

Resumo

Este artigo pretende reconstruir o debate crítico sobre a análise da crise nas disciplinas da História e Crítica da Arte, focando particularmente a proposta formulada pelos teóricos norte-americanos que contribuíram para a revista *October*. O descrédito de muitos métodos críticos modernistas, particularmente o de Clement Greenberg – o diktat modernista – marcou a criação da revista e deu origem a propostas estabelecidas por críticos comprometidos com uma nova abordagem. Contudo, as suas posições divergentes contribuíram para minar os tradicionais conceitos de autonomia da arte e da crítica. As propostas discutidas durante o curso da publicação foram o resultado de uma reavaliação dos instrumentos disciplinares da História e da Crítica da Arte na sequência das cruciais alterações culturais que tiveram lugar nos anos 1980. ●

Abstract

This article aims to reconstruct the critical debate regarding the examination of the crisis in the disciplines of art history and criticism with a particular focus on the proposal formulated by U.S. theorists who contributed to *October* journal. The discrediting of many modernist critical methods, particularly that of Clement Greenberg – the formalist diktat – marked the birth of the journal and gave rise to proposals set forth by critics committed to a new approach. Their divergent positions, nonetheless, have contributed to undermining the traditional concepts of the autonomy of art and criticism. The proposals discussed over the course of publication were the result of a reappraisal of the disciplinary instruments of art history and criticism pursuant to the crucial cultural changes which took place in the 1980s. ●

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Arnauld Pierre
Université de Paris-Sorbonne

Pedro Lapa
Instituto de História da Arte
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa
Museu Coleção Berardo

palavras-chave

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HISTORY OF ART AND ART CRITICISM: A SYSTEM IN CRISIS

MARIA GIOVANNA MANCINI

University of Salerno, Italy

Academy of Fine Art, Urbino, Italy

“Art criticism is in a worldwide crisis” (Elkins 2003, 4) is the starting point of the investigation by James Elkins, the theorist who in 2008 was the driving force behind the seminar on the state of criticism. At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, art criticism is without doubt in crisis. Criticism, as underlined by Tara McDowell in the opening section of the fourth issue of the journal *The Exhibitionist* (McDowell 2011), has given up its place in contemporary practice to curating. The figure of the critic has in fact lost appeal to the advantage of the figure of the curator. Yet the questions which today enliven international debate regarding the role of the critic in crisis (the crisis of theoretical practice, the nature of critical judgement, the critical relationship between interpretative practice and art object) are analogous to those which at the end of the 1970s, in the eyes of the critics involved in the conference of Montecatini, had appeared to be breaks which were impossible to heal in some cases, or else were obstacles which one could get round in the process of incessant interpretation. On that occasion, Filiberto Menna discussed the state of criticism, responding with an unavoidable position to the crisis of the discipline which pulls art and criticism inexorably together in the common destiny of self-analysis and the rejection of ingenuous realism/referentialism (Menna 1979, 110) still linked to the tradition of the eighteenth century. Criticism, like art, from those years onwards put the emphasis on the heteronomy of the practices involved “in extraneous phenomena, of a socio-cultural order” (Menna 1979, 115). At that same conference, Dorflès posed the question of whether axiologic judgement was still practicable, a question which, with contrasting results, has been posed more recently both by the theorists involved in the round tables of the seminar organised by James Elkins (Elkins 2008) and those who took part in the debate published in the *October* journal (Baker et al. 2002). At Montecatini again, Angelo Trimarco, looking into the theoretical relationship between the positions of Gombrich and those of Kris and, taking advantage of the studies by Freud, had stated that any interpretation is conjecture. In this way, the

Italian critic attributed a positive characteristic to the word, conceding the power to the critic, in relation to the interpretation of the symbol, rather than to over-determine, to question the text “as a plural text, which can never be completely unveiled” (Trimarco 1979, 162).

The crisis of art criticism brought to light by the Montecatini conference has never been resolved anywhere. It has rather become a sort of fundamental question of critical practice, which, on the one hand, exacerbates the crisis of previous paradigms, on the other, it translates as a metaphor that constantly feeds investigation in art regarding methods and practices in criticism. The condition in which the history of art and art criticism found themselves at the end of the 1970s is one of the objective impracticability of traditional methods. Such a crisis was brought about by the art that was re-founded in the previous decade on the dynamics of signification which neutralised any attempt at autonomy. One may think of the character of political protest and of the art market to which phenomena like Process Art or Arte Povera gave rise through their de-materialisation in actions and processes. Parallel to one another, art and criticism looked for references in contexts that were external to their narrow specific discipline, contributing to the building of a system of broad relationships between criticism, art history, institutions and the market (Menna 1982). In this condition of total subversion of the cultural paradigms and of the methodological instruments of art and art criticism, the journal *October* was born in 1976. Founded by Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson in 2004, the most well-known authors among the editorial board, published their “history of art”, the book *Art since 1900* (Foster et al. 2011). The trajectory of the *October*, from the moment of its foundation up to the year in which the “manual” of art history was published, keeps the self-analysis of one’s methods constantly active in a condition of crisis. The same movement of “overcoming of Greenberghian formalism”, in which we can identify the act of foundation of the journal, becomes the metaphor of a change of epoch and is constantly reiterated in the methodological essays. The antagonism of the journal towards formalist critical theory, its methods and its epigones is never pacified, indeed it constantly feeds the critical analysis. Formalism is the enemy and Greenberg is the father to be killed. Yet the control that the formalist perspective exercised, for example, over the organ of the press of the most mainstream contemporary art culture of all time, the journal *Artforum*, had already been reduced to a minimum by the end of the 1970s. The proposal of a re-reading of the past, in particular of the European historic Avant-garde, one of the missions of the journal *October*, continues to be compared with the formalist orthodoxy that had been the theoretical model according to which the institution, for example Barr’s MoMA, made its choices.

The crisis seems to be part and parcel of the discipline of art criticism itself and in the investigation of critics in the second half of the nineteenth century who constantly asked themselves the question regarding the value and the function of what they were doing. In 2008, the volume *The State of Art Criticism* (Elkins 2008) was published and came about as a round table, where the seminar gave itself

the objective of mapping out and considering the problems associated with the reasoning behind the diverse tendencies in art criticism. In the introduction to the volume with the optimistic title "The Recovery of Criticism", Michael Schreyach outlines a concise history of the function of criticism from the second half of the nineteenth century. The crisis of the discipline of art criticism embraces all aspects: first of all Schreyach points out that the crisis of the discipline translated into the consumption of moments of analysis, of judgement and writing, in a condition of autonomy which is no longer practicable since by now we have gone beyond the confines of the discipline in a hybrid practice which, in fact, cannot recognise its own special public. Such problems related to the role of criticism, to writing and to the role of the art critic had all already been debated in the Italian conference of 1978. Yet what probably becomes more acute in 2008 is the knowledge of the invasive presence of the market which reserves a secondary and subordinate role to criticism. Writing without a reader, Schreyach defines it in this way, referring to the position of Elkins (Elkins 2003). The art critic, freeing him or herself from his or her audience, rediscovers his or her liberty and frees him or herself from the obsessions of the market. In this process of liberation criticism runs the risk of becoming an autonomous discipline, not because of theoretical assumptions, but because of isolation. At the same time, however, Schreyach suggests an ethical involvement in criticism inasmuch as every aesthetic judgement is "inseparable from social and ethical judgements". Rather, the method, the analysis of methodologies of art criticism and even the use of determinate theoretical tools, in and of themselves imply taking a political position, and an example of this may be the critical conduct of Buchloh. In the essay "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" or else "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriations and Montage in Contemporary Art", Buchloh not only contributes with an unpublished reading of the phenomenon of the return of painting and the post-conceptual experiences in the United States in the 1980s, but above all, on the one hand, he suggests a brilliant analogy between the conservative politics of governments and regimes and the asphyxiating and conservative values of art and, on the other hand, traces out a careful analysis of the concepts of Modernism and Post-modernism. Buchloh was present at Montecatini in 1978 with a contribution that claimed for the art critic the ability to balance historicity with subjectivism. He constantly compares the critical positions of Marxist theorists adopting in reference to Marxist and psychoanalytic theory without ever losing sight of the works and the artists in a critical interweaving which contributes to rebuilding the broad contexts in which art acts. French Structuralism and Post-structuralism, Marxist theory and knowledge that criticism, like art, has an active role in the consciousness of one's time, make Buchloh's essays dense and involving diachronic reconstructions of historical facts and also critical discourse. Ivo-Alain Bois, who in 1997 published an interview with the critic in *Artforum*, recognised that Buchloh's analyses help readers and younger generations to "negotiate the difficult mourning of Modernism's utopia without falling into the trap of cynicism" (Buchloh and Bois 1997). In the crisis of

the modernist paradigm in art criticism, and not only in this field, the spark of the renewal of the method of investigation should be identified, of which the *October* put itself forward as a supporter and, together with the journal, all the critics who assisted in its publication. Indeed, it is precisely in the problematic overcoming of Modernism and Formalism, as has been carried out in the journal, that the crisis takes place but, at the same time, there remains a question which is still open which becomes a fertile field of investigation and theoretical production for all critics who gather round the editorial board of *October*. The overcoming of the Formalist perspective that took place at the heart of the journal, instilled in the United States' context the suspicion that the *Modern* and *Modernism* were not commensurate and identifiable cultural unities. Recognition was made of this by T. J. Clark in his introduction to the volume of 1999 which recounted the exhaustion of an idea, defining formalism, opticalism, elitism and purism, to which we could add other modernist ideologies such as realism, as forms of representation which by now were illegible. Following this, in an article published in *October*, Clark affirmed that "Modernism was an approach to modernity" (Clark 2002, 164).

Recently the debate on the outcomes of modernism has addressed itself, also recording the change of perspective grammatically with an inversion from the singular to the plural, to re-building the plurality of the experiences of the modernisms. With an exhibition at the Tate Britain in 2009, Nicholas Bourriaud, in a manifesto with the eloquent title "Altermodern", pointed out a creolisation of the global state of culture and the end of the postmodern in a New Modernity (Ryan 2009). Showing scepticism towards the position of Bourriaud, Rebaté clearly laid out the strategy with which poets and intellectuals referring to philosophical theories, have begun a canonisation of modernism and of "the tenets of what is recognized as a Theory" (Rebaté 2014). Reflection on the relationship between the terms modern, modernism and postmodernism is itself a thesis which cannot be dealt with exhaustively here, though it is necessary to point out the critical nature of such concepts.

Paul de Man, who in 1956 had already confirmed the end of Formalism, at least, in literary criticism, rejected the idea that criticism served as a connecting channel between the sense of the original experience of the author and the communicative form and hence the reader-spectator. De Man's criticism does not smooth over misunderstandings, it does not normalise or translate, but rather, in the hermeneutic irreducibility of *blindness* in *insight*, it nourishes the two categories which act as counterweights to each other in the volume published in 1971. Paul de Man sanctions the possibility of a formal reading of the literary work and of an interpretation that, with clarity, unveils the significance of the text. "Criticism" which shares the same semantic environment as "crisis" is certainly for Paul de Man a practice which can sometimes produce visions, and sometimes blindness (de Man 1971), but always makes suppositions difficult which, until the moment of reading, were considered solid, since every text, and from here de Man's discourse also extends to the universe of visual art, is a methodological self-investigation

inasmuch as it measures the distance between itself and the preconceived idea of the original intent. At the same time, however, criticism, which is before all else an investigation into one's own presuppositions, runs into the same blindness which it had previously programmatically aimed to overcome: from here we get the process which de Man defines as the *rhetoric of crisis* (de Man 1971, 16), in a movement of a *self-reflecting mirror*. The process of self-mystification of which de Man speaks, would in our eyes lead *en abyme* (an expression and figure which is dear to Deconstruction and, in particular, to Owens who, in *October*, publishes some essays which, with de Man, share many critical suggestions) (Owens 1978, 1980), to the reiterating of the crisis in a process which is inexhaustible and always functional to the validation of new critical presuppositions. The crisis – *the rhetoric of crisis* – becomes the model of the process of methodological investigation.

In 1982, a new monograph issue of the journal *Art Journal* was dedicated precisely to the crisis of art history. Numerous pages are dedicated to methodological reflection, and the editor of the issue, Henri Zerner, invited some scholars to reflect publicly on questions of the discipline without, however, having the intention of representing all the contemporary tendencies in art history in the debate. Henri Zerner was of the persuasion that the history of art had to be *re-examined, rethought, restructured* and, in effect, he not only posed the question of historicism and anti-historicism, but also asked himself if referring to categorizations which distinguished creation and production, artefacts and artworks were still valid. Over the years, histories that questioned philological principles or methods of historical criticism alternated with investigational methodologies which, taking as a model French critical theory and the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, declared them to be obsolete. Yet, Zerner warns us that such a model has undergone a further updating and the new art history gives itself the objective of being “more thoroughly historical than the old, because it believes that art is not purely aesthetic but that it has many functions and that these functions are not simply peripheral or even detrimental, but an essential part of its nature and meaning” (Zerner 1982, 279). The distinction between criticism and history of art, not sketched out, but discounted in Zerner's discourse, translates very effectively in the incipit of the article by Oleg Grabar which first of all declares his difficulty as an art historian in discussing the methodological presuppositions of his practice, and so runs the risk of seeming “obvious, obscure, doctrinaire”. Soon after, however, in categorizing the different approaches to the problem, he underlines the methodological criticalities which oscillate between hyper-specialisation and the jargon of chronological or iconographical investigation and those “centred on a mass of ‘isms’, ‘ics’ or ‘logies’” (Marxism, Structuralism, semiotics) (Grabar 1982, 281). The model proposed by Grabar, to simplify its long and articulated discourse, is based on several issues and, in particular, on the perception that has as its presupposition “a universal relationship between man and his visual experience” (Grabar 1982, 283). In the monographic issue there follows a series of methodological proposals that show how much the discourse of art history is not at all neutral, but rather always manifests a relationship of reciprocal implication with art criticism. An example of this

is the essay by Werckmeister which looks into the attempts by art historians informed by Marxist theory to radicalize the interpretations of works created by politically-involved artists who have instead been historically depoliticised by institutional discourse (Werckmeister 1982, 291). In a similar way, the proposal by Rosalind Krauss puts the accent on the nature of *aesthetic discourse* and, in particular, on the interpretation of photography which when, in a manipulative way, it is brought into the museum institution, is transformed from a complex sign into an autonomous work of art. "The transformation of landscape after 1860 into a flattened and compressed experience of space" takes place through the aesthetical categories which art history has developed in order to legitimise itself (Krauss 1982, 313).

What is the relationship between criticism, art and reality? In what order, and with what function, can they be linked together? What should the aim of criticism and art history be? The problem of history and of philological historicism comes back again and again to the debate that literary and artistic criticism have kept going since the end of the 1950s. Yet, often the question is reduced to the meaning of the art object in its materiality since Formalism, and this is something about which Sheyrach's analysis puts us on our guard, analyses the contingent dimension of that object from a historical perspective. Avoiding all the "narratives in which local forces, tensions, or contexts caused stylistic changes" (Sheyrach 2008, 8), Formalism has as its object to supply an objective historical interpretation of the meanings of art, whether these are cultural or artistic. The formalist reading of art, however, can neither exhaust the art of the historic Avant-garde nor the art which, from the end of the 1960s, finds its legitimacy in the relationship with the spectator and with the political and social existential context of the author which, of necessity, escapes the presuppositions on which the formalist method is calibrated. It is the case of the critical experience of the *October* journal that, in the United States, contributes to proving wrong some historical-critical equivocations regarding the widespread European Avant-garde from the tentacular and self-coherent Greenberghian critical setup. The same object of investigation in the perspective of Bürger, which favours the forms of collage and cubist and Dada montage, is proof of a total adherence of art to life and, therefore, is the result of a process leaning towards heteronomy rather than the autonomy so dear to Greenberghian Formalism. One can further think of the analyses by Filiberto Menna who, in the essay *Profezia di una società estetica* (Menna 1983), already located the Avant-garde in a political dimension, and in the book *La linea analitica dell'arte moderna* (Menna 1983), put forward the idea that art is the language which aims to subvert the dictates of representation. The break with Formalism, in the practice of criticism which made headway at the end of the 1970s in the United States with the foundation of the *October* journal, coincides with the crisis in the modernist paradigm with its narratives which do not operate, but does not immediately identify with an unconditional adherence to the post-modernist perspective. The moment of germination of the affirmation of this new perspective in art criticism in the United States is without doubt the foundation of the journal *October* and the beginning of a criticism that turned to French philosophical thought as a source of new tools. First

Krauss, in the essay that appeared in September of 1972 in *Artforum* and significantly republished in 2010 in the volume “Perpetual Inventory” (Krauss 2010), enters the fray with the criticism of the infinite form of the inventory, refusing to adhere to a formalist theory of art. She, at the same time, recognises that her method is modernist. Such a notation suggests a much broader idea of the *Modern*, almost self-inclusive, than Modernism itself had given. In the essay, Krauss progressively distances herself from the presuppositions of the practice of Greenberg and from the partiality of the method of Fried. The reading of the work according to a historicist mind-set, writes Krauss, is founded on “systems of control and censure”. The instruments of investigation – a question by then widely accepted – serve not only to evaluate, but also contribute to giving form, to identifying the object to be investigated. So even a strictly philological method is not practicable. Rosalind Krauss is still a modernist critic, she herself states as such, but she addresses herself to a criticism – and she will give proof of this in the project on the Formless, a critical text, a catalogue and an exhibition all in one, turning continuously to the thought of Bataille- “as part of a larger modernist sensibility and not the narrowed kind” (Krauss 2010, 128). In the introduction to the volume *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (Krauss 1986), Rosalind Krauss immediately poses the question of a change of perspective in art history which rejects the rigid and authoritarian formalist and historicist mind-set of Greenberg to arrive at an investigation of art events and on the methods of art history and criticism. She begins a change in perspective of the historicist model which identifies, in historical succession, the place where a sense of the work is produced, proposing a synchronic system which combines the entreaties of Structuralism with the updating that Post-structuralism has offered. In this way, the categories on which the historicist method advanced its hypotheses were brought into crisis: those of the author and authorship, of the work, of the original and originality, of continuity and rupture, of unity and identity, of gender, of the institutions and of history itself. It goes without saying that practical criticism should be reformulated with the contribution of different tools of investigation which take from various disciplines such as the theory of language and psychoanalysis, so as to capture the sense of the work in the “expanded field” of cultural production. The contributions by Krauss and other scholars that enrich the debate in the *October* journal are often exquisitely methodological. Even in this sense their critical conduct is radically revolutionary, since it never takes method for granted and instead it makes it the object of study at the very moment in which it deals with art and its context. Among the most radical articles by Krauss, in this sense, we should include “In the name of Picasso” (Krauss 1981) and “No More Play” (Krauss 1984) in which the theorist launches a ferocious attack, not so much against the Formalism of Greenberg, as rather against its institutional results. Under Krauss’s fire is William Rubin, former director of the Department of Painting and Sculptures of MoMA, curator of the exhibition *Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage* and *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: The affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. Krauss, in a single blow, sweeps away the resistance of art history which, through a nominalistic use of biographical data,

flattens the multiplicity of senses of the work to data which are identifiable in the biography of the artist and, taking advantage of the presence of collage, suggests a textual method for art criticism which uses linguistic theories, a media analysis and the theory of the sign. In the letters published in *October* in reply to Krauss's 1981 article, Rubin claims the possibility of referring to the artist's biography as a source, among other sources, for extending studies of a work, but Krauss insists on a drastic distinction between "a denotational system that ties and limits meaning to a real world referent (label to object)" and "the other connotational system that works from a different picture of signification altogether" (Krauss 1981, 119). Some years later, in 1988 in the *October* journal, the essay by Leo Steinberg "The Philosophical Brothel" was published, brought up to date with a *Postscriptum*, and in the editorial which accompanied the issue, Rosalind Krauss, in effect, includes the critical method of Steinberg in the programme of methodological renewal that the journal has set itself as a goal. Leo Steinberg, in the essay "The Philosophical Brothel", entering into in earnest the methodological question, goes on to de-legitimise all the current readings of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* and adds various textual connections to the iconographic reading, making it more than an end in itself. In the essay entitled "Other Criteria", based on a lecture held at MoMA in March of 1968, published in a short form in *Artforum* in 1972 and, finally, in full in a volume with the same title, Leo Steinberg defines his critical practice as opposed to Formalism given that he does not share the "certainties, their apparatus of quantification, their self-righteous indifference to that part of artistic utterance which their tools do not measure" (Steinberg 1972, 64). The distance between Steinberg's method and Formalism can be measured, in a definitive sense, with the introduction of the idea of the "flatbed picture plane" of the works of Robert Rauschenberg where, through the "tilt of picture plane from vertical to horizontal", the most radical change in art is carried out. This was a process that saw a radical transformation in the relationship between artist and image in a style of painting which Steinberg before any others defines as *Post-modernist* because it is conceived as the image of an image.

The crisis of the method of art history and art criticism in the rejection of the formalist dictates of Greenberg is a spark, which shoots out regularly every time, in the course of the forty years that separate us from the foundation of the journal, that the problem of methodology is posed. Greenberg on the one hand and Formalism on the other are the negative models.

The relationship with Greenberg's theory, as a negative model, is central in the bibliography of most of the editorial board. It is interesting to note how Buchloh, in an essay published in 1990 as a result of a debate on the places which are central to the discourse of art between 1945 and 1964, reconstructs the facts linked to the art of the Russian avant-garde in the post-war period from the American point of view. In particular, Buchloh points out the "failure" of the reception in Western Europe and America of constructivist poetics and more in general of geometric poetics in the post-war period. Buchloh, whose work maintained a rigorously historicist structure, begins from the reflection on the transition of the work of Gabo from the Avant-garde

to the Neo-avant-garde. Such a passage should be seen as a reference to the work of Clement Greenberg: "What manoeuvre was Greenberg obliged to perform, initially to accommodate Gabo's work, then to exclude it from integration into the critical, institutional, and aesthetic framework of 1950?" (Buchloh 1990, 86). Buchloh, in short comments, identifies in the years immediately after the Second World War the beginning of a process of "deny the development of the movement" and "erase its commitment to mass audiences and ignore its utilitarian dimensions" with the aim of reorientating facts and personalities towards the modernist concept of autonomy which characterises American art. Greenberg with his theoretical production, and Alfred Barr and MoMA, through the process of musealization of works of art, contributed to the de-politicisation of the experiences of the Avant-garde. Buchloh's essay, together with the essays of Margit Rowell (Rowell 1978) and Maria Gough (Gough 1998; 2000; 2005), has contributed to a re-thinking of the history of the Soviet Avant-garde from an American point of view. The attempt by the octoberists to distance themselves from the hegemonic theory of Greenberg also translates into the identification of the problems related to the concepts of Modernism and Post-modernism. In 2004, the records of *The Vancouver Conference on Modernism*, held in the early 1980s, were republished, which bring together the critical voices of Lefebvre, Pleyne, Buchloh, Sekula, T.J. Clark, Crow and Greenberg who was the guest of honour at the meeting. In 2004, the republication of the results of the international debate on the modern is fundamental, Buchloh warns us in the editorial note to verify the concepts of the Modern that the Post-modern has aimed to take the place of. In fact, in the conference discussion is about the relationship between art and culture, high culture and mass culture (Crow, Buchloh 2004): a central theme in the reflection that Hal Foster was carrying out in the 1980s (Foster 1985, 33). In any case, the critical proposal that is made, and this is true of Foster who makes use of cultured references to French thought, psychoanalysis, but also to Marxist theory, is of radical rejection of the hegemonic formalist theory. In Foster's criticism, however, such a rejection, which stands out for its polemical opposition to "pluralism", the typical banner of conservative Post-modernism, distinguishes itself by its will to not only promote and interpret the proposals of contemporary artists with heterogeneous, interdisciplinary tools, but also to rethink the avant-garde which was poorly understood by formalist dogmatism (Foster 1985, 13, 31).

In the contributions published in the October journal, the critics always reserved very close attention to methodological questions by accompanying the various proposals, as well as with the use of various sources, with the publication of those same sources. From the very first issue methodological investigation had always accompanied the different proposals, but it had never been structured as a separate moment in which to discuss the role, the aims and the methods of art criticism and art history. With the translation of "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" by Foucault (Foucault 1976), or else with the publication in the second issue of the "Notes for a film of 'Capital'" by Sergei Eisenstein (Eisenstein 1976), or later on with the monographic issues dedicated to *Photography* (*Photography* 1978), or to *Psychoanalysis* (*Discipleship* 1984), or else

to Bataille (*Bataille*, 1986), or with issues which are set out as training in criticism like that dedicated to Broodthaers (*Broodthaers* 1987), to feminist perspectives (feminist issueS. 1994), to Aids (*AIDS* 1987), to multicultural identities (*The Identity in Question*, 1992), to the *Duchamp Effect* (*The Duchamp Effect*. 1994), or with the re-reading of specific or little-understood moments in art history, criticism was identified with militant practice which carried out methodological self-investigation at the same time as criticising oneself. *October* responds to the crisis of the discipline with an easily changing setup that renews its methods in a movement of continuous and incessant necessity to overcome the asphyxiating Greenberghian diktat. The articles in which critics reflect on the role or the work of the journal remind us of the form of a manifesto, for the demand for method and for the will to make an impact on contemporary culture. At a later moment, however, in the mid-1990s, in a climate of revision of the cultural presuppositions of Post-modernism (Foster 1993), with the advance of different models of art history and with the emergence of theoretical questions linked to the image, a whole issue is dedicated to investigation into Visual Studies (*October*, vol. 77). In volume 77, the theorists are involved in reflecting on the changes in direction that Visual Studies are undertaking. It is interesting to note that already at the beginning of the 1990s, the review dedicated space to reflection on Cultural Studies with the publication of an article by Stuart Hall. It was he who before others highlighted how Cultural Studies was born in answer to the crisis in order to go on to explain the implications of the long revolution that Cultural Studies had given rise to. The practice of study inaugurated by the Centre for Cultural Studies in Birmingham was contextual, broadened and involved “in the formations of contemporary culture and the theoretical models that would help to clarify what was going on was designed as a series of raids on other disciplinary terrain” (Hall 1990, 15). Such a radicalization seems to be the most evident discriminating factor that distinguishes the experience of Cultural Studies from that of Visual Studies. In that same issue there was the publication of an essay dedicated to the theory of Warburg and of his “Study of Ritual and Art on Two Continents” (Forster, Britt 1996), a questionnaire on visual culture to which most of the theorists involved on that front had responded and an essay by Mitchell. Finally, it was the turn of Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster to reach their conclusions between the different perspectives of Cultural Studies and Visual Studies. Foster chose to read their antinomies rather than oppose the two models on exclusive fronts (Foster 1996). Krauss, on the other hand, demonstrated how little Visual Studies had in common with Cultural Studies, a theoretical model which is still operative and which had produced a real insurgency in contemporary culture, feeding “an ever more technologised structure of knowledge [...] to increasingly alienated conditions of existence” (Krauss 1996, 96).

Finally, in volume 100, dedicated to Benjamin’s concept of obsolescence, for which the critics reserve a place separated from their militancy in order to discuss methodological questions in a round table on the theme of the “present condition of art criticism” with the theorists who were are closest to the journal and the art

historians of the major American institutions. The discussion was begun by Baker who notes that criticism is in crisis and who looks for the reasons. The loss of theoretical appeal seems to have reduced criticism to a surrogate of the ancient Connoisseurship, today involved on the one hand in curatorial organization and on the other in the legitimisation of tendencies whose aim is the market. The question around which the debate took place with the heat of a clash was that of judgement. Buchloh underlined the subordination of judgement to the choices of the market in a situation in which criticism is no longer militant and has abandoned the utopian dimension that had characterised it in the past. Foster, in no uncertain terms, totally rejected the idea that criticism should pass judgement and reminded those present that his generation had fought against this practice which instead was the foundation of the Greenberghian perspective. Not everyone was of the same opinion. For example, David Joselit attributed to judgement the value of identifying the theoretical object of critical discourse, even re-introducing the concept of quality. It should be emphasised as well that on the occasion of the already-mentioned round table organized by Elkins in 2008, the theoreticians invited repeatedly discussed analogous questions, claiming the necessity for criticism to judge quality. At the time of that seminar and the debates that followed it, a tough and widespread protest took place against the critical proposal of the octoberists, as the most regularly published authors in the journal were labelled with irony and a touch of polemic, feeding the crisis and disciplinary clashes. Laid out on a synchronic plane, in the debate over methods of art criticism and art history, the disciplines appear to be constantly in crisis, genetically forced to live out a continuous process of calling into question methods of investigation and interpretation for which every interpretation is always a test of method. In this way, art history is subjected to a process of incessant investigation into the methods more commonly adopted in order to be really contemporary regarding the object of one's studies, in a situation in which the history of the present of art cannot in any way demand neutrality in discourse and has to take account of criticism, sometimes radical and militant, sometimes acting in the interests of the market. ●

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