 'oral document' might shift to that of a 'speech event' has also been analysed. This change in perspective from 'document' to 'event' has been presented by following three main directions: the interview as a method for writing art history based on a biographical approach; the interview as a dialogic form of 'art writing' and/or critical practice; finally the interview as a methodology for self-reflective performative and critical inquiry. One leitmotif in the analysis of these three different contexts has been the topic of authenticity: the authenticity of the artist's voice as well as of the interview itself as original artefact and/or media object.

The notion of authenticity in art history always returns to the problem of how to define the originality of an artwork or an idea, and how those works and ideas have been critically assessed by designated art experts, be that the professional figure of the connoisseur in the sixteenth and seventeenth century or that of the modern art historian, art critic and curator. To shift the focus of art historiography from the artistic value of the artwork, to that of the artist's voice, means to unpack the relationship between authenticity and the artist's intention.¹⁵⁸

In spite of the close relationship to performance and the self-conscious presentation of self, the interview retains a seductive promise to reveal secrets – as Wainwright's months-long quest to uncover the 'psychological underpinnings' of Morten Viskum attests.¹⁵⁹ The intimacy of the form has been likened to 'eavesdropping':¹⁶⁰ we hope to find out something about the artist's character that we didn't already know. The American journalist Janet Malcolm wrote that in most interviews 'both subject and interviewer give more than is necessary. They are always being seduced and distracted by the encounter's outward resemblance to an

¹⁵⁷ Amelia Jones, 'Unpredictable Temporalities: The Body and Performance in (Art) History', in *Performance Archives/Archives of Performance*, 2013, 68.

¹⁵⁸ In her consideration of the phenomenon of the 'literary last interview', Anneleen Masschelein asserts that to qualify as a 'literalised' interview – that is, belonging to the literary genre – an interview 'must have literary qualities'. Similarly, one might create a subgenre of artist interviews that have artistic qualities. See Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 34.

¹⁵⁹ Wainwright, 'Small lies?', 3.

¹⁶⁰ Blazwick, 'The Anatomy of the Interview', 25.

ordinary friendly meeting.¹⁶¹ Rebecca Roach observes that interviews ‘encourage us to read them instrumentally’, that is, to extract information out of them, although the nature of that information might range from gossip to trade secrets.¹⁶² Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten propose that interviews are ‘typically based on a minimal truth claim that the discourse is empirically correct and morally honest’, creating the effect of a ‘pact of authenticity’.¹⁶³ In visual art, Rosalind Krauss’s notion of indexicality – the idea of a physical trace of a subject in an artwork, particularly obvious in photography¹⁶⁴ – might be considered in relation to the interview. Even if a transcribed interview is not precisely mimetic (that is, a verbatim, word-for-word transcription), might its power nonetheless come from retaining some kind of indexical relationship to its subjects via the inscription process? And might the power also come from Walter Benjamin’s enduring notion of aura in the visual arts; the sense that while the published version of the interview might be reproduceable, and the content heavily edited, at its heart the interview is supposedly based on an unreproducible event, an encounter between living people? (Although, of course, that interview might well be a collage of several such events, and the encounter might take place over the phone or internet rather than in person.)

Robert Storr, who recently published his own collection of *Interviews on Art*, proposes the idea of the artist’s word as a kind of partial truth: ‘Of course what an artist says about his/her work is not the first word, is not the last word. It is a word. A singularly well-informed word but one of many. It doesn’t control interpretations, but it does give you useful information as you make your own interpretation of the work.’¹⁶⁵

Michael Diers uses Maurice Blanchot’s term ‘infinite conversation’ (from the title of his 1969 book *L’entretien infini*) to describe Hans Ulrich Obrist’s ongoing interview project with contemporary arts practitioners and thinkers. Diers links the idea of ‘infinite conversation’ to the current ‘society of conversation that practically worships any form of public utterance’.¹⁶⁶ But he also gives it a historical context, noting that infinite conversation ‘refers to the concept of German romanticism that a conversation will never reach an end, for it always only approximate (sic) its subject and therefore always requires continuation’.¹⁶⁷ This notion of interviews not representing the artist’s definitive word is important, as it leaves space for artists to develop, change and even contradict their thoughts on their work and its contexts over time, and reminds us not to consider interviews in isolation.

¹⁶¹ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, London: Granta Books, 2020.

¹⁶² Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 8.

¹⁶³ Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, ‘The Literary Interview’, 37.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object.’ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America’, *October*, vol. 3, Spring 1977, 75.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Storr, *Interviews on Art*, London: Heni Publishing, 2017, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Diers, ‘Infinite Conversation’, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Diers, ‘Infinite Conversation’, 25.

The American writer Siri Hustvedt makes a similar point about partial truth and interviews in her essay 'A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women' (regarding the exhibition, *Women*, of works by Picasso, Max Beckmann and Willem de Kooning):

What artists say about their own work is compelling because it tells us something about what they believe they are doing. Their words speak to an orientation or an idea, but these orientations and ideas are never complete. Artists (of all kinds) are only partly aware of what they do.¹⁶⁸

Hustvedt here brings up the contentious subject of intention in relation to creativity.¹⁶⁹ In allowing for 'partial' awareness of intention, Hustvedt is not being vague or just hedging her bets. She takes the question of intention seriously, considering the 'universally maligned' question 'where do you get your ideas?'.¹⁷⁰ Hustvedt draws on neuroscience to describe the close link between imagination and memory (while also acknowledging that association's origins in Greek philosophy), arguing that, while 'the act of fiction cannot be reduced to a writer's autobiography', nonetheless 'the stories must also come from somewhere ... A writer's imagination is not impersonal, and it is necessarily connected to his or her memory.'¹⁷¹ Hustvedt concludes that creative material 'is not produced by an *essential*, fixed self', nor does it come from some elusive quality of "genius".¹⁷² For her, rather, it is 'the result of autobiography in the loosest sense'; the 'accumulation of years of reading and thinking and living and feeling'.¹⁷³

In his book on paratexts, Gérard Genette describes the idea of 'autocommentary' by an author as 'relatively modern', claiming that the idea of an author revealing information about their craft was considered improper and taboo in the classical period.¹⁷⁴ This reticence likewise characterised the eighteenth and

¹⁶⁸ Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, London: Sceptre, 2017, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Modernist criticism of both literature and art rejected intention. New Criticism focused on the literary work as an object in isolation, while formalism in the arts likewise rejected biography and socio-political context. In the postmodern period, socio-political context slipped back in regarding visual art. Leo Steinberg's *Other Criteria* (1972) is a significant text here, rejecting the limitations of formalism – but biography continued (and continues) to be problematic. As Steinberg himself noted: 'The attempts to cope with more private or more freely metaphorical and evasive aspects of art become professionally suspect. They tend to be left to art writers, popularizers, critics, psychologists – that is, to men who have neither the habits nor the responsibilities of the historian's hard-won methodology, so that their contributions to the literature of art serve to confirm the discredit of the whole enterprise.' See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 314.

¹⁷⁰ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men*, 382.

¹⁷¹ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men*, 384.

¹⁷² Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men*, 390–1.

¹⁷³ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men*, 391.

¹⁷⁴ Genette, *Paratexts*, 367.

nineteenth centuries,¹⁷⁵ and conveniently allowed the Romantic writers¹⁷⁶ to 'give the impression that their inspiration had been of a quasi-miraculous spontaneity'.¹⁷⁷ If the modern period is 'unquestionably more open to such confidences', it is nonetheless 'subject in actual fact to a third taboo based on the presumption of noncompetence, prohibiting authorial interpretation', such that the writer might claim: 'I am not better (and am perhaps worse) qualified than someone else to say what my work means and why I wrote it; however I am better equipped than anyone else to say *how* I write it, in what conditions, using what kind of process, indeed employing what methods.'¹⁷⁸

In 1946, 'The Intentional Fallacy', written by two prominent figures of New Criticism, W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, criticised the search for intention in poetry. They argued that the poem belongs neither to the author or the critics but rather the public. The poem, they proposed, 'is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge'.¹⁷⁹ Masschelein et al explicitly acknowledged this enduring critique of intention in the 'Literary Interview', writing that '[a]s sources of information, interviews derive (part of) their credibility from the lingering and renewed belief – against the intentional fallacy – that authors can offer unique insights into their work'.¹⁸⁰

The idea of being able to gain access to artists' lives – that some kind of special status should be conferred upon these artists' insights – through viewing their work or listening to them talk was likewise scorned by Hal Foster in his *Art in America* article 'The Expressive Fallacy' (1983). For Foster, authentic expression is an ideological construct; the 'crisis of the individual versus society' is a 'cliché' that masks the real crisis of the individual as 'now largely an instrumental category: the entrepreneur of early capitalism returned, in late capitalism, as a consumer of "individuality" ...'.¹⁸¹ He concludes that 'the desperate attempt in neoexpressionism' – as exemplified by the work of Julian Schnabel or Anselm Kiefer – 'to reinvest art and artist with aura and authenticity, transparent in its economic motives and political agenda, attests only to the historical decay of such qualities'.¹⁸²

Instead of asking to what degree an interview is a truthful or authentic reflection of an artist's character, then, would it not be more productive to ask what value the interlocutors place on truth and authenticity in the interview? Do they subvert expectations of authenticity, as Reva Wolf, among many, has argued that Warhol did? In her article "'A heuristic event": reconsidering the problem of the

¹⁷⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and François-René de Chateaubriand are the exceptions in this period, according to Genette.

¹⁷⁶ Here, Genette offers the 'significant' exception of Edgar Allan Poe, who in 1845 wrote 'The Philosophy of Composition', after the success of *The Raven*.

¹⁷⁷ Genette, *Paratexts*, 367.

¹⁷⁸ Genette, *Paratexts*, 367.

¹⁷⁹ W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy', *The Swanee Review*, 54: 3, July–September 1946, 470.

¹⁸⁰ Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview', 3.

¹⁸¹ Hal Foster, 'The Expressive Fallacy' in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, New York: The New Press, 1985, 75.

¹⁸² Foster, 'The Expressive Fallacy', 75.

Johnsian conversation' – published in this journal,¹⁸³ Amy K. Hamlin analyses how Jasper Johns's eccentric interview style (what has been termed in the art world the 'Johnsian conversation') has been studied in term of a 'heuristic event' (critic Leo Steinberg's term for an inquiring method that sends readers back to the artwork itself in the case of discrepancies in its critical reception). Hamlin argues that the act of looking for discrepancies between one interview and another could also be seen as a 'heuristic event itself' and liberate the viewer-cum-interpreter from having to find closure in the work's interpretation. As Johns states in an interview with Terry Winters: 'meaning is difficult to control, and I think that much art allows us to find or invent meaning of our own'.¹⁸⁴

The problem of authenticity was surely one of the major concerns of Lonzi in writing *Autoritratto*. In her diary Lonzi states that *Autoritratto* was 'a recognition of the authenticity of the artists', yet that authentic artistic moment was something that she herself felt separated from: 'I needed to find out who I was after accepting something that I was not aware of.'¹⁸⁵ While *Autoritratto* still functions as a primary source of information about the artists' lives and works, Lonzi's objective was not to create a document of oral history in which the authorial voice of the art critic gradually disappears to give voice to the artists. While the use of the tape recorder is considered by oral historians a tool to capture the authenticity of the artist's voice, for Lonzi it was not so much 'a medium to reproduce the authenticity of reality, but as a means to write authentically. Recording drastically changes the mode in which Lonzi (the art critic) made herself present to the artists.'¹⁸⁶ The legacy of Lonzi's *Autoritratto* is that of questioning and unmasking the very role and authenticity of the critic, and less, perhaps, about being preoccupied with the artist's truth.

Researching the artist interview goes to the heart of artists' involvement in writing art history: the extent to which their words should be valued and trusted. Is there greater anxiety over artists' trustworthiness than over other art mediators: historians, critics and curators, say? And if so, why? Tracking the biography of an interview, and rendering the process of the interview more transparent, can help explain the reasons behind those anxieties. Furthermore, elaborating on the many ways in which artists have used interviews creatively, particularly since the 1960s – employing them not just as a tool or method, but as a methodology – reminds us of the inherently performative aspects of the interview.

¹⁸³ Amy K. Hamlin "'A heuristic event": reconsidering the problem of the Johnsian conversation', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 7, December 2012.

¹⁸⁴ 'Jasper Johns: In the Studio, A Conversation with Terry Winters', in *Jasper Johns: New Sculpture and Works on Paper*, 151.

¹⁸⁵ 'Dovevo trovare chi ero dopo aver accettato di essere qualcosa che non sapevo', Carla Lonzi, *Taci Anzi Parla. A Diary of a Feminist (1972–1977)*, et. al. Edizioni, 2010, 30. Translation Lucia Farinati.

¹⁸⁶ See Francesco Ventrella, 'Carla Lonzi e la disfatta della critica d'arte: registrazione, scrittura e risonanza', in *Studi Culturali*, 12: 1, April 2015, 89. Farinati would like to thank Ventrella for the long exchange on Lonzi's work during her project 'Come una possibilità di incontro. A choral reading of Carla Lonzi's *Autoritratto*', organised in collaboration with Elena Biserna and Rita Correddu, Radio Città Fujiko, Museum of Modern Art (MAMBO) Bologna, 2013–14.

For many artists whose voices have been forgotten or sidelined, the question of trustworthiness in interviews may be less relevant than simply taking up the opportunity to be heard. As Lauren Cross has shown, taking this opportunity for one's voice to be heard and recognised, as opposed to being expected to represent a generalised category (African American woman artist, say), is of vital personal and political significance.

Interviews can be especially important in re-evaluating the work of dead artists. The Museum of Modern Art, New York's (MoMA) \$450million revamp last year provided an opportunity for a radical rehang, which included the prominent display of a recently purchased video installation (*Dumping Core*, 1984) by the late American multimedia artist Gretchen Bender (1951–2004), whose work had been neglected since her death. Alongside catalogue information, Bender's artist page on the MoMA website includes only one external text: an interview with Bender conducted by her peer (and now unquestionably more famous artist) Cindy Sherman for *BOMB* magazine in 1987.¹⁸⁷ This *BOMB* interview is also quoted in an article for Tate gallery's website, 'Who was Gretchen Bender?', on the occasion of Bender's solo exhibition at Tate Liverpool in 2015 – again, the only bibliographic reference at the time of writing.¹⁸⁸ In the interview, Bender discusses her work in relation to new technology, mass media, the art market and art criticism. One of her comments seems, reading it today, to infer a gendered motive for the institutional neglect of her work: 'Why don't we open another can of worms, like wouldn't it be nice if it were the 22nd century and women artists were as important as men artists.'¹⁸⁹ In common with many other dead women artists, Bender's interview is vital proof that her work and opinions were valued and sought-after during her lifetime – and that any subsequent 'rediscovery' is not gratuitous but rather serves to restore her rightful place within the artistic canon. Interviews may be a partial truth, but they are nonetheless a truth.

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¹⁸⁷ 'Gretchen Bender by Cindy Sherman', *BOMB*, issue 18, January 1987. See <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/gretchen-bender/>

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/gretchen-bender-19998/who-was-gretchen-bender>

¹⁸⁹ 'Gretchen Bender by Cindy Sherman', *BOMB*.



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