

## Clarifications concerning Gianfranco Sanguinetti

Well before Samson Kambalu used my open letter to Gianfranco Sanguinetti as part of his art installation titled *Sanguinetti Break Out Area*, currently displayed at the Venice Biennale – indeed, shortly after posting that letter to my website on 20 December 2013<sup>1</sup> – I regretted, not the contents of it, but the manner in which I’d expressed myself. I should have reserved the open letter for its primary recipient, and I should have written a second letter for public consumption. Such a letter would have been shorter and more to the point. It would have said the following.

Ever since August 2011, I’d been working with Sanguinetti on putting together an anthology of his writings. But he hadn’t been truthful with me: he’d withheld from me the facts that he’d located and begun organizing his archives, not with an eye towards putting together our anthology, but with the intention of selling them off through Christie’s. In fact, by the time that I was fortuitously tipped off by someone else, Sanguinetti’s archives had *already* been auctioned off and purchased by Yale University – without Gianfranco saying a word about these events or what they might mean for our projected anthology. And why would he keep me in the dark? Because he no doubt feared that I would denounce him for selling his archives instead of donating them and for selling them to the very buyer that, in 2008, had unsuccessfully tried to purchase Guy Debord’s archives (they ended up somewhere else). And, of course, after-the-fact denunciations are much less powerful than those made while the deal is still being worked out.

But Sanguinetti didn’t simply hide relevant facts from me. He also used me to settle a longstanding score with Debord or, rather, with the Debord estate (his ex-wife, Alice Becker-Ho). Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Debord had waged a nasty little campaign against Sanguinetti and his book *On Terrorism and the State*, which had been published in 1979. Debord claimed that, because of his association with someone named Mignoli, Sanguinetti wasn’t to be trusted and his book wasn’t to be published alongside Debord’s own comments about terrorism, which appeared in his “Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*,” also published in 1979. At the time, and for years afterwards, Sanguinetti didn’t say anything in response to Debord’s allegations. In fact, it was only in December 2012 that he broke his silence by publishing parts of a recent letter to Mustapha Khayati, with whom Sanguinetti had discussed Debord,<sup>2</sup> and by writing a brand-new text about Mignoli.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “Breaking Bad”: <http://www.notbored.org/breaking-bad.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: <http://www.notbored.org/To-Mustapha.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> “The Doge: A Recollection”: <http://www.notbored.org/The-Doge.pdf>.

I was intimately involved in this long-awaited, two-fisted response, which I took to be entries into our forthcoming anthology. In fact, my translations were the first versions of these texts to be published anywhere and, because these particular translations reflected changes that had been made in response to queries and suggestions from me, they were slightly different (and better) than the French originals.

At the time, I was led to believe that Sanguinetti had decided to finally break his silence because of my interest in his writings, which I'd been diligently translating and posting online ever since the late 1990s. (According to Gianfranco himself, he'd been following my work ever since then.) With our anthology in mind, or so I thought, Sanguinetti had unearthed and started going through his archives. He sent me a few gems as he did.<sup>4</sup> But nothing as important as the letter to Khayati and the statement about Mignoli. After they'd been published, Sanguinetti no longer spoke about the anthology, preferring instead to speak about the conspiracy theorists and situationist-inspired activists who'd caught his eye, to say he was too busy tending his orchards to do any other work at the moment, or to say nothing at all.

It was only later that I realized that – in addition to keeping me in the dark and thus neutralizing any objection I might make to the sale of his archives – Sanguinetti had in fact never intended to produce an anthology with me. He'd simply planned to use me as a part of his counter-attack against Debord & Company, and nothing more. And, of course, if I'd known that he'd been hiding the sale of his archives from me, I wouldn't have helped him in making his counter-attack. It would have struck me as hypocritical that, at the very moment that he was publicly attacking the institutionalization of Debord's archives, Sanguinetti himself was quietly arranging for his own archives to be institutionalized. Today, the cynicism of the move is obvious.

And yet I'm not happy that my open letter to Sanguinetti has been used as the glue that holds together all the random stuff (the dozens and dozens of decontextualized texts and photos) that Samson Kambalu found in the Beinecke Collection at Yale University, photographed despite signing a document saying that he wouldn't do anything of the kind, and is now displaying on the walls at the Venice Biennale. Make no mistake: my letter to Sanguinetti isn't merely a part of the *Sanguinetti Break Our Area*. Blown up to huge proportions, it is that installation's *raison d'être*. Why does Sanguinetti deserve to be subjected to the humiliation of having his entire archives reproduced and displayed in this fashion

---

<sup>4</sup> Including excerpts from his unpublished letter to Guy Debord dated 24 September 1978: <http://www.notbored.org/sanguinetti-24September1978.html>.

and without his knowledge? Because of the contents of my letter. Remove it and the whole thing falls apart.

I detest this usage of my letter for a number of reasons. As I have noted elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> I wasn't informed by Kambalu that he was going to use my letter and, if I *had been* informed, I would certainly have taken that opportunity to write a new text such as this one, clarifying the circumstances in which my open letter was written, and I would have insisted that Kambalu include it as well.

But the most irksome aspect of all this is that no one, neither Kambalu nor any of the journalists who have ridiculed Sanguinetti for suing Kambalu,<sup>6</sup> have paid attention to how I have treated Gianfranco *since* December 2013. Did I scuttle the publication of my translations of his *Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy* and *On Terrorism and the State*? No, I did not; they came out as planned, in January and February 2014, respectively. Did I say anything about my problems with their author in the translator's introductions that are included in each of these volumes? No, I did not; neither one includes a single negative remark.

These actions have clearly not spoken as loudly as my words, and so I take this opportunity – the very day on which Samson Kambalu is scheduled to appear in court in Venice – to say publicly what I have been saying privately for the last two years: despite my problems with Sanguinetti, I respect him for what he did for the revolutionary movement in Italy and elsewhere, and I think that his books deserve to be widely read and appreciated for their originality, insight and usefulness to current struggles. I am completely opposed to Kambalu's abusive treatment of his archives, and I wholeheartedly support Sanguinetti in his efforts to have the *Sanguinetti Break Out Area* dismantled immediately.

Bill Brown  
5 November 2015

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my letter to Okwui Enzewor dated 8 may 2015: <http://www.notbored.org/SamsonKambalu.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Roxana Azimi, *Le Monde*, 19 October 2015: <http://www.notbored.org/azimi.pdf>.