

# Small lies? Authenticity and the artist interview

Jean Wainwright

In 2007, Matt Wrbcian, archivist and Warhol authority,<sup>1</sup> revealed that Andy Warhol had never in fact uttered the famous quote, 'If you want to know all about Andy Warhol just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it.'<sup>2</sup> (fig. 1) Rather, these were the words of the interviewer Gretchen Berg, from a carefully edited conversation with Warhol in the *East Village Other*, published on 1 November 1966, in which her questions were not only removed, but were transposed into allegedly authentic statements by Warhol.<sup>3</sup> This paper examines questions that are raised when face-to-face interviews and conversations with artists are edited for sound clips or transcribed for books and catalogues, raising both art-historical and ethical issues.

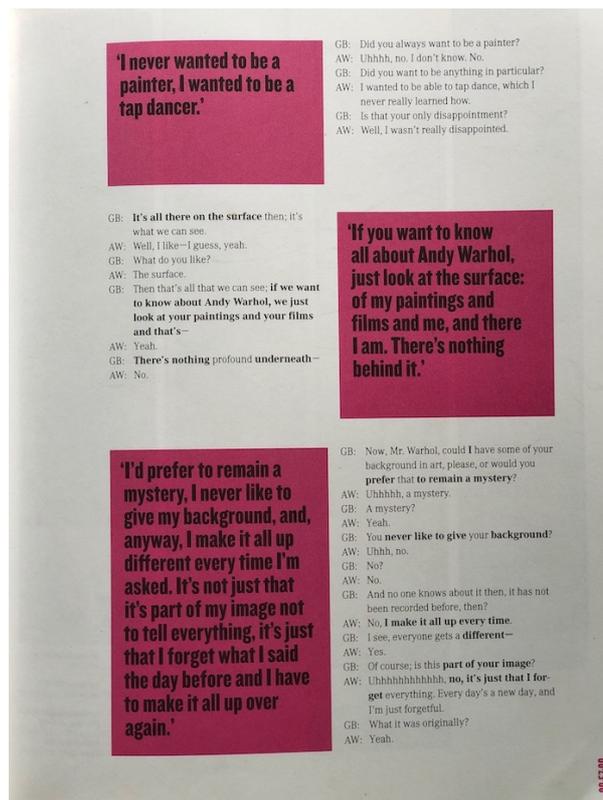


Figure 1 Page layout from Matt Wrbcian, 'The True Story of "My True Story"'. © The Warhol/NAI.

<sup>1</sup> Matt Wrbcian died on 1 June 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Matt Wrbcian, 'The True Story of "My True Story"' in Eva Meyer-Hermann, ed., *Andy Warhol: A guide to 706 Items in 2 Hours 56 Minutes*, Rotterdam: Stedelijk Museum/NAI, 2008, 00:57:00.

<sup>3</sup> Gretchen Berg, 'Andy Warhol: My True Story', *East Village Other*, vol. 1, 1 November 1966.

In the artist's interview, intentionality on the part of both interviewer and interviewee and the psychological, sociological and, indeed, egotistical, implications of what is 'said' can raise questions for the legacy of an artist's practice. Should the reader of an interview be aware of how much has been 'tidied up' or redacted, or of the (conscious) biases of the interviewer? As Iwona Blazwick has pointed out in *Talking Art*, 'The artist – the star – makes a public affirmation of trust in the interlocutor, who is also caught in the glow of reflected glamour. Most crucially, the interviewer is inscribed into art history along with the artist.'<sup>4</sup>



Figure 2 Jean Wainwright in the Andy Warhol Archives, 2000. © Jean Wainwright.

Drawing on my experience of conducting more than 1,600 audio interviews with artists over the past twenty-four years,<sup>5</sup> I will reflect on how interviews can be manipulated, how time can be compressed, or how the words attributed to the artist result from a free flow of answers and agreement with the interviewer's suggestions and interpretations (fig. 2). I will argue that in the ebb and flow of conversational desire and ambition even a 'literal' transcription can contain 'small lies', being just a version of what was said and by whom. Just as a portrait by an artist conveys an impression of the subject, so conveying the actual experience of an encounter between interviewer and artist always contains some form of absence. Drawing on four contrasting examples, I will trace the significance of the editing process, from the uttered voice to the edited page. Using Berg's interview with Warhol, I discuss the 'authentic' artist's statement. With Warhol's *a: A Novel*,<sup>6</sup> I explore the limits of a

<sup>4</sup> Iwona Blazwick, 'An anatomy of the interview' in Patricia Bickers and Andrew Wilson, eds, *Talking Art 1. Art Monthly interviews with artists since 1976*, London: Art Monthly/Ridinghouse, 2013, 26.

<sup>5</sup> My audio interviews began in 1996 when I began interviewing for *Audio Arts*.

<sup>6</sup> The book was originally titled *a*; in later editions it was titled *a: A novel*. Andy Warhol, *a: A novel*, New York: Grove Press, 1968.

literal transcription. Discussing my series of interviews with the artist Morten Viskum, I examine the months-long process of determining the psychological underpinnings of his work. Finally, with the artist Nathalia Edenmont, I consider the interview in the context of a traumatic confession.

Recording an artist's voice is a specific intervention in the artistic process, where the interviewer and interviewee jointly perform an 'authentic' act in real time. The complexities of this act, relationships between questions, responses and the agendas of both parties, are considerations that lie at the base of all artist interviews and dictate their outcome and effectiveness. The interview itself is shaped by whether it will be used as background material for critical writing, transcribed for a catalogue or book, or used as the basis for archiving, broadcasting or audio publishing. Some have an aspect of the confessional – one of the dynamics of this form is to reveal confidences, but unlike ordinary conversation this is a constructed scenario where both parties are aware that what they say is going to be heard.

Sound is capable of projecting mood and atmosphere, highlighting complexities and power relationships between artist and critic. It can travel through air and penetrate our bodies. The voice is a palette of different tones. In contrast, the written word does not cast the same spell: it cannot reproduce each person's distinctive voice, nor convey the tone, inflections, nuances, emphasis, accent, pauses and interruptions that characterise everyday speech and permeate the artist-critic conversation. These qualities are unique to each recording session, overlaid with other factors such as the acoustic resonance of the interview location. Importantly neither a written transcript nor an audio clip can capture non-verbal communication such as facial expression and body language, which interviewer and interviewee will implicitly respond to, and which will have meaning unique to their felt experience.

When I listen to interviews, I am often reminded of Mikhail Bakhtin's proposal that there can be 'neither a first or last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in a chain of meaning which in its totality is the only thing that can be real'.<sup>7</sup> In general, the production of meaning in recorded interviews or conversations reflects their circumstances. The location, time of day and length of the 'utterance' place both the agenda and structure of the interview within a specific set of references; there is the power bound up in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee; and there is familiarity with the artist – whether meeting them for the first time or based on a relationship built up over a longer period. All these factors influence non-verbal communication and, by implication, the shape and meaning of what is said. Then there is the flow of the discourse and how things are expressed. As Jacques Derrida suggested, the voice is 'the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously, from within the self'.<sup>8</sup> One of the most difficult things for the audio

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel* in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, 345.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967, 20.

interviewer and interviewee to control are discourse markers – the ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’, the ‘you knows’ and ‘I means’ – the habitual glitches and verbal tics that permeate ordinary speech. Emitting unbidden, it is these verbal ‘trips’ that often make it difficult for us to listen to our own voice. They have meaning, and yet they are usually removed from transcribed and published interviews, providing a seamlessness which is often not there. I will return to this when discussing Morten Viskum.

One critical question asked of the interview genre is whether mediated dialogue is the most appropriate way for artists to expose themselves and their work. Although speech is a primary code of communication, the ‘trace of the real’, an interview at one point in time can have both merits and drawbacks. You hear accent and age, you hear whether the person on the recording has a cold or is tired or is nervous, whether they are fully engaged and interested. Donna De Salvo, Dia Art Foundation’s senior adjunct curator, has said that ‘...in a sense [artists] are under no obligation to speak at all. That’s what their work does.’<sup>9</sup> The desire of the interviewer, however, is to get the artist to share what their work means in terms of influences and contextualisation, and, as suggested by Blazwick, ‘[M]aybe it is the promise of a true confession that makes [the interview] so seductive’<sup>10</sup> (a point that I return to later when discussing Nathalia Edenmont).

I began this paper with Warhol’s ‘quote’ from his interview with Gretchen Berg because it highlights a key point about authenticity: Berg spent six months trying to capture ‘the real Warhol’, the artist having initially agreed to be interviewed by her with the words, ‘Alright, but I never say anything.’<sup>11</sup> Her determination to ‘capture’ Warhol resonated with me. I understood her desire to get the interviewee to talk, and the ethics of her ‘filling in the gaps’ or putting [her] words into Warhol’s mouth as a result of inference and collaboration. Whether the resulting conversation did actually capture the ‘true’ Warhol is a matter for debate. Warhol was happy to see Berg’s prompts and responses published and requoted as his words,<sup>12</sup> but as he did not actually say them, can they really be considered to represent his authentic ‘voice’? Which leads to other questions. What if the artist consciously lies to the interviewer, lies by omission or withholds information: can this also be considered to be their authentic ‘voice’? Can what happens in a recorded face-to-face interview or conversation ever truly be conveyed? What are the limits of fidelity to ‘truth’ and the artist’s ‘authentic’ self when conducting and using material from interviews?

<sup>9</sup> Donna de Salvo in conversation with Jean Wainwright, Berlin, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Blazwick, ‘An anatomy of the interview’, 26.

<sup>11</sup> In 1965 Berg attended one of Warhol’s screenings and began her work with Warhol ‘possibly as early as February 1966’. For more on the background to the interview see Matt Wribican, ‘G is for GRETCHEN’ in *A is for Archive: Warhol’s World from A to Z*, Pittsburgh/New Haven: The Andy Warhol Museum/Yale, 2019, 106–111.

<sup>12</sup> The Berg interview has been reprinted a number of times. See inventory Time Capsule 14, Manila envelope containing a transcript of interview with Berg, Archives Andy Warhol Museum. Expanded and re-edited as ‘Nothing to Lose’, Los Angeles Free Press, 17 March 1967. Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004, 85. ‘Gretchen Berg’, reprinted in Gilda Williams, ed., *On and By Andy Warhol* 2016. London /Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, 85–96.

Warhol was strategic in conversations and embraced the creative edit, using it very cleverly. He was not good at expressing himself and would often simply agree with a comment, complicit in allowing the interviewer to subsequently 'put words into his mouth' and even re quoting words attributed to him in this way himself in subsequent interviews. Indeed, he claimed that '[T]he interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him. I think that would be so great because I'm so empty I just can't think of anything to say.'<sup>13</sup> Warhol was a complex man who enjoyed knowingly subverting the interview technique. This was illustrated on a number of occasions and can be considered as part of his creative process. A revealing insight into his psychological engagement with the interview technique is exposed in a conversation he had with Edie Sedgwick in July 1965. Counselling her on her forthcoming *Life* magazine interview, he suggested that she 'save her energies for the really important interviews' but that 'it doesn't really matter anyway' and she 'shouldn't really care' because 'even if they [*Life*] care, by the time the art department gets it, it comes out different, it just does.'<sup>14</sup>

Whilst Berg's interview with Warhol provides an example of the collaborative nature of the genre and 'creative editing', Warhol's *a: A Novel*, published in 1968, highlights issues relating to the 'literal' transcription of a creative and extended voice performance – it documented twenty-four supposedly continuous hours in the life of Warhol's most verbose superstar, Ondine [Bob Olivo], Warhol following him with a tape recorder.<sup>15</sup> (fig. 3) Warhol wanted a faithful transcription of every word and sound that was uttered. In 'The Last Words Are Andy Warhol',<sup>16</sup> Lynne Tillman suggested that

Warhol wanted Ondine to say everything, to keep talking, to say whatever came into his mind. It's a psychoanalytical idea and if that is the case Warhol is the analyst ... the unedited relates powerfully to confession, to psychoanalysis, to not leaving anything out, to wanting to say and hear and listen to everything. To me Warhol's lust for the unedited is the most resonant mysterious aspect of his work.<sup>17</sup>

Absolute fidelity to the original is an interesting concept here, since although this was certainly the intention when transcribing the tapes, *a: A Novel* is actually based on a continuity lie, since the 'continuous twenty-four hours' were in fact three extended taping sessions between 1965 and 1967. In the book the chapters correspond to the numbering of the tapes, for example '1/1' and '1/2' (cassette tapes

<sup>13</sup> Gretchen Berg, 'Andy Warhol: My True Story' in Gilda Williams, ed., *On and By Andy Warhol*, London/Cambridge, Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, 2016, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Edie Sedgwick. Notes from my listening to the now-embargoed tapes in the Andy Warhol Museum in 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Olivo was better known by his 'stage' name Ondine. In Warhol's factory he was sometimes known as Pope Ondine. He appeared in a number of Warhol films.

<sup>16</sup> Lynne Tillman, 'The Last Words Are Andy Warhol', *Grey Room*, no. 21, Fall 2005, 38–45.

<sup>17</sup> Tillman, 'The Last Words Are Andy Warhol', 38

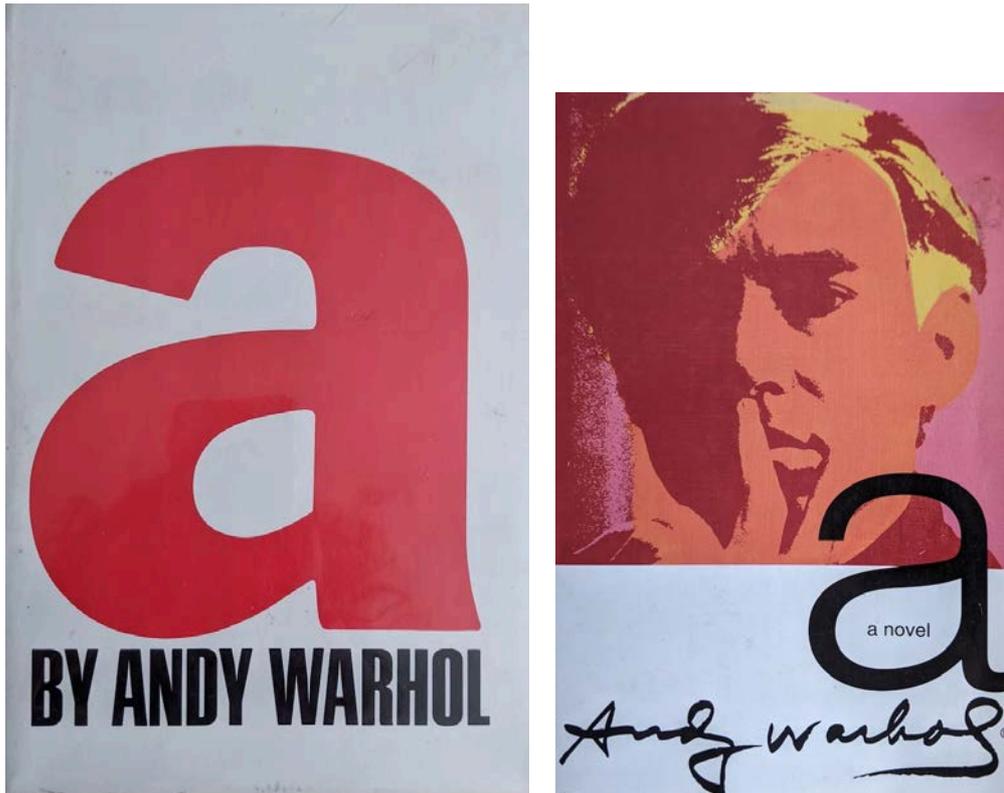


Figure 3 Cover of the first edition of *a: A novel*, New York: Grove Press, 1968. © Grove Press.

Figure 4 Cover of the first paperback edition of *a: A novel*, New York: Grove Press, 1998. © Grove Press.

were double sided). There is, however, no indication when the first twelve-hour continuous taping session ends, rather the sequence continues as if it had all been taped on the same day, not months later; we only know this from either listening to the original recordings, or by referring to Victor Bockris' glossary that was added to the first paperback edition of the book in 1998.<sup>18</sup> (fig. 4)

Transcribing the 'klatch'<sup>19</sup> (every click, clunk, noise and voice) provides a unique challenge, highlighting the difficulty of 'literal' transcription, given the atmosphere of the different locations in the recordings, and instances where a number of voices and sounds are piled on top of each other, but Warhol appears to be aware of this and certainly when he was shown the transcript embraced the confusions in the text. On the tapes there are a number of instances when Ondine and Warhol discuss the issue of literal transcription [evidence I gathered from listening to the original (now embargoed) recordings].<sup>20</sup> For example, at one point Ondine lets out an odd exclamation, transcribed on page 32 of *a: A Novel* as

<sup>18</sup> When first published in 1968, there was no glossary.

<sup>19</sup> Warhol particularly liked the review which calls *a: A novel* 'bacchanalian coffee klatch', quoted in Patt Hackett and Andy Warhol, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties*, London, Pimlico/Random House, 1980, 287.

<sup>20</sup> I completed my PhD in 2007 which was on *The Andy Warhol Tapes: Resonance and Repetition*. Subsequent to my being awarded my doctorate the recordings were embargoed. You can listen to the recordings for *a: A Novel* in the Warhol Museum but you are not able to take notes.

'Uheauh'. 'How are we going to write "Oouh"?' queries Warhol. Ondine assures him that they will 'find a way' and makes the sound again: 'Uheauh.'<sup>21</sup> In an email correspondence with me in September 2004, Susan Pile, one of the four transcribers of the tapes, claimed:

I remember nothing about transcribing other than trying to get every breath and syllable down on paper, in homage to Gerry (Gerard Malanga) and falling in love with Ondine. Despite what Victor Bockris has told me (that Maureen [Tucker] did almost all of the transcribing – imagine the audacity!) I remember doing LOTS and LOTS of work on *a: A Novel*.<sup>22</sup>

Pile was attending Bernard and Kate Millett's Modern Literature class at Columbia University and was reading 'loads of "stuff" that reinforced the reality/absurdity of my attempts at precise transcription of the audio tapes that awaited me each afternoon at The Factory. For me, the task was to be as exact and mechanical as possible without injecting any slant or authorship. I wanted to be a machine, like Andy.'<sup>23</sup>

My research, listening to the tapes recorded for *a: A novel*, was done intensively in 2000, 2001 and 2005 in the archives of the Warhol Museum prior to the tapes' embargo. As might be expected with literal transcribing, I found frequent errors, mainly 'mis-hearings'. The errors tend to be those characteristic of any transcription by non-professionals, although close comparison of text and tapes does reveal quirks specific to each typist. In some cases there is evidence of censorship, such as the removal of the word 'cocksucker', the result of [unauthorised] edits of swearwords on the part of the Maureen Tucker.<sup>24</sup> The fact that scholars are no longer allowed to take notes when listening to the original recordings in the Warhol Museum renders it unlikely that deliberate edits and omissions such as Tucker's (usually not indicated in the text) will always be remembered after the event, allowing these 'small lies' to perpetuate, and further questioning the idea of authenticity in the 'literal' transcript.

Another issue in *a: A Novel* is that Billy Name<sup>25</sup> changed the names (indicated in the text by initials) of all of the participants, which was done after the transcription; only Gerard Malanga insisted that his name stayed the same. This allowed an insight into the [then] closeted society of the Silver Factory but meant

<sup>21</sup> Andy Warhol *a: A Novel*, New York: Grove Press, 1968, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Pile, email to Jean Wainwright, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Pile, email to Jean Wainwright.

<sup>24</sup> Maureen Tucker was a drummer with the Velvet Underground, who were using Warhol's factory as a rehearsal space. Tucker had been asked by Warhol if she could help with the transcribing.

<sup>25</sup> Billy Name, who died in 2016, was born William Linich. He became Warhol's lover, factory photographer, lighting expert and an important member of Warhol's entourage. Wainwright recorded Name talking about his decisions for *a: A Novel* in 2005 (unpublished).

that only 'insiders' knew exactly who and what was being spoken about.<sup>26</sup> There were also concerns about libel cases. This name-changing initially took the book into the realms of fiction – something the flyleaf of the first edition reinforced.<sup>27</sup> On many pages the initials indicating who is speaking – for example, Ondine 'O' and Drella (Warhol) 'D' – are removed altogether, further adding to the deliberate confusion.

Warhol's method of embracing the accidental as well as his culture of collaboration and the way that gossip functioned within his milieu, coded with playful pseudonyms and wordplay, meant that 'small lies' or disguises are a feature of the book. Coded in this way, gossip could be hidden, giving Warhol an insider's power which is only exposed when the tapes are played and figures such as Jasper Johns (Jack Daniels), David Whitney (Wee Carter Pell) and Philip Johnson (Johnny Fatts) are revealed:

Who is he?  
Johnny Fatts' lover  
Who's Johnny Fatts?  
He's Bill's, et [sic] the ...secret... building.<sup>28</sup>

In this extract Warhol explains that Philip Johnson has 'built the Seagram building',<sup>29</sup> which has been misheard and transcribed as '[H]e's Bill's et the ... secret'. The misunderstandings extend to inconsistencies in typographical layout, which often make it unclear who is speaking, and grammatical rules are often ignored in the service of 'faithful transcription'. Yet the impression of authentic reality is highlighted in reviews. For example, in the *Herald Examiner* (17 November 1968): 'Andy Warhol does stuff about life he's like real man, his idea seems to be the best way to produce a novel is to eliminate the author – why bother with a plot or your own words when life itself can be taped (with a recorder).'<sup>30</sup>

Audio authenticity or the faithful transcription is particularly relevant to *a: A novel*. The capturing of the recorded voices of Ondine and Edie Sedgwick, in their drug-induced states, as they enter into wordplay, bouncing meanings between them, quickly transforms into a game in which friends, enemies and acquaintances are given names and hierarchical placements. The in-house jokes and asides about 'schlitz mongers', 'penny pigging', and 'baaped-booby' emphasise the psychological changes that the drugs are causing, and their voices change as they become increasingly

<sup>26</sup> In the glossary, Bockris adds that 'Since the cast numbered over one hundred different characters, only those who play meaningful roles throughout the book have been identified...' Victor Bockris, 'a: A Glossary' in Warhol, *a: A Novel*, 453-458.

<sup>27</sup> The flyleaf of the first edition of *a: A Novel* states: 'in this, his [Warhol's] first novel ... It is his first basically literary work, but in the use made of the tape recorder, stems directly from his work in film ... a total experience of daily life', New York: Grove Press, 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Warhol, *a: A novel*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> The Seagram building was designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson in 1958.

<sup>30</sup> *Herald Examiner*, 17 November 1968. Article preserved in Time Capsule 7 in the archives of the Andy Warhol Museum.

‘gammy mouthed’ and find new connections within their psychedelic vocabulary. There are almost trans-linguistic leaps in the text as sentences are left unfinished and words become scrambled and played with in the altered consciousness of the speakers.<sup>31</sup>

There is also a significant difference between the listening time [real time] and the indication of time in the transcript. For example, there are many long pauses and although their presence is indicated, their timed length is not. Yet Warhol believed in a real time aesthetic [even though he never asked for timed pauses to be included in the transcripts]. Taping people talking about ‘what they usually talked about’ was something that he maintained in his film-making and transferred to *a: A novel*, stating in *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* that he never liked the idea of

...picking out certain scenes and pieces of time and putting them together, because then it ends up being different from what really happened – it’s just not like life ... What I liked was chunks of time all together, every real moment ... I only wanted to find great people and let them be themselves and talk about what they usually talked about.<sup>32</sup>

The whole concept of *a: A novel* was that Warhol wanted to write a book by transcribing ‘every real moment’ of Ondine’s day recorded by his ‘wife’ (his tape recorder) – in this way capturing the authentic Ondine. However, the authenticity of the ‘real’ is called into question by actions such as games of substitution. For example, at one point Ondine goes home to rest and the taping continues with Chuck Wein in his place, although the book implies that it is Ondine who is still talking.

Whilst *a: A novel* provides a study of the inadequacy of the ‘literal’ transcription to convey the reality of an audio atmosphere and the spoken voice, albeit with mistakes and inconsistencies being embraced by both Warhol and his publisher, my interviews with the Norwegian artist Morten Viskum provide another and very different experience. I first interviewed Viskum in his studio in Vestfossen, Norway, followed by extended interviews in Oslo, Venice, London and finally Paris over a number of months in 2015. The interviews were for a chapter, ‘Holding Hands with History’, to be included in a new volume on Viskum’s works from 1993 to 2016.<sup>33</sup> My question here is whether it matters that the flow reproduced in the published text was not how it was recorded; that the ‘truths’ that Viskum revealed were not obtained seamlessly, but were the result of repeating questions in different ways, sometimes on different occasions;

<sup>31</sup> Warhol, *a: A novel*, 125–134.

<sup>32</sup> Warhol was discussing how he had always wanted to make a movie of a whole day in Edie’s life, but in this instance the quote also applies to his taping of Ondine for *a: A Novel* : in Hackett and Warhol, *POPism*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Wainwright, ‘Holding Hands with History’ in Demetrio Paparoni, ed., *Morten Viskum: Works 1993-2016*, Milan: Skira, 2016, 87–153.

that there is no indication in the text that a conversation about a body of work might be the result of editing together two conversations in different cities. Do these 'small lies' amount to inauthenticity?

The interviews themselves created some challenges for me in terms of trying to elicit from Viskum answers connected to some of his most controversial and challenging works, particularly where he uses severed [dead] human hands as brushes. I wanted to try and understand the underlying dynamics of his practice and his psychological engagement; but, while the subject matter in a great deal of Viskum's work is ultimately linked to death, I also wanted the extensive interview to highlight the art-historical references in his work and to explore the integrity of his practice. The challenge, for me, was to get a good extended interview for the monograph that did not show any bias on my part, and which required confronting my own boundaries and personal fears. How would I feel seeing the dead hands that Viskum painted with or his works with cancer cells from mice? Yet I was also intrigued by this artist who has an established art career with museum exhibitions, and whose integrity and sensitivity were clearly evident in my conversations with him. Should the reader then be aware of the edits and redactions, that what resulted was an edited version of the raw audio conversation?

Our first meeting took place on 27 May 2015 in Viskum's cavernous studio in Vestfossen. Recording for over six hours, with only a few short breaks, I broached the subject of the dead hands and was trying to find out where he acquired them. (fig. 5) I quickly realised that Viskum's pauses at the beginning of each sentence together with his short laughs were a strategy to gather his thoughts and give him time to think in a different language. But it was also nervous laughter, especially highlighted by the fact that he often repeated that 'he had to be careful'; in other words, he was very aware that he was being recorded and did not want to be misinterpreted, as in this sequence:

Jean Wainwright [JW]: Do you get offered [the hands] by someone who is suicidal, someone who is dying or, you know, this kind of... Because, you know, they are all different.

Morten Viskum [MV]: [Laughs softly] [Tuts] Now I have to be careful [laughing]. I am sorry!



Figure 5 Morten Viskum, *The Scream*, 2015. Still from performance. Blood and silkscreen on canvas. © Morten Viskum.

Over the next few months we discussed many of Viskum's individual works. In the transcript I edited the questions I had asked at the time to include further references to art-historical works and some of my own comments. For example, in the first interview I pose the question, 'You specifically wanted a hand? Was that because in your mind as well you were thinking about the hand of the artist?' Viskum responds, laughing wryly,

In a way, it's also important and interesting, because when people ask why I use this, and isn't this ... I tell the same story every time, and it's ... I'm not sure if it's ... I think it's true and I think it's the reason, but it's just a way of explaining it ... and it's because of all these famous old artists, they went to the morgue to paint dead body parts, and I took it a big step further – I removed the dead body part and painted with it.

To which I respond,

Yes, I was very interested in this because of people like [Théodore] Géricault. As I was saying, to make *The Raft of Medusa* he went and studied all these bodies in the morgue and he talks rather eloquently about how after a while he could deal with it and people were rather shocked that he could spend so long painting these studies and doing sketches.

In the final edit, I shifted the Géricault reference so that it now came from Viskum, since he agreed that it was one of the artists he was thinking about:

JW: I want to pursue the idea of the authentic and how we talk about the 'hand of the artist'. Were any of those ideas on your mind?  
 MV: I think what you are saying is true and part of the reason. When people ask why I use dead hands, I tell the same story. It is also about art history because artists such as Théodore Géricault went to the morgue to paint dead body parts, and I took it a step further – I removed the dead body art and painted with it.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Wainwright, 'Holding Hands with History', 113.

Viskum's work deals with death in many different guises and he uses a number of different methods and interpretations, from re-contextualising Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) as a Norwegian artist<sup>35</sup> to his large installation works such as *Norway* (2009). After extensive questioning into his processes and speaking about his background and his need to tackle confrontational subject matter, I was, however, still not satisfied that I had completely caught his reasons for making his different bodies of work, particularly his *The Hand That Never Stopped Painting* and *Cimetière du Père Lachaise* series, both begun in 1998 and ongoing. I knew that I would have a last chance to fill in any gaps for the final text when Viskum went to Paris in the summer of 2015 to make a new life-size self-portrait with his fabricator, something he did every year on his birthday. I would also have the opportunity to walk with him round the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. This time I drew up a series of questions that I felt needed answering, going against my usual practice of just having a conversation. We had at this point been on an interviewing journey together and I had gained his trust. For him this was a turning point. Returning from the cemetery, we searched for a quiet space to continue the interview and went to his hotel bedroom. Viskum lay back on the bed while I sat on the chair, unconsciously mimicking a psychoanalytic session, and it was here that he finally felt able to talk about some of the traumatic events which had previously eluded our conversations. My preparation had included notes on typical therapeutic listening techniques in order to try and elicit the answers he had until then eluded:

REFLECT BACK... literally just repeat what he says... E.g. "You collect a certain number of spent candles...?" then WAIT. If he senses you are on his wavelength, he will expand. Even if he just says "Yes", still wait. Count in head!

"I sense that..."

"I get the feeling that's quite hard for you."

"That sounds quite hard."

"I sense that's quite hard."

"I'm hearing a lot about..."

"I wonder what was going on for you emotionally when you..."

"It's interesting that you say that, because..."

Once he was comfortable I began questioning him. The transcript below attempts to capture the literal audio exchanges between us:

JW: Are you sure you are relaxed now? [JW takes an intake of breath]  
 OK, so I wanted to start by talking and obviously [intake of breath] I know that sometimes you need some time to think about the translation, so tell me if I am going too fast, but I wanted to get some feel [pause] about your childhood and important points that relate to

<sup>35</sup> Morten Viskum was invited to take part in the Haugar Vestfold Art Museum exhibition *Munch by Others*, 8 June – 8 September 2013.

your work, particularly because you are doing the self-portraits going back to your childhood and your early life. So, um, firstly I wanted to ask you about the dead birds because that *is* an important point in your life [pause], so tell me about those – we have spoken about it before, but in relationship to what happened and why [pause]. Was that the first time you were... you thought of mortality, [pause] in seeing dead things or had you seen dead things before the birds?

MV: [long pause] Probably, yes – but it's the first thing I can remember [long pause] um [pause] and before that, I am not sure what I remember and what I have been told about [JW takes a sharp audible intake of breath]. So that's the thing I really think I remember by myself and nobody has told me about it, uh.<sup>36</sup>



Audio recording: Jean Wainwright and Morten Viskum. Extract from a recorded conversation at the New Hôtel Gare Du Nord Paris, 25 May 2015. Duration 5 mins 43 secs ©Jean Wainwright and Morten Viskum.

The dead birds, which from the age of six Viskum would find every morning on the terrace of his family home in Norway, having flown into the large plate glass windows, was a subject we discussed a number of times. In the final version of *Morten Viskum: Works 1993-2016*, the conversation about Viskum's father and the dead birds, sections of which had been recorded months apart and in five different locations and countries, is presented as one continuous conversation split into five sections. The interview chapter was long, and had to take into consideration a number of bodies of work; I dealt with this by grouping together his conversations about the different subjects into themes, in such a way that the words appear as if spoken in chronological order. For example, all the various discussions about Viskum's first experiences of death, including seeing his father's death from cancer, appeared under 1. *The Dead Birds and Other Stories*. The encounter in Paris quoted above was extremely important in terms of capturing the 'authentic' Viskum, since this was the first time I felt he had dropped his guard and revealed to me subjects that he had not previously felt comfortable discussing.

One issue is that listening to the recording and reading the transcript are, as I argued earlier, very different experiences. However, here I do not feel that reproducing the raw, unedited transcripts in the book would have added to the dialogue, nor, I would argue, to the authenticity of Viskum's interview. Viskum read my edits after transcription and approved the grouping of them together under themes. Although there are omissions in the text in terms of place and continuity – the 'small lies' – they do not alter what was eventually said both by Viskum and myself, illustrating the collaboration of suggestion and agreement that I highlighted with Berg's interview.

<sup>36</sup> Extract from Jean Wainwright, interview with Morten Viskum, New Hôtel, Gare Du Nord, Paris, 25 June 2015.

JW: Now I know it is a very sensitive subject for you, I know you have been very emotional when we started to talk about it, which is your father and [JW intake of breath] I know that you may not want to talk about it and I do understand, that, but, um, was your father, did your father die of a disease, or heart or... ?

MV: Brain cancer.

JW: Oh. So, so cancer being for you being ... those works [*Blood and Cells V* (1990)] which I find very difficult [MV intake of breath]. I can see why they would be particularly traumatic works.

MV: And, um, [pause] because it was the brain, he was sleeping so long time without being able to speak or without, yeah, so, so it's ... it's ... it was very tough.

JW: It must have been awful.

MV: And I think that is very common but you almost think to the bitter end that he will survive.

JW: Are you comfortable?

MV: Yes.

The conversation continues with questions about the dead hands he uses, where I ask him at what point he made the decision to use the hand as a brush. After a long pause and a quiet 'um', he clears his throat with the response,

I'm always thinking before I am answering but now I *really* have to think because ... um ... [little laugh and long contemplative pause] um, it's very connected to the story about the shape that I cannot tell about [pause]. So what did you ask about?

Finally, again after another long pause, he says, Um, yes I am not sure if I am going to tell it ever how I got it.' At which point, having seen that he was uncomfortable, I suggested that we talk about something he felt comfortable talking about. Morten then felt able to discuss his father, which is reproduced in the book as the following paragraph:

MV: I greatly admired my father, Ola Viskum, but he died of brain cancer. I was scared to see his demise, which began when I was sixteen, the loss of speech, being unable to eat, the endless hospital visits... but somehow you almost think to the bitter end that the person will survive. My father was interested in city planning and then when he was a young architect, he was made the chief of the city planning department of Drammen. He was very successful and well regarded... However, in January 1982 when I was sixteen and he had been at his new job for a few months, he was skiing alone outside our house when he collapsed, someone found him and brought him home, it was the first indication that something was wrong. He was diagnosed with cancer of the brain which he lived with for fourteen months.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Wainwright, 'Holding Hands with History', 88.

Should the reader of an interview be aware of how much has been 'tidied up' or redacted? Have I revealed enough of Viskum himself that his work is contextualised rather than sensationalised? I wanted him to be comfortable, and not feel forced to speak, if he wished the work could do that for him. Although there are small lies, I hope the reader can hear his voice as he wishes to be heard.

My final case study is the Ukrainian Swedish artist Nathalia Edenmont. My interviews with her only existed in order to gather background for catalogue essays, since she preferred catalogue text to contextualise her work rather than transcribed interviews. I first met her in 2008 and we built up a relationship where I would interview her about her various exhibitions. In 2015 I wrote an essay 'Bloodlines', beginning with the words: 'Life and death, the sacred and the profane are the umbilical cords that tether Nathalia Edenmont's art... Edenmont's art lays her bare, she flails herself with it. She cannot escape her thoughts and dreams, the wraiths that invade her mind... Edenmont's work lays her bare.'<sup>38</sup> However, in 2016, following a number of years conversing with and interviewing Edenmont, we were discussing one of her works from 2015 *Lost Soul* when she revealed to me a traumatic encounter from her past which she let me record. I made the decision to always keep her 'confession' as an audio file, to be played (with her consent) at appropriate conferences. Is this then an example of the most authentic interview, because we can hear her voice – bring her into the room? Would the interview or confession be less authentic if transcribed? What are the ethics of playing this recording to an audience? Does it somehow increase a voyeuristic and dramatic intent that might be more measured in a transcript? Is the recorded voice speaking the truth in its authenticity?

<sup>38</sup> Jean Wainwright, 'Bloodlines' in Ruth Anna Eriksson, ed., *Nathalia Edenmont*, Wetterling Gallery, Sweden, 2015, 157.



Figure 6 Nathalia Edenmont, *Daughter*, 2015. C-print mounted to glass in wooden frame. Dimensions variable. © Nathalia Edenmont.

Edenmont would often describe in interviews that her work ‘lurked inside her’ and it was a huge relief to see it expelled from her body and released to hang on the walls of the gallery. By 2016 I had been interviewing Edenmont for eight years, gaining both an in-depth understanding of her work and an intuition about the traumas of both her life and her body, her perilous journey from the Ukraine to Sweden in 1991 when a young woman, and her obsessive attention to detail in her elaborate photographic art. It was during a preview of her retrospective in the Dunkers Kulturhus in 2016 when I was interviewing her for my archive<sup>39</sup> that her dramatic and troubling confession emerged. At the age of seventeen and a half, and in a relationship with her first boyfriend, she discovered that she was pregnant. She had been visiting her boyfriend’s mother in the Soviet Union<sup>40</sup> with whom she had a good relationship. Edenmont found herself being taken at night to the local hospital for an illegal abortion as she was under eighteen and the mother who liked her had ambitions for both of their future careers. The operation was administered without pain relief; she had also not really understood what abortion was. When the doctor began to cut her inside, she began shouting for her mother, ‘calling Mama, Mama

<sup>39</sup> *Through the eyes of Nathalia Edenmont*, Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden, 4 November 2016 – 19 March 2017.

<sup>40</sup> The Soviet Union, officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), was a federal sovereign state in northern Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991.

come and help me' – but it was her 'new mother' who appeared. (fig. 6) The doctor told her to leave, telling her not to disturb them but to stuff Edenmont's mouth with a cloth because 'the bitch' [Edenmont] was shouting so loudly he feared that they would all be arrested. Her mouth was stuffed so that she 'wasn't shouting anymore and she horrifically understood what was happening to her. Edenmont then explained that an earlier work that I had written about, *Thirteen and a Half* from 2007, had been based on her memories and that was why she had dressed her model Carolina<sup>41</sup> in black with a small black empty cot. (fig. 7)



Figure 7 Nathalia Edenmont, *Thirteen and a half*, 2007. C-print. Dimensions variable. © Nathalia Edenmont.

What does the knowledge gained from Edenmont's confession add to what I already know about her work? By not transcribing or quoting from this raw emotional 'confession' in my essays, am I diminishing the level of authenticity? Does this traumatic event have impact on how her work might be interpreted in future? I certainly believe in the power of the voice to engage and to add to the artist dialogue. Yet the circumstances of the recording, in the blocked-off exhibition space of the Kulturhus as Edenmont made her final walk around in preparation for the opening, had its own particular intimacy. Being given this 'confidence' – one she had not 'shared' – presented a responsibility. If I did transcribe it the loss would be the particular acoustics of the gallery, the background noises of people getting the space ready for the Private View later that evening, her accent and vocal re-enactment of her terrible memory, my intake of breath at hearing of the violence and the words that had been directed at her as she lay tethered and unable to move. As the final example it not only raises the question of the role of the gatekeeper and the responsibilities it entails, but also implications of what is 'said'. I felt keenly that listening to the recording without 'interference', without any transcription, was currently the most way appropriate for the artist's voice to be heard.



Audio recording: Jean Wainwright and Nathalia Edenmont. Extract from a recorded conversation at the Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden, 3 November 2016. Duration 2 mins 16 secs. ©Jean Wainwright and Nathalia Edenmont.

<sup>41</sup> Edenmont has been working with Carolina as a model for a number of years, and she appears regularly in her artworks.

Mel Gooding wrote in the introduction to William Furlong's *Speaking of Art: Four Decades of Art in Conversation*:

No transcription can do justice to the true sound of the living voice; every transcription involves a transmutation of the original... Studying a transcript, however faithful in its indications of surface feature, we are engaged with a secondary source, a mediation; listening to a recording we encounter the actual.<sup>42</sup>

However, I argue that the actual is also the *being there* in front of the artist, the intimacy of two people and the recording device; listening is the memory of that experience. The actual 'real' moment is experienced by the interviewer in time and space; for everyone else listening it is a secondary witnessing played through headphones or speakers.

When I revisit the raw material of my interviews and conversations, my unedited audio recordings, I am struck by the ability of spoken dialogue to propel me back to the time and space of its construction, the powerful memory of being there. I am also reminded of opportunities that I missed, sometimes too eager to follow my own train of thought, the questions that went unasked or unanswered bought back to me as they resonate with their absence. The different aural spaces resound with their own personality, the particular acoustics redolent with atmosphere and a sense of place.

To return to the question I posed at the beginning of the essay: do 'small lies' matter? The tidying-up of speech, the re-ordering, the absences of expression or body language – are they lies at all? Surely what matters is that the process is negotiated between the artist and the interviewer, that both feel comfortable and that what is printed is always in the 'spirit' of the truth retaining the real moment? For the interviewer interviewing an artist, there is a responsibility arising from expectation. With Berg's interview, Warhol hands over that responsibility. There is a lie, he did not say the words, but it could be argued that this is his authentic voice, that Warhol is agreeing to the 'truth' in the statement. In *a: A novel*, there are conceits in the transcript – it not being twenty-four hours, the slips of understanding – but a transcription can, as previously discussed, never be a completely authentic representation. Interviews themselves are often tidied up with the ums and pauses, the tics of speech removed so that only the words remain that represent the spirit of the truth. I continue this argument with Morten Viskum where the points I have raised about transcription and tidying up are debated. I conclude that I wanted Viskum to be comfortable and not to be forced into a position where he felt somehow coerced into revealing, that it was essential for me to accept that barrier that he was placing with his carefully chosen words and respect it; his voice is, I believe, heard. Finally, I concluded that at times it might be appropriate to retain the authenticity of the artist's voice by deciding to only use the raw clip of Edenmont's 'confession' to evoke as much as possible the encounter with the 'real'.

<sup>42</sup> Mel Gooding, 'Audio Arts: The Archive as a Work of Art' in William Furlong, *Speaking of Art: Four Decades of Art in Conversation*, London: Phaidon Press, 2010, 5.

David Bailey felt certain that the success of Andy Warhol's *Interview*<sup>43</sup> magazine was that it was 'always positive ... because you can write interesting things positively; and they always put the *whole* interview, so you were never misquoted; so whatever you said, was what you said, it wasn't what some journalist interpreted.'<sup>44</sup> Bailey's quote suggests that the ideal interview transcript is verbatim; but, as we have seen, this is an illusion. More realistically, it is important to recognise that an interview is a collaboration between the interviewer and interviewee; that, when swapped around and edited, any parts of a printed conversation still retain the authentic voice of the artist; that the agendas and intentions of what the interview will be used for are discussed and transparent. Of course, there also needs to be an acknowledgement that times change, that something said in the 1960s or even 1990s may be interpreted differently by our society today. Interview material has to be understood in the context of the time: artists might regret some of the things they said, or wish to re-articulate something they implied about their work with the benefit of hindsight. Whose ethical responsibility then is this? Where does that leave authenticity and ethics? The responsibility of the gatekeeper is an important one. I am reminded here of Vito Acconci's *Face Off* (1973), a performance that he films, which highlights for me not only some of the problems of the confession but also the very particular relationship that happens during the act of recording, that intimacy of encounter, often in quiet space, where one waits for the reveal. Acconci is shown with his head bent down close to a reel-to-reel recorder disclosing and then self-censoring his revelations, which blocks out the original reel-to-reel recording. Acconci infers that he is going to reveal a secret on the tape 'another fact from his past' to which he responds with agitated cries 'No, no, no, no, leave it out, leave it out, no, no, no, no, no, no, keep it out ... no, no, no, don't play it, don't play it, can't play it, keep it out.'

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<sup>43</sup> *Interview* was founded by Warhol in 1969. It ceased publication in 2018 but re-launched four months later.

<sup>44</sup> David Bailey in conversation with Jean Wainwright in his studio, 2002.