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## Interviews with artists as a device for contention and the discursive dispute in the 1960s and 1970s

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**Abstract:** This article proposes to reflect on the role of interviews with artists as a contention device in the interaction between two subjects, considering that the desire to apprehend works of art through their various ways turns the artist's word into a privileged object. That can be seen by understanding the context of the 1960s/1970s, when a discursive dispute took place in the field of art as artists claim speech spaces. Artists' words are not the *truth* about their works, since they are as historically, socially and culturally determined as the works themselves; therefore, interviews can be seen as mechanisms that open meaning-making and expand it in the crossing of internal and external views about artistic practice.

**Keywords:** Interviews with artists. 1960s and 1970s. Contention device. Meaning making. Discursive dispute.

In addition to art discussions crystallized in books and historical narratives, getting in touch with artists' thinking is a strong desire in the field of art knowledge at least since Vasari.<sup>1</sup> The attempt to understand a work of art through its various ways of expression has led many researchers to look at materials written by artists. By bringing together biographical elements, formal analyzes, historical, geographical, cultural, social and philosophical contexts, metaphors, allegories, comparisons, we try to extract meanings from works of art. In this context, artists' words end up playing a significant role. As something that stands parallel to visual art production, they take on distinct roles within the various processes of understanding and approaching works of art. A current example of that interest is Hans Ulrich Olbrist's projects of interviews with artists and other professionals.<sup>2</sup>

This curiosity seems to be related to the desire to understand artists' own processes and procedures, intentions, wills and projections about their work as the dark side of poetics, and also with the views about art, thoughts, questionings and

discussions that are only possible to those devoted to doing art – here understood in its whole range of possibilities. But the *revelatory* role that words promise to play is rarely delivered. Rather, they often increase enigmas and add more layers, opening the universe of supposedly latent contents. This takes into account that artists' words are not the truth about their works, but something parallel to them and therefore equally determined in historical, social and cultural terms. Therefore, discussing the several modes of expression of artists' words turns out to be an interesting field for thinking about knowledge construction in art.

In my PhD thesis<sup>3</sup> I studied texts produced by artists in the 1960s and 1970s and included in anthologies, in order to find what artists working with photography talked about, thought, did not think, etc. Such extensive contact with that type of material at that time made me question those productions within the field of artistic knowledge. An interesting perception that came from the study of anthologies is the status of artists' word within the field of artistic knowledge. As far as I was able to investigate at the time, even though artists have always written – texts, letters, manifestoes, informal conversations, etc. –<sup>4</sup> a more intense movement to systematize and spread

3. GISI, Juliana (Juliana Gisi Martins de Almeida). *Fotografia e Práticas Artísticas: os discursos dos artistas nos anos 1960 e 1970*. PhD Thesis in Visual Arts. Instituto de Artes da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2013. In 2014 I received the 14<sup>th</sup> Marc Ferrez Photography Award and turned it into a book: GISI, Juliana Gisi Martins de Almeida). *60/70: as fotografias, os artistas e seus discursos*. Curitiba: Juliana Gisi Martins de Almeida, 2015.

4. "Not until the last century did the malicious and false concept arise that artists – painters, sculptors, printmakers – were anti-intellectuals. During the Renaissance Age the artist who wrote poetry, composed treatises on aesthetic problems or manuals on technique, who discoursed with sophisticated scholars and traveled widely, was not uncommon. A man of the Baroque Age like Rubens spoke several languages and was assigned delicate diplomatic missions by his government. Cambridge University conferred upon him the honorary degree of master of arts. [...] Delacroix, Gauguin, Van Gogh: their writings dispel the false notion that 'artists say the silliest things'. Unfortunately, students of the history of art are not often required to devote as much time to the perusal of letters as to the examination of paintings, sculptures and prints. Many a college student who has obtained a fair idea of what Rubens' paintings are like, has never sampled his letters (though the painter's correspondents include the leading scholars, collectors and artists of the time). Sir Joshua Reynolds' portraits are more widely known than the *Discourses* he delivered at the Royal Academy, let alone charming letters he addressed to Lady Ossory. Pablo Picasso's conversations with Christian Zervos or Henry Moore's articles on sculpture are not often enough used by writers on contemporary art, though their value as bridges to the creative ego is unmeasurable. It is true that some of the world's greatest artists – Giotto, Giorgione, El Greco and Rembrandt come quickly to mind – have either failed to leave to posterity a single letter or, at most, nothing more than some trivialities that neither illuminate their personalities nor shed additional light on their work. It is equally true that an artist at times turns out to be a very weak commentator on

1. I say at least since Vasari because his book is considered the first art history book where artists' lives are narrated. VASARI, Giorgio. *Vidas dos Artistas*. São Paulo: WMF Martins Fontes, 2011.

2. OBRIST, Hans Ulrich. *Interviews*. Vol. 1. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2003.

those materials begins in the late 1990s with the recognition of their importance for understanding art. That movement can be seen in the boom of anthologies of artist's texts,<sup>5</sup> reflecting a desire to extend and formalize their inclusion in the list of possible materials for the construction of art knowledge.

My analysis was intended to think indistinctly about the various modes of materialization of artists' words, whether they were texts, statements or interviews, focusing on the meaning of these materials, their place within the field of art knowledge and especially how artists placed themselves in the discursive dispute over art that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, that is, occupation of the public space to reflect on art. Attention to artists' discourse in my thesis,<sup>6</sup> as my object of study, put me in contact with numerous ways in which that discourse can be materialized.

Now, after some time has passed since that work was completed, I propose to think about one of those ways: interviews. I leave the content of the discourses aside to focus on their form – in this case, the particular form of interviews with artists as well as the contexts in which they happened, their importance, their foci.

Looking at the material I studied at the time I conducted my PhD research, I see that in the 1960s and 1970s the artistic context that included what we now generically call conceptual art was especially good for conducting and publicizing interviews with artists.

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his own work, a very awkward and inadequate expounder of his views. But the majority of artists are perfect guides through those bewildering landscapes they have created. They ought to be listened to – with avid attention!" WERNER, Alfred. Artists Who Write. In: *Art Journal*, Vol. 24, No 4 (Summer, 1965), p.342-347. College Art Association. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/774811>, accessed on November 8, 2012, p.342; 346-7

5. Well known anthologies of artists' writings include: CHIPP, H. B. *Teorias da Arte Moderna*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1996, published for the first time in 1968; Ursula Meyer's 1972 book *Conceptual Art*; Gregory Battcock's 1973 *Idea Art: a critical anthology*; Lucy Lippard's 1973 book reedited in 1997: LIPPARD, Lucy R.. *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* California: University of California Press, 2001. Publications from the 1990s include: HARRISON, Charles; WOOD, Paul. *Art in Theory 1900-1990: an Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford; Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1993; STILES, Kristine; SELZ, Peter (Eds.) *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' writings*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1996; ALBERRO, Alexander; STIMSON, Blake. *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology*. London, England: The MIT Press, 1999; OSBORNE, Peter. *Conceptual Art. Themes and Movements*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2005, among others.

6. As it is written there: "This material is not intended to illustrate a theoretical or historical narrative or exemplify a notion: the texts are my object of study, the focus of my interest and the sphere in which my analyses are developed". GISI, 2013, p.33-34.

The process by which artists spoke at that historical moment, which allowed them to open space in the order of discourse about art and to be accepted as subjects that could speak, is evident in the tone of their dispute with theoreticians and critics. The academic training of those artists, which has generally increased since that time, allows them to acquire the necessary tools to occupy the places of those who speak. The strength of what they said and wrote produced the establishment of the artistic discourse of that moment.<sup>7</sup>

But this process of taking over the word is not peaceful; it demands action that results in some kind of legitimation, something like restructuring the places of speech within a discursive field, because, as described by Foucault, subjects who wish to occupy places of speech somehow need to meet certain requirements:

There is, I believe, a third group of procedures which permit the control of discourses. This time it is not a matter of mastering their powers or averting the unpredictability of their appearance, but of determining the condition of their application, of imposing a certain number of rules on the individuals who hold them, and thus of not permitting everyone to have access to them. There is a rarefaction, this time, of the speaking subjects; none shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. To be more precise: not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions.<sup>8</sup>

Only those subjects who fulfill certain requirements and show their authority and qualification to pronounce discourses that can be accommodated within the limits of the discipline are allowed to penetrate in more restricted regions. At that moment artists' desire to publicize what they think about their own work, about art and other related subjects, as opposed to what theorists, critics and historians said and wrote, appears more strongly. And it is precisely that public dispute that produces the opening of some of the regions of this discursive field.

The editor has written me that he is in favor of avoiding "the notion that the artist is a kind of ape that has to be explained by the civilized critic". This should be good news to both artists and apes. With this assurance I hope to justify his confidence. To use a baseball metaphor (one artist wanted to hit the ball out of the park, another to stay loose at the plate and hit the ball where it was pitched), I am grateful for the opportunity to strike out for myself.<sup>9</sup>

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7. GISI, 2013, p.28-29.

8. FOUCAULT, Michel. *A Ordem do Discurso*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2008, p.36-37.

9. Sol LeWitt, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, 1967. In: ALBERRO&STIMSON, 1999, p.12, apud GISI, 2013, p.60, note 63.

In this excerpt from Sol Lewitt's 1967 article *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* as in many other examples,<sup>10</sup> irony is a strategy to destabilize established places of discourse that only come into play when these artists' gestures begin to challenge them. The questions we find in artists' texts *undermine* the authority of critics and theorists, challenge their need and relevance to the field of art, thus claiming the role of speaking about art and works for themselves. Either because critics' role is nullified by works that are structured over the word<sup>11</sup> or because artists' texts become equally accessible to the public or because artists believe that their inner views of artistic practices are more significant than the external views of critics, theorists and historians.

Alongside this intense process of claiming spaces of speech, there is a movement to extend the limits of what a work of art can be, which has opened up space for the word as a constituent element of artistic practices. One example is Ian Wilson's *Oral Communication*,<sup>12</sup> which since 1968 has

10. Daniel Buren, *Beware*, 1969: "One might ask why so many precautions must be taken instead of merely putting one's work out in the normal fashion, leaving comment to the 'critics' and other professional gossip-columnists". In: ALBERRO; STIMSON, 1999, p.155; Víctor Burgin, *Rules of the Thumb*, 1971: "Some confusion has also arisen in regard to what has been seen as a blurring of the distinction between 'art' and 'criticism'. On one hand this, rather simple-mindedly, recognizes the fact that both work and comment use the same system of signs, and on the other hand acknowledges the symbiotic nature of the two activities". In: ALBERRO; STIMSON, 1999, p.251; Robert Smithson, *Cultural Confinement*, 1972: "A work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge, and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world. A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral. Works of art seen in such spaces seem to be going through a kind of aesthetic convalescence. They are looked upon as so many inanimate invalids, waiting for critics to pronounce them curable or incurable. The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society. Next comes integration. Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement." In: ALBERRO; STIMSON, 1999, p.280; Joseph Kosuth, 1975, 1975: "What separates the critic and art historian from the artist is his/her demand to have an *external* relationship to art-practice; the myth of scientific 'objectivity' has demanded this—in some ways one can define the artist as one who tries to affect change from the *inside*, and the historian/critic as one who tries to affect it from the *outside*. There can be little doubt as to why the historian/critic is increasingly viewed as a 'cultural policeman'." Kosuth, 1975. In: ALBERRO; STIMSON, 1999, p.342.

11. Such as the 1969 text *Introduction Art&Language* by the art group Art and Language, which claims the status of work of art. In: STILES& SELZ, 1996, p.826-828.

12. This entry in Lippard's book describes an interview of Ian Wilson with Robert Barry, with the recording of the conversation; I believe that to be the reason why it appears as Barry's rather than Wilson's action. "Robert Barry presents a work by Ian Wilson, July, 1970. The work: "Ian Wilson". Ian Wilson and Robert Barry on Oral Communication, July, 1970, Bronx, N.Y.: "[Note: Ian Wilson has been concerned with Oral Communication as a way of making art for the past four years. This part of a discussion between him and Robert Barry was recorded in July, 1970. The interview grew out of the compatibility in their stances at that time and can be considered a part of Robert Barry's 'presentation of artists' series." LIPPARD, 2001, p.179.

described the practice of talking about diverse subjects with specific people. He schedules conversations and requests that they not be recorded on any media to preserve their transient quality. Just like Lee Lozano's *Dialogue Pieces* that took place from 1969 on and have similar dynamic. The word, as the most transparent among possible materializations of an artistic practice, is not exactly triggered by the content of what is said, but by the exchange it allows, by the engagement of two subjects in something that ultimately leaves no traces and cannot be apprehended by third parties or marketed – which characterizes a wish widely publicized by many artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Something that is closer to performance or action art, but which is not presented to an audience, but rather lived, experienced by two people, without derivatives, without residues other than what they carry as a result of that experience.

This debate about the limits of the field of art, as far as artistic practice is concerned, can be understood by what I have called the displacement of the locus of the work of art,<sup>13</sup> that is, the perception that it may be in any of the several stages of artistic practice: art can be in doing it itself or in not having a definite object, in addition to other forms of materialization. Such extension opens up a very interesting field of indetermination for artists who were, as the historical vanguards in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, challenging the conventions and limits of the field of art. A movement of openness, experimentation, instability; a moment of effervescence and practices so diverse that they could no longer be grasped under the more traditional categories of art theory, history, and criticism, and therefore demanded the theoretical elaboration and exploration of those who engaged in them. And that was also the desire of those artists: to participate in conversations and discussions, to write texts, to talk about their works in order to broaden meanings, to account for all the contents that emerged from such practices. Precisely because they were experiments, indetermination was part of the works and exchanging with their peers should seem an interesting way to explore the possibilities that arose with each proposition, regardless of how they were materialized.<sup>14</sup> Thus

13. GISI, 2015, p.114-115.

14. "More than any other of conceptualism's distinctive qualities, thus, it was its *intellectualism* that made it radical and empowered its momentary takeover of the institutions of art. The burden of the endless philosophizing about the meaning

many meetings, debates, interviews, conversations, among others, took place among artists, sometimes including participation by art theorists or critics or thinkers. Many specialized publications featured those materials and opened up interlocution between those very active agents in the field of the art.<sup>15</sup> Artists took advantage of the possibilities they had for establishing interlocution on various art and life topics and thereby penetrated the discursive field of art.

From that moment on – and perhaps as a result of it – the discursive field of art has changed and, with it, the interchange between its agents. Not that the requirements for a subject to pronounce discourses in the field of art have been miraculously abandoned, but the rules have changed and new requirements were established.

By returning to the discussion about the use of artists' words as a way, medium or mode to approach works of art, poetics and broader art issues, we can establish a distinction between interviews and texts written by artists in order to begin to approach interviews' specificity. Texts written by artists are devices to spread ideas that start from and are developed as a manifestation controlled by artists. This might include both spontaneously produced texts and those triggered by external forces (from commissions to projects). The control exercised by artists when writing a text allows exploring those art issues that are stronger for artists themselves in establishing a line of thought that allows them to wander through their own thinking, through their own perspective, through their most dear references.

Therefore, while a text follows a line determined by the artist in which he or she link ideas based on a logic of their own, in their own timing and in a certain way isolated in their space – just like any other person who writes a text

– an interview is carried out through contention, immediate exchange between interviewer and interviewee, the encounter of two people in dialogue.

But an interview is a text format that can be used in several discursive fields – from academic works to daily newspapers – and that use will determine how the interview is conducted. Therefore, the specificity of interviews with artists can reveal much of art's discursive field.

In an academic interview, interviewees are usually selected because they are people who have something to say about a subject, whatever it is; but, although essential, these subjects are anonymous or at least there is an attempt to guarantee their anonymity because what matters is the quantitative and/or qualitative overlapping of discourses, opinions, ideas, propositions. In a newspaper interview, in turn, the statement prevails, whether it is about a flood or a political event. The aim is to use that discourse to illustrate a fact, and the signature and photography of the subject responsible for the answer are guaranteed, depending on the case. These characteristics are important insofar as the interviewee is approached by the interviewer with a subject as the focus of attention, a fact usually of greater interest or which may reflect in a life context.

Within the interview spectrum, that is, across its several modalities, interviews with artists resemble interviews with personalities. They are inquiries intended to understand the works and the creative process of subjects who gain notoriety for their competence in some area of knowledge, art, science, etc.

But this preamble has only one purpose: establishing a way of looking into an interaction that bears some specificity. For it is clear that characterizing an artist as a personality in terms of conducting an interview informs only of a certain reverence, a respect that determines a place occupied by a subject or two in a given situation. Because interviewer and interviewee are always in contention, regardless of the type of interview. The interlocution set by the interview follows implicit and explicit rules, a desire of a subject who wants to know things about another and the establishment of strategies for these things to be revealed or not – it will depend on which subject we are talking about and one's availability to surrender to the other in the interaction.

of art, the burden of the shift from object-based aestheticism to a language- and theory-based anti-aestheticism, the burden of the rejection of the street coding of happenings, the commercial coding of pop, and the industrial coding of minimalism in favor of academic philosophical, literary, and scientific associations, was to aggressively usurp the authority to interpret and evaluate art assumed to be the privileged domain of scholarly critics and historians. Such was the liberation on offer from conceptualism; such was the insurrection it promised a generation of artists and that allowed it the claim, as Gregory Battcock gushed, that "everything that happened in 1968, at Columbia and Paris and all other symbolic places... REALLY meant something and... really will result in something", because its significance had already been realized in conceptual art." STIMSON, in: ALBERRO; STIMSON, 1999, p. xli. [my translation] apud GISI, 2013, p.82.

15. In order to understand that context, see Lucy Lippard's book *Six Years...* cf. LIPPARD, 2001.

Therefore, we can think of the interview as an interaction device that mobilizes two subjects. Interviewers are supposed to conduct interviews based on a previous plan. They usually want to know some things and study about artists and their work, read texts and previous interviews – when there is any – and arrive with an agenda of more relevant artistic issues perceived to exist in the interviewee's work or poetic or in controversies and questions that he or she feels the need to elucidate. But interviewees often have their agendas of questions and issues that interest them and about which they are willing to talk as well. Therefore, that interaction device is also a contention device, for both are instigated to take stances toward each other's speech. I see this characteristic of interviews as what makes them so interesting: to open space for understanding and connections, to look into issues that were not postulated, to argue about previously untouched topics, to compare external and internal points of view of an artistic practice. It is a mechanism that opens and expands meaning-making.

Douglas Huebler's 1969 interview with Patricia Norvell, under a project in which she was investigating the notion of system in art, clarifies the contention relation between interviewer and interviewee:

Douglas Huebler: Trying to show the system, or the idea, the things that you've set up as the structure within which you will work, is what the art's about.

Patricia Norvell: But then you say it doesn't matter whether the pictures were taken every minute or every five days.

Douglas Huebler: That's right.

Patricia Norvell: So then you're destroying your system, or you're ignoring it?

Douglas Huebler: Right, right, right. That's right because, as I said, these systems do not prove anything either. They're dumbbell systems. Very simple dumbbell systems. In other words...

Patricia Norvell: Yes, but then what do you leave the observer or the receiver with?

Douglas Huebler: You leave him with the notion that he can have an experience that is just that experience. It could be that one or the next one or the next one. In other words, they are all based on the convention that the system sets up. But it could be any system, you know. And the visual experience gets knocked out.<sup>16</sup>

In this very interesting case, the interviewer tries to extract a 'truth' from Huebler about his work procedures because she perceives some inconsistency between the artist's statements that supposedly describe the steps of his actions (elements that had been part of his work since the early 1960s) and the actual execution of the works. But, as in other times, Huebler

dodges and plays with language – which happens both in his statements and in the conversation with the interviewer – reversing the idea that he should linearly describe in his statements what he did, in behalf of something that he perceives as much more important in the context of his production: the experience allowed by apprehension of the work, which would involve reflection, even about that truth.<sup>17</sup>

In Jan Dibbets' interview to *Avalanche* magazine, the questions asked by the interviewers somehow force him to take stances on some issues that they consider important about the relationship between work and its residues.

Avalanche: So what you are really interested in are the ideas within this medium.

Jan Dibbets: Yes, much more than the scale. And the documentation about the work isn't of real importance to me either. I've done lots of works without taking photographs.

A: But some people say that the photograph becomes the work, in a sense, because the work gets destroyed, and the photograph is what people see.

JD: Well, I am trying to develop something, and I feel I'm not at the end of the development yet.

A: You're trying to develop the ideas rather than the material works themselves.

JD: Yes, but I also feel I have to try to correct what I did earlier.<sup>18</sup>

We can see that interviewers somewhat confuse work and documenting – two products that are connected but ontologically different in absolute terms. Dibbets's stance is important because it underscores that difference by stating that the locus of his work lies in the idea and, at another point in the interview, in the experience, but not in documenting it – even if that's what people see... Another interesting point is how Dibbets is not exactly sure, but he is in the process of understanding his own productions in their relation to context and the ways he materializes his ideas. This is typical of a time when the fragments resulting from shattering several boundaries within the field of art reverberate in productions still unusual, both to the public and to artists who are experiencing things without foreseeing all their consequences.

Edward Ruscha's interview with John Coplans, *Concerning "Various Small Fires": Edward Ruscha Discusses His Perplexing Publications*, published in *Artforum* magazine in February 1965, is extremely instigating, beginning with its title.

17. This issue is discussed at length in the final chapter 3.2 of my thesis. Cf. GISL, 2013, p.206-216.

18. Jan Dibbets, in: STILES; SELZ, 1996, p.659.

16. Douglas Huebler, 1969. In ALBERRO; NORVELL, 2001, p.148.

In 1965 Ruscha's publications formed an unprecedented type of experimentation: a book with only photographs, with no text, and, more strikingly, whose photographs did not reflect the technical quality typical of books of great photographers who were already established in the publishing market. That is why the word *perplexed* was in the title as a qualifier for those publications: they had no place either in the editorial field or in the field of art – a subject that is also addressed by the two artists in the interview.

Coplans: Is there a correlation between the way you paint and the books?

Ruscha: It's not important as far as the books are concerned.

Coplans: I once referred to *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* and said "it should be regarded as a small painting" – was this correct?

Ruscha: The only reason would be the relationship between the way I handle typography in my paintings. For example, I sometimes title the sides of my paintings in the same manner as the spine of a book. The similarity is only one of style. The purpose behind the books and my paintings is entirely different. I don't quite know how my books fit in. There is a whole recognized scene paintings fit into. One of the purposes of my book has to do with making a mass-produced object. The final product has a very commercial, professional feel to it. I'm not in sympathy with the whole area of hand-printed publications, however sincere. One mistake I made in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* was in numbering the books. I was testing – at that time – that each copy a person might buy would have an individual place in the edition. I don't want that now.<sup>19</sup>

Ruscha was already known for his paintings when he published his first books in the early 1960s. In this excerpt in which Coplans asks about a possible relationship between the two works, Ruscha's first reaction is to reject that possibility, but not definitively. It is as if transit were forbidden in understanding the books, but perhaps not with respect to paintings. This is very interesting, since in the development of the second answer, after Coplans' insistence, we see that his reflection on possible approaches leads him to set the two practices apart again in a balance between the most established place of paintings – within a most recognizable tradition – and the undetermined place of books. That was a production that mobilized him but which he still could not embrace within the more immediate context of art, an artistic experimentation that stretched the limits of what a work of art could be. In an attempt to discursively apprehend the books, Ruscha distinguishes them from those in which photographs are enlarged

manually, as perhaps in Stieglitz's *Camera Work*,<sup>20</sup> stating that there were no terms for comparison at the time. The exercise of addressing his own work, trying to define it, in a way, was triggered by Coplans – also an artist who worked with photography. And, although it seems difficult to talk about something that does not appear to have a theoretical basis – that is, which cannot be approached from already established notions and concepts – this contention produces some kind of definition, although open and made of negations.

Based on these examples we can see interviews based on the notion of contention device mentioned above: an interaction between subjects who play with language in a speech-production movement, and in a broad sense – production of a discourse on art, an opening of its definitions and practices, a movement to reach a place of speech that accounts for those things that are not yet established within the discursive field of art, which still inhabit a *wild exteriority* in the field, this *teratology of knowledge* – that which has not yet been appeased and is not comfortably established in what is true.<sup>21</sup>

Artists' words are not the *truth* about their work; they are an incredible source for reflection about art, a time, context and desire. A desire that grounds making, practice, which sets an action in motion and effectively results in something. A productive impetus that expands beyond intentions and projects. Finally, artists' speech materializes what their blindness allows them to see. As different ways for materializing views and ideas, word and work of art feedback in constant movement. For this very typical place that artists occupy in their relationship to their work opens and closes their view at the same time. We could even set a parallel to Marcel Duchamp's words: "... the personal 'artistic coefficient' is like an arithmetical relation between what remains unexpressed though intended and what is unintentionally expressed".<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the contention provided by the interview and other similar interactions adds a third element to this Duchampian

20. *Camera Work* was a magazine edited by Alfred Stieglitz from 1903 to 1917 whose images were manually printed photogravures carefully arranged between sheets of tissue paper. It can be considered the maximum example of diligence and perfectionism in making a photography publication. STIEGLITZ, Alfred. *Camera Work: the Complete Illustrations 1903-1917*. Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 1997.

21. Terms in italics were appropriated from Michel Foucault's discussion about the Order of Discourse. FOUCAULT, 2008.

22. DUCHAMP, Marcel. O Ato Criador, 1957. In: BATTACK, Gregory. *A Nova Arte*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva S.A., 1975, p.73.

19. Edward Ruscha, 1965, in: CAMPANY, 2008, p.223.

equation, as if artist and audience could establish another type of exchange beyond immediate contact with the work.

The desire to know what artists think is what drives interviews, as if it were possible to reach this internal device that puts artists in operation, as if there were in fact an *absolute precedence* in making a work. But if we think of Michel Foucault's discussion about authors,<sup>23</sup> we will see that this function is always ascribed a posteriori, as a result of the establishment of a work. It does not exist before as wholeness and omniscience as we sometimes wish it would.

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