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Factual paratext, author and media. TV interviews by Roland Barthes and Primo Levi

Abstract

When Gerard Genette discussed the interview as a secondary and accessory dimension of the text in his book, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, he claimed that the “use of the mediated paratext—a use inevitably destined to spread—will have to take into account” elements such as facial expressions and “non-verbal utterance.” The television interviews given by Roland Barthes (*En toutes lettres*, 1972) and by Primo Levi (*Il mestiere di raccontare*, 1974) offer an interesting extension or re-modulation of Genette’s concept of the epitext. Both authors perform their public role visually as well as verbally. Their attire and performances act as a “factual” paratext in the interviews to communicate messages concerning writer’s life, which are, in turn, visually coded to make statements about their work and how it is to be understood by readers.

Résumé

Lorsque Genette inclut l’entretien dans la dimension secondaire et accessoire du texte, il affirme que « l’utilisation de ce genre de paratexte [médiatique], inévitablement appelée à se développer, devra tenir compte » d’éléments tels que les expressions faciales et « l’expression non verbale ». L’interview accordée par Roland Barthes à l’émission télévisée *En toutes lettres* (1972) et *Il mestiere di raccontare* de Primo Levi (1974) offrent une extension ou une modulation intéressante de cet épitexte. Les deux auteurs jouent leur rôle public plus que verbalement. Les façons de s’habiller et de performer soi-même agissent comme un paratexte « factuel » dans l’entretien. Il s’agit de messages concernant la vie des auteurs, qui sont codés visuellement pour se référer à leur travail et, à l’adresse des lecteurs, pour orienter la façon de comprendre leurs ouvrages.

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FACTUAL PARATEXT, AUTHOR AND MEDIA. TV interviews by Roland Barthes and Primo Levi

When Gerard Genette considered the “interview” as a secondary and accessory element of a text in his 1997 study entitled, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, he had both the printed and the audiovisual interview in mind. He predicted that the “use of the mediated paratext—a use inevitably destined to spread—will have to take into account” particulars such as facial expressions and “non-verbal utterance.”¹ According to Genette, all verbal and non-verbal messages, communicated in the context of the interview, thus take on a paratextual function that orients the reader. In other words, the performance of a writer in an interview should be considered a visually-encoded analogy to the paratext. The self-fashioning of writers together with other elements such as their gestures and artistic performances (for example playing an instrument), can be understood as a paratext in the context of TV interviews and, therefore, functions to orient the reception of a book in the same way a verbal paratext would.

In the thirty years since Georg Stanitzek’s pioneering work was published,² studies on the paratext have contributed to our understanding of verbal paratextuality on such visual supports as cinematic projection, home video (DVD), and e-books. Recent research explores verbal paratexts of different types and contexts such as music scores, legal texts,³ serialized narrative,⁴ and both digital reading in e-books and audio commentaries in DVD.⁵ On one hand, most of these studies have focused on the paratext as something that is materially contiguous with the text, i.e. the peritext that is spatially – and perhaps also temporally – closest to the text. On the other hand, the author interview – if considered a paratext at all –

¹ Gérard GENETTE, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1997, 357.

² “His [Genette’s] main shortcoming is that he is not willing to risk the category of the text as book (or the work) itself. Instead, he tries to restrict texts to the domain of books by stopping the functional analysis at this point—by refusing to go further” (Georg STANITZEK, “Text and Paratext in Media”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, 2005, 32, 1, 27-42, 35). We can also add a previous chapter by Ole E. HANSEN, “Television Stations and the Internet: Paratext, Intratext or Hypertext”, in: Ib BONDEBIERG & Helle K. HAASTRUP (eds.), *Intertextuality & Visual Media*, Copenhagen, University of Copenhagen, 1999, 195-217.

³ Richard Lawrence Étienne BARNETT (ed.), *Poetics of the paratext*, in: *Neobelicon*, 2010, 37, 1. The identity of Barnett has been questioned and the author has been accused of plagiarism (See Car FERGUSON, “Tracking down lit crit plagiarism leads to “discourses of madness”, in: *Retraction Watch*, November 20, 2014, <https://retractionwatch.com>). However, several articles by scholars contributing to this issue are of great interest. See, in particular, for music paratexts, Marcin STAWIARSKI, “This Is All but a Book: Musicalized Paratextuality in Literature”, in: *Neobelicon*, 2010, 37, 1, 93-112; and, for legal paratexts, Bethel G. A. ERASTUS-OBILO, “Liminal Devices of Interpretation: Paratexts of the Supreme Court”, *ibid.*, 127-137.

⁴ On the study of paratexts in seriality, see Raúl RODRÍGUEZ-FERRÁNDIZ, “Paratextual Activity: Updating the Genettian Approach within the Transmedia Turn”, in: *Communication & Society*, 2017, 30, 1, 165-182. See also Maria LINDGREN LEAVENWORTH, “The Paratext of Fan Fiction”, in: *Narrative*, 2015, 23, 1, 40-60.

⁵ For a bibliography of paratextual studies on media (DVD and digitized narrative), see Dorothee BIRKE & Birte CHRIST, “Paratext and Digitized Narrative: Mapping the Field”, in: *Narrative*, 2013, 21, 1, 65-87.

is regarded as a function of the epitext. This article considers non-verbal paratexts in the genre of the interview as epitexts of the author's written work.

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette argued that the interview can always be included in an author's collection of works; his understanding of the interview as an epitext provides the theoretical foundation for the present study.⁶ For example, the complete works of Roland Barthes (1915 – 1980) and those of Primo Levi (1919 – 1987) contain interviews together with their published texts, arranged in chronological order for Barthes, and in a separate and last volume for Levi. In each case, interviews included in the book are situated on the same level as other peritextual elements included by the editors (such as prefaces) and aimed at orientating the reading of the author's *corpus*. At the same time, the term "metatext" is generally used to describe a commentary on a text.⁷ For example, an interview by Roland Barthes or Primo Levi on national television seems not to have been given a paratextual function because those interviews do not exhibit material contiguity with one of their texts. Some scholars consider the authorial intervention in an autographic preface and during an interview not as part of the paratext, but as metatext, precisely because they are separable from the support of the printed book.⁸ More precisely, Genette's choice of the term "epitext" for the interview allowed him to restrict the use of the term "metatext" to the allographic practice in which a writer cites another writer. Despite Genette's straightforward categorization, the integration of the interview within the paratextual category has been questioned by some scholars because the category of the epitext—that of the interview in particular—appears to be separable from the text, whereas the peritext—which includes the cover, title, and preface—is always attached to the book itself. The interview, therefore, has been considered a commentary on a text rather than a paratext. For this reason, the interview experienced a sort of *de-paratextualisation* and has rarely been considered a paratext of a literary work; instead, it is seen as a literary work in itself.⁹ In particular, studies by John Rodden, Jérôme Meizoz and Galia Yanoshevsky interpret the literary interview as a writer's performance.¹⁰ Following Meizoz, for instance, the public performance of an author in the interview can be

⁶ See Odile CORNUZ, *D'une pratique médiatique à un geste littéraire. Le livre d'entretien au XXe siècle*, Genève, Droz, 2016, in which the author studies the interviews collected in autonomous volumes as a genre that develops in 20th century.

⁷ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, 12.

⁸ "[U]ne distinction est nécessaire entre paratexte et métatexte ou, disons-le plus clairement au risque d'une simplification, entre le paratexte en tant que lieu de discours et le commentaire en tant que forme de discours [...] forte serait alors la tentation d'inclure aussi dans le paratexte le commentaire auctorial figurant dans l'œuvre, surtout dans la fiction romanesque, par voie de métalepse, ou par le relais du narrateur considéré comme porte-parole de l'auteur" (Andrea DEL LUNGO, "Seuils, vingt ans après. Quelques pistes pour l'étude du paratexte après Genette", in: *Littérature*, 2009, 155, 3, 98-111, 110). I have to thank Jan Baetens who posed this problem in a comment during the Bologna conference "*Attention au paratexte! Seuils: Thirty Years Later*" (February 15-16, 2018). Following this interpretation, the authorial interview could consequently be named an autographic metatext.

⁹ John RODDEN, *Performing the Literary Interview. How Writers Craft Themselves*, Nebraska, Nebraska University Press, 2001; Anneleen MASSCHELEIN, Christophe MEURÉE, David MARTENS and Stéphanie VANASTEN, "Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre", in: *Poetics Today*, 2014, 35, 1-2, 1-47.

¹⁰ See Galia YANOSHEVSKY, *L'entretien littéraire. Anatomie d'un genre*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2018, especially ch. 3 ("L'entretien littéraire comme performance"), 131-195. The author focuses on the setting and body of the writer, intended as totality of physical features, on both printed and filmed interviews.

interpreted according to the concept of literary *posture*. He also argues that literary *posture* involves both non-verbal behaviour and discourse.¹¹ To illustrate this idea, Meizoz refers to Louis-Ferdinand Céline and his renowned white coat—that is, his medical uniform—which he chose to wear during his meeting with the press for the launch of his *Journey to the End of the Night* (*Voyage au bout de la nuit*) in 1932. The writer consciously adopted the posture of a poor doctor who treated poor people, implying that he was a man condemned to working a real job in order to make a living. This intentional act positioned him as a stranger to the bourgeois world of other writers. Moreover, his dress code corresponded to an equivalent rhetorical instrument within the novel: his enunciative posture was indeed characterized by an unrefined way of speaking, which intensified the populist issues at the basis of the novel.¹²

Despite Genette's focus on verbal paratext, he recognized three other kinds of paratext: iconic, material, and factual.¹³ Factual paratexts are *facts* that “may or may not be brought to the public's attention by a reference that, itself, belongs to the textual paratext.” The age, sex or sexual orientation of the writer are examples of *facts* expressed by factual paratext. These elements, as part of the “authorial context, [...] provide some commentary on the text and influence the text's reception.”¹⁴ In broadcast interviews, authorial information such as dress¹⁵ and gesture can be deemed factual because they publicly perform a paratextual function in relation to the meaning of their works.¹⁶ Here, an interesting parallel with

¹¹ Jérôme MEIZOZ, “Modern Posterities of Posture. Jean-Jacques Rousseau”, in Gillis Jan DORLEIJN and Ralf GRÜTTEMEIER (eds.), *Authorship Revisited: Conceptions of Authorship around 1900 and 2000*, Leuven, Peeters, 2010, 81-93, 84-85.

¹² See Jérôme MEIZOZ, “Ce que l'on fait dire au silence: posture, ethos, image d'auteur”, in: *Argumentation et Analyse du Discours*, 2009, 3 [online], <<http://aad.revues.org/667>> [accessed on 9 January 2019]. We will show that the white coat has a performative function also in Primo Levi's TV interviews.

¹³ “Most often, then, the paratext is itself a text: if it is still not *the* text, it is already *some* text. But we must at least bear in mind the paratextual value that may be vested in other types of manifestation: these may be iconic (illustrations), material (for example, everything that originates in the sometimes very significant typographical choices that go into the making of a book), or purely factual” (GENETTE, *Paratexts*, 7).

¹⁴ “By *factual* I mean the paratext that consists not of an explicit message (verbal or other) but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received. [...] The existence of these facts of contextual affiliation, like the existence of every kind of factual paratext, may or may not be brought to the public's attention by a mention that, itself, belongs to the textual paratext: a genre indication, the mention on a band of a prize, the mention in a ‘please-insert’ of an author's age, the indirect disclosure of an author's sex by way of his or her name, and so forth. But the existence of these facts does not always need to be mentioned to be a matter of ‘common knowledge’” (*ibid.*, 7-8).

¹⁵ Nothomb's outfit has been considered a media performance by YANOSHEVSKY, *L'entetien littéraire*, 154-155. On the Italian side, a possible comparison can refer to Aldo Busi's appearances in TV. Concerning writers' performances, also articulating a gender perspective, see the dossier *Gender Authorial Corpographies*, edited by Aina PÉREZ FONTDEVILA and Meri TORRAS FRANCÈS, and their Introduction, “Authorial Corpographies. Performing Gender and Cultural Authorship”, in: *Interférences littéraires/Littéraire interferences*, 2017, 21 [online], <<http://www.interferenceslitteraires.be/index.php/illi/issue/view/54>> [accessed on 25 June 2019].

¹⁶ This insight on factual paratext may concern an inherent contradiction within Genette's understanding of the author: “Namely, on the one hand he [Genette] uses the author and his will as a criterion for determining the presence of a paratextual element as such, and on the other hand he treats the authors themselves—their names and biographical facts about them—as paratextual elements” (STANITZEK, “Text and Paratext in Media”, 35). “Again, as a consequence of Genette's contradictory statements, there has been a controversy about the question of whether he embraces the idea of the author as real-life person or rather the idea of an ‘author function’ or ‘authorizing function’” (BIRKE & CHRIST, “Paratext and Digitized Narrative”, 70).

Genette's definition of the *performative* function of the paratext can be drawn. Genette indeed argues that dedications and inscriptions have the ability to perform what they describe: "a novel does not signify 'This book is a novel,' a defining assertion that hardly lies within anyone's power, but rather 'Please look on this book as a novel'"¹⁷. Factual paratexts similarly orient the reception of literary works by performing an authorial meaning on the public stage of broadcast television. In short, in the case of the TV interview, the performative function is carried out by some factual paratexts, which are coded as visual and non-verbal messages. Therefore, authorial performance in a television interview not just functions as a paratext, but as a *factual* paratext.

As previously mentioned, the performative function of the interview has been largely debated by academic research. The writer's performance, communicated through postures, dressing, and specific gestures, can be attributed to the author's attempt to self-fashion him- or herself with the spectator in mind. In his article entitled, "La visite au grand écrivain", Olivier Nora claimed that, in comparison with the printed interview, the audiovisual interview reconstitutes the public imaginary of the author, who is no longer in his or her own home but, instead, is present in the studio and therefore enters the private space of his or her spectators. Although Nora was referring to the radio interviews from the late 1940s, the same assertion can be made about interviews on television and on the internet.¹⁸ Alluding to Philippe Lejeune's pioneering research on the radio interview, Nora argued that "the charismatic effect of writing is no longer based on reading, but on hearing and vision."¹⁹ The transformation of factual paratext from print to radio interviews is demonstrated by that, in the printed interview, readers often encounter a threshold at the beginning of the text, written by the interviewer. This paratext provides the reader with the circumstances of the interview, including the occasion, location and, sometimes, a description of the author's voice, behavior, or clothes. In other words, the paratext of a printed interview contains a description of the writer's appearance as the interviewer sees him or her. In TV interviews, viewers no longer need a description of the author because they can make their own observations. Features such as voice, clothes, and gestures communicate the writer's performance directly through the camera and into the presence of the audience without the intermediary interpretation of the interviewer.

This study examines the appearances of Roland Barthes and Primo Levi²⁰ within the context of television interviews and demonstrates the ways in which their

¹⁷ GENETTE, *Paratexts*, 11.

¹⁸ "L'interview écrite, dans ce qu'elle a de capital – la traduction d'une pensée –, a donc rendu périmé ce que la visite a de plus marginal, lui laissant l'apanage du portrait vivant en situation. C'est cette spécificité que lui confisquera justement l'audiovisuel, qui donne à entendre et à voir de façon immédiate cet écrivain fantôme dont la visite tenait de restituer la voix et de reconstruire l'image" (Olivier NORA, "La visite au grand écrivain", in: Pierre NORA (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. II, *La Nation*, t. 3, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, 563-587, 581).

¹⁹ "[L]'effet charismatique propre à l'écriture ne repose plus sur la lecture, mais sur l'audition et la vision" (*Ibid.*, 582. My translation). "[L]a radio et la télévision ont au contraire développé au-delà de toute mesure l'effet charismatique propre à l'écriture, fondé sur l'absence" (Philippe LEJEUNE, "La voix de son maître", in: *Littérature*, 1979, 33, 6-36, 6).

²⁰ See this book's chapter about the role of photography in historical testimony in which the author has already compared Barthes and Levi (Ciro TARANTINO, "Il reale e il possibile in Roland Barthes e Primo Levi", in: Marcello Walter BRUNO & Emanuele FADDA, *Roland Barthes Club Band*, Quodlibet, 2018, 193-207).

performances function as factual paratexts that directly relate to their writing. Moreover, the examples of Barthes and Levi serve as strong indicators of the important function of performative paratexts since, in each instance, the author's use of factual paratexts helped him strategically re-orient the audience's reception of his work during a turning point in his career.

Roland Barthes as pianist *amateur*

Several examples within the large corpus of Roland Barthes's interviews require a reconsideration of paratextuality through the analysis of the author's performance. Between 1971 and 1974, his public posture overlapped with his past commitment as a semiologist and a structuralist in a way that directed the audience toward new explorations of his authorship. In particular, Barthes drew attention to his new style of essayistic writing and his enhanced exposure as a public figure.²¹

The TV broadcast *En toutes lettres* (January 7, 1972²²), which includes multiple video interviews of the same period, most clearly demonstrates the changes that took place in Barthes' work.²³ *En toutes lettres* is a series of edited sequences of the author, shown in the following order: in a television studio answering questions about his new book, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971); at the Jardin du Luxembourg recounting his childhood and education; and finally while giving a tour of his own house, smoking a cigar, playing piano and painting.²⁴ It can be argued that the interview portion of the broadcast posits itself as a paratext, or metatextually raises the issue of the paratext in order to signal that it wants to be read as a paratext, because it includes iconographic peritexts to Barthes' earlier work *L'Empire de signes* (1970) in its field of vision: for example, cover, images and photos of Japan included in this book are shown on the screen.

Moreover, the interview for *En toutes lettres* seems to comply with a large project of authorial conduct that was consciously elaborated upon and developed by Barthes during an interview published in the literary review *Tel Quel*. Barthes envisaged the genre of the interview as the occasion to perform an autofictional discourse that would combine his writings with his own authorial imagination.²⁵ The TV interview *En toutes lettres* reveals the way in which Barthes, according to his broader project of authorial imagination, performs "himself" as a new type of

²¹ See Guido Mattia GALLERANI, "Les entretiens « romanesques » de Roland Barthes à la radio (1976-1979)", in: *Komodo 21: L'entretien d'écrivain à la radio (France, 1960-1985)*, 2018, 8 [online], <<http://komodo21.fr/>> [accessed on 9 January 2019].

²² Roland BARTHES, *En toutes lettres*, interview with Philippe Jacques, January 7, 1972, RTF. INA Archive.

²³ See GALLERANI, "The Faint Smiles of Postures: Roland Barthes's Broadcast Interviews [Annex: List of print, radio, and filmed interviews given by Roland Barthes]", in: *Barthes Studies*, 2017, 3, 51-96 [online], <<http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/barthes/>> [accessed on 9 January 2019].

²⁴ The author's description of his home and the consequent division of his working spaces mirror the subsequent portrait he will give to *Le Monde*. See BARTHES, "Un rapport presque maniaque avec les instruments graphiques" (1973), in: *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, Paris, Seuil, 2002, t. 4, 485-486.

²⁵ ID., "Réponses" (1971), in: *Œuvres complètes*, t. 3, 1023-1044. This was a originally filmed interview. John RODDEN extensively discusses the idea of novelizing one's own life in *Performing the Literary Interview*, 203-225: "Isabel Allende has sought to transform the interview into a personal art form" (203). See for a concrete example, ID., *Conversations with Isabel Allende*, Texas, University of Texas Press, 2004.

author. Furthermore, if interviews can be used as a method of anticipating and controlling the reception of future works, Barthes took this opportunity to prepare viewers for the release of his next book, *Le Plaisir du texte*, which was to be published the following year. News of the book's release was shared in a comment *before* his performance at the piano in his parlor, where he played *Sonata n° 6, Andante in Fa minors* by Haydn. Interestingly, just before he began the sonata, Barthes claimed that, "rules are factors of pleasure rather than constraints."²⁶ Barthes dedicated half an hour every day to study the piano as a "substitute for sport."²⁷ Guided by his comments, the audience experienced Barthes' playing as a practical occurrence—and an anticipation—of his own future theory, which he had not yet divulged in a book. In other words, the pleasure of playing a musical "text" could be seen as mirroring the future theory of the text as pleasure.

In his performance, Barthes conveyed an image of himself as an *amateur*, one who is not a professional artist but who shares the same creative pleasure, in this case playing the piano alone in his room, for himself.²⁸ That he was attired in everyday clothes (he is not shown wearing a smoking jacket as a professional player would) highlighted the *fact* that he was an amateur appearing before his audience. The cinematography of the segment further supports his role as a non-professional musician. In the footage, the camera first provides a wide shot of the whole scene in which Barthes plays the piano at home. The diagonal angle cleverly shows Barthes approaching the piano while simultaneously offering the audience a view of the rest of the room. Then, the camera cuts to a position behind Barthes's back and films the musical score in front of him. There is no close-up of his hands while he is playing, which would have been interpreted as a synecdoche for the work of a writer, specifically for the genius embodied in those hands. Similarly, no pretense of the quality of his performance is expressed, for example, with a shot framing Barthes's technical skill. Instead, the performance at the piano offers a portrait of Barthes in relation to the room in which he plays. Both author and performance exist within a unique moment in which he, by means of his playing, experiences the private pleasure of spending time alone. Therefore, the cinematography of the interview works with the author's performance by carefully framing Barthes as a man resting in his own home. He is shown neither as a writer, nor as a professional artist, but as a common educated bourgeois spending his free time with an amusing hobby.

The connection between his writing and his home emerges immediately after his performance at the piano. In the next segment of the broadcast, a recording of Barthes's earlier playing continues in the background while he explains how his home is divided into different spaces according to his needs: "each spot of my room has a precise function." To elaborate, he points out that while he works, writes, paints, and plays the piano in the upper-room, he lives in the apartment below: "the

²⁶ BARTHES, *En toutes lettres*. My transcription and translation.

²⁷ Barthes will write the same in a short later text: "Jouer, c'est *toccar*, toucher ; cela renvoie à une activité corporelle : une demi-heure de piano par jour m'apporte sans doute le même équilibre musculaire qu'un peu de sport quotidien à un autre" (Id., "Piano-souvenir" (1980), in: *Œuvres complètes*, t. 5, 899).

²⁸ See Adrien CHASSAIN, "Roland Barthes: les pratiques et les valeurs de l'amateur", in: *Fabula-LbT*, 2015, 15 [online], <<http://www.fabula.org/lht/15/chassain.html>> [accessed on 25 June 2019].

rest of my material life is carried out downstairs.” He also provides a symbolic division between the two spaces by means of a trapdoor.

His performance at the piano in the televised interview, together with the tour of his home, indicates that Barthes sought to link his new literary posture as an amateur to his public role, who appears to be closer to the pleasure of artistic creation than the ordinary intellectual. His performance, therefore, seems to promise that his pleasure as an amateur will be the source of new ideas as well as serving as the “site of the transgressions” between (his) text and (his) context.²⁹ In fact, the performed transgression of the limits of the intellectual ordinary space announces, on the screen, an argument stated later in *The Pleasure of the Text*:

Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body. The pleasure of the text is irreducible to its grammatical functioning, as the pleasure of the body is irreducible to its physiological need. The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas as I do.³⁰

The pleasure allows the transgression of such boundaries between the text and the body because it abolishes any division between the two bodies of an author: his biological body and his public one, the life that provides the context of his writing and the writing itself. His need of pleasure in artistic performance nourishes from now not only a hobby, such as his exercise at the piano, but also any intellectual creation that he pursues afterwards. In this TV interview, the pleasure of the amateur turns into a public performance that already intermingles the public body and the physiological life of Barthes.

Primo Levi’s way of dressing

Unlike Barthes’s interviews, those that feature Primo Levi have not yet been subject of research.³¹ The earliest known interview took place in 1961, and very few were conducted between 1963 and 1978. This period of relative silence does not come as a surprise, however, since his *Se questo è un uomo*, first published by De Silva Publisher in 1947, had very little initial success.³² It was not until the publication of the revised edition by Einaudi in 1958 that the work received recognition. Levi’s

²⁹ “As supplement, the body is the site of the transgression effected by the narrative: it is at the level of the body that the two *inconciliabilia* of the Antithesis (outside and inside, cold and heat, death and life) are brought together” (Roland BARTHES, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller, Oxford (UK), Blackwell, 1990, 28).

³⁰ ID., *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller, New York, Hill and Wang, 1975, 17. I have modified the published translation because this is an incomplete translation of the original text, thus I copy here the original French: “Le texte a une forme humaine, c’est une figure, un anagramme du corps? Oui, mais de notre corps érotique. Le plaisir du texte serait irréductible à son fonctionnement grammarien (phéno-textuel), comme le plaisir du corps est irréductible au besoin physiologique. Le plaisir du texte, c’est ce moment où mon corps va suivre ses propres idées – car mon corps n’a pas les mêmes idées que moi” (ID., *Le plaisir du texte*, (1973), in: *Œuvres complètes*, t. 4, 228).

³¹ See Primo LEVI, *Opere complete III. Conversazioni, interviste, dichiarazioni*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, Torino, Einaudi, 2018. The list of Levi’s interviews stops approximately at 300, 143 of those are included in this volume.

³² The first edition counted 1500 copies sold on 2500 printed and had 20 reviews on the print press. See Roberta MORI & Domenico SCARPA, “Cucire molecole”, in: *Album Levi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2017, 126.

belated fame exploded during the last years of his life, 1979-1987 (he died while *Seuils* was still in the bookstores), which explains why most of his interviews were conducted during the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1973, an edition of *Se questo è un uomo* with Levi's commentary was adopted in school curricula. During this period, he took a break from his meetings with students and his educational commitment as a Holocaust witness. As a sort of compendium of this experience, he drafted a self-interview in the 1977 scholastic edition, in which he collected responses to the most frequent questions asked by the students.³³ Levi himself conceived of the genre of the author interview as a paratext, as a guide to understanding the work. But in a 1979 article by Silvia Giacomoni in *La Repubblica*, Levi confessed that his role as a Holocaust witness had changed:

I want to talk to the new generations as well. You see, I've talked about *If This is a Man* during at least one hundred and thirty classes, however, I will not accept these invitations anymore. For a while now I've been asking myself whether I managed to tell what actually happened. And now I am convinced that, even though the subject of the Lager is still striking, it is no longer relevant.³⁴

In other words, Levi believed that since the events that took place at Auschwitz belonged to the past, his personal testimony was not as useful as it had been in the decades immediately following the Second World War.

Not long after the interview for *La Repubblica*, Levi received Italy's most prestigious literary award—the “Premio Strega”—for his novel *La chiave a stella*: the story about a worker and his relationship with the narrator, a chemist. His transition from a Holocaust witness to a fiction writer, therefore, explains Levi's literary posture in interviews both published in print and broadcasted on radio and television during this period. The shifting focus of his interviews reflects his development from the documentary style of his early works to the insertion of personal and fictional elements in his writings, as was also the case for the main character of *La chiave a stella*.

In a broadcast interview in 1963, for example, Levi was interviewed at home – the journalist pointed out that they could not find him at the factory where he worked as a chemist and, later, as a director. At home, Levi was filmed while repairing his son's toy car, to which the journalist purposely drew the audience's attention by asking, “Levi, what are you doing!?” The author's reply – “I'm trying to repair my son's toy car” – immediately distanced the author from his work as a writer. The journalist continued by asking, “Why do you work as a chemist?”, to which Levi replied: “To make a living! And I like it. [...] Separating things is very

³³ “LEVI, “Ma perché Auschwitz?”, in: *Tuttolibri. Settimanale d'informazione edito da La Stampa*, 1976, February 28, 2. As an Appendix to the 1977 scholastic edition, with an introductory commentary written by Levi in November 1976, in: *Se questo è un uomo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1989, 327-350. Now in ID., *Opere complete III*, 89-111.

³⁴ “Voglio parlare anche alle nuove generazioni. Vede, io sono stato a parlare di *Se questo è un uomo* in almeno centotrenta scuole, ma non accetterò più questi inviti. Da un po' di tempo capita che mi si chieda se ho raccontato proprio cose vere. E mi sono convinto, d'altra parte, che il discorso sui Lager continua a essere impressionante, ma non è più attuale” (LEVI, “Il mago Merlino e l'uomo fabbro”, interview with Silvia Giacomoni, in: *La Repubblica*, 1979, January 24; in ID., *Opere complete III*, 134-137, 134. My translation).

important for me. I don't want to be a professional writer."³⁵ Then he commented openly on the botched reception of *Se questo è un uomo*, in light of the success of his new book, *La tregua* (1963), which recounts his Odyssey across Eastern Europe after the liberation of Auschwitz.

Interestingly, Primo Levi's 1963 interview began with an everyday situation that positioned him as a father doing some housework for his family. In fact, the first thing the audience sees is a close-up of Levi's hands working on the toy as if he does not expect company. Then, once the journalist appears, Levi acts as if he is being distracted from his task by the interview. Typically, a professional writer filmed at home entails some sort of connection between his public writings and his private background. The act of repairing his son's toy, however, distances Levi from that kind of connection. By performing the role of a caring father in front of the camera, Levi emphasized the peculiarity of his public position at the time: a writer-Holocaust witness who was re-integrating into ordinary Western society and, particularly, into family life.

Ten years later, in 1974, Levi accepted an invitation to travel with a TV troupe in order to trace the origins of his first book and the following, *La tregua*. The result is a collection of three interviews entitled *Il mestiere di raccontare* ("Professional Storyteller").³⁶ At that time, students had just started reading his book in school, and in 1976, 220,000 copies of *Se questo è un uomo* were sold and the book had been translated in seven languages.³⁷ In a passage of *Il mestiere di raccontare*, Levi directed his audience to his new book project, *La chiave a stella*, which would be published in 1979. During the third part of this interview, Levi appeared in his jumpsuit – the white lab coat that served as his chemist uniform. In this instance, his was of dressing worked differently from his performance as a family man, which accounted for a separation between his role as a writer and his everyday life. Instead, Levi clearly intended to show a link between his "two destinies", similarly to the mythological figure of Tiresias – who goes through a sex change – a comparison Levi made during his acceptance speech for the Premio Strega prize.³⁸ Initially, Levi had conceived of his two sides as polar opposites, but ten years later, he began to develop a much more integrated view of his dual nature as he continued writing and giving public appearances.³⁹

The trajectory of Levi's transition from Holocaust witness to professional writer is predicated on a reconsideration of his first book within the context of his overall career. In fact, considering his works in this manner positions *Se questo è un*

³⁵ ID., "L'approdo", interview with Luigi Silori, 1963, September 27, RAI. Teche RAI Archive; transcription in: ID., *Opere complete III*, 13-16. My translation.

³⁶ ID., *Il mestiere di raccontare. Se questo è un uomo*, collection "Indagine sul romanzo contemporaneo", by Anna Amendola and Giorgio Belardelli, RAI UNO, 1974, May 20 & 27, June 3. Teche RAI Archive.

³⁷ Gabriella Poli, Giorgio Calcano, *Echi di una voce perduta. Incontri, interviste e conversazioni con Primo Levi*, Milano, Mursia, 1992, 92.

³⁸ During the counting of votes of Premio Strega (1979, July 4), Levi confesses that he left his job as a chemist and became a professional writer in order to experience, as well as Tiresias, "two destinies". See the interview at Premio Strega, Teche RAI Archive. See also the chapter "Tiresia", in: LEVI, *La chiave a stella* (1978), Einaudi, Torino, 2014, 44-51.

³⁹ As a later print interview with Piero Bianucci, entitled "Il romanziere in camice bianco" ("The novelist in a white coat"), shows (*Tuttolibri*, 1985, October 26). Cit. in: LEVI, *Conversazioni e interviste 1936-1987*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, 97.

uomo as the starting point of Levi's entire career as a writer, and not just of his work as a Shoah documentalist. When examined in a similar way, *Il mestiere di raccontare* marks a turning point in his postural conduct in front of the audience. At the beginning of the interview, the journalist asked, in reference to *Se questo è un uomo*: "The things you write about, have they really happened?" To which Levi replied, "So they say. I know they happened. [...] After having written them, I sometimes feel as if they didn't happen. I experience them as a novel, a plot. [...] I need other witnesses in order to believe it."⁴⁰ His answer implies that he considered his experience at Auschwitz as if it were part of a book, the documentary value of which, according to Levi, was progressively receding for new generations. When considered from the point of view of the historical climate in which Levi found himself during the 70s and 80s, it becomes clear that his first text had taken on more of a literary, rather than documentary, role. In 1985, during one of the latest interviews, Levi recalled the period in which he wrote *Se questo è un uomo* and observed that, according to his change in perspective, he had had "the wish to testify," but that it was "was partial, secondary."⁴¹

By 1974, as evidenced by his performance in *Il mestiere di raccontare*, Levi had stopped differentiating between his writerly and scientific identities; instead, he found a successful postural continuity between his "two destinies." This continuity was demonstrated by Levi's response when, in another interview, Philip Roth quoted a passage from *Se questo è un uomo*: "But to me the civilized man who thinks too much is inseparable from the survivor. The scientist and the survivor are one."⁴² To this, Levi replied: "I must say that being a chemist and being a writer are not incompatible at all, on the contrary, the two activities sustain each other."⁴³ At that point, it became clear that Levi had accepted his hybridity, which he discussed again during several other public occasions:

As for the question of my several souls, I am deeply hybrid, and it is no coincidence that hybridity is so profoundly important for my stories: I have been talking about Centauri, about the breach between the rational and the emotional; the short story *Disfilassi* in *Lilít* is all about hybridity. I am Jewish and also Italian, or Italian and also Jewish; I am a chemist and also a writer, I tend to be rational, or at least I would like to be rational, but I have a piece of *Id* too: so it's normal for me to feel hybrid and made of different materials.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ ID., *Il mestiere di raccontare*. My transcription and translation. See also "Today, as this very moment as I sit writing at a table, I myself am not convinced that these things really happened" (ID., *If This is a Man*, trans. by Stuart Woolf, New York, The Orion Press, 1959, 120).

⁴¹ ID., *Dialogando con... Primo Levi*, interview with Ernesto Olivero, 1980, in: *Opere complete III*, 196-203, 202.

⁴² ID., "Risposte a Philip Roth", in: *Opere complete III*, 1077 (Original questions).

⁴³ "[D]evo ammettere che non c'è alcuna incompatibilità tra l'essere un chimico e l'essere uno scrittore, anzi le due cose si rafforzano l'un l'altra" (ID., "Conversazione a Torino con Primo Levi", Philip Roth interviewed Levi on September 6, 1986, in: *Opere complete III*, 641. My translation).

⁴⁴ "Quanto al discorso delle parecchie anime, io ibrido sono nel profondo, e non è un caso che l'ibridismo tanto profondamente compaia nei miei racconti: ho parlato di Centauri, di spaccature tra razionale ed emotivo; in *Lilít* il racconto *Disfilassi* è tutto ibridismo. Io sono ebreo e anche italiano, o italiano e anche ebreo; sono chimico e anche scrittore, sono tendenzialmente razionale, o almeno mi piacerebbe essere razionale, però uno straccio di Es ce l'ho anch'io; quindi è un po' una mia costante quella di sentirmi ibrido e impastato di materiali diversi" (ID., "Segrete avventure di eroi involontari", in: *Il Globo*, 1982, June 13 & 14; in: *Opere complete III*, 265-271, 267-268. My translation).

Throughout his career, Levi's body represented a Holocaust survivor: it was a material testimony when, for instance, like other survivors of Shoah, he chose to show the serial number tattooed on his arm as undeniable evidence against Holocaust denial.⁴⁵ But when his career developed, his literary posture had to adapt in order to direct the reception of his writings in a completely different way. This could explain why he chose to wear his white lab coat. In doing so, he presented his profession as a topic of his writing by using his attire as a direct and personal testimony. The white coat Levi wore not only confirmed his expertise as a chemist, but also demonstrated that, as a writer, he knew what he was writing about. It was a topic related to his occupation, which consequently, he was able to shape in *La chiave a stella*. In other words, his professional clothes in this interview functioned as a factual paratext related to the main topic of the book.

Conclusions: factual paratext in TV interviews

Genette claimed that the interview has an ephemeral status – it is a message “destined to disappear when its monitory function is fulfilled, whereas a preface would stay attached to the text.”⁴⁶ Epitexts are not bound to stay attached to the text. However, clothing and mannerisms in a TV interview, when interpreted as a factual paratext, can provide the audience with information related to the author, whether this information is part of the author's private life or relates only to his writing.

Inevitably, the factual paratext is related to the authorial function and contributes to preserving the author as a function of discourse that, according to Foucault, works as a principle of classification for texts.⁴⁷ Barthes's performance at the piano and Levi's calculated gestures and manner of dressing can be interpreted as a visualization of the authorial function, as a way to foster the public role of the author within a media landscape that envisages a full exposure of the writer.

At the same time, however, the factual paratexts also have a performative function. Indeed, whereas Barthes's and Levi's texts expressed meaning through written words, the details of each man's performance and mannerisms in his respective interview functioned as a way to visually express the meaning of those texts. These authorial actions, therefore, translated the writers' meanings into a different semiotic code than the one found in their books.

In a passage in *S/Z*, in the chapter entitled “The Real, the Operable,” Barthes writes:

What we call “real” (in the theory of the realistic text) is never more than a code of representation (of signification): it is never a code of execution: *the novelistic real is not operable*. To identify – as it would, after all, be ‘realistic’ enough to do – the real with the operable would be to subvert the novel at

⁴⁵ See, for example, ID., “Parla Primo Levi il numero 174517”, in: *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1979, May 20; in: *Opere complete III*, 154-157.

⁴⁶ GENETTE, *Paratexts*, 344.

⁴⁷ See Michel FOUCAULT, “What is an author” (1969), in: Donald F. BOUCHARD (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1977, 113–38.

the limit of its genre (whence the inevitable destruction of novels when they are transferred from writing to film, from a system of meaning to an order of the operable).⁴⁸

In the last line, Barthes emphasized the difficulty of passing from the signification of the text to the “order of the operable” of that text in visual form. Thanks to the medium of TV and the genre of audiovisual interview, performance can also be considered a mode of the operable, because that which we call “real” about an author—the factual paratext—is effectively “executed” by the author himself. Within a media landscape in which video interviews play a central role, performances of writers give a new *illocutionary force*⁴⁹ to their literary posture. In other words, their “presence” provides information within the video interview, and that information goes beyond simply fulfilling the curiosity of the reader. This kind of message also has an operative function for the reception of books and influences the audience by revealing personal facts of the authors, even if they are presented as a message *from* and *for* their texts. The interviews of Roland Barthes and Primo Levi, therefore, illustrate the ways in which performance functions as a factual paratext when particular information is conveyed about the author that necessarily remains closely connected to his or her writing. The information would then be conveyed through the literary posture, codified in the manner of dressing or by gestures that the author performs. The purpose of that operation, in which the author always partakes with both the interviewer and the videographer of TV interviews, is to prepare the audience for the reception of the author’s texts – both published and forthcoming.

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⁴⁸ BARTHES, *S/Z*, 80-81.

⁴⁹ GENETTE, *Paratexts*, 10.