



Issue 17: The Interview

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Editor's Introduction to NANO Special Issue 17: The Interview

by Sean Scanlan

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Abstract: NANO founder and editor Sean Scanlan sets the stage for special issue 17: The Interview. Drawing from classic texts on dialogue to sociological approaches to the interview and to current uses of the interview in media and in the classroom, Scanlan highlights the interview as a space for meeting and sharing rather than a contested, competitive space.

Keywords: Interviews, Interviewing, criticism, conversation, dialogue, exchange

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According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word interview comes from “Anglo-French *entreveue* [or] meeting, from (s')*entreveer* to see one another, meet, from entre- inter- + veer, to see...” Although the first known use of the word interview is from the early 1500s, as a concept, the idea of seeing and meeting another through a spoken conversation is, of course, much older. In *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*, Rebecca Roach says that interviews are shaped by the tradition of dialogue, “a tradition that stretches from Plato’s *Dialogues* to Martin Luther’s sixteenth-century *Table Talk*,” (2) and, of course, the interview is woven into our hyper-connected world through podcasts, Zooms, magazines, newspapers, social media, and they still occur in private settings.

In his brief article titled simply “Interview,” Charles Briggs alerts anthropologists and social theorists to the idea that the interview is not simply a conversation (although it is that too). Instead:

Interviewing constitutes one of the most fascinating and poorly investigated realms of social scientific and linguistic inquiry. Practitioners in a range of disciplines rely on interviews, and the widespread use of interviewing by journalists, providers of social services, physicians, and employers, as well as the emphasis that politicians and corporations place on surveys, point to the central role that interviews play in creating the institutional structures of modern societies. (137)

Indeed, as Briggs points out, interviews are ubiquitous; they can be formal and informal, closed or open-ended; they can yield quantitative and qualitative results; they can invoke power and symbolic capital. But, the interview can also be less about gate-keeping and more about the tension inherent in knowledge production and sharing. As Roach says, the interview can “capture information” and “portray people, two commitments which can be in conflict with one another” (4). Yet discoursing with an expert need not be adversarial. The interviews in this special issue of *NANO* are about this last type. Although the following eight interviews exist within a communicative practice that adheres to the genre and style of the interview format of question and answer, they are less about Briggsian “constructing hierarchies of communication practices,” and more about his positive outlook that interviews can “provide sites for constructing alternative identities and practices” (139).

Since we can never know someone fully, we seek methods to gain a small bit of insight. The interview is one of the more common, useful, vital, direct, approachable, sometimes dangerous, and caring ways to peer into the interviewee’s identity.

This issue begins with an interview that is also a college assignment in an upper-level technical writing class at City Tech, the home institution of *NANO*. The course instructor, Shauna Chung, asks three undergraduate students in the Professional and Technical Writing program to consider how the interview can help smooth transitions between the

classroom and the workplace. Through an interview-themed podcasting assignment, their multimodal essay illustrates “how the classroom can operate as a staging ground for workplace dynamics and as a site for critically assessing the technical and professional writer’s role, affordances, and limitations.”

David Banash interviews the cultural theorist Marcus Boon to share his views on how music, activism, and theory intersect—drawing from the fields of anthropology, continental philosophy, and religious metaphysics. Boon reveals that his far-reaching interests stem from an energetic curiosity about space and the vibrations that settle around a strong belief in the next question.

Tara Fee’s interview with the artist Jennifer Lockard Connerley reveals a personal journey from academia to painting. Their conversation reveals that there is never a straight line between the practicalities of a career and the need to study, develop, and make the thing you want to do into a reality.

Jason Ellis’s interview with the editor Emily Hockaday puts readers in the middle of a conversation about the threats and implications of Artificial Intelligence in the sphere of writing, creativity, literary production, and the future of science fiction. Throughout the interview, both writers grapple with fundamental questions about the role of the artist and the writer and how to ensure that the human voice remains central to the creation and curation of literary culture with the rise of generative AI.

The scholar Carmen Neamtu interviews the translator Dana Craciun who has translated many of Salman Rushdie’s works from English into Romanian. The pair discuss the difficulties of translation for both the translator and the reader. Despite the nightmares of translation, its foreignness, its unbearableness, the conversation points to the ongoing need to enter the life of a new text.

Next, from the English Department at City Tech, Leigh Dara Gold interviews Laura Westengard. This conversation highlights Westengard’s new book and her trailblazing work in which gender studies is productively connected to gothic studies. Readers learn the importance of her impulse to develop communities both inside the classroom and in the wider world.

Matt Miller’s interview with Johannes Göransson puts poetry, especially the role of imagination, technology, and gatekeeping, at the center of their conversation. Their far-ranging video exchange reveals the connections among Kafka, Lynch, and violence as they touch on the topic of national and religious traditions in the poetry classroom.

Lastly, I sit down with the artist Bill Saylor in order to explore his early fascination with the natural environment, especially rivers and oceans. Saylor’s imaginative drive is not only to

produce drawings and paintings (among other media), but also to create empathetic and sympathetic spaces for reflecting on art.

Together, these interviews create spaces of sympathetic exchange, where the goal is not interrogation but collaboration—where ideas are not extracted, but expanded through dialogue, curiosity, and mutual understanding. This special issue returns to the idea of interview-as-meeting, but meeting on more equal terms.

References:

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Roach, Rebecca. *Literature and the Rise of the Interview*. Oxford UP, 2018.