DE GRUYTER

INSPECTING THE INTERVIEW

A COMPANION

Edited by Carsten Junker

DISKURSMUSTER DISCOURSE PATTERNS

Inspecting the Interview

Diskursmuster
Discourse Patterns

Edited by
Beatrix Busse and Ingo H. Warnke

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Carsten Junker
The Interview as Genre: Notes on Form, Praxeology, and Epistemology —— IX

Staging Culture and the Interview as Form

Jeffrey J. Williams
The Literary Interview and the Critical Interview: History, Uses, and Lessons —— 3

Rebecca Roach
Little Questions: The Interview and Literary Studies —— 23

Galia Yanoshevsky
Performing the Literary Interview: Body and Decorum —— 39

Guido Mattia Gallerani
The Imagined Interview: A Literary Genre —— 61

Mario Aquilina, Nicole B. Wallack, Bob Cowser Jr.
Essayistic Interviews: The Interview as Collaborative Essayism —— 83

Whitney Arnold
The Secret Subject: Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, and the Interview as Genre —— 101

Creating Knowledge and the Interview as Praxis/Practice

Stefania Maffeis
The Interview as a Philosophical Method: Irritations, Functions, and Potentials —— 119

Kay Brauer and Rebekka Sendatzki
The Interview as an Assessment Method in Psychology — 137

Elisabeth Punzi
Research Interviews as Interaction and Therapeutic Possibility: A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach — 161

Tomasz Basiuk
Interviews as Life Writing? A Literary Scholar's Field Notes on Reciprocal Witnessing in an Oral History Project — 177

Christian Bär, Hagen Steinhauer, Jonas Trochemowitz, Ingo H. Warnke
Sounds of Democracy: The Interview as an Instrument of Heuristic Attention to Discursive Voices — 201

Miriam Akkermann
Tech-talk in Oral History: Tracing, Catching, and Capturing Information on Music Technology — 249

Notes on Contributors — 267

Index — 273

Introduction

Carsten Junker

The Interview as Genre: Notes on Form, Praxeology, and Epistemology

1 Theorizing the Interview as Genre

It is almost too much of a cliché to start the introduction of this companion to interview research by mobilizing the topos of ubiquity. Nonetheless, you might ask yourself: when did you last read, hear, watch, and analyze, or even conduct and participate in an interview? Most likely recently. We encounter interviews frequently. They seem to be everywhere in our "interview society" (Atkinson and Silverman 305). As products of contemporary media, interviews feature prominently in political, business, and sports journalism. They also give voice to personalities in culture sections of newspapers and magazines and to celebrities on television and in social media. Interviews play a crucial role in many areas of the highly mediated worlds we inhabit.

But interviews are not only "structured products (*opus operatum*)" (Bourdieu 140), they also serve as "structuring structure (*modus operandi*)" (140). With respect to the latter, the interview continues to serve as an essential means of collecting and generating research data, for instance, and as a significant frame for the production of knowledge in different disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities (see Punzi; Brauer and Sendatzki; Maffeis; Warnke et al., in this volume). Conducting interviews can serve cultural historiographers to reconstruct history (see Basiuk, in this volume) and archive historically situated performance practices (see Akkermann, in this volume). The "critical interview" (see Williams, in this volume) has become a privileged site to learn about cultural theorists' works, the "essayistic interview" (see Aquilina et al., in this volume) and the "literary interview" give us insights into how literary authors position themselves in the cultural sphere (see Roach; Yanoshevsky, in this volume), and the "imagined interview" has come to be considered a literary genre in its own right (see Gallerani, in this volume). I suggest subsuming these manifold uses and forms of the interview under the term of *genre* in a broad sense. Understood as a genre, the interview serves as a knowledge interface: it transforms personal experience into socially expected scripts, converts particular situations into generalizable settings, and translates contingency into linear orders, for instance, narratives. Considering the ubiquity and multiformity of the interview genre as a knowledge

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interface, the interview seems to respond to the demands of our highly mediatized world in particularly useful and versatile ways.

These demands are not only relevant in the present. The interview has a long history. From a Eurocentric historical perspective, practices of the interview—avant la lettre—have been traced as far back as population censuses in ancient Egypt and the dialogues of Socrates (see Masschelein et al., “Hybrid Genre” 6). The term “interview” itself arose in the early sixteenth century from the French term *entrevue*, from *s’entrevoir* (to see each other), and in its earliest uses referred to a ceremonial face-to-face meeting or conference between persons of the same rank such as sovereigns and nobles (see “interview, n., sense 1.a”). The visual aspects in the semantics of the term refer to a constitutive aspect of the interview which is of crucial importance when analyzing it: the looking relations between the participants of an interview, interviewer and interviewee. These relations can be marked by an unequal distribution of social power and discursive authority. Therefore, the interview seemed predestined for such powerful dynamics in later uses. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, for example, its practices included the formal questioning or interrogation of a person by the police or a formal meeting in which applicants for a paid position or for a course of study at an institution of higher learning were asked questions to assess their suitability (see “interview, n., sense 4.a”; “interview, n., sense 4.b”). When the interview refers to a meeting or conversation in which a journalist asks questions of a person of public interest for the purpose of publication or broadcasting (see “interview, n., sense 4.c”), the interview sets up a seemingly less hierarchical force field, but one in which its participants nevertheless negotiate the extent to which they are endowed with discursive authority. Power dynamics also unfold beyond the interview setting itself when the question arises of who takes control of editing the published version of an interactive encounter and benefits from its distribution and public availability.

Uses and manifestations of the form can be related directly to changing media landscapes in the past two centuries: “the interview is an American creation that coincides with the rise of the penny press (boulevard press) in the 1830s” (Masschelein et al., “Hybrid Genre” 6). While the modern interview “was originally a *journalistic* genre, born in the pages of the journal as a subgenre of investigative journalism” (Yanoshevsky, “On the Literariness” 182, emphasis in original), its functions and related power dynamics diversified when it crossed over from print media to radio in the 1920s and television a few decades later, all the way to the Internet today. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the media interview covered a spectrum of poles between documentation and supposed objectivity on one end and overtly subjective, literary forms of

interviewing that centered individuals (for instance, in the New Journalism starting in the 1960s) on the other end of the spectrum. In the latter cases, interviewers have made use of the form to leave their mark (see Masschelein et al., "Hybrid Genre" 7–8).

This brief overview gives an idea of the sheer variety of styles and methods of the interview, not to mention the various fields and domains in which it has been and continues to be of importance. When inspecting the interview, where does one begin to adequately map it, let alone theorize the broad range of its uses, purposes, and effects? The interview as genre includes all of its thinkable types, and yet, different disciplines assume respective prototypes of the form. This is the case, for example, when communication scholars Philip Bell and Theo van Leeuwen address media interviews and their functions: "What media interviews do [...] is give the public a perspective on the *social actors interviewed* and/or the field of their expertise or experience—a perspective from which to judge what they do and what they have to say" (22, emphasis in original). I may assume a different prototype of the genre of interview from my perspective as a literary and cultural studies scholar, and this can yet differ in relation to forms of the interview that are considered prototypical in the social sciences. What, then, do different prototypes of the interview look like in different fields? This volume invites such questions on grounds of the assumption that it is impossible, and arguably undesirable, to provide a comprehensive classification and categorization of the interview. Rather, what this volume seeks to highlight are specific examples of formalization as well as diverse functions of the interview in place and time. By engaging specific bodies of texts as well as singular instances related to clearly delimited contexts of use in a range of disciplines from the humanities and social sciences, this companion aims to make visible particular patterns of use. Without aiming to give exhaustive answers, the observation of these patterns can contribute to a better grasp of the interview as a practice in general.

2 Considering Form

A conceptualization of the interview as *genre* allows us to link questions of formalization, praxis/practice, and the production of knowledge. I foreground a state-of-the-art approach to genre here that rejects a normative focus on the classification of the formal features of genres in favor of an interest in the "manifest [...] and latent functions" (Merton 117) of genre. Such an approach can take its cue from a pragmatic perspective on genre as "social action" (see Miller; Freadman et al.). It can thus open up an attention to formal features, such as the dialogic

structure of the interview, to broader interests in the discursive and social impact a form can afford those who employ it in specific spatiotemporal and discursive contexts—not least in scenarios in which power is distributed unevenly. As John Frow has influentially pointed out, theorizing genre can foreground an exploration of how genres "create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility" (2). This, then, is an approach that relates questions of generic function to a wider interest in the ways in which knowledge, power, and the authorization of discursive positions are formalized. This understanding of genre finds resonance in conceptual reconfigurations of what Caroline Levine has termed "'politically minded' new formalisms" (12), which have generated recent work on social and political aspects of form. For instance, Ramzi Fawaz sees "the political aspect of forms [...] in their capacity to make public and circulate 'figures of the newly thinkable' that facilitate innovative thought and collective action" (378n47). While Levine argues for an expansive concept of form, broadening the meaning of the term to include questions concerning the organizing and ordering mechanisms of social arrangements, Fawaz makes the term "form" productive in its reference to "an everyday inventive practice of conceiving something differently or anew in the mind's eye" (378n47). By rejecting one-sided approaches to genre that constrain themselves to defining and classifying formal features, such current approaches have immensely invigorated and dynamized considerations of form.

Interview research gains much from striking a balance between a traditional grasp limited to a normative classification of the formal features of genre, and new formalist approaches to functions of form concerned with sociopolitical arrangements in a broad sense. The point is to conceptualize the genre of the interview by connecting questions of form with the social and discursive impact of generic practice. Masschelein et al. speak of "genericity": as they point out, referencing Jean-Michel Adam and Ute Heidmann, "it makes more sense to look for [...] 'effects of genericity' that appear in a dynamic process, on different levels of editing, production, and reception, than to try to define the genre as an essential category" ("Hybrid Genre" 18; see Adam and Heidemann 25). Such an approach to the interview enables an understanding of the ways that recurrent generic patterns give formal shape to and generate discourses, including assigning speakers different positions in discourse. Discourse here is understood not only as public debate powered by sociopolitical attitudes but more broadly in a Foucauldian vein as specialized, regulated speech that shapes what we can know. Considering various formal manifestations of the interview as genre thus also brings to the fore broader epistemological perspectives.

A general understanding of genre that connects the study of patterns of formalization with an account of their social, discursive, and disciplinary functions also provides an apt background for research on the genre of interview with respect to its uses as a method of knowledge production. Disciplinary differences are key here. Assuming that disciplines construct the objects they study in the first place, different fields create research about *and* through the interview, both as an object and as a means of study in ways that differ in outlook. The interview in literary studies and cultural historiography, for example, can and should be differentiated from approaches to the interview in other areas of research. Taking an interest in the formal aspects of an interview as part of a narrative text should be distinguished from, but also juxtaposed and compared with, an interest in the interview as journalistic text. And this is a different focus than one on the interview as a journalistic method, as a means of testifying in a public hearing or a court case, as a diagnostic tool in medicine, and as an instrument for collecting research data. Formal aspects relate to different conceptualizations of interview functions across diverging fields.

With respect to method and methodology, the social sciences in particular have generated ample scholarship that addresses the interview as an instrument with which to gather and interpret data. (Handbooks addressing the history, types, methods, and ethics of interviewing include Gubrium and Holstein; Fontana and Prokis; Gubrium et al.; Denzin and Lincoln). Rather than drawing disciplinary boundaries, however, it promises to be beneficial to take note of the various framings of the interview as an instrument across fields (see, e.g., Love). Work in social-science research alone is broad and highly diverse. We only need to consider quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as various types of interviewing techniques from structured to semi-structured to unstructured and informal types (see Fontana and Prokis 111), which have contributed fundamentally to a conceptualization of the interview as a form with respect to its methodical affordances. Crucial methodological questions that have been raised in the social sciences and in anthropology, pedagogy, media studies, and sociolinguistics, among others, can give impetus to adjacent areas of research in the humanities. Examples here include approaches in biographical research that address how participants in an interview co-generate data (see, e.g., Grenz), reflections in education theory that consider interviewing as a tool for developing critical literacy among students (see, e.g., Ohmann et al. 34), media-discourse-analytical approaches to the news interview (see Weizman) and the interview in political debate (see, e.g., Chilton; Blas Arroyo), reflections on the interview in ethnographic participant observation (see, e.g., Ahmed 9–12), as well as the sociolinguistic observer's paradox and its repercussions for an interview setting. To consider this

foundational position from the history of sociolinguistics: “the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation” (Labov 209). The observer’s paradox, for instance, prompts a consideration of the functions of the interview in the realm of the humanities more broadly. Its methodological and epistemological implications can also help to gain a better understanding of the interview as a literary and/or journalistic or hybrid form that formalizes dyadic communication and generates and authorizes knowledge in specific ways in cultural fields. Different disciplines raise comparable questions about the formalization of the relationship—the looking relations—between the participating parties, about who observes and who is being observed, about the extent to which interviewer and interviewee are endowed with or divested of discursive clout respectively, about the degree to which the former can make claims to objectivity, and so on. Scholars from different fields find dissimilar answers to similar questions, for instance to the question of how to transcribe spoken words: while linguists may decide to pay attention to and record an interviewee’s accent, tone, vocal noises, and pauses, among other aspects (see Du Bois et al.), psychologists may show no interest in such data. The overall point is that distinct fields may nonetheless share related sets of questions about formalization that drive their respective production of knowledge, even if they don’t share the same methods to answer those questions.

Diverging disciplinary practices can yield different results, but what they have in common is the epistemological assumption that acts of interviewing and transcribing perform the interview as a knowledge interface. This image of performance is intended to illustrate that the dynamics that take place in an interview cannot be grasped beyond their formalization. They are to be understood explicitly as a question of form. One crucial aspect introduced above concerns the formal framing of power (im)balances in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the more or less explicit “competition” that “takes place over the command of the interview (Yanoshevsky, “On the Literariness,” 208). John Rodden highlights this dynamic with respect to the literary interview, which he reads as “[p]ublic [p]erformance,” as a “serious art form” with “diverse patterns of literary performance” (402). Conceptualizing these interviews as performance stresses the formal aspects by which interviewees manifest their positions. This formal dimension becomes obvious in the tentative typology of interviewee personae Rodden develops: while those he classifies as “traditionalists *down*play their personalities,” those he types as “raconteurs *dis*play them [and] ‘take control’” (“The Literary Interview” 403). Other types in this typology, especially the “provocateur” (404), highlight that interviewees can deliberately attempt to project

an image not only for those who interview them but also for an audience who see them perform a certain way. As this taxonomy suggests, interviews can be witnessed as acts that formalize not only a dialogic but also a triangular communicative structure (see Masschelein et al., "Hybrid Genre" 23). The dyadic relationship of the interview opens up to the broader public setting within which it is performed and received by its adressees. It is enacted—formalized—in a force field of tensions.

Another way to conceptualize this force field is by picturing it as a network of spectra constituted by opposite poles: oral versus written, fixed versus open, factual versus fictional/narrativized, objective versus subjective, autonomous versus heteronomous, singular versus collective, private versus public. The list goes on. The image of these spectra can only serve heuristic purposes. It should also be noted that the binary logic implied by a spectrum should be deconstructed. Take the oral-versus-written spectrum, for instance: while an interview may be read as a spontaneous dialogue, it is often carefully edited to give an impression of orality, creating an authenticating effect of immediacy and spontaneity which can be achieved by both editing in *or* out markers of orality. As this intended effect is a formal strategy of discursive authorization, it raises questions about the formal dimensions by which an interlocutor can be granted discursive clout. Or, regarding the spectrum spanning fact and fiction: as Stuart Hall once put it paradoxically, "the event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event" (164). In other words, facts can only be signified when they are emplotted within a specific discourse. The interview is one site where that happens.

It is the spectrum between the private and the public, perhaps more than any other factor, that accounts for the high visibility of the interview across diverse media-formatted public domains of which we are all part. The private-public nexus also explains why the interview has driven research across scholarly fields for decades. It demonstrates why the interview is of such relevance as a knowledge interface in areas that work with and on the interview. Among other functions, the interview can respond to an apparent need for personal encounters and self-expression as well as to a desire for insights into private and oftentimes individual life worlds. Obtaining personal insights—be it for entertainment or reference and analysis—from those who impart intimate facts and personal stories runs counter to the sense of alienation that can result from social media technologies, an effect of what media scholars have called "deep mediatization" (see Hepp). An emphasis on the personal presumably alleviates experiences of anonymity related to our parameterized, "algorithmic" lives (see Bucher) and oftentimes faceless interactions.

Accordingly, the interview—as a formalized encounter between individual people—has been read as an index of a person-centric culture. The interview can translate public concerns to the personal, or rather, it can help to infer general issues from particular, personal instances, much like what the late Lauren Berlant discussed with reference to “the case,” which can make abstract ideas familiar and in turn fold “the singular into the general” (663). The interview oftentimes revolves around the particular case of an individual person. But it does more than that. We continue to live, as noted above, in the “interview society” that sociologists Paul Atkinson and David Silberman identified in their 1997 article, which brought together social-science research and literary and cultural studies scholarship more than a quarter of a century ago. In an anonymous world of mass culture, they argued, access to the personal lives of individuals is luring. In light of the ubiquity of digital media and the concomitant awareness of how highly mediated our lives and perceptions are, the “collection and celebration of personal narratives” (304) was then a relevant preoccupation, and protocolling the personal continues to this day to arouse scholars’ ongoing attention to the interview.

The “centrality of the interview culture” prompted Atkinson and Silberman to critically address scholarship that assumed it was possible to access personal experience as supposedly authentic by way of the interview. They thus criticized “an implicit appeal to the authenticity of narrated experience in the dialogic revelation of selves” (305). As the present volume attests, the interview is indeed a matter of conscious formalization, not of simple exposure and unmediated reflection. All contributions assembled here highlight, from a variety of different angles, that the interview always arranges standpoints, thoughts, and data, and that it relates one speaker to another in orchestrated interactions. They show that it affords speaking positions in a generic framework and thus also provides specific formal conditions for the articulation, negotiation, and circulation of ideas. What emerges, then, is an understanding of the interview as a form that situates and regulates knowledge and, at the same time, is itself situated in and regulated by textual, institutional, and discursive settings in which stylized selves and their viewpoints become readable.

3 Questions of Praxis/Practice

While a publicly accessible interview may project an impression of tapping an individual's private life, the impression of public revelation is always already a mediated effect in communicative processes. This is the case not least because such interviews are made for audiences. Accordingly, private selves emerge as actors in public domains. They figure as personae of communicative conventions, representational patterns, and discursive assumptions that interviewers and interviewees share with their audiences. Likewise, the interview does not simply present a dialogue. Understood as a generic framework for which an interaction is foundational, it provides formal conditions for the staging of such a dialogue. This staging can be altered in the process leading up to the publication of its finalized version and beyond, for instance if we take into consideration procedures of cross-medial (re)contextualization (for a discourse-analytical understanding of "contextualization" in linguistics see, e.g., van Dijk). Interviews generate knowledge about personal experience and about an interviewee's work, for instance, according to historically and culturally specific scripts. Conceptualizing the interview as a form within a pragmatic genre-theoretical framework opens up an additional dimension to Atkinson and Silberman's assumption that "the personal and the private enter into public discourse through shared expectations and a common stock of narrative formulations" (316): in each new take on the interview, in every instance of genre use, cultural scripts can also get adjusted and modified. This way, any occasion of reformalization also updates and transforms the genre of the interview itself. Key questions that arise here include: how and to what effect do interviews shape speaking subjects' selves and the ways they share knowledge? How can participants in the interview process use the form to position themselves in public domains? How can they impact the dynamics in which interviews are then circulated and consumed? A performative, pragmatic approach to the interview as genre adds a further crucial question: how do singular interviews reperform and update the interview as a genre?

These are questions of praxis. To put it differently, considerations concerning the manifest and latent functions of the interview are a matter of the practical use to which the genre of interview is put: who, what, when, where, how, and why are obvious points to address, and they do not only relate to the practice of interviewing itself, but also to other stages in a larger process of enacting the interview as genre. For some, this includes preparing, holding and giving, transcribing, editing, publishing, and distributing it; for others, what matters is analyzing, interpreting, theorizing, and contextualizing the work performed by an interview. This, as discussed above, has to do with domains such as the journalistic and the

literary domains, as well as with fields, understood here as academic disciplines. We might extend the trope of performance to say figuratively that domains and disciplines want the interview to take on different roles. Sciences that collect and analyze data in large quantities, for instance, will cast the interview as data collector. Literary studies are divided over its role (for a comprehensive annotated bibliography on the "literary interview," see Masschelein et al., "Annotated Bibliography"). Should it serve as "metatext" that yields theory about the literary field and contributes to writing literary history, or should it rather be cast as literature in its own right, as "another form of fiction" (Yanoshevsky, "On the Literariness" 201, 208)? Yanoshevsky here suggests that we consider the interview *beyond* its function as an epitextual paratext in the sense of literary theorist Gérard Genette: "a text about the work but outside the bound volume of the work" ("On the Literariness" 201n36; see Genette 407). As such a paratext, the interview can provide insights, for instance, into how authors' works and authors themselves can be positioned in the cultural sphere.

Michel Foucault's notion of the commentary function as delineated in his "Orders of Discourse" comes to mind here: Linking it to the genre of the interview, we can say that the interview—as discursive commentary—becomes central to discourse itself: "Not a few major texts become blurred and disappear, and commentaries sometimes come to occupy the former position" (Foucault 13). If we understand the interview to perform the "infinite rippling of commentary," then we can also assume, with Foucault, that it turns into a central text itself through its own acts of repeating and reciting a "primary text" (13): "The novelty lies no longer in what is said, but in its reappearance" (14). This, then, turns our attention to the reperformance of the interview as a form, especially in the sense of its repeated uses and the consequences that this can have for a broader assessment of the interview as genre.

Assessing the significance of reperformance, that is, of what happens to the genre when it is being updated through individual reenactments of interviews, prompts us to take up a very basic differentiation here made in the area of praxeology (or practice theory) between *praxis* and *practice*. The idea is that concrete acts of praxis reenact abstract patterns of practice. As Alkemeyer et al. elaborate from a sociological point of view, praxis refers to particular activities, to "contingent events of execution," whereas practices can be conceptualized to refer to recurring and identifiable patterns, to "typified and socially intelligible bundles of linguistic and non-linguistic activities" (see 27, translation CJ). Transferring this to the interview allows us to highlight that a theorization of the interview can examine singular instances of genre use—specific examples of interviews in praxis—to then reconstruct them within the larger framework of the genre of

interview as a practice that contributes to the discursive formalization of social dynamics, a practice that is historically situated as well as culturally and socially relevant. Thus, "acting out" does not only mean concrete doing, it also means realizing formats and patterns of communicative action, in our case of genre. For this reason, it is important to distinguish two aspects concerning the interview on two levels: on the level of its situational realization and on the level of its epistemically-bound typicality. Genre encompasses both aspects, for genre exists neither without praxis nor without practice.

4 Epistemological Interfaces

The interview, as form in praxis/practice, including its circulation, provides specific modalities of knowledge production. Hence, this volume aims to contribute to nothing less than the crucial epistemological question of how we can know. Akin to an interface in computing, the interview connects various "items," strands of knowledge, so that they can jointly operate: for instance, in the various stages of enacting the interview as form, someone's personal experience can be translated into experiential knowledge shared by many. Protocolling this—linking someone's individual experiences to larger questions of knowledge—is one of many aspects that complicate theorizing about how we can know. The protocol must involve more than one variable: how a person's experience relates to knowledge is not least a matter of who can claim to know what from what perspective. The concept of "lived experience," addressed here in all due brevity, cannot be conceptualized independently of a consideration of the positioning of subjects in social arrangements and discursive settings nor of the parameters that always already prescribe certain scripts by which that experience can be transformed into generalizable knowledge. As historian Joan Scott had convincingly argued years before Atkinson and Silverman, and with reference to marginalized groups and subjects, the appeal to experience "as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation" (777) should not preclude an examination of the discursive conditions that shape perceptions of experiences of marginalization and exclusion in the first place. Genre provides such a discursive condition, in part because it regulates access to and organizes knowledge production.

This way, the genre of the interview also serves as an interface between subjects and discourses: Let us consider, as one specific example, to what effect the form was put to use in the United States in the cold-war 1950s, when the so-called Red Scare mobilized fears of communism and the so-called Lavender Scare caused anxieties about homosexuality. At that paranoic time, the US senate

resolved to launch two congressional investigations whose aim it was to identify women and men as “homosexuals and other sex perverts” (Adkins) in the federal government workforce—not least by way of the interview. The committees operated on the assumption that people ostracized as “moral perverts” were vulnerable to communist blackmail (Adkins). Branding them as supposed security risks, they were to be ousted from their jobs. Documents retrieved from the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., show how the congressional investigations operated: committee members heard testimonies (themselves a kind of interview) to gather information from representatives of “federal agencies, law enforcement, judicial authorities, and the medical community”; the committees followed a procedure by which their members spoke about, not with “gay men or lesbians” (Adkins). They thus confirmed and stabilized a discourse that pathologized and criminalized people by assigning them object positions in discourse.

However, while the US senate manifested its institutional and discursive power to record and stabilize hegemonic knowledge, epistemic orders were also unsettled. In particular, one representative of the medical discourse of the time (Dr. Leonard Scheele, Surgeon General of the US Public Health Service from 1947–1956) complicated the committee members’ work of unambiguously identifying homosexuality. He “underscored the sketchiness of knowledge about the issue: ‘We are dealing in a gap area in large degree’” (Adkins), and suggested that such matters of ascription should be juxtaposed with the perspectives of those spoken about—perspectives that were to be retrieved by way of the interview:

> The committee, it seemed, hoped [...] for clarity, simplicity, and straightforward solutions. Senator [Margaret Chase] Smith asked Dr. Scheele, “There is no quick test like an x-ray that discloses these things?”
> “No, unfortunately,” he replied, “it is a long interview affair.” (Adkins)

The use of the interview in the context of the Lavender Scare apparently held the potential to destabilize dominant epistemic orders. The interview’s setting did not only open up a space for experts to elicit their expertise (and disclose “these things”). Perhaps it enabled those who were interviewed to resist normative interrogation, modify dominant perspectives, and ultimately complicate assumptions that their interviewers brought to the table in a drawn-out interviewing process. By being interviewed, interviewees could articulate their own points of view. However, it is likely that they also had to fight off shame and other affects, and it would be credulous to assume that they could use the interview to access discourse on their own terms, simply reject their assigned object position and change discursive positioning practices, thereby subverting knowledge

production. The "interview affair" suggested by the Surgeon General would articulate glaring power differentials and serve the committee members' interests in maintaining an oppressive knowledge regime. Participants would enter the interview setting with varying degrees of discursive authority. For instance, interviewers could focus attention on topics of their choice, determine the length and scope of responses to their questions, and set the tone of the interview. As medical experts of their time, they had the final say, both literally and figuratively, in conducting the interviews. The interview here comes to serve as an instrument of surveilling and regulating a demographic group.

Asymmetries of power are not only at play *within* interview situations; power dynamics also take shape *beyond* the interview, in domains in which interviews are recontextualized. This includes matters concerning the negotiation of norms about what can or should happen in an individual interview, as well as of the modality of the interview as a genre more generally. In other words, interviewing constitutes a communicative practice that is embedded in dynamics of discursive and structural power on a broader scale. Interviews manifest what anthropologist Charles L. Briggs calls "metacommunicative norms" (911). These norms can consolidate hierarchical relations not least when those interviewed are seen as representing a particular subject position or demographic group, as was the case when interviews aided the construction of "moral perverts" in the 1950s (Adkins). While the interviewees in principle spoke for themselves and likely hoped that their life stories would be publicly recognized in a way that corresponded to their own narratives, the epistemic and political scenario of the time in which the interviews were embedded probably made this almost impossible. Instead, medical experts as intermediaries used the interview to speak vicariously for the interviewees. This is corroborated by Briggs's general epistemological observation: "The power invested in interviews to construct discourses that are then legitimated as the words of others points to their effectiveness as technologies that can be used in naturalizing the role of specialists in creating systems of difference" (913).

As I argue elsewhere with respect to the interview as genre in the framework of a cultural historiography that traces the legacies of transatlantic enslavement in the United States, an interview featuring marginalized subjects can be read for its investments in centering them in discourse: "The material could be read for its documentary evidence, for the ways in which it provides a platform for interviewees to articulate themselves, as it seems to give voice to them, heaving them into speech by providing them with speaking positions from which they can give accounts of themselves" (Junker, "Interrogating" 312). At the same time, the material "may also be read—and this makes the picture more composite—for the ways in which its interviewers interrogate their interviewees and frame their

articulations, speaking for them and appropriating their life accounts for their own interests" (312). The point here is not so much that interviews should be read with suspicion, but rather that it is useful to place them in an overarching discursive setting in which the interview as knowledge interface contributes to the negotiation of power differentials, including dynamics involving the recognition of subjects and groups and the concomitant potential redistribution of attention in political or disciplinary settings in which attention is a scarce resource. Cases in which interviewers speak *for* interviewees raise general issues related to a problem of vicariousness that extends beyond the genre of interview across various forms (see Junker, "Vicarious").

Following Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as political technology and Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of communicative competence as symbolic capital, research on the interview, such as Briggs's, has contributed to a better understanding of the ways in which interviews are recontextualized to serve shifting and emerging scholarly paradigms or consolidate epistemic orders. Much more than an instrument for the objective collection of data in various scholarly disciplines—or a frame for presenting political positions in the nightly news or exchanging views at eye level in talk shows—the interview is a highly instructive object of inquiry that provides insights into discursive dynamics, including the positions assigned to subjects and groups in discursive arrangements. For instance, interviewees may well shape the course of an interview and be in a position to determine how an interview is edited, interpreted, and where it is published—including cases in which famous interviewees retract pieces because they do not see their positions adequately represented, which can result in broader discussions of free speech (see, e.g., Moynihan). Interviews can also circulate and be recontextualized in medial and discursive frameworks, especially in social media, in ways that neither interviewees nor even interviewers can control.

Under the current impression of geopolitical conflicts as well as divisions within democratic societies, it seems that what should not be left out of sight when we consider how the interview formalizes knowledge production is how interlocutors interact, especially when *conflictual* dynamics are negotiated in and beyond the interview. This includes meta-generic debates over how contested matters should be formalized in an interview. Take political interviews between journalists and politicians, the performative dimensions of which are stressed by discourse-analytical linguists when they refer to them as "highly rule-governed [and we might add, rule-governing] discourse activities" (Blas Arroyo 405) and which—considering the interview as a matter of genre—pre-structure audience expectations. Audiences may anticipate certain ways in which interviewer and interviewee should or should not interact in political interviews. Modality here is

shaped by multiple flexible factors such as historical, cultural, medial, national, political, or ideological ones. These factors can also shift over time: "deep changes in the political and ideological makeup of a country also account for changes in preferences for certain types of interviews over others" (Blas Arroyo 407). Audiences may expect interviewed politicians to cooperate and comply with interviewing journalists or, inversely, expect interviewees to disturb expectations set by interviewers, with the latter in turn challenging the former critically. Interlocutors in political interviews can thus be situated on a spectrum between friendly and hostile—consensual or conflictual—interaction, they can confront each other to different degrees on what has been called "the scale of interactional cooperation" (Blas Arroyo 406). I forward as a hypothesis here that norms of what is sayable within certain medial and national contexts become particularly salient when interlocutors display especially low or especially high degrees of cooperation.

Closely inspecting how the interview as genre formalizes political discourse, and also bringing into view normative standpoints about debate culture, contributes to a better understanding of the role of the interview in fraught debates over contested issues not only *in* democracies, but also *about* the state of democracy itself, when freedom of speech and of the press (as they are protected, taking the example of the United States, by the First Amendment) are turned into points of controversy. Such debates include questions of whether and how to go about interviewing political opponents, populist politicians, and demagogues. What if "systematic verbal violence […] is not only sanctioned but even rewarded in accordance with the rules and expectations of the corresponding political [and medial] institutions" (426)? If the interview becomes a site for interlocutors to stage aggressive behavior, how can its functions be assessed in relation to political cultures? Moreover, when commentators of interviews express concern about a leveling out of differences and hierarchies between interviewers and interviewees, and about the former not making sufficient use of the possibilities of critical investigation, to what extent do they make a valid point about risks to democracy? Observations about frictions and antagonistic dynamics in an interview, or lenient and harmonious ones, for that matter, can hardly serve as the ultimate index of the overall state of political polarization in democratic debate cultures, let alone of current states of democracy. But the interview remains a site for close inspection of what we can know and of how knowledge making takes shape.

One iconic instance of the interview stands as a testament to the possibilities of organizing knowledge, paradoxically by playfully denying the possibilities that the interview offers: a shrewd satirical series that combines text-based dialogue and visual caricature by Mexican artist and anthropologist Miguel

Covarrubias (1904–1957). Provisionally titled *Imaginary Interviews* in its first installment and thenceforward published as *Impossible Interviews*, the series toys with the interview as a platform of affordances that, indeed, offers potentialities for bringing into dialogue positions that would otherwise be considered diametrically opposed or unmatchable (see "Legends at Loggerheads"). The series appeared in *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* magazines in the 1930s, starting with "Imaginary Interviews—no. 1: Aimée Semple McPherson vs. Mahatma (Stick) Ghandi" in *Vanity Fair* in Dec. 1931, and ending with the "Impossible Interview: Stalin versus Schiaparelli" published in *Vogue*, 15 Jun. 1936 (for a detailed publishing history, see Bevan 122–23). In the title of the pieces, Covarrubias relates the names of the two characters by the conjunction "vs.," so they are contrasted. He makes the impossible possible. *Impossible Interviews* may have surprised and entertained its audience because it presents unlikely pairs: a politician with a show business celebrity or a sports star, a social reformer with a child movie star, a fascist dictator with an industry tycoon, a nuclear physicist with an astrologer. It brings together characters that represent different fields, from politics, business, and science to sports and entertainment.

These caricatures are part of early mass media celebrity culture; what makes them both entertainingly funny as well as ambivalently enlightening is their visualization: Covarrubias uses an artistic language of exaggeration. We see exaggerated proportions and striking facial expressions. Some illustrations show overstated stereotypical gender images, while others echo and expose the stylized racializing depictions of modernist primitivism. Every interview displays two well-known characters as representatives of a larger professional group and social type, a political attitude or totalitarian ideological position. Not only is the improbability of the encounter completely obvious, but the impossible conditions under which the pairs meet are at times highlighted in a spectacular way: in the final installment of the series, Josef Stalin meets Elsa Schiaparelli, the famous fashion designer of the time, during a parachute jump. The interviews entertain, but more so, they exploit the critical potential of satire. They provide sharp-witted, biting comments on the characters and what they stand for, demonstrating their naivety, their ordinariness, and yet their dangerousness. Amusement turns into mockery. In the *Impossible Interviews*, Covarrubias resorts to the genre of interview to turn it into the form par excellence for the creation of unlikely couples. In this incarnation of the form, the artist does not only illustrate, embody, or mock. He also brings discursive positions into dialogue, playfully taking up the notion of the interview in the original etymological sense of two interlocutors seeing each other. As we observe them interviewing each other, we are invited to grapple with the vagaries of epistemology. As it turns out, we

can also witness the interview—in its function as epistemic interface—emerging as the protagonist of knowledge production.

5 Rationale of the Volume

This companion presents state-of-the-art contributions that address demands met by the interview. The collection includes an international and interdisciplinary roster of contributors who theorize various uses and functions of the interview from the perspectives of different fields in the social sciences and humanities. In its interdisciplinary outlook, the volume brings together theoreticians and practitioners from across literary studies, cultural studies, and historiography, as well as philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and musicology. It presents the interview as an object of study by conceptualizing it as a genre that traverses disciplinary boundaries. In this interdisciplinary framing, it inspects various manifestations and meanings of the interview—as form, but also as praxis/practice, and as epistemic site and ubiquitous knowledge interface. The chapters are organized into two main parts. Part one—Staging Culture and the Interview as Form—examines the interview primarily in its manifold manifestations as a specific form of cultural expression. Part two—Creating Knowledge and the Interview as Praxis/Practice—principally considers uses of the form as well as homing in on its methodological and epistemic implications. The title of the volume, *Inspecting the Interview*, takes up the visual dimensions provided by the original early-modern meaning of the term "interview," from *s'entrevoir*, to see each other. These dimensions are understood here in a metaphorical way as a cue to take a close analytical look at the looking relations in the interview, one among the many aspects that make the genre an important object of study across fields.

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Staging Culture and the Interview as Form

Jeffrey J. Williams

The Literary Interview and the Critical Interview: History, Uses, and Lessons

Abstract: This essay discusses the interview in Anglophone literary and cultural studies, focusing on its rise as a genre to help establish creative writing, notably during the mid and later twentieth century in the *Paris Review* interviews with major authors, and in the 1990s and after to help explain theory, in interviews with critics in theory journals. The essay traces the lineage from the philosophical dialogue up to the nineteenth-century invention of the journalistic interview, through the twenty-first century proliferation of interviews with writers and critics, in print and online.

After recounting its history, in contrast to dismissals of the genre as popular or casual, the essay makes the case for the distinctive things that interviews offer. Drawing on the author's experience doing critical interviews, it outlines four key strengths: interviews can give entryways to writers' and critics' work in ordinary language, and they help understand that work holistically. More generally, they emphasize that criticism is an activity, not a system or formula. And they help fill in the history and context of literature and criticism since World War II as it has been experienced by successive generations in the academy. Finally, the essay tells the lessons that the author has learned while conducting interviews, notably reminding one to stop and listen rather than give one's view or position, and about the value of editing and distilling what one presents.

Keywords: the literary interview, the critical interview, *Paris Review*, interview studies, cultural studies, literary theory, editing, the literary journal, the theory journal, ordinary language, literary generations, reductiveness, Scott, David, Roach, Rebecca, Marcus, Sharon

The Interview as a Literary Genre

The interview is a familiar fixture in literary and cultural studies. If we think of the literary field as a room, it is a standard piece of furniture—not the bed or dresser, which would be the main pieces, like novels or poems. But a side table, perhaps, alongside the bed. Since the 1960s, the literary interview has become a common genre, appearing in many journals and book collections and offering

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accounts of the practice and profession of literature.[1] In some ways, the interview has a medial role between literary works and critical commentary, as it gives the firsthand testimony of writers about writing, about craft, the literary tradition and extant influences, the possibilities of language and representation, the literary life, and culture and politics. Like most genres, the literary interview has expanded over time, spinning off variants, and since the 1980s a new variant, the critical interview, has in turn become a standard genre in literary and cultural studies. It likewise has a medial role, explaining the specialized discourse of contemporary literary studies, notably theory and the permutations of cultural fields and focuses.

By "literary interview," I mean an interview with a literary producer, typically a novelist or poet, though sometimes a dramatist, essayist, critic, or editor. It does not necessarily indicate the literariness of the interview itself; the quality of interviews as literature is debatable, but I believe that they form a literary genre because they are a pivotal part of the literary field.[2] Like biography or criticism, they may or may not attain the aesthetic value of the literary. By critical interview, I mean one with a critic or theorist talking about their work, literature, method, the state of criticism, their career, and culture and politics in general. And while they result from interviewing, I do not mean quotes that one might find in an article or profile, or answers to a short set of questions about a new book, for instance that *Inside Higher Ed* regularly runs. Rather, I mean a long-form piece, 20 to 30 pages, akin to a full-length short story or critical article, published in a literary magazine or critical journal.

Another way to pinpoint the literary interview is to consider it in contrast to other kinds of interviews. It might have some passages that reveal the history an author has lived through or institutions they have inhabited, but its primary aim is not a sustained oral history; similarly, though it might reveal something of the

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1 For example, more than 100 literary journals have run them, including *AGNI*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *Glimmer Train*, *Granta*, *Iowa Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Tin House*, and *World Literature Today*, over the past thirty years. In addition, there has been a regular stream of collections, including seven volumes of *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* beginning in the late 1950s, and more than 200 volumes of "Conversations with" various authors published by the University of Mississippi Press since 1985, among many others.

2 Some, like Yanoshevsky, argue for the literary quality of interviews themselves, whereas others, like Rodden, state that the interview has not formed a genre yet. Massachelein et al. argue that it is a hybrid genre, and Richardson notes that interviews have inherently poetic qualities, like ordinary speech. Recognizing the range of interviews, Roach emphasizes that it is a form rather than genre, although she does also identify particular kinds that seem to have solidified into a genre, such as "the craft interview," common in *Paris Review* in the contemporary period.

culture of creative writing, it does not work out a full-fledged ethnography; and though it might recount life experiences on the way to discussing writing, those are usually brief and the main aim is not biography. Further, it might capture some of the speaking style of its subject, but it does not aim for a precise record of speech patterns as one would in sociolinguistics; and though it might contain passages that can be used in journalistic profiles, it aims for a deeper account of the work and career of its subject. A literary interview might include elements of any of these other disciplinary forms, and certainly one of its genealogical roots is in journalism, but for the most part, literary interviews have developed as a distinctive form typically giving an overview of an established author's work, career, and views. While first addressed to the literary field, it might also explain some of the specialized matter inside literature to an interested general public.

The literary interview parallels the dialogue in several ways. Like the dialogue form, there are many different versions of the interview, some formal, some casual, indeed that seem ubiquitous in contemporary society. In fact, the sociologist David Silverman has called our current order "interview society," noting how the mode runs through contemporary culture.[3] But just as the dialogue forms a recognized genre in philosophy, from Plato through Diderot up to works like Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet's *Dialogues*, the interview also forms a recognized genre, yielding a substantive piece of writing. Though it contains quotes, like the philosophical dialogue it is not "speech verité" but a shaped product, like other literary genres. Similar to a play, it stages the question and answer of writers or critics or others about literary work. In this regard, it is cousin to interviews with artists, philosophers, and other kinds of cultural producers, that discuss work in their respective fields.

The literary interview is a relatively new genre in Anglo-American literature, coalescing in the period after World War II. The modern technique of interviewing arose in the nineteenth century, with the rise of modern journalism, as Charles Ponce de Leon explains:

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3 In *Handbook of Interview Research*, Gubrium and Holstein list the myriad ways that interviews are used in contemporary culture, in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology; in professions such as policing and banking; and I would add in everyday practices, such as hiring a cleaner or exchanging texts or emails before going on a date.

> An even more important form of reporting was the interview. Though [...] reporters for the penny press asked their sources questions and, on occasion, the answers appeared in direct quotations, interviews did not become a regular feature of newspapers until the 1870s, and it was not until the turn of the century that the now common practice of interspersing quotations from sources was widely employed. (53)

That technique fed into forms such as "visits with the author" or profiles in magazines about a great writer in his (or more rarely her) house or habitat, drawing on material from interviews, and through the early twentieth century more extensive interviews with authors began appearing, for instance in a series that Everyman's Library sponsored with authors such as W. B. Yeats, as Rebecca Roach notes in her authoritative history *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*. But still, as the modern critic Malcolm Cowley observed in 1958, "compared with Continental Europeans, the English since Boswell [...] and the Americans from the beginning have seldom been good at literary interviews" (3).[4]

The cornerstone of the genre as it solidified was the *Paris Review*, founded in 1953, which included an interview with E. M. Forster in its first issue and has published more than 400 since (see esp. Wilbers, as well as Bains; Fay; and Kerninon). Based in Paris from 1953 through 1973, the *Review* likely took a page from the French model of the literary and intellectual interview, as interviews were a more prominent part of the French cultural scene. It also responded to the Anglo-American literary field at the time, which had been transformed in the wake of World War II. Two key factors were the massive expansion of higher education and the ensuing profusion of academic criticism. Before that, critics rarely did sustained "readings" of literary works; they largely focused on scholarship, adducing literary sources and influences, or the history of the language, or background history.[5] But in the period after the war, they focused much more on "close reading" of literary works. According to his major disciplinary history, *Professing Literature*, Gerald Graff speculates that the chief reason for the success of the New Criticism was that it provided a fitting method for the new entrants to university study, who often did not have much preparation or background in

4 The masterful bibliography compiled by Anna Maschelein and others records more than 40 entries in French and only 7 in English and American literary studies. Earlier interviews, like the Yeats interview for *Everyman*, a journal sponsored by the press, reports a conversation over tea, tend to be chatty, recounting the personality and quips of a major author.

5 As M. H. Abrams recalled in an interview with me, "Before the New Critics, close reading was, as far as I know, not exemplified by anyone" (73). He explains that some early critics, like Coleridge, might have discussed a metaphor or image that "deals only with a short passage" (74), but there were no extended "readings." It was only after WWII, with approaches like the New Criticism, that critics "confronted the verbal particulars of a poem" (73).

languages or history, as previous generations of college students usually had (145, 155, 173–78). I would also speculate that it fit the more mobile tenor of the contemporary period, more geared to deciphering the welter of information than reverence for tradition. In this milieu, the *Paris Review* interviews provided a channel for creative writers to counter criticism's rising monopoly on interpretation. As George Plimpton, a founding editor of the *Review*, recalled, "In an Age of Criticism, when so many magazines were devoted to explanations and exegesis of contemporary texts, the notion was to skip the indirect approach and seek out the authors in person to see what they had to say" (qtd. in Wilbers 198). While a writer might not have scholarly standing, one could not doubt their credibility about their own practice, and in a sense, they carved out their own field of creative writing separate from the scholarly and critical faculty.[6]

In its first phase, *Paris Review* presented many of the major modernist writers of the early part of the century, for instance Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and T. S. Eliot, as well as some European writers, such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline. In effect, it normalized modernist literature for the postwar generation, offering conversational comments about that once-avant-garde movement. The *Review* also covered midcentury writers, from the World War II and succeeding generations, such as Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, James Baldwin, William Styron, and Eudora Welty, and in a sense spoke for the WWII generation as it came to the fore. Through the 1980s and 90s it featured writers who stamped postmodernism, such as Toni Morrison, William Gaddis, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In other words, while it had a role in recounting literary history, it moved to focus on contemporary writing and movements. It tended to signal an established position in the literary field to have been the subject of a *Paris Review* interview. The *Paris Review* provided a model for many other journals—one can find interviews in more than a hundred contemporary journals, regularly in *AGNI*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *Glimmer Train*, and *Tin House*, and occasionally in *Iowa Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Missouri Review*, and many other creative writing journals. As John Rodden has observed, the "Age of Criticism" gave way by the mid-70s to "the Age of the Interview" (5). The literary interview forms a main artery of discussion within the field of creative writing.

At first the literary interview left critics behind, and *Paris Review* has only run 4 of their 400 interviews with critics, none of them academic critics except Harold Bloom. To see it from another angle, it is striking that a critic like Lionel Trilling, a preeminent American critic during the postwar period and whose 1950 book,

6 A number of recent studies have commented on the rise of creative writing programs, notably McGurl's *The Program Era*, although Myers' *The Elephants Teach* is still worth consulting.

The Liberal Imagination, sold more than 170,000 copies, was never featured in a full-length interview (Menand 80). That omission likely reflects the split between creative writing and academic criticism, with the interview an assertion of creative writers reclaiming their authority. In addition, I think another factor was that critics of the time wrote in fairly self-explanatory, straightforward prose, for the iconic "educated reader" as Trilling put it. One did not need specialized training to read it.

The critical interview did not gain momentum until the 1980s, when criticism morphed to "theory." From the 1980s through the 90s, literary and cultural studies saw a wave of interviews with leading theorists, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Donna Haraway, in journals such as *diacritics*, *differences*, *Journal of Advanced Composition*, and *Radical Philosophy*. Through the next two decades, the pool expanded to a wider range of critics from the multiplying fields of cultural studies and an increased fleet of journals, including *Minnesota Review*, *Workplace*, *Public Culture*, *Symploke*, and *boundary 2*. In a sense, the first phase of the critical interview took a similar role to that of the first phase of the literary interview, representing avant-garde work, notably deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, or hermeneutics, that otherwise was difficult or obscure, in a more colloquial form. Since the 1990s, the critical interview has expanded to cover the permutations of the various fields in cultural studies, with critics such as Lauren Berlant, Jodi Dean, Rita Felski, Roderick Ferguson, Jack Halberstam, Henry Jenkins, Amitava Kumar, Sharon Marcus, Fred Moten, Bruce Robbins, Cary Wolfe, and many others. Rather than centering on a pantheon of theorists defining the major schools, interviews now seem to serve a more capacious role, explaining the plethora of approaches and practices in the field. While an interview typically marks a certain level of accomplishment and an influential body of work, the critical interview has become a common genre.

I have told this history at more length in essays such as "The Rise of the Critical Interview" and elsewhere, but I'm also a practitioner of the form, particularly the critical interview, and have published more than 90 in literary and critical journals. So, drawing on my own experience, I have several surmises about what interviews offer and what I have learned from doing them. In particular, I will focus on the critical interview, because I know it best and also because it has received relatively little commentary.

What Interviews Offer

To be sure, literary and critical interviews vary a good deal and one might specify different types of them. I favor the synoptic interview, covering a writer's or critic's career and span of work, whereas some lean toward the craft interview, for example the excellent and detailed q-and-a's in Robert S. Boynton's collection, *The New New Journalism*, illuminating the process and practice of writing literary journalism, or toward the issue-based interview, for instance in Michael Lackey's series of in-depth discussions with writers about the use of biography in contemporary fiction. But I find four things that interviews offer that are especially distinctive.

First, they show *that criticism is not a body of doctrine but an activity*.[7]

Literature sometimes seems as if it records statements of the literary gods. However, it is first and fundamentally an activity, subject to all the vicissitudes of any human production. More particularly, criticism and theory sometimes seem a body of statements issued by the founders of approaches, and an approach or theory yields a set of postulates or theses. Indeed, one might find a summary of the tenets of deconstruction or feminism or Marxism in various guidebooks and histories. That might have its uses, but it also suggests fixed doctrine. For instance, when we talk about theory, we often invoke major figures as if they are priestly or oracular—"As Foucault states," "As Derrida has said," "As Butler has shown,"—and issued the governing statement on the topic. To be fair, we might draw inspiration from such statements, but often they seem as if declarations of church law. Moreover, the style of a good deal of critical work seems very distant from actually speaking people. We call criticism a "conversation," but most criticism is not conversational.

In contrast, I think that interviews emphasize that criticism is an activity, a lived practice, conducted by people in fields and institutions trying to explain their thinking and ideas to others, answering questions and aiming for understanding, even if in disagreement. While an interview does not record unvarnished speech and is a mode of representation, like any other kind of writing, it foregrounds the activity of speaking and its interchange. It stages the activity, dramatizing critical thought and discussion, mindful of the movement of talk and thinking. It is also mindful that it is located in time and place, rather than a

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7 For those philosophically-minded, you'll recognize that this paraphrases thesis 4.112 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, where he remarks that "Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity," and further says that it is not propositions, but clarifying them (49).

statement for all time. In addition, an interview represents criticism as a kind of work that one actively does with others, that people in the profession of criticism do, care about, and compare notes about.

In many ways this goes back to a sense I had in college when I first started reading philosophy. I was in a history of philosophy class taught by James J. Walsh, a historian of philosophy and chair of the department at Columbia when I was there. One of his first writing assignments was to summarize the argument of Plato's *Phaedo* in no more than 10 pages, preferably as few as possible. Walsh emphasized that the task was not to fill the paper out, as we might have in other course papers, when you strain to reach the assigned page count, but to boil it down. I traced the argument as best I could in a few pages but spent another couple of pages talking about the dialogue form. It seemed to me that one could not divorce the presumed content from the fact that it was a dialogue. Professor Walsh, who was very kindly and unpretentious, took it seriously and commented that I had included a lot that was not part of the normal argument, though he granted I had presented a case for those other, more literary qualities as part of the meaning.

I was likely influenced by a book I had picked up at the campus bookstore by another Columbia professor, *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* by John Herman Randall, Jr. Randall argues that a crucial part of Plato's dialogues is their form. Most of the time in philosophy, scholars would comment on Plato's various theories, taking the dialogue form as a strut or somewhat clunky delivery system that one discarded, like a wrapper.[8] It almost seemed as if philosophers thought it was unfortunate that Plato had not written in treatise form like Aristotle's extant texts. But it seemed to me, and still seems, that the experience of reading Plato is fundamentally toned by the dialogues, sometimes amusingly, sometimes frustratingly, but continually reminding one of the back and forth of talking and intellection. While Socrates occasionally leads his interlocutors by the nose, you cannot always tell where his argument will go or when it will stop, and an irreducible part of the representation is that activity. In Randall's words, Plato "depicts the dramatic qualities of [hu]man's thinking, the play and conflict of his ideas, the spectacle of [her] mind…," and shows life rising "to the level of philosophy" (3). That is, criticism is not something people only do on paper or screen, in their own mind's eye, but through speaking and engaging others, and interviews mime the back and forth, representing life as continuous with it, rather

8 Randall remarks that much of the scholarship "tended to construe Plato's philosophy in something of the systematic and literal-minded spirit" (263) rather than what "the dialogues themselves reveal," which is the drama of the life of reasoning, philosophy, and thought.

than a detachable pursuit. Criticism is not just an academic subject, but part of life.

What if, rather than the dialogue as the strut to provide occasion for philosophy, the theories are the strut to provide the occasion for the talk and exercise of intellect? For me, it is the talk, the interaction, that constitutes the life of the mind. And there is an openness in reaching outside oneself and hearing from others.

Second, interviews convey *criticism in ordinary language*.

Contemporary criticism is known for its difficulty, often using special terms or jargon and invoking challenging or obscure concepts. Indeed, contemporary critics will say that they want to "complicate" a text or idea. A number of antagonists have complained about this tendency, holding that it is unnecessary and has eroded the public relevance of criticism, or worse, charging that theories like postmodernism have undermined our culture. Even those who defend criticism and theory usually acknowledge its difficulty but justify it as necessary to get beneath conventional views.[9] More neutrally, it seems fair to say that criticism has become more professionalized since the 1970s, less an explanatory discourse for an educated public and more a specialized research pursuit. One of the virtues of interviews is that they provide a species of accessibility. In an earlier moment in literary history, in the face of the high diction and mannered style of neoclassical poetry, Wordsworth calls for literature to tack closer to "the real language of men" (22). (Perhaps this reflects a tendency in the ebb and flow of literature, as literary writing is renewed with infusions of the colloquial). While not necessarily in everyday English, interviews provide a more plain-spoken channel of criticism.[10] Interestingly Wordsworth also mentions that one complaint against using real language is that it sometimes exhibits a "triviality and meanness both of thought and language" (19), but he holds that the cumulative effect, even if there are trivial moments, can be illuminating. Interviews seem to enjoin a similar complaint and are sometimes dismissed as chitchat or gossip, but I think that they also can provide a way to gain a fuller understanding of a critic's thought.

The value of critical interviews was brought home to me when I was in graduate school during the mid and late 1980s. I was interested in Paul de Man's work, in part because my mentor, Michael Sprinker, was an aficionado (though he was an avowed Marxist, he was also preoccupied with de Man's insistence on the difficulties of meaning and interpretation), and in part because I was intrigued with its view of incommunicability. In addition, it was the moment just after he died,

9 See, for instance, the essays in Culler and Lamb, *Just Being Difficult?*

10 In "The Rise of the Critical Interview," I argue that they "colloquialize" academic work for a public—which still might not yield everyday language, as they talk about matters inside the field.

when his reputation was at its apex, but before his antisemitic wartime writings became known. I was sorting through *Allegories of Reading* and its sometimes oracular statements, which seemed to point to a higher knowledge, with pronouncements in key passages like "The pro- or regression from love to economic dependence is a constant characteristic of all moral or social systems based on the authority of noncontested metaphorical systems" (239). It was like reading a foreign language, and heady when it started to make sense. When *The Resistance to Theory*, a collection of his essays, came out in early 1986, I immediately got a copy and perused it, but kept going back to its concluding selection, a rare interview that de Man had done for an Italian magazine (Rosso).

The interview is quite clear and forthright, often witty, and sometimes pointed. It moves through a number of topics, such as differences among the European and American educational systems, the New Criticism and close reading, de Man's memory of first encountering Derrida at Johns Hopkins, the difference between his approach and Derrida's, the influence of Sartre as well as other figures on the French intellectual scene, and his nascent plans to address political questions more prominently. The interview made his work make more sense to me. In particular, it helped me understand how his version of deconstruction differed from Derrida's. Some critics, such as Jeffrey Nealon, subsequently compared the versions of deconstruction, but de Man's own articulation clarified it for me: "I am a philologist and not a philosopher" (118). That is, in the interview he explained that his practice focused narrowly on literary readings, rather than being guided by philosophical arguments, whereas Derrida fundamentally aims to speculate on larger issues, like the university as well as language, epistemology, and metaphysics. The interview was also helpful to get a lived sense of how Continental philosophy arose in the European context in the wake of World War II. Finally, what perhaps made the biggest impact on me was that de Man was not the oracle in the interview, but real. You got more of a human sense of him, as a teacher (he says what matters about deconstruction is how it changes teaching literature for him) as well as thinker.

Third, modifying Horace's dictum that art should "instruct and delight," interviews can *inform and interest.*

Reductiveness is usually a derogatory term in contemporary criticism. But I think that one of the virtues of interviews is that they tend to be reductive, providing an overview of a critic's work and its concerns, as well as how they came to do that work. Interviews tend to be retrospective, looking back on their work and

career, and synoptic, summarizing it.[11] Thus they are typically second-order in stance, recursive rather than original, which figures into one bias against them. But like a retrospective in art, an interview can help us see the work better—how it comes together, how it has built over a career or how it diverges, where it comes from, and what stands out. An interview is one of the few places where a critic might summarize their work in a digestible way, so it is frankly informative, particularly for those not as familiar with the work, although it can make those more familiar understand it more fully, too.

Reductiveness can also bring a kind of clarity. I mean clarity not just as a question of diction, but of thought. For instance, I have always found the two or three pages of Foucault's interview "Truth and Power" one of the most striking expositions of the idea of the intellectual, as he distinguishes between "the universal intellectual" and "the specific intellectual" (126). He quickly notes the vaunted idea of the intellectual who comments on affairs public and scholarly, taking a role as a general spokesperson for intellectual, cultural, and political matters, and then counters it with his idea of the specific intellectual, one he finds more viable in the contemporary world and its glut of information. Without an involved analysis of the intellectual through the modern period, Foucault also tacitly deflates the heroic model of the intellectual, represented especially by the looming figure of Sartre during the postwar years, and Foucault is in turn arguing for his own practice, as having a specific role as a university-based historian and social analyst. The idea of the specific intellectual supplies a way to do engaged intellectual work in the age of disciplinary specialization. The many interviews with Foucault tend to be issue-centered rather than synoptic, but they are informative, offering a toehold onto aspects of his voluminous thought.

Furthermore, interviews can pique or provoke interest, particularly at moments when a critic gives their frank opinion, or when they respond to more challenging or controversial questions, or when they tell anecdotes about a professional situation or stories about their life. Sometimes, of course, personal stories can be kitschy, but in interviews they often reinforce a point and make it sharper. For instance, in an interview I did with the literary scholar and critic Sharon Marcus, she mentioned that she grew up in Queens, New York, in a neighborhood that had both apartment buildings and single-family houses, but when she later

11 Peter Osborne, who conducted a series of interviews with major critics and theorists, such as Derrida, Hall, and Spivak, while he was editor of *Radical Philosophy* in the late 1980s and 1990s, outlines his general strategy: "starting from questions about the interviewees influences and formative years, they move on, via critical exchanges about key concepts and ideas, to reflections on political issues and recent events" (i).

moved to another Queens neighborhood, she wondered, "Where are all the apartment buildings?" (93). Marcus is known especially for taking to task "symptomatic reading" or "critique," the tendency in contemporary criticism and theory to claim to expose the deep secret underneath what texts seem to mean, and thereby to perform a political act. Seeing that as an over-reach, she instead has advocated "surface reading" and defended the value of description. The interview was useful in clarifying what she means by surface reading, which has been controversial. She also made one correction, saying that she regretted suggesting the issue was generational, as critics from different generations practice both kinds of reading. Those comments were interesting on their own, I think, and in addition her exposition of surface reading helped to illuminate her approach in her books, *Apartment Stories* and *Between Women*. In the latter, for instance, she holds that Victorian fiction does not reveal a hidden culture of lesbianism beneath the surface of society, but women had rich and complicated relationships that were often visible and acknowledged. In *Apartment Stories*, she looks at the representation of domestic space in the nineteenth century, which led her to study the literal spaces and design of apartment buildings. We tend to take them for granted—as a surface or façade—and she discovered that there was not much written about them. So she constructed a history from architectural, design, and other texts, as well as fiction, comparing their prominence in France in contrast to the rooming houses of England. I thought her anecdote about Queens made for a memorable emblem—one conducts research not just from a cold calculation but often a personal resonance, and we tend to assume housing is one way, typically the single-family home, which in fact is favored by US policy and tax law.

Fourth, interviews *compile traces of a history*.

Histories of criticism usually report a march of ideas and the main figures issuing them. Those confer some sense of the field, but only go so far, and the history looks a bit different if you talk to the people doing it, what they have responded to, how the field constituted itself when they came onto the scene, what it has been like working in the field in their time, and what their personal path has been. While not quite oral history, interviews build a fuller picture of the field and how people have experienced it. They give a sense of history as lived, its ad hoc quality and character, before we extrapolate the main ideas. In his *Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci remarks that, "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of [being] a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces; therefore it is imperative at the outset

to compile such an inventory" (qtd. in Said 25).[12] While interviews only offer fragments from any individual, they compile an inventory of the practice of criticism in our time, often providing insight into the academic context, the historical situation, and other vectors affecting criticism, as well as the official concepts.

One vector that I have especially tried to cover is institutional history, interviewing, in addition to critics, more than a dozen book and journal editors, as well as asking questions about the state of the university, academic jobs, and so on. Publishing often seems extraneous to criticism and theory proper, a tertiary service, but I think that Bill Germano, the founding editor of the New York office of Routledge, for example, had as crucial a hand as many well-known critics in creating the thing called theory in the late 1980s and 1990s, catalyzing books on postcolonial, gay and lesbian, and queer theory, and other new pursuits, and an interview with him brings to light more about that moment. In a more recent account, an interview with Jamia Wilson recounts the history of the Feminist Press as seen through the eyes of a Millennial feminist, who tells about some of the tensions of sustaining the press in a new media era.

Overall, I think that interviews bring out a pivotal aspect of contemporary criticism: the layering of generations. In the journal *Small Axe*, the anthropologist David Scott has conducted a series of interviews with Caribbean writers and intellectuals, and he has found decidedly different sensibilities that he sees as "*generational* [...] marked by my sense that within the span of my own lifetime crucial aspects of the historical cognitive-political present in relation to which we conceive the *background* as well as the horizon of criticism have altered with bewildering speed and apparent finality" (158). I feel similarly in the interviews I have done, and I have distinguished between "the theory generation" and "the posttheory generation" in criticism, though wonder if we need a yet further term, perhaps "the crossover generation," indicating the different venues that younger critics might write in, or "the adjunct generation," signaling the precarious character of jobs in the field now. Still, interviews do not simply report the history, but give a sense of the situation from which criticism arises. Scott makes an astute distinction between the two stances; in his practice, interviews do not aim to "write, from the outside, as it were, an intellectual history of these generations, but to reconstruct, from the inside, the intellectual problem-spaces out of which these older generations had conceived [...]" their projects ("Temporality" 159). For me, interviews help to give a sense of the "problem-spaces" critics see in their moment, how they have responded to them, and where they imagine going.

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12 Said notes that the final clause is surprisingly omitted from the Hoare and Smith translation of the *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 324).

Which also suggests that we tend to misjudge previous generations, as we view them from the problem-spaces of our own moment.

Another way to put it is that generations offer a shorthand for talking about differences in experience over time. For instance, I got a sense of criticism before World War II in speaking with the iconic critic, M. H. Abrams, then in his late 90s, about how literary study barely extended past the Renaissance and the Romantics did not really have credibility as a proper academic field until the 1950s, and how critical interpretation was rare until then as well. Or I got a sense of the rise of feminist criticism in an interview with Nancy K. Miller, who talked about her mentor Carolyn Heilbrun, who walked against the current in the 1950s and 60s to forge an early attention to women's writing, whereas Miller's experience was inflected by the excitement of the Women's Liberation movement and also the rise of French theory through the 1970s. Further, she mentioned how her own students, such as Deborah Nelson, have a different, perhaps Generation X, sensibility, turning to intellectual history rather than theory to write on "tough women" intellectuals like Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and Susan Sontag. In a different line, two students of Edward Said have both continued Said's anti-imperialist project, but also took their own turns in new directions. Lisa Lowe has concentrated more on the Asian implications of Orientalism, calling attention to the labor of Asian-American women, for example, as well as taking a more materialist approach in criticizing contemporary globalization. Rob Nixon has continued a kind of postcolonialist criticism, but has focused on the environment, which has uneven effects on those around the globe, especially affecting the poor, generating what he memorably calls "slow violence." In other words, he has met the problem-space of the present, going where the previous generation did not quite imagine.

What I've Learned

In conducting interviews, I have learned the history of contemporary criticism from the horses' mouths, as it were. I have learned about the practices of the field, the problem-spaces to which they responded, and the relation of criticism to the institution of higher education, as well as the larger trajectory from the welfare state to the neoliberal state. I have also learned that careers, even esteemed ones, are often accidental and anomalous. And I have learned many writing lessons in preparing, conducting, and shaping the text of the interview. For now, I will pull out two particular moments in the process, the event of the interview itself and editing the transcript that results. Preparation is one of the essential stages, of

course, but it is not that different from writing an essay on a critic, going through their work and gaining a surmise of its path, so I will elaborate on the two stages that one does not usually encounter in most literary-critical writing.[13]

First, during the actual interview, one of the main lessons I have learned is listening. I only conduct my interviews in person because I believe that they have a different quality in real time and the same place. Maybe it is a matter of gestures, cues, and all the non-verbal things that happen in person, that feed into the electric current of more genuine question and answer. In my observation, interviews over email tend to produce wooden prose, and people give boilerplate or more formal statements; in person, the dynamic changes, as we talk, suss each other out, go back and forth, start and stop, go in a new direction, fill out a previous point, with pauses, tic phrases, quirks and all. In "The Case for the Scholarly Reporter," Andrew Ross observes that he "had been trained, first and foremost, as a 'reader,' alert, above all to decoding the secret life of words," which in turn meant "that I was not a very good listener" (243), Thus, to study and write about Disney, USA, trade in China, or Palestinian stone masons in occupied territory, he talked to people to find out what they did there, as well as researched the relevant scholarship. For me, an interview is not about delivering my views, or challenging others' views, as one is trained to do in criticism, but about trying to understand and bring out someone else's ideas. And I have learned to say less and to be more comfortable with pauses, silences, and wait until someone might chime in, or go in a direction that would not have come otherwise.

David Scott sees interviews as an alternative to the standard mode of critique. They enjoin "a 'listening' self who is an agent of attunement and receptivity [...]. [I]ts motivation is more tentatively exploratory, clarifying, and reconstructive than explicitly critical" (*Hall's Voice* 5). Listening is not merely passive, idyllic, or without obligation; it is what they call in psychology "active listening"—that is, interested, attentive, with real questions responding to what someone has said, and conscious of the thread. I typically outline a few thematic nodes to ask about, so that I am assured of covering the fundamental topics in a person's work, but I do not draft a set of questions in advance, so I am open to the movement of the conversation. In a few of my early interviews, I would type out a list of questions, but found they were more distracting than helpful during the actual event, and impeded rather than spurred the flow of the conversation. I usually begin with a question that might encapsulate a main theme of their work, as with Marcus on

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13 I discuss the practical stages in "Criticism Live." Also, I have written a number of essays on critics drawn from interviews, published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, my book *How to Be an Intellectual: Essays on Criticism, Culture, and the University*, and elsewhere.

surface reading, that most people would associate their work with, and then move to particulars about their relevant writing and how they developed it, sometimes veering back to their training, early work, or background, sometimes marching through their work in order, sometimes shifting to debates in the field or in general cultural politics. Rather than either a mute recorder or a clamorous adversary, I try to proceed as a kind of a tour guide, covering the main sites, although I do not shy away from asking about topics that might be uncomfortable. However, I do so not to score a point but so they can explain themselves, and readers can judge as they see fit.

Second, while editing the text, I have especially learned the value of trimming or cutting. This phase is at the other end of the spectrum from the heightened and convivial moment of the interview itself, a solitary task requiring repeated time at a desk and screen. Still, it literally and figuratively makes the form that we recognize as an interview. (I have to admit that, while I transcribed the first few I conducted, back in the 1990s, I now thankfully can hire assistants to transcribe them). For those who have never heard tapes or seen a video of themselves speaking extemporaneously, transcription yields an often jumbled and twisty clump of text, with many false starts, repetitions, roundabout paragraphs, "you knows" and other colloquial fillers, and digressions or unclear moments. But editing shapes the material into a written entity, according to the expectations of the genre. Interviews are written through editing.[14] I say this to dispel the assumption people sometimes have that an interview is largely a transcription: you simply sit down, ask questions, and then presto, an interview. In contrast, I can testify that the verbatim text of what one has said can be humility-inducing. However, it still surprises me how one can trim the raw text and sift out or distil the most germane statements. To wit, interviews typically start with a transcript of 16–24,000 words for a 2–2 ½ hour session (which seems a human limit for the intensity of the activity), to 6–8000 in publishable form. My principle is to leave the words as spoken, just less of them, abridged to the parts that seem most necessary, informative, and interesting.

The process of editing, I imagine, is like that of a film editor, looking at clips over and over and splicing together the most fitting ones. Or a music editor, who might select the beats or phrases that best capture the mood and smooth out the bridges. To edit, I read and reread, going over each sentence or cluster of words, trying to picture what captures the point the best, what might be cut, and what gives the clearest impression. It is a labor-intensive process, more like chiseling

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14 As Osborne remarks, "Interviews are children of opportunity. Creatures of context and occasion, they are nonetheless ultimately the products of the artful edit" (vii).

and polishing stone, and you have to take a lot of breaks, otherwise you lose the sharp sight that one needs to pinch this phrase and pick the other. But it is rewarding to see it take shape. I think other kinds of academic writing would benefit from trimming with a similarly ruthless eye.

Finally, I feel that interviews are affirmative, affirming the value and significance of the work that a particular person has done and that we do collectively. In particular, the kind of interviews I do affirm that literature and criticism matter, the humanities matter, and academic or other serious intellectual work matters, which are salutary reminders in the face of current dismissals of them as superfluous or useless. (The same, I assume, applies to interviews in art, philosophy, history, and so on). As I mentioned, we often talk about criticism as a conversation, but it largely delivers a monologue; interviews affirm the practice and pulse of intellectual talk and exchange.

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Rebecca Roach

Little Questions: The Interview and Literary Studies

Abstract: This article discusses the interview's status and use in literary studies and literary culture more broadly. It outlines a typology of the interview as conceived in literary studies, arguing that the diversity of conceptions and uses of the form and practice is illuminating for our understandings of why interviews have flourished within the field while being simultaneously belittled by literary scholars. Moreover, in tracing the rise of Interview Studies in the last decade, the article claims that this diversity within literary studies is suggestive for scholars working in other disciplines.

Keywords: literary interview, *The Paris Review*, contemporary anglophone literature; author interview, literary studies, literary field, life writing, chatter, book talk, mediation, paratexts, subjectivity, inscription technologies

What defines a literary interview? This little question has a surprisingly broad range of possible responses. Is it the subject: interview Seamus Heaney, Nadine Gordimer, Margaret Atwood, or any number of authors or editors, and voila the interview is considered "literary"? Or is it the topics discussed: where conversations around form, creative practice, and literary influences abound a literary interview is born? Or perhaps it is the way in which the interview transcript is treated: edited and shaped into a piece of aesthetic writing with qualities of "literariness?" Maybe we could even define an interview as literary by the way in which it is received: deemed literary if it is utilised by literary scholars or framed as such by publishers?

I am not highlighting these distinctions in order to be pedantic. Granted, there is often a degree of overlap in the possible approaches I outlined above, with such factors co-existing in the same interview scenario. My point is rather that, in the realm of literary studies, publishing, and culture more broadly, there is little consensus around the question of what defines a literary interview.

Perhaps this seems like a rather little question, one that needn't occupy scholars outside of those relatively few who write on interviews in literature,[1] and of little interest to those working in other fields—to a researcher deploying interviewing as a method within the social sciences, for example. Why should they care

1 My monograph *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* was the first to treat the topic in the Anglophone sphere.

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about what seem to be questions of aesthetic value?[2] Actually, I want to argue that this little question has a significance far greater than its apparent reference and with far greater reach. Looking to the interview's utilisation and status within literary studies has much to teach scholars working across a whole range of disciplines. Moreover, it sheds light not only on the fruits and challenges of interdisciplinary work itself, but on such fundamental topics as twentieth-century conceptions of identity, the nature of public spheres, or even the relationship between humans and technology.

A Typology of Interviews in the Literary Field

Let us start small. We will circle back to the question of the literary interview, and its potentially tricky associations with literariness. Instead, let's replace it with a focus on the interview in literary studies. Even here, however, my little question would seem to have left literary scholars with something of a foundational problem. What do you do when there isn't even agreement about what the object of study is exactly? By way of approaching that question, I will outline a typology of interviews as they are deployed and thought about within the literary field writ large (encompassing the literary market and criticism). This move is perhaps suggestive. That such a descriptive exercise is warranted indicates the limited nature of scholarship on interviews in the field today. It is indeed something of a paradox that interviews are avidly read within the literary field and yet rarely discussed by scholars. It is a point to which I will also return. But first, let me put forward my categorisation, born of my own research, of interviews as they are deployed in the field.

Interviews as Data

Interviews have been utilised as a means to collect, from subjects, information that has relevance to the literary field. I start with this classification not because it is necessarily the most prevalent understanding of what an interview in the field might constitute but because it is likely the most familiar deployment of interviews to scholars from other disciplines. Interviewing is deployed as a means

2 Laurel Richardson has written engagingly on this question. Although I do not think that interviews should be considered synonymous with poems, her attention to the poetics of the interview is refreshing.

of data collection within literary studies despite it not being as common a methodology as in other disciplines—as textual scholar Jerome McGann notes, the objects studied in the humanities are "not primarily informational materials. They are made for reflective and imaginative purposes" (16). Where interviewing is deployed, it is often in the arena of literary sociology and those areas wherein information about subjects of interest to literary scholars—readers, writers, editors, etc.—is currently lacking: where the archive, beloved by many a literary scholar, is yet to exist.

This research is often oriented towards literary culture itself and often, for obvious reasons, focused around contemporary trends. Scholars and publishers working in contemporary literary culture, or book history, for example, might be keen to use qualitative interviewing methods to develop an understanding of how readers utilise digital reading devices, for example, or how their reading habits have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, or why they might choose to visit a literary festival. Similarly, scholars interested in relations between the publishing industry and the literary field turn to interviewing as a means of collecting information from subjects working in the industry. John B. Thompson, a sociologist by training, has produced a number of works on the contemporary publishing industry that are the product of extensive interviews with key players. In other instances, literary scholars have themselves emulated similar approaches. When writing *Making Literature Now* literature professor Amy Hungerford interviewed several editors and authors as part of her research; I have done the same when trying to catalogue contemporary author interview usage in the publishing field (Roach, "The Role and Function of Author Interviews").

In other cases, interviewing becomes a means by which to open up or advocate for an area of study, population of readers, or local culture that has hitherto been neglected. When, in their pathbreaking work, Janice Radway argued that scholars should attend to the ways in which readers engaged with the romance novel, or Elizabeth Long made the case for the cultural significance of book clubs in readers' lives, they both went out and interviewed women readers to collect information on areas that had been ignored by scholarship to date. Usually, the result of such interviewing is oriented towards a scholar's specific research project, more unusually is it conceived as contributing a dataset that will be made available to other scholars as a kind of archive of the present. In all cases these interviews are perceived as informational materials, with attendant assumptions about how they should be treated.[3]

3 For a discussion of the import of the changing status of the interview in the social sciences in an era of social media data, see Masschelein and Roach.

Interviews as Life Writing

Perhaps the dominant understanding of interviews within literary studies, and certainly within our broader reading culture, is that they provide a portrait of the individual. As scholar and interviewer Ronald Christ had it, the purpose of the (literally) "inter-view" is to "allude to data while being about the real business of creating character" (114). Certainly, the interview is perceived to be a culturally privileged site of authentic and spontaneous expression, even by social scientists as Paul Atkinson and David Silverman noted back in 1997. Its ties to longer Western traditions of both confessional narrative—in the vein of Rousseau or Saint Augustine—and Socratic dialogue—which seeks to obtain a truth through rigorous examination of the speaking subject—underlines the perception (which we might want to contest) that the interview offers a revelatory form of writing about the self. Distinct from the research interview, in which confidentiality and anonymity are key, the interview aimed at a reading public promises a behind-the-scenes glimpse of a public figure (politician or author), whether in the form of confession or access to the supposedly "truer" private self.

In recognising the interview's connections to other forms of auto/biographical writing, we can conceive of it as a form of "life writing." The term designates genres that include autobiography, memoir, biography, diary, letters, oral history: namely forms of writing that narrate personal lived experience.[4] The term also designates an interdisciplinary field of relatively recent formation that draws heavily on its antecedents in and continued interactions with literary studies. Expansive in its scope, life writing is attuned to the potential of narratives of the self to take multimodal forms, for example engaging with video games and Instagram feeds or technologies of bureaucratic identity such as questionnaires and preprinted forms. Such recognition opens the potential for critical engagement with hitherto neglected forms such as the interview. Despite representing a natural home for the form within literary studies broadly, to date interviews have received little attention within the field, despite them offering a quintessential example of what eminent life writing scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call "coaxed narratives" (the encouragement of certain kinds of expression via material, formal and social disciplining) (64–69). The interview's peculiarity—it differs from autobiographical writings like memoir and diary in containing not one

4 Increased attention to multimodality and digital constructions of the self mean that the "writing" in life writing has become a bit of a misnomer, but the term is valuable for its inclusivity in contrast to the more restricted import of terms such as 'autobiography,' with its associations with an Enlightenment, white, Western, male subject.

subject but two, it offers a formative rather than a retrospective account, etc.—in fact suggests that it might offer much food for life writing scholars‘ collective thought. The degree to which we privilege the interviewee's subjecthood and efface the interviewer's is curiously unmatched by our frequent designation of authorship rights to the latter and suggestive as we think about cultural constructions of authorship in our contemporary moment, for example. Interviews have always been imbricated with larger questions around race, gender, and class—who gets interviewed, by whom, is asked which questions, and to what purpose—and attending to interviews *en masse* can provide us with some important insights into how authorship has been constructed historically. As the field matures, it will, hopefully, provide an avenue for literary studies to perceive both the interview's formal singularity and popular cultural role in writing, reflecting and shaping images of authorship.

Conceiving of the interview as life writing has ramifications for the way in which it is understood in both a literary studies and interdisciplinary setting. While sharing with the social sciences an assumption that the interview might provide information on the subject or their views, a life writing perspective shifts emphasis slightly in placing greater emphasis on the text as a shaped narrative portrait. The focus is often on its production of individual expression rather than extractable or reproducible qualitative data—with significant repercussions for the way we understand the (aesthetic) status of the interview manuscript, any revisions or editorial contributions, and any ethical consequences deriving from such.

Interviews as Chatter

Despite interviews being considered as informational materials or portraiture in some quarters, there is a strong perception within literary culture that interviews are documents of dubious standing. Ever since the inauguration of the published interview in nineteenth-century America,[5] the form has also been associated with gossip, scandal and the improper circulation of private communication in the public sphere. This is part of its appeal: it promises an intimate portrait of the subject—in the case of an author usually in her or (more usually) his private study, hence the common narrative of the interviewer venturing into this sphere

5 Debates raged around the 'first' published interview. See for example Nils Gunnar Nilsson, "The Origin of the Interview" and Christopher Silvester "Introduction."

and describing (or photographing) the study, that often sets the scene of an interview. Such a rhetoric emphasises privacy, conversational immediacy, and the possibility of disclosure, despite the interview's heavily mediated status and its explicit aim of conversing precisely for the purposes of publication and an absent reader. As journalism scholar Michael Schudson notes, interviews "promoted a novel form of communication between interviewer and interviewee, in which the most important auditor, the public, was present only in the imagination" (49). The overall result has been that the published interview, particularly when associated with the "prying journalist-interviewer" (satirical sketches of whom abound in nineteenth century periodicals), has retained more than a whiff of illegitimacy.[6]

Today interviews with authors abound within literary culture. They are published in literary magazines, in the book sections of broadsheets, in industry publications or performed as platform interviews at literary festivals and book readings, on television, radio or podcasts. Yet this hegemony has not resulted in any accrual of cultural weight for the form. The interview's long-standing associations with journalism do not help in this. Often considered outside the remit of literature proper, journalism's perceived ephemerality (both in terms of its production and status in the archive) is regularly contrasted with literature's supposed longevity, to the detriment of the former. Both the interview's regular appearance in serial publications such as newspapers and periodicals and its presentation as occurring in a specific time and locale have left it open to accusations that it too is an ephemeral text.

Perhaps the extreme of this association is sociologist Daniel Boorstin's influential conception of the interview as the quintessential "pseudo-event" (11). An event planned for the purposes of its being reported or reproduced, for Boorstin the interview is an exemplar of media- and publicity-oriented culture. In such a conception, the interview is both insubstantial and endlessly reproducible, designed solely for the purposes of news coverage. In such a reading the interview is the form *par excellence* of celebrity culture.

This potential has been enthusiastically embraced by the marketing departments of publishing houses (and by some authors) in the last half century. When an author publishes a new book, the promotional campaign will regularly include a number of interviews—whether print, broadcast or in person—all designed to raise the author's profile and promote the title. The expectation that authors participate in these interviews is strong enough that not only can writers'

6 For extensive discussion of this aspect of interviews' reception see my discussion of the Hawthorne-Lowell Scandal (Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* 33-47).

refusals to give interviews become news, but we also see a trend in anti-interview rhetoric among authors. Toni Morrison resignedly spoke of the repetitiveness of being interviewed, John Updike more stridently of it being a process that “rots a writer’s brain, it cretinises you” (Amis). That both did so in the course of an interview indicates the degree to which such rhetoric does important work in distinguishing between types of interview interactions and between the labour of being interviewed and the labour of writing: responding perhaps to a perceived concern that “authors’ utterances have elbowed aside authors’ texts” (Mobilio).

For many the interview has become synonymous with its worst uses within celebrity culture. The “tell all” interview, the piece of promotional “fluff,” the Q&A of form questions conducted entirely via email, the scandal around a quote attribution, or perhaps the exposé wherein the subject was unaware that they were being interviewed … all contributed to the interview’s negative reputation.

Despite a myriad of concerns about the status of the interview within literary culture, it is notable that they continue to flourish. In addition to their recognised promotional value, they are popular with editors (perhaps because there is not the suggestion that an author be paid for their contribution when interviewed) and with readers. Even writers recognise their potential as a platform (for advocacy, promotion, or alike). Chatty they may be but they also offer, as interviewer and literary scholar Jeffrey J. Williams has noted, a “toehold” for readers: a potentially democratic and timely introduction to the author and their work (“The Literary Interview as a Genre”). They are often entertaining, accessible and enjoyable to read.

Collectively such interviews also hold out the promise of behind-the-scenes insight into an industry and the writing process. They offer a modern incarnation of that perennial feature of literary culture “book talk.” For this reason, they can, *en masse*, have significant value for scholars interested in the literary field itself, whether those concerned with the development of readerships and publics, constructions of authorship, marketing practices, or conceptions of writing and literary value. As I argue in my book, chatter can be a valuable source of information.

Interviews as Paratexts

This next categorisation is particularly shaped by theoretical conceptions of the nature of the “text” within literary studies, which have had significant implications for the perceived status of interviews within the discipline. When he proffered his influential theory of the “paratext” in the 1980s, French literary critic Gérard Genette described the interview as such. Paratexts, for Genette, are those

features that surround the text and help to "present" or "assure its presence in the world" ("Introduction to the Paratext" 261). Such features might be "peritextual," or attached to the text, such as an author's name, an epigraph, illustrations, etc., or they might be "epitextual" and spatially distinct from the text, such as an interview. Together these paratexts may shape the text's reception in the world but they are not, by implication, constitutive of the author's literary creation.

There is a tension here in that Genette's work was meant to raise the profile of those features that are often overlooked by literary scholars in their rush to engage with the text "proper"—the discrete literary object or "well-wrought urn" so beloved of an older generation of literary scholars (namely the New Critics who dominated literary studies during the 1950s). Yet, in his rush to recover the paratext, Genette denies the possibility that the interview could claim the status of text, or literary object.[7] Such a positioning highlights the paratextual functions that the interview might demonstrate—promoting an author and her work for example—but it also narrows the interview's potential value for literary scholars to those interested in the material circulation of books and in literary culture broadly.

Genette's own analysis of the interview-as-epitext compounds this positioning. Although acknowledging that the function of the epitext (unlike the peritext) "is not always basically paratextual (that is, to present and comment upon the text)," his depiction of the interview is heavily and negatively shaped by such a function (*Paratexts* 345). The interview is "drudgery" for writers, it is a false dialogue, a constructed manuscript created by an author and a "nonperson"—an "ungracious" description he admits but describing what he seems as the role of the interviewer as "messenger" (*Paratexts* 360, 357). Genette contrasts the interview and the conversation—for him the latter occurs after the fact, is with a more "personalized" interlocutor and is wider in scope, suggesting that he views the interview as less valuable for being (apparently) ephemeral and tethered to a specific (often journalistic) occasion (*Paratexts* 358). Such a characterisation is in part born of the French intellectual tradition within which Genette writes, and which has a slightly different conception of the interview to that held in the Anglophone sphere. Nevertheless, Genette's depiction, with its alignment of the interview with promotional activities, with book talk, and with its failure to conceive of the interview's potential function as a co-creation between two parties,

7 His use of the term "text" in fact indicates a desire to more expansively conceive of the material of literature than that designated by the New Critics, but he fails to grant the interview this status.

or as a form of creative practice, has hitherto done little to raise the interview's status within Anglophone literary studies.

Interviews as a Critical Resource

Despite their often-lowly status within literary culture, interviews are regularly mined for evidence of authors' opinions, literary influences and work habits by scholars. Ignoring the shaping role of the context, interviewer or any editing processes, these published interviews are largely taken to be authorised and reliable informational materials by the scholars that use them. Such usage differs from the data collection described above in that these are previously published, usually conducted by a third party, and, intriguingly, commonly considered to be subject-specific. In contrast to the research interview, wherein the information is, to a degree, conceived as extractable and generalisable—as providing evidence about a population cohort—the published author interview is often taken to be a portrait of the unique subject. The interview is, in this light, a source comparable to the autobiography, the diary, or any other form of supposedly revelatory self-expression (but with the added suggestion of proffering expertise through use of such a consultation format) and can be deployed by the critic keen to utilise such (subject-specific) information.

The pre-eminent author interview in this respect is that conducted by American literary magazine *The Paris Review* under their series "The Art of Fiction." Inaugurated in 1953, these long-form interviews are highly regarded by critics, authors and general readers and heavily cited within literary studies. The list of authors interviewed is impressive: from E. M. Forster in the first edition through to Ursula K. Le Guin, Athol Fugard, Joan Didion, Umberto Eco, James Baldwin, Derek Walcott and a few hundred more. The eminence of the series is in part due to its subjects, but also a format wherein authors are encouraged to edit the transcripts and consider them as the ultimate self-portrait: "constructed to stand as testimonials for the ages" (Gourevitch ix). Some impressive self-promotion by the magazine doesn't hurt—one editor described a *Paris Review* interview as "a sort of international laurel for writers, a recognition of a mature life's work" (Gourevitch xi).[8]

The success and status attained by *The Paris Review* interviews has also pushed critics to consider, despite insisting on the author's privileged

8 Such a quotation also indicates the degree to which an interview can be akin to a literary prize, on which see James English.

subjectivity, the collective import of the form and the value they might have for criticism writ large. The *Review* has again been a leading example for scholars, perceived to offer a collection of definitive statements on the craft of literature; it once ran under the tag line "the DNA of literature" (*TheParisReview.org*). The *Review* has, since its early dates regularly put out a number of anthologies of interviews under titles such as *Writers at Work*, *Latin American Writers at Work* and alike which encourage readers to read across the different examples. In this they have been followed more recently by other publishers. We have seen a flurry, since the 1990s, of interview anthologies, whether those of single authors like the University Press of Mississippi's "Conversations" series, specific series such as those of Canadian interviewer Eleanor Wachtel, or thematically organised (often around writers originating from a specific country). More than book talk, interviews might offer insight into the nature of writing itself.

This growing body of interviews also seems to proffer a kind of alternative literary criticism. Scholar Tim Mayers has spoken of author interviews as providing what he calls "craft criticism" at mid-century—in an era in which literary studies was dominated by New Criticism, author interviews became a place wherein authors could discuss questions of craft and readers learn. Certainly, numerous writers have backed this point up in their insistence on the literary advice the format offers: Orhan Pamuk is not alone in talking of the comfort taken and practical knowledge gleaned from reading *Paris Review* interviews as a novice writer.

In a slightly different vein, Williams has noted the degree to which interviews with critics, a burgeoning sub-genre of the author interview since the 1970s, can themselves collectively provide an intellectual history of literary criticism. For him, "Interviews give a lived sense of criticism, of the intellectual, institutional, and biographical coordinates that inflect the ideas critics have and the positions they take. They show how critics might speak and move through their thought extemporaneously" ("Criticism Live" 237). Indeed, he suggests that the critical interview offers something of a hybrid between the literary interview, with its "holistic framework" and the scholarly article, from which it takes "the more serious bearing of academic work as well as presumed intellectual remove to talk about criticism and cultural politics" ("Criticism Live" 236–7). While some critics, like some writers, have dismissed the interview as promoting what Frederic Jameson calls "bad habits," "from which thinking only slowly recovers, if at all," for others the form offers the opportunity to address readers in a less formal environment than the scholarly article (6). For still others, the interview form itself offers a focus for intellectual reflection—and sometimes experimentation as Michel Foucault's 1969 anonymous interview as the "Masked Philosopher"

demonstrates.[9] Overall then, we can argue that, within literary criticism and the history of post-WW2 intellectual thought more broadly, the critical interview offers an important corollary to the scholarly article and other more familiar forms of criticism. They offer, as Williams has eloquently put it:

> a unique mode to help build a picture of criticism and theory in our time. Interviews give a lived sense of history and of the conditions that both produce and limit criticism [...]. Critical interviews compose a kind of intellectual autobiography of the institution of criticism in our time, as well as of the various critics who have done their work alongside us. ("Criticism Live" 250–1)

Whether critical or literary, interviews are an important potential resource for literary scholars. In acknowledging as much, we can recognise that there is a significant gap between the uses to which the interview is and might be put within the field, and the status it currently holds.

Interviews as a Source of Literature

Interviews appear in literature. Often, they crop up in treatments of literary culture or authorship—thus the writer-protagonist in Rachel Cusk's *Outline* (2014–18) trilogy is subject to promotional interviews (within works that are themselves often shaped as conversations) as part of her role as a working author. Elsewhere they become the form with which the author experiments. J. M. Coetzee's *Summertime* is made up of interviews with the now-dead author "John Coetzee's" former acquaintances; the interview becomes a means by which to explore questions of narrative and biographical truth. David Foster Wallace meanwhile examines misogyny and contemporary masculinity in his short story collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* via a series of supposed interview transcripts with the titular men. Adding further interest to the volume, following accusations of abuse made against Wallace, the degree to which the expressions of the subjects should be collated with those of the author (given the supposed revelatory nature of the interview form) has been the subject of discussion in recent years (Hungerford).

9 A 2003 special issue of the journal *Nottingham French Studies* entitled "Thinking in Dialogue: The Role of the Interview in Post-War French Thought" demonstrates the importance the form has for prominent French intellectuals such as Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Barthes, Kristeva, and Derrida.

The phenomenon of featuring interviews and interviewers in fiction is not new. Henry James frequently used interviewers as a symbol of the "devouring publicity" of modern life and as a foil for the serious writer in his fiction, in works such as *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Bostonians* (1886), and short stories (James 40). He also gave interviews. In the interwar years in Britain and France a penchant for publishing collections of so-called imagined or dream interviews prevailed and in the US *Vanity Fair* ran a hilarious series of impossible interviews between discordant figures such as Sigmund Freud and Jean Harlow or gossip columnist Walter Winchell and media commentator Walter Lippmann.

Such examples demonstrate that the interview has offered fodder for authors interested in thinking through issues as diverse as the perceived health of the public sphere, literary inheritance, the nature of celebrity, surrealist practices, or the Socratic method. Pointing to the diversity of ways in which authors might respond creatively to the form—of value in itself, focusing on interviews as a topic nevertheless somewhat sidesteps the question of the form's epistemological status within literature.

In another twist, interviewing has also contributed to the creation of literature and scholarship via its function as a "creative practice." Anneleen Masschelein and I coined the term to describe "how interviews have been and are used in creative ways, and how they in turn contribute to new forms and ways of being" (174). The collaborative process entailed in interviewing has been embraced by some for its ability to develop ideas. Coetzee's volume *Doubling the Point*, a collaboration with the young scholar David Atwell, intersperses essay reprints with interviews between the pair that seek to examine the nature of writing on the self. In doing so it presses at the (often dialogic) process by which intellectual thought emerges. Meanwhile for Sylvère Lotringer interviewing is a form of thinking, particularly appropriate for artists and activists in its inherent provisionality (199–234). In such an understanding of interviewing, the process becomes less a revelation of the self and instead a generative practice of co-creation. Here interviewing itself becomes part of the craft of literature.

Interviews as a Form of Literature

Can an interview be literature? This is perhaps the thorniest question concerning interviews in the literary field and one that will often raise the ire of scholars. During my research for my own monograph, I was regularly asked by senior scholars whether I was claiming that authors' interviews could attain the high status of literature. The implication was often that the sanctified walls of the English department had been scaled and Literature itself was threatened. If the critic's

fine discriminations could not hold back the onslaught of such attacks against Literature's aesthetic singularity and superiority, then all was lost. I confess, those scholars' concerns were somewhat beside the point for me. I wasn't trying to make a claim for the interview's literariness (although J. M. Coetzee's oeuvre is a useful case study if I so chose) but rather describe the emergence and deployment of a form within literary studies and culture. I might have noted that the interview is a relatively recent innovation from the standpoint of form: unlike the lyric, the novel, and the biography, our contemporary conception of the interview didn't exist in the mid-nineteenth century. Novelty certainly brings suspicion: while we might not think to contest the novel's status as a literary form, it too was attacked as a terrible modern invention on its appearance. But the sheer persistence of this anxiety was and continues to be suggestive.

For the record, yes, I do think that interviews can reach the lofty status of literature if they ask to be read as such. But not all do, nor do all aspire to be considered literature. In fact, to read interviews as literature is to deny their subversive and chameleon nature. The very plurality of their associations, their fluidity as a form and method, indicates that they are an epistemological oddity. They can undermine the stability of the object of literary criticism itself in stimulating (if sometimes anxiety-producing) ways. They force literary scholars to consider the question precisely of what makes literature literature—and how we define the author, the craft, the book, and how too these features are, to steal a phrase from Genette, made present in the world.

Interview Studies

In the above I have offered you a typology of interview usage and conception within the literary field. We can and should argue about my sortings—why not include the platform interview, with its aim to entertain, as a separate category? Surely, I should pay more attention to the question of expertise, given that interviews are often presented as the novice writer/interviewer in consultation with the literary lion? Aside from not wanting to perpetuate this list endlessly, my aim has been to highlight the degree to which the interview is a heterogeneous thing and process within the literary field. The word carries wildly different associations to different people depending on their investments, sub-disciplinary orientations, and knowledge. These different associations also bring with them very different expectations as to how the process or text should be treated. How we define a literary interview might seem like a little question but in trying to answer it we are forced both to recognise both the plurality of endeavours within the field

and to move beyond the bounds of literary culture entirely. Even within literary studies, discussion of the interview requires an interdisciplinary perspective and appreciation of the potential effects of its definitional diversity.

We have begun to see movements in this direction, not least in volumes such as the present. Within the literary field, the last decade has seen a flowering of criticism by a number of scholars on the topic. Work by Anneleen Masschelein, Galia Yanoshevsky, Sarah Fay, Jeffrey J. Williams, myself, and others has begun to elucidate the current and historical status of the form and sketched possible directions for future research. We can identify what Williams has called the "emergence of Interview Studies" within the field ("The Literary Interview").

The rise of Interview Studies has the potential to shift perceptions of the previously "iffy" form within literary studies, while also bringing more theoretical and practical revolutions as well. Looking broadly across the field we might note the degree to which interviews have often promoted a very particular version of authorship that has been unappealing or inaccessible to many writers: what are the ramifications of that on a global literary stage and how might we use the interview as a means to examine authorship norms and practices in other cultural, geographical and World Literature contexts? How have interviews been used—or not used—outside of Anglophone and European literary contexts?

Elsewhere, Masschelein and I have called for interviewers and editors to more overtly discuss and acknowledge the editorial decisions and processes entailed in producing the published text which are too often left unsaid (174). Such a shift would encourage more reflection on the variety of mediations entailed in the process and perhaps more recognition of the degree to which an interview is always a construction of sorts—and thus of interest to literary and media scholars more broadly. In my discussion of chatter above I pointed to some of the ways in which interviews might prove of interest in those studying textual circulation—something I flesh out more thoroughly in my book. So too I might note that, following N. Katherine Hayles and Friedrich Kittler, print interviewing is an inscription technology in that it offers a set of social practices designed to capture utterances so they can be stored and retrieved. It follows too that the interviewer is a technology of inscription, inscribing and mediating a conversation into text—while having to bear the weight of heavy claims to objectivity. The frequent scandals around attribution and quote accuracy in interviews and the suitability of certain categories of humans to be interviewers (female interviewers often get a very bad rap) are an expression, as I note, of anxieties around "the precise nature and value of the human (and by extension art) in an enterprise that is associated with the statistical, representational, mechanical, and biopolitical: the

relationship between bodies and technologies in modernity" (*Literature and the Rise of the Interview* 12).

We can already see then that the emergence of Interview Studies has the potential to contribute to more fields than the literary. Interviews offer an example of Foucault's "technologies of the self" and have constituted, as I have noted, two versions of subjectivity in modernity (16–49). More than this, we can identify that in our modern culture the mediatized subject is promoted, while the mediating subject is often erased. These recognitions have implications for the ways in which we understand constructions of selfhood across disciplines and import in the realm of politics, history, sociology, philosophy, and a number of other fields. A literary perspective brings to the study of the interview an awareness of form's diverse role in shaping our understandings of ourselves. The question of how we define a literary interview might be small; the ramifications of any answer are not.

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Galia Yanoshevsky

Performing the Literary Interview: Body and Decorum

Abstract: The author interview in the press and in the electronic media is more than just a promotional activity. It is an interaction between an interviewer, an interviewee, and an audience, where what is said, done and shown can be used to extract information on the author's work. When studied as performance, that is, as a media ritual where the author is embodied, the interview becomes an extension of the author's work by other means. By analyzing examples based largely on the French literary field in the twentieth and twenty-first century, this article shows how the two key elements of the performance—decorum and body—can be used by the audience and in research to make inferences about the author's person and their work. It also suggests that when discrepancies appear between the author in person and the image that springs from their writings, the interviewer and the medial framing try to reduce the gap between the author and their poetics. Finally, the article shows that in literary interviews, gendered scripts are enacted.*

Keywords: literary interview, author interview, interaction, persona; performance, decorum, setting, gestures, embodiment, ritual, scene, gender, media

Introduction

The interview reveals information about the author and their work through what is being said in conversation. It is a genre with a well-established script and distribution of roles: the interviewer is the middleman whose role is to provide a third party (the readers, audience, or spectators) with information about the writer—their person and their work. The author, who appears in the interview in person, is supposed to speak about himself or herself and their work. Thus, an analysis of the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee enables us to extract data pertaining to these aspects. In a previous work on Nathalie Sarraute's interviews, I showed how the author's image is built through the verbal interaction between interviewer and interviewee (see Yanoshevsky, "L'entretien d'écrivain").

* This article is based on chapter 3 of Yanoshevsky, "L'Entretien littéraire."

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However, the site of an interview holds more than what is said; its analysis should extend to what is being done and shown. To begin with, the author comes in person to the interview. As they "[enter] the scene" (Meizoz, *La littérature "en personne"* 3), their embodied presence conveys more than is contained in their writings and what is said in the interview. Their gestures and their facial expressions, the way they perform their role as a writer-interviewed, is recorded on tape and on paper, and is part of the information conveyed, along with what is being said. Though some argue that interviews are "fluff"—that they are promotional media activity *outside* of the author's works, I claim otherwise. In this article, the author interview is not viewed as yet another type of authors' promotional activity, one which is to be viewed as external to their works. It is part and parcel of their oeuvre, shaping an understanding of their poetics, the specific style (structure and themes) associated with their work. To explore it, we need to study the functioning of the author interview through the notion of performance.

I understand "performance" in a double sense, first as action on a stage. It involves a script, actors—each holding a specific role and interacting with one another, and decorum—a specific setting where action takes place. But "performance" encompasses more than just the activity on stage. In Richard Schechner's understanding, it also comes to include the rites and rituals of all spheres of life. Understood in this way, the interview is one of the many rites performed by authors in the literary and the media spheres (e.g., interviews, debates, and book launches), which can each be studied as a substrate of their respective poetics. In French culture, the author interview descends from the *lieu commun* (*locus memoriae*) known as the visit to the great writer (see Nora), where the journalist travels to the author's place to meet them in their private home, because one can learn about a person from the way they live. In its contemporary rendering, however, the author is interviewed in a studio where, out of their natural environment, they are "caught" on film and tape. While previous research mainly turned to recovering the writer's *persona* through the interview (Rodden; Yanoshevsky, "L'entretien d'écrivain"), or to explaining how the interview is a sociological phenomenon where the writer "enters the scene," and where their image is forged (Meizoz, *La littérature "en personne"*), I am interested in the way the author's specific poetics are simultaneously sought after in interviews and produced in the interaction. In this article, I would like to show how authors' physical traits, corporal gestures, and attire (all falling under the headline of "body") interact with "decorum," here to be understood as how the writer is described or filmed and how the setting is used in relation to the writer and their body in a way that pertains to their poetics. In the last section of the paper, I look into feminine scripts of embodiment in interviews.

The Interview in the French Tradition

With one foot set in the American press of the late nineteenth century and another anchored in the ritual visit to the great writer, the literary interview in France evolves from both the journalistic and the literary traditions. It is initially brought from across the Atlantic, in the form of an interview with eyewitnesses. However, once in France, it turns into interviews with celebrities in various fields, continuing the tradition of the "visit to the great writer" by other means.

Introduced in France in 1884 by *Le Petit Journal* (Speirs 301–07), the author interview becomes a sub-genre of the interview, a new journalistic genre of field reporting invented by James Gordon Bennett Senior of the *New York Herald* (Palmer 90). Designed to collect live information from laymen, New Journalism emerged as a form of grassroots journalism meant to inform the general public on topics of human interest and to sell newspapers (Thérenty 333–34). In late-nineteenth-century France, the vogue of interviewing not only laymen, but also celebrities who were not specialists about the topic at hand, gave rise to heated debates about the interview's (un)reliability (Seillan 1033). Though naturalist author Émile Zola questioned the authenticity of interviews, he did not entirely reject the form. Interviews could be useful if the interviewer was "a man of talent, who respected someone else's thoughts" (Leyret). Others agreed with this point of view. Journalist Pierre Giffard and novelist, journalist, and politician Maurice Barrès defended the written form of an interview (see Barrès, "L'ésthétique"; Giffard, *Le Sieur*). Not merely a stenographic report, the text had to convey the journalist's (artistic) talent (see Barrès). According to journalist André Lang an interview belonged to the interviewer, and the interviewee was not entitled to proofreading, an opinion commonly shared by most of the journalists who took part in the inquiry (see Lang). In his view, the interest in interviews is in large part due to the reporter's ability to reproduce the atmosphere and to interpret the thoughts of their interviewee as a function of their own personality.

The literary interview in France is also an offshoot of great authors' portraits in their homes that flourished in eighteenth-century Europe (Nora 563–87; Thérenty 341; Kött 69–72, 239). It was a ritualized institution of literary consecration (see Dubois; Sapiro). Descending directly from "the visit to the great writer" ("la visite au grant' écrivain"), it is a ritualized moment where, according to Nora, one is exposed to the shocking presence of the great writer in flesh and blood, they who are usually ratified by their work, rather than by their person (571). These encounters included visits to the home of the renowned writer, in order to explore the place where their work is produced. They originated from a biographical desire to know the person behind the work, in the tradition of Sainte-Beuve, who

spurred interest in the biography of the author in French literature history (see Sainte-Beuve). Although Marcel Proust vividly protested against the confusion between the two entities of the writer's person—the one who writes and the one who visits the salons—the literary interview ultimately further drew attention to the author's persona and performance outside of his writing (Proust 224).

Such a meeting is encapsulated in a mise en scène made up of a setting (decorum) and a certain way to observe the writer in that space, as the physical ratifier of their work (see Maingueneau, "Ethos, scénographie, incorporation"). This is in fact the opposite direction we take, as readers of a book, as we reconstruct the author's image from their writing, or what Amossy dubs "the discursive image" (*see L'image de soi dans le discours*). Once we get a glimpse of the writer in person, we instantaneously interpret their conduct by inferring from their work and are astonished to discover discrepancies between the writing and the person (like a stuttering in oral discourse of a writer who is otherwise eloquent in writing). As spectators, we cannot help going back and forth between the writer's image as it comes across in the written work, and the extra-literary images transmitted through journalistic accounts of the interview ("des *propos recueillis*") or in audiovisual media.

With the advent of electronic media (radio and television) the paradigm of the visit to the home of the writer has shifted. Interviews are mostly recorded or filmed in the studio, and so the writer has to travel. It is now the writer who invades the interviewer's habitat, rather than the interviewer penetrating the space inhabited by the interviewee. For instance, in the famous French literary roundtable, *Apostrophes*[1] host Bernard Pivot only rarely traveled to the writer's home.[2] The new media context further complicates the performance and the interview's transmission, because it entails that the interviewee is now not only at the mercy of the interviewer's pen, but also has to perform in an unfamiliar media context, one that records their every move and takes an active part in fashioning their performance.

In what follows, I examine two key elements of the performance of the author interview: decorum and embodiment.

1 *Apostrophes* was a live, weekly, literary, primetime, talk show on French television (Antenne 2) created and hosted by Bernard Pivot. It ran for more than fifteen years (1975–1992).

2 Exceptions are Marguerite Yourcenar and Alexander Solzhenistyn. Pivot interviews Marguerite Yourcenar in her home in Mount Desert Island, United States, in September 1979, and Alexandre Solzhenitsyn in his home in Cavendish, Vermont, during December 1983.

Reading Poetics from Decorum

By *decorum* I designate the physical/actual place or the environment in which the interview performance of the writer takes place. Likewise, “decorum” refers to a certain way to frame—to describe or to film—the body’s movement in space. The literary interview is conducted on a set or in the writer’s home, the latter corresponding to zoological and anthropological conventions of exploring species by describing them in their “natural” habitat, as a means to explain their behavior (in the animal realm) and their activities (in the human realm) through their spaces of living. This perspective echoes Balzac’s realistic, Buffon-inspired model:

> There has therefore existed, there will therefore always exist social Species as there are zoological Species. Buffon has produced a magnificent work in trying to represent in a book the whole of zoology, but was there not a work of this kind to be done for society? (Balzac 8, my translation)

Filming the author’s home and surroundings sheds light on this perspective of habitat, where the author is, as Claude Lévi-Strauss puts it, “in his element” (Lévi-Strauss). Upon his request, Jean José Marchand and his team film Lévi-Strauss in his mansion of Montigny-sur-Aube in June 1974. In the introduction to the film (“Claude Levi-Strauss”), Lévi-Strauss appears elegantly dressed, using a cane as he strolls on the paths of his property, and finally settles down in an armchair across from a chateau, described in the voice-over alternately as his home (une maison/sa maison) or as an old French residence (“devant une vieille demeure française”). The apparently minor difference in description bears a special meaning in the context of the interview: in the first part, we are shown the familial context in which Levi-Strauss grew up (the first few images shown are photos of his grandparents and his childhood). The second part focuses on Lévi-Strauss’s professional life as a post-war author, his return to France in 1948, and the period in which he headed of one of France’s most prestigious institutions, the École pratique des hautes études. Describing his house as an “old French home” (“une vieille demeure française”) leads the spectator to connect what they are seeing with *enracinement* (being part of a place, taking root, for generations) and “old Frenchhood” which was contested by antisemitism throughout the war and—given Lévi-Strauss’s Jewish heritage—would have been denied to his family. The decorum thus restores Lévi-Strauss’s right to belong to the French nation, signaling that he is a French writer. The introduction to the third part incorporates alternating images of Lévi-Strauss walking along a path and photos of his books and expeditions; this represents the crossing paths of the young Lévi-

Strauss and members of South American Indigenous groups and provides a symbolic introduction to his lifelong career as an anthropologist.

In a 1961 documentary devoted to Louis-Ferdinand Céline, by then one of France's greatest living writers after being rehabilitated from his pre-war notoriety as siding with France's collaborationists during the second World War, Céline walks to his house in Meudon (Pauwels). While comparable in certain respects, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's walk is symbolically different from that of Lévi-Strauss's. The anthropologist's stroll is staged in a way that elevates an everyday gesture towards the importance of his work; his walk towards the house, as we have shown, is accompanied by a montage of images of his various field work with South American Indigeneity. Known for his collaboration and avowed antisemitism, Céline's walk is anything but elevating: it dismounts the writer from the great author's pedestal by showing him dressed in rags and surrounded by his domestic animals. The voice-over emphasizes this effect by describing his walk toward his home in the following manner:

> Still full of anger and shrouded in misery, here he is. His true companions are mongrel and angry dogs. He calls them all 'my little peer' [*sic.*] with great tenderness. His most intimate friend is the parrot that you will hear hissing during our conversation. For indeed Céline lives, works, and dreams among the furious barking and this ironic bird's whistling. (Pauwels, my translation)

In previous examples, we saw how an author's reputation and works are symbolically represented in the contact between the writer and their surroundings. In the following example, the description of the author's surroundings provides the journal's readers with an analogy between the writer's environment and their literary themes. In the summer of 2015, journalist Ariane Chemin offered *Le Monde*'s readers a weekly portrait of best-selling author, Michel Houellebecq, notorious for his rowdy relationship with the media and his provocative literary themes. Like the narrator of *Soumission* (2015), Houellebecq lives alone, in a tall building in the thirteenth arrondissement. Moving back and forth between the building which is inhabited by middle class Chinese and Houellebecq, and its environment which encompasses the small shops, supermarkets and the ring road represented in his novels, the descriptions supposedly give the reader the writer's perspective on the world. According to Chemin, Houellebecq prefers the ordinary and the banal (view of the ring road, or no view at all) to celebrity and shoulder rubbing with the Saint-Germain élite. The look cast on the author's residence serves as proof of this claim.

Detailed descriptions of the writer's environment can be used to reveal the sources of their oeuvre. A good example of this tendency is Roger-Michel

Allemand's documentary film interview with French laureate author Michel Butor (*Michel Butor*; see Allemand). Butor's interview is part of François Flohic's collection of in-depth interviews with writers, designed to trace back the sources of the works through the author's life. It shows Butor at *A l'écart* (literally: "apart"), his residence at Lucinges in Haute-Savoie, France. The back cover of the DVD describes this interview as an "original portrait of the writer in the privacy of his place of life and work." Dressed in his usual pocketed overalls, Butor is filmed in his home office, packed with books. During the interview, Butor draws an analogy between the house and his writing: His home is "bursting with objects," to a point where to add something, you must remove something else. In the same manner, the process of writing a book involves forgetting other books you have written. The camera focuses on the background, loaded with books, brushes and paintings. A few close-ups of Butor's face, with a globe in the background, hints at Butor's lifelong experience as a travel writer whose travels have shaped his writing. The camera follows Butor as he strolls on the path of his home and says: "I am a classic in the difference, apart," this last adverb is the name of his property, *à l'Écart* (indicated in the film by a sign). Everything in the visual framing of Butor's interview in his residence works to prove the relationship between a life and a work: Butor's writing is given here as the result of the daily living conditions of the author of *La Modification* (1957).

The importance of the home as a driving force for writing is evident in French Academy's author Michel Tournier's interview. He uses metaphors and analogies based on the link he establishes between his country home and his work. The work is like a plant or a tree, he says, which must be cared for by a gardener. The whole interview is therefore set not in his Paris residence, but rather in his countryside home. As he welcomes interviewer Viviane Forrester of the *Chemins* series, he admits that he cannot possibly imagine writing in Paris, without a garden, which for him is an essential space for writing (Forrester, "Interview with Michel Tournier").

When in the same series Viviane Forrester interviews French New Novelist Nathalie Sarraute, she visits her not in the author's residence, but rather in her writer's habitat, that is, the Parisian café where she is known to write her novels: in the tumult of the place, among strangers, the author of *Tropismes* manages to detach herself, to withdraw into herself, in order to capture the microscopic movements in the confines of consciousness that her novels are all about (Forrester, "Nathalie Sarraute").

In all examples cited above, the interviewers reference the authors' current location (more or less removed from the epicenter of literary action or from "home") as an explanation of their literary production. However, other interviews

give a diachronic perspective on the origins of writing. Georges Perec and Amos Oz, for instance, are interviewed in their biographical surroundings. Viviane Forrester sets Georges Perec's interview in rue Vilin, Belleville, where his mother used to own a hair salon. This is Perec's first visit to his childhood place after the Second World War, and the interview clearly views it as a trigger to speak of his works. Israeli laureate writer Amos Oz's first steps in becoming a writer date back to the days when, as a teenager, he made himself a "room of his own" at the communal Herzl house in Kibbutz Houlda. As he is filmed by journalist Ilana Dayan, the camera follows the paths of the kibbutz today before focusing first on Oz's walk towards Herzl house, where he used to clandestinely write away from the mocking eyes of his peers: "I didn't want the other children to know that I was writing. Every evening I went to the Herzl house" (Dayan). The interview then takes place in the now empty space of Herzl house, used here to recall Oz's past.

Jean José Marchand films Nobel prize winner Jorge Luis Borges's interview in the Argentinian writer's workplace, the library (Marchand, "Interview with Jorge"). He thus gives a symbolic meaning to the space, turning it into a place: Borges is seated on a chair and surrounded by books at the corner of the National Public Library in Buenos Aires. Already blind at the time of the interview, Borges cannot read the countless books that have nourished his writing. In a dark and viewless corner of the library, surrounded by wooden walls, he talks about the connection between his blindness (symbolized by the dark windowless space) and explains that his sedentary life is just as rich as that of his military ancestor, and that many of his poems were spurred on by that type of active soldier life which was denied him by his blindness.

The connection between the writer and their writing can be made not only in the fixed location of their own residence or surroundings, but also on the move. This is how journalist Jules Huret interviews Leo Tolstoy. The Russian aristocrat is surprised by Huret on the train, as he heads to Tambov or Voronezh to distribute wheat to starving peasants. The interview takes place in a third-class compartment which the interviewer finds "very hard, following the night I had just spent on a bench" (Huret, "Léon Tolstoï" 229). The reader becomes acquainted with Tolstoy through the latter's alternate remarks on changing landscapes and on French literature. Huret's description of the compartment's modest conditions, of the landscapes, and of the words uttered by Tolstoy provide a background to the works by the author. A rather rare setting for interviews, the itinerant decorum could perhaps be attributed to the energetic and surprising style that characterized Jules Huret's interviews for *L'Écho de Paris*. But it is also a perfect setting for Tolstoy to perform his social ideas.

We have seen that the writer's home plays a variety of roles in the great writer's visit ritual. First and foremost, it makes it possible to infer the writer's professional orientation from their home (Butor). Secondly, it views the author's residence as a place for literary incubation (see Dayan; Perec). The home can also be conceived as a necessary element for writing (Tournier) or, on the contrary, as a place from which one must stay away in order to write (Sarraute). In addition to the multiplicity of functions the environment plays in relation to the writer and their writing, the decorum is represented differently depending on the type of media in which the interview takes place. Thus, in the absence of a camera in Jules Huret's press interviews, the verbal description of the setting abounds, and the interviewer's talent plays a considerable role in depicting the setting in a manner that corresponds to the expected portrait. Where in the past it was necessary to condense the journalist's gaze into a description, the advent of video and photography facilitates a visual portrait of the author and their space. It is tempting to believe that photography and video are a means to relieve the description of its subjectivity but it turns out that electronic media are as selective in "describing" a space, in fact playing a determining role in fashioning the way a writer is perceived and understood. The camera's traveling and panoramic shots capture the essential parameters of the setting relevant to the author's image that the production wishes to create. In what follows, I concentrate on embodiment, or the way the author's body is described in space. The purpose is to show how the writer's poetics shapes the description of bodily features and enactment.

Reading Poetics from Body Language

Whether in writing (propos recueillis) or through the camera's lens—the focus is on how the depiction of body parts plays a role in asserting the author's poetics during the interview, especially when there is an apparent difference between the physicality of the author and their text. This distance is minimized through the interaction with the camera.

The writer's body here is defined as a set of their physical features—face, hands, voice—their gestures, and way of dressing and moving in space, as described in writing by the journalist or observed by the camera. A voice and its timbre, a speech rate, the delays in speaking, the writer's gestures, gaze, and facial expressions: the writer's body becomes a corpus (in French), a symbolic text in which the rest of the work at the time of the interview is manifested and through which it can be read. This kind of approach to the physical presence of the author challenges Proust's idea of an inherent divorce between the writer and their

social being (Proust). This watertight separation is strongly contested by Dominique Maingueneau (*Contre Saint Proust* 43) and Paul Dirkx, who precisely proposes to reintroduce the term corpus to abolish this rift and to designate what is indistinctly “textual” and “contextual” (“Corpus” 7).

The writer’s body participates in the construction of their media image, but it also extends their literary vision—the one that emerges from their texts—in the interactive context of the interview. Every word and every gesture of the writer in the space of the interview (whether at home or in the studio) takes part in the media rituals which define the writer for the audience. The writer inhabits a communicating body, one capable of producing information and transmitting it according to the conditions being examined (see Dirkx, Review).

Before television, the writer is represented via written descriptions occasionally accompanied by visual illustrations (sketches, paintings, or photos). In such media, the body is necessarily incorporated into the decorum. Take for example Huret’s depiction of Tolstoy, set on his mission to distribute wheat to famished peasants:

> He extended his hand to me cordially, with a welcoming smile on his venerable face. Dressed in a gray wool shirt tied with a belt at the waist, wearing a cloth cap, wearing boots, a stick in his hand, he seemed to me like the good pilgrim of humanitarianism that he was. (Huret, “Léon Tolstoï” 228, my translation)

In Huret’s description, Tolstoy blends in with the context: the famine and the need to feed his farmers. His body thus parts from the posture of the writer seated in front of his desk and turns to another posture, that of the benefactor that he becomes.

With television, as Sophie de Closets explains, the writing-reading relationship is replaced by an association between the person of the writer, their body, their words, and the viewer’s attention (108). According to Noël Nel, television imposes values of embodiment as it reveals the author through the power of direct speech. An authenticity effect is produced by the body’s sheer presence, and by the dramaturgic effect of appealing to the emotions of the audience (178). However, it seems to me that the emphasis placed on “seeing the real thing” that television provokes diverts attention from the issue of the display of the writer’s body, namely the continuation of literary activity by other means. This is what I attempt to show here.

As we have already seen, when the interview takes place in the writer’s own environment, the staging of their body is blended in the general description of the context and surroundings. However, when the author is filmed in a studio, the focus shifts to their body. When positioned outside of the writer’s ordinary

environment, their body becomes the *foyer* of their talent, the holder of their writing "secrets." The filming angles are used not only to build or consolidate the writer's image, but also to show and observe the poetics of the writer. In any case, we acquire a new vision of Balzacian realism where space not only explains the person, but where the way of showing the body of the writer becomes a lens through which to interpret and determine the vision we have of their writing.

In this new paradigm, physiognomic features—eyes, hands, mouth—as well as accessories (clothing, gloves, hats, shoes), and gestures are carefully captured, observed, and depicted, and participate fully in the interpretation of the writer's work. A good example is the description offered by a journalist of the *Paris Normandie*, who makes an explicit connection between Nathalie Sarraute's poetics and her physical presence:

> Nathalie Sarraute corresponds perfectly to the idea that one can have of her when reading her novels: a pale face, with clashing features which denotes a great personality, huge black eyes, short hair scraping a stubborn forehead. ("Nathalie Sarraute," my translation)

In this example, a link is drawn between Sarraute's physical presence and her discursive image. In the next example, her gaze is used as cues for her poetics, derived, according to the journalist, from one of her sources of inspiration, Proust:

> Madame Sarraute speaks hesitantly, without ceasing to fix a dark and deep gaze on her interlocutor, that "nocturnal" gaze with which, it is said, Marcel Proust considered his visitors without seeing them. It is also the inner world that interests and fascinates this new novelist. (d'Aubarède 4, my translation)

The eyes stand for a window to the writer's sources, thus considering them as a window to the soul. It comes as no surprise, then, that the opening theme chosen for the literary program *Chemins de la littérature* de Viviane Forrester is a compilation of close-up images of famous authors' eyes (Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Céline, Proust, etc.).

At the beginning of some of the *Chemins* interview series, the camera focuses on the interviewee's writing tools: the paper, the pen, the hand which accomplishes the process of writing. It provides, for example, close-ups on Sarraute and Tournier writing on a white paper. The writer's hands are also instrumentalized when Roger Grenier interviews Georges Perec in *Actualité littéraire*, about Perec's latest work, *La Disparition* (1969). The camera focuses on the gesticulations of Perec's hands and fingers, as if it were a question of visually exemplifying the magician's work it took to make the vowel "e"—the most frequent in the French

language—disappear from *La Disparition*. A metonymical relationship is thus established between the hands of the writer and the "magic" of writing.

The dress of authors also provides poetic cues. These range from Marguerite Duras's finger rings and turtleneck to Amélie Nothomb's large brim top hat. When Nothomb appears on the set of Thierry Ardisson's popular talk show *Tout le monde en parle*, Ardisson protests that she appears without her trademark ("Amélie Nothomb at Thierry Ardisson"). Nothomb's hat can be understood as part of what Nathalie Heinich dubs "the test of visibility" (80–81), that is, a way to cultivate a public image, one that allows the spectator to identify with the writer. I would like to suggest, however, that it can also be read as a poetic cue. In Nothomb's case, the theatrical image that the writer cultivates in public can be associated with her eccentric characters (like Pretextat Tach, the protagonist of *Hygiene de l'Assassin* (1992), or that of protagonist Sérieuse in *Crime du Comte Neville* (2015) and many others, all a little extravagant). Even though the images promoted by the media and by Nothomb seem to be more closely related to her media persona than to her writing, there nevertheless remains a part of her that links her media appearance and her writing, even on a popular talk show like *Tout le monde en parle*. In the same interview, Nothomb promotes her novel *Stupeur et tremblements* (1999), which tells the story of the social downfall of a young Western woman employed in Japan. She appears to be Japanese (white skin, very red lips) and sings *Utai* in the tradition of *Noh*, the Japanese dance-drama. Her physical appearance and her mastery of Japanese culture, in which she spent part of her youth, serve to authenticate the story of the novel which she declares as "truly autobiographical."

Ariane Chemin's portrait of Michel Houellebecq in the 2016 summer series of *Le Monde* offers a radical link between the writer's body and the corpus of his work. The fourth article in the series is devoted to Houellebecq's own physique in relationship to how he treats the body in his novels:

> Hairstyles, teeth, metamorphoses […] we talk a lot about the writer's face, but his body basically says more. And each novel also reads like a health report. (Chemin)

Chemin's article reads like an autopsy of the living author, drawing parallels between his diminishing physique (teeth, hair, skin) and his attitude towards the human body in his novels. The reader catches a glimpse of the novelist's poetics of decomposition and compromise by merely "looking" at Houellebecq: Houellebecq, according to Chemin, is "a writer of the dermis, who stuffs his books with drugs and his hypochondria" (18).

A diametrically opposed body-text approach is found in Pascale Bouhénic's series *Les Ateliers d'Ecriture* (1994–2007). Where the previous cases suggest a

sometimes simplistic analogy between the author's performance in the media and their writing, Bouhénic offers a sophisticated visual staging of the writer's body in physical interaction with the body of their work. The stated purpose of Bouhenic's series is to explore an author's writing methods by confronting the author's words, voice, facial expressions, and gestures with the texture of their work: the white page, the printed sentences, and the images related to the content of the text. A good example is Olivier Cadiot's *Writing Workshop* (2007), based on the model of an interview with the author in his workplace, around the techniques of language, play of forms, and choice of style, combined with readings of excerpts from his works (L'atelier). Bouhénic introduces the spectators to Cadiot's writing by filming him walking through his apartment's hallway with the author's voiceover saying "beginning, all the same." This passage leads to the writer's chair, empty at first, then inhabited by different spectral images of Cadiot reading his texts. As in most of Bouhenic's interviews in this series, the viewer is introduced to the materiality of the paper. When we are presented with the material text, the author gets to embody it, fusing it with his breath, voice, and gestures: as Cadiot reads he becomes one with his text, producing it by reading it. The body here is not a mere representation or symbol of the writer's poetics, but it actually enacts it. Thus, the reading makes the writer's physical presence an indispensable condition for performing the text. This kind of enactment draws us away from conventional media appearances of writers in media interviews, where the focus is on the writer's physique as a means to produce a branded image of the writer. Here, on the contrary, the physical means extend the writing and literariness replaces (or complements) the brand.

Femina mediatica—The Embodied Female Writer

According to Jean Baudrillard, the body is simply the finest of the psychically possessed, manipulated, and consumed objects, the place of desire and exchange-value in our society (see *The Consumer Society*). When the writer agrees to come to the set in person, they participate in this game of desire and literary investment, which is enacted through embodiment. However, does the enactment of desire and exchange value have to be considered with respect to gender in the interview? For instance, are female writers expected to "play the woman" in the media, in Judith Butler's sense (see "Performative Acts")? And if so, how does the gendered enactment relate to their work?

Gender significance in media representation is old news. For instance, Aliza Lavie claims that news presentation is gendered: women present the news

differently than their fellow male presenters. Sandy Montañola's study of the mediatized body in athletic performance in the press and on television shows that the journalist's gender affects media coverage of female and male athletes. In relation to literature, the question has already been discussed explicitly on the set. For example, Thierry Ardisson asks author Muriel Cerf if she prefers to be called "écrivaine" (the female form or "writer" in French) or "écrivain" (the masculine form of "writer" in French, also used as the neutral form), to which she replies "écrivain, it's still prettier" (Ardisson, "Le clash"). It should no doubt be added that such questions respond to the audience's expectations and interests. A study of the writer's mediated body should therefore ask whether it communicates information specific not only to the writer's profession, but also to the gendered dimensions of conventions and expectations of "going on stage." In this respect, I ask here, what does it mean for a female author to be interviewed?

To answer these questions, I compare female interviewees belonging to two generations. I start with mid-twentieth-century authors, Nathalie Sarraute and Marguerite Duras. I then compare two novelists at the turn of the twentieth century: Amélie Nothomb and Nelly Arcan.

Sarraute is not a writer of femininity or sexuality. She distances her focalizers (author and narrator personae) from the body in writing, focusing on an underlying, sub-epidermal layer (the sub-conversation) where "we are all like two drops of water" (Finas 4–5). What is more, her autobiography, *Enfance*, uses a gender-neutral pronoun ("tu" [in English, you]). In a conversation with playwright Simone Benmoussa, she admits that she is unable to fathom her own image (see Benmussa). Physical portraits of her are hence often limited to her gaze, the writing hand, or her general posture as a *grande dame*, and the question of her femininity is only rarely mentioned.

Marguerite Duras, on the contrary, is a writer of sensuality and sexuality: she has often been associated with the idea of a feminine and even feminist writing.[3] How is this sensuality reflected in her media performance in later life interviews? Upon the release of her autobiographical novel *L'Amant* (1984), Bernard Pivot interviews her on *Apostrophes*. The conversation is accompanied by photographs of a young and beautiful version of herself to which the interviewer alludes:

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3 There is a heated debate in the literature on Duras's feminism (or lack of). The debate brings opposing opinions: whereas Gauthier argues that her writing is typically feminine (*Les parleuses*), Selous thinks her characters are subject to a masculine glance; (see *The Other Woman*); where Murphy claims Duras to be a self-acclaimed feminist (see *Feminism and Femininity*), Duras herself declared in one of her interviews "I am not a feminist at all" ("L'arroseur arrosé"). However, determining whether she is feminist or that her writing is feminine goes beyond the scope of this paper, which concentrates on her sensual writing themes.

Bernard Pivot [photos of young Duras]: At 15, you are awfully dressed
[he notes that she is sporting a man's hat; Duras recalls how she was seduced by a wealthy Chinese man]
Bernard Pivot: He is madly in love with you.
Marguerite Duras: Yes, I was very young, it's impossible not to love such a young [person][4].
Bernard Pivot: And you, you didn't like it?
[Duras smiles shyly]. ("Marguerite Duras dans 'Apostrophes'")

The present tense used by Pivot when he states "He *is* madly in love with you" diverts the sensual glance cast upon Duras towards the young woman she was. But her answer in the past tense ["Yes, I *was* very young"] along with the generalization ["it's impossible not to love such a young [person]"] shift the interview away from the current body to one of the past, a younger one, and elevates it to a more theoretical sphere, as Pivot plays along the game of generalization and uses concepts such as "pleasure" and "jouissance" to describe Duras's sensexual experience. However, seven years later, when she publishes a rewritten version of *L'Amant* (*L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 1991), another strategy is adopted by interviewer Bernard Rapp: the abstract discourse on "pleasure" and "jouissance" gives way to a concrete physical recollection, as Duras evokes the "joy to touch a man, the skin of this man, to seek the skin of this man, his smell" and Bernard Rapp echoes this move:

Bernard Rapp: You describe the hand
Marguerite Duras: The hand, yes, the hand. ("Marguerite Duras à propos," min' 51)

As her discourse becomes more concrete in the Rapp interview, she says: "the real women were the whores [*putains*], those who were free, walked alone in the street, on the sidewalks" (min' 55). In comparison to Sarraute, whose interview performance—much like her works—is not related to femininity or to gendered roles, Duras, for whom feminine desire occupies a major place in her work as well as in life, re-enacts these themes in the interview. The interviews on *L'Amant* are a good example of how the author's poetics play a role in determining the interview's perspective, albeit through two opposing strategies. Duras's poetics of the sensual is thus relived through both interviews: it is mediated through remembrances of her younger self, alluding to concepts of sensuality ("Marguerite Duras dans 'Apostrophes'") or, on the contrary, by resorting to crude or very concrete discussions of female and gendered roles ("Marguerite Duras à propos").

4 Oui, j'étais toute petite, on ne peut pas ne pas aimer, toute petite.

As with the older generation of novelists, the younger generation of female authors is not subject to a uniform handling of gendered aspects in interviews. For instance, interviews with Amélie Nothomb do not encompass a gendered perspective. When Nothomb enters the scene, the spectator's gaze is centered on the novelist's eccentric performance: totally aware of the show, her attire includes elements like a large brim top hat, which have come to be her brand.[5] Comments on her physical appearance, if at all, remain centered on these gadgets and are otherwise reserved to some of her other eccentricities, like her extraordinarily prolific literary production, her noble origins, her childhood in Japan, her fondness of champagne and of strong tea (Béglé). The only aspects of femininity brought to the fore in her interviews are metaphorical, in the sense that they pertain to her writing, which she views as pregnancy, and the release of a novel, which she views as childbirth ("Amélie Nothomb a dédicacé"). These oddities make her an amusing interviewee. Nothomb's feminine perspective is thus mediated in this format of entertainment by the eccentric and funny persona of the novelist.

Unlike Amélie Nothomb, Canadian author of *Putain* (2001) Nelly Arcan's performance in the interview affords a gendered gaze. This autobiographical novel depicts her two-year experience as an escort girl and earns her an inquisitive surveilling on the set of *Tout le monde en parle* ("Nelly Arcan"). There is a stark discrepancy between Arcan's physical appearance in the show and the prostituted sexuality in her novel. She is dressed in the style of a good schoolgirl, with a light blue shirt with collar, hair up and a cross pendant. The interviewer's questions, the *mise en scène*, the participants' reactions, and the camera traveling all attempt to reduce this gap. The interviewer's questions ("what do you like most about prostitution?" "What do you hate most in prostitution?" and answers in her place: "she doesn't like it when guys are on top of her, that's why she prefers doggie style"), his request from Arcan to read a very graphic excerpt, participant Clotilde Courau's disgusted reaction and moral judgment ("It doesn't make you dream [...] I don't know if I want to read that, no," min' 16), and finally, the camera's pointing to Arcan's ample chest and traveling behind her, to a piece of exposed skin between the shirt and the pants, all work together to overcome the unbearable difference between the saintly media persona and the "real" Arcan that springs off the pages of her novel. Each and every detail in the interview works to this effect. Even an innocent question, such as the talk show's standard quiz question, "What is the best thing about you?" becomes a part of this

5 The satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* shows her at the book fair, clad with this hat ("État d'urgence").

gendered narrative when Arcan retorts "foolishly, my eyes" (min' 22). Whereas in other author interviews, the eyes usually stand for the author's inner self or poetics, in Arcan's case they acquire their primary meaning as the seat of desire. Her eyes and gaze are not metonymical for her literary style, but for the theme that occupies the novel—the use of her prostituted body, the absence of which in the talk show is re-embodied in the stare of the interviewer and the audience. Courau implicitly suggests that love is diametrically opposed to the activity of prostitution, and therefore offers it as a healthy alternative, suitable for what Courau considers decent women.

> Clotilde Courau: And you [points to the chest/heart]?
> Nelly Arcan: You what?
> Courau: Love?
> Arcan: Me, love… I believe in it perfectly.
> Courau: Yes?
> Arcan: Yes […] I don't necessarily believe in it for me […] but I believe in it, I see people around me who love each other. (min. 20')

In response, Arcan sets herself apart from the narrator of *Putain*: she says she believes in love. When she rails against Courau's attempt to portray her novel as part of a fashionable women's trend of exposing their sexuality ("but I didn't know that existed!" min' 17), she chooses a script that goes against the one imposed on her by the team on set yet remains cloistered within scripts that reproduce dominant notions of femininity.

Conclusion

Considering that the author interview is more than just promotional content, it should be examined as performance. Studying the author interview as such means that both the author's body and the setting of the interview should be taken into account to assess its potential effects on the interpretation of an author's work. The author's environment is staged or can be read as a source of information about the author and/or as an explanation of their writing. The author's physical features and gestures can be interpreted as cues, from which the author's style and poetics are inferable. There is a constant desire in the interview to find echoes of the work and, on the part of the interviewer, to align the interviewee with the discursive image that springs from their novels. Where discrepancies are found between the two images—elements from the context and setting like the camera, the description, and the script intervene to reduce them. In this space,

gendered scripts can be re-enacted to provide an image of the interviewee that is coherent with their discursive one.

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Guido Mattia Gallerani

The Imagined Interview: A Literary Genre

Abstract: While "press interview" is an umbrella term defining all journalistic interviews that circulate among different media, I propose to call the literary genre that writers create by imagining the interviewer, the interviewee, or both as fictional characters "imagined interview." By analyzing examples within the French, Italian, and English literary fields in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I identify three types of the imagined interview based on the interlocutor who is invented in each of them—the self-interview, the impossible interview, and the fictional interview. In addition, I examine the imagined interview in books, radio, and theater because, like the press interview, the imagined interview spans different media. Re-staging some characteristics of the press interview, the imagined interview does not merely represent the writer's revenge on the press, exemplified in this genre by the interviewer's caricature. Above all, it shows us the different uses that literature and the press make of the same principle of character investigation: indiscretion.*

Keywords: literary interview, fictional interview, imaginary interview, self-interview, media, press, literature, radio, theater, contingency, plurivocity, reliability, authenticity, authorship, co-authorship, indiscretion

From Press Interview to Imagined Interview

The interview is a transmedia genre, as we find and recognize an interview independently from the various media in which it appears (Fastelli 26). The term "press interview" is used here to indicate the set of journalistic interviews conducted through different media forms—radio, TV, newspaper, etc. The press interview is, in short, a journalistic and transmedia genre, in which we can identify certain characteristics, namely contingency, reliability, authenticity, plurivocity and co-authorship.

Firstly, it is important to stress that the interview is an encounter that takes place in a well-defined space and time. Think of the first press interviews transcribed in newspapers, where journalists wrote a prologue introducing the

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importance of the interview and describing the place and occasion of the event, in order to help the reader situate the dialogue (see Thérenty, "Parole"). Later, this prologue remained and took an oral form on radio and television (Lejeune 126). The dialogue within the interview also bears traces of the moment in which it occurs, for example through references to recent events, to issues currently debated, and texts just published—in short, the dialogue itself displays the "here and now" of a society.

Secondly, the interview aims at providing the audience with a trustworthy message. This does not mean that the interviewee's opinions are taken for granted. On the contrary, the journalist often contests the claims of the interlocutor. Rather, the principle of the interview itself is to be a serious and reliable communicative event for the audience. On the one hand, a printed interview should faithfully report the dialogue that actually took place between the journalist and the respondent. On the other hand, in a recorded interview—on radio or TV—the editing should not alter the meaning of the exchange and the speech (Marin 13). The press interview is based on a pact of trust between the journal and the public, the broadcaster and the audience.

At the same time, each interview takes place between two people who meet to talk to each other. In a press interview, the interlocutors should not pretend to be someone other than themselves or to speak for someone else. As far as any interaction between people implies the performance of certain roles, which Erving Goffman notably studies taking the model of the theater into account, even writers perform some codified role during an interview (Rodden 6–19). Nevertheless, when journalists ask authors about their personal life and convictions in an interview, the writer is addressed not as a fictional character, but as a *persona* in their physical presence. In addition, even interviewers are commonly perceived by the audience as real people—that is to say—individuals belonging to society.

As a dialogue, the interview contains at least two alternating discourses. The questions and answers are interwoven in oral discourse as well as in the written one, even when the latter results from a shorthand transcription of a recorded interview: the interview is defined as such by the intertwining of the interviewer's questions and the interviewee's answers. In any case, the interview always holds a bi-vocal discourse or even a plurivocal one when there are more than two interview partners. Here, the traditional plurivocity of some types of discourse, as Mikhail Bakhtin claims, is not integrated into a unique voice or discourse, as in the case of the narrator in the novel, who presents different points of view under the same expression. Both discourses of interviewer and interviewee remain visible, and this concrete plurivocity affects the whole discourse.

Indeed, the dialogue involves two speakers who collaborate in its construction (Yanoshevsky, *L'Entretien littéraire* 218). Its published version therefore belongs to both. The press interview can be defined as the construction of a shared message addressed to a virtual addressee (Morin 72). Each interlocutor is credited with a relative number of utterances, but the ownership of the whole interview is ultimately a matter of double authorship.

The imagined interview is a literary genre which stages, as a fictional narrative, the situation of an interview. We will see that the imagined interview borrows some of the constraints from the press interview. The imagined interview identifies, among the five features listed above, those to be imitated and those to be faked.

It is possible to identify three categories of imagined interviews according to the interlocutor who is turned into a fictional character: the interviewer, the interviewee, or both.

When the interviewer is a fictional character imagined by the author, we call the interview a self-interview—the appropriate name to define an interview that a writer conducts with her/himself. The interviewee can also be a fictional character, for example when the author plays the role of the interviewer who converses with an imaginary interlocutor such as a ghost from the past or a mythological hero. We call this interview "impossible" (based on the title of a seminal Italian broadcast series analyzed here) since the writer is always publicly recognizable beyond his task as interviewer but still interacts with an interlocutor who cannot exist in the moment of the dialogue. The label "fictional interview" identifies the situation in which both interlocutors are fictional characters. This regularly happens when the imagined interview is included in a novel, but we can generally find it in any form of fiction.

We will now look at select examples of each of these three categories, taking into consideration case studies of three specific media: the printed book, the radio, and the theater. In this way, I would like to demonstrate that this two-fold perspective—the interlocutors as fictional characters and the media involved—is essential to the understanding of the mechanisms that regulate and animate this genre.

Self-Interviews—The Interviewer as a Fictional Character

Let us start with the first category, the "self-interview": in this case, in addition to the role of the interviewee, the author assumes that of the interviewer. The result is a literary text that reproduces the bi-vocality and contingency of a press interview but avoids "co-authorship" in the sense that questions are both asked and answered by the author. Nevertheless, we will see that the self-interview claims to carry a public message as reliable as the one of the press interview.

Most published self-interviews have minimal degrees of invention. Their interviewer does not rise to the rank of a real fictional character, but remains a simple textual function, a 'shifter' for continuing the self-interview. In most cases, the invented interviewer has no name and appears only to present the questions; during the dialogue, no references give the character an identity; the extent of speech is limited and the questions serve the writer's ideas, if they are not limited to assertive interruptions or interventions that reinforce what has just been said. This less inventive use of the interviewer's character reveals above all the desire for control that an author tries to exercise over the social discourse usually managed by the press. The most relevant effects are that of losing the structure of the dialogue despite showcasing it. The text appears as a bi-vocal discourse but hides the author's monologue. At the same time, the authenticity of the interviewee—the author—cannot be contested, while the other—the interviewer—fades into an anonymous journalist, whose role, opinions, and ability to address questions seem no longer relevant.

Let us have a look at some examples of the most common self-interviews in book format. *Interviews imaginaires* by André Gide (1943) represents the earliest model of the self-interview in French culture, but I want to discuss simpler cases of self-interviews before moving to a more complex example. If we consider *Entretien sur des faits divers* by Jean Paulhan (1945) and *La nuit sera calme* by Romain Gary (1974), the interviewer is given a figurehead who is said to have agreed to the dialogue. Gary's fake interviewer has the name of his longtime friend, François Bondy, who acts as a chronological alibi (see Amossy; Cornuz 145), because his biography coincides—temporally—with that of Gary. We find the same ruse in Michel Butor's *Le retour du boomerang* (1988). Presenting the volume, the writer states that Béatrice Didier, editor of the series including the book, is his interviewer, but in another note she herself confesses that Michel Butor is the sole author of the dialogue.

The Swiss author Jacques Chessex has produced the most eloquent example of a self-interview as introspection. Published posthumously but completed before his death, *L'interrogatoire* (2011) can be interpreted as a self-analysis in the form of an interview. Chessex represents himself as chased by an *interrogateur*, a nameless voice that embodies a divine and inescapable power, like the one of an ecclesiastical inquisitor or of a judge acting in a court. Although this voice comes from the ego ("one is always questioned by oneself," 109, trans. mine), its first appearance is through a beam of light (11) that hits the victim in the face and leaves the persecutor in the shade, as if in a police interrogation. By bringing the role of the interviewer closer to the grim figure of a police investigator, *L'interrogatoire* makes explicit the analogy with the sadism of the media that Chessex had experienced as real public defamation. Therefore, he decides to clean up his reputation which has been unfairly sullied by the press: "I say what it is. I don't wear masks" (55, trans. mine). In order to defend himself and "illuminate" his own truth, the self-interview aims to project a "clear light" on Chessex's "human depths" (102) as opposed to the cruel spotlight of the press.

Why are the fictional interviewers such poor characters in these self-interviews? The self-interview aims at the self-portrait, which disguises the author's monologue as a fictional confrontation with the press. In this sense, the interviewer ceases to be an intermediary between the author and the public and becomes a mere verbal function that allows the writer an inner interrogation of their own life, both public and private. In short, the self-interview accounts for an author who renounces the public confrontation with a journalist, even though the dialogic structure of a press interview remains entirely in sight. It is exactly the self-interview's appearance as a press interview that accounts for the reliability of a different message—a self-portrait alone, instead of an actual interview with a journalist.

In some self-interviews, the interviewer can, however, become a fictional character who performs his duties as a writer's interlocutor. Although composed of different self-interviews that were published separately in *Le Figaro* between November 11, 1941, and June 2, 1942, once put together in a volume (several editions appeared in 1943) the *Interviews imaginaires* by André Gide expose a series of fictional encounters between the writer and journalists. Initially Gide employs a fictional interviewer he had previously created in 1905 for three texts published in the magazine *L'Ermitage*. 'Summoned' again, in *Interviews imaginaires*, the journalist returns and visits Gide, who, in the meantime, has grown older. Surprisingly, during the tenth self-interview, "L'interviewer interviewé," Gide decides to interrogate the interviewer and has an unexpected revelation: "let me say that I am not who you believe. I am his brother. It is curious that you do not pay

attention to people's age" (357, trans. mine). In fact, Gide claims that the journalist was twenty in 1905, while this time (in the early 1940s) the interviewer is thirty-eight. As the interviewer observes, he could not be the same person. Moreover, this journalist is not the last of the interviewers who visit Gide, as another appears right afterwards and is amazed that during the previous meetings his colleagues did not interrogate the writer about certain topics and authors.

Changing his interviewers allows Gide to represent different types of interviewer characters—the interviewer can be hostile or friendly, a competent critic or an occasional journalist, a professional figure in compliance with the task entrusted to him by the press or a novice writer who uses the interview with a great author as a springboard for a career in literature. The variety of interlocutors in Gide's self-interviews and their endless substitution point out that the interviewer's task, which is to be at the service of the author, cannot be accomplished, as an interviewer capable of that task does not exist, neither in fiction nor in reality. Therefore, Gide seems to impose upon himself the responsibility of giving the audience a reliable and authentic message of his proper authorship under the guise of a press interview.

Gide's example shows that, in order to create an authentic sense of the writer, the fictional representation of the interviewers must replace actual journalists with the author interviewed, who can perform both roles of the interview's interlocutors.

Another writer, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, invents a self-interview that equally aims at taking control over the interview, but this time it concerns a replacement of the journalistic style of the press interview with the literary style of the author himself. In *Entretiens avec le Professeur Y* (1955), the dialogue that fakes an interview between him and an interviewer is an example of his own style of writing, which can give a more reliable image of Céline himself than any other press interview.

The book was written in the post-World War II period, when Céline's public life and career faced strong ostracism and when the author found himself dealing with his rehabilitation after exile, prison, and conviction for anti-Semitism. Previously, in the thirties, during the promotion of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, he presented himself as a "physician for the poor," that is, as a writer outside of the traditional system of literature and its social elite. Then, before and during World War II, he contradicted himself by publishing anti-Semitic pamphlets, where he proposed his work as that of an authentic French writer who opposes the "Hebrewization" of language (Meizoz 103). Upon his return to France in 1951, Céline was considered the "traitor, the genocidal man […] whom people mustn't talk about!" (32, trans. mine), and therefore needed to restore his own image. His

solution to the problem was to promote his modernist style of writing. His fictional interview *Entretiens avec le Professeur Y* served this purpose. The interviewer in this book is a fictional emissary of the press, who helps the writer deliver a defense of his own style. In this sense, the self-interview builds a real "aesthetic manifesto" (Cornuz 72), in which Céline pleads the case of his own style.

In the Arts-et-Métiers district, the author meets Professor Y, a grotesque and highly caricatural interviewer, who is potentially also a writer or perhaps already a failed one (he, too, like Céline, has submitted a manuscript to the *Nouvelle Revue Française*.) When given a fictional identity and personality, interviewers are often portrayed as intrusive or incompetent. David Martens and Christophe Meurée call the self-interviews that turn the interviewer's character into a caricature "playful fiction" (86), as in Céline's *Entretiens*.

The interviewer is the ideal character to act as the vehicle of Céline's literary style because his comic connotations make him the perfect representative of a mediocre audience—the press and the public—that Céline aims to persuade. In fact, Y echoes the discourse of his interviewee: "he repeated all my words to me" (80, trans. mine). Near the end of the *Entretiens*, Y is involved in a paradoxical exercise: taking a kind of summary quiz, made of the most important keywords of the previous dialogue, he must answer without mistakes (110–11). Even if he does not immediately understand Céline's ideas, Y has been provided with minimum requirements as a fictional character. For example, he is a musician and, therefore, can follow Céline comparing the ellipsis of his writing with the pauses of music and, in the end, he agrees with the writer that the melody cannot be imagined without such moments of silence (96).

At the end, the interviewer is perfectly tamed. He becomes a docile puppet in the interviewee's hands. Réséda (the interviewer by his name) has by now taken on the role of the imitator so well that he reads reality itself as described in a page from Céline: "He sabotaged the whole subway!... he put breaks everywhere!... anarchist monster!... sold writer!... traitor!..." (102, trans. mine). The interlocutor could have played the role of the intermediary between Céline's opinions and the public interest but ends up taking on the task of the author's defense. Obviously, this is a convenient way for Céline to conduct a self-interview and, at the same time, to represent a situation in which he deals with mass media and public exposure. Céline simulates an interview situation to contrast public opinion and to shift focus from his current negative image as a "collaborateur" during World War II to his innovative style of writing, thanks to which he was supported by his publisher, Gallimard (see Lacroix 119–22). Instead of defending himself as a political victim, Céline depicts himself as the most influential writer of his era by virtue of his creative power and turns his fictional interview into a

weapon against the press and the literary scene of his period. His interview should be read as a more reliable image *of* himself rather than the one offered by the press *about* him.

Impossible Interviews–Inventing the Interviewee on Air

The "impossible interview" designates interviews that an author imagines having conducted with others. In this paragraph, we will focus on those that a writer "holds" with historical figures. When broadcast on radio, the interview is always a dialogue that takes place in front of an audience at a precise time. An imagined interview on radio pretends to be a "live interview" between two voices whose plurivocity is clearly perceived by the public. Nevertheless, the double presence of an actor who plays the role of the interviewee and the answers prepared by the writer deprives the character who is being interviewed of any authenticity.

An exemplary case study of this model is the series *Interviste impossibili*, an Italian radio broadcast that, in the mid-seventies, stood out for a large group of writers involved in its creation and for its popularity among the public.[1] The formula of *Interviste impossibili* is very simple: a writer interviews in first person, with their own voice, a figure from the past or a mythological character played by a professional actor.

Evidently, the impossible interview can be interpreted as an example of "the presentification of past worlds," which is about "experiencing the past" by "techniques that produce the impression (or rather the illusion) that the worlds of the past can become tangible again" (Gumbrecht 94). Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's formulation is particularly relevant for this type of imagined interview, as "the presentification of the past" accounts for—as he claims—"the possibility of 'speaking' to the dead or 'touching' the objects of their worlds" (123).

The idea of an imaginary dialogue with the dead is an ancient one that dates back to an Ancient Greek genre (e.g. *Dialogues of the Dead* by Lucian) and is still present in the twentieth century (see Boni). The impossible interview takes up some of its features from other previous genres. There is the effect of a journalistic scoop because the interviewer manages to interrogate a dead person and

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1 Several Interviste impossibili are accessible on YouTube and RayPlay Sound (https://www.raiplaysound.it/playlist/leintervisteimpossibili). All of them are transcribed in a volume edited by Lorenzo Pavolini (2006), from which all of the quotes are taken.

brings their voice to a contemporary audience. In addition, the idea of communication with the afterlife comes from séances and the technical means used for pretending to speak with the dead (e.g. electromagnetic connections, see Kittler 12). Finally, the characterization of the interviewee as a ghost has already been outlined in the same mediumistic transcriptions, such as *Le Livre de Tables: Les séances spirites de Jersey* (1835–55) by Victor Hugo, defined as the "best collection of interviews" by Pierre Michon in the preface to his own collection of interviews *Le Roi vient quand il veut* (2007) (see Seillan 23).

The impossible interview finds a more suitable technology in the radio than in any other mass medium. As historians of media have pointed out, the radio has a peculiar power of suggestion over its audience (see Sconce), not so much because of its orality, but rather thanks to the invisibility of the speaking voice, "for the essence of broadcasting consists just in the fact that it alone offers unity by aural means" (Arnheim 135). Even without the speaker's physical presence, the audience "considers the sequence of phases of thought at the same time as the congruence of people taking part in a discussion"; this is "the most elementary and most primitive illusion that hearing transmits" (189). The "acoustic bridge" (195) that radio creates manages to connect different voices in a unique event of sound and, in the case of *Interviste impossibili*, it is apparently built between the domains of life and death, between the now and an eternalized time.

The voices of the past, which radio makes us hear and with which, in the *Interviste impossibili*, it makes us speak, are built by discourses that are already included in our cultural traditions. In order to appear recognizable to the listeners, the interviewees interpolate direct quotations in their answers, report documented references on their life and social background, and respond in a detailed manner with respect to their own history. In short, the writers make characters speak by following the traces that they have already left in written sources and others provided by historiography. These quotes from historical sources foster the effect of a reliable message coming from the past.

The magazine *Radiocorriere* announces the new format in 1974 as follows: "through these imagined conversations each interviewer will try to give an unconventional interpretation of the character and of the events of which she/he was the protagonist or witness" (Libera 17, trans. mine). However, this "interpretation" goes beyond that purpose. The interviewee will undergo an anachronistic transformation because, in addition to their own knowledge of the past, they are made aware of issues concerning current events that happen in the present of the broadcast (1974–75) and that the writer—the interviewer—projects onto them. The most evident reference to current times is the feminist movement of the seventies when divorce (1970) and legal abortion (1978) are broadly debated in Italy

across the media. It is interesting to consider some impossible interviews with important women of the past in which the writers perform their role differently depending on whether they are men or women.

For example, Umberto Eco interviews Dante Alighieri's muse, Beatrice, whose character as an interviewee is composed of references from *Vita Nova* and *Comedia*, and is also provided with an anachronistic capacity of self-analysis that makes her a feminist activist. She is endowed with the knowledge of current agitation against the patriarchal system; she is aware of the debate that exploded in the Italian magazine *Effe* in the days of broadcasting; she is preparing actions against the chauvinistic power of Dante and other past author in the afterlife. In short, Beatrice wants to free herself from Dante's exploitation (Pavolini 224–30).

The same happens in other impossible interviews. Edoardo Sanguineti manages to reach Dante in the afterlife by telephone. He wants to interview Paolo Malatesta, but Francesca da Rimini, initially mistaken for a telephone operator, cannot put Paolo on the phone, just like in Dante's inferno where the lover couldn't start a conversation and got lost in sobs before the poet (*Inf.* V). Sanguineti can do nothing but listen to Paolo's weeping while Francesca protests at being regarded by posterity as the cause of their shared divine punishment (217–23). Cleopatra, interviewed by Luigi Santucci, tries to free herself from the prejudices of those who have portrayed her as a calculating and dangerous woman for centuries. She claims her own vitality as a woman and refuses to be considered by history as the cause of her beloved Antony's downfall (100–06). Joan of Arc is interviewed by the same author in a sort of afterlife inquisitorial process (239–45). Facing Santucci, she claims her revolutionary nature: she dresses like a boy, shaves her hair, and resists male bullying. Finally, Joan of Arc claims to have inaugurated "this thing that should spare me from burning for unpopularity": feminism (244, trans. mine). Zelda Fitzgerald, in her own way, tries to demolish the memory of her that history has given us (709–18): she was not only the wife of the famous writer Francis Scott Fitzgerald, but also a transgressive and uninhibited feminist who rebels against her interviewer, Fabio Carpi. Zelda retorts that, as a feminist, she has the right to protest against the yoke imposed on her by the famous writer (714).

The male writers basically seem to move backwards when they play the role of interviewers. They start the interview recklessly by using their own voice, but usually end up stammering, trembling, or losing sight of the purpose of their interviews. So much so that Joan of Arc, as soon as she grasps the discomfort of Luigi Santucci, scolds him: "Don't tremble and don't get pale" (240, trans. mine). The same interviewer, as he faces Cleopatra's charm, fears falling prey to her and then runs away exclaiming in a languid tone: "goodbye, devil spirit…" (106). The

interviewer's final escape actually stages a sense of general inadequacy that characterizes all male interviewers confronting the female characters they invent.

We therefore see that, unlike in the self-interview, in the impossible interview the author acts as someone else. Despite their voice, which is the sensible and unmistakable mark of their presence, male interviewers abandon the writer's role to play an unqualified intermediary, which voluntarily diminishes the figure of the interviewer. On the one hand, they content themselves with taking the place of a de facto unaware interviewer, who speaks from a social situation for which he is not responsible. On the other hand, the writers use the interview to avoid expressing an opinion on the present, because they delegate to their interviewees the task of expressing friction with the current times. The whole impossible interview loses the authenticity of an actual interview because none of the interlocutors speak for themselves. In the end, male interviewers become similar to the representatives of the press against whom writers react in the form of the self-interview. The impossible interview is a type of the imagined interview that the authors employ to represent interviewees who stand up to the interviewer, while the self-interview serves them to show the journalist how his task can be better accomplished (from their point of view).

In this series, male interviewers cannot express the same complicity and empathy with the female characters they imagine interviewing, as it happens, for instance, between Maria Luisa Spaziani and Catherine the Great. There, we listen to two women speaking the same language and agreeing on their different historical situations. The interviewee has an anachronistic knowledge of the present just like any other character. She defines the second half of the twentieth century as the "first great youth" (333) of women. But Catherine finds in her interviewer a conniver because she shares the same preoccupations and goals of taking a stand. The character asks while replying to a question: "Aren't you a feminist? Why should a question about children interest […] the mothers more than the fathers?" Spaziani can do nothing but agree and be complicit: "Touched! It is true…" (336, trans. mine).

One reason for this difference in the role played by women writers is a historical one: in 1977, at the conference "Women and Information" held two years after the *Interviste impossibili*, statistical data were given stating that only 8% of Italian professional journalists were women (Buonanno 6). Except for the prominent figure of Oriana Fallaci (1929–2006), renowned worldwide for her role as a war correspondent and interviewer for the print media, there are only few examples of Italian female interviewers on radio for women writers to emulate in the seventies. In the cases of female interviewers interviewing women of the past, the imagined interview becomes a self-conscious meeting between women who feel

the need to discuss their historical position. Female writers do not seem to forget who they are—contemporary authors in a patriarchal system that dates back ages—and claim their gender-coded authorship in the dialogue. By addressing their specific experiences as women, female writers can turn the impossible interview into a friendly dialogue between peers who share the same destiny rather than into a journalistic duty.

Nevertheless, from a broader perspective, being either a male or a female writer does not make any difference concerning the characterization of an anachronistic interviewee. When talking to the dead guarantees the scoop of the meeting, the presence of ghosts seems here to take control of the dialogue. To the extent that the interviewee knows what the interviewer also knows, the conduct of the dialogue shifts to the advantage of the interviewee. Ultimately, the dialogue with the dead does not really proceed in one direction from our present to the past, because the latter is already altered by the former. Rather, the *Interviste impossibili* put us in dialogue, neither with our present nor with our past, separately, but with their encounter, which takes place between text and interpretation, between historical memory and current standpoints.

Fictional Interviews—The Imagined Interview on Stage

The theatrical stage has offered interviews with invented characters since the early years of the twentieth century. According to Marie-Ève Thérenty, these first appearances are comic creations, "joking interviews" ("Frontières"). Octave Mirbeau early wrote a one-act farce titled *Interview*, which was performed at the Parisian theater of the Grand Guignol February 1, 1904, and included in the book *Farces et moralités* in the same year. Between interviews with very important personalities (a politician and a king) and from a position of power ("I am the press! [...] It denounces, judges, condemns", trans. mine), the journalist mistreats an innkeeper to extort from him the confession of a crime. The ending reveals that it is a case of mistaken identity. All dialogues revolve around a misunderstanding between interviewee and interviewer and related linguistic jokes.

In the third type of imagined interview, the "fictional interview," questions and their answers take place in an imaginary world where they are attributable only to fictional characters. Both the interviewer and the interviewee belong to the same world of fiction. The interlocutors cannot be seen as authentic in the sense that they have no reference to the external world.

While invented, the fictional interview preserves plurivocity and the idea of an occasional communication, characteristic of the press interview. In a fictional interview in the theater, two actors develop a dialogue that takes up a segment of the performance. In the case of transcripts of oral interviews, the meeting has already taken place and the reader only encounters a re-creation, which follows certain rules in transcribing the words spoken by the interviewer and interviewee: "the literary interview is above all an *event* [...] that precedes the writing of the dialogue and its reworking into a publishable text" (Yanoshevsky, *L'Entretien littéraire* 76, trans. mine). In contrast, on stage, the script is prepared by the author in advance. The actors interpret it as a "live interview," a dialogue in synchrony with listening and watching the show: "the temporal relationship to the enunciation scene is reversed: anteriority of the bodies in the presence for the interview, posteriority for the theater" (Cornuz 185, trans. mine). Thus, the fictional "live interview" in the theater (or in the impossible interviews on radio) aims at reproducing the contingency of a press interview.

Both of the following case studies of a fictional interview in the theater encourage the "live interview" form to broaden temporal and historical insights respectively. In the first piece, the performance of the interview takes place offstage (even if it is the main topic of the piece) and, thus, even though the "live interview" is not visible to the audience, allows a general consideration of the entire life span of an author. The second piece exemplifies an imaginary encounter, provided by the interviewer. While this conversation is localized neither in space nor time and the dialogue moves freely across different eras, the audience experiences it as a "live interview" that focuses on pivotal moments of the character's story and even links it with the global history of his country.

Our first example is Natalia Ginzburg's 1989 comedy *Intervista*, which revolves around an interview that a young journalist fails to complete, once in the first act and another time in the second act. The journalist's name is Marco Rozzi; he visits the house of a famous intellectual, Gianni Tiraboschi, located in the Tuscan countryside. Marco Rozzi explains that he wants to publish an interview with him to bring prestige to a new periodical. However, on neither occasion does Tiraboschi show up to the agreed meeting. Failing twice holds Marco's unsuccessful interview up to ridicule.

Nonetheless, the third act puts the comedy aside and features more serious dialogues. A time leap takes us from 1978 to 1988. Reunited, the characters talk about the passing of time and the changes in their lives. In the absence of the interviewee, who is a ghost that never appears on stage, Marco talks to the other two residents of the house: Tiraboschi's younger sister, Stella, with whom Marco has a quick and unsuccessful love affair, and the dissatisfied partner of

Tiraboschi, Ilaria. Their friendly dialogues give a positive value to Tiraboschi's absence during the first two acts. There are multiple occasions that highlight his international fortune as an author and a keynote speaker: "He always travels from one point of the world to another. They always call him. It is incredible how much they call him" (Ginzburg 9, trans. mine). But in the third act, his absence from the scene reveals a turnout in his reputation. Ilaria tells Marco that Gianni no longer leaves his room because of depression. While his life proceeds from success to oblivion, that of the two younger characters—Marco and Stella—goes the opposite direction. Marco has become a successful screenwriter. Stella is freed from the tutelary deity of the house—Ilaria—and, after being in Rome with Marco (between the first and second act) and returning to the villa in Tuscany (second act), becomes a much sought-after cook for her recipes in poor cuisine (35).

Over the years, the villa, which could be the setting of the "visit to the great writer" (Nora), transforms into a decaying mansion, as the characters comment, and the audience witnesses the reversal of fortune in favor of the naïve journalist and at the expense of the illustrious author. We learn that the ex-interviewer stole his latest lover from the great intellectual between the second and the third act. While Marco's life, after an unsuccessful departure as editor and publisher, has finally found financial security and a respected social position, Tiraboschi's world has collapsed onto itself. Even his books are no longer reprinted (39). At the end, the play focuses on the dissipating action of time, inhibiting the previous irony.

The promised meeting between interviewee and interviewer will finally take place, but offstage away from the public eye; it is only announced by Ilaria. Tiraboschi has surprisingly accepted, despite his precarious health situation, to speak with Marco, who had not managed to meet him in person even during his relationship with Stella. At this offstage interview, the ex-journalist will have to look back at his past, momentarily return to the role of the young admirer he had been and honor the defeated Tiraboschi with a final gesture—the interview, significantly ousted from the scene:

> You will sit next to Gianni [...] and ask him [...] all those questions that journalists usually ask. [...] You must now behave as if time has not passed. As if you were who you were, a reporter, and as if he was who he was, when he never slept, he wrote his books all night, and they called him at dawn and got in his car and drove from town to town. When he talked to people, standing on all those stages. [...] People listened to him enchanted, and applauded [...]. So people will remember him. Gianni Tiraboschi. The famous Gianni Tiraboschi. One of the best men that Italy has ever had. (45, trans. mine)

The third act of *Intervista* takes place under the sign of melancholy, which differs from the repetition and return of comic situations in the first two acts. The last interview with Tiraboschi effectively represents the opposite of a press interview. We know that a journalistic interview is closely linked to a specific occasion: it respects social norms and obeys the ephemerality of fame. Marco's interview with a disgraced intellectual, instead, goes beyond such objectives. Marco knows that he can do little to rehabilitate Tiraboschi: "I'm no longer a journalist. I no longer collaborate with any magazine, any newspaper. Nobody remembers my name among the editorial boards" (44, trans. mine).

This fictional interview follows the rules of two genres. As far as comedy is concerned, the courting interview initially elevates the interviewee to the rank of a sought-after celebrity and lowers the journalist to a disastrous position. Regarding drama, the final reversal of destinies fills the gap previously opened between the two characters and, eventually, changes the meaning of the interview from a journalistic event to an act of friendship. Through these different values across the play, the fictional interview becomes exemplary of the trajectory of an author's life.

The second example reuses the genre rules of the impossible interview, but with a significant variation. David Greig's play *Miniskirts of Kabul* (2009) is part of a series designed by Nicolas Kent for the Tricycle Theatre in London: the project, entitled *The Great Game*, focuses on the history of Afghanistan and its renewed centrality in the international arena since 2001. In Greig's piece, the interviewer creates the interviewee like any *Intervista impossibile* on radio, but the whole process of fictionalization is directly stated to the audience. *Miniskirts of Kabul* creates the character to be interviewed during the dialogue, that is, while the play is taking place.

The interlocutors are a nameless British female writer and Mohammad Najibullah, the last president of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The dialogue takes place on UN premises on September 26, 1996: the very day Najibullah died at the hands of the Taliban. The writer acts as a reporter and immediately states that she has not been formally authorized to meet him in his shelter, while a battle explodes in the distance:

> What channels did you go through?
> This is not a normal visit.
> I don't understand.
> I'm imagining you.
> It wasn't possible to arrange a meeting any other way. (Greig 130)

Unlike the other impossible interviews, the interviewer explains to her interlocutor from the beginning that he is a product of her imagination. The exchange suggests that the imagined interview is a necessity because Najibullah is already dead ("Imagining what it was like to be you. / Was? / Is. / I meant 'is.'", 134–35). At the end of the dialogue, while the Taliban troops approach the compound, the writer also tells the interviewee the details of his imminent death. At the same time, unlike the "acoustic bridge" in the impossible interviews on radio, the illusion of a channel between the present and another world is no longer necessary. The impossible interviews' typical suspension between life and death materializes straight from the writer's imagination.

Some scenic elements also enhance the power of the imagination. For example, the woman remedies an initial shortcoming: she had not brought a gift for her interviewee and, scolded by him, she thinks of a bottle of whiskey that magically appears on the stage. Najibullah does not protest in light of the confirmation of his invented nature. Made aware of being a momentary invention sprung from another mind, he asks, "What do you want? / Only to talk" (131). The writer replies that she is dissatisfied with the existing biographical sources on the life of Najibullah, so she decides to question him directly to learn more about him and better understand his point of view (134–35). Najibullah points out the aporia of this way of thinking, because according to her perspective, anything he thinks or says is already in the woman's mind. In addition, he compares himself to his own country, Afghanistan, which has been historically imagined by colonialist countries with tragic outcomes:[2]

> You want everything to be easy? You want me to be like you? […] My country is the creation of foreign imaginings. The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is an imaginary line […] Every blood conflict in the world today has its origins in the imagination of British surveyors. You come here imagining. You expect me to co-operate? (134)

Then, the dialogue reveals a story that is both personal and national thanks to the cooperation of the interviewee: the events of the country intertwine with the biography of Najibullah, his studies at the university, his years of communist militancy, his work for the secret service, his rise to power through torture and terror up to the relationship with the Soviet Union and its role in the conflict with the Taliban. According to the title of the play, though, the interviewer seems to narrow the topics down according to what interests her above all: women's

2 For such political topics, as a model for *Miniskirts of Kabul*, Maggitti recalls the piece that Peter Morgan created in 2006, based on David Frost's interviews with Richard Nixon: *Frost/Nixon* (Maggitti 15).

fashion during the Najibullah regime. An interest that seems to disappoint Najbullah: "Have you come all this way—imagined yourself all this way—imagined yourself sitting with me in a city under siege—to ask me about women's fashion? / I'm interested in how it felt to be a woman in Kabul in the nineteen eighties. / It felt better than now" (141).

The interview overcomes the limited perspectives of both interlocutors. Neither of them has complete awareness of time. On the one hand, the interviewee knows his biography and the history of Afghanistan better than anyone but remains unaware of his final fate; on the other hand, the interviewer has a considerable advantage in knowledge over Najibullah's death, although she is short-sighted towards the affairs of Afghanistan. The woman's point of view, culturally located in Western culture, is as useful to Najibullah as his is to her. Making these two plans complementary is Greig's goal. The dialogue of imaginary characters combines two points of view, giving the imagined interview the value of a historical reconstruction. In short, the fictional interview simulates an interview that happens at a precise moment; nevertheless, the event of the dialogue opens up to both national and biographical history and brings together two distant ideological perspectives.

Conclusion—Reasons for the Imagined Interview

In each of the three types of the imagined interview studied here—self-interview, impossible interview, fictional interview—the authors do not completely break with the conventions of the press interview but replace some of them with literary features. These texts conspicuously maintain the appearance of a press interview by preserving its characteristics.

As we have seen, there is a difference between the types of the imagined interview according to their degree of fictionality. This degree increases from the self-interview to the fictional interview and, consequently, there is a progressive departure from the press interview. First, the self-interview imitates four aspects of the press interview: contingency, plurivocity, reliability, authenticity. Second, the impossible interview emulates three of these characteristics: contingency, plurivocity, and reliability. Finally, the fictional interview only imitates contingency and plurivocity.

These variations show us that the imagined interview does not reject the rules of the press interview altogether—not even in its complete fictional rendering. This happens because the characteristics of the press interview are fundamental in managing the relationship between a writer and the audience.

Modern authors are forced to deal with how the press manages their authorship, but at the same time they want to regain some control over the media by using their own literary style (see Yanoshevsky, “The Interviewer”). While the imagined interview simulates the effective framework of a journalistic discourse, it takes place under the full control of the writer. In fact, the only press interview’s characteristic always absent is the co-authorship of interviewer and interviewee: this cannot be respected in imagined interviews where the real confrontation with a journalist is replaced by a fictional *mise-en-scène* of the interview. If, as it has been written, through the fictional form of the interview, “literature takes its revenge, retaking possession of what has been stolen from it” (Yanoshevsky, *L’Entretien littéraire* 16, trans. mine), then the imagined interview steals a precise form of discourse back from journalism: the press interview.

Such appropriation can only work because literature and the press share a common ground. From the end of the nineteenth century, writers, novelists, and poets have explored without reticence the interiority of their characters and the subjective layers of their lyrical selves. During the same era, the press interview develops from that same expressive core. The ambition of exposing the subject to readers entails an indiscreet look, which means that the individual’s several faces, external images, and latent content have to be perfectly visible and presentable to the public.

Modern novelists, through their narrators, have generally turned this same indiscreet gaze over to their characters. Guido Mazzoni identifies an *inward turn* in the history of the novel after the mid-nineteenth century. Narrative texts turn inward when interest shifts from what everyone can see or hear to what only individuals know, and which the narrative text reveals: a hidden territory of characters, their intimacy becomes the content of the narration (Mazzoni 334–36). Concurrently, the press analyzes public characters with the same indiscreetness. It is the “light of the press” that a journalist characterized by Henry James in *The Reverberator* states as a new paradigm for the penetration of the public gaze into our private life, the *chronique intime* (James, 40–1). As Ponce de Leon explains, “the tendency of reporters and biographers to focus on a subject’s private life” fulfills the interest of readers (104).

This indiscreet gaze finds its counterpart in the press interview, which responds to a more general principle of public life: the demand for indiscretion with which journalism haunts celebrities, a status writers also gain during the nineteenth century (see Salmon). The imagined interview is nothing other than the genre in which this principle of indiscretion—which makes the private accessible to the public—finds an expressive opportunity otherwise separated in two

communicative contexts: on the one hand that of the press, on the other hand that of literary writing.

In short, revelations made by the press relate to those traits of character that the narrator also sees and likewise reveals to the reader. The light that narrative discourse casts on the interiority of its subjects is analogous to the one projected by the press on civil life. Both use an indiscreet look, which makes individuals more interesting by unveiling the secrets they hide, the thoughts they harbor about themselves and other people, and the emotions they are led by. A character's interiority is no longer concealed, neither in the novel, nor in the press, nor in the interview.

With the imagined interview, on the one hand, writers adopt the principle of indiscretion against the interviewer or the interviewee, transformed into fictional characters. On the other hand, having experienced the press interview, they turn an indiscreet look onto themselves. Literary discourse makes this journalistic practice a counterattack, in which the author exposes an image that they would like the media to accept and share (the self-interview). Yet, the writer can create more interesting interviewees who also display conflicts of interpretation, for example about the gender roles of the past (the impossible interview). Finally, in the fictional interview biographical and historical narratives emerge that differ from what appears in a regular press interview. In conclusion, the author of an imagined interview pretends to use the principle of indiscretion as a press device while employing it as a fictional tool. More precisely, the self-interview turns into a self-portrait; the impossible interview creates fictional characters from past figures, mixing historical biographies and current affairs; the fictional interview becomes a dialogue that enters into a relationship with other narrative representations, which now encompasses the entire destiny of a character (Ginzburg) or collective events of Great History (Greig).

It remains to be decided whether the imagined interview's imitation of the press interview's indiscretion aims to increase the circulation of fictional texts within a cultural market that is governed by mass media, starting in the second half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, it is true that, from this period onward, audiences get used to finding fiction in any media form, including audiovisual formats from radio dramas to podcasts, from movies to television series available on streaming platforms. In this sense, the imagined interview can be interpreted as an early invasion of fiction in a territory traditionally occupied by the press, with newspapers and then radio as early forms in this field. On the other hand, not least because an author can be more or less telegenic, certain literary genres are, to a certain degree, particularly suited to adapt their features to the specific codes of the media system. As far as the imagined interview is

concerned, this genre succeeds in taking on several media adaptations thanks to the quality of its simulation of the press interview's characteristics. Ultimately, the literary simulation of the interview follows the need to adapt literature to a cultural system in which it is no longer prevalent as a form of communication that can influence the audience and give it orientation. The imagined interview becomes a successful example of the peculiar hybrid condition of literary genres in the twentieth century. Not only do literary genres intermingle with each other, as the history of the novel has taught us, but they establish deeper relations with other social discourses that emerge from media technologies different from publishing and subsequently explode as new forms of social life for a mass audience. One of those connections between literary and media genres can be found precisely in their function as a means of indiscretion.

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Mario Aquilina, Nicole B. Wallack, Bob Cowser Jr

Essayistic Interviews: The Interview as Collaborative Essayism

Abstract: Through a reflective discussion of what the authors call "essayistic interviews" published in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* (2022), this chapter proposes and develops the concept of "collaborative essayism." The authors survey existing theories of the interview as a genre, and they then outline the rhetorical practices behind and the formal choices made in the interviews for *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* in order to explore how and in which ways the interviews may be deemed "essayistic" and "collaborative." The chapter argues that these essayistic interviews extend and challenge already-existing genre definitions, and it proposes collaborative essayism as a form of thinking and a form of writing that depends on an experimental, collaborative and dialogic interplay of voices.

Keywords: essay, essayism, essayistic, collaboration, essayistic interview, authorship, genre, rhetorical practice, style

Introduction

Essayists often draw on interviews among the myriad materials they assemble for their writing—both those they conduct and those that they have been thwarted from conducting. Tressie McMillian Cottom's "Modern Folklore" features interviews with five Black women, who are all country-music singer-songwriters, to explore how they are changing audiences' expectations for their genre. By contrast, Gay Talese—one of the most lauded figures in the New Journalism movement of the mid-twentieth century—launched his career in 1966 by crafting a profile of Frank Sinatra despite his subject's *refusal* to be interviewed; Talese's accomplishment in "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" relies instead on his first-hand observations of Sinatra and nearly 100 interviews with people in the celebrity's sphere. While essays, clearly, can be deeply shaped by interviews, it is worth considering whether the inverse holds, as well. What characteristics might make an interview essayistic? How would one conduct, edit and then present an interview in ways that bring it closer to the essay as a form? What would such a process reveal about the relationship between the interview and the essay both as genres and as rhetorical practices? These are some of the questions underpinning our

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conception of eight interviews that, as editors, we conducted and curated for *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay*, a volume that gathers contributions by thirty-five essayists, literary critics and writing instructors (Aquilina, Wallack, and Cowser Jr., *Edinburgh Companion*).

As a scholarly book that provides an overview of literary, political, theoretical and pedagogical debates around the genre, this volume did not strictly require interviews. Indeed, the timelines associated with academic publishing, often spanning more than two years between commissioning and publication, may seem antithetical to the genre of the interview, which often responds to a sense of occasion at a particular moment in time. Nonetheless, as editors, we were granted permission by our publisher to experiment by interviewing eight prominent contemporary essayists about their essays and their thoughts about the essay, and then curating the transcript and presenting it in a written essayistic form.[1]

The interviews were not only meant to make the volume more attractive to prospective readers but also to allow us to explore specific ideas and issues that we considered important for the volume as a whole. Consequently, the interviews we conducted were a hybrid of the "author interview" focusing on the works and experiences of the author and the "literary interview" discussing "literature [in our case mainly the essay], its writing, or its experience" (Masschelein et al. 13).

Working on the manuscript of the book throughout 2020 and most of 2021, that is, during a pandemic, meant that all the interviews for the book had to take place remotely and virtually. One interview was conducted via an email exchange between the editors and the interviewee, while the other seven took the form of recorded Zoom meetings, each lasting between one and three hours. Through this contemporary accommodation of our limited mobility, we we were enacting a dynamic in interviewing that goes back to antiquity. As Kevin J. Peters notes, the private and public dimensions of any interview may be navigated both informally and formally. Peters identifies how in Plato's *Phaedrus*, for example, the "walk of Socrates and Phaedrus from the city walls to the shadow of the plane tree […] conditions the manner in which they perceive, approach, and engage one another." More specifically, the "private topography provides the participants in the dialogue with a pedagogical site in which a sense of intimacy may develop" (*Captivating Question* 10). The virtual setting of the Zoom meetings, which the editors as well as the interviewees attended from their own homes, conflated the public and private spaces of the interview. On the one hand, the participants were not

1 In alphabetical order: Robert Atwan, Brian Dillon, Kaitlyn Greenidge, Leslie Jamison, Jamaica Kincaid, Claudia Rankine, David Shields and Rebecca Solnit.

in each other's physical presence. On the other hand, their screens gave them access to each other's private, domestic spaces. This, together with the fact that the interviewees were informed that the video recordings would not be shared, contributed to the creation of what Peters describes as "a private, pedagogical place free of distraction where intimacy may emerge and truth may be pursued" (*Captivating Question* 17). In the context of our interviews, the pedagogy went in two directions: as interviewers, we learned about the authors we met, but several of them also indicated that they had never been asked to reflect on the essay's affordances and limitations as a genre and as praxis. Through the dialogue, the interviewees had space to reflect aloud both about why our questions felt new to them and how they chose to respond to them. These moments of metacognition, which occurred in almost every interview, struck us as deeply essayistic both in content and form.

As a genre, the "author interview" involves a dialogue between someone in the role of interviewer who asks questions and an interviewee, the "author"; the author may be an "authority" or "noteworthy" for their artistry or their status in public life. Regardless, the author's words are reproduced—with different degrees of faithfulness—by the interviewer, who often assumes the role of a secretary-witness. While there is collaboration, the relation is asymmetrical in that it is assumed that the interviewee knows more about a subject and that the prospective readers are primarily interested in their words. However, the interviewer can also be thought of as not simply a "listener" or reporter but as another active participant in a conversation.[2] Along these lines, Gerard Genette and others distinguish between the interview, with its dependence "on specific circumstances," and the "conversation" that exhibits a less hierarchical relation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Genette 358–59). The literary interview, with a wider scope than the work of the author, tends to be held more like a conversation and requires interviewers who can participate more actively, bringing their knowledge of the subject to bear in more direct ways on the proceedings of the discussion. Having essayists being interviewed by editors who are themselves essayists and published scholars meant that the interviews for this book went beyond a question-and-answer reporting format, and they included a conversational element with the editors often presenting interventions in the form of comments and reflections rather than simply questions. This also meant that what Peters describes as the pursuit of "truth" in the interviews required a series of collaborations among different participants over the course of the texts' production.

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2 See Jean Royer, "De l'entretien."

The editing and curation of the recorded interviews was done in a process lasting several months after the interviews were recorded. The interviews were first transcribed by a person who was not a part of the interview itself. Therefore, the transcriber could not rely on first-hand experiences of the interviews to supplement the recordings. At this point, a crucial decision had already been made by the editors to ask the transcriber to only render fully the words of the interviewee.[3] As a result, the conversational element of the actual interviews held in intimate spaces shared by different individuals was effaced by the transcriptions that retained only the faithfully reproduced words of the interviewees.

As editors, we selected which sections of the transcribed interviews would be included on the basis of their relevance to the volume, in some cases cutting up to one half of the text transcribed. We rearranged the sequencing of the interviewees' words to group similar ideas, thus creating a conceptual arc within the text, moving, for example, from the personal to the public dimensions of the essay and then to reflections about the future of the form.

We were also responsible for the division of the text into sections with different subheadings meant to emulate essayistic titles, such as "On the Essay as Political Discourse," "On Journalism and the Essay," "On Form," "On Language and Possibility" and "On Other Voices." At this point, the curated versions of the texts were forwarded to the interviewees, who were asked to suggest further corrections and additions. Revisions by the interviewees at this stage ranged from no changes to substantive ones for style, clarity and accuracy. While our iterative approach to these interviews is not typical, we strove to ensure that the authors approved of the version that would be published in the volume. In this effort, the authors' own revisions helped their interviews achieve greater conceptual and formal coherence. Counterintuitively, we found that the more layers of collaboration each piece accrued through the editorial process, the more essayistic it appeared on the page.

Such editing of the texts represents not only a modulation of the intimacy of the interview by the awareness of the demands brought about by the public dimension of the volume but also a radical recontextualization of the interview. From an interview in which, using Peters's words, the participants are "seemingly unconcerned that anyone might be listening," the interview is transformed into an object for public consumption. In this process, from a discursive virtual exchange, the interviewee's words were reconceived into essayistic texts to be printed and read ("Captivating Question" 122).

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3 The words of the interviewers were transcribed for one of the eight interviews for possible future use in a different context than *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay*.

The rest of this collaboratively written chapter provides further reflections on these interviews by focusing on the implications of these interviews for our thinking of genre as rhetorical practice; the relationship between the interview and the essay; and the concept of collaborative essayism that arises from our work on these interviews.[4]

Genre as Social Action

The interviews created both logistical challenges and presentational ones for our editorial group: while their exigence was clear to us from early in the project, it took longer to determine the published form the interviews would take, how we would decide to place them in the text, and how the interview-essays as a distinctive sub-genre would shape our readers' experiences of the whole book. We sought to signal clearly both the similarities and differences between the interviews and the other offerings of the book, namely chapters written in a more academic style. That is, we faced a problem of genre that involved both literary and rhetorical considerations.

The past forty years have provided key insights into the social and rhetorical dimensions of genre study. By attending to key findings from this extensive literature, we can begin to reflect about the ways in which we might think of these interviews as a form of what we are calling "collaborative essayism." Until 1984, when the rhetorician, Carolyn Miller, published her landmark essay, "Genre as Social Action," a primary approach to analyzing genre was largely based on the idea that genres are pre-determined formal "containers" for content. By contrast, Miller proposes that genre should be defined "not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" in "recurrent [rhetorical] situations" within specific social contexts (159). Focusing on rhetorical action allows us to identify everyday sites in which written genres are the means by which people interact and collaborate—from laboratories and law offices, to union halls, hospitals, and, of course, classrooms. The sites for the interviews in the volume included the virtual and physical spaces in which the interviewing was done, but they also extended to the long discussions among the editors about how to best use the interviews in the volume. As such, from a rhetorical perspective, we note the importance of collaboration not only in the process of selecting

4 For a rare use of the term "collaborative essay," see Patrick Madden, "This is How You Write a Collaborative Essay."

the interviewees, conducting the interviews and then curating the transcripts for publication, but also in determining the genre characteristics that the interviews would take in their printed form.

Because genres are both sites and means of permitting people to engage with one another, they tend to achieve common features over time. Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff note that "genres normalize activities and practices, enabling community members to participate in these activities and practices in fairly predictable, familiar ways in order to get things done" (79). The editors and the interviewees in the interviews for *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* had all participated in several ways in interviews before, and this meant that they came with expectations about what an interview is and does. However, as editors intent on transforming the transcripts of the interviews into texts that could be described as "essayistic," we also brought an understanding of what the essay tends to do as a genre. To increase cohesion between the interviews and the other chapters, we sought to heighten formal properties of the essay in the interviews. This fundamental commitment meant that the rhetorical actions associated with the genre of the interview were, in this project, combined, qualified and challenged by the rhetorical and formal demands of the essay.

As Bawarshi and Reiff argue, if genres help people to get the work of the world done, they cannot remain static, because they are also responsive to their "conditions of use" (79). This responsiveness requires genres to change in different times and contexts. Amy Devitt notes that genre is a "dynamic concept created through the interaction of writers, readers, past texts, and contexts" (699). The specific combination of and tension between the generic and rhetorical expectations associated with the interview and with the essay meant that the essayistic interviews published in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* represent a somewhat distinct intervention in and deviation from these two well-established genres.

Approaching the generic qualities of a text in terms of social actions reveals how the participants understand their work not only as fulfilling social or discursive functions, but also as contrasting their goals with other possibilities. Jacob Nyboe theorizes that "genre labels" signify how texts both fulfill and violate expectations for the genre through choices of form: "An attempt to perform a different action can be expressed as a deviation in form" (369). In this chapter, we are referring to the texts we produced for the volume as "essayistic interviews," a term which has very limited circulation, with Timothy Corrigan being a notable exception who uses the term primarily to talk about specific types of film essays (88). It should be noted that in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay*, we group these texts under the generic title of "Contemporary Essayists in Focus," and each

text is then individually labeled as per the formulation "[Author's name] and [Surname] on the Essay," for example, "Rebecca Solnit on the Essay." In our "Introduction," we describe the interviews as: "eight experimental texts presenting the thoughts of important contemporary writers about the essay," (4) as "collaboratively edited versions of interviews"; and as texts "presented in the form of a series of more or less essayistic interventions" (5).

Our use of the term "essayistic interview" here is a response to the rhetorical demand brought to us by the offer to write a chapter for this volume. The invitation obligated us to reflect on our editorial practices in the previous two years and to try to find a way of accounting for the experimental texts we had produced together with the interviewees. Nyboe emphasizes that when one creates a new "genre signature" or label, it acts as "an appeal to consider the text as one that explores a specific genre, or the praxis of genre as such, and an invitation to expect the unexpected" (374). "Essayistic interviews" is the closest term we could find to match the rhetorical practices in the writing and the generic characteristics of the texts we produced, being neither conventional "interviews" nor "essays" but involving aspects of both genres. Anne Freadman highlights the centrality of deviations in understanding how genres are identified and why they are chosen to fulfill specific functions. She notes that while most theories of genre focus on similarities or "like-statements," "most descriptions of individual texts in terms of generic generalizations concentrate on 'not-statements'" (24). Much of the dynamism of genre as a category of analysis depends, therefore, on accounting for both a genre's change over time and context, but also how any given text tests the genre-category's boundaries or expectations for its users.

Central to these conceptions of genre as both expressions and sites of social action is David R. Russell's understanding of sites of discursive exchange as "activity systems." Building on the theoretical foundations set by educational researchers including Yrgo Engestrom, Russell defines activity systems as "any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction," where the "tool" in use can take discursive forms, such as interviews (510). Crucially, as Bawarshi and Reiff argue, citing Russell, "'[d]issensus, resistance, conflicts, and deep contradictions are constantly produced in activity systems' as subjects may have different understandings of the motives, and as the division of labor will create hierarchical differences and power relations" (511). As we shall see, essayistic interviews or forms of collaborative essayism may also be thought of as activity systems involving continuous negotiation among the participants. In other words, an interview represented in writing can be understood both as a form with recognizable features but also as an activity that calls on myriad genres in order to accomplish its goals for the

interviewer(s), the interviewee(s), and for publics who will encounter it in its final form.

On Interview as Essay

In which ways might one describe the interviews for *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* as "essays" or as "essayistic?" Most obviously, the texts were curated to look and read like essays in the printed volume or, in other words, to incorporate generic and formal properties of the essay. In his preface to *Interviews to Literature*, Jean Royer proposes "that the interview should be rewritten in order to produce a text of durable literary interest" (*Interviews* 8). Royer's focus is on how the interview can be conducted and curated to accrue literary value and thus enhance its readability and relevance over time. Among other things, he suggests thinking of the literary interview as a:

> Literary portrait, a report in which the person who is conducting the interview stays in the background. When the test [sic] is transcribed, it must be *written* so as to echo as closely as possible the speech and ideas of the writer; by turning the encounter into a narrative, by presenting a synthesis of the writer's views by means of a text which has literary value. (*Interviews* 11)

Our approach towards the interviews in the book had similar aims, but differed from the way Royer describes his work in that we specifically attempted to create *essayistic* texts using *essayistic* methods of composition.

Galia Yanoshevsky writes that the "literariness of the author interview" is "embodied and reflected," in part, "in its *style*." By "style," Yanoshevsky refers to a range of qualities in interviews, including the interviewee's "manner of responding to questions" but also the interviewer's "narrative" as well as the interviewers' development of their "own style in relating conversations with different writers" (184). In other words, the literariness of the author interview, which Yanoshevsky describes as a "mediated genre of conversational exchange" and "a place for cooperation between the interviewers and the interviewee," also derives from the contribution of both interviewer and interviewee as well as their mutual collaboration at the level of style (185).

Some of the stylistic features of the interviews published in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* take the texts close to the essay form. These include: the use of a first person "I" that, through the elision of the interviewers' questions, performs the self-reflexive voice we associate with the essay; the preservation of the conversational language used by the interviewees in the interview; the

organization of the material in short sections "on" different topics; and the resistance to comprehensiveness and completion in the development of thinking. However, besides their formal qualities as printed texts, the interviews were conceived as essayistic throughout also in terms of the rhetorical practices behind them.

The cardinal property of intimacy, which characterized the interviews we conducted, is also a widely acknowledged feature of the essay. The essay, as conceived by Michel de Montaigne—almost universally considered as the "father" of the essay in modernity—but also as written throughout a long subsequent tradition, is an intimate space not only in the sense of engaging the reader through conversational and discursive styles but also in being founded in and giving access to the most intimate of spaces: the essayist's thoughts in process, the sense of a mind in action laying itself bare to the readers' contemplation.

In most cases, the essayists interviewed for the volume were not "intimates" known to the editors prior to the interview, yet even when familiarity and intimacy did not develop in real time over the course of the interview, the approach was significantly more intimate than in the conventional academic essays that comprise the rest of the volume, wherein the authors present themselves primarily and almost exclusively in their public roles of critics, writers or instructors. In curating these interviews, while the editors' questions were excised, efforts were made to maintain the intimate presence of that querying other, "the essayistic spirit."[5] The essayistic quality of a mind in action that proceeds with digressions and hesitations towards a pursuit of truth is recreated also in the fragmented form of the texts with subsections that approach different subjects from different angles but without any pretense of comprehensiveness or completion. Consider, for instance, Leslie Jamison reflecting on "showing and telling" in writing:

5 For a discussion of the "essayistic spirit" or the essayistic as a "mode," see Mario Aquilina, "Thinking the Essay at the Limits."

> [G]ood telling [...] deepens and complicates a situation, rather than reducing it to any single pat meaning. It's thinking on the page. Isn't that—in some sense—the point? Isn't all showing, without any telling, evading some of the primary work that writing might do? If you are simply 'trusting a reader to figure it out for themselves' (an argument often proffered for showing rather than telling), doesn't that imply a claustrophobic understanding of the relationship between experience and insight? That some 'it' exists as the singular meaning that might be extracted from a given piece of narrative? That the reader is not—to some extent—*looking* to the writer not simply to narrate experience but also to analyze it? (Aquilina, Wallack, and Cowser Jr., *Edinburgh Companion* 311)

The slippage of the essay as a genre—its being characterized by resistance to and transgression of definitional limits—as well as its inherently dialectical or dialogic form—the essay being a performance of a mind encountering other minds or encountering itself in a process of self-reflection—gave us permission, so to speak, to think of the interviews we were going to be conducting and curating *as* essayistic. Thomas Recchio argues that the essay in its "Montaignean sense [...] is intensely dialogic, acutely sensitive to the pressure of other voices and to the imperatives of the subjective self" (280). Montaigne's essays, while deeply personal, are also meditations on and with others: the many voices and characters to be found in his (mostly classical and historical) library. There is perhaps no discursive practice more shaped by the ideas and tone of other voices than the interview.

The essay often performs or constructs a subjective self in dialogic contexts, whether the dialogism involves the essayist's confrontation of their ideas or thoughts with those of others or whether it involves a self in dialogue with itself. It is this kind of othering of the subjective self through confrontation or affinity with itself or with others that provides the swerves or turns of thought and feeling in the essay; or the deepening of insight—often inconclusive—that we associate with the essay. Our author interviews were dialogic both in terms of structure and substance: we structured them as conversational exchanges, but we also encouraged our interviewees to reflect on their own work, as well as the affinities and differences they discerned between their own writing and that of others. This invitation to reflect led Rebecca Solnit to speak at length about how writing about George Orwell "raised many more questions for [her] about pleasure and beauty in the natural world and all the things we do that are not productive in a Fordist assembly-line kind of way, but essential, nevertheless" (Aquilina et al. *Edinburgh Companion* 150). It led Claudia Rankine to identify the "great influence" of Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein and Toni Morrison on her writing (156). It led Brian Dillon to detail the affinities with Roland Barthes's 'swerving from confession into something else" such as the "theoretical, the academic, the authoritative voice," a swerve that Dillon finds "tremendously moving" (162–63). It led Jamaica

Kincaid to recount her experiences of "always quarelling with" the Bible and of having her "view of the world as a writer" affected by Homer's peculiar sense of ethics and justice (471).

What the essay tends to do with relations with other voices, though, involves a process of what might be described as curation or orchestration. That is, in understanding the genre of the essay is itself a "social action," the author reckons with the presence of other thinkers through the alembic of their own priorities and presence.[6] Even in highly intertextual essayists like William Hazlitt, who quotes (and misquotes) Shakespeare and several Romantic poets very frequently, the inherent dialogism of the essay exists in tension with the uniqueness and intimacy of voice curated by the essayist.[7]

The elision of the editors' questions in the published text of the interviews for the volume was meant to enhance the sense of the interviewees' individual voices as essayists. At the same time, the editors' traces are to be found not only in the text being a response to their questions but also in their own editing or curation responsible for the differences between the recorded interviews and the published texts. Paradoxically, the omission of the editors' own questions and comments turns out to be one of the most important interventions of the editors in taking the interviews closer to the essay form and thus recontextualizing them. It was not lost on the editors that effacing our presence from the public-facing version of these interviews amplified the fundamental dialogism of the essays' rhetorical and literary activity. The omission of the editors' voices, turning the dialogic interview into a monologue, took the interviewees' words towards the style of the essay. This, however can also be read as a form of imposition of style by the editors on the interviews, something which, for instance, Yanoshevsky notes as a characteristic of Frederic Lefevre's interviews that in their manner of presentation turned "each individual portrait into part of a larger one—that of the interviewer" (190). Indeed, while the editors' words were omitted, leaving eight monologues presented in an essayistic form, the editing in all the interviews bears the signature of the editors both in the resonances in the topics discussed as well as in the presentation of the material as essays.

While the essay often assumes a "conversational" style, and while a multiplicity of voices converge into the text of the essay through quotation or allusion, the essay tends to read more like a self-reflective monologue and seemingly

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6 For a discussion of "presence" see Nicole B. Wallack, *Crafting Presence: The American Essay and the Future of Writing Studies*.

7 See Mario Aquilina, "Echoing as Self-fashioning in the Essay: Hazlitt's Quoting and Misquoting of Shakespeare."

performs the authoritativeness of a single voice in dialogue with itself. In some essays, the writer's dialogue with themselves has a retrospective quality. In 2002, for example, Susan Sontag uses the occasion of her essay "Looking at War" to reckon with—and reject—ideas she first had proposed in 1977 for *On Photography*: "Consider two widespread ideas [...] on the impact of photography. Since I find these ideas formulated in my own essays, the earliest of which was written thirty years ago, I feel an irresistible temptation to quarrel with them" (96). Such retrospective skirmishes between essayists and their former selves are the least congenial reason for these encounters. However, essayists also include the presence of previous selves to embody key moments from the past, provide a glimpse into an alternate reality, and to offer the writer someone to talk with or about. As Ned Stuckey-French wryly observes, "This essay stuff is getting complicated, isn't it? An essay recaptures the voice of a former self and in so doing enables one's current self to talk about that former self, and then one or both of them, though most likely just the current self, talks to the reader about the lives lived by both selves. Got it?" There are dialogic dynamics in the self-reflexive turns that the essay might take, as the essayist turns their attention to their own thinking by confronting it with that of others and with the world "out there," but even in the most tentative and inconclusive essayistic approaches, the voices of the other are subsumed under the voice of the essayist.

This quality of the essays contributes to the performance of authenticity. Volkmar Hansen and Gert Heine write about how the interview offers the reader or audience the promise of "authenticity—the interview gives us the feeling of truth coming from personal contact" (qtd. in Royer, "De l'entretien" 120).[8] Sometimes, like personal essays, interviews become a sort of "literary autobiography." Thus, for example, David Shields recounts the influence of his childhood experiences of listening to comedy on the radio on his writing style:

8 As cited by Jean Royer, "authenticité — l'interview nous donne une sensation de vérité proche du contact personnel" ("De l'entretien" 120).

> I grew up in LA and San Francisco, and I would listen to stand-up comedy shows on KSFO on Saturdays from 8 a.m until noon; they would have all of the best stand-up that you could air. It was San Francisco; it was the 1960s and 70s, so it was pretty lenient. [...] I would walk around with this little transistor radio pressed to my ear, and I used to just love, love, love the sound of these idiosyncratic voices imposing their consciousness on the world. As a kid, I had a horrible stutter, so the aggression of these comedians' voices was manna to me. I found them thrilling. So much of the way I write, still, is for the ear; I'm addicted to the staccato sound of a comedian's voice (which is why I love Leonard Michaels so much, Joe Wenderoth, Simon Gray, David Markson), the compression, concision, velocity, and brevity of stand-up are crucial to me. (Aquilina et al. *Edinburgh Companion* 465–66)

The autobiographical form of the interview and the essay thus resonate with each other in the way they suggest to the reader the idea of encountering the presence of an author as it is constituted through a specific voice. The essayist, like the interviewee, tends to speak in their own voice, even though of course this is a mediated and curated voice, a construction of sorts. Indeed, as Royer argues, the "contact" that the interview provides between the reader and the authentic self is "illusory" in the sense that it is always curated or mediated ("De l'entretien" 120).

Another essayistic quality that we note in the interviews is their relation to time and to occasionality. As Erin Plunkett puts it, "The essay begins with something. It is occasional. It is about something" (69). Or, in György Lukács's words, the essay "always speaks of something that has already been given form, or at least something that has already been there at some time in the past" (10). The interviews we conducted often began from and kept returning to this "something that has already been there," whether that is the interviewee's previously published work or life experiences. Robert Atwan, for example, reflects on his experience of writing forwards for *The Best American Essay Series*:

> The April morning I sat down to begin the foreword to the 2017 edition I had just come across a message in my inbox reminding me that this day marked the one hundredth anniversary of our entry into World War I. As I reflected on that moment, I thought of an essayist who powerfully opposed our participation in that conflict, Randolph Bourne. I decided to devote the entire Foreword to a discussion of Bourne, his relationship to the essay, and the significance of irony in political writing. I had no idea when I sat down to write that the Foreword would take that direction. Since I believe essays are a form of discovery—that the departure is more delightful than the destination—I enjoy the act of composing the Forewords. Always eager to begin and curious as to where I will wind up. (Aquilina et al. *Edinburgh Companion* 316)

In this example, Atwan climbs the ladder of abstraction by moving from the sense of a specific occasion towards the claim that "essays are a form of discovery" (316). Likewise, the essay as a genre is occasional in its being provoked by specific

events, but the essayistic also requires a move beyond this occasionality towards thoughts and issues that have a wider and more durable relevance. The essayistic is also an oscillation between the particular and the general, the tangible and the abstract.

The interviews in our edited volume perform these oscillations, not only for texture or to follow the shape of our interviewees' thinking, but to dramatize how essayists approach thinking itself as an activity, one on which artistic (political, etc.) work is based. While the conversation often led to a discussion of specific works or events in the interviewees' life, they were not designed to respond to a specific event (such as the recent publication of a specific work) but to a subject, the essay. The focus, therefore, was at least dual in scope, oriented towards the work of the interviewees but also towards the subject, the essay, that was the occasion for the interview. This gave the interviews a strong sense of essayistic thinking, the movement from the particular to the general and back, as seen in these excerpts from Solnit, Greenidge and Dillon, respectively:

> Essays in particular ask us to think harder about something, look more closely at it, find out more about it. Just that process of thoughtfulness feels almost antithetical to what totalitarianism, fascism, cults etc. want of us, which is a kind of unthinking obedience to received ideas. (Aquilina et al. *Edinburgh Companion* 146)

> The idea that anger can be tempered through a craft, in writing, is an extremely difficult idea. Oftentimes, when you're writing as a woman, especially when you're writing as a black woman, especially when you're writing as a black woman writing about race or about politics, the biggest critique is always that this is too angry or you're too angry or it's wonderful that you were not angry. And the expectation that you leech out that anger is to make sure that you're actually going to be published by anybody; so you're already self-censoring just to get in the door. (323)

> The essay has a purchase on the world. It is not simply a matter of form, not simply a matter of the excitements of style, or the excitement of undoing style, of exploding style. It must also be—and this must be part of the excitement and part of the rigor, for me, as much as anybody else—it must be a question of trying to describe, accurately, some portion of the real world. It must be something to do with a commitment to conveying the reality of real things in the real world. To be made to say that right now is surprising to me—because I find myself talking about the essay so often, in much more abstracted and formal terms. (162)

The movement from a discussion of the occasional towards wider aspects of literature or writing makes these conversations more durable and also more relatable to a wider audience. Conversations about literature, as Genette argues, are thus more readily relevant for later collections than author interviews that focus exclusively on the author's work (359). This durability through abstraction and

through widening the scope of the discussion is an essayistic characteristic that the interviews in the volume share with the essay as a genre.

Towards Collaborative Essayism

We conclude this chapter by reflecting on the extent to which essayistic interviews for *The Edinburgh Companion* may thus be considered an example of collaborative essayism. The rhetorical practice of collaborative writing is well established in academic writing, in pedagogy and in different work contexts.[9] In creative contexts, research has been done especially in relation to collaborative authorship in film studies, but the concept and practice of collaborative writing has not been given the attention it deserves in literary studies,[10] possibly due to, as Robert L. Callinger puts it, “a fear that alternative models of authorship might compromise authorial sacrality in the canon” (378). The same may be said about the essay. Essays are highly intertextual and often depend on an interplay—of affinities and contestations—between the authorial voice and that of others who are quoted, echoed or commented upon by the essayist. However, the actual writing of the essay is rarely thought of as a fully collaborative practice because the voice and style of an essay are deemed to be traceable in the individual essayist or organizing consciousness who authors it. The elision of the editors’ questions and comments in the published texts of the interviews for *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* was indeed one of the stylistic choices meant to make the interviews come closer to an essay.

The interview, as a genre rooted in specific rhetorical practices, is more readily thought of as collaborative than the essay, but even here collaborative relations tend to be asymmetrical or conceived to be so. Genette writes of how the interviewer “effaces his ‘person’ in order to (confine himself to) play(ing) his role and in which the writer disregards his interlocutor enough to aim, through him, only at the potential addressee.” The rhetorical relation established, therefore, is one in which the interviewee, despite the presence of the interviewer, is bypassing the interviewer to address the reading public. This conception of asymmetry detailed by Genette suggests that the interviewer is simply a “messenger”

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9 See, for example, Lisa S. Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*.

10 See Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*; Andrew Bennett, *The Author*; Stephen B. Dobranski, “The Birth of the Author: The Origins of Early Modern Printed Authority”; and Carsten Junker, “Vicarious Writing, Or: Going to Write it for You.”

(not an "autonomous" person) whose function is not so much to interact and collaborate with the interviewee but to relay what the interviewee says to the public (357).

However, while Genette's argument might seem valid when referring to the kind of interview he has in mind, that is, the interview of a primarily journalistic kind, it might be argued that denying the collaborative element of the essayistic interviews in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* would have to depend on forgetting the collaborative practice underpinning the whole process, including: the recording of the interview itself; the dialogic give and take in the development of thinking during the interview; the editing and curation of the transcript as it was transformed into a print version. Indeed, an element of collaboration is also to be found—to different degrees—in the academic chapters of this and other edited volumes, which are often the product of intensive editing processes that help the authors of the individual chapters conceive, develop and refine their writing.

This does not mean that the interviews in the volume should be described as symmetrical collaborations. Indeed, the editors' almost absolute self-effacement in the published interviews (with the exception of contextualizing and explanatory notes about the interviews in a separate section of the volume, the introduction to the book) would seem to reinforce the idea of the essayist as single author and authority of the texts. However, reflection on the whole rhetorical process of writing these interviews allows us to see how the dialogic and multivocal dimensions of writing that thinkers like Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and others make us aware of in their questioning of the idea of the "author" may be present in tangible ways in the essayistic interviews in the volume.

Perhaps, it would be productive to think of the collaborative essayism producing these essayistic interviews through an analogy with the collaborative experience of a curator curating an artist's installation, a practice in which what is produced and presented to be experienced by the author is to different degrees affected by the artist and the curator and by the rhetorical relations between them, their expected audiences and the site of the installation.[11] Essays, it might be said, are always collaborative in the sense of presenting an interplay of voices, but what the essayistic interviews in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* try to do is experiment with writing practices to the extent that writing becomes less an authorial orchestration of multiple voices and more a fundamentally collaborative attempt to think essayistically.

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11 See Madden, "This is How You Write a Collaborative Essay," for an attempt to produce "collaborative essays."

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Whitney Arnold

The Secret Subject: Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, and the Interview as Genre

Abstract: In a 1983 interview with Charles Ruas, Michel Foucault reflects on his 1963 *Raymond Roussel* (translated *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*), characterizing the text as both personal and outside the sequence of the rest of his works. While *Death and the Labyrinth* explores Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*), in which Roussel describes his methods for writing various of his texts, Foucault's interview about *Death and the Labyrinth* participates in a similar gesture, as Foucault describes his own relationship to *Death and the Labyrinth* through the interview. This essay analyzes Foucault's interview with Ruas while examining Foucault's many interviews as a particular body of work. Highlighting complexities of the interview form, the essay argues that Foucault's interview about *Death and the Labyrinth* mirrors the same tensions and nonrevealing revelations that he explores in *Death and the Labyrinth*, with Foucault ultimately pointing to his own subjectivity and aesthetic transformation as a key to the text.[*]

Keywords: Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, Raymond Roussel

> My relationship to my book on Roussel, and to Roussel's work, is something very personal. … I would go so far as to say that it doesn't have a place in the sequence of my books.
>
> —Michel Foucault, "An Interview with Michel Foucault"[1]

In this 1983 interview with Charles Ruas, Michel Foucault reflects on his 1963 work *Raymond Roussel* (translated into English as *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*). While Foucault often uses his interviews to paint

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1 This interview first appeared as "Archéologie d'une passion." Ruas included introductory comments regarding Foucault's appearance, mannerisms, and apartment in the English translation. Foucault intended to edit the interview transcript but passed away before Ruas was able to mail him the manuscript.

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trajectories of his thought—even characterizing his interviews as "scaffolding" holding together and plotting a course between his works—in this particular interview he insists on the differences between *Death and the Labyrinth* and the rest of his oeuvre. In *Death and the Labyrinth*—a text that has received a marked lack of critical attention—Foucault examines Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*), in which Roussel describes the methods he employed for structuring certain of his works.[2] Foucault's efforts to clarify *Death and the Labyrinth* through his interview about the text parallel Roussel's problematic efforts to explain his texts with *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. Much as Roussel veils while unveiling in his explanatory text, revealing the presence of an undisclosed "secret," Foucault clarifies *Death and the Labyrinth* in the interview by pointing to what he does not reveal. He presents *Death and the Labyrinth* as a personal text intricately connected to his private thoughts, desires, and experiences, yet he declines to elaborate on these connections.

This essay analyzes Foucault's interview about *Death and the Labyrinth* while examining his many interviews themselves as a particular body of work. It explores the processes and practices of the Foucauldian interview while interrogating its disclosures. In the later interviews Foucault responds to questions concerning a turn to the subject—an issue of continued critical debate—by insisting that he has *always* been interested in the subject.[3] He recasts earlier works in terms of current preoccupations, painting *Death and the Labyrinth* in light of his later work on aesthetics.[4] Throughout the interviews he suggests that his texts are intricately tied to his subjectivity, yet in the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview, in particular, he portrays his early text as a concerted, unique work of aesthetic self-fashioning. Much as Foucault analyzes Roussel's laborious efforts to create beauty in *Death and the Labyrinth*, in the interview about *Death and the Labyrinth*

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2 An early version of what became Foucault's first chapter of *Death and the Labyrinth* was published in 1962 in *Lettre ouverte* (see Foucault, "Speaking and Seeing"). For critical work thus far on *Death and the Labyrinth*, see Kaufman *The Delirium of Praise* pp. 64–66, Macherey *The Object of Literature*, and Rajan "The Phenomenological Allegory."

3 Whereas Eric Paras, for instance, calls Foucault's 1978–79 Collège de France course "a bold departure into the uncharted territory of subjectivity," (107) Lynne Huffer argues that Foucault's late concerns with subjectivity and ethics appear throughout his early works, as well (125). Alexander Nehamas insists that Foucault never denied the existence of the subject, but that he continually worked against widely accepted ideas of the subject as absolute origin. Nehamas acknowledges changes in Foucault's thought while maintaining the overall continuity of his area of exploration.

4 Gary Gutting has observed that Foucault often describes his past works in terms of current projects (71–73).

he claims that his early text incorporates and reveals his own efforts to create a beautiful life. While he puts forth a history of aesthetic practices in many of his later texts, in the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview he points to a personal practice of aestheticism. Mirroring the same tensions and nonrevealing revelations that he examines in *Death and the Labyrinth*, Foucault portrays his own subjectivity and aesthetic transformation as the veiled core and foundation of the early work.

The Foucauldian Interview

Although Foucault's interviews often appear in scholarly analyses, little work has been done on the Foucauldian interview itself.[5] However, critics, as well as Foucault, assert the significance of the interview in Foucault's body of work. Paul A. Bové observes that "many of Foucault's most telling statements" appear in his interviews, and Gilles Deleuze declares, "*If Foucault's interviews form an integral part of his work*, it is because they extend the historical problematization of each of his books into the construction of the present problem" (115). The interviews work to tie together his earlier and current texts. Foucault himself states of his interviews, "[They] tend to be reflections on a finished book that may help me to define another possible project. They are something like a scaffolding that serves as a link between a work that is coming to an end and another one that's about to begin" ("Interview" 240).

The interviews speak to prominent critical debates about Foucault's thought: while scholars have disputed the methodological soundness of using a biographical lens to interpret Foucault's works (a debate that came to the forefront with James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault*), in his interviews Foucault takes pains to establish and obscure connections between his works and life, seeming

5 Introductions to collections of Foucault's interviews tend to analyze his career in general. The only essay I have found thus far that focuses specifically on the interviews is David Macey's "The Foucault Interviews." Macey has identified roughly one hundred interviews that appear in eighty publications. His essay primarily concerns genre definition: he works to define Foucault's interviews versus Foucault's public conversations, radio broadcasts, et cetera. In this essay, in comparison, I focus more on content than genre. I examine as interviews the texts already defined as such in print. Although a weakness of this approach is that I must rely on others' definitions of an interview, the published interviews have similar components (being organized in question-and-answer formats between Foucault and one or more interlocutors) and provide a solid basis for an analysis of content.

both to encourage and to qualify biographical interpretive methodologies.[6] Moreover, while scholars have attempted to map trajectories of Foucault's thought and works throughout his career, Foucault grapples directly with these trajectories in his interviews, deliberately painting continuities and discontinuities in his thought while depicting his oeuvre as a whole. His descriptions of his career are often similar to the rough periodizing that appears in much contemporary scholarship.[7] However, as this essay will detail, he also recasts his earlier works in terms of his current concerns. In the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview this gesture is particularly clear due to the notable length of time that elapsed between the book and the interview.

Research on the interview genre itself has examined the history of the form, its communicative norms (particularly as game or speech event), and its dialogic nature (as both interviewer and interviewee work together to construct a life narrative of the interviewee).[8] The author interview in particular (a form made famous by the *Paris Review*) invites authors to explain their works in terms of their life experiences and intentions—a methodology discouraged by the now-commonplace biographical and intentional fallacies.[9] The interview also presupposes the coherent personhood of the interviewee; it seeks to mask the disjunction between past and present (between the current, embodied self and the narrated

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6 James Miller's 1993 work, which gained a good amount of attention in the United States and France, was often criticized for drawing connections too closely between Foucault's works and life (and, specifically, his sexual practices). Didier Eribon, author of *Michel Foucault* (1989), was among the most vocal of Miller's critics.

7 Critics often separate his career into three parts: an early period concerned with knowledge, a middle period concerned with power, and a late period concerned with the subject. Foucault presents this three-part characterization of his work in certain of his late interviews. In a 1983 interview, for instance, he describes the areas (or "axes") of genealogy that he has explored during his career as the "truth axis" (with *The Birth of the Clinic*, 1963; and *The Order of Things*, 1966), the "power axis" (with *Discipline and Punish*, 1975), and the "ethical axis" (with *The History of Sexuality*, 1976–84) ("Genealogy of Ethics" 262–63).

8 Michael B. Palmer asserts that the modern interview form began with the *New York Herald* in 1836 (90), and Dorothy E. Speirs observes that interviews appeared in the French press in the 1870s (301). Most scholarship on the interview as genre thus far explores areas of sociolinguistics, media studies, and social research methodology. However, in a more literary vein, Ted Lyon has analyzed the interviews of Jorge Luis Borges, and David Neal Miller has examined those of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Both Lyon and Miller work to draw parallels between the interviews and both authors' literary texts.

9 Bruce Bawer examines the influence of the *Paris Review* interview in "Talk Show: The Rise of the Literary Interview."

self) in order to shape past and present into a unified life narrative, with previous experience contributing to the form or characteristics of the current self.

Attempting to establish a coherent trajectory of thought in his interviews, Foucault depicts his earlier works in terms of his current projects, maintaining in his later interviews that his works have *always* concerned the subject and subjectivity. In a January 1984 interview, when questioned by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, Helmut Becker, and Alfredo Gomez-Müller about a turn to the subject in his later works, Foucault responds:

> In actual fact, I have always been interested in this problem, even if I framed it somewhat differently. I have tried to find out how the human subject fits into certain games of truth. […] This is the theme of my book *The Order of Things* [1966], in which I attempted to see how, in scientific discourses, the human subject defines itself as a speaking, living, working individual. In my courses at the Collège de France, I brought out this problematic in its generality. ("Ethics" 281)

He never rejected the subject, he declares, but an a priori idea of the subject ("What I rejected was the idea of starting out with a theory of the subject […] and, on the basis of this theory, asking how a given form of knowledge [*connaissance*] was possible") (290). When pressed, Foucault acknowledges that the "games of truth" he has analyzed have shifted from coercive practices to practices of the formation of the self. Indeed, his language about the subject *has* changed in his interviews; he shifts in large part from discussing how the subject is constituted to how the subject works to constitute himself. In a May 1984 interview, he also acknowledges that with *The Use of Pleasure* (1984) he "reintroduc[es] the problem of the subject that [he] had more or less left aside in [his] first studies" ("Return of Morality" 472). Yet, overall, he takes pains in his later interviews to portray the general continuity of his thought; while each book may be different from its predecessor, he claims, it still takes part in a loosely organized exploration of a larger problematic of subjectivity. In the afterword to Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, he asserts:

> I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyze the phenomenon of power […]. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. […] Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research. ("Afterword")

Furthermore, Foucault frames this exploration of subjectivity in terms of aesthetics, or the transformation of the self. His focus on the care of the self in the late interviews turns into an exploration of the self as a work of art—of living in such a way as to create a beautiful existence. He insists that his concept of

aestheticism—which has inspired much critical debate as to its precise definition and ethical implications—has been the impetus for much of his work. In a 1982 interview he states:

> For me, intellectual work is related to what you could call “aestheticism,” meaning transforming yourself. [...] You see that’s why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That’s the reason also why, when people say, “Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else,” my answer is [...] [*Laughs*] “Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?” This transformation of one’s self by one’s own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. (“Michel Foucault” 130–31)

Elsewhere in his later interviews he describes *aesthetics* (or the *aesthetic experience*) as “the will to live a beautiful life” (“Genealogy of Ethics” 254). His concept of aesthetics encompasses both the act of working on oneself and the effect of working on oneself.[10]

This aesthetic transformation of the self appears, in many of his interviews, as the transformation of *him*self. Foucault avows openly, as in the interview just cited, that he is concerned with his own transformation (declarations that likely contributed to critical accusations of dandyism).[11] He claims that his works are experiences through which he changes: “What I think is never quite the same, because for me my books are experiences. [...] An experience is something that one comes out of transformed. [...] I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before” (“Interview” 239–40). Yet while he

10 Critics have noted the slipperiness of Foucault’s use of “aestheticism” and “aesthetics.” For perceptive analyses of these terms in Foucault’s work, see Kevin Lamb “Foucault's Aestheticism,” Timothy O'Leary *Foucault: The Art of Ethics*, and Andrew Thacker “Foucault’s Aesthetics of Existence.” At times, Foucault also ties his concept of aestheticism to reputation, linking “the will to live a beautiful life” with the desire to “leave to *others* memories of a beautiful existence.” This concern with reputation is striking, especially as it occurs near the end of his career (“Genealogy of Ethics” 254, emphasis mine).

11 Pierre Hadot notably criticized Foucault’s late focus on aesthetics and the care of the self as tending toward “a new form of Dandyism, late twentieth-century style” (211). Others, responding to Hadot, argued for the ethical basis of Foucault’s project. Todd May and Timothy O’Leary maintained that Foucault’s aim was not to prescribe a beautiful self, but to draw attention to the techniques available for forming the self, making others aware that the process of self-formation was not determined or natural (May 180–82; O’Leary 131). Alexander Nehamas defended Foucault by asserting that public and private were necessarily linked in the lives of public figures; “great individuals” must transform themselves in order to transform the lives of others (180–81).

continually refers to these experiences and aesthetic efforts of self-transformation, he carefully avoids detailing the characteristics and results of these experiences. While emphasizing the very personal aspects of his intellectual work ("I haven't written a single book that was not inspired, at least in part, by a direct personal experience"), he withholds details as to these personal aspects (244). Ultimately, while claiming that his work concerns subjectivity, and while discussing his work in a genre (the interview) that highlights the speaking subject, he also veils his experience of subjectivity by portraying a continually transforming self that evades analysis. He gestures toward an interiority that he does not reveal—a secret somehow held in his texts. The *Death and the Labyrinth* interview reveals the presence of this secret most directly.

"Clarifying" and Reframing the Text

The *Death and the Labyrinth* interview is unique in that it occurs twenty years after *Death and the Labyrinth* was published; most interviews focusing on only one of Foucault's texts took place shortly after publication of the text. In his notes on the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview, Ruas observes Foucault's surprise at recent interest in his obscure text. However, Ruas states that Foucault "readily offered to assist [him] by clarifying any obscurity in his text" ("An Interview" 172). Foucault's move to clarify and explain his text mirrors Roussel's effort, with *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, to explain certain of his texts. (Roussel asserts in his text, "I have always been meaning to explain the way in which I came to write certain of my books. [...] It involved a very special method. And it seems to me that it is my duty to reveal this method, since I have the feeling that future writers may perhaps be able to exploit it fruitfully") (*How I Wrote* 3). With his offer to clarify *Death and the Labyrinth*, Foucault enacts a similar authorial gesture.

The notable amount of time that elapses between Foucault's early text and his late interview purporting to explain the text provides a revealing glimpse into his later characterizations of his earlier works. By the time of the interview (15 September 1983), he had progressed well into his work on Greek ethics and practices of the self. During an interview in April of the same year he readily talked of his already extensive work on the "aesthetics of existence" ("Genealogy of Ethics" 266). In the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview Foucault portrays his text as an exercise in aesthetic self-transformation. Although any metatextual references to or gestures toward the author are absent in *Death and the Labyrinth* itself, he paints the text as overwhelmingly concerned with the author. One might argue, as Foucault does in a May 1984 interview, that his intellectual endeavors are a

progression; he states, "One always moves backward toward the essential" ("Concern for Truth" 456). Yet the absence in *Death and the Labyrinth* of Foucault's later language regarding the constitution of the self suggests not that his aesthetic concerns developed out of the text, but that he reframes the text in terms of his later concerns.[12]

Foucault's offer to explain and clarify his text is also fraught with problems due to the same instability of repetition that he analyzes in *Death and the Labyrinth*. In his early text, he examines Roussel's process of generating stories in the space between two almost identical sentences, with the second almost repeating the first. He proposes the ultimate impossibility of the second sentence repeating the first due to "a slight gap which causes the same words to mean something else" (*Death* 23). The gap is presumably a result of the unfolding of the text, the language that appears between the first sentence and its purported repetition at the end of the story. A similar gap is present between Foucault's text and interview; while he attempts to repeat ideas from *Death and the Labyrinth* in order to clarify them, these ideas necessarily change in meaning due to the space (in terms of time, events, changes in Foucault's thought) between the text and the interview. Foucault cannot clarify his text without modifying his text. Furthermore, Foucault argues that Roussel, by repeating his first sentences at the end of his stories, necessarily adds meaning to the originals. He asserts of *Locus Solus* (1914), "The language of [the] second part of the text has the function of restoring meaning to signs. [...] The narrative returns to the original moment when it started, recovers the image which stood at the beginning like a mute emblem, and *now* tells what it means" (*Death* 54, emphasis mine). Meaning is added only in the return, suggesting the relative emptiness of the original. Foucault's arguments about the impossibility of repetition in Roussel's works effectively suggest his own inability to clarify *Death and the Labyrinth* through his interview. Extrapolating his arguments in the text to the text, we might argue that, in purporting to repeat and clarify his ideas from his original text, Foucault adds meaning and creates a necessarily different text. The interview thus reveals his current concerns; he constructs a narrative of *Death and the Labyrinth* while simultaneously constructing the "I" of the present. This "I" in the interview necessarily eludes complete presence: it highlights impossibilities of repeating the past while negotiating between past and present itself—continuously becoming itself by

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12 Of course, thought, in a sense, is always a progression, with thoughts leading to other thoughts. Yet here what I would like to highlight is the apparent juxtaposition of Foucault's aesthetic concerns with *Death and the Labyrinth*. These aesthetic concerns appear more as a construct imposed *on* the text than as an organic development *from* the text.

constructing itself in the present moment and pushing previous moments into the past. In this way, the interview reveals the ongoing creation of the narrated "I." Foucault strategically uses this elusive "I" to both point to and mask his own subjectivity.

Death and the Labyrinth and the Subject in the Shadows

Insisting that *Death and the Labyrinth* is entirely unlike any of his other works, Foucault proclaims that the unique text concerns his own aesthetic transformation. While tantalizingly suggesting that the text somehow contains and points to his self, he paints this self only in its negativity, indicating a space of interiority but refusing to detail its contents. The interview ultimately reveals similar lacunae and disjunctions to those Foucault analyzes in Roussel's works: it reveals and hides, includes and excludes, illuminates and casts shadows.

The *Death and the Labyrinth* interview sheds light on the problematic of subjectivity in Foucault's oeuvre by painting the authorial self as the irrefutable core of the work. Foucault declares:

> I believe that it is better to try to understand that someone who is a writer is not simply doing his work in his books, in what he publishes, but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books. [...] The work is more than the work: the subject who is writing is part of the work. ("An Interview" 186)

In addition to suggesting that the work somehow includes and points to the self, Foucault gestures to a process of self-formation or self-transformation in writing—an aesthetic process. He invokes this aesthetic process, as well, when discussing Roussel's experience of authorship: "The first text one writes is neither written for others, nor for who one is: one writes to become someone other than who one is. Finally, there is an attempt at modifying one's way of being through the act of writing" ("An Interview" 184). He emphasizes the aesthetic possibilities of authorship and, by extension, hints to his own aesthetic project. The work, he declares, reveals the authorial self, and in doing so it reveals the author's efforts to transform and modify his "way of being."

Throughout the interview, Foucault portrays his writing of *Death and the Labyrinth* and his encounters with Roussel's work as intensely personal aesthetic experiences. However, when Ruas attempts to pin down Foucault's particular interest in and relationship to Roussel's works, Foucault only speculates as to

"what could be said," preceding his response with an evasive "perhaps" ("An Interview" 178). Although he continually points to his subjectivity in the interview (and although the introductory copy to the original *Magazine littéraire* interview tantalizingly suggests that Foucault reveals his "real self" in the piece), Foucault masks as much as he reveals.[13] He emphasizes his personal relationship to the text without describing or detailing this relationship; he reveals its presence, but not its form or characteristics. Ruas states to Foucault later in the interview, as Foucault continues to withhold details about his personal connection to the text, "You've said that you don't want to analyze your personal reactions." Foucault responds, "It is not a question that what I have to say can illuminate Roussel's text, but that it will eventually reveal the type of interest that a Frenchman of the nineteen sixties could bring to these texts" ("An Interview" 187). Foucault redirects Ruas's focus from himself to a larger social context, addressing possibilities of thought instead of his personal thoughts and interests.

In fact, throughout the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview, Foucault draws attention to what he does *not* reveal. Just as Roussel in his posthumous text explains only certain works and certain aspects of these works ("I cannot remember anything more relating to *Locus Solus*") (*How I Wrote* 12), effectively highlighting the negative and unexplained spaces, Foucault explains in the interview what did not interest him in the text and what is absent in *Death and the Labyrinth* ("I have to admit that my research was not extensive precisely because it was not [Roussel's] psychology that interested me") ("An Interview" 178). Moreover, just as Foucault delights in examining the texts that are excluded from Roussel's process, he reveals in the interview that he considers *Death and the Labyrinth* itself to be outside the sequence of his works:

> It is by far the book I wrote the most easily, with the greatest pleasure, and most rapidly. [...] In my other books I tried to use a certain type of analysis, and to write in a particular way. [...] My relationship to my book on Roussel, and to Roussel's work, is something very personal. [...] I would go so far as to say that it doesn't have a place in the sequence of my books. ("An Interview" 187)[14]

13 See Foucault "Archéologie d'une passion" (100).

14 Critics have also asserted that *Death and the Labyrinth* appears to be different from Foucault's other texts, resting somehow outside his body of work. James Faubion characterizes *Death and the Labyrinth* as the most "axiomatic" of Foucault's works (xi), while Frances Fortier proclaims it a "rupture totale avec le reste de l'oeuvre" [total rupture with the rest of the oeuvre] (136, translation mine).

Death and the Labyrinth is a personal endeavor excluded from his own process. Indeed, Foucault often refrains in his interviews from listing the text among his works. In a 1968 interview he refers to *The Order of Things* and his "preceding" works, yet he indicates that only two texts preceded *The Order of Things*—presumably *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), though Foucault published *Raymond Roussel* the same year as *The Birth of the Clinic* ("History" 33–34).[15] In a 1969 interview about *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault refers to "the three books that precede this last one—*Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things* and *The Birth of the Clinic*" ("Birth of a World" 65).[16] He leaves out *Raymond Roussel*.

By highlighting the place of *Death and the Labyrinth* outside his oeuvre, Foucault draws attention to this negative, excluded space. Thinking with Foucault's concepts from this text, one might say that *Death and the Labyrinth* is a "negative code" or "negative copy": it discloses its boundaries where it touches on light, or the positive sequence of Foucault's works (*Death* 32). In "explaining" *Death and the Labyrinth* in the interview with Ruas, Foucault emphasizes the shadows that surround the work. Yet is *Death and the Labyrinth* simply excluded from Foucault's oeuvre, existing in a negative, undefined space, or is it a positive presence with its own code? Foucault states of a text excluded from Roussel's process, "This evidently does not mean that it was structured *without* a process; nothing prevents a strictly logical attempt to uncover *another* process in the texts that he did not explain, the only condition being that it not be the *same* process" (*Death* 103).

In *Death and the Labyrinth*, Foucault delights in the secrecy inherent in Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, observing that Roussel "forces the reader to learn a secret that he had not recognized" by using the visible to highlight the invisible, obscuring and veiling while revealing (*Death* 5). He notes in the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview, "The fact that there is a secret transforms the experience of reading into one of deciphering, a game, a more complex undertaking, more disturbing, more anxious than when one reads a simple text for the pure pleasure of it" ("An Interview" 183). The secret is the unexplained and the obscured in Roussel's purportedly explanatory text. The simple knowledge that a

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15 I assume Foucault refers to his *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963) here by his repeated references to these two works in other contemporary interviews.

16 See also Foucault "Interview with Michel Foucault" (240) and "Discourse of History" (23–24). Although, in a 1961 interview, Foucault lists Roussel as an influence, thus far I have not found a specific reference to the text *Raymond Roussel* in an interview until 1975, when Foucault mentions the text to Roger-Pol Droit (Foucault "Madness" 7; "On Literature" 152).

secret is present adds depth and complexity to the experience of reading the text. Foucault imagines that Roussel, in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, attempts to "keep the secret by revealing that it is secret, only giving us the epithet but retaining the substance" (*Death* 7). While Foucault's comments here concern Roussel's texts, one must wonder whether Foucault employs a similar gesture in his interview. In other words, does *Death and the Labyrinth* possess a secret, and does Foucault's interview reveal the presence of this secret?

The secret of *Death and the Labyrinth*, I propose, is Foucault's subjectivity; he indicates that the text is inextricably connected to his interiority, yet he deliberately declines to elaborate on this connection. His interiority is a positive element in a negative space that reveals itself, in its invisibility, only where it touches on the visible. Of his original interest in Roussel, Foucault declares, "I developed an affection for his work, which remained secret, since I didn't discuss it" ("An Interview" 174). However, even in finally discussing this personal affection in the interview, Foucault veils as much as he clarifies. As noted in the beginning of this essay, he insists, "My relationship to my book on Roussel, and to Roussel's work, is something very personal. [...] No one has paid much attention to this book, and I'm glad; it's my secret affair. You know, he was my love for several summers [...] no one knew it" ("An Interview" 187). Foucault not only points out that there *was* a secret, involving his strong interest in Roussel for several years, but he indicates that there *is* a secret. The interview reveals the presence of a secret in *Death and the Labyrinth* while keeping the secret itself; Foucault's self is just outside the narrative he wishes to tell. When Ruas asks about the place of *Death and the Labyrinth* in "the perspective of [his] work" and "the development of [his] thinking," Foucault responds, "Those things that matter to me in a personal way [...] I don't feel any inclination to analyze" ("An Interview" 184). He points to the secret while, like Roussel, "retaining [its] substance."

The question remains, though, as to *why* Foucault withholds the substance of the secret. With this interview, he markedly transfers his theoretical explorations of the subject and aestheticism to a more personal space, bringing into play his own interiority. However, he simultaneously obscures this interiority, pointing to its presence while veiling its substance. One potential, yet perhaps rather facile, explanation for Foucault's withholding is that he attempts, with the interview, to create interest and intrigue through secrecy. As we have seen, he delights in Roussel's admission of the presence of a secret; Foucault observes that this presence transforms the experience of reading into a game of decoding. We might argue that Foucault is playing a game of his own with Ruas and his readers. Perhaps he both highlights and obscures his subjectivity in order to pique others' curiosity and interest. Or, perhaps, we might look to the language of Foucault's

revealing nonrevelations to explain his withholding. He speaks of Roussel as his secret love ("he was my love for several summers [...] no one knew it"), and he describes *Death and the Labyrinth* as his "secret affair." This interplay of silence, secrecy, and sex brings to mind his repressive hypothesis. However, any reading of his sexuality as the secret of *Death and the Labyrinth* would be problematic.[17] Foucault argues in the interview against interpreting Roussel's works solely in terms of his sexuality: "The private life of an individual, his sexual preference, and his work are interrelated not because his work translates his sexual life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text" ("An Interview" 186). Establishing Foucault's sexuality as the final explanation of the secret—attempting to prescribe a final truth—would contradict his thought.

Ultimately, I argue, Foucault points to yet obscures his interiority and efforts of aesthetic self-fashioning in order to avoid creating a prescriptive ethics. By describing his aesthetic efforts in detail, he risks creating an unintentional mandate that specifies how to live a beautiful life—an ethical guide, along with a solution or goal. He notes, when he declines to interpret Deleuze's work in a 1983 interview, "The moment a kind of thought is constituted, fixed, or identified within a cultural tradition, it is quite normal that this cultural tradition should take hold of it, make what it wants of it and have it say what it did not mean" ("Structuralism" 446). In detailing his interiority and attempts to transform himself, he risks becoming an example for others to follow, with his words misinterpreted and/or reified into aesthetic and ethical guidelines. He not only wishes to avoid prescribing ethical behavior but wishes to be free to transform and change himself, as noted earlier. He famously insists in the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same"; he proclaims this desire throughout the interviews, as well, praising the intellectual who "incessantly displaces himself'" and is "permanently capable of self-detachment" (17).[18] Foucault's concept of aestheticism is then slippery because the self to whom it refers is purportedly always changing (and, in fact, works to change). As Kevin Lamb has observed, aestheticism, for Foucault, is typically a relational idea, describing the continually changing relation between himself and his works (45–46). Whereas Foucault historicizes and theorizes aesthetic practices in his

17 Exploring the much-analyzed potential intersections between homosexuality and secrecy would lead us outside the scope of this essay. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick famously examined these intersections with *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), and many valuable studies have followed in the last two decades.

18 See also Foucault "End of the Monarchy of Sex" (225) and "Concern for Truth" (461). With his "Masked Philosopher" interview, Foucault performs the effort to "have no face" that he describes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

later works, in the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview he finally gestures to his own aesthetic practices. He points to his efforts to explore not only the theory, but also the practice of aestheticism (with “aestheticism” functioning as both process and result—the act and effect of creating a beautiful life). To avoid creating a system of transformative techniques and goals, however, he deliberately does not detail these efforts of self-transformation.

Thus, although Foucault often claims in his interviews that he works to change himself through his texts, only in the *Death and the Labyrinth* interview does he point to the presence of this self in the text. He transfers his theoretical explorations of the subject and aestheticism to a more personal space, bringing into play his own interiority. He reveals the existence of a personal project of aesthetic transformation while concealing details of the project under a veil of secrecy. Much as Roussel provides a key to examining his works with *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, Foucault’s interview about *Death and the Labyrinth* functions as a key to his early text and veiled efforts of aesthetic transformation.

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Creating Knowledge and the Interview as Praxis/Practice

Stefania Maffeis

The Interview as a Philosophical Method: Irritations, Functions, and Potentials

Abstract: Contrary to the intuition that interviews do not represent primary textual formats in philosophical literature, this paper engages with the interview as a philosophical genre. It explores functions and potentials of this particular form of interaction in philosophy as a discipline and practice. The exploration is characterized primarily as a methodological reflection and extension of authors' previous research on the social history of philosophy in the GDR and unified Germany and on Hannah Arendt's transnational philosophy. The first part of the essay discusses the tension between the interview and the philosophical topos of dialogue. The asymmetrical form of the interview is discussed as a way to make philosophy appear as a public social practice. The second part of the text analyzes different ways of handling the interview in philosophical inquiries. Three main domains are identified in which the interview is used as a methodological tool, a source, and a practice of philosophy. The paper concludes by arguing for the recognition of the interview as one of the central epistemological methods.

Keywords: dialogue, public sphere, practice, Arendt, Hannah

Introduction

Interviews are not intuitively among usual philosophical sources nor among established methods of philosophical inquiry. At university seminars and academic conferences, as well as in publications, it is mainly monographs, papers, essays, and, perhaps, philosophical conversations that are discussed. Because the interview is considered an asymmetrical form of communication among philosophers, it is a devalued conversational form in comparison to the dialogue. In the dialogue the interlocutors ask questions and search answers together. In this way, they follow the path of knowledge favored in philosophy, the Platonic dialogue, which leads intersubjectively from everyday and private opinions to objective truths (Horster 112–13). In interviews, on the other hand, philosophers usually take on the role of experts. They are usually asked by non-philosophers about their philosophical perspective on socially relevant problems, assuming the role of experts of general opinion or "doxosophers," as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called them disparagingly to criticize their universalist tendencies (Bourdieu

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223). Interviews, therefore, seem to be interactions that confront philosophy with its outside. This could be because they are conducted by non-philosophers who make philosophical insights accessible to non-experts, or maybe because they lead philosophers to formulate true statements about their time and world from their presumed impartial position.

In this piece, however, interviews are explicitly interrogated as philosophical sources, interactional formats, and instruments of knowledge. One reason for this is that interviews with philosophers are becoming increasingly popular and are increasingly circulating within the boundaries of academic philosophy, even if they originated outside them. The popularity of the interview with philosophers has been particularly visible in the last two years on the basis of the many interviews with prominent philosophers about the Covid-19 pandemic in newspapers, magazines, television programs, and podcasts (see, e.g., Loquenzi and Agamben; Schwering and Habermas; Kurianowicz and Zizek). But interviews with philosophers do not only circulate in the media. They are also read, cited, and commented upon as sources by students, lecturers, and researchers of philosophy.[1] In some cases, the increased circulation of interviews with philosophers even leads to their becoming part of the text corpus of the respective authors. A striking example of this is Günter Gaus's famous 1964 television interview with Hannah Arendt on *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (ZDF), which I will discuss later in this essay. Since the video was made available on YouTube, it has been viewed millions of times. Nevertheless, the interview was already part of Hannah Arendt's body of work. Its transcription and publication in 1996 by Piper Verlag ensured its citability (Arendt, "Fernsehgespräch"). Parts of this interview were cited so often that they were able to assert themselves as elements of Arendt's work.[2] Thus the question of the function and effect of interviews, even when they originate outside academic philosophy, is of considerable philosophical relevance.

A second reason for my consideration of interviews as philosophical sources and instruments of knowledge is that they are increasingly conducted by philosophers and embedded in philosophical processes of knowledge. These include interviews that are understood as conversations between philosophers, but

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1 A striking example of this is the U.S. podcast series Philosophy Bites, founded in 2007 by David Edmonds and Nigel Warburton. Here, philosophers are interviewed on various philosophically and socially relevant topics. The series is among those with the most downloads and listeners worldwide. Some of the radio interviews have been published by Oxford University Press (see Finn). A similar format is offered by the podcast series Sein und Streit in German-speaking countries.

2 On the historical background of the interview, see Maffeis, Transnationale Philosophie 234–50. On the popularity of the interview, see Trinthal and Maffeis.

where the interviewer and the interviewee assume fixed and asymmetrical roles in relation to each other (e.g., Borradori; Boelderl), as well as studies that use qualitative interviews to explore social practices of philosophy (e.g., Maffeis, *Wissenschaft und Politik*; Guthoff) or to philosophically interrogate certain everyday knowledge and constructions of reality (see Andow; Brönnimann).

Starting from the premise that the interview is a method and text type of philosophy, this essay explores functions and potentials of this particular form of interaction for philosophy as a discipline and practice. The exploration is characterized primarily as a methodological reflection and extension of my previous research on philosophy in the GDR and unified Germany (Maffeis, *Wissenschaft und Politik*) and on Hannah Arendt's transnational philosophy (Maffeis, *Transnationale Philosophie*). These analyses center on philosophical insights, lines of tradition, and concepts that I have viewed as results of collective processes of negotiation about the boundaries of the philosophical field, its mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, its power relations and norms. In the course of this research, I interviewed philosophers through qualitative methods as well as analyzed historical interviews with philosophers. In both cases, I was interested in understanding how the interviewees used the interview to position themselves explicitly and implicitly in relation to the practice of philosophy. In quite a few cases I could detect a certain irritation, an ambivalent relationship of the philosophers to the interview, which, in my opinion, is one of the essential features of the philosophical interview and can be traced back to the tension between interview and dialogue. In the first part of this article, I will discuss this tension using the example of choice interviews with Hannah Arendt and Roland Barthes from the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequently, in the second part of the essay, I will discuss different ways of dealing with the interview in philosophical investigations in order to explore their functions and potentials.

The Interview as an Irritation of Philosophy

> Roland Barthes, we see very little of you, and you rarely speak in public: aside from your books, we know almost nothing about you…
> Supposing that to be true, it's because I don't much like interviews. I feel trapped between two dangers: either one enunciates positions in an impersonal manner, leading people to believe one considers oneself a "thinker," or else I constantly say "I" and end up accused of egoism. (Barthes 258)

In an interview with journalist Bernard-Henry Lévy for the *Nouvel Observateur* in 1977, philosopher, literary critic, and semiologist Roland Barthes, at the time a

newly appointed professor of literary semiology at the Collège de France, expressed a clear discomfort with being interviewed. The interview centered on the question of the social role of intellectuals, to whom Barthes attributed a subversive function: the possibility of alienating, outwitting, redirecting relations and things that are usually taken for real and natural (Barthes 272). Intellectuals have this function, Barthes argues, because they are marginalized, "the refuse of society. Waste in the strict sense, i.e., what serves no purpose, unless it's recuperated" (272). "The intellectual crystallizes, in the form of refuse, impulses, desires, complications, blockages that probably belong to society as a whole" (273). Barthes's discomfort with interviews, then, was that they deny the interviewed intellectuals or philosophers their subversive power and their marginal and invisible position as the "waste of society." Interviews can do this, according to Barthes, by either depersonalizing intellectuals and questioning them about totalizing worldviews, or by interrogating them in an overly personal way, thereby robbing them of their ability to articulate socially relevant analyses. The possibility of subverting and reinterpreting what is given and taken for granted goes hand in hand with a non-identifiability of intellectuals as subversives. Barthes saw the interview as an instrument for identifying and objectifying a figure of the intellectual whose contours were to remain blurred and in constant flux so that they could serve their function as subverting "waste." Indeed, in this interview Bernard-Hénry Lévy repeatedly attempted to identify and label his interviewee: "What does being a Protestant mean to you?"; "Were you ever a Marxist?"; "If one had to select a label for you, 'left-wing intellectual' would just about do." (Barthes 261, 267, 268).

In a 1979 conversation with Pierre Boncenne in *Lire*, Barthes put his discomfort with interviews in a more nuanced way. On the one hand, as Barthes noted, it was indispensable to be interviewed, because the interview was a social game that a publicly known author had to accept. Ultimately, it was also an act of solidarity between writers and the media. On the other hand, Barthes experienced some interviews as very unpleasant situations:

> I don't think this will apply to you, but very often, you know, in interviews for the major media, a somewhat sadistic relationship is established between the interviewer and the interviewee, where it's a question of ferreting out some kind of truth from the latter by asking aggressive or indiscreet questions to get a reaction out of him. I find the rudeness of these maneuvers shocking. (323)

In addition to this feeling of being pushed to make true and irrevocable statements, Barthes was also concerned that what was said in the interview and

recorded on tape could not be revised, or that the revisions could not be made transparent, which, on the other hand, writing allowed:

> The voice is an organ of the image-repertoire, and with the tape recorder one can obtain an expression that is less censored, less repressed, less subject to internal laws. Writing, on the contrary, implies a kind of legalization and the function of a rather harsh code brought to bear in particular on the sentence. (324)

Barthes was addressing the problem of the relationship between spoken and written language, dialogue and text as a central aspect of his deconstructive semiology following Jacques Derrida. Critically disputing Plato's devaluation of writing as a repetition of what has already been said, his prioritization of oral language as the most immediate means of expressing truth, and his advocacy of dialogue as the path to truth, Derrida had declared writing to be the privileged method of cognition as well as of ethical and political action precisely as a supplement, as a non-simultaneity, as a *différant* of a truth that can neither be present nor tangible (Derrida). Interestingly, in the course of the same interview, Barthes noticed that the interview does not have a purely oral or dialogic character. Rather, it is usually transcribed, revised, corrected, and edited, and represents a complex interplay between spoken and written language. Thus, Barthes concluded that it would be important to scrutinize and analyze the interview more closely as an intellectual practice and method, after all, in order to reconstruct a sociology of knowledge—in his words, an "ethology of intellectuals:"

> One meaning of "ethology," in French, is animal behaviorism, the study of the habits of animals. In my opinion, the same work should be done on intellectuals: a study of their activities, seminars, conferences, interviews, etc. As far as I know, no one has ever deduced the philosophy of the modern intellectual's way of life. (323–24)

Barthes thus succeeded, contextualized by the same interview, in problematizing his discomfort and translating it into a research agenda. He acknowledged that the interview had long since become a common practice of intellectuals and that it was now time to look more closely at the practice. The discomfort with the interview allowed Barthes to shift perspective and reposition himself, previously as an objectified interviewee suffering an alienating situation, now as an agent in the intellectual field who performs interviews alongside several other activities.[3] Barthes's discomfort with the interview, his reference to the role of philosophers

3 On Barthes's programmatic approach to the interview, see Binczek.

as social critics, and the issue of orality versus writing all point to two *topoi* central to Western philosophy that seem threatened in the situation of an interview.

A similar discomfort can be seen in the example of some interviews with Hannah Arendt. Paradigmatic here is the aforementioned television interview with Günter Gaus (Arendt, "Fernsehgespräch"). The interview was part of an advertising campaign for the German publication *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Piper Verlag. The reportage about the trial of the former SS-Obersturmbannführer, responsible for the persecution and murder of European Jews under National Socialism, had triggered a fierce debate in the USA and the FRG. Critics on both sides of the Atlantic had increasingly sought to defame Arendt by delegitimizing her as a theorist. The figure of Hannah Arendt was at the center of the controversies surrounding her book. Arendt confronted this situation in several radio, television, and newspaper interviews by trying to counter the discrediting and sometimes sexist image of her as a callous and ironic German Jew who was incompetent, arrogant, and disloyal to the Jewish population (on the debate, see Maffeis, *Transnationale Philosophie* 188–256). Interviews with Hannah Arendt from 1963 to 1965 can therefore be read as particular forms of social interaction between the interviewers and the interviewee, in which the figure of Hannah Arendt and her speaking position were constantly negotiated, defined, revised, and, in the process, transnationalized across linguistic spaces. Along with the figure of Arendt, the boundaries of the intellectual and social fields in which she was active were also negotiated: philosophy, political theory, the intellectual culture industry, and politics. Finally, in engaging with the figure of Hannah Arendt and her social fields, it was also possible to further develop and translate her theoretical reflections.

The beginning of her conversation with Günter Gaus is characteristic of this type of interaction:

> GAUS: Mrs. Hannah Arendt, you are the first woman to be portrayed in this series. The first woman, albeit with what is commonly thought to be a highly masculine occupation: you are a philosopher. May I move from this preliminary remark to my first question: Do you feel that your role in the circle of philosophers, despite the recognition and respect you are given, is a special one—or are we touching on an emancipation problem that has never existed for you?
> ARENDT: Yes, I'm afraid I must protest first. I do not belong to the circle of philosophers. My profession—if one can say so—is political theory. I don't feel like a philosopher at all. Nor do I believe that I have been admitted to the circle of philosophers, as you kindly suggest. But if we come to the other question that you touched on in the prefatory remark, you say: it is commonly a male occupation. Well, it need not remain a male occupation! It could well be that a woman will one day be a philosopher.
> GAUS: I think you are a philosopher.
> ARENDT: Yes, I can't do anything about that, but I can express an opinion myself.
> GAUS: I'm asking you to do that.

> ARENDT: And my opinion is that I am not a philosopher. In my opinion, I have finally said valet to philosophy. I studied philosophy, as you know, but that doesn't mean that I stuck with it. (Arendt, "Fernsehgespräch" 44, trans. S.M)

At the beginning of the interview, Arendt was addressed in the same breath as a philosopher and a woman. She replied that she was not a philosopher, but a political theorist. She could not help it if others perceived her as such, but she did not consider herself a philosopher. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of the sadistic relationship between interviewer and interviewee that Barthes feared so much: Günter Gaus tried to subsume his interview partner under certain categories and to objectify her; Arendt resisted. The discomfort of these first minutes of interaction emerges even more clearly in the video. At first, the viewers heard Arendt's lighter buzzing. Then she came into view. She sat smoking, dressed in an elegant black blazer, her legs crossed. Gaus could be seen from behind. He sat quietly and calmly facing his guest. Arendt's gestures, voice, and posture betrayed her excitement and insecurity in the face of the media public. She distorted her mouth and face, could hardly sit still, gesturing with a cigarette in her hand (see Maffeis, *Transnationale Philosophie* 243–45).

Several times in the course of the conversation, Arendt tried to undermine rigid attempts to categorize her person and to transfer them to problems of content. The external ascription as philosopher and her self-designation as political theorist offered her the opportunity to define the boundaries of philosophy vis-à-vis politics and political theory and thus to situate her own position *between* these fields. Philosophy and politics stand in a traditional relationship of tension, Arendt said. Since Plato, philosophers have been hostile to politics due to the dichotomy between theory as contemplation and politics as action (Arendt, "Fernsehgespräch" 45). Arendt defined herself as a political theorist in order to mark her speaking position precisely on the boundaries between these two competing fields. It was a position at the intersection of the exterior and the interior; grounded to the world, unlike philosophy; caring for the world but theoretical, unlike politics. The field of political theory as a subdiscipline of political science, in which Arendt gradually established herself in the U.S., had not been institutionalized at the time. It was thus an extremely precarious position, even in purely material terms. Arendt attempted to negotiate and defend her internal/external boundary position of multiple, ambiguous, mutable affiliations in several contexts, interventions, and writings, as well as to conceptualize it as a privileged position of cognition and critique of existing social and epistemic orders (Maffeis, "Theorie und Praxis").

The analogy between Arendt's in-between positioning and Barthes's reflections on the intellectual as the "waste of society" is striking. The irritations they

express toward the medium of the interview refer to the possibility of losing their theoretical-critical external position in the media public sphere. But it seems particularly clear that it is precisely the situation of the interview in which the outsiderness of philosophers emerges, as well as their aversion to external determinations, categorizations, and normalizations. The discomfort and irritation with the interview, and the asymmetrical relationship between interviewer and interviewee, create the boundaries of this interview situation, between university and journalistic theory production, between philosophy and politics or society, visible and nameable. I will return to the potential of the interview to open a space of appearance (Erscheinungsraum) for philosophy later.

First, I would like to further discuss the reason for the irritation with the interview, which has to do with the *topos* of dialogue and with the hybrid character of the interview between orality and writing. Barthes clearly favored writing and was skeptical of the interview as a spoken medium. Arendt did not comment on this directly in the interview. But it can be asserted from other texts that she leaned towards the traditional model of dialogue. This is particularly evident in her description of the activities of thinking and judging (Arendt, "Thinking," *Lectures*). She characterized thinking as a dialogical interaction between the ego and the self-reflecting self. Judging represented for Arendt a more political form of thinking, which she called an extended mode of thinking, after Kant. According to this, the ego makes its judgment by entering into dialogue with an imagined community of different points of view. To characterize this particular form of interaction, Arendt drew on the figure of Socrates and his method of conversation, the *dialeghestei* (Arendt, "Thinking"). Arendt defined Socratic dialogue as a circular and aporetic game of exchanging opinions. Circular, because it never comes to an end, but always starts again from the beginning by asking new questions. Aporetic, because the goal of dialogue is not to solve problems, but to maintain the processuality of knowledge. In dialogue, abstract concepts that are used on an everyday basis, such as happiness, courage, and justice, are questioned in their self-evidence. Because dialogue questions general opinions, it has a thoroughly destructive character. Borrowing from the model of Socratic dialogue, Arendt considered the faculty of judgment to be an eminently political activity because of its destructive character and its ability to initiate new interpretations of the real (Arendt, "Thinking" 446).

While Barthes had attributed his irritation with the interview to the fact that, because of its oral character, the interview would make linguistic norms and codes opaque, Arendt's discomfort with the interview can be explained by the fact that for her the model of spoken dialogue without fixed rules and role attributions was incompatible with the asymmetrical situation of the interview. But

Arendt's political theory, and in particular her theory of the public sphere, cannot be read unambiguously or, in my view, particularly fruitfully, as one of the many variants or origins of a consensus-based ethics of discourse as established by Jürgen Habermas.

For Habermasian discourse ethics, dialogue represents an ideal communicative situation of symmetry and freedom from domination. The interlocutors recognize each other as legitimate participants in communication, accept their alternating roles as speakers and listeners, and are therefore able to take each other's perspectives, so that the reality they discuss is interpreted intersubjectively and, as a result, their decisions, norms, and judgments are made consensually (Habermas). Discourse ethics has been repeatedly criticized for making the ideal and empirically non-existent situation of symmetrical and domination-free communication the basis of ethical and political action, thus displacing the question of the conditions of access to public conversation on the part of people and groups marginalized or excluded from the legally political sphere. This repression would render invisible and ultimately reproduce social mechanisms of exclusion (discussed in more detail in Fraser).

What is important to emphasize here is that even if Arendt does not reject the model of spoken dialogue as, for instance, Barthes does, her irritation with the medium of the interview cannot be understood in the sense of a plea for a public sphere based on consensus. One indication of this is her reference to the subversive, political character of dialogue. Toward the end of the conversation with Gaus, Arendt was asked about her concept of the public sphere. The public sphere, Arendt had illuminated in *Vita Activa*, is first of all a space of appearance. What is public can be seen and perceived. Moreover, the public sphere is a world of artifacts that people create together and inhabit from different points of view. In acting and speaking, a new beginning is laid down, existing orders are rescinded or suspended, and new ones appear. The beginning of something new becomes possible because new actors, previously considered apolitical, such as women and workers before the women's and workers' movements, insert themselves into the world, become visible and audible by demanding and performing their human right to political participation (Arendt, *Human Condition* 50–57, 175–81; Arendt, "Rights of Men"). Arendt's concept of the public sphere is thus not deliberative and consensus-oriented, but primarily performative and agonistic (see affirmatively Honig; Marchart; critically Benhabib; Mouffe). In performing an action, people appear as political actors. And they do so by stepping out of darkness, to use a metaphor of Arendt, and generating a conflict with existing and exclusionary structures. It takes a certain courage, Arendt told Gaus in conversation, referring to the public figure of Karl Jaspers, to enter public space.

First, because something new and incalculable in its consequences occurs; second, because one exposes oneself at the risk of being perceived differently than one perceives oneself, thereby becoming trapped in certain roles (Arendt, “Fernsehgespräch” 70).

This digression to the question of the public sphere provides more clarity about Arendt’s irritation with the interview. It is not due to the fact that Arendt longed for symmetrical dialogue, but rather that she experienced the situation of being interviewed as an eminently public one and felt the excitement or agitation that came with the exposure of her figure and with the possibility of making a new beginning. In support of this thesis, the observation could be made that in interviews conducted on the co-founder of consensus-based discourse ethics, Jürgen Habermas, such an irritation as that of Barthes and Arendt does not manifest itself (see, e.g., Borradori; Schwering and Habermas; Calloni et al.). Certainly, one of the reasons for this is that we are in a historical phase in which the media interview has become more common and ordinary than in the 1960s and 1970s. But it cannot be a coincidence that all the interviews with Habermas are consistently named as conversations and staged as examples of a communication free of domination, in which the aim is not to objectify the person of the philosopher but to discuss certain problems and to shed light on their perspective. None of the participants in the conversation seem to be irritated by the fact that in the interview the role of the speaker and the listener is asymmetrically distributed, that the interviewer and the interviewee are also unequally positioned socially, and that only the perspective of the interviewee is illuminated. These asymmetries only become visible when discomfort with the medium of the interview finds expression.

The Interview as Source, Method, and Practice of Philosophy—Three Fields of Application

Based on an agonistic understanding of the public sphere, the interview, rather than the dialogue, seems to be a more appropriate method of philosophical insight, mostly when it comes to challenging the public, socio-critical potential of philosophy. This is because the asymmetrical communicative form of the interview allows one to problematize the liminal position of the philosopher’s relation to the public sphere and to reflect on the structures of thought or *topoi* in which the philosopher is enmeshed. My aim here, however, is not to identify a privileged epistemological method of philosophy and to reproduce the dichotomy of

dialogue vs. interview, but to take a closer look at the specificity, functions, and potentials of the interview in philosophy.

Understood as a public moment of philosophizing or as one of the various methods and practices of philosophical cognition, the interview finds different applications and fulfills different functions, which now need to be explored further. Three fields of application of the interview in philosophy seem to me particularly relevant. In the *first,* interviews are conducted to ask people—not only philosophers—about their everyday opinions and constructions of reality. Interview transcripts are analyzed as sources in order to empirically substantiate generalizable statements about mentalities, value systems, ways of life, and structural conditions of action. A *second* way of dealing with interviews is to ask philosophers questions in order to understand their perspective as actors in the philosophical field. Here, the interview fulfills the function of offering a space for reflection on philosophical practices that are usually not made explicit because they are perceived as external, material conditions of philosophy and theory. In the *third* form of use discussed here, philosophers are interviewed as experts in their field about specific philosophical or general social issues. Theoretical complexes and philosophical-historical questions are thus made accessible to a broader audience without a formal background in philosophy. Here, the interview fulfills the functions of offering a resonance chamber of philosophy outside disciplinary boundaries and of expanding the body of texts of the philosophers who are interviewed.

The first mentioned use of the interview in philosophy shows a significant difference in relation to the cases considered so far and those considered later. In the field of critical realist and empirical philosophy, quantitative methods and qualitative interviews are used to explore the reality constructions and value systems of different social actors (Andow; Brönnimann). Thus, these are not interviews with philosophers, but by philosophers. Their analyses aim at empirically grounding and extending the theory of the social construction of the real. Certain contexts of action are examined, which describe the actors in these contexts. The analysis of what is said aims to make certain structures and material conditions of action recognizable, especially in cases of change, crises, and problems. Interviews initially pursue the analysis of the life worlds of the interviewees. Beyond that, they are a reflection on modes of construction and possibilities of change of the real, which is designed as a cooperative process between philosopher and interviewee on the basis of several interview runs.

The second possible application of the interview in philosophy is the one I favored in my research. It is based on premises from the sociology of science and knowledge, which I would like to outline briefly. Philosophy is predominantly

understood as a collective practice that takes place between different actors—such as lecturers and students or philosophers who see themselves as colleagues or who come from different time periods and countries—and artifacts—texts, concepts, and elements of knowledge. Practices of philosophy are structured according to certain rules. Some of them are known to all participants and others are not, which is evident from their different positions in the philosophical sphere under consideration. Participants in philosophical practices stand in certain power relations to each other and to other social groups and spheres. These power relations are negotiated, thematized, or unreflectively reproduced in certain interactions and situations of philosophy, for instance in seminars or conferences—or in interviews. As a rule, power relations are not addressed directly, but emerge from discussions about philosophical elements of knowledge, that is, about what is considered philosophical and what is not. Negotiations about the boundaries of philosophy take place, for example, when access criteria to study and the profession are established, certain philosophers and philosophies are recognized as belonging or not belonging to the philosophical canon, and publications, qualification, or research projects are judged as worthy of funding or not (Schatzki et al.; Schäfer; Maffeis, *Transnationale Philosophie* 30–44).

The qualitative interview can be used in this case to give visibility to such negotiation processes. For this purpose, the interviewer should maintain a distanced, observing position. This principle is called "ethnomethodological indifference" in sociology (Garfinkel and Sacks qtd. in Flick 40). Even when the participants are colleagues, interviews should avoid ending up in dialogical situations. For in the symmetrical situation of dialogue, an internal philosophical addresses power relations in philosophical language, making these relations unrecognizable. This can be exemplified by feminist philosophy. Philosophical reflections on gender constructions, processes of marginalization due to gender-relevant attributions, or gender justice models were considered non-philosophical for decades, and they are still not deemed central philosophical topics today. This marginalization on a philosophical level goes hand in hand with processes of social exclusion towards certain people and groups who not only deal with gender injustice theoretically but are also affected by it. However, such processes of social exclusion are considered external to philosophy, as no one would openly claim that, for example, women* or trans-identified people should not philosophize as such, even if this is exactly the case (Landweer et al.). The asymmetry of the interview, in which the person of the interviewer (e.g., a philosopher) does not act as an interlocutor on an equal footing, but instead acts as an observer, can lead the interviewed philosopher to self-reflect, thematize, or refer to the implicit rules of philosophical practice, e.g., the entanglement between epistemic

and social processes of exclusion, e.g., through the repeated use of dichotomies and boundary drawing. Direct and indirect references can be further revealed by content and discourse analyses of the interview transcripts. Heike Guthoff has conducted such analyses of interviews with German philosophers, elaborating on the gender of philosophy, that is, the ways in which gender constructions influence and determine perceptions about what is considered philosophical (content, authors, writing styles, questions) (Guthoff). In my study of philosophy in the GDR and in the early years of German unification, I used interviews with GDR philosophers to obtain historical information that could not be published due to GDR censorship mechanisms, on the one hand, and to shed light on philosophers' understanding of the boundary between philosophy and politics in the GDR and in the present, on the other (Maffeis, *Wissenschaft und Politik*).

This particular use of the qualitative interview makes it a method and practice of philosophy itself. Its different stages—preparing a guideline, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing the transcript, and finally embedding the interview analysis in the research reports—are like different steps in the process of reflecting on philosophy as a social practice, and at the same time, they are different practices of philosophizing. In this process, a further condition other than ethnomethodological indifference is important. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee should not be confused with the relationship between someone ignorant and someone better informed about the implicit rules of philosophy. The asymmetry of the interview should not be understood per se as an epistemic or social power relationship. It may well be that interviewers and interviewees represent competing positions within the same social field. But interviewing and being interviewed are initially nothing more than different locales in the shared site of an interview. These different locations stand in a structural asymmetry to each other that is dictated by the logic of the interview itself. The interviewers conceive their questions, follow their epistemic interest, and develop an analysis of how philosophy draws boundary on the basis of transcripts, which the interviewed philosophers do not do to the same extent. But, even if the interviewers do not ask about the boundaries of philosophy directly, instead pursuing it through a content and discourse post-analysis of the transcripts, they do not do so behind the backs of the interviewees. Interviewers assume that the internal perspective of interviewees is essential to define and analyze the practices of philosophy. Therefore, a relationship of trust, not power, should be established and maintained between interviewees and interviewers. The interview can thus open a space for reflection and lead all participants to a better understanding of their own philosophical practice, its complexity and diversity, its historicity, and finally its social

relevance. The qualitative interview in philosophy ultimately has the potential to specify the project of the "ethology of intellectuals" that Barthes envisaged.

Let us now come to the third use of the interview as a resonance chamber of philosophy. In this case, philosophers are interviewed as experts on socially relevant or philosophical-historical topics. The project *Philosophy Bites* belongs to this kind of philosophical interview (see footnote 1), where philosophers are surveyed about concepts or authors in which they specialize. The short interviews allow them to explain often unwieldy philosophical concepts and complexities, to convey their relevance and topicality, and thus to open the doors of academic philosophy, to democratize philosophical knowledge, to make it accessible to a broader interested audience. Transcripts and recordings are thus considered sources available for future use, including reading practices and analysis. They can also be received as components of the body of texts of the interviewed philosophers. The conversation between Arendt and Gaus is one example of such a philosophical interview because it both popularized and shaped Arendt's work. Many other interviews of this kind can be mentioned. One of them is Gilles Deleuze's *Adécédaire* (Boutang and Pamart). The philosopher, who had always refused television interviews, agreed to an interview of eight hours with one of his students in 1988. Deleuze spontaneously answered questions that addressed certain aspects of his work and life. This resulted in a long documentary about Deleuze, organized along alphabetically ordered themes, from A for Animal to Z for Zig Zag. In the first part of the video interview, Deleuze explained that he found the experiment of being interviewed about unknown questions very risky because as a philosopher he tends to think about self-selected questions and does not provide definitive answers. He therefore demanded to publish the film only after his death.

On the one hand, this interview has made the philosopher's thought and life accessible to a wider audience. Moreover, as Deleuze's "text," it can be read, analyzed, constructed, deconstructed, and translated in various ways (Stivale). However, this source becomes interesting not only when it is received as a sounding board, an extension, or a simplification of a supposed core idea of the philosopher. The interview can ultimately also be seen as a performative act of philosophizing. Especially in video interviews like these, we can perceive the persona of the philosopher in interaction with the interviewer. We see Claire Parnet, Deleuze's student, from behind, sitting on a chair. Her face can be seen in the mirror that is mounted on the wall behind Deleuze, also sitting. In the mirror, the camera and the cameraman are not visible. But Deleuze occasionally looks to the cameraman and to the camera in order to seek direct contact with the spectators. Even this play of perspectives is a philosophical quotation and performance. It

refers to Michel Foucault's analysis of Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, in which the asymmetrical relations of dependence between the different points of view (of the portrayed girl, of the painter, of the portrayed spectators, of the mirror, of the spectators outside the painting) refer to the typical spatial representation in the classical age (Foucault 3–17). In the *Abécédaire,* on the one hand, we perceive the interviewer reading her notes, smoking, laughing, or smiling. We see Deleuze frontally, gesturing, showing his famous long fingernails. His gestures and excited posture betray his discomfort at being placed in the role of an oracle. As the conversation progresses, however, Deleuze's train of thought, his method, his perspective, his search for words, and his pauses—together the pivotal points of the conversation—become understandable and comprehensible. It is, after all, an interaction that cannot only be placed alongside others as simply a text, but which can be used as a primary source to observe and tap into philosophizing as a social practice.

Concluding Observations

The present exploration of the characteristics, functions, and potentials of the interview in philosophy has led to several insights. First, the asymmetrical interactional form of the interview was discussed in comparison to the topos of the philosophical dialogue, in which there is no fixed role between interviewer and interviewee, but a topic or a problem is placed at the center of the discussion between different opinions and perspectives. I first highlighted the interview as a disturbing element of this ideal-typical symmetrical dialogical situation. This was exemplified by the discomfort of two public intellectuals and philosophers, Roland Barthes and Hannah Arendt, with being interviewed. Both found the medium of the interview problematic because it involved an exposure of the philosopher and an objectification of his and her person, which was perceived as a loss of the critical and marginalized position of intellectuals in society. Both philosophers also find the interview problematic as a staged, asymmetrical conversation. Barthes contrasts the conversation with writing. Finally, however, he opens up to the interview as one of the various intellectual practices and techniques and argues for observing such practices and techniques more closely as well as more systematically. Arendt initially seems to contrast the interview with the dialogue. However, this hypothesis was put into perspective by the discussion of her agonistic and non-consensual understanding of the public sphere. Her discomfort ultimately stems from her agitation in the face of her exposure as an acting and speaking person.

The discomfort, the irritation of the interview in philosophy, its unusualness as a medium of philosophical cognition in relation to dialogue—I traced these through the first consideration in order to discuss the interview as a particular method in the process of philosophical inquiry and as a form of interaction in which philosophy is confronted with its social and disciplinary boundaries. Three particular areas of application were considered. A first, in which strong standardized as well as qualitative interviews are used as sources of empirical grounding for philosophical theories about constructions of reality. A second form of application is found in qualitative interviews with philosophers that aim to understand the interviewee's internal perspective about the philosophical field in which they are situated. This second form of application has been found to be an exploration of philosophy as social practice and, at the same time, as a practice of philosophy itself. As a third way of implementing philosophical interviews, I have considered interviews with philosophers about their views on philosophical-historical or socially relevant issues. In this case, interviews have the potential to become philosophical sources, texts, and part of the complete works of the interviewed philosophers.

Finally, I argue for understanding and practicing the interview both as a source and as a method and practice of philosophy. Unlike texts signed by individual authors, interviews are per se collective interactions. The asymmetrical relationship between interviewers, interviewees, and readers or viewers turns interviews into public moments and venues of philosophizing. The asymmetrical relationship between the perspectives represented opens up a process of reflection and negotiation about the boundaries of the discipline and about what is considered philosophical in different historical and geographical contexts, and in contrast, what is perceived to be outside the margins of philosophy. Interviews should therefore be seen as central, not unusual or liminal, methods of philosophizing. This requires the implementation and dissemination of knowledge about interview techniques, an increased engagement with interview methods generally, with philosophical interviews specifically, and with interview analyses and experiences on varied levels and at different educational institutions of philosophy.

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The Interview as an Assessment Method in Psychology

Abstract: The interview has a tradition in psychology. In this chapter, we discuss it as an assessment method within the field of psychology, first discussing the general measurement problem in psychology (i.e., assessing non-observable constructs). We then give an overview of findings on the objectivity, reliability, and validity of interviews, characteristics that distinguish different types of interviews, their merits and disadvantages (e.g., in comparison to other assessment methods such as subjective self-reports in questionnaires), and their usage in applied settings such as personnel selection and clinical assessment. In conclusion, we posit that the interview remains an important method to generate data to derive diagnostic information in psychology.

Keywords: assessment, diagnostic, job interview, objectivity, psychology, qualitative, reliability, standardization, validity

When laypeople think of psychologists, they typically think of the stereotype of a psychotherapist or psychoanalyst in the tradition of Sigmund Freud, who interviews and speaks with patients (e.g., BDP; Jiménez and Raab). Thus, psychology is partly synonymously linked with the interview as a method to collect information and to treat clients and patients. However, the understanding of psychology has transformed into an empirical science in the tradition of natural sciences. Thus, there is a strong emphasis placed on the objectivity, reliability, and validity of the methods used to generate data. While modern psychological science uses interviews to generate data less frequently in comparison to its beginnings, interview techniques remain a powerful tool of psychological assessment in research and applied disciplines, for example, in both the clinical assessment of psychological disorders and personnel selection. In this chapter, we will give an overview of different types of interviews and discuss their usage, merits, and limitations from the viewpoint of psychological assessment. Before discussing the interview as a concept in more depth, we first give a short overview regarding the change in data generation within psychology over time and the challenge of assessing psychological characteristics. This might help readers unfamiliar with assessment methods in psychology to understand the *general* aims and problems of psychological assessments. We will discuss interviews from the perspective of their objectivity, reliability, and validity, and illustrate their usage in examples

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of personnel selection and clinical assessment. Finally, we compare the interview method with the frequently used questionnaire method.

Psychology as a Science

As mentioned, the role of the interview in psychology has changed in the last century, whereas quantitative data collection and analysis methods have received increased interest. To understand this trend, one has to investigate the history of psychology as a science throughout the last century. Modern psychology is an *empirical* science that aims to describe, explain, and predict cognitive and affective processes and behaviors (see Zimbardo et al.). Following the distinction between quantitative (i.e., using quantifiable and scalable units) and qualitative (i.e., knowledge derived from "soft" data sources such as interviews) approaches, psychology has been a quantitatively driven science since the late nineteenth century, beginning with the works of Wilhelm Wundt, William James, Herrmann Ebbinghaus, and others on human perceptual processes, short- and long-term memory, and learning processes (for an overview see, for example, Mandler; Mischel). They began to collect and analyze quantitative data on individuals' reactions (e.g., reaction times, frequencies of remembered stimuli). In the early twentieth century, quantitative data began to dominate psychological research (see, for example, Young). Similarly, the development and increased use of self-report instruments (i.e., questionnaires) to assess individual differences in personality traits, values, and attitudes, as well as the availability of complex data analysis methods such as correlation and factor analysis in the early twentieth century, led to psychology transforming into a data-driven natural science (see, for example, Bollmann; Vincent; Young). Thus, only minor space was left in psychological research for "soft" assessment techniques such as interviews.

At the same time, psychoanalytic works stood in contrast to the aforementioned quantitative strategies but, nevertheless, received great attention both within and outside of psychology. In contrast to quantitative approaches to psychology, psychoanalytic theories were frequently theory-driven and rarely systematically tested empirically (e.g., Freud's theory of personality development; for a discussion see, for example, Fisher and Greenberg). This had implications for the role of the interview in psychology: the underlying notion of psychoanalysis is that psychological characteristics and processes are not directly accessible but must be "uncovered" through *talk therapy* in which the psychoanalyst gains insight into the client's feelings and thoughts. This view generally echoes the approach of psychological assessment aiming to measure latent traits (see the

following section). While the methodological approaches to assessing psychological processes, states, and traits have been extended in recent decades (e.g., Ecological Momentary Assessment, Daily Diary Methods, and Smartphone Sensing; see, for example, Harari et al.; Smyth and Stone; Wu and Clark), the interview technique remains an important method of psychological assessment. Although it might seem that quantitative and qualitative approaches to psychological assessment are diametrical opposites, it must be noted that they share the same aim, namely, assessing non-observable psychological constructs that describe the experiential world of individuals.

The Challenge in Assessing Psychological Constructs

To understand the role of the interview for psychological assessment, it is crucial to clarify the general challenge of "measuring" psychological constructs and how they are expressed in affect, thought, and behavior. In contrast to physics or chemistry, where variables such as the temperature, weight, or height of objects can be observed and *measured* in the narrow sense (e.g., by using an objective, reliable, and valid measurement instrument such as thermometers, scales, or rulers), psychological characteristics such as personality traits or intellectual abilities (e.g., intelligence or attention) cannot be directly *measured* as they are not directly observable (see, for example, Michell). For illustrative purposes, one might imagine assessing the expression of a personality trait: for example, extraversion is characterized by enjoying human interaction and is expressed by behaviors such as being talkative, assertive, and sociable (e.g., Costa and McCrae). It is not possible to measure the expression of one's extraversion in a similar way as in physics because the characteristic of interest is a *latent* construct—no scaling device or ruler for extraversion exists. To address this measurement problem, psychologists have to approximate the latent non-observable trait by collecting information about manifest indicators (i.e., those observable to oneself or others) that allow inferences about the expression of the underlying latent trait. Of course, such indicators should be valid and correlate with the trait of interest discriminately (i.e., with no other traits) to allow robust conclusions. When considering our example of assessing extraversion, one might be interested in responses to indicators such as "do they speak loudly" or "do they often attend parties," or "do they like talking to people" or subjective descriptions with adjectives such as "affectionate" in contrast to "reserved," "talkative" in contrast to "quiet," or

"joiner" in contrast to "loner" to infer one's level of extraversion (e.g., McCrae and Costa). We would conclude that someone is highly extraverted when they endorse such statements that indicate extraversion or describe themselves with the named adjectives.

Taken together, the main aim of psychological assessment is to provide and analyze indicators that reliably, objectively, and validly operationalize a given latent construct (e.g., personality traits, cognitive abilities, or creativity, to name but a few). The evaluation of such indicators that allow conclusions about latent constructs to be drawn might be realized either by quantitative (e.g., using self-report questionnaires in which responses are quantified to scores that reflect expressions of psychological traits) and/or qualitative approaches, with the interview belonging to the latter category. While both approaches should ideally lead to the same conclusions, they differ regarding a number of formal factors that have consequences for the data analysis and are discussed in later sections of this chapter. After introducing the three main criteria that must be met by any assessment technique to derive robust information, we will discuss the merits and issues with the interview method from the point of view of these criteria.

Objectivity means that results are independent of the researcher (or interviewer) and that no other contextual variables (e.g., confounders such as noise, the interviewer's mood, or the weather) affect the assessment process. For example, a personnel selection interview is considered to be objective when fixed criteria based on a priori selected points concerning the aim of the interview (e.g., what information has to be collected concerning each candidate) are used to construct it. In our example of personnel selection, independent interviewers should use the same questions to derive information about the applicants' suitability for the open post, and the interview questions or addressed topics should not depend on the interviewer. Moreover, information should be assessed in the same way across participants (i.e., by using the same type of questions with minimal deviations in the wording thereof). Applying high standardization by using a-priori criteria and clear strategies for assessing them should result in a selection process that is only minimally dependent on the interviewer or other external sources (for a discussion see, for example, Latham and Saari). However, interviews differ with regard to their structuredness, as we will discuss later in the "Types of Interviews" section.

Reliability is characterized by the consistency and accuracy of the assessment method. The results and information obtained from a reliable experiment, questionnaire, or interview should be identical, or at least very similar, in repeated ceteris paribus measurements. For example, an interview would be

considered reliable when the derived information leads to the same conclusions when conducted repeatedly with the same respondent.[1]

Validity means that the assessment instrument (e.g., questionnaires and interviews) assesses what it claims and aims to assess; for example, by collecting information that is distinctively indicative of the latent trait of interest. For example, the question "how often have you had a drink containing alcohol during the past week" is a valid indicator for examining drinking habits as it allows conclusions concerning the underlying latent construct of "substance use." Assessing and evaluating these three criteria for interview methods is difficult because the qualitative nature of the collected data does not permit the use of the standard quantitative approaches to evaluate reliability and validity (e.g., computing internal consistency as an indicator of reliability; using factor analysis for validity analyses etc.; e.g., Furr and Bacharach). However, the past few decades have seen efforts to evaluate the objectivity, reliability, and validity of interviews by aggregating findings across studies (meta-analyses) and providing a database for such analyses.

Objectivity, Reliability, and Validity of Interviews

First, it must be noted that a singular interview method does not exist as the term describes a classification of techniques that differ in their structure, approach, and course depending on the context and aim of the interview technique. When we use the term "interview" without further specification, we mean the minimal definition of what it constitutes; namely, the interaction between one person who aims to collect information (also called "assessment"; i.e., the interviewer) and someone who provides information to the interviewer (i.e., the interviewee). As we will discuss later, interviews differ regarding numerous characteristics such as the level of standardization (i.e., non, semi, or fully structured; see "Types of Interviews") and context (e.g., clinically oriented; job interview; interview for research purposes) that also play a role for its objectivity, reliability, and validity. In line with this minimal definition, we will discuss the factors that play a role during the interview process in this section.

1 The notion of repeated measurements is a theoretical illustration. Of course, one would expect that changes over time can occur; for example, when comparing the interview of a patient with depressive symptoms before and after successful psychotherapeutic and/or psychopharmacological interventions. In this case, one would expect that changes in depressiveness would be detected by the interviewer.

Objectivity. The interview approach is affected by subjectivity in both the interviewer as the receiver and processor of information and the interviewee (or respondent) as the source and provider of information (e.g., Morrison; Nordgaard et al.). As displayed in figure 1, an interviewee's responses are affected by their perceptions and interpretations of the true facts. When retrieving such information internally, the interviewee reports their recounted information to the interviewer. Taking the subjective nature of this process into account, how reliable and valid the interviewee's reported information is in relation to the factual event cannot be measured objectively.

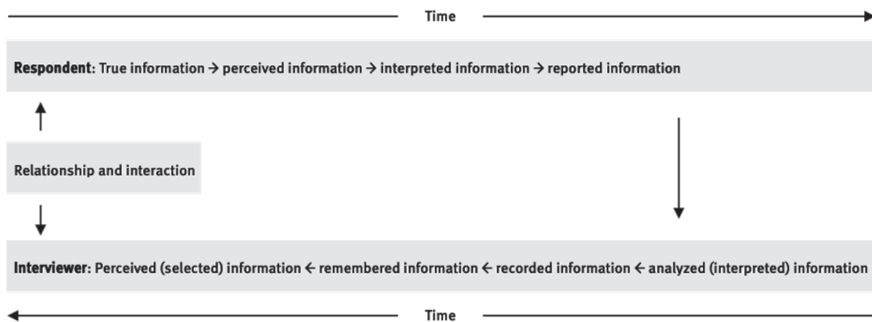

Fig. 1: Process and structure of interviews concerning the respondent, interviewer, and the unique dyadic interaction between interviewer and respondent.

Further, the interviewer needs to decode the reported information provided by the interviewee, which is also affected by subjective interpretations concerning how the interviewer perceives the reported events, which content the interviewer remembers, and which details are recorded. Such records are typically based on memory logs or audio and/or video records. Thus, the interviewer, who assumes a subjective role in the interview process, is also a source of reliability and validity concerning the diagnostic information collected. Considering the amount of subjectivity in both interview partners, one can conclude that objectivity is not perfectly displayed in the interview method. However, objectivity can be increased through standardization; for example, by using fully structured interviews instead of non-structured interviews and training interviewers in how to conduct interviews according to certain protocols (e.g., Morrison; Nordgaard et al.). The use of structured interviews helps to guide the formal interview process and to follow rules to collect information in a standardized way. In addition, it minimizes individual decisions by the interviewer. An example of low objectivity would

be that an interviewer could be preconceived by potential foregone conclusions and may ask questions that fit into their hypothesis but are too narrow to assess the full background needed for a correct diagnosis[2] (e.g., Morrison; Nordgaard et al.). We will illustrate this point with an example from the field of forensic psychology: research on the accuracy of eyewitness testimonies and the reconstruction of memories has shown that the *wording* of a question already affects the retrieval of memorized events in respondents. In a classical experiment, Loftus and Palmer showed participants video footage of a car crash and subsequently asked them for their estimates of the speed at which the cars collided. In their question ("How fast were those cars when they…"), they systematically varied the verb (i.e., "contacted?"; "hit?"; "bumped?"; "collided?"; and "smashed?") and tested whether this might affect people's estimates of the crashing cars' speed. As a result, they found participants' speed estimates varied as a function of the verb used, with "contacted" being related to the lowest speed and "smashed" being related to the highest speed estimate. The findings have been replicated well and show that how one is asked for information influences the response. This can be related to the interview process, as the interviewer's questions can affect the responses by the interviewee—showing the influences of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Hence, it is important to standardize the content of interest and wording of questions to prevent selective questioning on the basis of interviewers' preconceptions and to maximize comparability of responses among interviewees.

Beyond such subjective processes in both interview partners, it must be noted that the relationship and interaction between the interviewer and interviewee play a role in the reports given. There is robust evidence in the literature that dyadic interactions (i.e., the unique interaction between two persons) are denoted by the interdependence and characteristics of both dyad members who shape the interaction (for an overview and discussion, see Brauer and Proyer). For example, establishing rapport is important for creating an atmosphere that allows the respondent to talk about sensitive topics (e.g., Morrison), and studies have determined that establishing rapport increases respondents' sense of interpersonal security and relates to respondents' greater disclosure regarding sensitive topics (e.g., Henson et al.; Sun et al.). However, *how* rapport is established differs not only between interviewers but also depends on the respondent; it is thus unique to each dyad. This poses the issue that the interviewer has to balance two aims simultaneously: namely, acting in a way that ensures professional

2 We use the term "diagnosis" in its broad definition of assessing a psychological phenomenon and not limited to diagnoses in the sense of identifying a clinical disorder.

distance and enhances objectivity, while at the same time establishing rapport by acting and reacting toward the respondent in a unique personal way to create an atmosphere that allows the respondent to speak openly—particularly when sensitive topics are the subject of the interview. There is no "formula" for establishing rapport, and the same rapport strategy can have different effects depending on the interviewee. For example, it is often suggested that smiling, as an expression of positive emotions, is fundamental to establishing rapport (e.g., Stocco et al.), but recent research has revealed that people differ in how they perceive being laughed and smiled at: a group of people experience smiling as malicious ridicule and a means of putting them down—independently of the intention and morphological characteristics of the smile (Ruch and Proyer). In the case of those people misinterpreting smiling (so-called *gelotophobes*; Greek: gelos = laughter, phobos = fear; Ruch and Proyer), using smiling to establish rapport can lead to participants quitting interview sessions, as gelotophobic respondents feel ridiculed by the interviewer (Platt et al.). Hence, while non-verbal behaviors such as smiling may increase rapport in the majority of interviewees, they can also have adverse effects. This example shows that the interviewer has to adjust the strategies of establishing rapport to the respondent's reactions while simultaneously conducting the interview and aiming to collect diagnostic information. Hence, the dyadic relationship plays a role in the interview, and there is no one-strategy-fits-all formula to establish a good relationship between interviewer and interviewee. However, this unique dyadic interaction affects the objectivity and highlights the high cognitive demand interviewers face.

Finally, it must be noted that time, or more specifically, the time delay between forming and retrieving information (e.g., an episode depicting a prior event) from memory, affects the veridicality and biases of recollections (e.g., Lalande and Bonanno; Read and Connolly). Again, this affects the interviewer and interviewee alike, but it can be assumed that interviewees' recollections suffer from greater time-related biases (e.g., when remembering episodes from childhood), whereas retrieval in interviewers is often comparatively short (e.g., covering the time span between interviews). However, using records (e.g., notes, audio/video records) often allows interviewers to address this issue and increase objectivity (e.g., Burnett et al.).

Taken together, objectivity is affected by psychological and formal factors that also affect the reliability and validity of interviews. To address the latter two, meta-analyses have helped to draw conclusions on reliability and validity.[3] In a

3 Validity coefficients are described as correlations. Correlations range between -1.00 (perfect negative association between two variables) and 1.00 (perfect positive association), with 0.00

meta-analysis, the statistical coefficients of many independent studies addressing the same question are aggregated and statistically processed into an average coefficient. This approach allows the aggregation of knowledge across studies and has statistical advantages (e.g., higher statistical power than single studies). Two comprehensive meta-analyses on personnel selection interviews have advanced the understanding of the reliability and validity of interviews.

Reliability. Conway et al. aggregated 160 reliability coefficients from personnel selection interviews and found an average reliability of .70. They used the criterion of inter-rater reliability, which assesses the convergence between conclusions among independent interviewers (e.g., the consensus between interviewers in their decision to select a candidate), with higher convergence indicating higher reliability.[4] This indicates that, on average, interviewers derive the same inferences based on their interview data. The coefficient meets the threshold for satisfying reliability (e.g., Furr and Bacharach). Further, Conway et al. investigated which factors contribute to the reliability of interviews and found that greater (a) standardization of interview questions (i.e., using pre-defined questions), (b) standardized interpretations of the responses, and (c) interviewer training were all associated with higher reliability. Using more advanced statistical techniques that allowed them to disentangle different sources of measurement error, Huffcutt et al.'s meta-analysis on job selection interviews again supported the notion that reliability increases with standardization and structuredness. Based on such findings, the literature recommends using structured interviews composed of a priori defined questions and on the basis of considerations concerning what should be assessed (e.g., psychological disorders; job-person fit; vocational interests etc.). Furthermore, training interviewers on how to conduct interviews (e.g., how to present themselves and react to interviewees) and interpret responses (e.g., using pre-defined criteria) improves their reliability (e.g., Craig; Latham and Saari; Rogers, *Diagnostic*, "Standardizing"; Wittchen). The objective of this training can also be achieved "naturally," as interviewers gain experience throughout their career. This contributes to understanding why trained clinical psychologists' diagnostic conclusions are comparatively reliable when conducting non-structured interviews; put simply, their years of experience in diagnosing patients support their judgmental processes and diagnostic inferences (e.g., Powell et al.). Additionally, psychometric theory

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indicating independence between two variables. Reliability coefficients are interpreted similarly, with 0.00 indicating no reliability and 1.00 indicating perfect reliability.

4 More information on the statistical and theoretical background of this reliability approach can be found in Tinsley and Weiss' seminal paper.

shows that the reliability of judgments (e.g., on personnel selection or diagnoses) increases when using the judgments of more than one interviewer, as the biases and errors of individual interviewers are minimized by aggregating the interpretations and conclusions of multiple interviewers (e.g., Walker). Hence, it is recommended that interviews should be supplemented by an additional observer if the situation, context, and resources permit this decision.[5] Findings on the reliability of *clinical* interviews are comparable, with a satisfying overlap among clinicians' diagnoses and the positive effects of training and structuredness (see, for example, Miller et al; Rogers, "Standardizing"; Widiger; Wittchen). Thus, available evidence suggests that interviews provide reliable information, especially when standardization is high.

Validity. Schmidt and Hunter's meta-analysis addressed the utility and validity of the interview approach in comparison to 18 other selection criteria (e.g., job experience in years, assessment centers, or reference checks, to name but a few) by testing the predictive values for the "job performance" and "training performance" outcomes in the field of personnel selection. They analyzed studies from 85 years of research and examined the associations between the performance in a selection interview and the measured job performance later in the job. Considering the time delay between the job interview and the assessment of performance, the correlations indicate how well the interview predicts subsequent performance. Schmidt and Hunter's findings identified that *structured* employment interviews predict job performance with a validity of $r = .51$, whereas *unstructured* interviews only reach a coefficient of $r = .38$. Overall, this ranks them second and ninth out of the 19 tested criteria, respectively. Further, the comparison of the coefficients (structured vs. unstructured) shows that the standardization of the interview plays an important role in the validity of the interview, with higher standardization going along with greater validity. They extended their findings by testing whether interviews contribute *beyond* the knowledge of applicants' intelligence, as measured by standardized cognitive mental abilities tests. When using intelligence as a baseline for predicting job performance, structured and unstructured interviews increase the validity of predictions, as they account for 24% (structured interviews) and 8% (unstructured) increases in validity. Thus, the findings again highlight the need for the standardization of interviews. Overall, Schmidt and Hunter's findings recognize that the interview is a useful and valid method in personnel psychology. Findings from the field of clinical psychology are also widely aligned with the evidence for validity, although it has

5 While it is typical that employment interviews are conducted with several interviewers/observers present, interviews in the clinical context are typically conducted by a single interviewer.

been criticized for its dearth of comparably large studies, such as that provided by Hunter and Schmidt, especially on the criterion of convergent validity (i.e., the agreement between interview and external data; see, for example, Miller et al.; Renner and Jacob; Widiger; Wittchen).

Overall, the findings from the literature show that the interview provides the means to collect information that facilitates the derivation of reliable and valid conclusions, increasingly so when standardization (e.g., structuredness, interviewer training) is high. As the findings also show, objectivity and standardization are important prerequisites for a reliable and valid assessment with the interview method.

Types of Interviews

As discussed, interviews differ regarding several criteria, such as their degree of standardization, which include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. This distinction regards their characteristics such as the questions asked, interviewee answers, data analysis (i.e., interpretation of the responses and methods to derive conclusions), and the interviewer's behavior (e.g., Craig; Miller et al.; Renner and Jacob). Which type of interview is used often depends on the field and diagnostic aim. Moreover, the training of the interviewer plays a role; for example, a well-trained interviewer who has conducted numerous diagnostic interviews over many years typically no longer needs structured or semi-structured interview templates as they have memorized the topics and questions that need to be addressed to obtain robust conclusions (e.g., Morrison).

Structured Interviews. In structured interviews, the questions are standardized, meaning that they are fixed in their number, wording, and order for each interviewee. This interview form enhances objectivity because each patient or client is interviewed under very similar circumstances, which allows comparability and ensures that variations in the given answers are caused by differences in the assessed trait and not by confounding variables or interviewer bias. For example, when a structured interview to assess depressive symptoms comprises the question "Have you been especially critical of yourself this past week, feeling you've done things wrong, or let others down?" (Williams), the question needs to be read out loud word-by-word by the interviewer. Further, it is clearly defined how to continue if the respondent affirms the question (i.e., if the interviewee responds with yes: "What have your thoughts been?") and how to record and interpret the responses ("0 = *absent*; 1 = *self-reproach, feels s/he has let people down*; 2 = *ideas of guilt or rumination over past errors or sinful deeds*; 3 = *present illness is a*

punishment. Delusions of guilt; 4 = *hears accusatory or denunciatory voices and/or experiences threatening visual hallucinations*"; Williams). A crucial advantage of structured interviews is the minimization of bias and errors, but the consequence is that they are not as flexible and adaptive to the individual interviewee. In the course of the conversation, other aspects and topics may become more important than the ones the interviewer had prepared for. In a structured interview, open questions cannot be addressed in depth, which may cause a loss of information. Moreover, the structured and rigid form may seem too artificial to interviewees and in some cases not appropriate. For example, in a first clinical interview, patients should be allowed to talk freely about their circumstances, problems, feelings, and thoughts. This form is recommended as interviewees, particularly in the clinical sector, open up more easily if the interview feels more like a normal conversation where the interviewer (e.g., therapist) reacts to the addressed topics and asks further questions (e.g., Morrison).

Unstructured Interviews. In the unstructured interview, the purpose of the interview is fixed, and the topics and questions arise out of the situation, context, and conversation. Usually, this approach leads to a rich, detailed, and more individual conversation because the interviewee can respond more freely and add depth to their answers. Therefore, unstructured interviews can be described as more adaptive because the interviewer can advance into certain topics that are mentioned by the respondent and may be important for the course and outcome of the interview. Furthermore, follow-up questions can be asked depending on the interviewees' responses. The most fundamental limits of unstructured interviews are the missing comparability as well as less objectivity and reliability than in structured interviews (e.g., Conway et al.; Schmidt and Hunter). However, there is no guarantee that every important topic is discussed, as the conversation may go in a different direction than intended, which makes the interviewer's expertise even more important in ensuring a thorough assessment.

Semi-Structured Interviews. After introducing structured and unstructured interviews, one might think of a continuum where structured interviews are on one end of a pole and unstructured interviews on the other. The majority of interviews will not fall on either end, but will range somewhere on the continuum, making it semi-structured. This approach combines the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews, allows for a certain degree of objectivity and flexibility, and widely avoids their disadvantages. Semi-structured interviews are based on a fixed structure to a certain extent but can be individualized and adapted situationally to acknowledge interindividual differences in the interviewees (e.g., Renner and Jacobi). This is realized by using a pre-defined catalogue of broader topics and questions (e.g., "examine depressive mood" or

"check for depressive symptoms") instead of using a catalogue of previously formulated questions word-for-word, as shown in the example of structured interviews. The interviewer might make a list of topics and some questions beforehand to remember the most important aspects but use these as an orientation rather than a fixed guideline. Note that semi-structured interviews are particularly effective when carried out by interviewers with a certain degree of training and experience that allows them to adapt the interview individually.

The decision to use structured, unstructured, or semi-structured interviews depends on the aim of the interview. In certain situations, such as selection and diagnostic interviews, structured interviews should be preferred because objectivity, reliability, and comparability play a crucial role in these contexts, and errors based on interviewers should be kept to a minimum (e.g., Armoneit et al.). On the other hand, unstructured interviews are best suited for explorative settings, when the aim is to cover many diverse issues (e.g., Renner and Jacob).

Note that besides structuredness in conducting the interview, the *data analysis* can also range from structured to unstructured. There might be strict and predefined rules for analyzing and categorizing the given answers to compute a "score" for a latent trait (structured; e.g., Widiger; Williams), whereas the assessment of the given trait might also be decided solely according to the experience of the interviewer (unstructured). As with the standardization of conducting interviews, reliability increases when using standardized algorithms to interpret interviewees' responses (e.g., by counting the occurrence of certain topics or symptoms; Morrison). Moreover, recent research has provided numerous digital and analogous approaches to analyzing qualitative data such as interviewees' responses. For example, narrative analyses (McAdams; McAdams et al.) allow the identification of psychological themes by finding systematic patterns of content and topics in transcriptions of autobiographical interviews. Another approach is the quantitative language analysis of transcribed interviews. For example, the *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count* (LIWC; for an overview, see Tausczik and Pennebaker) software scans interview transcriptions digitally and identifies keywords that are indicative of, for example, negative emotions (e.g., words that indicate anxiety, anger, or sadness). A merit of quantitative and structured scoring procedures is that qualitative data are converted into quantitative units (e.g., word frequencies as in the LIWC software), allowing quantitative analyses. For example, correlating word usage as derived from the LIWC with self- and other ratings in questionnaires allows one to learn more about which linguistic cues might relate to personality traits (e.g., Proyer and Brauer). In the field of personnel selection, a recent study showed that the information derived from written

applications by the LIWC predicted the success of a candidate's application (Brandt and Herzberg).

Furthermore, one might differentiate the types of interviews with regard to their usage and aims in different fields. We will give examples from two disciplines, namely clinical and occupational psychology. In clinical psychology, interviews are often used when the aim is to gather personal information such as acute, past, and process-related information that might be informative for psychological disorders and symptoms. For example, the client's description of life events gives the interviewer insight into not only overt information about critical events but also how the client experienced and experiences them, their attitudes and feelings, and their behavioral reactions when confronted with sensitive topics. In clinical psychology, two types of interviews are broadly distinguished: (1) the *first interview*, which aims to derive a first impression of the client's matter of concern in order to acquire a working hypothesis for their diagnosis and to plan the therapeutic work and interventions and (2) the *diagnostic interview*, which aims to collect information to refine working hypotheses about potential diagnoses.

Illustration—The First Interview and the Diagnostic Interview in Clinical Psychology

The *first interview* in the context of psychotherapy is typically on the low end of the unstructured to structured dimension in order to give the client the opportunity and space to report all information about their current situation and problems, as well as their relevant psychosocial background. However, it is the interviewer's task to ensure that information relevant to the therapy and the therapist's understanding of the problems is given, which is achieved by specific types of questioning (see, for example, Morrison). A first interview is framed by time restrictions (typically 45 minutes). Another principle of the first interview is to establish a trusting interviewer-client relationship to create an atmosphere in which the client can open up and speak about their problems. It must be noted that the interpersonal relationship is of high importance, as such interviews touch the intimate and personal sphere of clients—supportive interpersonal dynamics (see establishing rapport) can therefore contribute to diagnostic and therapeutic outcomes (e.g., Lambert and Barley; Norcross). In the first interview, the diagnostician gathers a broad range of information on various topics (e.g., family and friends of the client or experiences in childhood) and can adjust the

questions to the client's responses. In comparison, information obtained from a questionnaire is limited to the pre-defined answers (e.g., on a rating scale) for each client.

In contrast to the first interview, the *diagnostic interview* relies on higher levels of structuredness. Using standardized interviews such as the *Structured Clinical Interview for the DSM* (SCID; see First), psychological disorders and their severity can be diagnosed by trained therapists (e.g., Widiger; Williams). In this context, it is crucial to phrase the questions in the same way for every patient because even slight differences in the wording may cause different answers, as discussed in the section on the objectivity, reliability, and validity of interviews. Every person with the same degree of depressive symptoms should be diagnosed with the same severity in a depressive disorder by different interviewers. This objectivity in conducting the interview and assessing the responses is especially important in ensuring a reliable and valid diagnosis in order to provide patients with appropriate treatment.

Illustration—The Structured Job Interview in Personnel Selection

In occupational psychology, the interview is often used as a selection method in the application process to fill open positions with the best suited candidates. Schuler et al. showed in their meta-analysis that interviews are the most-used selection instrument, with analyses of application documents ranking second (99% of the studied companies used these). Moreover, the structured interview (73%) was more frequently used than the unstructured interview (42%). Recently, Schuler's work group again surveyed the application criteria among 318 German organizations in 2017 and 2018 in order to re-evaluate the usage of selection criteria (Armoneit et al.). Interestingly, the structured interview remains an important instrument (73%), whereas the usage of unstructured interviews has decreased (34%) over the past decade. This example from occupational psychology signifies the critical role of the interview in the applied disciplines of psychology. More examples can be found in the fields of, for example, educational and health psychology (see e.g., Morrison; Renner and Jacob).

As discussed previously, structured interviews are associated with higher reliability and validity than unstructured interviews; Armoneit et al.'s findings show that this is reflected in their usage in personnel selection. In this section, we highlight on which basis interviews can be structured using job interviews as

an example. First, before conducting the job interview, it is important to collect information concerning the characteristics of the work and conditions the candidate would work in (i.e., the so-called *job analysis*; Campion et al.). This ensures that the requirements for a successful applicant are known and the most suitable person can be selected. To ensure the best fit between the job position and the applicant, the following aspects should be considered and included in the selection interview (Schuler). Like most interviews, the selection interview begins with an introduction of the attendees and an overview of the course, topics, and duration of the interview. To obtain an initial impression of the applicant, they are asked to present themselves; for example, regarding their educational background, professional career, and prior job experiences, and consecutive questions can be asked. After this self-introduction, the candidate should be encouraged by the interviewer to talk about their professional interests, why they applied to the company, and describe their interest in the open position. In the next step, questions about the interviewees' biography and job experiences are asked, which should be based on the requirements of the position (see job analysis) to examine the candidate's fit in relation to the open post. It is important that the interviewer gives a realistic insight into the job position and company and mentions positive as well as negative aspects. Furthermore, situational questions (e.g., "Imagine your work group has a conflict over unjust distributions of workload. Please tell us about your course of action in such a situation to solve the conflict.") should be used as an indicator of the candidate's potential future behaviors in critical and challenging job situations. This type of question enhances validity because it is specifically job-related and the answers of the candidate are valid predictors of future behavior (e.g., Campion et al.). At the conclusion of the interview, open questions from all attendants can be addressed, and the interviewer should give more information on the further procedure and organization of the selection process.

Good Interviewers

After highlighting the differences concerning the structuredness of interviews and formal factors that affect their objectivity, reliability, and validity, it must be noted that *interviewers* themselves might be considered a method factor, as they differ in their "ability" to conduct interviews. The competencies of the interviewer in conducting a good and comprehensive interview are crucial to the quality of the derived information. Morrison argues that a "good interviewer" should have three main aims: (1) to gather the maximum amount of information possible, that

(2) should be accurate and relevant for the specific context, (3) in the shortest amount of time possible. While following those prime aims of collecting information, the interviewer should establish and maintain a good relationship with the client or patient to create a good working atmosphere (rapport). Further, a good interviewer has different perspectives on the situation and uses varying sources of information. For example, an interviewer should be sensitive to behavioral observations as an additional source of information: one might think of an interviewee who explicitly denies feeling nervous while simultaneously showing non-verbal signs of nervousness (e.g., trembling movements). This contrast should be taken into account by the interviewer as it provides incremental behavioral information that is contrary to explicit responses by the interviewee (e.g., Nordgaard et al.). Overall, interviewers are faced with high cognitive demand, as they have to collect information by being receptive to various sources of information and their (in)congruence (e.g., concerning speech, facial expressions, and body gestures) while also establishing rapport (e.g., Morrison).

Furthermore, the interviewer should embed the derived information into the context of the interviewee. For example, in clinical interviews, important aspects may be the behavior of the client and its dynamics, social milieu, and biological aspects (e.g., comorbid diagnoses), as well as interactions between such factors. Morrison argues that a good interviewer is prepared to handle different "personalities" in the interview situation (see objectivity and unique dyadic interactions). Accordingly, the level of language used might be adjusted to the interviewee's verbal abilities (Morrison). Hence, a good interviewer knows *how* to collect the required information for a reliable and valid assessment.

As mentioned previously, the interview process is denoted by subjective impressions for both the interviewer and the interviewee. To derive accurate information, the interviewer should monitor and control their *own* potential cognitive and affective biases. For example, common perception biases are the *halo effect* (i.e., the interviewer focuses strongly on one positive aspect while ignoring other potentially relevant information), *anchoring* (i.e., the interviewer uses prior expectations as an anchor that guides the interview), *confirmation bias* (i.e., first assumptions about a person are sought to be confirmed during the interview by seeking information that validates these beliefs while ignoring contrary evidence), and the *affective heuristic* (i.e., judgments are based on personal preferences or salient aspects such as ethnicity, gender, or social background). To address such potential biases, interviewers often participate in training and supervision sessions which contribute to the familiarity with the situations, potential biases, and different types of interviewees that may cue the interviewer's biases and/or attitudes (e.g., Bensing and Sluijs; Ventura et al.).

Contrasting the Interview with the Use of Questionnaires

Interviews and self-report questionnaires are valuable assessment methods in psychology. In this section, we compare both methods and show their merits and limitations. In contrast to self-report questionnaires, interviews are more individual-centered, personal, subjective, and flexible because questions can be varied from case to case and tailored to the respondent depending on their circumstances and situation. Most people prefer to talk to a professional than check boxes in an anonymous questionnaire, as they perceive interviews as more pleasant and emotionally rewarding (e.g., Neuschwander et al.). The interviewer can also explain certain questions or ask for a more elaborate answer if the interviewee does not understand the question or gives brief or ambiguous responses. However, initial findings show that questionnaire and interview data typically lead to the same conclusions (e.g., Fairburn and Beglin). Despite these advantages and similarities, interviews are usually more time-consuming and less objective because, as discussed previously, the interviewer's bias or low structuredness may influence the answers of the respondent and their interpretation.

Furthermore, self-report questionnaires can be examined and revised with regard to their objectivity, reliability, and validity on the basis of psychometric analyses and considerations. They might have an advantage when intimate and/or embarrassing topics (e.g., eating behavior in patients with eating disorders) or topics that relate to socially desirable responses (e.g., political attitudes and personal values) are discussed: In questionnaires, respondents can answer anonymously without face-to-face interaction with the interviewer. Additionally, socially desirable responding (i.e., answering in normative ways) might be reduced in questionnaires due to anonymity. However, social desirability is also an issue in questionnaires (e.g., Paulhus), and in some cases the interview might be the assessment method that overcomes this bias, as trained interviewers can create an atmosphere of security and intimacy that allows interviewees to respond truthfully. Contrary to interviews, questionnaires typically limit responses to predefined categories (e.g., a scale might give seven response options ranging from 1 = *do not agree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) that cannot be elaborated upon by the respondent, which can limit the comprehensive collection of information (see Stewart and Newton). Thus, questionnaires are more suitable when questions are simple and clear, and no complex attitudes or behaviors are involved. Also, interviewer errors and biases are excluded in data collection using questionnaires, but this also poses the limitation that no behavioral observations can be made.

In terms of resources, questionnaires are more easily administered in group settings and online, both of which are highly effective standardized ways of collecting large sets of data.

As previously discussed, it is possible to "translate" qualitative information from interviews by quantifying and categorizing information of interest into quantitative units. To do so, participants' responses need to be coded and categorized before they can be analyzed and interpreted. This is typically done in specific software packages like MAXQDA, which allows researchers to code and analyze interview data based on predefined categories of interest (e.g., the occurrence of certain events) and using computerized language analyses (e.g., LIWC; Tausczik and Pennebaker).

Although interviews and questionnaires share similarities and differ with regard to their merits and disadvantages, it is questionable whether one method is superior to the other. We argue that this question relies on the aims of data collection, resources, and type of hypothesis (i.e., exploratory vs. confirmatory). Again, findings on the comparison of questionnaire and interview methods to assess the same variable of interest have shown that both converge comparatively well (e.g., Fairburn and Beglin; Widiger).

Conclusion

Our discussion has shown that the interview method is a valuable approach to collecting diagnostic information in research and applied psychology. As meta-analyses have demonstrated, interviews allow for comparatively reliable assessments and provide valid and oftentimes incremental information, even beyond objective criteria (Schmidt and Hunter). The knowledge of the objectivity, reliability, and validity of interviews as well as factors systematically affecting them has advanced the understanding of the shortcomings of interviews and facilitated the adjustment of interview strategies; for example, by maximizing the structuredness, using multiple observers, using recordings of interviews, and increasing efforts to train interviewers in conducting them and processing the collected information (e.g., using standardized coding rules).

Putting the merits and shortcomings of interviews and other assessment methods aside, we want to highlight that the assessment of psychological phenomena, clinical diagnoses, or personnel selection should never rely or be based on a single method. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of multiple assessments with a variety of methods provides the best approach to collecting information and deriving reliable and valid conclusions (e.g., Campbell and

Fiske; Fairburn and Beglin; Schmidt and Hunter; Vazire; Widiger). For example, by supplementing interviews with questionnaire data, information provided by the interviewee's knowledgeable others (e.g., teachers or supervisors), and objective data (e.g., [neuro]psychophysiological measures). Taking the many merits of interviews into account, we conclude that the interview is a strong method in the field of psychological assessment.

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Research Interviews as Interaction and Therapeutic Possibility: A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach

Abstract: This chapter concerns interviews as an interaction. Specific attention is given to interviews that are centered on topics that are sensitive and potentially shameful. I will illustrate that a series of interviews may be adequate when sensitive topics are explored, through presenting examples from interviews I have made with participants who had difficulties with substance abuse and sexuality. Most of them identified as "sex addicts," others described difficulties in accepting homosexual desire, or struggled with coming to terms with being a transgender person. Adjacent to this, I will reflect on my own experiences of conducting interviews and my thoughts on how interviews could be framed to support understanding and knowledge about the topic that is being researched.

From the perspective of relational psychoanalysis, it is acknowledged that each of us "consists of" different self-parts. These self-parts might be in conflict with each other, and some self-parts may be unaccepted, even by oneself. I will present a participant, Albert, who had struggled with accepting those self-parts that involved his homosexual identity and desire. Albert's narrative provides opportunities to see how non-accepted self-parts may be acknowledged and understood during research interviews. Adjacent to this, I will describe how research interviews often are perceived as supporting by the participants. The interviews may even be considered therapeutic. I propose that just because research interviews are open and not aimed to be therapeutic, they might paradoxically be therapeutic. Simultaneously, psychotherapeutic processes might provide knowledge that cannot be reached through research interviews. Therefore, I argue that research interviews, theoretical development, and research need to be intertwined.

Keywords: substance abuse, dissociation, interaction, open-ended questions, relational psychoanalysis, self, sexuality, psychotherapy

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I would like to start this chapter by reflecting on the word "interview". In my understanding, the word interview means that something is going on between persons, and what goes on is that they see something, it might be each other, a specific topic, or both. In line with this, I perceive the interview as an interaction, aimed at seeing something. As a clinical psychologist and a researcher, I strive to understand the experiences of persons who have lived through traumas, mental distress, disability, and most often recovery, and how they can be supported. Accordingly, I focus on how research interviews (henceforth termed interviews) can support understanding of subjective experiences—for the researchers as well as for the participants. I perceive subjective experiences as a valid and necessary basis for knowledge and for enhancing clinical practice.

The Research Interview as Interaction

There are varying conceptions of how interviews should be performed and analyzed. Some researchers are convinced that interviews need to be precise and objective, whatever that means. Therefore, they suggest that interviews should be performed according to detailed interview guides with specific questions that should be posed in a specific order. This is an adequate form of interview if the participant is seen as an informant, and if the aim is to gather information to answer predefined and unambiguous questions. Often such interviews are connected to a view of research as value-free, and in the final report, the interviewer is often invisible, and data are discussed as neutral findings (Brinkmann and Kvale; Keen; Potter and Hepburn). If the researcher rather wants to understand personal experiences, the interview should not primarily be seen as a process of gathering data but more as an unpredictable interaction that allows exploration and personal expression (Englander). In such cases, questions, as well as their ordering, need to be open and possible to adjust to each participant. The word interaction underlines that interviewing is an active endeavor. During interviews with a low level of structure, based on open-ended questions, the aim is to support the participants to tell their narratives. In this process, the interviewer might seem inactive (Englander). It should, however, be noted that the interviewer is listening carefully, and listening is an active endeavor. To listen carefully is to note details and non-verbal forms of communications. It also means that the listener remembers, makes connections between different parts of the narrative, and understands both explicit messages and underlying themes as well as the fragmentations and discontinuities of the narrative. The interviewer also needs to listen to

silences and to responses that come forth long after a specific question was posed. This is a demanding activity.

Dialogic philosophy has considerable significance for practitioners as well as for researchers working with open-ended interviews centered on the participant's evolving narrative (Friedman 91). Through engaging in dialogues, verbal and non-verbal, the capacity to understand unique situations, as well as others and ourselves, is developed. Nevertheless, the possibility to understand the experiences, self-perceptions, needs, and emotions of another individual should be reflected on. After all, there is an unknowable element in human interaction and in our capacities to understand each other. I would like to argue that we all need to accept that it is impossible to firmly define or understand other individuals and their experiences. Most often, it is even impossible to understand ourselves and our own experiences. However, it is possible to communicate perceptions and experiences to an attentive listener who strives to grasp what one expresses and strives to see something more than one is able to see by oneself. Even though subjective experiences are difficult to prove, the acknowledgement and understanding of them is fundamental for knowledge (Holm Ingemann 79–83; Keen). Reflections on dialogue and interaction are needed. Anything else would be unscientific and a reduction of human life.

An openness to ambiguity and to the evolving narrative is specifically important when interviews concern sensitive topics, since this permits the person who is interviewed to regulate the pace and ordering of the narrative, as well as how much he or she wants to share. This openness also gives the participant the opportunity to relate unique experiences and perceptions that are novel to the researcher (Hollway and Jefferson). This means that genuine discoveries and new understandings may be reached. As researchers, we also need to consider the number of interviews each participant engages in. If the interview concerns a non-sensitive and clearly defined topic, one interview that lasts for about 30 to 60 minutes might be enough. If we rather want to understand lived experiences that are complex, and/or sensitive, a series of interviews are recommended (Seidman 21). This might, however, be demanding for the participant, and it is possible that he or she only wants to share some parts of her/his experiences. If so, a single interview is of course adequate. Other participants might want to take the opportunity to tell their story and share their innermost experiences. In such cases, a series of interviews provides time for the narrative to evolve, and also permits the interviewer and the participant to continuously reflect on their dialogues, and revisit topics that they have discussed during prior interviews. Thereby, they can develop discussions, amend misunderstandings, and reflect on ambiguities, fragmentations, and paradoxes that are part of the stories we as human beings

tell about ourselves and our lives. In this process, it is important that the interviewer is able to remain silent and listen actively to the unsaid and to the messages that are found in between the lines. Concerning silences, the interviewer needs to note that there are different kinds of silences. Levitt investigated silences in psychotherapeutic processes and found that silence might be productive, neutral, or obstructive. When I listen to interviews that I have made, or read transcripts of them, I am sometimes embarrassed by my eagerness to ask questions and my inability to wait for the narrative to evolve. Often, I think to myself, if I had only remained silent, the participant would have told me something really important; he or she was searching for a way to express thoughts, emotions, and experiences. In the moment, I was unable to have faith in the productive silence but rather forced the interview. Thankfully, it is most often possible to admit and amend failures and reconnect to the narrative and the participant.

Sensitive Topics

In my research and also in my clinical practice, I encounter individuals who have struggled with substance abuse, mental health issues, and traumatic experiences and who often have been exposed to neglect and abuse during childhood. Specifically, I have interviewed individuals who have struggled with substance abuse and sexuality, most often excessive sexual activities; some of them also struggled with uncertainty concerning sexual identity or desire. Many individuals I interviewed used the word "sex-addict" to describe themselves. I encountered each participant from three to six times, and I listened to them for many hours. The first aim of the interviews was to explore how the participants understood their difficulties with substance abuse and sexuality and how they perceived themselves. The second aim was to understand their thoughts about treatment needs. In order to understand their thoughts about treatment needs, I asked them to give advice and suggestions to me and other practitioners.

Sexual activities and excitement might serve different emotional and relational needs within and between individuals. Sexual activities have the power to shield from emotional and relational difficulties and might be enacted in order to achieve acceptance, a sense of identity, revenge, control, or self-punishment (Dimen; Giugliano; Punzi et al.). Therefore, excessive sexual activities can be repeatedly enacted even though they increase distress and reduce the satisfying aspects of sexuality (Beveridge; Sloate). Moreover, narratives about sexual activities evoke emotions and reactions in the listener. They might even be overwhelming. Some of us may react with prudishness, others may underes-

timate the destructive side of sexuality and perceive any attempt to problematize sexuality and sexual activities as repressive or prudish. The difficulties my participants described did not concern an overly strict view or an adaption to normative ideas about sexuality, nor did they describe a specifically strong sexual drive. They rather understood their sexual activities as connected to suffering and self-hate. One man I interviewed related that when, after decades of excessive masturbation, he decided to stop, his penis was ulcerous. A young woman I interviewed related that she had been sexually involved with hundreds of men, yet she had never enjoyed sex with a man and she had never experienced an orgasm. By the time of the interview, she self-identified as a lesbian and was in a stable relationship with a woman. Very slowly she began to sense that sex could be pleasurable. She could sometimes even enjoy her body, a giant step for a person who was severely sexually abused in childhood and had felt contempt for her own body and herself ever since.

It had been difficult for my participants to regulate or refrain from the sexual behaviors that caused them distress and suffering. Simultaneously, they had profound experiences of self-blame and/or self-hate. The shame they experienced was overwhelming. Shame is an emotion that is experienced in relation to others. Therefore, it influences relationships and interactions, including the relationship and interaction with an interviewer, and thereby the evolving narrative. The core of shame is a wish to hide, disappear. This is visible in the posture of the individual concerned; the gaze is lowered and gestures are restrained (Schore 199–207). Shame is often seen as a strictly negative emotion, but it is also beneficial to us since it inhibits hyper-aroused states, in which we might go too far and hurt others or ourselves. Nevertheless, shame is painful, and when we have been exposed to cruelty, ridicule, or contempt, shame overwhelms us to the extent that we are prepared to do anything to avoid it, including engaging in destructive behaviors. Thereby, a vicious circle develops, and in this circle, shame, destructive behaviors, and avoidance fuel each other. Ironically, those experiences, shortcomings, and difficulties that we cannot bring ourselves to utter are those that we need to approach in order to understand ourselves, heal from what has been done to us and, as my participants underlined, what we have done to ourselves and in some cases also to others.

When research interviews are performed, we, therefore, continuously need to reflect on how shame, as well as other difficult affects and conditions, influence our praxis as well as the knowledge we gain from the interviews. Experiences might be so shameful, frightening, or anxiety provoking that it is difficult for the participants to talk about them in a straightforward manner. Nevertheless, they might be approached and understood if individuals concerned are given the

opportunity to tell their narratives (Billig; Hollway and Jefferson). This does, of course, not mean that we should pressure our participants to relate experiences they are not ready to share. That would be unethical and would reinforce the vicious shame-circle. Simultaneously, it would be unethical to invite individuals to talk about difficult experiences while not being prepared to talk about shortcomings or shameful experiences. It takes time, courage, discretion, and some sense of humor to support individuals to express their innermost concerns. Sometimes we fail as researchers, but if we do not try, we deny our participants the opportunity for dialogue and validation. From an epistemological perspective, our understanding and knowledge become limited or even distorted if we do not dare to talk about difficult experiences, shortcoming, shame, and sensitive topics.

There is also a risk that we as researchers perceive the researched topic as less troubling to our participants than it actually is, and we might ascribe more agency to our participants than there actually is. If so, we cannot relate the topic to our participants. In other words, the interview is failed. Researchers share this risk with mental health practitioners who might avoid sensitive topics, not least connected to sexuality (Lykou; Shalev and Yerushalmi). We should not pathologize activities or experiences. But we should be open, pose questions, and be prepared to listen. In my research, participants have related that they cannot talk about their innermost fears and difficulties with the practitioners they encounter, not even with their therapists. They sensed that some practitioners are unprepared to handle shameful topics, specifically difficulties connected to sexual activities. According to them, the practitioners could also be too governed by a certain treatment method they had to follow. In other cases, the participants sensed a need to keep the practitioner happy and satisfied and therefore did not want to express their innermost distress or talk about difficulties that did not disappear (Punzi et al.; Punzi, "It's a Deficiency Disorder"). I wonder how many times I have failed to listen to my clients and communicate that I am open and able to endure dialogues about shameful and anxiety-provoking experiences. I also wonder how reflections on our own shortcomings could enrich and develop both treatment and interview praxis. If we admit shortcomings and discuss them with others, including our participants, we will learn more about the research process, which in turn contributes to understanding and truly seeing the topics we are researching.

Albert

I will now present a man, I call him Albert, who had difficulties with substance abuse and with accepting his homosexual desire. Albert is real, yet the narrative is created by me, representing many clients and participants I have met. As human beings, we are both unique and surprisingly similar to each other. Therefore, readers could sense that the narrative is about themselves or someone they know. I, therefore, would like to underline that the narrative is an aggregate of many individuals and of my imagination.

When I met Albert, he was in his mid-thirties. He participated in the research study concerning substance abuse and difficulties with sexuality that I conducted. He self-identified as gay, and he wanted to participate since he wished that people would understand that substances might be used to handle sexual desire that is difficult to accept by others as well as by oneself. I interviewed him four times; altogether we spoke for nine hours.

Albert grew up with a violent father who engaged in criminal activities and drug abuse. He described his mother as a loving person who, however, drank too much and suffered from periods of severe anxiety and depression. He understood this as her response to a terrible life situation. Albert said that, as a child, he was an outsider, "a sissy boy," and he did not adapt to the gender-normative expectations from his parents, the neighborhood, or other children. There was no place for him, neither in the neighborhood, nor in school, or at home. "Where I come from, gay is the worst thing a person could be," he said. As a teenager he became part of the first group who accepted him, a gang that could be characterized as hypermasculine, namely right-wing soccer hooligans. During weekends they were out harassing and abusing people, specifically gay men. He said, "This was a perfect place to hide for a young gay man. No one thinks you're gay if you're a soccer hooligan." It was also perfect for being close to other men. When they were drunk, and they often were, they hugged and were always together. I never grasped if Albert as a teenager sensed that he was hiding his homosexuality by joining the gang or if he sensed this later on. He, understandably, avoided such questions. He seemed overwhelmed by guilt for having been part of this violent gang and it would have been unethical to insist on discussing it.

For Albert, it was still difficult to accept his sexual desire. On a conscious level he had accepted his homosexual desire and embraced a homosexual identity, but simultaneously he sensed that "Deep inside of me, I am not allowed to be gay." So, whatever he did, there was a conflict. He felt uncomfortable with himself and lacked a sense of being whole. He had only been able to have sex with a man after having used alcohol or drugs since this mitigated the inner conflict. When I met him, he had been abstinent from alcohol and drugs for several

years and been in psychotherapy and treatment for substance abuse. Albert sensed that he had been supported by his psychotherapist, and he appreciated the help he had been offered by the health care system and social services. Yet, he sensed that increased awareness about questions of gender and sexuality could enhance treatment, and he wished that practitioners dared to invite their clients to discuss complex and ambiguous perception of oneself, such as the simultaneous tendencies to accept and reject homosexual desire. Treatment focus had almost exclusively been on terminating drinking, which he considered necessary, but it was equally important for him to reflect on who he sensed that he could become when he was drunk or who he did not want to be. He wanted to have a serious dialogue about what it means to be human and all the destructive behaviors we might engage in to cope and to handle ourselves. Albert sensed that his substance abuse could have been terminated earlier if practitioners had invited him to discuss complex self-perceptions and possibilities for self-acceptance.

Relational Psychoanalysis, the Self, and Dissociation

Throughout the interviews, with Albert and other participants, it came forth that struggles with substances and sexuality could not be separated from what I would like to call "struggles with oneself." It had been difficult for Albert to accept himself and he had not allowed some parts of himself to exist. Parts that concerned homosexual desire had been specifically difficult for him to accept. Other participants I have met sensed that any sexual desire was non-accepted. Paradoxically, one part of them could deny sexuality while another part could engage in sexual activities in violent or self-destructive ways. These participants could not understand themselves. They simply could not grasp how their behaviors and self-perceptions could be so contradictive.

The multiplicity of the self is central to relational psychoanalysis (Reis). The self is not seen as an entity, but as an ongoing process in which multiple self-parts exist side by side or replace each other. Yet, there is an experience of being the same person, with various characteristics, experiences, emotions, and reactions; it is "me" over time and in different situations, even though "I" have many sides, sometimes contradictory ones. The self can thus be seen as a continuous center of experience, of being a discrete but multifaceted person.

Our perceptions of ourselves continuously change as we develop during life and also from day to day, or even during the same day. For some, these changes,

however, are dramatic and even traumatic. Their selves become fragmented, there is a sense of not being oneself, of being outside oneself, of numbness, depersonalization, or disruption between self and reality (Strait 311).

In relational psychoanalytic theory and practice, such experiences are central, and the term "dissociation" is used for them. Dissociation exists on a continuum. Dissociative experiences can be mild, as when we are stressed and sense that we register what happens but are disconnected, not present; here but not emotionally here, like a camera. Other forms of dissociation are dramatic and often connected to trauma or abuse. We might be so dissociated that we cannot remember what we have done or where we have been. Such amnesia as well as experiences of being outside one's body, of being disconnected from reality, are common among people who have been raped, for example, and these experiences may remain or return long after the abuse. Experiences of continuous dissociation are common among individuals who have suffered traumas and continuous life-stress for longer periods, not least during childhood (Schäfer et al.). In more severe forms of dissociation, non-accepted self-parts become located outside oneself and accordingly disavowed. Thereby, distress is mitigated (Holmes et al.).

Dissociation is a so-called "defense mechanism." It is a common misconception that defenses are pathological in themselves, and signs of psychological disturbances. Defense mechanisms are continually operating in all of us. Thanks to our defense mechanisms, we are not constantly aware of our deepest worries, shame, dissatisfaction, or traumatic experiences. If we were, we would be overwhelmed by anxiety and distress, and sometimes we are. Since defense mechanisms are operating, we are able to engage in productive, sustaining, and satisfying activities. However, when dissociation not only occurs momentarily, but becomes a structure according to which the individual functions, her/his self becomes fragmented and disrupted (Holmes et al.). The lack of continuity that develops, means that relational, emotional, and behavioral difficulties, including for example substance abuse, develop (Schäfer et al.) and add to the difficulties. Dissociation, however, continues since the individual is numbed during dissociation and thereby shielded from suffering and from self-parts that are perceived as unacceptable (Bromberg). The cost, however, is an increased lack of coherence that in turn increases distress which might fuel tendencies for destructive behaviors (Bromberg; Burton). A vicious circle evolves.

For Albert, the cost was homophobic violence and difficulties with alcohol and relationships. By the time of the interview, his "not-me" parts were more or less integrated. Even though there still were conflicts, for example between identifying as gay and sensing that he was not allowed to be gay, the fact that he could

talk about the conflicts means that these self-parts were no longer profoundly dissociated. The parts could exist alongside each other. This is an example of how a person moves from fragmentation toward self-integration. Self-integration does, however, not mean a total absence of difficulties. Albert still had difficulties with accepting himself and with relationships, sexuality, and physical intimacy. It was also difficult for him to talk about the right-wing hooligan gang and his part in it. He could tell me about it in small portions. Thereby, during the interview, we could understand how profound his non-acceptance had been and how much he had struggled for self-acceptance and integration. We could also understand more about his prior substance abuse and the need for discussing desire, identity, and self-acceptance, which he stressed when he contacted me and said that he wanted to participate in the study. Since we met for several interviews, it was possible to return to such topics and interlink these parts of his narrative.

Interviews cannot always cover every topic, and important topics might have been missed also in Albert's narrative. I find it important to acknowledge that in the lives of our participants dissociation may have occurred and may occur, especially when interviews concern sensitive topics. We need to consider that some self-parts might be difficult to accept, or they might be unaccepted and therefore dissociated. As human beings, we all consist of multiple self-parts that are sometimes difficult to grasp. Therefore, as Seidman (24) writes, researchers should ponder the possibilities for participants to tell their narratives in a series of interviews. If this is impossible, we could instead appraise the pieces the participants share with us. We do not need to know everything. But we need to avoid claiming that we know everything, which goes for interviews as well as any other research activity.

Research as Therapy, Therapy as Research

Interviewing, just like any research activity, has contingent as well as inherent limitations (Potter and Hepburn). One example is that the framing of the interview influences the narratives the participants tell, and we need to acknowledge that ideas about "telling the truth" and "confessing" are widespread in Western societies (Aarsand and Aarsand). Interview data cannot be treated as neutral but should be approached as narratives that are told within a specific form of interaction (Potter and Hepburn 290–94). My position as a clinical psychologist may, for example, increase my participants' ideas about interviews as a form of confession. It should also be noted that participants might censor themselves, perhaps because they perceive some experiences as irrelevant, perhaps because

they do not want to admit shortcomings. The topic might also be so shameful or guilt provoking, as Albert's engagement in right wing violence seemed to be, that the participant consciously or unconsciously avoids it. As relational psychoanalysis shows us, our multiple self-parts are not easily grasped or communicated.

The strengths and possibilities of interviews are nevertheless numerous. According to Rossetto, research interviews can make a difference in people's lives, not least since they are spaces for sharing experiences with an interested listener. To share emotions, reflect on them, and have one's experiences validated is healing. Through sharing difficult experiences with a researcher, the participant contributes to knowledge that can improve the lives of others, and this is a therapeutic aspect of research interviews (Rossetto 484–85). The importance of contributing to research, of having a purpose, also came forth in a study concerning substance abuse and treatment needs I made some years ago. One participant expressed it in the following words:

> That's why I wanted to participate in this study. I need to tell [...] to comprehend. I also want to contribute. If you are able to write about my experiences and if that is helpful for someone else [...] then I'm satisfied. And even if you are the only one who is helped [...] my suffering was not totally meaningless. (Punzi, "It's a Deficiency Disorder 50)

Dialogues that permit emotional sharing have the capacity to provide experiences of mutuality (Benjamin 25–31). Therefore, in line with Rossetto, I would like to argue that research interviews can be therapeutic. The prerequisites are that the participants are invited to tell their story, rather than being perceived as informants, that the interviewer is open to difficult experiences without pressuring the participant, and that the interviewer is able to listen attentively, also to what is avoided or missing in the narrative (Hollway and Jefferson; Ogden and Cornwell; Seidman). Simultaneously, the interview needs to be considered with respect to the researcher's position of power (Barron). The researcher defines the topics, poses the questions, decides how the interview data should be analyzed and presented, and also decides the epistemological position (Brinkmann and Kvale). Should the participants' narratives, for example, be treated as representations of what actually happened; as the truth? Or should we perceive the narratives as representations of prevailing discourses or as ways the participants construct themselves or their life courses? Or something else? Whatever epistemological position we choose, we need to be open about our intentions and positions. It is unethical to invite participants to tell their stories without informing them about how their stories will be understood and presented in the final report.

The validating experience of telling one's story to an interested listener and contribute to knowledge is indeed a therapeutic aspect of research interviews

(Punzi, "It's a Deficiency Disorder 50; Rossetto 484-86). The participants tell the researchers what they deem to be true. Through posing questions, asking for examples, or for the participants to explain or expand on the topic, researchers show that they validate their participants, and simultaneously their questions signal that there is more to know, more to understand (Ogden and Cornwell). Individuals who have gone through psychotherapy and found it helpful, underline that the experience of being understood, of respectful dialogues, and of simultaneously being validated and challenged to broaden their perspectives, meant that they could accept themselves and make necessary changes in their lives (Binder et al. 292–93). Accordingly, there are similarities between meaningful research interviews and meaningful psychotherapeutic processes. Researchers have the opportunity to validate their participants and through thoughtful questions support them to broaden their views on themselves, without the therapeutic aim of providing solutions. It should also be noted that through telling their narratives, the participants, in turn, support the researchers, and the sense of contributing to others and to the possibility of improved care might strengthen their sense of wellbeing (Punzi, "It's a Deficiency Disorder; Rossetto).

I suggest that the lack of therapeutic aims may paradoxically contribute to the therapeutic value of research interviews. The interview becomes an arena for expression, meaning-making, recognition, and witnessing, and such experiences are healing. It should be noted that while many people are supported by psychotherapy, therapeutic methods may also be experienced as methods of control (Faulkner). The controlling aspects of psychotherapy, as well as ideas about a golden standard of normality that the client is compared to and expected to follow, may have a negative influence on the experience of treatment, not least for clients with considerable difficulties who are often told how they should think, feel, or behave (Punzi, "The Art Studio" 132). Clients may therefore need spaces that are not loaded with therapeutic expectations and assumption, such as spaces for creative activities or peer support (Punzi, "The Art Studio").

The research interview may also be such a space. Research interviews with open-ended questions resemble psychoanalytic consultations since they both concern the exploration of narratives and their inherent silences and disruptions, as well as non-judgmental understanding. Therefore, research interviews may be spaces in which multiple self-parts, including non-accepted ones, can be addressed and explored. Relational psychoanalyst Ken Corbett describes the psychoanalytic consultation with Mitchell, a young boy who had a non-normative gender expression, and his parents. The understanding of Mitchell was supported by an open approach and by avoiding taking social consensus and normativity as signs of well-being. Through the open, dialogic process, Corbett and

Mitchell's parents could provide a space for Mitchell in which he could reflect on his experience of difference without being governed by normative experiences about masculinity. Both the parents and Corbett allowed Mitchell to develop his own subjectivity. In other words, they provided a space for Mitchell in which all his self-parts were invited, accepted, and integrated. Thereby, some self-parts did not have to be dissociated, as unfortunately had been the case for Albert.

In the article by Corbett, the consultative, therapeutic process was integrated with theoretical development and a commitment to acknowledging individual cases in research. This can be contrasted to the prevailing idea that research and therapy are different domains that should be separated by defined boundaries (Rossetto). If these boundaries mean that researchers should not diagnose their participants, not provide advice regarding how participants should behave, feel, think, or handle their problems, I agree. If the boundaries mean that only psychotherapeutic or medical interventions are perceived as healing, I disagree. Psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy, as well as practitioners and researchers in these fields, tend to present themselves as experts and contributors to sole solutions to human distress. This represents processes of power and professionalization that may be understood as ways to guard territories, which of course also has financial aspects. Contrary to the idea that these disciplines provide the experts, I suggest that a range of human activities may be therapeutic. Engagement in voluntary work, religious activities, and creative expression can also be healing (Hosseini and Punzi 177–81; Ahlman). The same holds true for participation in research interviews.

It should also be acknowledged that integration of theory, research, and practical work increases the possibility to achieve valid knowledge (Keen). Therefore, research interviews, the development of theories, and clinical practice need to be intertwined, as in Corbett's article. Therapeutic processes may provide material for research and theoretical development since the psychotherapeutic process permits the person's narrative to unfold over long periods of time in all its complexities. Freud's theories were created from his experiences of encountering patients. Likewise, Aaron Beck created cognitive theories and Carl Rogers created humanistic theories and methods (Englander) from their clinical experiences, and their research was closely connected to clinical practice. The integration of theory, clinical practice, and research, not least research interviews, is perpetual, and through moving back and forth between them, insights, knowledge, and development are facilitated. Thereby we can see phenomena. Together.

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Tomasz Basiuk

Interviews as Life Writing? A Literary Scholar's Field Notes on Reciprocal Witnessing in an Oral History Project

Abstract: This paper describes my experience interviewing queer individuals in Poland as part of the "Cruising the Seventies: Unearthing Pre-HIV/AIDS Queer Sexual Cultures (CRUSEV)" project. My practice was influenced by my earlier work on gay men's life writing, as I searched for narrative patterns and ways in which they were interrupted, paying close attention to experiences of shame and to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls queer performativity. I propose that a relationship of reciprocal witnessing between the interviewer and the interviewed plays a role in interviews conducted with queer participants.

Keywords: homosexuality, oral history, performativity, queer, reciprocal witnessing, sexology, shame, state-socialist Poland, testimony, transgender (transsexual)

Introduction

My experience with oral history interviews stems from my involvement as a PI in a HERA-funded project "Cruising the Seventies: Unearthing Pre-HIV/AIDS Queer Sexual Cultures (CRUSEV)," which brought together research teams from the UK, Spain, Germany, and Poland.[1] Not only did the queer 1970s have a different run in each of the four countries but their queer pasts have been researched to an unequal degree. In Poland, LGBTQ historiographies typically began in the 1980s (see Fiedotow 258), with some scholars noting that grassroot organizing intensified as a response to a state police operation dubbed Hyacinth, which first occurred in November 1985, and then exploded after the transition of 1989. Scholars working on earlier periods usually focused on specific historical figures without offering a contextual narrative about Poland's queer past. The 1970s remains a promising period to examine in this respect because it is a little-explored decade marked by political thaw and relative prosperity, which offered novel

1 "Cruising the 1970s: Unearthing Pre-HIV/AIDS Queer Sexual Cultures (CRUSEV)" was financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme 3 *Uses of the Past* and the European Commission through Horizon 2020 under grant agreement No 649307. The project began in 2016 and ended in 2019.

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opportunities for the exchange of people, ideas, and goods both within the Soviet bloc and across the iron curtain. It is also recent enough to identify individuals who could be interviewed about their queer experience as young adults then.

My co-investigators and I assumed from the start that oral history interviews would be an important component of our research, in part due to the relative scarcity of available archival sources. The Polish research team included a cultural anthropologist, two literary scholars, a literary translator, an artist, an art historian, and three doctoral candidates, one in history, two in cultural studies.[2] All of us conducted archival research, examining personal ads, state police training manuals, court documents, letters sent to sexologists who wrote sex advice columns, literary criticism, documentation of art exhibitions, a samizdat gay bulletin and letters sent to its editor's address in Vienna, and various private archives. However, many of these sources were ephemeral, incomplete, and difficult to reach. For example, letters sent to magazines which had folded years ago may have been destroyed or have ended up in the possession of individuals who did not always consent to share them, while court files were difficult to locate because they have never been catalogued to enable a search for "homosexuality," which is not a category under Polish criminal law. (The absence of penalization did not preclude social ostracism.) We therefore understood that our archival research needed to be supplemented by interviews, which helped us locate additional sources and better understand the documents we were reading. For example, team members interviewed sexologists who wrote for the popular press, as well as men who had been targeted by the police for their same-sex activities. The interviews provided a fuller grasp of how the 1970s were experienced by queer subjects, allowing us to develop at least a fragmentary account of this decade. On a pragmatic level, the chances to speak to people who had witnessed the queer 1970s were diminishing. Indeed, a man of eighty died within a year of being interviewed for the project. Conversely, we interviewed a former activist whom others mistakenly thought had passed away (Zabłocki).[3]

The interviews helped us understand that queer culture in state-socialist Poland survived the introduction of a Soviet-backed regime and that it endured from the interwar years, albeit in subdued forms. Queer men in big cities socialized in cruising spots and habitual places like bars and saunas, none of which were

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2 My co-investigators were Jędrzej Burszta, Agnieszka Kościańska, Karolina Morawska, Karol Radziszewski, Magdalena Staroszczyk, Wojciech Szymański, Błażej Warkocki, and Krzysztof Zabłocki.

3 Two edited volumes are issued forth to-date from the Polish research team (Kościańska et al.; Basiuk and Burszta) and a third is forthcoming. Additional papers by individual researchers were published in collected volumes and in journals.

exclusively gay under state socialism. Informal gatherings took place in private apartments, hosted not just by homosexual men but by heterosexual women too, for example, a well-known opera singer.[4] Moreover, the 1970s saw a continuation of intellectual, academic, and artistic cultural transfers that the Soviet-backed regime had been cautiously curating, including in the scope of sexology. This moderate permissiveness allowed echoes of the sexual revolution in the West to reverberate, however faintly, in the Polish media, including in popular sex advice columns.[5] According to some of our interview partners, in the 1970s people began to speak more openly about homosexuality, gradually lifting this social taboo. The change in discursive norms, though subtle, meant that queer people were more likely to discuss their sexuality among themselves outside romantic or sexual relationships, even if covertly. And as queer social life flourished in semipublic and private settings, so did the rise of informal, non-anonymous networks of queer people and their acquaintances, providing a safe space for these early debates. These networks set the ground for the political activism of the subsequent 1980s, for example, by facilitating the distribution of gay samizdat publications. In this way, the 1970s stand out as "proto-gay" (Szcześniak) or "protopolitical" (Basiuk, "Od niepisanej umowy" 37–40). While these developments are limited to urban centers and therefore do not reflect a universal queer experience, they could not have been traced at all had we not spoken to individuals who had witnessed this unfolding social history; as Thomson aptly puts it, oral history has enabled us to practice "history from below" (52).[6]

Some Parameters of the Oral History Component of the Project

The methodological bias inherent in our choice of interlocutors must be acknowledged. As is true of qualitative research in general, our respondents were a voluntary, self-selected cohort. We reached out to individuals whom we had met through a senior LGBTQ support group and to others we knew professionally or

4 See Burszta "Three Circles" for a discussion of locations in which urban gay men socialized in state-socialist Poland.

5 For a discussion of the role played by a sexologist who wrote a sex advice column see Kościańska, "Treatment."

6 Thomson also discusses "bearing witness" (59) and "shared authority" (67) in the context of oral history projects conceived as ethico-political. Similar considerations inform my present argument although the CRUSEV study was research-based rather than aimed at community building.

personally. All members of the seniors' LGBTQ group agreed to our interviews and some recommended additional interview partners, but we were also turned down by others we approached. Moreover, our efforts to diversify the cohort rarely panned out. The more widely—and publicly—we spread word about our study, the fewer people responded. A radio program in which my colleague and I described the project and provided contact information yielded no observable result. Meanwhile, the snowball method of seeking out interview partners led to an urban-centric bias. A female colleague who attempted to break this pattern by publicizing her call for interview partners on a gay social media site secured a single interview. In the end, most people we spoke to came from Warsaw and Poznań, some from Kraków and Gdańsk. Most were middle class. We did not interview anyone living rurally. This geographic distribution may suggest that discourses of queerness feature urban space as a privileged site of queer self-making, and that these discourses are largely shaped in cities.

While we did not count the reasons why potential interview partners turned us down, a pattern correlating with their gender seemed to emerge. Some women declined because they believed that they had nothing to say about lesbian life in the 1970s. Others became aware of their desires only much later, while others still had a single isolated same-sex affair in their youth and had not met other lesbians at the time. Interview partners uniformly affirmed that lesbian social life and self-organizing only began at the cusp of the 1980s and 1990s. Men declined to be interviewed because they felt this would impinge on their privacy. A few expressed their disapproval, suspecting we would manipulate their biographies to accommodate and affirm a contemporary gay identity. Some disapproved of what they saw as the study's leftist bias, reflecting Poland's intense political polarization under the right-wing regime in power from 2015 till 2023.

The ratio of men to women among the total of almost fifty interviews was about 5:1.[7] The disproportion no doubt reflected a differential visibility between lesbians and gay men. Two of the interviewed women were transgender while all the men were cis-gendered. When looking for interview partners we were confronted with a terminological dilemma. The word "queer" in the title of our project was sometimes unfamiliar to the older age group we were trying to reach, as was its Polish translation (*odmieniec*). The abbreviations LGBT and LGBTQ were occasionally unfamiliar as well, though they were known to seniors in the support group to whom we reached out. The word "gay" (*gej*), which in Polish refers only to gay men, was acceptable to some men but not all; however, many men responded to the designation "homosexual" without finding it problematic or

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7 In the age bracket of fifty years and more, our cohort had a similar gender ratio to other similar studies (see Mizielińska et al. 35).

offensive. The derogatory term *pedał* (derived from *pédé*) for a male homosexual was almost never used by our interlocutors. Some male interview partners recalled using feminine names and pronouns to refer to themselves and other male homosexuals in the 1970s, but others opposed this camp usage. The linguistic situation was even more complicated for women, some of whom deemed the word "lesbian" (*lesbijka*) pejorative. Additionally, women identifying as lesbian today did not necessarily identify as lesbians in the 1970s. The women we interviewed did not commonly describe themselves as homosexual, either. More descriptive solutions, such as "women loving women" (*kobiety kochające kobiety*) seem to have been confusing or, in any case, did not yield new interview partners. These terminological issues compounded the difficulty of seeking interlocutors other than through the snowball method. The words bisexuality and polyamory almost never came up, but bisexual behavior and polyamorous arrangements were mentioned in some accounts. While our analysis does not support a statistically meaningful conclusion in this regard, it seems worth noting that a permanent arrangement between a married heterosexual couple and the husband's male sexual partner was described by a working-class man (the husband).

Prior to the project, four people in our team of nine had published extensively or created art based on interviews. Some others had previously interviewed people on specialized subjects, but not about their personal lives. At a preliminary stage of the project, we discussed the methodology and ethics of conducting oral history interviews with a professional historian specialized in oral history. We also obtained access to a collection of oral history interviews with queer subjects which had recently been created as part of a different project and which served as a practical reference for us. We met regularly as a group to discuss the interviews, compare notes, and draw plans. Some of our meetings were open events in which we summarized our findings and answered questions from the public, which included activists and other queer community members, faculty and graduate students in history, literature, cultural studies, and other fields.

The Relationship between Interview Partners (Reciprocal Witnessing)

The oral history interviews were loosely structured in the sense that the interview partner was not required to answer all questions and could decide where the conversation should go. We typically began by asking for a brief outline of the interlocutor's life, including what they remembered about the 1970s. Some interlocutors responded well to this open-ended invitation while others asked for

additional questions to guide them. Some asked questions about our project and, in a few cases, about ourselves. For example, Renata*, a middle-aged woman whom I was interviewing, recounted a period in her life when she was deeply religious.[8] At one point, she queried me about whether I was a believer and wanted to know when and why I lapsed. I understood this as a request for reciprocity, motivated by her wish to have her experience acknowledged by someone who could relate to her story on a personal level. She was seeking recognition, or more precisely a gesture of reciprocal witnessing, through which I could reassure her that I was hearing her without judging her or disapproving of her choices. She expected me to confirm this by sharing a relevant bit of my life story.

The term "interview partner" (alongside "interlocutor") follows one of the established terminological conventions in oral history. The convention is intended to reflect a reciprocal relationship between the interview partners that is necessary for some experiences to be communicable. It bears noting that certain memories were difficult for my interview partners to bring up because they invoked shame or embarrassment when recalled and narrated, especially if the shared narrative failed to conform to the interlocutors' contemporary sense of themselves and to the norms they had come to embrace as members of the LGBTQ community. These interlocutors were initially uncertain about my anticipated response as a scholar and queer community member, often presuming me to be a progressive activist.[9] Before they would open up, these interview partners required assurance that their stories would not be misunderstood or met with condemnation. Such assurance would likely be ineffective if given in a perfunctory manner by someone who, in their view, failed to understand the moral complexity of their choices and the differences between past and present contexts. (To illustrate, Renata* chose to speak to a man in her age bracket instead of a younger woman.) Sharing some of my own story sometimes eased those concerns.

The expectation of reciprocity, sometimes articulated and other times left unspoken, thus occasionally required me to share my experience to establish my own credentials as someone capable of bearing witness to the testimony the interview partner was offering. I use the terms "testimony" and "witnessing" to emphasize the moral dimension of the personal accounts shared but also to

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8 The name of this anonymous interview partner has been changed, as have the other names. The asterisk next to a name indicates a pseudonym.

9 I did not present as an LGBTQ activist in the formal sense of being affiliated with a particular group or organization, although the very nature of the research project was sometimes taken to mean that the researchers were themselves activists also when no such claim was made by myself or others. A member of our research group was an activist in the formal sense, a circumstance which greatly facilitated contacts with the aforementioned senior support group and which led to a number of interviews.

underscore the speaker's sole authority about their own intimate experiences. Reciprocal witnessing does not mean that my personal account received equal weight or took as much time as my interview partner's account. On the contrary, I kept my self-exposure to a minimum, rhetorically speaking. My objective was to reassure my interview partners that I was listening to their accounts with empathy.

Hearing My Interview Partners

As a literature scholar, I listened to my interview partners with an ear for the narrative patterns they were using but also for ways in which they broke with those patterns. While working on a previous project (Basiuk, *Exposures*), I have come to think of life writing as prosopopoeia, that is, as the fiction of voice, as Paul de Man famously defined autobiography, but also as motivated by the need to include the events from one's life which might not comfortably fit one's adopted narrative model, but which demand to be included. I saw this paradoxical way of narrating as linked to performativity and to what I call the demand for reciprocal witnessing.[10]

When we were applying to have the project funded, I gave a seminar about queer life writing. At that occasion, I suggested that coming-out narratives are premised on the notion that in coming out of the homosexual closet one leaves behind one's shame about being queer. However, I added, even the most emblematic of such narratives often communicate feelings and memories of shame which persist after one's coming out. I was contending that life writing does more than one thing at a time, things that may seem mutually contradictory. Someone asked if any of the writers I was discussing eschewed the coming-out narrative as an inadequate response to the lived experience of being queer. My answer was a qualified no. A narrative framing such as that of a coming-out story dictates in part what is expressed and what is left out, but that is not the whole picture because life writing is often haunted by the persistence in memory of some event, perhaps especially if that event defies the narrator's understanding of it or fails

10 Shoshana Felman cites a student describing a literary text which she has asked her class to read as testimony and to which they were to respond with their own testimony as "the site of my own stammering" (56), thus underscoring the importance of discontinuity and interruption for testimony and witnessing.

to fit into the narrative framing.[11] In the context of queerness, such a past event or the memory of it may threaten to shame the narrator. The decision to confront rather than avoid such an event, to give testimony in this regard, or to become *interested* in it, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick puts it in a famous essay on queer performativity, has the potential to disrupt the narrative framing. Moreover, the contagiousness of shame (Sedgwick 36) makes it likely that such a gesture will provoke the reader's empathy. It thus has a doubly performative function: on the one hand, it reconfigures the narrative framing and, on the other, it draws the reader into what I call reciprocal witnessing because the reader's own shame is interpellated by the narrator's display of their past, present, or potential shame.

I was attuned to moments when my interview partners recounted an event from their past in which they addressed, and in some cases failed to address, their shame about being queer. Furthermore, I focus on the related difficulty of communicating life decisions which had been taken in epistemological and discursive contexts different from the present ones, a discrepancy likely to produce a sense of shame in the present. Writing about the hermeneutics implicit in these interviews, I call on the notions of testimony and witnessing, which I see as connected to queer performativity. I also offer comments about why some interviews seemed to work better than others. Reciprocal witnessing was not a feature of all the interviews I discuss here, and it addresses some, but not all difficulties which arose in the interview process.

The Trap of the Rote Account and of the Dissipated Raconteur

Most interviews I conducted were one-on-one; for some, I was joined by a colleague. In retrospect, I found that the presence of more than one interviewer sometimes impeded the interview partner from speaking more personally than they might have otherwise. Except for interviews with professionals, such as sexologists, my colleagues and I expected to hear something about our interlocutors' emotions and their intimate lives; this expectation was occasionally ignored. We also prompted our interview partners beyond generalized, rote accounts, but some would not probe so far. Finally, we tried to place our interlocutors' personal experience in a historical context, which meant in part that we paid attention to

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11 The narrator's betrayal of his teacher, which in effect is also a self-betrayal, at the end of Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* is a well-known example. This closing anecdote threatens to undo the novel's affirmation of its narrator's self-liberating sexual exploration.

the chronology of events and sometimes asked for clarification of factual points. Our efforts to obtain such precise information were sometimes frustrated. In what follows, I underscore difficulties posed by some of the interviews as well as instances in which the communication felt seamless, for example when an interview partner and I agreed on the significance of reciprocal witnessing.

One of the most rote accounts was offered by Anna*, a middle-aged trans* activist who shared her life story in a manner which seemed to follow a coming-out paradigm. Anna* described her teenage forays into cross-dressing in the 1970s, her early attempts to pass, her failed marriage to a woman, offered as the low point of her life, and her post-1989 transition, offered as narrative resolution. Her account was generic, as though it had come from an activist pamphlet.[12]

Another interview partner was Tadeusz*, a gay man of eighty with a long and successful career as a drag queen, a hobby he had pursued while working as a clerk at the offices of an older homosexual lawyer who seemed to provide patronage and functioned as a queer role model. Retired for years, Tadeusz* has continued to perform drag and had appeared in a photo story in a magazine shortly before we sat down for our talk. He had already given other interviews about his life and, unsurprisingly but disappointingly, his account was almost exactly the one that he had given on other occasions. While I did not expect to hear a completely different story, I had hoped for details that were previously unpublished. His account was filled with humor and offered information about how queer men used to socialize, but these details were not new. Like Anna*, Tadeusz* emphasized the positive aspects of his experience and spent less time on obstacles that may have required substantial effort to overcome, elements which might have introduced additional complexity to his colorful life story.[13]

Andrzej* was an interview partner in his late seventies who wrote a gay novel published in the late 2000s, which he dismissed as an artistic failure. He spoke to us as though he were being interviewed for a literary magazine, name-dropping writers and publishers to spice up his account with literary gossip. This account of his professional self seemed almost a protective shield, diverting attention away from personal parts of his life. This was disappointing because he had been one of the few literary figures to have come out as a gay man in his

12 We did not interview anyone who transitioned prior to 1989. See Dębińska for an illuminating discussion of transitioning in state-socialist Poland.

13 The narrative included a dramatic anecdote from the man's wartime childhood that was unrelated to his queer self. I think of that anecdote both as the manifestation of a persisting memory demanding to be expressed and as a detail anchoring his story in something other than his queerness, perhaps to win sympathy from his audience.

advanced years. I asked about this experience and was told that his coming out was overwhelmingly positive, as various editors and publishers he was working with showed their support. However, he would not dwell on his experience of the many years he had stayed in the closet. We spoke briefly about the relief of overcoming the shame over being queer, but he did not expand beyond acknowledging his familiarity with such shameful feelings. His reticence in the interview seemed to reiterate his approach in the novel, which tells the story of a summer love between two young men of different nationalities, and which reads like a fantasy. Neither the novel nor its author's accounts of queerness transcended a straightforward articulation of same-sex attraction. Andrzej*'s reserve might be explained by the historical and discursive context of his formative years. He was well into adulthood by the time the taboos of homosexuality began to lift. Among my interlocutors, men who were a decade or two younger and who grew up among seemingly lighter taboos spoke more freely about their past. Those born in the 1930s and early 1940s, like Andrzej*, had come of age in a world in which same-sex encounters often took place in furtive silence (Basiuk, "Od niepisanej umowy" 37–40).

These accounts were similar in their close adherence to a storyline formed prior to the interview. A certain reluctance to address motivations and emotions was an aspect of all three, apparently stemming from the wish to maintain a demarcation between the subjects' public personae (trans* activist, drag queen, openly gay writer) and their private selves. Although all three interview partners had called this demarcation into question when they publicly professed their queer subjectivity—and thus declared that the personal was political—a determined emphasis on their public personae seemed to obscure their individual selves.

The neat organization of these three accounts stood in sharp contrast to an interview with Jurek*, a man who was describing the events of his life out of chronological order and whose memory did not always seem trustworthy because his account seemed inconsistent and occasionally jarred with information obtained from other sources. For example, Jurek* described his two long stays in the USSR, where he was friends with local gay activists, but it was difficult to understand when these events took place, which complicated our team's understanding of the temporal relationships between Soviet and Polish gay rights activism. At another moment this interview partner referred to the contact he maintained with an important Polish activist after this man defected to the West in the second half of the 1980s. Jurek* seemed to have information about this man which no one else possessed but when I probed for more, he simply pivoted the conversation. (He seemed to realize he had made a mistake.) In the end, I was left with a tangled sense of Jurek*'s account. The interview exemplified the issue of factual

credibility in personal testimony. My interview partner was deemed to be credible when he was recounting his personal experience, for example, when he explained how participating in the youth movement enabled him to travel outside his small town to make friends and meet prospective lovers, or when he described broadly the views of his gay activist friends in Soviet Ukraine. But our uncertainty about the specific details he shared left us with open questions about developments of significant interest, including his passing assertion that women took part in the fledgling gay rights movement in Warsaw in the late 1980s. Their alleged participation may have been one of the very first such occurrences, and so to learn more about these lesbian activists and their identities would be indispensable to an authentic understanding of social queer development in Poland.

Understanding Historical Differences—The Marriage Compulsion

Establishing the boundaries of factual detail is a challenge. Another challenge is appreciating the difference made by the sweeping historical change which has occurred since the 1970s. For example, coming out of the closet was neither common nor was the phrase itself common verbiage prior to the late 1960s (Delany 24–25). This was also true of Poland in the 1970s, where a sexual revolution had not yet taken place: the politically tumultuous year of 1968 was marked by student protests and the government's brutal response to them, as well as anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic rhetoric, but none of the countercultural phenomena of that time provoked a mainstream debate about sexual mores (Garsztecki 184). Distant echoes of developments in the West concerning sexual minorities received coverage in the Polish press, including in a popular sex advice column written by the sexologist Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz (Kościańska , "Treatment" 74 ff.), but their impact was limited and gradual. Several interview partners claimed that their parents were aware of their same-sex liaisons but that they were never discussed. As a colleague in the CRUSEV project has noted, without a popular concept of coming out and given that the very term homosexuality was taboo, telling your parents you were queer was both inappropriate and unthinkable (Burszta, "Do czego się" 14–15, 18). By contrast, the contemporary context of greater social and rhetorical openness in which our interview partners were describing their intimate lives differed significantly from the past which they were recalling, as they were reaching back across four or five decades.

Some very intriguing interviews resulted from partners searching for ways in which to express the epistemological and discursive differences between the

1970s and the present. Several brought up the relatively common experience of marrying a person of the opposite sex while harboring same-sex desires. Interview partners whose life trajectory included a short-lived marriage were able to dismiss it as relatively unimportant chapters in their lives. (This strategy was used by Anna*.) But those who spent many years in a marriage found it difficult to gloss over it. They contended that their marrying was dictated by the very strong familial and societal expectation that one should marry at an early age. Such imperative expectation may be difficult to fathom in today's context, where casual romantic and sexual relationships are more common. Additionally, today there is a more readily available language to speak about queer life. This language emphasizes the courage needed to make what are deemed morally right choices but pays less attention to the dilemmas that provide the context for what are deemed morally wrong ones. In the contemporary discursive framing, marrying someone of the opposite gender while harboring same-sex desires may easily be dismissed as conformist surrender to social shaming.

Two interlocutors, Renata* and Jan*, both in their sixties, struggled to voice their experience under this framing but were determined to encapsulate it with words. Both had divorced a number of years ago to pursue same-sex relationships but each regarded marriage as an important part of their life. Both remained married for about twenty years. Jan* had been an only child. His dominating father was a professionally and socially successful man who wrote police dramas for state television in addition to having a career as a public servant. His mother was the more self-effacing parent. Jan* partly escaped their supervision by going to college in another city. He recalled his acute awareness of his same-sex attraction when he would observe students from East Germany taking showers and walking in the nude. He also befriended a female classmate, whom he initially disliked but later married before graduation, aware that his parents expected him to. Although Jan's* parents occasionally entertained friends who were suspected or known to be homosexual, he was too afraid to broach his same-sex desires with them.

Jan*'s decision to marry reveals the intensity of pressure from the family of origin. In his eyes, his father's openness to homosexual friends did not extend to him. His father's perfunctory comments about homosexuals reflected the widespread homophobia of the day, which resembled indifference to the fate of queers more than it did explicit hatred. Jan* surmised that his father would reject his homosexuality had he learned of it. While his father's intentions remained untested, they dictated Jan*'s fate for a number of years. His unwillingness to risk separation from his family of origin was reinforced by very practical considerations. Jan*'s well-to-do parents would help him in practical and financial ways if he started his own family. Such an offer was not unusual; it did not necessarily

indicate suspicion about the young man's sexual preference. When Jan* married his college girlfriend, his parents fulfilled their promise by finding him an apartment that a friend of theirs was vacating while away on a diplomatic mission. They subsequently helped the young couple settle in Warsaw and leveraged their connections to help their son find a job.

These practical benefits loomed large in state socialism. Finding an apartment in a big city was a challenge and it was doubly difficult in Warsaw, where there was a severe housing shortage which the authorities mitigated by discouraging newcomers. A career in foreign trade allowed Jan* to travel abroad, bringing in significant additional income because of the difference between official and black-market currency rates. Most families would not have been able to provide their children with comparable advantages, but many people in state socialism routinely depended on personal connections for commodities and necessities. The unofficial circulation of goods, services, and benefits strengthened the dependence on one's relatives in a way which may be difficult to fathom in today's environment, which is premised more apparently on money than on the socialist "economics of shortage."[14]

These pragmatic considerations are only part of the story. So is the social taboo of homosexuality, reinforced by a conservative family model to which being married and raising children were central. Many who harbored same-sex desires could not imagine a life trajectory that did not include these elements. My interview partner was not being simply opportunistic when he married his girlfriend, but rather was unable to live his life as a gay man because the social context of the 1970s did not leave room for this choice except in few and narrow social niches, and only to the most determined individuals. Remaining single and being queer were not in the repertoire of reputable biographical possibilities.

This last point is illustrated by the interview with Renata*, who met her future husband in group therapy, which she joined after ending an affair with a female schoolmate triggered a mental breakdown. Renata* and her girlfriend saw their love as aberrant and chose different colleges to intentionally separate themselves. At the time, it did not occur to Renata* that she could cultivate a romantic relationship with another woman. Like other interview partners who had been

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14 The term was coined by János Kornai. In the real socialist economy, characterized by commodity shortages, scarce goods assumed some of the functions of currency, that is, they became exchangeable for other scarce goods. Access to these goods was more advantageous than having money because money on its own did not guarantee that one could purchase these commodities. My point is that that this kind of economic environment deepened one's dependence on familial and other informal networks, since they often provided the coveted access. By contrast, John D'Emilio shows that market capitalism has enabled the emergence of gay identity because life's necessities could be obtained from the marketplace rather than from one's kinship group.

married, she described her inability at the time to imagine an openly queer life. The circumstances in which she met her future husband meant that he knew about her past same-sex partner. However, as lesbianism was barely discussed at the time—in contrast to the more vilified male homosexuality—the events from her past did not present an obstacle to the couple's eventual marriage. She was relieved that her past affair would not surface unexpectedly because her husband already knew about it.

Renata*'s married life seemed happy to the outsider—she and her husband raised two sons and she had been looked after—but the marriage felt suffocating. In her words, she was not living her own life. Two decades into the marriage, after her children had grown, she had a one-night stand with another married woman which resparked her same-sex desires and eventually unraveled in a divorce. After a series of affairs with women she was meeting at one of the newly opened gay-and-lesbian bars, she settled into a relationship with a younger partner. She has remained on friendly terms with her former husband, who has not remarried, and her sons are aware of her lover but refuse to discuss her homosexuality.

Jan*'s marriage ran a similar course. He and his wife raised an adopted son, even as he remained attracted to men. When the son had grown up, Jan* began to visit cruising spots only to watch other men have sex, until a later trip to France, when he had sex with a man at a cruising spot. Back in Poland, he struck up an affair with a man. His wife found out about the affair, then divorced him. To this day, she has not forgiven Jan* for what she considers his betrayal and for having misled her about his sexuality during their marriage. Once divorced, Jan* volunteered his translation services to a new gay magazine and eventually met his present partner.

The changes in the lives of these two interview partners as they moved from their stifling twenty year-long marriages coincided with a rapid growth in LGBTQ visibility in Poland in the early 1990s and were enabled by this social and discursive transformation. By then, Renata* could meet other women in a new bar for lesbians and gay men, the kind of institution that simply had not existed earlier. Jan* became enthused that a Polish gay magazine was now sold at newspaper stands; he had known such magazines from his travels abroad, but until then not at home. (Previously, there had been Polish gay samizdat pamphlets with limited circulation.) Jan* deemed the new magazine important and volunteered for it as translator. This involvement was his symbolic entry into the newfound gay community, the likes of which had not existed at the time of his marriage.

Gay and lesbian bars, magazines addressed to LGBTQ readers, widespread grassroot organizing, and representations of queerness in popular culture—all of them consequences of a regime change—reconfigured social understandings of same-sex desire not only for the straight majority but also for queer individuals

themselves. Renata* and Jan* strove to elucidate the change which had occurred in society and in themselves, risking the possibility that narrating the story of their marriages would expose them to accusations of hypocrisy, internalized homophobia, and opportunistic self-delusion. In listening to their accounts, I had the sense that they were walking through an experience which not only had been painful in the first place but threatened to dishonor them if interpreted without regard to historical context. They seemed aware of this risk, for example, Renata* specifically asked to speak to a middle-aged researcher rather than to a younger female graduate student because she was concerned that a young person might not understand what she wished to say.

Understanding Historical Differences—Lesbian Invisibility, Gender Bias, Seduction Theory

By contrast, some interlocutors unselfconsciously voiced assumptions about homosexuality and gender which seemed holdovers from a bygone era. Stefan* described parties at private apartments in the 1970s, when he was in his twenties and thirties, and where he and his partner met other homosexual men. These parties were hosted by queer men as well as by women, including Maria Fołtyn, a famous opera singer and director. When I asked him about the possible presence of lesbians at such gatherings, he seemed surprised by the question. He could not recall any lesbians being present but perhaps more significantly, the question had not occurred to him. His surprise may tell us that the subversion of lesbian subjectivity in 1970s Poland persists, to some degree, today. The point is reiterated with Renata*'s youthful assumption that (other) lesbians did not exist and with her sons' contemporary refusal to acknowledge her gayness.[15]

Stefan* expressed his disapproval of effeminate men and of cross-dressing men as politically damaging, in addition to finding such behavior personally distasteful. The same sentiment was reiterated by two other men in separate interviews. This was surprising in the sense that all three were authors who have contributed to gay rights activism in various ways, but unsurprising in the sense that these men were echoing the gay movement's earlier, exclusionary position on drag queens and male effeminacy.

Roman*, another male interview partner, made a surprising claim when he attributed his same-sex preference to having been repeatedly fondled as a young boy by an older brother with whom he was sleeping in one bed. As a teenager,

15 For a discussion of lesbian unintelligibility see Staroszczyk.

Roman* hoped to meet a girl at a carnival but ran into two men in a restroom, perhaps a cruising spot, who struck up a conversation with him and whom he told he was hoping to pick up a girl. One of the men orally pleasured Roman* while the other talked to him about girls. Encouraged by this encounter, the teenager returned to the carnival area, where he met a young soldier with whom he had oral sex more than once and with whom he began discussing his feelings and learning about other cruising spots. He returned again and again to the park where the carnival had been, which to this day remains a cruising area. Roman*'s subsequent life story was a series of affairs and relationships with men. He was one of the young men visiting Michel Foucault's apartment in Warsaw in the late 1950s (although he never met Foucault), he was the occasional lover of an enterprising older man who was suddenly arrested and never heard from again, and at one point, he was a suspect in a widely publicized murder case of a high-ranking homosexual officer whose apartment he had indeed visited. (The case may have prompted closer surveillance of homosexual men.) He spent time in the US, where his Polish boyfriend began sex work. They subsequently broke up and Roman* found other gay partners, including a wealthy medical doctor who hosted gay parties at his home. He also described encountering a sexual orgy in the men's room of a New York City subway station. Roman* returned to Poland with a stack of hard currency and a fancy car with which he seduced men. He had a long-lasting relationship with a man, now a farmer, whom he left for a series of younger lovers but to whom he remains devoted. Roman* is godfather to the child of another former lover, with whom he has remained friends after the man married and started a family. When I interviewed Roman* in his elegant apartment (one of his two homes), he was accompanied by a much younger lover. Nowhere in his account or in his surroundings could I see any trace of heterosexual desire.

And yet, this adventurous gay man thought that, had he not been seduced by his brother when he was a child, he might have turned out bisexual or even straight. Roman* seemed to resent his brother for making him gay. His anger was abetted by the fact that his brother, now married with children, seemed to have forgotten these childhood interactions even as my interlocutor suspected him of furtively having sex with men after marrying. The complaint was as much about the brother's hypocrisy as it was about his youthful advances. Nonetheless, Roman*'s claim that he had been pushed into homosexuality was astonishing in the context of his biography, which did not substantiate it. I sympathized with his anger at having been harassed sexually and with his frustration at his brother's perceived hypocrisy, but I also realized that he was relying on the debunked psychological concept that homosexuality resulted from same-sex seduction at an early age. Roman* did not explicitly mention this theory, but he implicitly called upon it as though it were common sense, as indeed it had been for the generation

of his parents and perhaps his own. At this juncture in the interview, Roman* seemed caught between an older, homophobic discourse about homosexuality and the more contemporary, affirmative language with which he was describing his life as a gay man. His words seemingly bespoke envy of his brother's ostensibly heterosexual life, although Roman* did not explicitly acknowledge such feelings. This impression resulted from his invocation of a psychological doctrine that cast homosexuality as affliction. It seemed that an indirect acknowledgment of residual shame about being queer had manifested itself, testifying to the effectiveness of social stigma. I was impressed that Roman* had been able to cast off such feelings in so many areas of his life.

Leaving the apartment, I glimpsed a political sticker in support of the right-wing party currently in power glued to a coat hanger in the hallway. Roman* saw me look at it and asked about my political views. I was too tired to plunge deep into this conversation, as it was unrelated to the interview which had been focused on the past. The incident made me think, however, about those who may have turned down an invitation to be interviewed because they expected to disagree with the research team's presumed views about sexuality and politics.

Interview with a Self-Proclaimed Conservative Queer Man

In one instance, an interlocutor preceded his interview by voicing his right-wing sympathies and questioning the project's validity on political and methodological grounds. Piotr*'s tirade was loud and long, and before turning on the voice recorder my colleague and I were asked to promise that we would not use his words to illustrate and affirm a contemporary gay identity. Piotr* was a retired physics professor who became an expert in the energy sector. We were able to contact him due to connections he had made through his short-lived engagement with LGBTQ activism.

Piotr* had lived his life as a single man, a choice inspired by his desire to remain intellectually and spiritually independent. He treasured the time and freedom that being alone offered him using them reading and learning. At the same time, he was painfully aware of his attraction to teenage boys, on which he has not acted but which colored his self-perception and influenced some of the most important decisions in his life. He gave up his ambition to become a schoolteacher when he understood that the temptation would be too strong. He became an academic instead, working at a major university to avoid the urge to make advances towards teenage boys, but in his middle age he fell in love with his neighbors'

son, whom he had been home schooling. He experienced intense internal turmoil and was helped by a straight woman friend who put him in touch with an LGBTQ group, where he received moral support and psychological advice. He then left the university and found a better paid position in a government agency.

Contrary to my expectation, Piotr* welcomed the advent of lesbian and gay rights but stopped short of supporting gay marriage and child-rearing. He was a self-described social conservative but rejected the label of right-wing radical. Neither was he religious, though he thought that most people needed religion as a moral compass. His main critique of LGBTQ activism was that it confronted people's deep-held beliefs about gender roles, sexual morality, and family values. He believed that social and cultural change took patient effort and required time. Radical demands were pointless shortcuts at best and likely regrettable provocations, much like ostentatious displays of queerness, such as crossdressing, which risked provoking backlash.

There was a whiff of pessimistic elitism to Piotr*'s position in the sense that he did not trust people to change their views simply because they were given good reason. He never came out to his long-dead parents, convinced that they could not possibly grasp the concept of homosexuality because they lacked education. He thought of them as honest and well-intentioned people who would never change their minds about certain things. These parental figures seemed to stand in for the way he saw society. Nonetheless, change was theoretically possible. When this man moved to a big city to enroll at the university, he became friends with some male ballet dancers and regularly spent time with them and others working at the theater. Although most of these acquaintances were straight, he was struck by their openness about homosexuality. Their liberal, matter-of-fact treatment of sexual liaisons between men became for Piotr* a model of how society at large could become more open-minded if broader sexual diversity was introduced to everyone at an early age in an appropriately neutral manner, as a simple fact of life rather than sensationalist gossip, extravagant rights claims, or jarring displays of difference.

Piotr* was an intellectually rigorous interlocutor. His arguments were clear and to the point. However, some of his well-reasoned views seemed overdetermined, obliquely colored by his personal dilemma. For example, his choice to live alone seemed an answer to his illicit attraction to young boys, which he rejected as immoral. These repudiated desires were nonetheless indulged in, as he illustrated with his enthusiasm for a French novel about love between schoolboys and with an account of his long-lasting, chaste friendship with a much younger

ballet dancer.[16] Likewise, his reluctance to come out to more than a handful of people seemed affected by the complicated nature of his personal closet. He lamented that some of his relatives failed to acknowledge his homosexuality, believing that they knew about it even though he never came out to them. By contrast, he insisted that no one at the university knew he was gay even though he had once run into a colleague in a cruising spot. I asked if he thought his colleagues and relatives were perhaps simply being discreet, respectful of his reticence, but the question seemed to strike a nerve and Piotr* switched topics.

I thought of this interview partner as painstakingly negotiating the threat of social stigma and his deeply felt ethical apprehension about his illicit desires. Like some other interlocutors, Piotr* was engaging with his queer shame by addressing it and explaining it as best he could. In retrospect, his angry opening tirade tested our reaction to his explicit warning that his account would not conform to a model gay narrative, while implicitly demanding that we adopt the non-judgmental tenet of reciprocal witnessing to hear him out. While Piotr* did not expect that we would share our stories with him, he did require some rhetorical and gestural reassurance that we were not judging him and that we were prepared to hear his account which, in his own assessment, did not meet the standards of a contemporary model gay identity.

Piotr's* political views were difficult to disentangle from his complicated coming out. His friendships with people at the theater and his enthusiasm for a novel about love between schoolboys refuged him from the normative straight world and also from a model gay trajectory in which one celebrates their gayness. At these junctures, his account was a throwback to an earlier era in which homosexuality functioned like a secret fraternity rather than as a political project premised on public visibility and a demand for equal rights. But in praising the easygoing interactions among straights and queers in his theater circle he was also proposing an alternative political project premised on mutual respect between the queer minority and the straight majority rather than on confrontation and dissent. This project was at the core of his professed conservatism.

More than any other, the interview with Piotr* made me wonder why potential interlocutors may have turned down the invitation to speak to us. It also made me aware of just how exceptional our self-selected sample of interview partners was. A remarkable quality which distinguished a significant number of them was their willingness to tackle potentially shaming life experiences and memories and negotiate them in a mode which Sedgwick has called queer performativity. In consenting to the interviews, these partners must have counted—one can only

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16 For a discussion of Henry de Montherlant's novel *Boys* and its place in this interview see Basiuk "One's Younger Self" 28–29.

surmise—on encountering interviewers who would treat them with reciprocal respect and strive to understand the experience being conveyed. Certainly, the testimonies which they gave demanded, and merited, such witnessing.

Reciprocal Witnessing Acknowledged By Interview Partner

Without presuming to know my partners' experience of being interviewed, I can say that I came to appreciate the central importance of reciprocal witnessing in the three years during which the interviews were conducted. Serendipitously, the idea of witnessing came up in one of the very last ones. Adam* was a sixty-year-old man who led an unusually privileged life. He grew up in a big city, in a progressive and well-to-do family, attended prestigious schools, and spent time in the West through various educational programs. He was a professional film critic and a TV personality. While our conversation at first focused on a more distant past, his very public coming out in the late 2000s inevitably came up. He described the events which led up to it, including a book-length interview with his straight friend and TV co-host of many years, an older film critic who had died before the book was published. As Adam* was completing the manuscript, he realized that his authored passages were noticeably more constricted than those of his late friend because he had been avoiding the subject of his homosexuality. Although he was in a long-term relationship with a man and had come out to family and friends, including to his late co-author, he had not broached the subject in his public appearances or his writing. Working on the manuscript made him reconsider his silence.

Asked to pen an introduction to his partner's gay-themed novel, Adam* disclosed in it his relationship with the book's author. This admission was immediately picked up by a celebrity gossip website and led to a front-page interview in a popular tabloid. Adam* described at length the empowering effect of his public coming out. On numerous occasions he was stopped in the street and congratulated for his courage, usually by straight men (including some opposed to gay rights). But the change which impressed him most was that he was finding it much easier to converse with people, who could tell that he was being frank with them. His job includes conducting interviews, moderating panel discussions, and addressing live audiences. He reported that these occasions became livelier as people spoke to him more candidly than before, as if reciprocating his candidness. In my interlocutor's mind, this dynamic, which I call reciprocal witnessing,

completed the cycle of giving testimony to which he was challenged by the manuscript which he co-authored with his late colleague.

Conclusion

Adam* recognized the importance of reciprocal witnessing as he was rereading and revising his co-authored text. He subsequently confirmed this recognition in multiple spoken exchanges. My trajectory was similar: I first identified reciprocal witnessing as one of the rhetorical strategies in gay men's life writing and argued for its conceptual and affective affinity to what Sedgwick has called queer performativity. I then recognized reciprocal witnessing in numerous interviews in which my partners engaged with actual or potentially shaming experiences and memories by showing an interest in them instead of avoiding them. In doing so, they were forging a reciprocal relationship of witnessing with the interviewer or interviewers, counting on a sympathetic person occasionally willing to share about their own life, as if to confirm that they were not being judged for their words.

I have been struck by the number of times that I was called upon to provide information about myself or felt compelled to do so by some turn in the conversation.[17] While contributing information about oneself may not be the most orthodox way to conduct oral history interviews and while I strove to contain these self-focused excursions to brief remarks, and to only offer them when they were expected, they seemed appropriate to bring up when discussing queer lives. The candidness for which I was asking required me to be equally forthcoming, especially when asked to do so. The times my narrators were struggling to find the right words to express their experience, when they were communicating across the barriers of historical change and of the different discursive regimes available then and now to address their dilemmas, and when they risked being shamed in the process, required a moral and epistemological stance of reciprocal witnessing. When successful, this gesture opened a performative space in which the narrators were reassured that their testimony was welcome, and which allowed them to experiment with their discursive strategies in the hope of greatest possible clarity.

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17 Yew compares oral history interviews to the interaction between psychiatrist and analysand, for example, comparing oral history to case study (35) and notes that "oral historians may sense the need to talk briefly about their own experience" (37).

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Sounds of Democracy: The Interview as an Instrument of Heuristic Attention to Discursive Voices

Abstract: Against the backdrop of general considerations of the interview as a genre, the paper discusses under which theoretical conditions interviews are suitable instruments for discourse analysis. With a special interest in questions of the linguistic constitution of shared knowledge in discourse, the authors outline the discourse-linguistic status of interviews in a systematic way. Based on a discourse-analytical characterization of the genre of the interview, the preliminary assumptions of the present paper are tested through a pilot study which deals with the question of the contemporary state of democracy. This explorative European interview project documents and demonstrates the possibilities of a computer-assisted interpretation of the discursivity of interviews. The paper thus makes a fundamental contribution to the further exploration of discourse-linguistic methods, to discussions about the current state of democracy, as well as to reflections on the interview as a complex research genre in its interdisciplinary dimensions, including digital-humanities methods.

Keywords: discourse linguistics, digital humanities, corpus pragmatics, experience

1 Democracy through the Looking Glass of the Interview

Interviews are equally prevalent in popular and high culture, they are also widely used as a method for generating data in scholarship, and they are an instrument for tapping into and staging experience. As a genre of multilogical communication, the interview is situated at the interface of a variety of fields. Celebrities get interviewed as well as randomly selected people from everyday life; political decisions and trivial personal experiences can become the content of interviews. In light of this, it is not surprising that the interview itself has repeatedly become an object of scholarly interest, for example in studies on qualitative interviews (Misoch) and especially in qualitative social research (Mayer; Nohl). Works in

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political science (Mosley) and general survey handbooks in interview research (Gubrium et al.) are also worth mentioning here. It is also not uncommon to see interviews as important supplements to other methods of knowledge acquisition, such as studies of publications in a given field (Mosley 3). In addition to the scholarly interest in the interview, journalistic works on the interview are also a relevant object of research, especially in the interface area of knowledge development, knowledge transfer, and entertainment; we refer here, for example, to Müller-Dofel (v), who considers the interview to be central to everyday journalistic life.

Our paper adds a linguistic perspective to the areas of interest listed above that focus on the interview. The interview is an important and widespread procedure of linguistic field studies, especially in sociolinguistics (Meyerhoff et al.). In linguistics, interviews are considered an appropriate way to gain insights into social practices; they can be used as data sources (Dannerer). While Briggs already dedicates a detailed handbook chapter to sociolinguistic interviews, the author—apart from expressing a fascination for the research genre—clearly identifies a desideratum: “Interviewing constitutes one of the most fascinating and most poorly investigated realms of sociolinguistic inquiry” (1052). He sees one reason for the sociolinguistic relevance of the interview in “its widespread use as a means of obtaining information” (1052). Another linguistic field that has dealt with the interview in depth is interactional linguistics. We refer here to a paper by Deppermann, to which we will return. Last but not least, questions of a standardized transcription of interview data are relevant in the context of the digital provision of research data, and this is not only a relevant aspect for linguistics. We here refer to the *CLARIN Hands-on Tutorial on Transcribing Interview Data* (Heuvel and Draxler).

Despite the broad range of elaborated theories and their subject-specific methodological operationalizations, not least in linguistics, it should be pointed out once again, however, that the interview is always also a genre of everyday life and non-scientific communication practice. It is the everyday nature of the interview that presumably makes the interview so successful for research because informants do not encounter an unfamiliar scholarly world when being interviewed, but rather a genre that is also familiar outside of scholarship. The interview offers a low threshold and allows direct contact between a scholarly and non-scholarly sphere. We also use this characteristic in an explorative study delineated in this article.

We are particularly interested in the interview as a heuristic with which to access voices in discourse. On the one hand, this is a matter of individual positions, but on the other, this also concerns their social, discursively formed, and

discourse-shaping signature. We discuss this aspect in more detail in part 1.3. The focus of our paper lies on perceptions of contemporary democracies from a European perspective. We will also explain this in more detail. But beforehand, let us consider further the interview as a genre and note two characteristics that are relevant to its discourse-analytical use.

First, interviews as products share a functional commonality that bears consideration: the perception of statements in an interview should always be understood as an effect of recontextualization. This can already be seen in the fact that journalistic interviews usually require authorization because they work with interview material, they select passages and assemble them. Although the scholarly interview cannot handle its data this freely, the transformation of what is said into the status of data always already results from a recontextualization that deviates from the original context of speech. One example is the highly extensive US interview project *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project* of the years 1936 to 1938, which is accessible today on the website of the Library of Congress. This, like any scholarly generation of interview data and its interpretive perception—which, moreover, is anything but stable over decades given shifting research paradigms—fundamentally dislocates the supposed immediacy of what is said in the interviews to a level of (the ongoing possibility of) recontextualization. In addition, *Born in Slavery* is also complemented by 500 black-and-white photographs. Compared to the situation of a direct conversation, one soon realizes how remote the interview as a published or medially processed genre is; the multimodal design of interviews as a product shows this well, especially also in the context of popular culture. In this regard, it does not matter whether a published interview is based on transcripts or audio-visual material. There is the moment of speech in an interview situation and there is the interview as a product, which is in itself characterized by a shift in context. For our own research interest, this means approaching any idea of the immediacy of the interview—independently of questions concerning the observer paradox—with utmost restraint. It is evident that the aspect of recontextualization also requires special ethical attention.

Second, interviews share a general characteristic that should be pointed out: the focus in an interview lies on someone's pre-existing knowledge and previous experience, on decisions interviewees already made, something known to them, or anything about them which is not yet known but can be marketed as capital in economies of attention. By making an interviewee the informant of an authority of inquiry, the interview can or aims to elicit information and, in the best case, gains insight into a subject matter that is always considered publicly relevant, interesting, or even merely entertaining. In this respect, the interview, qua genre,

asserts the relevance of its contents and, as reconstructed context, does not shy away from assigning general meaning to individual knowledge.

These two aspects—the fact of recontextualization and the public interest in what should be or already is individually known—should not be overlooked. For a reflective scholarly use of the interview, this results in the necessity for disclosing forms and degrees of recontextualization and reflecting the question of why one aims to know what others know or think, feel, and carry with them. If we understand the interview as process, as a deliberate and disclosable intervention in the integrity of individual knowledge and experience, and if we understand the interview as product, as a genre of the recontextualization of knowledge, of experience, etc., then we have also captured two fundamental starting points for a discourse-analytical interest in the interview: the interview operates at the intersection of the individual and the social. This applies to both the practice of interviewing and the resulting product, and it is what makes the interview so interesting as a method and object of discourse analysis. Within a discourse-linguistic context, it is therefore surprising that not many more interviews are conducted to focus on the subject-society interface. We propose to do exactly that.

Third, our interest in the interview in discourse points to yet another characteristic of the genre: to experience as a discourse-analytical object. Focusing on this specific aspect of the interview implies that expectations of authenticity can or should be deconstructed. At first glance, the promise of the interview to document, make accessible, or sell individual experiences seems to stand in the way of considering the interview in the purview of discourse analysis. While Roth already argues for a consideration of interpersonal realizations of discourse, the vast majority of linguistic work in discourse analysis is a-personal, which means it is interested in collective mediatizations of language. Discourse analysis itself is precisely not geared toward the analysis of individual phenomena but is interested in social rules and products of what can be said and what is said. For discourse analysis, then, what is the role of the interview as a genre that anticipates and enacts the personal? The answer results from a deconstruction of the concept of experience.

When interviews are related to experience, this precisely does not mean that individual informants or interviewees provide insight into their personalities. On the contrary, the genre of the interview socializes experience. We could also say the form discursivizes it. And this is not only the case through the recontextualization it always represents, but through the focus on experience itself. This may seem paradoxical at first glance, but only as long as we conceptualize experience outside or beyond discourse. However, this is not an adequate approach. This is a position we also take with reference to Joan W. Scott, who in her text "The

Evidence of Experience" fundamentally questions the personal origin of experience. The starting point of Scott's reflections is autobiographical writing as an approach to experiences otherwise little considered in normative history, "dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mention in convention"; individual stories "have provided evidence for a world of alternative values and practices whose existence gives the lie to hegemonic constructions of social worlds" (776). Scott's starting point is the assumption that such a historiography "of difference" is considered unquestionable when it refers to individual experience (773). This is about something that is also central to any interview, which motivates it, and seems to justify it: "documenting the experience of others" (776). After all, interviews, not least in scholarly varieties, are always based on an assumption of the truth of individual experience: "what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through?" (777). But those who argue this way take "as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference" (777). This is exactly where Scott intervenes and fundamentally questions the evidence of experience as the source of a position or statement. This involves "[q]uestions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured—about language (or discourse) and history" (777). For Scott, experience is "a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings)"; and it is precisely here that the interface between the concept of experience and discourse becomes apparent: "Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual" (793). In other words, experience is as much a discursively-linguistically produced state of affairs, and thus social, as it is supposedly individually anchored. This is the very reason why interviews, with their reference to experience, are discourse-analytically challenging and interesting. They are located at interfaces, in the transitional area between the individual and the social. They are experiential, and experience is anything but prior evidence. Junker also points out, with reference to Scott, that the point must be to consider lived experience in the context of discursive structures (155). Coming back to the interview, it is precisely the seemingly individual reference to experience that arouses discourse-analytical interest. This is all the more pertinent because the interview recontextualizes discursive voices into wider discourses.

This brings us to the expectation that interviews provide authentic insights into the evidence of individual experience. The promise of authenticity has to do with the assumption, already grounded etymologically, that the interview presupposes the situation of an encounter (Misoch 13). Interviews seem to bring scholarly work in particular into an encounter with its objects. However, just as

experience itself does not stand outside of discourses, the assumption of an immediacy of authenticity (Schwidlinski) and the associated expectation of authenticity from the interview, while obvious and above all genre-justifying, is misleading. Both the interview situation as such and the interview as a product are only authentic in a performative way.

Thus, the interview is a genre that is as familiar to everyday life as it is thought-provoking from a discourse-analytical point of view. However, we do not want to merely continue to survey the interview here in terms of discourse analysis, but to actually use it as a research tool. Our research question is initially quite independent of the genre of the interview: what does democracy sound like? But why is this very question at the center of our considerations? We will go into this in more detail, but already point out here that we have a scholarly interest in what Shalini Randeria titles *Democracy in Question* in her internationally acclaimed podcast: an internationally apparent crisis of democracy and the corresponding democratic self-image of societies (Hoppmann). In this context, numerous opportunities arise to gather important insights into citizens' attitudes toward democracy. Interviews are one tool in this process. It is our intention to document attitudes that European citizens have about the condition of democracy through the looking glass of the interview. As stated, our paper is no more than an exploratory study, but we see it as a pilot project. We do not ask directly about attitudes toward democracy but take a detour in order to question from the outset the quasi-documentary character of the interview as a product: we do not ask about attitudes but about the Sounds of Democracy (Randeria, *Sounds of Democracy*).

Against the backdrop of our previous considerations, this means making a clearly recognizable recontextualization methodologically transparent through a methodical move, because the sound of democracy is not an immediate experience but a metaphorical translation which we examine in interview products. We are indeed interested in what is individually known, believed, or considered to be correct. What is central to our investigation, however, is the patterned, discursive trace in the interview data as well as the deconstruction of authenticity, which we intend to implement via the detour of a metaphorical translation. In a broader framework of democracy research, we want to call this research a heuristic attention to discursive voices.

Let us now consider in more detail how democracy, but also sound, is talked about and what status the interview has in discourse linguistics. We then present the methods of our survey and our data as well as document and discuss the results of the pilot study.

1.1 Speaking about Democracy

Democracy is based on values like equal participation, representation, and accountability. Therefore, language and communication are fundamental aspects of a democratic public, as they shape the way we express ourselves, interact with others, negotiate meaning, and thus construct the social and political world around us. Democratic modes of governing rely on the language-bound capability to utter dissensus, negotiate common grounds, and generally make oneself heard. Speaking up for one's own interests, representing groups, electing spokespersons—all these important democratic micro-practices shape the political culture in democracies. It is arguably no coincidence that many democratic institutions are metaphorically framed with labels from the source domain of speaking:[1] the word parliament for instance derives from the French verb *parler* (to speak) and denotes an indispensable cornerstone of modern democratic governing. Speaking in public forums, exchanging arguments, and investing words with meaning—these inherently political linguistic practices are institutionalized in democracies and shape public discourse.

The concept of *voice* is another case in point. As Laura Kunreuther remarks: "Democracy is commonly associated with various forms of voicing" including "shouting protesters," "political speeches," or even "heated debates in teashops" (1). Originating from the capacity to speak and thus marking a commonly shared human competence, voice can also be regarded as an implicit claim: every individual voice shall be heard, picked up by the elected representatives, and taken into account. Liberal democracy pays tribute to this idea by inscribing equal political rights into the principle of constitutional liberalism: regardless of individual properties like gender, race, class, or faith, every citizen has one vote, the right to protest and freely express their opinion. Voice is therefore not confined to elections and "never synonymous with simply *opposing power*," as Ivan Krastev remarks, drawing on Albert O. Hirschman's famous text on exit, voice, and loyalty (23). Hirschman understands *voice* as the opposite of *exit* which would mean dismissing the organization or institution in question altogether, leaving it to itself. Therefore, "voice-led activism is constructive by its very

1 "The two domains that participate in conceptual metaphors have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain. […] The target domain is the domain we try to understand through the use of the source domain" (Kovecses 4).

nature" as it "assumes a readiness to take responsibility for what one suggests". In other words, "it assumes the responsibility to be the power" (Krastev 23).[2]

Voice is also an integral concept of political science preoccupied with democracy; Marlies Glasius for instance attributes great value to the concept. In her theoretical framework of authoritarian practices, she sees sabotaging voice as an intentional restriction of democracy—an authoritarian practice aimed at confining accountability by the elected representative to the democratic forum (517). Beyond deliberate restrictions of accountability, democracy has been thought of as an ideal to be striven for and never fully achieved, an "unrealized dream" as Wendy Brown puts it in an interview with the Institute for New Economic Thinking (5:34–5:38). It is produced in the many polyphonic struggles about its very meaning—as soon as one single idea of the *true* meaning of democracy gains hegemony, the democratic prerequisites of an open (i.e., democratic) discourse are no longer given. From a Foucauldian point of view, democracy could be conceptualized as a specific set of rules implemented in the discursive order of a given society—a guiding principle or *rule of the game* concerning the ways in which the "production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed" (Foucault 52). Speaking about democracy, we argue, shapes the possible concepts of democracy and is therefore an integral part of democratic governing.

Also from this perspective, we are interested in the metaphorical conceptualization of recent democracies across Europe. What do they tell us about the current state of democracy, about the way we conceptualize it, and what we take for granted or consider debatable? Which imaginations of democracy are available and ready for uptake at our current point in time and how does this shape the way we (are) govern(ed)? Let us now specify the metaphor of sound as the starting point of our interviews about the state of democracy in different places in Europe.

1.2 Speaking about Sound

The word *sound* is used to describe a variety of phenomena. In the most common sense of ordinary language use it can be defined as "something that is heard" (Encyclopædia Britannica), "something that you can hear or that can be heard"

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2 Although Krastev's point in *Democracy Disrupted* is that contemporary protests offer no solution to neoliberal there-is-no-alternative-politics and can therefore not be seen as inherently constructive anymore, he nevertheless concedes that they remain "powerful manifestations of resistance to the subordination of politics to the market" (75).

(Cambridge Dictionary; also Oxford English Dictionary, OED Online).[3] Thus, in general terms of acoustics it may refer to any sonic facet within the whole spectrum of *sounds* and *noises*, whether they be unsettling or pleasant, sharp or atmospheric. Linguistically, when speaking about sound, we use numerous adjectives like *faint, sweet, soft, joyful, muffled, sharp*, *pleasant, shrill, harsh, complex, gentle, harmonious, orchestral, cheerful* and others (e.g. BNC Consortium) as attributes to describe its specific acoustic or phenomenological qualities. We talk about sound as much in musical terms of timbre and nuances as we think of it in relation to the acoustic ecology—the "sonic environment" (Schafer)—in general, e.g. the calming of a campfire or the noisy background of an urban soundscape.

It is therefore not surprising that sound is commonly intertwined with *experience*, *meaning*, and *atmosphere* conveyed by or being expressive of the acoustic shape of a sound or a soundscape. "The expression *sound of silence* may give an example of how sound is fundamentally associated with meaningfulness or symbolism, shaping even the absence of sound" (Bär et al.; Warnke et al., *Sounds of Democracy*). Still, the phenomenological (and ontological) specificity of sound/s is elusive, being physically invasive, material and amorphous, spatial and ephemeral at once (Bayreuther).[4] Hence, within the anthropology of sound, the specific historical, cultural, social, and political context, sound/s may be equally regarded phenomenologically as sonic, semiotic, and functional phenomena—investigating "sound as a modality of knowing and being in the world" (Feld 226). In other words, "[s]ound [...] provides a place in which embodied social and cultural traces can be carried, often without the awareness of their bearers" (Barber paragraph 18), referring to Schafer as well as Bull and Back. Within the cultural anthropologist paradigm of Sound Studies (Schulze; Bull and Back 1–18), reflecting on sound enables us to reevaluate our social experiences with regard to their meaning and significance, our relationship to society, how we relate both to

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3 In linguistics, *sound* is first related to the field of phonetics or phonology, primarily with regard to the distinguishing function of sounds as phones or phonemes in the segmentation of speech. Furthermore, the word *sound* is used to refer to the so-called *tone of a voice* in discursive speech, which gives rise to interpreting a speaker's intention, a possible undertone, or the emotive content of a speech act. More generally, the word *sound* may be used (as a metaphor) to capture the typicality of the "linguistic style" that dominates verbal practices of a discourse (Bär, *Musikdiskurse*; *Urbanes Place-Making*).

4 From a philosophical perspective reflecting the ontological status of 'sound/s,' it is obviously tempting to ask if there really are acoustic structures that constitute, e.g., "a 'thunderous sound' as such and distinguish it from a 'booming sound'?" Or is it, in fact, "rather the result of linguistic conventions that gave nominal status to a more or less accidentally intended [sound] property" (Bayreuther 129; translated by the authors)?

others and ourselves within the spatial environments we live in. Van Leeuwen therefore rightly points to the "common ground between speech, music and other sounds" (1) as interrelated "semiotic resources" (10). Moreover, in response to sound we also reevaluate our relationship to power and authority (Bull and Back 4). We refer here to Machin, who considers (musical) "sound as discourse" (426) (see also Machin and Richardson).

Following on from that, especially urban soundscapes or sonic environments should also be reflected as discursive variables to the extent that they significantly influence the social and political constitution of the public sphere as much as the ambient texture of urban spaces, hence the discursive constitution of "place[s] endowed with meaning [...], which [are] constantly negotiated and contested" (B. Busse, *Practices* 620).[5] In this sense, it is also the sound that converts "space to place" (Barber paragraph 44).

What is particularly important to us here, is that sound is also employed as a metaphoric source "to describe the complexity of social, cultural, and political spaces or dynamics" (Bär et al.; Warnke et al., *Sounds of Democracy*). As stated, this is closely related to the notions of *discourse* and *political voice*, yet "[p]olitical metaphors of voice are often disembodied, rarely invoked with reference to the materiality or texture of embodied voices or other actual sounds that make up democratic practice" (Kunreuther 2).

> In many philosophical discussions of democracy, metaphors of political voice almost always refer to discursive speech, analytic or reasoned discourse. They rarely conjure other forms for political utterance, sound, or even noise—voices shouting, collective chanting, the production of noise for political effect, or, significantly, the active performance of silence—that make up the many practices of participatory democracy. (2)

Hence, to pursue the question of "what democracy sounds like today," we refer to *sounds of democracy* on two interrelated semantic levels: first, as a "metaphoric figure of thought" (Bär et al.), and second as being related to the empirical and phenomenological dimension of democratic utterances, whereas "the

5 Following Warnke (*Making Place* 160) with reference to Lefebvre: "[i]n principle, cities may not only be considered as pre-existing constellations of space; rather, they are produced in interdependent discursive processes," whereas "the production of [urban] space is constituted through the interaction of [...] three dimensions," namely "spatial practice, representations of space, representational space" (Lefebvre 40, qtd. in Warnke, *Making Place* 160), constituting also "three modes of urbanity: a) dimension, b) action, and c) representation" (160). Hence, "[t]he city becomes urban space through the interdependence of dimension, action, and representation" (161). See also B. Busse & Warnke, *Urban Linguistics*; B. Busse et al.; B. Busse, *Patterns*; Cresswell; Warnke, *Raum*.

metaphor of sound is a bridge in conversations about democracy today" (Bär et al.; Warnke et al., *Entering*). Furthermore, we assume that both dimensions are reflected linguistically (discourse linguistically) and epistemologically in discourse practices, semantics, and patterns in language use. We consider speaking about sound in the context of democracy as a communicational pivot to address discursive aspects of democratic dynamics starting from individual and subjective verbalizations of experiences.

1.3 The Interview in the Context of Discourse Linguistics

Apart from linguistics, the interview has been discussed in many contexts within discourse studies (see Hammersley 8–15; Abell and Myers 145–161; Misoch 97–109). When we use the term *discourse linguistics* on the following pages, we mean the German-speaking field in the tradition of D. Busse and Teubert as well as the more international tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) associated with authors such as Norman Fairclough, Siegfried Jäger, Teun van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and Martin Reisigl. Even though both fields differ to some degree in their research interests (see Spitzmüller and Warnke 78–118 for a detailed overview), they both have employed the use of interviews and analyzed them by using linguistic methods.

Thus, it should be emphasized that discourse linguistics' employment of the interview (although there are similarities) differs in comparison to other fields such as anthropology or sociology. The reason for this is that the ways researchers make use of interviews often differ in their methodological and epistemological presumptions depending on the prevailing paradigm of a specific field (Roulston 51–73; Silverman 168–86; Deppermann). This is also one of the main reasons for the enormous amount of literature as well as the multiplicity of different interview techniques developed by researchers coming from different disciplines (for an overview see Helfferich 35–37).

To understand the interview in the context of discourse linguistics in the German tradition of historical semantics, one has to be aware of its rather text-focused origins. Starting off from conceptualizing discourse as a virtual corpus (D. Busse and Teubert), discourse linguistics in the understanding of many began as an expansion of text linguistics and only later on opened up to interdisciplinary perspectives and methods from qualitative social research (Dreesen 266–68). In order to illustrate how this tendency affected the way researchers in discourse linguistics conceptualize interviews, it is useful to differentiate three perspectives: (i) the interview as a genre of text, (ii) the interview as a method, and (iii) the interview as social interaction. We want to reconstruct each of them briefly.

The text-linguistic perspective in discourse linguistics mentioned above is characterized by considering the interview as a textual genre rather than a method for collecting data. For example, Krüger, in her analysis of discourses on aging, uses journalistic typology in order to describe the different textual genres her corpus consists of (102–13). In this context, she considers the interview to be a textual genre which serves the purpose of providing information as well as opinions and which differs from other textual genres regarding its dialogicity (110). Spieß, in her analysis of the discourse on bioethics, highlights the fact that the interview as an oral text has a special status within mass media, although due to transcription and editing it cannot be considered to be oral on a conceptual level (268, 273–74). Likewise, Mattfeldt argues that in the course of the editorial process most of the paraverbal and dialogue-controlling elements of the interview are lost, which is why one should be aware that journalistic interviews differ very much from linguistic transcriptions (25). Further discussion of the interview as a textual genre can be found in Stenschke (20–26) and Römer (138–40). It should be mentioned that the work on language in the context of journalism by Lüger is a common reference for this topic.

Analyzing corpora in discourse linguistics usually employs quantitative methods such as keyword or cooccurrence analysis as well as qualitative methods like hermeneutic text analysis. Discussing interviews as a textual genre can be methodologically useful in order to reflect on the heterogeneity as well as the polyphony of textual data (Zhang and Hongbing), since without any manual annotation or qualitative analysis it is not possible to correlate corpus results with authorship and voice. Furthermore, it can be important in order to reflect on what kind of language use (oral or written, monologue or dialogue) the results are representative of.

In this sense, the second group is very different, since they do not use interviews taken from mass media and instead conduct interviews according to their research question themselves. Thus, this area of discourse linguistics is less influenced by text linguistics and more by qualitative social research. Unlike the rather text-linguistic tradition of historical semantics, CDA has a much stronger affinity for the interview as a method of qualitative and ethnographic research. An important example here is a study by Berger and Wodak, in which they interview forty returnees of communist and/or Jewish parents born between 1939 and 1953 who came back to their homeland from exile countries and concentration camps. Further examples of the use of interviews in the context of CDA are a study on Austrian national identities by De Cillia et al. and an ethnographic study of communicative behavior by Wodak. Moreover, Rheindorf demonstrates how a corpus-analytical approach as well as a qualitative approach to interviews as

discursive data can be combined (255–79). One of the most prominent discourse-linguistic works not coming from the field of CDA is a study by Fix and Barth in which the authors use narrative discursive interviews in order to research every-day communication within the context of the GDR. Thus, they conceptualize interviews as a means of insight into the history of language use, which can be interpreted as a shift in the order of discourse (21–29). It should also be mentioned that empirical examples of discourse-linguistic analysis making use of interviews can be found in the study of language ideologies, for example in Arendt's study of discourses on Low German, in which she analyzes language attitudes (148–55), as well as Trochemowitz's research on the Austrian and German *Identitäre Bewegung*, for which he interviewed a former member in order to gain insight into how the group communicates internally (25–29).

Regarding methodological discussions within discourse linguistics, the interview is mentioned in the context of ethnographic fieldwork as well as Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM). Dreesen, for example, argues that opposed to textual analysis, ethnographic approaches have the benefit that they can get a better grasp on how discourse affects everyday life due to the many kinds of data being collected (field notes, photography, video, interview, etc.) (279). Likewise, Bock suggests using interviews in order to reconstruct orders of knowledge by integrating them into research strategies of GTM (313). Papen gets more specific in this context and argues that interviews can help determine semiotic choices of speakers in the construction of texts (*Discourse Analysis* 286). Moreover, interviews can help to analyze how people perceive signs, which she exemplifies by referring to her own research on urban protest communication within linguistic landscapes showing how it affects the special perception of local residents (295–300; *Signs in Cities*). Similarly, Trochemowitz argues that interviews in ethnographic research contexts can help to contextualize discursive practices and how they are affected by power relations ("Linguistische Diskursethnographie").

Although perspectives (i) and (ii) differ in whether they treat the interview as data or as a method, they both share an interest in content and semantics rather than in the situational and contextual factors of how meaning is created through interaction in the interview. Thus, the interview is reduced to a textual product of discourse rather than a context-specific social practice which follows its own set of rules in which it produces discursive knowledge. Therefore, in order to conceptualize how the experiences of participants are discursively formed in the context of interviews, we need to take a third perspective into account, which comes from the field of interactional linguistics and suggests that the interview is best

considered not as a transcript or text but as an interactional social practice (Deppermann; Abell and Myers 145–46; Myers and Lampropoulou 78–80).

Implementing interactional approaches into discourse linguistics and thus analyzing microsocial dimensions of discourse neglected before must be considered a great achievement by Roth. Roth's approach distinguishes itself from textual analysis in the sense that it is not interested in the quantitative analysis of trans-textual patterns but instead focuses on how discourse and interaction affect one another within specific social contexts. A key concept here is the idea of interpersonal manifestations of discourse ("Interpersonale Diskursrealisationen") which he later called participant-oriented manifestations of discourse ("teilnahmeorientierte Realisationen des Diskurses"). In order to grasp the role of the interview in this context, one has to understand a basic problem of collecting data for the purpose of analyzing interaction from the lens of discourse linguistics. The problem, as Roth puts it, is that everyday-life communication is not available in mass media corpora and even oral corpora often do not include discussions and utterances related to discourse that researchers are interested in (Roth, "Interpersonale Diskursrealisationen" 326). Thus, the focus on topic-related oral speech makes it very difficult to gather data. Therefore, most often it is necessary to collect data for which, as Roth argues, the interview can be one method. However, he highlights that, although the interview may be useful to elicit discourse related interaction, the artificial setup of the interview situation is far from being an everyday-life situation. Roth suggest that researchers may employ strategies to make situations appear more natural, however he does not give any examples for this (Roth, "Interpersonale Diskursrealisationen" 331). Against this background, one might argue that the interview, at least if it is not conducted spontaneously, is more or less a compromise to collect data, which is one of the reasons why Roth uses experimental methods instead of interviews (Roth, *Diskursrealisationen* 174–77). A good example of how interviews can be used within a discourse-analytic research design focused on interaction is a study by Stojiljković, who analyzes social positioning practices in interviews with Serbian philologists.

Roth's methodological discussion of the interview as a method of conducting discursive interaction creates an interesting starting point for conceptualizing the interview as a context-specific discursive practice, yet he only addresses the issue on a methodological level rather than asking how this can be an object of discourse-linguistic analysis on its own. In other words, while Roth considers the way in which interviews create artificial contexts to be a methodological flaw for discourse-linguistic inquiry, we want to argue that this supposed lack of

authenticity is a social construction itself and an essential part of the interview as a discursive genre which makes it worth investigating for its own sake.

According to these three perspectives, our approach can best be described as an explorative combination of all of them. Although we use qualitative as well as quantitative procedures of text analysis, the fact that the interviews were conducted by us enables us to critically reflect on the interview as an interactive means of linguistically co-constructing experience. The link between the three different perspectives is the idea that interviews can be conceptualized as an everyday-life as well as a discursive genre that influences the way in which we as researchers as well as the participants engage with one another and interactively produce textual data. Genres, in this sense, can be understood as conceptual frameworks that actors use to evaluate and interpret communicative practices and to connect them with context and social roles (Briggs and Baumann 141). Furthermore, Spitzmüller argues that genres are a part of discourse knowledge and thus an object of metapragmatic negotiation within discourse (245). Metapragmatics with reference to Silverstein and Spitzmüller can best be understood as language use which refers to other language use and thus categorizes and conceptualizes it. Metapragmatics as a sociolinguistic discipline is primarily interested in reconstructing how knowledge about language is socially stratified and how speakers position themselves to language in accordance with language ideologies. In relation to the topic of our paper, we ask if partaking in an interview about politics can be considered taking a stance within the sound of democracy. Although our approach cannot be considered an analysis of interaction in the sense of Roth and Deppermann, the self-reflection of the interview opens up the opportunity for participants to reflect on how they interact with one another.

In the following part we discuss the framework and preliminary results within our project *Sounds of Democracy*—an interview study intending to “stimulate a dialogue about contemporary democracies” (Warnke et al., *Entering*).

2 Methodology & Data

As pointed out earlier (see 1) the project *Sound of Democracy* is centered around the research question *What does democracy sound like today?* (Warnke et al., *Entering*). To this end, we conducted a non-representative sample interview study on how democracy sounds in different European countries between February and April 2022. The resulting interview corpus includes individual as well as group interviews.

2.1 How the Interviews Were Conducted

The target group for the study were master students across different European countries with whom we got in touch via contact persons from different universities. We focused on Europe because we wanted to discuss if the sound of democracy could be thought of on a transnational level. With each student we conducted an individual interview that gave us the basis for another group-discussion (Schäffer and Bohnsack; Kühn and Koschel) for which we matched two to three participants. Two of the participants came from Austria, one from Poland, one from Germany, one from Spain, one from Italy, and one from Sweden.

In terms of qualitative social research our conversations can best be described as semi-structured guided interviews (Misoch 65–71). Since it would have been quite costly and time-consuming for interviewers as well as participants to travel across Europe, the interviews were conducted online. The individual interviews started off by playing four 30-second audio samples for which the participants were asked to write down their associations while hearing them.

– [AUDIO 1] Ludwig van Beethoven (1822–1824), *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, 4th mov.*, so-called *Ode to Joy* (Anthem of Europe)
– [AUDIO 2] Måneskin (2021), Zitti e Buoni (Winner of ESC, Eurovision Song Contest 2021)
– [AUDIO 3] The White Stripes (2003), *Seven Nation Army* (Chant)
– [AUDIO 4] Soundscape of a Demonstration

For the first question the interviewer asked the participants about their associations and if any of the sounds evoked a thought or feeling of democracy. Based on their answers, the participants were asked if they had any examples for the sound of democracy themselves. Further questions were dedicated to whether the participants considered themselves to be participants or recipients of the sound of democracy, if the sound of democracy was real or just a metaphor, in what kind of media it appeared, what language had to do with it, and if there was a European sound of democracy. The Interview closed off by asking if there were any discrepancies in how the sound of democracy was in its current state and how it ought to be. The cumulative length of the seven interviews amounts to 190 minutes, averaging approximately 27.14 minutes, or roughly 30 minutes per individual interview.

By analyzing the interviews' common topics, differences as well as similarities were detected, which were the basis for the interview guides in the second phase of our study. For this part, the following constellations for the group interviews were assembled:

- Group Interview A (A0) Austria I (A1), Poland (A2) (ca. 25 min.)
- Group Interview B (B0) Austria II (B1), Italy (B2) (ca. 28 min.)
- Group Interview C (C0) Spain (C1), Sweden (C2), Germany (C3), (ca. 53 min.)

For reasons of time management, the way in which the participants were matched was more a matter of availability rather than the interview's content. Regarding how the interviews were conducted, the interviewer tried to employ the techniques suggested by Kühn and Koschel (164–72). In this context, it was important that, although the interviewer was participating in the conversation by asking questions, he tried to step back as much as possible in order to give the participants room for discussion. All group interviews ended with bringing the interview to the aforementioned metapragmatic level by asking if the participants considered the conversation itself to be a sound of democracy.

2.2 The Interviews as Discursive Data

After addressing how we conducted the interviews, this passage recapitulates the status of the interview as discursive und textual data. Our main assumption is that interviews can serve as an intermediator between individuals and discourse and thus be a useful heuristic approach to explore voices in discursive fields. In this respect, we are interested in both individual perspectives and discursive factors that shape them. In this study we are specifically interested in how interviews (being discursive practices themselves) can shed light on the perceptions of contemporary democracies, encompassing the diverse experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that people in Europe hold about 'democracy' (e.g. democratic ideas and values) in the present day. Thus, we consider the interview itself a discursive practice. In this respect, the metaphor of sound is seen as a bridge between individual and discursive aspects. Discussing sound in the context of democracy may help us to address the discursive elements of democratic dynamics, beginning with individual experiences and subjective narratives (see 1). When interpreting the answers that were given in the interviews to the question of *what democracies sound like today*, we centered on the following interrelated research questions:

- RQ1: When speaking about 'sounds of democracy,' are there typical lexical structures, keywords, or linguistic patterns emerging that can be identified across the interviews? (see 3.1)
- RQ2: How do participants resolve the metaphor of sound when speaking about democracy, linguistically and epistemically, to conceptualize democracy? (see 3.2)
- RQ3: Which concrete instances do the participants refer to? (see 3.3)

Additionally, we asked:
- RQ4: What are metapragmatic reflections on the interview situation or about the relation of individual and discourse? (see 3.4)

With all four questions, we take up our previous reflections and focus them on a specific analysis of contemporary debates about democracy.

2.2.1 The Interviews as a Text Corpus

As described at the beginning of this section, the data consists of seven transcribed guideline interviews building three groups of two or three individual interviews each, and three subsequent discussions within the respective groups (Group A, Group B, Group C). Interviews A1 ("Austria I"), A2 ("Poland"), B2 ("Austria II"), and C4 ("Germany"), as much as the follow-up discussion in Group A were originally conducted in German. The remaining interviews and group discussions were conducted in English (see Table 1).

For the heuristic discourse-linguistic analysis, both quantitative and hermeneutic approaches were considered. For the preliminary quantitative data analysis, a linguistic corpus was built—operationalizing 'discourse' as a structured corpus (see 1.3)—, including all interview transcriptions as a collection of textual data. Each interview transcription was regarded as one textual unit (see Table 1) and stored as a plain text file, whereas each conversational turn (SP = speaker) was stored and displayed as one line.

```
1  Sp1   Once again thanks for being here and participating in this group …
2  SP1   Yeah, interesting. We did not talk about economics in our interviews …
3  SP1   Mhm, interesting. Speaking of examples, we got to this topic because …
4  SP2   I think that, thinking about economics, it's not about, not only …
5  SP1   What do you think about that?
6  SP3   Sorry, not used to Zoom meetings. I think, sorry, I just I kinda …
7  SP1   That's an interesting example. Religious sound in the public sphere. …
8  SP4   Sorry.
9  SP1   Yeah, go ahead.
10 SP4   Like, for some reason I was just thinking about, like, actually what …
11 SP1   That made me think of one very interesting example T. gave me, he …
12 SP4   My first though was the [...] I think it's very [...] It's, like, …
13 SP1   Mhm, yeah. What are your thoughts on that?
14 SP3   I completely agree with what L. is saying, and I think that's a very …
15 SP2   Well, I think I don't have too much to add. I will try. I think the …
```

(1) Excerpt of the interview data (group interview C0), KWiC = *sound of democracy*

For technical reasons, the corpus was provisionally divided into two monolingual corpora. In order to provide a consistent linguistic basis for the automated textual analysis, the English language data were machine-translated into German (using the online translation service *DeepL*) and manually revised. However, the following table provides an overview of the overall frequencies of the primary data in the original language regarding the occurrence of words (tokens), lemmas (types of words reduced to the dictionary form of a word),[6] and sentences per interview.

Using the software Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al.), the corpus was linguistically preprocessed (tokenization, lemmatization, part-of-speech-tagging) by applying the RFTagger 4.2 for German based on the STTS tagset (Schmid and Laws) and the Tree Tagger for English based on the Penn Treebank tagset English 3.3 (Santorini).

6 See McEnery and Hardie, among others, for an introduction to approaches used in corpus linguistics. To become familiar with corpus-linguistic concepts and methodologies, see also McEnery and Wilson; Tognini-Bonelli; Perkuhn et al. Furthermore, see Baker; Bubenhofer, “Diskurslinguistik”; McEnery and Baker; Teubert for an account of the connections between corpus linguistics and discourse analysis.

Table 1: Overview of the textual data (transcribed interviews and group discussions)

No.	group	textual interview data	original language	words	lemmas	sentences
	Group A					
1		A0 group interview (A1, A2)	German	1,657	394	97
2		A1 Austria I	German	1,946	434	198
3		A2 Poland	German	3,165	525	233
	Group B					
4		B0 group interview (B1, B2)	English	3,328	528	186
5		B1 Italy	German	2,765	472	169
6		B2 Austria II	English	2,693	581	139
	Group C					
7		C0 group interview (C1, C2, C3)	English	6,978	779	326
8		C1 Spain	English	2,902	510	180
9		C2 Sweden	English	4,234	585	298
10		C3 Germany	German	4,202	685	221
				30,574	**2,881**	**2,047**

2.2.2 Corpus Pragmatics and Hermeneutics

In the social sciences as much as in discourse studies, strong efforts have been made to integrate computer-assisted workflows into interdisciplinary research approaches that aim to combine quantitative and qualitative or hermeneutic methods technically and epistemologically (e.g. Bubenhofer, *Quantitativ*; Duchastel and Laberge; Scholz; Rheindorf; Lemke and Wiedemann; Wiedemann). Rheindorf, for example, discusses the intersections between corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse studies (CDS) in detail in the context of critical discourse analysis: "The integration of CL methods into CDS can be traced back to the 1990s" (33):

> Indeed, I would argue that the way in which we approach co-text (concordance lines, extended concordances or entire texts retrieved by CL tools) around specific lexical patterns identified by CL tools should be a key point of interest in the debate on 'combining' or 'integrating' quantitative and qualitative methods in CDS. (33)

Also, in linguistic discourse analysis, quantitative (corpus-assisted) approaches have become increasingly important (Bubenhofer, *Sprachgebrauchsmuster*;

Felder et al.; Müller). Informed by corpus linguistics, the most comprehensive methods in the context of digital discourse linguistics can be covered by the term *lexicometry*, which we adapt here as a quantitative heuristic approach to discourse analysis (Dzudzek et al.; Glasze; see also Scholz).

While in content analysis, the initial stages of interpretation typically involve categorizing text sections, in lexicometry, the primary focus is on establishing relationships among lexical elements within a specific text corpus. As a result, the hermeneutic interpretation is postponed until later in the research process. However, this shift primarily pertains to the emphasis placed on interpretation, as the formulation of research questions, compilation, and the delimitation of closed corpora as discursive data is also based on interpretative decisions (see Dzudzek et al. 234). Regarding the interview as a 'discursive genre' (see 1.3), we are also intrigued by the particularities of lexical structures and linguistic patterns within the context of our study, given the following:

> Common to concepts of discourse used in the social sciences [and discourse studies] is that they refer to some kind of social practice as [sic!] regards language use or the use of other sign systems in particular social contexts. Social practices are ways in which humans do things: patterns of action, habits and conventions that follow more or less explicit rules. (Boréus and Bergström 6)

In this regard, automated lexicometric methods are particularly valuable for comparing the linguistic surface across our interviews and for exploring the possible variations in meaning within the conceptual frame of 'sounds of democracy.'

In contrast to the narrower research perspective often taken by quantitative corpus linguistics focusing on the study of language patterns and structures intrinsically, that is, not taking into account the contextual, social, or cultural factors in which actual discursive and interactive language use is embedded,[7] quantitative approaches in discourse studies that borrow from corpus linguistics specifically emphasize the role of extra-linguistic (e.g. epistemic, social, societal etc.) parameters based on the language use within discursive fields and practices. Hence, quantitative results need to be interpreted respectively, taking a special interest in the question of how *meaning* is constructed, constituted, or assigned linguistically by means of social, cultural, and political dimensions of discourse

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7 Although, as Müller points out, corpus linguistics is actually "based on the idea of the linguistic series in context, inasmuch as it understands language as expression complexes situated in usage, serialized, and culturally contextualized," this is by no means common research practice (20).

(see Wodak and Krzyżanowski). “This type of research was [*sic*] summarized under the label *corpus pragmatics* […]” (Felder et al. 4, qtd. in Müller 20):

> We take corpus pragmatics to mean a linguistic research approach which examines the reciprocal relationship between linguistic means on the one hand and context factors on the other hand in digitally prepared corpora, and whose goal it is to establish a typology of form-function correlations. […] Notably, the analysis makes use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. (20)

Hence, in addition to exploratory quantitative analysis, we opted for a complementary hermeneutic approach based on the theoretical framework of discourse-linguistic hermeneutics (Hermanns, *Linguistische Hermeneutik*; see also D. Busse, *Diskursanalyse* 78–84)—“considering hermeneutics as a technique and method of linguistic analysis” (Dang-Anh and Scholl 103).

3 Data Analysis

3.1 Lexicometric Exploration

To investigate our corpus—the ‘interview-as-text data’—linguistically, we combined the following lexicometric methods with descriptive and exploratory purposes.

- Frequency analysis of words (tokens / lemmas), nouns; adjectives and verbs (excluded here)
- Analysis of co-occurrences / n-grams (example)
- Keyword analysis (example)
- KWiC / concordances

Lexical analysis was conducted at all levels of the corpus infrastructure, i.e. each interview was focused individually as much as the corpus was analyzed from an overall perspective, since we were also interested in the main topics of the entire dataset as a discourse fragment.

nationalism
harmony
noise
instrument
solidarity
tone
meaning
country
dissonance
thought
Europe
song
economy
politician
idea
sound
feeling
democracy
imagination
law
human
market
anthem
music
language
sounds
chorus
society
nation
people
voice
mask
demonstration
song
hope
state
silence
metaphor
experience
majority

Figure 1: Illustration of the most frequent nouns within all interviews (visualization Ch. B.)

The following table summarizes the most frequent lemmatized nouns (n=50; N=1017) within the corpus, i.e., the utterances of both the interviewer and the interviewee or the participants in the group interviews (see Table 1). Each column represents one interview. The occurrences vary within the range between F=0 (blank), F=1 (grey), and F=104 (yellow).

Table 2: Contrastive overall frequency analysis of the word occurrences (nouns) in all interviews (1–10)

noun	F	A0	A1	A2	B0	B1	B2	C0	C1	C2	C3
democracy	434	23	24	27	43	36	19	104	46	54	58
sound	328	9	15	27	26	26	14	62	24	33	35
example	162	4	2	12	12	20	20	27	18	30	17
question	106	3	6	4	5	15	4	19	6	23	21
human	100	5	1	3	22	9		15	10	11	24
Europe	56		1	13	9	5	2	12	4	7	3
people	52	3	1	5	11	7	8	8	2	7	
music	51		5	6	1	4	9	1	7	11	7
voice	50	5	7	5	10	3	5	6	8		1
country	48	6		10	8	3		10	1	4	6
sense	42			2	1	4	1	19	8	3	4

thought	41	1	2	3	1	2	2	5	1	4	20
language	40		10	6		1	1	1		16	5
feeling	37	3		1	9	1		6	2	7	8
case	36	2	6	1	1		8	2	2	5	9
idea	36			1	1		1	10		12	11
solidarity	36							31		5	
group	35		2	5	2	3	2	12	4	2	3
perspective	35	2			1	3		20	4	1	4
song	33			3	5	9	4		8	3	1
demonstration	29		1	3						20	5
point	28			1	3	1	2	14	2	1	4
discussion	27	1			1	1	1	20		3	
problem	27				5	4		18			
reference	26		2	2		2		12	5	2	1
plane	25		5		4	1		2		6	7
thing	23		2	1	2	2		2	11	2	1
discourse	23	1	1		2		1	9	3	4	2
opinion	23	2		3	4	1	3	7	3		
ideal	22				2	1	2	4	2	2	9
law	22		1	3				1	16	1	
topic	22	1	3	4	1	1	4	6		2	
part	21			1	2	6	1	7		3	1
interview	20	6	1	4	3	1	2	2		1	
mask	20	17		3							
song	20		2	2	1	2	3	2	2	5	1
state	20						5	10	2	1	2
time	18		2	1	2	4		5	1	1	2
association	17		1	3	1	2	3		3	2	2
thing	17			2	2		2	3	5	2	1
aspect	16				1	1		4		1	9
discrepancy	16		1	1	1	4	5		1	1	2
woman	16	2		4		4	1	1	4		
instrument	16	5		4		1	2	2		2	
beginning	15		3	5		2	1		2	1	1
experience	15	2		1	3	2			5	1	1
society	15						1	9		1	4
market	15							4	11		
metaphor	15	3	1		5	1	2	1		1	1
difference	15				2			13			
	4763	205	242	389	482	422	357	1028	487	596	555

Min. Freq. = 1; M = 100; max. Freq. = 104

Considering the results of the overall frequency analysis as a discourse-linguistic exploration, the lexical occurrences, both in the upper and lower frequency ranges, may serve as indicators of specific semantic fields that reflect the 'conceptual landscape' based on the vocabulary used to describe and discuss 'sounds of democracy' in the context of our interviews. While frequent occurrences often indicate discursive keywords (see Table 3), a large proportion of occurrences in the lower frequency range can be semantically grouped and hyponymically assigned to one of these terms, although the statistical keyword analysis may differ.[8] In this sense, the lexical field of 'democracy' encompasses a wide range of words, terms, and expressions associated with the concept of democracy. It includes nominal terms directly related to democracy, such as *democracy* (434), *parliament* (10), *representation* (10), *civil society* (5), *elections* (4), *freedom* (3), *rights* (12); *human rights* (4), *participation* (4), *constitution*. It may also include phrases like *civil society* (5), *electoral system* (3), *freedom of speech* (3), *principle of representation* (2) and collocations that are used when referring to 'democracy' (e.g. *democratic sound/s* (10), *democratic discourse* (5), *democratic country* (4), *democratic society* (3), *democratic discussion* (2), *democratic language* (2), *democratic principles* (2), *democratic state* (2), *democratic system* (2), *democratic ideals* (1), *democratic interest* (1), *democratic organization* (1), *democratic value* (1) and others (see also part 3.3)).[9] The following examples show the most prominent lexical fields based on the wordlist of nouns related to 'sounds of democracy,' which may be regarded as discursive topics, including only utterances by the interviewees:

8 The notion 'statistical keyword' (or 'key term' for multiword units) refers to lexical items that significantly stand out in a given focus corpus in relation to a predefined reference corpus (see part 2.1) based on inductive statistical measures.

9 It is important to consider that verbs and other parts of speech equally contribute to the constitution of lexical fields in this context (e.g. the infinite verbs *represent* (25), *participate* (24), *debate* (10), *discuss* (9), *protest* (8), *vote* (8), *elect* (7), *empower* (1), or adjectives like *democratic* (10), *civil* (9 tokens), *liberal* (10), *anti-democratic* (1), *undemocratic* (1), *non-democratic* (1)). However, the focus of these examples is primarily on nouns as 'discursive nodes' as minimal discursive condensations of discourse (Linke 40).

- Politics & Society: *democracy* (434), *law* (26), *state* (20), *society* (15), *politician* (10), *parliament* (10), *nation* (8), *nationalism* (6), *politics* (5), *system* (5), *participation* (4), *election* (4), *public* (4) ...; *demonstration* (38), *protest* (3) ...
- Sound / Music: *sound* (328), *music* (51), *voice** (50), *instrument* (16), *silence* (14), *choir* (13), *dissonance* (13), *harmony* (8), *drum* (7), *noise* (7), *cacophony* (6), *orchestra* (5), *jam session* (3), *polyphony* (2) ...
- Collectivity: *people* (52), *country** (48), *solidarity* (36), *group* (35), *society** (15), *nation** (8), *civil society* (5), *public** (4), *community* (3), *citizen* (2), *neighborhood* (2) ...
- Discourse: *discussion* (27), *discourse* (23), *opinion* (23), *conversation* (20), *metaphor* (15), *debate* (6) *interaction* (4), *parliamentary debate* (4) ...
- Concepts: *diversity* (14), *difference* (6), *hope* (6), *majority* (7), *equality* (5), *peace* (5), *humanity* (4), *freedom* (2) ...
- Tension / Conflict: *problem* (27), *discrepancy* (16), *contradiction* (7), *conflict* (5), *disagreement* (4), *tension* (6), *violence* (4), *war* (3), *oppression* (2), *discrimination* (5), *paradox* (2) ...

Another way to identify lexical relations is to statistically examine the corpus by using a corpus-driven approach to create a lexical network based on the similarities between words that occur in comparable linguistic contexts, its statistical cooccurrence profile. Within the framework Sketch Engine, the so-called Similarity Score (see Table 3), which acts as an indicator for similarity, represents the basis for the lexical compilation of the thesaurus (Jakubíček and Rychlý; Kilgarrif et al.). The graphically translated result of this calculation visualizes a percentage of the overlaps of the word profile of the source term with those of the other words. In addition, the results can be clustered defining the threshold of a minimum similarity score (Kocincová et al.). The following example shows the results of the analysis for *sound* (left) and *democracy* (right) as input terms using a minimum similarity score of 0.15 (see Table 3). Graphically, the size of the displayed words corresponds to its frequency, the relative proximity to the center corresponds to the determined similarity score (see Figure 2 as an example for *sound*).

Table 3: Thesaurus *sound* (left) and *democracy* (right)

sound	Cluster	Score	F	*democracy*	Cluster	Score	F
democracy		0,26	296	**sound**	sound	0,26	240
	solidarity	0,18	42	**solidarity**	solidarity	0,22	42
	people	0,11	114		everyone	0,22	24
					discussion	0,18	35
kind		0,25	61		state	0,17	17
	voice	0,16	29		song	0,14	39
	lot	0,12	54		question	0,12	65
					thing	0,11	42
discussion		0,18	35	**people**	people	0,20	114
	question	0,13	65	**lot**	lot	0,14	54
	thing	0,12	42		voice	0,09	29
	song	0,11	39		kind	0,08	61
	idea	0,09	28		something	0,08	131
	demon-stration	0,08	22	**economics**	economics	0,13	12
	state	0,08	17		demonstration	0,11	22
	everyone	0,07	24		right	0,10	18
perspective		0,14	31	**difference**	difference	0,11	20
	country	0,13	21		idea	0,10	28
problem		0,09	23		thought	0,05	18
	way	0,08	72		part	0,05	21
feeling		0,09	12		problem	0,05	23
	right	0,07	18	**example**	example	0,08	101
example		0,07	101	**Europe**	Europe	0,06	38
group		0,07	38	**feeling**		0,05	12

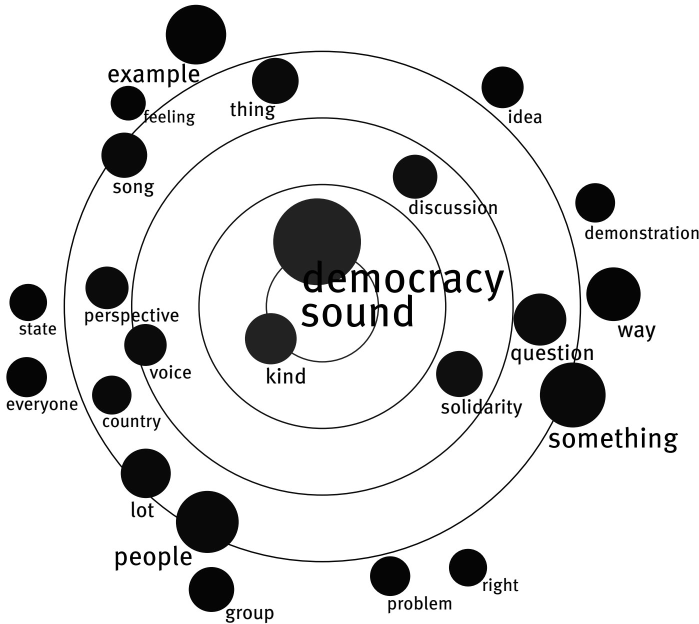

Figure 2: Thesaurus of *sound* (visualization Sketch Engine, Kocincová et al., modified by Ch. B.)

Furthermore, it must be taken into account that the results of this lexical analysis are linguistically decontextualized. A large proportion of the occurrences are embedded in multi-word units of different lexical status. In Table 2, those nouns that obviously indicate names i.e., proper names consisting of more than one lexical item like Eurovision*, contest*, song* ('Eurovision Song Contest'), ode*, and joy* ['Ode to Joy'], union* ['European Union'] were filtered and removed. However, to ensure the specific word use within the discursive context, these nodes have to be displayed as Keywords in Context (KWiC) or be examined by other procedures such as co-occurrence analysis or n-gram analysis.

Hence, in addition to the lexical analysis based on single-word units, we were also interested in the patterns of language use to specify the respective conceptual frame (e.g. 'democracy' → "*less silence between the sounds of* ***democracy***"; 'voice' → "*their own* ***voice***"). The following examples show n-grams (2–6-grams) containing ***democracy*** (291 tokens), ***solidarity*** (42 tokens), ***voice*** (15 tokens), ***feeling*** (15 tokens), ***solidarity*** (42 tokens), and ***experience*** (23 tokens) within the corpus subset of the interviews conducted in English (N=20,207 tokens) (see 2.2.2); the minimum frequency is 2 occurrences.

– *of democracy* (189), [...] *the sound of democracy* (66), *a sound of democracy* (51), *sound of democracy is* (14), *European sound of democracy* (13), *is a sound of democracy* (11), *of the sound of democracy* (11) [...] *sound of democracy is something* (4), *how the sound of democracy* (4), *this is a sound of democracy* (4), *to be a sound of democracy* (4), *ideal sound of democracy* (3), *pan-European sound of democracy* (3), [...] *of how the sound of democracy* (3), *participate in the sound of democracy* (3), *recipient of the sound of democracy* (3), *in regards to democracy* (2), *sounds of democracy are* (2), [...] *democracy is like a* (2), *a discussion about democracy* (2), *sound of democracy should* (2), *of democracy may be* (2), *different sound of democracy* (2), *democracy on a European* (2), *diverse sound of democracy* (2), *think that democracy is* (2), *unitarian sound of democracy* (2), *unitarian vision of democracy* (2), [...] *consider a sound of democracy* (2), *this a sound of democracy* (2), *of democracy on a European* (2), *the sound of democracy on* (2), *the sound of democracy should* (2), *a unitarian vision of democracy* (2), *a unitarian sound of democracy* (2), *European sound of democracy is* (2), *unitary sound of democracy or* (2), *a sound of democracy for* (2), *a different sound of democracy* (2), *silence between the sounds of democracy* [...] (2–6-grams, 182 nested n-grams; 1,092 occurrences).
– *different voices* (7), *voices of* (3), *the voices* (3), *the voices of* (2), *own voice* (3), *their own voice* (3), *the voice* (2), *voice of* (2), *the voice of* (2), *a voice* (2), *have a voice* (2), *about voice* (2), *voice to* (2), *voices that* (2)
– *of solidarity* (12), *solidarity is* (7), *that solidarity* (3), *if solidarity* (3), *about solidarity* (3), *problems of solidarity* (3), *signs of solidarity* (3), *sound of solidarity* (3), *solidarity could* (2), *solidarity and* (2), *solidarity in* (2), *solidarity from* (2), *the solidarity* (2), *think solidarity* (2), *solidarity within* (2), *think solidarity is* (2), *if solidarity is* (2), *solidarity within Europe* (2), *the problems of solidarity* (2), *a sound of solidarity* (2)
– *feeling of* (7), *this feeling* (3), *feeling of belongingness* (3), *this feeling of* (3), *feeling invited* (2), *are feeling* (2), *create this feeling* (2), *we are feeling* (2), *create this feeling of* (2), *can create this feeling* (2), *can create this feeling of* (2)
– *individual experience* (2), *very individual experience* (2), *your experience* (2)

Furthermore, the analyses of key terms conducted on all levels, i.e. in relation to the entire interview corpus (German and English) as well as a comparison of the individual interviews, are revealing. Here, an indication emerges that especially ‘diversity’ / ‘variety’ (or: ‘diversity’ / ‘difference’) come to the fore as categories in relation to democratic values (e.g. *different sound* / *different voices* / *different perspectives* / *different opinions* / *diverse sound* / *diversity of democratic sounds*). Yet

'diversity' is often critically contrasted with 'uniformity' (e.g. *uniform sound | uniform democratic sound | uniform opinion | unitary sound | unitarian sound*) or framed by concepts of 'community,' 'common ground,' or 'consensus' (e.g. *common European sound | harmonious sound | sense of universality*). Also, key terms including *solidarity* stand out compared to the reference corpus (see 2.2.2), e.g. *sound of solidarity, problem of solidarity, sign of solidarity*.

3.2 Intensional Concepts of Democracy—Unwrapping 'Sound'

Linguistically, the word *sound* is used in different ways. On the one hand, it is used in a rather narrow, lexical or literal sense to describe specific soundscapes of situations or events, acoustically associated with prevailing concepts of democracy. For example, the urban soundscape of public demonstrations, the spatial acoustic atmosphere in a soccer stadium, or the sound of political events like the chatter of voices during parliamentary debates.

(2) A1, pos. 20: [...] for example, <u>demonstration procession</u>, the <u>drums</u> and <u>whistles</u>, something like that.
(3) C3, pos. 33: [...] <u>the sound of the demonstration</u> really does take on a very central role. It's about <u>being loud</u>, really <u>being heard</u> in the most literal sense.
(4) C3, pos. 33: My first thought was <u>actually demonstrations</u>. Because I believe that one of the most important [...] aspects of democratic societies that is most likely to disappear when a society becomes less democratic, is the aspect <u>that people can actually express themselves freely and also demonstrate freely for the things that they think are right</u> [...].

Mostly, statements like *being loud*, *being heard*, or adverbs like *freely* are strongly symbolic, insofar as they reference to *sound* as '(political) voice' (→ VOICE) or 'protest' (→ PROTEST) often representing basic democratic principles like 'equal rights' and 'freedom of speech.'

In this context, 'democracy' is also often seen in the process of participation or interaction, bringing people together and fostering a sense of community or collectivity. Hence, 'democracy' is referred to 'intensionally'[10] as a social

10 Here, we heuristically draw on the linguistic distinction between 'intensional' and 'extensional meaning'. Hence, the term 'intensional concept of democracy' is primarily used to describe semantic aspects attributed to the concept of 'democracy.' In contrast, 'extensional concept of democracy' addresses the use of the word *democracy* to refer to specific political instances or

dynamic that involves a collective political engagement, represented by the actual sound of, e.g., collective chanting of slogans at political demonstrations.

(5) B0, pos. 02: So basically, I feel like the sound of democracy is always about what brings people together as a whole, and what makes them one, what unites them. We talked about […] music, and drumming, and rhythm for instance at maybe protest marches something like that, and we also talked about concerts and chanting something. And on the flip side we also talked about people maybe purposely trying to disrupt some kind of harmony, some kind of rhythm, which is the exact opposite of what democracy should be about and is trying to achieve.

Furthermore, the word *sound* is closely related to 'language use' (→ LANGUAGE) and 'discourse' (→ DISCOURSE); to some interviewees, both equally constitute the sounds of democracy. One participant indicates the different styles or varieties of language (*linguistic registers*), insofar as language use within democratic discourse encompasses various contexts, ranging from informal conversations in a pub with casual language to more formal settings such as parliamentary debates or political speeches on TV (A1, pos. 42–47).

Moreover, *sound* is used to frame or contrast notions of non-democratic tendencies in social dynamics or political orders. With this in mind, sound is also critically mapped onto the absence of sound as a political stance. The metaphor of the *silent majority* (German: "*schweigende Mehrheit*") is also considered to constitute a specific sound of democracy, described by the absence of political participation by the majority of the population. This negative 'political voice' is critically characterized as being merely receptive, passive, or uncomplaining by the interview partner. In this case, being asked about his/her personal associations, 'sound(s) of democracy' is narrowed down to one word: *silence*.

(6) A1, pos. 40–42: This might sound a bit strange, but I would actually say silence. […] And that is because of this metaphor of the silent majority, which is also often used.

societal circumstances by the interviewees. Generally, when talking about democracy and sound in the context of our interviews, both dimensions are usually intertwined.

The core idea in this interview is an implicit criticism of the fact that rather extreme positions of the political fringes are present in the contemporary media discourse, whereas *more reserved voices* do not get a chance to or do not speak out (*making themselves heard*).

(7) B0, pos. 09: I do think that democracy is when people talk out loud and people are to protest more to, like, yeah, raise their voices together. So, for me, I think silence would be a dissonance.

Generally, both the lexical / literal meaning of *sound* and the rather metaphorical implication of the phrase *sounds of democracy* are closely related, hence semantically intertwined. This stands out in particular, when 'democracy,' 'democratic social dynamics,' or 'democratic societies' are compared to the sound of a choir, to an orchestra, or to a musical jam session constituted by the interplay of collective musical interaction and individual engagement. In these examples, sound is also associated with 'voice' (or 'instrument'), but on a different epistemic level. In this metaphor, it is not so much the individual political voice that stands out in particular, but rather the effect that emerges from the diversity of (individual) voices and instruments in the process of social and musical interaction analogous to the dynamics in discourse and communication. In other words, this is when individual differences are united in a collectivity: on the one hand, in relation to 'sound,' 'democracy' is often metaphorically reflected as a rather holistic concept of a polyphony being constituted by the inclusion of diverse individuals ("voices and instruments") participating or interacting ("playing together"). This sheds a harmonious light on the sounds of democracy constituting a unified entity, i.e., a sort of consonance (see ex. 5).

(8) A0, pos. 04: [...] for me, democracy is several voices, several instruments playing together.
[...] I realized that democracy is actually everything. It's kind of our culture. Yes, that's why for me democracy is very diverse and there are a lot of voices that somehow interact.

On the other hand, this multitude of diverse voices is interpreted as a constructive kind of dissonance ("constructive dissonance"), constituted by freedom of speech, allowing people to express their opinions openly without fear of discrimination. Hence, 'democracy' is positively conceptualized as a rather inharmonious and noisy matter, where diverse opinions can be voiced and discussed (see ex. 6). In a similar way, this is expressed in (7), where the question is raised

whether democracy should only consist of a unified sound or whether a cacophony of diverse democratic sounds would be acceptable. The interviewee is considering the idea of a guiding sound or harmony that emerges from this cacophony and its relationship to 'democracy.'

(9) B0, pos. 37: [...] I do believe that there is this <u>constructive kind of dissonance</u> where people are allowed to voice their <u>different opinions</u> and to talk about them out loud without fearing any kind of discrimination.

(10) C3, pos. 17: Again, that's the question of, <u>can it only be a big sound</u>? Or would it be okay if we could live with a big <u>cacophony of democratic sounds</u>, and how would it be a democratic sound, or how would there be a guide, or <u>a guiding sound</u>, or a harmony that would result [...] which arises from it.

Also, reference is made to specific pieces of music such as the popular Italian partisan song *Bella ciao*. Given its historical dimension of resistance to European fascism, this 'sound' is also seen as an emblematic expression of 'democracy from below,' voicing opposition against manifestations of political oppression, violence, or arbitrariness in general (→ PROTEST / POLITICAL ACTIVISM). At the same time, this continues the idea of a strong community or ingroup solidarity (→ COMMUNITY / SOLIDARITY) which also includes a particular concept of 'democracy' as a consensus-oriented practice of social and political interaction or communication (→ COMMUNICATION).

(11) B1, pos. 24: [...] for me a sound of democracy is this song "Bella Ciao" [...] <u>because it's the sound of people who really believed in democracy</u> and they were <u>against dictatorship</u>, and <u>they died for that principle, for their beliefs</u>.

Furthermore, the cited examples can be interpreted in terms of their ideological implications, especially statements on political activism or criticism of the close conjunction of liberal democracies with economic ideologies, e.g., the marketing pressure of art (C1, pos. N.A.). Hence, with reference to the methodology of *qualitative analysis of ideas and ideological content* (Lindberg) in the social sciences and discourse analysis (Boréus and Bergström 6), we also consider our approach as a contribution "to a better knowledge of the patterns of ideas and ideologies inherent in the communication and discourse" (Lindberg 88) about democracy.

However, as these *sound*-related metaphors exemplify, in the course of the interviews, different abstract categories can be identified by means of which participants refer to different conceptual aspects of democracy or 'democratic values,' formatted by the specific semantic interpretation of *sound* within the

conversational context. The following table shows a heuristic of the various *conceptual aspects*, which are often intertwined, implied by the metaphor of *sound* as ‘political voice’ (see also 3.1).

Table 4: Conceptual aspects of ‘democracy’ within the metaphor of ‘sound-as-political-voice’

***sound* → ‘voice’ as:**	**conceptual aspects related to ‘democracy’**
‘participation in society’	→ Basic Democratic Rights → Basic Human Rights → Freedom of Speech and Opinion
‘diversity of voices’	→ Diversity / Pluralism
‘civil engagement’	→ Community / Solidarity
‘political activism’	→ Community / Solidarity / Protest
‘legal democratic participation’ (e.g. ‘suffrage’)	→ Democratic Political System → Basic Democratic Rights
‘discourse / communication’ (e.g. ‘debate culture’)	→ Political Discourse → Communication → Consensus as an Ideal of Social Interaction
‘political representation’	→ Parliamentary System / Political Justice
‘presence of marginalized groups’ (e.g. within ‘discourse,’ ‘media,’ or ‘language use’)	→ Equity / Justice ⇒ Basic Human Rights → Diversity / Tolerance → Awareness

3.3 Extensional Concepts of Democracy

Understanding *sound* as ‘political voice’ and capturing ‘democracy’ as ‘diversity of voices’ often linked to human rights as basic democratic principles is certainly one of the strongest conceptual condensations within the metaphor of sounds of democracy. Yet, another aspect should be mentioned that comes to light in the analysis of the interviews. Specifically, conceptual categories as presented in Table 3 (through the example of ‘sound-as-political-voice’) are to be understood in the respective context of the interviews. Hence, they are intertwined with different types of reference. This means that they embody not only conceptual aspects or values of democracy (‘intensional concept of democracy’), but also involve references to factual democratic instances or entities such as political institutions,

names of politicians, or geopolitical entities ('extensional concept of democracy'). To circumscribe these tendencies, we propose to distinguish two modes of reference, that is, a) *reference to concepts and values related to democracy* (see 3.2) and b) *reference to factuality* respectively *factual instances related to democracy*, yet both are assimilated in discourse—as specified in the introduction (see 1)—as they equally include narrations of personal experiences and abstract reflections with regard to a rather "ideal image of democracy" (A2, pos. 6). Hence, in terms of actual language use, especially in light of its discursive function, these referential modes are closely related or even inextricably intertwined.

In the following passage, for example, the interviewee refers to the controversial British politician John Simon Bercow, former Speaker of the House of Commons, whose commanding tone of voice calling for discipline by shouting "Order!" during a parliamentary debate became a symbol of the tense situation within the British Brexit debates in 2019: "The soundtrack of Brexit has been delivered by a gray-haired man in a silk gown bellowing "Order! Order!" over crowds of braying lawmakers" (Smith; also Barry).

(12) C3, pos. 29: John Bercow in the British Parliament who screams "Order!" is for me, [...] a very practical [concrete] sound of democracy [...].

Thereby, the interview partner is referring not only to this 'event' and its mediatization but, more generally, to the entity of 'parliament' as a legal political institution representing parliamentary democracy giving an example of "how parliaments sound" (C3, pos. 29) by specifically naming John Bercow as an exemplary representative of the political atmosphere and debate culture that also constitutes a 'sound of democracy.' Subsequently, the interviewee comments on the given example and recalls an intensional concept of democracy that indicates a democratic value, namely "being able to debate openly."

(13) C3, pos. 29: [...] just the idea of debating and being able to debate openly [...].

In contrast, the interviewee asks to what extent the parliamentary institution in authoritarian countries is rather a "politicization of democratic elements" in place to normatively uphold a democratic political status without actually exercising a democratic culture. Hence, this raises the question of the authenticity of democratic institutions:

(14) C3, pos. 29: [...] to what extent are they sounds of democracy that we can then perceive in real terms, to what extent are they then really the sign of a democracy, or to what extent are they the sign of a politicization of a democratic element [...].

Another example that fits a similar pattern is the following, in which reference is made to a "Fridays for Future" demonstration. Here, the Canadian President Justin Trudeau, who joined the demonstration, is named as an example of possible paradoxes within in a 'sound of democracy.' This example points out how political representatives may undermine the purpose of democratic participation as an expression of protest.

(15) C0, pos. 54: [...] the "Fridays for Future" demonstration in Canada, where Trudeau joined [...] the demonstration. And whereas, like the idea is everyone should participate, of course, but it's also a little silly when the person who can make a change goes out to demonstrate to make a change.

Generally, the interviewee highlights the importance of broad participation in what is understood here as 'sound of democracy' but acknowledges the potential limitations or barriers that certain individuals may face. This may also apply when it comes to pointing at the discursive conditions of agency that enable a polyphonic sound of democracy as a central issue of democratic structures.

(16) B0, pos. 17: But I always have to think like this, also journalism, for example—I don't know if you know him – but Armin Wolf in Austria is very well known. This is a, ok from OHF [sic!][ORF], a very famous journalist, who is known for his, yes let's say very active interview tactics, and always really puts the politicians he interviews through their paces, and also doesn't somehow get distracted by their tactics, but really gets to the point, and that's just something that I think very much reflects democracy, because, as I said, in an anti-democratic state something like that would be absolutely impossible, where there might even be censorship or whatever, where you can't say something like that at all.

Furthermore, from a discourse-linguistic standpoint, it is also interesting to mention the use of toponyms. When approaching the transcribed interviews as corpus data, it is particularly noticeable that geographic entities, such as countries and city names, often indicate reference to an example taken from the personal background of the participants considering their national origin. For the most

frequent occurrences—besides the proper names *Europe* (56) and *European Union* (13)—we note the toponyms *Austria* (14), *Poland* (14), *Spain* (13), *Germany* (8), *Italy* (8), whereas city names *Krakow* (1), *Uppsala* (1), *Valencia* (1), and others count only few occurrences. Therefore, the entanglement of intentional and extensional referents within a confined linguistic frame, such as a speaker's turn or statement, mentioned at the beginning also applies to the case of naming national referents indicated by patterns like *in Spain for example* | *in Poland, for example* | *as in Poland, for example*:

(17) Sample of 3–4-grams: *in Austria –* | *in Austria after* | *in Austria is* | *in Austria at least* | *in Germany,* | *in Germany, as* | *, Germany and ,* | *in Germany firmly* | *In Germany we have* | *not represent Germany,* | *in Poland, a* | *and Poland, but* | *in Poland happens* | *in Poland it happens* | *in Poland for example* | *in Spain.* | *in Spain possibly* | *in Spain not as* | *Spain has not yet* | *in Spain may be* | *in Spain in general* | *in Sweden with similar* | ...

Generally, under the category 'extensional concept of democracy,' the following 'instances,' often referred to as illustrative examples of democratic concepts or values, stand out in particular:
- state (e.g. government, law, political system, political order, society)
- legal political institutions (e.g. National Constitution, Parliament, Court of Justice)
- legal democratic functions in practice (e.g. elections, political parties, law)
- persons of the political sphere (political representants / politicians, contemporary and historical)
- persons of the public media sphere (e.g. journalists)
- civil engagement / political protest (demonstrations, protest march, history of anti-fascism)
- civil society organizations (e.g. Labor Unions)
- basic democratic rights (e.g. suffrage, freedom of speech)
- discourse and communication (e.g. diversity of opinion, media)

3.4 Metapragmatic Aspects—*If This Is a Sound of Democracy*

As shown in part 1.3, "[s]igns functioning metapragmatically have pragmatic phenomena [...] as their semiotic objects" (Silverstein 33). Hence, the concept of metapragmatics linguistically concentrates on language use that refers to language use itself "and asks how communicative actors themselves reflect and conceptualize communicative acts (their own and that of others) or the circum-

stances of communication" (Spitzmüller 264; translated by the authors). Based on this idea, we also integrated a metapragmatic approach, asking the interviewees to reflect on the given framework within the interviews themselves being a 'sound of democracy.' The following excerpts illustrate the importance of a metapragmatic perspective to be taken into account.

First, the interview partners (Interview C0) have concerns about the lack of representativity and inclusivity in the current conversation. They highlight the fact that the conversation is taking place in English, which excludes those who do not speak the language. They question whether this represents an actual 'sound of democracy' as it should be, considering its limitations.

(18) C0, pos. 56: I think that if this is a sound of democracy, it's not a quite representative sound of democracy. Because we are, for example, we are talking in English. I mean, I have a lot of friends that are not able to have this type of conversations, because they don't speak English. I mean, I don't speak a great English, but I can understand you, and I can communicate with you. But, I think, well, this is not like a sound of democracy. This is a sound of what could potentially [*sic*] democracy.

Second, the interview partners acknowledge their own privileged positions as white, European, educated males and recognize that this does not align with their ideal vision of democracy. In this context, they discuss the need for more diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, origin, class, and education to achieve a more inclusive democracy. They also reflect on the challenges of attaining a high level of inclusion within discussions about democracy.

(19) C0, pos. 58: [...] I mean, like, if we just look at us four. We are four white, European, educated, male beings. If this is a sound of democracy, which I mean, honestly [it is] in a way [...] it's not really the sound of democracy I would like to have [...]. Because the level of inclusion we have to get to, it's very hard to grasp? And I think [...] that it's probably less about getting to a specific point, and more about having an ideal that we are pursuing, and to always try to make the sound of people talking about democracy as inclusive, as big, as diverse as possible, without the necessary aim of having [...] every gender represented and every sexuality represented and every origin represented [in a discussion]. [...] It's more about like the process of getting there in a way?

Third, despite the challenges of achieving 'full inclusivity,' there is also the belief that every discussion that moves towards democratic values can be considered a democratic discussion. The interview partners highlight that reaching a perfectly inclusive democracy is difficult, but they consider any discussion that promotes democratic principles as a democratic discussion, even if it is not ideal.

(20) C0, pos. 59: And I think the same happens in discussions. While I would love to see a lot more representation, I don't, I think we can never include every aspect in every discussion as L. said. It's gonna be hard to find a discussion where you can have every sexuality, every gender identity, disabilities are included, age, class, and everything, all of that is equal, but we're not gonna get there. So I think every discussion where people together move toward, at least a discussion on democracy is a democratic discussion, and that's a democracy, even if it's not necessarily a very good one.

This awareness of one's own position and privileges indicates a metadiscursive consciousness of the participants (Schlieben-Lange 234). This level of reflexivity shows that experience is nothing that precedes its articulation in discourse but is rather mediated through different levels of discursivization. Yet again, one has to be aware that experience is a matter of being interpreted by the language provided by a particular context, in this case the interview. Nevertheless, as this particular segment of the interview shows, this use of language is not necessarily uncontested but rather negotiated and disused. This may be what makes a meta-pragmatic perspective on the interview as a form of understanding it as a sound democracy so interesting. It blurs the line between the interview considered as an observatory tool for scholarly inquiry and adapted as a genre and thus reinterpreted by participants. Interviews do not merely give insight into experience. They provide a tool for participants to discursivize their experience in a new light:

(21) A0, pos. 4: But actually [...] before the conversation, I thought about democracy, it's purely political. But after the conversation, I thought about it, and I realized that democracy is actually everything. It's also kind of our culture. Yes, that's why for me democracy is very diverse and there are a lot of voices that somehow interact.

Finally, we want to argue that an awareness of this phenomenon can help to understand that interviews as well as the language and speaker roles they provide are nothing beyond discourse. Applying a meta-pragmatic framework to

interviews can be useful to gain insights into the process of intermediation between experience and discourse.

4 Results and Discussion

In this contribution, we propose to establish interviews as a standard heuristic of discourse linguistics and thus to structurally extend traditionally text-bound analytical procedures. Interviews are a suitable method of knowledge production and analysis, especially for discourse analyses related to the present, which always have to deal with the problem that those who analyze do not stand outside the discourses of their research object.

However, this presupposes that interviews are not used naively, i.e., based on the assumption that they provide direct insights into personal experiences. Rather, when conducting interviews and, above all, evaluating them, the voices articulated in them must be understood as voices in discourse. We speak of individual positions in their social, discursively shaped, and discourse-shaping signature. A goal of the discourse-linguistic interview, then, is to make voices in discourse recognizable and analyzable as such. This is about socialized experience as a discourse-analytical object. It should also not be overlooked that the interview must always be seen as recontextualization and that the interview always assumes that prior knowledge will be tapped, while also always generating knowledge in the process.

Our specific interest in this paper is the perception of contemporary democracies from a European perspective. It is the topic of our example and more than that, it ultimately forms the core of our remarks. The results of the data based on the seven transcribed and grouped guided interviews are rich and complex. Distinct patterns emerge that suggest further and broader analysis based on our exploratory study would be useful. *Sounds of democracy* have proven to be an eminently suitable focal point for engaging with discourses about the contemporary constitution of democracy and a doorway to engage in a dense conversation about democracy. The corpus-based analysis not only allows for evidence of the social shaping of individual viewpoints and utterances, but it also unlocks the discursivity of a thematically grouped set of interviews. The metapragmatic reflection of the interviews thereby underlines that the interview as a genre is never only speaking about something, but always also speaking as someone in discourse, as a discourse actor.

Overall, *sounds of democracy* provides a rich and multi-layered conceptual framework for discussing the values, dynamics, and difficulties within

democratic societies in Europe. By reflecting on sounds and soundscapes associated both acoustically and symbolically with the subjective perception of 'democracy,' our interview partners refer to a wide range of societal phenomena and values related to democratic aspects. One of the key references that come to the fore is the importance of 'participation' and the values of 'diversity' and 'community/collectivity' considered to be essential components of democratic societies.

In conclusion, we highlight the following issues in particular which are often intertwined and often related to human rights as fundamental democratic principles:

1. **Participation**: 'Sounds of democracy' are often associated with the active involvement of citizens in political and social processes, which is seen as a core value of democratic societies. This refers to different levels and areas of participation (e.g. suffrage, civil, social, or political engagement, discourse, or protest).
2. **Freedom of speech and expression**: The right to free speech is seen as a fundamental value of democratic societies. Hence, 'sounds of democracy' are often linked to freedom of expression of opinions and viewpoints.
3. **Diversity and discourse**: Democracy is often seen as a space of diversity. 'Sounds of democracy' are therefore also associated with diversity of (political) voices within discourse (discursive democratic practice), the possibility of marginalized groups to be represented, in contrast to discursive authoritarianism. Moreover, this diversity of sound is also related to multilingualism in the media and in the public sphere.
4. **Community**, **collectivity, and communication**: 'Democracy' is often seen in the process of bringing people together and fostering a sense of community and collectivity. Hence, 'sounds of democracy' are referred to as social dynamics that entail collective political engagement, including the collective chanting of slogans at political demonstrations. Democratic ideals or values such as unity or collectivity are also compared to the effect of musical synchronization when different people sing together in a chorus. This is when individual differences are united in a collectivity.
5. **Political activism, protest, and solidarity**: 'Sounds of democracy' are associated with activism, protest, and solidarity, particularly in the context of demonstrations or social movements related to marginalized or oppressed groups. This aspect largely overlaps with the concept of collectivity. The sound of drums and whistles at the procession of a demonstration or the collective chanting of a slogan is linked to the democratic principle of the right to demonstrate or—more generally—to 'freedom of speech' and thus to

fundamental *democratic rights*, which are allegorically *and* sonically considered constitutive for *a sound*.

6. **State authority and repression**: The presence of police or other forms of state authority is seen as a potentially oppressive force that stands in contrast to the values of democracy. This can be reflected in the way that interviewees interpret the sound of police sirens or other symbols of state authority.
7. **Economic factors:** A critical aspect appears to be the intertwining of business and politics, power and authority.

Overall, reflecting on *sounds of democracy* also serves as a linguistic approach to contrast democratic and non-democratic tendencies or dynamics within democratic societies. In this context, types of conceptual framing play a major role for semantics and the location of utterances in discursive positions.

To summarize: By demonstrating in an exploratory case study the potential of linguistically studied interviews for the pressing debate about the constitution of contemporary democracies, the interview emerges as a research object relevant to and from the perspective of discourse linguistics. It has far-reaching theoretical, methodological, and heuristic implications for further linguistic and interdisciplinary discussions.

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Miriam Akkermann

Tech-Talk in Oral History: Tracing, Catching, and Capturing Information on Music Technology

Abstract: Electro-acoustic music and computer music face several challenges concerning their documentation and preservation, especially as knowledge on the technologies used to create compositions and on how to technically operate the embedded set-up is often not handed over in written form but instead follows a practice-based and orally transmitted tradition. Due to rapid developments in digital technologies, original hardware and software used in compositions in the 1980s and early 1990s is nowadays usually outdated. Oral history interviews in this context can collect yet undocumented information and contribute knowledge on the history of electro-acoustic music and computer music, particularly on the music technology involved and its practical use on different levels. They thus play a fundamental role for archiving and for re-performing these compositions. The article gathers approaches of oral history in contemporary music with special emphasis on electro-acoustic music and computer music and its involved technologies, outlines benefits and challenges of interviews within the documentation and preservation of this music, and examines the position that interviews can have within documentation and research processes.

Keywords: computer music, mixed music, music technology, documentation, archiving

Introduction

Even though the technique of oral history interviews is rooted in ethnographic and sociologic research as carried out in traditional (folk) music, jazz, and also popular music, the first institutionally recognized oral history project in musicology started with interviews on the US-American composer Charles Ives.[1] In

1 Acknowledged as the first oral history project at a major institution, the "Oral History of American Music OHAM" project was established in 1969 at Yale University based on the Charles Ives project. It now provides space for a broader scope of topics, as does the collection "Oral histories of performing arts and music" at the British Library; more specific is "The Louis Armstrong Jazz Oral History Project" at the New York Public Library. In addition, there are many projects based

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contrast, musicological research on western music traditions has been strongly guided by written artefacts of music related sources—sketches, score/notation, descriptions of the artistic idea and the (intended) performance, analyses, reviews, and program notes. During the 20th century, audio and audio-visual recordings of concerts and performances were added. While the number of these sources on individual musical works rapidly increased in the beginning of the 21st century, genres such as computer music still discuss documentation and archiving strategies that fully meet the challenges resulting from the genre's outline and materials.

In computer music and electro-acoustic music, the fast-changing development of digital technologies has become both the basis that has enabled its rapid musical development as well as the major challenge to the field. This derives from practical issues: in the 1980s and early 1990s, musical compositions and music technologies were often developed in a close mutual relationship. The software in use was commonly hardware-bound; a change in hardware could cause the loss of former programs. The development of digital music technologies was carried out mainly by audio engineers who collaborated closely with composers and musicians to develop new music. Information on the developed technologies, however, has not always made its way into the compositions' scores, partly because there is no standardized notation for electronics in music. Neither documenting the compositional and technical processes as well as the rehearsals, nor archiving the finished projects has been a regular part of the artistic projects for a long time. In order to maintain technical functionalities, codes and programs must be continuously updated to new program versions—a procedure that is not only time-consuming but can fundamentally change processes and may thus result in a different sound. Hence, compositions can also lose information during their technologies' preservation process.

In consequence, despite its young age, information on digital sources used within compositions is constantly at risk of getting lost. In electro-acoustic music and computer music, this challenge applies to digital technologies such as computer hardware, digital synthesizers, tapes, computer programs, and code ('patches'), but also to knowledge on the handling of these technologies and their (musical and technical) production processes, which are specific for each device, for each institution, and for each electronic studio. These major challenges of archiving electro-acoustic music and computer music have only been discussed more profoundly in the last few decades (see, e.g., Pennycook; Berweck). A

at universities and local institutions collecting documents of oral history on music and musical (performance) traditions. Furthermore, see for example Chasalow and Cassidy, and Chami.

central aspect is that in contrast to the tradition of writing and documenting musical scores, there is no tradition of writing down the characteristics and performance of music technologies. On the contrary, the knowledge of establishing and performing electronics within musical compositions has long been handed over orally between engineers and so-called "live electronic musicians"[2] (Lemouton 11; Lemouton et al., "Electronic Music" 123). Although the awareness that written documentation would add to this practical knowledge has risen since the end of the 20th century, written and oral sources of information have stayed strictly separate. Against this background, the technique of oral history interviews promises connection points for two areas of interest: on the one hand, by extending knowledge on the (oral) history of electro-acoustic music and computer music by biographic and artistic interviews with composers, live electronic musicians, and institutional staff members and students. On the other hand, by withdrawing particular knowledge on the music technology involved including its practical use by talking about artistic ideas, production processes, performance issues, and the context of the productions—information that is not only fundamental for archiving and for re-performing these compositions, but also to understand the institutional and socio-political situation and aims in which the works have been developed (see e.g. Sarno).

Oral History in Contemporary Music

One of the first researchers to use the rich source of contemporary witnesses' knowledge to learn about contemporary music is the musicologist Vivian Perlis. From 1968 to 1972, she gathered material for a biographical project on the composer Charles Ives, substantially building on interviews with "Ives's friends and colleagues while they were still alive" but facing "the attitudes that the twentieth century was not yet *old* enough to qualify for history and that American music was unworthy of study" (Perlis 610). In her reflections on this project, which provided the basis for the Oral History of American Music (OHAM) project at Yale University, she also states methodological obstacles, for example that traditional music researchers were only trained on working in libraries and archives. To her

2 Peter Plessas and Guillaume Boutard promote the term "live electronic musician" (LEM) for the musician guiding the electronics in real-time during a live musical performance (see Plessas and Boutard; Boutard 38). In the context of productions at the Institute de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique IRCAM in Paris from the 1980s and 1990s, this position was called "Realisatéur en Informatique Musicale" (RIM) (Zattra, "Les Origines").

it seemed in the beginning that "oral history methods are the antithesis of musicology. The act of interviewing resembles performance more than research. It requires two players who perform (and sometimes improvise) to create an artifact that did not exist previously" (Perlis 610).

Despite these initial challenges, OHAM has become a substantial source for research on music in America in the 20th and 21st century. The focus of OHAM is not primarily contemporary (classical-experimental) music but more broadly American and Afro-American history, including interviews with Yale student composers as well as, most recently, an interview series on the situation of composers and musicians during the COVID-19 pandemic ("Oral History of American Music—Collections").

Another early trace for the use of oral history techniques in the field of electro-acoustic music and computer music can be found in a publication by musicologist J. A. Prögler. In 1991, he describes the challenges of transcribing interviews in an interview series with Lejaren Hiller, composer of the *Illiac Suite*, the first acknowledged computer music composition (Prögler, "Choices"). Prögler, who, at the time, was a doctoral student in music at Columbia University and later became known for his research on rhythmic timing in Jazz,[3] published an article on editing interview transcriptions in *The Oral History Review*, the Journal of the Oral History Association, focusing especially on the challenges he faced with an interviewee who spoke with long pauses and stumbled in his answers. While Prögler aims at the change of impression of the interview from an aural realm to "editing a visual document meant to be read" (Prögler, "Choices" 6),[4] the paper also reveals another insight that is especially important for the field of computer music: Prögler states that his preparation on Hiller's work and, also more broadly, on the role of computers in music "freed Dr. Hiller to talk about his work in his own terms, without his worrying whether or not he was speaking beyond my level of comprehension" (2).

This suggests that, on the one hand, the interviewer needs a certain expertise in the field of computer music and music technology in order to withdraw in-depth information on electronics in oral history interviews, and that on the other hand, finding technical information in biography related conversations with a

3 More widely known is, for example, Prögler's study on swing in jazz music using the approach of 'participatory discrepancies,' a direction in US-American music ethnology that has been discussed especially in research on popular music and jazz (Prögler, "Searching for Swing," referenced by Pfleiderer).

4 The interviews Prögler is referencing in his article are not included in the table of contents on Lejaren Hiller at the University of Buffalo Libraries.

technical uninformed interviewer seems rather unlikely. In addition, the general lack of knowledge of many aspects regarding biographic and artistic ideas of composers and of computer music history may often hide the fact that detailed information on compositions is missing, as even simple conversations may offer new information on these topics that already appears to be more than satisfying on a historic level.

Forrest Larson, electronic musician and researcher of MIT's Lewis Music Library, remembers the moment, after a conversation with composer Stephen Erdely, which gave the initial impulse for the "MIT Oral History" project, which is one of the few interview collections with a main focus on contemporary (classical) music: "And my boss, Peter Munstedt, heard that conversation, and afterwards we said, gee, it's too bad we didn't have a tape recorder running. We realized what he was saying was stuff that's probably not in the history books" (Larson 0:58–01:11). Larson accompanied the "MIT Oral History" project from its very beginning in 1999, when he started conducting and recording interviews with students, alumni, and staff of MIT's music department and music library. The interviews are published online and can be searched by classifications including the positions of the interviewees as 'Composers,' 'Conductors,' 'Performers,' 'Musicologists,' and also by topical categories like 'Music Libraries,' 'Music Technology,' 'Engineering,' 'Jazz,' 'Music & the Arts,' 'Science,' and 'Science, Engineering, Music & the Arts,'[5] as well as by the interviewees' status as 'MIT Faculty, Staff Musicians,' 'MIT Music Library, Librarians, Staff,' and 'MIT Student/Alumni Musicians.' Enriched with personal information on the interviewees, their work and their relation to MIT, the interviews can be obtained as video, audio, and transcription keyed by themes on the Oral History Project's website ("Index of Interviewees"). The neatly documented and transcribed interviews provide insight into the 29 interviewees' personal views on their work achievements and into the MIT music department's history, creating a vivid image of the department's musical activities and its possible role in the development of contemporary music. While selecting the category 'Engineering' brings up two entries: a professor who contributed to the concert hall's acoustic design and a former member of the Council for Arts at MIT, the category 'Music Technology' brings up only one: Barry Vercoe, Professor of Music at MIT in the Department of Humanities from 1971 to 1985, and after the founding of the MIT Media Lab in 1985, Professor of Media Arts and Science. Vercoe, presented as "Computer Music Engineer, Composer, Conductor" and additionally tagged with the categories

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5 These more broadly titled categories which include names of other categories are individually assigned classes and not a compilation of the separately existing labels.

'Composers' and 'MIT Faculty, Staff Musicians,' carries out two interviews with Larson, the first in August 2011 (Vercoe, "Barry Vercoe Interviewed"), and the second in April 2012 (Vercoe, "Barry Vercoe"). Quite similar to Perlis's approach, Larson's questions are aimed at biographical information, information on artistic education and ideas, and knowledge on the MIT institute's history. Despite the assumption that this may not tackle any detailed technological aspects, Vercoe gives a detailed account of technologies in the sidenotes of his answers. For example, he talks about different versions of the program MUSIC IV they developed for different processors, which at the same time also gives information on the computer technology in use at Princeton,[6] where Vercoe never officially worked but where he—as he tells in his short CV—"did pioneering work in the field of Digital Audio Processing" (Vercoe, "Barry Vercoe"). In addition, Vercoe gives quite detailed information on the digital-to-analog-converter available at MIT, encouraged by a technical inquiry of Mark Ethier, an MIT Alumni in Computer Science and Music who today is CEO of iZotope.[7] This short excerpt of Vercoe's

6 LARSON: So you were studying composition with him [Godfrey Winham], or—?
VERCOE: Well, not so much. I was studying digital techniques, I suppose, with him.
LARSON: Okay, so he knew a lot about digital audio, but he wasn't doing much himself.
VERCOE: No. Well, what he did was to create a digital version of MUSIC IV called MUSIC IV-B Well, let me—let me back off. MUSIC IV-B was the BEFAP version of Max Mathews' MUSIC IV. And then later on, when the big IBM 709, or 7094, which was the BEFAP assembly language machine, was suddenly replaced by the 360, Godfrey decided he would never write assembly language again.
And so he then wrote a Fortran version of MUSIC IV called MUSIC IV-BF. And that became quite widely used. But of course, being a Fortran program, it was sort of slow.
And what I then did in parallel was to do my own version of that called MUSIC 360. And I was able to get—and I did that in assembly language. And I decided—Godfrey had decided he was never going to touch assembly language again because the—it was quite plain that the manufacturers just would switch assembler languages willy-nilly (Vercoe, "Barry Vercoe Interviewed" 13–14).

7 ETHIER: So the DDP-24 that you went down to Bell Labs to use was actually the same one that you had here at MIT.
VERCOE: Ah, no. I wasn't using the 224. There was another computer that was running the D-to-A converter. No, the two—the 224 that—or the DDP-24 that Max sent up here was sort of a cast-off. I don't know whether they got a tax writeoff or something for that. But it was Max's [Mathews] gesture to MIT, and also perhaps in—coincident with my coming here.
By that time, I had written the largest—the bulk of MUSIC 360. And Max was happy to see the—sort of, the digital tradition brought up to MIT, his alma mater. And so he gave the—the twen—the DDP machine as sort of—as a —something that had D-to-A—that we could use for D-to-A converters.
And so it worked for a little—little while in that capacity. But it was very hard to maintain. And we eventually threw it away. (Vercoe, "Barry Vercoe Interviewed" 15).

interview shows two things: firstly, that despite the biographical aim of the interviewer's questions, the interviewee brings up unsolicited details on technologies whenever it seems relevant (to the interviewee), and secondly, that the more precise the technical questions are, the more information is unveiled.

In this respect, recently emerging projects entitled "oral history"—which range from audio recordings and videos from diverse source material (Stanford Libraries; Computer History Museum), to testimonial-like videos (NAMM)[8] and wiki-threads (IRCAM) that highlight the broad public interest in electro-acoustic music and computer music—as well as historical approaches to production sites based on interview studies (Sarno 168–227) can obtain genuine information on music technology.

Music Technology—A Kind of Orally Transmitted Knowledge

While oral history interviews held by practitioners and staff have been proven to be an important source of information on the history of music and music institutions,[9] they have not yet attracted much attention in electro-acoustic music research. However, with the rising awareness that music technologies include a wide range of practical knowledge that might not be embedded in its technical documentations, the technique of interviews offers new possibilities to receive individual knowledge that allows more detailed research on electro-acoustic music and computer music compositions. As outlined, information on the implementation and real-time use of music technologies has, in large parts, been transmitted orally. A key position is filled by the involved engineers and live electronic musicians who help establish the technical outline of compositions' performances and who are also in charge of controlling the electronic part during live performances.

8 Even The National Association of Music Merchants NAMM Foundation, a broadly industry based foundation that supports music-making and music education-related research, features an Oral History Program, promoting the composer and music developer Max Mathew—a computer music pioneer who fundamentally contributed with his developments to recent music technology standards—explaining his challenges developing his digital sound synthesis.

9 To be mentioned here is especially Georgina Born's study on IRCAM which was carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s with an anthropological approach, giving a fundamental insight in the working environment and production processes based on interviews and participant observation. Technical information appears hereby as sidenotes within her ethnographic fieldwork.

For the Institute de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris, musicologist Laura Zattra examined this special role with a focus on the position of the Réalisateur en Informatique Musicale (RIM), as audio engineers and electronic musicians were called at IRCAM at the beginning of the 21st century. Zattra, who describes the position of an RIM as "le plus proche collaborateur d'un compositeur accueilli en résidence dans un laboratoire de recherche" ("Les Origines" 113), traces back the position's history to the 1970s, when volunteers helped the composer adjust the technologies. This task—as Zattra describes—was "on peut dire, au-delà de leur fonction officielle" (113). The term "tuteur" was used in the beginning of the 1980s, which was changed to "assistante musicale" at the end of the 1980s and finally replaced by the term RIM in 2007 (115–18). Zattra points out that the tasks assigned to this position were already clearly stated in the late 1980s, namely: the production of musical works, the documentation of these works, and "la pédagogie," which is described as an active role in the computer courses, teaching collaborators, and administrative tasks (116).

To some extent, these requirements may explain the state of source material that can be found in the compositions' documentations: besides scores, there is technical information such as codes or programs, signal flow plans and patch plans, as well as descriptions of loudspeaker settings or seating orders. The documentation also often includes program notes or brief descriptions of the composition's artistic idea and sometimes analyses of the composition or the composition's technical structure. All these materials can be categorized among the first two tasks of producing a composition and documenting its basic outline. Material related to the pedagogical work, however, is missing. This suggests that either the pedagogical content was archived somewhere else or that the information considered as 'pedagogy' was handed over in a 'not-written transmission.' Technical information on the exact program versions and platforms, the involved hardware, special modifications for unique performances, and instructions on the use of the electronics during the performance—important information for a composition's performance—is missing in the documentation apart from a few attempts by composers. Hence, the question arises of whether basic knowledge on performing with electronics and specific information on the performance of individual compositions was passed on with a 'pedagogic' attempt—implying that playing electronics in computer music and electro-acoustic music compositions is the skill of a performer educated in maintaining the instrument 'electronics' (e.g. by computer courses) and trained in interpreting certain pieces along the established lines by the currently operating RIM.

Looking closer into Zattra's study, two aspects become apparent: firstly, Zattra often refers to self-reports in IRCAM's annual activity reports and to interviews with people in the position of RIM, and secondly, in this setting, oral history interviews seem the most promising access to missing knowledge. This comes with two interwoven challenges: when looking into the data on concerts of computer music at IRCAM in the 1980s and 1990s, it can be seen that in early stages, often several people were involved for different tasks, such as audio engineering, programming different parts of the electronics, and coordinating the electronics during live performances. This may lead to several differing memories on detail information. At the same time, it can be seen that one RIM usually stayed longer (in some cases always) with a certain composition and was engaged in most performances. The knowledge needed for re-performing a composition thus appears to have stayed with one person who covered the—perhaps retrospectively acknowledged—position of the RIM. Hence, a certain RIM could act like a gatekeeper for the appearance of a certain piece which raises the question of the extent to which RIMs influenced the interpretation of a composition—especially when considering that knowledge concerning performance aspects may have been passed directly from one person to the following by oral (practical) explanations.

Interviews with contemporary witnesses and involved protagonists can thus provide a missing link between archived information on electro-acoustic music and computer music as well as knowledge on involved technology requiring technically detailed information on gear and set-up on the one hand, and information on the handling of the electronics during the performance of compositions, which may include specifications on technical presets and settings on the other, integrating also technical shortcomings and their solutions given time restrictions and technical limitations. At the same time, individual memories can also cause inconsistencies regarding the given information, for example when receiving contradictory statements of different people who worked at the same production, or when a composer's ideas develop over time, referring now to a different sound ideal than to the one the composer originally had in mind. This shows that talking about the technology often tackles artistic aspects such as the artist's ideas for the composition and visions regarding the performance that would have otherwise gone unaddressed, as well as possible resulting discrepancies between the executed and intended sound visions.

The importance of a concordance between different data sources becomes even more evident when looking at two silently connected developments: one is that after personal computers became available for broader use in the 1980s, the production of electro-acoustic music and computer music was no longer bound

to institutional support, as broader technological access enabled composers to work at home (Akkermann, *Improvisation und Algorithmus* 90–91); the other is that the importance of archiving electro-acoustic music and computer music compositions has become apparent only recently, and strategies to do so are still in development (see ,e.g., Lemouton, et al., "Documentation"; Lemouton; Akkermann, "This Hardware"; Akkermann, "What Is Saved?").[10] As a result, a lot of documentary source material—especially on the electronic part of compositions—is stored within the composers' private holdings, or, again, in their private notes.[11]

This challenge also reveals itself when examining performances of mixed music compositions, i.e., compositions that combine acoustic and electronic elements.[12] In this context, RIMs can be an exceptionally rich and necessary resource for understanding the existing documentation of a composition and its performances when the documentation contains incoherencies. An assumption is that this results from the fact that not all information was transmitted in written form. This non-written information can be approached based on two interlinked concepts: starting from a knowledge-based perspective on individual experiences which is not framed within a consolidated and commonly agreed upon music-related transmission tradition or starting from common knowledge framed and guided by (musical or cultural) norms. The individual experience can be seen as part of the so-called *silent* or *tacit knowledge*—a concept that can be found in analysis approaches to mixed music and other western classical music compositions. For Nicolas Donin, musicologist and former head of the research group "Analyse des pratiques musicales" at IRCAM, *silent knowledge* is characterized as knowledge deriving from prior work experience or individual expertise that is not explicitly framed and transmitted or noted down (Akkermann, *Improvisation und Algorithmus* 44).[13] While Donin traces this inherent knowledge with emphasis on

10 The challenges of using the archived sources in order to re-perform electro-acoustic music pieces have been explored and documented by Germán Toro-Pérez and his team at Züricher Hochschule der Künste ZhdK.

11 In consequence, it is often necessary to get information on compositions from the composer or involved (electronic) musicians, as a large part of the material is not published. This applied, for example, to the compositions analyzed in Akkermann, *Improvisation und Algorithmus*.

12 Mixed Music can be seen as a category directly related to electro-acoustic music and computer music.

13 Guillaume Boutard, Catherine Guastavino, and James Turner refer among others to the three-dimensional knowledge management model outlined by the architect Max Boisot which is, according to the authors, "primarily concerned with tacit knowledge [and which] provides a conceptual framework that describes knowledge" (Boutard et al., "Digital Archives Framework" 51;

the compositional process,[14] he also assumes that this silent knowledge can play an important role in the development of performances (167); soft factors such as knowledge of aesthetic preferences of a composer or of debates that have taken place during rehearsals can influence a new interpretation of a musical work. This links directly to the concept of social norms that can be understood, as the historians Margareth Lanzinger and Martin Scheutz summarize, as framework for an inherent group related knowledge that guides human actions, ranging from oral traditions to written law, as well as, for example, from *tacit knowledge* to political agreements.[15]

The importance of inherent knowledge held by collaborators can be seen for example when looking at the state of source material on Marc-André Dalbavie's composition *Diadèmes* which was composed in 1986 for solo viola, small ensemble, and keys/electronics. The 'electronics' consist—following the score—of a reverb module, a multi-effect module, and two MIDI-keyboards playing sounds synthesized by two Yamaha TX816 modules—hardware components that contained eight digital sound synthesis entities each (Dalbavie, *Diadèmes*). The source material contains a score for the acoustic musical instruments, a description of the composition from Jacques Duthen, the first RIM, which lacks a date, a technical report by composer Marc Battier, who was never mentioned as RIM but who gave a detailed description in 2001 based on no-longer existing documentation from 1995, and a project documentation by Serge Lemouton and Kathrin Weissbrunner from 2008.[16] The piece was performed five times between 1986 and 1992

with reference to Boisot). In the context of her research on the mixed music composition *Stria*, Laura Zattra emphasizes the importance of *tacit knowledge* within creative processes (Zattra, "Assembling of Stria").

14 In more general terms, Donin's approach is mirrored in the concept of the conference "Tracking the Creative Process in Music TCPM" (Donin and Traube).

15 "Jener Teil des Normen-Spektrums, der auf das Verhalten abzielt, ist dem Bereich der sozialen Normen zuzurechnen. Ihre Bandbreite umfasst mündliche Tradition wie verschriftlichtes Recht und erstreckt sich von Formen des zwischenmenschlichen Umgangs—[…] von einschlägiger Sozialisation oder implizitem tacit knowledge—bis hin zur 'Genfer Konvention'" (Lanzinger and Scheutz 5).

16 The documentation from 2008 was developed in context of the European project "Cultural, Artistic and Scientific knowledge Preservation, for Access and Retrieval CASPAR" (2006–2009), which included series of projects committed to the preservation of artistic works from different genres emphasizing cultural and artistic digital components from an engineering point of view. The technical report by Battier as well as further transfer versions are archived in the IRCAM-intern data base Sidney, which is dedicated to providing technical and practical information necessary to set up a performance of a composition, here *Diadèmes*.

by two different ensembles[17] who were probably using the same hardware, after which there was a break of nine years before two more performances followed: one in 2001 with Colin Yates assigned as the RIM and one in 2008 by Lemouton and Weissenbrunner (Akkermann, “This Hardware”; Battier; Dalbavie, “Interview”; Lemouton et al., *A La Recherche*; Weissenbrunner). In-between, there appear to be three more versions with different technical equipment but no documented performance date. Despite the fact that there exists a full documentation of the process of establishing the performance in 2008, including self-reports and videos of Lemouton explaining the tests of the technologies in use (e.g., one of the synthesis modules appeared to be partly broken which made it impossible to re-perform the piece using the original technology), there is no hint about the status of the versions from 1992, 1995, and 1998, last assigned to Ipke Starke, who incidentally mentioned during a telephone call with the author that his work on *Diadèmes* was an experiment to transfer electronics to a current programming language. He also stated that versions documenting the ongoing developments were insufficiently saved and kept, which may explain the versions of 1992 and 1995 (Starke).

This underlines how important interviews with the composer and performer can be in order to understand existing sources and the details they contain, such as the relationship between the code versions used, and how they help to complete the picture of single performances or give hints at the genesis of the composition’s performances. Existing sources contain information that is fundamental to the composition, but it becomes clear that when working with such a state of source material, interviews with the involved collaborators can be a substantial way to get in-depth information for linking them. This applies to the versions of the electronics, the hardware used after transferring the electronics from a hardware module-based performance environment to a completely computer-based set-up, but also to the idea behind the choice of hardware and software driven by implicit knowledge and experience with then contemporary technologies or performance issues. Existing gaps in archived information are often at risk of being widened as they are perpetuated along the preservation process. This is reinforced by the necessity of updating: besides technical decay like that described for the electronics of *Diadèmes*, updates and other changes in a composition’s set-up take place as a ‘natural’ step to keep the technology working—and thus to keep a composition re-performable. However, each change in the set-up may

17 Two performances in 1986 by Ensemble L’Itinéraire with RIM Jacques Duthen and three performances by Ensemble Intercontemporain with no RIM named (Akkermann, “This Hardware” 141).

change the originally implemented instrumentation, the resulting sound or—in the worst cases—the whole outline of the composition. This means that talking about the inherent unwritten knowledge not only tackles the debate on what is considered 'the compositional work,' but also raises questions concerning alternative strategies of documenting the composition and the development of its performance, into which it is possible to integrate orally transmitted knowledge.

Interviews as Part of a Strategy for Archiving

While the interest in oral history in the field of electro-acoustic music and computer music is rising, there are only a few systematic approaches that use interviews as a research technique. One approach was developed by Guillaume Boutard, an archival studies researcher with a strong focus on electro-acoustic music, Catherine Guastavino, a researcher on auditory perception and cognition as well as music archiving and retrieval, and James Turner, a researcher who specializes in the archiving and retrieval of pictures and the preservation of moving images. They propose a digital archives framework with a special emphasis on artistic works with technological components based on the assumption that "preservation relates to the ability to re-perform the work, rather than preserving the recording of the performance" (Boutard et al., "Digital Archives Framework" 43). In reference to a study from 2012, in which Boutard and Guastavino aim at documenting the creative process in musical works, they also discuss the relationship between documentation and models of digital curation and digital archiving. In this study, they analyze data on the composition and production of compositions by Florence Baschet, collected from 2006 to 2008 at IRCAM. The final data set consists of audio-visually captured studio rehearsals, ethnographic data, and interviews with the composer, the principal researcher, and the computer music designer. The record also contains conversation documents, notes, scores, and documentation on the electronics at different stages during development, which were analyzed and assigned to four categories that are used as a basis for creating a conceptual documentation framework: organological specifications, knowledge lifecycle, production process lifecycle, and electroacoustic composition (Boutard and Gustavino). Here, Boutard and Guastavino explicitly mention that "[a]lthough the current study relied on the analysis of observational data and interviews collected during the creative process, less intrusive methods should be considered in order to minimize potential interferences with the creative process" (73). They refer to the approach of Donin and Jacques Theureau, who use the method of taking interviews with situation simulation through material traces in

order to learn about long term creative cognition in the context of compositional ideas (Donin and Theureau).

Boutard, Guastavino, and Turner reference approaches for their digital archives framework in which interviews are implemented several times on different levels and for different purposes. In their conclusion, the three authors emphasize that the archive of artistic works—such as electro-acoustic music or computer music—that integrate technological components has to prioritize readability, authenticity, and intelligibility, and that "intelligibility is especially relevant to records whose preservation relies on migration procedures and those that deal with performer-technology interactions, especially since issues of appropriation are more complex in the digital world" (Boutard et al., "Digital Archives Framework" 60). Their concluding argument that information on performances is a basis for capturing knowledge interactions and a starting point for reflecting on the methods for data collection and data ingestion, directly points back to two initial questions: how to frame the method of oral history interviews in research, and how to provide an adequate interview setting and analysis approach in order to get the intended information from the rich and possibly widespread memorized knowledge of the interviewees.

Archiving the Un-Archived

It becomes clear that not all interviews intend to gather historically relevant information that is transmitted orally, but all oral history interviews contain information that can be useful for outlining 'historic' (former/initial) settings and for solving archival challenges, which contribute to some extent to more knowledge on an artwork's history—serving in either case to save formerly oral and then written history from oblivion. At this point, it is helpful to distinguish between the different aims of archiving. While oral history projects often aim at learning more about memories on institutional, project, or artistic ongoings based on the interviewee's experience and memory, Donin aimed at tracing information on artistic decisions, and Lemouton as well as Boutard worked, amongst others, towards a framework for categorizing existing sources and individual knowledge in order to gather and preserve information needed for developing new performances of mixed music compositions. At the same time, all of these approaches are interlinked in the sense that the individual participants within music projects are at the center of interest, assuming that there is substantial information that has not yet been archived by traditional methods.

On the one hand, this links to the challenge of categorizing the resulting information (forms, content, and context of received knowledge as well as its classification within the research) as addressed by Boutard and Guastavino, and on the other hand it raises questions concerning the value that interviewing assigns to the interviewer and interviewee who participate in the interviews, especially in the context of contemporary music research. In qualitative and rather narrative interviews, interviewees are asked to recall their memories about which technology was implemented for specific compositions at certain performances, and how. When an oral history interview is structured and handled as such, the interviewees become contemporary witnesses on the one hand—for example of a certain performance—and on the other hand they become analytical sources for technical details. Interviews can thus bring interviewed researchers, artists, or technicians in a double position: an active narrating source and an analytical one. The protagonists appear as primary and secondary sources at the same time. The interviewer, on the other hand, may find oneself in the position of a 'curator' who selects the sources to be heard, coloring the content, for example, through the transcription, as Prögler describes in detail ("Choices"), or the choice of interviewees for outlining one of many possible (hi-)stories, as Giulia Sarno does for Tempo Reale. Both positions can thus intendedly or unintendedly influence the archived source material as well as future appearances of an artwork or composition. They become part of a wider historic narrative, as noted by Perlis.

Oral history interviews are therefore not restricted to historic information or to tacit knowledge such as information on (aspired) musical performance practices and the use of technology in them. They can also run the risk of retrospectively creating personal narratives and consolidating certain historical narratives; the fact that all interviews are colored by the participants' individual experiences can be both a pitfall for neutral information and an element important to learning about personal intentions. In any case, when evaluated carefully regarding their context, interviews can be a substantial source of information that is rarely acknowledged or published, and they can serve as a source of inspiration when providing new insights on ephemeral knowledge and fill informational gaps with memory and imagination.

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Index

Arendt, Hannah 16, 120, 121, 124–128, 133, 213
archive 25, 28, 262
archiving 250, 251, 258. 261, 262
authorship 27, 29, 33, 36, 66, 72, 78, 97, 109, 212
– co- 61, 64, 78, 97
– double 63
– rights 27
autobiography 26, 31, 33, 52, 183,
book talk 29, 30, 32
chatter 27, 29, 36, 230
collaboration 34, 44, 85–87, 90, 98
contingency IX, 61, 64, 73, 77
cultural studies XI, XVI, XXV, 3, 4, 8, 178, 181
dialogicity 212
dialogism 92, 93
dialogue X, XV, XVII, XXIII, XXIV, 5, 10, 11, 30, 62–64, 66–68, 73–77, 79, 84, 85, 92, 94, 119, 121, 123, 126–130, 133, 134, 163, 166, 168, 171, 172, 212, 215
– Platonic 119
– Socratic 26, 126
discourse linguistics 206, 211–214, 221, 240, 242
dissociation 168–170
editing X, XII, XV, XVII, 16, 18, 31, 62, 86, 93, 98, 212, 252
embodiment 40, 42, 47, 48, 51
essay 83–98, 119
– essayism 87, 89, 97, 98
experience IX, XI, XV–XVII, XIX, 5, 8, 10, 16, 26, 45, 53, 54, 72, 84, 86, 87, 93–95, 98, 102, 104–109, 111, 112, 134, 145, 146, 149–152, 154, 162–166, 168–173, 178, 179, 182–188, 191, 195–197, 201, 203–206, 209, 211, 213, 215, 217, 223, 224, 228, 235, 239, 240, 258, 260, 262, 263
Foucault, Michel XVIII, XXII, 8, 9, 13, 32, 37, 98, 101–114, 133, 192, 208
form IX–XIV, XVI–XIX, XX, XXIV, XXV, 5, 6, 8, 10, 18, 23, 26–29, 31–36, 41, 62, 63, 65, 71, 73, 78–80, 83–93, 95, 96, 104, 105, 110, 119, 121, 126, 128, 133, 134, 147, 148, 170, 204, 239
gender 27, 51, 52, 72, 79, 130, 131, 153, 167, 168, 172, 180, 188, 191, 194, 207, 238, 239
generation 7, 14–16, 30, 52, 54, 192
genre IX–XIII, XVII–IXX, XXI–XXV, 3–6, 8, 18, 26, 32, 41, 39, 40, 61, 63, 68, 75, 78–80, 83–85, 87–90, 92, 93, 95, 97, 104, 107, 202–204, 206, 211, 212, 215, 221, 239, 240, 250
gestures 17, 40, 47, 49, 51, 55, 107, 114, 125, 133, 153, 165
homosexuality XIX, XX, 167, 178, 179, 186–196
indiscretion 78–80
interaction XV–XVII, XXIII, 11, 26, 29, 39, 40, 47, 51, 62, 88, 120, 121, 124–126, 130, 132–134, 139, 141–144, 153, 154, 162, 163, 170, 192, 195, 202, 211, 213–215, 226, 230, 232–234, 262
interview, author 25, 31, 32, 40–42, 55, 84, 85, 90, 104
– critical IX, 4, 8, 9, 11, 32, 33
– diagnostic 147, 149–151
– essayistic IX, 88, 89, 97, 98
– fictional 63, 65, 67, 72, 73, 75, 77, 79
– imagined IX, 62, 63, 68, 71, 72, 76–80
– job 141, 146, 151, 152
– journalistic 61, 75, 203, 212
– literary IX, XIV, XVIII, 3–8, 23, 24, 32, 35, 37, 41–43, 63, 73, 84, 85, 90
– media X, XI, 51, 128
– oral history 177, 181, 197, 249, 251, 252, 255, 257, 262, 263
– press 49, 63–68, 75, 79, 80, 82
– qualitative 123, 131–134, 136, 203
– recorded 62, 86, 93
– research 26, 31, 162, 165, 170–173
– self- 63–67, 71, 77, 79

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life writing 26, 27, 183, 197
literary field XVIII, 3–7, 24, 25, 29, 34–36
– studies XIII, XVIII, XXV, 4, 23–27, 29–32, 35, 36, 97
literature XVIII, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 19, 23, 28, 32, 33–36, 52, 66, 78, 80, 84, 96, 181
– French 42, 46
Marcus, Sharon 8, 13
media IX, 42, 44, 47, 48, 50–52, 61, 63, 65, 70, 78–80, 120, 122, 216, 234, 241
– electronic 42, 47
– mass XXIV, 67, 79, 212, 214
– Polish 179
– print X, 71
– social IX, XXII, 180
mediation 36
music, computer 250–253, 255–258, 261, 262
– mixed 258, 262
– technology 251–253, 255
objectivity X, XIV, 36, 137, 140–142, 144, 147, 148, 149, 151–155
paratext XVIII, 29, 30
The Paris Review 6, 7, 31, 32, 104
performance XIV, XVIII, 40, 42, 43, 51–55, 62, 73, 92, 94, 132, 146, 210, 250, 251, 252, 255–263
performativity 183, 184, 195, 197
persona 40, 42, 50, 54, 62, 132
plurivocity 61, 62, 68, 73, 77
Poland, state-socialist 178, 187
pragmatics, corpus 220, 222
– meta 215, 217, 218, 237–240
press XXIII, 15, 41, 52, 64–68, 71, 72, 78, 79, 178, 187
psychology XXV, 17, 110, 137, 138, 143, 146, 150, 151, 154, 155, 173
psychotherapy 150, 168, 172, 173
public sphere 24, 27, 34, 126–128, 133, 210, 241
queer 177–191, 193–195, 197
reliability 41, 61, 65, 77, 137, 140–142, 144–146, 148, 149, 151, 152, 154, 155
rhetorical practice 83, 87, 89, 91, 97
ritual 40, 41, 47, 48
Roussel, Raymond 101, 102, 107–114
Scott, David 15, 17
setting IX, X, XIII, XV, XVI, XIX–XXII, 27, 40, 42, 46, 47, 55, 84, 149, 155, 179, 231, 257, 262
sexology 179
shame XX, 165, 166, 169, 182–184, 186, 193, 195
standardization 140–142, 146, 147, 149
style 5, 9, 11, 40, 51, 55, 66, 67, 78, 86, 87, 90, 91, 93, 94, 96, 97, 131, 231
subjectivity 32, 37, 47, 102, 103, 105, 107, 109, 110, 112, 142, 173, 186, 191
technologies, inscription 36
testimony 4, 182, 184, 187, 197
theater 62, 63, 72, 73, 194, 195
transgender 180
validity 137, 141, 142–147, 151, 152, 154, 155
witnessing, reciprocal 181–185, 195–197