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- 1 In interviews, all forms of authorized narratives¹ become condensed: those of the figure of the artist, of the biographical narrative, and of the iconographical contract, which includes the encyclopaedia of the artist and the history. Added to all this is another factor which, for its part, is specific. This is the interview's openness to any kind of interlocutor: peer, student, critic, and anyone else working in the artistic arena and contributing to the artist's socialization. Any attempt to reduce the interview to such and such a characteristic is doomed to failure. Any attempt to incarnate a specific interlocutory figure also remains relative, because the artist involved is always publicly involved, whatever his close or distant links might be, whether already existing or set up for the occasion. If knowledge and confidence are always close, there are always third parties who share the conversation and are called upon as witnesses.
- 2 As far as skills are concerned, meaning the way the artist aims his idea at the audience by way of one or two other interlocutors, there is probably a story, like the one which prompted Lucio Fontana, a restrained producer of writings and statements, to pass by way of speaking by proxy. After his students had committed to paper the terms of a manifesto (*White Manifesto*, 1946), and when colleagues and critics had taken over (*Spatialistes 1*, 1947 and *Spatialistes 2*, 1948), the artist felt obliged to take up the essence of the previously formulated proposals, on his own account in the *Technical Manifesto of Spatialism* (1951). It was only when the success of his spatial concepts forced him to abandon the relative discretion in which his twofold academic and avant-garde production had kept him up until then, that he had a chance to express himself more broadly in one or two interviews, including the exemplary one with Carla Lonzi in 1967. Paradoxically, public art has no public, only art offered on the market and in exhibition venues demands an interaction from which the artist can only extricate himself with difficulty. The relative rarity of interviews in Lucio Fontana's case constitutes their considerable interest, whereas, for other artists, the abundance of interviews is itself meaningful.
- 3 So it is, for example, with Georg Baselitz, who has not stinted on conversations, to such a degree that, just for the magazine *Art press*, he has given six interviews in the collection "Les Grands entretiens", co-published with the IMEC. Over and above a general awareness of his work, it is nevertheless hard to understand the place he accords to interviews, and what he says in them. In comparison, the *Gesammelte Schriften und Interviews*², compiled by Detlev Gretenkort for Ridinghouse in 2010 and Hirmer in 2011, bring out the fact that beyond the first manifestoes produced between 1962 and 1966, Georg Baselitz prefers to tell his interlocutors what he has to say rather than produce texts off his own bat. "Question to myself", written for the catalogue of a solo show of his at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1995, comes across clearly as a response about the challenge of his drawings and the way he makes them, as offered to a curator who is absent in the reconstruction.
- 4 Georg Baselitz is an obliging narrator, as Anne and Patrick Poirier can be in their exchanges with Françoise Jaunin. The author and her two interlocutors respond to all the possible styles of the interview, with their biographical narratives helping to lend a unity which, at first glance, is not easy to grasp, because of their nomadism and the dispersal of their works.

- 5 Michel Parmentier, Roberto Matta and Michel Butor are much more reticent about the biographical exercise as an iconographical and interpretative key, using a thousand and one ruses to thwart the insistent questions being fired at them.
- 6 The hardest to get to grips with is probably Michel Parmentier, who has only ever expressed himself in a parsimonious and reluctant way, not because he puts no trust in language when he answers Michel Nuridsany—"I sometimes believe more in words than in paint"³—but because he is "not sure that he wants to explain himself."⁴ Just as he stole away from painting for many years, he has refused any legend being created about him, in the years prior to 1968. At the moment of his return to the art world, he became a commander-like figure, an uncompromising observer making no concessions, demonstrating a great lucidity, which gives all the more weight to what he says, and to his writings. We should not forget that, together with Simon Hantaï, he played a role which marked those who spent time with him, before coming to the forefront of the stage. Michel Parmentier is the key to a moment when a certain history of informal painting came to a close.
- 7 Eduardo Carrasco, for his part, struggles to wrinkle out of Roberto Matta any explicit links between the different moments of his life, meetings with other artists, and the works produced. He is forced to become involved in exercises befitting the artist who cannot present his work without raising questions about language, he who, alongside his native tongue, has lived in French, English and Italian. He has to follow it in his great debates about living together and politics, he who, hailing from a grand bourgeois family, discovered war, racism and Trotskyism to such a point that he claims several identities, a bit like Marcel Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. There are facts and events communicated here and there in the conversation which only rarely dwells at any length on the narrative as the key giving access to the whole œuvre. His place in the world of culture in the midst of writers, like Pablo Neruda, André Breton and Gabriela Mistral, seems to be the fact of a social determinism, more than it fits into a legend; and the publisher's notes at times complement the lack of accuracy of the factual account. It is much more interesting to understand the vision of the world of a person without roots, together with his anti-colonialism and his inability to act in the social arena other than through his paintings, which he says do not interest him as paintings, thus turning his back on the idea of describing himself as a painter.
- 8 Michel Butor, for his part, plays a more subtle role, in which he does not stint in his conversation with Kristell Loquet, who is close to him, on all the anecdotes of everyday life. They bring the reader into the conversation, but each time that it is a matter of establishing the link with his writings to bring forth their sense and sensibility, Michel Butor politely sidesteps. Of the textual objects he talks about, Michel Butor says: "They indicate lots of things for me. Lots of things that I'm almost the only person to have been able to do like that. As a result, they are also my portrait. And I'm not trying to avoid that. I'm not trying to do it, I'm not trying to introduce myself, no."⁵ He nevertheless acknowledges the importance of interviews in his writing work, and the fact that they help to shed light, for readers and for himself alike: "I've had plenty of dialogues with journalists, and some of those journalists have such a quality that they become writers. But I'm talking about interviews, because I'm the hub, if you like. There's someone asking me questions. Not really an egalitarian exchange. The person who's asking me questions is very important, and there are people who are very good at "searching" me, but it's something different from two writers talking about things between them."⁶ He also

remembers the importance of the interviews with Henri Desoubaux, the heed he paid to the opinions of Georges Perros, with whom he had a lengthy correspondence and to whom he gave several of his books to read before handing them to the publisher. He reckons that his books have constructed him. Otherwise put, Michel Butor had things to say and create but without the legend about his character replacing the legends proposed by the interactions of his texts and his interlocutors, among whom feature his readers. But is it not because he has got over the fact of having a name that was an insult and because he constructs his books in an extreme way before writing them, that he transmits no flaw or memory of a primitive scene?

- 9 There is a comparable assurance in what Roy Lichtenstein⁷ has to say to many different interlocutors, the best of which were translated for his show at the Centre Pompidou. If he was interested in popular culture, Roy Lichtenstein knew full well what place he wanted to have in art. He made use of images taken from "snapshots", but he knew what had to be done with them to produce form and style. He also knew how to rein in and relativize the imagination of an interviewer like David Sylvester, who saw teeth in his brush strokes, by simply saying to him: "I think I understood that I was in the process of making brush strokes looking like brush strokes".⁸ He was interested in certain images because they seemed devoid of sensibility, but he did not want to deliver any social message for all that. In other words, the interview enabled him to specify what he was trying to do and how he was doing it, but also to re-frame the at times uncontrolled imagination of his interlocutors.
- 10 The collective book, edited by Jérôme Dupeyrat and Mathieu Harel Vivier, is of another genre. It tries to cover the span of the interview, what it permits and what it cannot promise, and this in the most diverse of situations, including in the apprenticeship of the interview and in apprenticeship through the interview. Florent Siaud describes the nature of the interaction that is quite naturally produced in conversation: "So the artist's interview is not only a place where art is displayed in its factory: it is a process during which the artist tries to understand his own praxis using someone else as go-between; it represents *per se* an exercise in which the person asking the questions is open to this comprehension which is in the process of taking place thanks to his own questions."⁹ Franck Chauvet finds it harder to define the uncompromising words of Raymond Hains, words which send the interlocutor astray rather than really illuminating him, to such a degree are they the very stuff of the work, and of the work in progress, without any other end purpose being assigned to it. While Federica Maltese (about Pier Paolo Pasolini) and Eléonore Antzenberger (about Louise Bourgeois and Bernard Marcadé) analyze the interviews conducted by others, John Cornu highlights his apprenticeship in research by interview in a process where, once formalized, this latter, in the thesis, replaces training through spending time with "masters" of yesteryear.
- 11 The text by Jérôme Dupeyrat and Mathieu Harel Vivier deconstructs, despite itself, that machine for getting people to talk called Hans Ulrich Obrist, the man who interviews people whose language he does not speak (Oscar Niemeyer) and who does not transcribe what he has recorded, while Julie Noirot has fun, in the case of Christian Boltanski, in re-introducing that game of truth and falsehood which the artist has played with so much pleasure. Lastly, the text by Laurence Corbel on "Fakes, appropriations and parodies of the artist's interview" touches on an aspect which undeniably merits being dwelt upon, but learns somewhat conventional lessons therefrom. A reading of this volume is, overall, refreshing because of its openness, and the diverse range of choices of both areas and

placements in the face of the "interview" as object. I have not got all the way through the pile of new things, so plentiful is the material, but this text cannot be closed again without, for very different reasons, pointing to Pierre Encrevé's *Manessier*, and the special issue of the magazine *Volume*, made up almost exclusively of interviews. Pierre Encrevé's book on Manessier mixes interviews and essays based on a somewhat rare procedure among art critics and historians. Two dialogues exist jointly: one with the man and the painter in an attempt to elucidate the arrival of the paintings, the other with history, in which Pierre Encrevé fights against those who seem to have removed from history's flow a painter who remained pigeonholed in the 1950s, when, together with several of his French contemporaries, he survived for a long time after that and went on painting after his moment of glory. In his interviews, Pierre Encrevé does not essentially differ from the aesthetician critics of the postwar years, who explored the truth about the man, while in his writings he takes up the tools with which American critics wanted to teach their Parisian colleagues a lesson. He managed to persuade Alfred Manessier of the usefulness of the endeavour, even if the content of their dialogues did not change. This is a step towards a re-reading of those pictures which are still too imprisoned by a time that is over.

- 12 Like a re-framed photograph, the contemporary art magazine devoted to sound, *Volume*, has clung tightly to the nub of its interviews, in such a way that each one of them goes straight to the point and contains much dense information. The whole offers a sort of international overview of actors, artists, musicians, composers and gallery owners currently working with sound. Among them, we should especially mention Anri Sala (by Anne-Lou Vicente) and her attempt to keep the audience in the present with, as tools, films that are staggered in time; the interview with Alain Berland and David Sanson about punks, art and music, which is rounded off by the explanations given by Eric de Chasse; and the ideas of James Webb about his acoustic installations and the movements and manipulations of sounds recorded in altered settings. We also find here narratives about curatorial methods, including Tucker Neel's art by telephone, and his 323 projects.
- 13 This last sequence of interviews brings the reader to the shared present, the retrospective times of each of the figures involved being too short, or else cancelling each other out, unlike those in which the reader can think back, even if they present breaks, discontinuities, and hiatuses. Otherwise put, the interviews perused have led us to as many experiences of the past, to as many narratives conducted by invariably intractable guides to the shared world, even if some only take the path with reluctance, or bawring of private preserves which are impenetrable despite many attempts to intrude.

NOTES

1. "From the relations which the artist has with language there emerges a set of linguistic productions which have the distinctive feature of systematically accompanying the work or service which takes place. [...] It appears that, through their very elaboration, they construct an edifice which is peculiar to them, that of the authority of the artist. We might describe this

authority as the definition of the field of the artist's skills, and this in all the terrain where his oeuvre and his figure are socialized." Quotation taken and translated from: Poinso, Jean-Marc. *Quand l'œuvre a lieu : l'art exposé et ses récits autorisés*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2008, (MAMCO), p. 143

2. Detlev Gretenkort (ed.), *George Baselitz Gesammelte Schriften und Interviews*, Munich : Hirmer, 2011

3. Parmentier, Michel. *Textes et entretiens dont Daniel Buren, Michel Parmentier : Propos délibérés* [1991], Paris : Blackjack, 2014, p. 127. Edited by Aristide Bianchi

4. Idem, p. 81

5. Butor, Michel. *Légendes à l'écart*, Illiers-Combray : Marcel le Poney, 2013. Pref. and interviews by Kristell Loquet, p. 66

6. Butor, Michel. *Op. cit.*, p. 23

7. Lichtenstein, Roy. *Ce que je crée, c'est de la forme : entretiens, 1963-1997*, Paris : Centre Pompidou, 2013

8. Lichtenstein, Roy. *Op. cit.*, p. 44

9. *Les Entretiens d'artistes : de l'énonciation à la publication*, Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013, (Arts contemporains). Edited by Jérôme Dupeyrat and, Mathieu Harel Vivier, p.18.