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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

² On the historical background of the interview, see Maffei, *Transnationale Philosophie* 234–50. On the popularity of the interview, see Trinthall and Maffei.

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

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

The Interview as an Irritation of Philosophy

Roland Barthes, we see very little of you, and you rarely speak in public: aside from your books, we know almost nothing about you...

Supposing that to be true, it's because I don't much like interviews. I feel trapped between two dangers: either one enunciates positions in an impersonal manner, leading people to believe one considers oneself a "thinker," or else I constantly say "I" and end up accused of egoism. (Barthes 258)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GAUS: Mrs. Hannah Arendt, you are the first woman to be portrayed in this series. The first woman, albeit with what is commonly thought to be a highly masculine occupation: you are a philosopher. May I move from this preliminary remark to my first question: Do you feel that your role in the circle of philosophers, despite the recognition and respect you are given, is a special one—or are we touching on an emancipation problem that has never existed for you?

ARENDT: Yes, I'm afraid I must protest first. I do not belong to the circle of philosophers. My profession—if one can say so—is political theory. I don't feel like a philosopher at all. Nor do I believe that I have been admitted to the circle of philosophers, as you kindly suggest. But if we come to the other question that you touched on in the prefatory remark, you say: it is commonly a male occupation. Well, it need not remain a male occupation! It could well be that a woman will one day be a philosopher.

GAUS: I think you are a philosopher.

ARENDT: Yes, I can't do anything about that, but I can express an opinion myself.

GAUS: I'm asking you to do that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concluding Observations

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

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

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

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