

From: *A.B.O. Theatron. Art or Life*, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 25 June 2021 – 26 June 2022) (Milan: Skira, 2021), pp. 112-129.

The cross-eyed approach. Achille Bonito Oliva and the art of criticism

Stefano Chiodi

1. Screen test

Nine pages. A photograph: a close-up repeated in eight stills. A text that flows. The face and words are those of Achille Bonito Oliva, A.B.O. for short, the shot was taken by Ugo Mulas, and the context is *Amore mio*, the catalog of an exhibition held at Palazzo Ricci, Montepulciano, in the summer of 1970¹. The 30-year-old critic signs himself as “general secretary” and his opening text declares the desire to “inaugurate a different kind of behavior unprecedented in the history of cultural mores: the assertion for all artists of direct responsibility for their own critical configuration outside the customary mediation of art criticism.”² The invitations to take part had in fact been handled by the “self-convened” artists themselves on the basis of avowed affinities and preferences in an open assertion of the “critical component implicit in their *modus operandi*.”³ This was reflected in the design of the catalog, where all of the participants were free to compose their own allotted pages. It is against this background that we must see A.B.O.’s choice. Called upon to operate on an equal footing with the artists, the critic divested himself of the traditional, invisible role of mediator and guarantor to bring his own subjectivity into play. His face and, by extension, his behavior, literally became materials of the exhibition.

Preceded in the catalog by the pages of Carlo Alfano and Getulio Alviani, and introduced by a biographical note in which he describes himself as a “writer and art critic,” A.B.O. presented an enigmatic poem in prose. The first “stanza”—the only one not accompanied by an image—reads as follows:

All the interest of this story lies in the way in which eight movements—distinct to a certain degree but connected to the point where their interdependency is concealed—take place together. The eight movements are necessary in order to attain death, but which of them triggers the others? Which is the most important?⁴

The “eight movements” outline a singular process of initiation based on the model of the philosophical tale *Igitur ou la Folie d’Elbehnon* (1869). This text represents a crucial stage in the literary career of Stéphane Mallarmé and his pursuit of the pure poetic word leading to *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (1897). The work describes a *katabasis*, a plunge into nothingness toward a symbolic suicide that constitutes the gateway to the “power of the negative,” a paradoxical state of full self-awareness hinging upon the defeat of creative impotence. Self-annihilation thus becomes the paradoxical prerequisite for achievement of the work of art.

This descent into the abyss is transformed in the catalog *Amore mio* into the initiatory path of the “chamber hero”⁵—the poet-critic’s esoteric double—in search of a new birth and a new principle of individuation. This is discovered through “clear-sighted work to proceed beyond the self, to perceive oneself in the act of disappearing and appear to oneself in the mirage of this disappearance.”⁶ The “hero” is therefore the Critic himself, grappling with the necessity of a symbolic death, exit from the

“chamber”—from the past—being imposed as the prerequisite for an indispensable metamorphosis. The ritual of detachment from the scenario of previous life—“the chamber is empty as though everything had already happened”—takes the shape of a plunge, a paradoxical motionless journey. Eight chimes, eight identical, repeated measures, mark the time of the death, transformation, and rebirth of the hero in a new individual: “as though it were necessary to die anonymously in order to die in the certainty of your name.”⁷

For the Critic, *dying*, passing through his own negative, means addressing the possibility of survival in another dimension, namely that of the Artist, who is, however, no longer regarded as the “producer” and exclusive repository of a material wisdom. He is rather seen as the agent of a creative praxis that now comprehends both intellectual action and biography, idea, word, and act. This praxis is no longer concentrated solely on the production of “objects” endowed with peculiar aesthetic qualities but open to the everyday flow of experience and thought, to the darkness of the body.⁸ The dominion of the word attained by the “hero” is not the dominion of the Poet that A.B.O. had been, but of the Critic-as-Auteur, which now takes on the shape of an invisible but decisive shift.

Nor is this all that the words and images reveal. The phrases appearing in white over each photograph, including those just shown, are in fact quoted literally or with few variations from an essay on *Igitur* by Maurice Blanchot in his well-known book *L’Espace littéraire*.⁹ A.B.O. nonchalantly appropriates it in an act symptomatic of an attitude directly traceable to his literary and poetic activities of the previous decade. The method is borrowed from two key procedures of the new avant-garde of the second half of the twentieth century. The first is the Dadaist technique of cutting-up, revitalized by Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs in the 1950s and broadly used over the next two decades in both the literary and the artistic field. The second is the Situationist *détournement* with the anti-conventional value attributed to the decontextualization, reuse, and assemblage of verbal and iconic materials. In Italy, examples are to be found in particular in the field of visual poetry, where A.B.O. made his debut as a poet in the mid-1960s, and in the Gruppo 63, which he joined in 1967. The most immediate point of reference is Nanni Balestrini, with his verbal-visual collages and narrative and poetic texts created with the aid of combinatorial techniques. These are also to be found in the works of members of the Gruppo Operativo Sud 64 and the Gruppo 70, with whom A.B.O. collaborated on various occasions.¹⁰

The image repeated in the eight “stanzas” of his entry in the catalog is one of the three photos taken by Ugo Mulas and used in the book *Fiction Poems* published by A.B.O. in 1968,¹¹ together with two other shots in profile and from behind to form a sort of anthropometric record. The photos were printed on sheets of paper cut into four so as to open and reveal the next image in succession in accordance with a graphic design devised by Gianni Colombo.¹² Mulas’s photo, with the two halves of the face illuminated by opposing sources of light, creates an effect of absence, of unnatural, hieratic fixity. The suffocating maternal “chamber” inhabited by the “hero” is therefore also the camera, with its power of reproduction and multiplication, its ability to generate the simulacrum of a new life. Citation and self-citation thus compose a new signifying whole in the pages of *Amore mio*. It is an authentic “iconotext,” its cryptically dissimulated theme being the assertion, in the guise of narcissistic hyperbolic mirroring, of a new possibility: a performative relation between biography and artwork, writing and image, critical thought and poetic creation. In this sense, the pages are to be regarded as ideally crowning the literary and visual experiences of the previous decade. Also and above all, they can be considered a veiled programmatic affirmation, the opening of a game that was to see the development of strategies of communication then used all the way through A.B.O.’s subsequent trajectory on the razor’s edge between conscious exhibitionism and enticing spectacularity.

In the following pages, I shall endeavor to reconstruct how A.B.O. managed in the 1970s to blaze a

trail in which criticism and authoriality became indistinguishable within a persona into which an unorthodox practice of art history, active critical militancy in the present, and an unprecedented behavioral dimension all flow. It is criticism therefore as performance, in which body, word, and action combine in an unforeseen, hybrid form.

At the same time, the work for *Amore mio* establishes a plane of comparison—of what we could call “interdiscursiveness”—with the artistic practices then developing over the two decades and in particular with performance and the photographic *tableau vivant* as practiced by artists close to A.B.O. like Vettor Pisani and Gino De Dominicis, as well as heterodox figures like Luigi Ontani and Salvo. Further points of reference at the visual level are to be found, however, in photographic works produced in Italy and elsewhere over the same period and all sharing the same formal basis of a frontal close-up facing the viewer.

Already used by Giulio Paolini in his photographic canvas *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto* (1967), this reappears in works by Giovanni Anselmo (*Lato destro*, 1970), Giuseppe Penone (*Rovesciare gli occhi*, 1970), Salvo (*Autoritratto [Come Raffaello]*, 1970), and Gilberto Zorio (*Odio*, 1971). Albeit with the evident differences in sensibility, poetics, and meaning, in all these cases—as in the specific case of A.B.O.—the matrix is always the treatment of the face used by Andy Warhol in his photographic screenprints and perhaps still more specifically in his *Screen Tests*.¹³ These provide the fundamental visual grammar—anti-expressive and objective—for a silent but determined exhibition of the artist’s very *presence*.

A combinatorial and theatrical logic also governs other works by A.B.O. of the 1970s, in which the image becomes a simultaneously suggestive and challenging statement of a performative approach to the function of criticism.¹⁴ One example is the portfolio of photos published by Pio Monti’s Artestudio gallery in Macerata in 1972,¹⁵ where a shot taken by Claudio Abate, repeated in the ten “plates” of the edition, shows A.B.O. full-length against a wooded background in a white suit with shirt and tie, one hand in his pocket, and a determined expression. The frontal pose is reminiscent of Joseph Beuys’s well-known print *La rivoluzione siamo noi* (1971) and perhaps also of Alighiero Boetti’s presentation of himself with his alter ego in the iconic photomontage *Gemelli* (1968). The caption in Italian and English beneath each of the ten images always begins in the same way (“I am Achille Bonito Oliva the critic, [and] therefore...”) but has a different ironic or witty ending (“the medium of a third party,” “the leader,” “the traitor,” and so on). The set was accompanied by a short text (*Autocritica*) in which A.B.O. pointed out the power of critics “to divert the work of art from its autonomy and integrate it into the art system, and hence from “inside” to “outside,” a “verticalized” and inevitably hierarchical relationship. For this reason:

the critic’s role must now consist also of displaying and investigating his or her own ideology as a typical contradiction between the “neutrality” of the moment of precise analysis of the work and the inevitable “partiality” of the exercise of selective and discriminating power. In my view, the critic’s behavior must elucidate this historical and political contradiction (all the more so today, when art also occupies the space of critical reflection): the age-old myth of mediation between work of art and viewer (art experienced through a third party) and the real exercise of cultural power experienced first-hand.¹⁶

It is hard to resist the idea that this text and especially the photographs accompanying it contain a coded allusion to Germano Celant. The critic and curator epitomized the great upheaval of the Italian art scene at the time, together with A.B.O., and his vision and choices—as we shall soon see—were inevitably opposed to A.B.O.’s, both in cultural terms and at the level of personal strategies. The contrast was immediate also at the visual level, for A.B.O. seems to respond to the all-black look that

Celant adopted at an early stage (and maintained until his death in 2020) with his white suit in a gesture that blends an ironic desire for distinction and the detachment of a dandy, “partiality,” and “neutrality.”

In order to resolve the “historical and political contradiction,” critics in the era of spectacle must become visible, bodily present, occupy the void left by their old function of mediation with an *excess* capable of projecting them into the same dimension as artists. For this reason, A.B.O. concludes, if they are to preserve their right to speak, self-publicization means “the poisonous and narcissistic awareness that criticism ideologically performs its task only through tautology, pure self-exhibition.”¹⁷

2. Criticism as performance

A.B.O.’s theoretical and performative works, and his very decision to regard—as we have just seen—exhibition as a significant element of critical activity, are to be seen in the broader setting of the turbulent transformation taking place in the field of art over the previous decade and culminating in the frenetic period of 1968. Confining ourselves to the Italian scene, we find paradigmatic evidence of this in two events held in the spring and autumn of that year. The first, in May, was *Il teatro delle mostre*, the “festival” of one-day solo shows organized by Plinio De Martiis in his gallery La Tartaruga in Rome, a “long, sleepless, neurotic, temporal mechanism of creation and destruction,”¹⁸ for the catalog of which A.B.O. wrote short and trenchant pieces on the works shown.¹⁹ Then came *arte povera più azioni povere*, curated by Germano Celant in Amalfi at the beginning of October. The works and actions presented there beneath the Gothic vaults of the old Arsenali della Repubblica, in the streets and on the shore, as well as the open meeting of critics, artists, and the public held in the same spaces as the exhibition with the participation of figures including A.B.O. and Celant, as well as Gillo Dorfles, Tommaso Trini, Filiberto Menna, and Marcello Rumma, whose idea the event was, represented the eruption of a radically new spirit. Works and “behaviors” gave rise to an unprecedented and anarchic mixture of materials, images, bodies, and thoughts. As A.B.O. wrote in the catalog, this seemed capable of creating a total, non-alienated “humanization of the subject through the possibility of retrieving any image and any material of the world.”²⁰ Exemplifying an explicitly anti-systematic approach, the event in Amalfi inaugurated a model of the exhibition as a place in which art can “happen” in continuity with life.

The explicit theoretical value assumed by the work of the artists and their consequent rejection of critical mediation challenged art-critical authoritativeness, measured in terms of intellectual prestige and bound up, in Italy and elsewhere, with crystallized and highly ideological interpretive schemata, clearly evident in critics with an idealist and Marxist background. Also critiqued was the traditional hermeneutic function of the text, with respect to the image, and its asseverative value as a guarantee in relation to museums and the market.²¹ The attack on the “institution” of art, the detonation of expressive media, and the advent of a kind of art-in-general opening up to ephemeral “situations,” to the immaterial and performative, the sharing of spaces and procedures with theater, music, and dance, all characterize a scenario in which the artists were determined to take control of the modalities of exhibition and comment. This ran parallel to the emergence of the figure of the independent curator as an essential link in the processes of valorization of the most recent art.

At the same time, the emergence of a generation of critics forged in a political and cultural climate completely different from that of the immediate post-war period in Italy also marked an irreversible change of pace, as did the appearance of innovative periodicals like *Bit*, *Cartabianca*, *Data*, *Flash Art*, and others.²² These magazines were characterized by a militant and multidisciplinary approach, as well as an innovative graphic design in which images play a crucial role in documenting new developments on the international scene in real time, so to speak. The theoretical and political arsenal

and the intellectual sensibility of the generation of 1968—grounded among other things in psychoanalysis, anthropology, post-structuralist philosophy, and neo-Marxist critiques of imperialism and capitalism—clashed in any case with that of the old cultural sensitivities of the traditional Left and of the Italian Communist Party. It also broke away from the structuralist and semiotic perspective that had dominated debate in Italy during the first half of the 1960s, a rift that could also be measured physically in the difference of approach to communication and even to clothing. Criticism was in fact obliged to reinvent its physiognomy and abandon any orthopedic temptation with respect to artistic practices and to become—if it was to avoid condemning itself to irrelevance and disappearance from the scene—“behavior, information, and exhibition making, i.e. a heterodox and performative practice.”²³ As indicated by Tommaso Trini in 1970, two paths thus opened up in that moment for critics and artists alike: either the rejection of any compromise with bourgeois ideology and therefore an exit in the direction of political militancy, or “use of the techniques peculiar to art in order to attain new attitudes to be established in the system.”²⁴ The latter was largely embraced by artists and critics, with few exceptions, perhaps the most important being Piero Gilardi and Carla Lonzi. From 1969 on, Gilardi devoted himself to political militancy and experiences of collective creativity. Lonzi was to abandon art criticism after 1970, found the feminist Rivolta Femminile group in Rome, and embark on a theoretical and personal trajectory, among the most original and controversial of the period.

A.B.O.’s primary interlocutor and rival in this context was inevitably Celant, who also practiced writing and exhibition-making at the same time. Fierce competition was to develop between them, both at an intellectual level and in terms of individual style. From the outset, Celant adopted a stance of opposition to the prescriptive “selecting and judging” attributed to critics like Giulio Carlo Argan (with whom A.B.O. was and remained on close terms²⁵). For Celant, Argan was a figure emblematic of an attitude to be wholly rejected, as he wrote in his well-known essay of 1970 “Per una critica acritica.” According to Celant, contemporary art

asks to be left in peace but refuses to be reduced to words or critical readings, refuses to intervene or to put forward a reading of the world, does not moralize, will not agree to be tamed in accordance with a one-way, univocal vision, rejects interpretive encrustations, being concerned solely to verify its eco-bio-logical intentionality once again, and offers itself only in its magical and mental naturalness.²⁶

Accepting the call “to see more, to hear more, to feel more” put forward by Susan Sontag in her widely read book *Against Interpretation* (1964), which is aptly quoted at the beginning of the article, Celant’s “acritical criticism” rejects interpretation and judgment in favor of “collecting,” “archiving,” and “recording” to become the artists’ aider and abettor. In other words, it dissolves the conflict implicit in the artist-critic relationship on the one hand and rejects precisely the relationship between art criticism and civil mobilization that had been the distinguishing feature of the new landscape of contemporary art in Italy after 1945 on the other.²⁷

This position reflects and confirms a circumstance of crucial importance for critics of the new generation like A.B.O. and Celant, namely the divorce between art criticism and art history that took place in Italy after 1968 and was to constitute for some decades a considerable obstacle to more mature reception of contemporary art in the country. It was now to be the new, inclusive, and pluralistic international “art system”—born in the early 1970s and founded on the coexistence of discordant aesthetic paradigms within a homogeneous context of public and market—that affirmed the value of artworks by admitting them to the exhibition space, while the ancillary and increasingly less influential task of interpretation was left to the critic.

2. The magical territory

Arte povera, Celant's first book, published by Mazzotta in 1969 and immediately translated into various languages, revealed the 29-year-old critic's ability to create long-range connections and to locate Italian experiences within the European and American panorama of environmental and process art. The change of pace was also radical in terms of its trend-setting graphic design, including full-page images without captions, the absence of traditional introductory texts, and a simultaneously documentary and visionary approach. A shift in perspective was, however, already discernable. The metaphor of guerrilla warfare with which Celant had launched *Arte Povera* in 1967 now gave way to a different vision, less politicized and confrontational, in which "magical" elements and responsiveness to the archetypal and mythological aspects of artistic practices took the place of collective mobilization and revolutionary change.

A.B.O.'s response took over two years to arrive. Largely written in the summer of 1969, *Il territorio magico* was finally published in December 1971 by Centro Di after Marcello Rumma's death in 1970 led to the cancellation of its printing by his publishing house.²⁸ This is the first book in which A.B.O. provides an in-depth exposition of his vision of contemporary artistic practices after the two exhibitions of 1970, namely the above-mentioned *Amore mio* and *Vitalità del negativo*, which had established him as one of the best-known critic-curators of the moment. It is a book of dense and sometimes difficult writing, essentially characterized by a tussle with language and the search for innovative interpretive keys in spheres distant from art criticism.

The world to which the book looks appears still capable, after the blaze of 1968, of imagining a cultural and social palingenesis. As the opening sentence tells us, this is a time "in which myths are put to the test and the exercise of imagination is no longer the sublimation of a sphere separate from life, but the hypothesis of global integration in the closely meshed web of events."²⁹ A.B.O.'s analysis necessarily takes stock of the cataclysmic eruption of artistic practices no longer susceptible to assimilation into the formal structures and critical narratives inherited from the early avant-garde, which Menna and his master Argan still regarded as indispensable models. The "prophecy of an aesthetic society" examined by Menna in his book of that name, published late in 1968, seems to have come true in unforeseeable forms very different from those expected by the new avant-garde. It was rather, as Hal Foster wrote,³⁰ a process of interminable creative criticism that sought to comprehend (and not to complete) the project of the early avant-garde movements by taking up their latent suppressed or unexplored possibilities. It also aimed to reformulate the drive for a real change and a new humanity that had been one of the cornerstones of modernist poetics in the form of a critique from within the institution of art.

What faced A.B.O. was "uninterrupted imagination"³¹ dragged along by the wave that shook the political and social institutions and cultural paradigms of the industrialized world, albeit without touching—a contradiction that was soon to emerge—the production systems and centrality of the consumer economy. The critic was presented with a map of divergent possibilities with the common feature of criticism of the institution of art (in its spatial and ideological aspects) on the one hand and the search for alternatives to the already rooted dominion of the media and the cultural industry on the other, backed by the rejection of reification and the pursuit of alternatives based on contingency and performativity.

Il territorio magico is therefore a snapshot of a historical moment, the "narrow ridge" between the 1960s and '70s when art and politics could still be seen as parallel ways of liberating individual and collective energies and thus re-establishing a "reparatory totality."³² Here, the imperatives of the market and consumption are opposed by a different symbolic economy grounded on the reappropriation and sharing of a common space. It is one in search of the "sole opening through which

the partiality and circumstances of life flow into totality and the liberated freedom of the artist.”³³ There are two possible ways of reading. One is the text itself, divided into chapters devoid of any progressive character or probative intent (“no programs of life and work but rather a meekly contradictory and asystematic attitude in which nothing is merely work”³⁴) but horizontally ramified. This is the pathos-laden journal of an explorer determined not to turn back but to remain in a newly discovered territory, not an objective and “acritical” mapping. The images instead plot an autonomous course in the form of a sequence with no captions: not illustrations but an authentic *exhibition*, albeit reduced to the two-dimensionality and predetermined order of the printed page; a kaleidoscopic visual landscape made up of works of art but also of lightning observations, gestures, looks and faces captured in the public, attitudes, and places.

In this landscape, as A.B.O. writes, “artists have withdrawn and laid claim to the task of giving their work concrete shape at zero distance from their imagination. And zero distance means overcoming the separation between the imagination and reality.”³⁵ It is in fact interaction between artist, viewer, and “place” that innervates all the creative trajectories surveyed in the book. This new “territory” appears to be pervaded by vigorous currents that dynamize artistic experiences in a fully international context where the circulation of ideas, artists, and works now comes about in synchrony on both sides of the Atlantic for the first time after World War II and with a significant broadening of scope. It is certainly no coincidence that the book’s subtitle “Alternative Behaviors in Art,” with its greater stress on *action* than on the end result, echoes the title of what was perhaps the most important exhibition of the period, *Live in your Head. When Attitudes Become Form* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), with which Harald Szeemann inaugurated a synchronous, horizontal, transcontinental model for the exploration of contemporary art.

At the same time, however, even if they are no longer bound by the imperative of production and pursue an existential identification of body and artwork as well as a “global movement of the self,”³⁶ artists are not thereby any less subject—A.B.O. maintains—to the mechanisms of alienation. They remain in a fragile position, subjected to social norms that seek to hollow out their action and reduce it to mere form, to something “tending to take shape as *interrupted imagination* because it cannot secure an effective connection and supportive concentration with the community of viewers.”³⁷ The artist’s subjectivity is therefore captured in a contradictory, schizoid condition, torn between the need for contact between self and the world and the need to adapt to a structurally alienated condition.

A.B.O.’s implicit point of reference here is the ideas of the psychiatrist R. D. Laing on schizophrenia³⁸ as symptomizing an irreparable rift between the inner and outer worlds, between the individual and the social universe. In *The Politics of Experience*,³⁹ a book widely read in the period around 1968, Laing saw schizophrenia as a symptom of the subject’s fundamental inability to adapt to the world outside, and at the same time as the construction of masks and impersonations designed to conceal the identity. This is a vital necessity in that artists—as we read in *Il territorio magico*—are not required “to transmit any message transfigured by form but to present their imaginary associations,” and because, in a world where revolution is no longer a credible option, “the transgression of every system of expectation is the only possible mobile opening for the resolution of one’s vital movement.”⁴⁰

4. The theater of criticism

Held in Palazzo Taverna, the Rome headquarters of Incontri Internazionali d’Arte, in March 1972, *Critica in atto*⁴¹ is perhaps one of the least-known but most significant events curated by A.B.O. in the 1970s. Inspired by the example of the *Teatro delle mostre* and the still earlier evening meetings with critics and artists at the Guida bookstore in Naples, in which A.B.O. took part during 1966–67, the event—as he wrote in 1970s in two articles in *Marcatre*—can be seen as giving concrete shape to

his call for criticism to regain “its own individual space of corporal and reflective action.”⁴²

If artists [...] are no longer technicians producing forms external to their physiological and mental system, in the same way, critics are no longer those who mediate the meaning of the work with sterilized instruments but rather secure their own salvation and an authentic degree of freedom through their activities.⁴³

The formula of *Critica in atto* provided for a series of daily “events” in which the critics taking part discussed and exchanged views with one another and in dialog with artists, bearing witness to their work in a free, performative form as “criticism in progress.” Those taking part included representatives of academic criticism (Argan, Barilli, Calvesi, Fagiolo, Fossati, Volpi), leading figures on the contemporary scene (Boatto, Celant, Diacono, Palazzoli, Trini), and international personalities (Millet, Poinot).⁴⁴

The documents held in the archives of Incontri Internazionali⁴⁵ make it possible to follow step by step the planning and course of the event, whose vitality and informality are vividly captured in the tape recordings of the sessions but often largely lost in the subsequent publication.⁴⁶ Attitudes, sensibilities, interests, and personal styles are clearly shown by the different choices of the participants. For example, while Celant remained silent during the projection of slides documenting the activities of the Information Documentation Archives that he himself founded,⁴⁷ Mario Diacono gave a reading from Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.⁴⁸ The artists invited to take part in the evening session performed actions “to annul (i.e. not to abolish but to project onto nothingness) an individual creative, critical discourse (Diacono) in a tribal creative-critical discourse (artists).”⁴⁹ Daniela Palazzoli presented herself in *Arte e decultura*, “silent, wearing an orange wig of feathers made in China and a nineteenth-century dress made entirely of lace,” writing “her protest against borrowed culture on the walls of Palazzo Taverna”⁵⁰ and then asking the public to comment and participate in order to “start learning to speak instead of being spoken about [*invece di farsi parlare*].”⁵¹ Catherine Millet devoted all of her space to a discussion with the artists Michael Baldwin and Joseph Kosuth on Conceptual Art and the ideas of the Art & Language group.

A.B.O.’s presentation was divided into two parts, one in which he read a piece on the ideology of “diverted citation”⁵² and one in which Gino De Dominicis recited a text about his own death and immortality⁵³ and engaged in a lively discussion with the public. The artist responded to the objections of Bruno Corà by inviting him to “come here and say what you think of the world. A microphone is to be used only for this purpose. Because I think it’s laughable to come here and talk about criticism. And so, I come here and tell you what I think of the world.”⁵⁴ Delivered with one work by De Dominicis and another by Pisani behind him,⁵⁵ A.B.O.’s lecture was nominally devoted to a critical reappraisal of sixteenth-century Mannerism, but actually addressed the highly topical question of the relationship between art and politics. In evident disagreement with what was still seen at the time as the indispensable bond between experimental art and political stance, he argued that “the diaphragm between art and life” remains an “ineluctable mark and threshold that the artist cannot pass”⁵⁶ given the pointlessness of pursuing a “lost totality” as inaccessible in the present as it was in the era of Mannerism. Art is indeed, “not an immediate grip on the world but only possibility and *diverted citation* [...], its subversive tactics,”⁵⁷ and artists cannot but occupy an ironic position off-center to their time. The fundamental strategy of art is therefore a “traitor’s ideology,”⁵⁸ an ideology stripped of its subversive intentionality that does not protest against the loss of center, like Hans Sedlmayr had done, but rather appropriates it. In his irreparable ambivalence, the *traitor* is in fact one who has “detached himself from the group (from society) in order to observe it in its alienation, striving for a correction of reality but powerless to grasp it” and therefore “excluded from the world

and necessary to the world, devoted to *praxis* but incapable of taking part in it other than through the immobile link of language.”⁵⁹

In a posthumous cultural condition pervaded by the feeling of paralysis, art can therefore no longer act—in A.B.O.’s view—as a critical or therapeutic force. Rather, it must act as a moment of skepticism imbued with a sense of the deep, irremediable irony of history, where all that remains open is the possibility of an individual testimony already aware that it is on the losing side, a questioning and *lateral* point of view. One consequence of the crisis of ideology—in the implicit sense of a progressive, emancipatory vision of human history—is in fact the discovery that “history, existing along a vertical dimension of transformation and not asking itself the primary question of the value of time, is doomed to entropy and reduction to silence.”⁶⁰ In this scenario, like a kleptomaniac, the artist draws upon the materials of art, nature, and technique in order to divert them from their primary destination toward the production of new imagination. This is why, A.B.O. continues, artworks present themselves “as riddles in which the artist’s mind asks a question or the title clouds the work’s concreteness,” citation is always diverted, and “the ideology of betrayal”—a key theme in the critic’s subsequent work—seeks to accredit itself ultimately and highly problematically as utopia.⁶¹

We are not far from the characterization of the figure of the *traitor* that was to become one of the recurring themes of A.B.O.’s reflections over the following years, starting with what is perhaps his most unexpected and prophetic book, *L’ideologia del traditore* (1976), an authentic foray onto the terrain of art history and a precursor of the poetics of the Transavanguardia.⁶² Here, A.B.O. reaffirms his vision of Mannerism as a “space of laterality and splitting [...] an impervious place of make-believe and fission,”⁶³ already implicit in which is the awareness of a rift, a “*historical exhaustion*” that prevents the artist from drawing on a primal creativity,⁶⁴ as we read in the preface added to the book in 1985.

The words “historical exhaustion” contain a veiled but decisive reference to *Ideologia e linguaggio*,⁶⁵ the book of 1965 in which Edoardo Sanguineti addressed the end of the avant-garde at a very early stage and with a highly intense perception of what was at stake.⁶⁶ To the “traitor,” every utopian drive now appears in fact little more than an ingenuous gesture. As a result, his position is thought to be free of the need to sever links with history⁶⁷ and of the sense of responsibility required—if we shift the scene from the sixteenth to the twentieth century—of those who placed themselves within the radius of action of the key characteristic of modernism, identified by Alain Badiou as the tyrannical *passion du réel*. Badiou referred to the essential modality whereby the century conceived itself, a drive toward breaking away from and belligerent opposition to the past as a way of giving birth to the new human being: “The passion of the century is reality but reality is antagonism.”⁶⁸

If the Mannerist position is therefore not antagonistic but instead a “cross-eyed,” lateral, minority one, this is because Mannerism (like the Transavanguardia) takes cognizance of the semantic catastrophe of the languages of art and the associated ideologies of totality. It is aware that history moves outside of any obligatory and predictable path and that artistic production can also take place outside the lines of the experimental approach.⁶⁹ The paths not only of political action but also of linguistic revolution are barred to the Mannerist and therefore by extension also to the Transavanguardista. Legitimizing a process of appropriation with respect to the history of art and to Italian history in general, this simultaneously lucid and cynical diagnosis by A.B.O. looks forward to postmodernism and indicates one of its essential mechanisms.⁷⁰

5. The cross-eyed approach

If art is material production, the critic’s role is contradictory: vital in terms of knowledge but

lethal because it steers art toward the museum and the market. Criticism is the analytical passage through the contradictions of the art system and writing is its synthesis (not its notarial double), the philosophical theater in which the criticism of art becomes the art of criticism.

This diagnosis of the simultaneously uncertain and irreplaceable position of criticism in the contemporary field of art ends the book *Autocritico automobile*, published by A.B.O. in 1977.⁷¹ Indicating its irreparable, structural ambivalence, A.B.O. again examines the paradox of an activity that ends up discovering its dual nature—both “vital” and “lethal”—as a means of liberation and a tool for the reification of artistic potential precisely when it addresses the need for its own autonomy. The “analytical passage through the contradictions of the art system” is therefore at the same time a necessary realization of the contradiction in which the work of the art critic is involved in the scenario of late modernity and an obligatory strategic move, maybe the only one capable of saving it through transformation from the danger of irrelevance. At the heart of this lies an idea of writing that was to accompany A.B.O. all the way along his subsequent path, the idea that the critic’s task is not that of asseveration or “notarial” confirmation but rather of interference or indeed antagonism with respect to the work of art.

The book from which the passage quoted above is taken—a “collage anthology”⁷² of interviews granted by A.B.O. over the period 1972–76 entitled *Posizione riflessa*—opens with the unexpected question of whether the art critic is a co-author. The answer leaves no room for doubt. Critics must reject any kind of “inferiority complex” with respect to art and “feel authorized to carve out their own niche in the artistic experience by externalizing their narcissism” in relation to the expansion of the theoretical field brought about by conceptual developments.⁷³ In this sense, A.B.O. continues, they are necessarily “traitors” because they must repel the fetishistic cult to which society condemns art so as to preserve its “hope of proving useful once again.”⁷⁴ Criticism is therefore a “sadistic hunt” whose purpose is to “kill the work of art,” deny it an aura, and help it “to become merchandise immediately.”⁷⁵ Criticism therefore aids and abets a “process of expropriation” of which its action of cultural mediation and contribution to the reification of the artwork constitute indispensable stages. It is only on these conditions that art can continue “to produce the antibodies and the social contagion” in which its most authentic function manifests itself—according to A.B.O.—while remaining inside a *system* made up of artwork, public, and market in which symbolic meanings, intellectual prestige, and monetary value all coexist.

Hence the paradox of a *necessary* poisoning: stripping the artwork of any theological illusion to restore its contingency and original connection with collective life. Behind A.B.O.’s hyperbole and provocation lies a clear-sighted vision of what is at stake. The now full-blown crisis of the function of mediation, intellectual authority, and indeed the very legitimacy of the art-critical discourse demands non-orthodox responses no longer based on repetition of the modernist schema of supersession, of the continual destruction and reconstruction of the practice, the languages, and the ideas of art. It is not only the critic’s writing but also his personality, his biographical self, and even his image, displayed with uninhibited vitalism, that become different ways of operating and acting, of giving shape to ideas and discourse.

A.B.O. took these ideas up again in *Arte e sistema dell’arte*, a slim volume published in 1975, as an implicit response to an influential article of 1972 by the British critic Lawrence Alloway.⁷⁶ This analysis of the new characteristics of the world of art identified a system based on cooperation, a network of institutions and individual actors—artists but also critics, curators, collectors, museum directors, editors of journals, and so on—that create a “negotiated environment,”⁷⁷ a horizontal, non-hierarchical network for the distribution and consumption of art in which critics lose their traditionally privileged position. What part does criticism therefore play in the new ecosystem defined by the

expression “contemporary art” and by the absence of conflict rather than the frontal clash between the avant-garde and tradition? With his apparent cynicism and a programmatic determination to shock, A.B.O. points out a latent contradiction that was to become increasingly visible the further the cultural climate of the 1970s was left behind and the more firmly art came to believe that it could set aside what Adorno had indicated as its essential task in the modern era, namely to rise up against the reification of the world. For A.B.O., it is necessary for critics to overcome their “inferiority complex (failure to create)” and investigate “the possibility of an autonomous role of their own.”⁷⁸ They can no longer confine themselves to exercising their power in a “verticalized relationship” with the artist but must rather “exhibit and investigate their own ideology: the typical contradiction between the neutrality of the phase of precise analysis of the artwork and the inevitable partiality of the handling of a power of delection and discrimination.”⁷⁹

If critics do not wish to be reduced to a sadistic and repressive notarial role, their criticism must therefore become self-criticism “in the sense of poisonous self-awareness of their role vis-à-vis the public and the market.” This role is “vital and mortal”: *vital* as indispensable cognitive mediation of a “Socratic” character with respect to the viewer, and *mortal* because this task is accompanied by the work of dissemination, “which makes art comestible through a broadening of taste (which therefore seems democratic).”⁸⁰

A view of criticism as singularity, as a highly individual, anarchic, and irregular variable, was and has always remained the important thing for A.B.O. Many of the charges brought against him in over half a century ultimately end up reasserting a hasty judgment. His visibility and his love of the limelight have been regarded as excessive and reprehensible, dismissed as manifestations of narcissism. As I have endeavored to show, however, A.B.O. has regarded criticism from the very outset as a gamble, an adventure of words and behavior, a performative activity whose excess is clear from the start: always irritating and always corrosive, even at the cost of compromises and collapses. The strength and in a certain sense the secret of this attitude lie in an intuition essential to any understanding of how the practice of art and the practice of criticism mirrored one another at the end of the twentieth century. It is indeed a dual intuition. On the one hand, art is seen as a system in which the physics of power is the object of constant renegotiation within a common, horizontal plane that tolerates all differences because it is capable of encompassing them in a definition of “contemporaneity” no longer grounded in modernist rifts, division, and opposition. On the other, criticism is seen as an activity involved from the outset in artistic creation, its double, and no longer as an external stage of judgment and classification. There is awareness that the critic’s action no longer develops in written texts alone, but precisely in behaviors and in the machinery of the exhibition, to the point of making permeable the boundary between creation and discourse, between biography, history, and judgment. For this reason, says A.B.O., there is no

function of criticism but rather the indispensable action of critics who develop theories and interpretations, enter into dialog with artists, and make their own ideas visible through exhibitions. In critics, too, there is kind of forgetting by heart, a creative—albeit more self-reflective—process of construction in time. Every show, every book, every gesture must be produced with cultural awareness but also [...] with a prophetic attitude, with the courage to overstep boundaries.⁸¹

It is the awareness of the contradictory nature of his simultaneously lethal and redeeming profession, as well as an early understanding of the indivisible intermingling of depth and appearance in the age of spectacle, that endow A.B.O.’s trajectory with the value of exemplary testimony and an original key to the interpretation of his time. For him, practicing the criticism of art as the art of criticism has

ultimately always been a simultaneously perilous and indispensable gamble.

¹ A. Bonito Oliva, ed., *Amore mio*, exh. cat., Palazzo Ricci, Montepulciano, June 30 – September 30, 1970 (Florence: Centro Di, 1970). Though regarded by A.B.O. as officially commencing his career as a curator, the event was actually preceded by others in Naples over the previous years, often jointly organized with Filiberto Menna. For *Amore mio*, see A. Bonito Oliva, “Amore mio: i segni della presenza,” in *Domus*, no. 490, 1970, p. 47; F. Belloni, “Approdi e vedette. Amore mio a Montepulciano nel 1970,” in *Studi di Memofonte*, no. 9, 2012, pp. 121–65.

² *Amore mio*, n.p.

³ See F. Menna, “Una originale mostra d’arte a Montepulciano,” in *Il Mattino*, August 6, 1970.

⁴ *Amore mio*, n.p.

⁵ *L’eroe da camera* was to be the title of a key group of works by Vettor Pisani shown in Montepulciano and based on the motif of the “slide” (including the action *L’eroe da camera. Tutte le parole dal silenzio di Duchamp al rumore di Beuys*, performed during the inauguration of dOCUMENTA 5 in Kassel, 1972). See M. Bremer, “Autorappresentazione come ‘autospossessionamento’? Epigonalità e singolarità ne *L’eroe da camera* di Vettor Pisani a dOCUMENTA 5, 1972,” in L. Cherubini, A. Viliani, E. Viola, eds., *Vettor Pisani. Eroica/antieroaica. Una monografia* (Milan: Electa, 2016), pp. 104–13, and S. Chiodi, “Lo scorrevole. Il teatro della crudeltà di Vettor Pisani,” in *il verri, L’io in finzione*, no. 64, 2017, pp. 89–107.

⁶ *Amore mio*, n.p.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ On the question of the eclipse of the work of art as material creation, the critique of its condition as a fetish, and the advent of an art now understood as *praxis* rather than *poiesis*, see S. Benvenuto, “Le réel à l’époque de la reproductibilité technique. Notes en marge de Walter Benjamin,” in *Ligeia*, no. 101–04, 2010, pp. 35–44. Similar views are expressed in

G. Agamben, “Archeologia dell’opera d’arte,” in *Creazione e anarchia* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2017), pp. 9–28.

⁹ See M. Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955). Italian translation: G. Zanobetti, *Lo spazio letterario* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), pp. 90 and 93; the sole change is the replacement of the three “movements” of the original with eight. All the other quotations are taken from the same chapter of the Italian version, *L’esperienza di Igitur*, pp. 90–97. Fabio Belloni was the first, in “Approdi e vedette,” p. 127, to note this borrowing from Blanchot.

¹⁰ See for example *Parola e Immagine. Bonito Oliva, Bueno, Camillo, Isgrò, La Rocca, Malquori, Marcucci, Miccini, Nazzaro, Ori, Piemontese, Pignotti, Rosa, Ruffi, Russo, Tola, Vaccari, Ziveri*, exh. cat., La Soffitta, Rome, March 12–25, 1967, produced by Gruppo 70 with a text by Gillo Dorfles (Rome, 1967).

¹¹ A. Bonito Oliva, *Fiction Poems*, with three photographs by Ugo Mulas (Naples: Modern Art Agency, 1968).

¹² For A.B.O.’s pages in the catalog of *Amore mio* and an analysis of the borrowings from Mulas and Blanchot, see G. Biagi, “Sulla traccia della citazione. Achille Bonito Oliva: un’arte della critica tra effimero permanente e linguaggio come paralisi,” in *Studiolo*, no. 15, 2018, pp. 226–46, esp. pp. 239–46.

¹³ It should be noted that the sections of Gianni Colombo and Gabriele De Vecchi in the *Amore mio* catalog also feature close-up photographic portraits on opposite pages very similar to that of A.B.O. For the spread of the artist’s self-portrait in Italy, see F. Belloni, “Stampo virile. Vettor Pisani e Claudio Abate nel 1970,” in *Studi di Memofonte*, 21, 2018, pp. 15–16.

¹⁴ The covers of two magazines (*Proposta*, no. 5, 1973 and *Art Dimension Art*, no. 1, 1975) were to display the photo of A.B.O. with the caption “I am Achille Bonito Oliva the critic and therefore the traitor.” The later nude photos that caused an outcry in the magazine *Frigidaire* (no. 104–05, July–August 1989) are to be seen, for all their playful and uncommitted accentuation, as following on in the same line.

¹⁵ A. Bonito Oliva, *Io sono Achille Bonito Oliva*, photograph by Claudio Abate, portfolio of 10 prints, edition of 125 numbered copies, 50 x 70 cm (Macerata: Artestudio, 1972). See A. Capasso, ed., *A.B.O. Le arti della critica*, exh. cat., Palazzo Bice Piacentini, San Benedetto del Tronto, May 5 – June 18, 2001, pl. 2 (erroneously dated to 1970).

¹⁶ A. Bonito Oliva, *Io sono Achille Bonito Oliva*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ T. Trini, “Le notti della Tartaruga,” in *Domus*, no. 465, 1968, p. 42.

¹⁹ The captions are in *Teatro delle mostre*, exh. cat., Galleria La Tartaruga, Rome, May 6–31, 1968 (Rome: Marcalibri and Cosenza: Lerici Editore, 1968). For the “festival,” see I. Bernardi, *Teatro delle mostre. Roma, maggio 1968* (Milan: Scalpendi, 2014).

²⁰ A. Bonito Oliva, “Contro la solitudine degli oggetti,” in G. Celant, ed., *arte povera più azioni povere*, exh. cat., Antichi Arsenali, Amalfi, October 4–6, 1968 (Salerno: Rumma editore, 1969), pp. 69–72.

²¹ For a reconstruction of the different positions in Italian art criticism in the 1960s and ’70s, see M. Dantini, “‘Ytalya subjecta’. Narrazioni identitarie e critica d’arte 1937–2009,” in G. Guercio and A. Mattiolo, eds., *Il confine evanescente. Arte italiana 1960–2010* (Milan: Electa, 2010), pp. 293–99. For the contribution of Carla Lonzi, see L. Iamurri, *Un margine che sfugge. Carla Lonzi e l’arte in Italia 1955–1970* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016).

²² For an overview of critical debate in the period, see F. Belloni, *Militanza artistica in Italia, 1968–1972* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2015), pp. 15–56; A. Trimarco, *Italia, 1960–2000: teoria e critica d’arte* (Naples: Paparo edizioni, 2012); G. Sergio, “Forma rivista. Critica e rappresentazione della neo-avanguardia in Italia (Flash Art,

Pallone, Cartabianca, Senzamargine, Data),” in *palinsesti*, 1, 2011, <http://www.palinsesti.net/index.php/Palinsesti/article/view/21/26>.

²³ L. Conte, “Comportamenti e azioni della critica negli anni Settanta: attraverso e oltre *Critica in atto*,” in D. Lancioni, ed., *Anni 70. Arte a Roma*, exh. cat., Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, December 17, 2013 – March 2, 2014 (Rome: Iacobelli Editore, 2013), p. 84.

²⁴ T. Trini, “Mutare le attitudini concettuali in pratica,” in R. Barilli, ed., *Gennaio 70. Comportamenti progetti mediazioni. III Biennale internazionale della giovane pittura*, exh. cat., Museo Civico, Bologna, January 31 – February 28, 1970 (Bologna: Alfa, 1970), pp. 26 and 28. Quoted in Belloni, *Militanza artistica in Italia*, p. 15.

²⁵ In 1988 A.B.O. was to write *L'arte fino al Duemila*, a supplement to Argan's influential high-school textbook *L'arte moderna 1770–1970* (published by Sansoni).

²⁶ G. Celant, “Per una critica acritica,” in *NAC*, no. 1, 1970, p. 29. Three successive versions of the article were produced between 1969 and 1970; see Belloni, *Militanza artistica in Italia*, pp. 70–72.

²⁷ For Celant's article and the debate it triggered in the magazine *NAC*, see M. Dantini, “Germano Celant, Carla Lonzi, Paolo Fossati e il dibattito italiano sulla ‘critica acritica.’ *NAC 1970–1971*,” in *Geopolitiche dell'arte italiana* (Milan: Christian Marinotti, 2012), pp. 143–66.

²⁸ A. Bonito Oliva, *Il territorio magico. Comportamenti alternativi nell'arte* (Florence: Centro Di, 1971); all the subsequent quotations are from the new edition of 2009 by S. Chiodi (Florence: Le Lettere).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁰ H. Foster, *The Return of The Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 15.

³¹ Bonito Oliva, *Il territorio magico*, p. 62.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ As shown by Giacomo Biagi in “Sulla traccia della citazione,” esp. pp. 233–34. It should be noted that Laing was also quoted in a 1970 essay on Vettor Pisani, to whom A.B.O. attributed “a schizomorphic attitude.” See A. Bonito Oliva, “Il teatro della paralisi,” in *Vettor Pisani. Il Premio Pascali*, exh. cat., Castello Svevo, Bari, July 15 – August 12, 1970 (Rome, 1970), pp. 8–9.

³⁹ R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (London: Penguin, 1967).

⁴⁰ Bonito Oliva, *Il territorio magico*, p. 42.

⁴¹ Curated by A.B.O. and supervised by Bruno Corà, the event ran from March 6 to 30, 1972. See the proceedings in A. Bonito Oliva, ed., *Critica in atto* (Rome: Edizioni Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, 1973).

⁴² A. Bonito Oliva, “La felicità del circolo,” in *Marcatre*, 8, no. 61–62, 1970, p. 85.

⁴³ A. Bonito Oliva in “Una parte di lucidità e una di ironia. Atti del Convegno di Firenze,” in *Marcatre*, 8, 58–60, 1970, p. 30.

⁴⁴ The complete list comprises Giulio Carlo Argan, Alberto Boatto, Luciano Caramel, Mario Diacono, Germano Celant, Renato Barilli, Italo Tomassoni, Maurizio Fagiolo, Giuseppe Gatt, Vittorio Rubiu, Maurizio Calvesi, Daniela Palazzoli, Marisa Volpi, Paolo Fossati, Tommaso Trini, Catherine Millet, Jean-Marc Poinsot, and Achille Bonito Oliva. Francois Pluchart, Michel Claura, and Klaus Honnef were also invited but unable to attend.

⁴⁵ Archivi MAXXI Arte, Fondo Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, Rome.

⁴⁶ For a survey of the audio recordings, see M. Bracci, *Gli Incontri Internazionali d'Arte: Il teatro della critica d'arte*, degree thesis in Art History, Università Roma Tre, 2020.

⁴⁷ See G. Celant, “Information Documentation Archives,” in *Critica in atto*, pp. 26–30.

⁴⁸ E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1956; second ed. New York: Doubleday, 1959).

⁴⁹ M. Diacono, “Annullamento,” in *Critica in atto*, p. 48. The actions were performed by Sandro Chia, Ferruccio De Filippi, Franco Gozzano, Gianfranco Notargiacomo, Eliseo Mattiacci, and Cesare Tacchi.

⁵⁰ D. Palazzoli, “Arte e decultura,” in *Critica in atto*, p. 92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 90.

⁵² A. Bonito Oliva, “La citazione deviata: l'ideologia,” in *Critica in atto*, pp. 156–63; now in A. Bonito Oliva, *Passo dello strabismo. Sulle arti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 153–64, the source of this quotation.

⁵³ G. De Dominicis, “Lettera sull'immortalità,” in *Flash Art*, no. 25, 1971 p. 8.

⁵⁴ Archivi MAXXI Arte, Fondo Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, Rome, *Intervento di Gino De Dominicis in risposta a Bruno Corà durante l'evento di Achille Bonito Oliva a Critica in atto*, scatola “Incontri Internazionali d'Arte (maggio 2003),” materiale audio; quoted in Bracci, *Gli Incontri Internazionali d'Arte*, p. 146.

⁵⁵ And therefore in open contrast to Calvesi, who had involved the same artists in his event a few days earlier.

⁵⁶ Bonito Oliva, “La citazione deviata,” in *Passo dello strabismo*, p. 154. This passage reappears *verbatim* in A. Bonito Oliva, *L'ideologia del traditore* (Milan: Electa, 2012), p. 28; see A. Cortellesa, “Dialettica del manierismo,” *ibid.*, p. 233.

-
- ⁵⁷ Bonito Oliva, “La citazione deviata,” p. 154.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid. For the birth of A.B.O.’s ideas about the “traitor,” see Biagi, “Sulla traccia della citazione,” pp. 226–47.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Bonito Oliva, “La citazione deviata,” in *Passo dello strabismo*, pp. 153–64.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 163.
- ⁶² For an overview of A.B.O.’s ideas about the Transavanguardia, see the recent work by D. Viva, *La critica ad effetto: rileggendo La trans-avanguardia italiana (1979)* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020).
- ⁶³ A. Bonito Oliva, *L’ideologia del traditore* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), p. 9.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ As first noted by A. Cortellessa in his afterword to *L’ideologia del traditore* (ed. 2012), pp. 235–38.
- ⁶⁶ See in particular the chapter “Sopra l’avanguardia” in E. Sanguineti, *Ideologia e linguaggio* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965).
- ⁶⁷ On this point, see in particular Y.-A. Bois, “Historisation ou intention: le retour d’un vieux débat,” in *Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne*, no. 22, 1987, pp. 57–69.
- ⁶⁸ A. Badiou, *Le Siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 61.
- ⁶⁹ A. Bonito Oliva, foreword (1985) to *L’ideologia del traditore* (ed. 2012), p. 25.
- ⁷⁰ See in this connection the severely negative judgment of M. Dantini, “Internazionalismo e folklore. Achille Bonito Oliva, ‘l’ideologia del traditore,’” in *Flash Art*, no. 335, 2017, nazionalismo-e-folklore/. For the problem of national identity in Italian art between the first and second half of the twentieth century, see Dantini, *Geopolitiche dell’arte*, esp. pp. 89–112.
- ⁷¹ A. Bonito Oliva, *Autocritico automobile. Attraverso le avanguardie* (Milan: Edizioni il Formichiere, 1977), p. 262; new edition with the subtitle *Remake per le nuove generazioni* (Rome: Cooper & Castelveccchi, 2002). The book ends immediately after this with a famous passage from Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (K. Marx, *Opere filosofiche giovanili*, ed. G. della Volpe, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1969, pp. 252–56).
- ⁷² Bonito Oliva, *Autocritico automobile*, p. 262 (the essay is on pp. 216–62).
- ⁷³ Ibid., p. 217.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 218.
- ⁷⁶ L. Alloway, “Network: The Art World Described as a System,” in *Artforum International*, 11, no. 1, 1972, pp. 28–32; now L. Alloway, *Network. Art and the Complex Present* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 3–15.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 5.
- ⁷⁸ A. Bonito Oliva, *Arte e sistema dell’arte. Opera, pubblico, critica, mercato* (Pescara: De Domizio Edizioni, 1975), p. 48.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 50.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid. For the role of the market, see also A. Bonito Oliva, “Il mercato come opera d’arte,” in *Op. cit.*, 57, 1983, pp. 5–12, <https://opcit.it/cms/?p=1936>.
- ⁸¹ S. Chiodi, “Memoria del dimenticare (a memoria). Conversazione con Achille Bonito Oliva,” in Bonito Oliva, *Il territorio magico*, p. 266.