

In Their Own Words: Disseminating Feminist Self-Art Histories in Sound Archives

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Abstract In 2009, artist Marysia Lewandowska began digitizing and sharing the Women Audio Archive (WAA) online. Begun in 1983 and conducted until the early 1990s, the WAA is a sound archive containing around 120 hours of public and private conversations recorded by the artist between London, the United States, and Canada with a Sony Walkman WM-F1 cassette player. The WAA embodies the trajectory of feminist interview and oral history practices of the 1970s in an exemplary way, deliberately exploiting the potential of analog recording technology to capture traditionally marginalized voices of art and social history. Considering the obsolescence of recording technologies and dissemination channels, this paper interrogates the historical forms of accessibility to feminist art practices of self-historicization and calls for reflection on the shift that the digitization of these sound documents entails. Particular attention will be given to the historical negotiations of intellectual co-ownership and the contemporary contexts in which private analogue sound archives can become public and open source following their digitization.

Keywords Feminist art interview. Feminist oral art history. Feminist conversations in visual arts. Marysia Lewandowska. Cindy Nemser. Nazli Madkour. Helen Khal. Eleanor Munro.

Summary 1 Feminist Q&A. – 2 Speech-to-Text. – 3 Self-History or History of the Self. – 4 Collecting Art Talks. – 5 The Missing Voice. – 6 Public Playback. – 7 Conclusions.



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257

When we talk of recording history, we do not necessarily think of it as evidence. But a large part of that evidence is already edited, if not missing.

(Marysia Lewandowska, *Speaking, the Holding of Breath / A Conversation Between Marysia Lewandowska and Caroline Wilkinson*, 1990)

We hesitated to publish these interviews in this way. We know we are taking a risk by leaving them exactly as they were said. [...] This work of putting them in order would have been an act of censorship whose effect would have been to hide what is undoubtedly essential [...]. The essential is what we did not want to say but what was said without our knowledge, in the failures of clear, limpid, and easy speech, in all tongue slips.

(Xavière Gauthier and Marguerite Duras, *Woman to Woman*, [1974] 1987)

Since 2015,¹ eighty-two sound files from the *Women's Audio Archive* (WAA) have been publicly available online.² Founded in London in 1985 by artist Marysia Lewandowska (Szczecin, Poland, 1955), the WAA was conceived as an analog collection of conversations recorded with a Sony Walkman WM-F1. Up to the early 1990s, Lewandowska's sound archive inscribed itself in a critical genealogy of feminist oral history. The cassettes keep track of dialogical reflections on feminist theory, collective organization, the functioning of the art system, and its alternatives, creating a sound record whose storytelling relies on the historical and aural performance of the voice.

Conversations as a means for art writing came to feminism in a variety of ways. Undervalued in the academic sphere, interviews flourished in feminist art practices of the 1970s and largely contributed to critical revisions of objectivity and authorship in art writing. For feminist art criticism and history, conversations allowed the renegotiation of power dynamics in public speech away from the mainstream media and the production of new collective approaches to art epistemologies.

In the following pages, we will explore how feminist art conversations serve as unedited carriers of voices to preserve art history in

1 This essay resorts to sound documents alongside the cited bibliography. In particular: Olivia Alexandra Fahmy's conversation with the artist Nazli Madkour (2024); conversations between the authors and Marysia Lewandowska (2023; 2024); sound files of conversations recorded by Marysia Lewandowska for the *Women's Audio Archive* (in the text indicated as WAA); interviews conducted by Cindy Nemser (Getty Museum Archive); the radio series *Women in the Arts* by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (Pacifica Audio Archives), and the magazine *Audio Arts* (Tate Archives). Mention is also made of the podcasts *Recording Artists: Radical Women* by Helen Molesworth and *Bow Down: Women in Art* by Jennifer Higgie.

2 The Women's Audio Archives are hosted online by the Library and Archives of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York.

the making and counter the scarcity of historical sources (Bard et al. 2023; Bly, Wooten 2013; Malhotra, Carrillo 2013). Taped conversations function, in this context, as much as a documentary act and as an act of presence, which the audio recorder allows to re-present and play back (Couzins 2022, 36-7).

Whether transcribed or kept as sound documents, from the 1970s to the inception of the WAA in the mid-1980s, feminist art interviews have combined alternative visions of contemporary and historical art with an unprecedented transdisciplinary ability to bring together methodologies from cultural journalism, feminist oral history in the social sciences, and activist self-archiving through recording technologies. This plural weaving of sources, voices, and references is reflected in the case studies featured in this essay, which considers both transcribed interviews and sound documents disseminated in the feminist art press (*Feminist Art Journal*), the anthologies that collected tape-based interviews in print form,³ radio experiments (Radio Pacifica) and sound archives (WAA). Through the WAA, we will be able to observe the trajectory of these feminist forms of art history writing up to their recent resurgence in the context of digital archives and podcasts to interrogate their contemporary relevance in the critique of canonical art history.

1 Feminist Q&A

Conversational art practices have evolved amid what Christopher Grobe (2017, 6-7) describes as a “confessional turn” in art, when recording technologies enabled the capturing of “private selves [...] in public performances”. Although related to specific dialogic protocols, publicly performing and recording one’s self offered alternatives to more structured survey and Q&A forms dominating the so-called “interview society” (Atkinson, Silverman 1997).

The “culture of questioning” acquired unprecedented breadth in the 1950s and 1970s, at the same time when artists’ interviews got increasingly mediatized (Gelshorn 2012; Wuggenig 2007). The hypervisibility of video and print interviews with contemporary artists such as Francis Bacon, Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol contributed to the commercialization of their voice, giving access to primary information with exceptional accuracy (Gelshorn 2012; Miller 2007; Wolf 2020).

Simultaneously and more critically, recording conversations unsettled singular authority because of its dialogical outset. Interviews shifted the writer’s position as the “true interpreter” of the artist’s

³ Khal 1988; Madkour 1991; Munro 1979; Nemser 1975.

work and challenged critics' claims of "objective and disinterested universality" (Jones 2012, 27). In inheriting from the decentred form of writing proper to interviews, feminist dialogues shattered the canonical critical judgment that equated objectivity with renouncing personal experience. Encouraging a conscious co-authorial position, the personal is accounted for as a source for inclusive art discursivity where recourse to the spoken word, recalls Sherna Gluck (1977, 3), was one such means to refuse "to be historically voiceless" and re-define what reverts to "historical importance".

Gluck's assertion weaves a direct link between the pioneering phase of oral history in the 1930s and the new feminist positioning of the discipline in the 1970s, not least through an unparalleled technological acceleration of sound recording (Ventrella 2021, 50-3). Back in the 1930s, the realization that technologies such as the telephone had an impact on reducing journal writing and paper-based correspondence invited social scientists to produce their own sound documents. Translated into the sphere of the visual arts, these observations fitted into a dense web of experiments at the crossroads between activism, artistic practice, and feminist interventions in art history.

2 Speech-to-Text

To track art conversations through the feminist press is to witness how aspirations to self-archiving emerge across conceptual approaches to information and institutional critique. In the 1970s, countless data and images on women artists were collected and disseminated as reports or published in new scholarly journals and art magazines. International networks including WEB - West-East Bag (1971-73) acted as paper-based databases to gather information through slide registries and newsletters devoted to women artists. Archival initiatives, such as the Feminist Library in London, established documentation centres and structured library projects. Parallel to this, transhistorical group exhibitions set up the institutional frameworks where women's art practices could exist as aesthetic and research subjects (Dumont, Sofio 2007; Nochlin, Harris Sutherland 1976; Vergine 1980).

Amid this collective effort of self-history, conversational practices combined with editorial and curatorial projects to preserve and review ongoing reflections, research findings, and practices. As Zapperi (2013, 7) highlights, this context where the subjective and affective bond enabled feminist artists, art historians and historians' desire for memory and knowledge to situate itself in their specific historical condition. Where feminist documentation centres laid the foundations for safeguarding the work of historical and contemporary women artists, the rich production of journals confronted the silences of official art history at the accelerated temporality of the

periodical. There, interviews provided an essential methodology to record art history in women's own words.

In January 1970, art critic and feminist activist Cindy Nemser (New York, USA, 1937-2021) recorded a conversation with artist Eva Hesse (Hamburg, Germany, 1936-New York, USA, 1970) in her studio at 134 Bowery in New York. An art historian by training, Nemser had come to feminist commitment through reporting from and eventually actively participating in the feminist collective WAR - Women Artists in Revolution. In 1970, she launched a survey titled *Forum: Women and Art*, in which she questioned gender politics in the art world. Hesse, one of the circa fifty questionnaire respondents, replied to the question, "How do you feel about the position of women in the art world today?" with a controversial and notorious sentence: "Excellence has no sex" (Nemser 1975, 9).

Nemser's assessment of the responses to her questionnaire was harsh. This was, perhaps not surprisingly, her only quantitative and collective survey experience, which preluded to an intensive interview practice with individual artists. The body of conversations also included two fictitious interviews - *Interview with an Anonymous Artist* (1970a) and *Interview with Successful Women Artist* (1972) - which summarize Nemser's vision of the actual conditions of women's art in a collective persona. Many of these preliminary insights converged in the editorial plan for the *Feminist Art Journal*, which she co-founded with art historian Patricia Mainardi (Paterson, NJ, USA, 1942) and artist Irene Moss (1927-2012) in 1972.

Hesse and Nemser met three times in 1970 to record an interview for *Artforum* (Nemser 1970b). A second, revised interview version was released in 1973 in the *Feminist Art Journal* when Hesse's retrospective exhibition was held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (Nemser 1973). Finally, the conversation was included in the anthology *Art Talks* (Nemser 1975). This recorded encounter constitutes a unique resource for the study of feminist interviews. Along with the original sound file, we have access to three distinct transcripts of the conversation aimed at feminist and art press. The three versions of the interview released between 1970 and 1975 reveal different editorial stands and narrative flows. The orientation of the text - interview or conversation - is defined through the fine-tuning of the spoken word, the silences, and the discursive circularities that orality implies in the search for a dynamic balance "between extreme precision and spontaneity" (Nemser 1975, 5).

The *Artforum* interview focused on Hesse's vocabulary and references, progressing from influences on her artistic work - "Do you identify with any particular school of painting?" - to the elaboration of an original language - "Is there another work that particularly embodies your impulses towards contradictions?" (Nemser 1970b, 59). The text questions Hesse's place in art history and the network of

intellectual and artistic affinities established through her practice. Nemser's short questions clarify or complete an unfolding thought. No concrete biographical data regarding education and life experience is shared in this version, if not by ellipsis (Nemser 1970b, 62-3). Only the expanded text published in the *Feminist Art Journal* addresses the artist's biographical experience at length. Nemser re-edited the tapes ("Hopefully, the entire tape will be made available to the public at a future date", Nemser 1973, 13), embodying aesthetic statements in raw and direct language. Hesse's answers were extensive, though the transcription still renounces the reciprocity the original sound file revealed, eliminating laughter and hesitation.

Ultimately, a new version of Hesse's interview was included in the *Art Talk* (Nemser 1975) in a longer form. Here, Nemser's voice and personal recollections of encounters with Hesse's work are conjugated in the first-person singular. To this more subjective voice responded the last, incomplete lines of Hesse's journal in May 1970, shortly before her premature death: "I have not not [sic] kept writing. I will try a tape recorder after I get one", followed by "I did a tape interview with Cindy Nemser—3 different days would say each day—" (Hesse 2016, 887). The impossibility of self-recording transfers the storytelling role from Hesse to Nemser. It condenses in the long dash the potential transcriptions to come from the last tape containing Hesse's voice.

3 Self-History or History of the Self

By examining language and historical contexts, feminist interviews aim to identify the circumstances by which women's voices can access public debate, be recorded and preserved for posterity (Malhotra, Rowe Carrillo 2013; Olsen 1978; Sandino, Partington 2013). Far from being a mere art writing method, the conversation is a tool and premise for "collectivizing knowledge", disrupting "our own assumptions by staging an encounter between various voices and positions" (Horne, Tobin 2017, 33). The aim is not only to record and evidence women artists' practices. As artist Yvonne Rainer (2008, 8) highlights, "stolen moments, appropriated knowledge, quoted references, reported conversation" constitute the dialogical environment where new discursive art practices develop and become visible.

This desire for a multi-faceted and collective discursiveness is also reflected in the anthologies of feminist interviews, which provide a privileged site for observing the feminist epistemological drive to transform and pluralize the critical act (Lonzi [1969] 2010). When collected, feminist conversations give way to a contextualized and polyphonic perspective on art history. Many interview anthologies have a thesis (to prove the existence of women artists), a documentary goal

(to archive the history of women in their own words), a pedagogical purpose (to constitute the materials necessary for teaching the art of women artists) and the awareness that, when dispersed in the feminist art press, the existence of these dialogical acts is volatile. In *Originals: American Women Artists* by Eleanor Munro (New York, USA, 1928-Rye, NH, USA, 2022), orality defines a new field of art history that places the personal and the subjective at the centre of the “imaginative work” (Munro 1979, 18-19). What is distinctive about Munro’s book is its deliberate intention to write a history of art from interviews, which are quoted but not reproduced in their entirety. On this ground, Munro rejects the role of the “objective interviewer” to adopt the self-analytical position of the “empowered art critic”:

I spoke with each artist from one to five or six hours. I asked the subjects, however short an interview we were going to have, to talk in a circular way beginning with early memories and ending in the present. (Munro 1979, 20)

Along these lines, Munro makes the conversation’s dialogical dimension tangible, while restructuring it to serve her narrative plan.

4 Collecting Art Talks

In a valuable double review of Munro and Nemser’s books, Margot Kriel (1980) delivers a rare comparative analysis of feminist interview styles. At the time of the review, Kriel was an art historian and professor affiliated with the Women’s Studies Program at the University of Minnesota. In 1978, she conceived a transdisciplinary course on women’s painting, music, and literature and started a long-time collaboration with *WARM - Journal of the Women Art Registry in Minnesota*. Through this experience she gained hands-on knowledge about the biases at work when collecting “the raw material of history” through interviews and discovering “a hidden legacy” of women artists (Kriel 1980, 60-1). It is, however, on the biographical level that Kriel expresses her hesitation when she notes that Munro and Nemser’s interviews “read like stories” and seem inclined towards “increasing our awareness” through codified narrative models that leave the artists’ work in the background (Kriel 1980, 62-3). Mainstream art criticism’s preoccupation with the subjectivity of the interview is here rephrased in feminist terms with the concern about losing the individuality of the artistic practice in favour of exemplarity. Although much feminist work of the 1970s was understandably devoted to “recovering from revisited archives a substantial and consistent record of women artists across all ages and cultures”, the aim was not to create new categories but to dissolve

“a fixed categorization – a ‘stereotype’ – for all that women artists have done” (Parker, Pollock 2013, xvii, 3). This implies, on the one hand, putting on record the history of contemporary women artists and, secondly, producing “diverse records” of women’s artistic activities (Pollock 2003, 34).

More or less consciously, the interview collection’s tendency to prove a thesis on women’s artistic creation challenged the singularity of the spoken word and its legitimacy in rendering the stakes of individual art practices. If the result is not always or necessarily essentialist, losing sight of the singularity of the artist’s work sometimes strays from the objective of documenting an aesthetic method to produce quantitative evidence of women’s creativity. Still, as is also evident in the critical corpus of women artists’ voices assembled by artists Helen Khal (Allentown, PA, USA, 1923-Ajlout, Lebanon, 2009) and Nazli Madkour (Cairo, Egypt, 1949), the quantitative perspective seems indispensable when bringing the continuity of women’s contribution to art history is a priority. Even more so when, as with Khal and Madkour, the question of sexual difference openly meets the project of writing a post-colonial art history.

We read in Khal’s (1988) introduction to *Women Artists in Lebanon* that her research aims to trace the historical development and document the present of women’s artistic participation in Lebanon. An artist herself, Khal is a peer of the artists she encounters and benefits from insider information on the topic she analyses, with methods akin to social science investigation. Preparing her interviews with questionnaires enabled her to move away from the cultural journalism and self-analysis methods adopted by Munro and Nemser. As for *Women Artists in Egypt*, recounts Madkour, the origin of the project is in the impulse of Nawal El Saadawi (Kafr Tahlh, Egypt, 1931-Cairo, Egypt, 2021) to produce history books on women in different fields of knowledge (Fahmy 2024, recording). Madkour confronted the task as an amateur historian, passing through the orality of preparatory conversations as a premise for inviting the artists to write self-presentations (Fahmy 2024, recording). Neither for Khal nor for Madkour the end result is an interview. The questions serve to pave the way for the creation of a dialogic self-portrait.

First published in Arabic, the English edition of *Women Artists in Egypt* includes an augmented introduction. This includes a critical statement on the difference between Egyptian women artists’ experience and that of their “Western sisters” as described in Linda Nochlin’s landmark essay *Why Haven’t There Been Great Women Artists?* (Atallah 2020, 11; Madkour 1991, 8; Nochlin 1971). The commentary on Nochlin’s text also recurs in the introductions by Nemser (with polemic) and Munro (with praise). Across the multiplicity of responses to Nochlin, the conversation proves the ability to provide interviewees room to formulate their own answers and theoretical positions.

5 The Missing Voice

For the Women's Audio Archive, Marysia Lewandowska imagines a logo made of three concentric circles with a semicircle evocative of an ear in the middle. In the first essay on the WAA, a brief statement situates the prerogatives of the archive in the "impossible task" of unravelling "the knot of the relationship of language/voice/power" (Lewandowska 1990, 55). A brief statement situates the archive in the "impossible task" of untangling "the knot of the relationship of language/voice/power", followed by a text laid out in two columns (55). On the left is Lewandowska's first-person writing, and on the right is a dialogue with artist Caroline Wilkinson. Each section follows its own temporality and sense of reading, inviting the voices to overlap in a non-linear narrative.

Lewandowska came to sound out of interest "in language and the construction of historical evidence" (Lander, Lexier 1990, 377). With a background in textiles and art history, her definitive inscription in art practice finally occurred in London, where she arrived in 1982. One year later, Lewandowska joined the Banff Centre in Canada for a seven-month residency, where she participated in a two-week workshop on recording with John Cage and met artists such as Barbara Kruger and Allan Kaprow. Back in London, she recalls, the creation of the WAA served as a way to claim a space for herself in the local art scene: "I quickly realized that in coming on behalf of the Women's Audio Archive, I was self-instituting myself" (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording).

The conversations prompted and recorded by Lewandowska document artistic practices and feminist engagement. The meetings occur in studios or public spaces and follow a loose structure. The aim is to "shatter language" and find a discourse closer to the body (Lewandowska 1990, 56). The linguistic desire to explore "the privilege of truth" is coupled with the archival need to preserve artistic projects that are doubly volatile due to technological obsolescence and a structural lack of listening to women's voices (Lewandowska 1990, 56).

Archiving conversations allows for both the collection of information and experience - "By means of recording, conversation represents time. It enters history. It articulates history" - as much as memory formation in the listener (Lewandowska 1990, 60). The records assembled in the WAA are historical and sound matters that convey information and evoke memory without concealing the subjective nature of the operation. The archive thus cumulates different functions of oral history in the visual arts. The tapes bear a specific sound aesthetics; they chronicle art history; they document displacement and new contested identities in artistic scenes, working on the register of "affective resonance" and memory (Sandino, Partington 2013, 5). Situating oneself "in", "about", and "nearby" what is recorded opens

up the possibility of studying conversations as “extensions” of the artistic process beyond their documentary value. Nevertheless, once the voices are on the record, how to “voice the archive”? (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording).

6 Public Playback

Between 1983 and 1990, when the WAA was being made, Lewandowska recalls carrying her Sony Walkman everywhere, relishing the possibility of publicly recording in a protected manner, though not without apprehension (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording). She would tape public talks, hiding the microphone in her sleeve or purse. Later, when digitizing the tapes in 2009, the sound engineer told her that emotion or anxiety was audible in her sound files (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording). The noises and rustlings in the sound file testify to a specific economy of truth related to the artist’s experience in Poland in the years immediately preceding the 1982 martial law, where “recording in public was not well tolerated” and “everyone was self-archiving”:

Everyone gave you their version of the truth, and you could only trust a few people around you. So, you had to find a way to verify what was true. (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording)

The archived conversation establishes a “liquid” relationship with the present, from which it is possible to confront the voids of the past. With Italo Calvino, Lewandowska states: “It is not the voice that commands history, it is the ear” (Lewandowska 1990, 62). On this priority given to aurality, she lays the foundation for public accessibility of her archive.

The proximity of conversation to the sound arts, its format of “real intervention” rather than “reflection of an artistic event”, confronts the artist’s spoken word with the possibilities opened up by the storage and dissemination of material (Furlong 1994). The advent of the cassette prompted a shift from the live broadcasting of independent radio to the copying and multiplication of tapes. In 1973, William Furlong’s *Audio Arts* magazine created a unique editorial platform that found in the audiotape the ideal vector for sound arts and the “unmediated voice of the artist” (Furlong 1994, 4). Volume 4 of *Audio Arts* includes two conversations on feminism in the visual arts: no. 1, titled *Feminist Issues in Contemporary Art* (1979), records an exchange between artist Margaret Harrison and curator Lucy Lippard; no. 3 records a discussion between artists Mary Kelly and Susan Hiller on *Women’s Practices in Art* (1979) hosted by Conrad Atkinson. Conversation styles vary: Harrison and Lippard discuss freely, comparing

feminist experiences in the United States and Great Britain; in the case of Kelly and Hiller, the moderating role adopted by Atkinson orients the conversation towards the objective of documenting recent feminist struggles in the London art scene. Similarly, in some feminist radio experiments broadcasted live, the spoken word is taped to create a record that is eventually circulated in feminist documentation archives, as in the case of the five-episode broadcast *Women in the Arts* (1971) by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro for Pacifica Radio.

Recorded conversations interrogate the contexts in which live events are documented and their eventual retrievability. The WAA was first made available for research weekly in Lewandowska's studio in Shoreditch, London. The emphasis on listening in presence is consistent with the principle of the conversation. The playback function and its documentary value imply an embodied representation, though "the recording of the sound and the moment of replay does not share the same space and time" (Lewandowska 1990, 59). Replay means manifesting a historical voice in the public domain, a task that the WAA's online availability will reconfigure in Lewandowska's reflection on intellectual property and authorship.

It would not be until 2009 that the WAA will be recontextualized through the medium of the online archive. A corollary of the digitization of the tapes is the shift in the status of the archive from private to public. Together with her students at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, NY, in 2009, the artist contacted her conversation partners to negotiate the release of their voices under the Creative Commons license. All the bureaucratic passages performed in the process were carefully documented, providing a detailed record of the multiple forms of intellectual property each conversation was subject to, leading to retrospective negotiations with artists who conditioned permission for digital distribution on the re-listening and validation of the cassette (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023; Gausden 2015). Once in the public realm, listening to the WAA conversations is no longer contingent on the physical encounter in the artist's studio. Nevertheless, other forms of encounter, not least through the medium of the exhibition, are envisaged by Lewandowska. In 2015, for the show *Renegotiations* in Auckland, she employed materials from her recently digitized archive as a "source for imagining a fictional round table" (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2024, recording).

7 Conclusions

Transcribed or aural, informational source or final object, the dialogical feminist acts analysed in the preceding pages retain a deliberate ambiguity between recording the event as it is and editing the sound file through montage or transcription. This ambiguity is sometimes reflected in the synonymous use of interview and conversation, two genres in which semantic areas broadly intersect without completely overlapping. In the transcription, the cursor shifts from conversation to interview depending on the editorial address and the negotiations between interviewer and interviewee. In lending themselves to capture a thought in the making, conversations facilitate a deliberately non-linear dialogical exchange that unravels the patriarchal structures of canonical art history. However, the presence of the recorder (Nemser 1972), the preparation through scripts or advance questions (Khal 1988), or the fact that certain artists are interviewed several times by different interviewers predisposes the setting of concepts in narration. Even the choice to transcribe in a register close to orality proves more the dialogical origin of the text than adherence to the as-told-to event. The risk of the search for authenticity hangs over artists' interviews, and the co-presence of those who produce the work and those who put its narration into dialogical form creates an inevitable expectation of truth. Barely touched by the precautionary mistrust of mainstream art criticism, the ambivalence of the interview remains unresolved outside feminist art practices, which are able to grasp its potential to produce new genealogies and terms for art history beyond the romanticism of genuineness. Moreover, this is partly because, in an activist context, the priority of recording as many vulnerable sources and voices as possible leaves limited time for theoretical reflection and critical archiving of methods.

Between the 1970s and the mid-1980s, interviewing was experienced as a means to bridge outward feminist activities (exhibitions, publishing, activism...) and inward feminist activities (self-consciousness sessions, community life...), corroborating the assumption that personal and artistic experience are inseparable (Paoli 2011, 17). The construction of this feminist alternative to art history meant earning awareness about the exclusionary dimension of the vocabulary and syntax used in art writing (DeVault 1990, 99). The prejudices to be countered applied as much to what was said through the semantic distortions of women's spoken words as to their voices, which historical and literary tropes represented as "apolitical and seductive" (Cavarero 2003). Considering women's voices as a form of relational knowledge that involves listening, feminist conversations thus revealed the systemic weave of these missed inscriptions in historical records (Lippard 1976; Nochlin 1971; Parker, Pollock 1999).

The transitions of recorded conversations from cassette to feminist art press and books tell of a multiplication of preservation strategies, the constant search for new audiences, and the anticipation of the obsolescence of historical analog archives that become again relevant today in the shift towards online repositories. In recent years, the digitization of sound recordings of feminist interviews, such as Cindy Nemser's files, has led to new conversational formats in podcasts. Notably, the Getty Archives have commissioned art historian Helen Molesworth to realize the first season of the podcast series *Recording Artists* (2019). Molesworth's season 1 includes six episodes, each providing a portrait of artists Alice Neel, Lee Krasner, Betye Saar, Helen Frankenthaler, Yoko Ono, and Eva Hesse using sound files of interviews made by Cindy Nemser and Barbara Rose (Washington, D.C., USA, 1936-Concord, NH, USA, 2020) in the 1970s. Like *Recording Artists* by Molesworth and Jennifer Higgin's *Bow Down* (2020), many contemporary feminist conversational practices mediated by the podcast straightforwardly address ways to make archives' contents public again and re-perform historical narratives from the present, emphasizing the significance of this reclamation of history.

However, the discursive potential of dialogical art writing often appears unresolved and remains partly unresolved in a study that, like ours, aims to locate the singularities of certain protagonists of conversational practices. Each interviewer and interviewee analysed in our essay vary in education, forms of feminist militancy, access to publishing platforms, and specific historical inscription in a given cultural context. Added to this is the academic resistance to oral sources, which has been resolved more readily by history than by art history, and the related difficulty in recognizing an epistemological autonomy to the conversation. To define the reasons for this academic reluctance, artist Patricia Norvell notes that the recorded dialogue is "information without analysis, without interpretation, without criticism" (Norvell 2001, XIV). In these threefold absences lurks the reserve about the deliberate subjectivity of feminist art conversations, and the more general reticence that hangs over self-produced forms of art writing. Often, as is also the case with the art historian Valentina Anker (Padua, Italy, 1938), interviews take place as a method to self-produce as comprehensive a study as possible on women artists outside an academic world, which is indifferent to this line of research. After failing to secure research funds for a national project on women artists in Switzerland, Anker published her interview collection, *La Relève des Muses: Entretien avec des femmes artistes*. Her initial plan was to adopt social science methodologies, such as questionnaires, to extensively study women artists' practices and experiences. She then turned into an interview project facilitated by a network of supportive women, including Gilberte Gillioz, secretary of the art history department at

the University of Geneva, who helped conduct and transcribe the interviews in her free time.

Anker's experience, far from being unique, highlights a crucial aspect of feminist interviews, whether on tape or podcast. Conversations are, still today, a flexible tool for recording accounts that too often go unnoticed by conventional art history and search for visibility by reaching a broader audience. While the incorporation of sonic art into academic study and art history is still ongoing, cultural institutions have made significant strides in developing discursive programs and multimedia art criticism that enable feminist sound records to reemerge in the public realm. Although reproducing some of the historical forms of disappearance we have traced in this essay, the resurgence of these sound files allows us to insert contemporary conversational productions into a broader genealogy of feminist oral history practices and consolidate the legitimacy of art histories as told through the words of historical feminist practices.

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