

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. 88-101.

A.B. Origine (Materials for an archeology)

Andrea Cortellessa

A.B.O. and writing: a mutual courtship now in progress for nearly sixty years. While never aspiring to the inebriation of trying his mettle in the more or less Longhian sense of the term *cimento*, A.B.O. definitively renounced the temptation of what we might call a performative autonomy after the appreciable exploits of his books *L'ideologia del traditore* and *Manuale di volo*¹. An authentic manifesto of this autonomy of “criticism as writing” is to be found in the provocatively entitled essay “Io come Borges” (Me like Borges) included in *Autocritico automobile*, a somewhat neglected work due to its content of occasional, “easy” pieces and its adoption in some respects of “positions” that the new wave of Transavantgarde was soon to overtake with much sounding of the horn. Starting from its title—which is, as always with A.B.O., only apparently playful²—it is, however, the only one of his books programatically aimed at defining his “position.”³

If criticism is “an inherently alienating institution already born out of an alienated social situation” like that of a “divided society stratified in classes,” A.B.O.’s corresponding move is the practice of “a structure of signs counterposed not only as meaning but precisely as internal development to what is the movement of the work.”⁴ This “knight’s move” is thus intended as comparable—hence the title—to that of the stories Borges described as indirect, i.e. those presented as synopses or (precisely) as critical descriptions of lost, forgotten or indeed perfectly non-existent stories by other hands. This was in 1977, just after *L'ideologia del traditore* and five years before *Manuale di volo*, and A.B.O.’s “performative” choice can be already clearly discerned in his use of the words “*Je parle toujours de moi puisque je ne veux convaincre*” from Tzara’s Dada manifesto of 1918 as its motto.

After *Manuale di volo*, however, A.B.O. adopted writing as only one of the forms of his omnipresence and omni-prehensibility in all the “places” of art. For the “critic in progress”⁵ he opts for becoming, a figure that he was indeed to epitomize, writing was to be no more than the material trace, almost the organic secretion, of a presence that means above all *compresence*—not necessarily but often also in the biographical, existential sense—with artists.⁶ (In this sense, *Passo dello strabismo* can be identified unquestionably among the three key books published between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s as the one with the most bearing on the future.) While never losing the passion for reading that has led, among other things, to meetings and collaborations of great prestige with absolute masters of the twentieth century like Roland Barthes, Jorge Luis Borges, and Ernst Jünger, A.B.O. was henceforth to develop a symptomatic attraction/repulsion toward the constitutive virtuality and ineluctable *absence* that is inherent to literature whether we like it or not. In the meantime, the linguistic but primarily conceptual hircocervus of “exhibition writing” was soon to be taken up with great enthusiasm as his overriding activity.⁷

The pathway outlined above is well known, but it stems from something that, while it cannot be called hidden, has never yet been the object of specific attention, not least due to the scarcity of materials. (If I have been able to embark on this exploration, it is thanks to the extraordinary courtesy and dogged research of Laura Cherubini and Paola Marino, to whom my gratitude goes far beyond the

bounds of conventional acknowledgments.) Anything but concealed, and indeed recalled whenever possible by the party concerned, this origin regards A.B.O.'s involvement as a writer—albeit of a very particular kind, as we shall see—in the last throes of a cultural movement that, though interdisciplinary by ideal vocation and concrete praxis, was born out of literary and specifically poetic expression and cultivated this all the way through as its core activity (starting from the seminal anthology *I Novissimi* edited by Alfredo Giuliani in 1961). I obviously refer to the new avant-garde movement known as Gruppo 63.

As A.B.O. recalls with meticulously detailed brevity: “In 1967, the year I joined the Gruppo 63 by invitation of Nanni Balestrini and Edoardo Sanguineti, I spent a year in Bologna working for the avant-garde publishing house of Sampietro, highly innovative also as regards graphic design, where Adriano Spatola had worked earlier. It was Sampietro that published my first book of poems, *Made in Mater*, the same year. *Fiction Poems*, the second, was instead brought out by Lucio Amelio in Naples the following year.”⁸

He also took part, as a 27-year-old “absolute beginner,” in the movement's fifth and last meeting, held in the great hall of the Palazzo Malatestiano in Fano from May 26 to 28, 1967.⁹ I do not know whether we can state once again that what appeared to be a dawn, the dawn of a new avant-garde, was already a sunset. In actual fact, 1967 also saw the founding of the magazine *Quindici* (the first issue appeared in June), whose unforeseeable success appeared to break through the diaphragm historically existing not only between the artistic and political avant-gardes but also between them and the general public. But instead, in the glowing light of 1968, it was precisely the combination of the imperfectly coinciding aims of the two avant-gardes that led not only to the closure of the magazine but also to the complete cessation of the activities of the movement it represented.¹⁰

The young A.B.O. was blessed with the sad fate of spearheading the most youthful and utmost extremity of an avant-garde that was by then on its last legs, when the dust of battle was already beginning to settle. The irony of the time so often vented on “linguistic Darwinism”—the “ideological dogma that had accompanied the art of the new avant-gardes,” according to which “art was the result of a linear evolution of language”¹¹—most probably finds its true angular momentum in this eloquent short circuit (and thus acquires a pungent, bitter aftertaste in this connection). Like the other decisive knight's move, which was to subsume in the name Transavanguardia (and more importantly in the group's activities) so many aspects of the new avant-garde of which it obviously represented the dialectical antithesis (but truly so at the time).

1968 was not the end of the world, however, even though it may have seemed like it. In the exhibition *Teatro delle mostre* held by Plinio De Martiis that spring, A.B.O.'s captions displayed such quickchange polymorphism as almost to upstage the artists called upon to perform.¹² He had, however, already curated his first exhibition in 1966, a two-man show of Pino Pascali and Renato Mambor, symbolically held in the red room of the Guida bookstore in Port'Alba, Naples, where he came into contact over the same period with the Novissimi poets on the one hand and Giulio Carlo Argan on the other, impressing them all with his irreverent effrontery no less than his intellectual vivacity. As he told Stefano Chiodi, those encounters “developed my bent for dialog and led me to switch gradually from poetry to prose.”¹³

This is the same formula—obviously symptomatic in this context—as the first piece in *Autocritico automobile*: “now that art has finally changed course (switching from ‘poetry’ to ‘prose’), criticism can also place itself dialectically on the same plane and make cynical use of the work of art as *field*.”¹⁴ (It should be noted in passing that although the birth of the concept of the “social field” evidently precedes its complete formulation in Pierre Bourdieu's *Règles de l'art* of 1992, I believe we can rule out the possibility that A.B.O. borrowed it from there. In any case, in my view, examination has yet to focus on the similarity to this idea of the notion of the “system of art” put forward by him in 1975

on the basis, I believe, of this very formulation, as intuitive as it is already penetrating.¹⁵⁾

The fact is that after his conversion to prose, A.B.O. never failed to recall the two Novissimi poets Sanguineti and Balestrini with gratitude for their invitation of 1967. Significantly enough, it was precisely these poets that he chose, I shall not say as his polemical idols, but certainly as his liquid terms of opposition—and not only, as one might imagine, in the ideological sense. While there was to be a brief period of collaboration with Sanguineti at the end of 1984 and the beginning of '85 as joint editors of four issues of *Il cervo volante* (an “international review of art & poetry” founded the previous year by Adriano Spatola), their disagreement could hardly have been more complete. (After signing the *Manifeste de Naples* of Gruppo 58, drafted by Guido Biasi as an offshoot of Enrico Baj’s Movimento Nucleare, in 1959 together with the other future Novissimi Leo Paolazzi, Antonio Porta, and Balestrini, Sanguineti was in fact to remain faithful to the school of “Nuova Figurazione”¹⁶ opposed by A.B.O. as linguistically retrograde, localistic in scope, and “paleo-Marxist in mentality.”¹⁷) His relations of friendship and complicity with Balestrini instead remained more solid over the years. It is unquestionably to the encouragement of A.B.O., who invited him to take part in the 1993 Biennale, that Balestrini owed his return to the visual arts practiced in the 1960s but then long neglected apart from short spells during his French “exile” of 1979–84.¹⁸ It is, however, in writing about him that A.B.O. betrays a certain degree of irritation deriving, I believe, from his own “poetic” past, now distant but, as we have seen, never forgotten. In a fine piece eloquently entitled *Parola mia: la poesia*, while praising Balestrini as “perhaps the only avant-garde poet and writer not to have lagged behind the visual arts,” he lets slip this revealing remark: “one speaks of visual poetry to employ an almost trade-union category of art.”¹⁹

Though brief, A.B.O.’s work with the Bolognese publisher Sampietro in the fateful year of 1967 was by no means fortuitous. He can in fact be regarded in that period as a member—albeit not yet in organically official form—of Gruppo 70, founded in Florence in the spring of 1963, a few months before the better-known Gruppo 63, by the poets Eugenio Miccini and Lamberto Pignotti together with the artist Luciano Ori.²⁰ A.B.O. proves to have taken part in its third conference (called a festival and involving a number of different venues and events) over the period May–July 1965.²¹ A piece of his also accompanied the Florentine group’s play (or rather happening) *Poesie e no 3*, published in Naples by Guida the same year.²² Above all, he was one of the authors included by Pignotti in the first of four anthologies of visual poetry published in 1965 by Sampietro in a series entitled “Il dissenso (schede di poesia d’avanguardia),” which appeared in the form of small-format folders containing interchangeable files of poetry. As Teresa Spignoli observes,²³ Pignotti, who was also in charge of the series, most probably got the idea from *Composition n. 1*, published in France by Luc Saporta three years earlier. This was the first interactive novel, made up of 148 loose, unnumbered pages for the reader to rearrange at will (Lerici published a translation by Ettore Capriolo the same year with the words “Shuffle the pages like a deck of cards and read” on the cover and “AS MANY NOVELS AS THERE ARE READERS” on the band). It is interesting to note that in addition to the novice A.B.O., Danilo Giorgi, and Luca (Luigi Castellano), the authors featured in Pignotti’s anthology included Balestrini, whose first novel *Tristano*, designed on similar lines to Saporta’s work, was to be published by Feltrinelli the following year.²⁴

Graphic innovation was an aspect of Sampietro’s work highly appreciated by A.B.O. It is, however, certainly impossible to describe as equally innovative the language employed by him in the four collages entitled *Comandamento*, *L’altro di Super-Io*, *Pubblicità ed etica*, and *Cuore*, which closely recall the soon repetitive and somewhat trite language of the “technological poetry” theorized by Pignotti as early as 1962 in the magazine *Questo e altro* as the *détournement* of words and images of mass communication (newspapers, magazines, advertising, and comics).

While the inspiration may recall that of American Pop Art, which had triumphed in the midst of

polemics at the 1964 Venice Biennale, ideological aims and content are instead displayed here with explicit and intransigent inflexibility, as announced by the young author in the poetic and biographical note²⁵ accompanying the works, speaking of “reality” as a “place of relations of consumption taking place through a system of signals constantly hetero-directed by the mass media” in which the “bureaucratic-lexical and linguistic optimism of advertising, conditioned by the capitalist system, creates a rift between problematic reality and languages.”

More interest attaches to another episode dating back again to 1965 but then “archaeologically” unearthed in two different editions, one published by Edizioni Laboratorio, Salerno, in 1969 and the other, with the title *5 mappe del 1965*, in a very limited screenprint edition by Ableo (Carmine Limatola) at the end of 1971.²⁶ This consists of five reproductions of pages, again loose and unnumbered, from a school atlas (with a space at the bottom for the pupil’s name, which is obviously where the copies are signed by the author) showing Africa (in two different versions), South America, Europe, and Spain and Portugal. Reproduced on the back is an educational test with spaces for the pupil-user to insert the answer (in the case of South America, for example, the task is to indicate where workers emigrated from Italy are mostly concentrated or why the Tierra del Fuego is called this way). The image on the front is instead manipulated and printed over with ungrammatical words and phrases using different fonts and formats (“jbuch i | apparenty | del | corolario” appears, for example, on the map of South America).

In this case, the anxiety over influence does not apply to the writers of the new avant-garde²⁷ but rather to the artist closest to them, namely Piero Manzoni.²⁸ There is indeed an undeniable *air de famille* with the artist’s portfolio of *8 Tavole di accertamento* published in the autumn of 1962 by Scheiwiller with an accompanying text by Vincenzo Agnetti indicating with his customary brevity the continuity of these prints with Manzoni’s other “tautological” works (“the maps, the imprints, and the alphabet are simple relations of the subconscious condition. Nothing real and still less abstract: just a moment by itself ‘in itself.’ [...] Baltimore is really in Baltimore”). Two of the *Tavole di accertamento* are in fact maps, of Ireland and Iceland, and both are manipulated, albeit to a far less marked degree than A.B.O. was to do,²⁹ highlighting the railway system of one and the hydrography of the other (the islands being obviously juxtaposed, not least because of the metonymic shifting of their respective toponyms).³⁰

The next episode was *Made in Mater*, A.B.O.’s first publication in book form (albeit to be assembled in accordance with the format of the series; it should be noted, however, that the pages are numbered this time in large print at the bottom). This appeared in April 1967, again in the Sampietro “Il dissenso” series, but surprisingly with “linear” poems, i.e. not combined with images. Here too, however, there is an evident debt to the models that had just led him to join the group of *majores*. The *laisse* on p. 17, for example, can be read as an almost explicit tribute to the Novissimi poets:

generally known
the distinguished allocution *rebus sic stantibus*
considering the circularity of the father
and the quick consumption (such is the phrase
never fear) no longer an end in itself
then the conclusion (with matters standing thus)
there are so many to say (I’ve read Bohr)
perhaps the ashes (at the end of the game)
come to say farewell

While the only evident citation is of Beckett’s *Endgame* (a wellknown point of reference, at least for

Antonio Porta³¹), the reference to Niels Bohr may recall Pagliarani's *Lezione di fisica* of 1964,³² just as *rapido consumo* may allude to "La carne è l'uomo che crede nel rapido consumo," the six-sided conversation initiated the same year by the magazine *Grammatica* (Balestrini, Giuliani, and Pagliarani together with Giorgio Manganelli, Gastone Novelli, and Achille Perilli of the magazine's editorial staff).³³ Above all, however, apart from a generic wink at Sanguineti's terroristic use of Latin, *rebus sic stantibus* is to be read as a translation, ironically legalistic (we recall A.B.O.'s degree in law) but very precise, of the well-known and ominous citation of no less a figure than Stalin hammering the first *laissez* of *Laborintus* ("le condizioni esterne è evidente esistono realmente").³⁴ And it is from the most illustrious model of the Novissimi poetic repertoire—the one represented by *Laborintus* (dating by now to over a decade earlier) and above all, I would say, by *Purgatorio de l'Inferno* (the third of the poems published by Sanguineti in 1964 in *Triperuno*)³⁵—that A.B.O. draws the most evident formal characteristics of this work: the long verse (albeit not to the monstrous extent of *Laborintus*) metrically broken up by a shower of parenthetical asides conducive to the intrusion in free direct speech of anonymous "voices of others" in conflict with a lyrical subject undergoing multiplication and disintegration at the same time.

These characteristics are also found in the second and markedly more mature work *Fiction Poems*, published in December 1968 by the Modern Art Agency in Naples (founded three years earlier, as mentioned above, by Lucio Amelio). The compulsive use of parentheses is attenuated and, apart from two last texts identified by backdating to 1967 at the bottom, it is now a continuous flow that is segmented by the ends of the (unnumbered) pages. Once again, there is no lack of fond tributes to the *majores*. On the sixth page, for example,

Still dreading the act at night
with the eye bound inside the porthole
to rediscover the cone of trees
still closely together
with the curved sense of maps
and the blood distinguished by fears
tischh – the sentimental interference
(your dogs are horrible even if you have none)
walking alongside the motionless seaweed
afraid of falling between two fires
skirting hazard and description:

l'oblò (the porthole) is a sphragis paying tribute to the novel *L'oblò* (1964) by Spatola, a highly influential figure in this period, as we have seen, while the colon at the end is a blatantly Sanguineti trademark (even though it can certainly also be read in continuity with what follows).

The fact that A.B.O. was freeing himself at the time from the anxiety of influence and the "nightmare of the Novissimi"³⁶ is demonstrated, however, by the original—and not only in graphic terms—device at the end of *Fiction Poems*. After a lengthy biographic and bibliographic note, which describes him as a "writer and art critic in Rome and member of Gruppo 63" and even includes his articles (still limited at the time to magazines like *Cartabianca*) and work with artistic institutions (like the above-mentioned captions for the exhibition *Teatro delle mostre*), the slim volume ends with a self-portrait based on photographs by Ugo Mulas and "movements" by Gianni Colombo. While the first image shows the back of A.B.O.'s head, the page then opens with a four-cornered pop-up to reveal the second photo in profile, which opens up in turn to show the last image, taken from the front, at the bottom of this simple but allusive graphic device. There is certainly no lack of precedents for this

multiplied self-portrait. Suffice it to recall what is perhaps the archetype of the genre, the magnificent *Io, noi* of Umberto Boccioni, which A.B.O. was indeed to replicate about ten years later in a photomontage printed by the Lastaria gallery in Rome on the postcard publicizing his appearance of November 30, 1978 on the Italian state TV channel.³⁷

The back of the leaflet bears a text focusing with virtuoso bravura (as he was to do so often in the years to come) on the *interpretatio nominis*, i.e. on the now patented acronym A.B.O., the “itinerary of the name” that was to inspire a work by Sandro Chia entitled *A.B.O.* the following year. To complete the circle, this was then to be commented on by the dedicatee in one of the pieces in *Manuale di volo*: “The name is the *vano* [space] of identity. It uses the forms of concavity and convexity. A guarantee of comprehension, of being inside, and also equipped to inspect the outside.”³⁸ Like the word *volo* in the title, which of course designates the hubris of flying too high but also the treacherous theft of the *voleur*, *vano* is certainly to be understood in two senses: identity as a mere “container,” a Dantean *vas d’elezione* or chosen vessel always ready for new adventures and *mésalliances*, but also the mirror of an irreducible vanity (and perhaps, with a further dialectical step, the *vanitas vanitatum*).³⁹ And this is precisely the conjuring trick that transforms the untimely beginner, the tardy acolyte, the occasional “writer” into the infallibly prompt scene-stealer that we all know: in short, the super © corresponding to the brand universally known as A.B.O.

One of the most often cited (and most frequently misunderstood) precepts of the Novissimi poets is the “reduction of the I” as formulated by Alfredo Giuliani in the introduction to the anthology of 1961. As Giuliani explained, albeit to little avail, this certainly did not mean its (impossible) elimination (since writing cannot be other than “an individual act of myself writing, nor do I seek in any way to conceal my subjectivity,” so that “the ‘reduction of the I’ is my last historical possibility of expressing myself subjectively”), but rather a kind of porosity, so to speak, to absorb “the quality of the time” (with the “dialectic of alienation” for which Giuliani was to be so severely criticized).⁴⁰ The reduction of the I can therefore be legitimately rounded up or down. In the case of Sanguineti, for example, it is in fact “a trick with mirrors.”⁴¹

This is indeed the function that A.B.O. assigns to his triune name. The O designates “interchangeability, the sense of circular reference, of a return to the first letter of the name and of the alphabet. At the same time, it appears to foster the idea of interchangeability between A and B: A or B.”⁴² If the interchangeability of his early days as a visual poet was only the reified and regulated interchangeability of the compositional materials of an already obsolete polemic, it is now and far more daringly tried and tested in the most worthless of bodies, namely his own. And an increase in vitality⁴³ is certainly derived in the form of euphoria and laughter. As for the Ulysses of the Homeric myth, with whom Achille feels a bond of brotherhood at least onomastically, adopting the name Nobody is equivalent to an assertion of freedom: “forced to declare himself, he is thus freed from the dignity of the name. One who is dispossessed can laugh.”⁴⁴

If we now return to the above-mentioned praise of Balestrini in *Parola mia*: la poesia, the definition of the “plural I” now takes on a more precise sense that is anything but generic: “if poetry is the fruit, nearly always the production, the assertion of a solitary I, yours is in a precursory and I would say futuristic way the assertion of a singular We.”⁴⁵ The chiasmus may appear to be for effect, as indeed it is, but it has a meaning that is anything but merely rhetorical. Clearly, the new avant-garde’s reduction of the I had had a providential effect—like an “anti-aphrodisiac for Platonic love,” to borrow the witty title of an early work by Ippolito Nievo⁴⁶—on the subjectivistic introversion of a nearly adolescent Achille, whose first wails in verses, which have remained hidden so far (*et pour cause*) and were rediscovered on this occasion—the archaeology of an archaeology—could sound like this: “In the closed hand of memories / I want to keep / the days / in solitude / with you. / [...] But your hand / brings me back / green, rediscovered / hope”⁴⁷). On the other hand, it’s also true that

in the post-avant-garde and hyper-ideological period in which he was fated to live, the risk was instead that of a total annulment, rather than mere reduction, of the I into We. But when A.B.O. met Joseph Beuys through Amelio in 1971 on the occasion of the exhibition *La rivoluzione siamo noi*, he was ready to word out his freedom from any need to “reduce the I”: “He’s an authentic guru, one who courageously opposes the ‘we’ of the demonstrations of 1968 with an ‘I’ that becomes plural through the communication of his works to the public.”⁴⁸

Reducing the I thus actually meant subjecting it to multiplication if not indeed to exponentiation. Poetry, in verse or visual, perhaps was not his thing and in any case, he was off the beaten track. In all probability, however, it did make a crucial contribution by showing Achille how to become Ulysses too, at least to some extent; and thus to turn the solitary I with which we are all boringly equipped into a singular We, or a plural I if you prefer. Because *Outis* is certainly also *Polytropos*, and No-one really means Everyone.

¹ Readers are referred respectively to the present author’s “Dialettica del Manierismo,” the afterword to the most recent edition of *L’ideologia del traditore* (Milan: Electa, 2012), pp. 224–43, and “Achille Hermaphrodito,” in P. Balmas and A. Capasso, eds., *Arte e le teorie di turno. Omaggio ad Achille Bonito Oliva* (Milan: Electa, 2011), pp. 79–90. A new edition of *Manuale di volo. Dal mito greco all’arte moderna, dalle avanguardie storiche alla transavanguardia* (first ed. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982) was published by Abscondita in 2017.

² As A.B.O. remarks in the long conversation with Stefano Chiodi included in the latter’s new edition of his first book, “for me, the title is half of the work.” See “Memoria del dimenticare (a memoria),” in *Achille Bonito Oliva, Il territorio magico. Comportamenti alternativi dell’arte* [1971] (Florence: Le Lettere, 2009), p. 255.

³ See A. Bonito Oliva, *Autocritico automobile. Attraverso le avanguardie* (Milan: Edizioni il Formichiere, 1977) (my quotations are from this first edition rather than the later one of limited circulation brought out with the addition of the subtitle *Remake per le nuove generazioni* by Cooper & Castelvocchi in 2002). The three sections comprising the work are entitled “Posizione critica,” “Posizione mobile,” and “Posizione riflessa.” It may not be entirely mistaken to see this use of the somewhat compromised term “position” as an allusion to Alberto Arbasino’s ironic title *Sessanta posizioni* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971) published some years earlier.

⁴ Quotations from “Io come Borges,” in *Autocritico automobile*, pp. 40–42. It should be noted that, apart from the title, Borges is not actually mentioned in the piece or indeed in the book containing it. (A meeting with Borges in Buenos Aires in 1981 did, however, give rise to the “Prefazione in forma di dialogo sul labirinto dell’arte,” in A. Bonito Oliva, *Enciclopedia della parola. Dialoghi d’artista. 1968–2008*, Milan: Skira, 2008, pp. 9–13). See also “La critica come autocritica” (in *Autocritico automobile*, pp. 61–63) and *Autonomia e creatività della critica*, a monographic issue of *Rivista Lerici* (directed by W. Pedullà) edited by A.B.O. in February 1980.

⁵ This expression is drawn from the title of a conference organized by Graziella Lonardi Buontempo (*Critica in atto. Rassegna internazionale della critica d’arte*, March 6–30, 1972) and is the title of Angelo Capasso’s introduction (“Critico in atto”) to *Arte e le teorie di turno*, pp. XVI–XXV.

⁶ “The decision to live alongside artists became an integral part of my writing experience”: “Memoria del dimenticare (a memoria),” p. 255.

⁷ A.B.O. attributed this Copernican revolution to Harald Szeemann and Jean-Christophe Ammann, “two critics who did not like writing and invented a new way of doing it through exhibitions.” “I believe in writing and they showed me that I could also write through exhibitions, i.e. practice an exhibitional form of writing”: *ibid.*, p. 258.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248. Also remembered for the first published work of the 29-year-old Gianni Celati (a translation of Swift’s *Tale of a Tub*) in 1966, the first Italian translation of *La invención de Morel* by Adolfo Bioy Casares (again in 1966), and for embracing what is now known as the graphic novel, Sampietro was tried for obscenity in 1967 after publishing translations by Spatola of De Sade’s *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* and *Les Crimes de l’amour*, and defended by the brilliant poet and lawyer Corrado Costa, albeit with mixed fortunes. For its short but splendid life and collaboration with the Grafiche Mignani printing house, see E. Minarelli and M. Osti, eds., *3 editori storici d’avanguardia. Sampietro Editore – Geiger/Baobab – 3ViTre, dalla sperimentazione grafica al suono*, exh. cat., Museo internazionale e Biblioteca della musica, Bologna, September 19 – October 21, 2012 (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 2012), with an amusing account of the trial in Osti’s foreword on p. 16. A.B.O. provides greater detail on pp. 25–27 in a fond and precise account entitled “Una felice turbolenza editoriale”: “It was Adriano Spatola who told Enrico Riccardo Sampietro about me in 1966. I was a young experimenter with words and possible interweavings with images as a visual poet. [...] I had already started out and indeed attempted to switch from poetry to prose with my initial essays on the visual arts [...] Sampietro came to see me in Naples and our reciprocal narcissism soon took care of the rest. He asked me to move to Bologna and run the publishing house at number 2 Via Pescherie Vecchie with him early in 1967. I accepted.” In addition to the graphic originality of the “books with interchangeable sections,” A.B.O. recalls the publication of *Made in Mater*: “and with the book in the series entitled ‘Il dissenso,’ I went to Fano to read my poems in the meeting of

Gruppo 63, supported in actual fact by Spatola, Balestrini, and Sanguineti.” For the publisher Sampietro, a rich playboy from Taranto who died in a car crash at the age of 35 in 1968, see also the equally entertaining account of Maurizio Spatola at http://www.archiviomauriziospatola.com/prod/pdf_storici/S00215.pdf.

⁹ See “I convegni del Gruppo 63,” in *Gruppo 63. L’antologia. Critica e teoria* (Milan: Bompiani, 2013), p. 909, the product of the juxtaposition with variants of the movement’s historical anthologies: N. Balestrini and A. Giuliani, eds., *Gruppo 63. L’antologia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964) and R. Barilli and A. Guglielmi, eds., *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976). Beginning in 2003, the poetry section includes three works by A.B.O. under the common title *Nella corrente* corresponding to *Made in Mater 9*, a fragment from *Fiction Poems*, and a weird text entitled *L’eudemonismo di “occhio”* on Mario Schifano dated Naples, June 1968: pp. 132–34. Unlike the first four conferences, little is known about this one apart from the agitated verbal-visual account offered by the playwright and painter Giordano Falzoni (a member as from the first meeting in October 1963), previously unpublished and restored by Teresa Nocita in *Album. Appunti inediti dell’ultimo incontro del Gruppo 63 (Fano, 26–28 maggio 1967)* (Leonforte: Insula, 2012).

¹⁰ Readers are referred for this controversial episode to “Volevamo la Luna,” my afterword to N. Balestrini, ed., *Quindici. Una rivista e il Sessantotto* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2008), pp. 451–72. A.B.O. was in time to contribute only one article to the magazine in the last issue, published on August 19, 1969, a review of an essay by Giuseppe Gatt on Max Ernst published by Sansoni.

¹¹ “Memoria del dimenticare (a memoria),” pp. 259–60.

¹² The texts appear in “Immagine e sconfinamento,” in *Autocritico automobile*, pp. 146–57. See I. Bernardi, *Teatro delle mostre. Roma, maggio 1968* (Milan: Scalpendi, 2014).

¹³ Bonito Oliva, “Memoria del dimenticare (a memoria),” p. 249.

¹⁴ A. Bonito Oliva, “La critica come profitto dell’opera d’arte,” in *Autocritico automobile*, p. 11 (author’s italics).

¹⁵ See A. Bonito Oliva, *Arte e sistema dell’arte: opera, pubblico, critica, mercato* (Pescara: De Domizio Edizioni, 1975); P. Bourdieu, *Le regole dell’arte. Genesi e struttura del campo letterario* [1992], introduction by A. Boschetti, trans. A. Boschetti and E. Bottaro (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2005). While an initial definition of the concept is put forward by the great sociologist in “Champ intellectuel et projet créateur,” in *Les Temps modernes*, 246, November 1966, pp. 865–906, it takes clearer shape in the studies of the 1970s gathered together in his *Questions de sociologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980): see for example pp. 113–14. See also, however, the essay by Stefano Chiodi referring to Lawrence Alloway in this volume.

¹⁶ Readers are referred to my “Le buone macchie di melma. Sanguineti dall’Informale alla Nuova Figurazione – e oltre,” in M. Berisso and E. Risso, eds., *Per Edoardo Sanguineti: lavori in corso*, proceedings of the conference held in Genoa, May 12–14, 2011 (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2012), pp. 329–47.

¹⁷ A. Bonito Oliva, “Posizione preliminare,” in *Autocritico automobile*, p. 31.

¹⁸ For an initial summary, see *Con gli occhi del linguaggio*, exh. cat., Fondazione Mudima, Milan, May 16 – June 6, 2006 (Milan: Mudima, 2006); his subsequent production is, however, very abundant. For the linkage of visual and linear poetry, as from the chronograms of *Come si agisce* (1963), readers are referred to “Il senso appeso. Balestrini, poesie che si vedono,” my afterword to Nanni Balestrini, *Come si agisce e altri procedimenti. Poesie complete volume primo (1954–1969)* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2015), pp. 447–71.

¹⁹ A. Bonito Oliva, “Parola mia: la poesia,” in Nanni Balestrini, *Milleuna. Parole per vedere*, exh. cat., Galleria San Ludovico, Parma, June 18 – July 23, 2008 (Parma: Centro Grafico, 2008), pp. 3–5.

²⁰ The movement began with the conference *Arte e comunicazione*, Forte Belvedere, Florence, May 24–26, 1963; the proceedings, edited by Miccini and Pignotti, appeared in *Dopotutto*, an insert of the historic review *Letteratura*, 67–68, January–April 1964, pp. 144–60, and are now in F. Fastelli, “Cinquant’anni, ‘dopotutto’... Per un catalogo ragionato,” in T. Spignoli, M. Corsi, F. Fastelli, and M. C. Papini, eds., *La poesia in immagine / L’immagine in poesia. Gruppo 70. Firenze 1963–2013*, proceedings of the conference, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, June 2013 (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 2014), pp. 189–213. The movement’s second conference, entitled *Arte e tecnologia*, again took place at the Forte Belvedere, June 27–29, 1964 (the proceedings appeared in issue no. 11–13 of *Marcatre*, 1965). A.B.O. also curated a show of work by Bueno and Ori at the Libreria Guida in 1966.

²¹ See “Cinquant’anni, ‘dopotutto’...,” p. 119. The proceedings of this third conference were apparently not published. Bonito Oliva took part in the evening event *Poesia*, Galleria Numero, June 30, together with Balestrini, Giuliani, Isgrò, Leonetti, Pagliarani, Pignotti, Porta, Roversi, Sanguineti, Spatola, and others; see T. Spignoli, *La parola si fa spazio. Poesia concreta e Poesia visiva* (Bologna: Pàtron, 2020), p. 179.

²² The work was written and performed by the most permanent members of Gruppo 70 (Pignotti and Miccini together with Lucia Marcucci and Antonio Bueno and the participation on some occasions also of Emilio Isgrò and Ketty La Rocca). A performance also took place at the third conference of Gruppo 63, September 1965, in Palermo and a version was broadcast on the third program of the state radio (Terzo Programma Rai) in 1967. The script of this appears on pp. 214–21 of *La poesia in immagine*.

²³ See Spignoli, *La poesia si fa spazio*, p. 156.

²⁴ Even though it proved impossible to print it in copies differing from one other, as the author would have preferred. When a second edition of Balestrini’s *Tristano* was published by DeriveApprodi in 2007 with the subtitle *Romanzo multiplo* and a foreword by Umberto Eco, the combination of digital technology with a new-generation printing

machine finally made it possible to bring it out in multiple form. (Even before I was aware of Pignotti's anthology, I suggested Saporta as a precedent in "La riscossa di Frenhofer," in *il verri*, 38, September 2008, pp. 13–14.) The other three anthologies of visual poetry edited by Pignotti respectively contained work by Isgrò, Miccini, and Pignotti; by Lucia Marcucci, Stelio Maria Martini, Ori, and Porta; and by Giuliani, Spatola, Luigi Tola, and Guido Ziveri. The first title in the series "Il dissenso" (a total of eleven appeared before the abrupt halt on the publisher's death in 1968), published in 1965, was the programmatic *Poesia da montare* of the director Adriano Spatola, consisting of thirty-two loose cards, one with a drawing by Giuliano Della Casa and 28 with visual poems to be arranged at will (in the recent and long-awaited overall edition of Spatola's poetic work, edited in 2020 by G. Fontana and published by Diaforia in Viareggio, the cards appear in random order on pp. 139–68). A.B.O.'s relations with Gruppo 70 must have continued for a little longer, as works of his are included by Miccini in the retrospective anthologies *Archivio di poesia visiva italiana* (Florence: Tèchne, 1970) and *Poesia e/o poesia* (Brescia and Florence: Sarmic, 1972); see "Cinquant'anni, 'dopotutto' . . .," pp. 145–46). A.B.O. appears to have shown works of his on at least one occasion (in a group exhibition of visual poetry held in 1966 at the Galleria Tunnel in Rome) and to have been a contributor to the mimeographed magazine *Tèchne* founded by Miccini in 1969; see the dossier by G. Lo Monaco in C. Pieralli, T. Spignoli, F. Iocca, G. Larocca, and G. Lo Monaco, eds., *Alle due sponde della cortina di ferro: le culture del dissenso e la definizione dell'identità europea nel secondo Novecento tra Italia, Francia e URSS (1956–1991)* (Florence: Goware, 2019), pp. 185–88.

²⁵ In the biographical part, printed in italics, Bonito Oliva presents himself (like Luca) as a "member of the group Operativo Sud 1964" and announces that he is "setting up a 'Gnomic Theater' operating on avantgarde texts." He is also experimenting with "hypotheses of echophony and metaphonic communications on magnetic tape."

²⁶ A sixth map (of Central Europe with Germany, Benelux, Czechoslovakia, and Poland) appeared the same year in the first issue of the magazine *Gramma* based in Lecce.

²⁷ An evident trace of which remains, for that matter, in A.B.O.'s *Introduzione alle mappe*. When he writes that "these lettrisms are poised between the apocalyptic (for the alternative organization of the languages proposed) and the integrated (for the analogical use of verbal and visual institutions)," the reference is obviously to the well-known work of U. Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati. Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964).

²⁸ Although they had both been educated at the Istituto Leone XIII, the Milanese Jesuit school, Manzoni and Balestrini (who was two years younger) came into contact later, in the second half of the 1950s. Subsequently, the very few to write about Manzoni during his lifetime included Luciano Anceschi, Antonio Porta, and Elio Pagliarani. See "Una violenta fiducia. I Novissimi con Piero Manzoni," in *alfabeta2.it*, May 4, 2014, cia-i-novissimi-piero-manzoni/; an abridged version is now in my *Monsieur Zero. 26 lettere su Manzoni, quello vero* (Rome: Italo Svevo, 2018), pp. 68–70.

²⁹ Contrary to what Germano Celant has maintained on various occasions, the apparently misleading toponyms of *Capo Horn* in Iceland and *Valencia* in Ireland are not arbitrary distortions but rather an hyperbolic emphasis on Manzoni's part of "real" toponyms effectively registered in the territories in question, albeit far less known than their South American and Spanish counterparts. For that matter, in the case of Baltimore mentioned by Agnetti, the well-known city on the East Coast of the United States has one counterpart in Peru and no fewer than two in Ireland (see G. Zanchetti, "Baltimore è proprio a Baltimore? Spaesamento e tautologia nelle 'Tavole di accertamento,'" in *Piero Manzoni. Nuovi studi*, Milan: Carlo Cambi, 2017, pp. 108–09). It may be no coincidence that two of A.B.O.'s five maps are devoted precisely to the "ghost territories" conjured up by Manzoni. If attention is to be drawn to this precedent, it should also be noted that A.B.O.'s interest in cartography was prior to the maps of Alighiero Boetti and to the subsequent "spatial turn" in general; see F. Tedeschi, *Il mondo ridisegnato. Arte e geografia nella contemporaneità* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2011); M. G. Messina, "Viaggi virtuali di Alighiero Boetti alle origini delle mappe, 1967–1971," in *L'uomo nero*, X, 10, December 2013, pp. 211–25.

³⁰ A.B.O. also speaks in the *Introduzione alle mappe* of his "intention to checkmate the ineluctable metaphoricality of poetry and establish it on its own metonymic certainty."

³¹ See F. Francucci, "Il sasso e l'uovo. Beckett e Antonio Porta," in G. Alfano and A. Cortellessa, eds., *Tegole dal cielo. L' "effetto Beckett" nella cultura italiana* (Rome: EDUP, 2006), pp. 77–96.

³² E. Pagliarani, *Lezione di fisica* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1964); now in Idem, *Tutte le poesie (1946–2011)*, ed. A. Cortellessa (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2019), pp. 154–57.

³³ The conversation also appears in G. Novelli, *Scritti '43–'68*, ed. Paola Bonani (Rome: NERO, 2019), pp. 180–90.

³⁴ E. Sanguineti, *Laborintus* [1956], in Idem, *Segnalibro. Poesie 1951–1981* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982), p. 13. We are also reminded of the not so playful quotation from Stalin that appears as a motto to the first text in A. Bonito Oliva, *Passo dello strabismo. Sulle arti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978, p. 7): "It's always death that wins in the end."

³⁵ See Sanguineti, *Segnalibro*, pp. 69–90.

³⁶ It may prove hard today to understand the influence exercised by the Novissimi on the working hypotheses of the next generation of poets. One eloquent indication is *L'incubo dei novissimi*, a self-debunking performance put forward by one of its most significant representatives, the Bolognese poet Gregorio Scalise, in the event *Il poeta postumo* organized by Franco Cordelli in 1977 at the Ferro di Cavallo bookstore in Rome. The photos by Agnese De Donato and Giorgio Piredda included in Cordelli's book documenting the episode a year later (now in S. Chiodi, ed., *Il poeta postumo. Manie pettegoleszi rancori*, with contributions by A. Cortellessa and D. Giglioli, Florence: Le Lettere, 2008)

show Scalise reading from books distinguished by the unmistakable graphic design of Feltrinelli's "Materiali" series, including Giuliani's *Immagini e maniere*, Sanguineti's *Ideologia e linguaggio*, and Balestrini's *Ma noi facciamone un'altra*.

³⁷ The photographs juxtaposed are by Alessandro, Claudio Abate, Elisabetta Catalano, and Ugo Mulas.

³⁸ A. Bonito Oliva, "Itinerario del nome," in *Manuale di volo*, p. 23. The second part repeats the text of the leaflet of November 1978.

³⁹ Ibid.: "The name is therefore the *vano* [space], the dwelling place of the spirit that uses the figure of the surface. At the same time, it is *vano* [vain, ineffective] in the sense that it does not completely conceal what it promises to house."

⁴⁰ Quotations from pp. 21–22 of A. Giuliani's introduction to *I Novissimi. Poesie per gli anni '60* [1961] (Turin: Einaudi, 2003); "quality of the time" is a quotation from the first *laisse* of Sanguineti's *Laborintus* ("noi che riceviamo la qualità dai tempi," *Segnalibro*, p. 13), which is in turn a quotation from Foscolo's commentary on the *Lock of Berenice* by Callimachus.

⁴¹ Giuliani's introduction to *I Novissimi*, p. 26.

⁴² "A. o B." in Italian. See Bonito Oliva, "Itinerario del nome," pp. 24–25.

⁴³ "The purpose of 'true contemporary poetry,' as Leopardi observed in 1829, "is to increase vitality." This is the opening line of Giuliani's introduction to *I Novissimi* (p. 15; the reference is to the *Zibaldone*, February 1, 1829, where Leopardi writes that we can say of "true contemporary poetry [...] what Sterne said of a smile: that it adds a thread to the very short tapestry of our life. It refreshes us, as it were, and increases our vitality").

⁴⁴ Bonito Oliva, "Itinerario del nome," p. 23.

⁴⁵ Bonito Oliva, "Parola mia: la poesia," p. 5.

⁴⁶ I. Nievo, *Antiafrodisiaco per l'amor platonico* [1851], ed. A. Balduino (Venice: Marsilio, 2011).

⁴⁷ The quotation is from the most organized of the many unpublished poems discovered in A.B.O.'s archives by Paola Marino. Bearing the title *Elegia* and the date 1961 at the bottom of the page, it is the second in a collection of 27 typewritten compositions entitled *La cauta misura del gesto* (a reference to Rilke).

⁴⁸ Bonito Oliva, "Memoria del dimenticare (a memoria)," pp. 260–61.