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**The lives of the interview: the development of the artist interview in twentieth-century
Britain and the United States**

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PhD

The University of Edinburgh

2021

Declaration

I declare that the thesis has been composed by myself and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I confirm that appropriate credit has been given within this thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

Parts of the introduction are based on my contributions to the jointly authored (with Dr Lucia Farinati) 'Preface', 'Critical introduction' and 'Commentary on the documents' published in the 'Artist Interview' section of the December 2020 issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography*. See <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/23-dec20/>.

Abstract

This thesis examines interviews with artists in Britain and the United States, mapping changes in their form, function and status over the twentieth century, and highlighting Transatlantic connections. The modern meaning of ‘interview’ only appeared in the late nineteenth century, immediately being regarded as a low form of journalism. Using case studies, this study demonstrates the complexity of artist interviews, overturning the simplistic perception of interviews as journalistic tools, apparently ‘neutral’ historical documents or as forms of oral history. I build on recent research into author interviews to determine what is specific about the artist interview.

Based on a model of the interview as performative and co-constructed, this research shifts the emphasis away from the biography of the artist to the ‘biography’ of the interview itself. I track the stages in the production and dissemination of each case-study interview, emphasising the network of stakeholders and institutions involved. This method brings to light the many iterations an interview can take over time – from the unpublished material (recordings, scripts and transcripts) to different edited versions for print and broadcast.

The thesis begins with a survey of artist interview broadcasts on BBC radio and television from the 1930s to the 1960s, comparing the pedagogical approach to art in pre-war interviews with the post-war emphasis on artists as public figures. It assesses the impact of innovations in broadcasting technologies, including the microphone and the portable tape-recorder. It considers social, cultural and political contexts, such as how the culture of the Cold War popularised the notion of ‘brainwashing’ through interviews. It then looks at the relationship between interviews and fiction in the 1960s through British social realist writer Nell Dunn’s book of conversations *Talking to Women* and American New Journalist Barbara Goldsmith’s interview profile of Warhol associate Viva, to consider how interviews affect the legacies of neglected artists. The final chapters focus on interview-led ‘little’ magazines (*BOMB*, *Interview, index*) published in New York from the 1960s to the 1990s, to explore artists’ relation to criticism and politics, including the AIDS crisis. These magazines pioneered experimental forms of interview transcription and a more egalitarian relationship between artists and their interlocutors.

Lay summary of thesis

The interview form as we know it today only dates back to the late nineteenth century. This thesis examines interviews with artists in Britain and the United States from the first artist interviews on radio in the 1930s, to postwar celebrity television series, and the publication of interview transcripts in magazines and books up to the 1990s. Through interview case studies, I assess the impact of innovations in broadcasting and recording technologies, including the microphone and the portable tape-recorder. I explore social, cultural and political contexts, such as how the Cold War popularised the notion of brainwashing through interviews, and highlight the Transatlantic connections in the interview's evolution. I ask how interviews affect artists' reputations, as well as the public appreciation of art by living artists. I build on recent research into literary interviews to consider what is specific about the artist interview.

The artist interview has often been treated as a means of revealing biographical information about the artist and the meaning behind their artworks. However, this approach has proven problematic in that an artist may not be aware of all their intentions or want to reveal information. The interviews may have been edited to remove or add information. Some artists treat interviews as a creative extension of their own artworks. My thesis therefore shifts the emphasis away from the idea of the 'authentic' artist's voice and instead focuses on the interview itself as the main object of study. Using published and archival material, in addition to my own interviews, I follow all the stages of the production and dissemination of each case study interview – what I call the 'biography of the interview'. I also explore ethical issues, including whether certain interview practices are exploitative. This framework demonstrates the complexity of artist interviews, challenging the simplistic perception of interviews as journalistic tools, apparently 'neutral' historical documents, or forms of oral history.

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Before his unexpected death, my father was the first to read my draft chapters. I know how proud he would have been.

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Anaïs.

¹ The formatting and referencing style of this thesis is based on the Style Guidance given by the *JAH*. The bibliography follows Chicago Manual of Style (*JAH* does not require separate bibliographies).

Introduction

Reading and re-reading Rembrandt's seven rather unenlightening and meagre letters, picking over the scraps of information about this or that master from the past, one looks with envy at the abundance of sources for the study of twentieth-century art. Oh for a transcript of an interview with Leonardo da Vinci.

– Keith Roberts, 'The Artist Speaks?', *Burlington Magazine* (1975)¹

In her essay 'A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women' (2017),² the novelist and critic Siri Hustvedt sums up the ambiguity surrounding artists' interpretations of their work: 'What artists say about their own work is compelling because it tells us something about what they believe they are doing ... Artists (of all kinds) are only partly aware of what they do.'³

Similarly, curator and critic Robert Storr, who recently published an anthology of his own *Interviews on Art* (2017), proposes the idea of the artist's word as a kind of partial truth: 'Of course what an artist says about his/her work is not the first word, is not the last word. It is a word. A singularly well-informed word but one of many.'⁴ In this thesis, I assess the value of listening to artists' own words, through artist interviews. It is my contention that the interview's significance has been underplayed as a mere journalistic tool, as well as overplayed as a historical source predicated on the 'authentic' artist's voice. I hope to demonstrate the variety and complexity of artist interviews that make them worthwhile objects of study in themselves.

The recording of artists' words is nothing new. Patricia Bickers, editor of *Art Monthly* magazine, contends that art collector Paul Fréart de Chantelou's 1665 written encounter with Gian Lorenzo Bernini may well constitute 'a prototype of the interview proper'.⁵ Chantelou had been asked by Louis IV to accompany Bernini during his four-month stay in France, and kept a diary of the Italian painter's activities, including what he said. That biographical,

¹ Keith Roberts, 'The Artist Speaks?', *Burlington Magazine*, 117: 866, May 1975, 301.

² The title refers to the exhibition *Women*, featuring works by Pablo Picasso, Max Beckmann and Willem de Kooning.

³ Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, London: Sceptre, 2017, 4.

⁴ Robert Storr, *Interviews on Art*, London: Heni Publishing, 2017, 10.

⁵ Patricia Bickers, 'Introduction', in Bickers and Andrew Wilson, eds, *Talking Art: Volume 1: Art Monthly interviews with artists since 1976*, London: Ridinghouse, 2013, 13.

anecdotal interest in artists' lives, as well as their work, is famously already evident in Giorgio Vasari's 1568 *The Lives of the Artists*.⁶

But for a form that is so well established today, the interview is in fact only a recent phenomenon: our contemporary understanding of the term 'interview' dates back to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the drive to attract a wider readership for newspapers 'increasingly owned by commercial organizations (rather than by radical, politically motivated individuals)'.⁷ Before this journalistic meaning – what *Encounter* editor Melvin Lasky has called the 'bastardised version of a dialogue or a conversation which appears in our newspapers and our television screens' – was established, the term interview 'referred to a formal meeting ... of great persons'.⁸

This relatively short history offers the opportunity to chart the changes in interview format and attitudes since the interview's early days when it was viewed with misgiving. For instance, in 1886, Lasky tells us, the *Pall Mall Gazette* called the interview the 'worst feature of the new system; it is degrading to the interviewer, disgusting to the interviewee, and tiresome to the public'.⁹ The literary theorist Gérard Genette describes the idea of 'autocommentary' by an author as 'relatively modern', claiming that the idea of an author revealing information about their craft was considered improper and taboo in the classical period.¹⁰ This reticence likewise characterised the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and conveniently allowed the Romantic writers to 'give the impression that their inspiration had been of a quasi-miraculous spontaneity'.¹¹

In their edited volume of essays *The Mediatization of the Artist* (2018), Rachel Esner and Sandra Kisters describe how since the late eighteenth century, 'diminishing patronage, the

⁶ In their analysis of literary interviews, Masschelein et al. offer further examples of early precursors to the interview, including population censuses in ancient Egypt, the dialogues of Socrates and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann (1836). Based on both the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary and *Oxford English Dictionary*, they also date the first English use of the term 'interview' to 1514. Anneleen Masschelein, Christoph Meurée, David Martens and Stéphanie Vanasten, 'The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre', *Poetics Today*, 35: 1-2, June 2014, 5-6.

⁷ Masschelein et al. claim that the modern form of the interview 'is an American creation that coincides with the rise of the penny press (boulevard press) in the 1830s'. Its first modern usage dates back to 1869 and was originally 'associated with sensationalist crime reporting'. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸ Melvin J. Lasky, 'The Art of the Interview', *Encounter*, March 1989: 61-3. *Encounter* was published between 1953 and 1991 and was funded by the CIA.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 367.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

rise of the middle classes, and the increasing dominance of the market in both the production and circulation of art objects' has made it 'something of a necessity' for artists to 'build their own persona in the promotion of their art'.¹² That necessity increased dramatically from the second half of the twentieth century, with pressure growing on artists to build themselves as recognisable brands in the art market. In this way, interviews can be seen as a form of currency, creating artistic and commercial value for the artist and interviewer. In 1961, American historian Daniel Boorstin coined the term 'pseudo-event' to describe 'an event created solely for the purpose of being reported'.¹³ Hans Ulrich Obrist, who has over forty volumes of interviews to his name, was called a 'shameless name-dropper' in the *Art Newspaper*, always eager 'to place himself in the spotlight, while simultaneously revealing so little of himself'.¹⁴ Has this association between interviews and self-promotion negatively affected the interview's cultural status? Rebecca Roach, in her research on the author interview, believes it has. She writes:

Given the central reputation of "high" modernist writers ... in literary studies across the twentieth century, the interview form's association with the Other of modernism – celebrity, journalistic, and mass culture – has had significant negative consequences for its critical evaluation.¹⁵

But not all artist interviews are based on promoting specific events or achievements. Many interviews position themselves critically in relation to media events and mainstream, celebrity culture, such as those in the artist-led interview magazines that I examine in this thesis. In any case, the original impetus for the interview often becomes less relevant over time. Instead, our interest lies in such elements as the personal dynamic and power play between the speakers; the particular language with which the artists describe their work and working practices; and the attitudes of the artists at that moment towards any number of topics, including how they view their own celebrity, their peers, and confront others' interpretations of their work. It is for this reason that anthologies of interviews with such artists as Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol continue to be published, sometimes years after

¹² Rachel Esner and Sandra Kisters, 'Introduction', in Esner and Kisters, eds, *The Mediatization of the Artist*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, 3.

¹³ Reva Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 16. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/wolf.pdf>. Accessed 28 May 2021.

¹⁴ Jonathan Griffin, 'The lives of the artists, according to Hans Ulrich Obrist', *The Art Newspaper*, 12 May 2015. www.theartnewspaper.com/news/the-lives-of-the-artists-according-to-hans-ulrich-obrist. Accessed 28 May 2021.

¹⁵ Rebecca Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 91.

any media event – if indeed there was one. As case studies for this thesis, I have selected interviews commissioned for diverse reasons, such as wanting to capture an ageing artist before his death (the *Face to Face* interview with Augustus John in Chapter Two) or create a sensational story (*La Dolce Viva* interview profile of Viva in Chapter Four).

I will compare how artists at different stages of their art careers have responded to interviews: when have artists embraced the opportunity to speak about themselves and when have they resisted or reacted with suspicion? How have changing attitudes towards privacy affected artists' willingness to expose themselves in public? What impact have interviews had on the public reception of art – both at the time of the interview's publication and subsequently? Instead of seeing artists as merely interview subjects, this thesis explores how artists (and their interviewers) have themselves been involved in determining the evolution of the interview form and its range of uses.

I have limited my main geographical scope to Britain and the United States, more specifically London and New York, so as to examine the strong Transatlantic connections in the evolution of the interview, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Andy Warhol, in particular, features heavily in the literature on artist interviews, but I will also look at the influence of Ed Murrow, an American broadcaster based in London during the Second World War, on British television interviews.

Defining the artist interview

But what is an artist interview? How can a definition of the artist interview take into account its status as an object (a document) and as a process (a method of enquiry and an encounter)? This ambiguity is mirrored in the etymology of the term 'interview'. 'Inter-view' (formerly also 'enterview(e)', from the Middle French *entrevoir*: have a glimpse of, and *s'entrevoir*, see each other)¹⁶ implies a relation to seeing, as well as a sense of between-ness. Certainly, many theorists have seen the interview as a hybrid form, that implicates speech and writing, listening and reading. For Roach, the 'tension the word expresses between concept and physical object also parallels the tension inherent to studying interviews in the cultural

¹⁶ T. F. Hoad, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford University Press, online version, 2003. www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192830982.001.0001/acref-9780192830982-e-7909?rskkey=bn8KQv&result=7911. Accessed 28 May 2021.

imaginary, since they are understood as both a media object and a methodology, a form and a practice'.¹⁷ By contrast, Johanna Burton and Lisa Pasquariello, in their essay for a special issue on interviews in the *Art Journal* (2005), describe the artist interview in terms of what it is not: 'not quite document, not quite literature, not quite propaganda, not quite staged voyeurism, not quite entertainment, not quite verifiable fact'.¹⁸

In 2019 I co-convened, with Dr Lucia Farinati, a session called 'The Artist Interview' at the annual Association for Art History (AAH) conference, the six papers of which were further developed for our guest-edited section of the *Journal of Art Historiography* in December 2020.¹⁹ The 2019 AAH conference sought to stimulate responses to the question 'what is art history and visual culture in an expanded field?' The prompt was based on Rosalind Krauss's definition of the expanded field of sculpture, in which she created a logically expanded field based on the binaries 'landscape-not landscape' and 'architecture-not architecture' to generate a set of new possibilities such as 'marked sites' and 'site construction', and thus account for the striking new developments in contemporary art in the 1970s that seemed to elude categorisation.²⁰ Following Krauss, Farinati and I asked if it would be possible to conceive of an 'expanded field' of the artist interview in relation to such positions as oral history, artwork, art criticism and artists' writing.

Nonetheless, it is useful to begin this research with a set of minimum conditions for defining the artist interview. The sociologist Raymond Lee helpfully identifies four 'wider contingencies' of the interview: 'the motivation of the participants, the coordination of the encounter in time and space, the deployment of technical as well as interactional skills, and the representation of the material produced in the interview'.²¹ Expanding on these contingencies, I begin with the basic assumption that the artist interview describes a premeditated conversation between an artist and at least one interlocutor addressed to a third

¹⁷ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 11.

¹⁸ Johanna Burton and Lisa Pasquariello, "'Ask Somebody Else Something Else": Analyzing the Artist Interview', *Art Journal*, Fall 2005, 46.

¹⁹ This introduction to my thesis expands on the material that I had developed for my co-written (with Lucia Farinati) Preface, Introduction and Commentary sections of 'The Artist Interview' in *The Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020. <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/23-dec20/>. Accessed 28 May 2021.

²⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, vol. 8, Spring 1979, 30-44.

²¹ Raymond M. Lee, 'Recording Technologies and The Interview in Sociology, 1920-2000', *Sociology*, 38: 5, 2004, 882-3.

party or an audience generally not also present.²² The artificiality of this situation is captured by celebrity interviewer Lynn Barber when she writes: ‘The interview is an odd transaction ... It looks like an intimate tête-à-tête but you know that it’s “on the record”, intended for publication. On the other hand you don’t *speak* as if to an audience.’²³

This definition still leaves scope as to the identity of the interlocutor (who might be an art critic, art historian, journalist, fellow artist or arts practitioner, among other possibilities) and the size and location of the audience. It also leaves open the nature of the encounter (live, video call or phone call, or written correspondence by post or email), the motivations behind it, the specifics of the commissioning process, the interview’s duration (including whether it took place over more than one encounter), location, whether or not it was recorded, and its published form and platform (such as the popular question-and-answer – Q&A – format in magazines), as well as its purpose. The interview may be recorded or not, transcribed (by the interviewer or a third party) or not, and approved by the interviewee prior to publication or not. The interviewer’s questions may be pre-prepared or not, structured or open-ended – in the latter’s case, the interview might be called a ‘conversation’, the preferred term of author Nell Dunn for her book *Talking to Women* (1965), discussed in Chapter Three. This loose definition also allows for the many subgenres of artist interviews that will be discussed in this thesis: from published interviews, as found in newspapers, periodicals and interview anthologies; to live and recorded interviews, broadcast on radio and television. It also leaves scope for artistic exploitations of the interview, such as Andy Warhol’s interview-based book *a: A novel* (1968), discussed in Chapter Four; Marcel Broodthaers’ absurdist *Interview with a Cat* (1970); or Lutz Bacher’s *The Lee Harvey Oswald Interview* (1976), in which the artist interviewed himself on the subject of President Kennedy’s assassin.²⁴

Artist interviews and oral history

One incentive for convening the AAH session was to disentangle the artist interview from its close association with oral history, especially as the 2006 AAH session (the last time the subject had been explicitly addressed at the conference) was titled ‘The Artist Interview:

²² Rebecca Roach argues that this tripartite speech situation gives the interview its uniqueness. Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 10.

²³ Lynn Barber, *A Curious Career*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, 40.

²⁴ The interview was presented as a collage of cut-up fragments of the interview and photocopied images of men posing as Oswald.

contents and contentions in oral history/art history'. Farinati and I argued that while there was certainly overlap between the two forms, oral history, belonging to the field of social science, has its own distinct history, as well as ethical and legal protocols.²⁵ This disentanglement is especially pertinent in the UK, where the *Artists' Lives* project, established by National Life Stories in 1990 and based in the oral history section of the British Library, has enjoyed much success at developing appreciation for the artist's voice as valuable historical source material.

Subsuming the artist interview within the field of oral history restricts opportunities for interpretation and minimises its performative and creative aspects. Oral history, with its function to generate primary historical evidence, necessarily strives for validity and reliability. Artist interviews, however, may be used for any number of functions, including as a form of criticism, for publicity purposes, for quasi-ethnographic purposes (cataloguing the opinions of one's peers) and to generate an artwork. At its core, oral history has a moral remit that artist interviews do not necessarily share: to offer a more democratic history from a wider array of voices, and to widen the scope of history. 'It [oral history] provides a means for radical transformation of the social meaning of history,' as Paul Thompson (founder of National Life Stories) puts it in *The Voice of the Past* (1988).²⁶

Oral history interviewers are trained to mitigate any 'lack of equity between participants', such as choosing a location that makes an interviewee comfortable.²⁷ Interviewers are thus not supposed to occupy the spotlight themselves: to 'record life stories requires "an abandonment of the self in a quest to enter the world of another"'.²⁸ Indeed, in Michael Bird's book *Studio Voices: Art and Life in 20th-Century Britain* (2018), based on a fellowship at the British Library surveying the 400 interviews in its *Artists' Lives* oral history archive, he does not specify the names of the interviewers. In the case of artist interviews, on the other hand, the status and popularity of the interview might be predicated as much on the

²⁵ See, in particular, Lisa Sandino and Matthew Partington, eds, *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.

²⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 28.

²⁷ Brad E. Lucas and Margaret M. Strain, 'Keeping the Conversation Going: The Archive Thrives on Interviews and Oral History', in Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier and Lisa S. Mastrangelo, *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010, 265.

²⁸ Molly Andrews in Sandino and Partington, eds, *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, 3.

reputation of the interviewer as the interviewee, as demonstrated by interviewer-led anthologies, such as Dunn's *Talking to Women*.

Biography: a new methodological paradigm

In the opening paper of the 2019 'Artist Interview' session, on the historiography of the artist interview, art historian Reva Wolf claimed that 'virtually everyone who has thought about the history of interviews ... came to the topic through... [their] work as an interviewer'.²⁹ This observation certainly resonated with Farinati and me. Having interviewed many artists in my capacity as a critic as well as art historian, I wanted to reflect on the relationship between interviews and criticism.³⁰ In offering an unmediated form of interpretation, are interviews a form of anti-criticism?

My experience of interviewing includes convening live conversations in front of an audience and for broadcast on radio, as well as conducting, transcribing and editing interviews for print publications such as magazines and art books. What effect do these different platforms have on the form, function and reception of interviews? A particular artist interview may take several forms over time – altered in the process, as it is transcribed, edited, recorded, performed or re-performed. For reasons of comparison, then, many of the interviews I have selected for this research exist in multiple formats across different platforms, including scripts, live dialogue, transcripts in magazines and books, audio/audio-visual broadcasts and recordings and fictionalised versions in novels.

A number of these variants may even be found in one archive (such as the BBC Written Archives Centre or the Downtown Collection at New York University), permitting comparisons between, say, different draft transcripts, or an audio recording and a script. But in many cases throughout this thesis, I find that variants, to which references exist, have been lost or are inaccessible. Trying to reconstruct missing variants through existing documents echoes the challenges faced in the field of textual philology. This potential for migration across platforms over time, and the futility of locating all these variants, challenges the idea

²⁹ Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', 11.

³⁰ For example, five of my artist interviews have been published in *Art Monthly's* anthology *Talking Art 2: Art Monthly Interviews with Artists since 2007*, London: Riding House Press, 2017.

that an artist interview resides in a singular document – the Ur interview – and instead recognises the individual significance of variant formats.

With no standardised training for interviewing in the art world, I have developed my own set of protocols, including giving the artist copy approval, which is not typical of mainstream journalism.³¹ This lack of codification is reflected in the huge variety of artist interview styles. For instance, some interviewers chose to focus on an artist's artmaking, avoiding biographical questions, while for others the opposite might be true. Some magazines or broadcasting programmes are also known for a particular interview format, like BBC radio's *Desert Island Discs*, discussed in Chapter One. Outside the framework of academic research, in which ethical guidelines are becoming commonplace for all types of interview,³² could or should protocols exist for artist interviews? For example, Lynn Barber advocates never meeting an interviewee before the interview and preferably having no mutual friends – what she calls 'clean' interviews.³³ For those working in what still feels like a relatively small art world, this principle would surely be difficult to uphold. I was curious to compare different approaches to interview technique and etiquette in the case studies for this thesis. Guides to good interview practice tend to be the preserve of curators, who use oral history methods to gather specific information from artists to aid in the future conservation of artworks.³⁴ Other interview manuals, such as Christian Thiele's *Interview führen* (2013),³⁵ are too general to apply to artist interviews.

It is challenging, then, to find a one-size-fits-all method to examining artist interviews. Within the social sciences, researchers have access to a range of methods to accommodate different types of interviews. For example, relational approaches to interviewing emphasise

³¹ This view is shared by Bronwyn Davies, known for her work on collective biography. Davies said in an interview that she would never write about a named interviewee without their agreement and approval, seeing 'that as both to do with ethics and as a means of expanding and checking what the text is trying to do'. Anneleen Masschelein and Rebecca Roach, 'Emergent Conversations: Bronwyn Davies on the Transformation of Interview Practices in the Social Sciences', *Biography*, 41: 2, Spring 2018, 266.

³² These include producing consent forms for interviewees to sign and seeking approval of one's research from ethics committees.

³³ Barber, *A Curious Career*, 77.

³⁴ See Lydia Beerkens et al., *The Artist Interview – for Conservation and Preservation of Contemporary Art. Guidelines & Practice*, Prinsenbeek: Jap Sam Books, 2012, and the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA)'s guide to good interview practice (2016), available to download here: https://www.incca.org/sites/default/files/field_attachments/2002_incca_guide_to_good_practice_artists_interviews.pdf/2002_incca_guide_to_good_practice_artists_interviews.pdf. Accessed 28 May 2021.

³⁵ Christian Thiele, *Interview führen*, Constance: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2013.

the dialogical aspect of interviewing over one-way interrogation.³⁶ Narrative theories deal with generating stories through interviews.³⁷ And the classic ‘case-study’ method used in social sciences is useful for narrowing down a field, and as such can be helpful in dealing with the sheer abundance of artist interviews. Nonetheless, while I might borrow some aspects of social science methods, like case studies, it is important to remember that the social sciences generally use interviews as a tool for data-gathering from a live encounter, and thus focus on content and context rather than form. Conversely, I was not present at the case-study interviews I examine in this thesis, and the form of the interview is an essential element of my research.

Michael Diers uses Maurice Blanchot’s term ‘infinite conversation’ (from the title of his 1969 book *L’entretien infini*) to describe Hans Ulrich Obrist’s ongoing interview project with contemporary arts practitioners and thinkers, collected in an ever-growing number of anthologies. Diers links the idea of ‘infinite conversation’ to the current ‘society of conversation that practically worships any form of public utterance’.³⁸ But he also offers a historical context, linking infinite conversation ‘to the concept of German romanticism that a conversation will never reach an end, for it always only approximate (sic) its subject and therefore always requires continuation’.³⁹ In my research, I have also taken a diachronic approach, frequently comparing case-study artist interviews with interviews given by the same artist or conducted by the same interviewer at other times. In this way, the interview does not represent the artist’s or interviewer’s definitive word – the ‘last word’, as Storr put it – but rather allows scope for the interlocutors to develop, change and even contradict their thoughts on art and life over time.

Moreover, qualitative methods from the social sciences cannot account for the life of the artist interview beyond the live encounter. My own interviewing practice has made me acutely aware of the many stages in shaping an interview for publication or broadcast. It seems vital that any survey of artist interviews should take into account this entire journey, from pre-production to post-production, as well as all the stakeholders involved, including

³⁶ See Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018.

³⁷ See, for example, Robin Alison Mueller, ‘Episodic Narrative Interview: Capturing Stories of Experience with a Methods Fusion’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 18, January 2019.

³⁸ Michael Diers, “‘Infinite Conversation’ Or the Interview as an Art Form’ in Thomas Boutoux, ed., *Hans Ulrich Obrist, Interviews: Volume 1*, Milan: Carta, 2003, 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

interviewer and interviewee, but potentially also commissioning editor, subeditor, transcriber, publisher and others. In the case of radio and television interviews, producers, directors, sound engineers and camera operators would be among the stakeholders that need to be considered.

The life, and after-life of the interview might be thought of as the biography of the interview, after anthropologist Igor Kopytoff's seminal paper 'The cultural biography of things' (1986).⁴⁰ This methodological framework treats the interview as the object of study itself, foregrounding the material conditions of the interview, as well as the social relations it engenders. Tracking interviews chronologically makes it easier to observe shifts in language and perspectives on art and the art world, changes in levels of formality, and in societal mores over the course of time, such as whether an artist feels able to allude to their sexuality.⁴¹ Tracking the biography of an interview makes visible the process by which it becomes a notable text in an artist's career bibliography, or even a canonical art-historical reference – or not. As Kopytoff helpfully proposes, the biography of a thing might 'ask questions similar to those one asks about people', in that one 'can draw an analogy between the way societies construct individuals and the way they construct things'. The examples he gives make useful prompts for the biography of the artist interview:

Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markets for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?⁴²

Focusing on the life of the interview offers a paradigm shift away from the interview's problematic association with biography and intentionality. In the visual arts, the suspicion of authorial intention is associated with the formalist traditions of art history, most famously

⁴⁰ Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 89. I would like to thank Deborah Jackson, Director of Postgraduate Research, Edinburgh College of Art, for suggesting this analogy in relation to my research methodology.

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

⁴² Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things', 66-7.

represented by Heinrich Wölfflin's slogan 'art history without names'.⁴³ More recently, it has been linked to formalist art criticism, and poststructuralist theories such as those advanced by Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, who both overturned the historically superior status of the writer (or artist), arguing that the reader (spectator) in fact has the power to generate meaning.⁴⁴ The idea of being able to gain access to artists' lives – that some kind of special status should be conferred upon these artists' insights – through viewing their work or listening to them talk was likewise scorned by Hal Foster in his *Art in America* article 'The Expressive Fallacy' (1983) – a play on the title of the influential paper 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) by two prominent figures of New Criticism, W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, which criticised the search for intention in poetry.⁴⁵ For Foster, authentic expression is an ideological construct; the 'crisis of the individual versus society' is a 'cliché' that masks the real crisis of the individual as 'now largely an instrumental category: the entrepreneur of early capitalism returned, in late capitalism, as a consumer of "individuality"'.⁴⁶

In the postmodern period, socio-political context slipped back in regarding the interpretation of visual art – Leo Steinberg's *Other Criteria* (1972) is a significant text here rejecting the limitations of formalism – but biography continued (and continues) to be problematic. As Steinberg himself noted:

The attempts to cope with more private or more freely metaphorical and evasive aspects of art become professionally suspect. They tend to be left to art writers, popularizers, critics, psychologists – that is, to men who have neither the habits nor the responsibilities of the historian's hard-won methodology, so that their contributions to the literature of art serve to confirm the discredit of the whole enterprise.⁴⁷

⁴³ According to Marshall Brown, Wölfflin's 'slogan is often quoted but rarely attributed. It comes from the suppressed preface for the first edition of *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, which has not been translated into English'. Brown, 'The Classic is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History', *Critical Inquiry*, 9: 2, December 1982, 382.

⁴⁴ See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Stephen Heath, ed., *Image-Music-Text*, London: Mill and Wang, 1977, 142-8; and Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967.

⁴⁵ W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *The Swanee Review*, 54: 3, July-September 1946, 470.

⁴⁶ Hal Foster, 'The Expressive Fallacy', in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, New York: The New Press, 1985, 75.

⁴⁷ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972; this edition 2007, 314.

Yet there have been recent attempts to offer a more nuanced take on authorship. Siri Hustvedt reminds us that the reader/viewer is not a neutral figure, and that one must acknowledge their ‘prejudices, limitations, and particular emotional tone to the text’.⁴⁸ What’s more, acknowledging the significance of the reader/viewer does not automatically kill off the author or artist. Séan Burke, in *The Death and Return of the Author* (2008), persuasively argues that as ‘often as not, the conceptual network proposed in the stead of *auteurist* criticism serves to reawaken the very categories it would vitiate’.⁴⁹ He offers the example of intertextuality: comparing texts by different authors ‘returns quite compliantly to notions of influence and revision’.⁵⁰ More cynically, as Esner and Kisters wryly note in *The Mediatization of the Artist*, the ‘theoretical debate [about authorship] did not, however, alter the institutional and commercial focus on the artist’s persona’.⁵¹

Furthermore, developments in art history over the past two decades have reinvigorated interest in biography and interviews, so that they are no longer as ‘professionally suspect’ as Steinberg lamented. The recent ‘affective turn’ in research builds on the legacies of feminism, postcolonial and queer studies (among others) for which the personal was necessarily political, in order to diversify and decolonise art history.⁵² In this way art historians have turned their attention to that which had been considered too minor, too anecdotal, too emotion-led⁵³ – criticisms that indeed might previously have been levelled at artist interviews.⁵⁴ For example, Gavin Butt asserts the importance of rumour and gossip for his important survey of homosexuality in the New York art world, *Between You and Me: Queer disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (2005). Acknowledging the difficulty of relying on ‘the published discourse of the day’, Butt writes:

⁴⁸ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men*, 399.

⁴⁹ Séan Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, third edition, 2008, 166.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Esner and Kisters, *The Mediatization of the Artist*, 6.

⁵² See Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, eds, *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; and Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

⁵³ Rebecca Roach similarly writes of author interviews as offering ‘a version of the author that has often been considered too personal, too oral, too embodied for criticism’, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 5. For an analysis of the role of anecdote in historical research, see Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Ben Highmore, *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010; and Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-war Britain*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017.

... I make much use of biographies and autobiographies, as well as interviews with artists, poets and critics; written or conducted in subsequent, less oppressive times, they are invaluable sources which latterly make public those things kept semiprivate as gossip between intimates at the time.⁵⁵

Acceptance has grown for non-traditional, more subjective methods for transmitting and documenting art-historical events, such as performing archival material, and a return to the use of 'ekphrasis', which fell out of favour in the late nineteenth century, through which visual memories are recounted orally.⁵⁶ Oral history has raised awareness of the importance of capturing living artists' voices, and in so doing promoted greater interest in very recent art history. As Cathy Courtney, project director of the *Artists' Lives* oral history project, quipped in a recent conference, people used to like their artists dead and silent even until the 1970s.⁵⁷

Following these art-historical developments, then, it is important to state that examining the life of the interview does not preclude observations about the life of the interviewee. Museum director and writer Iwona Blazwick has described the particular intimacy of the form as 'eavesdropping': we hope to find out something about the artist's character that we didn't already know.⁵⁸ As Roach observes, interviews 'encourage us to read them instrumentally', that is, to extract information out of them, although the nature of that information might range from gossip to trade secrets.⁵⁹ The American journalist Janet Malcolm goes further, believing that in most interviews 'both subject and interviewer give more than is necessary. They are always being seduced and distracted by the encounter's outward resemblance to an ordinary friendly meeting.'⁶⁰

In their influential study of Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality*, in which they popularised the term 'interview society', Paul Atkinson and David Silverman warn against the 'ironic and unintended consequence if the proper attention to the voices of ethnographic representation

⁵⁵ Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005, 2nd printing 2006, 16.

⁵⁶ For an analysis of ekphrasis in art history, see Jás Elsner, 'Art History as Ekphrasis', *Art History*, 33: 1, January 2010. For discussions of performance in archival research and the idea of embodied memory, see Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14: 3, 1988; Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011; and Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013.

⁵⁷ 'The Voice of the Artist', conference, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2016.

⁵⁸ Iwona Blazwick, 'The Anatomy of the Interview', in Bickers and Wilson, *Talking Art: Volume 1*, 25.

⁵⁹ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 8.

⁶⁰ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, London: Granta Books, 2020.

[derived from feminist and postcolonial scholarship] were to reintroduce an uncritical view of the subject'.⁶¹ So how best to acknowledge the value of biography, while also retaining a sense of criticality? Esmer and Kitters usefully 'call for an approach in which biography, social status, psychological constitution, habitus, and the art itself are studied holistically, as a complex construction within a specific historical context'.⁶² They advocate continuing 'to deconstruct both the popular image of the artist and the media that give rise to it'.⁶³

In my research, I acknowledge the curiosity that interviews provoke – the seductive promise to reveal – as well as the limitations of this approach, such that interviewees might refuse to divulge information, lie or mislead, and have particular motives (personal, political, commercial, promotional) for doing so. The biography of the interview allows for revelations to be uncovered not just in the published interview, but at any stage of its life and in any number of variants, and for attitudes to change over time. This methodology expands the scope of interest to include not just the prejudices, limitations and emotions of the interviewee but also of the interviewer and other interview stakeholders.

Writing a historiography of the artist interview: a slippery subject

Reva Wolf's paper on the historiography of the artist interview since the 1990s, cited earlier, offers an impressive overview of the literature on this subject, as well as a discussion of the 'impediment' to writing a history of such a 'slippery' subject with its 'sheer abundance of material' and 'breadth of associations with other histories that it involves and invites, such as with journalism, broadcasting technology, psychoanalysis, performance, and literature'.⁶⁴ In the United States, where Wolf is based, the College Art Association included a session on the artist interview ('The Interview with the Artist as a Genre: History, Function, Theory') in its 1996 conference. In 2005, a special issue of the *Art Journal* was dedicated to the artist interview, based again on a panel at the College Art Association the previous year. In the UK, the abstract for the 2006 AAH session 'The Artist Interview', mentioned earlier, claimed that

⁶¹ Paul Atkinson and David Silverman, 'Kundera's Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of Self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3: 3, September 1997, 322.

⁶² Esner and Kisters, *The Mediatization of the Artist*, 6.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 7.

⁶⁴ Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', 1.

the artist interview was ‘emerging’ as a genre. Since then, recognition for the artist interview has grown significantly.

Over the past four years, I have noted the publication of a substantial range of interview anthologies.⁶⁵ As Lynn Abrams writes in her preface to the second edition of *Oral History Theory*, oral history – as with art history and criticism – has become more democratic ‘now that anyone with a mobile phone can conduct an interview’.⁶⁶ Dominating the contemporary artist interview field is Hans Ulrich Obrist, whose *The Conversations Series* with artists and some architects currently numbers twenty-six volumes, and whose *The Infinite Conversations*, published in 2020, gathers together his famous interview marathons with artists and other cultural practitioners at the Fondation Cartier in Paris.⁶⁷ In 2017, London’s Whitechapel Gallery displayed a selection of interviews from its own archive for the exhibition *Q&A: Artists in Conversation*. Podcasts have become an important new platform for artist interviews. These include American artist Brainard Carey’s podcasts with art practitioners available on his Museum of Non-Visible Art website;⁶⁸ the Getty’s ‘Recording Artists’ podcasts;⁶⁹ and London-based art historian and curator Katy Hessel’s ‘The Great Women Artists’ Podcast (including episodes on Yayoi Kusama and Pauline Boty that have provided useful material to this thesis).⁷⁰

Wolf writes that ‘first interviews’ are continually being discovered, and that there has been no sustained collaborative effort to share research on the origins and history of the artist

⁶⁵ Examples include anthologies of interviews from *Art Monthly*, *Impulse* and *Brooklyn Rail* magazines; and collected interviews by critic and curator Robert Storr (*Interviews on Art*, London: Heni Publishing, 2017) and with artists Ray Johnson (Julie J. Thomson, ed., *That Was the Answer: Interviews with Ray Johnson*, Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2018) and Andrea Fraser (*Andrea Fraser: Collected Interviews, 1990–2018*, London and New York: Koenig Books/ A.R.T. Press, 2019). Other recent anthologies have taken a more anthropological approach, such as *Los Angeles Studio Conversations: Part II* (Berlin: The Green Box, 2019); *What it Means to Write About Art: Interviews with Art Critics* (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018); and the New York organisation ART21’s *Being An Artist* (2018).

⁶⁶ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, second edition, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016, 10. See also the increased availability of automated transcription software, such as Otter, which offers live transcription and real-time captioning. www.otter.ai. Accessed 31 May 2021.

⁶⁷ In addition, Hans Ulrich Obrist’s *The Richter Interviews* (2019) collects conversations with the artist over the past two decades. Obrist has also been running live ‘interview marathons’ since 2006. The original versions took place at the Serpentine Gallery, and are collected in the volume *London Dialogues*, Milan: Skira Editore, 2012. His book of conversations *Lives of the Artists, Lives of the Architects* was published by Allen Lane in 2015.

⁶⁸ www.museumofnonvisibleart.com/podcast/. Accessed 28 May 2021.

⁶⁹ The ‘Radical Women’ season is available at [www.getty.edu/recordingartists/?mc_cid=151ac86dc8&mc_eid=\[2de5738fe2\]](http://www.getty.edu/recordingartists/?mc_cid=151ac86dc8&mc_eid=[2de5738fe2])). Accessed 28 May 2021.

⁷⁰ www.thegreatwomenartists.com/katy-hessel-podcast. Accessed 28 May 2021.

interview. For example, *Das Interview* (2013), a German-language book on the artist interview edited by Michael Diers, Lars Blunck and Hans Ulrich Obrist, has yet to be translated. As Wolf wryly notes, the introductions to both the 1996 College Art Association panel and the 2019 AAH session make ‘the very same observation’ that there has been no history of the interview as a critical genre in its own right.⁷¹

Wolf concludes her paper on an optimistic note, praising the collaborative approach to writing a history of interviews that was recently trialled in the field of literature. As an example, one might cite the vast bibliography on literary interviews collated by Anneleen Masschelein, Christophe Meurée, David Martens, Stéphanie Vanasten and Guillaume Willem in *Poetics Today* (2014).⁷² More recently, Rebecca Roach’s book *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* (2018) makes a clear case for establishing a history of the author interview, as Roach calls it. This is especially important, since Roach and Masschelein point out, in their recent special issue on interviews in the journal *Biography* (2018), that there has been ‘remarkably little cross-fertilization between theoretical work in literary studies and art history’.⁷³

In his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), Gérard Genette relegated the interview to the subordinate, instrumental role of the ‘paratext’ – that which surrounds the main text. As epitexts (the subgenre of paratexts that exist outside the text), the function of artist interviews would be to support the presentation, reception and consumption of this main work.⁷⁴ Current scholarship on the literary interview is intent on establishing a more equal, horizontal platform for an author interview and any related texts (such as a novel by that author). In ‘The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre’, Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten borrow Torsten Hoffmann’s useful term

⁷¹ Wolf, ‘The artist interview: an elusive history’, 18.

⁷² Anneleen Masschelein, Christophe Meurée, David Martens, Stéphanie Vanasten and Guillaume Willem, ‘The Literary Interview: An Annotated Bibliography’, *Poetics Today*, 35: 1-2, Spring–Summer 2014. The bibliography includes a few non-literary references, including Julia Gelshorn’s seminal paper on the functions of art interviews, ‘Two Are Better Than One: Notes on the Interview and Techniques of Multiplication’, *Art Bulletin*, 94: 1, March 2012.

⁷³ Anneleen Masschelein and Rebecca Roach, ‘Putting Things Together: To Interviewing as Creative Practice’, *Biography*, 41: 2, Spring 2018, 172.

⁷⁴ Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 10.

‘deparatextualisation’ to liberate the interview from its previous supporting role.⁷⁵ If the interview could itself be considered a main text, then the interview, too, could have its own paratexts. For instance, the title, introduction and pull-quotes in a published transcript of an interview could then be analysed as peritextual information.⁷⁶

The depth and scope of Roach’s scholarly research in *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, in particular, makes it possible to compare interviews in the fields of art and literature, and to consider in what ways an artist interview might be categorised as a distinct genre. For example, in her analysis of the phenomenon of the ‘literary last interview’, Masschelein asserts that to qualify as a ‘literated’ interview – that is, belonging to the literary genre – an interview ‘must have literary qualities’.⁷⁷ Similarly, one might create a subgenre of artist interviews that have artistic qualities. Reva Wolf’s introduction to a collection of Andy Warhol interviews, *I’ll Be Your Mirror* (2004), begins with the question ‘Can an interview be a work of art?’⁷⁸ – to which she answers that, in Warhol’s case, yes, ‘his vision of the interview ... [was] both a parallel, and a component of, his art’.⁷⁹

Author and artist interviews both benefitted from developments in printing technology in the 1960s and 1970s, which allowed for cheaper printing on home machines and made possible the surge in DIY ‘little’ and underground art and literary magazines. This thesis examines the commonalities and differences between the artist and author interviews that appeared in little magazines. Was there cross-pollination between the two?

Notwithstanding, it is important to recognise that modern and contemporary literature has enjoyed a wider reception in the popular media and thus greater public visibility than its artistic equivalent. In 2009, Midge Gillies noted the popularity of literary biographies over those of other public figures: around half the winners of Costa Book Awards’ Biography

⁷⁵ ‘Deparatextualisation’, translated from the German *Entparatextualisation*, referred initially to ‘the German literature of the 1980s, when the literary interview began to be treated as an independent form’. Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, ‘The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre’, 4.

⁷⁶ The peritext refers to paratextual information that is incorporated into the main text, such as the front cover or introduction. See Genette, *Paratexts*, 5.

⁷⁷ Anneleen Masschelein, ‘Morituri Te Salutant: The Mediatization of the Literary Last Interview at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century’, *Biography*, 41: 2, Spring 2018, 362. Masschelein does not specify what she means by ‘literary qualities’ but describes last interviews with Jacques Derrida and Dennis Potter that she believes qualify.

⁷⁸ Reva Wolf, in Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, 1962–1987*, New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2004, xi.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxi.

Award are biographies of writers (the remainder being of ‘politicians, artists, painters, composers and other historical figures’).⁸⁰ Additionally, newspapers and Sunday supplements feature far fewer artists than writers, musicians or actors. As Lynn Barber says of her time as an interviewer for the *Sunday Express* in the 1980s: ‘There was no question of interviewing artists ... Our readers were determinedly philistine and still made jokes about Picassos with two noses, or Henry Moores with holes in them.’⁸¹ She acknowledges that artists get more media coverage ‘than they did twenty years ago, but even if you count the column inches devoted to, say, Lucian Freud over his entire lifetime versus the column inches devoted to, say, Victoria Beckham ... you will find that Freud counts as practically unknown.’⁸² It is for this reason, Barber observes appreciatively, that artists rarely ‘come laden with PRs’, and are, for her, more enjoyable to interview.⁸³ Is the dearth of artist interviews in the mainstream due more to reluctance on the part of the artists or editors and publishers?

There are also fundamental differences in the modes of communication in literature and art. As Roach points out, for many writers, the interview itself could be seen as ‘contiguous’ with their oeuvre, given that both are based on the writer’s own words. Some authors have used this to their advantage, becoming what Masschelein et al. call ‘interview authors’, who incorporate interviews into their work.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, this conflation of an author’s written words in their oeuvre and the transcription of their spoken words from an interview is precisely the reason many writers dislike interviews. Roland Barthes was explicit about his aversion to them, explaining: ‘I’m always uneasy when speech is used somehow to repeat writing, because then I have the impression of uselessness. I could not say what I want to say any better than by writing it, and to repeat it by talking about it tends to diminish it.’⁸⁵

In visual art, the issue has tended to be just the opposite: that is, that visual information cannot be mapped or translated neatly into speech or written language. The British art historian Michael Baxendall argues that ‘direct descriptive terms can cover very little of the

⁸⁰ Midge Gillies, *Writing Lives: Literary Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 52.

⁸¹ Barber, *A Curious Career*, 163.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁸⁴ Masschelein, Meurée, Martens and Vanasten, ‘The Literary Interview’, 2-3. They offer as examples Karl Kraus’s (1912) ‘biting satire on the press, “Interview mit einem sterbenden Kind” (“Interview with a Dying Child”’, as well as André Gide’s 1942 *Interviews Imaginaires (Imaginary Interviews)*. *Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980*, London: Vintage, 2010, 322.

interest one wishes to indicate’, and that one must therefore expect the hearer to ‘supply a great deal in the way of mental comparison with other works of art, of experience of the previous use of such words in art criticism, and of general interpretative tact’.⁸⁶ But there are occasions when an artist’s spoken words might be considered contiguous with their artwork. From the 1960s, many conceptual and video artists began to use text or spoken language as an artistic medium – such as the Art & Language group with their *Art-Language* journal as a written example, or William Furlong’s *Audio Arts* cassette-based magazine.⁸⁷ Yet these were not attempts to use writing to explain artwork, but rather to abolish the divide between language and art.

The pleasures of the transcript

In contemporary oral history, listening to a voice recording is ‘paramount’ and written transcripts, if indeed they are produced at all, are seen as ‘secondary’.⁸⁸ Marxist historian Raphael Samuel’s ‘The Perils of the Transcript’ (1971), in which he complains that the ‘spoken word can very easily be mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page’, continues to be influential in oral history.⁸⁹ Samuel regarded the oral historian as the custodian ‘of priceless information which would otherwise be lost’, who is duty-bound to preserve it in its ‘original integrity’ without imposing her or his own research interests on it.⁹⁰

The oral history principles of the integrity of the material and the objectivity of the interviewer are generally less strictly observed by those involved in artist interviews, and indeed sometimes wilfully abandoned. In her paper for the 2019 AAH ‘Artist Interview’ session, art historian Claire Holdsworth offers intriguing examples of artists using live and recorded interviews as strategic elements in their own work, exploiting the potential for variant formats of the ‘same’ interview. For instance, Catherine Elwes’s *Kensington Gore*

⁸⁶ Michael Baxandall, ‘The Language of Art History’, *New Literary History*, 10: 3, Spring 1979, 456.

⁸⁷ See Lucia Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, PhD, 2020. Accessible at: <https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/46708/>.

⁸⁸ Cathy Courtney, ‘National Life Stories’, in Lisa LeFeuvre, ed., ‘Artists’ Lives’, *Essays on Sculpture*, Henry Moore Institute, vol. 69, January 2014, 6-7.

⁸⁹ Raphael Samuel, ‘The Perils of the Transcript’, *Oral History*, 1971, 1: 2, 19.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

(1982) features different accounts of an accident Elwes witnessed, the same story re-told in as many ways as she could think of to create an ‘acoustic collage’.⁹¹

In keeping with his distaste for interviews, Barthes proposed that transcriptions should not even be termed ‘writing’ but rather a form of inscription he called ‘scription’.⁹² He lamented the loss through scription of what he saw as the immediacy, danger and innocence embedded in speech; all the idiosyncratic features that make up the ‘grain of the voice’.⁹³ Furthermore, by tidying up sentences, such as getting rid of repetitions or contradictions, according to Barthes, we also erase the way we expose our thought patterns in speech.⁹⁴ Barthes went as far as to argue that ‘what is lost in transcription is simply the body’.⁹⁵

Giving such prominence to the voice typifies the logocentrism of Western thought, as described by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (1967), whereby thought is understood to be first mediated by speech and then again by writing. However, tracking the life of the interview rather than the subject disrupts assumptions about the primacy of oral documents over written transcripts. Interviews migrate between different platforms, oral and written, over time. Decisions must be made about which variants to keep for posterity. For instance, in the 1920s, the first decade of BBC radio, programmes were not recorded, and so scripts might be the only surviving form of an interview. The question of the status of transcripts is especially timely as libraries and archives battle to save their audiovisual material, whose physical carriers face continual degradation and obsolescence. The British Library estimates that it holds seven million recordings across forty different formats made between the 1880s and now.⁹⁶ Constraints on time and money, as well as copyright concerns, mean that many will not be saved, including interview recordings. In these cases, no audio or audiovisual version of an interview will exist, and any scripts and transcripts will be the only records.

⁹¹ Claire Holdsworth, ‘Vocal acts: video art and the artist’s voice’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 13-8. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/holdsworth.pdf>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

⁹² Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4; 183.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁶ As claimed by British Library curators Sally Jennings and Will Prentice at a British Library ‘Save our Sounds’ talk, 17 September 2018.

As with reading, listening to a voice is not a neutral activity. Might one be tempted to deride an inarticulate speaker, or one with a heavily inflected voice (through accent, class or speech impediment), but react in a less prejudiced manner when reading a transcript of their speech? Should one not ask what one gains – as well as loses – in transcription? There are many examples in archives of artist-interview transcripts that contain supplementary comments, diagrams and drawings that *only* exist in those specific documents.⁹⁷

Transcribing interviews is not without ambiguity either. In my research, I always endeavour to uncover the degree to which an interview has been edited: whether abridged, revised, corrected or redacted in the case of transcripts, and all the pre- and post-production aspects of broadcasting. There is no such thing as a 100% verbatim interview transcript, even for court reports.⁹⁸ Transcription agencies even acknowledge the different levels of ‘verbatim’ required in transcription. The Transcript Divas agency, for instance, differentiates ‘strict’ verbatim (with all the ums and ahs included to reflect spoken language) from the more common ‘standard’ or ‘intelligent’ verbatim, which is lightly edited to remove such tics and hesitations, and therefore resembles written language.⁹⁹

No two individuals will transcribe the same recording in the same way – indeed, no two people will hear the same. From incidents of mishearing to the more extreme phenomenon known as auditory pareidolia (in which one hears phantom words), psychological, social and physiological factors will affect how something is said and what is heard at a given time.¹⁰⁰ Even if the same words are transcribed, people tend to impose different levels of punctuation and choose a particular format to indicate the turn-taking of the interlocutors.¹⁰¹ Transcribers may ‘correct’ non-linear sentences, ignore interruptions or censor expletives, creating what

⁹⁷ For example, the doodles on the William Wegman interview transcripts, I.A.287, 49, *Avalanche Magazine Archives*, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

⁹⁸ The passing grade for the Audio Transcription certification exam set by the International Alliance of Professional Reporters and Transcribers is 98%; for the Transcription Society it is 99% – very high but not absolute accuracy. <https://www.iaprt.org/certification>. Accessed 28 May 2021.

⁹⁹ The agency also makes allowances for the recording quality (from broadcast quality to faint or very faint) and whether or not the interlocutors are native speakers. See www.transcriptdivas.com. Accessed 2 June 2021.

¹⁰⁰ For philosophical theories of the voice, see Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006; and Adriana Cavarero, translated by Paul A. Kottman, *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005. For a discussion of ‘ghost voices’, see Joe Banks, *Rorschach Audio: Art & Illusion for Sound*, London: Strange Attractor, 2012.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion on the history of the use of the semicolon, as an example of changing habits in punctuation, see Cecilia Watson, *Semicolon: The Past, Present, and Future of a Misunderstood Mark*, New York: Ecco Press, 2019.

art historian and critic Jean Wainwright, in her paper for the AAH ‘Artist Interview’ session, calls ‘a seamlessness which is often not there’.¹⁰² They must decide if and how to indicate accent, prosodic variations (length of pauses, changes in pitch, tempo or volume) and non-verbal effects (background noises, laughter, coughing, interruptions or talking over another).¹⁰³ The ‘orthography’ used by discourse or conversational analysts to transcribe these extra-verbal effects – using such symbols as arrows for significant changes in pitch, or underscore to indicate stress (in pitch or amplitude) – are not commonly used for artist interviews.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, attempts to capture what these analysts call ‘visible conduct’ – such as mapping the visual orientation of the gaze through symbols, introducing a timeline, or presenting photographs of participants like a film strip alongside transcription – might, in an artist interview context, be reduced to just a commissioned photographic portrait of the artist in a magazine interview.¹⁰⁵

Social scientists often supplement recordings with copious field notes that might capture emotion, a sense of power hierarchies, and what Wainwright calls the ‘acoustic resonance of the interview location’.¹⁰⁶ Such notes are not a formal part of artist interviews, though some of these impressions might be found in the introduction to a published transcript or descriptive asides to the dialogue. However, related experiments in musical and performance notation have been undertaken by individual creative practitioners in the art world, often influenced by the unconventional musical scores of John Cage and others associated with the Fluxus movement. Examples include the ‘event scores’ first realised by performance artist La Monte Young in 1961, a student of Cage’s; the pictographs used by Fluxus composer Toschi Ichiyanagi (another Cage student); and the graphic dance notations used by Yvonne

¹⁰² Jean Wainwright, ‘Small lies? Authenticity and the artist interview’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 4. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/wainwright.pdf>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

¹⁰³ See Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, and other Vocalizations*, London: Reaktion Books, 2014, for a discussion of how these effects produce meaning.

¹⁰⁴ For a comparison of different styles of transcription, see Gail Jefferson, ‘Glossary of Transcription Symbols with an introduction’, in Gene H. Lerner, *Conversation Analysis: Studies from the first generation*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004, 24-31; and Alexa Hepburn and Galina B. Bolden, ‘Transcription’, in Jack Sidnell and Tanya Stivers, eds, *Blackwell Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2012, 57-76.

¹⁰⁵ For examples of such mapping experiments, see Paul Luff and Christian Heath, ‘Transcribing Embodied Action’, in Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, eds, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, vol. 1, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Wainwright, ‘Small lies?’, 3.

Rainer.¹⁰⁷ Have any of these experiments with notation impacted on artist interview transcripts, particularly those published in artist-led magazines?

Introduction to the chapters

I begin with an examination of the relation of artist interviews to the material history of sound reproduction from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, including the invention of the phonograph and microphone, and the advent of radio and magnetic tape-recording. The lack of research into the connection between interviews and recording technologies has previously been noted in sociology. Raymond Lee suggests this may be because of the low status accorded to the ‘craft aspects of [social] science’, in which researchers ‘learned their craft in apprentice-like relations with a more experienced mentor’.¹⁰⁸ This point is certainly relevant to artist interviewers, who – often in a freelance capacity – generally learn their craft in an ad-hoc, often self-taught manner, and who may not have access, nor the resources or expertise, to make use of the latest technological devices.

Since, as Wolf observes, it is difficult to determine the first artist interview, I have chosen to narrow down the search to consider the earliest BBC radio interviews. In Chapter One, then, I endeavour to identify the first broadcast artist interview and first artist interview series. Given that no BBC radio programmes were recorded before 1931, I rely on scripts and correspondence at the BBC Written Archives Centre. I then attempt to locate the earliest audio recording of an artist interview via the BBC Radio Archive at the British Library.

I assess the significance of radio in the development of the interview format, etiquette and technique. I aim to follow the lives of a number of artist interviews on radio. I am particularly intrigued by the efforts undertaken to give the impression of natural conversation when in fact all early radio interviews were scripted, edited and rehearsed before the live broadcast. I am also interested in how broadcast talks were adapted for print publication, including booklets, interview anthologies and the *BBC*’s inhouse magazine, *The Listener*. Finally, I want to investigate whether the advent of listening to broadcast artists’ voices for the first time in history had a noticeable effect on the British public’s appreciation for modern art.

¹⁰⁷ See Liz Kotz, ‘Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the “Event” Score’, *October*, vol. 95, 2001, 55-89.

¹⁰⁸ Lee, ‘Recording Technologies and the Interview in Sociology’, 869.

In Chapter Two, ‘Torture by television: *Face to Face* with Augustus John’, I turn to artist interviews on British television at the turn of the 1960s. By this point, talks-based broadcasting, and interviews in particular, had become more commonplace. Influence from American television – particularly the celebrated journalist Ed Murrow – had resulted in a move towards unrehearsed conversation and a more probing interviewing style. As the BBC broadcaster John Freeman put it, in a self-interview published in *The Listener*, the interview was now seen as an important means of presenting public figures to viewers ‘as they really are’, at a time when they are ‘surrounded more and more by a cocoon of public relations’.¹⁰⁹ I take as my case study an interview that Freeman conducted with the artist Augustus John for the seminal BBC television series *Face to Face* (1959–62), comparing this to other BBC interview-based series from the same era, such as *Monitor*, *Panorama* and *The Artist Speaks*.

While in the early days of radio interviewing artists were treated with polite deference and curiosity, *Face to Face* showed that by the late 1950s they were beginning, in the UK at least, to be seen as celebrities on a par with the politicians, actors, writers and music stars who made up the other guests on the show. Nonetheless, artists like John were not comfortable with what they saw as media intrusion. This case-study interview – judged to be a disaster by Freeman, John and the audience – dramatises the clash of egos between a presenter at the height of his popularity, and an artist at the end of his life, resentful of his waning artistic reputation. I scrutinise the sequence of decisions that led to the final disputed edit, following the interview on a journey from script to filming, editing, broadcast and later publication in book and DVD anthologies.

I also examine the particular context of the Cold War in relation to interviewing technique, specifically 1950s fears about brainwashing and the vogue for Jungian psychology. This chapter allows me to question the appropriateness of using psychological techniques for public interviews.

Chapters Three and Four delve into the fascinating relationship between fiction and interviews. The idea that the written interview should be considered ‘a fiction’ is commonplace among interview historians, who often cite French philosopher Louis Marin’s reflection that the transcript is merely a fiction or echo of the oral encounter, and thus can

¹⁰⁹ John Freeman, ‘The interviewer interviewed’, *The Listener*, 30 April 1964, 721.

only ever offer a partial impression of what really happened.¹¹⁰ However, when interviews operate within the context of literary fiction – such as the inclusion of interviews in fiction, and the use of fictional devices in editing interviews – the oral encounter becomes more of a means of producing the final written form.

The growing availability of portable tape recorders from the late 1950s allowed writers to record their own interviews with subjects. The subsequent increase in the use of recorded dialogue in journalism, non-fiction and fiction writing led to a re-evaluation of transcription conventions and the opportunity for greater experimentation and creativity beyond the now-standard Q&A model. In particular, the *Paris Review* magazine (established in 1953) pioneered a literary approach to editing interview transcripts, acknowledged in many historiographical accounts of the interview as setting new standards for published interviews.¹¹¹

Chapter Three, ‘The poetics of overhearing: the fictional turn in interviews in 1960s Britain’, begins with a reflection on the development of *Paris Review* interview guidelines. I then focus on the context of British social realism, considering the importance of conversational dialogue to this genre. For example, British writer Nell Dunn’s work relies on vernacular speech to capture the particularities of location and time, as with her first book, *Up the Junction* (1963), based on her life in working-class Battersea, south London. My case study is a conversation between Dunn and Pop artist Pauline Boty, published in Dunn’s second book, *Talking to Women* (1965). A collection of interviews with nine women, including Frances Chadwick (ex-wife of sculptor Lynn Chadwick) and fellow writer Edna O’Brien, it gained notoriety for its frank opinions that challenged contemporary morality. Dunn transcribed the interviews to appear verbatim, which adds to their sense of intimacy – Boty’s, in particular, is notable for its hesitations and contradictions.

I compare the different contexts in which the Dunn-Boty interview was published: an extract appeared in *Vogue* (September 1964); Ali Smith used it as source material for her novel

¹¹⁰ Louis Marin, *De l’entretien*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1997, 14-15. For a discussion of Marin’s notion of fiction in relation to artist interviews, see, for example, Poppy Sfakianaki, ‘From “Portraits d’artistes” to the interviewer’s portrait’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 8. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/sfakianaki.pdf>. Accessed 28 May 2021.

¹¹¹ These include Masschelein et al., ‘The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre’ and Wolf, ‘The artist interview: an elusive history’.

Autumn (2016); and it was included in a reissue of *Talking to Women* (2018), for which Smith wrote the introduction. I ask how this interview contributed to Boty's legacy following her death in 1966, and the subsequent disappearance of her artwork until the early 1990s. I am especially alert to the gendered reactions to *Talking to Women* given the notoriously sexist attitudes of the 1960s media and British art world.

In Chapter Four, 'Extreme realism: New Journalism and slice-of-life recording', I look at the American approach to literary realism known as 'New Journalism'. Andy Warhol is the artist most associated with interviews in 1960s America, as both a famously inarticulate subject and a keen commissioner of interviews through his *Interview* magazine. However, in this chapter I have turned my attention instead to Warhol's muse Viva to offer another perspective on life in Warhol's entourage. I focus on a New Journalism-style interview portrait of Viva by the American journalist Barbara Goldsmith, published, with risqué photographs by Diane Arbus, as 'La Dolce Viva' in *New York* magazine in Spring 1968. I have chosen this specific example because of its dramatic after-effects: not only did it create a furore when it was published, generating tensions between the editorial staff of the magazine and its board and advertisers, but it was considered recently by Viva as one of the worst incidents of her life.¹¹²

I compare the published interview with its draft transcripts, as found in Goldsmith's archive at the New York Public Library, noting the editing decisions that contributed to the dramatic and moralistic tone of the interview. I ask: to what extent might this interview be considered exploitative or unethical – criticisms that have been levelled at fellow New Journalist Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965)?¹¹³ I compare the highly polished New Journalism style with the largely verbatim, slice-of-life interviewing style preferred by Warhol and his associates, including Viva for her own novel, *Superstar* (1970).

The final chapters consider interviews published in the American arts press from the late 1960s to the 1990s, when there was a proliferation of new publications, many artist-led, in New York. I consider the specific context of the Downtown cultural scene in New York, and

¹¹² Christopher Bonanos, 'The Diane Arbus Photo That Almost Killed *New York* Magazine', *New York*, 21 April 2016. www.thecut.com/2016/04/diane-arbus-viva-new-york-magazine.html. Accessed 28 May 2021.

¹¹³ As explored in Gerald Clarke's 1998 biography *Capote*, and its 2005 film version, which follows the writing of *In Cold Blood*.

the strategic use of interviews by artists as part of a mounting distrust of mediation, particularly formalist art criticism. As the interview genre loses its novelty in the second half of the twentieth century, I watch for signs of cliché and interview fatigue.

In Chapter Five, ‘SILENCE = DEATH? Discussing art during New York’s AIDS crisis’, I take as my case study an interview between the artist Robert Gober and the writer Craig Gholson, for *BOMB Magazine* in 1989. Still published today, *BOMB* is proud of its Downtown roots, its cross-disciplinary approach and commitment to peer-to-peer interviewing.

As the chapter’s title indicates, with its reference to the famous slogan from AIDS advocacy group ACT UP, the timing of the Gober-Gholson interview coincided with the height of the AIDS epidemic in New York. Both interlocutors were highly implicated in this crisis: as with their peers in the *BOMB* community, they were busy volunteering to care for the sick, and mourning the losses of loved ones. Gholson himself died of AIDS complications three years after the interview. Yet whereas previous case studies in this thesis (especially Augustus John and Viva) have been deemed problematic for revealing too much of their subjects’ lives and views, the *BOMB* interview with Gober is notable for what is withheld.

In this chapter, then, I explore the political, cultural and social conditions that would make it uncomfortable and potentially hazardous for an artist to openly disclose their beliefs. Comparing the published version with the original audio recording and interview drafts reveals that almost all the references to AIDS and Gober’s political activism discussed in the live encounter were redacted by Gober for the published article. Why? With little information in the *BOMB* interview archive, I turn instead to later interviews with Gober for clues.

Chapter Six, ‘The keys to the kingdom: *index* magazine and fan culture’, takes as its main focus *index* magazine, founded in 1996 by artist Peter Halley and curator Bob Nickas, in Halley’s studio in Downtown New York. For Halley, the magazine was like owning the keys to the kingdom, in that it offered the perfect pretext for contacting his heroes. With its chatty tone and fan attitude towards its interviewees, *index* paid homage to Warhol’s *Interview* magazine, albeit with a more lo-fi aesthetic to complement the new ‘indie’ culture. My case study is an interview in *index* between Yayoi Kusama and the curator Midori Matsui, conducted in 1998 when the artist was on the cusp of being re-discovered in New York, which she had left to return to her native Japan in 1973. What was appealing about Kusama

for *index*'s young readership? Was this era particularly significant in recognising previously neglected older women artists?

Kusama is now undeniably famous, both for her art and for the narrative around her mental health issues. I am interested in why so many feminist writers would have us disregard Kusama's illness, while Kusama has herself – as in this interview – generally been very open about her challenges. The 1990s were characterised by an interest in identity politics, particularly queer culture, and a more global outlook. In this new open atmosphere, the danger for interviewees was not so much censorship as a loss of control of one's own narrative. Indeed, Rebecca Roach has warned of interviews being used as 'soft weapons' (Gilliam Whitlock's term), that is, 'those life narratives that can help us attend to overlooked subjectivities but can as easily be packaged, promoted, and commoditized in a global marketplace'.¹¹⁴ An attempt to avoid the exploitation of her narrative, then, might explain why Kusama, in stark contrast to Gober, was so keen to supply intimate, sometimes outrageously frank biographical information to interviewers.

A note on ethics

As with Goldsmith's 'La Dolce Viva' interview, the threat of libel hangs over interviews. The decade-long libel trial brought against Janet Malcolm by one of her interview subjects Jeffrey Mason in 1984 (relating to her book *In the Freud Archives*) stands as a cautionary tale; although she eventually won the case, her reputation suffered. Yet Malcolm refused to compromise her risk-taking. Her non-fiction book *The Journalist and the Murderer* (1989) begins with the proclamation that every 'journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible'.¹¹⁵

But what of the coercion of the interviewer? Magazine editor Tim Griffin goes as far as to compare interviews to method acting, asking 'to what extent does the interview format itself invite "mechanical" or "rubber-stamp" acting?',¹¹⁶ suggesting that it is in fact the artist who is guilty of manipulating the interviewee into believing in the authenticity of his or her answers. As an example, he recalls the humiliating experience of interviewing Jeff Koons on

¹¹⁴ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*, London: Granta Books, 2018. The journalist of that title, Joe McGinniss, also published a book, *Final Vision* (2012), as a rebuttal to his critics.

¹¹⁶ Tim Griffin, 'Method Acting: The Artist-Interviewer Conversation', *Art Journal*, 64: 3, Fall 2005, 77.

his first day as art editor of *Time Out New York*, when it turned out that Koons had already given an almost identical interview to *The New York Times Magazine*, resulting in Griffin's piece having to be pulled at the last minute.¹¹⁷

The question of ethics comes up repeatedly throughout this thesis. What indeed are the ethical responsibilities of interviewer and interviewee? Tracking the life of the interview makes it possible to observe the anxieties that were negotiated or ignored at the various stages of the production and editing process. Where possible, I have tried to contact the key stakeholders involved in a particular case-study interview. As such, I have been able to speak with the author Nell Dunn; *BOMB*'s editor Betsy Sussler and contributing editor Saul Ostrow; and *index* publisher Peter Halley. These interviews brought up their own issues, such as the difficulty of recalling events from decades earlier and acknowledging the sometimes competing motivations for historicising particular interviews. Some stakeholders did not respond to invitations to speak with me. Many others are no longer alive. When there are many stakeholders involved and significant gaps in the documentation of an interview's trajectory, it is often difficult to ascribe blame to one party or another in the case of disputes. Moreover, the line between editing and deception often depends on your viewpoint and motives.

I have also had to question my own motives when assessing material that was not intended for public consumption: for example, private correspondence, drafts of interview transcripts, scripts, rushes – even when these are in public archives. In negotiating 'how and whether the private should be publicized ... the balance of power becomes a central ethical question', feminist literary scholar Margaretta Jolly writes, especially in relation to socially vulnerable individuals.¹¹⁸ What power, therefore, do I have as a researcher? I found it helpful to be guided by the set of questions proposed by Heidi McKee and James Porter in 'The Ethics of Archival Research' (2012):

How do my personal and professional experiences shape the questions I ask, the archives I research, the methods and methodologies I choose, and the conclusions I draw? Why is it important to research the details of this person's or this community's

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 72

¹¹⁸ Margaretta Jolly, 'On Stealing Letters: The Ethics of Epistolary Research', in *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, 225. Thank you to Bec Wonders for alerting to me to this text.

life and writings? Does what I am doing or planning to do have value and benefit beyond my personal interest and, if so, to whom?¹¹⁹

Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that there is public value in looking behind the scenes of the case-study interviews I have chosen. Jolly justifies her use of private letters as a means to ‘extend alternative visions of personal and public relationship ... if we are to have any hope of a truly just, truly protective form of privacy’.¹²⁰ For Jolly, the ‘real secrets at stake’ are not just personal, but ‘underlying systems of sexual, gender, class, and racial exchange that prompt such epistolary possessions and outings’.¹²¹ Meanwhile, in his account of the challenges of researching archives in post-Communist Czech Republic, Marek Tesar justifies his motivations based on the need to ‘muddy’ history, the idea of adopting perspectives that ‘do not claim objectivity’.¹²² I, too, hope that my analyses of artist interviews will shed new light on relationships, systems and hierarchies, and thus offer a ‘muddier’, richer account of the history of art and artists.

¹¹⁹ Heidi McKee and James Porter, ‘The Ethics of Archival Research’, *College Composition and Communication*, 64: 1, September 2012, 65.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹²² Marek Tesar, ‘Ethics and truth in archival research’, *History of Education*, 44: 1, 2015, 101-2. Tesar borrows the concept of ‘muddying history’ from Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, *He Kōrero – Words between Us: First Māori–Pākehā Conversations on Paper*, Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers, 2011, 6.

Chapter 1

New ways of speaking: the first artist interviews on BBC radio

Broadcasting ... is bringing a new consciousness of speech. By so doing it is influencing pronunciation and intonation, but it is also affecting the structure and composition of the language. It is not improbable that it may help to re-unite spelling and speech.

– Hilda Matheson, *Broadcasting* (1933)¹

Wide-ranging developments in sound-recording technology from the 1870s to the 1950s helped to shape (and were also shaped by) the form, style and power dynamics of interviews. This chapter explores the impact of four key machines on the artist interview: the phonograph, the microphone, radio and the magnetic tape-recorder, and what composer and theorist Michel Chion calls the ‘basic technological effects’ that these enable. I will consider the most relevant effects in relation to the interview: sound capture, telephony (the transmission of sounds at a distance), acousmatisation (hearing without seeing the source) and phonofixation (recording).² In doing so, I draw on media historian Lisa Gitelman’s concept of a ‘softer’ technological determinism that rejects ‘causality as a one-way street along which technology drives history’, allowing for the economic and political as well as material aspects of technology to be discussed.³

I give particular prominence to the role of BBC radio since its quasi-monopoly on broadcasting until the 1950s permits clear tracking of the frequency and evolving content of early artist interviews.⁴ In the pre-Second World War period, the BBC’s paternalistic attitude towards art education, its avoidance of controversial subjects, and prejudice against women and the working class all contributed to the character and the slow take-up of artist interview programmes on British radio.

In their introduction to *New Media, 1740–1915* (2003), Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree point to the ‘phase of identity crisis’ that every new medium must pass through, which is only

¹ Hilda Matheson, *Broadcasting*, London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933, 82.

² Michel Chion, *Sound: an acoulogical treatise*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016, 133-5.

³ Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, 7.

⁴ The exception was the commercial radio station Radio Luxembourg, launched in 1933.

‘resolved when the perceptions of the medium, as well as its practical uses, are somewhat adapted to existing categories of public understanding about what that medium does for whom and why’.⁵ As this chapter will demonstrate, the uncertainty that followed the introduction of the phonograph and radio was a further impediment to the development of the broadcast interview in the decades before it became more firmly established in the UK (and elsewhere) in the 1950s and 1960s.

Gitelman and Pingree argue that the potential for new media to experience identity crisis and technological failure counters the idea of ‘supersession’,⁶ the process identified by Paul Duguid by which ‘each new technological type vanquishes or subsumes its predecessors’, such as the radio superseding print media like books and periodicals.⁷ Duguid explains supersession as the desire to make a seamless break with old media, when the reality is in fact much messier. This chapter foregrounds the messier process by which radio interviews did not supersede but rather coexisted with print variants, by looking at BBC radio interviews that were transcribed, edited and printed in magazines like *The Listener*, in BBC pamphlets to accompany radio interview series, and in book anthologies of radio interviews.

Print formed the basis of early BBC radio interviews, since they were almost all scripted until the 1960s. Typically, the speakers met for a discussion a few days in advance of transmission. A stenographer transcribed the conversation, creating a script which was then edited for length and content by BBC producers and speakers. This revised script was then read out live on air, as if natural conversation. Charles Siepmann, who worked on the BBC’s educational and talks programming in the 1920s and 1930s, called this natural-to-artificial-to-natural trajectory a ‘double artifice’.⁸ His predecessor, and the BBC’s first Director of Talks, Hilda Matheson, nonetheless argued that this scripting procedure was necessary because ‘most speakers and certainly most novices need a prepared manuscript if they are to avoid tiresome hesitation or equally tiresome verbosity’. Moreover, when radio broadcasting was

⁵ Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds, *New Media, 1740–1915*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003, xii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷ Paul Duguid, ‘Material Matters: The Past and Futurology of the Book’, in Geoffrey Nunberg, ed., *The Future of the Book*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 65.

⁸ Quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 118.

still new, ‘they accept with thanks, if tactfully offered, criticisms of a manuscript which retains the form and flavour of an essay or treatise instead of a talk’.⁹

Writer and broadcaster Seán Street has argued that, contrary to early sound recording archives, which frequently feature actors reading out the words of a significant text, ‘we now venerate the true *voice* of history equally or above – in some cases – the actual text’.¹⁰ The British Library’s ‘Save our Sounds’ initiative and the National Life Stories oral history project, also based at the Library, are predicated on the significance given to the recorded voice.¹¹ Yet there can be no veneration of early recordings of radio interviews, because they simply don’t exist. Firstly, the BBC only started recording programmes in 1931, and these were mostly limited to royal or state events, political speeches, and issues relating to war.¹² Furthermore, many of these early recordings (in the form of wax records or magnetic wires) were too fragile to survive or were recorded over later.¹³ Even when recordings were transferred to the more stable magnetic tape in the mid-1950s, many tapes were subsequently recorded over by the special tape reclamation unit.¹⁴ Thus many early radio interviews survive only as scripts and/or transcripts, and others only as references in the BBC’s archives and listings in *Radio Times* magazine.¹⁵

Even when sound documentation does exist, the fidelity of the recording should be considered. Can there be a ‘true’ voice of history when, as Chion insists, ‘a sound said to be reproduced or recorded entails innumerable differences with regard to the original reverberation’?¹⁶ These include technological issues relating to bandwidth, intensity,

⁹ Matheson, *Broadcasting*, 76-7.

¹⁰ Street recounts that when the BBC put out a call for historical recordings for its sound archive in the early 1930s, several people sent in cylinder recordings all purporting to be the British statesman William Gladstone. Eventually, after playing them to people who remembered hearing the real man speak, one was declared the ‘winner’. Seán Street, *The Memory of Sound: Preserving the Sonic Past*, New York and London: Routledge, 2015, 7.

¹¹ ‘Save our Sounds’ was launched in 2015 as part of an eight-year plan. National Life Stories was established in 1987, with *Artists’ Lives* initiated as part of the project in 1990.

¹² The Edinburgh Festival was the first cultural event to be regularly recorded; the 1951 Festival of Britain also warranted a series of recordings, many from the venue itself.

¹³ The 1934 BBC handbook boasts that nearly 1,000 recordings of historical interest have been preserved – a number far higher than the handful of recordings listed in the BBC Radio Archive at the British Library for the early 1930s.

¹⁴ BBC Annual Report: 1958–9, 75.

¹⁵ The BBC’s online Genome project, which contains BBC listings in *Radio Times* between 1923 and 2009, has been indispensable in researching early broadcast interviews. See <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/>. Accessed 4 June 2021.

¹⁶ Chion, *Sound*, 141.

balancing sounds, proximity, all of which have evolved over time, such that today ‘by recording from a proximate position and with a larger bandwidth in the higher register ... the sound of a voice or an instrument is treated like a surface seen from close up and under low-angled lighting, which throws into relief textural details’. Unlike this current ‘impression of extreme presence’, past recordings seem to us today (despite having been considered as ‘the real sound’ in their time) ‘but distant glints of the sound in situ’.¹⁷

Capturing the voice: a new chapter in human history

It is surely no coincidence that ‘interview’ gained its new journalistic meaning (as opposed to referring to a face-to-face meeting) at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ The invention of the phonograph – an automated voice recorder – by Thomas Edison in America in 1877 marked the first time ever that it was possible to record sound permanently. For technology historian David Morton, this discovery provided a dramatic new perspective on history: ‘we have recognised the muteness of the great majority of human history’.¹⁹ For sound theorist Jonathan Stern, the phonograph’s significance lay in its capacity to preserve sounds for posterity: earlier, sound ‘withered away’, while now ‘suddenly the human voice gained a measure of immortality’.²⁰

The 1870s represented a high-point in sound-related inventions, including the telephone and microphone, all founded on the capacity to convert acoustic into electromagnetic waves.²¹ But according to Stern, the pre-conditions for sound reproduction needed to be established before the invention of specialised technologies. For example, the mechanics of sound reproduction – such as the vibrating diaphragm – were modelled on the new physiological understanding of the hearing process. During the period 1750–1925, Stern argues, sound changed from being idealised and magical to becoming an object for rational study that could

¹⁷ Ibid., 141-4.

¹⁸ See Anneleen Masschelein, Christoph Meurée, David Martens and Stéphanie Vanasten, ‘The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre’, *Poetics Today*, 35: 1-2, June 2014, 6-7.

¹⁹ David L. Morton, *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, xi.

²⁰ Jonathan Stern, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, 1.

²¹ Edison’s phonograph closely followed the invention of the telephone, patented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, which had demonstrated the possibility of transmitting speech electrically. The carbon microphone was developed in 1879 by David Edward Hughes. These inventions followed earlier innovations in communication, such as the electric telegraph system, first used commercially in 1840.

be ‘measured, objectified, isolated and simulated’.²² Stern claims that the existential implications of the phonograph – the concept of ‘preserving the voice beyond the death of the speaker’²³ – were grasped by the Victorian public, for whom sound recording was considered a form of canning, an ‘extension of changing practices and understanding of preserving bodies and food following the [American] Civil War’.²⁴

Anne Karpf, in her study on the human voice, notes two additional factors that facilitated the development and acceptance of sound-reproduction technologies: the ‘idea of the voice as a personal attribute’ and the ‘growth of corporate capitalism’. With regard to American households, in particular, she observes an ‘emerging sense of private space as they opened themselves up to consumerism’.²⁵ The linking of voice to the notion of ‘personality’, and the commodification of speech would both prove significant in the development of celebrity interviews throughout the twentieth century.

That ability to record and playback the human voice offered the public the irresistible opportunity to eavesdrop on what previously would have been thought of as private conversations, as well as offering the potential for global communication. But the new technological possibilities prompted questions, most obviously: what should be recorded and for what purpose? Lisa Gitelman argues that technology is a ‘form of knowledge’ and, as such, ‘can be conflicted with doubt and contradiction, with assumptions and anxieties, just like other forms of knowledge’.²⁶ And indeed, like the Victorian fascination with mesmerism and spiritualism, the disembodied nature of the recorded voice created a mix of wonder, fear and mistrust. For example, an 1878 cartoon in the New York newspaper *The Daily Graphic* (fig. 1) proposed more nebulous applications of the phonograph than merely voice preservation.²⁷ Melodramatically titled ‘Awful Possibilities of the New Speaking

²² Stern calls this process ‘Ensoniment’, to challenge the visualist emphasis of the Enlightenment. Stern, *The Audible Past*, 3; 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 287.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵ Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice: The Story of a Remarkable Talent*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, 239.

²⁶ Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, 7.

²⁷ ‘Awful Possibilities of the New Speaking Phonograph’, *The Daily Graphic*, New York, 21 March 1878, front page.

Phonograph’, it included supposedly fanciful ideas such as a speaking Statue of Liberty; the suspiciously-forced-looking recording of a dying millionaire’s will; and fake battle sounds.



Figure 1 ‘Awful Possibilities of the New Speaking Phonograph’, Daily Graphic, 21 March 1878.

Nevertheless, a draft press release announcing the phonograph's invention by Edison, dated 7 September 1877, explicitly designates it as a voice recorder.²⁸ The phonograph originally included both recording and playback functions, causing the American poet and critic Wayne Koestenbaum to liken it to a confessional. The phonograph 'seemed to be *listening* to you'; it 'absorbed your secrets, stored them, and re-played them'.²⁹ But as interest in providing home players for a mass market grew by the mid-1890s, the recording function (which required a battery-powered motor) became optional in order to reduce costs, the weight of the machine and the need for maintenance. After all, most people were buying phonographs to play – not record – records at home. Despite this, the phonograph, Koestenbaum argues, 'even after its listening function became merely vestigial, remained a kind of confessional, not receiving confessions so much as throwing them back, mirroring them, producing in the listener the sensation of *having confessed*'.³⁰ The analogy between interviews and confession, discussed throughout this thesis, can thus be traced right back to the start of sound-recording technology.

Moreover, music (and the odd comic sketch) was better suited to the poor sound quality and short recording duration of the early phonograph records. Even when discs replaced the original, fragile wax cylinders around 1900, they could only hold a few minutes' worth of sound.³¹ From the turn of the century, music and recorded entertainment became the dominant economic model for the commercial phonograph companies, while their dictation divisions were deemed a failure.³² When radio arrived in the 1920s – with KDKA in Pittsburgh the first commercial radio to launch in 1920 – it is no surprise, then, that

²⁸ Under the heading 'Edison Phonograph' a subheading reads: 'An apparatus for recording automatically the human voice and reproducing the same at any future period.' Before 1900, Edison thought of the phonograph as a dictating machine that would be useful in note-taking, for example in law courts, although it proved too difficult for novices to use. But early touring demonstrations of the phonograph led to an interest in its public entertainment value. Louis Glass installed the first coin-operated phonograph (a forerunner of the jukebox) in the Palais Royal Salon in San Francisco in 1889. Response was huge and led to the establishment of phonograph parlours to play entertaining records from the mid-1890s to 1900. Morton, *Sound Recording*, 22-9.

²⁹ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2001, 50. Koestenbaum also makes the point, following Michel Foucault, that 'the institution of the confessional helped define the homosexual; the homosexual was one of those varieties of lapse, of sin, of taste, which one confessed to a shrouded, immune, omniscient, divine ear'.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Early seven- and eight-inch discs held two minutes' worth, rising to three and a half to four minutes for the new standard seven- or ten-inch discs by 1906. Morton, *Sound Recording*, 37.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

broadcasts were dominated by music.³³ Likewise, the first Annual Report of the BBC, published in 1927, shows that music formed two-thirds of the radio programme output.³⁴

The first radio talks and interviews: avoiding controversy

The first day's broadcast on BBC radio, on 14 November 1922,³⁵ included two news bulletins read by Arthur Burrows, the first Assistant Controller and Director of Programmes, but it took until 23 December 1922 to launch other regular talks programmes.³⁶ Aside from the news, these talks programmes – very much in the minority compared to music – were often targeted at children and women, such as 'Women's Hour', inaugurated by Princess Alice on 2 May 1923.³⁷ In those early days, the BBC was struggling to find the right balance between light entertainment and education. Then, in 1927, the BBC's first Royal Charter set out the 'value of the Service as a means of education and entertainment', expanding this to 'information, education and entertainment' in the 1937 Charter (popularised by the first Director General John Reith as the mission to 'inform, educate and entertain').³⁸ The deliberate ordering of those values indicated (and still does today) the BBC's prioritisation of serious programming over popular entertainment.

Even so, serious talks programming in the BBC's early years was constrained by a ban on controversial subjects in the fields of religion, politics and industry, not lifted until March 1928.³⁹ Thus, cultural subjects during the ban tended towards the patriotic (such as the 1924 series 'The Nation's Pictures') or were linked to state institutions ('Foundation and History of

³³ The transition away from recorded talks into music is reflected in the record catalogues published by the various phonograph companies.

³⁴ The BBC Annual Reports continued to place their analyses of music programming before talks until the 1947–8 edition, reflecting the previous year's launch of the intellectual Third Programme service, from which point the order was reversed.

³⁵ The first BBC radio programmes were transmitted by the Marconi Transmitter 2LO – the name Marconi in honour of the electrical engineer Guglielmo Marconi, who had demonstrated the possibility of long-distance, cross-Atlantic radio transmission, and whose commercial offices on the Strand became the home of the BBC (then British Broadcasting Company) in 1922.

³⁶ The 'First Children's Hour', 'First Broadcast General News Bulletin' and 'First Broadcast Talk' all launched on that same day.

³⁷ Not to be confused with the post-Second World War 'Woman's Hour'.

³⁸ BBC Royal Charter, 1927, 1; BBC Royal Charter, 1939, 1. The phrase 'entertaining, informing and educating' had previously been used by American broadcasting pioneer David Sarnoff in 1922.

³⁹ Asa Briggs writes: 'In January 1927, at the beginning of the new Corporation, the Secretary of the Post Office had written to Reith stating firmly that in accordance with Clause 4 of the BBC's Licence, the Corporation had to abstain from "statements expressing the opinion of the Corporation on matters of public policy" and from "speeches or lectures containing statements on topics of political, religious or industrial controversy".' Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II*, 120.

the National Gallery' on 8 April 1924; 'Greenwich – The Nelson Relics and Naval Paintings' on 21 April 1924, as well as a series of talks by various curators of the Victoria & Albert Museum, in 1923–4).⁴⁰

The format of talks evolved over that first decade from single-speaker talks to multi-speaker discussions, the first mention of which is a debate between author Marjorie Bowen and journalist Edith Shackleton on 20 May 1924 titled 'Can Women ever be Free?'.⁴¹ Based on the BBC's published 'Programme Records', the term 'interview' was first used in relation to a programme in 1924 – for an interview of actress Gladys Cooper by Mary Kingdom. Two types of interview emerged that year: the oral history style, in the form of interviews in the studio with working women (flower girl, charwoman), and the celebrity interview as exemplified by a series of interviews with prominent women (including suffragette Millicent Fawcett and writer Rebecca West) in November and December that year by Jane Barrington.

The common feature of these first interviews was that they were almost all of women, by women. For Koestenbaum, this is no accident. He observes that the voices 'captivated' by the phonograph – and one could extend this to radio – were 'often women's' but that 'the wish to captivate was male'.⁴² Moreover, Koestenbaum cites an 1878 pamphlet that claimed that the phonograph 'could captivate sounds "with or without the knowledge or consent of the source of origin"'. For him, this amounts to stealing the woman's voice, locking it 'into grooves and waves'.⁴³ This early emphasis on the female voice is worth contrasting with the BBC's artist interviews when they arrived from the 1930s onwards, which were almost entirely dominated by male critics and male artists.

Experiments in dialogue

The development of talks formats relied on the upgrading of technical equipment and growing broadcasting experience. The 1928 BBC Annual Report notes an improvement in discussion technique, singling out the programme 'Marriage' by Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicholson for approval.⁴⁴ As Asa Briggs remarks in the first of his epic five-

⁴⁰ BBC Programme Records 1922–6, Volume 1.

⁴¹ Broadcast on 2LO London.

⁴² Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 48.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁴ BBC Annual Report: 1928, 6.

volume *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (1995), successful broadcasters had to ‘triumph over the technical weaknesses of the medium’, the first of which was the poor quality of listeners’ receiving sets. ‘It was’, Briggs continues, ‘through a haze of “atmosphere” and the roar of distortion and interference that the first broadcasters made themselves known to their public.’⁴⁵

Radio guests had to grapple with the new psychological apprehension at talking to a vast, invisible audience. Charlotte Higgins’s historical survey of the BBC, *This New Noise* (2015), includes an extract of a letter by Sackville-West to her husband, on the strangeness of being in the recording studio: ‘One has never talked to so few people, or so many; it’s very queer.’⁴⁶

Studio acoustics were also a major factor. The early radio microphones were cumbersome and more suited to recording music than intimate dialogue. The Marconi-Sykes Magnetophone microphone, used at the BBC’s Savoy Hill studio from 1923, was so sensitive that it had to be supported by a rubber sling to isolate it from vibrations and sit inside a copper-mesh box (a Faraday cage) that blocked out electromagnetic interference.⁴⁷ No wonder, Anne Karpf has written, that radio required a new type of speaking voice. As she describes it, ‘the rotund voice fell out of favour and an anti-oratorical sound became coveted, with the microphone favouring those who didn’t boom into it as if addressing a mass public meeting’.⁴⁸

New radio voices had to be vetted for their suitability. Already in 1924, Arthur Burrows wrote that the ‘BBC has been told that it possesses the greatest influence over the speech of the British people. This is an awful thought, but as it possesses more than an element of truth the company is ever vigilant for men who can be relied upon to do justice to this

⁴⁵ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 1: The Birth of Broadcasting*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 235.

⁴⁶ Charlotte Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC*, London: Guardian Books and Faber & Faber, 2015, 20.

⁴⁷ It earned the nicknamed ‘meat safe’ microphone because the box resembled the meat storage cupboards of the time. Announcers generally stood three to five feet away from it. The Savoy Hill studio was also lined with heavy drapes which, Arthur Burrows recalled, gave the performer ‘the impression of working on a mountain top. His voice sounds strange and singularly lacking in its customary strength, which leads to uneasiness and a desire to remedy a seeming defect.’ See A. R. Burrows, *The Story of Broadcasting*, London: Cassell and Company, 1924, 98–100.

⁴⁸ Karpf, *The Human Voice*, 240.

responsibility.’ Indeed, there was no room for error because all early discussions were broadcast live, albeit read from scripts – it was not until 1935 that experiments into unrehearsed debates before a live audience were introduced. Burrows described the intimidating procedure as follows:

The announcer intimates that there will be an interval of one minute ... During these few short seconds a distinguished speaker, probably the greatest authority on the subject to be addressed, is introduced for the first time to the microphone. He is informed exactly as to the strength of speech required, the distance to stand from the microphone, and the necessity for avoiding the rustling of paper, as the microphone is singularly sensitive to noises of this character. With these few instructions he is announced and left to his own devices, except that the manuscript which he reads has been previously submitted to the company, and must be strictly adhered to. Judging by the condition of many new-comers at the end of their broadcast talk, the experience of the first address before a microphone must be a considerable ordeal.⁴⁹

Stanley Casson, interviewer for *Artists at Work*, the first artist interview series listed in *Radio Times*,⁵⁰ concurred. In the preface to an anthology of transcripts from the 1932 series, he thanked the artists ‘who so patiently endured my cross-examination, and, who, when the tumbrils had called for us, carried out their part with me so courageously in the dungeons of Broadcasting House’.⁵¹

‘The Interview and Oral Evidence’ was the topic of a BBC radio lecture given by sociologist and Fabian Society member Beatrice Webb on 13 March 1929.⁵² The talk is significant in offering the opportunity to compare interviewing as used in the social sciences at this time, with its equivalent in broadcasting.⁵³ Its appeal to the lay person was confirmed by the inclusion of a printed version of the talk in *The Listener* on 20 March 1929 – the first year of the BBC’s in-house magazine. The existence of the original script in the BBC archives permits a comparison with the shorter article in *The Listener* to note what has been redacted.

In her talk, Webb identifies two types of interviews used in social study: the subjective interviewing style of the individual researcher, which should seem to the interviewee like ‘an

⁴⁹ Burrows, *The Story of Broadcasting*, 95-6.

⁵⁰ *Radio Times*, Issue 445, 8 April 1932, 30.

⁵¹ Stanley Casson, ed., *Artists at Work*, London: Harrap, 1933, 5.

⁵² The lecture was part of the series ‘How to Study Social Questions’. Beatrice Webb was addressed as Mrs Sidney Webb.

⁵³ Webb also acknowledges the important precedent set by her cousin by marriage, Charles Booth, forty years prior, who used interviews to augment his poverty maps of London.

agreeable form of social intercourse'; and wholesale interviewing, such as the public interrogation of witnesses for government inquiries, which has a tendency to cause nervousness and bewilderment in the interviewee.⁵⁴ In the script for the talk, but not included in *The Listener* version, Webb concludes that 'the art of interviewing is a specialised form of psycho-analysis which demands a skilful operator and a client or patient at ease in body and mind'.⁵⁵ Why was this reference to psychoanalysis removed? Any unease at promoting a relation between interviewing and psychoanalysis pre-empts later accusations of BBC interviewers acting as psychoanalysts or interrogators, as discussed in the following chapter.

A pleasant, informal environment is, according to Webb, vital in creating such a state of ease. The script includes the line (not included in the printed article): 'The atmosphere of the dinner table or the smoking room is a better "conductor" than that of the office during business hours.'⁵⁶ The atmosphere of the BBC's broadcasting studio could hardly have seemed further from a dinner party, but Webb's ideal scenario is a useful benchmark for gauging the atmosphere of various interview programmes on BBC radio and later television.⁵⁷ For example, the BBC producer Edgar Lustgarten wrote in 1953 that '[g]ood debating flows not only from a technique, but from a state of mind'. Since '[o]nly a few Spartans can scale the topmost heights after a humourless briefing over a jug of water', he argued, it is 'not senseless extravagance, but sound investment, to entertain your speakers as you would any private guest'.⁵⁸

Prejudice at the BBC: women, the working class, art

Serious talks programming increased significantly with the appointment in 1926 of Hilda Matheson as the BBC's first Director of Talks (1926–31). She had been headhunted by John Reith for her extensive network of cultural and political contacts, and skill at bringing influential people together; her impressive early career had included setting up an M15 office

⁵⁴ Mrs Sidney Webb, 'The Art and Craft of Interviewing', *The Listener*, 1: 10, 20 March 1929, 348-9.

⁵⁵ Mrs Sidney Webb, script for 'How to Study Social Questions. II The Interview and Oral Evidence', broadcast on BBC radio stations 2LO London and 5XX Daventry, 13 March 1929.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Webb's emphasis on the individual human qualities of encounters might be said to anticipate criticism of the impersonality of the Mass-Observation anthropological project that ran from 1937 to the 1950s, and whose 'scientific model for the purposes of segregating and degrading the masses', argues John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 'had a sinister counterpart in the assimilation of the masses to bacteria and bacilli'. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligensia, 1880–1939*, London: Faber & Faber, 1992, 25.

⁵⁸ Edgar Lustgarten, 'Producing Discussions for Broadcasting', *The BBC Quarterly*, 8: 3, Autumn 1953, 139.

in Rome, and position as political secretary to Nancy Astor, the first woman MP to take her seat in the Commons. However, having persuaded H. G. Wells to give a talk on world peace, Matheson voiced her concerns about offending either the listeners or the BBC:

The British public ... have of course all the national prejudices, even more I think when a loudspeaker talks to them in their sitting-rooms than when they read something in print: perhaps it is a feeling of impotence, that they can't answer back or interrupt. It would for instance, as we agreed, strike them as unfair if one were to attack such conceptions as God, King, or America.⁵⁹

As a gay woman working at senior-management level in the male-dominated early days of the BBC, Matheson undoubtedly encountered prejudice on a personal and professional level.⁶⁰ Higgins quotes one of Matheson's two male assistants, Lionel Fielden, scorning female speakers: 'women were (and are) almost never good broadcasters. I don't know why this should be, but it is a fact.'⁶¹ Indeed, in this era, Anne Karpf argues, broadcasting was 'mostly the province of men using a "voice of authority" that purported to be the disinterested truth', modelled on such newsreels as *The March of Time* (later parodied by Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane*, 1941).⁶² Karpf contrasts the attitude of male broadcasters with that of the mainly female switchboard telephone operators, who were 'seen as more patient, polite, and pliable', and therefore capable of domesticating the 'telephonic intruder'.⁶³

Yet it was the few women executives at the BBC who were behind the drive to improve the standard of broadcast talks. According to Kate Murphy, in her history of women in the early years of the BBC, the BBC's first Director of Schools Programming Mary Somerville was 'the first person to have requested changes to a script and insisted on a rehearsal', in December 1925. In December 1927, Matheson followed up with a leaflet 'Broadcast Talks

⁵⁹ Hilda Matheson, letter to H. G. Wells, 19 June 1929. BBC WAC RCONT1 – Wells, Herbert George (Talks File 1), 1925–33.

⁶⁰ Higgins notes that Matheson started a relationship with Sackville-West on the night of her talk on 'The Modern Woman'. In fact, Higgins devotes an entire chapter of *This New Noise* to Matheson, who she regards as defiant and unashamed of her sexuality. By contrast, Burrows' 1924 book on the early years of radio contains a chapter 'The Men in the Background', on the BBC staff at the time, which – true to its title – mentions no women at all.

⁶¹ Lionel Fielden also offered the backhanded praise: 'I had at first thought that it would be strange, perhaps impossible, to work under a woman... [but Matheson] drew my admiration, respect, and affection almost immediately.' Higgins, *This New Noise*, 18; 29.

⁶² Karpf, *The Human Voice*, 241.

⁶³ Karpf observes that telephone operators were initially men. Karpf, *The Human Voice*, 236. The BBC operated a marriage bar between 1932 and 1944, meaning women lost their jobs after marriage, with allowance made only for 'exceptional women'. Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, 83.

and Lectures: Suggestions to Speakers’, which included such advice as to speak slowly, avoid monotony, write as you would to a friend, refrain from long sentences and difficult words, and not to declaim.⁶⁴

If women were considered inferior broadcasters, this also applied to working-class people, despite the fact that listeners were of every order of social class.⁶⁵ (In fact, 80% of the British population was working class in the interwar years.)⁶⁶ The working class were invited to speak either as a kind of rare anthropological experiment (as with the flower girl and charwoman cited earlier) or on the condition that their idiosyncrasies be polished away in the transcribed script before being read out in a formal studio environment. By contrast, the BBC’s public image was upper-middle class and upper class, with announcers obliged to



Figure 2 *Artists at Work II: Sculpture*, radio discussion between Stanley Casson (left) and Frank Dobson (right), 1 April 1932. © BBC Photo Library

⁶⁴ Ibid., 222. Leonie Cohn, who became a Talks producer in 1952, was another important woman at the BBC, working for BBC radio for thirty-five years.

⁶⁵ Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 1*, 258.

⁶⁶ Murphy, *Behind the Wireless*, 190.

wear evening dress after 8pm from January 1926 (as did many guests).⁶⁷ The BBC's Advisory Committee on Spoken English had selected Standard English spoken with a Received Pronunciation (RP) accent as its standard in 1922. If RP was supposed to be a regionally non-specific accent, in reality it was drawn from Southern English (around London, Oxford and Cambridge) and British elite public schools and universities.⁶⁸

Matheson resigned in December 1931, following an escalation of disputes with Reith, who regarded her as too left wing.⁶⁹ Reith's own views were particularly conservative in regard to visual art. Higgins quotes Matheson complaining that:

He tends to regard as controversial and partisan and therefore inadmissible a talk about which any of his business magnates complain or disapprove, e.g. [critic] Osbert Sitwell, because his [views] on art were objectionable and because all modern art is objectionable and therefore can only be discussed if there is also somebody to put the case for the Victorians or the classics. The fact that *all* talks on art hitherto have been given by spokesmen of the old school and that Osbert, however tiresome, was therefore evening things up, wasn't regarded as relevant.⁷⁰

Reith's personal dislike of modern art might explain why it is largely absent from BBC radio during his directorship, which ended in 1938.⁷¹ The eminent critic and curator Roger Fry's 1929 lecture series, 'The Meaning of Pictures', for example, concentrated on 'great masterpieces' such as those by Giotto, Michelangelo, Raphael, Rembrandt and Velázquez. There were a small number of exceptions. 'Art and Life', co-presented by formalist art critic Clive Bell and literary critic Desmond MacCarthy on 7 December 1928, is the first programme-length critics' discussion on modern art listed in *Radio Times*. The surviving script gives the impression of an amicable conversation, centred mostly on John Ruskin and Impressionist painting, with a digression on the status of the art critic – who both men

⁶⁷ Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 1*, 268.

⁶⁸ Jonnie Robinson, 'Received Pronunciation', British Library online, 24 April 2019. www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/articles/received-pronunciation. Accessed 31 May 2021. Robinson is the British Library's Lead Curator for Spoken English.

⁶⁹ They had disagreed on issues of censorship, the suitability of the guests she invited and her preference for topic-based talks rather than his view that talks should be connected to events.

⁷⁰ Higgins, *This New Noise*, 31. Osbert Sitwell was a writer and critic. In addition to reading his own fiction on radio programmes, he also took part in debates such as 'What's Wrong with Theatre?' (8 December 1930) and 'How Shall we Spend our Sundays?' (20 July 1932).

⁷¹ See Sam Rose, 'The visual arts in the BBC's *The Listener*, 1929–39', *Burlington Magazine*, 155: 1326, September 2013, 606–11, for a discussion on how, in contrast to BBC radio, *The Listener* included articles on modern art almost every week from 1930 onwards. Herbert Read was by far the most prolific writer in the 1930s, followed by Stanley Casson, then Eric Newton.

considered subordinate to the artist. ‘You would agree, wouldn’t you, too’, MacCarthy asks, ‘that as a matter of fact art-critics never create any ~~great~~ [annotated in script] change in art; it is artists themselves who begin a new movement, then the critics learn from them to see with new eyes, and at last teach the public to do so.’ ‘I quite agree,’ affirms Bell.⁷²

Artists at Work: the first radio series of artist interviews

Broadcast on 12 April 1932, the first programme in the *Artists at Work* interview series was called ‘How to appreciate Art’.⁷³ It featured a dialogue between Stanley Casson, better known as an archaeologist for his previous radio programmes on Ancient Greece and

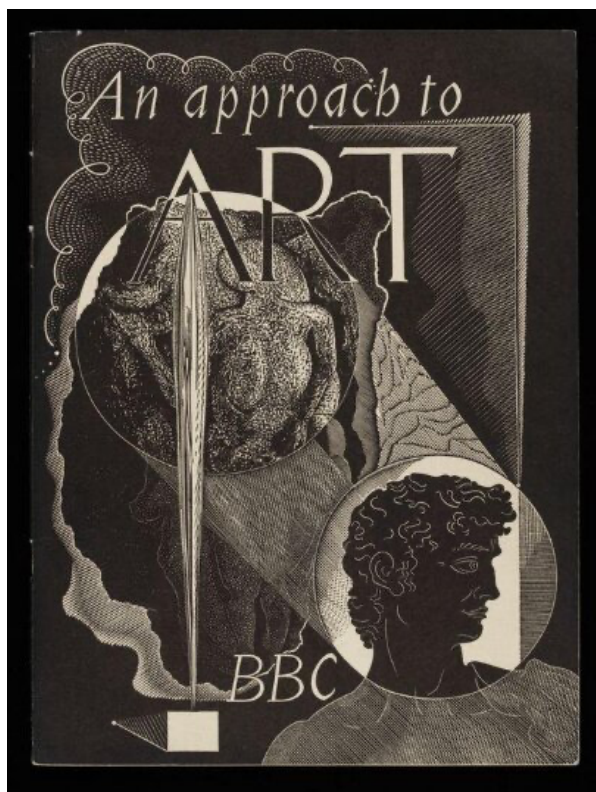
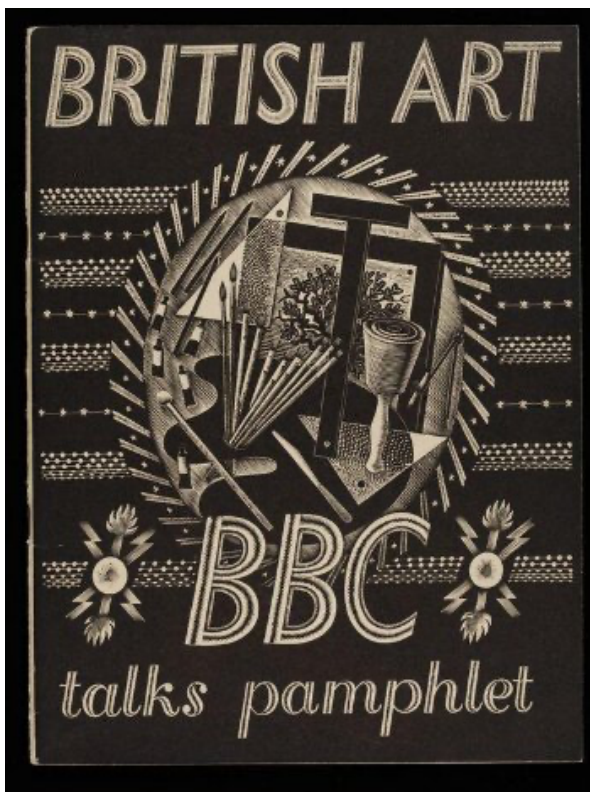


Figure 3 R.M.Y. Gleadowe, *British art*, London: BBC, 1934. Illustrated wrapper designed by Eric Ravilious.

Figure 4 Eric Newton, *An approach to art: a pictorial guide to twelve broadcast talks and discussions on the artist and his public*, London: BBC, 1935. Illustrated wrapper designed by Blair Hughes-Stanton.

⁷² ‘Art and Life’ script, BBC Written Archives Centre. John Carey argues, however, that Bell’s views on the public were not as benign as they appeared in this discussion, but rather informed by Nietzschean images of supremacy. He cites as proof Bell’s 1914 book *Art*, in which Bell dismisses the ‘herd who frequent the “snug foothill of warm humanity”’ instead of the purely aesthetic, “cold, white peaks of art” appreciated by him and his fellow aesthetes. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 74.

⁷³ That same year, J. E. Barton, headmaster of Bristol Grammar School, gave a series of six talks on ‘Modern Art’ for BBC radio, accompanied by a BBC booklet of the same title.

Istanbul, and an anonymous ‘Philistine’. This provocative, if tongue-in-cheek, set-up assumed an audience (like Reith) ignorant and fearful of modern art. Subsequent programmes focused on the technical side of art-making, featuring interviews between Casson and Frank Dobson (sculptor, fig. 2), Henry Rushbury (etcher), Albert Rutherston (painter) and Edward Halliday (portrait painter). The programme was not recorded, the original scripts appear to be missing, presumed lost, from the BBC Written Archives Centre, and so the only remaining documentation is from the following year, when a book version of *Artists at Work* ‘based on a series of broadcast dialogues’ was published.

Illustrated publications were an attempt to get around the key problem of discussing art on radio – the obvious fact that you couldn’t see the artworks.⁷⁴ They existed in two main formats: as independently published books that might also include extended versions of the broadcast programme, like *Artists at Work*; and as BBC-published talks pamphlets. The earliest BBC arts pamphlet, *British Art* (1934, fig. 3), accompanied six broadcast radio talks by R. M. Y. Gleadowe, Art Master at Winchester College. With its striking cover design by Eric Ravilious, illustrations of artworks discussed in the programme, and supplementary information (such as the artworks’ location in galleries and further reading lists), it established a template for future publications, including *An approach to art* (1935, fig. 4) and *Aspects of Art in England* (1950). These pamphlets may also have been aimed at the BBC-sponsored Wireless Discussion Groups, which had been in existence since the late 1920s and would meet weekly under a group leader.⁷⁵ The BBC’s publications can thus be seen as part of a national effort to educate British people about culture, of which the most notable other example was the Workers’ Educational Association (founded in 1903), whose members included the renowned Ashington Group of ‘Pitmen Painters’.

Casson’s substantial 146-page book of *Artists at Work* (1933) includes a preface, introduction, transcripts of the artist interviews preceded by short artist biographies, black-

⁷⁴ Seán Street makes an equivalent point that ‘[i]n the early days of British broadcasting, when the first live soccer matches were broadcast, the BBC’s listings magazine *Radio Times* would print a diagram of the field of play, divided into numbered sections’. Street, *The Memory of Sound*, 31.

⁷⁵ The Wireless Discussion Groups were launched in response to the 1928 *New Ventures in Broadcasting* report by Sir William Henry Hadow, which recommended the establishment of a Central Council for Adult Education. The BBC offered a grant to the Council, which was supplemented by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. See David Goodman, ‘A transnational history of radio listening groups I: the United Kingdom and United States’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 36: 3, 2016, 444-5.

and-white illustrations of both artworks and artists' tools and instruments, and finally a section titled 'A Summary'. The book not only records but expands on the information in the interviews and Casson's views on art and criticism. The introduction reworks the Casson-Philistine dialogue into a treatise by Casson on the reasons behind what he views as a philistine attitude towards art in the UK. As had Bell and MacCarthy in their 'Art and Life' discussion, Casson blames philistinism on the separation of art from life that began with the Industrial Revolution,⁷⁶ as well as the absence of visual education for children.⁷⁷

If Casson believes that he has shown that the 'position of the Philistine to-day is not tenable', he nonetheless pours scorn on art criticism, particularly the 'hack-writer, who knows little and cares less, and has never seen a picture in process of painting or a statue in process of being carved'. In addition, he argues that '[w]riting about art is to the artist an intrusion on privacy, as if one were to write a book about one's best friend'.⁷⁸ Instead, Casson underlines the value of the artist's own words over criticism. 'Nothing', Casson insists, 'is more valuable for the study of art than the thoughts of the artists', especially since, he laments, only an 'incredibly small quantity' of such information currently exists.⁷⁹ But why, then, should artists permit the interviewer's intrusion of privacy? Because, Casson argues, artists operate 'in a public place', and the public thus deserves 'some sort of right to an answer' about the motivation behind their work.

Casson is dismissive of jargon, whether relating to psychoanalysis or aesthetics. In his interview with painter Albert Rutherston, he apologises for being 'a plain, blunt man, addicted to plain, blunt thinking, and no artist'.⁸⁰ Yet somehow, in spite of the emphasis on artistic process, more general attitudes to art and life do emerge in the interviews. For example, Frank Dobson's opinion on British attitudes towards art reveal the country's preferred leisure activities:

You speak of the average man. As far as I can see the approach to works of art and to art as a whole is, in this country, average. There is no class distinction. If the hunting

⁷⁶ Yet if this suggests a nostalgia for the pre-industrial age, Casson distances himself from specific comparison with John Ruskin in his first interview with sculptor Frank Dobson, accusing Ruskin of 'grave lapses' and supporting the use of mechanical aids by sculptors. Casson, *Artists at Work*, 40-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

man gave a quarter of his time he gives to horses, and the football fan and the greyhound enthusiast a quarter of the time they give to these particular relaxations, to an effort to understand what is happening when he looks at a piece of sculpture, there would be no question of the quality of taste in this country.⁸¹

Likewise, the transcript offers a sense of the interviewee's speech patterns and colloquialisms. For instance, many sentences begin with a conversational 'Now' or 'Well', and the speakers address each other by their surnames ('Tell me, Halliday...').

The last interview, 'Portrait-Painting' with Edward Halliday, takes place in Halliday's studio where he is drawing a portrait of Casson as they talk, shifting the balance of power away from the critic.⁸² In fact, this interview breaks convention by starting with the interviewee speaking:

E. H. Well, here you are, Casson. Let me take your coat and things. Now if you'll just sit over here in the light – no, a little more round – that's it. Now, we'll see if we can't get this drawing finished. I dare say you think it's about time, too.

S. C. May I smoke?

E. H. Fire away, only don't rock about too much.⁸³

Of particular significance, given the scarcity of other documentation from the 1930s, is Casson's demystification of the process of producing radio interviews. Firstly, Casson dismantles the idea that the interviews took place on one sole occasion. Rather, the 'discussions were the culmination of many evenings of diverse argument with the artists. With some of the artists I have argued for many hours at various times in recent years.'⁸⁴ Indeed, the sense of trust and playfulness between interviewer and interviewee can be observed in regular moments of repartee. For example, Henry Rushbury responds to the first question with: 'Well, Casson, you've put me in the dock right away. Perhaps your Old Bailey technique will stop me from getting woolly or wandering off into theories of beauty and aesthetics.'⁸⁵ Did this atmosphere of camaraderie survive the artificial process of reading the

⁸¹ Ibid., 48.

⁸² Casson prefaces the transcript with a note that the discussion took place during the last of three sittings in the artist's studio. Ibid., 105.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 133.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 58.

script on radio as if it were natural conversation? Or is it better inferred from reading the transcript oneself?

In the book, Casson acknowledges the substantial editing that goes into giving ‘the final discussion ... some definite shape, some coherence which a mere random argument would have lacked’.⁸⁶ His technique, he reveals, was to give each artist the same set of questions at the start – what he calls a questionnaire. Thus: ‘I put the points one by one to the artist, and left him to answer me without interruption on my part. Then I expanded my questions, and the artist adapted his answers to suit.’⁸⁷ He insists that ‘[i]n no case have I persuaded any of the artists in question to adopt my own words or modes of speech, and the statements are faithfully written down as they were originally spoken to me by the artist’.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, Casson seems untroubled by the contradiction between the reduction of the dialogue into something ‘proper’ and his insistence on faithful transcription.⁸⁹

The Artist in the Witness Box: the first recorded artist interviews

The next major artist interview series on radio was presented by the *Manchester Guardian* art critic Eric Newton. Newton’s 1929 radio series *The Plain Man’s Attitude*,⁹⁰ as well as his 1934 BBC National Programme lecture ‘The Trials of an Art Critic’, had already established him as a public educator with the patience and plain-speaking attitude to explain modern art and his role within it. Such was his popularity that he went on to present two major series in the 1930s, both accompanied by pamphlets and turned into books: *The Artist and His Public* (7 January – 25 March 1935), a mix of talks and interviews;⁹¹ and the more explicitly interview-based *The Artist in the Witness Box* (1939–40) that continued through the Second World War.⁹²

Newton exposes his own prejudices on modern art when he tells the artist Edward Wadsworth, in an episode of *The Artist and His Public*, that he had ‘always liked immensely

⁸⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 133–4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁹ In the Introduction, he goes on to complain that ‘[ma]ny artists have been “written up” by admiring jackals. But their authentic views are obscured by the professional editing of their admirers.’ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁰ For regional station 2ZY Manchester.

⁹¹ The pamphlet accompanying *The Artist and His Public* was the earlier-cited *An approach to art*.

⁹² Newton also regularly featured as the arts expert on the weekly BBC Home Service programme ‘The Critics’ and appeared as the art critic in the 1944 wartime TV documentary, *Out of Chaos* (1944) – the first documentary to show living artists.

your pictures of ships and marine objects but I must confess I felt a little disturbed when I saw that you had started painting abstract pictures'.⁹³ Newton's introduction to *The Artist in the Witness Box* pamphlet similarly begins: 'The Fine Arts are up for trial. The charge against them is that they are useless ... and that of recent years they have become divorced from life.'⁹⁴ Indeed, the first episode of this later series, a discussion between Newton and taxi driver Herbert Hodge, known as the 'Cabbie Philosopher', suggests parallels with Casson's dialogue with a Philistine for *Artists at Work*.⁹⁵ According to the script, Hodge begins by telling Newton that '[m]ost modern art ... certainly is a bit of a mystery to me'.⁹⁶ Newton responds by acknowledging that '[m]ost people think of artists as a set of clever, rather mysterious, rather abnormal people unlike other human beings'. Instead, Newton proposes that we think of 'artists as workmen, men who produce a certain class of goods – just as hatters or motorcar makers do'.

The wartime 'Propaganda' episode of *The Artist in the Witness Box* (5 February 1940) is in fact the earliest surviving recording of an artist interview programme on radio, although disappointingly for the purpose of my research, the four-minute-twenty-two-second extract consists solely of a monologue by the cartoonist David Low, rather than any dialogue.⁹⁷ The earliest surviving recording of an interview with a cultural figure, according to the BBC's Radio Archive chronological listings, is an extract of an interview with the American writer Gertrude Stein on 12 November 1934, part of the series *American Points of View*. The faint, crackly sound and brevity of the extract clearly reflect the poor quality of the recording technology available.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Stein comes across as a force to be reckoned with, smartly admonishing the American interviewer's leading but meekly delivered questions about the intelligibility of her language and her 'very interesting' life.

If, in the pre-war period, the replacement of wire by steel tape had achieved some improvements in recording quality,⁹⁹ the BBC soon needed higher-quality magnetic recording to produce packages of 'transcription' recordings of BBC programmes for

⁹³ 'The Artist and His Public: 11', script, 1, BBC Written Archives Centre.

⁹⁴ Eric Newton, ed., *The Artist in the Witness Box*, London: BBC, 1939, i.

⁹⁵ The seventh episode involved Newton asking the 'man on the street' for his opinions on art.

⁹⁶ 'The Artist in the Witness Box: 1', script, 1, BBC Written Archives Centre.

⁹⁷ The other speakers for this episode were Eric Newton and J. L. Beddington, advertising executive.

⁹⁸ BBC Radio Archive, British Library Sound Archive. IC00288869.

⁹⁹ G. A. Briggs, *Sound Reproduction*, Bradford: Wharfedale Wireless Works, third edition, 1953, 231-2.

subsequent broadcast across the then British colonies, at a time convenient to each time-zone.¹⁰⁰ Budget constraints, however, continued to hamper developments in sound recordings even when the technology had been invented.¹⁰¹

There was also a need for mobile recording units to cover major state events and those of mass public interest, such as the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937, which was recorded in colour for the early BBC television service – the first example of outside broadcasting. The Second World War stimulated further innovations in mobile location recording. Recording was notoriously used for spying and monitoring – to record telephone conversations or foreign broadcasts. Recorded battle sounds were allegedly played on battlefields to deceive the enemy,¹⁰² ironically validating *The Daily Graphic*'s satirical cartoon about phonograph uses. But the real gains were made after the war, when the more advanced German recording technology was transferred to America and Europe as spoils of war.¹⁰³

But it would take a decade before portable 'midget' recorders became more readily available to BBC reporters.¹⁰⁴ It would also take until 1955 to complete a scheme for equipping every studio centre with fixed and mobile magnetic recording facilities – the year also marking the inauguration of microphones without trailing leads.¹⁰⁵ At the end of the 1950s, 'suitcase' outside broadcasting equipment was also introduced, as with midget recorders forsaking the need for an engineer. The portable midget and suitcase recorders enabled the recording of interviews outside the 'ordeal' of the studio environment. By consequence, a wider range of otherwise reluctant guests could be persuaded to speak before the microphone, such as artists

¹⁰⁰ The Empire Service launched in 1932, later renamed the World Service.

¹⁰¹ In fact, the first magnetic recorder had been invented in 1899 by Valdemar Poulsen in Copenhagen.

¹⁰² Morton, *Sound Recording*, 107.

¹⁰³ The Nazis had been using a wire recording device called a Textophone, from 1932, in the mass surveillance of German citizens. The portable Stahltonbandmaschine was then launched in 1935 for use in public address systems and news-gathering sound trucks. This was then replaced by the lighter Magnetophone, which used 'a tape made of lightweight paper or plastic', coated or imbedded with a fine powder made by the chemical firm I. G. Farben (later infamous for producing poison gas used in concentration camps). The American Field Intelligence Agency Technical (FIAT) collected technical intelligence following the war, making it publicly available via the US Department of Commerce by late 1945. Morton, *Sound Recording*, 111-27.

¹⁰⁴ The BBC's 1954-5 report counts more than 100 in service at that time. In particular, British-led expeditions, such as the 1954 Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey Expedition, necessitated new lightweight and durable recording equipment.

¹⁰⁵ BBC Annual Report: 1955-6, 61-7.

Augustus John and Henry Moore, who would often only agree to interviews if reporters travelled to their studios outside London.

But the fact that original material might be retained for posterity caused anxieties. For instance, Henry Moore asked the BBC to destroy the original recording of his interview with the critic David Sylvester on 11 July 1958. An internal memo reads:

Mr Moore doesn't normally give interviews and is most anxious that the original material of these should not be retained in any permanent form, though he would not mind the further use of the edited versions. So may I by this memo ensure that all the original recordings are destroyed at the correct time and that R. P. Permanent Library considers only the edited material for processing if they so wish.¹⁰⁶

The BBC agreed to do so.

Notwithstanding, recording cultural programmes was so rare until the 1960s that the BBC Annual Report for 1955–6 declares: 'Broadcasts are by their nature ephemeral. The extent to which a programme, once broadcast, can be repeated is limited.' The 40,000 separate BBC programmes in one year become, the report poetically continues, the 'snows of yester-year'.¹⁰⁷

The artist as castaway

The BBC, in fact, faced objections to the use of what pre-recorded material they did have, both pre- and post-war. The 1952 BBC Annual Report notes with frustration that the Musicians' Union and Variety Artists' Federation would not allow pre-recorded programmes for later transmission, although the British Actors' Equity had withdrawn their objection.¹⁰⁸ All the same, the BBC had amassed a substantial gramophone library of commercially available records (30,000 discs by 1933) and was determined to find a way to use it. A number of programmes were therefore specially built around the broadcast of gramophone records. The most famous of these is undoubtedly *Desert Island Discs*, in which the

¹⁰⁶ Extract from internal memo from Rosemary Jellis, 20 August 1958, BBC Written Archives Centre Rcont 1 – Henry Moore Talks file 1, 1941–62.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ BBC Annual Report: 1952, 24; 46.

interviewer – initially broadcaster Roy Plomley – asked a celebrity guest what records they would bring if they were a castaway on an island.¹⁰⁹

First broadcast in 1942 and still running today, *Desert Island Discs* was recorded in order to be aired on the Forces Programme. There were only three visual artist castaways, in the loosest sense, before 1955: Tom Webster, sports cartoonist, on 23 April 1942; Peter Scott, son of Antarctic explorer Capitan Scott, on 7 February 1951 (although he was probably better known as a naturalist); and Michael Ayrton on 9 August 1955. Was art considered too esoteric for the early days of this programme?

In its early years, *Desert Island Discs* was scripted, and read out by guests in the recording studio (following a pre-recording lunch at the Garrick, the male-only private club for

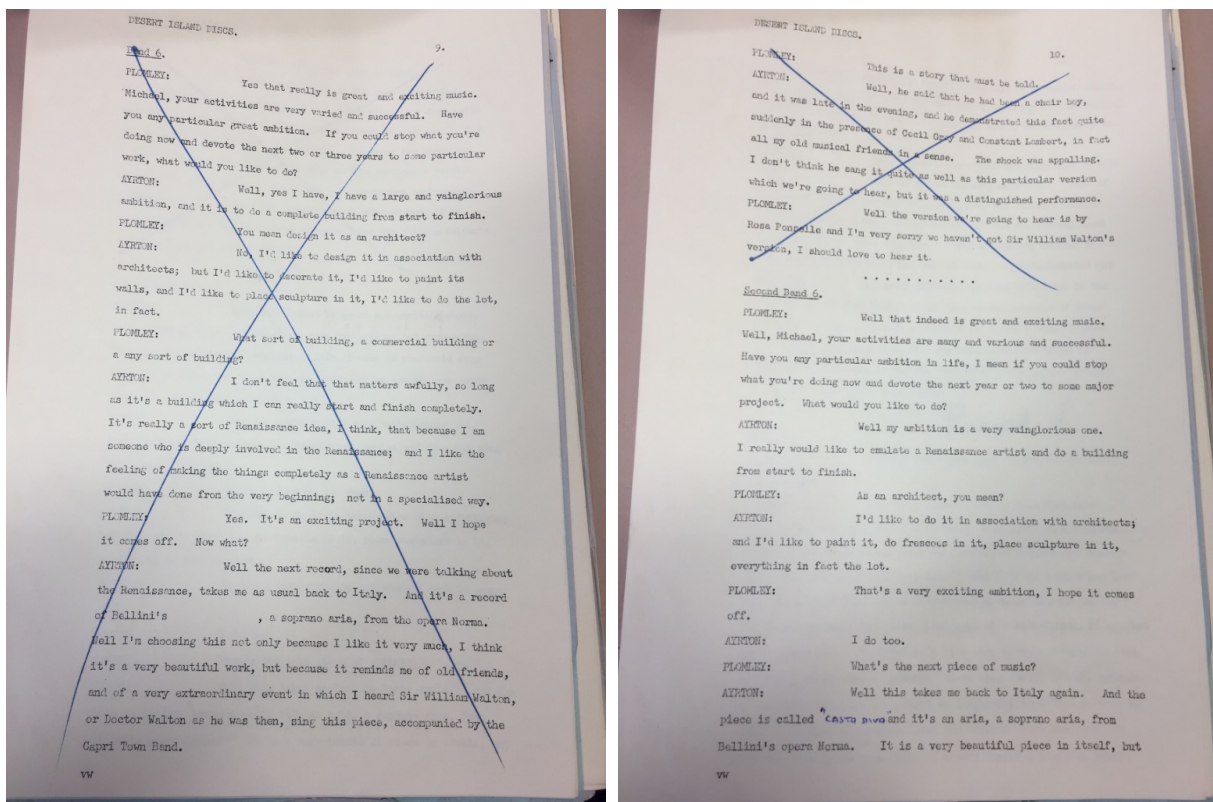


Figure 5 Extract of script for Michael Ayrton episode, *Desert Island Discs*, broadcast 9 August 1955. Page 9 of the script is crossed out completely. On page 10 of the script, the same information is included in a more condensed form. BBC Written Archives Centre S133/18/21. © BBC.

¹⁰⁹ Other programmes included *Housewives' Choice*, *Family Favourites* and *Music Magazine*.

actors).¹¹⁰ Copies of the scripts show just how much heavy editing was required before the live studio reading and recording. A script for Michael Ayrton's interview, which was recorded on 22 July 1955, includes pages that are entirely crossed out (fig. 5), perhaps for reasons of time constraints.

Notwithstanding, the script makes clear how deferential Plomley was to his guest, keeping the questions away from revealing biographical issues, and focusing instead on Ayrton's interest in music, and general questions about how he would cope – theoretically – on his own on the island. For example,

Plomley: Do you think you'd be able to continue painting on the island, could you find materials for getting paints, brushes, something to paint on?

Ayrton: I think one could, one would have to find out what the vegetation was, what the earths were, and use fats and so on to mix the colours with, but I think one would manage that, yes.¹¹¹

The interview ends – at least as the script would have it – with Ayrton naming his fantasy luxury item to take to the island: a 'piece of Greek sculpture called the Moscoferus', which would 'keep me in faith with my profession ... and will also give me the feeling ultimately of the importance of men'.¹¹² Given Ayrton's esoteric choice compared to the more usually (in the 1950s) cited luxuries of cigarettes, musical instruments, toiletries or at least more famous artworks, this interview was unlikely to dispel the British suspicion of art as high-brow and difficult.

Conclusion

As the BBC's influential Director of Talks Hilda Matheson passionately believed, the 'most pervasive and the most powerful effects of broadcasting are seen, not in music, but in speech. This is true socially, psychologically, educationally, politically, but the fact took some time to emerge'.¹¹³ Indeed, although the phonograph had been predicated on recording speech, music had initially been prioritised on BBC radio. Acoustic issues, financial pressure and the ban on

¹¹⁰ As described on the BBC's 'History of Desert Island Discs' webpage. www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/59YrnYM0Tw8J7WJ0MGKVfh7/the-history-of-desert-island-discs. Accessed 4 June 2021. It is not clear whether the few women guests on the early programmes were able to dine at the club as visitors.

¹¹¹ *Desert Island Discs*, script, 7. BBC Written Archives Centre S133/18/21.

¹¹² *Desert Island Discs*, script, 12.

¹¹³ Matheson, *Broadcasting*, 59.

controversies had contributed to the slow establishment of talks, particularly multi-speaker talks like interviews and panel discussions. But if interviews had a slow start on BBC radio, then the establishment of artist interviews was further stalled by the fact that the corporation's first Director General (until 1938), John Reith, was sceptical about modern art.

The technologies discussed in this chapter created opportunities for artist interviews to exist in a variety of formats. This multiplicity causes problems in trying to designate any one interview format as the 'original' and the others as dependents. Before 1931 documentation of BBC radio interviews is, if it exists at all, most likely to be found in (often annotated) script form. Scripts indicate what was intended to be broadcast, although it is not possible to know if there was any divergence from the script at the time of live transmission. Scripts are also ambiguous evidence. A note attached to a script for *The Artist in the Witness Box*'s 'The Royal Academy' episode draws attention to the fact that '[t]here are two indexed copies of 8th January 1940', one with thirteen pages and one with ten, with 'nothing to indicate which was used'.¹¹⁴ And what of *how* the script was read, in what tone, and with what extra-linguistic information that might indicate the atmosphere of the interview. Did it approximate cosy dinner-table chatter or was it like being interrogated from inside a witness box?

From 1930 onwards, increased use of sound editing allowed different versions of recorded programmes to be produced for different purposes, including clips for 'best of' programmes, and transcription packages for overseas broadcasting. When transcripts of interviews began appearing in print form, these too existed in variant forms. In their respective books on broadcasting, Matheson and Asa Briggs bring up the new relationship between written and spoken word raised by the publication of talks in such magazines as *The Listener*. Matheson welcomed radio's new emphasis on conversational or vernacular speech over literary language, 'enabling complicated, difficult and novel ideas and experience to be conveyed to people whose lack of literary education would ordinarily prevent or hinder them from getting in touch with those ideas and experiences direct from printed books'.¹¹⁵ Matheson's belief in the democratising potential of broadcasting no doubt prompted disagreements with *The Listener*'s editor Richard Lambert, who wanted to tidy up talk transcripts for publication. As

¹¹⁴ D. May, handwritten note, 7 March 1962, attached to script for 'The Royal Academy', *The Artist in the Witness Box* (ten-page version), BBC Written Archives Centre.

¹¹⁵ Matheson, *Broadcasting*, 75.

Briggs recounts, ‘Matheson and [her successor] Siepmann were always at pains to treat the Talk as a separate art form: they did not care whether it read well or not if it sounded right. This made them distrust editorial tidying up in *The Listener* office.’ According to Briggs, they ‘wanted something nearer to a *Hansard* [the official report of UK parliamentary debates] of talks than Lambert was willing to concede’, that is a more verbatim record of what was spoken.¹¹⁶

Contrary to the democratising spirit of broadcasting to the many, the desire to create a broadcasting standard of spoken English had the effect of limiting who could speak on early radio to the upper-middle and upper classes. Women’s voices were also deemed less suitable for the new medium, despite the importance of women behind the scenes, like Matheson and Mary Somerville, who were responsible for promoting talks programmes on radio and boosting interviewing standards. Thus it is no surprise that the first artist interview series on BBC radio, like *Artists at Work* and *The Artist in the Witness Box*, featured only white British male critics and artists, speaking in RP or what became known as ‘BBC English’. This focus on national art continued until the late 1950s, with only a small number of exceptions, such as interviews with French artists Jean Hélion (1945) and Henri Matisse (1950). Thereafter, there was a steep rise in international artists, albeit mostly American and French, being introduced to British radio audiences, in such series as *Art-Anti-Art* (on Dadaism and Surrealism, 1959–60) and *Painting as Self-Discovery* (on Abstract Expressionism, 1960).

The pedagogical tone of the first artist interviews was reinforced by the publication of illustrated pamphlets that could be referred to during transmission (including at Wireless Discussion Groups). However, while early arts interviewers like Stanley Casson and Eric Newton purported to be on the side of the audience and their artist interviewees, eschewing art-critical jargon and pretension, their efforts come across as paternalistic and could not alter the reality that the visual arts were elitist and impenetrable to most. As Casson had alleged in his ‘Philistine’ discussion, audiences were nervous of visual arts until the mid-1960s, when the Labour Government brought in comprehensive education, and access to arts education was widened. An audience research report on BBC radio’s weekly review of the arts, *New*

¹¹⁶ Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II*, 270. Richard Lambert confirmed this attitude in his account of editing *The Listener*: ‘We sought to achieve in our editing a compromise, whereby what you read in *The Listener* would not look offensively colloquial...’. Lambert, *Ariel and All His Quality. An Impression of the BBC from Within*, London: Gollancz, 1940, 111.

Comment, showed that 81% of listeners would listen to a programme about literature, compared to 52% about painting and only 29% about sculpture.¹¹⁷ From the early days of broadcasting to at least the early 1960s, when the poll was conducted, the UK was still a literary (and sporting) rather than artistic nation. It would take the launch of television to boost interest in visual art.

¹¹⁷ Audience Research Report LR/64/222, BBC Written Archives Centre R51/893/1 – New Comment.

Chapter 2

Torture by television: *Face to Face* with Augustus John

A critic of your own methods writing in a Canadian newspaper recently said that the whole purpose of probing and fencing for an opening seemed to be to knock the interviewee off his balance and cause embarrassment. Do you think that a man who is embarrassed and confused and off his balance is likely to reveal the truth?

I do not really think this is a fair point. Obviously a man who is knocked off his balance may or may not reveal the truth; sometimes he will, but this is not the object of the operation. What one, I think, is trying to do is to relax a man enough so that he will show himself as he really is. After all, in practically every case a man who agrees to submit to a television interview does so voluntarily, and therefore that means at some level he is willing to expose himself. The task of the interviewer is to create as quickly as possible the conditions in which he will really do so.

– John Freeman, ‘The Interviewer interviewed’ (1964)¹

In the UK in the 1950s and early 1960s, television was still black and white, and the BBC’s monopoly on programme-making was only just beginning to be challenged.² This period nonetheless saw a huge rise in interviewing, owing to television’s new emphasis on topicality and talks-based magazine programmes, and the influence of American unscripted presenting formats.³ In this chapter I examine the role of early television in the development of the interview and the changing public status of artists.

It is important to bear in mind that the television interview, as with the radio interview, was not a readymade format, but had to be adapted from existing models to suit the new medium. In a 1953 article for *The BBC Quarterly* magazine, BBC producer Edgar Lustgarten claimed the differences between radio and television discussion programmes to be ‘fewer and less marked than may be generally supposed’. The most notable difference, he suggested, related to tempo, such that ‘[because] there is no need to identify changing voices, because

¹ John Freeman interviewing himself on the role of the interviewer in ‘The Interviewer interviewed’, *The Listener*, 71: 1831, 30 April 1964, 721.

² Even so, television audiences doubled between 1956 and 1960 (from 41% to 77% of adult population). BBC Handbook: 1961, 130.

³ Television interviewer Geoffrey Johnson Smith referred to an ‘epidemic of interviews on television’, quoted in ‘Did You Hear That’, *The Listener*, 60: 1532, 7 August 1958, 9.

interruption can be more readily absorbed, because the eye somehow aids the ear in following debate, a television debate can advantageously move faster'.⁴ By contrast, in a 1960 article for *The Telegraph*, John Woodforde lamented that '[m]ost sound radio interviews, however interesting, now seem tame against the televised sort'.⁵ Just how different were television interviews from their radio equivalents?

The case study for this chapter is the 1960 interview between artist Augustus John (1878–1961) and presenter John Freeman (1915–2014) for the celebrated interview series *Face to Face*, which ran on BBC1 between 1959 and 1962,⁶ and was widely praised for its technological innovation as well as its daringly candid interviewing style.⁷ Veteran television presenter Joan Bakewell recalls, in her introduction to the thirty-year anniversary anthology of transcripts from *Face to Face*, that the 'interviews soon became compulsive viewing, instant classics'.⁸ Four and a half million people watched the first episode. The reason for the popularity was, Bakewell writes, because it 'tried to unmask for the first time on screen the private faces of public figures, to peel off their protective layers and expose what was hidden underneath'.⁹

Because this highly personal approach to interviewing was so new to British television, most interviewees appear earnest and remarkably unguarded to the contemporary viewer, freely answering intimate questions posed by John Freeman. *Face to Face* is an example of an early television series that marks the turn towards a 'more direct and incisive' style of interviewing during that period (as was noted by the BBC Handbook of 1961)¹⁰ and what happens in particular when an artist is subjected to this kind of questioning.

In contrast to the 'well-mannered formality' of the concurrent arts television programme *Monitor* (1958–65),¹¹ many saw Freeman's interviewing style as too intrusive, accusing him

⁴ Edgar Lustgarten, 'Producing Discussions for Broadcasting', *The BBC Quarterly*, 8: 3, Autumn 1953, 140.

⁵ John Woodforde, 'Questionable Tactics', *The Telegraph*, 11 April 1960. Press clipping, no page number. BBC Written Archives Centre T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

⁶ It was revived much later between 1989 and 1998. BBC1 was the BBC's only channel until 1964.

⁷ The series became a benchmark for future presenters such as Michael Parkinson, according to John Freeman's biographer. Hugh Purcell, *A Very Private Celebrity: The Nine Lives of John Freeman*, London: The Robson Press, 2015, 140.

⁸ Joan Bakewell, 'Introduction', *Face to Face with John Freeman: Interviews from the BBC TV series*, London: BBC Books, 1989, 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ BBC Handbook: 1961, 30.

¹¹ William Trevor, 'Television', *The Listener*, 74: 1897, 5 August 1965, 211.

of psychologically ‘torturing’ or ‘brainwashing’ his guests – particularly so with Augustus John, who was old and frail at the time of his interview, and in fact died the following year. The volume of correspondence in the BBC Written Archives Centre testifies to the controversy this particular interview caused.¹² Yet this episode has been neglected in media histories in favour of interviews with John’s more famous peers, notably Henry Moore and Francis Bacon. In fact, John’s older sister Gwen John is now arguably better known than her brother, with a room recently dedicated to her work at Tate Britain as part of its Spotlights display (2020–1).¹³

Rebecca Roach has argued that by the time of *Face to Face*, the interview had become a masculine pursuit:

From the late 1940s onwards the interviewer was no longer the deferential guest, enthusiastic fan, or obscure ethnographer: he – and the remasculinization of the interviewer in the post-war period is notable – was now the public prosecutor, forensic profiler, military commander, or wiretapper.¹⁴

Indeed, only two of *Face to Face*’s interviewees were women, which Joan Bakewell proclaimed a ‘sign of the times’.¹⁵

Early television interview programmes prompted a discussion about whether there ought to be a code of ethics for interviewers.¹⁶ The phrase ‘face to face’ infers a sense of equality between the interlocutors,¹⁷ and indeed Bakewell suggests that the guests on the show ‘seemed genuinely willing to collaborate in a search for the truth about themselves’.¹⁸ But who was this collaboration with? In the case of the Augustus John episode, the input of numerous individuals involved in the commissioning, pre- and post-production and

¹² Unusually, this interview merited its own separate archive file [BBC WAC T32/590].

¹³ Augustus John’s work might also be re-examined in light of the publication of letters by his first wife, the artist Ida John (née Nettleship), which discuss her complicated menage à trois with him and Dorelia McNeill. See Rebecca John and Michael Holroyd, eds, *The Good Bohemian: The Letters of Ida John*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

¹⁴ Rebecca Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 132.

¹⁵ Bakewell, *Face to Face*, 6.

¹⁶ William Trevor believed that ‘the fact that no such code at present exists is one reason, I’m afraid, why the unrehearsed studio interview, with its display of facial expressions, is often regarded by viewers as television at its best’. Trevor, ‘Television’, 211.

¹⁷ The title *Face to Face* has been used for other interview anthologies, including for Richard Cork’s *Face to Face: Interviews with Artists*, London: Tate Publishing, 2015; and Manuela de Leonardis, *Face to Face with the Great Photographers: Vol. 1*, Rome: Postcart, 2018.

¹⁸ Bakewell, *Face to Face*, 6.

distribution of the interview must be considered. In addition to John and Freeman, these included the producer/director Hugh Burnett, BBC TV Controller Kenneth Adam, Head of Television Talks Leonard Miall, chief cameraman Peter Sargent, editor Harry Hastings and artist Feliks Topolski. Television increased the number of stakeholders involved in an interview, and thus increased ambiguity as to whom the interview material belongs, and who has the right to amend or use it.

Moreover, the authenticity and originality of an interview are brought into question when several variants exist, whether in archives or in the public realm. In the case of the John interview, these include two recordings on two separate occasions; an unpublished transcript of the first recording; an edited recording used for broadcast on BBC1 and a later DVD version; and an edited transcript (Freeman's questions removed) of the broadcast for a published anthology.¹⁹ And what is implied about the changing value and reputation of the John interview by its being omitted from the thirtieth anniversary anthology of *Face to Face* interviews, yet included in the 1964 anthology and (in DVD format) for the fiftieth anniversary?²⁰ Likewise, transcripts from *Face to Face* were also printed in the BBC's weekly magazine *The Listener*, but again not John's.²¹ Why was John's so maligned when the *Face to Face* interview with the only other artist on the programme, Henry Moore, was included in both the thirtieth anniversary and *The Listener*?

Interviews as brainwashing

The accusations of 'torture' and 'brainwashing', in relation to *Face to Face*, should be understood within a Cold War political context. In fact, John Freeman's second appearance as an interviewer on BBC television's *Panorama* (on 7 November 1957) was on a

¹⁹ Hugh Burnett, ed., *Face to Face*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1964. Illustrations by Feliks Topolski.

²⁰ Additionally, the BFI admits to holding unedited production material that was not used for the final broadcast, but that, given its unique 'master' status, is deemed too precious to watch.

²¹ Transcripts of interviews included Carl Jung (29 October 1959), Lord Morrison of Lambeth (7 January 1960), King Hussain (14 January 1960), Lord Shawcross (28 January 1960), Henry Moore (10 March 1960), Sir Roy Welensky (9 June 1960), Lord Reith (10 November 1960), Victor Gollancz (8 December 1960), Frank Cousins (26 October 1961), Jomo Kenyatta (7 December 1961), Sir Compton Mackenzie (25 January 1962) and Roy Thomson (15 February 1962).

programme about the brainwashing of American and British prisoners of war in Korea into making false confessions.²²

Reflecting on the horrors of Nazi genocide in the post-war period, psychologists were preoccupied with questions of human morality and evil – how could humans torture, denounce and kill one another? The philosopher Hannah Arendt had argued, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), that the mob mentality of totalitarian states was born of the atomisation of society: frustrated individuals deprived of political rights and a sense of belonging to a social class.²³ In the US, the American Jewish Committee sponsored a study of social discrimination, of which the most famous contributor was the philosopher Theodor Adorno, published in 1950 as *The Authoritarian Personality*. As the title suggests, the study attempted to create a psychological profile of what they termed a ‘potentially fascist’ individual, using questionnaires to score people on scales for anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, politico-economic conservatism and even antidemocratic tendencies.²⁴ Rebecca Roach has also discussed the interview as a key tool in this type of forensic psychology in the post-war years, giving the example of American psychoanalyst Walter C. Langer’s secret assessment of Adolf Hitler in 1943, for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), based on research interviews with people who had known him.²⁵

During the Cold War, the West feared totalitarian regimes that employed psychological means of controlling their populations.²⁶ Brainwashing – a translation of the Chinese colloquial term *his nao* (‘wash brain’) – was a buzzword of the 1950s and early 1960s.²⁷

²² These fears were popularised through such iconic war films and spy dramas as *The Prisoner* (1955), *Brainwashed* (1960), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and the *Ipcress File* (1965), as well as psychological thrillers like *Gas Light* (1944).

²³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London: Penguin Classics, 2017 (first published 1951), 183; 415.

²⁴ T. W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950, 1; 13.

²⁵ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 135. Langer’s survey was commissioned by General William Donovan, the Head of the OSS, during World War Two. It predicted Hitler’s suicide. The survey was eventually published as *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* in 1972.

²⁶ The full details of the CIA’s own clandestine mind-control experiments on US citizens were not made public until 1975. For further information on brainwashing in the Cold War, see the Birkbeck online research hub, Hidden Persuaders. www7.bbk.ac.uk/hiddenpersuaders/. Accessed 7 June 2021.

²⁷ The term was first used by American journalist Edward Hunter, originally to describe Chinese Communist indoctrination techniques as part of ideological reform, then extended to Russian and Eastern European contexts – then ‘just about everywhere’. See Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1961, 3.

Writing in 1961, American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton claimed: ‘The word “brainwashing” is so new and yet already so much a part of our everyday language.’²⁸ Dutch psychologist Joost Meerloo had also argued that the kind of psychological pressures encountered in warfare were in fact just extreme versions of the ‘systematized suggestion, subtle propaganda, and moreover mass hypnosis’ that one encountered in everyday advertising and political broadcasting.²⁹

The dismantling of the boundary between private and public lives was also a characteristic of totalitarian states. Lifton referenced George Orwell’s earlier dystopian novel *1984* (1949) in his discussion of the ‘cult of confession in such states; that is, the policy of ‘making public ... everything possible about the life experiences, thoughts, and passions of each individual, and especially those elements which might be regarded as derogatory’, such that ‘private ownership of the mind ... becomes highly immoral’.³⁰ That there was a fine line between therapeutic confession and interrogation in *Face to Face* was suggested by the psychologist Anthony Clare, when interviewing Freeman himself, at the age of 73, for the thirtieth anniversary of the show:

If you start to uncover, the psychotherapist at least has the potential and the time to cope with the wounds if there are any and heal them to some extent. The problem with television or radio interviewing is that we have but the time to uncover, and that you can then leave people rather raw and the viewer or the listener rather pained.³¹

Psychological terms had also gained popular currency in the post-war period. Clinical psychological treatments had been available in the UK since the 1910s through the Medical Psychological Clinic (1913–22), established by Jessie Murray and Julia Turner;³² and the Tavistock Clinic (founded 1920), based on Dr Hugh Crichton-Miller’s treatment of shell shock victims in the First World War. But the end of the Second World War brought increased attention to psychology, with the founding of the National Association for Mental Health (now Mind) in 1946, and the splitting of the Tavistock in 1948 into its clinical arm,

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ Meerloo, who had interviewed concentration camp survivors and Nazis on trial, also used the term ‘menticide’ to describe a ‘direct and premeditated’ assault on ‘the integrity of the human mind’. Joost A. M. Meerloo, *Mental Seduction and Menticide*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1957, 73.

³⁰ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, 425.

³¹ *Face to Face*, London: BBC Books, 1989, 13.

³² Sally Alexander, ‘Psychoanalysis in Britain in the Early Twentieth Century: An Introductory Note’, *History Workshop Journal*, no. 45, Spring 1998, 137. The British Society for Psycho-Analysis was founded by Ernest Jones, who met Freud in 1908, in 1919.

the Tavistock Clinic, to become part of the new National Health Service, and a research branch, The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. John Freeman himself chaired a radio discussion on the 1959 Mental Health Act, which replaced the earlier Lunacy, Mental Treatment and Mental Deficiency Acts, and aimed to establish parity between ‘mental disorder’ and physical ailments.³³ But as this chapter will demonstrate, a little psychological knowledge could have risky consequences.

Early British television: marginal and eccentric or a form of social control?

Joost Merloo believed that television itself could unwittingly cause psychological manipulation. Discussing the televising of court trials in the US, he claimed that anonymous viewers created a ‘magic effect’ because ‘the witness or defendant imagined their approval or disapproval – [which] influenced the outcome of the hearings’.³⁴ Aldous Huxley devoted a whole chapter to brainwashing in his book *Brave New World Revisited* (1959), acknowledging regret at not having discussed the tactic of ‘subliminal projection’ in his original *Brave New World* of 1931.³⁵ In the revisited version, Huxley warns that ‘the hand of the would-be dictator has been strengthened’ today, thanks to television and the development of techniques and procedures in brainwashing.³⁶

However, the reputation of television had suffered from interruptions to its development in the UK, first because of war and then post-war austerity.³⁷ Some commentators on early television, including many within the BBC itself, believed it to be a mere ‘extension of radio’,³⁸ and therefore not particularly innovative. The BBC’s first Director General Lord Reith haughtily claimed in his 1960 *Face to Face* interview that he never watched television.³⁹ Charlotte Higgins, in her history of the BBC, *This New Noise* (2015), likewise

³³ Talks Booking Requisition for ‘chairman with two other speakers’ on current affairs programme *At Home and Abroad*, on BBC Home Service, 6 January 1959. BBC Written Archives Centre RCONTI John Freeman Talks 1c: 1959. See also Mental Health Act, 1959:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1959/72/pdfs/ukpga_19590072_en.pdf. Accessed 7 June 2021.

³⁴ Merloo, *Mental Seduction and Menticide*, 160.

³⁵ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1959, 119.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁷ John Logie Baird gave the first public demonstration of television to members of the Royal Institution in 1926, but it would take until 2 November 1936 for the BBC to begin regular broadcasts – the world’s first regular television service. However, this early glory was short-lived, as the television service was shut down in 1939, lying dormant for the duration of the Second World War, and only reopening on 7 June 1946.

³⁸ Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960–75*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 8.

³⁹ BBC Television, 30 October 1960.

notes that television was initially seen as an ‘upstart’, not to be taken seriously.⁴⁰ She writes: ‘It is hard, now, to recapture just how marginal and eccentric television seemed from the purview of the established wireless operation in its elegant (though war-battered) headquarters in Portland Place.’⁴¹ Yet BBC television’s early isolation – literally, as it was based in suburban Alexandra Palace until 1954⁴² – Higgins argues, served as an opportunity to Grace Wyndham Goldie (a rare senior female figure in the BBC),⁴³ who was given *carte blanche* to develop the current affairs side of the BBC Talks department.⁴⁴ It was Goldie’s achievement, Higgins continues, ‘to prove that TV could tackle serious subjects and engage with the complexities of politics’.⁴⁵ Goldie also employed former politicians; specifically she ‘swept up a number of sharp, charismatic former MPs who had lost their seats in the 1950 and 1951 elections’, including former Labour MP John Freeman.⁴⁶

Furthermore, as Robert Hewison observes, the ‘attitude of intellectuals to television was almost universally hostile’.⁴⁷ One such example was the Welsh Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams, who cautioned against television’s special status, this time from a political angle. In *Television: Technology and cultural form* (1974), he argued against the notion of technological determinism, vehemently countering the suggestion that television had any agency for societal change of its own accord.⁴⁸ Instead, he maintained that the profit-driven need to sell consumer goods such as the television monitor necessitated the making of

⁴⁰ Charlotte Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC*, London: Guardian Books and Faber & Faber, 2015, 69.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴² Robert Hewison maintains that it took until the 1960 appointment of Hugh Carleton Greene (brother of Graham Greene) as Director General for the ‘mandarin atmosphere of the BBC’ to be ‘disrupted’, and TV to be made a priority and given more central London (Wood Lane) studios from which to operate. Hewison, *Too Much*, 26.

⁴³ Another important female figure in the BBC Talks department was Nancy Thomas, who was one of the producers on *Monitor*. Later, Judith Bumpus joined the BBC in 1968 and produced arts programmes and documentaries for nearly thirty years, including the series *Conversations with Artists* on BBC Radio 3 (1980–2).

⁴⁴ Higgins, *This New Noise*, 82.

⁴⁵ BBC news had previously, under Tatu Hole, been resistant to change and had ‘no real interest in developing television news as a visual form, resisting even putting newsreaders on screen until weeks before ITN launched in 1955’. *Ibid.*, 81–2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 82. No doubt this experience explains Freeman’s earlier success at tackling politicians on BBC Television’s *Panorama*.

⁴⁷ Hewison, *Too Much*, 10.

⁴⁸ Williams’ theoretical opponent was the Canadian media analyst Marshall McLuhan, for whom medium was of utmost importance, determining viewers’ reactions to content (famously, ‘the medium is the message’). A decade earlier, in 1964’s *Understanding Media*, McLuhan declared television to be a ‘cold’ medium compared to radio’s ‘hot’ status, in that it offers ‘little detail and a low degree of information, much like the cartoon’, thus requiring high audience participation to fill in the missing details. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, 314.

programmes, not the other way around.⁴⁹ Like Merloo and Huxley, Williams was uneasy about what he saw as the inherent manipulative dangers of broadcasting, writing that ‘if seen only in hindsight, broadcasting can be diagnosed as a new and powerful form of social integration and control. Many of its main uses can be seen as socially, commercially and at times politically manipulative.’⁵⁰

Topical television: the rise of talks-based programming

A large number of talks-based magazine programmes were developed by Goldie and her team at the BBC in the 1950s, including *Press Conference*,⁵¹ *Panorama*, *Tonight*, *Face to Face* and *Monitor* (the latter considered ‘a kind of *Panorama* of the arts’).⁵² *Panorama*, re-launched in 1955 to rival the new, commercial Independent Television (ITV),⁵³ became one of the two most popular programmes of the time,⁵⁴ proving that ‘[i]t is a fallacy to imagine that the mass audience is only interested in “entertainment”’.⁵⁵ In Spring 1959, the British Film Institute’s (BFI) film magazine, *Sight & Sound*, devoted an entire feature to ‘Topical Television’, surveying the extraordinary volume (twenty-six) of such topical programmes put out by the BBC and ITV at that time, noting that audience numbers for these were ‘clearly dwarfing’ reader figures for the ailing illustrated print magazine market.⁵⁶

The interview format was particularly suited to topical magazine programmes, which, unlike radio before, were predominantly broadcast live. Interviews were also a means of circumventing the BBC’s editorial principle of strict impartiality; *Panorama* and interview

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and cultural form*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 18. Original version, London: Fontana, 1974.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵¹ Before being an interviewer on *Panorama*, John Freeman had been on *Press Conference*, a show whose format – a panel of journalists interviewing a public figure – was borrowed from American TV. See Purcell, *A Very Private Celebrity*, 122.

⁵² Higgins, *This New Noise*, 88.

⁵³ *Panorama* had launched in 1953, but Goldie took it over and revived it in 1955.

⁵⁴ The other was panel show *What’s My Line*.

⁵⁵ BBC Handbook: 1960, 54. An early producer of *Panorama*, Rex Moorfoot, was appointed Head of Presentation at the new Television Centre in 1960, in order to address ‘the strong feeling that the presentation of television needed a radical overhaul’. See Leonard Miall, ‘Obituary: Rex Moorfoot’, *Independent*, 30 September 1994. www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-rex-moorfoot-1440080.html. Accessed 7 June 2021.

⁵⁶ See Derek Hill, ‘Topical Television’, *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1959, 28: 2, 95.

programme *Face to Face* were openly listed as ‘controversial’ programmes.⁵⁷ After all, the BBC Handbook’s ‘Quote of the Year’ for 1960 was by the-then Director of News and Current Affairs, Hugh Carleton Greene (soon to become the BBC’s Director General), in which he argued that a public broadcasting service ‘must not try to influence its audience in any particular direction and must mirror with the greatest possible fairness and objectivity all main streams of opinion without fear or favour’.⁵⁸

Stuart Hood, the BBC’s Controller of Programmes for television between 1961 and 1963, recalled that the interview format would also force the BBC to confront its fears over ‘what they interpreted as a cult of personality’.⁵⁹ Before the advent of Independent Television News (ITN), BBC news reporters had always been anonymous. ITN, however, in the manner of American television, named reporters and encouraged idiosyncrasies; they were ‘themselves journalists and reporters, not merely lay figures with good voices and a presentable appearance’.⁶⁰ The BBC, with its ‘clerical blandness’, had to take note.⁶¹

A regular Murrow

As with ITN, the style of BBC current affairs programmes borrowed heavily from American formats, particularly CBS television’s *See It Now* (1951–8), with its fearless presenter Ed Murrow, who made his name by daring to stand up to Senator Joseph McCarthy during the period of his notorious anti-Communist show-trials and witch hunts. For Rebecca Roach, McCarthyism marked ‘a traumatic moment in the history of American journalism’ and prompted a self-conscious examination of interview techniques – especially after Murrow’s ‘famous *See It Now* broadcast of 9 March 1954, which highlighted the Senator’s contradictions and false accusations’.⁶²

⁵⁷ Rebecca Roach makes the point that the controversy over the BBC’s coverage of the Suez Crisis in 1956, in which the broadcaster criticised the British government’s handling of the situation, led to the ‘eventual disregard of the gag rule (which had hitherto barred the broadcast of material on topics scheduled to be debated in Parliament over the next fourteen days) and a more critical relationship developed between broadcasting and government’. Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 143.

⁵⁸ BBC Handbook: 1960, 35.

⁵⁹ Stuart Hood, *A Survey of Television*, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1967, 105.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 106. Rebecca Roach comments that, like the BBC’s Grace Wyndham Goldie, ITN’s then-news editor, Arthur Glifford, was also keen to experiment with a harder line of interview questioning. Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 142.

⁶¹ Hood, *A Survey of Television*, 106.

⁶² Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 141.

Murrow went on to host two further interview-based, celebrity-focused television programmes that broke technological ground. In *Person to Person* (1953–61), Murrow interviewed guests from a chair in the studio behind which a large screen revealed the celebrities in their own homes, allowing the audience virtually to ‘visit’ them.⁶³ This programme had such mass appeal that ‘Murrow became a kind of generic noun, instead of a proper name – “he thinks he’s a regular Murrow” – and was even used as a verb, “to Murrow”, meaning to engage in social chitchat’.⁶⁴ Murrow’s later *Small World* (1958–60) brought together four celebrities from different geographical locations for a discussion, and was imported by the BBC.⁶⁵

Murrow was much admired in the UK, having spent nine years as a war correspondent for CBS radio based at the BBC’s London studios.⁶⁶ He was thus well placed to compare British and American approaches to television. Murrow characterised privatised American television as highly competitive, commercial, loud, at times vulgar and experimental; while British television (particularly the publicly owned BBC that lacked financial investment) was careful, cautious, rather paternalistic and not quite so often vulgar.⁶⁷

Malcolm Muggeridge, interviewing Murrow – who he introduced as the ‘world’s most famous television interviewer’ – for *Panorama* in 1955, claimed to particularly admire the way in which Murrow elicited such fascinating interviews while saying little himself.⁶⁸ In response, Murrow advocated listening hard to difficult interviewees, and ‘doing an interview with the camera working over my shoulders so that the interviewer does not get between the subject and the audience’. Furthermore, Murrow poured scorn on scripted interviews:

⁶³ A precursor of video software like Skype or Zoom. Murrow was replaced by Charles Collingwood.

⁶⁴ Alexander Kendrick, *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1970, 364.

⁶⁵ According to one of his biographers, Murrow was one of the first presenters to cross ‘over the line separating those who are well known for doing something to those who have attained the semimystical state of being famous for simply being’. Joseph P. Persico, *Edward R. Murrow: An American Original*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1988, 353.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Roach argues that the American broadcaster Myron Leon Wallace should be recognised for pioneering the interrogative interview, and that the BBC also took note of him. Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 137-8. Wallace hosted two interview programmes in the 1950s: *Night Beat* (1955–7) and *The Mike Wallace Interview* (1957–8). He then spent nearly forty years as a correspondent for CBC’s *60 Minutes*. See also Peter Rader, *Mike Wallace: A Life*, New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2012.

⁶⁷ Interview with Malcolm Muggeridge, *Panorama*, BBC Television, 1 June 1955.

⁶⁸ Malcolm Muggeridge also presented *Appointment With* (1960–2) on ITV, a rival chat show to *Face to Face*.

I never know when I'm doing an interview where I'm going because my questions generally arise from the preceding answer rather than being carefully thought out. I'm very much opposed, as I'm sure you are, to the rehearsed, planned interview.⁶⁹

One might suspect that Murrow's preference for spontaneous discussion was also a political tactic that meant that slippery opponents such as McCarthy could not prepare in advance for his questioning. It also meant that he couldn't be censored, although he could (and was) later punished for upsetting advertisers.⁷⁰ In the UK, the unpredictability of topical programmes, with their emphasis on spontaneous discussion, might also be viewed as a means of unsettling the deeply conservative, self-censoring attitudes of the 1950s – 'conservative' to be taken in both a moral and political sense (the Conservatives were in power through the entire decade, from 1951 until 1964).⁷¹

The arts on TV

The arts, having been treated in an often patronising, pedagogical manner on radio – as discussed in the previous chapter – would also benefit from the visual medium of television. The fact that television was initially black and white (colour television would be launched in 1967) did not trouble Mervyn Levy, artist and presenter of BBC television's *Painting for Housewives*, who wrote in 1955 that 'colour can be *imagined*'.⁷² Now, the images as well as voices and sounds of artists, their work, their studios and exhibitions could all be widely shared.⁷³

As John A. Walker notes, in *Art & Artists on Screen* (1993): 'In 1950 very few artists expected to be filmed. A decade later, filmed interviews with leading artists had become a

⁶⁹ *Panorama*, BBC1, 1 June 1955.

⁷⁰ CBS cancelled *See It Now* in 1958.

⁷¹ Robert Hewison argues that '[s]ince, unlike their American counterparts British intellectuals were not harassed by loyalty oaths or Congressional enquiries, their response was less extreme; indeed it tended to be neutral but in that neutrality was a caution, and a self-limitation. The Cold War tended to freeze public attitudes, and counselled silence about private ones'. Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945–60*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 122.

⁷² Mervyn Levy, 'Television and the Visual Arts', *Art News and Review*, 24 December 1955, 7: 24, 1.

⁷³ Despite the intellectual distaste for television, the art historian and ex-National Gallery Director Kenneth Clark was hugely enthusiastic about the medium. The first chairman of the new Independent Television Authority (ITA), parent company of ITV and ITN, he went on to make forty-eight arts programmes for Associated Television (ATV) in the late 1950s, as well as the first colour television arts series, *Civilisation*, a decade later. See John A. Walker, *Arts TV: A history of arts television in Britain*, London: John Libbey & Company, 1993, 22-3.

matter of routine, especially in the United States.’⁷⁴ Walker credits British filmmaker John Read, son of art critic Herbert Read, as the pioneer of artist profiles during the 1950s.⁷⁵ It was he, according to Walker, who ‘thought it essential to ask artists about their work and who tape-recorded their comments’.⁷⁶ Indeed, in the introduction to the BBC booklet accompanying Read’s 1960 documentary series, *The Artist Speaks*, Read muses on the fact that it is ‘often regretted that so little remains on record of what great artists of the past had to say for themselves’.⁷⁷ The publicity notes for that series clearly seek to overturn this historical silence, claiming: ‘It is quite possible for a film on art to be seen by more than 20 million people.’⁷⁸ In fact, a transcript of the first episode of the series, focusing on British painter and sculptor Michael Ayrton, was published a few days after broadcast in the BBC’s *The Listener* magazine, with a commitment to publishing transcripts of the following episodes.⁷⁹ This inclusion marked a significant editorial shift for *The Listener*, which until this point had not published transcripts from visual arts programmes with any regularity. Two years later, interviews between Graham Sutherland and critic Andrew Forge (26 July 1962) and Oskar Kokoschka and Forge again (20 September 1962) even made the front cover of *The Listener*.

Stuart Hood also credits the ‘adventurous’ and ‘long spell of pioneering work’ of *Monitor* as having prepared the viewing public ‘to progress beyond the limits of the magazine programme and to have subjects treated more intensively and at greater length’.⁸⁰ An article titled ‘Popularizing the Arts’ in the same issue of *The Listener* as the Ayrton transcript, tentatively claimed that the BBC’s ‘art programmes do seem to have led more people actually to visit museums and picture galleries’.⁸¹ A more confident affirmation of television’s role in popularising art was made in 1966 article in *The Listener* by the critic William Trevor:

⁷⁴ John A. Walker, *Art and Artists on Screen*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, 183-4.

⁷⁵ Walker also credits artist and critic John Piper as another ‘pioneer of arts television’ who also ‘made an effort to increase the viewing public’s appreciation of modern art’. Between 1936 and 1937 Piper regularly offered his commentary on exhibitions in London for BBC television. Walker, *Arts TV*, 20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁷ Herbert Read, *The Artist Speaks*, booklet, London: BBC, 1960, unpaginated.

⁷⁸ 27 June 1960. BBC Written Archives Centre T32/442/1 – The Artist Speaks.

⁷⁹ The Michael Ayrton episode of *The Artist Speaks* was broadcast on 11 July 1960. The printed version appeared in *The Listener* on 28 July 1960. As with the television programme, the printed version of the Ayrton episode appeared as a monologue, with no indication of what prompts the artist was responding to.

⁸⁰ Hood, *A Survey of Television*, 157.

⁸¹ ‘Popularizing the Arts’, *The Listener*, 64: 1635, 28 July 1960, 140.

I'm certain that in these islands, where for so long there's been a suspicion of artists and writers, the climate is changing, the word has surely got round that these people, odd in their choice of work perhaps, are none the less presentable. The arts on television can safely take a bit of credit.⁸²

Yet there were potentially negative consequences to popularising art. BBC broadcaster and *Monitor* editor Huw Wheldon gave a lecture, reproduced in *The Listener*, on 'Television and the arts', asking whether TV reduced the artist or artworks, 'parcelling them up neatly, taming them'. He debates and tries to answer American critic Harold Rosenberg's complaint, in the latter's article on 'Art books, book art, art', that artworks have become mere illustrations and no more than what is written about them. Wheldon ends, however, with an apology: if a TV programme fails, it's because television programmes are 'hard to make'.⁸³ The *Face to Face* interview with Augustus John, discussed in detail below, could indeed be described as hard to make. But did it tame or reduce artist and artwork?

***Face to Face* and 'Establishment art'**

John Freeman had cut his teeth as an interviewer on *Panorama*, where Hugh Burnett was assistant producer. *Face to Face* grew out of a BBC radio celebrity interview series that Burnett produced called *Personal Call*,⁸⁴ which described itself as 'a kind of sound version of Ed Murrow's *Person to Person*'.⁸⁵ The *Face to Face* team would later acknowledge their debt to Murrow by asking him to front a US version of the show (Murrow claimed to be interested but nothing came of it).⁸⁶ Freeman also endorsed similar interviewing principles to Murrow's. He professed to be 'jealous of the record of *Face to Face* as a programme of truth, spontaneity and immediacy' – and was particularly indignant when post-production editing of his interview with Augustus John threatened to compromise those values.⁸⁷

⁸² William Turner, 'The Arts', *The Listener*, 76: 1969, 22 December 1966, 939.

⁸³ Huw Wheldon, 'Television and the Arts', *The Listener*, 73: 1873, 18 February 1965, 257-60. Huw Wheldon was editor (until 1962) and principal interviewer of *Monitor* (until 1964).

⁸⁴ 'Face to Face began as a plot between the distinguished judge Lord Birkett and myself. He had taken part in *Personal Call*, a BBC radio series I produced in the early 1950s for listeners in the Far East ... A few years later I moved across to the chaos of the Corporation's fledgling Television Service, and by 1959 had spent two years trying to persuade Grace Wyndham Goldie ... that the *Personal Call* format could transfer successfully to the new medium.' Hugh Burnett, 'Introduction to the interviews', *Face to Face*, booklet accompanying DVD boxset, London: BBC Worldwide, 2009, 7.

⁸⁵ Letter from George Looker to Alec Sutherland, 16 February 1955. BBC Written Archives Centre E17/134 – *Personal Call*.

⁸⁶ In fact, Murrow was appointed Director of the United States Information Agency in 1961 (until 1964).

⁸⁷ John Freeman, letter to Kenneth Adam, 14 June 1960. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

Up until this point, BBC interviews had been almost entirely scripted. The new format of television, however, put pressure on producers to develop live, unscripted programmes (although in practice, there may have been a pre-transmission rehearsal). As Andrew Shonfield put it in *The BBC Quarterly* in 1954, if the disembodied voice on radio could carry off the pretence of reading from a prepared script, ‘as soon as the cameras are turned on the reader, the sham is revealed’.⁸⁸ Preference was also given for programmes that required little editing, since it was, at least until the advent of electronic videotape editing (introduced in October 1958), difficult and expensive to do. Fourteen of the thirty-five *Face to Face* programmes were broadcast live, adding, as Burnett wrote later, ‘perhaps a little more tension as a result’.⁸⁹

Perhaps because Augustus John (aired 15 May 1960) and Henry Moore (21 February 1960) were the only artists among the high-profile personalities interviewed for *Face to Face*, the series is not discussed by John A. Walker in his history of art on British television, *Arts TV* (1993). The choice of artists would no doubt have been considered familiar enough for a general – if culturally unadventurous – audience, given that both were already well established professionally and had previously been interviewed for radio and television. John was known for painting portraits of such influential figures as George Bernard Shaw, Dylan Thomas and Colonel T. E. Lawrence (‘Lawrence of Arabia’). Both John (1928 and 1948) and Moore (1959) had even featured on the cover of the American weekly news magazine *Time*.⁹⁰ Significantly, Moore’s sculpture was included in the first *BBC Television Demonstration Film* of 1937.⁹¹

Certainly, the art world of the time would have considered Moore and John as ‘Establishment’ – that very Fifties term of disparagement. Alan Bell, reviewing Malcolm

⁸⁸ Andrew Schonfield, ‘The Topical Programme in Television’, *The BBC Quarterly*, 9: 1, Spring 1954, 15.

⁸⁹ Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 8.

⁹⁰ Augustus John featured twice on 10 September 1928 and 31 May 1948, and Henry Moore on 21 September 1959.

⁹¹ During the war, the propaganda film *Out of Chaos* (1944), written and directed by Jill Craigie and shown in cinemas, featured footage of artists at work, including the earliest shots of Henry Moore, working in the underground shelters. Furthermore, John Read had written and directed the BBC film portrait *Henry Moore* in 1951, going on to make another five films with the artist. Moore appeared on Hugh Burnett’s radio programme *Personal Call* in 1954, and on BBC television’s *Monitor* the same year as *Face to Face*. Moore was also a favourite of Kenneth Clark’s, and appeared with him on ITV’s *Encounters in the Dark* in 1958. See also John Wyver, ‘Myriad Mediations: Henry Moore and his Works on Screen 1937–83’, in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Tate Research Publication, 2015.

Easton and Michael Holroyd's biography *The Art of Augustus John*, claimed that by the time of the *Face to Face* interview, John 'had long outlived his professional reputation, becoming critically unfashionable and commercially in the doldrums many years before his death'. Notwithstanding, 'as a public figure he was vividly appreciated by a wide and perhaps envious following, who were largely unaware of the sense of artistic failure, as an epitome of old-style roistering and irreverent bohemianism'.⁹²

In the *Face to Face* interview, Freeman acknowledges John's reputation: he refers to the artist's Order of Merit and his re-election to the Royal Academy. He asks John: 'Do you consider that you are now accepted by the art establishment in this country, as being a master, or do you think you're still regarded as being rather a wild man of art?' John replies that he thinks he has 'a very fishy reputation' because he is 'out of date' for not doing abstract art. More precisely, younger artists working in the late 1950s were heavily influenced by American culture: whether Pop Art (Whitechapel Gallery's *This is Tomorrow* of 1956 was the first major exhibition) or British versions of American Abstract Expressionism.⁹³ When *The Sunday Times* launched its first colour supplement magazine (the first in the UK) on 4 February 1962, its groundbreaking, fashionable credentials were reinforced by the inclusion of Pop Artist Peter Blake. Later that decade, John Russell summed up what Pop Art was against:

Much of the English art-world at that time was distinctly and unforgivably paternalistic. Pop was meant as a cultural break, signifying the firing squad, without mercy or reprieve, for the kind of people who believed in the Loeb classics, holidays in Tuscany, drawings by Augustus John, signed pieces of French furniture, leading articles in the Daily Telegraph and very good clothes that lasted for ever.⁹⁴

But if Moore and John appeared to be established media figures, they were not necessarily comfortable playing the celebrity game. In his interview, John claimed not to own a television set. Their degree of media-savvy was particularly low in comparison to that of the politicians and the younger, more fashionable stars – like singer Adam Faith – on *Face to*

⁹² Alan S. Bell, 'The Masks of Augustus John Legend and Achievement', *The Sewanee Review*, 84: 1, Winter 1976, 209.

⁹³ Abstract Expressionism could be encountered through high-profile shows such as the Tate Gallery's *Modern Art in the United States* (1956), organised by MoMA as part of the CIA's Cold War cultural strategy. See Andrew Forge and David Sylvester, 'A Kind of Anarchy', *Encounter*, 1964, 44-7, for a discussion on the influence of American art on British artists.

⁹⁴ In Hewison, *Too Much*, 50.

Face. In fact, politicians had already begun to receive media training, which, according to Hood:

improved their techniques considerably... Over the years they have established close relationships with many of the television reporters. It is no uncommon experience to find a politician who has simulated rage, surprise and pain at a well-aimed question peacefully discussing the programme with the interviewer over a drink afterwards.

Moore and John did not engage in this playful camaraderie with journalists. Letters in the BBC archives demonstrate how frequently producers pursued them for interviews and documentaries throughout the 1950s, and how rarely they agreed – and then only with conditions. Indeed, Moore and John asked to be interviewed at their home studios for *Face to Face*, which, requiring outside broadcasting units, would have added considerable expense to the programme budget. After all, even the non-live interviews for *Face to Face* were usually recorded in the studio within the thirty-minute slot. John's interview cost £1,508,⁹⁵ across one research visit, two filmed visits, and a visit by the cartoonist Felix Topoloski,⁹⁶ and the deployment of three camera crews from different BBC programmes. The reluctance to come to the television studio was attributed to John's busy schedule (as it was with Moore), but it is useful to remember that John Read had set a precedent by insisting on filming in and outside artists' studios, including Moore's, for his art profiles throughout the 1950s.⁹⁷

Cross-examining Augustus John

Of the two artists, Augustus John's is the most compelling and memorable *Face to Face* interview. Neither Moore nor John seemed willing to allow Freeman the opportunity to look behind the public mask, but while Moore is courteous and professional, John is far less cooperative. The-then eighty-two-year-old artist appears obstinate, distracted and irritated by the interview and interviewer. Freeman, normally charming and professional, likewise looks uncomfortable and frustrated. He wanted the episode 'scrapped', seeing it, 'by serious standards, a shabby piece of work'.⁹⁸ In his biography of Freeman, Hugh Purcell describes the John interview as the low point of the entire series: 'The old painter appeared semi-drunk

⁹⁵ Summary of cost, 15 May 1960. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

⁹⁶ It was filmed on 26 September and 23 December 1959. Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 23. Topolski was dispatched to sketch Augustus John on 25 September 1959 according to the BBC Transport Requisition. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

⁹⁷ Walker, *Arts TV*, 27-8.

⁹⁸ Letter to Kenneth Adam, 14 June 1960. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

and slightly senile. For once, Freeman appeared to have no empathy and little courtesy; in fact, he could barely contain his irritation.⁹⁹ Television audiences agreed: the BBC's own audience appreciation index ranked it sixty-three (out of 100), well below the average (seventy-one) for the fifteen previous editions of *Face to Face*.¹⁰⁰

There were a few 'warmly appreciative' compliments in the audience research report: viewers who enjoyed watching the artist's 'marvellous face, changing expressions and lovely smile'; the excellent camerawork, particularly the close-ups of John's face and hands (fig. 6); John's candidness and wit; and Freeman's tact and patience.¹⁰¹ A four-minute extract was selected for BBC Radio's *Pick of the Week*. Hugh Burnett asked for it to be kept indefinitely in the BBC's Film Library for 'future possible repeats'.¹⁰² But far more complaints were logged in the report, including: that John 'smoked almost incessantly', 'sometimes lost the drift of the question and was incoherent, hesitant or evasive in answering'; that 'due to his age and deafness the programme was slowed up very badly'; and a few 'would have liked to

⁹⁹ Purcell, *A Very Private Celebrity*, 156.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Moore's *Face to Face* interview in fact fared even worse with viewers (despite no complaints from interviewer and interviewee), with an audience appreciation index of sixty.

¹⁰¹ BBC Audience Research Report, *Face to Face: Augustus John*, VR/60/276. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

¹⁰² Hugh Burnett, internal memo, 19 May 1960. *Ibid.*

hear more about his opinions of art'. In sum: 'Clearly a sizeable group held that a man of Augustus John's age should not be subjected to such a cross-examination in public.'¹⁰³

That accusation of cross-examination had been made more generally about Freeman's interviewing manner throughout the *Face to Face* series. Joan Bakewell reports that some viewers considered that he 'was acting as a psychoanalyst ... by asking such personal and probing questions'.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in the series he regularly asks guests about their earliest memories, attitude towards their parents, violent tendencies, even dreams, in addition to questions about class, schooling, religion and money.¹⁰⁵ He asks Augustus John, for example,

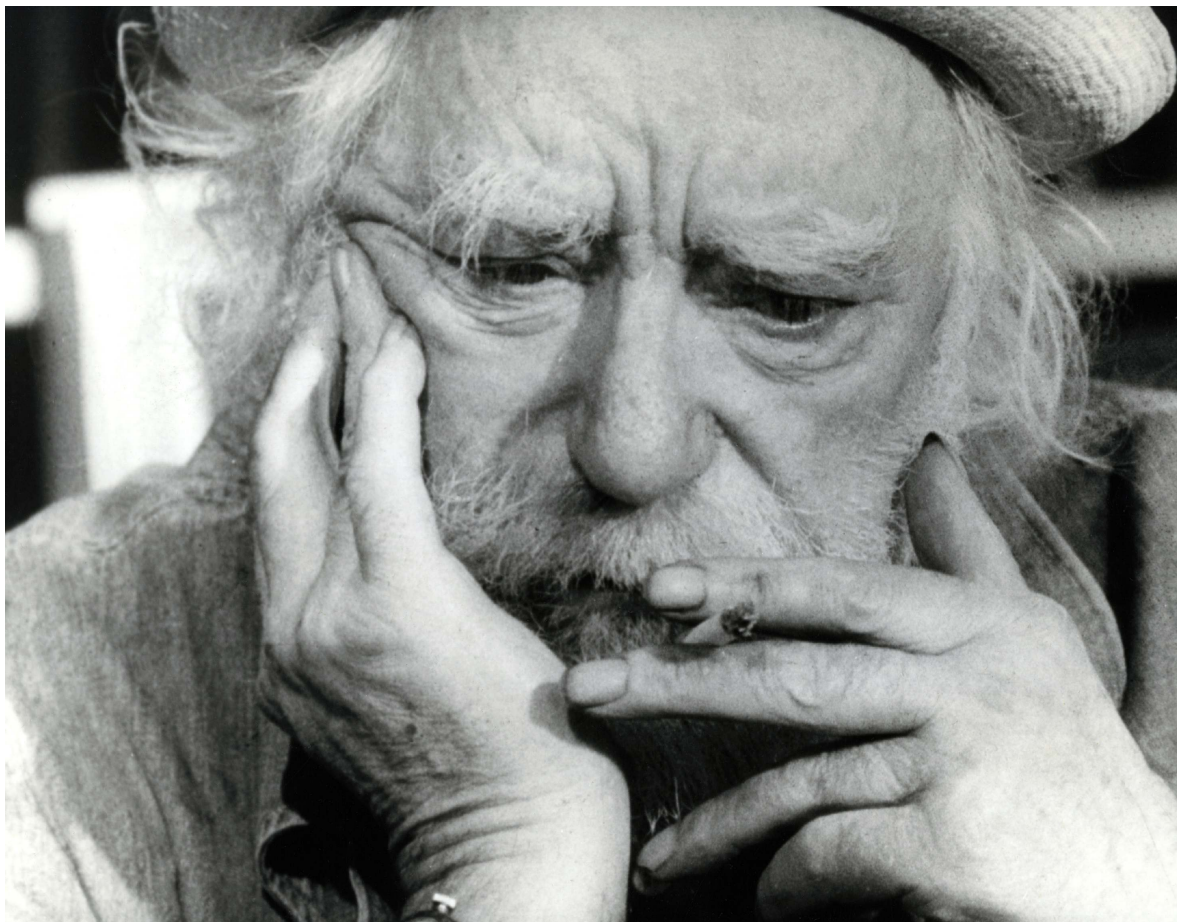


Figure 6 *Face to Face*: Augustus John, broadcast 15 May 1960. © BBC Photo Library

¹⁰³ BBC Audience Research Report, *Face to Face*: Augustus John. Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Bakewell, *Face to Face*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Questions include: 'Did you in fact have a feeling of guilt about sex?' (to Bertrand Russell); 'Do you think you're to blame for the lack of success in marriage?' (to John Huston); and 'Have you ever been with a person dying?' (to Gilbert Harding, who began crying).

‘which of your parents did you feel most closely attached to?’ Freeman undoubtedly showed keen amateur interest in psychoanalysis, interviewing Carl Jung for *Face to Face* in 1959 (Jung’s only major TV interview), and going on to co-edit and write the introduction for a popular book on Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, published soon after the latter’s death in 1961. But, as Freeman himself acknowledges in that introduction, ‘it soon came to my knowledge that Jung’s reason for selecting me was essentially that he regarded me as being of reasonable, but not exceptional, intelligence and without the slightest serious knowledge of psychology’.¹⁰⁶

Other viewers went further still in their criticism, accusing the programme of ‘torture by television’ and complaining that ‘the guests looked as if they were being brainwashed, interrogated, fried alive by the lights; unfortunate subjects made to look like gargoyles’.¹⁰⁷ Freeman clearly expected his subjects to submit to his questions, taunting them that they should have known what to expect from the interview. When Freeman asks Augustus John ‘how much have women really meant to you in your life?’, and John replies that it is ‘a very difficult question’, Freeman presses him with, ‘Well, I wouldn’t have known about it except from reading your book, so you ought to be prepared to answer.’¹⁰⁸

It wasn’t just viewers who were concerned about the ethics of television interviewing. In the 1960 *Telegraph* article cited earlier, John Woodforde reports on a private gathering of ‘interviewers and technicians from both television services’, organised by the Society of Film and Television Arts,¹⁰⁹ to discuss interview techniques and ‘all the fuss about unfairness’.¹¹⁰ The article, titled ‘Questionable Tactics’, contains warnings about ‘shortening a subject’s replies in such a way that he looks an idiot’; ‘the loaded question’; and the ‘lasting harm’ done to reputation if the interviewee ‘seems to be discredited’. Woodforde notes that the proceedings began with an address by John Freeman who, despite having been ‘accused of

¹⁰⁶ Carl Jung, ed., and after his death Marie-Louise von Franz, Coordinating Editor John Freeman, *Man and His Symbols*, Aldus Books, 1964; this edition, London: Pan Books, 1978, vii.

¹⁰⁷ Bakewell, *Face to Face*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Augustus John script, BBC Archives, 5. In other *Face to Face* interviews, Freeman asks Evelyn Waugh and Danny Blanchflower why they came on the programme; he asks Tony Hancock if he is ‘in the mood to come clean?’ and Lord Morrison if he’ll ‘co-operate with me’.

¹⁰⁹ Established in 1958 following the merger between the Guild of Television Producers and Directors (founded 1953) and the British Film Academy (founded 1947). It became the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) in 1976.

¹¹⁰ Woodforde, *The Telegraph*, 11 April 1960.

baiting Tony Hancock in addition to acting like a prosecuting counsel in the stormy Foulkes interview',¹¹¹ offered 'advice on giving the subject and outline of the questions before the interview, and not betraying him later in front of the camera'. Further advice brought up in the meeting included giving the interviewee sufficient time to answer the final question (suggestion: at least ten seconds) and not taking 'unfair advantage of intimate knowledge'.¹¹² It would be hard to argue that Freeman adhered to his own advice on *Face to Face*.

Two features of the opening and closing sequences of *Face to Face* add to the impression of guests as victims. There is the choice of title music, Berlioz's unfinished opera *Les Francs-Juges*, which as the series' first guest, Lord Birkett, teases Burnett, 'actually concerned the sinister tribunals of the Middle Ages in Westphalia, which saw condemned men disappear for ever'.¹¹³ The music accompanies a sequence of satirical portraits of the interviewees, commissioned from celebrity cartoonist Feliks Topolski (fig. 7). Usually taking place at his London studio the day before the interview by 'circling around, several times', the portrait sessions acted as 'a self-conscious preliminary to the next day's grilling by the interviewer'.¹¹⁴ Aware that they might be perceived as vicious, Topolski never allowed his sitters to see the portraits, so 'that I can draw unhampered by clogging restraints'.¹¹⁵ To demonstrate their accuracy, the final drawing of the opening sequence is often superimposed onto the 'real' image of the guest sitting in their armchair. In this, it takes on the aspect of a court drawing, with the sitter cast as the defendant appearing to await trial. Topolski himself kept diary notes on all the *Face to Face* guests,¹¹⁶ his writing style as savage as his drawing.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ John Freeman interviewed Tony Hancock for *Face to Face* on 7 February 1960, and Frank Foulkes, general president of the Electrical Trades Union, for *Panorama* on 22 February 1960.

¹¹² Woodforde, *The Telegraph*, 11 April 1960.

¹¹³ Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 8.

¹¹⁴ Feliks Topolski, *Fourteen Letters*, London: Faber & Faber, 1988, unpaginated.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Only Carl Jung refused to be drawn.

¹¹⁷ For example, Gilbert Harding was 'the very acme of a media-hype paper-tiger'; Sir Cecil Beaton was 'enjoyable subject, not enjoyable company'. Topolski, *Fourteen Letters*.

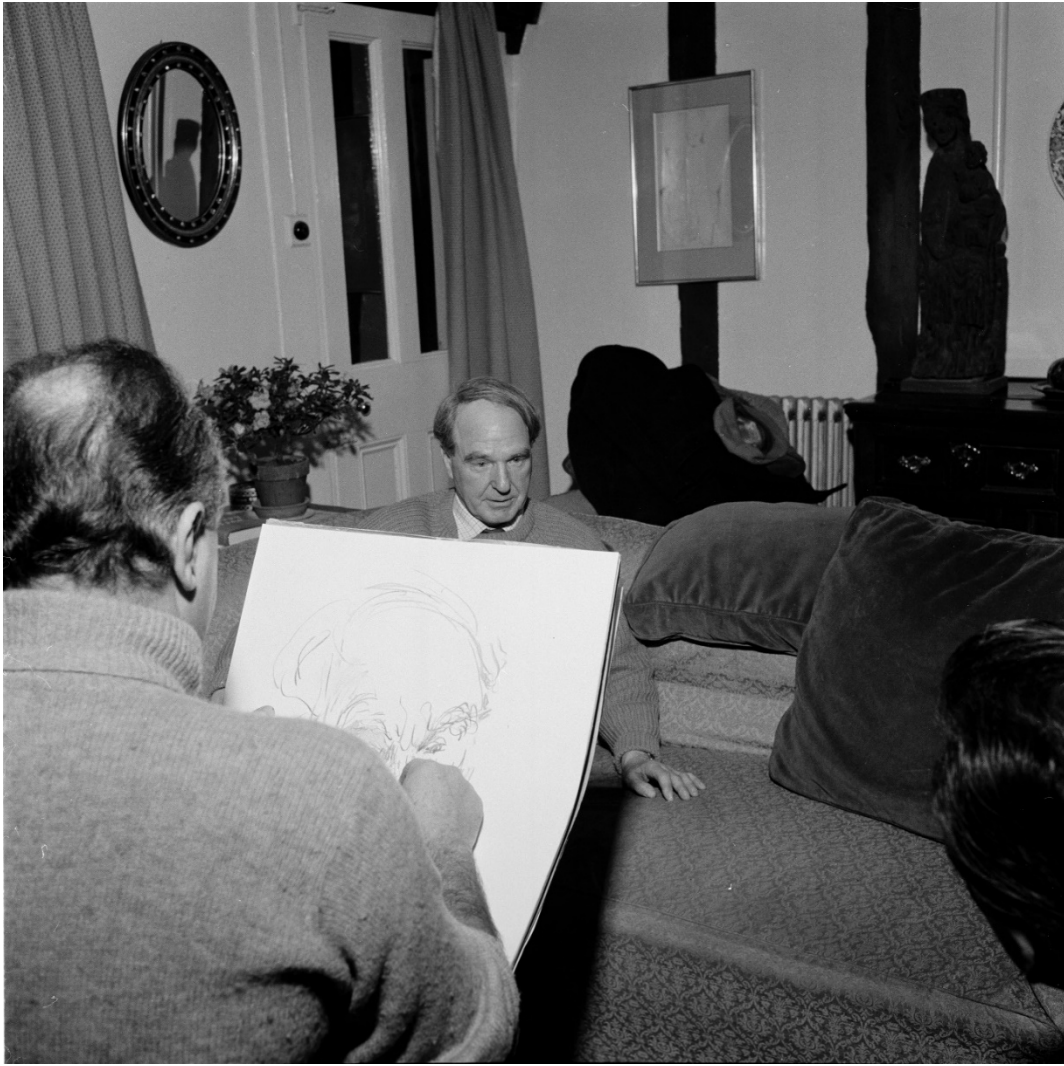


Figure 7 Feliks Topolski sketching Henry Moore at his home in Much Hadham, for *Face to Face* (broadcast 21 February 1960). © BBC Photo Library

Nonetheless, recognising a fellow contrarian, Topolski was unusually deferential in his notes about Augustus John, calling him a ‘legend’, and professing his gratitude that John had once convinced the Tate Gallery to purchase three of Topolski’s drawings.¹¹⁸ He wrote that John had ‘charmingly cultivated me’, that he ‘drew and painted him plentifully and hung about with his coterie’.¹¹⁹ For *Face to Face*, Topolski drew John as part of the ‘downy landscape’

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ More controversially, Topoloski recounted that a friend of John’s daughter, Barbara, had told him ‘how in a taxi this shaggy/bearded hulk threw himself at her – not really an act of rape but an obligatory *comme-il-fautism*’. Ibid.

in which he lived: ‘rough barked tree trunk, the streaming hair-leafery – an arboreal crown; oak-like, he deserves to endure’.¹²⁰

The camera as interrogator

Like Freeman, *Face to Face*'s producer and director, Hugh Burnett, showed a keen interest in psychology; he was concurrently the producer for the fortnightly BBC television programme *Lifeline* (1957–60), in which a panel discussed mental-health and ethical issues (topics included homosexuality and corporal punishment). Moreover, *Face to Face*'s iconic *mise-en-scène* was his brainchild. The tightly closed set was designed to create psychological tension:



Figure 8 *Face to Face*: John Huston in conversation with John Freeman; Feliks Topolski sketching. Broadcast 1 September 1959. © BBC Photo Library

Freeman is shown from behind (as Murrow had earlier advocated), only the back of his head visible. The camera, as well as the harsh spotlight, remains almost entirely on the interviewee

¹²⁰ Ibid.

for the full thirty minutes, breaking Hollywood dialogue convention in which shots of the interviewer are alternated with counter-shots of interviewee, depending on who is speaking.¹²¹

The studio set-up for *Face to Face* was stark. At the BBC's Lime Grove studios, the interviewee sat in a comfy, upholstered armchair, with a side table for drink and often ashtray, on a raised platform against a backdrop of black drapes, while John Freeman sat lower down, on a plainer, more modern chair (fig. 8). Microphones, cameras, lights and clock were kept out of view.¹²² No doubt the austerity of the set-up was influenced by the pioneering Head of the BBC's first studio design unit, Natasha Kroll,¹²³ who abhorred the 'kind of visual dishonesty that made a studio interview appear to be taking place in a book-lined study', starting instead 'from the premise that the viewer should be aware that such an event was occurring in a television studio' and giving 'regular programmes their own house style, ranging from the elaborately decorative to the minimalist extreme – often incorporating no more than a couple of well chosen chairs'.¹²⁴ Non-studio settings, as with John and Moore, were arranged to mimic the BBC studio in terms of spatial set-up. For John's interview at his home in Fordingbridge, Hampshire, the two chairs were positioned opposite one another – so that the interlocutors are 'face to face' – with Freeman's back to the camera. Nevertheless, John's studio is filled with stacked paintings, book-lined shelves, busts, sketches and other artistic paraphernalia (fig. 9). The table that Freeman and John share for the interview is piled with clutter. The only way to minimise this visual distraction was to close in on John's face.

¹²¹ See James Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, fourth edition, 233.

¹²² This set up can be seen in the behind-the-scenes images that were included in the 'extras' section of the fiftieth-anniversary DVD box-set.

¹²³ See Natasha Kroll Archive, University of Brighton. GB 1837 DES/NKR.

¹²⁴ Bernard Lodge, 'Natasha Kroll', *The Guardian*, 7 April 2004, www.theguardian.com/media/2004/apr/07/broadcasting.guardianobituaries. Accessed 7 June 2021.



Figure 9 *Face to Face*: Augustus John. Filming at John's home in Fordingbridge. © BBC Photo Library

Face to Face was known for its extreme close-ups, which encouraged viewers to scrutinise 'every change of expression and bead of perspiration'.¹²⁵ Burnett was infamous for barking 'Tighter! Tighter!' at his camera operators.¹²⁶ Stuart Hood had called early television a 'clumsy kind of cinema, very close in its techniques and effects to certain films of the thirties with their long takes and slow cutting'.¹²⁷ And indeed, *Face to Face* does seem to borrow filmic techniques, more specifically expressionistic codes from *film noir*, such as the low-key setting and atmospheric cigarette smoke. It is surely no coincidence that the chief cameraman

¹²⁵ Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 7.

¹²⁶ Anthony Hayward, 'Hugh Burnett Obituary', *The Guardian*, 7 January 2012. www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2012/jan/09/hugh-burnett-obituary. Accessed 7 June 2021.

¹²⁷ Hood, *A Survey of Television*, 73.

of the series, Peter Sargent, had worked on Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935) before joining the BBC.¹²⁸

As with all *Face to Face* interviews, the camera in the John interview is effectively acting as a 'second interrogator'.¹²⁹ The camera zones in on elements that draw attention to his advanced age and lack of hearing: his hearing aid; an old-fashioned 'shove ha'penny' boardgame that John rests his elbow on; and a fly that keeps returning to land on John's arm and shoulder, even his cheek, never brushed away. There seems to have been, at least on the part of the producer, a rather morbid obsession with John's age, and the need to get the programme out while he is still alive. An ominous internal memo by Burnett reads: 'Every night he descends a concrete spiral staircase from his studio in pitch darkness. This fact alone is sufficient to merit an early placing of the programme.'¹³⁰

What went wrong?

Had Augustus John simply aged since his last major television interview, for *Panorama* on 4 November 1957 – only two and a half years earlier? In that interview, John appears jolly and animated. John's age is acknowledged – he is described as living in retirement in the country – but there is no suggestion that he is senile, but rather a lucid and entertaining raconteur, albeit one who insists on talking with a pipe in his mouth. For example, he discusses how he was unimpressed by his meeting with the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley, but after offering him a 'bottle of brandy with which he refreshed himself', his brain proceeded to 'work beautifully'. John's interviewer Malcom Muggeridge seems relaxed with the artist, claiming on air, with apparent sincerity: 'It was for me personally a most refreshing and pleasurable experience to meet this remarkable person.' The Deputy Director of Broadcasting, Cecil McGivern, was so 'interested, and moved' by this interview that he felt compelled to write a memo suggesting that the 'item should be remembered with reference to the death of Augustus John'.¹³¹ Hugh Burnett had also previously recorded John for *Personal*

¹²⁸ In an oral history account of his career, Sargent name-checks meeting Augustus John as one of the highlights of his career: 'Filming for television was absolutely delightful... When you meet top painters... That to me really meant something.' <https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/peter-sargent> [Part 1: 1:43:29]. Accessed 7 June 2021.

¹²⁹ John Freeman interviewed by Anthony Clare, *Face to Face* DVD, 2009.

¹³⁰ Hugh Burnett memo, 19 January 1960. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

¹³¹ Cecil McGivern memo, 5 November 1957. T32/1, 244/1 *Panorama*.

Call in 1955. When he met him again for *Face to Face* in 1959, he recalls: ‘he had begun to flag, wandering among his paintings, some of which he was no longer sure he’d finished’.¹³²

John himself was also used to being scrutinised in art, even in later life. His oeuvre features several self-portraits, and indeed in the introduction to his *Face to Face* interview, John drolly points to a painting in his studio – a self-portrait of the artist staring unnervingly at the viewer – that ‘bears some faint resemblance to myself’. He frequently sat for other artists; at the time of writing, the National Portrait Gallery lists John as a sitter in 106 portraits in its collection, twenty of which date from 1959 onwards.¹³³

But, like Freeman, John also objected to the *Face to Face* interview. Hugh Burnett wrote to Freeman shortly after the interview, explaining that John had not been ‘on good form, because he had had a sleepless night, because his memory was defective and because he had been in some pain with his foot trouble’.¹³⁴ In the accompany booklet to the fiftieth-anniversary DVD box-set, Burnett added further embellishments:

Augustus wrote to me after the visit, anxiously complaining that he was “an alleged painter, not a picturesque rival of Rasputin! Is it possible that you have been listening to Chelsea gossip or reading the ‘colourful’ and oh-so-intimate revelations of the cheaper press?” He wanted the programme re-filmed, claiming he had had a bad toe. “In any case I was ill... and suffering the results of a recent accident, now thank God cleared up.” He claimed he was “a shy and evasive personality. Of course I know nothing of the technique of television of which you are an acknowledged master and can only accuse myself of the miss-fire for which by ill-health I, not you, was responsible.”¹³⁵

Burnett conceded to another visit to John’s studio by the film crew, allowing John, exceptionally, to narrate his own introduction to the interview. This would significantly increase the length of the programme: now forty-three minutes instead of the usual thirty. But John was not to be placated, Burnett writing that ‘he still accused me of attempting to sensationalise him’.¹³⁶ The accusation that television sensationalised and trivialised was very

¹³² Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 23.

¹³³ These include a self-portrait from 1901; a bronze bust by Jacob Epstein; photographic portraits by George Charles Beresford, Cecil Beaton, Norman Parkinson and Ida Kar; and a number of snapshot prints by Lady Ottoline Morrell.

¹³⁴ Letter from Hugh Burnett to John Freeman, 30 September 1959. BBC WAC T32/590 – ‘Face to Face’ Augustus John.

¹³⁵ Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 23.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

much in the air. The Pilkington Committee was set up in 1960 by the Conservative government, ‘to consider the future of broadcasting in Britain’, marking ‘the official recognition of a general unease, particularly concerning the perceived conflict between “good broadcasting” and the immense financial profits reaped in the few short years since the first commercial licences had been awarded’.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, weighing up the pre-publicity, the broadcast programme and the archival material around this *Face to Face* episode, there are some clear grounds for John’s allegation of sensationalism.

For his part, Freeman objected to the ‘exceptional publicity treatment’ of the John interview, specifically that the programme made the cover of that week’s issue of *Radio Times* (fig. 10).¹³⁸ The preview blurb – written by Hugh Burnett¹³⁹ – certainly builds up hype:

This Sunday’s *Face to Face* with Augustus John will probably prove to be one of the most candid interviews ever conducted with a living artist. Augustus John has been described as the last of the great Bohemians. ‘I’m not a Bohemian – I’m a Welshman,’ is John’s laconic answer to this accusation ... Something of the ordeal that it is to sit for Augustus John comes through in *Face to Face*. The pale, prominent blue eyes in old age still carry the fire and fearsome qualities of this remarkable man – a born artist and a character.¹⁴⁰

Freeman’s accusation of bohemianism – ‘do you consider yourself to be one of the survivors of what used to be called the Bohemian set?’ – is his first question to John in the interview, a clear provocation. After that, Freeman asks his usual range of questions about his interviewee’s childhood, financial situation, religion and ambitions, which John appears to listen to intently and answer thoughtfully and occasionally roguishly (such as when he recounts punching a teacher). Prompted by Freeman, John reminisces about his mother’s early death, childhood misdeeds, living in London with his sister Gwen John, attending the Slade School of Art and his marriages to Ida Nettleship and Dorelia McNeill (including the death of Ida and one of his children).¹⁴¹ Occasionally, his memory falters, as with certain

¹³⁷ Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed, eds, *Cultural Revolution: The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, London: Routledge, 1992, 147.

¹³⁸ Quoted in a letter from Kenneth Adam to John Freeman, 27 June 1960. Kenneth Adam made the counter-point that ‘the decision as to what goes on the [*Radio Times*] cover is entirely that of the Editor who faced with information about any particular week’s important programme makes his own decision without reference back’. BBC WAC T32/590 – ‘Face to Face’ Augustus John.

¹³⁹ Hugh Burnett, ‘Augustus John’ press release, 3 May 1960. BBC WAC T32/590. It was customary (until the 1980s) for BBC producers to produce the copy that went with the features about their programmes in *Radio Times*.

¹⁴⁰ *Radio Times*, 15–21 May 1960, 4.

¹⁴¹ In fact, it seems that Augustus never officially married Dorelia.

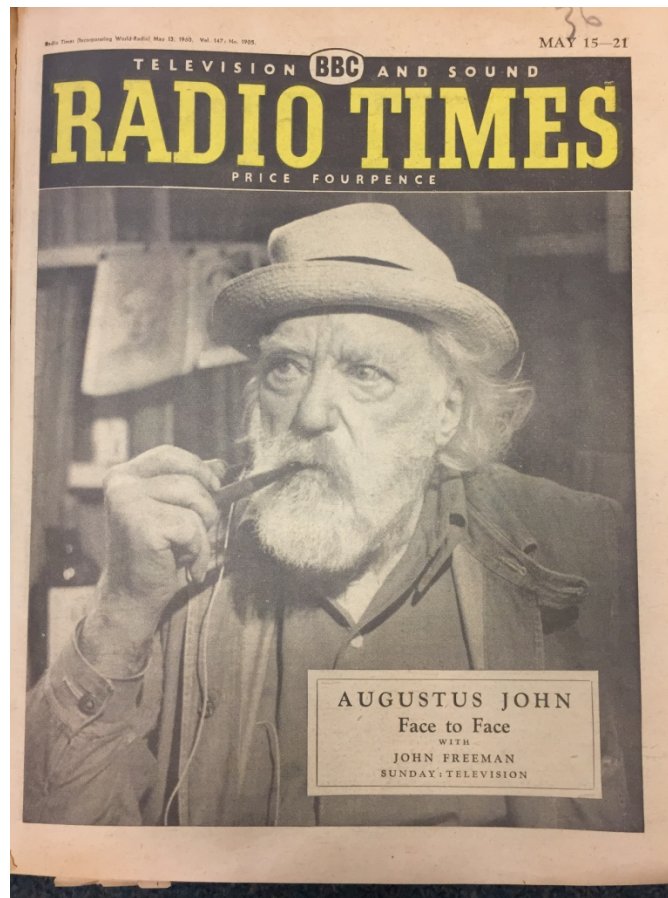


Figure 10 Augustus John on front cover of *Radio Times*, 15–21
May 1960. © Radio Times Archive.

dates, or the number of children he had with his first wife. In the BBC’s in-house transcript of the recording, the end of this exchange is marked by the note ‘end of Reel 1’.¹⁴²

At this point, Freeman changes tack and makes a leading comment that John has had ‘all sorts of adventures with women at one time or another’, and that there is an ‘inconsistency’ between these adventures and the ‘stability and happiness of your family life’. John interrupts him sharply, for the first time, that his family life and adventures are ‘not inconsistent’, although he refuses to expound on this. In fact, John’s 1952 autobiography, *Chiaroscuro*, makes little explicit reference to such adventures.¹⁴³ Neither do the seven-page research notes prepared for Freeman in advance of the John interview, most of which are excerpts from *Chiaroscuro*, with the addition of a few newspaper quotes. John’s adventures are, rather, only

¹⁴² *Face to Face with Augustus John* script, 5. BBC WAC T32/590 – ‘Face to Face’ Augustus John.

¹⁴³ Augustus John, *Chiaroscuro: Fragments of Autobiography*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1954. The second part of John’s autobiography, titled *Finishing Touches*, was published posthumously in 1964.

implied in one quote from the autobiography included in the notes: ‘His daughter and I had not been encouraged by [Mr] Nettleship to put into practice our theory of “free association”, so concedingaa [sic] civil marriage, we negotiated on the quiet.’¹⁴⁴ Previous broadcasts featuring John also avoided these intimate details: John does not discuss them in either his *Panorama* interview or a 1949 ‘Autobiographical Talk’, as part of the BBC radio series, *I Speak For Myself*.¹⁴⁵

John here refuses to satisfy Freeman’s desire to cast him as a bohemian artist. Moreover, it is apparent from the lengthy introduction John added on the second visit – a monologue on his artistic influences filmed among his artworks – that he wanted to shift the emphasis onto his work and away from his ‘bohemian’ personality (fig 11).¹⁴⁶



Figure 11 *Face to Face*: Augustus John. Introductory monologue filmed in John’s studio.

© BBC Photo Library

¹⁴⁴ Augustus John research notes, 2. BBC WAC T32/590 – ‘Face to Face’ Augustus John.

¹⁴⁵ Transmitted 10 September 1949. Script available at BBC Written Archives Centre.

¹⁴⁶ Ironically, *The Last Bohemian: Augustus John* is the title of a retrospective of John’s work at Lady Lever Gallery, Liverpool, 18 May – 30 August 2021.

Oneself is a major nuisance

During his interview preamble, John shrugs off explanation of his paintings: ‘What they mean, I give up’. Similarly, in his 1960 *Monitor* interview, Henry Moore admits to being suspicious of a recent Jungian analysis of his work, claiming: ‘If I was psychoanalysed I might stop being a sculptor.’¹⁴⁷ Michael Ayrton begins his *The Artist Speaks* film with the provocation: ‘I find the idea that the artist is expressing himself rather irritating... Oneself is a major nuisance of one’s life; a tiresome thing that has to be fed and flattered.’¹⁴⁸ In the same series, British sculptor Kenneth Armitage professes to ‘prefer to have a kind of “dumb blond” feeling’ about his subjects, avoiding looking into their faces.¹⁴⁹ The narrator for that episode, Robert Reid, backs him up, explaining that for ‘some artists, the creative process is something of a mystery’.

The artists’ wariness might be blamed on the modish appeal of psychology and psychoanalysis for British art critics at the time, the most fervent being the artist and art critic Adrian Stokes, who had undertaken seven years of psychoanalysis with Melanie Klein in the 1930s.¹⁵⁰ However, many critics were less informed than Stokes. Ironically, the psychologist (and student of Jung’s) Erich Neumann, who wrote the monograph to which Moore refers – *The Archetypal World of Henry Moore* (1959) – was as suspicious as Moore of the current ‘psychologizing manner so popular today’.¹⁵¹ Specifically, Neumann disapproved of the ‘false personalistic causality theory of psychoanalysis’ that relies on the ‘often ridiculous search for biographical facts that are supposed to explain everything but in reality mean very little’.¹⁵² Would he have accused John Freeman of falling into this trap with his interviewees? Neumann in fact chose to single out art critic David Sylvester’s ‘pseudo-psychology’ for censure, accusing him of reducing ‘Moore’s work to a repetition compulsion and ... as “nothing but” the early infantile sexual curiosity that, pathologically, he has failed to overcome’.¹⁵³ The art historian E. H. Gombrich, despite sufficient interest in psychoanalysis

¹⁴⁷ Henry Moore, *Monitor*, 20 November 1960.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Ayrton, ‘Did You Hear That?’, *The Listener*, 28 July 1960, 64: 1635, 141.

¹⁴⁹ Kenneth Armitage, *The Artist Speaks*, 8 August 1960.

¹⁵⁰ See Meg Harris Williams, ed., *Art and Analysis: An Adrian Stokes Reader*, London: The Harris Meltzer Trust by Karnac, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Erich Neumann, *The Archetypal World of Henry Moore*, translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959, 39.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41.

to deliver the Ernest Jones Lecture to the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1953,¹⁵⁴ also queried the reliance on intentionality and biographical detail:

And so I repeat the question whether it really matters all that much if we know what the work of art meant to the artist. It clearly matters on one assumption and one assumption alone: that this private, personal, psychological meaning of the picture is alone the real, the true meaning – the meaning, therefore, which it also conveys if not to the conscious at least to the unconscious mind of the beholder. I know that this assumption underlies a good deal of writing on modern art, but I doubt if it is sound analytical doctrine.¹⁵⁵

Aside from an ambivalent relation to psychoanalysis and biographical detail, British artists and art critics in the 1950s perhaps also felt that first-person narratives were too American. This is certainly alleged by British critic and curator Lawrence Alloway in his 1958 review of the American Abstract Expressionist magazine *It Is. A Magazine For Abstract Art*, an artist-run magazine that rejected journalism in favour of first-person, intimate or incidental types of writing, including ‘artists’ journals, artists’ discussions, artists’ panels, artists’ problems, artists’ statements, artists’ notebooks’.¹⁵⁶ Alloway argued that

To put a picture-window in the studio wall (looking inwards) has been the tendency of American criticism since the war. Neither French nor British criticism, as a whole, has this direction; our critics have curiously little curiosity about the point of origin of the works they review.¹⁵⁷

Or perhaps certain artists shared their suspicion of psychoanalysis with left-wing radicals like E. P. Thompson, who saw the obsession with the ‘human condition’ as an intellectual retreat from revolutionary politics and analysis of wider society and historical events. He blamed George Orwell’s ‘profound political pessimism’,¹⁵⁸ writing: ‘He sowed within the disenchanted generation the seeds of a profound self-distrust. Socialist idealism was not only

¹⁵⁴ Delivered on 19 November 1953 and reprinted as ‘Psycho-analysis and the History of Art’ in *The International Journal of Psycho-analysis*, vol. 35, 1954, Part 4, 401-11.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 402.

¹⁵⁶ As stated on its back page. There were no interviews, perhaps seen as too journalistic a form. Instead, there were conversations, transcribed as if they were entirely natural and merely overheard, such as a parody of an interview with a fictitious sculptor of no fixed address. John Asher, ‘Dialogue found in a Brooklyn Cellar’, *It is.*, issue 2, Autumn 1958, 44-5.

¹⁵⁷ Lawrence Alloway, ‘Here it is’, *Art News and Review*, 10: 22, 22 November 1958, 8.

¹⁵⁸ E. P. Thompson, ‘Outside the Whale’, 1960, in *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays*, London: Merlin Press, 1978, 13.

discounted, it was also *explained away*, as the function of middle-class guilt, frustration or ennui.¹⁵⁹

Yet John was by no means an innocent victim; he had a reputation for being notoriously difficult to work with. A letter from his publisher George Rainbird expressed hope that publicity for his Augustus John book might be ‘pegged’ to the *Face to Face* interview, ‘because the book is badly in the red through the difficulty of working with John’.¹⁶⁰ A planned film portrait by John Read (who had just made an award-winning film of Henry Moore in 1951) had to be abandoned in 1952, John having complained that Read’s ‘outlook was incompatible with mine’.¹⁶¹ On another occasion, following months spent persuading him (he is ill, he has too much work) to contribute to the BBC Wales radio programme *Gypsy Days* on 14 May 1954 on his favourite topic of gypsies, John expressed his disappointment with the end result.¹⁶²

Editing as fakery

The question of whether or not the *Face to Face* interview sensationalised Augustus John is further complicated by the fact that it had to be edited, unlike the majority of *Face to Face* interviews. Freeman was unhappy about this. A letter from Freeman to the Head of Television Talks Leonard Miall, on 28 April 1960, details three, relatively minor points in the editing about which he was displeased, none of them sensational, offering the editor Harry Hastings the back-handed compliment, ‘I realise that the problem of editing this film has been an exceptionally difficult case of cigarette continuity, etc. etc.’¹⁶³

However, Freeman’s problems with the programme and editing escalated over the following weeks. Soon after the interview was eventually broadcast, he complained in the *New Statesman* about a ‘thoroughly second-rate and unsatisfactory programme of my own, which had been tastelessly and indiscreetly over-publicised’.¹⁶⁴ Despite not naming the programme,

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from George Rainbird to Michael Peacock at BBC Television Studios, 4 November 1959. BBC WAC T32/590 – ‘Face to Face’ Augustus John.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Augustus John to Miss Knight, 30 February 1952. BBC Written Archives Centre RS/179/1 – Augustus John.

¹⁶² Letter from Augustus John to Mr Hughes, 24 May 1954. BBC Written Archives Centre WA2/4/1 – *Gypsy Days*.

¹⁶³ Letter from John Freeman to Leonard Miall, 28 April 1960. BBC WAC T32/590 – ‘Face to Face’ Augustus John.

¹⁶⁴ John Freeman, ‘The Captive Viewer’, *New Statesman*, 59: 1524, 28 May 1960, 784.

BBC TV Controller Kenneth Adam (and Miall's boss) wrote a letter to Freeman expressing his distress at the 'reference to Augustus John' and 'surprise that you felt the need to say so in print'.¹⁶⁵ In the letter, Adam asserts his seniority by reminding Freeman that while he knew that the programme was 'not without imperfections', it was a 'thoroughly worthwhile interview' and that Freeman should 'agree that the final decision in such circumstances must be mine'. Freeman then returned a far more emotional and aggressive letter to Adam, explaining his misgivings, including that 'the exceptionally heavy editing had made a nonsense of most of the questioning', causing his questions to appear 'impertinent and inconsequent in the finished product'; that the finished film 'bore practically no relation to the truth' and so was 'a made-up dish'. He claims it to be crucial to *Face to Face*'s viewing public and subjects that they 'should understand that it is not faked'.¹⁶⁶

Both Freeman's letters were written on *New Statesman* letterheaded paper, underlining his status not just as contributor but also staff member of this influential magazine, which he would go on to edit the following year. In yet another letter about the Augustus John episode, Adam accuses Freeman of double standards, reminding him that 'when you were doing the [Carl] Jung programme it was you who asked for cuts to be made which were designed to protect Jung from imperfections apparently due to old age'.¹⁶⁷

Adam's letter was almost entirely lifted from a confidential memo to him by Hugh Burnett, who urged him that 'my comments... be communicated to Mr Freeman, officially'.¹⁶⁸ It seems that Burnett was playing both sides against the middle. In a letter shortly after the John interview, Burnett assures Freeman that he was 'concerned to protect you in situations of this sort, and to ensure that your reputation in general is not harmed'.¹⁶⁹ But soon after filming, he had sent the Augustus John tapes to a colleague, Victor Menzies of the BBC 'Staff Training School', asking for his opinion on these 'wildtrack recordings with a particularly difficult subject'.¹⁷⁰ Burnett also appears to have read all the private correspondence from Freeman to Miall and Adam and been encouraged to advise on their responses to Freeman. In his

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Kenneth Adam to John Freeman, 7 June 1960. BBC WAC T32/590 – 'Face to Face' Augustus John.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from John Freeman to Kenneth Adam, 14 June 1960. Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Kenneth Adam to John Freeman, 27 June 1960. Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Memo from Hugh Burnett to Kenneth Adam, 21 June 1960. Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Hugh Burnett to John Freeman, 30 September 1959. Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Hugh Burnett to Victor Menzies, 25 January 1960. Ibid.

comments on the first letter from Freeman to Miall, Burnett seeks to clarify: ‘John Freeman’s thinking and my own have not run parallel on this programme. John is not happy when control is out of his own hands.’ He goes on warn, ‘[I]t is a potentially dangerous situation if a contributor thinks he is getting programme changes via the Head of Department.’¹⁷¹

Despite being the public face of *Face to Face*, Freeman found he had no control over post-production. Overall, Freeman’s objections seem less about his concern for John’s reputation and more about resentment at the undermining of his own reputation and integrity – part of a struggle between producer, controller and presenter as to who has the rights to the interview material.

Stuart Hood, writing in 1967, would have sided with the BBC’s senior management, having little patience for what he saw as interviewees’ (and here we might add interviewers’) vanity and ignorance: ‘Unfortunately there are still persons in public who do not grasp the fact that each foot of film is not sacred and that parts of an interview may have to be abandoned.’¹⁷² Hood argued that to give interview subjects final approval of the edited script or programme amounted to ‘censorship’.¹⁷³

The belief that editing did not compromise authenticity was shared by others involved in BBC arts programmes. In his introduction to an anthology of *Monitor* interviews, Huw Wheldon claims that editing had been minimal – a ‘matter of restoration rather than abbreviation’, such as ‘supplying the occasional unspoken word’ – and that ‘the interviews and talks have not been worked over or altered in any way by the artists concerned. What was said, was said.’¹⁷⁴ John Read, working on the contemporaneous documentary programme *The Artist Speaks*, recounts that the six artists’ commentaries for the series were ‘compiled from extensive tape-recordings made in the intimacy of their homes and studios’, some of which were ‘carefully prepared and read from notes’, some more spontaneous, some recorded before and some during filming, and that the ‘visuals and the words were edited

¹⁷¹ Memo from Hugh Burnett to Leonard Miall, 4 May 1960. Ibid.

¹⁷² Hood, *A Survey of Television*, 110.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷⁴ Huw Wheldon, *Monitor: An Anthology*, London: Macdonald & Co., 1962, 10.

simultaneously in the film cutting room'. For Read, there is 'both profit and loss in this technique, but at least the commentaries are authentic documents'.¹⁷⁵

So what was edited in the John interview? And was the editing just for pragmatic reasons, such as those detailed by Read and Wheldon, or did it cause significant changes in meaning? Comparing the broadcast programme to the transcript of the first filmed meeting between Freeman and John, produced by the BBC's inhouse Telediphone Unit, one is able to determine what was added from the second filmed visit and what was redacted. The redactions were fairly minor: a section on John's support for Bertrand Russell's anti-nuclear stance (which might have added nuance to John's political views, presented instead as purely anarchist),¹⁷⁶ and the replacement of a section in which John describes living in a caravan with his wife and another woman, this second woman (his present wife) taking charge after the first died, with the less bigamous, arguably less sensational statement that after his first wife's death 'we had a friend, who made herself indispensable'.¹⁷⁷

In terms of additions, John's voice-over introduction – added during the second visit – at first appears to add gravitas, as John compares himself to European painters such as Giotto. But the montage of that introduction subtly undermines this gravitas. For example, when John talks about his interest in the human body, the camera cuts to a portrait of a woman's naked torso, inferring the artist's lasciviousness. Surely this is but a variation of the subtle distortion technique '*suppressio veri suggestio falsi*, achieved by editing out qualifying statements or by making the speaker appear (by pictorial association) to agree with statements or arguments with which in fact he is at variance', that even Stuart Hood deplored.¹⁷⁸ Two further, significant additions add shock value and enhance John's eccentric, roguish allure: the first, about his approval of the violent suicide of a once-idolised teacher who betrayed him; the second, a rambling story about his pleasure at swindling an acquaintance out of a long-lost Van Eyck painting.

Because no transcript of the second visit exists, at least not in the archives, we can't know what was edited out from that recording. However, in his introduction to the *Face to Face*

¹⁷⁵ John Read, introduction to *The Artist Speaks* booklet, unpaginated.

¹⁷⁶ Amendments to page 9 of Augustus John script. BBC Written Archives Centre.

¹⁷⁷ Amendments to page 4 of Augustus John script. Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Hood, *A Survey of Television*, 111.

DVD anthology, Hugh Burnett reprints a note from Augustus John about a ‘a sequence that didn’t make the programme’, and which would have certainly caused a stir:

Please don’t get ratty with me. I made a mistake about the girl who posed for me. She is not my niece but my daughter-in-law aged 13. I have no niece in that big composition. If I had, I don’t suppose her schoolmistress would have approved of her posing in the nude. Are you trying to manufacture a Fleet Street sensation? If you and my distinguished interrogator were concerned to lay stress on my notoriety and appeal to the lower elements of our population I shall be very disappointed to put it mildly.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

The Augustus John interview highlighted a tension in the BBC between wanting to appear relevant, modern and daring, in the face of competition from ITV, and not being able to let go of its paternalistic, moralistic values that compelled it to err on the side of caution. All the same, there would be no going back to the polite, clerical blandness of the old BBC. The American influence, through Ed Murrow in particular, on interviewing style – unscripted and direct, using named interviewers – was here to stay. Like Murrow, John Freeman became a celebrity interviewer in his own right, with people recognising him for his voice, if not his face.

John Freeman and Augustus John certainly believed that television could be manipulative, as Aldous Huxley, Joost Merloo and Raymond Williams had argued. *Face to Face* exposed the dangers of combining the new direct interviewing with the amateur psychological techniques that had become fashionable in this post-war period. John’s interview seemed to epitomise Anthony Clare’s warning that, unlike a professional psychoanalytic session, television interviews could leave interviewees feeling exposed and raw, and viewers pained. This was especially true in the case of *Face to Face*, whose idiosyncratic televisual effects (including the set, the camerawork and the satirical cartoons) tipped the balance of power in favour of the interviewer, leaving the interviewee vulnerable. That there was no official code of ethics for interviewing caused uncertainty when BBC executives were confronted with both interviewer’s and interviewee’s complaints about their filmed encounter. *Face to Face* also highlighted the ambiguity over public figures’ right to privacy that continues to this day.

¹⁷⁹ Burnett, *Face to Face* booklet, 23-4.

The other BBC television artist interview series of the late 1950s and early 1960s, *The Artist Speaks* and *Monitor*, focused on the process of making art, the studio environment and the art itself, rather than the artists' personalities. As with the remasculinisation of interviewing in the post-war period that Rebecca Roach observed, *The Artist Speaks* featured a male presenter and only male artists, none of whom were shown to have a home or family life outside their artmaking.¹⁸⁰ In the case of Reg Butler, for example, we are shown the exterior of a large, beautiful home, with no mention of who lives there with him. The keenness of artists, and some arts presenters, to film in their own environment, rather than in a minimal studio, pushed television executives to accept outside broadcasting, regardless of the costs and inconvenience. This would lead to such innovative programmes as the 1962 *Monitor* episode *Pop Goes the Easel*, discussed in the following chapter.

Monitor's early artist interviews, as included in the 1962 anthology of transcripts, offered a little more biographical detail than *The Artist Speaks*, but only in passing – we learn that Ossip Zadkine's father sent him to England as a boy; that Max Ernst had fights with his father. In his *Monitor* episode, Henry Moore unusually mentions both his wife and daughter, but the fact that we only see the back of Irina Moore typing and walking through their house carrying a sculpture is indicative of her peripheral role within the documentary. Only one woman artist – Elizabeth Frink – features in the *Monitor* anthology.¹⁸¹ Tellingly, her episode focuses as much on Frink's family life as her work. The narrator, her friend Laurie Lee, asks viewers to witness Frink morph from one aspect of her identity into another: we see Frink at the pub (where she is just 'Liz'), Frink in her studio surrounded by her 'homely junk', Frink as a housewife shopping for groceries (where she is Mrs Jammet the 'good cook'), and finally, Frink as mother (we cut to footage of her young son holding out his arms to her). Unlike the other artists on *The Artist Speaks* or *Monitor*, then, Frink's work cannot be understood, the film insists, without reference to her domestic duties and role as a mother and wife.

Face to Face was unusual in attempting to create a psychological profile of the male artist, acknowledging a life outside his studio, perhaps because Freeman would have been out of his

¹⁸⁰ Three women artists (Sheila Fell, Elizabeth Frink and Cynthia Pell) were listed among a wishlist of possible guests, but no further mention of them can be found in the BBC Written Archives Centre folder for *The Artist Speaks*. [T32/442/1].

¹⁸¹ Broadcast on 22 May 1960.

depth discussing art rather than politics and current affairs. Where most other interviewees (including Henry Moore) submitted graciously to Freeman's pseudo-psychoanalysis, Augustus John, however, deflected intimate questions or returned excessively long or properly subversive answers, confounding expected stereotypes in the absence of serious artistic analysis. John emerges untamed from the interview, to use Harold Rosenberg's term. *Face to Face* may not have protected Augustus John against his declining art-world reputation, but it went some way to generating a new general audience for art.

Chapter 3

The poetics of overhearing: the fictional turn in interviews in 1960s Britain

Pauline: ...I'm very inclined to play a role that someone sets for me particularly when I first meet people – to accept me quite as a human being you know, with a mind and he [her husband Clive] accepted me intellectually which men find very difficult.

Nell: Why? Men think of you just as a pretty girl you mean?

Pauline: No, they just find it embarrassing when you start talking about – I've met so many men who get slightly embarrassed – they're a bit square probably. If you – well for instance you know there are lots of women who are intellectually cleverer than lots of men but it's difficult for lots of men to ever accept this idea, and often feel "Well anyway I'm a man and being a man is lots better than being a woman."

– Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women* (1965)¹

In *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, Rebecca Roach observes that, although the modern idea of the interview dates back only to the nineteenth century, 'interviews are shaped by, and in turn contribute to, a much longer cultural tradition around the art of dialogue, as a philosophical and pedagogic tool and as a metaphor for statesmanship and the rational critical sphere'.² In this chapter, the literary interest in using material from real interviews, as opposed to invented dialogue, can be read as part of the turn to social realism in British culture in the late 1950s and 1960s.

As a case study, I will analyse an interview between writer Nell Dunn (born 1936) and the Pop artist Pauline Boty (1938–66), published in Dunn's 1965 book *Talking to Women* (fig. 12). This anthology of interviews continued Dunn's desire to record the views of women of her generation begun in her earlier short stories, *Up the Junction* (1963). I follow the genealogy of the Boty interview, including its appearance in *Vogue* magazine, its re-issue in a 2018 edition of *Talking to Women* by the feminist publisher Silver Press (fig. 13),³ as well as its ubiquitous citation in the small number of studies on Boty. Fittingly for this chapter, the

¹ Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women*, London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965, 16.

² Roach notes that this tradition 'stretches back from Plato's *Dialogues* to Martin Luther's sixteenth-century *Table Talk* to reach its pinnacle in the "talking time" of the long eighteenth century, with James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) and Johann Peter Eckermann's *Gespräch mit Goethe* (1836, 1848)'. Rebecca Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 2.

³ Silver Press was founded in London in 2017. *Talking to Women* is their third publication after Leonora Carrington's *The Debutante and Other Stories* and Audre Lorde's *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*.

British author Ali Smith used the Boty interview as source material for her novel *Autumn* (2016), unexpectedly casting new light on Boty in the process. This leads to a reflection on fiction as a methodology for research. In doing so, I develop the proposition by John Shaw and Theo Reeves-Evison that strands of fiction can ‘reveal structures and gain agency in the construction of the everyday’.⁴

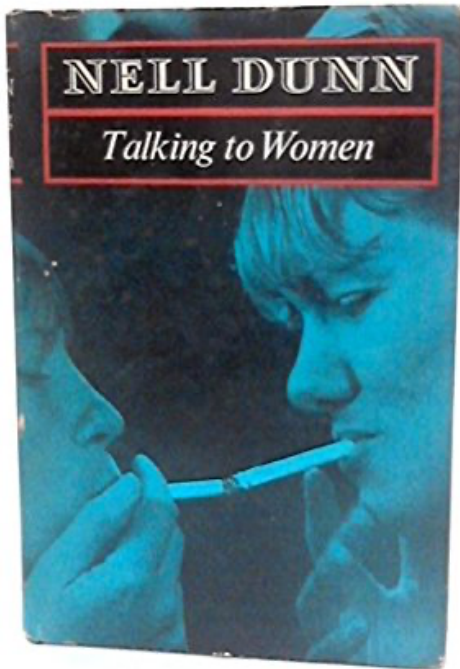


Figure 12 Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women*, London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965.

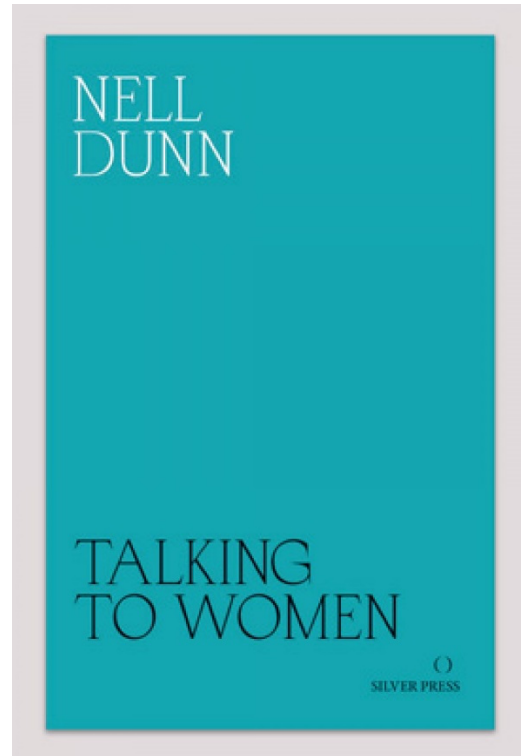


Figure 13 Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women*, London, Silver Press, 2018.

The *Paris Review* interviews in the Age of Criticism

The relationship between interviews and fiction was developed by the cult literary magazine, the *Paris Review*, both in its interviews with fiction writers about their working practices,⁵ and in its treatment of interviews as if they were fiction. Founded in Paris in 1953 by

⁴ John Shaw and Theo Reeves-Evison, eds, *Fiction as Method*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017, 8.

⁵ The first issue of the *Paris Review* featured an interview with author E. M. Forster, together with excerpts of creative writing and original illustrations.

Americans Harold L. Humes, Peter Mathiesson and George Plimpton,⁶ the magazine's reputation grew so rapidly that it began anthologising its interviews in 1958, under the series title *Writers at Work*.

Malcom Cowley, editor of the first *Writers at Work*, begins his introduction with the eulogy: 'This is the best series of interviews with writers of our time that I have read in English.'⁷

Introducing the first of another anthology series, *The Paris Review Interviews*, nearly half a century later, Philip Gourevitch notes that the interviews had been 'acclaimed canonical' and that the interview as a 'genre of literature ... to a large degree, came into its own during the second half of the twentieth century in the pages of a literary magazine of decidedly modest circulation called *The Paris Review*'.⁸ In conferring on interviews an unprecedented degree of value, the *Paris Review* contributed to the reputation of the 1950s as 'a watershed moment in the history of the artist interview'.⁹

The *Paris Review* focused on writers, but it maintained a close relationship with the art world by including an art portfolio in every issue until 1978, and by commissioning, from 1966, 'Fine Art Editions' by current art stars – including Andy Warhol, Marisol and Jim Dine – which were sold to supplement the magazine's income.¹⁰ The influence of the *Paris Review*, in setting a new tone and format for interviewing creative practitioners, extended beyond the literary world and was acknowledged by such diverse magazines as Andy Warhol's *Interview*, discussed in the following chapter, and even *Playboy*.¹¹

⁶ As was revealed by *The New York Times* in 1977, Peter Matthiessen used the magazine as cover for his work with the CIA. The other two founders claim to have been unaware of this link until the 1960s. See www.salon.com/2012/05/27/exclusive_the_paris_review_the_cold_war_and_the_cia/. Accessed 8 June 2021.

⁷ Malcom Cowley, ed., *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1958. This edition, London: Mercury Books, 1962, 7.

⁸ Philip Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews. Vol. 1*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007, vii.

⁹ Reva Wolf, 'The artist interview: an elusive history', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 7. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/wolf.pdf>. Accessed 28 May 2021. Wolf qualifies that this watershed moment is true 'at least in the United States'. She also points to the rise in the 1950s of celebrity interviews in such popular publications as *Life*, as well as the founding of the Oral History Program of the Archives of American Art in 1958.

¹⁰ Some commentators have suggested that the interview was attractive because of its cheapness relative to original contributions. Nonetheless, interviewers were paid (between \$50 and \$200), and occasionally interviewees, too. See Usha Wilbers, 'The *Paris Review*'s Answer to the Age of Criticism', *American Periodicals*, 18: 2, 2008, 201. Wilbers wrote her thesis on the magazine.

¹¹ Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews, Vol. 1*, xi.

Mid-twentieth-century American literary theory was then dominated by New Criticism, named after John Crowe Ransom's eponymous 1941 book, which favoured an objective approach to literary analysis at the expense of psychological and biographical interpretation. Conversely, the *Paris Review* rejected the principles of what editor George Plimpton had called the 'Age of Criticism', in which magazines usually 'were devoted to explanations and exegesis of contemporary texts'.¹² According to literary scholar Usha Wilbers, instead of foregrounding the critic and challenging the author, in the *Paris Review* the 'author was given the opportunity to assume the role of the critic and create an often confessional self-portrait'.¹³ In this, the magazine would anticipate the turn in the 1960s towards 'confessional writing such as autobiographies and journals', and thus from 'objectivism to subjectivism'.¹⁴ Likewise, Roach argues that the *Paris Review* was a 'means through which to re-personalize literature and modernism at a time when, as we saw, the agency of the subject was heavily curtailed'.¹⁵

So, what was particular about the *Paris Review* interview form and the interviewers themselves? Firstly, the magazine treated its subjects with respect; not as 'celebrities or freaks or quasi-experts on subjects other than their own, but as sober professionals engaged in the writing life',¹⁶ and therefore interviews were expected to be undertaken in the spirit of a 'collaboration, not a confrontation'.¹⁷ Interviewers were asked to keep their own egos in check and pay full attention to their interviewee; the ideal adjectives to describe their attitude were 'waiting', 'listening' or 'inquiring'.¹⁸

The interviewers were not professionals and were thus expected to learn the craft of interviewing.¹⁹ There were few restrictions as to the amount of time invested by interviewer, interviewee and editor in arriving at a publishable edit of the transcript; interviews typically

¹² Wilbers, 'The *Paris Review*'s Answer to the Age of Criticism', 198.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁵ Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, 173.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

¹⁷ Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews, Vol. 1*, ix.

¹⁸ Cowley, *Writers at Work*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

took place over two or three sessions, and underwent extensive revision.²⁰ After all, there was no urgency: unlike many celebrity interviews in popular magazines, the interviews were not linked to any specific promotional event.

According to Margaret Atwood, in her introduction to the third *The Paris Review Interviews* anthology, the *Paris Review* had ‘invented its own form’ of questioning that differed from previous styles of interviews that she characterises as the ‘newspaper interviews of the what-do-you-eat-for-breakfast kind, or the lion-hunting genre so deplored by many characters in the fiction of Henry James, or the kind in which writers pontificated on the issues of the day’.²¹ George Plimpton made his expectations of the *Paris Review* interview explicit in a letter to a prospective interviewer in 1953: it ‘must not read like a newspaper interview, a series of unlinked questions and answers’; it need not be verbatim (‘you’ll find it necessary, probably, to juggle the text around until it reaches a completed form’); it will be sent to the interviewee for corrections and be better for it; and it should focus on the art or craft of writing (‘questions ranging from the author’s working habits to his opinion of imagination, inspiration, outward influences on his work, such as war, religion [sic], the value of the obsessed mind – what have you’).²² In another letter to one of his writers, George Wickes, Plimpton elaborates on the editing process:

You should try to think of the interview as a dramatic form in itself – hard as that may seem – where one’s tools are very much the dramatic devices: character buildup, suspense, argument even. Obviously, it’s unlikely the interview actually moves along dramatically when it’s done; therefore re-arrangement of material is necessary, additional questions often must be asked to fill out a section which seems to need emphasis, etc etc.²³

Such was Plimpton’s veneration of dramatic interviews over flat, uninspiring ones that he wrote of his admiration for a fake interview that the poet Ted Berrigan conducted with John Cage (whom he had never met).²⁴ Likewise, the mere fact of an author’s death would not get in the way of running an interview with one of the *Paris Review*’s heroes. When John

²⁰ A seven-page letter from George Plimpton to the interviewer George Wickes, relating to a first draft of an interview with Aldous Huxley, is unapologetic about the fact that it ‘needs more work’, currently being ‘skimpy, diffuse ... flat and uninspired’. Letter, undated, New Box 14 (Aldous Huxley), *The Paris Review Archives*, MA5040, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

²¹ Margaret Atwood, *The Paris Review Interviews. Vol. 3*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008, vii.

²² Letter from George Plimpton to Ben Johnson, October 1953, *The Paris Review Archives*.

²³ Letter from Plimpton to Wickes. *Ibid.*

²⁴ Letter from George Plimpton to Richard Kostelanetz, 26 September 1969, New Box 17 (John Cage). *Ibid.*

Steinbeck died before his agreed interview had taken place, the magazine instead produced a composite interview of comments he had made over the years.²⁵

That the *Paris Review* interviews are not verbatim records of encounters bothered the author and critic Bruce Bawer. In a damning article published in 1988, he maintained that the popularisation of the interview led by the *Paris Review* had led to too much ‘unpremeditated yammering’ in the media,²⁶ few instances of which were ‘serious and useful’.²⁷ He would go as far as calling this level of editing ‘cheating’.²⁸ More recently, Wilbers has countered that the heavy editing means that we should view the interviews as ‘performances rather than authentic statements from “autonomous” authors’.²⁹ She proposes instead that the *Paris Review* interviews ‘may be viewed as a form of creative writing in which the interviewee is presented as a fictional character’.³⁰ And, indeed, from their inception, the interviews have begun with a literary sketch of the interviewee, offering first impressions of the author and describing the interview’s setting, usually the interviewee’s home, which has the advantage of encouraging readers to read their personality traits through interior décor. For instance, Truman Capote’s interview includes the following, subtly derisive description: ‘The parlour is Victorian in character and contains Capote’s most intimate collection of art objects and personal treasures, which, for all their orderly arrangement on polished tables and bamboo bookcases, somehow remind you of the contents of a very astute little boy’s pockets.’³¹

Another notable characteristic of the *Paris Review* interview is the use of interviewer asides – a technique more commonly found in plays or screenwriting. Although interviewers are credited by name at the beginning or end,³² in the text they are anonymously referred to as ‘interviewer’, and so the asides provide a rare moment for them to take centre-stage. For example, a couple of pages into an interview with E. M. Forster, his interviewers make the

²⁵ Published in issue 48, Fall 1969.

²⁶ Bruce Bawer, ‘Talk Show: The Rise of the Literary Interview’, *The American Scholar*, 57: 3, Summer 1988, 422.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 425.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 422-3. Ironically, he then accuses more verbatim transcripts of interviews – the ‘interview verité’, he calls it – as belonging ‘to a mentality that doesn’t appreciate the thought, the rewriting, the shaping that go into a coherent, unified literary composition’.

²⁹ Wilbers, ‘The *Paris Review*’s Answer to the Age of Criticism’, 201.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

³¹ Cowley, *Writers at Work*, 255.

³² Before tape-recorders became commonplace, two interviewers would be required to alternately ask questions and take notes.

following editorial comment: ‘(We noticed that he always spoke of the caves quite literally – as for instance when he interrupted himself earlier to say that the characters had to pass “through” them.)’.³³

The *Paris Review* interviews overturned the celebrity interview’s poor reputation to champion the idea of the interview as a dynamic literary genre – a craft to be learned and perfected, and to which as much time might be devoted in crafting and editing as any other form of writing. The interviews commanded a new level of respect: for the genre, for the interviewee and for the interviewer.

Poetic realism: Nell Dunn’s take on British social realism

Bruce Bawer complained that what ‘literary interviewers are after is not pure truth but sheer portraiture’.³⁴ But what if sheer portraiture is in fact the interviewer’s aspiration? In the 1960s, the British writer Nell Dunn pioneered a genre of dialogue-based writing, derived from real speech, that she has likened to Impressionist painting.³⁵ Like the *Paris Review*, Dunn does not differentiate between her fiction and nonfiction in the level of attention she pays them, and the way in which she presents them. Her interview technique certainly exemplifies the attitude of the new generation to which Cowley referred, who listen, wait and inquire, as opposed to the ‘lion-hunting’ that Atwood satirised. But Dunn’s writing differs from the *Paris Review* interviews – focused as they are on the craft of writing and the creative mind – in that she does not isolate her subjects from their social and political context.

In 1963 Dunn’s first fictional book *Up the Junction* became an instant bestseller, selling half a million copies. Based on a series of short stories, published in the *New Statesman* (when John Freeman was editor),³⁶ it offered a picture of working-class life in London’s Battersea and Clapham Junction, where Dunn had lived and worked in a sweet factory since 1959. The book is composed primarily of dialogue, as if responding to untranscribed interview questions. Only brief descriptions set the scene at the start of each chapter, indicate a change

³³ Ibid., 27. Italics and parentheses as in the original. The interviewers are listed as P. N. Furnbank and F. J. H. Haskell.

³⁴ Bawer, ‘Talk Show’, 426.

³⁵ Interview between author and Nell Dunn, 5 November 2018.

³⁶ Published between May 1962 and April 1963. John Freeman was editor from 1961 to 1965.

of location or describe an action mid-chapter.³⁷ To borrow the classical distinction between narrative devices, we might say that *Up the Junction* favours mimesis (the direct representation of the novel's characters) over diagesis (the narrator's comments on the thoughts and actions of the characters). And in this, it shares similarities with the genre of epistolary literature, particularly that of the 'novel of letters'.³⁸ However, while the novel of letters would have to wait until the end of the twentieth century for a revival, after 'two centuries of near abandonment',³⁹ the novel of dialogue gained popularity in Anglo-American literature in the 1960s – no doubt aided by the increased availability of portable tape-recorders. (Andy Warhol's *a: A novel* and Linda Rosenkrantz's *Talk* – both novels of dialogue published in 1968 – are discussed in the context of the New York art world in the next chapter.)

Up the Junction, as with Dunn's subsequent book of real-life interviews *Talking to Women*, focuses on young women's experiences of sex, work, going out, motherhood and money told from the point of view of an upper-class woman living among them (a thinly disguised proxy for Dunn herself). This attention to the ordinary, the working class and vernacular language was shared by other artforms in the late 1950s and 1960s, often collectively bundled under the term 'social realism'. These included the 'kitchen sink' group of painters (John Bratby, Jack Smith, Edward Middleditch and Derrick Greaves), the term coined by David Sylvester in an article in *Encounter* in December 1954; social realist theatre, of which John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958) are the best-known examples; and British New Wave cinema, such as film adaptations of the aforementioned plays.⁴⁰ Actors, too, were beginning to reflect a wider social range; *A Taste of Honey* was produced by left-wing director Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, based in

³⁷ Transcribed, verbatim dialogue was developed into a genre known as Verbatim Theatre in the 1970s, inspired by Peter Cheeseman's work at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke on Trent from the mid-1960s, as well as the BBC Radio Ballads and Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. See Derek Paget, "'Verbatim Theatre": Oral History and Documentary Techniques', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 3: 12, November 1987, 317-36.

³⁸ See Rachel Bower, *Epistolarity and World Literature, 1980–2010*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 21.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁰ Film adaptations of *Look Back in Anger* and *A Taste of Honey*, both directed by Tony Richardson, were released in 1959 and 1961 respectively. For a discussion of other important social realist films of the era, including *Tiger in the Smoke* (directed Roy Ward Baker, 1956); *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960); and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (J. Lee Thompson, 1957), see Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2017.

Stratford, east London, which used non-actors to perform in a realist style.⁴¹ Likewise, *Up the Junction* was adapted for BBC television by Ken Loach in 1965 for his first *Wednesday Play* series (which ran from 1964 to 1970), and considered groundbreaking in depicting real locations and real people, rather than actors filmed in a studio.⁴²

A parallel can be drawn between Shelagh Delaney and Dunn in their shared refusal to take a moral stance against their female subjects.⁴³ In their books and adaptations thereof, women drive the narrative and refuse to be read merely as victims – a rebellion against the ‘narrative subordination’ that John Hill characterises as the treatment of women in New Wave films of the time.⁴⁴ According to drama historian Stephen Lacey, *A Taste of Honey*’s heroine Jo, as with the female protagonists in *Up the Junction*, is ‘not broken by her situation’ (as a single, unmarried soon-to-be mother of a mixed-race child) and ‘does not follow the naturalist trajectory from misery into defeat’.⁴⁵ In her case, Dunn treats such subjects as stillbirth, backstreet abortion, infidelity, suicide and mental illness from the point of view of women, rather than focusing on their punishment by society. This was transgressive for the time, and the BBC version of *Up the Junction* attracted a record number of complaints.⁴⁶ As Karl

⁴¹ Joan Littlewood had been married to Ewan MacColl, co-creator of the BBC Radio Ballads, and fellow political activist. See Nadine Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood’s Theatre*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁴² Ken Loach also directed a film version of Dunn’s first novel, *Poor Cow* (1967), his first feature film (Dunn wrote the screenplay). *Up the Junction* was additionally made into a feature film in 1968 (directed by Peter Collinson). See Stephen Lacey, ‘Becoming popular: some reflections on the relationship between television and theatre’, Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey, eds, *Popular Television Drama*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, 202. This was a time of great hope for TV as a model for uniting people from diverse backgrounds through culture. Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), on the negative impact of mass culture on the working class, had influenced government policy to encourage television to put on serious and even transgressive programmes. See Dave Rolinson, ‘Small Screens and Big Voices: Televisual Social Realism and the Popular’, *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940*, David Tucker, ed., London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 179.

⁴³ There were a number of other female authors writing novels on transgressive subjects in the 1960s, such as Lynne Reid Banks, whose *The L-Shaped Room* (book in 1960; film in 1962) centred on an unmarried pregnant woman forced to live in a run-down boarding house; Olivia Manning’s *The Balkan* trilogy (1960–5), about a married couple during the Second World War, based on her own experiences; and Andrea Newman’s 1960s novels, including *Three into Two Won’t Go* (1967) about a complicated love triangle. Edna O’Brien, who adapted the latter novel for the screen in 1969, had written the *Country Girls Trilogy* (1960–4) that had been banned in Ireland for its explicit sexual references. O’Brien was one of Dunn’s interviewees in *Talking to Women*.

⁴⁴ John Hill, *Sex, Class, Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963*, London: BFI, 1986, 164.

⁴⁵ Stephen Lacey, ‘Staging the Contemporary: Politics and Practice in Post-War Social Realist Theatre’, in Tucker, ed., *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940*, 65.

⁴⁶ For a discussion on the furore *Up the Junction* caused, particularly in relation to debates on abortion laws, see Stephen Lacey, ‘The 1960s: social realism and The Wednesday Play’, in *Tony Garnett*, Manchester Scholarship Online, 2012, 7–10. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781847794352.00008>. Accessed 10 June 2021.

Miller, Dunn's literary editor at the *New Statesman*, noted: 'Her racy working-class girls were too much, allegedly, for the public, millions of whom had nevertheless watched the play, and too much for the Governors, very few of whom were or had ever been working-class girls.'⁴⁷ The reactions to Dunn following *Talking to Women* were certainly misogynist. A reviewer for the *New Statesman* admitted that he was 'too smugly male, too dominating and egotistical, to take to a book where ladies protest so much'.⁴⁸ Dunn herself recalled a live interview on television:

... and this man, well-known, I can't remember his name – really said to me: Miss Dunn, do you not think you might be promoting promiscuity? And I said ... I think it's absolutely acceptable to sleep with a lot of people if you're trying to find somebody you're going to be happy with. And he couldn't say anything after that.⁴⁹

It seems that the public was more amenable to 'Angry Young Men' – that trope of working-class kitchen sink drama – than their female equivalent. Moral outrage at working-class girls' sexual laxity had, after all, recently been stoked up by the media over 'showgirl' Christine Keeler and the Profumo Scandal.⁵⁰

Hill makes another important point about New Wave narratives that might be applied to the work of Delaney and Dunn. He contends that elements of transgression in New Wave cinema 'may prove too "excessive" to be contained by the logic of repression implicit in the film's resolutions'.⁵¹ Examples of disruptions to a neat resolution might be an 'overloaded' ending or one that fails to fully tie up all the loose narrative ends; an epilogue that jars with the preceding narrative; elements in the film that lack proper integration or whose significance might be difficult to gauge or run counter to previous knowledge.⁵² Hill also acknowledges, following Sylvia Harvey and Annette Kuhn, that 'acts of transgression' by female characters, particularly in film noir, can also produce an uncontainable excess of meaning.⁵³

⁴⁷ Karl Miller, *Dark Horses: an experience of literary journalism*, London: Picador, 1998, 24. Miller went on to co-found the *London Review of Books* in 1979.

⁴⁸ Quoted in a McGibbon & Kee advertisement for four of their books, including *Talking to Women*, in *Observer*, 5 December 1965, 27.

⁴⁹ Interview between author and Dunn, 5 November 2018.

⁵⁰ Lewis Morley's iconic photograph of Christine Wheeler sitting naked astride a chair was also printed in the *Sunday Mirror* in 1963 – a publicity shot for a film of the scandal, *The Keeler Affair*, that was never released.

⁵¹ Hill, *Sex, Class, Realism*, 62.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Social realism was an ideologically loaded term in 1950s and 1960s Britain; many rejected it as uncomfortably close to Soviet-style socialist realism or propaganda.⁵⁴ The country was still suffering from the aftermath of the Second World War, and society still deeply class-riven. As Lynda Nead puts it, in her survey of post-war British culture, ‘many were living in surroundings that belonged more to wartime than to peace and that were more suited to life in a Victorian city than the planned towns of the post-war world’,⁵⁵ despite increasing owner-occupation of homes and Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s famous declaration in 1957 that the British people had ‘never had it so good’.⁵⁶ Dunn herself told an interviewer that she much admired the atmospheric documentary *Morning in the Streets* (1959) by Denis Mitchell, featuring interviews and sounds he had recorded with a portable tape-recorder in a working-class, bomb-damaged area of Liverpool.⁵⁷

Defining the term ‘realism’ itself provoked debate. In his much-quoted ‘A Lecture on Realism’, Raymond Williams offers four defining characteristics of ‘realism as a whole form’, as it has developed from eighteenth-century bourgeois drama: ‘social extension’; the ‘siting of actions in the present’ as opposed to the historical or legendary past; secularism; and the use of real people or non-actors.⁵⁸ Williams notes that from the late nineteenth century, ‘there was an attempt to distinguish realism from naturalism’,⁵⁹ the latter becoming understood as

⁵⁴ For example, John Berger, as a young Marxist art critic and curator in the 1950s, came under intense criticism for championing realism in the visual arts, such as the *Looking Forward* exhibition he curated at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1952, which included work by kitchen sink painters Greaves and Smith. Berger also criticised the ICA’s competition, in 1952, to design a monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner for being won by abstract sculptor Reg Butler, declaring that ‘the “official” modern art of the West is now bankrupt’. Herbert Read, president of the ICA, countered that Berger was advocating the clichés of academic realism. See Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke*, 271-2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁵⁷ ‘I thought this is the sort of thing I want to write so I wrote to Dennis [sic] Mitchell and he said, “I’ll meet you, next Saturday on platform 13 at Clapham Junction.” And so that’s where we met. And we sat on a bench, and he encouraged me, and I never saw him again.’ Nell Dunn interviewed by Anna Coatman, ‘Ways of Listening’, *Boundless*, 2019, online at <https://unbound.com/boundless/2019/12/12/talking-about-womens-lives/>. Accessed 8 June 2020.

⁵⁸ Raymond Williams, ‘A Lecture on Realism’, *Screen*, 18: 1, Spring 1977, 61-74. Transcribed from a lecture given at the SEFT/*Screen* weekend school on Realism, 8–10 October 1976.

⁵⁹ In the introduction to her survey of the historical art and literary movement of Realism in nineteenth-century France, Linda Nochlin also muses on the ‘confusion bedevilling the notion of Realism’. In particular, she notes characterising Realism as “‘styleless” or a transparent style’ is a ‘gross simplification, for Realism was no more a mere mirror of reality than any other style and its relation *qua* style ... is as complex and difficult as that of Romanticism, the Baroque or Mannerism’. Nochlin, *Realism*, London: Penguin Books, 1971, 14.

that which merely reproduced the flat external appearance of reality with a certain static quality, whereas realism – in the Marxist tradition, for example – was that method and that intention which went below this surface to the essential historical movements, to the dynamic reality.⁶⁰

Based on Williams' definition, Dunn's writings would fall into the realist, rather than naturalist, camp. While Dunn reproduces reality with directness and simplicity, she demonstrates an empathetical connection to her subjects that goes beyond 'mere appearance', and an appreciation of the social and political implications of their viewpoints.

'I am a Tape Recorder': Nell Dunn's *Talking to Women*

In his review of *Up the Junction* in *The Listener*, David Lodge suggests that a better title might have been *I am a Tape-recorder*, such is the book's fidelity to the vernacular speech of Battersea working-class women that the dialogue must surely, he contends, have been transcribed from real-life recordings.⁶¹ Dunn, in fact, did not use a tape-recorder (she would use it later for *Talking to Women*) but confirms: 'A lot of the dialogue I would have overheard and then I would have carried it on. So, in other words, if the first sentence I used was real, I might make up two or three more sentences along the same vein.'⁶² Likewise, Rod Mengham perceptively notes, in his study of social realism in fiction, that Dunn's 'compositional technique reflects the absorbency of recording technology, which does not discriminate between significant and insignificant sounds and images'.⁶³ He terms the overall effect a 'poetics of overhearing',⁶⁴ recalling director Lindsay Anderson's idea that the Free Cinema of the late 1950s (which led to the British New Wave) should be modelled on 'poetic realism',⁶⁵ in opposition to the 'philistine' John Grierson documentary tradition of the 1930s.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Williams, 'A Lecture on Realism', 65. Such was the opposition to 'mere' naturalism by the mid-1960s that the television screenwriter Troy Kennedy Martin wrote the provocatively titled 'Nats go home' manifesto for *Encore* magazine, calling for more realism in TV drama. Troy Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home', *Encore*, March/April 1964, 5-14.

⁶¹ David Lodge, book review of *Up the Junction*, *The Listener*, 70: 1808, 21 November 1963, 852.

⁶² Interview between author and Nell Dunn, 5 November 2018.

⁶³ Rod Mengham, 'Bad Teeth: British Social Realism in Fiction', in Tucker, ed., *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940*, 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Hill, *Sex, Class, Realism*, 128.

⁶⁶ Dave Rolinson also notes a lack of discrimination in capturing the 'dailiness of life' in social realist film, quoting French film theorist and realist advocate Andre Bazin's idea of respecting the 'phenomenological integrity' of events over narrative causality. Rolinson, 'Small Screens and Big Voices' in Tucker, ed., *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940*, 189.

Lodge also makes a connection between Dunn's 'structure of spoken language-dialogue, anecdote, repartee, and snatches of song, encompassing the funny, the bawdy, the pathetic, and the horrific' and the BBC Radio Ballads (1957–64). These innovative documentaries – a collaboration between Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and Peggy Seeger – comprised sound collages of recorded interview fragments and folk songs written using interview material. They were considered a breakthrough for the BBC in terms of format and content: their 'ordinary' subject matter such as boxing, teenagers and fishing, as well as the extent to which working-class and regional accents were featured.⁶⁷

Both Dunn's first books and the Radio Ballads capture and preserve speech patterns that are now rarely if ever used today, and in this sense can be seen as important historical records of language. However, the temptation to fetishise this vernacular as 'other' was strong in the middle- and upper-class-dominated 1960s media. In a 1963 article on kitchen sink drama for *Encounter*, George Wilson Knight romanticises the authentic lives of those he calls 'outsiders', as opposed to the middle class in which he includes himself: 'References to birth, sexual intercourse, and physical death appear without the distancing which has to many of us become habitual. The people are in more direct relation to their own life, unmediated by conventions.'⁶⁸

Dunn's next book, *Talking to Women* (1965), is non-fiction, and comprises transcriptions of interviews – or conversations, as she prefers to call them – which Dunn had conducted with nine women, aged between twenty-four and thirty-two, who she knew as friends, acquaintances and neighbours. In the book, she offers no rationale as to the selection of her subjects or the order in which they appear. Like *Up the Junction*, only minimal introductions to each encounter are offered, in this case name, age, sometimes occupation, and number and age of children. The women come from a range of backgrounds: artist Pauline Boty; published writers Edna O'Brien, Paddy Kitchen and Ann Quin; factory worker Kathy Collier; and Emma Charlton, Suna Portman and Antonia Simon, whose occupations are unidentified.

⁶⁷ See Ewan MacColl, 'The Radio Ballads: How they were made, when and by whom', 1981. www.peggyseeger.com/discography/ballads/how-the-radio-ballads-were-made/. Accessed 8 June 2021.

⁶⁸ George Wilson Knight, 'The Kitchen Sink: On Recent Developments in Drama', *Encounter*, December 1963, 48-9.

The introduction to Frances Chadwick,⁶⁹ who had committed suicide before the book was published, is unsettling blunt: ‘Died in 1964, at 27; she left two daughters’.⁷⁰

Furthermore, by referring to each woman by first name only in the interview headings, Dunn effectively flattens social and class hierarchies, despite some of the women having an emerging public profile.⁷¹ This strategy also has the effect of conferring a universalising, fictional quality to the interviews. Like the *Paris Review* interviews, the spirit behind them was of collaboration, not confrontation, and Dunn has confirmed that she granted the women the opportunity to edit and correct the transcripts until they were satisfied.⁷² The original 1965 hardback cover – a photo by Tina Tranter of Kath Collier lighting her cigarette off Nell Dunn’s while it is still in her mouth – symbolises this sense of intimate trust.

Dunn wrote only a two-paragraph preface to *Talking to Women*, in which she suggests a link between her subjects based on shared, one might say proto-feminist, attitudes rather than interests or occupations: ‘If these girls have anything in common it is a belief in personal fulfilment – that a woman’s life should not solely be the struggle to make men happy but more than that a progress towards the development of one’s own body and soul.’⁷³ She then makes reference to George Eliot’s novel *Daniel Deronda*:

As Daniel Deronda tells Gwendolen Harleth that she should sing for the ‘private joy’ instead of the public ear so these girls have severed themselves from some of the conventional forms of living and thinking, in trying to find what for them are the “private joys” of life.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, *Talking to Women* lays bare the tension between private and public in these women’s lives. They talk intimately to Dunn in their homes, over tea, wine and cigarettes, about the most private subjects of sex, money, abortion (illegal until 1967), suicide, children and infidelity, but also of trying to find space for their creativity, their public selves, alongside their domestic duties. As British author Ali Smith writes, in her introduction to the 2018 re-edition of *Talking to Women*, Dunn’s is ‘one of the first books to address the

⁶⁹ Spelled Chadwicke in original edition; corrected to Chadwick in 2018 edition. The book is dedicated to her.

⁷⁰ Another interviewee, Ann Quinn, committed suicide in 1973 at the age of thirty-seven.

⁷¹ Paragraph-length biographies were added as an appendix to the 2018 re-edition of the book – perhaps to satisfy reader curiosity, and also to honour these women’s achievements more fully, particularly those who had since died.

⁷² Interview with author, 5 November 2018.

⁷³ Dunn, *Talking to Women*, 1965, 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

complications of the female self fragmented by and determined to change, or at least ask questions about, the prescribed notions of what women's creativity should or shouldn't be'.⁷⁵ In my own interview with Dunn in 2018, she described her motivation for the book as the need to 'try and understand what was happening in my generation and what was acceptable'.⁷⁶ The questions that most troubled her were: 'What are we meant to be doing with our lives? Are we meant to be going back to the Fifties thing of just being housekeepers and time managers for the family? How do you stop just collapsing into a heap of misery?'⁷⁷

Uncanny authenticity

Dunn had used notebooks and memory to record speech for *Up the Junction*. She also changed the names of the protagonists. But for *Talking to Women*, she used a tape-recorder (initially borrowed from the BBC) and the women are all represented by their real names. The transcriptions feel natural – verbatim – in that the editing appears very light, with frequent hesitations and contradictions left in the dialogue. As with *Up the Junction*, the use of the tape-recorder was commented on by reviewers. Writing on *Talking to Women* at the time, Anne Duchene considered the recorded interview format unsophisticated: 'This book is simply recorded – a dismaying method, and one to which we are already sufficiently exposed.'⁷⁸ Katherine Whitehorn, reviewing the book for the *Observer*, likewise dismissed interviews as belonging to TV, albeit conceding its sense of 'fascination':

Television has been borrowing from books since it started; now we have the process in reverse, a book of interviews: presumably cut but otherwise presented in all their wasteful, rambling, ungrammatical informality. It provokes the usual irritation you feel when someone has printed a question-and-answer interview instead of writing the article; but it has a lot of the fascination of a good "Face to Face."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ali Smith, 'Introduction', *Talking to Women*, London: Silver Press, 2018, xi-ii.

⁷⁶ Interview with author, 5 November 2018.

⁷⁷ Ibid. A BBC radio interview between Dunn and the psychiatrist Dr Anthony Clare in 1982 offers a psychological framework for Dunn's interest in observing speech. Dunn reveals that she was sent to a psychoanalyst for not being able to speak as a child – a consequence, it is implied, of having been evacuated to New York without her parents during the Second World War. When her family later moved to Paris then Rome, she read books as she couldn't speak the languages. Her family, in any case, came from the sort of privileged background that was not expressive. Since speaking was either withheld or unavailable to Dunn at key moments in her life, it subsequently held a special fascination. *In the Psychiatrist's Chair*, BBC Radio 4, 21 August 1982, 18.55.

⁷⁸ Anne Duchene, 'A sort of book thing', *Guardian*, 26 November 1965, 14.

⁷⁹ Katherine Whitehorn, 'Woman to woman', *Observer*, 21 November 1965, 26.

Anthony Burgess, author of the then recently published *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), was even more scornful of Dunn's use of the interview format, going as far as to use it himself to parody the book in a review for *The Listener*. He is particularly scathing about the colloquial tone of the interviews – rather ironically, given his own fetishising of youth slang in *A Clockwork Orange* – and the frequent mentions of sex and motherhood. He begins by implying that Dunn is dishonestly positioning herself as ordinary:

- A. You think it's a good thing then to talk it all out with another woman, I mean the frustrations of being a woman and hopes and fears and all that sort of thing?
- B. Definitely, so long as it's somebody like this Nell Dunn who's clever but doesn't let you see she's clever but just like you or I, having a fag and talking about sex and that just like she was, you know, ordinary.⁸⁰

Burgess concludes with a withering satire of the interview format as 'easy' and thus not to be taken seriously:

- A. It's very easy. A book I mean. Just switch on the tape-recorder and get talking and pay somebody a few bob to, you know, transcribe it. And then it's a book.
- B. An easy way to do a book, definitely.
- A. And an easy way to review it.
- B. Definitely.⁸¹

With hindsight, *Talking to Women* appears less 'easy'. Ali Smith, in the introduction to the new edition, describes Dunn's particular skill at listening to and recreating 'authentic' speech as an 'art'. She writes:

Her art – one where an expert instinct for edit and for the energy that radiates off perfectly judged juxtaposition comes together with a talent for hearing and relaying with an uncanny authenticity the rhythms and resonances of idiom – is ignited by voice, especially by voice more usually given no societal, literary or aesthetic power or space but whose authority, as soon as you hear it, is unquestionable.⁸²

Moreover, despite her reservations, Whitehorn also wrote that the women in *Talking to Women* are 'so like characters in a novel that it is shattering to think of them leading actual

⁸⁰ Anthony Burgess, 'Sisters under the skin', *The Listener*, 74: 1914, 2 December 1965, 914.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Smith, 'Introduction', *Talking to Women*, 2018, v.

lives, bearing actual children'.⁸³ I would agree that there is a literary quality to *Talking to Women* – something specifically 'Dunn-like' about the transcriptions, such as the way sentences run on without commas (which she attributes variously to being an amateur, grammar-blind, or simply that commas get in the way),⁸⁴ or the way in which the interviews are structured like chapters in a novel, vignettes that taken together offer a portrait of the lives and concerns of young women in the 1960s, as had *Up the Junction*. Dunn herself prefers to use an artistic metaphor to describe her work: 'I'm painting a picture, really, and part of the picture is done in dialogue.'⁸⁵

Pauline Boty: not such a happy dumb blonde

The first interview in *Talking to Women* is with Pauline Boty. Boty was part of the group of mainly Royal College of Art-trained artists, including David Hockney and Peter Blake, who made their reputations at the influential *Young Contemporaries* annual exhibition at the turn of the 1960s.⁸⁶ She featured alongside fellow Pop artists Blake, Derek Boshier and Peter Phillips in the experimental BBC television documentary *Pop Goes the Easel* in 1962, directed by Ken Russell for the arts series *Monitor*.⁸⁷

According to American art historian Thomas Crow, in his recent book on Mod culture in London, Boty's reputation at the time was comparable to Hockney: 'a peer in commanding the London spotlight in 1962'.⁸⁸ Yet Crow also acknowledges that '[r]ecognition as the leading, perhaps only female member of the Pop cohort at the Royal College had been, as might be imagined, more uncertain and circuitous a process than her male counterparts enjoyed'.⁸⁹ Indeed, assessing the revival of interest in Boty in 1993, the journalist (now author) Sabine Durrant points out that women were 'quietly discouraged' at the Royal College of Art to the extent that female washrooms were absent from the plans for the new

⁸³ Whitehorn, 'Woman to woman', 26.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Boty showed at the 1957 and 1959 editions of *Young Contemporaries*, but not the 1961 edition that many see as the first public Pop exhibition.

⁸⁷ *Pop Goes the Easel* was broadcast on 25 March 1962, and again on 29 July 1963, this time attracting a more positive response from the media and viewers. See Lisa Tickner, *London's New Scene: Art and Culture in the 1960s*, London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2020, 23-57, for an in-depth analysis and appreciation of the programme.

⁸⁸ Thomas Crow, 'Painting Sensations: Pauline Boty and Bridget Riley', *The Hidden Mod in Modern Art: London 1957-1969*, London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2020, 87.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

senior common room.⁹⁰ She quotes Boty's close contemporary Jane Percival on the challenges facing women then: 'Women painters like myself felt very alienated, the full feminist movement hadn't come in and we worked in isolated pools, mostly of depression.'⁹¹

Art critic Martin Gayford describes Boty as the 'personification of sexuality, fashion and youth'. 'Effectively', he writes, she was 'Andy Warhol and Marilyn wrapped up into one person' but that this was 'an impossibly dissonant combination for journalists – and the public – in the early 1960s'.⁹² Certainly, Boty's media interviews prior to *Talking to Women* had generally been superficial, focused on her glamorous appearance. Moreover, the catalogue for her only solo exhibition during her lifetime, at London's Grabowski Gallery in 1963, comprises just a checklist and a short biography. Significantly, Lawrence Alloway fails to mention Boty in his chapter on 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard's seminal survey of British and American Pop, *Pop Art* (1966).⁹³ Therefore, Boty's interview with Dunn was, and still is, a valuable source of information about her influences, her views on being a woman artist and her distaste for convention. As Lisa Tickner argues in a recent survey of the 1960s London art scene, Dunn's interview with Boty 'makes for a revealing counterpoint to her persona in *Pop Goes the Easel*', in which she 'teeters on the brink of that ubiquitous sixties stereotype, the "dolly bird" – carefree, unattached, desirable, perhaps not very bright – with just a smidgeon of irony alerting viewers to the artifice of the whole confection'.⁹⁴

Boty's published interview with Dunn gives the impression that it has been transcribed verbatim; it is full of non-sequiturs and hesitations, repetitions and expressions of the time like 'square'. While the 2018 re-edition of *Talking to Women* remains largely faithful to the original in terms of transcription – just correcting minor typos and adding a small number of commas – it does remove the italicised emphases that Dunn included in her transcripts.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Sabine Durrant, 'The Darling of her Generation', *Independent on Sunday*, 7 March 1993, 15.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹² Martin Gayford, *Modernists and Mavericks: Bacon, Freud, Hockney and the London Painters*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2018, 238.

⁹³ Alloway was also one of the jurors of the 1961 *Young Contemporaries* exhibition. See Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1966.

⁹⁴ Tickner, *London's New Scene*, 289-90.

⁹⁵ Dunn claims not to have retained the original audio recordings of *Talking to Women*. Interview with author, 5 November 2018.

Since I have found those italics helpful in reconstructing the tone of the interview with Boty, I have chosen to quote from the 1965 version (unless specifically stated otherwise).

In the interview, Boty talks unreservedly about drugs and sex; her bouts of self-doubt and depression; her stammer; and her childhood fears, including about her ‘ugly cunt’. (This latter reference is significant given that it was only since the 1959 British Obscenity Act, tested in 1960 by Penguin Books’ successful bid to publish the full version of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, that such terms as ‘cunt’ and ‘fuck’ could be printed if they were shown to be in the public good, that is ‘in the interests of science, literature, art or learning’.)⁹⁶ Describing her previous affair with a married man, Boty says that ‘he always gave me a sort of fantastic feeling of “ahuhah”, sort of escape, somehow, complete sort of escape and nothing to do with the kind of ordinary things you know’.⁹⁷ Honesty is evidently an important principle to Boty, as it is to her generation overall. She talks of the need to rebel against the ‘puritanism that still exists in England today’ as well as her appreciation of ‘hipsterism’, defined by her as ‘not being vulnerable ... being completely open all the time and not being ashamed of anything you’ve done or feeling guilty of anything that you are, which I think is a marvellous thing’.⁹⁸

Much of the conversation between Dunn and Boty turns on the various roles that Boty plays or is expected to play in life. She talks of her father’s Victorian values and the fact that he didn’t want her to go to work when she left school. She discusses the acting work that followed her *Monitor* appearance (‘it can be very agonising ... in the way that if you’re acting it’s *you* who they’re criticising’).⁹⁹ She is highly critical of the limitations imposed by these roles and stereotypes, such as that of the dutiful housewife (‘I would be so bored’).¹⁰⁰ She reveals her frustrations at being taken seriously, whether because people are too obsessed by rank and status (‘I’ve been in the company of people who are well known and they never know who I am’)¹⁰¹ or because men find it difficult to accept the idea of women intellectually

⁹⁶ See Obscene Publications Act 1959, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/66/section/4. Accessed 8 June 2021.

⁹⁷ Dunn, *Talking to Women*, 1965, 29.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

cleverer than them. She muses nonetheless that women are ‘*allowed* to be much lazier [than men] and they aren’t taught to be competitive except physically with other women’.¹⁰²

Boty is highly self-aware of her attractiveness, to the point of being able to joke about it: ‘I’ve been fairly lucky in that I’m pretty attractive to men because I have a – quite a sexual sort of quality but along with a thing that’s kind of like, Oh a happy dumb blonde you see.’¹⁰³ But, as Ali Smith points out, the ‘multiple meaning of a word like dumb isn’t lost in a book on talking’. Boty’s interview, she writes, is ‘the antithesis of dumbness, so clever, earnest, joyful, fragile, darting, layered and engaged’, as well as ‘scattered with violence and the repeated casual use of the words “kill” and “scream”’.¹⁰⁴

Given that Boty is best known as a Pop artist, she talks surprisingly little about her art. Yet when she does, it is clearly her greatest passion. When Dunn asks her whether she gets the most out of painting or acting, Boty replies ‘[p]ainting’, and the importance to her of it as a lone activity – ‘it’s your own terrible fight or your own lovely bit, whichever sort of phase it’s in’.¹⁰⁵

The interview features an addendum, dated June 1965, in which Dunn asks Boty how she feels about being pregnant now, to which Boty replies that, while at first she was ‘terrified’, she is ‘secretly more pleased about it than I could ever admit’.¹⁰⁶ Shortly after the publication of *Talking to Women*, however, Boty was diagnosed with cancer, and died less than five months after giving birth to her daughter. It is impossible not to let this knowledge add poignancy to the interview, especially when Boty discusses future plans and looking forward to being in her thirties.¹⁰⁷ It is also difficult to resist the temptation to look for signs of premonition in the text, as absurd as it might be to imagine Boty had predicted her future. Yet those signs are there if you are looking for them: for instance, when Boty discusses her fear of the atomic bomb and ‘sort of living my life as though I’d probably only got a few more years to live.’¹⁰⁸ Even if we appreciate that the interview is an artificial situation and that

¹⁰² Ibid., 18.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰⁴ Smith in *Talking to Women*, 2018, xi.

¹⁰⁵ Dunn, *Talking to Women*, 1965, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 34-5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 13.

editing has taken place, the honesty and near-verbatim transcription give it a sense of what Smith calls an ‘uncanny authenticity’. In this way, reading the interview posthumously has an effect similar to that described by Roland Barthes when looking at a photograph of someone who is now dead. This is the sense (what he calls photography’s *noeme*) that ‘someone has seen the reference ... *in flesh and blood*, or again *in person*’.¹⁰⁹ He continues: ‘...I can never see or see again in a film certain actors whom I know to be dead without a kind of melancholy: the melancholy of Photography itself (I experience this same emotion listening to the recorded voices of dead singers)’.¹¹⁰ And, we might add, reading the voices of dead interviewees.

The circumstances of Boty’s death, at the age of twenty-eight, added to the mythologising of her as a tragic icon, eclipsing the art-historical significance of her work, which in fact went missing after her death – presumed lost. Untimely deaths of her husband Clive Goodwin (of a cerebral haemorrhage in 1978) and daughter Katy ‘Boty’ Goodwin in 1995 (of a heroin overdose) have subsequently added to that tragic legacy.¹¹¹ Much of Boty’s work was eventually discovered in her brother’s barn in the early 1990s by art historian David Mellor, who included a selection of these in the exhibition *The Sixties Art Scene in London* at the Barbican Art Gallery in 1993. Boty’s work was then displayed in two key solo exhibitions: the first, *Pauline Boty: The Only Blonde in the World*, at Whitford Fine Art and The Mayor Gallery in 1998; the second, *Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman*, curated by Sue Tate, at Wolverhampton Art Gallery in 2013.¹¹² Indeed, the exhibition catalogues for these exhibitions, the first by David Mellor and Sue Tate (as Sue Watling), the second by Sue Tate, remain the only substantial monographs on Boty to date.

Sue Tate went on to write her PhD thesis on Boty, contextualising the gendered reaction to her work within misogynist readings of Pop Art in general, and noting the dearth of literature, not only on Boty but any women Pop artists.¹¹³ This explains, for Tate, the fact that ‘feminist

¹⁰⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage, 1993, 79.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹¹ Karen Rosenberg, ‘Overlooked No More: Pauline Boty, Rebellious Pop Artist’, *The New York Times*, 19 November 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/obituaries/pauline-boty-overlooked.html>. Accessed 8 June 2021.

¹¹² Tate was awarded an Arts Council of England grant to locate and photograph Boty’s works in private collections, in association with the Women’s Art Library.

¹¹³ Sue Tate, *Gendering the field: Pauline Boty and the predicament of the woman artist in the British pop art movement*, PhD thesis, 2004.

art literature has but few, and highly negative, words for Pop and until recently, almost nothing to say about women Pop artists' since there has been no 'conceptual space within which the terms "woman artist" and "Pop art" can meet productively'.¹¹⁴ When, Tate notes, Boty is mentioned in Marco Livingstone's 1990 survey on Pop,¹¹⁵ he dismisses her by writing that 'her fatal illness prevented the possibility of any real development at the most crucial point of her career'.¹¹⁶ The comment is particularly disingenuous, Tate argues, because Derek Boshier, Boty's friend and Pop ally, is given several pages and colour reproductions, despite being 'younger and even more briefly involved in Pop before he turned to hard edged abstraction'.¹¹⁷

Tate continues to play an important role in the reappraisal of women in Pop Art, contributing chapters to the exhibition catalogues for *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958–68* (2010)¹¹⁸ and *This Was Tomorrow* (2016),¹¹⁹ and the edited volume *Pop Art and Design* (2018).¹²⁰ In this latter book, Tate takes on the problematic discussed by Hal Foster in *The First Pop Age* (2012) that women Pop artists 'could not act as its principle *subjects* in large part because they were conscripted as its primary *objects*' [Tate's emphases].¹²¹ For Tate, this statement 'denies women artists agency'. Rather, it is precisely this ability to occupy 'the subjective position of the dolly bird and sexual woman as intellectual, proactive artist' – to perform 'right across the "long front of culture"', as defined by the critic Lawrence Alloway – that causes Boty's work to lie 'at the heart of ... Pop's ambiguous and paradoxical dynamics'.¹²²

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁵ Livingstone only included one female artist – Nikki de Saint-Phalle – in his exhibition of 202 Pop Art works, *Pop*, at the Royal Academy the following year. Sue Tate, 'Pauline Boty: Pop Artist, Pop Persona, Performing Across the Long Front of Culture', *Pop Art and Design*, Anne Massey and Alex Seago, eds, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 152.

¹¹⁶ Marco Livingstone in Tate, *Gendering the field*, 34.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Sue Tate, 'A Transgression Too Far: Women Artists and the British Pop Art Movement', in Sid Sachs and Kalliopi Minioudaki, eds, *Subversive Seduction: Women Pop Artists*, New York: Abbeville Press, 2010.

¹¹⁹ Sue Tate, 'Pauline Boty: An Artist for Our Time', *This Was Tomorrow: Pop Art in Britain*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2016.

¹²⁰ Tate, 'Pauline Boty: Pop Artist, Pop Persona', 148-69.

¹²¹ Ibid., 153.

¹²² Ibid.

Ali Smith: the power of fiction and memory in keeping women artists' work alive

Katherine Whitehorn's book review ends by suggesting that *Talking to Women* would make 'rich raw material for everyone else's novels'.¹²³ And, in fact, Boty's interview has been used as source material for a fictional novel by Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2016), the first of her four-season quartet, and presumably the reason she was invited to write the introduction to the *Talking to Women* re-edition.¹²⁴ Boty's inclusion in *Autumn* certainly offers rich narrative material: it is through discussions of her work that relationships between the fictional characters are shaped, and the discovery of her work offers a source of aesthetic and intellectual awakening for the young, female protagonist. But Boty's inclusion must surely also be read as a feminist strategy, given that Smith has consistently championed female artists (and authors) in her writing, particularly those whose work has been historically undervalued, such as Barbara Hepworth's sculpture as the inspiration for a hallucinatory floating head in *Autumn*'s sequel *Winter* (2017) or the photographer Lee Miller in her essay collection, *Artful* (2012).

At the heart of *Autumn* is the tender and enduring friendship between Elisabeth Demand – who in the story flits between being a lonely seven-year-old and a thirty-two-year-old 'no-fixed-hours casual contract junior lecturer at a university in London'¹²⁵ – and the elderly Daniel Gluck, who entertains and intrigues her with tales of an artist he once knew and adulated: Pauline Boty. But while Elisabeth and Daniel are fictional (or semi-fictional, at least),¹²⁶ Boty's part is based on nonfiction sources;¹²⁷ in her acknowledgements, Smith claims to be 'deeply indebted to everyone who's written about Pauline Boty but above all to the seminal work of Sue Tate ... and also to the interview with Boty by Nell Dunn'.¹²⁸ And yet, as it is told in *Autumn*, Boty's exuberant life and subsequent almost total neglect seems too fanciful to be real. Indeed, in the early part of the story, Daniel often invites Elisabeth to

¹²³ Whitehorn, 'Woman to woman', 26.

¹²⁴ In *The Hidden Mod in Modern Art* Thomas Crow cites Pauline Boty's inclusion in the 'present-day narrative' of Ali Smith's *Autumn* but does not cite the historical sources that Smith herself acknowledges for the Boty references. See Crow, 89.

¹²⁵ Ali Smith, *Autumn*, London: Penguin, 2017, 15.

¹²⁶ Daniel could be regarded as a composite of the many men (including teachers, fellow students and artists) who admired Boty.

¹²⁷ Smith's *Autumn* might be considered 'parafictional': 'Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived.' Carrie Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility', *October*, no. 129, Summer 2009, 54.

¹²⁸ Smith, *Autumn*, 263.

close her eyes and ‘see’ Boty’s work in her imagination, given that there is – at that moment in time the novel is set – no material evidence of her work, either as physical artwork or as printed reproductions. Following Daniel’s lengthy ekphrastic description of a dense and intricate collage by Boty (that includes a paper moon; a cut-out of a women in a swimsuit; a giant human hand with tiny baby hand holding its thumb; a repeated picture of a woman’s face on which is stuck real hair samples; a small drawing of a ship; and fragments of actual pink lace), Elisabeth questions its veracity:

Does that mean it’s a real picture? Elisabeth said. Not one you made up?

It’s real, Daniel said. Well, it was once. A friend of mine did it. An artist. But I’m making it up from memory. How did it strike your imagination?

Like it would be if I was taking drugs, Elisabeth said.¹²⁹

Boty’s work then, for the first part of the novel, exists in hallucinatory form.

Notwithstanding, Elisabeth’s attempt to pass on the description of the work to her mother is met with intense disapproval, especially because it was issued by a man: ‘He told you about a woman’s body, a woman’s insides, her mother said.’¹³⁰ When Elisabeth describes Boty’s collage painting *It’s a Man’s World* (1965) – ‘It’s got a stately home in it, and the Beatles and Elvis Presley and a president in the back of the car getting shot’ – her mother yells at her:

Unnatural.

Unhealthy.

You’re not to.

I forbid it.

That’s enough.¹³¹

It is only when Elisabeth serendipitously comes across a catalogue of Boty’s work in a charity shop (which we assume to be either the one by Tate and Mellor, or the later one by Tate) that Elisabeth – and the reader – is offered proof that the artist is not a figment of

¹²⁹ Ibid., 74-5.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹³¹ Ibid., 83.

Daniel's imagination.¹³² Smith's novel, then, prompts us to reflect on the power of fiction and memory to keep an artist's work alive when artworks and their visual documentation are scarce or absent. But the way in which Smith toys with our sense of what is real and what is dreamed or imagined, as well as alternating between time periods, prevents the reader from interpreting the narrative logically and cohesively. What is uncomfortable in the narrative – such as Boty's long-forgotten legacy and the negative attitudes expressed towards female artists – is thus not easily resolved. Smith's complex collaging of fact and fiction echoes Boty's visual collages, like those described above, that resist straightforward description and interpretation. As with the analysis of women's transgressive role in New Wave cinema, we might say that *Autumn* presents an uncontainable excess of meaning.

Fiction as method

Katherine Weese comes to a similar conclusion in her discussion of Ali Smith's novel *The Accidental* (2005), which she proposes should most productively be analysed 'at the intersection of feminist and unnatural theories of narrative' – whereby unnatural narrative theory deals with 'events depicted within a storyworld that are deemed impossible in the actual world, but also ... ways that the act of narration itself becomes unnatural'.¹³³ Weese gives as an example of unnatural devices in *The Accidental* the puzzling slippages between narrator and fictional character, which she terms 'ontological metalepses'.¹³⁴ In the context of *The Accidental*, the unnatural devices have a clear function in that they "'de-naturalize" or lay bare the ways in which ideologies of gender masquerade as the natural order of things and reveal their constructedness'.¹³⁵ Weese concludes by arguing that this type of reading or interpretation 'far from reducing the impossible elements in literary texts, might actually hinge on preserving their unnatural qualities'.¹³⁶

John Shaw and Theo Reeves-Evison, in *Fiction as Method* (2017), see the ambiguous relationship between fiction and nonfiction as a consequence of a 'near untraceable series of

¹³² In an interview with Katy Hessel for 'The Great Women Artists' podcast (episode 64), Ali Smith similarly describes chancing on Boty's work through a tiny reproduction of her painting *Colour Her Gone* (1962) in *frieze* magazine. <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/ali-smith-on-barbara-hepworth-pauline-boty-tacita-dean/id1480259187?i=1000521375124>. Accessed 10 June 2021.

¹³³ Katherine Weese, 'Feminism, Film and the Fantastic: An "Unnaturalizing" Reading of Ali Smith's *The Accidental*', *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 8: 2, Winter 2016, 137-8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 156-7.

discursive shifts, ruptures, and metamorphoses [that] have occurred in the way we experience fiction' since the 'rise of fictionality in the mid-eighteenth century'. Furthermore, 'borders of the "protective affective enclosure" that fiction once represented have become more permeable' while 'fictions proliferate in aspects of our lives, unconstrained by the novel as a specific form of art'.¹³⁷ Smith herself echoed this idea of 'living by fiction' in a public lecture that followed the publication of *Autumn*. Detailing the reasons, for her, why the novel matters today, she argued:

In the age of [American ex-President Donald] Trump, when truth is so blatantly revealed as something dismissible, somehow simply no longer relevant, the novel matters even more, because to some extent we all live by fictions, we have all along survived by using them. But in an age in which living by fiction means having powerful fictions politically, nationally, internationally foisted upon us, fiction lets us read and understand such fictions. But isn't fiction a lie too? ... A lie's not true. A fiction also knows it's not true, but the difference between a lie and a fiction is this: a lie goes out of its way to subvert truth. That's what a lie is for. That's its intention. A fiction has no such intention. If it intends anything to do with truth, it's to help us get to truth, maybe truth that's difficult to articulate, and for which reason has had to take another shape.¹³⁸

For Shaw and Reeves-Everson, the very act of reading involves 'constantly looping into and out of, and stacking up, manifold registers of criticality, credulity, and "entertaining belief" in the text'. And accordingly, this act 'sharpens our faculties and widens our horizons – both inside the dream, and on waking from it'.¹³⁹ The authors quote Félix Guttari's idea that fiction has a generative effect, that it 'leaves behind trails that ... are "stroboscopic after-images of other universes"', not 'merely fantastical universes to which we have escaped and which we now hazily recall'.¹⁴⁰ Shaw and Reeves-Everson likewise note the capacity of fiction to gather 'into its orbit a number of agents that progressively fill out its content'. They borrow from Tim Ingold the notion of 'meshwork' to describe the sending of 'semiotic ripples in multiple directions at the same time ... creating strands ... where lines don't serve

¹³⁷ Shaw and Reeves-Everson, *Fiction as Method*, 27.

¹³⁸ Ali Smith, 'The novel in the age of Trump: When politics is built on fictions, it's fiction that can help us get to the truth', The New Statesman Goldsmiths Prize lecture, Goldsmiths, University of London, 27 September 2017. Edited transcript: http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA513760487&v=2.1&u=ed_itw&it=r&p=ANE&sw=w. Accessed 8 June 2021.

¹³⁹ Shaw and Reeves-Everson, *Fiction as Method*, 57.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

simply to connect points but constitute paths along which growth and movement are lived out'.¹⁴¹ There are, they argue, real-life consequences to fiction.

Autumn can certainly be seen as a productive source for academic research, such was the impressive depth of Smith's own research into Pauline Boty and her work, and the rich way in which she depicted them in her novel that brought them back to life. It was through reading *Autumn*, for example, that I became aware that Boty's interview for *Talking to Women* had been republished elsewhere: an abridged, more polished version was published in the September 1964 edition of *Vogue* (fig. 14). Reading about Elisabeth's fictional trip to the British Library to find the copy of *Vogue* in *Autumn* prompted my own visit to see if this was true – it was. This was fortunate, since the *Vogue* version was not mentioned in the re-edition of *Talking to Women* and not remembered by Nell Dunn herself when I interviewed her.



Figure 14 Nell Dunn, 'Living Doll', *Vogue*, 1 September 1964. Photograph by David Bailey.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 35.

The *Vogue* version of the interview is titled ‘Living Doll: Pauline Boty’ – a play on Cliff Richards’ 1959 hit single, as well as the curious small doll pictured alongside Boty’s face like a kind of mini-me (*Doll in a Box*, made by Boty).¹⁴² Ultimately, however, the title asks viewers to appreciate the doll-like qualities of Boty herself. The close-up portrait of Boty is spread across two-thirds of a double-page spread, with one third left for text. The photo was taken from an elevated angle, leaning over her reclining figure, and focuses on her doe eyes, heavy with Brigitte Bardot-style make-up (she was nicknamed the ‘Wimbledon Bardot’ at college), and slightly parted lips. This highly seductive image, by *Vogue* fashion and celebrity photographer David Bailey, contrasts strikingly with the more serious and austere photograph of Boty by Michael Ward used to illustrate *Talking to Women*: a grainy, black-and-white portrait of Boty in long-sleeved top and apron standing over one of her paintings, presumably in her studio (fig. 15). The interview text, over twenty pages long in the book, is reduced to two columns in *Vogue*. In the magazine, the standfirst begins: ‘Pauline Boty, blonde, brilliant, 26. She has been married for over a year and her husband is inordinately proud of her achievements...’ The *Vogue* article makes no reference to the context of the

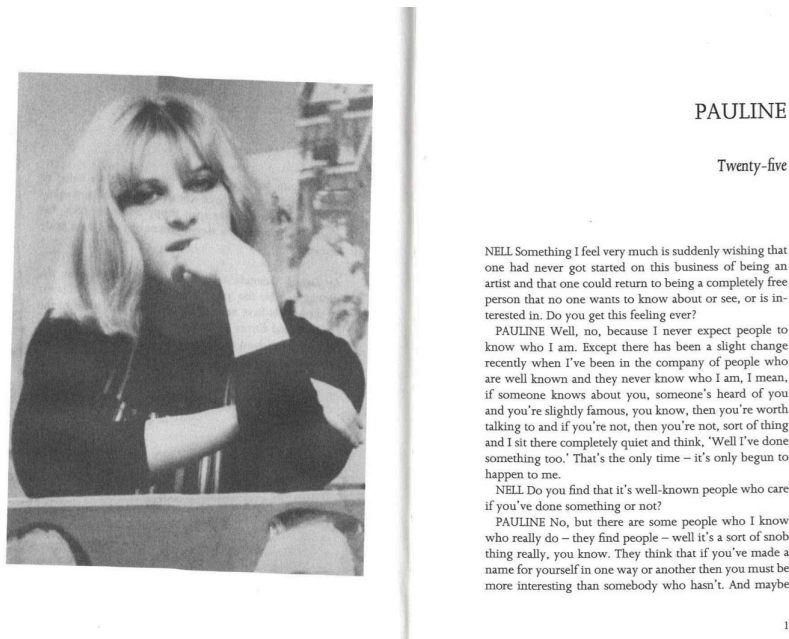


Figure 15 Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women*, London, Silver Press, 2018, 1. Photograph by Michael Ward.

¹⁴² Sue Tate also makes a connection between the doll and Boty’s affair with married TV producer Phillip Saville, since in her interview with Dunn, Boty described her experience of the relationship as being like a doll taken out of a box and played with at whim. See Tate, *Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 2013, 80.

interview – the upcoming publication of Dunn’s *Talking to Women* – suggesting that the interview text was simply an extended caption to the real point of the piece, to showcase Bailey’s portrait of Boty.

Boty might well have been resigned to such patronising and sexist appropriation of her image, having experienced it repeatedly. In the exhibition catalogue for her retrospective of Boty’s work, Tate details the occasions Boty’s image was exploited and manipulated. In 1959, her image appeared in a tabloid article about the Anti-Ugly Action Group (an architectural planning campaign group), the headline reading: ‘Of all things she is the secretary of the ANTI-UGLIES!’, an arrow pointing from ‘she’ to a photo of Boty.¹⁴³ She was interviewed for *Men Only* magazine in March 1963, her cover image cropped so that she appeared naked, and, Tate points out, with no caption or context to ‘anchor her identity as the artist’.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, photographs of Boty by Michael Ward – who, in addition to the *Talking to Women* portrait had photographed her for *The Evening Standard* – were used in 1965, without his knowledge (via his agency), in *Tit Bits* soft-porn mag to illustrate the article ‘Pauline has a contract to thrill’.¹⁴⁵

Tate also critically assesses the best-known media appearance by Boty, in the aforementioned *Monitor* episode, *Pop Goes the Easel*. Boty, in particular, is remembered for acting out a surreal nightmare scene (one she had dreamed herself) in which she attempts to escape from a woman in a wheelchair down a seemingly endless corridor. Yet, despite this celebrated television programme keeping her reputation alive for the years in which her works went missing after her death, Tate argues that *Pop Goes the Easel* prioritised Boty’s looks over her opinions. Following the nightmare episode, a long sequence is devoted to Boty backcombing her hair in front of her mirror, while the coffee she is making for the other three artists brews. When her artwork is finally shown to the camera, she is given less opportunity to comment on it than the other artists on their work, merely playing “spot the image” with Peter Blake, who in mildly patronising avuncular tones keeps asking, as if to a child, “What’s this Pauline?”. This is, Tate argues, in contrast to evidence that in Boty’s pre-interview with the director, she elaborated much further on an erotic, Freudian-inspired analysis of her imagery.

¹⁴³ *Daily Express*, 16 March 1959. Reprinted in Tate, *Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman*, 36.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

The attempt to subvert her own image – by overlaying a subversive reference to Marlene Dietrich’s cabaret singer in *Blue Angel* onto her mime of Shirley Temple as a cherubic girl singing ‘On the Good Ship Lollipop’ – went unnoticed by the original audience. According to Tate: ‘At the time, however, there was no resonance or context within which it could be understood and it had the effect of locking Boty back into mass culture as “actress” rather than being seen as a proactive artist.’¹⁴⁶

And, indeed, Boty did take on a range of acting roles, often typecast as a prostitute or seductress.¹⁴⁷ For example, she plays one of Alfie’s unnamed girlfriends in the eponymous 1966 film – unnamed in the film credits, too, as Ali Smith’s fictional character Elisabeth indignantly points out in *Autumn*.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Elisabeth is clearly taken with Boty’s performance and wants to write about it in her dissertation. But she also understands, like Tate, the futility of pointing out any subversive element. As she says:

You can’t write, even though it’s a lot more like the language expected, *though she’s in that film for less than twenty seconds she adds something crucial and crucially female about pleasure to its critique of the contemporary new and liberated ethos, which was indeed what she was also doing with her aesthetic.*

Blah.¹⁴⁹

Elisabeth’s frustration is exacerbated by the disparaging attitude of her tutor, who had earlier claimed that there were no female Pop artists. When she then confronts him with the example of Boty, he retorts that

they’re pretty dismissable. Poor paintings. Not very good. She was quite Julie Christie. Very striking girl. There’s a film of her, Ken Russell, and she’s a bit eccentric in it if I remember rightly, dresses in a top hat, miming along to Shirley Temple. I mean attractive and so on, but pretty execrable.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Tate, *Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman*, 51-2.

¹⁴⁷ Boty took acting roles at the Royal Court theatre, in an episode of ITV’s *Armchair Theatre* (1962), and in the BBC’s *Contract to Kill* mini-series (1965) – this latter parodied by the ‘Contract to thrill’ tabloid headline mentioned earlier. The part of Liz in the film version of *Billy Liar* (1963) was apparently based on Boty, although in the end the part was given to Julie Christie. The cover story on Boty in *Scene* magazine (8 November 1962) plays on these stereotypes; the ironic tone of its opening lines does not detract, however, from the blatant misogyny: ‘Actresses often have tiny brains. Painters often have large beards. Imagine a brainy actress who is also a painter and also a blonde and you have PAULINE BOTY’, Tate, *Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman*, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *Autumn*, 223.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

Like Boty in *Alfie*, the art tutor is unnamed, perhaps in retaliation for Boty's anonymity or perhaps to make him a kind of every figure for those (particularly male) art critics and historians who wrote her out of history.

Boty was co-presenter of BBC radio's *The Public Ear* from 1963 to 1964, a role that gave her the opportunity to vent some of her frustration at media stereotyping.¹⁵¹ In one memorable episode, she satirises 'sex advertising' in the guise of a type of performance poetry: 'Run free. You can live dangerously in your nylons ... How much sex is there in a gallon of petrol? ... But if you know your Freud ... He knows our hidden fears.'¹⁵² As a montage of disjointed observations on adverts that exploit male and female desires, it echoed the witty juxtapositions of Boty's eclectic collages. Yet, despite only being able to hear her voice, reviewers still couldn't get past Boty's looks. A *Radio Times* editorial that begins by expressing admiration for Boty's 'controversial remarks [that] are always incisive and pricklingly acute', can't resist concluding that she is 'a beautiful woman of twenty-five with novel ideas on innumerable subjects'.¹⁵³ In-between, the writer defines Boty as 'a wife who lives in a flat in Holland Park; a pop artist who has had a one-man [sic] exhibition at Grabowski Gallery in Chelsea; an actress who has appeared at the Arts and the Royal Court; a teacher who on Friday afternoons lectured in Hammersmith'.¹⁵⁴ He goes on to write, somewhat grudgingly: 'But it is as a pop artist that she is best known', thus exposing his apparent difficulty in accepting this to be her primary achievement over her marital status.¹⁵⁵ Boty would have been unimpressed. In her *Talking to Women* interview, she agrees with Dunn that marriage is 'out of date', and admits that she was 'rather surprised when I did it'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ In her podcast on Pauline Boty, Sue Tate claims that Boty's monologues for *The Public Ear* were so radical that they could have been in the feminist *Spare Rib* magazine ten years later. 'Sue Tate on Pauline Boty', in Katy Hessel, *The Great Women Artists*, episode 55. <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/sue-tate-on-pauline-boty/id1480259187?i=1000512318535>. Accessed 8 June 2021.

¹⁵² *The Public Ear*, 3 November 1963, BBC Radio 1. Programme number YR 00505/2, BBC Radio Archive, British Library.

¹⁵³ Editorial, 'The Public Ear', *Radio Times*, 7–13 March [no year given], 16. BBC Written Archives Centre R19/1, 827/1 – The Public Ear, File I, 1963–65. This file contains a number of letters to Boty, complaining about her 'outspoken criticism' of Elvis Presley. She also wrote cutting satires on rich people, 'smug' Englishmen and 'dreary' English women.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* The editor of *Radio Times* (1954–68) was Douglas G. Williams.

¹⁵⁶ Dunn, *Talking to Women*, 1965, 20.

Conclusion

The interviews in this chapter contrast sharply with the formal, highly stage-managed encounters that characterised their public form on BBC radio and television in the previous two chapters. In the literary world of book publishing and scriptwriting, experiments with interviews were an extension of the social-realist interest in dialogue. Transcripts were loosened up to reflect real speech, and power relations between interviewer and interviewee relaxed in accordance with less formal peer-to-peer encounters. The *Paris Review* had espoused interviewing as a collaborative exercise, and yet their interviewers were all but anonymous. In Nell Dunn's *Talking to Women*, however, the sense of collaboration and participant equality is more palpable, reflected in Dunn's preferred terms 'talking' and 'conversation' over 'interview'.

Talking to Women hit a critical nerve for featuring women talking unguardedly in a loosely edited recorded interview format – all those elements that seemed to really provoke the scorn of reviewers. But it is precisely this critical backlash that underlined the need for the book in the first place, and the need for women to create a forum for themselves. The male editors of the *Paris Review* were self-consciously building a pantheon of writers through their interviews. But most of these were male writers. The first anthology of *Writers at Work*, had, after all, only featured two women (Dorothy Parker and Françoise Sagan) among a total of sixteen writers. Art-world interview anthologies, even by women interviewers, similarly neglected women; Katharine Kuh's *The Artist's Voice: talks with seventeen artists* (1960) featured only one woman out of seventeen. *Talking to Women* is therefore an early and vital example of women-only interview anthologies that were proof that women artists and writers did exist and were worth listening to for their opinions. It would take until the 1970s, when second-wave feminism was more firmly established, for collections of women artist interviews to be published, as with American art critic Cindy Nemser's *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 women artists* (1975). Interviews could then become a form of self-historicisation for previously ignored women.

The increased availability of portable tape-recorders in the 1960s was another factor in the more creative use of the interview format, now for personal rather than simply media purposes. The women in *Talking to Women* had nothing to promote or prove by talking to Dunn, and conversely Dunn had no specific agenda, other than to satisfy her curiosity about the attitudes of women of her generation towards a range of existential, moral and creative

questions. Rather, the book is an exercise in mutual respect – for each other in their various roles as women, but also for the shared pleasure of simply talking.

However, Dunn does not simply listen but actively takes part in the conversations, offering her own opinions on being an artist, having children, marriage and her resistance to the pressures of ‘looking nice’. This fascination with the private as well as the public lives of interviewees anticipated the defiant ‘personal is political stance’ of early feminism. This was the idea, neatly summarised by Louise Levesque-Lopman in *Claiming Reality:*

Phenomenology and Women’s Experience (1988), that ‘[w]hat women may think is an individual problem may be a social predicament and hence a political problem’,¹⁵⁷ at a time when ‘conceptions of truth and knowledge that are accepted ... have been shaped throughout history by “male” cultures in which women’s experience has been treated as secondary or invisible’.¹⁵⁸ The art of active listening and the care not to catch out one’s subjects, but rather coax them into sharing experiences without fear, would likewise become an important methodology of feminist consciousness-raising talking groups. The publication of a new edition of *Talking to Women* in 2018, over fifty years after the original version, validates the pioneering nature of the book in taking women’s first-hand accounts of their daily life seriously.

Given her sexist treatment by the media, unable to get past her looks, and her art-institutional neglect, it is no surprise that Pauline Boty’s most comprehensive and revealing interview might not be found in an art catalogue or a mainstream news outlet, but in the pages of Dunn’s *Talking to Women*. And that it has been referenced in every art-historical essay on Boty ever since, including her inclusion, in 2019, in *The New York Times* series ‘Overlooked’, ‘a series of obituaries about remarkable people whose deaths, beginning in 1851, went unreported’ in this newspaper.¹⁵⁹ Boty’s work continues to be reappraised in the light of Tate’s and Mellor’s scholarship, the reissue of Dunn’s interview and the interest by Ali Smith, with Tate acquiring *Portrait of Derek Marlowe with Unknown Ladies* (1962–3) in 2018; Boty’s last commission, *BUM* (1966), selling at Christie’s for £632,750 in November 2017; and her collage work included in the major exhibition, *Cut and Paste: 400 years of*

¹⁵⁷ Louise Levesque-Lopman, *Claiming Reality: Phenomenology and Women’s Experience*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988, 47.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵⁹ Rosenberg, ‘Overlooked No More: Pauline Boty, Rebellious Pop Artist’.

Collage, at the National Galleries of Scotland (7 July – 27 October 2019). A website for Boty has recently been created in conjunction with the Pauline Boty Estate and Goldsmiths College Library, with Sue Tate providing research material.¹⁶⁰ The conversation with Dunn is particularly important to Boty’s legacy for not neatly trying to package her, but rather producing an ‘excess of meaning’ that cannot be easily resolved and that continues to provide rich and generative source material for all those fascinated by her work.

As Gilbert says to Ernest, in Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Critic as Artist’, dialogue is a ‘wonderful literary form’ that allows writers to present their surroundings and experiences ‘from each point of view, and show it to us in the round, as a sculptor shows us things’,¹⁶¹ as with Dunn’s atmospheric *Up the Junction*, in which Dunn captures the speech patterns and attitudes of Battersea’s working class. Her *Talking to Women* then presented dialogue in its purest form, as the transcription of real, intimate conversations with women she liked and admired. Yet with her idiosyncratic editing style, Dunn nonetheless manages to maintain the sense of dialogue as a literary form. As Philip Gourevitch had noted of the *Paris Review*, interviews can be seen as a literary genre in themselves.

Interviews and fiction are thus not incompatible. Ali Smith proved with *Autumn* that interviews can offer access to the most intimate thoughts of another person, especially when other source material is so lacking, as with Pauline Boty. And as Zadie Smith writes, in her influential article ‘Fascinated to Presume: In Defence of Fiction’, ‘making up fictional people ... starts as a consciousness out in the world: looking, listening, noticing’¹⁶² – a parallel, surely, with the *Paris Review*’s ‘waiting, listening and inquiring’, and Dunn’s interview philosophy, too.

¹⁶⁰ See <https://paulineboty.org/> for Boty’s exhibition history, bibliography and timeline. Accessed 10 June 2021.

¹⁶¹ Anon, ‘The Critic as Artist’, *Intentions by Oscar Wilde*, London: James R. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1891. <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/books/critic-as-artist/docview/2138581211/se-2?accountid=10673>. Accessed 8 June 2021.

¹⁶² Zadie Smith, ‘Fascinated to Presume: In Defense of Fiction’, *The New York Review of Books*, 24 October 2019. www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/. Accessed 8 June 2021.

Chapter 4

Extreme realism: New Journalism and slice-of-life recording

Viva was appalled. “I was getting dressed to go on The Merv Griffin Show — my first time on TV! — and this kid walked in and dumped this thing on me as I was putting on my ten separate clumps of eyelashes. And I said, I’m sorry, I have to cancel, and [the booker] asked why. And I said, because this horrible pack of lies has just appeared in *New York* [magazine], and my parents are going to see it — oh my God, I’m ruined.

– Christopher Bonanos: ‘Viva back in the Spotlight’ (2016)¹

In this chapter I continue to investigate the relationship between interviews and fiction, this time in the New York publishing world of the late 1960s. My case study is a New Journalism-style interview of Warhol ‘superstar’ Viva (born 1938) by the American writer Barbara Goldsmith (1931–2016), published in *New York* magazine on 29 April 1968.² Titled ‘La Dolce Viva’ and illustrated with risqué photographs by Diane Arbus (1923–71), the article documents a series of seemingly mundane moments spent with Viva: attending a movie-screening at Warhol’s studio, the ‘Factory’; hanging around her Upper East Side apartment; going to dinner with the Warhol entourage; and finally getting locked out of the Factory. The date of its publication is significant. Just over a month later, on 3 June 1968, Warhol was shot, and nearly killed, by Valerie Solanas, with the effect that the Warhol entourage became less open to journalists (or any other stranger) associating with them, and Warhol’s reputation took on more gravitas.³ Viva herself left Warhol’s circle in November 1969.⁴

At this time, artist interviews were appearing with increasing frequency in the American art press. As Jeanne Siegel observed in the introduction to her interview anthology *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*, ‘Artists developed a pervasive desire to discuss, explain, and control their work through their own words by the mid-sixties perhaps as in no other time in

¹ Christopher Bonanos, ‘April 29, 1968: Viva, Back in the Spotlight; The photo, now at the Whitney, almost killed this magazine. The subject still hates it, too’, *New York*, 18 April 2016, 8.

² Viva’s birth name is Janet Susan Mary Hoffmann.

³ Viva was on the phone to Warhol when he was shot.

⁴ See Blake Gopnik, *Warhol*, London: Allen Lane: 2020, 596.

history.⁵ Marcel Duchamp, a major influence on the American art scene who died in 1968, was particularly amenable to interviews, and wrote numerous critical pieces in the 1960s. Siegel remarked that the ‘artist’s personal account of intention in the work became more important than any subjective interpretation offered by the critic, often accompanying the work as text along with the title’.⁶ The pioneering documentary film *Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene 1940–1970* (1972) featured direct commentary from a cross-section of American artists, from the older generation like Barnett Newman to the younger, like Andy Warhol, speaking casually to interviewer-director Emile de Antonio in their studios. By contrast, critics could no longer expect to be treated with deference, and were becoming more self-conscious as a result. The artist project *Critic* (1966), by Les Levine, presented fifteen New York-based critics talking to camera about their craft for two minutes each. In it, Max Kozloff speaks of the ‘shifting of roles’ by which critics put on exhibitions, whereas artists ‘become their own critics’, while *Artforum* editor Annette Michelson talks of artists feeling that they ‘have in a sense to perform a critical task which hasn’t really been performed to their satisfaction by critics until now’.⁷

Meanwhile, the most high-profile experiments in mainstream journalism in 1960s America were undertaken by writers grouped under the category of ‘New Journalism’.⁸ This form of reporting used fictional techniques to produce non-fiction writing that, according to Tom Wolfe (1930–2018), a key advocate of the genre, was as – and often more – ‘absorbing’ and

⁵ Siegel gave the examples of Minimalist sculptors Donald Judd, Mel Bochner and Robert Smithson writing in *Arts* magazine from 1964, and Robert Morris writing a ‘little later’ in *Artforum*. Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1992, 1-2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷ The original visual track of the film was lost, but most of the audio remains and was transcribed for a publication by Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, on the occasion of their exhibition *The Critic*, 13 September – 26 October 2019. The exhibition also included the April 1968 issue of *Art and Artists* magazine with its cover image of Richard Hamilton’s caustic *The Critic Laughs* (1968), a surreal model made of a novelty candy denture stuck into the head of an electric toothbrush.

⁸ Tom Wolfe proposed that the term was first used in 1965 in relation to articles by journalists like Jimmy Breslin and Gay Talese, and that it began to be used more widely the following year. Truman Capote’s success with *In Cold Blood*, serialised in the *New Yorker* in 1965 and published in book form in 1966, was seen by Wolfe as having given New Journalism (Capote preferred his own term ‘nonfiction fiction’) ‘an overwhelming momentum’. Wolfe, ‘Introduction’, in Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, *The New Journalism*, London: Picador, 1975, 37-41.

‘gripping’ than a novel.⁹ Interviews were both a preferred method and published form of New Journalism, with Wolfe describing New Journalism’s ‘contributions to the interview story’ as having made it possible

to answer with greater frankness than ever before the question one is left with after most such stories – “Yes, but what is So-and-so really like?” – and to depict the entire social setting in which the subject lives; and, where possible, to render the interview in the form of a story.¹⁰

Needless to say, the goal of most journalistic interviews – certainly of celebrities – is to find out what someone is *really* like. Could New Journalism prove more incisive about art and artists than the art criticism of the time?

In ‘La Dolce Viva’, Viva’s side of the conversation has been transcribed in detail, including a phone conversation about an unpaid bill. She talks with unnerving candour about her family, precarious financial situation, sex and attitude to nudity, drug-taking and her association with Warhol. By contrast, Goldsmith opted not to include her own questions in the article, making it appear as if Viva were talking spontaneously and naturally – rather than responding to a journalist’s pointed questions. Wolfe, who (with co-editor E. W. Johnson) included the interview in the seminal anthology *The New Journalism* (1975), described the interview as a story developing ‘through such moments as Viva’s conversation with Con Edison electricity company and her confrontation with Warhol himself’.¹¹ But does the reader find out what Viva is ‘really like’, or did the quest to tell a good story obscure any significant revelations or diminish the reader’s ability to empathise with Viva?

In any case, Viva’s frankness, licentiousness and naïveté were surely irresistible ingredients for an entertaining celebrity magazine interview – and, indeed, it won Barbara Goldsmith a

⁹ Wolfe, ‘Introduction’, in Wolfe and Johnson, *The New Journalism*, 11. This blurring of fiction and nonfiction would become a hallmark of postmodernist writing, such as the so-called ‘paraliterary’ (as Rosalind Krauss described them) critical texts of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. In the 1970s a type of experimental critical writing that often incorporated found autobiography was named New Narrative, and included writers Kathy Acker, Gary Indiana and Cookie Mueller. The 1990s then saw the emergence of fictocriticism, which further sought to dissolve the boundary between literature and criticism; while most recently, autotheory, mixing theory with autobiography, is a mode of critical artistic writing closely associated with feminism and queer activism, and whose foundation texts include Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1997) and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015).

¹⁰ Wolfe, preface to ‘La Dolce Viva’, in Wolfe and Johnson, *The New Journalism*, 244.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

New York Times Outstanding Magazine Article Award in 1969.¹² But the interview's sensationalism came at a price. Wolfe quipped, with some pride, that 'it came close to finishing off' *New York* magazine.¹³

A letter to *New York* magazine congratulated Goldsmith for presenting 'the true picture' of this underground art scene, 'without moral judgements on her part'.¹⁴ Yet Goldsmith noted that *New York*'s editor Clay Felker also received 'thousands of letters saying, "This is a girl [Viva] whose picture has appeared in *Vogue* magazine and now you have pictures of her surrounded by drugs and dirt, and don't you have better things in life to devote your time to?"'¹⁵ Viva herself, forty-eight years after the interview, claimed to still be angry about what she considered to be a 'horrible pack of lies'; she remembered being worried that her parents were going to see it and that she would be 'ruined'. She went as far as to declare: 'A lot of horrible things have happened to me ... but I would consider that the worst.'¹⁶

The New Journalism interview can be compared, in terms of its ethics and relationship to realism, with the unedited, 'slice-of-life' interview style favoured by Warhol and his entourage, and most publicly evident in *Interview* magazine, launched in 1969. This latter, seemingly verbatim style was made possible by the availability of personal tape-recorders from the mid-1960s. For example, the novel *Talk* – published the same year as the Viva interview – was based on recordings by author Linda Rosenkrantz of conversations between three friends on holiday, similarly discussing everything from sex to the 1960s art scene in New York. Stephen Koch, introducing the book's 2015 reissue, describes *Talk* as a 'reality' novel, an 'authentic slice of the fabled 1960s'.¹⁷ Viva and Warhol also published slice-of-life novels, *Superstar* (1970) and *a: A novel* (1968) respectively, while many of Warhol's book

¹² As mentioned in the society report of the launch of Barbara Goldsmith's novel *The Straw Man, The Social Pictorial*, 23 February 1976. Barbara Goldsmith papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

¹³ Wolfe, preface to 'La Dolce Viva', in Wolfe and Johnson, *The New Journalism*, 244. Wolfe and Goldsmith were contributing editors to *New York*.

¹⁴ Alison Webb, 'Viva Observed', letter to editor, *New York*, 13 May 1968, 4.

¹⁵ Interview with Goldsmith, 2-55. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

¹⁶ Bonanos, 'April 29, 1968', 8. In a May 1975 interview with Bob Colacello for Warhol's *Interview* magazine, four years after Diane Arbus's suicide, Viva read out a poem about her experience with Arbus: '... When I saw what you did to me, I/ wept and howled and keened./ You who are older and wiser, whose/ eyes are brown and deep/ No pimp or hustler or gigolo, but a/ woman who could weep/ So I wasn't shocked in the least dear/nor did I shed a tear/ When they found your body, your/ bathtub as your bier.' 'Viva Talks', *Andy Warhol's Interview*, 5: 5, May 1975, 29.

¹⁷ Stephen Koch, 'Introduction', in Linda Rosenkrantz, *Talk*, New York: New York Review Books, 2015, vii.

projects were based on taped interviews.¹⁸ As broad definitions of the two modes of interviewing, New Journalism used the raw material of dialogue to create a narrative arc, full of drama, suspense and intrigue; while ‘slice-of-life’ interviewing can be seen as the opposite, avoiding ‘unnatural’ narrative arcs and actively trying to record and represent the most mundane, even boring details – ‘boring’ being a compliment in Warhol’s world.

Goldsmith, as a New Journalist, would later complain that everyone felt they could now be a writer, if only they had the time – based on the assumption, she put it, ‘that the writer serves merely as a conveyance mechanism, a conduit through which flow unfiltered, unprocessed stories’.¹⁹ Warholian-type interviews certainly give the impression of being unfiltered and unprocessed, what qualitative researchers might term ‘naturalised’ (‘where utterances are transcribed in as much detail as possible’)²⁰ rather than the ‘denaturalised’ (‘accuracy concerns the substance of the interview’ rather than every linguistic quirk)²¹ transcriptions of New Journalism. So, which is the more authentic? By which criteria might we judge degrees of authenticity and realism?

The rise of New Journalism

Like many of the interviews analysed in this thesis, ‘La Dolce Viva’ has been referenced and reprinted several times since its initial publication, including in a recent Warhol biography and in Viva’s semi-fictional memoir, *Superstar* – both discussed later. All the same, the interview’s inclusion in Wolfe’s and Johnson’s ‘best of’ anthology *The New Journalism* sealed it as a canonical example of the genre.

As an actress – or ‘Superstar’ – who had achieved fame in Warhol’s underground films, Viva fulfilled the first two of the four categories that John Hollowell identifies as typical New Journalism subjects in his book *Fact and Fiction: the new journalism and the nonfiction novel*. These are: celebrity, youth subculture, big events like criminal cases and anti-war

¹⁸ These included *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (1975), *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (1980) and *The Andy Warhol Diaries* (1989).

¹⁹ Barbara Goldsmith, ‘You Know, I Could Write the Most Wonderful Book’, *The New York Times Book Review*, 30 September 1984. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

²⁰ Daniel Oliver, Julianne Serovich and Tina Mason, ‘Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research’, *Social Forces*, December 2005, 84: 2, 1275.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1277.

protests, and general social and political reporting.²² With her bohemian attitude to nudity, sex and drugs, Superstar Viva was also not just any media personality but also ‘intimately bound to the extreme experiences of the social and political climate of the decade’ and thus a subject unfamiliar (and by extension of voyeuristic interest) to *New York*’s middle-class readers.²³ As Wolfe commented in relation to ‘La Dolce Viva’: ‘The art world existed in another galaxy. Only an extra-galactical creature could have watched these movies or “superstars” with a straight face.’²⁴

Wolfe’s introductory essays to *The New Journalism* included manifesto-type statements, such as the triumphant declaration that New Journalism dethroned the novel as ‘the most important literature been written in America today’.²⁵ He criticised contemporary fiction writing for having abandoned realism, instead retreating into the realms of magic and myth – or ‘Neo-Fabulism’, as he called it.²⁶ Wolfe blamed the demise of realism on the breaking up of bourgeois society: ‘A novelist could no longer portray a part of that society and hope to capture the Zeitgeist; all he would be left with was one of the broken pieces.’²⁷ Hollowell offered some other persuasive reasons for what he saw as the new ‘difficulty of writing fiction’ in the 1960s. These included the stream of headline-grabbing incidents of the era, including Kennedy’s assassination, that ‘seemed to pre-empt the possibilities of the novelist’s imagination’;²⁸ the rise of collective experiences in the 1960s, such as the Vietnam War, riots and mass political protests, impossible to account for in novels, conventionally ‘concerned with the individual’s fate’;²⁹ and, rather pragmatically, a preference for the immediacy of the magazine form, stemming from an impatience with waiting for fame and money in this new age of electronic media.³⁰

²² John Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction: the new journalism and the nonfiction novel*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977, 40.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Tom Wolfe’s ‘Excerpt on the Beginning of *New York Magazine*’. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

²⁵ Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 11.

²⁶ Likening the introduction of social realism into English literature in the eighteenth century to the introduction of electricity, Wolfe wrote that ‘to try to improve literary technique by abandoning social realism would be like an engineer trying to improve upon machine technology by abandoning electricity’. *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43

²⁸ Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8. Hollowell acknowledges that this point was made earlier by *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz.

But, for his part, Wolfe was less interested in the reasons for this abandonment of realism, and more thrilled at what he saw as the wide-open space left for New Journalism to chronicle contemporary society. This was particularly exciting, Wolfe wrote, as ‘New York was pandemonium with a big grin on’ in the 1960s;³¹ and ‘what really amazed me was that as a writer I had it practically all to myself’ (rather disrespectfully forgetting the other New Journalist writers in his anthology).³²

The use of literary techniques in journalism had been developed in the *Paris Review*, described in the previous chapter, such as editing interviews so that they follow a clear narrative arc. But New Journalism blurred the boundaries between journalism and literary fiction still further. For example, Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* was based on five years’ research that included interviewing killers in prison, a level of dedication typical of New Journalism. Wolfe elaborated on the research process of the New Journalist:

They developed the habit of staying with the people they were writing about for days at a time, weeks in some cases. They had to gather all the material the conventional journalist was after – and then keep going. It seemed all-important to *be there* when dramatic scenes took place, to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, the details of the environment. The idea was to give the full objective description, plus something that readers had always had to go to novels for: namely, the subjective or emotional life of the characters.³³

That combination of close but scientific observation of subjects could be likened to anthropology, and certainly Hollowell described Wolfe’s ‘ironic attitude toward American culture almost like that of an anthropologist studying a rare tribe’.³⁴ But was this ironic attitude, that suggests a certain impassivity, not in conflict with the New Journalist’s concern with ‘emotional life’, which implies a degree of closeness, even empathy? This ambivalent attitude and methodology of New Journalism poses ethical issues. After all, unlike with the *Paris Review*, editing New Journalist interviews was not a collaborative exercise. Goldsmith, in the cover letter accompanying her draft of ‘La Dolce Viva’, explicitly asked for the article ‘not to be shown to Viva or anyone connected with the Warhol group’.³⁵

³¹ Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 44.

³² *Ibid.*, 45.

³³ *Ibid.* 35.

³⁴ Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction*, 41.

³⁵ Letter from Barbara Goldsmith to Valerie Jennings, 4 April 1968. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

Wolfe presented New Journalism as a personality test that only tough-skinned writers would pass; that macho attitude was, no doubt, one of the reasons why it was such a male-dominated genre, with Joan Didion and Barbara Goldsmith as the only female contributors to the *New Journalism* anthology. Wolfe described what happens when reporters shadow their subject for a length of time: '[They] will develop a personal relationship of some sort. For many reporters this presents a more formidable problem than penetrating the particular scene in the first place. They become stricken with a sense of guilt, responsibility, obligation.'³⁶ Thus, he warned:

People who become overtly sensitive on this score should never take up the new style of journalism ... A writer needs at least enough ego to believe that what he is doing as a writer is as important as what anyone he is writing about is doing and that therefore he shouldn't compromise his own work.³⁷

Goldsmith's interview with Viva certainly displays no sense of guilt or obligation towards her subject.

In an unpublished essay draft called 'The New Interview', in the Tom Wolfe papers at the New York Public Library,³⁸ Wolfe described the kind of interviews the *Paris Review* was running in the 1950s and early 1960s as 'two-dimensional' with its standard interviewer-subject, question-answer format that he found 'flat, cold, and removed', relying as he saw it on 'skillful editing and arrangement for any impact that it might accidentally have'.³⁹ It took New Journalism writers such as Rex Reed in the mid-1960s to shoot 'some adrenalin into interviewing', developing a new form that 'was grounded in a concrete setting and developed through the use of scene, dialogue, and point of view'.⁴⁰ In doing so, the new interview format abandoned the question-answer 'in favor of a less formal, more artistic presentation which was essentially a dramatization of fact in a technically-fiction framework'.⁴¹ This resulted in a '3-D experience', in which the reader 'was now allowed to see, feel, taste, and smell as well as hear'.⁴² In the case of 'La Dolce Viva', the interview is thus not presented as

³⁶ Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ One of several drafts of introductory essays for *The New Journalism*.

³⁹ Tom Wolfe, 'The New Interview', Tom Wolfe papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Unpaginated.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

a Q&A but rather a montage of quotes imbedded within lengthy descriptions of atmosphere and mundane events.

Wolfe's interest in an expanded sensory perception no doubt drew on the writings of Marshall McLuhan, on whose media communication theories Wolfe had been one of the first to write in the popular press. In his 1965 profile of McLuhan, he detailed the latter's views on how television had changed the balance of the senses, from the visual to the aural. Furthermore, the new generation of under-twenty-five-year-olds, who had grown up with television, responded 'emotionally to the spoken word, they are "hot," they want to participate, to *touch*, to be involved'.⁴³ It follows that New Journalism had to adapt to competition from television journalism, and the new ways in which people responded to information.

***New York* magazine: chronicling new styles of life**

New York magazine began as the Sunday supplement for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Following the collapse of this parent newspaper in 1966, the supplement's editor, Clay Felker, re-launched it as the stand-alone, independent magazine *New York*. The magazine unapologetically belonged to the tabloid genre, in which, Wolfe remarked, 'unfiltered emotions are transformed, often on short deadlines, into dramas with characters and motives'.⁴⁴ Wolfe saw writing for popular magazines as a chance to destabilise the 'apparently eternal status structure' of twentieth-century literature,⁴⁵ arguing that the lack of traditions, rules and expectations of Sunday supplements, in particular, were an advantage, such that 'I never felt the slightest hesitation about trying any device that might conceivably grab the reader a few seconds longer'.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Felker considered the new magazine's main competitor to be the more established and serious *New Yorker*, which he scathingly decried as 'so damned dull'.⁴⁷

⁴³ Tom Wolfe, 'Marshall McLuhan. Suppose he is what he sounds like, the most important thinker since Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein, and Pavlov – What If He Is Right?', *New York Herald Tribune*, 21 November 1965, 6-9.

⁴⁴ Tom Wolfe in Steve Fishman, John Homans and Adam Moss, eds, *New York Stories: Landmark Writing from Four Decades of New York Magazine*, New York: Random House, 2008, xxxvi.

⁴⁵ Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁷ Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xv. Even before the founding of *New York*, Wolfe had written an unflattering profile of the *New Yorker*'s editor William Shawn, that grew into a 'murderous' feud, as gleefully recounted by Wolfe, which gained *New York* much valuable (if often negative) publicity. [xxi]

Felker's editorial talent, according to Wolfe, lay in the fact that he 'had developed night vision for detecting new styles of life', and the features he commissioned set out to describe them in intricate detail. This idea of 'style of life' was conceived by German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), who understood that all 'new styles of life ... were created by "status groups," like-minded souls who try to create spheres of their own, insulated from the opinions of people outside'.⁴⁸ From the late 1950s, those terms 'status' and 'style of life' entered mainstream language. As Wolfe summarised:

Clay realized the importance of detail as metonymy to bring alive the scenes that illustrated new styles of life. The new styles of life in turn revealed new status groups, some of which have proven influential enough to change life not merely in New York but all over the United States.⁴⁹

This interest in styles of life, Wolfe warned, is not the same as what became known as 'lifestyle'. Those magazines copying *New York* magazine created new style sections, which 'quickly degenerated into coverage not of styles of life in the Max Weber sense but style of living in the Martha Stewart sense, the right kitchenware, the right party planning, the right trips abroad'.⁵⁰

The third issue of the weekly *New York* magazine featured Goldsmith's article 'La Dolce Viva'. Having loaned Felker \$6,500 for the purchase of *New York*, Goldsmith was keen to be seen as a serious 'young writer', and not just a 'wealthy young woman'.⁵¹ In Wolfe's opinion, she succeeded. In his introduction to *New York Stories*, an anthology of 'landmark writing from four decades of *New York* magazine' (which didn't include 'La Dolce Viva'), Wolfe remembered the moment that Felker gave him Goldsmith's piece to read. In classic New Journalism style, he recollected: 'I was standing up when I started reading – and found I was unwilling to interrupt myself long enough to sit down. What I had in my hands was dynamite.'⁵² Why?

Tout le monde knew about the famous Andy Warhol and his famous Factory full of helpers and hangers-on. But Barbara Goldsmith's was the first story to capture the campy creepy K-Y/Vaseline-y queasiness of it... the Warhol style of life – a classic

⁴⁸ Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xvii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xxviii.

⁵¹ Goldsmith replaced the description 'wealthy young woman' with 'young writer' in her correction of the draft of Tom Wolfe's 'Excerpt on the Beginning of *New York* Magazine', Barbara Goldsmith papers.

⁵² Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xxii.

example, incidentally, of what Weber meant by a status group generating a style of life...'⁵³

Goldsmith's irreverence towards her subject was a hallmark of New Journalism. Hollowell made the point that New Journalism broke with the tradition of the star interview – as found in such magazines as *Photoplay*, *Screen Romances* and *Motion Picture* – to offer a 'less sentimental' take on celebrities. The titles of many canonical New Journalism articles, also featured in Wolfe's *The New Journalism* anthology, such as Gay Talese's 'Frank Sinatra Has a Cold' and Rex Reed's 'Do you sleep in the nude?' on ageing star Ava Gardner, brashly embody this new attitude.⁵⁴

Accompanying Goldsmith's article were two new controversial images by Diane Arbus, already known then for her snapshot documentary photographs of societal misfits and 'freaks'. Wolfe excitedly claimed to have 'never seen anything like it'. The photographs depict Viva 'reclining nude upon a ratty version of a Récamier sofa'; she looks, according to Wolfe, like a 'hairless rabbit', with eyes rolled 'up under her skull, as if she were stoned'.⁵⁵ Felker and Wolfe agreed it should be run (Wolfe: 'I don't see how you can *not* run it'),⁵⁶ despite the risk to advertising. And, indeed they did lose all their high-end, Madison Avenue advertisers: Felker suggested as much as \$500,000, half the first year's advertising revenue.⁵⁷ Moreover, the magazine's board were 'hopping', and would have fired Felker, had not the elder statesman Arman Erpf 'exercised moral suasion'.⁵⁸

Felker's writers, on the other hand, 'could only admire him for the risk he had taken, for brushing aside all the business types and seeing to it that a great story and a great photograph got published'.⁵⁹ Goldsmith herself confirmed the furore she caused by the story, recalling that Felker had said: 'You'd better leave town. This is just going to blow the top off New York.'⁶⁰ Goldsmith claimed to be unrepentant, telling Felker that the interview was 'simply a candid interview that refuses to glamorize this terrible drug-ridden life'.⁶¹ But why was she

⁵³ Ibid., xxii-iii.

⁵⁴ Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction*, 40.

⁵⁵ Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xxiii.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Arthur Lubow, *Diane Arbus: Portrait of a Photographer*, New York: Ecco Press, 2017, 414.

⁵⁸ Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xxiv.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Oral history interview with Barbara Goldsmith, transcript, 1982. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

⁶¹ Ibid.

so moralistic about Viva's life? Goldsmith was no art philistine, having studied art history at the prestigious liberal arts school Wellesley College. In 1975, she published a favourable review of Warhol's *Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, in which she called him the 'bellwether of America'.⁶² And Warhol expressed no reservations about Goldsmith's article. In *POPism*, he mentioned the upcoming 'long interview' with Viva by Barbara Goldsmith and that 'Diane Arbus was doing the pictures for that' in the context of his hope that Viva would 'make it big in the celebrity world'.⁶³ Warhol had later given Goldsmith a signed photograph, despite the latter's friend Barbara Walters jokingly warning her, post 'La Dolce Viva', that 'Andy Warhol (whom you expressed subtly and succinctly) will never paint your portrait'.⁶⁴

Perhaps Goldsmith's criticisms of Viva might be taken less personally if we consider that Goldsmith herself spoke of her fascination with celebrities, and particularly 'how fame affects people'. Further, she disclosed that 'a subtheme in all my work is image vs. reality', because in the United States 'we prefer image over reality – because you can manipulate an image, change it to suit a particular need, to get a desired reaction from the public'.⁶⁵

In her introductory essay to *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, Reva Wolf elaborates on this important theoretical context of the late 1950s and 1960s, during which image and reality were seen as 'so deeply intertwined that they are not necessarily distinguishable from one another'.⁶⁶ Wolf quotes the sociologist Edgar Morin: '[T]he real person cannot be distinguished from the person fabricated by the dream factories and the person invented by the spectators'.⁶⁷ But the person fabricated by the Factory might nonetheless, as in Viva's case, be different from the one manufactured by a tabloid journal.

⁶² Barbara Goldsmith, 'The Philosophy of Andy Warhol', *The New York Times Book Review*, 14 September 1975, 4-5.

⁶³ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s*, London: Pimlico, 1980, 266.

⁶⁴ Barbara Walters, letter to Barbara Goldsmith, Sunday [no further details on date]. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

⁶⁵ 'Whose Here: Barbara Goldsmith Author', *DAN'S PAPERS*, 4 September 1998, 63. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

⁶⁶ Reva Wolf in Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004, xxii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Revealing scenes

The journalistic method used by Goldsmith to get her story reflected New Journalism's emphasis on *being there*, or as Wolfe wrote: 'staying with her subject continually, until revealing scenes took place before her eyes'.⁶⁸ The first 'scene', to continue the dramatical analogy, takes place at Warhol's Factory, in which friends and journalists are invited to watch a screening of *Lonesome Cowboys*, starring Viva in the only female role. Given that the film lasted 200 or so minutes, according to Goldsmith, there isn't much live action to document. So, Goldsmith instead focuses on how Viva is dressed for the occasion and her commentary as the film runs. The descriptions are, as befits New Journalism's fictional bent and '3-D' sensory experience, lavishly embellished with adjectives, as in 'Viva leaned against the white-washed plaster wall, her cotton-candy hair bright blonde under the spotlights. Her fine-boned face and attenuated body were reminiscent of sepia-tinted photographs.'⁶⁹ And yet, this apparent initial flattery is undermined by the addition of comments designed to make Viva and her friends seem affected. When Viva asks her Warholian film colleague Paul Morrissey how she looks, Goldsmith notes that he said, 'Like a star', adding that he 'replied grandly'.⁷⁰ Viva herself responds to a fan's compliment on her acting by 'kissing the air in the manner of a Hollywood movie queen'.⁷¹ The implication is that Viva is not a *real* star, but rather a kind of parody thereof.⁷²

The film itself – the reason, after all, that Goldsmith has been granted access to Viva and the Factory – is barely discussed. The plot is dismissed as demonstrating 'the Warhol cinematic formula', that is a 'melange of homosexual sex, conversation, rape, conversation, transvestitism, conversation, homosexual incest, conversation, masturbation, conversation, heterosexual seduction, talk, talk, talk and an orgy'.⁷³ In describing the plot in such an absurdist *ad infinitum* manner, Goldsmith strategically underplays the drama of the film in

⁶⁸ Wolfe, preface to 'La Dolce Viva', *The New Journalism*, 244.

⁶⁹ Barbara Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', *New York*, 29 April 1968, 36.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² A more favourable interpretation of Viva's behaviour was later offered by a young Bob Colcacello, before he became the editor of Warhol's *Interview* magazine. In his university report on the film premiere for *Lions Love*, starring Viva, he wrote that she reacted to a standing ovation 'by throwing grandiose kisses from her box in Alice Tully Hall ... and then doubling over in laughter at her own stardom'. He declared this attitude 'cool', concluding 'she not only loves being a star, she's also hip enough to know it's all a joke. She was having her cake and eating it too.' Bob Colcacello, *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, New York: HarperCollins, 1990, 5.

⁷³ Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', 36.

order to satirise the blasé attitude of the Warhol entourage towards taboo subjects.⁷⁴ She continues this rhetorical device when she describes Viva's commentary during the film's rape scene (in which Viva herself was the target):

Viva nudged a friend and remarked, "There were about 40 children watching this scene. All the art students from the neighboring universities came and brought their children. I screamed 'those children will be shocked out of their minds.' You hear me say that in a minute." Viva hunched in a bewildered shrug. "No one complained. They were all artists so they thought it was art."⁷⁵

Goldsmith chooses not to add her own commentary to the documentation of this scene, yet she could surely not have envisaged the average *New York* reader (unlikely to have been the kind of artist to which Viva refers) sharing this blasé attitude.

Nonetheless, Goldsmith soon can't resist spelling out her distaste for Viva's circle, implying that Warhol is a kind of pimp. She calls Warhol 'a businessman who is by category an artist', and scorns that his Factory is so named 'because here he manufactures a blend of peep and ennui for public consumption'.⁷⁶ She also throws in a sly meta-joke about the interview piece itself, in capturing the following sequence:

"I'm really worn out," says Viva at the end of the movie as she popped a pill into her mouth and washed it down with a glass of red wine. "Andy and Paul are working me to death with all these interviews. How about dropping by to see me tomorrow when I wake up, say about one o'clock."⁷⁷

By including these lines, Goldsmith effectively delegitimises Viva's exhaustion, since we know from the last paragraph that they have all just been sitting down and watching the film for 200 minutes. We are also made aware of what Viva considers a normal wake-up time – a

⁷⁴ In fact, Viva herself wasn't averse to parodying the Warholian cinematic format. The 1969 film *Blue Movie* (the title changed from the original *Fuck* for the purposes of theatrical release) featured Viva and Louis Waldon engaging in various sexual activities, and was quickly banned by the authorities. Warhol published the transcript as a book in 1970, demonstrating the self-reflexive and often banal – rather than pornographic – nature of the protagonists' conversations. In one extract, for example, they discussed Viva's new blow technique, which turned out to be 'as though inflating a balloon'. 'That's a blow job' asked Louis. 'Yes,' Viva replied. 'Isn't it fabulous?' Andy Warhol, *Blue Movie: The complete dialogue with over 100 photos*, New York: Globe Press, 1970, 110. By contrast, according to Warhol biographer Blake Gopnik, seeing the raw footage of the film threw Viva 'into a tizzy and led her to withdraw further from the Warhol scene'. See Gopnik, *Warhol*, 664.

⁷⁵ Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', 36.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

very leisurely 1pm – which again sets her bohemian lifestyle apart from the magazine’s more conventional readers.

The next scene in the interview takes place at Viva’s apartment. Goldsmith has no qualms about revealing most of her address, East 83rd Street, the implication being that Viva wouldn’t mind. For, again, Goldsmith appears not to need to prompt Viva to disclose intimate details about her life. Within the first paragraph of this scene, Viva tells her that she is ‘absolutely penniless’ and that her ‘rent is paid by a man I know’.⁷⁸ This, she offers by way of explanation for the messy and filthy flat – which Viva herself describes in such lurid detail that the reader requires no elaboration from Goldsmith: ‘I haven’t cleaned up or picked up a thing in months. Every night I think I’ll die from the smell of dust and that cockroach powder.’⁷⁹

Ushering Goldsmith into the bedroom with its vast ‘sheetless’ double bed, Viva proceeds to show Goldsmith some photographs of her family – ‘I got these for you to see,’ she says, implying that she had been anticipating, even looking forward, to this conversation. Goldsmith then transcribes Viva’s commentary on the photos as one long monologue only occasionally interrupted by short descriptions such as ‘Viva flipped another picture’. As with the film screening earlier, it appears that Goldsmith is letting Viva hang herself with her own comments. Viva talks of her father’s terrible temper, his wealth (his seventy-four violins), her strict Catholic upbringing (‘I slept with a cross over my bed’), and her rebellion against it (‘I was a virgin until I was 21. Then I spent the next two years making up for it’), her education (first with nuns, then later in Paris at the Sorbonne), and her mother’s support for the staunchly Republican, anti-Communist Joseph McCarthy.⁸⁰ Viva’s supposed long monologue has the feel of a therapist’s session, or of confession since Goldsmith seems to be caricaturing Viva as a rebellious former Catholic.

Stretching and yawning, Viva explains that her tiredness is the result of a recent location trip to Tucson for the movie – not the travelling, she expands, but sleeping with a different man each night. After listing the names of them, she – unusually – appears to respond directly to Goldsmith: ‘Viva looked up and said “Don’t be so sceptical. It’s the truth. I always tell the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 36-8.

truth.”⁸¹ Of course, it is impossible to tell whether Goldsmith is truly sceptical or pretending to be in order to elicit further details. However, it is difficult to reconcile Viva’s assertion that she always tells the truth with her later insistence that the article was a ‘horrible pack of lies’ and that Goldsmith ‘had me having sex with every single cast member – who were all gay anyway!’⁸² Are the lies to be found in the transcription of Viva’s words or in the editing?⁸³ Or does the lying refer more subtly to the inferences made by Goldsmith, the way in which she chooses to present Viva? After all, Goldsmith doesn’t press Viva to clarify what she means by ‘slept with’ – and Viva later says she doesn’t like to sleep alone on account of her nightmares, and ‘I like to have someone in bed to cuddle up with’.⁸⁴ When *New York* magazine approached Goldsmith for a response to Viva’s accusations, in 2016, the magazine notes that she was ‘unavailable for comment but has always stood by the piece’.⁸⁵

Goldsmith makes it hard for the reader to sympathise with Viva, despite the latter’s pleas of poverty, and her descriptions of her difficult relationships with her father and former jealous and violent boyfriends. Goldsmith’s article casts Viva as impressionable, easily influenced by men in particular. For example, Viva claims to have been turned on to drugs (she gives an exhaustive account of all the drugs she has taken) by the notorious experimental psychologist Tim Leary, who told her to take the hallucinogenic mushroom Psilocybin. Moreover, the article implies that Viva’s misfortune is the result of her misplaced sense of entitlement and poor work ethic, when Viva is quoted as admitting: ‘I didn’t have a cent and my father didn’t give me anything so I got jobs modelling. I worked for three agencies, but I was too disorganized and somehow the word got out that I was unreliable.’⁸⁶ However, a draft transcript of the interview, in the Barbara Goldsmith papers at the New York Public Library, presents a more nuanced description of her modelling work (fig. 16): Viva confesses to feeling ‘like a fool walking in with a portfolio of pictures. It was a humiliating experience.’⁸⁷

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸² Bonanos, ‘Viva, Back in the Spotlight’, 8.

⁸³ Goldsmith’s expenses for the interview include a fee for ‘typing Viva’s tape’, implying that she had transcribed the interview herself. Fax from Barbara Goldsmith to Clay Felker, ‘Expenses’, 2 April 1968. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

⁸⁴ Goldsmith, ‘La Dolce Viva’, 38.

⁸⁵ Bonanos, ‘Viva, Back in the Spotlight’, 8.

⁸⁶ Goldsmith, ‘La Dolce Viva’, 38.

⁸⁷ Draft edits of ‘La Dolce Viva’, 11. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

Q I want a list of all the publicity you're getting (promised not to mention Vogue or Avedon)

V The woman from HOLIDAY wants to do a fashion story photographed by Eye, Glamour wants to go on a college tour,

Q I loved your notebook of clippings. It's a very neat notebook. You must have really worked on it.

V Tell me about when you were a model.

V I met a girl who said Call my agent (Paul Wagner) I didn't have a cent - so I went - he took me on and then I quit - I just couldn't do it - I was too disorganized. And I just always felt like a fool walking in with a portfolio of pictures. It was a humiliating experience for me. At the time. Paul told me I always looked like I'd just gotten out of bed - and I thought it was a crummy agency, so I went to Plaza 5 but I couldn't stand the man who ran it - so I went to Eileen Ford and one day she sent me to three photographers, and two weren't home and one was not interested, and at the time I was living with a photographer and he was insanely jealous and he didn't want me to model for anyone else (Louis Foes) So we'd fight and then someone would see some of my pictures and then I'd work a little and then we'd fight - it was just a mess. ^{He was off on that} It was the worst period of my life. My mother who's uncanny, wrote me a letter and said You can't spend all day and all night in a dark room, which is just what we'd do. We'd have dinner and buy magazine and watch TV and read in bed and he got so he would never let me go out or see anyone. He burned all my clothes. I was with him for about a year. I was a virgin

Figure 16 Barbara Goldsmith, excerpt from draft transcript of 'La Dolce Viva', 11. Barbara Goldsmith papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

Finally, just as all this rambling about sex and drugs is becoming rather tedious, Goldsmith's patience is rewarded with one of the two key scenes that Wolfe identified as carrying the 'story' of the article. The phone rings and we hear Viva's side of a conversation to her electricity supplier, threatening to cut her supply off for lack of payment. Viva replies that

she'd been away and that it was all being taken care of, but, hanging up, tells Goldsmith that she would call Warhol to pay it, and that he gives her \$100 here and there 'whenever I need money'.⁸⁸ Tellingly, she continues: 'I never ask for much. We're all supposed to go on regular salary soon, but Andy says the company is bankrupt.'⁸⁹ One might assume Viva to have been embarrassed to admit to this level of dependence on Warhol – which suggests an exploitative, even pimp-prostitute-type relationship. Instead, Viva shrugs off any discomfort and casually changes the subject back to drugs ("“Anyway,” she resumed. “I was telling you about Tim Leary.””).⁹⁰

Just as she had been candid about drugs and sex, Viva also readily discloses information about her fragile mental health. After the Leary drug episode, she asked her mother to have her committed to a mental institution. Once there, however, she claims that 'the attendant locked the door behind us and then clamped a name tag on my wrist'.⁹¹ She begged her mother to get her out, and spent the next week at home, not wanting her mother to leave her bedside, before moving back to New York to live with her sister. This admission of mental illness makes us question all the more whether Goldsmith's interview portrait is exploitative of an already vulnerable subject.

In the Goldsmith interview, Viva makes it clear that her frequent nudity in Warhol's films does not stem from her own vanity. Quite the opposite:

I'm nude because Andy says seeing me nude sells tickets. It's hard to believe. I think I look like a parody, a satire on a nude, a plucked chicken. Since I got an IUD (intrauterine device) and stopped taking birth control pills, I don't even have any breasts.⁹²

In fact, contrary to the impression given by Arbus's photographs, Viva wasn't naked during the interview. Goldsmith describes her wearing 'red slacks and an unbuttoned red cotton blouse', only briefly removing her trousers (she was 'naked from the waist down')⁹³ when searching for something to wear to a photo shoot of the Factory gang for *Eye* magazine.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', 38.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ This was published in *Eye* in August 1968.

From this description, Viva appears to be disorganised and casual about nakedness, rather than an exhibitionist.

Faked photographs?



Figure 17 Barbara Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', *New York*, 29 April 1968, 36-7. Photograph (*Viva as a fashion model*) by Lee Kraft. © Vox Media.

The article's opening photograph was in fact not by Diane Arbus, but by Lee Kraft. Titled *Viva as a fashion model*, Kraft's full-length portrait depicts Viva as elegant and self-possessed, wearing dark trousers, a blouse and boots, and sitting on a high stool with her arms pulling one knee towards her body (fig. 17). It had previously appeared in *American Vogue* magazine (hence the earlier reference to *Vogue* in letters to *New York's* editor). The subsequent two photos by Diane Arbus, commissioned by Clay Felker specifically for the feature, are captioned simply *Viva at home*. The first, another full-length but this time reclining nude portrait of a laughing Viva (fig. 18), might be seen as a counterpoint to Kraft's. Here, Viva is pictured lying on a sheet on her sofa, as if in an unmade bed (she had

actually slept there the night before),⁹⁵ her hair frizzy and unbrushed, an ashtray and a drinks carton on a sidetable in front of her.⁹⁶ Her knee is raised so that one of her legs hides her crotch, but other than that her thin body is totally exposed. Wolfe had described being able to ‘see her entire rib cage beneath her skin except where a pair of tiny shrunken breasts were in the way’ – corroborating Viva’s own assessment of her body.⁹⁷ She is, nonetheless, smiling directly at the viewer/photographer in this picture. Viva seems to be illustrating the kind of typical Arbus frontal pose that Susan Sontag warned deceptively implies ‘in the most vivid way the subject’s cooperation’, when in fact Arbus, according to Sontag, had neither compassion for them nor any ethics.⁹⁸ Sontag maintained: ‘A large part of the mystery of



Figure 18 Barbara Goldsmith, ‘La Dolce Viva’, *New York*, 29 April 1968, 38-9. Photograph (*Viva at home*) by Diane Arbus.

© Vox Media.

⁹⁵ Bonanos, ‘Viva, Back in the Spotlight’, 8.

⁹⁶ Tom Wolfe had described the empty carton as the ‘perfect objective correlative, as the literary critics of the 1950s and 1960s used to say, of the mental rubbish the picture captured’. Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xxiii.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York: Rosetta Books, 1973, 30. Sontag devotes most of the chapter ‘America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly’ to a discussion of what she sees as Arbus’s anti-humanism.

Arbus's photographs lies in what they suggest about how her subjects felt after consenting to be photographed ... Do they know how grotesque they are? It seems as if they don't.⁹⁹ In this case, Viva did.

The second Arbus photo is more shocking. This time in Arbus's more characteristic square format, it is a close-up of Viva's head and torso, as she reclines on the sofa, but the expression on her face is unsettling: her eyes are rolled back so that, in conjunction with the drug-references in the article, she appears – as Wolfe had observed – to be high on drugs (fig. 19).¹⁰⁰ The angle makes her look more gaunt than the earlier photos, and the camera has also zoned in on a tuft of armpit hair. It is not a flattering photograph of a woman described as a fashion model: she looks unkempt, emaciated and stoned. Wolfe summed it up as 'not what



Figure 19 Barbara Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', *New York*, 29 April 1968, 40-1. Photograph (*Viva at home*) by Diane Arbus. © Vox Media.

⁹⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ A print of this photograph, titled *Viva at Home*, was sold at Sotheby's for near the top end of its estimate, at \$194,500, on 5 October 2011. www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/photographs-n08775/lot.150.html. Accessed 14 June 2021.

one would call arousing'.¹⁰¹ In her *New York Times Magazine* profile on Arbus, Patricia Bosworth argues that the 'square format, as she used it, seemed to imprison the subjects',¹⁰² and one could certainly claim that Viva had been caught in Arbus's net or cage here.¹⁰³

Viva has since denied the implication that she was high, saying that at that time she 'wasn't really much of a drug user and that she was sober during the session'.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the draft transcript for the article supports this interpretation; it includes the following quote by Viva that Goldsmith chose not to include: 'If I feel the need to relax I have a couple of drinks, but drugs – no.'¹⁰⁵ Arbus's biographer, Arthur Lubow, offers a more poetic interpretation for Viva's expression: 'It might also have been the rapture of Saint Teresa as depicted by Bernini – or the aftermath of ecstasy, with the thin sheen of perspiration on Viva's dazed face contributing to the sense of postcoital exhaustion.'¹⁰⁶

In a 2016 interview with *New York* magazine, published to coincide with the display and acquisition of one of the Arbus prints from the Goldsmith interview (now called *Superstar at home, N.Y.C.*)¹⁰⁷, Viva admits to being naïve. In response to writer Christopher Bonanos's question 'How on earth did Arbus make such a picture?', Viva answers: 'Despite my degree from Marymount College and my one year at the Sorbonne and all the art schools in Paris ... I didn't have any brains.'¹⁰⁸ As an artist's model, she acknowledges being 'blasé about nudity'. Finally, she claims that she was on the phone to photographer Richard Avedon at the time, who told her she'd better let Arbus in.¹⁰⁹ She had made stronger claims to Patricia Bosworth in 1984: 'Those photographs were totally faked. I looked stoned but I wasn't

¹⁰¹ Fishman, Homans and Moss, *New York Stories*, xxiii.

¹⁰² Patricia Bosworth, 'Diane Arbus, Her Vision, Life, And Death', *The New York Times Magazine*, 13 May 1984, 43.

¹⁰³ If there was one saving grace for Viva, it was that only two of the dozen photographs that Arbus took were chosen by Felker and design director Milton Glaser to illustrate the article. Bosworth, 'Diane Arbus', 43. Goldsmith's interview mentions in brackets, in a rather underhand way since no visual evidence was provided for the reader, that '[F]or this story Viva was photographed having sexual relations with Marco St. John and his wife Barbara'. Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', 38. Fortunately for Viva, these were not published.

¹⁰⁴ Bonanos, 'Viva, Back in the Spotlight', 8.

¹⁰⁵ Draft edits of 'La Dolce Viva', 27. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

¹⁰⁶ Lubow, *Diane Arbus*, 413.

¹⁰⁷ *Superstar at Home, N.Y.C.* was sold in an online auction by Christies for \$18,750, 29 March – 12 April 2013. <https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/photographs-diane-arbus/superstar-home-n-y-c-1968-38/259>. Accessed 14 June 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Bonanos, 'Viva, Back in the Spotlight', 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Richard Avedon created the iconic photograph, *Andy Warhol and Members of the Factory*, 30 October 1969, 1969. Viva was fully dressed in this photo, unlike many of the entourage. Avedon later photographed Viva pregnant, with a naked belly and exposed breast (*Viva, Actress, New York City*, 1971).

stoned, I was cold sober. There was nothing natural about those pictures, nothing spontaneous. They were planned and manipulated. Diane Arbus lied, cheated and victimized me.’¹¹⁰

Arbus had in fact photographed the Factory before, in its previous location, during the production of the Warhol-produced film *Batman Dracula* in 1964.¹¹¹ In 1966, she had photographed Warhol’s then-assistant Gerard Malanga at his home. According to Lubow, when Arbus ‘asked if he would remove the trousers, he said no’. Nonetheless, Lubow continues, when the photo was published ‘she limited her frame to above his waist’.¹¹²

Lubow describes Viva, on the other hand, as ‘a more compliant model’. He mentions that Arbus visited Viva ‘more than once’, and certainly in the company of Barbara Goldsmith.¹¹³ The published feature does not include a description of the photo shoot, however Goldsmith’s expense sheet for the interview lists both a lunch for Viva, Arbus and herself, as well as a dinner for Viva. It also, rather cryptically, lists ‘Bikini for Viva (please pay direct to Diane Arbus)’.¹¹⁴ Was the original plan for Viva to be photographed in this bikini? Or a (possibly disingenuous) way to reassure Viva that she wasn’t expected to be naked? Who was at the shoot? Lubow recounts the photo shoot in detail, in such a way as to suggest that Arbus was alone with Viva:

Viva overslept. She had forgotten their appointment. Even if she hadn’t, Arbus might have arrived early, to catch her subject unprepared. Naked and wrapped in a sheet when she answered the door, Viva told Arbus that it would take just a few minutes to dress. No need, Arbus said, these would only be head shots, nothing would show. That is what Viva recalled, and it, too, was a promise that Arbus sometimes failed to keep.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, Lubow denies that Arbus directed Viva’s facial expression:

However, in Viva’s recounting, Arbus instructed her to roll her eyes up into her head. That seems implausible, because it was the kind of direction that Arbus avoided. She preferred to wait out her subjects until they revealed what she judged to be their true selves. Both Goldsmith and Jane Holzer remembered the eye roll as an expression of

¹¹⁰ Bosworth, ‘Diane Arbus’, 43.

¹¹¹ Lubow, *Diane Arbus*, 411.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 412.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ ‘Expenses’, 2 April 1968. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

¹¹⁵ Lubow, *Diane Arbus*, 413.

derisory incredulity that was part of Viva's repertoire of facial expressions. It was the instant Arbus seized.¹¹⁶

In his biography of Arbus, Lubow makes a useful comparison between the photographer's working style and ethics and those of New Journalism; after all, Arbus had created the photographic accompaniment to a 1962 New Journalism-style article by Tom Morgan about a peace march.¹¹⁷ The New Journalist practice of 'waiting for something to happen was familiar' to Arbus.¹¹⁸ Lubow quotes Arbus as saying: 'The Chinese have some theory that you pass through boredom into fascination and I think it's true.'¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Lubow likens Arbus to Warhol.¹²⁰ While acknowledging that they 'took opposite routes: she infused with profundity an art form devoted to surfaces, while he embraced the superficial as the subject of his art',¹²¹ nonetheless 'in some ways they were alike'.¹²² That is, according to Lubow, each 'surrounded themselves with people who were out of the mainstream: sexually ambiguous, histrionically self-dramatizing, either opulently rich or extremely poor. Both were accused of exploitation.'¹²³ With 'La Dolce Viva', it is hard to gauge which accusations of exploitation to take most seriously: Viva's exploitation by Warhol, or Viva's by Arbus and Goldsmith?

There is no doubt that Felker was highly aware of Arbus's controversial style and temperament when he commissioned her. Arbus had contributed to *Esquire* from 1960, when he had been one of its editors, as well as had an article accepted by Felker for *New York* when it was still the *Herald Tribune's* Sunday supplement.¹²⁴ Arbus had been invited to 'idea' meetings at *New York* magazine in 1967.¹²⁵ Felker might have been shocked by the results – 'far stronger than anything he had anticipated'¹²⁶ – but he still ran them. Viva, however, denied having seen Arbus's work beforehand, or as she put it, to have known 'an Arbus from

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 250.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 251.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Susan Sontag also argued that Arbus's work 'lies in the Warhol aesthetic, that is, defines itself in relation to the twin poles of boringness and freakishness; but it doesn't have the Warhol style'. Sontag, *On Photography*, 35.

¹²¹ Lubow, *Diane Arbus*, 411-2.

¹²² Ibid., 412.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 249-50; 345. The photographs were by Diane Arbus, the words by her daughter, Doon.

¹²⁵ Bosworth, 'Diane Arbus', 43.

¹²⁶ Lubow, *Diane Arbus*, 413.

a [American portrait photographer] Philippe Halsmann'.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, she claims, in her 2016 interview with Bonanos, that she abandoned plans to sue after Arbus begged her not to.¹²⁸ In the end, Arbus did suffer as a result of the piece: she never published in *New York* again,¹²⁹ and Diane Vreeland, then editor at *Vogue*, cancelled Arbus's bookings.¹³⁰

Andy and Viva

Goldsmith's interview gives the impression that Warhol and the Factory dominated Viva's life – as indeed was the case for many of the Superstars, hangers-on and employees. 'Almost all my friends are around The Factory,' Viva says, adding that she frequently accompanied Warhol on college lecture tours.¹³¹ But, from the interview, it appears that the relationship with Warhol was far from benign. He seemed to be exploiting her need for money and lack of organisation. As she tells Goldsmith: 'I have Andy now to think ahead and make the decisions. I just do what he tells me to do. Andy has a certain mystique that makes you want to do things for him.'¹³² Then Goldsmith builds up some suspense before delivering Viva's more dramatic accusation. She writes: 'Viva looked up, her eyes blank. Then she said slowly 'Sometimes though when I think about Andy, I think he is just like Satan. He just gets you and you can't get away ... He has such a hold on all of us.'¹³³ Then, as she does throughout the interview, Viva throws in a contradiction: 'But I love it when they talk about Andy and Viva.'¹³⁴

Finishing the paragraph on this point, Goldsmith emphasises Viva's sense of territorialism in relation to Warhol. Goldsmith writes that 'the names coupled in this way made me think of a time when it was Andy and Edie, so I asked Viva: "What happened to 'Superstar' Edie Sedgwick?"". ¹³⁵ Putting Superstar in quotations snidely questions the continued validity of that nickname, given that Edie was no longer part of the Factory crowd. No doubt Goldsmith also meant to imply that Viva's Superstar-dom might likewise be short-lived: Warhol's favourite today, replaced the next. The way in which Goldsmith describes her response

¹²⁷ Bosworth, 'Diane Arbus', 43.

¹²⁸ Bonanos, 'Viva, Back in the Spotlight', 8.

¹²⁹ Lubow, *Diane Arbus*, 415.

¹³⁰ *Diane Arbus Revelations*, ex. cat., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art/Random House, 2003, 286.

¹³¹ Goldsmith, 'La Dolce Viva', 40.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

confirms that Viva has understood the pointedness of the question: ““Oh,” said Viva, circling her lips with the point of her tongue in a nervous mannerism, “Edie looks fabulous. I visited her in hospital.””¹³⁶ Is she still jealous of Edie? Does she feel guilty that she is in hospital? Pleased to get rid of her rival? As earlier, Goldsmith does not explicitly volunteer any interpretation, but rather just alerts the reader to how Viva squirmed in discomfort.

The last scene of ‘La Dolce Viva’ is the most demeaning for Viva. After a meal at Max’s Kansas City with Warhol and his entourage (in which she is described as acting like a diva, sending back her fish, then a steak, ‘meanwhile sniffing methedrine off a spoon’),¹³⁷ Viva tries to enter the Factory but finds the door locked. Far from glamorising the Factory, Goldsmith instead describes it, rather soullessly, as a ‘loft in a business building’.¹³⁸ The Factory’s neighbourhood is likewise implied to be not so much bohemian as insalubrious, when Viva goes to find a phone booth but finds the first five – five! – vandalised.

As she has done earlier, Goldsmith then proceeds to undermine Viva’s Superstar status. When Viva calls the Factory from the sixth phone box, someone hangs up on her. She calls Warhol but gets his answerphone. Viva then tries to remove the doorknob with a ‘dime and a bobby pin’ in a vengeful attempt to lock those in the Factory in (“I’ll show them,” she raged.)¹³⁹ – clearly not behaviour one might associate with a glamorous Superstar. Finally, Warhol arrives on the scene. Viva confronts him furiously: ‘Why don’t I have a key to this place? ... I’m not treated with any respect around here.’¹⁴⁰ Warhol does not take the bait. He ‘regarded her, bland as farina, whereupon she flung her handbag at him catching him across the side of the face’.¹⁴¹ Goldsmith lets Warhol have the last word: ““You’re crazy, Viva” he said dispassionately. “What do you think you’re doing?””¹⁴² This is a powerfully effective literary strategy that encourages the reader to believe they have come to their own conclusion about Viva’s personality, instead of being led there by the author.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

waitress - sent badger
fish sent back
steak ate
steak

Ask Clay if he wants first communion , other childhood pictures, etc.

DINNER AT MAX'S
Bridget ^{Park} takes amphetamine every three hours - ~~she~~ sniffing it off a knife at dinner - Says buttocks are completely marked with needle pricks - has lost a total of 800 pounds in her life. Star in Chelsea Girls. Daughter of Dick Berlin. Complains that the new factory has lost the group spirit. Says "For Christ sake, they're scraping down the moldings to get to the natural wood and everything's so neat, I feel like wrapping the whole place in aluminum foil like the old studio. ~~where~~ We're really losing the naturalness and the realness of it. ^{kill} ^{life like contrast}

Viva
(name)
INGRID SUPERSTAR - Just out of the hospital for taking ^{drugs (sleeping pills)} smack, explain that she started with Downs (massive doses of sleeping pills). Ingrid had just purchased a package of rubbers which she proddly passed around the table.

STEIG - makes one minute commercials for television
Viva yelled at him. ~~Last year~~ you did 15 minutes of film in a year. Andy does 15 minues in 15 minutes."

cut
out
ANDY WARHOL - CUT SCENE

Answering ^{Viva's} Bridget's complaints that he owed her money and that she was working herself into a nervous collapse for him, answered: What have you done for me? Nothing. You were supposed to write 8 scripts and all yo've done is clean your apartment. Viva whispered He's like Satan. He just gets you and you can't get away. I used to go everywhere alone. Now I'm afraid to go anywhere without him.

Figure 20 Barbara Goldsmith, excerpt from draft transcript of 'La Dolce Viva' (cut restaurant scene).

Barbara Goldsmith papers.

Draft transcripts of the interview, in the Goldsmith archives, reveal that Goldsmith had cut a scene, which would have offered a more detailed backstory to the final dispute between Viva

and Warhol (fig. 20).¹⁴³ In this redacted section, Viva complains that Warhol owes her money, ‘and that she was working herself into a nervous collapse for him’ – to which he answers, ‘What have you done for me? Nothing. You were supposed to write 8 scripts and all you’ve done is clean your apartment.’¹⁴⁴ Viva might not have minded this extended transcript of her fight with Warhol, since it seemed that all the Superstars had the same issue with him. As fellow Superstar Ultra Violet once said: ‘Nearly all of us at the Factory have our moments of anger at Andy. He’s promised us fame, money, Superstardom, and only given us walk-on parts in his home-made movies.’¹⁴⁵

These drafts show that Goldsmith also changed her original ending, in which she had offered a more sensitive, considered contextualisation of Viva’s behaviour (fig. 21).¹⁴⁶ The original version reads:

Viva’s behavior is not aberrative. Her views and her actions are much like those of her associates. The people who appear in Warhol’s movies are not actors but gifted amateurs who re-create themselves on the screen. Warhol feeds upon this wretched confraternity who number among them drug addicts, sexual deviants and degenerates. Yet, in the permissive atmosphere of his studio, they become somebody – Superstars. They travel in a group insulated from the rest of society. In Andy’s movies Viva appears as a compulsive talker, obsessed by sex and religion, strident, driven, pathetic and on the edge of self-destruction.¹⁴⁷

This earlier ending, then, separates Viva the movie star from Viva the person, and paints Warhol as a Svengali, exploiting his impressionable and needy entourage. In the published ending, this is reversed, and Viva is portrayed as a kind of hysterical mistress.

¹⁴³ The transcript contains the pencilled annotation ‘CUT THAT OUT’ in the margin next to that scene.

¹⁴⁴ Draft transcript, unpaginated. Barbara Goldsmith papers. Earlier in the draft transcripts, Viva claimed to have written ten scripts, with Goldsmith noting the papers scattered all over the bedroom floor. Draft edits of ‘La Dolce Viva’, 15.

¹⁴⁵ Ultra Violet, *Famous for 15 Minutes: My Years With Andy Warhol*, Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988, 183.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Corrections and a new end to the Viva piece’, fax, 9 April 1968. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

¹⁴⁷ Draft edits of ‘La Dolce Viva’, 9-10. Barbara Goldsmith papers. Another slightly different version of this ending includes the line, crossed out in pencil, ‘Let us not cast her in the Hollywood image.’ Draft edits, 15.

have any breasts. But lately I've gotten a lot of attention and publicity. Some dumb reporter said "Viva has dropped out of the rat race. A lot she knows. I've just entered the rat race, I want money and I guess a career. Trying to plan ahead puts me in a terrible state. I can tell you what I'm doing at the moment, but if I think about the future I get all neurotic.

"I have Andy now to think ahead and make the decisions. I just do what he tells me to do. Andy has a certain mystique that makes you want to do things for him." Viva looked up, her eyes blank. Then she said slowly "Sometimes though when I think about Andy, I think he is just like Satan. He just gets you and you can't get away. I used to go everywhere by myself. Now I can't seem to go anywhere or make the simplest decision without Andy. He has such a hold on all of us. But I love it when they talk about Andy and Viva."

The names coupled that way made me think of a time when it was Andy and Edie, so I asked "What happened to Edie Sedgwick?" "Oh," said Viva, circling her lips with the point of her tongue in a nervous mannerism, "Edie looks fabulous. I visited her in the hospital. She's been there for a long time. I brought her a cactus plant in the shape of a prick. They kept a nurse in the room with us the whole time because before I visited somebody came and gave her an amphetamine. She was getting drugs to get her off heroin and whatever she was on, so the combination made her terribly ill. She said she was getting out soon."

Viva stood up and took off her slacks. She knelt before me, naked from the waist down, and began searching through the pile of clothes on the floor. "I've got to go as soon as I find something to wear" she said. "Eye Magazine is making an official group photograph at The Factory and they need me."

Viva's behavior is not aberrative. Her views and her actions are much like those of her associates. The people who appear in Warhol's movies are not actors but gifted amateurs who re-create themselves on the screen. Warhol feeds upon this wretched confraternity who number among them drug addicts, sexual

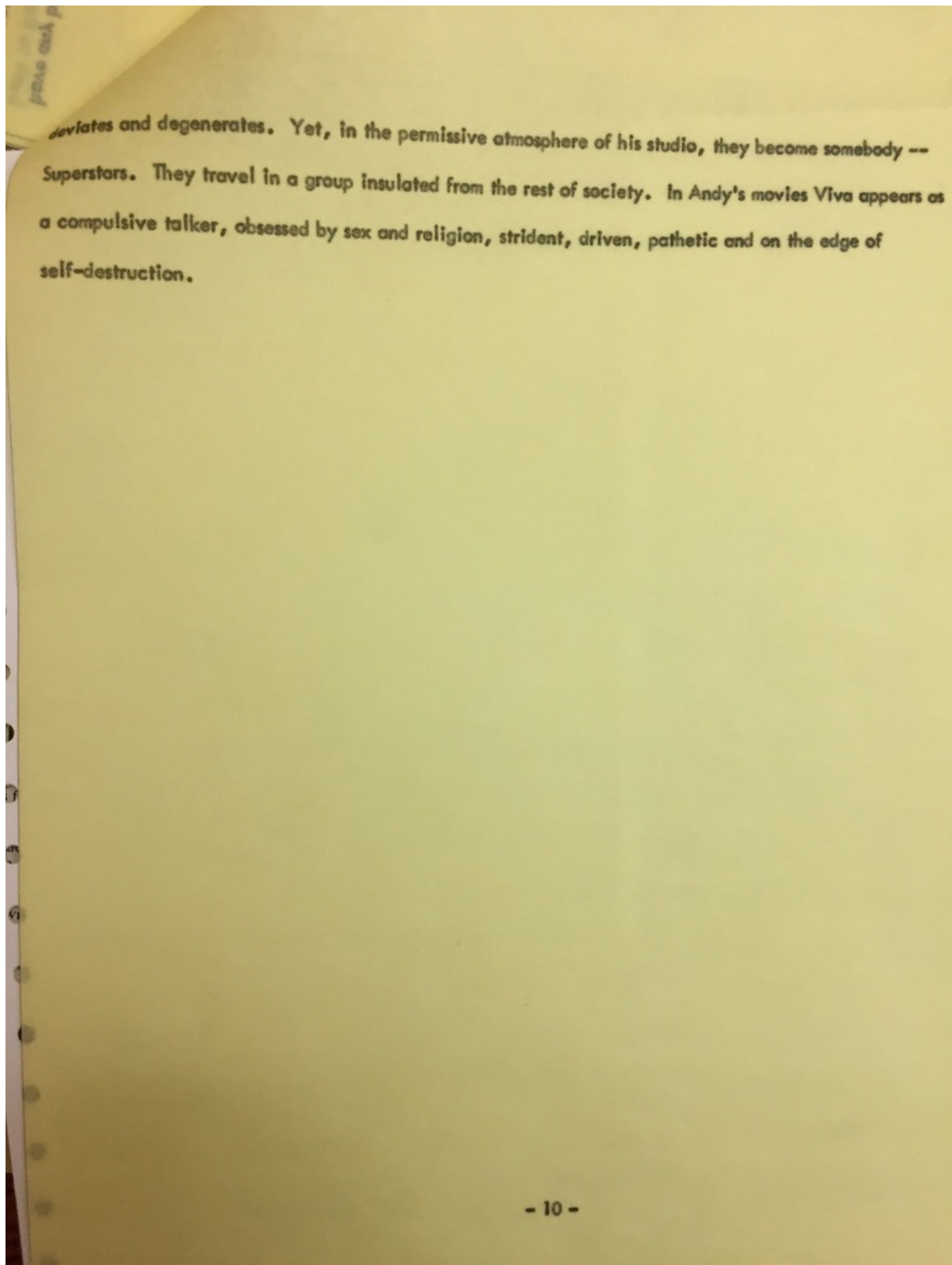


Figure 21 Barbara Goldsmith, excerpt from draft transcript of 'La Dolce Viva' showing different ending from published version, 9-10. Barbara Goldsmith papers.

Excerpts from Goldsmith's 'La Dolce Viva' appear in the recent biography of Warhol by Blake Gopnik, without specifying the source in the body text. These extracts seem to reinforce Goldsmith's characterisation of Viva as licentious and vapid.¹⁴⁸ In particular, Gopnik uses the description of Viva being locked out of the Factory as the final straw in the breakdown in relationship between Viva and Warhol. He reports Viva as alleging in a 'hysterical telephone call' to art critic David Bourdon shortly after the incident, 'They're trying to do to me what they did to Edie Sedgwick, whatever it is they did to her...'¹⁴⁹ Viva's manner, it seems, still incites cruel parody to this day.

John Wilcock: a fellow Underground radical

Viva gave her own account of that Factory incident in a later interview with underground press writer and publisher John Wilcock, for his book *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* (1971). When Wilcock asked whether Viva had ever had a violent disagreement with Warhol, she answered that she did 'over the fact that they wouldn't give me a key to the factory'.¹⁵⁰ Asked why, she replied, 'Because I'm a girl. Male chauvinism.'¹⁵¹ Pressed for further details, Viva described the argument and why she felt it necessary to go to the Factory:

Well I was practically living there, writing scripts and everything else. I was with Diane Arbus before she took horrible pictures for *New York Magazine* and we had all her equipment and it was raining and we went to the factory and the door was locked and none of the telephones worked in Union Square and I turned and smashed a telephone booth in. I was so frustrated. I was calling up Andy's answering service and leaving obscene messages and they were hanging up on me and I hung up and I was still banging on the door, I was trying to unscrew the lock with a dime. Andy showed up and I started yelling at him and he said, "you're crazy" and so I threw my pocketbook at him and he threw it back at me and I threw it at him.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Gopnik himself demonstrates little affection for Viva. He writes that once she began to star in Warhol's films, she 'had two specialities: She could outtalk even the Factory's best yakkers and her clothes would be shed on demand'. Gopnik nonetheless throws in a backhanded compliment that '[t]his [her 'verbal diarrhea'] had the upside of making her a liberated woman before women's lib'. Gopnik, *Warhol*, 544.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 596.

¹⁵⁰ John Wilcock and a cast of thousands, *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol*, New York: Other Scenes, 1971, 71.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

The description itself is largely faithful to the published account by Goldsmith, and yet there is no mention of Goldsmith here, only Arbus. If correct, then was Goldsmith in fact recounting, second-hand, Arbus's experience with Viva? Or was Viva misremembering, a few years after the fact, confusing Goldsmith with Arbus? Or was Goldsmith also there, and Viva has chosen not to mention her by name, including her only in the 'we'? Was Viva perhaps angrier at Arbus and her 'horrible pictures' than Goldsmith? Goldsmith herself didn't mention Arbus being present. Moreover, in his account of what appears to be same incident, in *POPism*, Warhol didn't mention Goldsmith or Arbus being there, but rather that it was the day 'that a big "family photograph" of the Factory crowd was being taken for *Eye*' magazine. He admitted to being horrified at Viva losing control and screaming 'You're crazy Viva!' – not the dispassionate Andy of Goldsmith's version.¹⁵³ These discrepancies serve to reinforce the difficulty of relying on even first-person accounts to accurately represent a scene.¹⁵⁴

Wilcock, co-founder of the *Village Voice* and publisher of the 'semi-radical tabloid' *Other Scenes*, had been a Factory regular and it was he who encouraged Warhol to start *Interview* magazine.¹⁵⁵ It seems that Viva trusted Wilcock not to exploit her. The cover of the second issue of *Other Scenes*, published just a few days after 'La Dolce Viva', featured a photograph of Viva and Abigail Rosen sitting naked in a transparent bath tub, presumably related to the filming of Warhol's *Tub Girls* (1967).¹⁵⁶ The following year, a naked Viva featured with her two (also naked) male co-stars on the cover of *Interview*'s first issue, to publicise Agnès Varda's film, *Lions Love* (1969), in which they enact a ménage à trois.¹⁵⁷ Again, nudity itself was not the issue for Viva, but rather how she was presented and in what context. She had no

¹⁵³ Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, 267-8.

¹⁵⁴ On another occasion, Viva offered a political response to John Wilcock's question about 'why so many people put down the factory crowd for being – what they erroneously assumed – was sexually licentious'. She said: 'They've got to work off their guilt on something else so they try to find something wrong with the morals of the country. So they can feel they should be complaining about something when they should be complaining about the [Vietnam] war.' John Wilcock, *Manhattan Memories: an autobiography*, lulu.com, 2009, 78.

¹⁵⁵ The magazine started life as *Andy Warhol's Inter/View*. John Wilcock held shares in it for the first few months before moving to Europe.

¹⁵⁶ *Fun at the Factory*, photo by Billy Name, in *Other Scenes & The New York Seer*, issue 2, May 1968. In Wilcock, *Manhattan Memories*, 77. Andy Warhol's *Tub Girls* (1967) featured footage of Viva in the bathtub with various other people.

¹⁵⁷ *Lions Love* was filmed in June 1968, two months after the Goldsmith interview was published. It included references to Warhol's shooting by Valerie Solanas. A later issue of *Interview* that year also featured Viva with Warhol Superstar Jackie Curtis in a playful article, in which the 'two Glamour Queens of the Underground get together in a bath tub at the Chelsea Hotel with Spring Water from a bottle and Michel and Lee [sic] record the entire affair'. 'Jackie Curtis & Viva!', *Inter/View*, 1: 4, 1969, 20.

qualms being shown naked with and to other fellow radicals – such as Varda, Warhol and Wilcock.

In Wilcock's own memoir, *Manhattan Memories*, he described what he saw as a welcome shift in journalistic tone from the 1950s to the 1960s – a time when the availability of cheap and simple printing processes like offset made the underground press viable:

When I had been at the [*New York*] *Times* ten years before, everything had been presented in a remote *nothing-to-do-with-me* sort of way. God help the reporter who injected any hint of personality or feeling into the story. We still have the admirable separation between fact and opinion but stories no longer sounded like they'd been written by automatons.¹⁵⁸

But Wilcock was critical about the radical credentials of New Journalism, explaining that: 'what they most displayed was a lively change of *style* rather than content. Although they shared our penchant for making the stories more personal, they were not – with rare exceptions – writing radical copy'.¹⁵⁹ From her own experience, Viva undoubtedly would have shared Wilcock's suspicion of New Journalism.

Warholian interviews: writing without writing

As a collection of interviews with Warhol's associates, Wilcock's *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* (1971) was produced in a way that echoed the collective art production of Warhol's Factory. According to Branden Joseph, Wilcock's book succeeded in setting the tone for subsequent Warhol literature; his method of 'assembling a collection of interviews and statements by the artist's associates and superstars has become a staple within the field'.¹⁶⁰ Credited as having been authored by Wilcock 'and a cast of thousands', *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* is a collective portrait of Warhol, who himself did not offer his own interview but is instead represented by an image. As Joseph puts it, this supports 'the impression that Warhol had nothing to say on his own behalf, that there was, behind the surface, nothing there'.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Wilcock, *Manhattan Memories*, 66.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶⁰ Branden W. Joseph, 'One Dimensional Man', *Art Journal*, 57: 4, Winter 1998, in Wilcock, *Manhattan Memories*, 80. Wilcock's *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* was published a year after the first two scholarly books on Warhol (Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* and John Coplans, *Andy Warhol*; both 1970), established the field of 'Warhol studies'.

¹⁶¹ Joseph in Wilcock, *Manhattan Memories*, 80.

Interview editor Bob Colacello has recalled the difference between the polished interview profiles in mainstream magazines, and Warholian-style interviews. Describing his first interview, with Bernardo Bertolucci, for *Interview*, he remembers:

I used a bulky borrowed tape recorder, but refused to let the transcript run, à la Warhol, in raw Q&A form, insisting instead on “writing it up.” It was my first interview and, visions of *New Yorker* profiles dancing in my head, I wanted to make a “literary” impression.¹⁶²

Following his editorial appointment (while still a college student), Colacello quickly learned to loosen up: ‘I didn’t cut copy much, because we had such large pages to fill, and anyway editing wasn’t really Warholian.’¹⁶³ Likewise, he claims that Warhol ‘certainly never minded the typos or other mistakes in *Interview*. “Why do you have to spend so much time proofreading?” he’d always ask.’¹⁶⁴ Warhol, Colacello says, liked things to be bad and boring.¹⁶⁵ Ronald Tavel, who wrote many of Warhol’s films, similarly recalls that Warhol wanted him to get rid of any plot in his scripts. His solution was to get rid of character, to make the names interchangeable, ‘so nobody knows who anyone is’.¹⁶⁶

Boring, in fact, could be strategic for Warhol. As Reva Wolf astutely remarks, the ‘apparent banality of Warhol’s comments tended to intensify when he disliked, or felt uncomfortable with, the interviewer’, such as the journalist Barbara Rose.¹⁶⁷ His evasive and often monosyllabic (yes/no) style, according to Wolf, allowed him to mask his nervousness.¹⁶⁸ It also worked to expose the predictability of interviews.¹⁶⁹

The catalogue for Warhol’s first retrospective at Moderne Museet in Stockholm, held in February 1968, features just a series of quotes from an interview with Warhol, rather than the more typical catalogue essay, including the line, ‘The interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I’ll repeat them after him.’¹⁷⁰ Indeed, Colacello claims he accompanied Warhol on most of his interviews and asked questions on his behalf when

¹⁶² Bob Colacello, *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, New York: HarperCollins, 1990, 37.

¹⁶³ Colacello, *Holy Terror*, 56.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Ronald Tavel in Jean Stein, edited with George Plimpton, *Edie: An American Biography*, London: Pimlico, 2006, 232-4.

¹⁶⁷ Wolf in Goldsmith, *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, xv.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁷⁰ Colacello, *Holy Terror*, 31.

Warhol was supposed to be the interviewer. After a while it ‘seemed normal’, he admits, for his words and questions to be printed as Andy’s.¹⁷¹ This smart cop, dumb cop game between Colacello and Warhol could certainly play to their advantage. Colacello remembers: ‘Andy always said, “I’ll ask a few [breezy fashion writer] Eugenia Sheppard questions, Bob, and then you’ve got to come up with the [hard-hitting broadcast journalist] Edward R. Murrow ones for me.”’¹⁷² Warhol went as far as sending a surrogate, Allen Midgette, to lecture on his behalf for a few months. Midgette confesses, ‘It was easy to impersonate Andy because to the questions I’d always answer “Yes” or “No” or “Maybe,” “I don’t know,” “Okay,” “You know, I don’t think about it.” Which is the way Andy would have answered the questions anyway.’¹⁷³

American poet and critic Wayne Koestenbaum dedicated an essay to Warhol’s interviews, in which he describes Warhol’s attitude to doing them thus: he ‘wanted to be left alone, and yet he pretended to seek interpersonal encounter; into the unsafe space of the interview, he inserted not his own, vulnerable, actual body, but a replacement body...’¹⁷⁴ For Viva, the interview with Goldsmith could be said to represent such an unsafe space. However, unlike Warhol, she could not hide her vulnerable body.

Since Warhol bought his first tape-recorder (‘his wife’) in the mid-1960s, he recorded everything obsessively and had most of his tapes transcribed by Factory associate Pat Hackett. Trying to persuade his literary idol Truman Capote to contribute a column for *Interview* magazine, based on tape-recorded material that another associate Brigid Berlin would transcribe, Warhol said: ‘Tell him it’s a new way of writing without writing.’¹⁷⁵ Ghostwriting was another means for Warhol to write without writing. Colacello describes how *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975) not only had a ghostwriter but the ghostwriter had a ghostwriter, all set up as an assembly line of writers.

However, the naturalised presentation of Warhol’s published dialogue is deceptive; despite appearances, the transcripts were heavily edited. Hackett, in Colacello’s words, transcribed

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 250.

¹⁷² Ibid., 250-1.

¹⁷³ Alan Midgette quoted in Stein, *Edie*, 221.

¹⁷⁴ Wayne Koestenbaum, ‘Warhol’s Interviews’, in *My 1980s & Other Essays*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, 237.

¹⁷⁵ Colacello, *Holy Terror*, 403-4.

Warhol's tapes 'with the reverence befitting a Faulkner or Joyce', cutting out 'libelous [sic] gossip, indiscreet chitchat' and 'fixing Andy's sentences ever so slightly, so that he sounded less infantile, more articulate', all 'without losing the fly-on-the-wall feeling'.¹⁷⁶ As Colacello wryly observes: 'Only Pat [Hackett] and those of us who were there know what Andy actually said, and what she said he said.'¹⁷⁷ Sometimes an outside party redacted Warhol's words from a transcription. Jennifer Sichel has written a persuasive paper in which she offers evidence that Tom Hess, executive editor of *ARTNews*, redacted whole sections of Warhol's first major interview – with Gene Swenson as part of a survey called 'What is Pop Art?' in 1964 – referring to his (and other artists') queerness.¹⁷⁸

For Wolf, Warhol's 'vision of the interview ... [was] both a parallel to, and a component of, his art'.¹⁷⁹ He certainly used the transcriptions of his own tape recordings experimentally – not always asking permission from the interviewee. He turned his tape-recorded telephone conversations between himself and Brigid Berlin, and also between himself and Viva, into a play called *Andy Warhol's Pork* that opened in May 1971 at La Mama, New York's premier experimental theatre.¹⁸⁰ Berlin was furious since the conversations revealed her private family life (already in the media spotlight due to her father being chairman of the Hearst media empire). Viva was also furious since her words were ascribed to the character Vulva, played by a transvestite named Wayne County, 'whose central obsession seemed to be excrement, in all its various forms, from rabbit to horse'.¹⁸¹

Slice-of-flesh memoirs

This unfiltered, naturalised method of recording and presenting audio-visual material was widely used by Warhol's associates in their own memoirs. Brigid Berlin was legendary for her 'trip' books, scrapbooks documenting her encounters with everyone, as well as her tapes that included recordings of orgies.¹⁸² Jean Stein's *Edie: An American Biography* was the result of ten years, beginning in 1972, of interviewing Edie's family and friends – over 250 of

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 74-5. In fact, Hackett insisted that the sensitivity and creativity of her efforts be recognised in print by the author credit 'redacted by Pat Hackett' rather than 'transcribed by'.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 251.

¹⁷⁸ Jennifer Sichel, 'Do you think Pop Art's queer? Gene Swenson and Andy Warhol', *Oxford Art Journal*, 41: 1, March 2018.

¹⁷⁹ Wolf in Goldsmith, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, xxxi.

¹⁸⁰ *Pork* was directed by Anthony Ingrassia and stage-managed by Lee Black Childers.

¹⁸¹ Colacello, *Holy Terror*, 68-9.

¹⁸² Danny Fields in Stein, *Edie*, 217.

them. The resulting transcripts were then edited by *Paris Review* editor George Plimpton.¹⁸³ Colacello describes the Edie biography as presenting ‘Andy as a craven manipulator, and an amoral voyeur’ and that ‘Andy had been putting down Jean Stein for years, saying she’d never finish her book, and now she had turned his own tape-recording technique on him, to devastating effect’.¹⁸⁴ Stein used tape-recording as her means of revenge.

Ultra Violet’s Factory memoir, *Famous For 15 Minutes* (1988), largely based on transcribed dialogue, is more diplomatic. In it, she describes a movie, *24 Hours*, that Warhol filmed in her apartment as having ‘no plot or story’.¹⁸⁵ She continues: ‘It’s the present, our present, whatever we’re doing. It is a slice of time, or slice of flesh. Later, this segment will be pieced with other segments to form the complete twenty-four hours.’¹⁸⁶ But, she reflects, although Warhol’s films captured ‘the realities of our lives as they unfold, the intention was not gratuitous titillation; we ‘seek verité rather than ejaculation under a folded newspaper’.¹⁸⁷

Slice-of-flesh might also be used to describe another Warholian production, his book, *a: A novel*, published in 1968 and purported to be based on twenty-four hours of the life of another Factory Superstar, Ondine (in fact, it was recorded over four sessions between 1965 and 1967, and transcribed by four women).¹⁸⁸ Unlike Berlin and Viva, Ondine was aware of Warhol’s attempt to record his every word and activity, but, as a notorious ‘speed freak’, he was not always in a position to give his consent.¹⁸⁹ He also clearly found the taping oppressive and intrusive at times, such as when he took a bath or went to the toilet. At one point (not the only time) in *a: A novel*, Ondine moans, ‘O God, it seems like it’s endless, will I ever be free?’¹⁹⁰ Notwithstanding this plea for freedom, Lynne Tillman argues, in an essay on *a: A novel* (structured, Warhol-style, like a shopping list), for a more nuanced reading of Warhol’s exploitation of his associates:

¹⁸³ Stein, *Edie*, 433.

¹⁸⁴ Colacello, *Holy Terror*, 459.

¹⁸⁵ Ultra Violet, *Famous for 15 Minutes*, 111.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁸⁸ Victor Bockris, ‘a: A Glossary’, in Andy Warhol, *a: A novel*, London: Virgin Books, 2009, 453. For more detail on the errors and mishearings in *a: A novel*, see Jean Wainwright, ‘Small Lies? Authenticity and the artist interview’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 5-9.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/wainwright.pdf>. Accessed 14 June 2021.

¹⁸⁹ At one point he confessed to being frightened at being so high. Warhol, *a: A novel*, 369.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

They used and were used, perhaps, in every possible sense. But another view is that, given the problems in their lives at the time and their insecurities, which *A* documents, Warhol offered them something – work or a feeling of significance for that moment or a way to fill time. The tape recorder is on. You are being recorded. Your voice is being heard, and this is history.¹⁹¹

The stream-of-consciousness dialogue, together with the various extra-linguistic notes (e.g. on background sounds), and changes in location and transcription style, is so convoluted that a glossary was added in the second edition to identify key characters, scenes and locations. In his introduction to the glossary, Victor Bockris reports that Factory associate Billy Name had drawn a parallel between the book and the Surrealist genre of automatic writing, or in this case, ‘automatic talking’.¹⁹² For Tillman, the boredom level in *a: A novel* is on an existential level: ‘Time and art in a sense are collapsed: Moments are precious or boring both to the reader and the story. ... Boredom tells us something about life’s relentless movement towards entropy and death.’¹⁹³ But that lack of editing, maintains Tillman, also allows us to see, by contrast, ‘how unlikelike most written dialogue and conversation is’.¹⁹⁴ She suggests a comparison between this unedited flow and confession or psychoanalysis, the idea of ‘not leaving anything out, accepting everything’.¹⁹⁵ Tillman also proposes that the novel questioned conventional notions of authorship: ‘It’s the typists’ books. It’s the tape recorder’s book ... Or, it’s Ondine’s book, he’s the author of himself, and the protagonist, it’s his 24 hours.’¹⁹⁶ In the end, she concurs with Reva Wolf when she concludes: ‘Or, and I think it is, it’s Warhol’s artwork, a conceptual and experimental book.’¹⁹⁷

Viva’s own ‘novel’, *Superstar: a novel by Viva*, was published in 1970, and clearly modelled on Warhol’s *a: A novel*. The ‘superstar’ of the title is a woman called Gloria – a thinly disguised pseudonym for Viva, especially given Viva’s own face on the cover – with Warhol named as ‘A’. In it, she uses a range of experimental slice-of-flesh recording techniques – transcriptions of telephone conversations, rambling face-to-face chats, letters, a dream about Warhol, a verbatim account of a sexual encounter – distinguished through different typefaces. The whole book is also presented as if it were the result of hallucinations from an acid trip,

¹⁹¹ Lynne Tillman, *What would Lynne Tillman do?*, Brooklyn: Red Lemonade, 2014, 22.

¹⁹² Bockris in Warhol, *a: A novel*, 453.

¹⁹³ Tillman, *What would Lynne Tillman do?*, 26.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-3.

during which ‘Gloria’ remembers her past life as Janet Lee Schumann (aka Viva’s birth name, Janet Susan Hoffmann).¹⁹⁸

Again, like her dealings with John Wilcock, the extreme levels of sexual frankness in her own novel suggest that it wasn’t necessarily the content of the *New York* interview that had been the problem for her. The issue lay rather in Goldsmith’s moral distaste for Viva’s lifestyle that surely influenced the editing of the transcription, and the dishonesty of Arbus’s strategy to obtain the visual material that so humiliated Viva.¹⁹⁹ There is the additional issue of agency: in Goldsmith’s article, Viva is presented as subordinate to Warhol – arguably the ‘real’ protagonist of ‘La Dolce Viva’. One must also note the difference in audience: the mass tabloid audience for *New York* magazine (including, potentially, Viva’s family and their circle) versus the hip, niche market for Viva’s novel – already a year after Warhol’s *a: A Novel* had broken new ground.

In her novel, Viva makes several references to the ‘La Dolce Viva’ interview in *New York* (masquerading as *Metropolitan* magazine) – each time as a kind of bad omen. For instance, at the hospital following A’s shooting by Regina La Paz (aka Valerie Solanas), a television executive counsels Gloria to be nice to the press, warning her ‘After that *Metropolitan* magazine article I don’t know *what* to expect’.²⁰⁰ Shortly after, when a PR man asks Gloria if she was Regina La Paz, she exclaims: ‘I was used to being reviled and spat upon, witness *Metropolitan* magazine, but to be accused of being a murderess was too much, even for me.’²⁰¹ The last, self-reflexive chapter of the novel takes the form of a letter from Gloria’s father prompted by watching her on television the previous night. He writes:

After ... hearing you talk about your novel, it appears to me that it will be anything but elevating. Your mother agrees with me. ... The suffering, humiliation, and anguish that the entire family suffered due to that article about you in *Metropolitan*

¹⁹⁸ Viva, *Superstar, a novel by Viva*, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1970, 16.

¹⁹⁹ Wayne Koestenbaum wrote another short essay on ‘Diane Arbus and Humiliation’, asking how she might be said to be humiliating her subjects, and whether viewers were in turn humiliated by looking at them. He concludes that, in photographing ‘the pathetic and the decentred’, Arbus ‘turns these figures into new vivid centers ... [d]ignifying them, according them with significance’. Koestenbaum, ‘Diane Arbus and Humiliation’, in *My 1980s & Other Essays*, 227-9.

²⁰⁰ Viva, *Superstar*, 123.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

magazine prompted not only your Uncle Jonathan, but many people in the professional world as well, to give us their sympathy.²⁰²

Her father's humiliation at her behaviour is acute. He continues: 'I used to pray every day that you would go to confession, and after having made a good confession that you would be immediately hit and killed by an automobile – knowing that that would be the only way you would get to heaven.'²⁰³ He urges her to consider the legacy of her book: 'Whatever you write may be the most important monument that you will leave behind you ... I plead with you, do not join the fetid cesspool of sex literature that is demoralizing our country.'²⁰⁴

The novel's last line, also the end of the letter, reads 'Gloria thought about it all day....'²⁰⁵ Who knows whether the father's letter is at all true – whether he really said he wished his daughter dead rather than face further humiliation? Or whether we should read it as a projection of Viva's feelings of guilt and fear at distressing her family.

Realism as a form of writing

By changing names, usually only slightly so that they are still recognisable, real transcripts of conversations could be called 'novels'. In the case of Linda Rosenkrantz's *Talk*, cited at the start of this chapter, her original publisher's fear of 'possible legal ramifications' – the book was considered 'repellently raunchy' and initially rejected by numerous editors – led them to play it safe 'by presenting it as a completely fabricated work of fiction'.²⁰⁶ When *Talk* was reissued half a century later, Rosenkrantz was finally able to reveal that in fact one of the characters was her, and that all the dialogue was real, transcribed by herself.²⁰⁷

The 'novel' appellation also justifies a more creative use of transcription than in non-fiction. Warholian transcripts are notoriously ungrammatical and misspelled, but more importantly they can be radically experimental. In *a: A novel*, the sound of opera acts as a backdrop to the

²⁰² Ibid., 315.

²⁰³ Ibid., 316.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 317.

²⁰⁶ Linda Rosenkrantz, 'Sex, Lies and Audiotape', *Paris Review*, 8 July 2015. www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/07/08/sex-lies-and-audiotape/. Accessed 14 June 2021.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

conversations.²⁰⁸ Indeed, Tillman writes that she ‘began to think about the book as music, as a score’, which made the reading of it ‘less stressful’.²⁰⁹

The change of names in Viva’s and Warhol’s books, while seemingly insignificant, nonetheless offers a little dignity and distance for the real characters, while also reinforcing the notion, as Tillman puts it, that, as Warholian Superstars, they were ‘self-creations’²¹⁰ – fictions themselves – such that ‘[a]ctual histories, biographies, and sometimes bodies were left behind and new ones manufactured in the Factory’.²¹¹

Conclusion

Competing with television, and the increased emotional response to spoken word as described by Marshall McLuhan, New Journalism spiced up non-fiction writing in the 1960s by adding extended dialogue from interviews for realism, as well as 3-D sensory detail and narrative climax for drama. By contrast, Warholian writing is ‘writing without writing’ – transcripts of mostly raw dialogue with next to no commentary, which Lynne Tillman suggests creates a form of realism that is even ‘closer to life, reality, than a realist novel’.²¹² New Journalism and Warholian writing built on the editorial innovations of the *Paris Review* and the opportunities afforded by portable tape-recorders and new publishing forums such as Sunday supplements, demonstrating radical variations on transcribing dialogue and documenting reality. In doing so, they opened up further creative potential: interviews were no longer merely tools but also works of fiction or artworks in themselves. The 1960s marked a broadening of who could conduct interviews and be interviewed, which Wolfe presented in terms of class politics. No longer just the preserve of the celebrated and respected public figure, interviews could be conducted with such Underground stars as Viva. As Susan Sontag has noted, contextualising Diane Arbus’s photographic subjects, this was the ‘decade in which freaks went public, and became a safe, approved subject of art’.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Marked variously in the text as ‘(Opera)’ or ‘(Music)’ or even ‘(Piercing Music and Ondine sings along)’, Warhol, *a: A Novel*, 73.

²⁰⁹ Tillman, *What would Lynne Tillman do?*, 25.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹² Tillman, *What would Lynne Tillman do?*, 23.

²¹³ Sontag, *On Photography*, 34.

However, neither genre could be said to be entirely objective or authentic. New Journalism was highly edited and polished for narrative effect, and deliberately not shown to the interviewee for copy approval. Power was thus heavily skewed towards the interviewer, rather than the interviewee. The characteristic attitude of ironic detachment, as in the case of Barbara Goldsmith in ‘La Dolce Viva’, masked moral judgement of others’ styles of life, including that of the late 1960s bohemian art world. With his penchant for goading the liberal and cultural elite, Wolfe, in particular, was singled out for criticism of philistinism.²¹⁴ For example, lawyer and *Esquire* associate editor Ben Pesta alerted Wolfe to the fact that, following the publication of Wolfe’s *The Painted Word* (1975), in which he ridiculed the contemporary American art world, a ‘whole issue of *Partisan Review* [is] devoted to exposing what a mean man you are!’.²¹⁵

If New Journalism could therefore not satisfactorily fill the critical gap left by American art critics, as described by *Artforum* editor Annette Michelson, could Warholian writing? But this writing raised its own ethical issues around exploitation and authorship, and, as *a: A novel* demonstrates, different transcribers produce noticeably different styles of transcription, while inaccuracies and misspelling due to human error are rife. The ‘novel’ designation also raises doubts over authenticity – as does the prevalence of ghostwriting, which promotes the cult of the named star artist-writer over the anonymous writers behind the scenes. It would take artist-run magazines like *Avalanche*, *BOMB* and *index*, discussed in the following chapters, to give artists greater control over the interpretation of their work and produce a credible counterpoint to critic-led art writing.

In her article ‘A Very Sadistic Man’, American journalist Janet Malcolm compares the sense of Ted Hughes’s personality readers might infer from his various biographies with the ‘epistolary persona’ of his letters and personal papers – the latter being ‘the persona he created the way novelists create characters’.²¹⁶ Although she perceives that Hughes comes across more favourably in his personal papers, for Malcolm the ‘question of what he was

²¹⁴ In a typically spirited letter, Hunter S. Thompson refused to be categorised by Wolfe as a New Journalist, warning, ‘I’ll have your goddamn femurs ground into bone splinters if you ever mention my name in connexion with that horrible “new journalism” shuck you’re promoting’. Letter, 3 March 1971, Tom Wolfe papers. In fact, an extract from Thompson’s ‘The Hell’s Angels’ was printed in *The New Journalism* anthology.

²¹⁵ Letter, 29 December 1975, Tom Wolfe papers.

²¹⁶ Janet Malcolm, ‘A Very Sadistic Man’, *Nobody’s Looking at You*, Melbourne and London: The Text Publishing Company, 2019, 266.

“really” like remains unanswered, as it should’.²¹⁷ Likewise, Viva’s epistolary self – the self she created for her own novel-memoir – is more likeable than Goldsmith’s and Arbus’s portrayal in *New York* magazine. Does it matter if this comparison doesn’t answer what Viva is ‘really’ like? That the comparison tells us as much about Goldsmith and Arbus as Viva? In the end, all three women were operating in what were, at the time, the male-dominated worlds of art and New Journalism, in which all three fought for recognition. Despite the accusations, counter-accusations and power jostling, there were no clear winners among the three women who created the ‘La Dolce Viva’ story.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 5

SILENCE = DEATH? Discussing art during New York's AIDS crisis

Craig Gholson: Do you like doing interviews?

Robert Gober: No.

– draft transcript for 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB* (1989)¹

This chapter continues the examination of the published artist interview in Downtown New York, this time focusing on the late 1980s. Writing in 1988, Jeanne Siegel justified the New York-centric focus of her interview anthology, *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, thus: 'I still see New York in the early 80s as the center of the art world. In other words, the dream of most artists in both Europe and the United States was still to find success in New York.'² In fact, it was not specific enough to describe New York as the art-world centre, but rather the area known as Downtown, and even more specifically by the 1980s, the East Village.³ Julie Ault, in *Alternative Art New York, 1965–85*, has summed up the factors that contributed to the flourishing of the Downtown scene:

an abundance (some would say over-abundance) of artists; a culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse urban population in flux; the political context of various civil rights and liberation struggles; the availability of affordable residential and commercial rents; a plethora of neglected or underutilized urban sites – spaces and places in transition; an unrestricted public sphere (as compared to the present); the growth of public funding for culture; and the city's status as a powerful cultural center.⁴

In the last chapter, Barbara Goldsmith's profile of Warhol muse Viva in *New York* magazine depicted Downtown as seedy and sordid. Viva and Warhol moved promiscuously between the Downtown of artist studios and clubs, and the Uptown of dealers, celebrities and

¹ Unpublished draft transcript for 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB*, no. 29, Fall 1989. *BOMB Magazine* records, 1978–2017, MS#1415. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

² Jeanne Siegel, *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1988, 1.

³ *Time Out New York* describes the geographical location of, and history of the term, the East Village: 'The neighborhood, which is bound by the Bowery and Third Avenue to the west, 14th Street to the north and Houston Street to the south, used to be considered part of the Lower East Side, but it was rebranded in the mid-20th century when beatniks and artists moved in.' See www.timeout.com/newyork/manhattan/east-village-manhattan-neighborhood-guide. Accessed 18 June 2021.

⁴ Julie Ault, ed., *The Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 6.

collectors. But, for many artists, beginning with the Abstract Expressionists and the Artists' Club of the 1950s, Downtown was not just a geographical location (seedy as it may have been) but a self-contained creative enclave in which they lived, worked and socialised.⁵ The creative peak of the Downtown period was, for many, from the 1970s to the early 1990s – reflected in the date range of little magazines and other material amassed as part of New York University's Downtown Collection.⁶

After the demise of *Avalanche* art magazine in 1976, an interview-led visual arts magazine that had launched in 1970 just after Warhol's *Interview*, a gap opened up for a publication that would reflect upon and serve the needs of the evolving Downtown community.

Avalanche co-founder Liza Béar and former *Interview* editor Glenn O'Brien were involved in the founding of the interdisciplinary *BOMB Magazine* in 1981, with Betsy Sussler as its editor (as she continues today). Perhaps because it is still published today, *BOMB* has received less art-historical consideration than the comparatively short-lived *Avalanche*,⁷ and will thus be the focus of this chapter.

In its first years, *BOMB*'s offices and printers were based in SoHo, as with *Avalanche*'s. As Sussler has commented, '[if] we could walk there, we did business there'.⁸ The tightness of this Downtown community was clearly emphasised in the cult film *Downtown 81*, in which Jean-Michel Basquiat, playing the young street artist around whose life the semifictional story centres, remarks that 'if you want to see somebody, just think hard, you'll run into them'.⁹ How was this strong sense of community reflected in the artist interviews produced there? According to Sussler, interviews were an extension of conversations happening anyway among the Downtown art community.¹⁰ If that kinship could also be romanticised, it

⁵ This affordability of rents can be explained, according to Sarah Lowndes, by the fact that 'by the mid-1970s, "white flight" to the suburbs had left the city in civic and economic decline'. See Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing: Subjugated Knowledges*, London: Routledge, 2016, 69.

⁶ Downtown Collection at the Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

⁷ See Kim Conaty, *Breaking Ground: Avalanche Magazine (1970–76), A New Medium for Art and Information*, PhD thesis, New York University, 2016; and Gwen Allen, 'Against Criticism: The Artist Interview in *Avalanche Magazine, 1970–76*', *Art Journal*, Fall 2005. An exhibition titled *Avalanche 1970–1976*, curated by Lisa Le Feuvre, was held at Chelsea Space, London, 11 June – 23 July 2005.

⁸ Betsy Sussler, 'This History of *BOMB*', in Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, eds, *The Little Magazine in Contemporary Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015, 22.

⁹ The film's credits also reflect this cliquishness, and feature many of the names discussed in this chapter: the screenplay was by Glenn O'Brien; Marisol was producer; Marisol's then-husband Edo Bertoglio was the director; the artist David McDermott was cast as the Man of the Past.

¹⁰ Sussler, 'This History of *BOMB*', 20.

was at least replacing the earlier myth of the American modernist artist as a lone genius, still prevalent in the early 1960s. In 1962, for instance, Sidney Geist complained, in the Artist's Club magazine *SCRAP* that he co-edited, of an instance in which it had become 'impossible to publish an interview with an artist because another artist's name came into the discussion', which he criticised as 'defending a uniqueness as valuable as a trademark, owing nothing to others, registered in all countries, and protected against imitation'.¹¹ He called for an end to this 'false image of the isolated soul, its genius revealed to itself in a *coup de foudre*'.¹² *BOMB*, on the other hand, was (and is) premised on the artist as a networked being, whose work relies on collaboration and conversation.

Furthermore, experiments in new technology, crossing traditional media boundaries (what Fluxus artist Dick Higgins had already called 'intermedia')¹³ in Downtown New York created a particularly fertile environment for collaborations between all types of creative practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴ In this way, this era might be seen as a reprise of the close relationship between the literary and artistic worlds of the 1950s, as exemplified by the New York School poet Frank O'Hara, who wrote art criticism as editorial associate for *ARTnews* in the mid-1950s,¹⁵ and worked at the Museum of Modern Art, writing *Lunch Poems* in his breaks.¹⁶

Avalanche and *BOMB* shared an informal aesthetic, an emphasis on the social relations between practitioners, and a strong sense of their readership,¹⁷ which Gwen Allen has characterised in the case of the former as a 'radical counterpublic, namely the politicized alternative-arts community centered in SoHo in the early 1970s' – but which could equally apply to the early days of *BOMB*.¹⁸ Like *Avalanche* before it, *BOMB* considers interviews not

¹¹ Sidney Geist, 'A number of Things: editorial observations', *SCRAP*, no. 7, 6 April 1962, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ See Dick Higgins, 'Statement on Intermedia', 3 August 1966, published in Wolf Vostell, ed., *Dé-coll/age (décollage)* *6, New York: Typos Verlag, Frankfurt – Something Else Press, July 1967, 1.

¹⁴ The overview of the Downtown Collection at the Fales Library states: 'Working across media, many downtown artists utilized new portable video technologies, low-budget film gauges, and new distribution technologies such as public access cable.' The Collection holds more than 37,000 video recordings, 6,000 film elements and 25,000 audio recordings.

¹⁵ *ARTnews* was then edited by Tom Hess, who commissioned many artist-critics, including O'Hara and James Schulyer, the latter also associate editor from 1957 to 1962. See Irving Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, 206.

¹⁶ An anthology of his *Lunch Poems* was published by City Lights in 1964.

¹⁷ The 1985 edition of the US-based *Directory of Literary Magazines* lists the readership of *BOMB* as 5,000, rising to 8,500 in 1990.

¹⁸ Allen, 'Against Criticism', 51.

only as a means of interpreting artists' work, but a vital part of the art-making process itself. Nell McClister, former managing editor of *BOMB*, told the Association of Art History conference on the occasion of the magazine's twenty-fifth anniversary: '*BOMB* foregrounds the work of art as always in dialogue, with the artist engaged in the world, and the reader as instrumental in the construction of the work's meaning.'¹⁹

However, the magazines differ in key aspects. *BOMB Magazine* covers the whole gamut of the arts, and, unlike the very focused aesthetic interests of *Avalanche* – mainly time-based and conceptual artists, such as Vito Acconci, Ed Ruscha and Lawrence Weiner – is heterogenous in its tastes. *BOMB*'s former art editor (now a contributing editor) Saul Ostrow has insisted, 'editorially it has no bias: figurative, abstract, and conceptual artists have all had access to its pages'.²⁰ This reflected the eclecticism of Downtown creative practitioners in its heyday, among which, as Lynne Tillman (novelist, cultural critic and a contributing editor to *BOMB*) wrote, 'there was no coherent aesthetic ... formally, the work was all over the map'.²¹ The eclecticism was further reinforced by the fact that, unlike *Avalanche*, whose interviews were all conducted by its editors Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp, *BOMB*'s interviewers were a mix of magazine staff and invited freelancers – one of only two 'hard and fast editorial rules' being that 'interviews conducted must be between peers, [and] both participants must be professionally engaged in a creative medium'.²²

Politically, the US had swung significantly to the right since the 1960s heyday of Warhol's Factory, with Ronald Reagan as President for most of the 1980s (1981–9), succeeded by his Vice-President George Bush in 1989. Reflecting on what he called the '*annus mirabilis*' of 1968 twenty years on, sociologist Todd Gitlin rued that for all the social and political achievements of that time – in terms of equal rights, arms control, the rise in activism – 'their limits become stark'.²³ Gitlin went on to lament that the 'thousands of activists who organized for civil rights and campus reform, against the war, etc. in the Sixties, and in successor movements since then ... are amazingly underrepresented in the Senate, the House

¹⁹ McClister in Sussler, 'This History of *BOMB*', 27.

²⁰ Saul Ostrow, 'Introduction', in Betsy Sussler, ed., *BOMB: speak art! The best of BOMB Magazine's interviews with artists*, New York: New Art Publications, 1997, xiii.

²¹ Lynne Tillman, *What Would Lynne Tillman Do?*, Brooklyn: Red Lemonade, 2014, 235.

²² Betsy Sussler, 'Preface', in Sussler, ed., *BOMB: speak art!*, ix.

²³ Todd Gitlin, 'When Were the Sixties? Where Are We Now? A Meditation', in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New York: Bantam Books, 1987, 4.

of Representatives, and among governors’.²⁴ Those activists had gained little real legal and State power in the intervening years.

The late 1980s also represented the height of the AIDS epidemic that Reagan had failed to officially recognise until 1987 (when he used the term ‘AIDS’ in public for the first time), that is, ‘six years after AIDS is identified, and after 21,000 American citizens have died from it’.²⁵ This neglect seemed to confirm the conservative view of AIDS in that decade as associated with ‘deviant’ sexual and social behaviour, such as homosexuality and drug-sharing – that is, nothing to do with ‘normal’ people. As Susan Sontag declared in 1989, ‘[E]very feared epidemic disease, but especially those associated with sexual license, generates a preoccupying distinction between the disease’s putative carriers ... and those defined ... as the “general population”’.²⁶ For Sontag, the upshot was that the pre-AIDS era of the 1960s and 1970s ‘now seems for the middle class part of a lost age of innocence – innocence in the guise of licentiousness, of course’.²⁷ Sexuality, and particularly homosexuality, was now of unavoidable public interest. After all, as Sontag noted, ‘...to get AIDS is precisely to be revealed, in the majority of cases so far, as a member of a certain “risk group,” a community of pariahs’.²⁸ Given this stereotyping and moral judgement, the question of how to talk about AIDS – how to express mourning and outrage – and whether to try to represent it in one’s creative work, was a serious challenge for the Downtown arts community that generated conflicting responses. How, for example, to interpret the famous slogan SILENCE = DEATH, popularised by AIDS advocacy group ACT UP?²⁹

Case study: Robert Gober by Craig Gholson

The case study for this chapter is an interview between Craig Gholson (playwright, poet and *BOMB*’s then associate editor) and rising art star Robert Gober that was published in *BOMB*’s Fall 1989 issue³⁰ – an exemplar of the magazine’s peer-to-peer, cross-disciplinary interviewing ethos. Does the fact that the interlocutors were from different disciplines offer

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ Claudia Carson and Paulina Pobocha with Robert Gober, ‘Chronology’, in Ann Temkin, ed., *Robert Gober: The Heart is Not a Metaphor*, ex. cat., New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014, 149.

²⁶ Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-5.

²⁹ The original poster featuring this logo was created by Avram Finkelstein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Kreloff, Chris Lione and Jorge Socarrás in 1987, before being adopted by ACT UP.

³⁰ The interview took place on 8 August 1989.

any special insights into Gober's work? Or should we rather note their similarities: the fact that they were of the same generation (Gholson born in 1951, Gober in 1954), and both were gay men living in the epicentre of the AIDS crisis, which formed a shared, poignant subtext to the interview? It appears from reading the interview that they did not know each other well, but that they shared a number of references (certain artists, the AIDS crisis).

By the time of this interview, the East Village scene, if not the whole of the Downtown area, was suffering. Peter McGough, one half of the eccentric artist duo McDermott and McGough, who dressed and lived as if in the early twentieth century, has described artistic life amid the scene:

In 1985 there were almost seventy galleries in the East Village. By 1987 almost all of them closed and a remaining few moved to SoHo. The East Village scene was disappearing. Rents were increasing more than six times over; collectors lost interest in that art, and people were dying or moving elsewhere from the devastation of AIDS.³¹

It is certainly difficult, in hindsight, to interpret this interview without considering the AIDS context, especially as Gholson died of AIDS-related complications in 1992, only three years after the interview. But, in fact, this interpretation has been hindered by Gober's attempts to keep his artwork and activist work separate, and to avoid courting victimhood. But this separation has not been easy to maintain. The draft transcripts of the *BOMB* interview, in the *BOMB Magazine* archives at Columbia University, as well as the original audio recording, reveal what was redacted from the original recording and offer some insight into this struggle. In the published *BOMB* interview Gober makes no specific mention of the AIDS crisis, although discussions of this feature in the drafts. As with each of my case studies, I have had to consider the ethics of disclosing material that was not intended to be made public, especially material explicitly referred to in correspondence as not to be included. Yet, in the case of Gober and Gholson, I would argue that the redacted material has for the most part been discussed by the artist himself in his later interviews and own writings.

Gober's protectiveness over his public persona seems to have deterred explicit political readings of his work, particularly in the early part of his career represented by this interview.

³¹ Peter McGough, *I've Seen the Future and I'm Not Going Out: The Art Scene and Downtown New York in the 1980s*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2019, 161.

Take the critic Hilton Als, who wrote of Gober that ‘despite his [Gober’s] interest, personal and professional, in AIDS-informed gay politics and in politics in general’, Als himself ‘didn’t look at his work through that scrim for years, for fear of preconceptualizing what I observed, of classifying him as one of those artists with a “difference” they felt the art world should acknowledge or pay for’.³² What prompted Gober to protect his work and image in this way?

Much of Gober’s subject matter is indeed mundane enough to resist political association; rather, critique of his work has tended to draw on psychological or psychoanalytic frameworks. He is, after all, best known for highly illusionistic, handmade sculptural versions of sinks, beds, drains and childhood furniture like cots and playpens, as well as disembodied human body parts like *Untitled Leg* from 1989–90 (a realistic-looking man’s leg that appears to protrude from a gallery wall). A *Village Voice* column by Gary Indiana (another *BOMB* contributor), based on Gober’s Paula Cooper Gallery exhibition in 1987, related the artwork to childhood archetypes, nostalgia and artisanal versus found objects.³³ Indiana saw the work as uncovering ‘disturbing possibilities in the everyday’, as well as having something to say about gender differentiation; Gober’s urinals, he wrote, ‘tell you about pissing, standing next to other people pissing, about cocks and having one and not having one in a disposal situation, and about being watched while you piss’.³⁴ One of Indiana’s main points of admiration for the work was that it was more universally ‘basic’ than work (like Pop art) about consumer culture that ‘belongs to “everybody” only in the most provisional sense (everybody sees the products, but not everyone consumes them)...’.³⁵

In the mid-1990s, Hal Foster included Gober among a set of realist artists whose work he analysed in terms of the Lacanian notions of trauma and repetition. In his essay ‘The Return of the Real’ (1996), Foster identified a type of realist art in which illusionism is pushed ‘to the point of the real’. This strategy of illusionism, Foster argued,

is employed not to cover up the real with simulacral surfaces [as with some superrealist art] but to *uncover* it in uncanny things, which are often put into performances as well. To this end some artists estrange everyday objects related to the

³² Hilton Als, ‘I Don’t Remember’, in Temkin, ed., *Robert Gober: The Heart is Not a Metaphor*, 24.

³³ Gary Indiana, ‘A Torture Garden’, *The Village Voice*, 27 October 1987, 105.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

body (as with the sealed urinals and stretched sinks by Robert Gober ... Other artists estrange childhood objects that return from the past, often distorted in scale or proportion, with a touch of the ... monstrous (as in the crib become a psychotic cage by Gober).³⁶

The one-paragraph summary of Gober's work and themes that prefaces the 1989 *BOMB* interview likewise focuses on the uncanny nature of his objects. It begins: 'Robert Gober's sculptures call everyday objects into question. And what he discovers in calling the common into question, is the disquieting, the disarming, the unnerving and the disconcerting.'³⁷ The interview proper opens with Gholson's striking question, 'What would you say if someone called your work perverse?', to which Gober replies, 'I would like that, and I would say that they were right' – without elaborating on what that term might mean. (In fact, Roberta Smith had written of 'Gober's gently perverse rehabilitations of Americana being particularly impressive' at the Whitney Biennial earlier that year.)³⁸ Gholson and Gober then move on to a discussion of the importance of humour in the work, with Gober expounding that '[A] lot of times in the studio, I push the pieces until they make me laugh. It's a way to let people enter into the piece, where you can give them more complicated and fraught material.' Again, there follows no further discussion on what might be so fraught in the material.

Archival material shows just how much was redacted before that first line – which appears on page seven of one of the drafts. While *Avalanche* interviews had often been lengthy and edited to appear verbatim (although not quite to the stream-of-consciousness level of *Interview*), *BOMB* interviews swing back towards the more controlled editing of *Paris Review* magazine, the second editorial rule of *BOMB Magazine* (the first being peer-to-peer interviewing) being that '[I]nterviews are edited by *BOMB* editors, as well as interviewer and interviewee. In this way, both participants get to say what they want, exactly the way they want, without misinterpretation.'³⁹ Like the *Paris Review*, *BOMB* treats the interview as a written form, a form of literature that requires 'transformation' (Sussler's term that suggests a

³⁶ Hal Foster, 'The Return of the Real', in *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, MA and London: October Books/MIT Press, 1996, 152.

³⁷ 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB*, no. 29, Fall 1989, 32. Available also at: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/robert-gober/>. Accessed 18 June 2021. Unlike the *Paris Review*, or indeed *Avalanche*, *BOMB* eliminated long, introductory biographies and scene-setting descriptions – the implication being that interviewer and interviewee would be familiar to their readership, and that any gushing introduction or mythification of the interviewee would be unnecessary and inappropriate.

³⁸ Roberta Smith, 'Review/Art; More Women and Unknowns in the Whitney Biennial', *The New York Times*, 28 April 1989, 32.

³⁹ Sussler, *BOMB: speak art!*, ix.

kind of alchemy)⁴⁰ from its oral source. While the *Paris Review* staff edited interviews to form a narrative arc, *BOMB*'s editor Sussler has instead proposed a more instinctive process. She has written of the imperative to find in the conversations, however 'elliptical or tangential', 'a thread, a rhythm, a subtext, and an interior logic'.⁴¹ The 'job' of editors, interviewers and interviewees is thus to 'listen and, in listening, push and pull at the interview's dialogue until its substance reveals itself'.⁴² With a background in theatre, Sussler also used her experience of enacting dialogue to hone her method of editing interview transcripts. She has credited her then-husband Linzee Smith's (director of the theatre group *Nightshift*) rehearsal ethos as particularly important:

He had a wonderful way of starting rehearsals where we'd just read the texts out loud with no intonation, nothing, just reading it out loud until we'd absorbed it, until we felt that it was really a part of us ... Through this process, we'd really absorb what the playwright was saying.⁴³

In the end, however, the *BOMB* principle of co-editing, and the idiosyncratic editing styles of the various freelance contributors, mean that literary aspirations are always subject to compromise.

Following the discussion on humour, the Gholson-Gober interview turns to some innocuous biographical questions, such as whether Gober owned a dog growing up ('two'), and whether the dog bed in Gober's upcoming Paula Cooper exhibition had belonged to one of his dogs ('No.'). The interview becomes more animated when Gholson asks very direct questions about Gober's Catholic upbringing and whether or not Gober still believes and goes to church ('Thank God, no.'). In a surprise twist to the interview, Gober then asks Gholson whether *he* believes in God, to which he replies, somewhat unexpectedly given Gober's emphatically negative response, 'Yes'. Gober then describes the church as a 'very sick place', adding: 'The Church that I knew was an extremely hypocritical institution. That might be where I got my initial inspiration of perversity, growing up within the Catholic Church.' This line is, in fact, used as the introductory quote of the online version of the interview, suggesting that his Catholic upbringing is the most salient aspect of Gober's work, and the source of the

⁴⁰ Betsy Sussler, interview with the author, 4 February 2019.

⁴¹ Sussler, *BOMB: speak art!*, ix.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Sussler, interview with author, 2019.

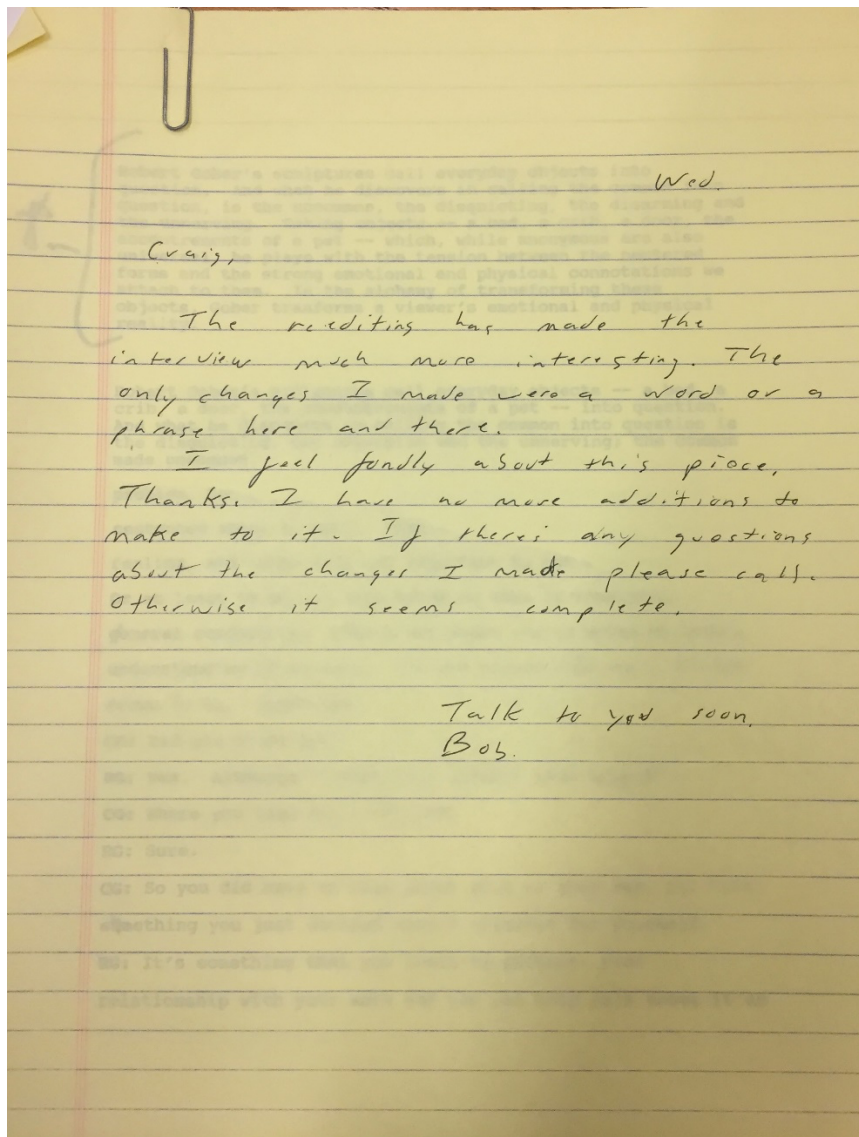


Figure 22 Letter from Robert Gober to Craig Gholson, dated 'Wed'. *BOMB Magazine* records, 1978–2017.

Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

psychological unease it provokes.⁴⁴ However, in an interview for *The Brooklyn Rail*, in 2014, Jarrett Earnest brought up the *BOMB* interview and the belief in God section, asking Gober 'So, since that time you no longer feel that way?' Gober replied:

That was a long time ago, maybe 25 years ago. I was young. But it's too reductive to ask, "Do you believe in god or not?" It was a rude question. Perhaps I was reacting to

⁴⁴ The print version features instead the pull-out quotes 'I don't think art is inherently cynical' followed by 'I think it's inherently hopeful'. 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB*, 34-5. Nonetheless, the most prominent reproduced artwork in the print and online versions is Gober's grave-like *Two Partially Buried Sinks* (1986–7), photographed as if in a cemetery.

that, I don't remember, but it isn't something to talk about publicly. Did Warhol talk about going to mass every Sunday?⁴⁵

When I first read the *BOMB* interview, I had the impression that Gober was being coaxed into feeling more comfortable revealing his beliefs and motivations. I also had the sense that the interviewer and interviewee had made a genuine connection, and that the answers were frank and intimate. But in examining the interview further, I have come to the conclusion that I was mistaken, and that there is much discomfort and withholding of information in the text – a sense that is confirmed by other writings by Gober and later interviews. Despite writing to Gholson that he felt ‘fondly’ about the *BOMB* interview (fig. 22),⁴⁶ it seems that he was either being polite or he changed his opinion. The interview is not mentioned in Gober’s bibliography on his gallery Matthew Marks’ website and is omitted from the ‘Chronology’ section and bibliography in the otherwise very comprehensive-seeming catalogue for his Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, survey exhibition in 2015.

It is important to note what is not discussed or included in the interview. The unpublished transcript of the interview, in the *BOMB Magazine* archives, shows that the conversation originally began with a brief discussion of Gober’s upcoming exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery (30 September – 28 October 1989). Even in the unredacted draft, very little of Gober’s work for the show is mentioned: his cat-litter works (eight plaster-cast sculptures of cat-litter bags), but not the hand-made sculpture of a bag of doughnuts, cast pewter drains and a life-size sculpture of a wedding dress. Likewise, Gober’s wallpaper pieces for the exhibition are only briefly alluded to: Gholson asks after the ‘piece on the wall now’ to which Gober responds ‘[T]hat’s a strike-off of the wallpaper’. However, Gholson misses the opportunity to press Gober on the nature of his wallpaper, changing the subject to Warhol with his comment ‘I love that Warhol cow wallpaper’.⁴⁷ In the end, this section was edited out, a brief mention later in the published interview (together with an image) of one of the cat litter works the only indication of the exhibition to come. Presumably the section was seen as

⁴⁵ ‘Robert Gober with Jarrett Earnest’ interview, *The Brooklyn Rail*, 18 December 2014. <https://brooklynrail.org/2014/12/art/robert-gober-with-jarrett-earnest>. Accessed 18 June 2021.

⁴⁶ Letter from Robert Gober to Craig Gholson, dated ‘Wed.’. *BOMB Magazine* records.

⁴⁷ Unpublished draft transcript for ‘Robert Gober by Craig Gholson’, *BOMB*, 29, 1 October 1989. *BOMB Magazine* records.

just warm-up material that didn't lead anywhere interesting, despite the contentious nature of the wallpaper works, in particular.

Installation shots of the *Robert Gober* exhibition at Paula Cooper, however, reveal the nature of the two wallpaper designs.⁴⁸ One featured an alternating pattern of male and female genitalia, based on drawings by Gober. These, as explained in the 2015 MoMA catalogue, were originally produced as endpapers for the short story *Heat* by Joyce Carol Oates, a collaboration between writer and artist published to generate funds for the Whitney Museum of American Art's library.⁴⁹ The other wallpaper design was *Hanging Man/Sleeping Man*, the imagery of which had previously featured as fabric for a dog bed at Gober's solo exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1988, and again at the 1989 Whitney Biennial. The sleeping man image is of a handsome man lying in bed, his muscular naked torso contrasting with the soft white bedlinen; its source material was a bedding ad from Bloomingdale's department store. This tender, mildly sexualised – possibly homoerotic – image is juxtaposed, disturbingly, with an image, as described in the MoMA catalogue, 'of a lynched black man, based on an early-twentieth-century illustration in the Picture Collection of the New York Public Library'.⁵⁰

The distressing nature of the work is amplified by the contrast between subject matter and Gober's pastel colour-palette and delicate drawing style. Hilton Als wrote of his first encounter with the wallpaper that 'it seemed to go on and on, which meant that the vulnerability of that sleeping man and the vulnerability of that murdered body went on and on, too. There was no getting any distance from it.'⁵¹ Reflecting back on the work in 2015, Als admitted to being confused how to interpret it. On the one hand, he acknowledged that:

my response to an artwork, especially a controversial one, in the years around the creation of *Hanging Man/Sleeping Man* was tainted by the ways in which people looked at art then: less as an experience of aesthetics and emotion than as an engagement with "meaning" and with politics, with the repudiation of "dead white

⁴⁸ See www.paulacoopergallery.com/exhibitions/robert-gober-1989-09-30/installation-views. Accessed 18 June 2021.

⁴⁹ Carson and Pobocho with Gober, 'Chronology', 158.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵¹ Als, 'I Don't Remember', in Temkin, ed., *Robert Gober: The Heart is Not a Metaphor*, 23.

men” and all the ghastly traditions that had informed previous generations of art – the machismo of Abstract Expressionism and of Minimalism.⁵²

But on the other hand, Als felt that looking at the work offered an alternative to what he called the ‘black-male fetishization’ of Robert Mapplethorpe’s work that, as a young black gay man, he nonetheless found unsettling. Instead, ‘Gober’s wallpaper drew a knife between me and all that ... It created a clean space for me to think not only about bodies, male bodies, but about my own reaction to them sociologically, racially, and visually.’⁵³ After all, as the artist David Wojnarowicz wrote in his memoir of the time, ‘[I]t is standard practice to make invisible any kind of sexual imaging other than straight white erotic fantasies.’⁵⁴ This censorship, Wojnarowicz despaired in 1991, applied just as much to museums and collectors, who ‘failed to support work that defines a particular person’s sexuality, other than a few examples such as Mapplethorpe’s’.⁵⁵

Reviewing the 1989 Paula Cooper exhibition for *The New York Times*, Roberta Smith saw Gober’s new work as an ‘exploration of the myths and taboos, especially concerning sex and race, that are longstanding components of the American mindscape’. Her concluding remarks made a clear link with American politics:

Studying Mr Gober’s odd yet affecting art, pets and junk food, hygiene and virginity, sexual and racial difference all become symbols, major or minor, of a perpetual American tragedy of repression and self-deception. In this, the season of the Helms amendment, his exhibition is unusually pertinent.⁵⁶

Smith recognised the courage in Gober’s work of making visible these symbols of ‘difference’ following the successful amendment to a Labour, Health and Human Resources and Education spending bill for 1988 (sponsored by Republican Senator Jesse Helms), designed to prohibit government funds ‘being used to provide AIDS education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote, encourage, and condone homosexual sexual activities or the intravenous use of illegal drugs’.⁵⁷ The real consequence of this bill was to ban the kind of sexually explicit imagery used in safe-sex brochures, thus severely

⁵² Ibid., 24.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ David Wojnarowicz, *Close to Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017, 128.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Roberta Smith, ‘Review/Art; The Reinvented Americana of Robert Gober’s Mind’, *The New York Times*, 13 October 1989, 28.

⁵⁷ See www.congress.gov/amendment/100th-congress/senate-amendment/963/actions. Accessed 18 June 2021.

curtailing the work of the Gay Men's Health Crisis, in particular. Writing also in *The New York Times*, the New York Mayor Edward Koch called the legislation callous.⁵⁸ Being seen to distribute sexualised gay imagery, then, had legal ramifications.⁵⁹

Art as metaphor

When Gober himself wrote about *Hanging Man/Sleeping Man* in 2015, he provided a range of references and influences, avoiding being pinned down to one specific political context. He explained the imagery was the

confluence of researching America's history of hate crimes; going to Germany, post-Holocaust, of course – of wanting to have that history present at least metaphorically in the exhibition; and of coming out of the intensity of the epidemic in New York, of wanting that also to be present metaphorically within the imagery.⁶⁰

In the Jarrett Earnest interview for *The Brooklyn Rail*, Gober again discussed the use of metaphor in his artwork, and the ambiguity of the title of his 2015 MoMA exhibition, *The Heart is Not a Metaphor*: 'I don't know what it means – "the heart is not a metaphor" – because obviously it is, sometimes. It still stays in my mind as a puzzle. It becomes a bit of poetry that is almost irreducible, and that is why I love it.'⁶¹ To Earnest's explicit question 'Do you think of your works as metaphors?', Gober replied: 'I don't know how else you would understand it without metaphor. It is one essential way to experience and feel something about the pieces.'⁶²

The problem was that not all of Gober's audience would read the work as metaphoric. When the *Hanging Man/Sleeping Man* wallpaper was shown at the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 1990, Gober himself acknowledged that the museum guards 'were enraged'. He recalled that one man reproached him: 'I understand what you're saying and I believe you. But why is that the only image of a black man in the entire museum?'⁶³

⁵⁸ Edward Koch, 'Senator Helms's Callousness Toward AIDS Victims', *The New York Times*, 7 November 1987, 27.

⁵⁹ The activist ensemble ART+ Positive, affiliated with ACT UP, was formed in response to the Helms amendment.

⁶⁰ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, 'Chronology', 154.

⁶¹ 'Robert Gober with Jarrett Earnest', *The Brooklyn Rail*.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, 'Chronology', 165. The exhibition was titled *Culture and Commentary: An Eighties Perspective*.

In response, Gober used this controversy to provoke a discussion among the artists, museum staff and wider community.⁶⁴ Als applauded Gober's wallpaper for giving him 'hope because at least he wasn't ignoring difference within difference. He made it clear that difference came at a price, but at least he was talking about it – and getting shit for doing so.'⁶⁵ Furthermore, Als wrote that

[W]hat struck me about Gober's argument then was his insistence on being included as an *American* as opposed to a *queer American*. ... He didn't want to fall into the conflation trap that any number of queer artists managed to get caught in time and again; he didn't want to be part of the "difference" conversation in order to earn a bigger piece of the victim pie.⁶⁶

Gober, according to Als, claimed to be 'indignant' about feeling that he had a 'right to that imagery'; that it was 'my history, too'. Nonetheless, he was not sure if would tackle racism in his work again.⁶⁷

In any case, Gober's use of the term 'metaphor' links to a key point of contention in the 1980s: whether to treat AIDS as a metaphor for society's wider ills, or whether this undermined the specificity and medical urgency of the crisis. Sontag, in her influential 1989 text *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (an update of her previous *Illness as Metaphor* prompted by her cancer diagnosis at the time, from which she had recovered against expectation), warned that '[I]t seems that societies need to have one illness which becomes identified with evil, and attaches blame to its "victims"'.⁶⁸ As might be expected from the author of the essay 'Against Interpretation' (1966), Sontag vehemently argued against the use of metaphor and the over-interpretation of AIDS. For her,

[T]he metaphor implements the way particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien "other," as enemies are in modern war; and the move from the demonization of the illness to the attribution of fault to the patient is an inevitable one, no matter if patients are thought of as victims. Victims suggest innocence. And innocence, by the inexorable logic that governs all relational terms, suggests guilt.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Gober wrote that a year later, he met with Teresia Bush, education officer at the museum, and chief curator Ned Rifkin to discuss issues around the work. *Parkett* published extracts in March 1991. Carson and Pobocho with Gober, 'Chronology', 166.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

Sontag observed from her own experience of illness ‘that the metaphoric trappings that deform the experience of having cancer have very real consequences: they inhibit people from seeking treatment early enough, or from making a greater effort to get competent treatment’. She concluded sharply, that the ‘metaphor and myths, I was convinced, kill’.⁷⁰ Later, she added that the use of botanical and zoological metaphors, such as ‘full-blown’ or ‘full-fledged’ AIDS had the fatalistic effect of making ‘development or evolution into AIDS the norm, the rule’.⁷¹ Max Navarre drew a similar conclusion in his article ‘Fighting the Victim Label’, for a special AIDS-themed issue of *October*, arguing ‘I believe that despair kills people with AIDS as much as any of AIDS’s physical manifestations. If we could truly believe in the possibility of *living* with AIDS, I think that survival figures would be higher.’⁷²

Nonetheless, other writers and artists – besides Guber – believed it was vital not to disregard the metaphorical implications of the AIDS crisis. Douglas Crimp, who edited the AIDS issue of *October*, wrote in his introductory article of the importance of shattering the ‘myth so central to liberal views of the epidemic: that there are, on the one hand, the scientific facts about AIDS and, on the other, ignorance or misrepresentation of those facts standing in the way of a rational response’. Instead, he asserted, ‘AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it. We know AIDS only in and through those practices.’⁷³

Other Criteria

In the introduction to *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, Siegel remarked on the rise in number of magazines in the late 1970s and early 1980s,⁷⁴ such as the artist-led *Real Life* magazine (1979–94), feminist journal *Heresies* (1977–93) and the more academic *October* – founded by breakaway *Artforum* editors Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson in 1976 (and later

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷² Max Navarre, ‘Fighting the Victim Label’, *October*, vol. 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism, Winter 1987, 144

⁷³ With this statement, he claimed to be following the argument of François Delaporte in relation to the 1832 cholera epidemic in Paris, about which Delaporte wrote, ‘I assert, to begin with, that “disease” does not exist. It is therefore illusory to think that one can “develop beliefs” about it to “respond” to it. What does exist is not disease but practices.’ Douglas Crimp, ‘Introduction’, in *October*, vol. 43, 3.

⁷⁴ The Downtown Collection at the Fales Library includes a large number of periodicals produced in the Downtown area, many crossing disciplinary boundaries and many also short-lived. Examples include *Between C & D*, *Cover* magazine, *Once* and *Appearances*. Printed Matter bookshop in New York is also a useful source for magazines of this period, such as *Tracks: A Journal of Artists’ Writing* and *The New York Spanner*.

joined by Douglas Crimp, among others). They often shared contributors; for instance, Craig Gholson, Gary Indiana, Lynne Tillman, Liza Béar and Kathy Acker wrote for *BOMB* and the more literary Downtown little magazine *Between C & D*. Siegel also noted a simultaneous, dramatic rise in interviews in art periodicals; even in the theoretically-inclined *October*.⁷⁵ Of these newcomers, Siegel singled out *BOMB* for having ‘especially favored the interview format and published five in its first issue’.⁷⁶

What was different about the interview in the 1980s? Siegel argued that the interviews of this period offered ‘a counterbalance to the overdetermined art criticism that typified the early 80s’.⁷⁷ Sussler has put it more bluntly: ‘There was a lot of heavy, philosophical language weighing down art criticism at the time, that was too exclusive in my mind and not that clear on what the hell they were talking about.’⁷⁸ Surely, both were referring, at least in part, to *October*. From its opening editorial, the journal pronounced a ‘strong theoretical emphasis’ that sought to counter the ‘isolated and archaic enterprises’ of American criticism that, *October* argued, were ‘largely predicated upon assumptions still operative in the literary academy’.⁷⁹ The current crop of intellectual journals had, *October* accused, suffered from ‘their ostentatious disregard of innovation in both art and critical method’, which only ‘encouraged the growth of a new philistinism within the intellectual community’.⁸⁰ *BOMB* certainly begged to disagree.

October’s AIDS special was an anomaly among its issues in focusing so heavily on contemporary politics outside the art world. Indeed, Douglas Crimp, who left the journal two years later, claimed that his co-editors had only read the material after it got so much attention post-publication; ‘and then they didn’t really like it. For them, it wasn’t what *October* was about.’⁸¹ There followed, Crimp alleged, a subsequent ‘retrenchment around a traditional notion of high modernism’.⁸² (A 1990 article in the *Village Voice* went further,

⁷⁵ Siegel, *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁷⁸ Sussler, interview with author, 2019.

⁷⁹ ‘About October’, *October*, vol. 1, Spring 1976, 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Mathias Danbolt, ‘Front Room – Back Room: An Interview with Douglas Crimp’, *Trikster – Nordic Queer Journal*, no. 2, 2008. Republished online: www.f-r-a-n-k.org/conversations/01/pdfs/150518_FRANK_conversations_Crimp.pdf. Accessed 18 June 2021.

⁸² *Ibid.*

implying that the resignation had ‘raise[d] the possibility that some of the editors of the journal that pioneered investigations into gay and lesbian representation may themselves have succumbed to homophobia’.)⁸³

In the 1960s and 1970s, Gwen Allen remarks, ‘[c]riticism and exhibition reviews were replaced by artists’ projects, writings, and interviews, through which the artists “talked back” to critics and took charge of the public discourse around their work’.⁸⁴ This fascination with the unmediated artist’s voice can be seen as a reaction to Greenbergian formalism and its strict emphasis on the formal properties of the art object. In ‘Against Interpretation’, Sontag had supported the need for greater attention to form in art, but with the added emphasis on sensory experience. ‘We must learn to see more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more,’ she urged.⁸⁵ Moreover, ‘[i]n place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.’⁸⁶

Leo Steinberg’s anthology of essays, *Other Criteria*, published in 1972, also set out possible other criteria by which art might be judged, no longer excluding social and political context, or the psychological make-up of its practitioners. Overall, while he agreed with Greenberg as to art’s special status, writing that the ‘objects of our attention differ from the concerns of physical science in being existential human creations; and they differ from the concerns of social science because ... they are remarkable feats, never repeated’, he favoured a greater pluralism and flexibility in the interpretation of art. According to Steinberg, ‘to the extent that works of art are subjectively structured by personalities formed in the total experience of both life and art, no one orthodox method at any one time can comprehend them’.⁸⁷

Of particular relevance for this chapter was Steinberg’s view of sexuality. He believed that the academic history of art remained ‘coy and chaste’, and that ‘a man’s sex life – even if mocked in the phrase “physical pleasures” and arranged under the heads of sin, crime, and sickness – is no less formative in his personality than his faith or his Neo-Platonist thought’.⁸⁸

⁸³ Robert Atkins, ‘October in Revolt’, *Village Voice*, 9 October 1990, 103.

⁸⁴ Gwen Allen, *Artists’ Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2011, 8.

⁸⁵ Susan Sontag, ‘Against Interpretation’, in *Against Interpretation and other essays*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1987, 14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007, 314.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 315.

Steinberg countered arguments about privacy, asking ‘who can say where an ultimate privacy lurks? Centers of privacy shift, as does the public status of sex. There are moments, individual as well as collective, when the sense of the obscene shifts from food to sex, and from sex to death.’⁸⁹ Was it now relevant and acceptable to ask an artist about their sexuality – and not just for reasons of sensationalism – in an interview? Craig Owens, in his essay ‘The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism’ (1987), made another case for not ignoring sexual difference (although he doesn’t mention sexuality here). Doing so, for him, was to perpetuate the masculine domination of art criticism and theory. As he pointed out, such ‘absence of discussions of sexual difference in writings about postmodernism, as well as the fact that few women have engaged in the modernism/postmodernism debate, suggest that postmodernism may be another masculine invention engineered to exclude women.’⁹⁰

Postmodernism and irony

By the 1980s, the dominant form of criticism, then, was no longer formalism, but the new postmodern theories of poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and identity politics. *Between C & D* offered a satirical take on how extensive and somewhat arbitrary the ‘other criteria’ for interpretation had become. Each issue, cheaply printed on ‘Epson FX-80’ computer paper, listed a different set of interests, while playing around with the arbitrariness of the magazine’s title whose letters could stand for myriad things, including the notorious Avenue names of Lower East Side’s Alphabet City. Coinciding with *BOMB*’s Gober interview, *Between C & D*’s Fall 1989 issue lists ‘sex, drugs, violence, danger, computers’ on its cover. *Between C & D* likewise mocked the current mode for theoretical language by adding various subtitles on its covers, such as ‘Post-Literate Lower East Side Fiction’ (fig. 23).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Craig Owens, ‘The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism’, in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, 1987, 61.

⁹¹ These invented ‘theories’ include the Post-Mordant, Post-Narrative, Post-Post-Modern, Post-Narcotic and Post-Pop; as well as Neo-Faux, Neo-Expressionist and New Romantic. See *Between C & D* Archive, MSS.084, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

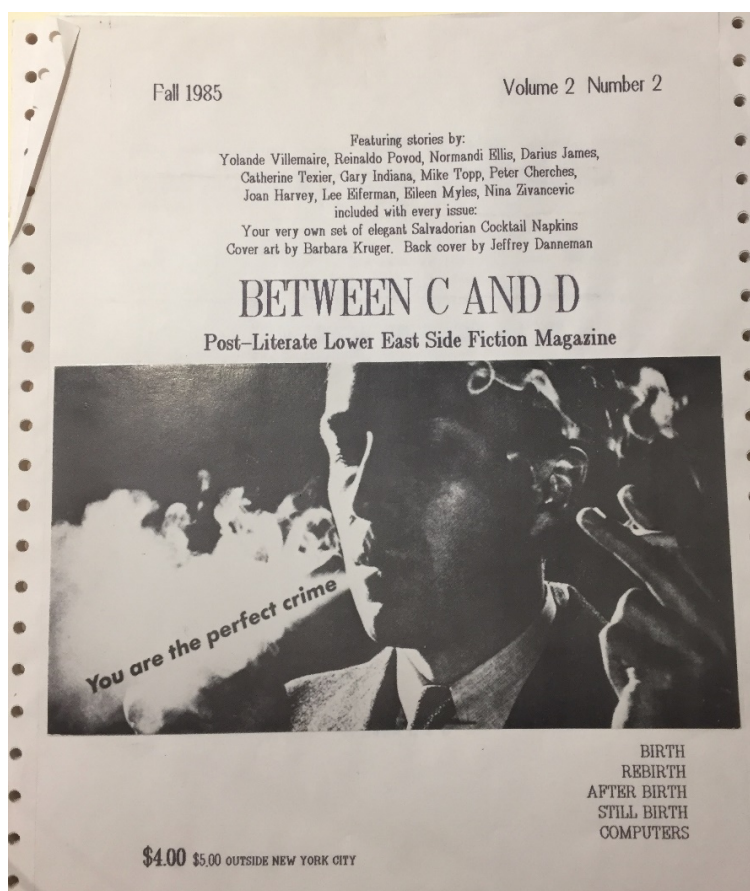


Figure 23 *Between C&D*, 2: 2 Fall 1985; *Between C & D* Archive; MSS.084; box 8, folder 7; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

Indeed, irony was such a prevalent aspect of the Downtown scene that the published Gober-Gholson interview contains ten instances of the words ‘irony’ and ‘ironic’, such that Gober muses, ‘I guess I don’t think about irony; it’s such a given. I mean, can art be interesting and not be ironic these days? Maybe, I don’t know.’⁹² Gholson, particularly, enjoyed word-play and playful formats in his writings and interviews. The *BOMB* interview boasts many witticisms, such as, ‘Psychology deals with things as problems; metaphysics deals with things as a journey. Do you have a problem or are you on a journey?’⁹³ But Gholson seems relatively restrained in this interview compared to his other writings, whether out of respect

⁹² ‘Robert Gober by Craig Gholson’, *BOMB*, 32.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

for the artist or slight discomfort at being outside his usual interests of literature, film, theatre and music. After all, only four of his twenty interviews for *BOMB* were with visual artists.⁹⁴

Prior to *BOMB* Gholson had held various writing and editorial positions at the punk rock, new wave magazine *New York Rocker* (1976–82), covering such icons as Patti Smith and Blondie. One interview, with the singer Richard Hell, is particularly unusual in form and content. After a fairly conventional start – despite seeming to take place at 11pm on account of Hell’s insomnia – the article features a number of lists, offered with no rationale and presented in random order. These include the questions people most want to ask him (‘What is your real name? And ‘Is Richard Hell Theresa Stern?’); and the contents of his fridge (‘Methadone bottle prescribed to Michael Johnson’).⁹⁵ The final section is more meta, with Hell asking, ‘Why don’t you spend the entire time describing my disability?’ (which is mentioned earlier, though with no evidence of this detected by Gholson).⁹⁶ Overall, the interview does nothing to clarify the nature of Hell’s disability or his identity. Despite Hell’s stated intention to ‘dispell those rumors’ about his being Theresa Stern,⁹⁷ for example, it wouldn’t take much digging to work out that she was indeed his creation (with fellow bandmember Tom Verlaine). But, surely, this was all part of the fun for the reader – and suited the irreverent tone of the magazine.

Gholson had also written for the short-lived magazine *X Motion Picture Magazine* (1977–8), seen as a predecessor to *BOMB* since it was co-founded by Betsy Sussler, with Eric Mitchell and Michael McClard, under the auspices of the New York-based Colab artists’ group. The February 1978 double issue contains, printed on its inside cover, a parody of the celebrity interview form. Titled ‘Transcript of an audio tape by Craig Gholson and Lance Loud’ (a rare ‘out’ gay TV personality and regular on the Downtown scene), it consists solely of a three-column list of typical interview questions, with no responses recorded. It is unclear which of the two names is the interviewer, and which the interviewee, or whether they have both contributed to the questions, or whether the answers have been redacted. The longer questions include such stalwarts as ‘How would you describe yourself?’, as well as more

⁹⁴ His other interviews are filed under the categories theatre, literature, film and dance.

⁹⁵ Craig Gholson, ‘Richard Hell’, *New York Rocker*, 1: 5, December 1976, 12. See *New York Rocker* file, ML3533.8.N49; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

banal ones like ‘What did you get for Christmas?’, overly prying ones like ‘Is that your real name?’ and seemingly irrelevant ones like ‘What did you do last night?’⁹⁸ These are interspersed with single-word questions like ‘Why?’, ‘What?’, ‘Who?’, and prompts and banal comments like ‘You didn’t?’ and ‘Isn’t that funny?’

This article can be read either as an interview template designed to cover every eventuality, or an amalgamation of all the questions asked in mainstream celebrity interviews. Either way, it was a telling indication of how boringly predictable celebrity interviews were seen to have become.

Artists speak for themselves

Both the Richard Hell interview, in seeming to perpetuate and relish the ambiguity surrounding his identity, and the interview spoof in *X Motion Picture Magazine* perfectly illustrated contemporary debates on authorship. Roland Barthes’ ‘The Death of the Author’, from 1967, had persuasively argued for the impossibility of ever fully understanding an author’s (or artist’s) intentions, and had reversed the conventional hierarchical relationship between author/artist and reader/viewer, to give power to the latter. Many artists and writers relished the creative freedom offered by this loosening of the responsibilities of authorship. For instance, the artist Larry Rivers’ 1992 memoir, *What Did I Do?* is amusingly subtitled *The Unauthorized Autobiography*, implying a kind of split personality, in which one side of Rivers does not consent to the other.⁹⁹ Lynne Tillman’s fictional character Madame Realism,

⁹⁸ ‘Transcript of an audio tape by Craig Gholson and Lance Long’, *X Motion Picture Magazine*, 2: 2 & 3, February 1978, inside cover.

⁹⁹ Larry Rivers with Arnold Weinstein, *What Did I Do? The Unauthorized Autobiography*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

through which she began writing about art in the mid-1980s, offers another key example of playful experiments with authorship.¹⁰⁰

...REPORT

SESSION OF 11/3/61
 Wolf Kahn: "Everybody wants to be in a show."
 Irving Kriesberg: "You can't do it with one stripe unless you assign to the stripe something outside of painting."
 Stephen Greene: "I'm going to talk about painting."
 Lucian Krukowski: "A lot of things affect people."

SESSION OF 10/27/61
 Jon Schueler: "The paintings in the Guggenheim show are marked by coldness, arrogance, elegance and calculation."
 Ray Parker: "What's wrong with sophistication."
 Paul Brach: "The Imagist tendency offers possibilities to my generation that école de Kooning doesn't."
 Nicholas Marsicano: "I think it's a spiritual show. That is, it's religious, there is a god in it. Then I must ask, what is that god?...You can't create a new god. You can only believe in man's capacity for belief. I believe in other people's beliefs."

SESSION OF 5/19/61
 Stan Vanderbeek: "...home movies."

SESSION OF 5/12/61
 James Harvey: "Shapur dragged Valerian around for twenty years in a cage that was kept in the palace. When he died, they skinned the body and stuffed it, and hung it in the temple. Valerian was the only Roman emperor Shapur ever captured."

SESSION OF 4/28/61
 Robert Wiegand: "All space is positive."
 Sally Cook: "I want to use everything--all color and all form--bending it to my idea of what a painting should be. The accidental is not justified by its own existence."
 William Littlefield: "One can say color is light or light is color. Actually, of course, color is the light reflected from the surface of the painting."

SESSION OF 4/21/61
 John CuRoi: "Love is politics. Painting is a means, not an end. Young men are being shot in Cuba because we artists in New York don't wield the power we should wield. Love is dead."

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Figure 24 'Report', *SCRAP*, no. 7, 6 April 1962, back page; NX1.S37; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

¹⁰⁰ Tillman dates the first iteration of Madame Realism back to 1983. See <https://brooklynrail.org/2016/11/art/lynnce-tillman-with-jarrett-earnest>. Accessed 18 June 2021.

What did this mean for interviews? In his introduction to the *BOMB* anthology of interviews with artists *Speak art!* (which includes the Gholson-Gober interview), *BOMB*'s then-art editor Saul Ostrow tried to clarify the magazine's aims in light of these theories. He claimed that the magazine represented the view of artists for whom 'criticism, while a relevant pursuit, is nothing more than an attempt to supersede the voice and intentions of an author by superimposing those of the critic'; *BOMB* thus 'gives art and artists a chance to speak for themselves'.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, he recognised the irony of *BOMB*'s belief in interviews when 'theorists, critics and audience alike had become sceptical of the relevancy an artist's intentions played in the understanding of works of art'.¹⁰²

BOMB is part of a lineage of artist-led activities in New York that prioritised the artist's voice. One important precursor was *SCRAP*, the Artist's Club's in-house magazine that ran for eight issues between 1960 and 1962. Edited by Sidney Geist and Anita Ventura, it reported on conversations during the Club's sessions, transcribing scraps of dialogue that required the reader to have been at the session (or at least speak to someone who had) to fill in the context. A note from the session of 19 May 1961 reads simply 'Stan Vanderbeek: "... home movies"'. (fig. 24)¹⁰³ There were plenty of witticisms that would no doubt amuse an in-crowd. Marisol (session of 24 November 1961) is quoted as saying: 'When I was eight years old I spent a year copying Mickey Mouse. Then I went through Goya, Matisse and Hans Hofmann. Now I'm back to Mickey Mouse again.'¹⁰⁴

SCRAP's irreverent tone was deliberately emphasised. When Hubert Crehan suggested to the editors, in issue 2, that the magazine title has a 'scatological intonation', Geist agreed, saying: 'Art is more serious than criticism, and we got that idea out quickly in the title.'¹⁰⁵ Indeed, in issue 6, eleven artists were invited to comment on their own work, '[a]s a change from criticism – criticism by others'.¹⁰⁶ Four declined, prompting a reflection on why this might be

¹⁰¹ Ostrow, *BOMB: speak art!*, xiv.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *SCRAP*, no. 7, 6 April 1962, 5. See *SCRAP* file, NX1.S37; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁵ 'Scrap's First Tape', *SCRAP*, no. 2, 23 December 1960, 5.

¹⁰⁶ 'That Is To Say/The Artist Talks', *SCRAP*, no. 6, 19 April 1961, 1.

(not ready; would talk of everything but the artwork; didn't know where to begin; everything to be said was in the paintings):

An artist might not have to talk if one of two conditions pertained: if his intentions were perfectly clear, or if someone else spoke for him. In the present state of affairs neither of these conditions prevails – and even if they both did, why not, in the chorus of comment that surrounds all human effort, hear the artist's voice?¹⁰⁷

The critic, it was frequently noted in the magazine, could not be relied upon to comment on art, and artists needed to answer back. One issue, for instance, was almost entirely dedicated to 'a critique of criticism' by Geist, specifically of a MoMA catalogue essay on Mark Rothko by the curator of that exhibition, Peter Selz, with commentary on the text taking up the same amount of space as the original essay (the two texts are printed alongside each other). It ends with the exhortation that 'artists not be silent when their works are wrongly described or when their intentions are misrepresented'.¹⁰⁸

A more nuanced point about artists speaking for themselves was made by Als in his MoMA catalogue essay on Gober. He noted that Gober had arrived in New York in time to witness the paradigm-shifting exhibitions of the *Times Square Show* (1980), a DIY exhibition organised by Colab at a former massage parlour, and including Nan Goldin, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, among the 100 or so artists;¹⁰⁹ and "*Primitivism*" in *20th Century Art* at MoMA (1984). This latter, Als wrote, 'seemed designed to shore up a world that Colab, [curator Diego] Cortez, and all their artists were working hard to tear down, a white world that, as James Baldwin once said, "was white no longer"'.¹¹⁰ For Als, then, after the *Times Square Show* and *Primitivism* 'language shifted from others talking about the Other to the Other speaking for himself'.¹¹¹

Blowing your own horn

In her anthology of interviews with artists of the 1980s, Jeanne Siegel argues that the 'activity of the media undoubtedly accounts in part for the escalation of interest in the artist's

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Sidney Geist, 'Moodily dare: IFP. A Critique of Criticism', *SCRAP*, 16 February 1961, no. 4, 4.

¹⁰⁹ See: <https://collaborativeprojects.wordpress.com/> and www.timessquareshowrevisited.com. Accessed 18 June 2021.

¹¹⁰ Als, 'I Don't Remember', 28.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 32.

words. Personalities became as important as the art object.¹¹² She offers Warhol as ‘the exemplar here’.¹¹³ In his recent memoir, artist Peter McGough remembers the SoHo-based critic Edit deAk (co-founder of *Art-Rite* magazine, 1973–8) writing in one of her articles that artists ‘were like Cabbage Patch dolls, each with its own personality and papers’, and suggesting that ‘the magazine just print the artists’ names in bold letters because that’s all they were interested in – seeing their names’.¹¹⁴ Likewise, in *Downtown 81*, Basquiat’s character nonchalantly remarks that ‘you’ve got to blow your own horn in this town’.

Is blowing your own horn a particularly American phenomenon? Even in the 1960s, the editors of *SCRAP* magazine had promoted the importance of artists expressing their views publicly if America ‘is not to degenerate into a succession of lonely giants, flashing comets and cultural sports’, compared to Europe, where artists ‘often’ write about art. American art ‘had better face the fact that art is a realm of ideas’, they warned.¹¹⁵ Could this competitive attitude towards European artists, the fear of being the underdog, be the key to the prominence of American artist interviews?

But it is important to remember that not every American artist had Warhol’s media savvy to blow their own horn – or even wanted to. In *Downtown 1981*, Basquiat’s character, homeless and struggling to make ends meet, is given advice by a friend, played by Betsy Sussler, who reassures him, ‘It’s OK to be difficult. Of course you are. It’s lovable.’ In his *BOMB* interview, Gober offers a clear rejection of the compliant artist,¹¹⁶ opting instead to maintain ambiguity around his work. Early in the interview, he explains his position: ‘You know, this interview is going to be a problem, because I’m not innately drawn to coming up with sentences about my work. What I cull is more of an emotional feeling, and to me it’s not important to put that into words.’¹¹⁷

He reinforces this justification a little later in the interview: ‘It’s something that you learn to protect; your relationship with your work and you can only talk about it so much before

¹¹² Siegel, *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ McGough, *I’ve Seen the Future*, 106.

¹¹⁵ *SCRAP*, no. 6, 1.

¹¹⁶ In the draft transcript, Gober tells Gholson that he hasn’t done an interview in five years due to a bad experience with *Flash Art*, in which he felt he was being set up by the interviewer to talk about one of his peer’s work. See unpublished draft transcript for ‘Robert Gober by Craig Gholson’. *BOMB Magazine* records.

¹¹⁷ ‘Robert Gober by Craig Gholson’, *BOMB*, 32.

certain things get spoiled. What is, for the first time a discovery of putting something into words, loses meaning the second time.’¹¹⁸ Richard Flood, chief curator of the New Museum, has compared Gober to Charles Burchfield and Forrest Bess, two artists whose work Gober has curated, as ‘artists who almost defy easy translation’. They are all, Flood suggests, ‘language resistant artists: you can talk all around them, but to talk about them is not so easy’.¹¹⁹ Fellow artist Charles Ray has similarly claimed that Gober’s work ‘whispers’ rather than declares its meaning. In a 2013 speech honouring Gober’s work, he said:

Art that is good deserves to be discussed. But good art is not great art and I think great art is much harder to talk about. It talks to us and it does not matter if we talk about it. Robert Gober’s art has been speaking for many years. If you were to ask me what his artwork talks about I would not be able to tell you. But this does not mean it isn’t speaking ... What I do understand about Robert Gober’s art is that I want to see it again. It asks me to be near. To come closer and look longer or to come back tomorrow and look again. The work whispers “Be with me.”¹²⁰

If Gober’s resistance or reticence to overt interpretation would seem to undermine the interview process, in fact, it might be seen as representing a more general shift in artists’ and viewers’ relationship to meaning in art. Ostrow considers the early days of *BOMB* as

...a period in which the modernist paradigm of self-consciousness and self-expression was giving way to the idea that the meaning of a work of art was indeterminate and culturally constructed, in part a consequence of the tendency of artists of the Fifties and Sixties to use interviews and statements to either mystify the effects of their efforts or to overdetermine their meaning.¹²¹

In the *BOMB* interview, Gholson himself admits to being uneasy with over-interpretation, saying: ‘A lot of times when I’m beginning to write a piece, I know that if I talk about it too much, I never write it, because, in a way it is out in the world already.’¹²²

And yet, Gober has not always been opposed to publicly disclosing biographical detail. He readily agrees with Gholson, in the interview, that his objects have a ‘personal narrative’; ‘I don’t think that it can be anything but?’ he says. ‘You try to place it into a larger consciousness; you try to place it within perhaps an historical perspective, a broader

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, ‘Chronology’, 232.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 238.

¹²¹ Ostrow, *BOMB: speak art!*, xiv.

¹²² ‘Robert Gober by Craig Gholson’, *BOMB*, 32.

American view. But, definitely, it's always a personal narrative.¹²³ The exhibition catalogue for Gober's 2015 MoMA retrospective includes a substantial 'Chronology' section, a detailed timeline of Gober's life.¹²⁴ The first entry begins with an account of Gober when still in vitro, describing how he very nearly doesn't survive emergency surgery on his mother's 'knotted intestine'.¹²⁵ This detail seems to be pushing the very limits of what constitutes relevant biographical information about an artist's life. Was Gober being satirical, going to ironically exhaustive lengths to satisfy curiosity about his private life? In his *Brooklyn Rail* interview, Gober recalls that the Chronology was an attempt to counterbalance the long essay by Hilton Als earlier in the catalogue, which he knew would be 'poetic, allusive, and non-hierarchical'. He tells Earnest that he didn't 'spend much time thinking about how I might come across to people outside my immediate circle' but that he'd 'been told that people say "oh, he's so private," and things like that'. Thus he had decided 'that it might be worthwhile to be pretty forthcoming about who I was, where I came from, what happened to me and where I am now'.¹²⁶

Writing on AIDS

Gober has also demonstrated his willingness to use the media strategically, as with his writings about AIDS and government policy towards hate crimes. In 1989, the same year as the *BOMB* interview, Gober published a frank and moving article exploring his feelings about AIDS in the Swiss art magazine *Parkett*. In it, he describes visiting a friend at work, making the stark observation that her colleague's brother had died of AIDS, his friend had just attended a funeral and 'I had just buried Dan'.¹²⁷ It seems to him, that if 'people aren't themselves sick, they know someone who is, or they are struggling to assimilate the loss of someone who was'.¹²⁸ Ultimately, he mourns, 'death has temporarily overtaken life in New York City'.¹²⁹ He admits that writing the article has been difficult. He asks: 'How could I add to the dialogue without exploiting it? How could I get past my own anger to write something

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The timeline was prepared by Gober's archivist Andrea Carson, together with the co-curator of the exhibition Paulina Pobocha, who interviewed a range of Gober's friends and colleagues. Gober himself was also highly involved in shaping the end result.

¹²⁵ Carson and Pobocha with Gober, 'Chronology', 93.

¹²⁶ 'Robert Gober with Jarrett Earnest', *The Brooklyn Rail*.

¹²⁷ Robert Gober, 'Cumulus from America', *Parkett*, vol. 19, March 1989, 169.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

that had larger calmer metaphorical ripples? Could I write about my friends' deaths honestly? And what does all this have to do with the art world?'¹³⁰

The remainder of Gober's *Parkett* article takes on a more militant tone about the prevalence of hate crime. He illustrates the extent of this prejudice through a series of anecdotes: his encounter with a taxi driver, 'who told me that "this AIDS thing" was a plot against him, that he couldn't get laid anymore';¹³¹ reading a *New York Times* article's 'warped conclusion' that Halloween was 'the chance [for gay people] to physically put on a mask and thus finally feel free to be ourselves';¹³² and later being informed by a supposedly 'informed, liberal' woman that 'she thought AIDS had been, in a way, good for homosexuals' in that the epidemic 'had brought them to a larger political awareness, had organized and focused their energies in ways that had never before happened'.¹³³ Gober rails at the misrepresentations of the gay community in the press, such that the same *New York Times* issue ran alongside the Halloween article a report on the dramatic increase in incidents of bias crimes during Ronald Reagan's presidency that, while mentioning 'racist, sexist and anti-semitic violence' nonetheless ignored attacks on homosexuals.¹³⁴

Gober ends the article with a moving account of the final hours in hospital of his friend Dan, whose parents had had to 'assimilate in one day that their son was gay, had contracted AIDS, and had perhaps a few days to live'.¹³⁵ Although, he writes, that 'it is by no means only gay men who are affected by this disease, it is primarily gay men (although this is changing and filled with exceptions) who have organized themselves to care for their own when their families and their government recoiled in bewilderment and fear'.¹³⁶ And, again, importantly for the Gober-Gholson interview, Gober notes here that 'should gay men succeed in moving through this pandemic ... they will have succeeded without the support of family and religion, the two mainstays of succor and strength for previously oppressed minorities'.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 170.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 171.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 170.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 171.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

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BG: It was in this little book, "The Journal of Contemporary Art." It comes out twice a year; it's mostly interviews with artists. They asked me, Did I want to be interviewed? And I thought about it, and it seemed such a shame to pass up the chance, you know? For years I said no to interviews, but then it seemed stupid to me. Like if the media is offered to you, like use it. That's why I asked them if I could interview somebody else. I interviewed John Conyers, who's a Congressman, a Democrat from Detroit, and he had sponsored a bill about bias crimes. And the bill was about -- all the bill did, it was very simple, was just to keep a record of bias crimes. Like right now, if somebody takes a baseball bat and hits a black-skinned person over the head, there is no -- the only way to report that right now is as -- what would you report that as?

CG: Assault.

BG: Assault, right; assault, right. There's no record for bias crimes, so there's no way to keep a record so we know what's going on. So all the bill would do is create a category in all the crimes that are reported from police precincts, that go via computer to the FBI, so a country can keep like a ...

CG: I know we keep track of statistics on assaults against gays and lesbians.

BG: But the government does not; the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force does, right?

CG: So how do they determine that, though? How could you

Figure 25 Excerpt from draft transcript of Robert Gober and Craig Gholson interview for *BOMB*, no. 29, 1 October 1989. *BOMB Magazine* records, 1978–2017. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Thurs.

Craig,

I reread the interview last night, and cut it even more. I like the way that it reads now very much. I have enclosed extra black + white photos in case that the text is too short.

Aside from the first 5 pages, which I told you about yesterday, I cut 2 or 3 from the end where I talk about articles I had written. It ^{seemed} unnecessary to reiterate them in print, but I have enclosed them for you.

Also please use Robert instead of Bob, and R G instead of B G.

Thanks,
Talk to you soon,
Bob.

Figure 26 Robert Gober, letter to Craig Gholson, dated 'Thurs'. *BOMB Magazine* records, 1978–2017. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Gober had the references to this *Parkett* article removed from the *BOMB* interview transcript, although a letter in the archives shows that he did send a copy of the piece to Gholson for his information. Gober also asked to remove references to another piece of writing published in 1988, an interview he conducted with Congressman John Conyers for *The Journal of Contemporary Art* (1988–95) (fig. 25); although again, he included a transcript for Gholson.

Was this act based on modesty or ambivalence about airing or even exploiting one's personal experiences in the art world? He simply wrote in the letter that '[i]t seemed unnecessary to reiterate them' (fig. 26).¹³⁸

The interview with Conyers, which took place in Washington DC, focuses on the Hate Crimes Statistics Bill that this Democrat Congressman had authored, setting out to gather reliable statistics on types of 'bias crime'. The bill had been passed by Congress but the proposed addition of a new category for sexually oriented crimes was causing difficulties getting it passed by Conyers' Republican colleagues.¹³⁹ It is clear from the exchange that Gober was highly supportive of Conyers, comfortable enough with the Congressman to confide that '[a]fter eight years of Reagan I find the mood of the country very conservative and a little scary'.¹⁴⁰ He seemed to be using the interview to spell out the positive implications of passing this bill for the gay community in particular, as well as to show his distress at the rise in racist and homophobic violence. He does not mention his role as an artist but rather presents himself as a concerned citizen.

Gober's published interview with Gholson, on the other hand, focuses on his role as an artist, and minimises discussion of his politics or personality. The unpublished transcript includes a question by Gholson (suggested to him by the artist Jackie Winsor) on how Gober experiences being an artist. Gober offers a considered response that begins with 'I mean, just the other day I was finishing up a particularly difficult session in therapy, and I just realized in certain ways how much I hate being an artist. It's a burden, it's very difficult.' This section has been redacted from the published transcript. Was Gober anxious not to appear too self-absorbed? The MoMA Chronology section states that Gober's 1992 Dia exhibition catalogue was dedicated to James Serafini, describing him as 'a clinical psychologist, who was Gober's first longtime therapist', as well as the founder of Dignity New York (established in 1972 to 'encourage gay men and lesbians "to express their sexuality in a manner consonant with Christ's teaching"'). Serafini, the 1992 timeline entry ends, died from AIDS in 1994.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Robert Gober, letter to Craig Gholson, Thursday [no other date]. *BOMB Magazine* records.

¹³⁹ It took until 2009 for the Hate Crimes Prevention Act to be expanded to include crime committed based on sexual orientation – as well as gender, disability, religion, national origin and gender identity. See: www.justice.gov/crt/hate-crime-laws. Accessed 18 June 2021.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Gober, 'interview with Congressman John Conyers, Jr (D-Mich)', *Journal of Contemporary Art*, 1: 2, Fall–Winter 1988, 17-23.

¹⁴¹ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, 'Chronology', 180.

Gober actually reminds Earnest of this Chronology entry about Serafini in the 2014 *Brooklyn Rail* interview. It would seem that the older Gober is more comfortable discussing intimate aspects of his being, no doubt also reflecting current society's greater acceptance of sexual difference and a more compassionate attitude towards AIDS sufferers.

In the *Brooklyn Rail* interview, Gober acknowledges that he had 'never talked publicly about what I did in the epidemic', although he tells Earnest that 'a lot of people did'.¹⁴² Why didn't he? In the middle of the *BOMB* interview, for instance, Gholson points out that Gober's studio lies opposite a cemetery and asks him whether he is 'obsessed with death', especially considering that some of his sink sculptures look like tombstones. Gober gives him a thoughtful answer about his objects being 'almost all emblems of transition; they're objects that you complete with your body, and they're objects that, in one way or another, transform you'. But he goes on to say, 'about being obsessed with death, it sounds a bit ... depressed'. Nonetheless, when Gholson laughs, he adds: 'Of course, it's hard living in New York right now not to be. It's always on your plate.'¹⁴³

In the unedited transcript of the interview, Gober expounds on the difficulty of living in New York, and the extent to which his life is dominated by the AIDS crisis around him. In this transcript, we read that Gober has 'almost always done volunteer work alongside of being an artist'.¹⁴⁴ This was redacted from the published transcript. Gober's MoMA catalogue Chronology, however, does offer details of his volunteer work. The entry for 1980 notes that he taught carpentry to children at the Children's Aid Society – including to actress and writer Cookie Mueller's son Max. (Cookie, the entry ends, died of AIDS in 1989.)¹⁴⁵ The 1984 entry states that 'Gober begins volunteering at GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis, an AIDS-prevention, care and advocacy centre, established in New York in 1982]'. He trained in the Buddy Program, to help sick people with their day-to-day needs, and then became a Crisis Intervention Worker, assisting with 'disability, housing, and legal issues'. The paragraph ends, '[v]olunteer work becomes a major part of his life'.¹⁴⁶ In 1987, Gober began attending weekly meetings of the AIDS activist group ACT UP, also taking part in demonstrations and

¹⁴² 'Robert Gober with Jarrett Earnest', *The Brooklyn Rail*.

¹⁴³ 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB*, 34.

¹⁴⁴ See unpublished draft transcript for 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB Magazine* records.

¹⁴⁵ Carson and Pobocho with Gober, 'Chronology', 125.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

later working on the fundraising committee.¹⁴⁷ In 1991, he was commissioned to interview the AIDS activist art collective Gran Fury for *BOMB*,¹⁴⁸ and ended up dating one of its members, Donald Moffett.¹⁴⁹ Activism and volunteering were and are clearly a huge part of Gober's life – but not an aspect he was willing to publicly share in interviews.

The unedited transcript also contains a short discussion of a recent article by Keith Haring in *Rolling Stone*, which Gholson asks Gober if he has read (fig. 27). Replying, 'Yes, wasn't it amazing?', Gober goes on to praise how 'plainly and straightforwardly he talked about both being HIV-positive and then being diagnosed' and that Haring, it seemed, 'really wanted to ... I think to help other people, that he talked about it in that article'. Furthermore, Gober says that the article made him 'reevaluate' the work of Haring, as well as of Jean-Michel Basquiat (who had overdosed on heroin the previous year), and that he had found it 'so smart' that Haring had been able to talk about his achievements without 'self-aggrandizement'. Gober asks why he brought up Haring's article, to which Gholson replies that he 'was wondering if you could ever imagine talking about yourself like that, publicly'. Gober answers, 'No. Not right now. But things change.'¹⁵⁰ This is followed by a long silence (captured in the audio recording but not transcribed).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 148.

¹⁴⁸ 'Gran Fury by Robert Gober', *BOMB*, no. 34, 1 January 1991. See <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/gran-fury/>. Accessed 18 June 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, 'Chronology', 169.

¹⁵⁰ Draft transcript for 'Robert Gober by Craig Gholson', *BOMB Magazine* records.

¹⁵¹ When I visited the *BOMB Magazine* archive, I found that the original audio recordings for *BOMB* interviews were available only as unique cassette tapes and thus unable to be played. I have since paid to have a number of them digitised, including the Gober-Gholson interview.

CG: Yeah.

BG: Is it a conscious decision? Well, there's words in that piece, in the cat litter. Although they're tangential - they're subsumed within a structure of the sculpture. But I guess that's the first time.

CG: Do you have a title for this piece?

BG: Probably "Cat Litter."

CG: 'Cause the titles of your pieces, it seems like the earlier ones were titled. You know, all the sink pieces had titles to them, and then gradually you kind of moved into the not titling things, and calling them "Untitled."

BG: Yeah, there was a poetic phase, when the sinks were mutated and distorted. It felt very useful for me to give them poetic titles, because I could load up the information even more and give you more information. But certain instances, it seemed better to hold back and not direct people.

CG: Did you read the Keith Haring article in "Rolling Stone"?

BG: Yes, wasn't it amazing?

CG: Mmm-hmm. What did you think about it?

BG: I thought it was amazing. I feel bad I didn't send him a note to tell him how incredible that I thought that it was. How plainly and straightforwardly he talked about both being HIV-positive and then being diagnosed, and it seemed that he really wanted to, that he did it, I think, to help other people, that he talked about it in that article. It also

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made me think about Jean Michel, because it made me
reevaluate Keith's work, now that I know that he has an
illness that's pretty much fatal. It made me reappreciate
his work; the same thing with Jean Michel dying. Not that
Keith's dead.... What did you think?

CG: I thought it gave him a heroic stature.

BG: True, true.

CG: I thought it was very eloquent and moving.

BG: It's amazing. It's so smart. I mean, there were
things like, they were asking him about selling out, and he
said to the interviewer, he said, Look, I could have been the
most successful designer in the world, the most successful
graphic artist in the world. And at first I drew back from
that. And then after I thought about it, I thought, Well,
it's true, and it's amazing to be able -- it wasn't self-
aggrandizement. But it's amazing to have that -- it's not
insight, what's the word? What am I looking for? It's an
assessment of himself.

CG: Objectivity.

BG: Yes, exactly, yeah. Yeah. Why do you bring it up?

CG: I was just wondering if you could ever imagine talking
about yourself like that, publicly.

BG: No. Not right now. But things change.

CG: Do you do drawings for pieces?

BG: Sometimes, but rarely. I used to, but it's pretty rare
now.

CG: And do you ever show them? Or are they just ...?

Figure 27 Excerpts from draft transcript of Robert Gober and Craig Gholson interview. *BOMB Magazine* records, 1978–2017. Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

The Keith Haring article cited by Gholson and Gober was an interview between the artist and David Sheff, published in *Rolling Stone* on 10 August 1989. In it, Sheff refers to Haring as ‘openly gay’ and writes that ‘he has used his art to benefit gay causes’, and that since the AIDS epidemic began, ‘he has been an advocate of safe sex, and the disease that has taken

the lives of some of his close friends has been an inspiration in his work'.¹⁵² Sheff adds that Haring had tested HIV-positive two years ago, and developed Kaposi's sarcoma, 'a form of cancer that often accompanies AIDS'.¹⁵³ Over the course of the interview, Haring talks openly about his drug use, sex life, moving from Pittsburgh to the East Village, accusations of selling out, his close friendships with Basquiat and Warhol, countering racism, and his own sickness. When asked whether 'people should be open about their homosexuality', Haring answers that they should be '[n]ormal about it' [his italics] and that it shouldn't prevent him working with children. 'It doesn't mean I'm going to molest them,' he protests bitterly.¹⁵⁴ Towards the end of the interview, Sheff proposes that by 'keeping quiet about it, Rock Hudson [the covertly gay actor, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1985] helped to perpetuate the ignorance', with which Haring concurs: 'Because he didn't talk about it, the media was able to perpetuate this thing that AIDS was punishment for something he did that was bad.'¹⁵⁵ Haring died a few months after this interview, on 16 February 1990, aged 31.

But to come out as gay, let alone as HIV-positive, in the late 1980s was still likely to be damaging to one's career and media reputation – hence Gholson's and Gober's admiration for Haring's interview in such a mainstream magazine. In the MoMA Chronology, Gober admits that

[W]riting the piece for *Parkett* was difficult, to put it mildly. Not because writing is difficult – it is, but so what – but because it meant "coming out" professionally. At that time there were precious few examples of gay artists who chose to be explicit about their sexual natures who weren't in some professional way punished or diminished for it.¹⁵⁶

In fact, *Rolling Stone's* own editor, Brant Mewborn, was to die of AIDS the following year, in 1990, although his illness was kept private and his hospital bills were 'quietly paid' by the magazine's publisher Jann Wenner. Mewborn's obituary did not mention his cause of death 'to shield his family'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² David Sheff, 'Keith Haring: Just Say Know', *Rolling Stone*, 10 August 1989.

www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/keith-haring-just-say-know-71847/. Accessed 18 June 2021.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, 'Chronology', 155.

¹⁵⁷ Joe Hagan, *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times of Jann Wenner and Rolling Stone Magazine*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2018, 453.

In 1989, the Corcoran Museum of Art, Washington, DC cancelled Robert Mapplethorpe's retrospective exhibition, *The Perfect Moment*, which had been touring since the previous year, the director having feared that the sexually explicit work would threaten their National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) funding. Writing in Goyer's MoMA catalogue, Als reflects that this kind of 'censorship, especially during the age of AIDS (Mapplethorpe himself died of complications from the syndrome that year), called into question not only what the institution meant in our changing world but how an artist could choose to represent the self'.¹⁵⁸

Ironically, while being gay or HIV-positive was still being denied, AIDS was now being covered widely in the mainstream media, as well as in the gay press and cultural little magazines. Writing in the *City Lights Review* special issue 'AIDS, Cultural Life, and the Arts' in 1988, San Francisco-based writer Robert Glück asserted that '[g]ays have gone from national invisibility to the front page, generating interest if not enthusiasm'. 'Time magazine', he continued, 'apologized for not covering the March on Washington ... A profound shift is occurring in our image. For the first time we are widely portrayed.'¹⁵⁹ And yet, for Glück, this volume of language – 'the torrent of factual coverage, a deluge of facts' – was ultimately meaningless, since 'no language can express so great a feeling' as the 'accumulating sorrow'.¹⁶⁰ What's more, to 'make death general, to say ten thousand died of AIDS, is an example of how language lies. Each death is beyond language.'¹⁶¹

In the same issue of *City Lights*, the novelist Sarah Schulman – who described herself as a 'lesbian living in New York's Lower East Side' – began her contribution to the 'Forum on AIDS' with the assertion that '[w]hen I sat down to work on a new novel I realized that it would be absolutely impossible to write about anything but the AIDS crisis. It was totally present.'¹⁶² She nonetheless tempered this with a refusal 'to produce a book principally concerned with watching one or more characters slowly deteriorate and die over the course of three hundred pages'. Instead, she chose to 'focus on AIDS activism'. Like many contributors to this volume, she mitigated any attempt at historicising this period with the

¹⁵⁸ Als in Temkin, *Robert Goyer: The Heart is Not a Metaphor*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Glück, 'HIV 1986–88', *City Lights Review*, no. 2, 1988, 46.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶² Sarah Schulman, 'Literature in the Age of AIDS', *City Lights Review*, no. 2, 1988, 34.

possibility that she might not survive the epidemic. But for ‘those of us who expect to live to that day, the purposefulness and dignity of our individual lives will be determined then by how we behave now’.¹⁶³

Hotel history

In fact, the Downtown scene had already begun to be historicised by the early 1980s, including in the important exhibition *New York/New Wave* (1981) at PS1, curated by Diego Cortez, and the aforementioned film *Downtown 1981* (shot in 1980–1, but only released in 2000.) But this historicisation was often over-romanticised or just plain inaccurate. Peter McGough recalls a filmset (for the 1987 film **batteries not included* about old people being forced out of apartments and then saved by tiny spaceships) being created in Downtown to look exactly like the tenement building already there. As McGough scathingly writes, ‘...at the time filmmakers liked to show that starving artists lived in big lofts with beautiful furniture’. But, he counters, ‘that was not the case. Just look at Nan Goldin’s photographs, which captured the downtown scene of sex, drugs, art, and the disarray of beautiful, messy slumlike interiors.’¹⁶⁴ Gober’s description of the home and studio he moved into in 1980 – a former Chinese laundry on 76 East 7th Street – likewise resists romanticising the poverty. In his MoMA catalogue Chronology, Gober reminisces:

It was empty but filthy when I found it – behind a grease-covered, roach-filled stove, there were plastic curlers with greasy clumps of hair in them. ... It was a horrible place to live, horrible ... My bed was right behind the studio. I had a little piece of foam, a single mattress. There was a small table, a stove, a sink, a closet with a toilet, and a window facing a wall. The building had a gate in front and I had to lock myself in at night.¹⁶⁵

How do first-person accounts from this period contribute to telling this still very recent history? What do the interviewers and interviewees from this period, many still alive today, make now of the opinions they offered publicly three or four decades ago? The transcripts and letters relating to the *BOMB* interview between Gholson and Gober offer no specific indication of why Gober did not wish to include their discussions about AIDS. In later interviews, however, he offers more insight into his position. When Earnest tells Gober, in

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ McGough, *I’ve Seen the Future*, 137.

¹⁶⁵ Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, ‘Chronology’, 124.

the *Brooklyn Rail* interview, that he ‘really appreciated all the information you included about your work with the Gay Men’s Health Center ... and ACT-UP’ in the MoMA Chronology, Gober takes the cue to discuss his former reluctance. He reflects:

I have never talked publicly about what I did during the epidemic. What a lot of people did. But something moved me and I thought it was important to put down into print what it was like living in the epicenter of one of the worst public health epidemics of the 20th century and how that might have affected me and my work. I’m not sure that young artists understand that. How could they?¹⁶⁶

Earnest also tries to subtly prompt him to make a connection between his work and his sexuality, asking: ‘At the moment you started making that work, were there certain formal or conceptual aspects that could speak to a gay sensibility?’¹⁶⁷ Gober gives the comically sexualised response: ‘Well, to appreciate the dollhouses [the works he was making at the time] you had to get on your knees.’¹⁶⁸ Gober, nonetheless, goes on to bemoan the fact that he was often referred to as an ‘openly gay artist’. As he says, ‘Finally, thank god, that stopped because it was absurd – who is talked about as “openly heterosexual?” Sometimes there is actually a review where it is not even referred to which is in some ways progress and some ways isn’t.’¹⁶⁹

Earnest asks Gober whether he believes there to have been a ‘contextual shift around the work’. In that interview, he responds with a ‘I don’t know’.¹⁷⁰ But in another interview – this time a live conversation in front of an audience with curator Robert Storr in 2008 – Gober acknowledges a shift in his own understanding and interpretation of his artwork.¹⁷¹ Storr asks about Gober’s sink sculptures that he began in 1984 and made for three years, variations on enamelled cast-iron utility sinks, which are painstakingly handmade replicas rather than Duchampian readymades, and which recall the particular sinks of his grandparents’ homes.¹⁷² Having discussed the realism of the sinks as a reaction to the ‘Minimal art shoved down my

¹⁶⁶ ‘Robert Gober with Jarrett Earnest’, *The Brooklyn Rail*.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ The conversation took place on 17 April 2008 at 92nd Street Y, New York, as part of the *Artists’ Visions* Conversations Series Program.

¹⁷² Carson and Pobochoa with Gober, ‘Chronology’, 131.

throat' at art college,¹⁷³ Gobert then muses further on the symbolic value of sinks in a way that echoes the relationship between cleanliness and AIDS explored by Sontag in *AIDS and Its Metaphors*.¹⁷⁴ He tells Storr:

I was interested in the reality of what you do when you stand in front of a sink: you clean yourself. But none of my sinks had fixtures; they had holes. So that possibility of cleaning yourself was removed. Only on looking back I see that I made them in the very first years of the HIV epidemic. That was before HIV was even identified, but I was living in the very epicenter of it. I think that that was part of my impulse as a gay man. And the importance of the repetition of it mirroring the relentless deaths.¹⁷⁵

By contrast, the writer Gary Indiana opted to withhold his account of this period in New York from his autobiographical book *I Can Give You Anything But Love* (2015). In an interview for the *White Review* in 2016, Indiana declared that the 'recent necrophiliac nostalgia for the late 1970s and early 1980s New York ... is so off-base that I didn't want to engage with it at all', despite having lived and contributed to the Downtown scene since his arrival in 1978. For him,

New York was never the same after the epidemic. In fact, it's been a horribly depressing, punitive city to live in ever since, thanks to the disappearance of so many vital people, and thanks to real estate developers and Wall Street. But people who keep dredging up what a great place New York was thirty or forty years ago should just shut up and open a funeral home, where nobody minds if you talk about dead people all day.¹⁷⁶

Lynne Tillman has dedicated an essay, 'Downtown's Room in Hotel History', to the historiographical issue of personal witness accounts. She muses: 'Often memory is cast as "ours," history "theirs," but sometimes the two battle: suddenly you – in this case, I – find your writing inside exhibitions and books that represent a period under investigation.'¹⁷⁷ The recentness of this history, however, doesn't stop historians disputing an event's

¹⁷³ An edited transcript of this conversation is published in Robert Storr, 'Robert Gober', *Interviews on Art*, London: HENI Publishing, 2017, 195.

¹⁷⁴ In it, Sontag compares AIDS with other diseases and pandemics, and the vicious scapegoating that comes with discussions of these, in the US in particular. She writes: 'Underlying some of the moral judgments attached to disease are aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny.' She groups together those ill with leprosy, syphilis and AIDS, since they tend to show physical marks on the face (in the case of AIDS, lesions due to Kaposi's sarcoma that develop in many who are HIV positive), which she describes as 'the signs of a progressive mutation, decomposition; something organic'. Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 41.

¹⁷⁵ Storr, 'Robert Gober', 195-6.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Barron, 'Interview with Gary Indiana', issue 16, April 2016, *The White Review*. www.thewhiterewview.org/feature/interview-with-gary-indiana/. Accessed 18 June 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Tillman, *What Would Lynne Tillman Do?*, 233.

‘interpretations forever’. After all, she continues: ‘In the same club at the same time, people tell different tales about how the singer fell off the stage.’ She concludes that ‘even flawed accounts reveal something about the past. We are all unreliable narrators, after all.’¹⁷⁸ Betsy Sussler considers *BOMB* interviews vital to art historiography – as ‘an oral history of ideas’, of ‘intellectual histories’.¹⁷⁹ Saul Ostrow has written similarly that interviews ‘function as an aid in clarifying as well as extending comprehension or awareness regarding the broad modes of thought and the varied concerns artists face’ – insights, which, while maybe not ‘evident in the actual work, are a determinate in the decision-making process’.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

In 1988, Jeanne Siegel posited that the ‘increasing popularity of the interview format reflects its importance for the compilation of a history in the making’. In her opinion, the ‘interview format strives for momentary clarity and refinement of ideas rather than the closing of debate, offering itself to further reading, contemplation, and critique’.¹⁸¹ Can this self-consciousness about the historiographic importance of interviews be detected in the interviews of this period? Might it explain Gober’s reticence to pin down the meaning of his work in his interviews?

For *BOMB* editor Sussler, the ideal interview is ‘storytelling in one or three or five acts; there is denouement, there is catharsis’.¹⁸² But there is no evidence of catharsis in the Gober-Gholson interview, rather an attempt to limit the exposure of Gober’s most private and political opinions. Gober clearly did not relish speaking publicly about his work or life; his sculptures of sinks and urinals might indeed be read as addressing the discomfort at private activities, like washing and going to the toilet, being made public. Nonetheless, his interview with his peer, Gholson, for *BOMB* certainly rewards further reading, contemplation and critique in terms of the shifting context of ideas between the late 1980s and today, forty years later. Together with the audio recording of the interview, the transcripts and correspondence, the interview offers an oral history, not of the artist’s life story but rather of the ideas of the time. These include: the fears around coming out as gay; the sadness, anger and terror around

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 237.

¹⁷⁹ Sussler, ‘This History of *BOMB*’, 24.

¹⁸⁰ Ostrow, *BOMB: speak art!*, xiv.

¹⁸¹ Siegel, *Art Talk: The Early 80s*, 13.

¹⁸² Sussler, ‘This History of *BOMB*’, 23.

the AIDS epidemic; and the challenge for artists of maintaining some control over the rhetoric around their work. Comparing the *BOMB* interview to later writings and interviews, in which Gober reflected on his public persona of the 1980s, underlines the importance of reading interviews in context, and allowing that views change over time. It demonstrates that decision-making as to what artists will, and can, disclose in public, is a continually negotiated process.

Chapter 6

The keys to the kingdom: *index* magazine and fan culture

Being a journalist in this society is like having the keys to the kingdom. I mean, you can call up people and get to meet them by saying, “I’m doing an interview.”

– Peter Halley, *index A to Z* (2014)¹

In covering Kusama Happenings, the national media, centred in New York, described me as “intense”, “mysterious”, and “multi-faceted”. And many of the articles written about my activities delved into speculation and rumours about my private life. Such analyses contained many misunderstandings and wildly inaccurate guesses mixed in with a few truths, and the “Yayoi Kusama” they portrayed was someone completely unrecognisable to me. I did not see myself as mysterious or difficult to comprehend.

– Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net* (2020)²

The case study for this chapter is an interview of Yayoi Kusama by the Japanese art critic and curator Midori Matsui, published in *index* magazine in 1998. If the last chapter, on Robert Gober, turned on the issue of privacy, of withholding personal information to interviewers, this chapter deals with the opposite issue: Kusama’s often disarming openness about personal and taboo subjects like her mental illness and attitudes to sex and fame. As Karen Kurczynski has written, ‘Kusama’s formidable persona has dominated nearly all discussions of her work’. For her, therefore, ‘a critical analysis that historicizes the artist’s perspective on her own work has been long overdue’.³ Kurczynski praises Midori Yamamura’s book *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular* (2015) for providing ‘new insight by avoiding excessive biographical or formal analyses in favour of an examination of the social and political contexts from which the artist’s work emerged’.⁴ I analyse Matsui’s interview in relation to the challenges of how to frame Kusama’s work. Should researchers resist prioritising Kusama’s own words at the expense of secondary interpretation?

¹ Peter Halley in Wendy Vogel and Rachel Ward, eds, *index A to Z: Art, design, fashion, film and music in the indie era*, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2014, 71.

² Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, London: Tate Publishing, first English edition 2011, reprinted 2020, 109.

³ Karen Kurczynski, ‘Review of Midori Yamamura, *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular*’, *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas*, 2: 3, September 2016, 346.

⁴ *Ibid.*

I argue that it is as impossible and misguided to ignore the biographical aspects of Kusama's work as its social and political contexts and its formal elements. They are all essential components of the work itself. As Mimi Thompson wrote in *BOMB* magazine, also in 1998, 'This world is her real world, not a fabrication – she erases the distance between the artist and the work, often literally, painting her own body with dots and reclining on a couch covered with phallic shapes.'⁵ Moreover, Laura Hoptman notes that it is 'virtually impossible to find a photograph of Kusama's work that does not include the artist', not because of her "'lust for publicity'" but rather her 'interactions on film with her paintings, sculptures, and environments constitute works in themselves'.⁶ Likewise, when asked by Grady Turner, the following year in *BOMB*, whether she feared that 'people may be interested in your biography at the expense of your art', Kusama replied, 'No, I have no such fear. My artwork is an expression of my life, particularly of my mental disease.'⁷

1998 marked a pivotal year in Kusama's career – the beginning of what Kusama herself called 'Kusamania' or the 'Kusama Renaissance'⁸ – from which her reputation has continued to soar, making the nonagenarian (at the time of writing) the world's 'top-selling living artist'.⁹ Recognition of her work had grown steadily since her first retrospectives in Kitakyushu, Japan (1987) and New York (1989),¹⁰ so that in 1993 she was honoured with representing Japan at the Venice Biennale – the first woman to do so, and 'virtually the first solo exhibition' of the Pavilion's forty-year history.¹¹ But the 'biggest highlight' of those last heady years was being offered a major retrospective, *Love Forever*, that toured America's most prestigious art institutions in 1998 – Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA),

⁵ 'Yayoi Kusama by Mimi Thompson', *BOMB*, no. 64, Summer 1998. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/yayoi-kusama-1/>. Accessed 29 June 2021.

⁶ Laura Hoptman, 'Down to Zero: Yayoi Kusama and the European "New Tendency"', in Lynn Zelevansky, Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata, Alexandra Munroe, *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958–1968*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998, 54.

⁷ Grady Turner, 'Yayoi Kusama by Grady T. Turner', *BOMB*, no. 66, Winter 1999. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/yayoi-kusama/>. Accessed 1 July 2021.

⁸ Kusama has been highly self-conscious of her media status, and she used these terms herself to describe her renewed fame. See Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 225.

⁹ Greg Allen, 'The Kusama Industrial Complex: How Yayoi Kusama Came to Captivate the World, Fueling Museums and the Market', *ARTnews*, 21 July 2020. www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/yayoi-kusama-museum-favorite-art-market-rise-1202694918/. Accessed 29 June 2021. Allen notes that 'auction houses have sold more than \$550 million worth of Kusama artworks in the last ten years'.

¹⁰ At Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art and Center for International Contemporary Art (its inaugural exhibition), respectively.

¹¹ As declared by Hiroaki Fuji, President of the Japan Foundation, 'Preface', in Zelevansky et al, *Love Forever*, 7.

the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis – before transferring to the newly constructed Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo the following spring.¹²

The opening exchange of Kusama's *index* interview acknowledges this context:

Midori Matsui: You just had a large retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. How was that?

Yayoi Kusama: The show was great. It exhibited really rare works of mine that I myself had forgotten about for a long time. About a thousand people came to the opening. That's twice as large as the usual audience. And the opening party was a lot of fun, with so many young artists coming to talk with me. You know, coming back to Japan in '75, I really lagged behind in getting recognized...¹³

After two decades of relative neglect by the press and art institutions, compared to the media frenzy that had surrounded her work and life when she lived in New York (1958–73), Kusama had found 'fame, again'.¹⁴

***index* magazine: Downtown culture's last hurrah**

The interview between Kusama and Matsui was published in the bimonthly 'indie' magazine *index* (1995–2005), which, while international in its range of interviewees and readership, nonetheless self-consciously presented its content from 'a downtown New York art world vantage'.¹⁵ In addition to the question of biography, this chapter examines the *index* interview in relation to New York's indie and fan culture, as well as the rise of identity politics and queer culture at the end of the twentieth century. Increasing globalisation and commercialisation – including a fascination with Japanese pop culture – offered new challenges and opportunities for the art and publishing world, presenting an important context for the renewed interest in Kusama.

¹² Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 223. The exhibition was organised in conjunction with the Japan Foundation. The exhibition in Japan was slightly different to its American presentations.

¹³ 'Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui', *index*, no. 15, September 1998, 42. Also available at www.indexmagazine.com/interviews/yayoi_kusama.shtml. Accessed 1 July 2021.

¹⁴ 'Fame, Again' is a subtitle in Laura Hoptman's 'Survey: Yayoi Kusama: A Reckoning', in Akira Tatehata, Laura Hoptman, Udo Kultermann, Catherine Taft, *Yayoi Kusama*, London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2020, 71.

¹⁵ Fax from Bob Nickas to Wolfgang Tillmans, 23 October 1995, *index* archive, Peter Halley studio.

For many who lived and worked there, the 1990s represented the tail-end of the Downtown scene, and thus a major blow to New York's creative life from which it has never fully recovered. In addition to the AIDS crisis that ravaged the Downtown scene in the 1980s and 1990s, the main threats to the creative community were the gentrification policies that destroyed its basic premise of cheap rent. Sarah Lowndes (quoting Will Hermes, music critic and historian of the New York music scene) dates the beginning of this gentrification to the arrival of the World Trade Centre (WTC) in Lower Manhattan in 1975.¹⁶ With bitter irony, the destruction of the WTC on 9/11 has now added further poignancy to the mythification of the Downtown scene. Lynne Tillman, in her essay 'Downtown's Room in Hotel History' (2014), undoubtedly spoke for many when she wrote: 'I might declare that Downtown signified the last hurrah from the last inhabitants of the last and premier modernist city.'¹⁷

Julie Ault blamed the policies of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the early 1990s for 'the dismantling of the city's residential rent control and stabilization system',¹⁸ leading to a 'series of subsequent real estate booms linked to art districts [that] contributed to making space a tremendously precious commodity in Manhattan'.¹⁹ Bruce LaBruce, photographer and frequent contributor to *index*, put it more strongly, writing that for him the '*index* decade' spanned

the last vestiges of a more impudent and unruly New York, following its slow strangulation by the overzealous and authoritarian Mayor Giuliani, and bearing witness to the subsequent tribulations of 9/11 and its aftermath and finally the city's reincarnation as a playground for the rich and famous that's been run through Woody Allen's proverbial "deflavorizing machine."²⁰

Wendy Vogel, in her introduction to *index A to Z*, an anthology of material from *index* magazine, described the 1990s as a 'transitional decade', during which New York

¹⁶ Sarah Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing: Subjugated Knowledges*, London: Routledge, 2016, 71.

¹⁷ Lynne Tillman, 'Downtown's Room in Hotel History', in *What Would Lynne Tillman Do?*, Brooklyn: Red Lemonade, 2014, 237.

¹⁸ Rudolph 'Rudi' Giuliani was mayor of New York from 1994 to 2001.

¹⁹ Julie Ault, ed., *The Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 6.

²⁰ Bruce LaBruce, 'My life index', in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 20-1. The reference to the 'deflavorizing machine' is lifted from Woody Allen's 1980 film *Stardust Memories*, in which Sandy Bates quips: 'It's funny, because in my family nobody ever committed suicide, nobody... this was just not a middle-class alternative, you know? I – my mother was too busy running the boiled chicken through the deflavorizing machine to think about shooting herself or anything.'

‘transformed from a place of financial and infrastructural hardship, where fragmented cultural diversity flourished, into a metropolis maximized for profit’.²¹

A nostalgia for the New York Downtown of the 1960s and early 1970s helps to explain why both the *index* magazine interview and the 1998 retrospective focus on Kusama’s New York period rather than later work. After all, Matsui’s questions refer mostly to the past, specifically Kusama’s time in New York over a quarter of a century earlier, when she developed her now-famous polka-dot and mirror installations, such as *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli’s Field* (1965), and began her (often naked) Happenings in parks, on sidewalks and beside prominent New York landmarks. For instance, Matsui’s second question is ‘You went to New York in 1957, and on your own. Weren’t you lonely?’²² This emphasis on the past invites questions about Kusama’s ability to remember all the details asked of her and might account for any fluctuations between her accounts of the era. For Matsui wasn’t the only one to focus on the New York period; other critics, too, have found it difficult to make sense of the changes in Kusama’s work since her return to Japan. Lynn Zelevansky makes this point in an *Afterall* article of 2005, about her visit to Kusama’s studio after a gap of several years, confessing that when she had met her in 1995, in relation to the *Love Forever* retrospective that she had co-organised, she ‘was not at all certain that I understood the work from her Tokyo period’, and it was only now that she ‘finally felt ready to consider her late work’.²³

***index* magazine: Interview without the empty glamour clichés**

The interview-led *index* magazine was published by the artist Peter Halley from his studio in the iconic West Chelsea Arts Building, its transformation from warehouse to artists’ studio complex itself part of the regeneration story.²⁴ Halley had begun his career in the 1980s as part of the East Village scene, creating geometric paintings that attempted to map the complex architectural and social environment in which he found himself. Once into his

²¹ Wendy Vogel, ‘Indexing the Indie Generation’, Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 42.

²³ Zelevansky, ‘Flying Deeper and Farther: Kusama in 2005’, *Afterall*, no. 13, Spring/Summer 2006, 55. Kusama’s touring retrospective of 2011–2 (Reina Sofia, Madrid; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) rectified this skewed view of her work to include very recent work, as well as works made before she left Japan.

²⁴ The landlord of the West Chelsea Arts Building, a ten-storey former clothing warehouse, is Raymond Naftali, whose gallery Greene/Naftali (co-owned with his wife Gloria) is also located in the building. Around 200 artists work in the building. Halley was one of the first to move there. See Marina Isola, ‘One RM RIV VU, Cheap: Only Artists Need Apply’, *New York*, 10 March 1997.

forties, however, he felt the urge to look for a project ‘to liven things up’, now that he was ‘no longer a young artist meeting a new crowd of people in the art world’. As he admits, ‘I had a bit of survivor’s guilt because my career was relatively stable’.²⁵ He had already had some experience of the publishing world, having written critical essays for a variety of magazines, including *Arts Magazine* and *Tema Celeste*.²⁶ Halley was joined at the start by the curator Bob Nickas, who was *index*’s editor until 2000,²⁷ after which he was succeeded by Cory Reynolds and then Ariana Speyer. The magazine featured a heterogenous mix of indie film and music culture, fashion, contemporary art, design, literature and architecture, and the new breed of public intellectuals like Slavoj Zizek.²⁸ In this, *index* was closer to lifestyle magazines like *W Magazine* and *Vanity Fair* and, in the UK, *i-D* and *The Face* than the avant-garde little magazines of earlier decades like *Avalanche* or *Between C & D*. Art did feature regularly in *index* but was usually limited to one artist interview per issue.²⁹ Halley was clear that it was not an art magazine,³⁰ rather a magazine founded by art people, reflecting the belief that:

artists are influenced by everything. Their work might be as influenced by the Talking Heads as by Elizabeth Murray. And so in a way the magazine was an expression of that, and my strong belief in – for lack of a better term – intertextuality and cross-over between genres.³¹

Following the art boom of the late 1980s, for Halley the early 1990s had been ‘kind of depressing. There was this huge crash in the art market. People were kind of gloomy’.³²

According to Nickas, Halley considered that ‘the art world at that time wasn’t as interesting

²⁵ Interview with author, Peter Halley studio, New York, 15 October 2019.

²⁶ These articles have been collected together in the anthology, Richard Milazzo, ed., *Peter Halley: Selected Essays 1981–2001*, New York: Edgewise, 2013.

²⁷ Peter Halley originally wanted to set up a curatorial programme along the lines of the Whitney Program in New York, before he and Bob Nickas decided on a magazine instead. Interview with author, 15 October 2019.

²⁸ Indie referred to ‘independent’, as in produced by smaller, independent corporations, often on a modest budget, rather than, say, the mega Hollywood film studios or major music labels like Sony or EMI.

²⁹ According to the list of interviews on *index*’s website, there were thirty-one interviews classified under ‘art’, compared to (in order of frequency) seventy-one under ‘film and theatre’, forty-three under ‘music’, thirty-four under ‘fashion’, twenty-four under ‘writing’, fourteen under ‘design and architecture’, seven under ‘politics’ (including, rather intriguingly, Bianca Jagger) and eleven under ‘more’. See www.indexmagazine.com/fullarchive_category.shtml. Accessed 29 June 2021.

³⁰ An *index* subscriber survey from 2004–5, however, showed that, of all the many options offered, readers most wanted to see more art coverage (followed by more music, then longer and more interviews). *index* archive.

³¹ Interview with author, Peter Halley studio, New York, 5 February 2019.

³² Max Lakin interview with Peter Halley, ‘Day-Glo Dystopian’, *Vulture*, December 2018. www.vulture.com/2018/12/peter-halleys-paintings-are-a-diagram-of-contemporary-life.html. Accessed 29 June 2021.

as what was going on in movies and music and design and architecture'.³³ Therefore, Nickas wrote: 'We are committed with *index* to cover younger actors, directors, artists, musicians, and designers who are beginning to attract attention, but have very singular sensibilities.'³⁴ The range of interviewees reflected the continued social and political push for equal rights, and the way this was expressed as 'identity politics' in the 1990s. Hence, the gender split of *index* cover stars was fairly even; and the magazine featured a notable number of people of colour (Kara Walker was the first artist interviewed for *index*), and those willing to discuss their sexuality openly (Catherine Opie was interviewed in the second issue about her portraits of what she described as the 'SM lesbian and gay community').

For Halley and Nickas, the touchstone was early *Interview* magazine; they claimed to be 'members of the first generation to really be influenced by Warhol during the '80s'.³⁵ Halley especially hoped to emulate Warhol's notion of 'business art', that is, the idea that an artist could also run a successful enterprise. While he financed the initial start-up costs, Halley then required the magazine to pay for itself in the usual commercial way: through advertising, subscriptions and copy sales. Yet while they admired *Interview* hugely, Nickas spoke for both when he claimed that it was no longer 'as interesting as it had been when Peter and I were younger'.³⁶ Michael Bullock, *index*'s advertising director, explained why:

In the early '00s, mainstream magazines in general had pushed Warhol's holy conception of celebrity and glamour to its absolute end point. *Index* took the concept back to its roots, stripping it of all empty glamour clichés and making the new cultural luxury an un-Photoshopped reality.³⁷

The un-Photoshopped photography of *index* was as important as the writing, and matched the 'lo-fi and real' design that Laura Genniger developed 'to look and read like a raw film transcript or a Fluxus manuscript', and which also referenced the first issues of *Interview* printed on a newspaper press.³⁸ Halley, in fact, said that 'that in my mind's eye it [*index*] was

³³ Bob Nickas in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 129.

³⁴ Fax from Bob Nickas to Wolfgang Tillmans, 1995, *index* archive.

³⁵ Halley, in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 70. Halley even has a portrait of himself painted by Warhol, which he has hung in his studio/*index* office's toilet. Incidentally, Warhol produced an artist's book called *Andy Warhol's Index Book*, published by Random House in 1967, although this hasn't been mentioned in relation to the origin of the magazine title.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

Interview magazine as a model, combined with Wolfgang Tillmans'.³⁹ Tillmans, already established as a photographer, such as for *i-D* magazine as well as showing in galleries, was commissioned to shoot the first year's cover photographs. His aesthetic of 'casual-seeming



Figure 28 'Yayoi Kusama with Midori Masui', photographed by David Ortega, *index*, no. 15, September 1998, 43. © David Ortega and Peter Halley/*index*.

³⁹ Interview with author, 5 February 2019.

35mm portraits of friends and celebrities were highly seductive without the artifice of studio lighting and styling' and set the tone for covers and portraits thereafter.⁴⁰

The portraits of Kusama accompanying her *index* interview were taken by David Ortega, and clearly reflect the 'lo-fi and real' aesthetic. The black-and-white full-length portrait opposite the opening page of the interview (fig. 1), as well as a close-up variant of this image towards the end of the feature, do nothing to disguise Kusama's age: she is pictured slightly stooped and wearing a long, modest dress, over which the pattern of her black, crocheted shawl hints at the 'infinity net' motif in her work. Her left hand seems to be clutching at her dress in a manner that might be interpreted as self-protective or defiant. In the *index A to Z* anthology, the full-length portrait was reproduced in lieu of the entire feature, confirming that for *index* images were as important as words. Despite the fact that the interview took place in Tokyo, Ortega's portraits were taken in New York, presumably when Kusama attended the opening of her MoMA retrospective. In the background of the image, a large fountain recalls Kusama's *Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead at MoMA* (1969), her unauthorised Happening featuring naked performers romping around MoMA's sculpture garden and fountain, in protest at all the museum's dead artists.⁴¹

A series of smaller-scale archive photographs and reproductions of Kusama's artworks are then also interspersed through the feature, including documentary images of her naked Happenings in iconic New York locations such as Central Park and Wall Street, and glamorous images of Kusama among her installations and mannequins, in a variety of photogenic outfits. These photos hark back to the golden age of New York hedonism – the pre-AIDS era celebrated by *Interview* magazine.

⁴⁰ Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 17. Photography was no longer a support act in *index* but a creative discipline to be taken seriously in its own right. As well as taking the portraits of other interview subjects, *index* photographers were interviewed themselves as artists. Wolfgang Tillmans was interviewed by Peter Halley and Bob Nickas in 1997, for example, and Juergen Teller in 2000. The notorious (then as now) Terry Richardson was interviewed in the same issue as Kusama's feature, discussing early sexual experiences and scandalising childhood, and in fact was that issue's cover star, photographed by fellow *index* photographer Bruce LaBruce. Other photographers who worked closely with *index* included Tina Barney, Timothy-Greenfield-Sanders, Leeta Harding and Ryan McGinley.

⁴¹ 'What's modern here? I don't see it. / Van Gogh, Cezanne, these other ghosts, all are dead or dying./ While the dead show art, living artists die...' Press release for the *Happening to Awaken the Dead at MoMA* (otherwise known as *the Museum of Modern Art*) featuring their usual display of nudes, Rockefeller Gardens, MoMA, New York, 24 August 1969. Reprinted in Tatehata et al, *Yayoi Kusama*, 114.

Two decades of neglect: conflicting explanations

At the time of the *index* interview, Kusama (born 1929) was nearly seventy years old and had been living in Japan for the past twenty-five years, having left New York in 1973 (although she had begun returning to the US since her 1989 retrospective). Whether her departure was based on her deteriorating mental health or political or financial reasons,⁴² the fact is that she has been living permanently since 1977 at Tokyo's Seiwa Hospital for the Mentally Ill, which specialises in art therapy. She has chosen to be open about her illness in her writings and in the press, particularly since the publication of her autobiographical essay in 1975 titled 'The Struggles and Wanderings of My Soul'.⁴³ In this text, she details her experiences, since childhood, of hallucinations and the feelings of '[d]issolution and accumulation. Proliferation and fragmentation. The feeling of myself obliterating and the reverberation from the invisible universe', as well as her compulsion to visually reproduce 'these strange, uncanny things' as a vital means of controlling and escaping them. Indeed, in the introduction to the *index* interview, Matsui informs the reader that in Kusama's New York period she was 'plagued by fears of intimacy and inadequacy' and that her 'art became a form of therapy'.⁴⁴

Kusama, however, might have objected to Matsui's line in the introduction that she has lived 'voluntarily in a hospital for the mentally ill for the past twenty years'.⁴⁵ Kusama has cautioned against any implication that her symptoms are psychosomatic, and therefore somehow not real. In her 1999 *BOMB* interview Kusama told Turner that:

Upon returning to Japan, I received treatment for and recovered from the two diseases: Basedow's disease and myoma of the uterus – not cancer of the uterus as rumored. Subsequently, I was hospitalized because of my obsessive-compulsive neurosis. In the articles written about me it is assumed that I voluntarily chose to live

⁴² Stephanie Rosenthal, curator of *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective* at Gropius Bau, 23 April – 15 August 2021, cites a letter Kusama sent to art historian Udo Kultermann in February 1973, in which she claims that 'New York, I think, is no longer the place to make a fortune', compared to Tokyo where the 'art pieces are selling like pancakes', and that she 'can see no future in New York'. Rosenthal, 'Yayoi Kusama: All My Works Around Me', in *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, ex. cat., Berlin: Gropius Bau and Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2021, 25.

⁴³ Originally published in the Japanese art magazine *Geijutsu Seikatsu*, Tokyo, 1975. Extracts reproduced in Tatehata et al, *Yayoi Kusama*, 115-20. SooJin Lee has written that Kusama's first public account of her hallucinations was in 1963, during an interview with critic Gordon Brown for WABC radio. See Lee, 'The Art and Politics of Artists' Personas: The Case of Yayoi Kusama', *Persona Studies*, 1: 1, 2015, 33.

⁴⁴ 'Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui', *index*, 42.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

in the hospital; this is wrong. I am not suffering from manic-depressive psychosis, either.⁴⁶

Kusama's autobiography, *Infinity Net*, first published in Japanese in 2002 and translated into English in 2011,⁴⁷ elaborates further, and in graphic detail, on her psychological condition, and her views on the limitations and failures of psychiatry. She analyses her fears about sex, which she links to witnessing her father's excessive womanising. She also reflects eloquently on the relationship between her mental state and her art, writing:

Artists do not usually express their own psychological complexes directly, but I do use my complexes and fears as subjects. I am terrified by just the thought of something long and ugly like a phallus entering me, and that is why I make so many of them. The thought of continually eating something like macaroni, spat out by machinery, fills me with fear and revulsion, so I make macaroni sculptures. I make them and make them and then keep on making them, until I bury myself in the process. I call this "obliteration".⁴⁸

A review of the autobiography in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, by Femi Oyeboade (a professor of psychiatry at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Mental Health) nonetheless praised Kusama's 'utmost honesty and frankness', recommending that 'her life, and the place of abnormal experiences and phenomena in her art, are both of interest to psychiatrists'.⁴⁹

However, as with Karen Kurczynski and Midori Yamamura cited earlier, many art historians have cautioned against an overtly psychological interpretation of Kusama's work. Yamamura has questioned the severity and significance of Kusama's mental condition, describing (and arguably minimising) what she terms her 'anxiety neurosis' as a 'mild disturbance of the mind accompanied by unpleasant, distressing emotions, caused by the body releasing adrenaline and cortisone into the bloodstream as a response to the stressful situations, quickening the heart rate'. 'But', she adds, 'the intensity of these experiences beyond the

⁴⁶ 'Yayoi Kusama by Grady T. Turner', *BOMB*.

⁴⁷ The English edition was published to coincide with Kusama's 2012 retrospective at Tate Modern.

⁴⁸ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 47.

⁴⁹ Femi Oyeboade, book review of *Infinity Net*, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, no. 201, 2012, 250.

artist's claims is unclear.⁵⁰ Designating Kusama a mentally ill artist, she warns, risks casting 'her an outsider to the dominant histories of painting and sculpture'.⁵¹

Yamamura asks the reader to critically question Kusama's autobiographical accounts, pointing out that they have evolved over the years, and that Kusama herself had 'attempted to expunge her own legend in June 2010, while preparing for her 2012 Tate Modern retrospective: she edited out a line describing her "hallucinatory visions" from the autobiographical narrative that she had previously supplied for official purposes'.⁵² Instead, Yamamura convincingly argues that Kusama's commercial marginalisation in the 1960s, followed by her neglect in the 1970s and 1980s, can be explained in relation to increased economic globalisation – what she terms 'capitalists' transnational activities to establish what was in effect a market monopoly'.⁵³ In the US art world, she singles out the dealer Leo Castelli as establishing market dominance, with the 'mostly US-born white, male artists' he represented.⁵⁴ Kusama, not fitting Castelli's template for an artist, was therefore highly disadvantaged in relation to the art market.

The importance of protest in Kusama's art is also emphasised by Mignon Nixon in her 2012 catalogue essay 'Infinity Politics'. Nixon sees Kusama's departure from New York as an 'act of political protest', following the 'dystopian turn against the era of pacificism and liberation struggles [that] drew a backlash against the alternative political culture of that decade', bringing 'disillusionment to many, despair to some'.⁵⁵ If there is trauma in Kusama's work, Nixon maintains, it lies in her 'rebellion against repression in any form', this resistance 'traumatic to the extent that it is boundless, a repetition without end'.⁵⁶ Her work 'does not project her symptoms and fantasies onto the world – the usual reading – so much as the

⁵⁰ Midori Yamamura, *Yayoi Kusama: Inventing the Singular*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015, 3.

⁵¹ Yamamura nevertheless also contests those feminist interpretations that avoid biography altogether (she cites Amelia Jones and Izumi Nakajima); 'without biography and history', Yamamura writes, 'we can only abstractly understand Kusama's situation'. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁴ Yamamura links this monopoly to the transfer of sponsorship of the São Paulo and Venice biennales in 1962 from MoMA to the United States Information Agency, after which 'US participation in international exhibitions assumed an increasingly propagandist tone'. The previous system of selection by committee was replaced by a single commissioner (Alan Solomon, director of the Jewish Museum and a close associate of Castelli's). Of the eight artists Solomon chose for the 1964 Venice Biennale, half were represented by Castelli. *Ibid.*, 2; 120-1.

⁵⁵ Mignon Nixon, 'Infinity Politics', in Frances Morris, ed., *Yayoi Kusama*, London: Tate Publishing, 2012, 184-5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

reverse. It absorbs and concentrates external excesses ... and distil[s] them in protest'.⁵⁷ Nixon concludes that Kusama's neglect was due to the fact that the 'complex persona she cultivated of relentless striving, unrepentant fame-chasing, sexual magnetism and entrepreneurial flair, all sustained under the sway of hallucinatory visions, does not correspond to any available image of politics in art'.⁵⁸

Griselda Pollock, writing in *Parkett* in 2000, similarly cautions against regarding Kusama as "mentally ill" (her quotation marks), which she disparages as a 'term of such extraordinary vagueness in an age of ever increasing precision in the classification of disorders that I feel sure that I am falling back into the wonderland of myth'.⁵⁹ Such a 'dependence on a traumatic "origin"' risks, furthermore, 'infantalizing the woman artist of whom it is told in a manner so at odds with the evidence of a long and productive career'.⁶⁰ However, Pollock has to concede that the vagueness surrounding Kusama's condition also had to do with the lack of 'discourse in which her traumatic experience of the Mother' (real and symbolic) could have been analytically addressed, without recourse to the 'Freudian misrecognition of the feminine'; that is, the therapists that Kusama had visited could not give her (following Michelle Montrelay) 'the relief of signification'.⁶¹

Ultimately, Yamamura's diagnosis of a 'mild disturbance' would not warrant Kusama's over-forty-year stay at a psychiatric hospital and would mean disregarding the often extreme and disturbing descriptions of her condition. Acknowledging Kusama's mental condition, however, does not subordinate all interpretations of her work to this. As Oyebode concludes in her review of *Infinity Nets*, '[h]er work undermines the notion that severe mental illness is incompatible with art of the highest standard'.⁶² And as Lynn Zelevansky reminds us in the *Love Forever* exhibition catalogue, 'it does not follow that others with similar problems would produce similar work'.⁶³ Kusama herself has used the same argument when discussing

⁵⁷ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Griselda Pollock, 'Three Thoughts on Femininity, Creativity and Elapsed Time', *Parkett*, vol. 59, December 2000, 109.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 111. The British psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell later interpreted Kusama as suffering from the trauma of the 'Dead Mother', André Green's term for 'a mother whose maternal joy in her baby is suddenly and catastrophically cut short by her falling into a cataclysmic depression with which the baby then identifies'. See Mitchell, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Flower', in Morris, ed., *Yayoi Kusama*, 194.

⁶² Oyebode, book review of *Infinity Net*, 250.

⁶³ Lynn Zelevansky, 'Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York', in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 14.

Vincent van Gogh, in what might be interpreted as a lightly veiled comment on her own condition. She writes:

Many people seem to imagine that Vincent van Gogh must have been great because his paintings now fetch enormously high prices, or because he was mentally ill ... My view is that in spite of whatever illness he may have had, van Gogh's art overflows with humanity, tenacious beauty, and the search for truth. His real greatness lies in these qualities, and in his fiery and passionate approach to life.⁶⁴

Moreover, as Zelevansky reasons, the questions that have been asked of Kusama – including whether she is ‘conscious or unconscious of what she produces?’, ‘mentally ill, or ... a shrewd manipulator?’, ‘exhibitionist, or ... [making] a scathing critique of male sexual, social, and artistic domination?’ – are ‘largely false dichotomies’ given the ‘all-encompassing’ nature of her work, in which ‘no contradiction exists for her between aesthetic engagement and publicity, or psychic disorder and emotional control, and there is no consistently discernible boundary between her self and her art’.⁶⁵ In the same catalogue, Alexandra Munroe maintains that instead of thinking in binaries, we should think in terms of dualities: Kusama’s work, for her, is based ‘on the repetitive production of a fantastic narrative that stars herself as an object *and* subject, author *and* protagonist, artist *and* artwork’.⁶⁶ Kusama’s frequent use of the third person to describe her work and successes in her autobiography – as in ‘[T]he Yasei Jidai prize marked the formal debut of Yayoi Kusama, novelist’⁶⁷ – would seem to support this idea.

Midori Matsui was certainly aware of the pitfalls of stereotyping Kusama in her *index* interview, writing in the introduction that knowledge of Kusama’s hospitalisation means that ‘the renewed interest in her work was inevitably entwined with the mystique surrounding the artist herself’.⁶⁸ Perhaps because of this, Matsui’s questions tend to be quite open, rather than directly reference the illness. For example when Matsui asks about how her all-over, abstract *Net-paintings* developed, Kusama accepts the prompt and vividly describes a hallucinatory

⁶⁴ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 211-2. Pollock also makes the connection between Kusama and Van Gogh, but notes that, of the two, ‘the factor of her mental travail and emotional pain ... has not served to make Kusama’s passage into cultural history easier’. Why, according to Pollock? Because ‘she did not die young and she is a woman’. Pollock, ‘Three Thoughts on Femininity’, *Parkett*, 109.

⁶⁵ Zelevansky, ‘Driving Image’, in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 11-12.

⁶⁶ Alexandra Munroe, ‘Between Heaven and Earth: The Literary Art of Yayoi Kusama’, in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 79.

⁶⁷ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 209.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

vision of a ‘net spilling over the desk’, then covering the window another day, followed by her hand, so that in the end the ‘entire room was covered with red net’.⁶⁹

Index aimed to cover ‘the cultural, intellectual, familial and/or political influences that contribute to their [the interviewee’s] talent’.⁷⁰ And certainly, in spite of her sensitivity towards typecasting Kusama, Matsui does not shy away from any aspect of Kusama’s work. Matsui asks intimate questions about Kusama’s fear about sex, her boyfriends in New York, and specifics about the evolution of particular artworks like the *Food Obliteration* works. She expresses her admiration for Kusama’s literary works and her avant-garde fashion label. She knowingly asks after Kusama’s ‘dresses with the holes’, to which Kusama brazenly elaborates: ‘Yeah, right in the butt, too.’⁷¹

Towards the end of the interview, after Kusama has volunteered several episodes about her illness and difficult childhood, Matsui appears emboldened and asks, based on her reading of Kusama’s semi-autobiographical satirical book *Manhattan Suicide Addict* (1978), whether she herself had ever considered suicide. Kusama responds with ‘[v]ery often’, describing the feeling of a white curtain falling and everything seeming to recede, which would make her cling to a pillar to avoid throwing herself out the window.⁷² She blames these impulses on childhood trauma: ‘I got constant verbal harassment and physical punishment from my mother until I was six years old. At that age I had my first experience of seeing the white curtain come down, and violet blossoms pop out from the tablecloth’. She continues: ‘Taking medication is the only way to bring me back from this state to the normal one. When I’m in that state, I can’t go home. I have to stay in the hospital. Even now.’⁷³

Likewise, Kusama answers Matsui’s intimate questions candidly. For instance, following Kusama’s description of a Happening in which participants painted each other with fluorescent polka dots so that in the dark you could only see the dots, and the ‘outlines were obliterated in the darkness’, Matsui asks her whether she’d found the experience ‘scary or groovy?’ Kusama answers ‘groovy’. When Matsui presses for an explanation, Kusama says:

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁰ *Index* press release, 18 January 1996, *index* archive.

⁷¹ ‘Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui’, *index*, 48.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

‘Because I really hated myself.’⁷⁴ Later, when Matsui tactfully mentions the one artist ‘who was completely crazy about you’, Kusama immediately specifies ‘Joseph Cornell’, and points to a drawing he had given her. She is nonetheless rather dismissive of him, complaining that the ‘old man wrote me so many letters. He was often a nuisance.’ She adds provocatively: ‘I had many other boyfriends.’⁷⁵ Matsui then takes the cue to ask who they were, and Kusama responds willingly, happy to name names: ‘Many were very gentle, even feminine sort of men. Some were really famous, like Adolph Gottlieb, Ad Reinhardt, David Smith.’⁷⁶ She also corrects Matsui’s euphemism that Donald Judd was ‘your true friend, who had bought and written about your work’, telling her that he was her boyfriend, and again that ‘we were lovers’.⁷⁷ (Zelevansky has since written that ‘[t]heirs was not a romantic relationship – she was living with a Japanese-American architect at the time – rather their connection was built on shared artistic concerns.)⁷⁸

Kusama often gives Matsui more than she asks for, seeming to trust Matsui and also appreciate her deference. When Matsui asks about where her Happenings took place, Kusama lists Central Park, Wall Street and the Statue of Liberty, as well as citing the ‘open protest against the Nixon administration at the voting office and the anti-war performance in front of the UN’.⁷⁹ She then takes the opportunity to show Matsui the dress for four people ‘made for the Love Orgy’, but also to clarify her own position: ‘I myself have never joined a sex orgy. I was afraid of venereal disease.’⁸⁰

Kusama’s and Matsui’s openness regarding female sexuality contrasts with the often formalist or euphemistic interpretations of Kusama’s work in the 1960s. For example, in reference to the phallic installation *Yayoi Kusama: Driving Image Show* (1964), the celebrated British art historian and critic Herbert Read poetically but elusively described Kusama as creating ‘forms that proliferate like mycelium and seal the consciousness in their white integument’,⁸¹ while Morio Shinoda, writing in *Bijutsu Techo* in April 1965, offered

⁷⁴ ‘Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui’, *index*, 46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Zelevansky, ‘An Unlikely Friendship: Yayoi Kusama and Donald Judd’, in Rosenthal, ed., *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, 92.

⁷⁹ ‘Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui’, *index*, 46.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 48.

the more prosaic: ‘She attaches profusions of white, potato-like, stuffed objects to boats, chairs, and mannequins.’⁸² As Zelevansky has pointed out, when it came to describing Kusama’s explorations of sexuality, particularly in relation to her New York work of the mid-1960s, ‘there was, as yet, little place in intellectual discourse for concerns specific to women’.⁸³ Faced with such linguistic coyness and inadequacy, no wonder Kusama felt the need to take control of her narrative and interpretations and offer bolder statements. On the same page of her autobiography that she quotes the above statement by Read, she refers to her works of the period as her ‘food-and-sex images’.⁸⁴

Kusama as an indie icon

Zelevansky argues that ‘[a]lthough it may not have been obvious during the sixties, when her affinities with developing styles would have been more prominent than the differences, Kusama’s art ultimately proved problematic in its idiosyncratic involvement with autobiography, the body and the feminine voice’. But, she insists, ‘it is those very qualities that make it especially resonant today’.⁸⁵

So who was the readership for *index*, and why was Kusama resonant for them? As Wendy Vogel has commented, whereas ‘*Interview* was synonymous with disco, fashion by Halston, and high camp, *index* embraced punk and indie, anti-fashion aesthetics, and a queer sensibility’.⁸⁶ The magazine’s demographic was the ‘Generation X culturati’,⁸⁷ those born between the early 1960s and late 1970s,⁸⁸ and notoriously characterised (at least in terms of its American demographic) by Douglas Coupland in his highly influential 1991 novel, *Generation X*, as anti-consumerist (in theory, if not in practice), highly educated but under-employed, hyper-self-aware drifters.

Index magazine shared this ultra-self-conscious, self-referential tone. It assumed that its readers were jaded with mainstream journalism and probably mainstream literature, too, since Douglas Coupland was never interviewed by *index*, although Peter Halley had earlier written

⁸² *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸³ Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 19.

⁸⁴ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 48.

⁸⁵ Zelevansky, in Zelevansky et al, *Love Forever*, 29.

⁸⁶ Wendy Vogel, in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁸ From the *index* subscriber survey from 2004–5, the majority of readers (50.5%) were aged 26-35, followed by 22.5% 36-45, and 15.3% 0-25; only 3.6% were 46-55 and 56+ respectively. *index* archive.

(in 1995) of Coupland's importance in reflecting the 'extent to which the range of emotional responses in Western culture has changed since the nineteenth century and the rise of Romanticism'.⁸⁹ Instead, David Sedaris's arch, camp memoirs and surreal stories were more to *index*'s taste (David's comedian sister, Amy, was an *index* cover star), as was one of Halley's favourites, the poet Wayne Koestenbaum. No doubt this was because so many of its readers (nearly three-quarters of New York subscribers) worked in the media themselves.⁹⁰

Halley has complained that 'most artist interviews are so boring, I can barely stay awake'.⁹¹ For Halley, focusing on biography is particularly tedious, or as he puts it 'What gets me is all these boring stories about, I painted this painting after my grandmother died...' As he elaborates, 'I'm completely interested in them as a person but I find that couching the explanations for one's artwork in terms of tragic personal experience is somewhat manipulative.' He has supported this opinion with reference to the philosopher Ortega y Gasset's idea that 'nineteenth-century art, which was based on tragic and dramatic stories, was in a sense misleading, because who wouldn't be moved if someone's baby dies?'⁹² Nonetheless, given the range of interviewers for *index*, there would always be differing views on the significance of life-events in the interpretation of art. Had Kusama been interviewed by Halley, the result would no doubt have been very different to Matsui's feature – but would he have been able to resist biography then?

In any case, the first press release for *index* boasted that it 'provides an intelligent alternative to the "celebrity interview" which has become so predictable in form, content and personality that the interview often must rely on the provocative (the exposé) to engage the reader'.⁹³ Peter Rothberg, reviewing the recently launched *index* for *Might* magazine, agreed, praising the choice of interview subjects as not being 'the same bland celebrities questioned left and right by every other writer from every other magazine'.⁹⁴ This would have been praise indeed from an otherwise sardonic and anti-celebrity magazine, run by Dave Eggers, David Moodie

⁸⁹ Peter Halley, 'A Short History of Affects', in Milazzo, ed., *Peter Halley: Selected Essays*, 197.

⁹⁰ An undated overview of *index* for potential advertisers claimed that (following a 'recently completed survey of New York subscribers'), 71% worked in the media. A mission statement for *index* likewise described its audience as 'opinion-shapers and media insiders'. Undated mission statement, *index* archive.

⁹¹ Interview with author, 5 February 2019.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *index* press release, 18 January 1996, *index* archive.

⁹⁴ Peter Rothberg, 'Garageland: Searching for intelligent life in the media', *Might*, no. 11, May/June 1996.

and Marny Requa. And while Yayoi Kusama was definitely not ‘younger’, she was attracting attention, had a very singular sensibility, and was neither bland nor boring.

Coupland’s novel had included a glossary of neologisms specific to Generation X, presented as footnotes. Similarly, *index*’s contents page, for example, would list a changing, arbitrary A-Z index of Zeitgeisty words, among which the actual content was interspersed (such as Interviews, Real Life, and Scene and Herd). The May 1997 contents page, for example, ends with the sequence ‘x-ray therapy/ yield management/ zero gravity’. And even though *index* carried advertising, it was presented not as a necessary commercial evil, but rather knowingly, as if coincident with the editorial vision of the magazine. The *index A to Z* anthology even begins with the chapter ‘A for Advertising’. It helped that the ads themselves shared the non-glossy aesthetic values of *index*, featuring as they did indie-looking models (shaggy hair, jeans, tattoos, androgynous), shot by the same photographers used by *index*, such as the Marc Jacobs and Helmut Lang ads photographed by Juergen Teller.⁹⁵ The arts editor of *The New York Times Style Magazine* M. H. Miller recently described the East Village artists of the 1980s with whom Halley identified (the Neo-Geo, Neo-Conceptualism, Commodity Art of artists like Jeff Koons, Ashley Bickerton and Barbara Bloom) as being ‘raised on television and Andy Warhol ... [and] concerned with critical theory and punk rock in equal measure’. Furthermore, ‘they were fascinated by what the culture’s growing consumerism was doing to people’s minds, and to art in particular’.⁹⁶ Kusama’s radical entrepreneurialism – among the various companies she describes in her autobiography are the Nude Studio, the gay social club KOK and her own magazine, *Kusama Orgy* – as well as her embrace of the press (at least until this point) would thus not have alienated this cultural generation of the late 1990s, as it had at the time she left New York.⁹⁷

J for Japan

Kusama’s nationality would also have been alluring for a generation for whom international travel was now more accessible and commonplace – Coupland ironically labelled them the ‘poverty jet set’ on account of their ‘chronic travelling at the expense of long-term job

⁹⁵ Reproduced in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 12-13.

⁹⁶ M. H. Miller, ‘The Artists Who Defined the East Village’s Avant-Garde Scene’, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, 17 April 2018. www.nytimes.com/2018/04/17/t-magazine/east-village-artist-jeff-koons-peter-halley.html. Accessed 29 June 2021.

⁹⁷ Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 135-6.

stability or permanent residence'⁹⁸ – and for whom Japan, with its highly influential fashion, anime scene and subcultures,⁹⁹ was a particularly desirable destination. Kusama's portrait by Ortega featured in the 'Japan' chapter of the *index A to Z* anthology, suggesting that she not only represented herself but also stood for this special fascination with Japan. In fact, following Kusama, Matsui also interviewed Japanese artists Takashi Murakami (November 1998) and Yoshitomo Nara (February 2001) for *index* – younger artists who embodied Murakami's new manga and anime-inspired art movement he called 'Superflat'.¹⁰⁰

However, some commentators have warned that this interest in Japan should not be glossed over without considering issues of racism, especially as this intersected with misogyny. Kusama was without doubt subjected to cultural stereotyping when she arrived in New York – as were other Japanese women artists of a similar generation like Yoko Ono (born 1933) and Shigeo Kubota (1937–2015) who began working in the New York art world in the 1950s and 1960s. As Zelevansky has remarked, among American intellectuals of that time, 'Zen Buddhism and other forms of Eastern thought' held a particular 'cachet'. Kusama responded by manipulating and assimilating 'the cultural biases that had been imposed on her'.¹⁰¹ For example, she wore a kimono for 'important openings' (she never usually wore these in Japan), evoking 'the image of a demure and passive Asian woman' and giving her 'an extra whiff of the exotic, further enhancing the special appeal that Asian women have for many Western men'.¹⁰² Unfortunately, according to Zelevansky, Kusama's strategy

⁹⁸ Douglas Coupland, *Generation X*, London: Abacus, 1997, 7.

⁹⁹ Notable fashion designers included Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Junya Watanabe of Comme des Garçons. Manga and anime, such as the films of Studio Ghibli, were also popular exports. It is no coincidence that Andrew, the narrator of *Generation X*, speaks fluent Japanese, having spent six months working at a 'teenybopper magazine office' in Japan. *Ibid.*, 61. See also Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the US*, New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Matsui herself went on to coin the term 'Micropop' in the mid-2000s to describe a new generation of Japanese artists, including Nara, born in the 1960s and 1970s. See Midori Matsui, *The Age of Micropop: The New Generation of Japanese Artists*, Tokyo: Parco Publishing, 2007 and the exhibition she curated, *The Door into Summer – The Age of Micropop*, Art Tower Mito, February – May 2007. The exhibition press release describes the phenomenon 'as a "small-scale, avant-garde" approach or attitude that attempts to create a new aesthetic consciousness and norms of behavior through the combination of fragments of information gleaned through one's own experience, in an age where history has come to be viewed in relative terms, and in which those spiritual statements that once served as the source or stronghold of various values have lost their authority.'

¹⁰¹ Zelevansky, in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 23.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

ultimately ‘worked against her in the long run’; her sexualised and exotic ‘masquerades provided fodder for those inclined to dismiss her efforts’.¹⁰³

Rediscoveries and remixes

Readers of *index* were likely to have been too young to have known Kusama in her New York period, and would therefore only be encountering her now. That sense of (re)discovery would have been appealing for ‘Gen Xers’, who, as Coupland’s novel demonstrated frequently, enjoyed delving into the past for inspiration, recycling and remixing elements to suit their own taste (the often-indiscriminate aspect of this labelled by Coupland as ‘decade blending’).¹⁰⁴ Coupland blamed this mental time-travelling on ‘now denial’, or ‘[T]o tell oneself that the only time worth living in is the past and that the only time that may ever be interesting again is the future’.¹⁰⁵

Generation X parodied the postmodern theories of the time that renounced grand narratives in favour of relativism and scepticism, such as Francis Fukuyama’s influential but much-critiqued *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), in which he declared the end of the twentieth century to be the ‘end of history’, and with it the end of ideological battles, to be replaced by an everlasting American-style neoliberalism. But even if one were politically opposed to Fukuyama’s conclusions, one had to concede that the modernist ideal of continual progress – the idea of linear sequences of influence – was no longer tenable. In art-historiographical terms, this breaking of teleology would seem to justify historical revisionism and rediscoveries, and a shift from telling history from above (historians, critics) to the artists themselves. Interestingly, Peter Halley had also written (in 1981) persuasively about how the language of formalist modernism, as espoused by Clement Greenberg, ‘was never adequate to define the full range of twentieth-century modern art’. For him, Gasset, particularly his 1925 essay ‘The Dehumanisation of Art’, produced a theory of modernism that was more specific to the twentieth century (as opposed to Greenberg’s attempt to

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Coupland, *Generation X*, 17. Intergenerational collaborations became popular at the turn of the twenty-first century, such as the Peaches and Iggy Pop single ‘Kick It’ (2004), and the much-publicised friendship (and subsequent falling-out) between Kate Moss and Marianne Faithfull.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 47.

encompass both nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and that was predicated, not on the confidence and passion of the nineteenth century, but rather on relativity and doubt.¹⁰⁶

The Foreword for Kusama's touring retrospective of 1998–9 indeed seems to confirm that 'her return to prominence [after years of neglect] can, in no small measure, be attributed to the attention of a younger generation of artists, whose concerns have much in common with Kusama's manner of connecting the personal and the formal, the organic and the mechanical, the physical and the intellectual'.¹⁰⁷ For Zelevansky, writing in the exhibition catalogue, those artists included Janine Antoni, Matthew Barney, Yasumasa Morimura (in regards to her 'performatory' installations and photography); and Robert Gober, Rona Pondick, Cindy Sherman and Kiki Smith (in terms of focusing on the 'body or its parts as a means of examining psychological states').¹⁰⁸ Zelevansky also points out that in the late 1970s Louise Bourgeois 'made sculptures with profusions closely resembling the phallus-studded furniture that Kusama created in the middle sixties'.¹⁰⁹ But one might also add that Kusama's rediscovery echoes the older artist Louise Bourgeois' artistic recognition late in life. Bourgeois (1911–2010) was a similar age to Kusama when she was honoured with a retrospective at MoMA in 1982.¹¹⁰

Damien Hirst was then another younger, and already very famous, artist willing to publicly acknowledge his admiration for Kusama (and by extension, her artistic influence on his use of spots). In the same year as the *index* interview, Hirst interviewed Kusama for the catalogue accompanying her exhibition *Now* at Robert Miller Gallery, New York.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Halley argued that as a consequence of this reassessment of modernism, the postmodern idea of a break with Greenbergian modernism was unnecessary. See Peter Halley, 'Against Postmodernism: Reconsidering Ortega', in Milazzo, ed., *Peter Halley: Selected Essays*, 51-3.

¹⁰⁷ Graham Beal and Glenn Lowry, 'Foreword', in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Zelevansky also quotes Lucy Lippard's view that 'of all the artists in New York during the sixties Kusama provided the most significant precedent for the obsessive, repetitive, body-oriented objects of Eva Hesse'. She concludes that 'even during the time when her accomplishments were eclipsed in the West, Kusama's influence was indirectly felt through the work of two of our most powerful sculptors' [Hesse and Bourgeois]. *Ibid.*, 28-30.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹⁰ Griselda Pollock saw disturbing parallels between Kusama's and Bourgeois' rediscovery, particularly in relation to the 'critical embrace of a "story" of childhood trauma told by an older woman'. See Pollock, 'Three Thoughts on Femininity', *Parkett*, 109.

¹¹¹ An extract is also reproduced in the Phaidon monograph, Tatehata et al, *Yayoi Kusama*, 138-44.

The global village

While *Avalanche* and *BOMB* were premised on a close community network (mostly living and working in Downtown New York), *index* represented the new globalised peer-to-peer network or ‘associative web’ of contacts. This could sometimes be observed literally as a chain of interviews in *index*, such as when Juergen Teller interviewed Björk, who interviewed Alexander McQueen, during which she dropped a reference to a Rem Roolhaas *index* interview.¹¹² A subscriber survey from 2005 showed that, while the readership of *index* was mainly US-based, it wasn’t entirely New York-centric; of 111 respondents, fifteen readers were in New York but ten were from Los Angeles, seven San Francisco and six Chicago – the rest were spread right across the States.¹¹³ The idea of an international web of contacts, of course, echoed the increasing use of the internet and email during the 1990s, following the launch of popular email services such as Hotmail (1996) and Yahoo Mail (1997).

Moreover, unlike *BOMB*’s collaborative principle of editing, and the co-constructed nature of the interviews this engendered, *index* did not believe in copy-approval by interviewees, and in this sense operated according to more typically journalistic codes. *index* interviews would likely have been heavily edited, given that their published length would be only around 2,000 words (3,000 for the earliest interviews), which if one takes into account the average speaking speed of 150 words per minute, would only be just over thirteen minutes of interview (Halley judged the average tape-recording of an *index* interview to be at least forty-five minutes).¹¹⁴ One would have to assume that Kusama was not involved in editing her interview; there is no evidence in the archives to this effect. Indeed, from Matsui’s correspondence, it is apparent that she in fact interviewed Kusama twice, and that she subsequently sent her two drafts to *index* to be processed by them. She faxed Cory Reynolds

¹¹² Vogel, in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 16.

¹¹³ April 2005 Survey, in ‘Subscriber Survey Results Analysis, August 2004 – April 2005’, *index* archive.

¹¹⁴ 150 words per minute is the average conversation rate for English speakers in the US according to the National Center for Voice and Speech. See www.ncvs.org/ncvs/tutorials/voiceprod/tutorial/quality.html. Accessed 29 June 2021. Halley said ‘one of the big jobs was saving a terrible interview. But we always had at least forty-five minutes of tape, and we were only going to publish around 2,000 words.’ Interview with author, 5 February 2019.

at *index* that the second interview with Ms Kusama went really well. She told me a lot about her gay household, about her prestigious [sic] lovers, about Andy [Warhol], about her best friend Donald Judd. I integrated them into the last part of my interview and changed the order of some sentences to make the interview read natural.¹¹⁵

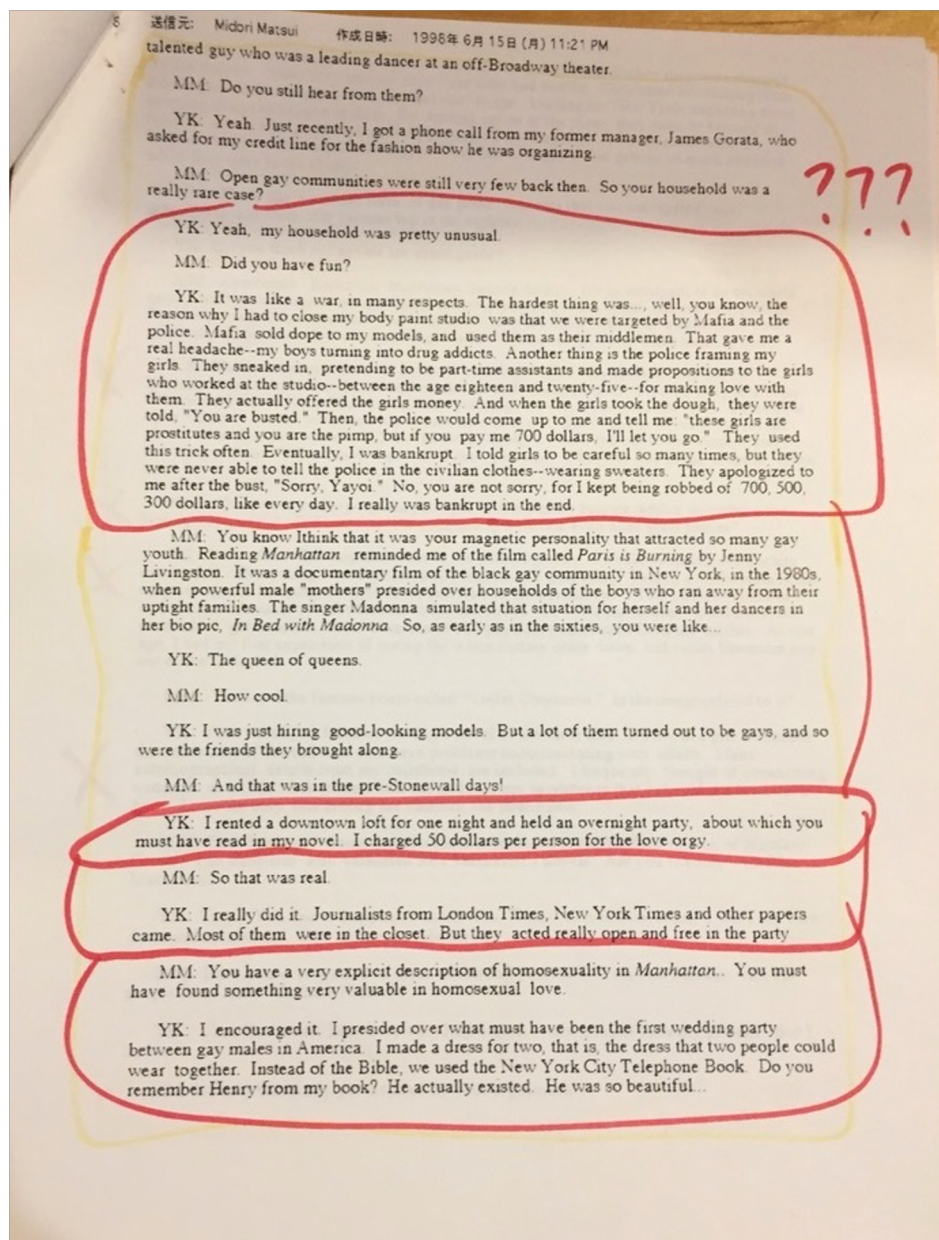


Figure 29 Midori Matsui and Yayoi Kusama, draft transcript of interview for *index*, 15 June 1998.

© Peter Halley/*index*.

¹¹⁵ Fax from Midori Matsui to Cory Reynolds, featuring draft introduction to Kusama interview, 15 June 1998, *index* archive.

The fax, as found in the archives, had been annotated in yellow and red pen – presumably by *index* staff, perhaps different pens for different editors – to indicate what was new in the second transcript (marked ‘new’), what was important and presumably to be kept (marked with an ‘x’), and also to flag up certain passages (with three emphatic question marks). These include episodes when Kusama went into rather salacious detail about her ‘gorgeous’ models who ‘stripped for the shower’, or recounted being framed by the Mafia and the police, and being asked for large bribes of up to 700 dollars a day to avoid arrest for allegedly pimping out her models.¹¹⁶ (fig. 29) Was it the threat of libel (for alleging police corruption) that caused these parts to be edited out – unlikely, these many years later – or that they seemed exaggerated or fanciful? Perhaps the editors felt these stories would reflect badly on Kusama at this time; in any case, these episodes and worse could be sought out in her autobiography and the semi-autobiographical *Manhattan Suicide Addict*.

A new attitude in art making: uncynical, kind, personal?

For such an apparently nihilistic readership as Generation Xers, the unironic sense of admiration for those interviewed in *index* magazine is striking. *Index* only covered people its staff revered, avoiding any criticism. As Halley said: ‘We didn’t want to be critical. We wanted to do long interviews with interviewees the person would be comfortable talking to, and we wanted that person to really tell us what was on his or her mind.’¹¹⁷ One subscriber advert claimed that ‘*index* is about people. We do real interviews. Short questions, long answers.’¹¹⁸ What are ‘real’ interviews? The *index* press release offered one interpretation, claiming the magazine ‘talks to people on the rise in their fields before the hype (the publicists, the media, the image) sets in to distort the interview process. What results are dialogues with interesting people who feel more real (more spontaneous) to the reader.’¹¹⁹ Halley has also frequently mentioned identifying with the New Journalism and Cinema Verité of the 1960s – as he said in an interview, the idea of ‘just tell[ing] it as it is’.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Annotated fax from Midori Matsui, 15 June 1998, *index* archive.

¹¹⁷ Halley, in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 70.

¹¹⁸ Subscriber advertisement, undated, *index* archive.

¹¹⁹ *index* press release, 18 January 1996. Ibid.

¹²⁰ Max Lakin, ‘Day-Glo Dystopian’, *Vulture*, December 2018. www.vulture.com/2018/12/peter-halleys-paintings-are-a-diagram-of-contemporary-life.html. Accessed 2 July 2021.

The desire to be positive resulted in what *index*'s associate editor (1999–2002) Jesse Pearson called its 'sweet, chatty tone'.¹²¹ First names soon replaced the use of initials to indicate turn-taking between interviewer and interviewee. Thus in the print version of the Kusama *index* interview, initials are used, but these are replaced by 'Yayoi' and 'Midori' in the online version. An extreme example of this chumminess can be found in *index*'s Elizabeth Peyton interview by Rob Pruitt and Steve Lafreniere (2000). In the introduction, Pruitt gushes: '...as I talked with this person [Peyton] who I knew was going to be a friend, my mind wandered, and I found myself mesmerized by her effervescence and beauty. It felt like falling in love.'¹²² Pruitt foregrounds the article with a comment on what he saw as a sea-change in the art world earlier that decade:

In the summer of '93 at the Venice Biennale, you could feel that things were about to change. The glitz and extravagance were beginning to fade – bye-bye Koons and black Armanis. In retrospect, we were bearing witness to a new attitude in art-making – cynicism-free, more personal, even kind.¹²³

In her interview, Peyton would seem to confirm this 'new attitude in art-making'. Responding to Pruitt's comment that she paints her portraits 'very personally. Not in a detached, Warholian way at all', she agrees: 'No, no distance at all ... In a way, you can be much more intimate with people you don't know.'¹²⁴

In her 1996 *index* interview Kara Walker similarly discusses her fandom of Andy Warhol, claiming that her 'identification with Warhol was so strong at one point that when he died people sent me condolence cards'.¹²⁵ Bob Nickas, writing to invite Wolfgang Tillmans to photograph the first *index* covers, told him that 'Peter and I are both big fans of your work'.¹²⁶ For Halley, one of the main benefits of being a magazine publisher was that it provided the pretext to meet one's idols, a particular useful strategy for a nerdy or shy artist who has difficulties socialising (Warhol certainly used it). The magazine also offered

¹²¹ Pearson, in Vogel and Ward, *index A to Z*, 27. Jerry Saltz's columns for the *Village Voice*, beginning in 1998, are another good example of the new informal, 'chatty' tone in art writing. See Saltz, *Seeing Out Loud: The Village Voice Columns, Fall 1998 – Winter 2003*, Berkeley, CA: The Figures, 2003.

¹²² 'Elizabeth Peyton with Rob Pruitt and Steve Lafreniere', *index*, no. 24, May 2000, 55. Pruitt's fan-worship of Peyton mirrors the artist's own veneration of the subjects she paints, an eclectic range from Napoleon to Kurt Cobain.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹²⁵ 'Kara Walker with Alexander Alberro', *index*, no. 1, February 1996, 28.

¹²⁶ Fax from Nickas to Tillmans, 1995, *index* archive.

abundant opportunities for parties and dinners, from its own issue launches to supporting events for its many contributors. Indeed, the final Z ('Zeitgeist') section of the *A to Z* anthology is dedicated to snapshots of these events, featuring *index* staff mingling with the celebrities of the day, from Björk to Winona Ryder and John Waters.¹²⁷

Fan studies had been developing as an academic study since the late 1980s, with Henry Jenkins' book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* seen by many as 'a bible for fan researchers, a "how to" book that showed ways to respectfully talk about fandom'.¹²⁸ In it, Jenkins had argued for a radical definition of fandom as a form of active resistance against homogenising commercial culture. Moreover, Mark Duffet has argued that 'Jenkins' research marked a tendency to adopt a politically utopian conception of fandom – expressed here as the return of the socially repressed – in effect a kind of *queering* of mass culture'.¹²⁹ In support, Duffet quotes from Jenkins' 1988 essay 'Star Trek: Rerun, Reread, Rewritten':

Fandom is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, and so on) to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations; fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests, a way of transforming mass culture into popular culture...¹³⁰

Kusama appreciated fans. In the *index* interview, she tells Matsui that 'hardly anyone visits me nowadays. Not for the last ten years. I receive many fan letters, though.'¹³¹ She also seems to delight in declaring that 'I fly all over the world, drive everywhere, and when I get home, I find interviewers and photographers and TV shows waiting for me. No wonder I'm so busy.' Kusama's autobiography, likewise, includes many candid references to fame and her desire for it. Her account of her work and life is frequently interspersed with quotes from flattering reviews, including by Donald Judd (then known more as a critic); the American critic Dore Ashton (seemingly the first to notice her work); as well as Herbert Read (whose 1964 statement claiming to be 'in the presence of an original talent' was distributed by

¹²⁷ That parties were considered a serious element of *index* is confirmed by the *index* archive, which includes several boxes dedicated to party photos and documentation.

¹²⁸ Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An introduction to the study of media fan culture*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, 16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³⁰ Henry Jenkins, in Duffet, *Understanding Fandom*, 64.

¹³¹ 'Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui', *index*, 52.

Kusama at the Venice Biennale).¹³² In her memoir, Kusama also notes the year – 1972 – she was first listed in the American *Who's Who*, and that she had been included ever since.¹³³ She recounts with glee Warhol's reaction to her *One Thousand Boats* exhibition of 1963 – “It's fantastic!”¹³⁴ She goes as far as to boast, ‘I had ardent fans not only in the USA but around the world, and I was reported on almost as much as Jackie O. or President Nixon.’¹³⁵

Midori Matsui was also clearly mindful of, and prepared to defer to, Kusama's senior, celebrity status, confessing in the introduction to the interview that she had been ‘nervous before meeting Kusama, but when I got to her spacious underground studio in Shinjuku, she greeted me warmly’.¹³⁶ In fact, this description was toned down from an earlier draft of the interview, in which Matsui pronounced her ‘the natural-born genius of Pop Art’, and wrote that she ‘was also a bit nervous, awed by her celebrity’.¹³⁷ In this same draft, the first version of the interview sent to the *index* office – translated by Matsui but not yet edited – Matsui had suggested that Kusama herself ‘looked shy and expectant, like a school girl about to be interrogated’ – this observation coming before her own admission of nervousness (hence the ‘also a bit nervous’).¹³⁸ In the published version, the order is switched, so that Matsui admits her shyness before mentioning Kusama's, and the comparison with a school girl dropped.

Unlike peer-to-peer interviews, in this interview it was important to acknowledge the gulf in status between Kusama and Matsui, despite the fact that Matsui made the effort to visit her Tokyo studio and that they spoke in Japanese. The effect was to suggest to the reader how lucky *index* was to procure an interview with this grande dame, Kusama, and perhaps to vicariously feel a thrill of excitement and nerves through Matsui. Kusama is nonetheless presented as gracious and warm; happy to speak ‘casually’ to Matsui and put her at her ease.

¹³² Kusama, *Infinity Net*, 47.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 153. *Who's Who* was significant to Kusama not only as a barometer of her celebrity status, but additionally because it was in this publication that she found the contact details for Georgia O'Keeffe, the first American artist with whom she corresponded before moving to New York.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹³⁶ ‘Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui’, *index*, 42.

¹³⁷ Email from Midori Matsui to Cory Reynolds, containing first draft of Kusama interview, 26 May 1998, *index* archive.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Queering mass culture

The fandom around Kusama could be interpreted with reference to Mark Duffet's 'queering of mass culture'. If Kusama, as a Japanese migrant with a history of mental illness, could be seen as an example of a marginalised subcultural group that Jenkins described, she also had a history of supporting other such excluded groups, and was particularly vocal in promoting gay marriage. In the published *index* interview she proudly discusses presiding 'over what must have been the first wedding party between two gay men in America', having made 'a dress that two people could wear together'.¹³⁹

For Halley, queerness was a key component of *index*. He has said:

the term 'queer' was really present in the mid-to-late Nineties. And I always thought of *index* as a queer magazine, and a lot of our contributors had a queer sensibility, a lot of people we covered had a queer sensibility. The queer movement was very important to me because it wasn't about your practice in bed, it was about a kind of cultural attitude of *détournement*, involving elements of camp. A kind of lightness, but also a desire to turn how you perceive culture.¹⁴⁰

For Halley, 'it was also an era in which gay people were eager to come out of a gay ghetto, and queerness, I think, was about gay and straight being able to mingle and find cultural common ground'.¹⁴¹ Thus the overt and often playful polysexual elements of Kusama's work could be read by the Nineties generation within a queer framework. This generation would finally appreciate Kusama's utopian dream of sexual freedom without recourse to the sensationalism and titillation expressed by the media when she had lived in New York.

Matsui herself highlighted the gay references in Kusama's work in her interview drafts. In her second draft introduction, for example, she writes that the Japanese media had presented Kusama as a 'Nudist Queen in Manhattan surrounded by beautiful gay youth' (the published version dropped the gay references and went with 'Nudist Goddess ... surrounded by beautiful youth').¹⁴² The body of the interview, in this second draft, featured a large section on Kusama's relationship to the 'gay youth' – prompted by Matsui. For instance, Matsui comments to Kusama that '[o]pen gay communities were still very few back then', with

¹³⁹ 'Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui', *index*, 48.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with author, 15 October 2019.

¹⁴¹ Interview with author, 5 February 2019.

¹⁴² Midori Matsui and Yayoi Kusama, draft transcript of interview for *index*, 15 June 1998, *index* archive.

which Kusama agrees. She then suggests that it was the artist's 'magnetic personality that attracted so many gay youth', making a connection between Kusama and the documentary *Paris is Burning*, depicting black and Hispanic men at drag-queen balls in Harlem in the late 1980s.¹⁴³ This section was cut, perhaps because it implies a comparison between Kusama and the 'powerful male "mothers" [who] presided over households of boys'. Also cut was a section about Kusama charging fifty dollars a person for a 'love orgy', which included '[j]ournalists from London Times, New York Times and other papers' who had been 'in the closet' but 'acted really open and free in the party'.¹⁴⁴ Matsui really presses Kusama on this relation to the gay community, asking finally 'You must have found something very valuable in homosexual love', to which Kusama replies 'I encouraged it',¹⁴⁵ followed by her

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

description of the gay wedding and dress – the only part that made it into the published version. Perhaps this insistence on Kusama’s relation to the gay community was deemed too naïve for the more blasé American audiences of the late Nineties, especially for a magazine in which, according to the subscriber survey, 30% of the readership identified as gay or bisexual (fig. 30). After all, Halley has noted with amusement that,

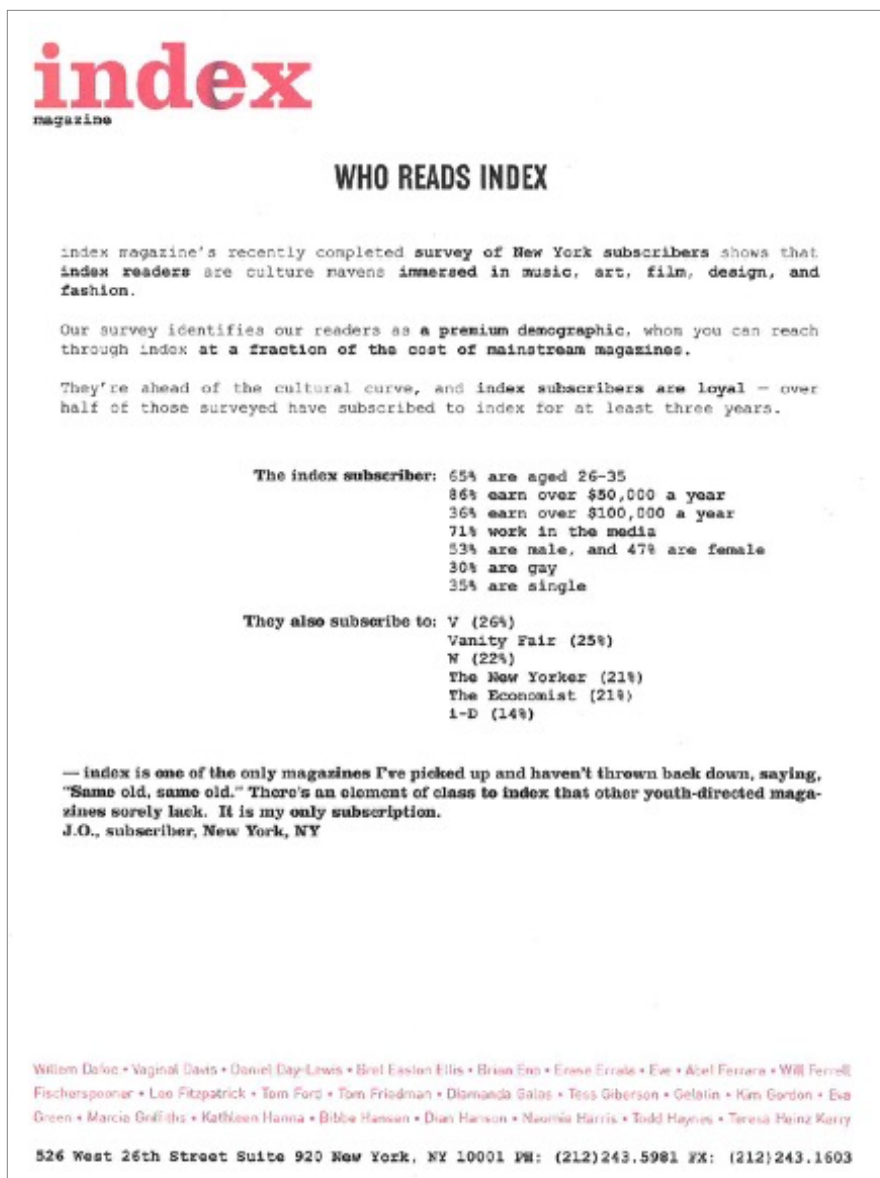


Figure 30 'Who reads *index*', *index* archive, Peter Halley studio. © Peter Halley/*index*.

Genesis P-Orridge was one of our interviews, and after we published it somebody came up to me and said, “*index* was the only magazine that would ever interview

Genesis P-Orridge and not ask him why he wore a dress every day!” It simply didn’t come up.¹⁴⁶

In stark contrast with Robert Gober’s interview in 1989, then, it seemed that there were far fewer consequences to – and therefore less fear of – discussing sexuality in public, at least within the cultural sphere. More important was the pursuit of a kind of queer defiance, defined by David Getsy as a refusal ‘to accept any operations of exclusion and erasure that make up the normal and posit compulsory sameness’.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

Yayoi Kusama’s interview in *index* was published at a time when Downtown’s village-like scene had become part of the global village. The new digital forms of communication, such as email, were supplementing the fax and the telephone to facilitate international interviews, although Halley and his editors were keen to maintain a New York Downtown-specific perspective, which at this time meant a highly self-conscious, queer, indie sensibility that abhorred the obvious and the boring in mass culture.

Although Halley himself was not a fan of biographical interpretations of art, in her interview Midori Matsui understood the importance of prompting Kusama into expanding on, and reassessing, what had previously been said about and by her. In this, she pre-empted Yamamura’s strategy of holding Kusama’s own autobiography to account; the important difference was that, in so doing, Matsui did not minimise Kusama’s childhood and psychological traumas, and thus the artist’s right to tell her own story. Matsui was not afraid to admit to being a fan of Kusama’s, and in return was treated warmly by the artist, who was growing weary of press interviews,¹⁴⁸ even agreeing to two sittings.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with author, 5 February 2019.

¹⁴⁷ David J. Getsy, ‘Introduction: Queer Intolerability and its Attachments’, *Queer*, Documents of Contemporary Art series, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2016, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Alexi Worth from *The New York Times* describes how an interview with Kusama was cut short. Worth, ‘Kusama Dot Com’, *The New York Times*, 24 February 2008, 266. Dexter Thomas has written how Kusama banned him and his *Vice* camera crew from her studio. Thomas, *Vice*, ‘Japan’s most famous avant-garde artist banned us from her studio’, 3 October 2017. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ywnqxx/japans-most-famous-avant-garde-artist-banned-us-from-her-studio>. Accessed 2 July 2021. In a 2018 feature on Kusama in the *Observer*, Tim Adams wrote that the artist ‘does not do interviews’, although she permitted three emailed questions. Adams, ‘Yayoi Kusama: the world’s favourite artist?’, *The Observer*, 23 September 2018. www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/sep/23/yayoi-kusama-infinity-film-victoria-miro-exhibition. Accessed 2 July 2021.

The *index* interview, then, celebrates Kusama's artistic achievements – particularly her contributions to 1960s counterculture – and captivatingly unconventional persona. But, despite focusing on the past, the interview still manages to cast her as an icon relevant to a contemporary readership, an international art star not confined to a hospital in Japan but rather fully involved in her global engagements. Kusama's parting words convey her resilience and commitment to the future: 'I want to live two or three hundred years to do all the things I want to do. I really need more time to think. I want to explore myself – my aesthetics, my relation to the world.'¹⁴⁹ Although many factors have contributed to Kusama's rise to celebrity status and a place in the new globalised art-historical canon, this interview will have played its part in winning over a new, highly influential audience, and widening the framework for interpreting her work.

¹⁴⁹ 'Yayoi Kusama with Midori Matsui', *index*, 52.

Conclusion

The first artist interview series on BBC radio was *Artists at Work*, broadcast in 1932. In his preface to the book version of *Artists at Work* (1933), comprising edited transcripts of the broadcast discussions, series interviewer Stanley Casson wrote of the need to demystify the interviewing process:

I will explain, without making any secret about it, exactly how these discussions reached the form in which they were delivered and are here printed. It is as much my duty to explain this as it was of the artists to explain the processes of their art.¹

In this thesis, I too have tried to explain how discussions have reached their live, broadcast and printed forms. A strong motivation for this research was to problematise the simplistic reduction of the artist interview to its functions as a journalistic tool and apparently neutral historical testimony. Treating the interview rather than the interviewee as an object of critical study with its own life and development has helped demystify how artist interviews are constructed, by whom and under what conditions. This ‘biographical’ model encourages art historians to respect the complexity of interviews in all their variant forms as research material.

As I show, focusing on the interview itself does not exclude an interest in the artist’s biography. In a conversation with literary interview scholars Anneleen Masschelein and Rebecca Roach, pedagogist Bronwyn Davies acknowledged that some of her interviewees (and interviewers) ‘approach the interview as a chance to reveal the essential truth of themselves’.² Among my case-study interviews, Nell Dunn’s *Talking to Women* comes closest to this confessional approach, although as much from Dunn’s side as from her interviewees. Nevertheless, emphasising the life of the interview rather than that of the subject has revealed as much about the attitudes of each interviewee towards their public persona as it has new information about their personal lives.

As interviews became more commonplace in the UK and US in the post-war period, the rigid structure, hierarchy and conventions of early interviews, as heard on BBC radio for example,

¹ Stanley Casson, ed., *Artists at Work*, London: Harrap, 1933, 133.

² Anneleen Masschelein and Rebecca Roach, ‘Emergent Conversations: Bronwyn Davies on the Transformation of Interview Practices in the Social Sciences’, *Biography*, 41: 2, Spring 2018, 256.

loosened and interviewers could choose to ask about artists' lives as well as their work. The growing cultural influence of the psychoanalytical mode, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, framed and conditioned the way interviews were thought of, and the borders between private and public life became increasingly porous.³ Indeed, the question of what someone is 'really like' – as Tom Wolfe hoped New Journalism would answer – presupposes a hidden private self that can be revealed given the right questions. My case-study interviews showcase different techniques to encourage this unmasking. For instance, New Journalism was based on persistence – being with someone long enough for something to be revealed. Alternatively, John Freeman opted for a more interrogative approach to questioning his *Face to Face* subjects, while Dunn's intimate and casual manner in *Talking to Women* could be thought of as a prototype for feminist consciousness-raising.

The popularity of the personal interview and confessional writing by the 1960s can also be attributed to the increasing social atomisation of liberal democracies by which the individual replaced the community as the basic unit of society. Certainly, there is a sharp contrast between pre-war BBC radio interview series such as *Artists at Work* and *The Artist and His Public*, with their didactic approach to explaining creative practice, and the post-war television series *Face to Face* that foregrounded individual personalities. Nonetheless, the declining deference towards public figures from the 1950s did not always encourage public figures to lay their personal lives bare. No wonder artists like Augustus John and Henry Moore strongly resisted exposing their private lives, especially to a general audience that might be sceptical of modern art. When they did agree to interviews, John and Moore requested that interviewers come to their studios to better appreciate their creative environment rather than hang out at London members' clubs like the Garrick or dress in formal attire for a BBC studio appearance. Alongside a greater societal openness about the life of the mind, then, came a greater attentiveness to protecting one's privacy, resulting in the US in particular in an increasingly litigious culture, exemplified by the tension caused by the publication in 1968 of 'La Dolce Viva' in *New York* magazine.

Artist interviews deal with art and ideas as much as biography. As I have found, many artists and critics find the notion of intentionality problematic and endeavour to steer conversations

³ Adam Curtis's documentary *The Century of the Self* (2002) memorably captured the wide-ranging impact of psychoanalysis on the twentieth century.

towards the art itself and artmaking. In defiance of John Freeman's attempts to pry into his personal history, Augustus John convinced the programme's production team to allow him to insert a monologue about the paintings in his studio as a preface to the interview proper. The curator Richard Flood maintains that certain great artists are 'language resistant', backing up Robert Gober's reluctance to offering explanations of his work, including in his 1989 *BOMB* interview with Craig Gholson. Indeed, just because artist interview magazines like *BOMB* pitted themselves against formalist and heavily theoretical art criticism did not mean that they supported the idea of interviews as therapeutic confession. Instead, *BOMB* editor Betsy Sussler describes her magazine as an 'oral history of ideas' and 'intellectual histories', moving the focus away from personality to a collective portrait of a particular era's concerns.⁴

Taking a long view of interviews highlights the fact that artists are not always consistent in their opinions and objections to talking about themselves and their art. In his *BOMB* interview, Gober seemed more comfortable talking about religion than politics or his childhood memories. In the decades since, Gober has acknowledged the AIDS-related symbolism of his work; asserted that it is rude and reductive to discuss religious belief in interviews; and published his own exhaustive autobiographical timeline in his 2015 MoMA exhibition catalogue. And despite his dislike of being interviewed, Gober used the interview format to further his own activist work, interviewing Congressman John Conyers on his proposed amendment to the Hate Crimes Statistics Bill that would benefit the gay community, as well as the anonymous collective Gran Fury on their AIDS activist work. Understandably, given the mainstream media's tendency towards homophobia and anti-AIDS rhetoric at that time, Gober was more comfortable in the role of interviewer than interviewee. By taking a biographical approach to the interview rather than the subject, I have been able to identify the specific context for these viewpoints – as well as allow for a contextual shift around art and society over time – rather than align them to the idea of an essential self.

Living histories

My case-study artist interviews are living histories that will continue beyond the timeframe of this thesis: the interviews may be referenced in the future, perhaps included in future

⁴ Betsy Sussler, 'This History of *BOMB*', in Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, eds, *The Little Magazine in Contemporary Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015, 24.

anthologies, and form part of an artist's ever-growing bibliography and evolving reputation within the art-historical canon. Any promotional aspect of an artist interview – the original hook, such as Viva's film premiere – it is now just one part of the story.

The far-reaching impact of many artist interviews has been one of the most surprising aspects of my research: that, for example, Viva could be so angry about her interview nearly half a century afterwards, or that Nell Dunn's *Talking to Women* should be considered relevant to a new generation of women over fifty years after it was published. With the advent of the internet and the digitisation of many archives, it is likely that interviews will have even longer and more eventful biographies – to borrow Igor Kopytoff's term – in the future. As Kopytoff explains in the 'Social Life of Things' (1986):

In the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of the various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context. As with persons, the drama here lies in the uncertainties of valuation and identity.⁵

Although Kopytoff was writing about physical objects, his description can be usefully applied to the life of interviews, if by 'singularization' we might substitute interview variant, and we might think of the migration of interviews across different media and platforms over time as 'reclassifications'. In an interview context, uncertainties of valuation and identity can certainly have dramatic consequences, particularly obvious in the Augustus John and Viva interviews analysed in this thesis. In these cases, the tension arises not just from the interviewee's personal rejection of the interviewer's characterisation of them, but the ripple effect this sets in motion. That the stakes are so high is because an interview not only reflects the opinions of the interview subject but often also the values of the host institution, such as the BBC and *New York* magazine in these cases, and the reputation of the interviewer, editor, producer and publisher – all those stakeholders involved in the interview's production. As with these examples, physiological factors and temperament all add to the drama: in John's case, his extreme age and defiance; in Viva's, her model looks, naiveté and candour.

⁵ Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 90.

Acknowledging the existence of variant forms of an interview weakens the sense of opposition between oral and written modes of communication. Unlike in oral history, whereby transcripts are seen as secondary to the oral recording, in my research transcripts, whether published or not, are considered primary documents in their own right. Conversely, I have sought to reinstate the value of oral recordings in contexts where they have been seen as a means to an end, as with interview magazines like *BOMB* that consider the interview to be a written form and thus often discard the recordings. Deparatextualisation of interviews – insisting on the central rather than peripheral status of the interview – has created space for the interview’s own paratexts to be examined. In published versions of interviews such as Yayoi Kusama’s interview in *index* and the *Vogue* version of Dunn’s conversation with Pauline Boty, the choice of photographic illustrations, page design and standfirst all contribute significantly to the reader’s impression of the interview.

My research has drawn attention to the difficulty of tracing all the variants of an interview. Variants may go missing, or we may not be aware of their existence. Many older oral and audiovisual recordings exist only in their original format and are considered too vulnerable to be played, even just to digitise them. Within my case-study interviews, many unknowns remain, such as who was actually present during the Viva interview. It is important, therefore, as with a biography of a subject, not to place too much importance on discovering everything about an interview. Rather, it is more productive to focus on what those elements we do have can tell us. For example, it has proved instructive to speculate on why a certain interview required so many draft transcripts or more than one encounter; and why an interview was republished in one anthology and not another.

As part of her groundbreaking research on Andy Warhol’s interview with Gene Swenson for *ARTnews* in November 1963, Jennifer Sichel examines what she calls the ‘slippery’ issue of tone. She asks:

Where does tone reside? Does tone emanate from Warhol and Swenson’s psyches, communicated in the cadence and rhythm of their voices? Or does tone designate something more diffuse that happens in the space of the conversation among Swenson, Warhol, and their friends, like a generalized feeling-state in the room? Or more diffuse still, does tone encompass my emotional response to the recording?

Does my transcript of the interview ... take on a tone of its own – one that allows readers to describe it as, say, campy, irreverent, or sincere?⁶

I think that these questions offer a fascinating prompt for future research, particularly as the issues of transcription and notation have been poorly investigated in relation to artist interviews. How could one convey feelings of tone more visibly in transcription? Likewise, it would be productive to allow for further reflection on one's emotional responses to hearing and reading interviews. How to account for the instinct to 'take sides' with an interviewer or interviewee, as I found myself doing with Viva – despite enjoying Barbara Goldsmith's dramatic, New Journalism-style of writing. Moreover, how does my feminist inclination influence my perspective on Dunn's interviews? And how about other worldviews on politics and social issues?

The artist interview canon

Over the course of this research, I found that certain interviews and interview platforms were referred to time and again as influences, such as the *Paris Review*; Ed Murrow's television interviews; the BBC's *Monitor* series; *Interview* magazine and indeed Andy Warhol's interviews in general. In this way, one could say that an artist interview canon is being created – one which will continue to grow and be revised. I would claim that all the case-study interviews in this thesis have themselves become canonical in the sense of being recognised as key examples of their genre and included in interview anthologies.

Specifically, Freeman and John's *Face to Face* interview was reissued in both book and DVD anthologies; Dunn's *Talking to Women* was republished recently by a new feminist press; Barbara Goldsmith's 'La Dolce Viva' was included in E. J. Johnson and Tom Wolfe's 'best of' volume, *The New Journalism*; Gober's interview was selected for *BOMB: speak art! the best of BOMB Magazine interviews with artists*; and Yayoi Kusama's interview with Midori Matsui featured in *index* magazine's anthology *index A to Z* (albeit only represented by a photo of the artist that originally appeared alongside the interview).

My research demonstrates the need to look beyond artist media platforms like art magazines and art documentaries for historically significant artist interviews. For example, artist interviews on radio and television magazine programmes offer the opportunity to examine

⁶ Jennifer Sichel, 'Warhol's Tone', in *Andy Warhol Exhibits: A Glittering Alternative*, Marianne Dobner, ed., Cologne: Walther König, 2020, 206.

the visibility and reputation of artists in relation to other notable personalities. The small number of artists interviewed on *Face to Face* and *Desert Island Discs* underscores how art was regarded as a niche interest in the mid-twentieth century compared to other artforms like literature, cinema and music. Furthermore, cross-disciplinary magazines like *BOMB* and *index* give an impression of how artists operate in a cultural community like New York's Downtown.

Dunn's *Talking to Women* offers an especially important example of a non-art context. The book's open-ended premise, to compare experiences between women, created the conditions for an interview in which Boty could relax rather than be typecast as a femme fatale who happened to be an artist. This interview has since become a vital resource for those researching Boty, and a source of fictional inspiration for novelist Ali Smith.

Interviews can be especially important in re-evaluating artists' legacies. In her contribution to the 'Artist Interview' section of the *Journal of Art Historiography*, focusing on women artists of African descent, Lauren Cross argues that 'artist interviews document hidden, subjugated knowledge that describes the ways in which artists on the margins of the art world navigate their artistic careers'.⁷ As the process of diversifying and decolonising the art world and art history gathers momentum, artist interviews will likely become better appreciated. In the absence of critical recognition on traditional art-specific platforms, interviews can be vital evidence that the work and opinions of a previously neglected artist (like Boty) were valued and sought-after during their lifetime – and that any subsequent 'rediscovery' is not gratuitous but rather serves to restore their rightful place within the artistic canon. On the other hand, if historians do not make the effort to scrutinise the backstory of artist interviews, misreadings and errors will continue to be made. As I noted in Chapter Four, in his recent biography *Warhol* (2020), Blake Gopnik reproduced excerpts of the 'La Dolce Viva' interview without reference to its contested status, allowing it to stand as objective evidence and justifying Blake's apparent antipathy towards Viva.

⁷ Lauren Cross, 'Artist interviews and revisionist art history: women of African descent, critical practice and methods of rewriting dominant narratives', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 23, December 2020, 1. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/cross.pdf>. Accessed 31 May 2021.

Literary interviews and artist interviews

In the introduction, I noted the extensive research being undertaken into literary interviews, and how these findings, particularly around the merits of establishing the author interview as a separate form or genre, might inform similar studies into artist interviews. My research has confirmed the continual cross-pollination between literary and artist interviews. In celebrating the editing of interviews as an art rather than a necessary evil, the *Paris Review*, in particular, paved the way for both author and artist interviews to be considered artforms in themselves. Moreover, it is often difficult to separate author and artist interviews. They may be broadcast or published alongside each other, as with *BOMB* and *index* magazines (which also include interviews with other types of cultural figure, such as musicians and actors). Frequently, the line between artist interviews and literature has also been blurred, creating new writing hybrids, such as Dunn's *Talking to Women* and Goldsmith's New Journalism-style 'La Dolce Viva'.

Notwithstanding these close connections, it is evident that artists' relationship to criticism and the public status of art and artists have created specific contexts in which to interpret artist interviews. The proliferation of artist interview-led magazines in Downtown New York from the 1960s can clearly be traced to a growing dissatisfaction with art criticism, particularly formalist and overly theoretical criticism, and a desire for artists to represent themselves and talk back to critics. Downtown magazines like *Avalanche*, *BOMB* and *index* built on previous artist-led publications like *SCRAP* and *Tiger's Eye* that prioritised the artist's voice, if not in interviews, then as artists' writing. By taking control of the artist interview, with the aid of the new portable tape-recorders, little magazines could experiment with the format and break conventions, such as disrupting the power imbalance between interlocutors by favouring peer-to-peer interviews and encouraging collaborative editing. Artist interviews, as Sussler observed, could be seen as extensions of conversations that were happening in studios and bars, especially during Downtown's heyday from the 1960s to the 1980s. These interviews, then, were considered less a means of interpreting artists' work for others but more in the Socratic tradition of stimulating ideas as part of the artmaking process.

The fear of revealing too much

Criticism and suspicion of the interview form were present from its beginnings in the nineteenth century. Each chapter in the thesis has made visible a particular set of concerns about the interview, thus tracking some of the reasons behind the interview's continuing

negative connotations over the course of the twentieth century. In the first chapter, the poor acoustic conditions of early broadcasting, such as highly sensitive microphones, were not conducive to the development of spontaneous, ‘natural’ dialogue on BBC radio. Together with the psychological fear of talking live to millions of unseen listeners and the intimidatingly upper-class and high-brow attitude of the BBC, radio interviews were widely considered to be an ordeal.

By the advent of television interviews, discussed in Chapter Two, material conditions had improved, including better recording and editing facilities, but the new visual element caused its own stresses. Producing a seamless film from more than one film reel, and sometimes more than one interview encounter, created challenges; in Augustus John’s case this was summarised as ‘cigarette continuity’ since John smoked incessantly through the interview. There was the additional challenge of creating an appealing visual identity for a programme about two people talking. With its stark *mise-en-scène* that inferred interrogation of suspects rather than relaxed conversation – facing chairs and over-the-shoulder camera angle directed at the subject – *Face to Face* evoked Cold War fears about brainwashing.

Chapter Three addressed the fear that interviews were becoming too confessional, too much like therapy by the 1960s. In contrast to the slickly edited *Paris Review*, Nell Dunn opted for a loose, apparently verbatim style of editing that emphasised the casualness of her encounters and idiomatic language of her often working-class (that is, decidedly un-BBC English-speaking) subjects. Many critics disapproved of the apparent excesses in Dunn’s writing, which from today’s perspective reads like a thinly veiled moral attack on her frank discussions of female sexuality and desire for creativity.

Andy Warhol chose to embrace and subvert the stereotype of celebrity interviews as indulgent and banal. The slice-of-life style of interviewing he and his associates preferred was deliberately rambling, as in the almost unreadable *a: A novel*, following a day in the life of Factory star Ondine. In Chapter Four, I compared this style of verbatim interviewing to the highly polished interview portraits favoured in New Journalism that embellished dialogue with literary description. This type of American journalism, then found in tabloid magazines and Sunday supplements, responded to accusations of the interview genre’s banality by ‘injecting adrenaline’ into it. New Journalist interviews also fuelled fears of the exploitation of interview subjects. My analysis of the Viva interview suggests that Barbara Goldsmith deliberately edited the transcript to exacerbate the reader’s moral distaste of Viva’s bohemian

lifestyle, as part of a personal campaign to dismantle the seemingly unreal, 'dream' image of celebrity that sociologist Edgar Morin had theorised.

Chapter Five dealt with interviewees' fears of overexposing themselves in public. Robert Gober was concerned that discussing his experience of the AIDS crisis in *BOMB Magazine* could cast him as a victim. Even Hilton Als, a staunch champion of Gober's work, admitted that he avoided interpreting Gober's work politically for many years in case it seemed he was exploiting Gober's sexuality and the AIDS situation. Fortunately for Gober, *BOMB*, like the *Paris Review*, allowed interviewees a chance to approve edits before publication. Gober took advantage of this to redact any mention of AIDS and his activism.

On the other hand, Yayoi Kusama's frankness about her mental health and attitudes towards sex, gender and race, discussed in Chapter Six, has caused anxiety among critics. Some feminists argue that focusing attention on her mental illness risks infantilising her; others that it minimises the political and artistic power of her work. Yet Kusama's unconventional and candid persona was a major factor in *index* magazine's interest in featuring her and her work, despite the wide age gap between the then-septuagenarian artist and *index*'s young readership. *Index*'s founders admired the early days of Warhol's *Interview* magazine, but were concerned that, in the years since, interview fatigue had begun to set in on the parts of interviewee and reader. *Index* thus feared boring or predictable interviews and strove to interview people before other media outlets hyped them, or in Kusama's case, just as Kusama-mania was beginning to hit in 1998.

An appetite for conversation

Janet Malcolm believed that interviewees inevitably reveal too much, and based on these case studies, the fear of over-revealing has been persistent throughout the history of artist interviews.⁸ However much those who commission and produce interviews try to control the staging, editing and distribution of an interview, it is impossible to maintain absolute authority. However carefully planned, rehearsed or scripted, the interview encounter produces its own unpredictable, psychologically charged atmosphere. The chemistry between Freeman and John is uncomfortably tense to watch, while, conversely, reading Boty's conversation with Dunn evokes feelings of ease and trust. But if interviewees worry about

⁸ See Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, London: Granta Books, 2020.

revealing too much, what might be considered an acceptable or ‘right’ level of revelation? From a reader’s or listener’s viewpoint, particularly from a historical perspective, one is often aware of what has not been said in an interview. For instance, in Gober’s interview, Gholson misses the opportunity to press him on the controversial *Hanging Man* wallpaper, and thus the issue of racism; while Matsui doesn’t ask Kusama about her recent work until the very end of the interview and is given an evasive reply which shuts down the conversation. Yet surely it is these gaps that make interviews sound real, however much they have been edited and neaten up, with all the inconsistencies of human conversational exchange.

The timeline for my research ends before the shifts in communication that accompanied the rise of the internet, social media and the global network. Interviews – recent and historical – are often available in the public realm for longer and on more accessible platforms than previously. One positive consequence has been the increased potential for researchers to share information about artist interviews. As such, I have been involved in a growing network of such researchers – including contributors to the University of Chicago’s ongoing ‘Speaking of Art’ seminar series and the ‘Artist Interview’ section of the December 2020 *Journal of Art Historiography* – who are helping to corroborate international research.⁹ Proposals for an edited volume of critical essays on artist interviews, and a shared online platform are in progress.

Today, we take the interview format as a given. The interview’s ubiquity has shrouded its origins and the extent to which it continues to develop in form and function. But as with all forms of communication, we should not take it for granted. After all, certain forms of communication are becoming obsolete in our lifetimes, as American critic Vivian Gornick notes about letter-writing and café talk. For, her a thriving café life is special in producing a ‘shared limberness of the mind that improves the appetite for conversation: an adequate sentence maker is then made good, a good one excellent, and excellent one extraordinary’.¹⁰ Despite the opportunity for frequent but brief exchanges through our phones and online platforms, extended conversation like interviews requires attention, commitment and planning for which time must be made within our hectic schedules.

⁹ See <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/23-dec20/> and <https://voices.uchicago.edu/speakingofart/>. Accessed 6 July 2021.

¹⁰ Vivian Gornick, ‘On letter writing’, *Approaching Eye Level*, London: Daunt Books, 2020, 169-84.

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