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The variational mode: three cases about documents, artworks and animation

Giacconi, R.

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The Variational Mode

Three cases about documents, artworks and animation

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Riccardo Giacconi

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Promotores

Prof. dr. Frans Willem Korsten

Prof. dr. Janneke Wesseling

Copromotor

Dr. Yasco Horsman

Roy Villevoeye

Artistiek adviseur

Promotiecommissie

Prof. dr. Henk Borgdorff

Prof. Frans de Ruiter

Prof. dr. ing. Robert Zwijnenberg

Dr. Joost de Bloois

Dr. Marc Boumeester

Dr. Pepita Hesselberth

Universiteit van Amsterdam

AKI ArtEZ hogeschool voor de kunsten

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Preamble

What really matters about the past is what we cannot remember. The rest, what memory conserves or retrieves, is mere sediment. A part of time passed has really become part, like a digested nutrient, of the living organism; it continues to be *past* but it is the only true living past and it lives in the brain and the blood, ignored by memory.¹

Furio Jesi

This dissertation is about a series of documents; it is about how I have used them in my artistic practice, and it is about the stories these documents convey. It starts from the postulation that a document is a narrative mode of an object; an object, in other words, would not function as a document if not narratively, if not conveying, serving the reconstruction of, proving a story. All of my artistic practice deals with documents, with using and exploring their narrative potential, inside and outside legal procedures and governmental discourses.

I will bring forward a parallel view of artworks and documents. As I will argue, both artworks and documents may be studied as situational and relational modes of existence of objects, insofar as both are based on the use a community makes of them. Therefore, not only documents will be studied as narrative artifacts. The following chapters will also deal with artworks that act as narrative artifacts. Artworks can tell stories. This seems obvious if we talk about films, puppet shows or radio-documentaries. But I will explain, starting from my practice, how even exhibitions may be conceived, in their entirety, as narrative artifacts.²

Of course, this is not a universal statement. I am far from arguing that every artwork is a narrative artifact – not all art may be described as narrative. However, my artworks included in this dissertation will be presented and studied in relation to their narrative potential.

Furthermore, I will attempt to demonstrate how the concept of ‘document’ is intrinsically connected to power and truth. A document, in order to act as such, always needs a certain validation, which usually is provided by an institution of power (a court, for instance). Such an institution certifies the truthfulness of the object, the narrative that invests it, and of the link between the two.

¹ Jesi, Furio. *Spartakus. The Symbolology of Revolt*, ed. Andrea Cavalletti, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 119.

² For a study of exhibitions as objects of cultural analysis, see Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), especially chapter 4, “Framing”, where Bal states: “The method I used in the exhibition was to deploy narrativity” (166).

My approach will be that of a ‘research in and through art’,³ which I believe can be extremely effective in proposing methods and possibilities for another use, another mode of existence of documents. If a document is a narrative mode of an object, then an artwork might function as an alternative mode of existence of the same object, as another way to animate it, potentially less related to power and authority. Art is capable of opening up a space for such an alternative mode, accommodating the narrative potential that documents express, while remaining outside legal procedures of officialization and validation.

My main research hypotheses, which I will try to test in this dissertation, are:

- *It is possible to conceive a mode of documents not based on official validation by institutions of power;*
- *Such a mode could be identified and studied in and through an art practice.*

In the following introduction, I will try to situate my artistic practice and my research project, by indicating a series of artists and artworks I was inspired by, from different fields, as well as by introducing certain concepts that will recur extensively in the dissertation, such as ‘intensity’, ‘mode’, ‘use’, ‘animation’ and ‘narrative’.

³ “The exceptional thing about research in and through art is that practical action (the making) and theoretical reflection (the thinking) go hand in hand. The one cannot exist without the other, in the same way action and thought are inextricably linked in artistic practice. This stands in contradistinction to ‘research *into* art’, such as art history and cultural studies.” Wesseling, Janneke. “Introduction”, in *See It Again, Say It Again: The Artist as Researcher*, ed. Janneke Wesseling (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), 2.

Introduction

Artworks and documents

1. Cycles

In my artistic practice I often work on long-term, research-based cycles of pieces. I usually begin by carrying out an investigation into an object of study – be it a social situation (e.g. a Tuareg community in Northern Italy), a historical event (e.g. a children’s theatre occupied and turned into a commune), a cultural artifact (e.g. a puppet play from the beginning of the XX Century). My investigation methods include collecting information in archives or libraries, as well as through interviews with people connected to the object of study.

Starting from the materials and the information I collect, I produce artworks that enact and engage with the object of study. Each of the cycles I have developed so far comprises different materializations and formalizations of the research, using multiple techniques, materials and narrative forms. For example, the cycle *Gondwana* (2015), about a Tuareg community in Northern Italy, comprises a video work, a museographic display of a series of objects and photographs, a tapestry, audio recordings of a series of musical improvisations and a publication. Each of the elements functions as a self-standing artwork, and they are not necessarily to be presented all together. Some of them have been presented on the occasion of art exhibitions; some during film screenings; some in the context of a performing art festival, some online, some through a radio program, etc. A ‘cycle’ in my artistic practice is an ensemble of different artworks related to a specific object of study.

In this dissertation, I will talk about three different cycles. Each of them focuses on a different figure. The first two are about Italian individuals (Simone Pianetti, Augusto Masetti), the third one concerns a traditional Colombian puppet character (*el espiritado*). Every ‘cycle’ is therefore intended both as a conceptual framework related to a case study, as well as a practical *ensemble* of artworks, objects and presentations thereof.

Each of the three cycles comprises multiple artworks, which narrate and present stories, information, questions and hypotheses around each character. The next chapters will consist of three intertwining layers:

1. a description of the artistic elements constituting the cycle, including reports on their making and on their modalities of presentation;
2. a historical framework about the characters, where I will present records, sources, documents and testimonies that I have encountered through archives and field research;

3. a series of theoretical reflections connecting the characters, their historical framework and my artworks.

The three layers will be interwoven, jointly developing the research discourse.

2. References

In the following chapters I will present examples from my artistic practice, ranging from exhibitions in gallery spaces to puppet shows in village squares, from films presented in movie theatres to workshops held in educational contexts. My work as an artist takes place in different fields and ‘disciplines’. Similarly, the scope of my artistic references – that is, the artists and artworks I was inspired by and looked at while working on my pieces – vary greatly.

I was hugely inspired by performers working in the field of puppetry, animation and *teatro di figura* today, especially by the experimental theatre company Pathosformel and solo puppeteer Marta Cuscunà, both from Italy. In works such as *La prima periferia*, *La più piccola distanza* and *T.E.R.R.Y.*, Pathosformel works with objects and animation in a contemporary, distinctive style, encompassing gesture, sound and space, without using words. In *La prima periferia*, for instance, three anthropomorphic, human-scale, skeleton-like puppets are animated by three performers. But the animation does not evoke a specific storyline. Rather, it can be described as a study on minimal, essential gestures: taking a hand to the head, slightly moving a foot, etc. The puppets emit only one sound: the creaking of the material of which they are made, a voice that seems to accompany the slow and measured actions of which they are involuntarily protagonists.



Pathosformel, *La prima periferia*

Marta Cuscunà, for example in *Sorry, boys. Dialogues on a secret pact for 12 severed heads*, explicitly connects her practice to the Italian puppetry tradition. As a one-woman show, she animates her puppets alone on stage, modulating her voice to give life to different characters. She works with puppets that have a clear continuity with classic *marionette* and *burattini* forms. What especially inspired me in Cuscunà's work is the fact that (in line with the Italian nomadic *cantastorie* tradition) she performs puppet adaptations of real stories, starting from sources like documents, written records, oral testimonies. For example, *Sorry, boys* is inspired by the 2008 controversy over the 'pregnancy pact' that 18 girls in a high school in Gloucester, Massachusetts had supposedly stipulated to get pregnant at the same time.



Marta Cuscunà, *Sorry, boys. Dialogues on a secret pact for 12 severed heads*

Apart from the context of performing arts, I have been interested in the way different practitioners have used puppets and animation in the ‘field’ of contemporary art, and I have been especially fascinated by specific pieces by artists Pierre Huyghe, Wael Shawky and Peter Friedl. Even within three very distinct artistic trajectories, the three share a common interest in the way animated objects may be used to tell stories.

In his super 16 mm film *This is not a time for dreaming* (2004), Pierre Huyghe documents a marionette show that tells the parallel stories of modernist architect Le Corbusier’s commission to design the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts at Harvard University, as well as Huyghe’s own commission to create an artwork to celebrate the building’s 40th anniversary. The puppets are recorded in intertwined timelines, mixing historical, contemporary and fantastic events. Le Corbusier and Huyghe are portrayed as puppet characters in the film, each describing the gestation of his own project. All the marionettes in the film have been manufactured by New Jersey-based company Puppet Heap, specialized in puppet fabrication. I have been very fascinated by Huyghe’s role as puppet master and narrator, as art critic Nicolas Bourriaud described him: “A researcher, traveller, narrator and organiser of events, Huyghe translates forms from one state to another – [...] an investigation of an institution into an opera for marionettes.”⁴

⁴ Bourriaud, Nicolas. “The reversibility of the real. Pierre Huyghe”, in *Tate Etc.* issue 7: Summer 2006, <https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/reversibility-real> (accessed 26 March 2018).



Pierre Huyghe, *This is not a time for dreaming*, 2004

Another artist embodying the figure of puppeteer and narrator in the contemporary art context is the Egyptian Wael Shawky. Grounded in extensive phases of research and investigation, his pieces question national, religious and artistic identity through film, performance and storytelling, mixing contemporary references with historical tradition, overlapping truth and fiction. Through marionettes, Shawky has staged epic recreations of the medieval clashes between Muslims and Christians in his film trilogy *Cabaret Crusades*, composed of *The Horror Show Files* (2010), *The Path to Cairo* (2012) and *The Secrets of Karbala* (2015). For the first film, Shawky used eighteenth century marionettes from the collection of Turin-based Maurizio Lupi marionette company. Custom-made ceramic marionettes were crafted for the second work, and glass marionettes from Murano for the third, blending human and animal traits, as well as referencing ancient African masks.



Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secrets of Karbala*, 2015

Artist Peter Friedl has been collaborating with the legendary Milanese marionette company Compagnia Marionettistica Carlo Colla & Figli (with which I, too, had the chance to collaborate, on a work that will be the focus of chapter 3 of this dissertation) on the piece *The Dramatist (Black Hamlet, Crazy Henry, Giulia, Toussaint)* (2013), a sculptural ensemble of four 80-centimetre-tall marionettes, embodying four historical figures: John Chavafambira, a healer and diviner of the Manyika tribe (from what is now Zimbabwe); Antonio Gramsci's wife Julia Schucht, to whom the Italian Marxist addressed most of his famous prison letters; Toussaint Louverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution executed by the French in 1803; and the legendary industrialist Henry Ford. Side by side, their feet touching the floor yet held up by strings, these figures indicate specific moments in cultural and political history. As puppets (moveable objects controlled by others), they are not monuments carved in stone but, rather, counter-monuments: they commemorate not what history has been, but its unexpressed potentialities.



Peter Friedl, *The Dramatist (Black Hamlet, Crazy Henry, Giulia, Toussaint)*, 2013

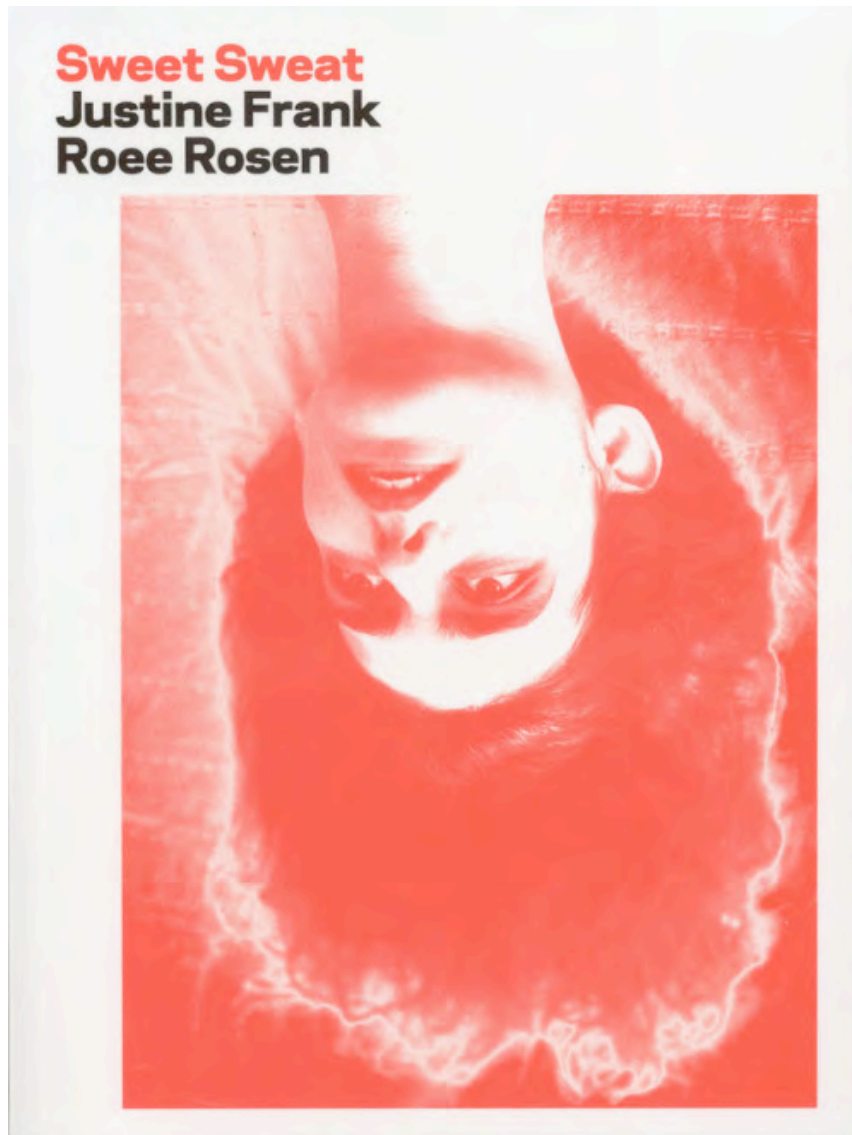
Peter Friedl has been a reference for me not only because of his use of puppets in his artistic work, but also because of his writings. Since his early times as a theatre critic, Friedl has been writing essays in parallel to (and in dialogue with) his work as a visual artist. A book has been published in 2010,⁵ collecting many of his texts tackling multiple disciplines. He wrote portraits of George Sand, Clarice Lispector, Theo van Doesburg, Alighiero Boetti and Jean-Luc Godard; he wrote on theatre and film history, as well as on colonial history and its traces in the present in Haiti, South Africa, Brazil, including Italy's half-forgotten colonial experience in Africa. Finally, I have been extremely interested in Friedl's written comments and reflections on his own projects, which I look at as a major reference of an artist writing about their own artworks.

Other notable examples of artists writing about and around topics connected to their artistic practice are Hito Steyerl (whose writings I will quote extensively), Roe Rosen and Raqs Media Collective. I will explain why their work as visual artists *and* writers has been a reference for my research.

Since the moment I had the chance to meet Israeli artist and filmmaker Roe Rosen, I have been fascinated by his role of narrator and protagonist of his films, publications and other storytelling projects in various media. He has published various books of writings connected to his works, among which *Live and Die as Eva Braun and Other Intimate Stories* (Sternberg Press, 2017), *The Blind Merchant (1989–1991)* (Sternberg Press, 2016), *Maxim Komar-Myshkin, Vladimir's Night* (Sternberg Press, 2014) and a novel written by fictional Jewish Belgian painter Justine Frank (*Sweet Sweat*, Sternberg Press, 2009). In all of his writings, there is a deep engagement and a constant experimentation in the relation between visual artistic forms (drawings, paintings, film) and different genres of writing (essays, reflections, fictional personas,

⁵ Friedl, Peter. *Secret Modernity: Selected Writings and Interviews 1981–2009*, ed. Anselm Franke (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010).

comments on artworks), both under the sign of a constant drive to tell, to evoke and to question stories.

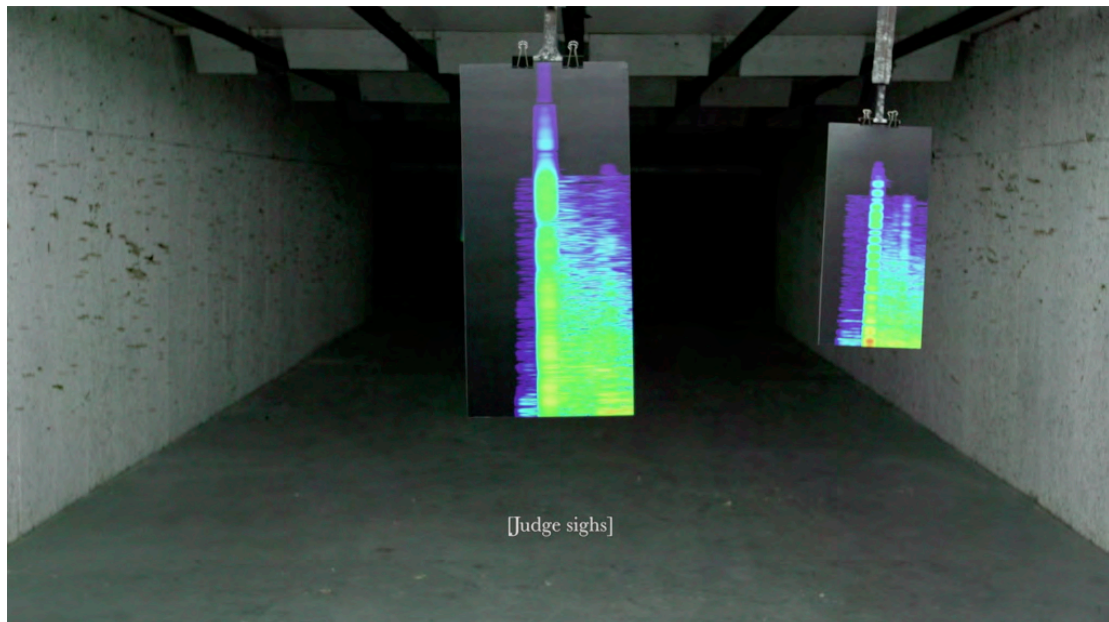


Roe Rosen, *Justine Frank, Sweet Sweat*, Sternberg Press, 2009 (front cover)

Another reference I have been very influenced by is the work by the Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective (Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Shuddhabrata Sengupta), especially in the way they intertwine artworks and writings. Raqs have lead, for more than two decades, a multifaceted trajectory, editing books, curating exhibitions and producing artworks. They have been variously described as artists, media practitioners, curators, researchers, editors, and catalysts of cultural processes. Their writings, an integral and foundational part of their practice, have appeared in multiple publications all over the world, tackling issues related to contemporary art, historical enquiry, philosophical speculation, while bridging artistic practice, research and theory.

To conclude this short and necessarily incomplete excursus of my references and inspirations, I will mention two artists – Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Naeem Mohaiemen – whose artworks and writings question and interrogate the status of documents and evidence, often through an active engagement in law procedures and studies, as well as through anthropology.

Beirut-based Lawrence Abu Hamdan is not only an artist but also an audio investigator, whose practice deals with sound and its intersection with politics. Apart from his work being presented in art institutions, Abu Hamdan’s audio investigations have been used as evidence at tribunals and organisations such as Amnesty International. The techniques used in his audio-aesthetic practice have been used to conduct forensic audio analysis for several legal investigations. In his book *[inaudible] : A politics of listening in 4 acts* (Sternberg Press, 2016), he writes and reflects on “listening” as “an activity that can lead to the development of an organized protocol for engagement.”⁶ Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s film *Rubber Coated Steel* (2016) presents the fictitious trial of an actual murder case, focusing on an event in 2014, in which two unarmed teenagers were shot and killed by Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank. The case hinges upon an audio-ballistic analysis of the recorded gunshots, in order to determine whether the soldiers had used rubber bullets, as they asserted, or broken the law by firing live ammunition at the two teenagers.

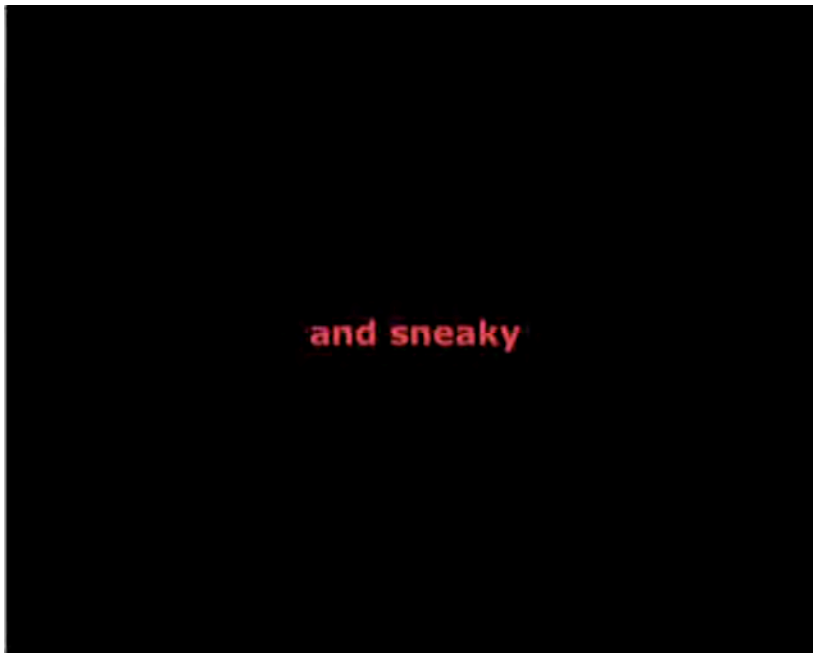


Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Rubber Coated Steel* (still from video, 2016)

⁶ <http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1702&l=en&bookId=595> (accessed 26 march 2019)

Naeem Mohaiemen, who works between Bangladesh and the US, is pursuing a doctoral degree in anthropology at Columbia University. He defines his artistic practice as “a search for objects. [...] Without the object there cannot be work on the wall, and one of the factors for doing anthropology is reeling back further to find the people, or social groups, that invented the myth of that object – the missing film canister, the trunk full of documents. It is [about] embracing the impossibility of a certain mythic object, and writing about that absence, about why people invent the story of the object – akin to inventing a god to structure your society – to give themselves the story they need.”⁷

In his 2012 video *United Red Army*, Mohaiemen includes pieces of documentary evidence to construct a narrative arc. He uses the original sound recordings from an airport control tower, reconstructing the hijacking of Japan Air Lines flight 472 at the hands of the Japanese Red Army in 1977, during which the hijackers forced the plane to fly to Dhaka, Bangladesh. In the film, the written transcript of the tense and watchful radio conversation between hijacker and hostage negotiator are presented on a dark background.



Naeem Mohaiemen, *United Red Army* (still from video, 2012)

I will now elaborate on how I intend to study the relations between artworks and documents in my own artistic practice.

⁷ Wilson-Goldie, Kaelen. “The Stories They Need”, in *Frieze* n. 166, October 2014, <https://frieze.com/article/stories-they-need> (accessed 26 march 2019).

3. Intensities

As it will be made clear throughout the chapters, in this dissertation ‘documents’ will be studied as objects of a very special kind. More precisely, they will *not* be studied as objects, but as a specific *mode of existence* of objects. In a classic definition by librarian and historian Suzanne Briet, a document is defined as “any concrete or symbolic indexical sign, preserved or recorded towards the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a physical or intellectual phenomenon”.⁸ In other words, documents may be considered objects (“concrete or symbolic”), which can be identified, read and interpreted (“sign”) in order to uphold a certain account (“reconstituting or proving”) about reality (“a physical or intellectual phenomenon”). So, for instance, a contract may be used as a document in order to uphold a narrative regarding the selling of certain goods; a set of digital data may be used as a document in order to uphold a narrative regarding an individual’s web browsing history; a fingerprint may be used as a document in order to uphold a narrative regarding the presence of an individual in a specific location, and so on. In this dissertation, documents will be conceived as interactions between objects and narratives.⁹

I will argue that documents come into existence when specific objects are invested with a narrative current that *runs through* them. Therefore, documents will not be considered *entities*, but *intensities*. From 2005 to 2009, when I was a student at IUAV University in Venice, I had the chance to follow several seminars by Giorgio Agamben, a philosopher whose ideas will recur throughout the dissertation. I remember that he would often use the term ‘intensity’ – a key-concept in his thinking – in a sense that I will try to clarify by referring to a recent interview he gave:

I divide the field of experience into two main categories: substances on one hand, and *intensity* on the other hand. As for substances, it is possible to establish their boundaries, to define their themes and subject, to trace their cartography; *intensity*, on the other hand, doesn’t have a unique place. [...] It goes without saying that *intensities* are more interesting than essences. [...] Philosophy isn’t a substance, but an *intensity* that can suddenly animate any field: art, religion, economics, poetry, passion, love, even boredom. It resembles something like the wind, the clouds, or a storm: like these, it suddenly shakes, transforms and even destroys the place where it takes place, but just as unpredictably, it passes and disappears. [...] I have always thought that philosophy and poetry aren’t two separate substances, but two *intensities* that animate the same field of language.¹⁰

Viewing documents as *intensities* entails that they are not to be studied as ‘things’, but as ‘modes of existence’ of things. The question, then, will not be, “*What is it?*”, but

⁸ Briet, Suzanne. *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* (Paris: Éditions documentaires, industrielles et techniques, 1951), 2.

⁹ This dissertation will study documents as an intrinsically human way of using objects. It will not aim at addressing “objects-in-themselves”, and therefore it will not enter the theoretical fields explored by contemporary discourses such as speculative realism or object-oriented ontology.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben interviewed by Antonio Gnoli. “Credo nel legame tra filosofia e poesia. Ho sempre amato la verità e la parola”, in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Milano: 15 May 2016. My emphasis, my translation.

rather, “*How does it act? How is it used?*” In other words, no *ontology* of documents will be proposed here: documents will be studied through the concept of ‘use’.

The same is true, according to Agamben, for objects and human practices that acquire the status of art. He emphasizes that art (but also politics) does not indicate specific objects or practices, but rather a certain ‘use’ of them, a ‘mode’, an ‘intensity’ that runs through them. “Politics and art are not tasks nor simply “works”: rather, they name the dimension in which works – linguistic and bodily, material and immaterial, biological and social – are deactivated and *contemplated* as such.”¹¹

Both in the artwork and in the document, the object is suspended from its everyday use in order to be contemplated, involved in an *other* use. If the status of the artwork and that of the document really share such a mode of existence, it will then be possible to study the two concepts through an approach that encompasses both. Envisioning such an approach is one of the aims of this dissertation.

Another crucial aspect in the delineation of the concept of ‘document’ that will be proposed, is its structurally *relational* and *situational* character. A document always implies a relation: it cannot be used by one person only. It usually implies a community that is willing to use an object as a document. As we will see throughout the chapters, the relational character of documents is akin to theatricality in multiple ways. Borrowing philosopher Samuel Weber’s words about theatre, a document “can never be construed as self-contained or self-regulating”.¹²

If a document exists in the interaction between an object and a narrative, it will not make sense to study documents by separating these two elements. A document exists only as a *situational* concept. Even this characteristic of documents may be related to theatricality. Weber uses the term “situational”, “with the proviso that “situation” here includes not merely the actions represented on stage but their presentation as well. [...] Meaning is not separable from the way in which it is staged”.¹³

4. Narrative, mode

To express more precisely how the term “narrative” is used in the text, I will refer to two theories by leading narratologists. Gérard Genette conceived a structure defining the three different concepts encompassed in the word “narrative”:

1. “the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events”, that is, “the signifier, statement, discourse or

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹² Weber, Samuel. *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26

- narrative text itself”, for which he proposes to use the word “*narrative*” [‘*récit*’];
2. “the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of [the narrative’s] discourse”, that is, “the signified or narrative content”, for which he proposes to use the word “*story*” [‘*histoire*’];
 3. “the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself”, that is, “the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place”, for which he proposes to use the word “*narrating*” [‘*narration*’].

Genette conceives these three different functions as interlocking parts of a single triangular structure: each of them lives “by the relationship to” the others.¹⁴

Another model is proposed in the seminal 1985 study by Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, defined by herself as a “theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’”.¹⁵ Bal defines a text as “a finite, structured whole composed of language signs”, and a “narrative text” as a text in which “an agent relates (‘tells’) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof”.¹⁶ To clarify that a text is a cultural object not only existing in a literary textual form, Bal specifies: “since ‘text’ refers to narratives in any medium, I will use this word with an emphasis on the structuredness, not the linguistic nature of it; to keep this in mind I will use it interchangeably with ‘artifact’”.¹⁷ It is precisely in this sense that I will often use the expression “narrative artifacts”. Both the documents that I will study and the artworks that I will present in this dissertation, will be defined as such.

Within a narrative text (or artifact), one may identify what Bal calls the ‘story’ and the ‘fabula’ (not dissimilar to Genette’s notions of ‘*récit*’ and ‘*histoire*’). It is a “three-layer distinction”, and each of the layers may be analysed separately. However, the fact that they are “inseparable” is clearly stated by Bal as an introductory precaution to the discipline of narratology, when she states that a distinction is “a reasonable basis for a further study of narrative texts”, but that such distinction “does not mean that these layers ‘exist’ independently of one another. The only material which we have for our investigation is the text before us”¹⁸.

Following Bal’s approach, this dissertation starts from the premise that, for every narrative artifact (a photograph, a pamphlet, a contract, a puppet show, a street

¹⁴ Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 25-29.

¹⁵ Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), second edition, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5. Another characteristic of a narrative text described in the introduction goes as follows: “That with which the narrative text is concerned, the ‘contents’ it conveys to its readers, is a series of connected events caused or experienced by actors presented in a specific manner”. *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

storytelling performance, etc.), the story it conveys and the artifact it conveys it through, can be divided only as “a theoretical supposition”, where “for text analysis [...] that which is in effect *inseparable* should temporarily be disjointed. [...] A narrative text is a story that is ‘told’ in a medium; that is, it is converted into signs”:¹⁹ “form and meaning cannot be disentangled.”²⁰

In this dissertation, every document will be studied as a ‘narrative artifact’ and, at the same time, as an ‘intensity’, as the interaction of an object invested with a narrative current that runs through it. The three chapters will focus on case studies in which the ‘story’ (the content) is not separable from the ‘text’ (the form through which the story was transmitted). In other words, the focus is on cases in which what the document *documents* is not detachable from the actual object through which such document exists. Therefore, it will be possible to distinguish, but not to separate:

- the objects and the narrative currents that run through them;
- the events and their modalities of transmission;
- story and text
- fact from artifact
- content from form.

Stories will be studied as structurally inseparable from the narrative artifacts that transmit them – that is, from their forms of transmission. Mieke Bal writes, “narrative must be considered as a discursive *mode* which affects semiotic objects in variable degrees”²¹. The concept of *mode* will be another central element in this study. Insofar as documents may be considered as a narrative *mode* of objects, they exist only in the act of *documenting*, of *being used* as documents. In his book *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben surveys the idea of a ‘modal ontology’, in an attempt to reframe ontology through the perspective of ‘mode’. But what is a ‘mode’? Via an examination of texts by Spanish Jesuit theologian and philosopher Francisco Suárez (1548—1617), Agamben defines it as

an affection of the thing, «which determines its ultimate state and its reason for existing, without, however, adding to it a new essence but only by modifying it». [...] it is a question of defining a paradoxical state of being, insofar as it is totally deprived of an essence of its own and yet is really distinct from that to which it adheres as a mode, namely, by modifying it. [...] «modal being cannot subsist by itself nor be separated from that of which it is a mode».²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

²⁰ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 26.

²¹ Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), second edition, 14. My emphasis.

²² Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV, 2*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 155. Agamben quotes Francisco Suárez, in *Francisci Suárez e Societate Jesu Opera omnia*, vol. 25 (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1861), 256, 263.

Later on in the book, Agamben observes that “We are accustomed to think in a *substantial* way, while mode has a constitutively *adverbial* nature, it expresses not “what” but “how” being is.”²³

It is in this sense that a document can be conceived as a *mode* of an object: a narrative current invests an object, “modifying” it without adding any “new essence”. A photograph remains *essentially* the same if it stays hidden inside a drawer, or if it is used as a piece of evidence in a trial: only its *mode* of existence changes. A document is an object *used* in a certain way, and *use* will be another recurring concept in this study.

A document (but a similar argument could be put forward with regards to an artwork) is “not something substantial or a preestablished end but coincides entirely with the use”²⁴ that one makes of it. It “is not a substance nor the objectifiable result of an operation: it is the operation itself, the relation itself” between of an object and a narrative: it is “that relationship and not one of its terms”²⁵.

5. Law, power

The concept of legal evidence will be addressed as a specific category of documents. Evidence is a mode of existence of an object when it is invested by law. A legal institution considers an object as a piece of evidence insofar as it allows its use to truthfully demonstrate a narrative. This view entails a purely *situational* nature of law, which is asserted, for example, by Jacques Derrida:

Laws are not just in as much as they are laws. One does not obey them because they are just but because they have authority. The word *credit* carries all the weight of the proposition and justifies the allusion to the mystical character of authority. The authority of laws rests only on the credit that is granted them. One believes in it; that is their only foundation.²⁶

If law – and its enforcement – is the basis for the official validation of documents, and if law is purely based on the credit that is granted it by a society, then the mode of existence of a document is, as well, purely based on such credit. That is, its mode is purely *performative*, not ontological. There is no document *as such*, there are only objects *used* as documents, credited as such, certified by law (which itself is founded on credit).

²³ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁶ Derrida, Jacques. “Force of Law. The Mystical Foundation of Authority”, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Psychology Press, 1992), 240.

In 1710, Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico formulated his well-known principle, *Verum esse ipsum factum*, translatable as “truth itself is fact” or “the truth itself is made”.²⁷ Filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl, commenting on Vico’s motto, writes, “A fact is something which is made. In our times, this seems like an obvious statement.” Steyerl, following a Foucauldian line of thinking, points out how, in contemporary societies, power controls the manifestation of truth, and how “documentary” forms present information and narratives as “true”. If “truth is something which is produced and constructed”, then “[d]ocumentary truth is considered as a product combining power and knowledge”.²⁸

However, the documents relating to the three case studies presented here, are of a very peculiar nature: there is no official version, no certified truth for the real events they refer to. They deal with acts of solitary, inarticulate and “pre-political”²⁹ resistance, often transmitted through outmoded³⁰ narrative formats. In order to investigate such stories, one has to rely on the mysterious, unofficial, marginal and latent ways in which they have been transmitted. This is why I will try to define an alternative mode of existence of documents: a *variational mode*.

Such a mode refers to documents existing only as non-authorized, non-institutional narrative artifacts, not certified as ‘true’ by any institution of power. These documents cannot act as bearers of truth, of an official version; rather, the narratives they convey are necessarily *variations* of an inaccessible truth. Despite their inherent variability and unofficiality, these artifacts did not withdraw from their documentary vocation: they still stubbornly carry the traces of a real event, a real life, a real gesture. Among them are the puppet shows, the pamphlets, the songs, the flyers and the rumours through which the stories of Simone Pianetti, Augusto Masetti and *el espiritado* have been transmitted. I will present these three characters, as well as the narrative artifacts through which they have been transmitted, as working examples towards a *variational mode* of documents.

But how did such artifacts escape power and its institutional mechanisms of certification and truth-production, while somehow preserving their documentary function? How can such artifacts be *used* as documents, and how should they be studied? What does it mean to use something as a document when it does not exist in

²⁷ His wording was “*Verum et factum reciprocantur seu convertuntur*” (“The true and the made are convertible into each other”). Vico, Giambattista. *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia ex Linguae Originibus Eruenda Libris Tres* (“On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language”, first edition 1710) trans. L.M. Palmer (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988).

²⁸ Steyerl, Hito. “Truth Unmade. Productivism and Factography”, in *transversal*, Vienna: Eipcp, March 2009, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/steyerl/en> (accessed 29 March 2019).

²⁹ According to Hobsbawm, “*pre-political* people [...] have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world. Though their movements are thus in many respects blind and groping, by the standards of modern ones, they are neither unimportant nor marginal.” Hobsbawm, Eric. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 2-3.

³⁰ I will refer to some of the narrative artifacts related in the next chapters as ‘outmoded’, ‘out-dated’ or ‘marginal’. These adjectives refer to specific codes, once widely shared by given communities but that nowadays scarcely used, or used in a different, less wide-ranging manner.

a stable format (as a photograph, a contract, a fingerprint), but only in a format that is, intrinsically, subject to variations (a puppet show, a *cantastorie* performance, a song)? These are questions this dissertation aims to address.

One of my goals is to propose examples of a way out of the connection between power and the “documentary”, as figured by Steyerl:

[I]n certain situations the rupture of the documentary image from the bonds of knowledge and power happens. And this event is even capable of paradoxically and temporarily liberating the documentary image from its ties to power, usefulness, pedagogy and knowledge. This truth is not produced. It cannot be calculated, manufactured or anticipated. It becomes a *factum verum*, a true fact precisely by being unmade, so to speak, by happening, being contingent and uncountable. At this point a new reading of Vico’s slogan emerges. *Factum verum* not only means that facts are produced. Simultaneously it also means: a fact can be true, precisely because it cannot fully be contained by the power relations of its production. (Of course this doesn’t apply to all so-called “facts”). It means that some documentary articulations cannot be wholly controlled by dominant discourses.³¹

6. An archaeological approach

In the last years, when I described my interest in non-certified documents and in events for which there is no official truth, I was often asked if my attitude did not imply a certain relativism or, even, historical negationism. I have also often been asked what was my position towards neologisms such as “fake news”, “alternative facts” or “post-truth”. Furthermore, since my three case studies all refer to the first half of the 20th century, I was often asked, “Why, in the middle of such a vertiginous transformation in media, communication and information technology, are you talking about half-forgotten events and out-dated narrative forms?”

Philosopher Maurizio Ferraris would probably reply that the possibility to produce a previously unimaginable amount of documents is precisely at the core of such a transformation. According to his theory, today’s economy is no longer based on agricultural, industrial or financial capital, but on a new form of capital: the *documedial capital*, which concerns the data that the human population continuously produce online.³² Today, State institutions and transnational corporations ‘read’ and use these data (mainly through machines and algorithms).

³¹ Steyerl, Hito. “Truth Unmade. Productivism and Factography”, in *transversal*, Vienna: Eipcp, March 2009, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/steyerl/en> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³² Ferraris, Maurizio. “Web è comunismo realizzato, ma resta lo sfruttamento: ecco l’era documediale”, in *Agenda Digitale*, 22 June 2018, <https://www.agendadigitale.eu/cultura-digitale/ferraris-web-e-comunismo-realizzato-ma-resta-lo-sfruttamento-ecco-lera-documediale/> (accessed 29 March 2019).

In the light of the contemporary, exponentially growing significance of documents (and of what Ferraris calls “documentality”)³³, this dissertation claims that it is more crucial than ever not to take documents for granted, but to study their modalities of production, transmission and validation, to explore their paradoxes and critical aspects and to question the origins of their mode of existence. I will present three case studies that provide examples of liminal situations of the concept of ‘document’. It is my belief that an ‘archaeological’³⁴ approach to documents is necessary to address the complexity of a concept at the centre of an epochal worldwide transformation – possibly more than an approach too narrowly situated in strictly contemporary social and technological ambits.

I believe that exploring cases of *variational documents* in the past may help reach a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what lies behind expressions like “fake news”, “alternative facts” and “post-truth”. Yes, I am presenting reports on characters from the past, but not to invite the reader to view them as historical half-forgotten curiosities; I present them today because I believe that their political potential has not yet fully come to fruition. I believe that their acts, the stories they generated and the artifacts through which they have been transmitted have something to tell us about the world we live in *now*. I gather them, as ghosts (or guests), in the spirit of Benjamin’s idea of a “constellation in which one’s own epoch comes into contact with an earlier one”.³⁵

7. Art, use

The proximity between artworks and documents that I will describe in this dissertation stems from two premises:

1. If art may open up an alternative space for documents to act, then research in and through art may be a very effective manner to study *variational documents*, since it is can encompass narrative artifacts as complex organisms, without separating content from form, story from text.
2. Both documents and artworks may be studied as ‘intensities’, as *modes* of existence of objects rather than objects ‘in themselves’. Their definition is not ontological, but performative: they need to be *used, animated* in a specific way in order to exist as such.

³³ See, for example, Ferraris, Maurizio. *Documentality. Why it is necessary to leave traces*, trans. Richard Davies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), *passim*.

³⁴ By “archaeological”, I refer to Agamben’s use of the term: “The *archē* toward which archaeology regresses is not to be understood in any way as a given locatable in a chronology [...]; instead, it is an operative force within history [...] the *archē* is not a given or a substance, but a field of bipolar historical currents stretched between anthropogenesis and history, between the moment of arising and becoming, between an archi-past and the present.” Agamben, Giorgio. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D’Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books 2009), 110.

³⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “On the Concept of History”, in *Gesammelten Schriften* I:2, trans. Dennis Redmond (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

Therefore, the notions of ‘use’ and ‘animation’ may be effective not only in order to study the notions of ‘document’ and ‘artwork’ separately, but also in order to explore a *variational mode* of existence encompassing both. In this perspective, through the concept of *variational mode* I will describe specific narrative artifacts that act *both* as artworks and as documents – puppet shows, songs, illustrations, tales, etc.

The method I intend to follow does not separate (even if it distinguishes) the theoretical and the artistic components. The study of narrative artifacts will be developed through the practical use of their very same formats within my artistic practice. For example, the investigation into Simone Pianetti and into the narrative artifact of the puppet show *Il Vendicatore* (recounted in Chapter 1) was developed using and re-enacting the very same artifact in my artistic work. The research project on Pianetti includes:

- a *re-enactment* of a puppet show (*Il vendicatore*, performed by Giacomo Onofrio and originally written by his namesake grandfather), right in the same location where the event that inspired it took place;
- a video documentary comprising archival footage of a film recording of that same puppet show in the 60s;
- a publication of flyers inspired by Pianetti’s story
- a series of interventions on the puppet show script.

In short: the narrative artifact of the puppet show *Il vendicatore* will be studied through its *use* in my artistic practice.

Agamben defines the concept of “use” as

a zone of indetermination between subject and object (the agent is in some way also object and place of action) and between active and passive (the agent receives an affection from his own action).³⁶

In this sense, the artistic practice is not separated from the object of study, and the research situates itself in the middle, between a narrative artifact that it aims to study, and an artistic practice that *uses* the very same narrative artifact. The artifact, the object of study, will always be allowed to “speak back”³⁷.

Most of the narrative artifacts that will be studied in the next pages can be properly considered *artistic* forms (i.e. puppet theatre, *cantastorie*, flyers, etc.). Therefore, a study on these forms will also necessarily be a study on their position within specific communities and historical, socio-political contexts, as well as on the social and

³⁶ Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV*, 2, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 28.

³⁷ “The rule I have adhered to, that I hold my students to, and that has been the most productive constraint I have experienced in my own practice, is to never just theorize but always to allow the object ‘to speak back’. Making sweeping statements about objects, or citing them as examples, renders them dumb.” Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 45.

“documentary” significance of such artistic practices. That is why the study of narrative artifacts *as* artistic practices will be constantly in dialogue with a reflection on my own artistic practice, on my use of such narrative artifacts and on the socio-political positioning of my own artistic practice.

I have often been asked which ‘fields’ I relate to in my artistic practice. My artworks are usually presented in contexts related to ‘contemporary’ practices: art museums and galleries, film festivals, performing arts events. So, one way to answer this question would be: my practice relates to contemporary art, cinema and performing arts. However, I feel that such an answer is somewhat incomplete. The works described in the following chapters have also been presented in contexts less related to ‘contemporary’ art culture (and I am mindful of the slipperiness of such definition), such as: public squares, local history circles, regional magazines dedicated to folk traditions, Colombian and Italian public radio, community centres... This choice was not motivated by an interest in “bringing contemporary arts to a wider audience”. It was rather motivated by an interest in engaging with the distribution channels proper to the very same formats that I was using (i.e. puppet shows, *cantastorie*, local legends, anarchist pamphlets, etc.). When I was working with Giacomo Onofrio, a traditional puppeteer, I knew that I could not just ‘displace’ his work in a more ‘contemporary’ setting, like a museum or an experimental theatre festival: I knew that engaging with *his* audience was part and parcel of our collaboration.

8. In and through

This dissertation will use concepts and reflections coming from multiple disciplinary fields, such as history, anthropology, philosophy, legal theory, literary studies and theatre studies. As Mieke Bal pointed out, “concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during, and after each ‘trip’”.³⁸ I will try to constantly follow this methodological warning, while embarking on this “inter-disciplinary”³⁹ research journey.

³⁸ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 24.

³⁹ According to Bal, the itinerary of “a concept travelling from one discipline to another and back again [...] is to be termed *inter*-disciplinary [...] To call it ‘transdisciplinary’ would be to presuppose its immutable rigidity, a travelling without changing; to call it ‘multidisciplinary’ would be to subject the fields of the two disciplines to a common analytic tool. Neither option is viable. Instead, a negotiation, a transformation, a reassessment is needed at each stage.” Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 39.

However, as a research in and through art, I believe that this study can legitimately claim an independent and distinct approach from the disciplines it refers to. To clarify what this approach consists of, I will quote a definition by Henk Borgdorff:

Does artistic research have a methodological framework of its own? My position is yes and no. Yes, because one specific characteristic of artistic research is that artworks and art practices form an integral part of the research process – the research takes place in and through art practice. No, because a researcher can additionally make use of a variety of methods, techniques, and perspectives, whether drawn from the humanities, the social sciences or the natural sciences (methodological pluralism).⁴⁰

My ‘cycles’ on Pianetti, Masetti and *el espiritado* consist of artworks *as well as* documents collected in field research, conversations, archives and libraries. They consist of hand-to-hand encounters with the *form* through such documents were collected and transmitted. My artistic practice uses these documents to (re)evoked, (re)activate, (re)transmit and (re)perform them, and this cannot be based solely on a historiographical or anthropologic approach, which would be both insufficient and incoherent. In my practice, the hand-to-hand encounter with documents – studied as narrative artifacts – occur *in and through* art, that is, in and through the *use* of those very same artifacts.

Documents cannot be presented ‘as they are’, with a false and naive claim of neutrality. My research in and through art aims to question such unattainable claim to neutrality, taking into account that any narrative regarding a real event is inseparable from the artifacts (the *form*) it is transmitted through. That is why research in and through art is suited to engage with narrative artifacts: because it can do so *in and through* such forms, *using* them.

The way I use an old puppet show (Case 1), anarchist pamphlets (Case 2), or oral testimonies (Case 3), is aimed at studying stories as inseparable from the artifacts they are transmitted through, objects as inseparable from the narratives that activate them. My artistic practice acts as a hand-to-hand encounter with documents; in order to study and use them in my artworks, I cannot simply borrow instruments from anthropology and historiography. Their study and use need to take place, from the beginning, in and through art.

⁴⁰ Borgdorff, Henk. *The Conflict of the Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012), 41.

9. Animation

I will often refer to the concepts of ‘animation’ and ‘use’, which will prove useful to reflect on the mode of existence of artworks and documents. In the case of both artworks and documents, in fact, an object is used, animated, performed in a specific way. In order to envisage the proximity between the concepts of ‘use’ and ‘animation’, I will refer to one of the *Bemerkungen* (“remarks”) in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*:

432. Jedes Zeichen scheint *allein* tot. Was gibt ihm Leben? – Im Gebrauch *lebt* es. Hat es da den lebenden Atem in sich? – Oder ist der *Gebrauch* sein Atem?

432. Every sign *by itself* seems dead. What gives it life? – In use it *lives*. Is it there that it has living breath within it? – Or is the *use* its breath?⁴¹

In this fragment, Wittgenstein interrogates the idea of animation in language, by juxtaposing two terms: *Leben* (“life”) and *Atem* (“breath”). If a sign, taken in itself, does not appear as a living entity, then what is it that brings it to life? Is its “living breath” something inner, inherent to the sign itself, or is it something external, blown into it through *use*? James Loxley and Mark Robson read the fragments in this way:

Wittgenstein seems to be asking what it is that gives life to that which appears to live. But having posed the question in this way, Wittgenstein continues in a manner that raises the suspicion that life rests outside the thing itself, in what he calls *use* (*Gebrauch*). There is no sense of life as essence or property, only as effect. At the level of the sign, then, the appearance of life is an appearance of *being animated*.⁴²

In a similar way I will refer to the notion of animation in relation to documents. A document is neither an object nor an ‘essence’, a ‘propriety’ of an object; rather it is a *use*. An object is animated, given life through a certain use we make of it. A document is a certain use of an object: a mode of its *existence* (as opposed to essence).⁴³ In exactly the same way one can regard art: as a use we make of certain objects – as a way to animate them. This dissertation will attempt to propose examples of a *variational* use of objects, animated as documents *and* artworks.

Furthermore, the notion of animation will inhere in the three case studies in a parallel sense:

⁴¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 135.

⁴² Loxley, James and Robson, Mark. *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Claims of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 2013), 79.

⁴³ Mieke Bal states something similar in relation to the act of looking, when she writes that “It is meaningful to activate the look only in the use of objects. Unread, a novel remains a mute object; unread, an image remains an equally mute object.” Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 49-50.

- Case 1 will focus on Simone Pianetti (1858-?), an Italian mass murderer who escaped and disappeared, and who then became a puppet character, *animated* as a stock character. I will report on my artistic work on one of the first puppet adaptations of his story.
- Case 2 will focus on Augusto Masetti (1888-1966), an Italian soldier who shot at his superior officer and declared not to remember having done it, as if in a state of ecstatic possession, as if *animated* by an external entity. Mainly using publications and workshops, I have produced a series of artworks related to legal, medical and anarchist records on his case.
- Case 3 will follow the appearance of a puppet character in Colombia, *el espiritado*, and its supposed connections to the Masetti case. I will describe a series of artistic works I produced, starting from a puppet script about the self-destruction of a village, which will be read as a commentary on puppetry, anarchism and *animation*.

The connections between art and animation have been extensively studied by curator Anselm Franke. His exhibition project *Animism* (2012) aimed to provide “a different context for reflecting on an old topic in the theory of art, one that has considerable reverberations in the present: the question of animation”. Franke’s definition of animation is somewhat similar to Agamben’s concept of ‘mode’: “What if the soul is not a substance, not a “thing,” but a function (not unlike the “zero” in mathematics)? What if “soul” (*anima* in Latin) is another name for the very medium that makes reciprocal exchange possible, for what happens in the very in-between, the event of communication?”

As I did before with regards to documents, Franke highlights the *relational* character of animation: “the *fact of animation* and the *event of communication* are one and the same. There is no being-in-communication that is not also a form of animation [...] Animation is always a form of entanglement with an environment and with *otherness*”⁴⁴. For Franke, a form of animation is required for an object to be regarded as ‘art’, and he asks if it is “in art – and in art alone – that modern civilization has reserved a place where animism is allowed to survive [...] do [museums] not yield their own paradoxical forms of animation? Museums make objects to be looked at by subjects – and this is already a “relational diagram” in which one side talks *about* the other”⁴⁵.

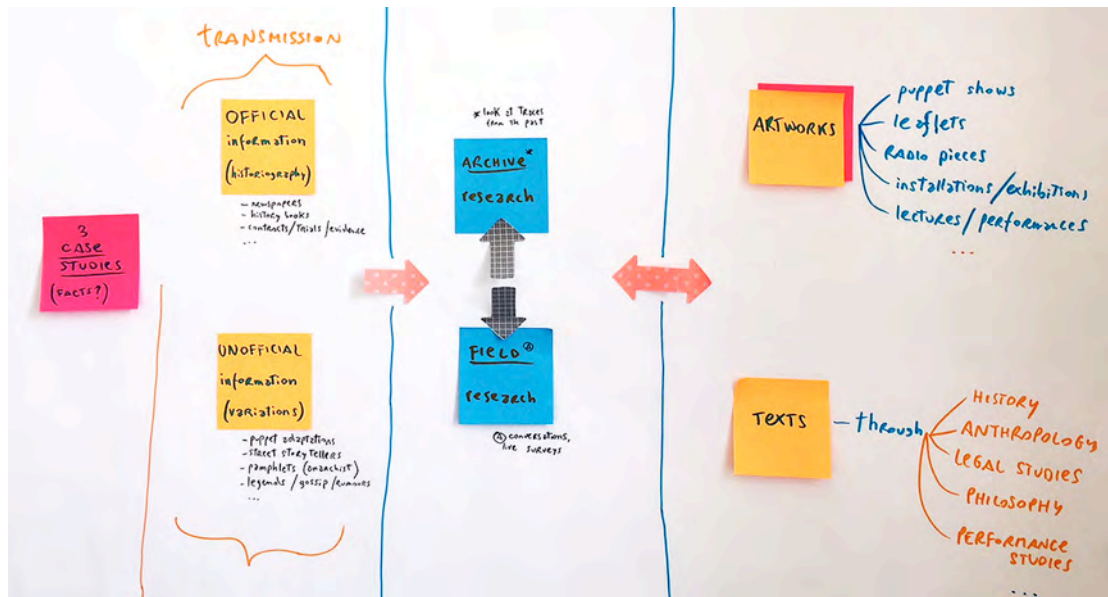
To summarize: my artistic work is about *animating* documents, *using* them and questioning their *mode* of existence. ‘Mode’, ‘use’ and ‘animation’ are the key methodological concepts that I have evoked in this introduction. If, as argued by Agamben, art can be intended as a contemplation of objects in a state of suspension, ‘research in and through art’ has the potentiality to overcome distinctions between

⁴⁴ Franke, Anselm. “Animism: Notes on an Exhibition”, in *e-flux journal*, n. 36, July 2012. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

practice and study, as well as between story and text, fact and artifact. Unlike historiography or anthropology, such a discipline does not have its subjects of study on the outside, separated from it. Rather, through the *use* of its objects of study, it occupies “a zone of indetermination between subject and object”⁴⁶.

10. Map



When I was almost finished writing this dissertation, I was asked to draw a map of it. The diagram above is what I came up with. On the left are the three case studies in their actuality, considered as real events in the moment of their occurrence. In the second column are the forms through which those events have been transmitted (up until my encounter with them), be it through ‘official’, institutional channels (newspapers, contracts, evidence, trials, historiography, etc.) or unofficial, *variational* channels (puppet shows, street story tellers, anarchist pamphlets, legends, gossip, etc.).

At the centre are the two manners through which I engaged with the abovementioned materials: archive research (traces, records) and field research (live conversations). The last section at the right comprises what I have produced during my engagement with the materials: artworks (in the formats of puppet shows, booklets, radio pieces, installations, lectures, performances, films, etc.) and texts (like this dissertation).

At the end of the dissertation I included a glossary, an overview of different concepts used throughout the text, composed as a collection of excerpts by theorists and artists

⁴⁶ Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV, 2*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 28.

I refer to. Such inter-disciplinary, fragmentary, heterogeneous and at times contradictory list of concepts was conceived both as an imaginary gathering of authors and as a theoretical toolbox for the reader.

Lastly, I would like to stress the deep importance of collaboration with regards to the practice related in the following pages. In the last years, during the research phases, during the production of the artworks and during my writing, I engaged in collaboration and dialogue with several persons, including anthropologist and artist Andrea Morbio, puppeteers Giacomo Onofrio and Franco Citterio, artist Herlyng Ferla, set designer and inventor Paola Villani, writer and educator Carolina Valencia Caicedo and philosopher Andrea Cavalletti (an interview with whom is included here as an appendix). My encounter with them has deeply shaped my thinking and my practice, and the works presented in this dissertation have been greatly influenced by these different forms of dialogue and collaboration.

Case I

Notes on the assassin Simone Pianetti (1858 - ?)

1. Discovery through practice

How, through an art project, I found myself into a discipline I could not name.

The project I am about to describe was the cause of my first encounter with artistic research, at a time when I still did not know what artistic research was. After I first heard about the story of Simone Pianetti, in 2009, I found myself navigating through a practice in which the collection of information, the production and presentation of artworks, the delineation of new concepts were all intertwined. It was also a practice in which the narrative forms I was studying (puppets, street storytellers, flyers) were the very same narrative forms I was using in my artworks. Furthermore, it was a practice in which it was not possible to separate the stories I was studying from the narrative artifacts through which they had been transmitted.

This project has kept me busy for almost ten years already. A couple of years into it, I somehow started intuiting that the field I was working in was not simply an intersection of art, history and anthropology, but that it was an altogether different discipline, which I could not name, and whose methods and terminology I was still unfamiliar with. It was only after starting my PhD research that I noticed my project showed affinities with projects by other practitioners, who were defining their field as, variously, ‘Artistic Research’, ‘Practice as Research’ or – which would later become the term I felt most comfortable with – ‘Research in and through Art’. That was, I discovered, how people were calling the discipline I could not name.

The project on Simone Pianetti was, therefore, experienced by me and Andrea Morbio (with whom I worked on it all along) as *a discovery through practice*, and as such it will be recounted in this chapter. First I will describe both the field research and the archive research we carried out, then the artworks we produced and presented. Then, I will introduce the theoretical journey intertwined with the research and the artistic production, which led me to reflect on the procedures through which ‘official’ documents are created. This journey, which crossed a territory comprising anthropology, legal theory, theatre studies and philosophy, finally confronted me with the necessity to identify a notion that stemmed directly from my experience with the Pianetti case: I called it the *variational mode* of documents, and I realized that it was a notion difficult to address through ‘traditional’ scholarly research, and that it was specific to the new discipline I was – still half-unconsciously – dealing with. Such notion will be introduced in the last part of this chapter, and it will be further exemplified in the subsequent chapters, reporting on two other case studies.

2. The list

Where Simone Pianetti's massacre and its preceding events are introduced.

At the beginning of 20th century, an Italian man called Simone Pianetti came back to Camerata Cornello, his native village in the Brembo Valley, near Bergamo, in the North of Italy. He had emigrated ten years before to New York, where he founded an import-export fruit company. There is few information about his American activities and life; we only know he had serious trouble with the Black Hand, the criminal organization established by Italian immigrants in the United States during the 1880s.

It seems that when Pianetti returned to Italy, he had enough money to run a business in his hometown. The economic and cultural situation of the area was not flourishing. The Brembo Valley was very rural, and people lived in a pre-modern society: no industry, no tertiary sector and very few opportunities for individuals to improve their economic position. The contrast between the modern life of New York and the stagnant society of his homeland must have been salient to Pianetti's eyes. But something was changing in the valley, in particular in San Pellegrino (a town that would become famous for its mineral water), where the Grand Hotel, the Casino and the Thermal Baths were built in 1906 to develop tourism for the leisure class. We know, for example, that the members of the Italian royal family, the House of Savoia, used to holiday in San Pellegrino, as well as artists and members of the *haute bourgeoisie*.

Such blooming context gave Pianetti the idea to develop new activities in his village, five miles to the north. He opened an inn, and he obtained the license to sell salt and tobacco. Business went well, until he started organizing dancing parties in the courtyard. Those were the spark of a conflict between Pianetti and the local parish, Don Camillo Filippi, who forbade his parishioners to go to Pianetti's inn, referring to it as 'the house of the devil', and declaring him possessed by the evil eye.

The boycott of the parish turned out to be a disaster for Simone Pianetti. He was forced to sell the inn and leave Camerata Cornello with his wife and seven children. He moved to the town of San Giovanni Bianco, two miles down the valley. There, he electrified an old mill (the first innovation of the kind in the area) and started to grind and sell flour. Once it started to gather momentum, business went well for a while, but then rumours were spread throughout the town, claiming that Pianetti's flour caused illness. It seems that Doctor Morali, the only doctor in San Giovanni Bianco, advised his patients not to grind their corn in the electrified mill. For Pianetti there was no way out, as he had invested all his capital to renovate the mill. He was on the verge of ruin.

On the morning of 13 July 1914, in a fit of lucid rage, Simone Pianetti, aged 56, used his rifle to shoot and kill seven people:

Domenico Morali, doctor
Abramo Giudici, town clerk
Valeria Giudici, daughter of the previous
Giovanni Ghilardi, shoemaker
Camillo Filippi, parish priest
Giovanni Giupponi, judge
Caterina Milesi, farmer

Many of them were figures of power in the village, including the town clerk and the parish priest. In the weeks before, according to different sources, Pianetti had filled out a list of people to kill, whom he considered responsible for ruining his life and reputation in the community. According to some, the list comprised 11 people. According to others, 34 people.⁴⁷

Soon after the killings, Pianetti left the village and reached Monte Cancervo, on the Alps, where he remained for some days, despite a search by a group of 200 people, composed of Carabinieri, State Police and an infantry regiment of the Italian Army. On one occasion, Pianetti fired at a group of Carabinieri in order to escape to the mountains near the village of Olmo al Brembo.

Shortly afterwards, the First World War broke out, which made the search for Pianetti a secondary concern for the Italian government. He was put on trial *in absentia* and was convicted to life imprisonment. The bounty on his head was 5000 Lire, an enormous amount. In the end, Pianetti would never be arrested and his body would never be found. However, this did not mean he was forgotten – on the contrary. He came to be very much alive in popular culture, for instance in the performances of those wandering artists we call *cantastorie*: singer-songwriters that were travelling around since the middle ages and found a specific form in Northern Italy between 1850 and 1950.⁴⁸

3. Pianetti's figure in the work of *cantastorie*

With a description of two flyers taking opposite stances about Pianetti, sold by cantastorie just after his killings.

At the end of their performances, *cantastorie* from Northern Italy would sell *fogli volanti* (literally: “flying pages”), printed flimsy flyers containing the lyrics of the song they had just performed. As well as words, there were often one or more illustrations summing up the main theme of the song: they were either vignettes


⁴⁷ *Il Giornale d'Italia*, Rome: 15 July 1914.

⁴⁸ A partial bibliography about Simone Pianetti include: “A 90 anni dalla strage di Simone Pianetti”, in *Quaderni Brembani* n. 3, Zogno: 2005, pp. 103-109; Arrigoni, Ermanno et al. *Briganti e banditi bergamaschi* (Bergamo: Ed. Corponove 2008); Pianetti, Denis. *Cronaca di una vendetta: La vera storia di Simone Pianetti* (Bergamo: Ed. Corponove 2014).

printed on the top or single pictures placed to the side of the lyrics. The range of themes a *cantastorie* could cover was wide and varied: fashion, wars, technological innovations, recent or remote historical events, bandits and gangsters, love and betrayal. The stories centred on existing people and objects that took on a legendary status within the performance. The singer-songwriter would stress the most engrossing aspects of the story they were narrating. Although the narrated events originated in real life, in their dramatization they were changed from time to time according to the singer-songwriter's personality. Most of the *cantastorie* flyers (*fogli volanti*) shared the same layout: a title, the lyrics of a song, one or more illustrations. All these conventional elements were gathered from the actual facts that inspired them but, in line with the oral tradition they stemmed from, they naturally underwent constant change.

Now, Simone Pianetti became a popular subject among Northern Italy's singer-songwriters in the early 20th century. Shortly after the massacre, local puppeteers and *cantastorie* started performing adaptations of his story, some of which were passed on and kept being occasionally performed until the 1990s. In two songs written by two different authors after the carnage, the avenger from the Brembo Valley is presented, respectively, as a wild animal and as the sad protagonist of a cruel affair. These two songs, reported on two different *fogli volanti*, represent two examples of the art of the *cantastorie*. In the song by Domenico Scotuzzi, published as a flyer in Milan in 1914 (i.e. just after the killings), Simone Pianetti is presented as a man-beast.

Luglio 1914



SIMONE PIANETTI
L'UOMO BELVA DELLA VAL BREMBANA
che uccise sette persone per brutale vendetta.

A S. Giovanni Bianco
ridente paesello
ed anche a Camerata
un uomo tristo e fello
barbara strage esso compì
e poi quel vile se ne fuggì.

Quest'uomo prepotente
esperto cacciatore,
nutriva da molt'anni
in petto un gran rancore
verso persone brave e di cuor
che furon vittime del suo livor.

Del vile a restar vittima
il primo fu un dottore
uomo caritatevole
stimato e di buon cuore,
con una palla gli squarciò il cuor
e fu il principio del gran terror.

Poi corse a Camerata
e davanti al sacro tempio
uccise cursore e Parroco,
senza esitar quell'empio;
poi l'arma terribil tornò a caricar
e nuove vittime corse a cercar.

Tosto verso il Municipio
corse quel sanguinario
e appena giunto uccise
il povero Segretario
e la di lui figlia Valeria ancor
che assiem parlava col genitor.

Propr. riserv. - Proibita la ristampa

Sempre imbracciando l'arma,
quel mostro indemoniato
in cerca del Ghilardi
ei tosto si è recato,
e appena scortolo il fucil spianò
sull'onest'uomo e lo freddò.

L'ultima fu una donna,
una povera vecchietta
che l'assassino uccise
anch'essa per vendetta,
e dopo la strage ch'esso apportò
fra le montagne si rifugiò.

Or la giustizia umana
sui luoghi si è recata
e caccia senza tregua
al mostro ha incominciata
e speriam che presto possa cader
in man della legge, e in suo poter.

Questa è la vera storia
di un delinquente nato,
che due paesi in lutto
l'ignobil ha gettato
però i suoi figli noi compiangiam
e l'onesta moglie noi rispettiam.

Dormon nel Cimilero
in pace gli assassinati,
ma i parenti piangono
per tanto orror straziati,
e la fiera belva errar dovrà
finchè giustizia si compirà.

Scotuzzi Domenico, Cantastorie

525

1914 - Tip. Ranzini - Milano S. Sisto, 4

Il Catalogo della **Musica Popolare** si spedisce a chi ne fa domanda.

Flyer about Simone Pianetti by *cantastorie* Domenico Scotuzzi, 1914

The reader of the flyer and the audience of the performance are immediately faced with a clear stance, where the assassin is portrayed as an exclusively negative character, with which they cannot and must not empathize. Pianetti is referred to as: “bossy” (“*prepotente*”), “vile” (“*vile*”), “bloodthirsty” (“*sanguinario*”), “wicked” (“*empio*”), “demoniacal monster” (“*mostro indemoniato*”), “arrogant beast” (“*fiera belva*”). This position is strongly reiterated by the illustration at the top of the *foglio volante*, where the capture of the outlaw is presented as imminent.⁴⁹ The text does not attack Pianetti’s family (“his children we pity / and his honest wife we respect”⁵⁰) and

⁴⁹ Flyer about Simone Pianetti by *cantastorie* Domenico Scotuzzi, 1914. Reproduced in “A 90 anni dalla strage di Simone Pianetti”, in *Quaderni Brembani* n.3. My translation.

⁵⁰ “i suoi figli noi compiangiam / e l'onesta moglie noi rispettiam.” My translation.

closes with a peaceful image of the victims (“Sleep peacefully / the murdered in the Cemetery”⁵¹) and the foreshadowing of a grim future for the assassin, who “will wander / until justice will be fulfilled”⁵².

Il bandito SIMONE PIANETTI
L'UCCISORE DI SETTE PERSONE
NARRA TUTTA LA SUA DOLOROSA STORIA

Ed io fiero mi son vendicato!
 Del mio cor diedi retta ai consigli.
 Se mai sento di sangue macchiato
 Sul mio onor v'era un grande perché!...

Avea lieto un albergo e vivevo
 Col lavor sempre intenso ed onesto,
 Un buon nome ovunque godevo,
 Mi stimavano tutti, e ogni dì

Dei miei clienti la lista cresceva
 Ma ballavan la festa e per questo
 Era giusto che l'odio doveva
 Nei loro onori avvampare così?...

Mi costrinsero a vendere tutto:
 Casa, Albergo ed un vasto terreno,
 Del sudato lavoro ogni frutto
 Mi distrusser per odio crudel

Sopportai tanta infamia, stantanto
 Che il mio cor non gridommi vendetta!
 Il fucile mi stava d'accanto...
 E tremendi in me l'ira scoppio

Feci male lo so, alla catena
 Dei dolori più l'anima ho stretta,
 Or se per la giustizia terrena
 M'afferrasse... resistere non vo'!!!

Proprietà riservata
 Marulli Camillo.

60 2 10

Tip. Ditta Marengo, Via S. Massimo 38 - Torino

Flyer about Simone Pianetti by *cantastorie* Camillo Marulli

Cantastorie Camillo Marulli chooses instead to have the ballad sung by the protagonist of the story himself.⁵³ Here, Pianetti embodies the narrator, who describes firsthand the reasons that led him to mete out his revenge on those who had ruined him, trying to state the motives to justify his act of violence: “All the fruits of my arduous labour / they destroyed through cruel hatred. / I endured much infamy until the point / that my heart cried for revenge! / The rifle was beside me... / And a

⁵¹ “*Dormon nel Cimitero / in pace gli assassinati*”. My translation.

⁵² “*errar dovrà / finché giustizia si compirà*.” My translation.

⁵³ Flyer about Simone Pianetti by *cantastorie* Camillo Marulli. Reproduced in “A 90 anni dalla strage di Simone Pianetti”, in *Quaderni Brembani* n.3.

tremendous anger erupted inside me.”⁵⁴ Pianetti asserts having been an esteemed man, attracting ever more customers to his various ventures, until the hatred of a group of people began to hamper his business. It would seem, from the lyrics of this song, that the figure of the avenger from Bergamo might somehow benefit from at least mitigating factors, if not a full justification. Although the song cannot be considered to completely identify with the character, there is a certain degree of semantic ambivalence.⁵⁵

Whereas these two examples of *fogli volanti* may serve to illustrate how Pianetti remained alive in popular memory, I will now trace how his figure started to travel even beyond its own region.

4. Pianetti as the object of criminological investigation

Where a 1929 book featuring a report on Pianetti is introduced, functioning as a document of both literary artifice and historical events.

As said, Pianetti’s figure never entered Italian official historiography, also due to the fact that his trial was conducted *in absentia*. He survived through songs, plays and legends, as a sort of stock character. However, I have found a text where his presence has a more ambivalent status.

Although Mario Simone Pianetti killed seven people as the result of a vendetta sworn in utter anguish of soul on the effigy of the Madonna, I have never been able to think of him as a criminal. [...] Rightly or wrongly, Pianetti was, in my eyes, a man, and I am glad to be able to tell his story.⁵⁶

American crime writer Harry Ashton-Wolfe, in a book published in Boston in 1929 called *Crimes of Violence and Revenge*, focused on a heterogeneous series of revenge stories, among which is the massacre by Simone Pianetti.

⁵⁴ “Del sudato lavoro ogni frutto / mi distrusser per odio crudel / Sopportai tanta infamia, fintanto / che il mio cor non gridommi vendetta! / Il fucile mi stava d'accanto.../ E tremenda in me l'ira scoppiò”. My translation.

⁵⁵ Leydi, Roberto and Vinati, Paolo. *Tanti fatti succedono al mondo: fogli volanti nell'Italia settentrionale dell'Otto e del Novecento* (Brescia: Grafo, 2001).

⁵⁶ Ashton-Wolfe, Harry. *Crimes of Violence and Revenge* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1929), 59.

CRIMES OF VIOLENCE AND REVENGE

BY

H. Ashton-Wolfe

*Interpreter at the British Civil and Criminal Courts
Author of 'The Underworld' and 'Crimes of Love and Hate'*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1929

Title page of *Crimes of Violence and Revenge* by Harry Ashton-Wolfe, 1929

The author, who in his previous books had taken an interest in criminology, deals here with a number of outlaws he had personally been in touch with. The chapter entitled *Pianetti, the Chamois Hunter – A Tale of the Black Hand* is an interesting account that allows to discover an otherwise unknown part of the biography of the avenger from Bergamo. Having emigrated to the U.S. in the late 1880s, Pianetti had founded – together with fellow Italian immigrant Antonio Allegri – a food import company in New York. Through their dealings, the two run up against a criminal organization known as the Black Hand, which brought pressure to bear on Pianetti for protection money. Reluctant to pay, he decided to report the situation to two local police investigators, Commander Shirley and French Inspector Lacassagne, long-time collaborators of criminologist Harry Ashton-Wolfe. It is through the offices of these two policemen that the Bergamask bandit-to-be and the American writer meet for the first time. Pianetti's complaint merely exacerbates the conflict with the Black Hand,

which carries out the murder of Allegri and kidnaps his daughter, who meanwhile has become Pianetti's fiancée. High drama ensues but Pianetti manages to rescue her, and then secretly flees with her to San Francisco. However, this bitter and economically unsuccessful experience pushes him to return to his homeland, where a few years later he will be the victim of further persecution and the protagonist of bloodstained revenge.

The chapter *The Chamois Hunter* raises a number of epistemological issues. In 1914, returning from Sarajevo where he had gone to collect information on the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, Ashton Wolfe learns about the Camerata Cornello massacre and decides to rush to the small village to report on the incident. It is thanks to such geographical and temporal coincidences that the American writer is able to produce an exclusive and exhaustive account of the massacre and escape of Simone Pianetti (whom, as said, he had known in the U.S.). *The Chamois Hunter* is a story where real elements fit together almost perfectly with masterfully engineered fiction. Ashton-Wolfe is a fiction writer but also a criminologist, who made of his 'scientific' career the emblem of his artistic inspiration. His account holds the middle between literature and science, and it is not a coincidence that he is thought to have had a friendship with Sherlock Holmes' creator Arthur Conan Doyle.⁵⁷ While reading Wolfe's account, we are not able to clearly perceive the dividing line between real events and literary invention.

One element that reinforces the impression of trustworthiness is the presence, within the chapter, of two photographs documenting the funerals of the victims, shown below.

⁵⁷ A picture of the two, from 1925, can be found at https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/A_Life_in_Pictures#1925 (accessed 30 July 2018).



CARRYING THE BODY OF DON FABRICE INTO THE CHURCH
BEFORE WHICH PIANETTI SHOT HIM

Detail from the chapter “Pianetti, the Chamois Hunter” from *Crimes of Violence and Revenge* by Harry Ashton-Wolfe, 1929



THE DOCTOR WHOM PIANETTI SHOT IN HIS GARDEN BEING
CARRIED INTO THE HOUSE

Detail from the chapter “Pianetti, the Chamois Hunter” from *Crimes of Violence and Revenge* by Harry Ashton-Wolfe, 1929

These images have probably been included in order to certify the authenticity of the literary testimony. They do not seek to play on gruesome or gory details, but rather invite the reader to concentrate on the social consequences of the massacre, on the

mourning of the community. These photographic choices immediately evoke a journalistic reportage rather than illustrations for a storybook account.

Still, the uneasiness we experience when reading *The Chamois Hunter* stems from the fact that we cannot be certain of the reliability of the events narrated by Ashton-Wolfe, while at the same time it seems that the method and the elements used to reconstruct the revenge story tend to persuade us that the writer was actually a witness to the events. For certain, the randomness with which the American author, within a few years and on two different continents, happened to be present for the two most dramatic episodes in the life of Pianetti, cast a shadow of doubt on the authenticity of his statements. Nevertheless, the overall impression of plausibility and the concordance of numerous details cannot but point, even though by way of conjecture, to the reliability of this document. Ashton-Wolfe's reconstruction constitutes an ambivalent testimony, in which literary artifice and historical trustworthiness assume, in equal measure, documentary value.

The criminologist's account can be compared, in this sense, to the two *cantastorie* ballads analysed above, in order to appreciate how each format makes a different claim to truth. In the *fogli volanti* there is no claim for a 'scientific' or even a 'neutral' point of view: they take their position in a clear, manifest manner. The ambivalence of Ashton-Wolfe's text lies precisely in its overall 'scientific' and technical tone. While making use of literary stratagems to articulate the narrative, it aims to instil in the reader the idea that the facts are presented 'as they are'.

I would like to further investigate this ambivalence in relation to yet another version of Pianetti's story, namely in the work of puppeteers.

5. Pianetti adapted for puppets

Where the proto-documentary role of burattini in Northern Italy at the beginning of the 20th century is evoked, and where puppeteer Giacomo Onofrio is introduced.

The term 'hand-puppetry' refers to a type of puppet that is controlled by the hand that occupies its interior. In Italian, a hand-puppet is called *burattino*, distinct from the *marionetta* (a puppet controlled from above using wires or strings). The distinction points to very different traditions. At the beginning of the 20th century in Italy, *burattini* theatre was usually a popular, wandering performative art form, often with a single hand-puppeteer traveling from village to village. String puppetry (*marionette*), on the other hand, was considered a more sophisticated art form; it usually needed an actual theatre building, in order to have space for the *bridge*, a raised area from which puppeteers (usually more than one) would operate the marionettes. Another key difference was in the repertoire: even entire operas were specifically composed for

marionettes (notable examples were written by Gluck, Haydn, de Falla and Respighi), while *burattini* were usually employed for folk plays.⁵⁸

A few years after Pianetti's killings, many *burattinai* from his region started to write puppet adaptations of the story,⁵⁹ and spread it in the villages around. At the time, hand-puppet shows used to tour from village to village, operating as a sort of nomadic newsreel, as proto-documentaries.⁶⁰

A still active practitioner of such traditional art form is Giacomo Onofrio. He embodies the third generation of a family of *burattinai* from the Italian North-West. Onofrio's grandfather was one of the various puppeteers who wrote an adaptation of Pianetti's story. His version was titled *Il vendicatore* ("The Avenger"). The play stands in favour of Pianetti, portraying him as a just man who had had enough of the abuse of power perpetrated by the ruling class of his village (the town clerk, the priest, the doctor, the judge, etc.). Depicted as a sort of Robin Hood, he brings justice to the poor. *Il vendicatore* was not a puppet comedy for children: it was presented as a 'tragedy', and that is why it hasn't been performed since the 90s. Onofrio does not perform puppet tragedies anymore, due to the lack of an adult audience. In an interview included in a film I made with anthropologist Andrea Morbio, Giacomo Onofrio explains why puppet tragedies have fallen out of puppeteers' repertoire:

Until 1968, until my father worked as a puppeteer, *Il vendicatore* was performed. [...] Once a week, there was a tragedy. [Then,] nobody went to see them anymore. When wealth rose, people wanted to have fun. They were no longer interested in crying at the tragedies. I remember it well: people used to cry at my father's puppet shows. Then, the arrival of television forced this kind of shows into oblivion. People started crying at the television.⁶¹

Pianetti's story has been transmitted through a theatrical form that nowadays is usually considered a children's genre, which has to remain child-friendly and is no longer suitable for telling tragic events. *Il vendicatore* demonstrates, in contrast, that the art of *burattini* presented a complexity with regard to the chosen themes. It could address real social events, disturbing and lesser-known episodes of national history – like Pianetti's massacre. In the early 20th century in Italy, *burattinai* served as transmitters of a collective memory, still unfiltered by official representatives of the dominant culture. Today, this subversive aspect of puppet theatre has almost completely disappeared, as the shift from an adult to a predominantly children's audience has led to a significant change in the traditional characteristics of such artistic activity.

⁵⁸ Haimon Joseph, Helen. *A Book of Marionettes* (New York: B.W. Huebsch 1920).

⁵⁹ Another well-known adaptation was written and regularly performed by puppeteer Sandro Costantini (1930-1997). A video recording of the show is available in the archives of the Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi, Milano.

⁶⁰ See Leydi, Roberto and Mezzanotte, Renata. *Marionette e burattini* (Milano: Collana del Gallo Grande 1958) and Sordi, Italo. *Teatro e rito: saggi sulla drammatica popolare italiana* (Milano: Xenia 1990).

⁶¹ Interview included in Giacconi, Riccardo and Morbio, Andrea. *Simone Pianetti (1858 - ?)*, film, 60', 2011.

In the 1910s and 1920s, however, *burattinai* would tour extensively, usually staying for a month in each village. Considering they performed five days a week without repeating the same piece twice, one can easily get an idea of the amplitude of their repertoire. Each evening they would present two kinds of shows: the main play (about two hours long) and a second, much shorter play, the *farsa*, in a satirical or burlesque tone. The repertoire of a puppeteer would vary from religious subjects to notorious brigands and bandits' adventures. They would often stage shows that dealt with touchy subjects, such as episodes from recent local history, inscribed in the collective memory of village communities. As a wandering, performative form of reportage, real stories about a community would be propagated by puppet shows from village to village. *Il vendicatore* is thus a perfect example of what I would want to call the *burattini*'s 'proto-documentary' function, in the sense that such narrative artifacts were reporting and reflecting on *real* events occurred in the territory.

In puppeteer families, the transmission of the pieces was ensured through mutual learning and, usually, without a script – the father and the grandfather of Giacomo Onofrio, for instance, were illiterate. According to Onofrio,⁶² a puppeteer like his father was perceived as a public figure, to which members of a community would confide secrets, in order to avenge a wrong suffered, or just for the pleasure of watching local news performed in a public show. Such a system of social influence and circulation no longer exists. It was specific to a nomadic artistic activity, where the puppeteer assumed a pivotal role that allowed him to connect different neighbouring communities by spreading narratives.

Members of a rural community would perceive the arrival of a puppeteer as an important event. The shows functioned as moments of collective gathering, where one could discuss the subjects represented and the manner in which they were staged. It was also a chance to express one's emotional reaction to unknown or lesser-known stories. During their stay, the *burattinai* learned certain site-specific elements of social life, events that had marked the local collective memory, nicknames of the inhabitants, local idiomatic expressions. They were therefore able to improvise jokes addressed to specific members of the audience, which made performances extremely interactive.⁶³

Usually, for adaptations of real events, the references were not explicit and the sources were concealed, even though the audience could easily recognize them. *Il vendicatore* is an exception: the names and the social role of the characters correspond almost entirely to reality. The play's point of view is favourable to the avenger, providing the spectators with the possibility to contemplate the reasons that prompted Pianetti to perform his bloody act.

⁶² Outtakes from the film *Simone Pianetti (1858-?)*.

⁶³ Leydi and Mezzanotte. *Marionette e burattini*, passim.

Yet the proto-documentary aspect of wandering *burattinai* was made more complex by the coexistence of characters inspired by real persons and *stock* characters – that is, fixed masks from a shared tradition. In the case of *Il vendicatore*, Simone Pianetti's character (as well as the other real individuals involved in the events) shares the stage with Gioppino, a stock character from the Bergamask tradition (called Giupì in the dialect of Brescia and Bergamo, a literal translation of which would be “Little Joseph”). In the play written by Onofrio's grandfather, Gioppino plays the undertaker, a role that allows him to enter the stage after each of Pianetti's murders, breaking the tension with jokes and gags. Gioppino makes fun of the dead, pointing the audience to their flaws and hypocrisies, and jestingly thanks Pianetti for his killing spree, which ensures him a salary for every burial.⁶⁴

In the newsreel-like function of puppet shows in Northern Italy in the early 1900s, the coexistence of characters like Pianetti and Gioppino in the same narrative artifact displays a peculiar intermingling of reality and fiction or, more precisely, a dynamic bipolarity between traditional and documentary. It shows how puppeteers pursued an artistic practice with a specific complexity, not intended to respect all historical data yet referring to specific real events. The puppeteer's creation was part of a field of forces bridging a traditional repertoire with the specific actuality of a socio-geographical context.⁶⁵ It was this field of forces that brought me to study the artistic reworkings of Pianetti's history in the context of my own artistic practice.

6. Pianetti in my artistic practice

With a summary of artistic projects developed by Andrea Morbio and me, through which our research on Simone Pianetti was presented.

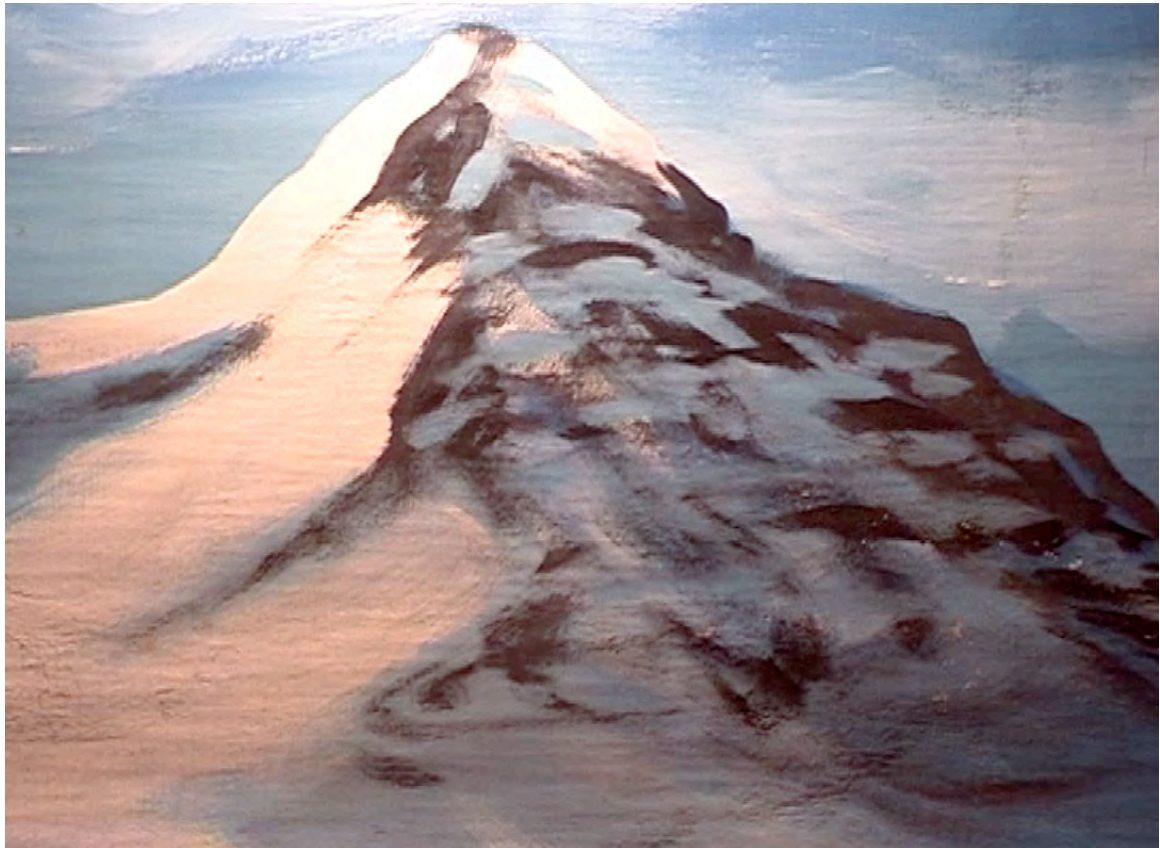
Burattini mix folk traditions with ‘documentary’ elements. One could, of course, easily dismiss these forms as ‘primitive’, but my encounter with them seemed to suggest that they, in fact, point to a different understanding of history – or, more precisely, of documents. If, following the definition postulated in the introduction, a document comes into existence through the interaction of an object with a narrative purported as true, what happens when, as in the Pianetti case, it is impossible to put forward any *true* narratives? What happens when it is impossible to access the reality of the facts? Can objects invested with narratives related to such unprovable facts, still be called documents? How to trace the distinction between facts and artifacts?

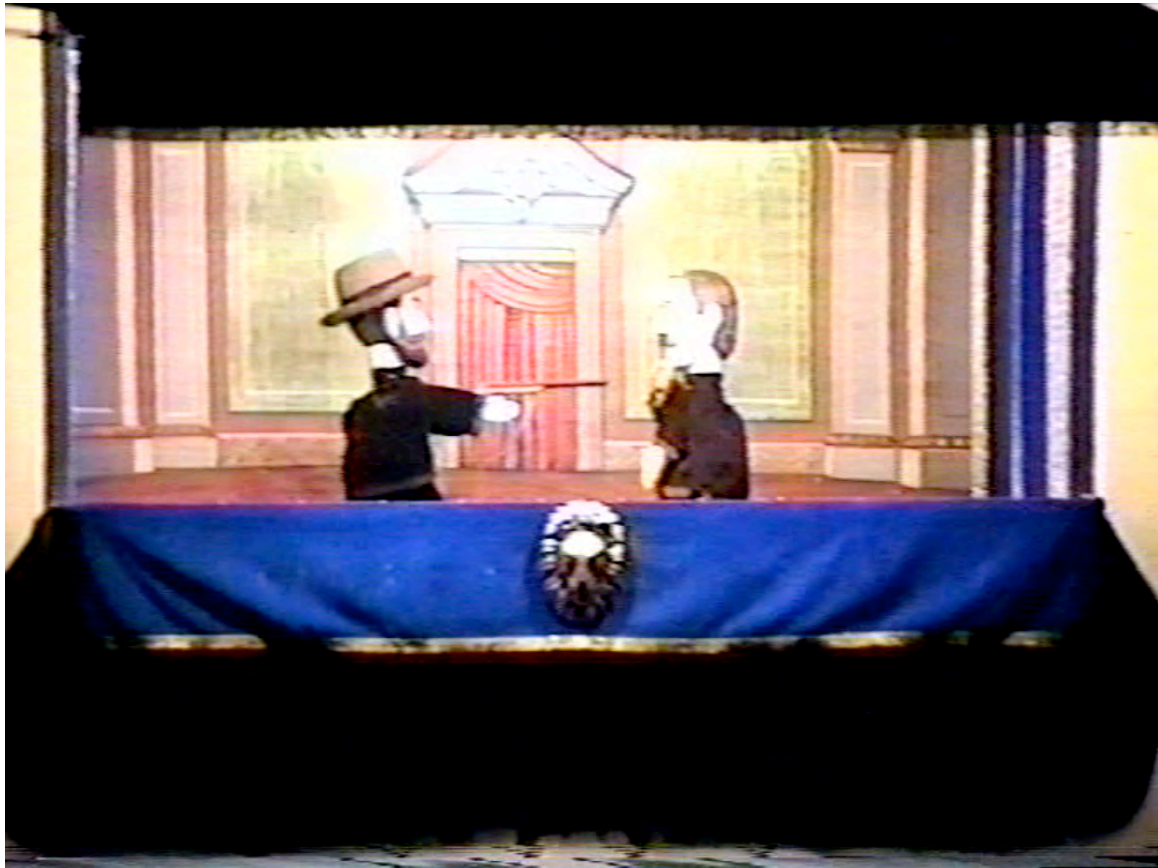
Similar questions were in our heads when, in 2010, anthropologist Andrea Morbio and I embarked on a project on Simone Pianetti. Apart from his life and his killings, we aimed to study their modalities of transmission through narrative forms such as

⁶⁴ Morbio, Andrea. *La pertinence d'un vengeur*, master degree thesis presented in 2013 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

⁶⁵ Sordi, Italo. *Teatro e rito: saggi sulla drammatica popolare italiana*.

puppet plays, *cantastorie*, pamphlets and local rumours. In 2011 we produced the first version of a documentary film, after an extensive research *in situ* in Camerata Cornello and San Giovanni Bianco. We interviewed numerous inhabitants of the two villages where the assassin had lived, and discovered that several of them were either descendants of his family, or of the victims' families. The interpretation of the facts greatly differed between the two sides, still almost a century after they took place.

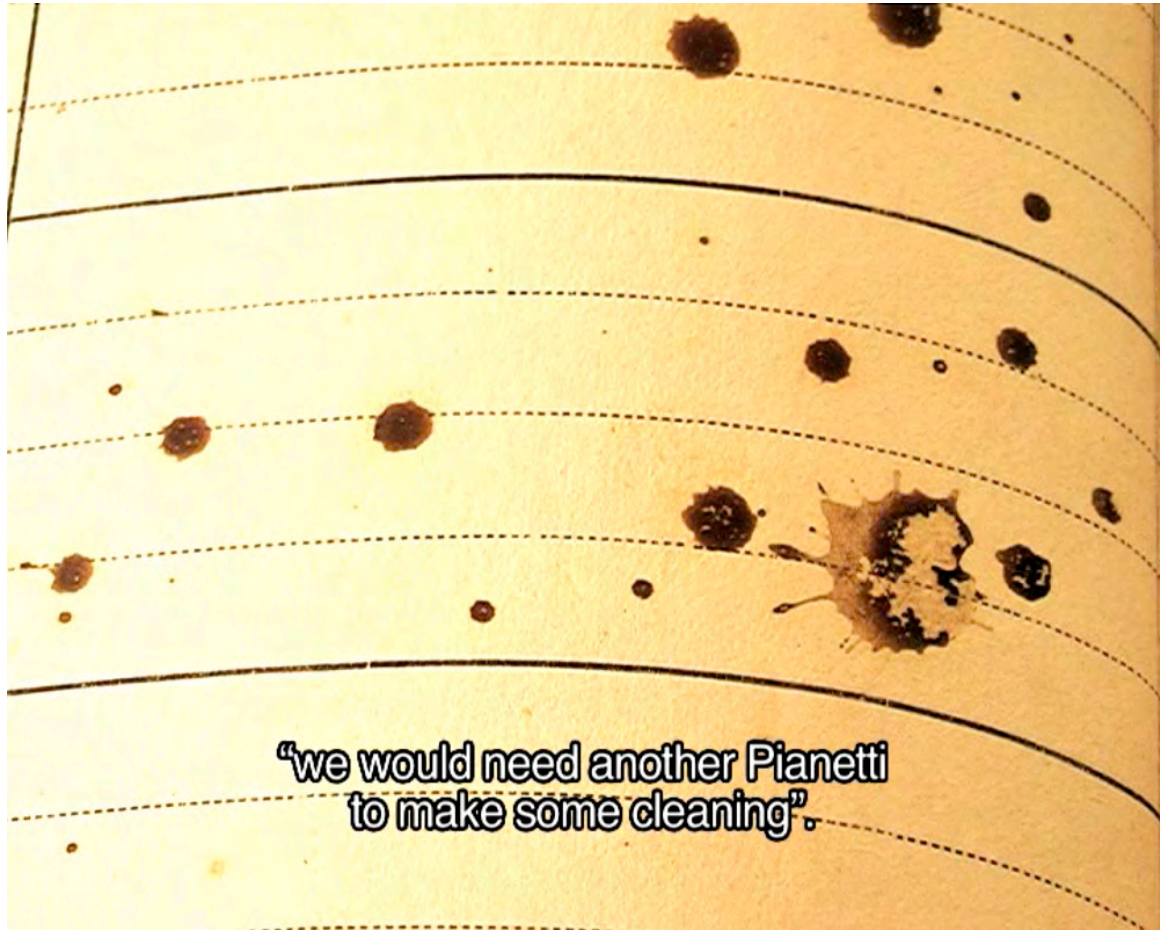




Film stills from *Simone Pianetti (1858-?)*, by Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio, 2011

The film, entitled *Simone Pianetti (1858 - ?)*, is 60 minutes long. The story of Pianetti's life, massacre and afterlife is told through a parallel montage intertwining interviews with the inhabitants of the two villages and a fragments from a 1992 VHS recording of Giacomo Onofrio performing the puppet tragedy *Il vendicatore*. Such cross-cutting was aimed at pointing to the intrinsic variability of the information transmitted about Simone Pianetti after his escape. The montage attempted to present the VHS fragments of the puppet show as if they were archival footage of the real events, thereby trying to establish a paradoxical short-circuit between the facts and the artifacts narrating them.

The still below refers to a moment in the film, when we interviewed the town hall managers, who showed us a blood-stained page of the town hall register. The page is a perfect example of a document in its standard mode: it bears the marks of the murder of Abramo Giudici, the town clerk, who was shot by Pianetti in his workplace, before the register.



Film still from *Simone Pianetti (1858-?)*, by Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio, 2011

Whereas this document surely connotes a negative view on Pianetti, we collected other voices as well. Below is a transcript of the dialogue that opens our film, where a series of five people in a bar casually talk about the assassin. The location is the bar that, today, occupies the same rooms as the inn managed by Pianetti.

Person 1: ...then he went to San Giovanni to open an electric mill. "Don't buy his flour, because it's the flour of the devil", people would say. They pushed him to the edge. When he escaped on the mountains, he stayed one night at my father's chalet.

Person 2: 14 July, 1914.

Person 1: My father had a chalet with cows. And when he left, he paid my father. He was good.

Person 3: They persecuted him with calumnies. That's all.

Person 1: At the time, the priests had the power. Nowadays, young people are finally waking up a bit.

Person 3: Then, one day it happened. He had an enormous list: seven people in a day.

Person 2: Even more, isn't it?

Person 4: Yes, he had an enormous list!

People used to dance here, didn't they?

3: Yes, everything was here. This bar, that corridor, the shop next door – it used to be a single dancehall.

4: He had a list of eleven people to kill.

2: Twelve!

4: Eleven or twelve. He didn't succeed, but if he had, it would have been eleven or twelve people.

1: He lived here for years. He opened the first dancehall. He was intelligent and educated. He explained people that not everything the priest said was right, especially about testaments. Some started believing him, so the priest cursed his tavern, saying it was the house of sin, the tavern of the devil.

3: Somebody sees Pianetti as a good man. I mean, as a just man. He was just – he wasn't good. And then there are people who see him as a criminal, a filthy pig.

4: Yes, but he had the support of the king. The castle on the way up from San Pellegrino, was Pianetti's. The king gave it to him as a present. He was the personal sniper of the king.

1: When there's something wrong, we always say we would need another Pianetti, to put everyone at his place and make some cleaning. One for each village, that's what we say.

He was not a solely negative figure, then.

3: No. He has never been a simply negative figure.

4: Not for the people in this village.

1: Pianetti has never been a negative figure. He was more than a just man, because he provided work. He wanted to start activities that didn't exist here in the valley. A hotel, a dance hall, emancipation, progress... He did nothing bad. All he did was good.⁶⁶

The least one can say after listening to this dialogue, is that there is a diversity of opinions, up until today, and that there is an ongoing discussion about Pianetti's legacy and his being a villain or a just man.

In 2012, Andrea Morbio and I decided to go back to Camerata Cornello. With the support of a scholarship from the EHESS – the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Paris – we invited puppeteer Giacomo Onofrio to re-enact *Il vendicatore* (written and first performed by his grandfather) in Camerata Cornello, in the exact same square where some of Pianetti's victims were killed. As mentioned

⁶⁶ Conversation included in the film *Simone Pianetti (1858 - ?)*, 2011. My translation.

before, it was the first time since the 1990s that the puppet adaptation was again performed in public.

We recorded the conversation in which we asked Onofrio to perform the puppet tragedy again after so much time. He was both surprised and pleased, and he started recalling the last time he had performed the play.

The last time I performed it, it was in... 1998 or 1999. That was the last time.

Did you use to perform it often?

Once, I used to perform it a couple of times per year when I was on tour. I used to perform it a lot in retirement homes, where it was always a success. Some old man would always tell me, "I remember the newspapers!"

Really?

Yes. That news was such a sensation at the time. Then it became history; it became one of the stories brought around by travelling storytellers. You know, people waited for puppet shows to come to their village in order to get news from other villages.

Have you seen the play performed by your father in Camerata Cornello [Pianetti's hometown]?

Yes, sure. I was there with my father. The first time, I was eight, ten years old. My father would drive around the village to advertise the play, shouting, "*Il vendicatore*. The story of Simone Pianetti, the man who killed seven people in 1914". That's what he said on the microphone.

I liked that play very much. Sometimes I rehearse it even now, only to overcome the nostalgia of past times. The problem is that nobody comes to see it; otherwise I would still perform it – it's a beautiful play, a beautiful story. Its content is marvellous: you see the wickedness of the power, of the lords, of those who control the village, against a poor devil. At least, that's how my grandfather wrote it – I don't know about the actual Pianetti.⁶⁷

Camerata Cornello, September 8, 2012, 8.30 PM.

After a lot of logistic work, we managed to organize the re-enactment of the puppet show *Il vendicatore* in the main square of Camerata Cornello. Giacomo Onofrio is here; he has set up his stage and he is ready to perform. In the previous days, while advertising the show, we informally questioned the inhabitants of the village, in public places or in their homes. They told us they know the story, but when we went a little deeper, we realized that their knowledge was fragmentary, contradictory, full of gaps, stereotypes and prejudices. We thought that, through the re-enactment of the show, the memory of the inhabitants could be revived, bringing out elements that remained obscure for us. We imagined that after the show, or even, with a little luck, during the show, the audience would intervene, addressing the puppet characters and the other spectators.

⁶⁷ Interview included in the film *Simone Pianetti (1858 - ?)*, 2011. My translation.

Camerata Cornello, September 8, 2012, 9.30 PM.

The show has started. The characters on the small stage, inspired by the story of the mass murder that took place in these very same places almost a century ago, are brought back to life. There are no frantic reactions in the audience, however. The spectators follow the development of the play as if it were an ordinary story that happened elsewhere, as if the story did not concern them. Children in the audience grin every time Pianetti kills a victim.

Camerata Cornello, September 8, 2012, 10.30 PM.

The show is about to end. In the audience there are a few children, our film crew, some friends of Onofrio's, our parents, a girl from the village and two families we do not know. It is not much of an audience. None of the people we have interviewed during our field research are here. In our intention, this was to be a unique opportunity for an artist, a researcher, a puppeteer and a local community to meet and reflect together on an event that has marked this village indelibly. Instead, this meta-performance of a document, on which we worked for over a year, reveals itself as nothing more than a simple puppet show.





Film stills from *Il ritorno del vendicatore*, by Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio, 2012

Giacomo Onofrio's 2012 re-enactment of *Il vendicatore* in Camerata Cornello was the subject of another documentary film by Andrea Morbio and me, titled *The Return of the Avenger* (2012). The film, conceived as an account on the afterlife of Pianetti in his hometown after a century, ended up being also a report on a failure: our endeavour of bringing back a puppet tragedy to the places where the facts inspiring it actually happened, left us with a bitter taste, a sentiment of dissatisfaction that we have not solved yet.

Since then, we have been invited to present Giacomo Onofrio's puppet show in several locations, among which Viafarini (Milan), during the Centrale Fies Performing Arts Festival, and at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome during the Quadriennale in 2017. On the last occasion, we also presented an installation featuring four of the original puppet backdrops for *Il vendicatore*, painted in the 1920s for Giacomo Onofrio's grandfather and inspired by the crime scenes in Camertata Cornello. Such backdrops were installed along with the head of the Pianetti *burattino*.



Documentation photo of Giacomo Onofrio's performance of *Il vendicatore* at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma, during the Quadriennale, January 2017



Installation view of Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio's installation at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma, during the Quadriennale, 2017, featuring Giacomo Onofrio's grandfather backdrops for *Il vendicatore*, as well as the puppet head for the Simone Pianetti character

Our research project about Pianetti has been presented in other forms, for example as a performance/lecture, where I and Andrea Morbio presented – through video, audio and performative media – the research materials we have gathered in the last years.





Documentation photos of Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio's performance/lecture on Simone Pianetti at FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France, 2017

Such performances/lectures have been presented, for example, at USVA Theater, Groningen, The Netherlands (2018); FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France (2017); Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, France (2016); KABK, Den Haag, the Netherlands (2015); MACRO - Museo d'arte contemporanea di Roma, Italy (2013). At some point during those lectures, we would play an excerpt of the voice of the Pianetti character, as interpreted by Giacomo Onofrio, after having presented it as the voice of the real assassin. Only in the end we would reveal that the voice actually comes from a puppet show.

After having followed traces of Pianetti's life until his massacre, it is time to focus on his 'afterlife', that is, on the different channels through which his story has been transmitted after his escape.

7. Variations on Pianetti's afterlife

Where the events following Pianetti's massacre are evoked, for which there is no official version but only variations on inaccessible facts.

After having studied the *cantastorie* flyers and the puppet plays about Pianetti that have survived until today, as well as the book by Ashton-Wolfe, one could not but

realize that, for many elements related to his killings, there is no official version, no certified truth.⁶⁸ After Pianetti escaped, writings supporting him started to appear on walls, stating that someone like him was needed in every village (in Italian: “*Di Pianetti ce ne vorrebbe uno per ogni paese*”). The monuments and pictures of his victims were often damaged in sign of contempt. Despite the assassin never claimed that his act was anything else but a purely personal revenge, his story of revolt against figures of power became enormously famous among anarchist circles. News of the massacre even reached the United States, where several individuals were reported to be passing themselves off as Simone Pianetti, proof of the magnitude of his fame within the anarchist movement.⁶⁹

There is no official version about Pianetti’s death, or about his life after the massacre. There are, however, several unofficial variations. They have been transmitted, over the years, by fellow citizens, relatives, acquaintances, local historians, journalists, anarchists. None of them has been officially validated by any institution of power.

The thesis provided by the family is that their relative died in the Alps, between the Cancervo and Venturosa mountains, a few days after meeting his son Nino.⁷⁰ Such version, stated by the same son, never convinced the inhabitants of the area, and is said to have been provided just to calm things down and give a little peace to the relatives.⁷¹ Numerous and contrasting versions indicate the fugitive on the American continent. To substantiate the hypothesis there are some letters, as well as the testimony of Domenica Milesi.⁷² The woman, originally from San Giovanni Bianco, claimed to have met Pianetti in Ciudad Bolivar, the city in Venezuela where she had emigrated with her husband. She recounts having come into contact with the fugitive through a Sicilian merchant resident. Pianetti gave her some letters and a little money to send to his family in Italy. He told her how he managed to escape: thanks to a very influential person, the visa office of the Police headquarters in Bergamo provided him with a false passport, which allowed him to embark on a ship for North America. Once in the United States, the local authorities helped him: given the sympathy that he received in the lower strata of the population, his capture would have caused riots and uprisings. Another hypothesis claims that Pianetti fled through the Orobie mountains, reaching the canton Grigioni in the Swiss territory.⁷³

A few decades later, in 1943, some inhabitants of Camerata Cornello claimed to have met an elderly man wandering around the mountains, not far from Cespedosio. They had a rapid exchange, from which emerged the true identity of Simone Pianetti (over

⁶⁸ For a reflection on the truth-status in the Pianetti case, see also the book by Denis Pianetti, a descendant of the murderer: Pianetti, Denis. *Cronaca di una vendetta*.

⁶⁹ “A 90 anni dalla strage di Simone Pianetti”, in *Quaderni Brembani*, 103-109.

⁷⁰ Interview with Nino Pianetti, in *Giornale del Popolo*, 18/09/1955.

⁷¹ Arrigoni, Ermanno et al. *Briganti e banditi bergamaschi*, 164-174.

⁷² Testimony by Domenica Milesi, *Giornale del Popolo*, 18/09/1955

⁷³ Arrigoni, Ermanno et al. *Briganti e banditi bergamaschi*, 164-174.

80 years old at the time), who then disappeared again in the surrounding woods.⁷⁴ Other rumours report that Nino Pianetti (Simone's son), who moved to Milan, confided to acquaintances that his father had escaped to the Americas and then returned with a false identity in Italy, where he spent his last years. According to this version, his last domicile would have been at his son's home in Milan, where he would have died in 1952.⁷⁵

Any reference to Simone Pianetti's escape needs to rely on the mysterious, unofficial, marginal and latent ways in which it has been transmitted. All these forms of transmission depend on narrative artifacts, whether these be photographs, oral or written stories, puppet shows, ballads. This is why I would like to explore the hypothesis that these unofficial narrative artifacts may be studied as documents, albeit in a *variational mode*. This phrase implies that they convey a series of variations on a conjectural and inaudible theme we call 'truth'. *Variational documents* orbit around such an inaccessible nucleus. In the case of Pianetti's escape, for which there is no official version, truth is an empty core; it is an unattainable picture, built up from the scattered and multiple traces left behind by the events. In the various accounts of his escape, these traces are arranged around a zone left empty by the absence of truth. Such empty zone functions as the origin of the axes, defining the coordinates of rumours, contradicting accounts, puppet adaptations, flyers, images, etc.

The hypothesis of a *variational mode* of documents forced me to delve deeper into the status of documents themselves, with documents, then, being the narrative artifacts related to the Pianetti case. This investigation involved a series of pieces that I produced, using the formats of *fogli volanti* and *cantastorie* performances.

8. Fogli volanti and cantastorie

On how, in my artistic practice, I used the same narrative formats through which Pianetti's story has been transmitted.

In order to give additional concrete examples of how I tried to interrogate the status of documents in my artistic practice, I will describe two other projects related to the Pianetti case, where I used the same narrative forms through which his story has been transmitted: *fogli volanti* and *cantastorie*.

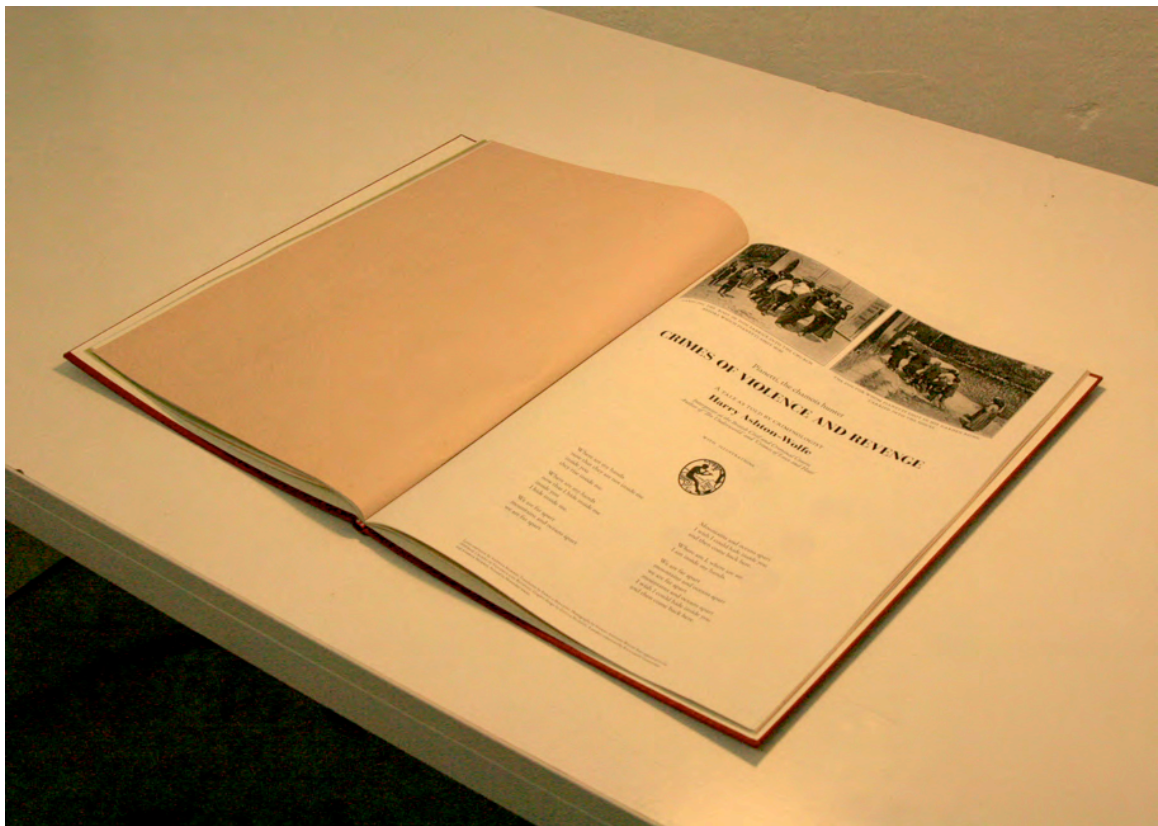
The research project by Andrea Morbio and me about Simone Pianetti has been also presented in the form of a book, composed of a series of *fogli volanti* (*cantastorie* flyers). After examining the two samples issued at the time of the murder (presented above), we produced a series of twenty new flyers. At the centre of each are the lyrics

⁷⁴ Testimony by Maddalena Gavazzi, in *Briganti e banditi bergamaschi*, 169.

⁷⁵ Testimonies by Battista Belotti e Ugo Boffelli, in *Briganti e banditi bergamaschi*, 174.

of a love song, *Monti e Mari* (“mountains and oceans”), written by Andrea Morbio, which has no historical or philological connection to the Pianetti case. The song functions as a fulcrum, as a core around which quotations and images are arranged. Through footnotes, captions, additions and similar variations on the graphic layout, various details about Pianetti’s story are introduced.

The book was designed in collaboration with Giulia Marzin, and the graphic design of the series is the result of a study of fonts, illustrations and themes found in Italian printed materials dating from the first three decades of the 20th century. Flyers, posters, book covers and pamphlets were studied for reference.



Installation view of Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio’s *fogli volanti* book *Monti e Mari*, Viafarini, Milano, 2011



La storia di SIMONE PIANETTI

"L'UOMO CHE NEL 1914 UCCISE SETTE PERSONE"

Dove sono le mie mani
ora che non sono dentro di me
dentro di te
nascono dentro di me.

Dove sono le mie mani
ora che nascondo dentro di me
dentro di te
nascondo dentro di me

*Siamo lontani
lontani monti e mari
siamo lontani
lontani monti e mari
vorrei nascondermi dentro di te
e poi, e poi ritornare qui*

Dove sono, dove siamo
sono dentro le mie mani

*Siamo lontani
lontani monti e mari
siamo lontani
lontani monti e mari
vorrei nascondermi dentro di te
e poi, e poi ritornare qui.*

Testo e musica di Andrea Morbio, illustrazione di E. Parodi, grafica di Giulia Marzin.
Un progetto di Riccardo Giacconi e Andrea Morbio. Esemplare stampato nel novembre duemilaundici.

Mountains and Oceans

Liberty, equality, and above all fraternity may become real for the moment in those stages of the great social revolutions which revolutionaries who live through them describe in the terms normally reserved for romantic love.



Where are my hands
now that they are not inside me
inside you
they rise inside me.

Where are my hands
now that I hide inside me
inside you
I hide inside me.

We are far apart
mountains and oceans apart
we are far apart
mountains and oceans apart

I wish I could hide inside you
and then come back here.

Where am I, where are we
I am inside my hands.

We are far apart
mountains and oceans apart
we are far apart
mountains and oceans apart
I wish I could hide inside you
and then come back here.

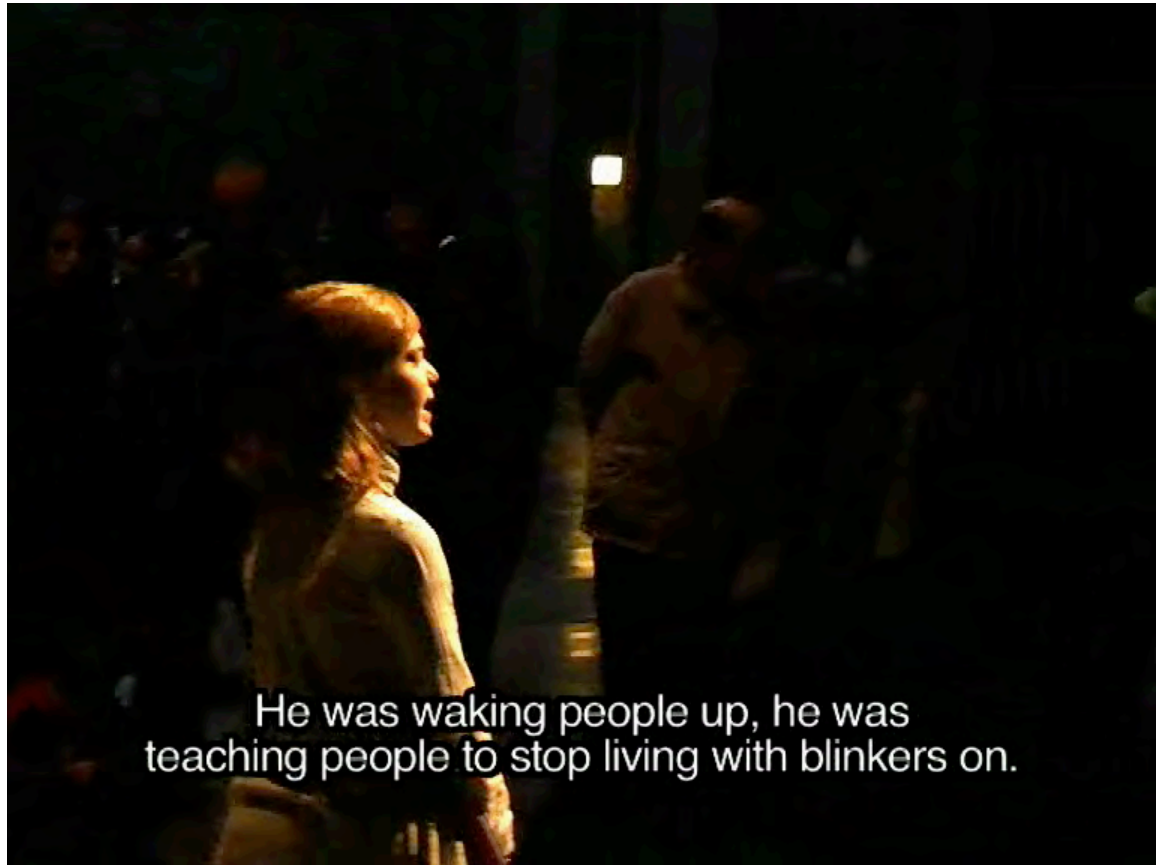
Lyrics and music by Andrea Morbio. English translation by Enrica Serafini. Graphic design by Giulia Marzin.
Subtitle: E. J. Hobstawni. A project conceived by Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio. Printed in November 2011.

Fogli volanti from Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio's book *Monti e Mari*, 2011

The very first public presentation of the Pianetti project was a performance, titled *Un ligero equipaje para tan largo viaje* ("A light luggage for such a long journey"). It

was presented as part of the performance festival *Desplazamientos Temporales*, curated by Laura Diez Garcia at La Alhondiga, Bilbao, in December 2010. In our performance, Nerea Elizalde, a 12-year old girl, shouted a looping series of sentences, standing at the entrance of the festival venue.





Documentation photograph of Nerea Elizalde in Riccardo Giacconi and Andrea Morbio's performance *Un ligero equipaje para tan largo viaje*, 2010

The text Nerea Elizalde shouted was a montage of fragments of interviews with citizens of Camerata Cornello, collected during our first field research in the summer 2010. In the performed text, all details about names, dates and locations were omitted, leaving only the bare narrative skeleton of the testimonies. We conceived the performance as a *performative documentary*, taking the format of *cantastorie* shows as a reference.

In both the book and the performance, the information we gathered about Simone Pianetti through both archival research and field research, was used as material for artworks we produced. Such mode of working required a reflection on the use of information collected during a research. What is the status of such information in the process of an artistic research? Does it constitute an endpoint, or a working material? Is such distinction intrinsic, or is it a matter of perspective, based on the discipline from which one is looking? While reflecting on these questions in my specific practice, I was struck by an observation on the notions of 'document' and 'monument' by Panofsky.

9. The loop of documents and monuments

Where an observation by Panofsky is presented, about documents and monuments being interchangeable according to perspectives, and where Brook's idea of theatre is introduced as a working hypothesis towards a definition of documents.

Art historian Erwin Panofsky, in the introduction to his book *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, outlines a series of “striking analogies between the methodical problems to be coped with by the scientist, on the one hand, and by the humanist, on the other”.⁷⁶ “When the scientist observes a phenomenon”, he continues, “he uses *instruments* which are themselves subject to the laws of nature which he wants to explore. When the humanist examines a record he uses *documents* which are themselves produced in the course of the process which he wants to investigate”.⁷⁷ Here, taking as an example an altarpiece and a written contract for its commission, Panofsky proposes a model of the relationship between *documents* and *monuments*, which I find useful to study the Pianetti case. Panofsky starts to question the authenticity of both the artwork and the document. Each of them should be checked against other artworks and documents from the same context, and then it may appear that “the documents which should explain the monuments are just as enigmatical as the monuments themselves”.⁷⁸ Here arises a paradox:

[I]ndividual monuments and documents can only be examined, interpreted and classified in the light of a general historical concept, while at the same time this general historical concept can only be built up on individual monuments and documents; just as the understanding of natural phenomena and the use of scientific instruments depends on a general physical theory and vice versa.⁷⁹

Panofsky's model of the relationship between monuments, documents and the historical context “operates as a consistent yet elastic organism, comparable to a living animal as opposed to its single limbs”⁸⁰. Yet the bipolar model between monument and document allows for an interchangeability of positions: a document or a monument is not what it is *per se*, but only insofar as it is *used* as such.

I have referred to the altarpiece as a “monument” and to the contract as a “document”; that is to say, I have considered the altarpiece as the object of investigation, or “primary material,” and the contract as an instrument of investigation, or “secondary material.” In doing this I have spoken as an art historian. For a palaeographer or an historian of law, the contract would be the “monument,” or “primary material,” and both may use pictures for documentation. [...] *everyone's “monuments” are everyone else's “documents,” and vice versa.*⁸¹

⁷⁶ Panofsky, Erwin. *Meaning in the visual arts: papers in and on art history* (Doubleday, New York, 1955), 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

According to Panofsky's model, it is only from the specific perspective through which one writes history, that an object can be considered a 'monument'. It is, in this case, the so-called 'primary material', like an artwork, or an event. Or it is only from a certain perspective that an object can be defined as a 'document' in the sense of 'secondary material': a support for a narrative, an instrument for research. In other words, 'document' and 'monument' are interchangeable; they are not ontological categories, they are not essential characteristics of the object itself.

In my research project on Simone Pianetti, the idea of an interchangeability of positions can be applied to documents and artworks. It has been pointed out how the story of the murderer from Camerata Cornello has not been transmitted through official, validated documents but, rather, through artistic forms such as flyers or performances by puppeteers or street storytellers. It may then be argued that, in this specific case, the concepts of 'document' and 'artwork' are two modes of existence of the very same objects. The 1914 *fogli volanti* about Pianetti, for instance, may be considered artworks or documents, according to the use one makes of them. But, more precisely, they would be better described as *both* documents and artworks since, in them, the two modes co-exist. A bipolar model, rather than a dichotomic one, would be better suited to analyse such artifacts. Rather than through the categories of history, anthropology or legal studies, a research in and through art may be the most appropriated approach to tackle this 'knot' of documents and art forms. Such research will have to develop a theoretical and practical approach, able to encompass the concepts of 'artwork' and 'document', and *use* them at the same time. This was my direction while working on the Pianetti case.

If we follow Panofsky's model, we can conclude that *a document is not an object*. Rather, it is a certain *mode* of existence of the object, a certain *use* of the object. The very definition of an object as a document depends on what Agamben called a 'signature': a surplus, a mark we leave on the object in order to *use* it in a certain way, include it in a certain narrative, theory, storytelling act. Agamben cites, as an example, the phrase *Titiatius fecit* written on a cartouche in the lower edge of Titian's *Annunciation* (in the church of San Salvador in Venice). He notes how "the painting would remain completely unchanged in its materiality and quality" if the information about its author were missing.

Now consider the example of a signature stamped on a coin which determines its value. In this case, too, the signature has no substantial relation with the small circular metal object that we hold in our hands. It adds no real properties to it at all. Yet once again, the signature decisively changes our relation to the object as well as its function in society. Just as the signature, without altering in any way the materiality of Titian's painting inscribes it in the complex network of relations of "authority," here it transforms a piece of metal into a coin, producing it as money. [...]

a signature does not merely express a semiotic relation between a *signans* and a *signatum*; rather, it is what – insisting on this relation without coinciding with it – displaces and moves it

into another domain, thus positioning it in a new network of pragmatic and hermeneutic relations.⁸²

An object becomes an official document in a specific domain – for example, a piece of evidence in court – only when a specific *signature* is applied to it. The most typical case of a signature that transforms an object into a document is the acceptance of evidence at a trial. A court needs to *accept* an object as a piece of evidence in a given judicial procedure, usually if three basic conditions are satisfied: relevance, materiality and admissibility (terms specific to Anglo-American law).⁸³ Such acceptance is the *signature* that needs to be applied to an object in order to use it as evidence, even if the object remains “completely unchanged in its materiality and quality”. More broadly, to acquire the status of document, an object must pass through a series of procedural conventions that are accurate, not debatable and related to a fixed context.⁸⁴ The object is removed from its common use and introduced into a different field, in which it is *withdrawn from its usual purpose, assuming an alternative mode of existence*.

The objects related to Pianetti’s story – puppet shows, *fogli volanti*, anarchist legends – do not bear any official signature: they have never been accepted as documents by any institution of power. That is why they cannot be considered documents in the standard mode. Nonetheless, I will try to point out how a different, *variational* mode of documents may be posited, starting from the marginal, non-official modalities through which Pianetti’s story has been transmitted. But in order to do so, I will first need to briefly analyse some of the basic procedures – judicial and philosophical – through which the status of documents is produced, or *performed*.

10. Felicity conditions

Where the theatrical character of the judicial is evoked, and where the felicity conditions of speech acts, as conjectured by Austin, are introduced as a theoretical tool for the study of documents.

In order to establish the context against which my alternative definition of documents (based on Pianetti’s *variational* sources) will stand, I will refer to the procedure through which an object acquires the status of a document. Since such a procedure inhabits an interdisciplinary territory, different disciplines will be brought into play: legal theory (the concept of *evidence*), theatre studies (the *theatricality* of the judicial space) and philosophy (more precisely, speech act theory). Such mixed territory hosts

⁸² Agamben, Giorgio. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D’Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books 2009), 40.

⁸³ See, for example, “The Legal Concept of Evidence”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, first published 13 November 2015: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evidence-legal/> (accessed 15 March 2019).

⁸⁴ An object can operate as a document in one context but not in another: for example, if a war fiction movie may not be considered a document for a history of war, it may be for a history of cinema.

the roots of a notion that, as I will try to point out, is at the heart of every document: *performativity*.

An object becomes a document when we use it as such. Our use of an object as a document changes its mode: the object that has been used as a document is characterized by a specific ‘intensity’.⁸⁵ It is as if a current has flowed through it, much like electricity does. In other words, a document is always a certain *performance* of a certain object, as a result of which its mode of existence changes. In order to better grasp what the term ‘performance’ points at here, I want to draw attention to the ‘degree zero’ of theatre that Peter Brook postulated in 1968: “A man walks across this empty stage whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged”.⁸⁶ This is not so much a definition but the description of a dynamics that may be separated into three parts, which – as a working hypothesis – we will consider as the necessary elements for a document to exist:

1. “*A man walks*”: an object and/or an action has to come into the light, to become visible and identifiable. Likewise, a document needs to involve a visible substrate, for example an object connected to a narrative (in judicial terms: *physical evidence*), a signed contract (*documentary evidence*), a digital recording, etc.
2. “*this empty stage*”: a specific, delineated situation. Likewise, a document comes into existence as a *situational* function – that is, within a specific context, which allows for the possibility of investing an object with a narrative. In the judicial domain, the context is typically the courtroom.
3. “*whilst someone else is watching*”: a relationship. Likewise, a document comes into existence as a *relational* function: it needs to be public, to be accepted and employed as such by a community (of which the jury serves as a representation in the judicial domain).

The connection between theatre and documents stems from a line of studies on the theatricality of the judicial space. “[T]hat justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done”⁸⁷ is a phrase from 1924 by Lord Chief Justice Gordon Hewart’s, quoted in Frans Willem Korsten’s essay *Öffentlichkeit*, which focuses “on the way in which the theatrical, public visibility of law [...] has been shaped historically by two distinctly different modes: the theatrical-proper and the dramatic”⁸⁸. The essay links each of the two modes to a system of law and its own specific history, respectively, the European and the U.S. American. According to Korsten, the basic distinction between the two modes of judicial theatricality is “one between actors dramatically acting with one another on a podium,

⁸⁵ See also the definition of ‘intensity’ provided in the introduction.

⁸⁶ Brook, Peter. *The empty space* (New York: Touchstone 1968), 7.

⁸⁷ R v. Sussex Justices, Ex parte McCarthy, [1924] 1 K.B. 256, [1923] All ER Rep. 233.

⁸⁸ Korsten, Frans Willem. “Öffentlichkeit and Law’s Behind-the-Scenes: Theatrical and Dramatic Appearance in European and US American Criminal Law”, in *German Law Review* 18(2), p. 401.

or their actions being seen by an audience, theatrically. When the action is watched by an audience, the podium becomes a stage.”⁸⁹

In the Pianetti case, the theatricality of law has been obstructed by the fact that the murderer was never captured: the trial was conducted *in absentia*, without his presence on the judicial stage. This made space for an absence at the very centre of the official narrative: the legal institution could never perform its procedural truth-production in full, nor publicly assign guilt on the assassin from Camerata Cornello. All had to be done *in absentia*, and this lack of public exposure allowed for Pianetti’s story to disappear relatively quickly from newspapers and mainstream media, also in connection with the beginning of the First World War.⁹⁰

The public, theatrical visibility that the judicial institution could not stage for Pianetti, was on the other hand taken over by unofficial narrative artifacts, such as *burattini*, *cantastorie* and *fogli volanti*. Those artifacts were able to stage and perform non-official documents, as well as to create a public visibility for a story unable to affirm any official and validated truth, but only *variations*. That is why it is mainly through such narrative artifacts, as well as through the anarchist movement, that Pianetti’s story was transmitted.

The connection between theatre and the judicial may be useful to grasp the intrinsically *performative* nature of documents, which, as postulated, comes into being when an object is invested with a specific narrative, in a specific situation and within a specific community. A document is not only a *relational* object, but also a *situational* one, following Samuel Weber’s definition of theatre as a *medium*:

[a medium’s] distinctively spatial quality – its status “in between” – indicates that it can never be construed as self-contained or self-regulating. Rather, it is relational and situational, depending decisively on alien or extraneous instances that, in the case of theater, are generally identified with the spectators or audiences.⁹¹

Following Weber’s definition, it becomes clear how the status of documents, whose origin lies in the judicial (theatrical) space, can hardly be grasped as an ontology (what is it?), but rather as a performance, a mode or as a *use* (how does it function? How is it used?). Even the actual knife used for a murder is not a piece of physical evidence *per se*, but only when it is invested in a certain narrative (the accusation), within a certain context (the courtroom), with the approval of a certain community (the jury).⁹²

In short, a document – if conceived as a performance of a certain object – needs a specific *procedure* to exist. Object, situation and relationship (the notions derived

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁹⁰ See “A 90 anni dalla strage di Simone Pianetti”.

⁹¹ Weber, Samuel. *Theatricality as Medium* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2004), 43.

⁹² The concept of ‘real evidence’ will be addressed more in depth in a later sub-chapter.

from Brook's definition of theatre) may be considered indications of a document's *felicity conditions*. This expression is drawn from J. L. Austin's formulation of speech act theory in his series of lectures *How to Do Things With Words* (1962). The reference comes as no surprise, since Austin was the first to famously bridge linguistics and juridical studies through the analysis of performative utterances (or just 'performatives'), that is, sentences that are not used to describe, but to *do*, and are therefore neither true or false. To utter a performative, in appropriate circumstances, is not just to 'say' something, but rather to perform a certain kind of action (for instance: "I promise..."; "I swear..."; "I name..."; "I bequeath..."; etc.) "[I]t is worth pointing out", stated Austin, "how many of the 'acts' which concern the jurist are or include the utterance of performatives, or at any rate are or include the performance of some conventional procedures."⁹³

The first two felicity conditions listed by Austin are very close to those we postulated above as the necessary elements for a document to exist:

(A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.⁹⁴

Further on, referring to the act of promising, Austin points to an underlying, more fundamental felicity condition, that of 'understanding':

It is obviously necessary that to have promised I must normally

(A) have been *heard* by someone, perhaps the promisee;

(B) have been understood by him as promising.⁹⁵

This last condition seems to mirror Brook's 'someone else watching': both state the ultimate necessity of a conscious relationship, a mutual agreement on the validity of the performative (or the act of theatre – or, for our purposes, the document). Austin, throughout his whole series of lectures, constantly comes back to the notion of *procedure*, a notion closely connected with documents (and, more specifically, with evidence). An object (be it a fingerprint, an audio recording, a photograph, a written testament) can acquire the status of a document only when it has been inserted in a certain space-time context; in other words, only when it has been *performed*. Fingerprints, audio recordings, photographs, testaments are not documents *per se*, but only when a certain narrative, theory, storytelling act runs through them; and only within a certain context. A written piece of paper in a bottle in the middle of an ocean becomes a message only when it is read. In the same way, a written statement

⁹³ Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

becomes a document only when it is used as such. If nobody uses it as such, an object is not a document, but simply an object (a sheet of paper, a fingerprint, a photograph).⁹⁶

Here, the proximity and mutual necessity of the terms ‘document’ and ‘evidence’ is key. Suzanne Briet’s classic definition of documents highlights the connections between truth and the performance of an object: a document is “any concrete or symbolic indication, preserved or recorded, for reconstructing or for proving a phenomenon, whether physical or mental”⁹⁷. The word ‘reconstructing’ points directly to a narrative act, while the term ‘proving’ points to the judicial production of a truth: these may be seen as the two components of the current, of the ‘intensity’ that, when it runs through an object, allows us to call it a document.

Following Briet’s definition, even the puppet shows and the *fogli volanti* about Pianetti could be justifiably considered ‘documents’. Nonetheless, their non-official status, their inherent variability need to be taken into account, which demands for another component in the definition of documents, which has not been properly tackled so far: power. If a *signature* is needed on an object in order for a community to use it as a document, *who is to sign?* I will try to address such question through a brief theoretical excursus on the notion of ‘documentality’.

11. Documentality and power

Where the structural connection between documents and power is highlighted, following Ferraris’ theory of social objects and an alternative definition of ‘documentality’ proposed by Hito Steyerl.

A definition of documents based on their *use*, such as the one outlined so far, has points in common with Maurizio Ferraris’ notion of *documentality*, while it departs from it in some crucial aspects. In a series of articles and books,⁹⁸ the Italian philosopher addresses the notion of *social objects*: “differently from physical and ideal objects, social objects exist only in so far as there are men thinking that they

⁹⁶ The paradox of the document in the dark. A similar question is frequently formulated for artworks: is an object an artworks if it is nowhere to be seen by anybody?

⁹⁷ Briet, Suzanne. *Qu’est-ce que la documentation?* Paris: Éditions documentaires, industrielles et techniques, 1951), 2. My translation.

⁹⁸ For example, see Ferraris, Maurizio. “Documentality or Why Nothing Social Exists Beyond the Text”, in *Cultures. Conflict — Analysis — Dialogue, Proceedings of the 29th International Ludwig Wittgenstein-Symposium in Kirchberg, Austria*, ed. Ch. Kanzian and E. Runggaldier (Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, New Series, 3, 2007), or Ferraris, Maurizio. “Science of Recording”, in *Philosophy of the Information Society, Proceedings of the 30th International Ludwig Wittgenstein-Symposium in Kirchberg 2007*, ed. H. Hrachovec and A. Pichler (Frankfurt/a.M., Ontos Verlag, 2008), or Ferraris, Maurizio. *Documentality. Why it is necessary to leave traces*, trans. Richard Davies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

exist”.⁹⁹ Social objects are defined as “the result of a social act (such as to involve at least two people, or a delegated machine and a person) that is characterized by being recorded, on a piece of paper, on a computer file, or even only in the minds of the people involved in the act.”¹⁰⁰ Examples of social objects are marriages, banknotes, promises, novels, bets, certificates, records, laws.

Among such objects, Ferraris includes documents, but also artworks. Documents and artworks share a mode of existence based on the use a community makes of them. Both can be regarded as ‘intensities’, as *modes* of existence of objects rather than objects ‘in themselves’. As ‘social objects’, documents and artworks need to be *used* in a specific way in order to exist as such: they exist “only in so far as there are men thinking that they exist”.

Even here, we might notice a certain similarity with Peter Brook’s definition of the degree zero of theatre (especially in the importance of a theatrical relationship, a *gaze*), but with key differences. For Ferraris, the importance of the inscription on a physical substrate, albeit minimal, is key, since “what is produced by social acts is not a self-contained *praxis*, but it is a *poiesis*, the construction of an enduring object”. Nonetheless, the “endurance” of such object is reduced to the fact that, as stated above, “objects such as marriages or penal convictions, differently from cows or mountains, [...] exist only if there are minds believing that they exist”.¹⁰¹ A theory of social objects would lead to a theory of documents – *documentality* being the proprieties and conditions for the existence of social objects. “Social objects are divided into documents in a strong sense, as inscriptions of acts, and documents in a weak sense, as recordings of facts”.¹⁰² Documents, in this perspective, are “records with a particular social value”.¹⁰³ Their structural elements are three:

1. a physical substrate;
2. an inscription (which registers its social value, regarding at least two people);
3. an idiomatic element, typically a signature (which guarantees its authenticity).

It could be observed that an inscription and a signature validating its authenticity are not sufficient conditions to guarantee an object the status of document – at least, not for an indeterminate amount of time. Instead of essential, intrinsic aspects of a document, the inscription and the signature may be seen as merely parts of a certain *use* of an object, valid as a document as long as they are backed up by force, by an institution of power able to certify them as such. Ferraris confirms it, when he admits that inscriptions are not almighty, insofar as they are dependent on a society who can

⁹⁹ Ferraris, Maurizio. “Social Ontology and Documentality”, in *Approaches to Legal Ontologies: Theories, Domains, Methodologies*, ed. Giovanni Sartor, Pompeu Casanovas, Mariangela Biasiotti, Meritxell Fernández-Barrera (New York: Springer, 2011), 84.

¹⁰⁰ Ferraris, Maurizio. “New Realism, Documentality and the Emergence of Normativity”, in *Metaphysics and Ontology Without Myths*, ed. Fabio Bacchini, Stefano Caputo, Massimo Dell’Utri (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 119.

¹⁰¹ Ferraris, Maurizio. *Social Ontology and Documentality*, 85-86.

¹⁰² Ferraris, Maurizio. “New Realism, Documentality and the Emergence of Normativity”, 114.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 92.

back them by force. “It is within a certain society that a bunch of words (heard by the interested parties and witnesses), or a written item (a cheque, a contract, a receipt from a supermarket) become something relevant, and constitute a social object (a marriage, a sale, a fine...)”.¹⁰⁴

Considering Ferraris’ definition of social objects, it could be argued that it is pointless to look for *essential*, ontological features in a document, or in an artwork. If we define documents and artworks purely based on their use, we cannot recognize their mode of existence as objects *in themselves*, but purely as a current, as an intensity that may invest different objects in certain situations. In other words, it is possible to formulate a coherent definition of social objects (documents, or artworks) – without looking for any ontological foundations, but based solely on procedural conditions.

In his work, Ferraris rarely refers to the idea of a narrative function, which is crucial to the concept of documents as postulated in the present study. Questions related to the narrative aspect of documentality would be:

- How does a document *document* about something else than itself?
- How does it refer to reality, to the actuality of an event?
- How does a society endow a document with truth-value?

The fact that inscription and validation do not permanently define an object as a document, rendering such definition entirely dependent on the use we make of it, can be demonstrated by two examples:

- A contract might be considered valid for an indeterminate period of time, and then suddenly declared invalid by an institution of power (a court), for instance if it bears a forged signature. Still, the contract has perfectly functioned as a document until declared invalid: the authenticity of the signature is therefore not intrinsically necessary for a document to be used as such. Inauthenticity does not intrinsically entails infelicity.
- A manufactured piece of evidence may function as a valid document if an institution of power accepts it as such. A document might be “felicitous” even if it has no material connection to the facts it is purported to document. An example is the legal controversy over the evidence in the case of Hemant Lakhani, the man who bought a fake missile from a fake arms dealer and delivered it to a fake terrorist, and ended up *truly* being sentenced in court in 2005.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ “È all’interno di una società che un po’ di parole (sentite dalle parti e dai testimoni), o una cosa scritta (un assegno, un contratto, lo scontrino di un supermercato), diventano qualcosa di rilevante, e costruiscono un oggetto sociale (matrimonio, compravendita, multa, ricevuta...)”. Ferraris, Maurizio. “Documentalità: ontologia del mondo sociale”, in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, IX, 2007, 2. My translation.

¹⁰⁵ In the case of Hemant Lakhani, every part of the crime had been supplied to him by the US government. The only defense available to him was entrapment: if the government had not set him up, he would have never supplied a missile to a terrorist group, or anyone else. At trial, the State had to prove that Lakhani was ready, and willing, to do the deal, or that he was able to actually get his hands on a missile. Lakhani’s lawyer told jurors that, although he may be loathsome and an idiot, Lakhani was only willing, not ready, and certainly not able. See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1469955/My-only-crime-is-greed-says-terror->

In short: while it can be felicitous or infelicitous, a document is never *intrinsically* true or false. When a forged document is deemed invalid, the object remains exactly the same: it does not undergo any *material* transformations – what changes is only its use. Usually, the use of documents is based on a declaration of truth validated by an institution of power, able to back it by force. No ‘inscription’, which Ferraris poses at the basis of the ontology of documents, is ever a sufficient condition for a document to exist. It has to be used and acknowledged as such by an institution of power, which may declare it invalid at any moment. As Foucault emphasized several times, power defines the conditions of truth in a given society.¹⁰⁶

Artist, filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl emphasized the connection between documents and power in an essay, which provides a definition of the term ‘documentality’ that differs from the one given by Ferraris.

Does truth determine politics or politics truth? It is a question of how the production of truth has always been influenced and standardized by social power relations [...] Michel Foucault called this process the “politics of truth”. He describes it as a set of rules that determine the production of truth, distinguishing true statements from false ones, and fixing procedures of the production of truth. Truth is thus always also politically regulated. [...] I call this interface between governmentality and documentary truth production “documentality”. Documentality describes the permeation of a specific documentary politics of truth with superordinated political, social and epistemological formations. Documentality is the pivotal point, where forms of documentary truth production turn into government – or vice versa. It describes the complicity with dominant forms of a politics of truth, just as it can describe a critical stance with regard to these forms.¹⁰⁷

In contrast to the definition by Ferraris, which almost disregards the intrinsic role played by power in the production of documents, Steyerl places governmentality right at the heart of it, following Foucault’s line of thought. Her political definition of documentality implies that “[t]here is hardly a visibility that is not steeped in power relations – so that we can almost say that *what we see has always been provided by power relations*”.¹⁰⁸

In the quoted essay, Steyerl takes as a starting point the “image politics” carried out by the Bush administration regarding the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 2002 and 2003 (which, after the invasion, could not be found). She focuses especially on USA Secretary of State Colin Powell’s infamous presentation before the Security Council of the United Nations, which included labelled satellite and aerial

[charge-Briton.html](#) (accessed 16 March 2019). See also *Arms Trader 2009*, the radio-reportage on the case broadcast in the radio program *This American Life* (episode 387, August 2009):

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/387/arms-trader-2009> (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Foucault, Michel. *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2014), lecture of 14 January 1976, or Foucault, Michel. *Du gouvernement des vivants. Cours au Collège de France (1979-1980)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2014), lecture of 30 January 1980.

¹⁰⁷ Steyerl, Hito. “Documentarism as Politics of Truth”, trans. Aileen Derieg, in *transversal* (Vienna: Eipcp, May 2003) <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1003/steyerl2/en> (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

surveillance pictures with interpretive written elements, aimed to prove the urgency to engage a war with Iraq. In such a case, according to Steyerl, documents “assume the character of catalysts for actions; they are supposed to first create the reality that is documented in them”¹⁰⁹.

One may counter this line of reasoning by warning against the temptation to relativize every piece of historical evidence, therefore falling in danger of disregarding records and responsibility, thus opening the way to negationist positions.¹¹⁰ Steyerl, however, denies that every concept of truth is contingent and relative.

On the one hand, the articulation, production and reception of a document is profoundly marked by power relations and based on social conventions. On the other hand, though, the power of the document is based on the fact that it is also intended to be able to prove what is unpredictable within these power relations – *it should be able to express what is unimaginable, unspoken, unknown, redeeming or even monstrous – and thus create a possibility for change.*¹¹¹

Akin to Benjamin’s invitation to “brush history against the grain”,¹¹² Steyerl invokes a non-governmental *use* of documents, an unleashing of their unexpected, “redeeming” potential. The use we made of the artifacts that transmitted Pianetti’s story aimed to follow such direction. After his escape, Simone Pianetti quickly disappeared from mainstream channels of transmission. Puppet shows, *fogli volanti*, *cantastorie* performances, Ashton-Wolfe’s account, anarchist rumours are all narrative formats operating outside major institutions of power. Andrea Morbio and I often defined such formats as ‘out-dated’ or ‘marginal’: this was done not in order to operate any judgments of value, but rather, to situate them outside mainstream media standards, outside governmental validation mechanisms, outside official historiographies.

In another essay, Hito Steyerl reiterates that “documents are usually *condensations of power*. They reek of authority, certification, expertise and concentrate epistemological hierarchies. Dealing with documents is thus a tricky thing; especially if one aims to deconstruct power, one has to keep in mind, that existing documents are—as Walter Benjamin once wrote—mainly made and authorised by victors and rulers”.¹¹³ The work we carried out on Pianetti attempts to propose a counter-paradigm for such “reek”. Already at the time when they spread Pianetti’s story, *burattinai* and *cantastorie* were inhabiting an unofficial, independent, nomadic tradition of art practices. Such ‘marginal’ art forms have, historically, often situated themselves outside the grasp of powerful institutions and “epistemological hierarchies”. Their

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Ferraris often warns against the “postmodernist” temptation to reduce facts to interpretations. See for example *Social Ontology and Documentality*, 87.

¹¹¹ Steyerl, Hito. “Documentarism as Politics of Truth”. My emphasis.

¹¹² Benjamin, Walter. *Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen. Zur Kritik der Gewalt und andere Aufsätze* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).

¹¹³ Steyerl, Hito. “Documentary Uncertainty”, in *A Prior* #15, 2007, <http://revisiones.net/antiores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html> (accessed 16 March 2019).

intrinsic unofficiality that asks for an alternative definition of documents, based on the capability of such forms to remain marginal, variational, relational and situational. Such capability is to be considered essentially political, in the sense that it firmly occupies and claims a space-time outside power structures. The marginality through which Pianetti's story has been transmitted, is a paradigm through which we can conceive an "unpredictable", "redeeming" potential for documents.

Inspired by Steyerl's idea of this potential for documents, I attempted to conjure 'marginal' narrative artifacts and give them space and time to speak, again. This could be done in dialogue with disciplines such as history, anthropology, theatre studies, philology, etc., but over time I realized that the space and time for the potential of such narrative artifacts to be expressed, could be best given in a field that encompassed also the *practice* of such narrative art forms – that is, in a *research in and through art*. It is within this field that the re-enactment of Onofrio's puppet show *Il vendicatore* could be performed and studied in its full theoretical and practical implications.

One of such implications, when considering a puppet show about Pianetti as a document, is the question: who does it speak to? Such a question remained unanswered in the days after the performance, when Andrea Morbio and I tried to get our heads around the lack of participation by the local community. If a document is entirely definable by its *use*, it is important not to disregard *who is to use it*, and who is subject to its effects. It will be useful, then, to study the essentially *relational* character of documents, by focusing on the concepts of 'intentionality' and 'responsibility'.

12. *Obligatio*

Where the notions of intentionality and responsibility are evoked, in relation to Ferraris' theory.

Ferraris takes care to evict any reference to intentionality from the foundations of his theory:

Shared intentional contents are just accidental elements that sometimes [...] are attached to social entities, but they are *not* their ultimate ground. [...] What is binding [...] is the content of the social act, [...] recorded on an "external" support – i.e. a *paper document* or a *digital document*. It is the content produced in the social act and then recorded somewhere that establishes the nature of the actual constraints, and guarantees the endurance of the social object. We shall call this recorded content a *document*, and defend the thesis that documents are the ontological ground of social objects. We can now state our thesis more precisely:

*documents are the basic source of the “independence” of social reality of subjectivity. That is, they are what make social reality resistant to individual or collective beliefs.*¹¹⁴

Further on in the same article, however, Ferraris admits that “[d]ocuments are the most basic social objects, because they require only generic dependence on people, and no specific dependence on further documents. The specific content on which they depend is the shared willingness of a certain community to regard as binding every document that has been produced according to a certain procedure.”¹¹⁵ If such definition seems to come back to a kind of intentionality, the author specifies, “*the only role of the collective intentions is that of validation. Certain documents have to be regarded as valid, by an explicit acknowledgment or, more often, by the implicit acceptance of a procedure of document production*”¹¹⁶. Here, Ferraris seems unable to free his definition of documents from intention, albeit a collective one. He eventually states that validation, necessary for a document to exist, relies on a power that enforces it: documents “have to be acknowledged as valid to have a social function.”¹¹⁷ Such acknowledgement derives from

...a form of dependence between a social object and the persons belonging to a society [...] On the one hand, social institutions are binding in so far as a certain collectivity of people regard certain documents as valid, although no specific person is required to regard them as valid. On the other hand, in institutionalized society, the validation is carried out by a *procedure* that is acknowledged as possessing the power of validating the document that is in turn produced by following the procedure.¹¹⁸

The political nature of such “power of validating” is evident, as I will try to explain. Ferraris’ definition of documents includes an “external support” on which the content of the social act is recorded. However, the validity of such a record is ultimately based on the presence of a power that, if needed, may use force to guarantee the obligations that the social act involves. In this sense, the notion of responsibility is key: any speech act, any oath would be empty, if it would not entail responsibility before a power. This is made clear by Agamben’s observation on the term:

The Latin verb *spondeo*, which is the origin of our term “responsibility,” means “to become the guarantor of something for someone (or for oneself) with respect to someone.” [...] In archaic Roman law, in fact, the custom was that a free man could consign himself as a hostage — that is, in a state of imprisonment, from which the term *obligatio* derives — to guarantee the compensation of a wrong or the fulfillment of an obligation.¹¹⁹

So, if we agree with Ferraris that a document, to exist, needs to be validated by a specific procedure, we cannot neglect that such validation has an intrinsically legal

¹¹⁴ Ferraris, Maurizio and Torrenzo, Giuliano. “Documentality: A Theory of Social Reality” in *Rivista di Estetica* 57, 2014, 16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁹ Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Zone Books, New York 1999), 21-22.

character, and therefore needs to be enforced by an institution of power. Any classical definition of ‘document’ cannot do without force, since responsibility (a juridical notion) has a relational character: it is always *responsibility before* someone or something. Ferraris states that “intentional contents are just accidental elements” and not the “ultimate ground” of social objects. Following his remark, if intention is not essential in the production of documents, then any validation ultimately needs to be backed by force: it needs to bear obligations and consequences, otherwise a contract would be no more than a piece of paper. Such force is the ever-present shadow behind any felicity conditions; it is the intensity that fills Brook’s theatrical “empty space” when transferred to the judicial realm.¹²⁰ And in order to properly analyse the judicial nature of documents, it will be necessary to briefly focus on the legal concept of ‘evidence’.

13. Evidence

Where a definition of the legal concept of evidence will be provided, and where the juridical dichotomy between ‘real evidence’ and ‘documentary evidence’ will be questioned.

Why is it necessary to investigate the concept of evidence when talking about documents? Because, as I will try to point out in this sub-chapter, all evidence is ultimately documentary, and a document’s function is primary evidentiary.

Judicial decisions are aimed at applying legal norms to concrete situations. The legal case concerns facts, which are not defined *a priori*; rather, they are identified, asserted and ‘attached’ by the subjects operating in the trial (parties, prosecutor, defendant, judge, etc.) according to particular procedures regulated by the law. The judge is expected to ascertain the facts on the basis of valid and adequate elements of knowledge, which are called ‘evidence’.¹²¹

A factual proposition (in Latin, *factum probans*) can be considered as evidence only if it may be used to draw an inference to a matter that is material to the case (*factum*

¹²⁰ Artist and researcher Yota Ioannidou clearly emphasises the link between documents and power in a text inspired by a conversation with archivist Charles Jeurgens: “As the state wants to make the society legible, the achievement is not through the registration of reality but through a modelling of reality via documents. [...] Furthermore, a dramaturgical perspective can be traced in the distinction between the state and the people: the state as creator of a play and people with the role of the subject. Subject, in my understanding, as a role that is not allowed to act out of specific borders and its role takes place under imposed structures by the state. The tools to constitute people as subjects are the documents.” From: <http://yotaiannidou.net/publications.html> (accessed 16 March 2019). See also Ioannidou’s essay “How Does a Document ‘Act’? Research-based Art as Docudramaturgy”, published on *Open!*, January 13, 2016: <https://www.onlineopen.org/how-does-a-document-act> (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹²¹ Taruffo, Michele. “Prova giuridica”, in *Enciclopedia delle scienze sociali* (Roma: Treccani, 1997), http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/prova-giuridica_%28Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali%29/ (accessed 16 March 2019).

probandum). This is why evidence is defined as an intrinsically *relational* concept.¹²² This comes as no surprise if we consider the structural connection between the notion of ‘document’ and that of ‘evidence’. I have pointed out before how a document is not a concept definable on an ontological level (‘what is it?’), but only on a performative level (‘how is it used?’). In the same way, evidence as a purely *relational* category allows us to consider it not as an *entity*, but as an *intensity* running through different objects when we use them in a certain way. Evidence (and, more broadly speaking, documents) is not a thing, but a specific *use* of things. With regards to hearsay, a source of information usually not admitted in court as evidence, legal theorists Roberts and Zuckerman wrote, “there is no such thing as hearsay evidence, only hearsay uses”.¹²³ A broader version of their statement may serve as an effective definition of evidence, based on its performative value: *there is no such thing as evidence, only uses*.

In order to clarify this relational character, it will be useful to refer to the basic conditions to be satisfied in order for a court to accept something as evidence. In Anglo-American law, such conditions are called ‘relevance’, ‘materiality’ and ‘admissibility’. Basically, they refer to the possibility of a court to consider specific pieces of evidence in a given case. A definition of relevance is included in the United States’ Federal Rule of Evidence 401, which states that evidence is relevant if “it has a tendency to make a fact more or less probable than it would be without the evidence”. In other words, nothing which is not relevant to a specific case may be received as evidence by the court. Again, this is a reference to evidence’s relational character, since a fact cannot be considered relevant *in itself*, but only *in relation* to another fact.¹²⁴

Legal systems throughout the world divide evidence into different categories, the three main ones being usually defined as: “*oral* evidence (the testimony given in court by witnesses), *documentary* evidence (documents produced for inspection by the court), and *real* evidence”¹²⁵ (also called physical, demonstrative or objective evidence), which captures “tangible physical objects”¹²⁶ “such as a knife allegedly used in committing a crime”.¹²⁷ In Pianetti’s case, these three categories may be easily exemplified.

- *Oral evidence*: Pianetti’s trial was conducted *in absentia* due to the fact that he was never captured. Several individuals from Camerata Cornello witnessed his killings, and thereby gave their testimony about them in court.
- *Documentary evidence*: Pianetti wrote a list of people on a piece of paper, a

¹²² Lai Ho, Hock. “The Legal Concept of Evidence”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2015 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evidence-legal/> (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹²³ Roberts, Paul and Zuckerman, Adrian. *Criminal Evidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 385.

¹²⁴ Lai Ho, Hock. “The Legal Concept of Evidence”.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ “Evidence”, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1985 edition.

¹²⁷ Lai Ho, Hock. “The Legal Concept of Evidence”.

lot of which he killed. Such list could be considered as a piece of documentary evidence, since it documented his intention to kill a series of individuals who supposedly ruined his reputation in the village.

- *Real evidence*: When Pianetti murdered town clerk Abramo Giudici, the latter fell on the register on which he was working. The blood-stained page of the town hall register bears the marks of the murder and may be considered a piece of physical evidence.

The relational status of evidence may be appreciated if one considers that, in a trial, the same object may be used as a piece of real evidence or of documentary evidence, according to which narrative it is invested with. Such a possibility is often evoked in texts explaining the difference between real and documentary evidence, as in the following example provided in *The Rottenstein Law Group Legal Library*:

[S]uppose that in a personal injury case, the injured plaintiff submits a blood-spattered letter. If the letter is offered to show that the plaintiff began bleeding severely when the defendant's defective ink pen shredded her hand as she was writing, the letter would be an example of real evidence. If the letter is offered because its contents are an explanation from the manufacturer that the pens are defective, however, the letter would be an example of documentary evidence.¹²⁸

Starting from the Pianetti case, I will now try to question the distinction between real and documentary evidence. “Ideally,” writes Charles Nesson, professor of Law at Harvard Law School, “a jury trial creates a separate, isolated information space, which is insulated from the outside. The jury is presented with a crafted body of evidence and called upon to make a decision.”¹²⁹ The idea of a *separate* information space, “insulated from the outside”, allows one to ask the question as to how external reality (‘facts’) is introduced inside. It happens through the strict procedure of the acceptance of evidence, as described above. Such procedure allows external reality to enter the courtroom. Reality, however, does not enter the judicial space *in its materiality*, but through a translation: evidence is, in other words, *how law captures reality through language*. The definition of evidence in the Treccani Italian encyclopaedia addresses this point:

In plain language it is customary to speak about facts, circumstances, events and so on, but these are elliptical expressions. *Facts do not enter the trial in their empirical materiality, but as objects of statements*. The allegations of the parties in civil trials and the formulations of the indictments in criminal trials are statements; the testimonies given by witnesses or included in documentary evidence are statements; lastly, the judge elaborates on the facts during the judgment through statements. [...] *The object of the judgment*, as a whole, is

¹²⁸ “What is documentary evidence?”, in *The Rottenstein Law Group Legal Library*, <http://www.rotlaw.com/legal-library/what-is-documentary-evidence/> (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹²⁹ Nesson, Charles. “What You Have Said in the Dark: The Evolution of Media in the Courtroom and the New Challenges of Containing the Jury's Information Space”, in *St. Thomas Law Review* n. 24, 2012, 385-386.

therefore constituted by a complex set of hypothetical statements related to all the facts [...] relevant to the decision of the case.¹³⁰

Facts, in order to enter the judicial space of the trial, need to be translated into statements: reality needs to be translated into language in order to be invested by the force of law. Evidence, that is, the procedural ‘intensity’ that allows facts to enter law, is therefore always an act of language operated on specific objects. If the blood-stained page in the Pianetti case needs to be translated into a linguistic statement in order to enter the judicial space as evidence, then the idea of *real* evidence – an object entering the trial *in itself* – is questionable at its foundations.¹³¹ Objects, in other words, becomes evidence *only when they are used as such*, that is, when they are transformed into a linguistic statement, when a narrative runs through them and, therefore, when they are accepted in the theatrical space of law. From this, it can be argued that, fundamentally, *all evidence is documentary*, in the sense that evidence is always summoned, linguistic, relational, situational, performative – never intrinsic, never *real*.

Tackling the issue from the other side, one could put forward that documents, as a broader concept, are fundamentally *evidential*, in the sense that they have their primary and most specific paradigm in the legal notion of evidence. It has been proposed above that documents are the way, for an institution of power, to use objects in order to produce truth. As Nesson clearly points out, the court is one of such institutions of power, insofar as

the jury and the trial system, actually create a truth. This truth is intended to be free of external influences. Remarkably, this is a system built on an idea that if almost any dispute in our society is run through the judicial machinery known as trial, out the other end will pop a manufactured truth.¹³²

In Pianetti’s case, as well in the case studies introduced in the next chapters, the manufacture of truth by a judicial machinery is suspended and made impossible. This opens up the possibility to conceive a mode of documents less dependent on institutions of power – not based on any ‘official’ truth, but rather on *variations*.

¹³⁰ Taruffo, Michele. “Prova giuridica”, in *Enciclopedia delle scienze sociali* (Roma: Treccani, 1997), http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/prova-giuridica_%28Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali%29/ (accessed 16 March 2019). My emphasis, my translation. See also Taruffo, Michele. *La prova dei fatti giuridici. Nozioni generali* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1992), 91.

¹³¹ “real evidence may not be accepted as legal proof unless it is authenticated by the testimony of witnesses”, in Nagel, Heinrich and Norton, Jerry. “Evidence”, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, October 27, 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/evidence-law> (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹³² Nesson, Charles. “What You Have Said in the Dark”, 386.

14. A variational mode

Where a different mode of documents, unrelated to any institutions of power, is proposed, taking the afterlife of Simone Pianetti as a paradigm, and where similarities between artworks and documents are presented.

Ferraris, referring to the argument against private language proposed by Wittgenstein, states that “[t]here must be at least two people not only to produce a document, but also to have a language and, more generally, a rule”.¹³³ Throughout the theoretical excursus sketched in the sub-chapters above, a triangular constellation recurs, linking language, theatre and law. The three notions all have a *relational* character. In the theatrical space of law, the latter comes into existence as ‘language backed by force’:

$$\text{LAW} = \text{LANGUAGE} + \text{FORCE}$$

Documents might be seen as the “+”, the performative device that allows language to be enforced, to *grip the world* (or, “grasp the real”).¹³⁴ Documents allow the communication between language and power: they may be seen as the modality through which power uses force to link words to things. But such link is not natural: it needs to be performatively enforced and validated. Documents are based on validation, which ultimately is a signature, an oath, and “[t]he oath represents precisely the threshold by means of which language enters into law”.¹³⁵

It is against this backdrop that Simone Pianetti’s afterlife – transmitted through puppet shows, *cantastorie*, anarchist rumours, *fogli volanti* and pseudo-criminological reports – may be regarded as a paradigm for an alternative mode of documents. A *variational mode* would open up a space for documents to act outside the validation procedures of an enforcing institution of power. *Variational documents*, as we may call the narrative artifacts through which Pianetti’s story has been transmitted, translated and betrayed,¹³⁶ are not used to claim any official, validated and certified links to any truth. They transmit a narrative, a variation on a theme that would be an unattainable, and therefore unprovable, truth. In Pianetti’s case, the standard mode that univocally links a document to a truth does not apply any longer, opening up a space for another mode, where different documents, all equally valid, would be *truth-bearers*¹³⁷ of different variations on the unattainable materiality of the events. The following diagram emphasizes the difference between the two modes.

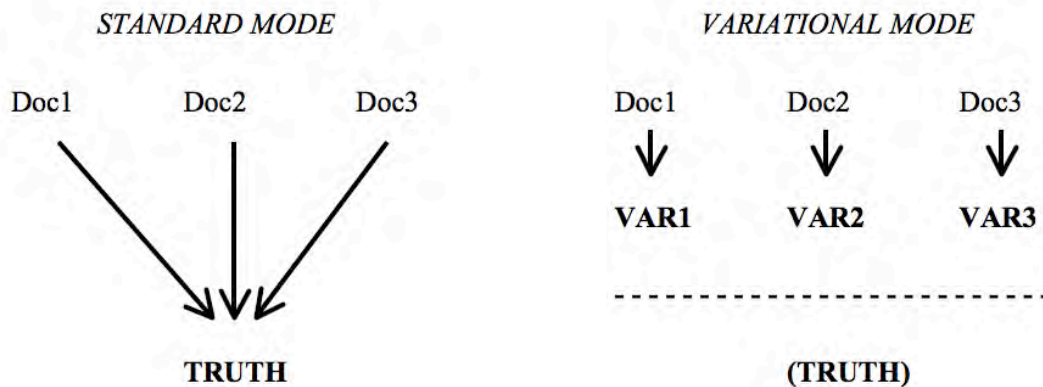
¹³³ Ferraris, Maurizio. “New Realism, Documentality and the Emergence of Normativity”, 114.

¹³⁴ Shaw, Jon K. and Reeves-Everson, Theo. “Introduction”, in *Fiction as Method*, ed. Jon K. Shaw and Theo Reeves-Everson (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 51.

¹³⁵ Agamben, Giorgio. *Il sacramento del linguaggio. Archeologia del giuramento. Homo sacer II, 3* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008). My translation.

¹³⁶ In Italian, the words “*traduzione*”, “*tradizione*”, “*trasmissione*” and “*tradimento*” (“translation”, “tradition”, “transmission” and “betrayal” clearly show their common prefix.

¹³⁷ A term introduced by Maurizio Ferraris in *Fare la verità: proposta di una ermeneutica neorealista*, 2017: https://www.academia.edu/34733141/Fare_la_verit%C3%A0_proposta_di_una_ermeneutica_neorealista (accessed 16 March 2019).



What does a document document, if bereft of a validated connection to truth? Can an object such as Onofrio’s puppet show be considered a document? My reading of Ferraris suggests it can, for instance based on the following observation:

If it were not possible to keep traces, there would be no mind – and it is not by chance that [...] the mind was traditionally depicted as a *tabula rasa*, a support on which impressions and thoughts are inscribed. But without the possibility of inscription there would not even be social objects, which consist precisely in the recording of social acts.¹³⁸

Following Ferraris’ observation, it can be argued that documents, apart from linking language to force in the judicial context, also serve to produce a collective mind, a shared social memory. Such function, in modern societies, seems to always come with strings attached to institutions of power. However, through the absence of real evidence and the impossibility of enforcement and validation, Pianetti’s case illustrates how a documentary function might still survive even when it is disconnected from institutional power.

Through the examples of Onofrio’s puppet show and the other variational documents presented in this chapter, a status of documents that are disengaged from official validation procedures might be glimpsed. The fact that the examples presented in this chapter function *at the same time* as documents and artworks, shows how both functions may inhere in the very same objects. It should come as no surprise that artworks, just like documents, also produce a collective mind, a shared social memory. The communality between artworks and documents as *relational* and *situational* concepts – whose basis is not to be found through ontology but through use – is the main reason why this alternative, *variational* mode of documents is best researched *in and through* art. In my view, documents and artworks are not only ‘social objects’ (as Ferraris states), but parallel modes of existence that may jointly co-animate an object.

¹³⁸ Ferraris, Maurizio. “New Realism, Documentality and the Emergence of Normativity”, 120.

The re-enactment of Onofrio's puppet show *Il vendicatore* in Pianetti's native village was conceived as an attempt to study a variational document in the perspective of a research in and through art. Its presentation aimed to investigate how a narrative artifact may assume, at the same time, the status of a document and of an artwork.

The fact that the artifact in question is a theatrical play, functioning as a relational entity in a social dynamics, is a key element of my study. The main incentive to re-enact narrative artifacts (variational documents) in my artistic practice comes from a postulation: re-enacting, rather than reading or interpreting documents, may be an effective method to identify and study their 'performative' dimension. In and through an artistic practice, I seek to 'revive' documents, rather than simply using them as sources of information. By animating them, blowing new life into them, one has the chance to see these narrative artifacts again *at work*, instead of studying them as dead, inert objects.

The next chapters will try to expand, through further examples, on the question of how the *modes* of document and artwork might jointly invest the same narrative artifacts, leading to two main features of variational documents:

- the impossibility to separate content and form (story from artifact);
- the importance to study such objects through a research method where 'theory' and 'practice', information and art, cooperate and blend.

15. Questions towards

Where a summary and a series of hypotheses on the status of documents conclude the chapter, opening up to reflections on further case studies.

Above, a series of questions was asked: If a document operates as a link – validated and certified by an institution of power – between an object and a narrative purported as true, what happens when, as in the Pianetti case, it is impossible to access such 'true' narrative, to reach the materiality of the facts, to separate facts and artifacts? Could objects invested with the narration of such unprovable facts, still be called documents? Through the working hypothesis of a *variational mode*, it might be argued that documents always document their same act of documenting. In cases such as Onofrio's puppet play, the narrative borne by the artifact (Pianetti's story) and the artifact itself (the puppet play) are inseparable, and therefore are to be studied as a single system – what may be called a *variational document*.

As stated above, documents can be studied non-ontologically, that is, as intensities rather than as entities. They can be studied through *signatures* and *procedures*; through the action of narrative currents animating specific objects; they can be studied as modes of existence (not essence), purely based on the use we make of them. In this

perspective, if documents are a way in which human beings use the world, in which they experience it through language, then a *variational mode* of documents may be conceived as a narrative intensity running through objects devoid of any univocal link to an official truth – and, therefore, less dependent on institutions of power.

A *variational mode* may emerge, as in Pianetti's case, when a document refers to an inaccessible truth and, yet, still documents of its relational, narrative function, without excluding other possible variations, without proposing itself as the sole, official bearer of a single truth. This mode could shed a light on the use-based character of documents, always open to the possibility of being revoked, debarred, misused, abused or disused.

Case II

The case of Augusto Masetti's amnesia

1. "Something you don't know you have done"

A description of a video work I made using found footage about Italian former soldier Augusto Masetti.

One of the elements displayed in my solo exhibition *The Variational Status*, presented at ar/ge kunst, Bolzano, in 2016 and at FRAC Champagne-Ardenne in 2017, is a video on a CRT monitor. It shows black and white film footage in Italian, shot by TV journalist Sergio Zavoli in 1964. It is an interview. An elderly man is standing on the balcony of an apartment, while the interviewer addresses him from below. What follows is a translation of the interview.

- Good morning, Mr. Masetti.
- Good morning.
- Sorry to bother you.
- No.
- Would you mind coming out on the balcony? Come out in the sun, show yourself.
- But don't be so formal. Let's forget about formality.
- Can you tell us about that day in the Cialdini barracks in Bologna?
- We were 300 soldiers, in a parade. Spread over 3 lines. Eight officers were on the stage. Lieutenant colonel Stroppa was sermonizing. He said we all had families, girlfriends, friends, but we were only to defend the fatherland. In that moment, I pointed the rifle – I was in the central line – and shot. When I tried to reload, they were all over me.
- Lieutenant colonel was only hurt, then?
- He was hurt in the shoulder, yes. Then, the bullet hurt another unlucky soldier.
- Mr. Masetti, your action was insane. But were you insane, as you were depicted, or not?
- I have a 36-hour long blank in my memory. From the night of the 29 until the morning of the 31 [October 1911]. I have always stated this, and I always will, because it is the truth.
- Are you repentant?
- No, no. How can you be repentant for something you don't know you have done? Even the doctors were always asking if I was feeling sorry. I can be neither sorry nor pleased for something I don't know I have done. That's the way it is.
- Did you know that groups in your favour were forming all over Italy?
- Not in the first place. I knew about it only when the doctors Saccozzi and Petrazzani told me that there was movement in my favour, outside. I was only aware that some people would come to greet me in front of my cell window. And they would sing a song they invented.
- How did the song go?
- It went like: "In the cell n. 9 Soldier Masetti is locked..." But I don't remember the rest.¹³⁹

The interviewee is an Italian man, named Augusto Masetti, in his mid-seventies. In the exhibition, the video is displayed next to a slideshow about the origins of a Colombian puppet character, *el espiritado*, whose characteristic feature is his constant

¹³⁹ Augusto Masetti interviewed by Sergio Zavoli, 1964, <https://archive.org/details/IntervistaAugustoMasetti> (accessed 26 March 2019). My translation.

state of amnesia. The whole exhibition proposes the hypothesis of a connection between Augusto Masetti and the *espiritado*.

Amnesia is the element that links Augusto Masetti and the *espiritado*, and it is the reason why I started investigating the possibility of a connection between the two. The character of the *espiritado* was supposedly inspired by an episode of amnesia, which followed the killing of a policeman in a Colombian village (something strikingly similar to the story of Augusto Masetti). Nevertheless, the variability of the accounts, as well as the lack of accessible documentation referring to the event, render this episode almost a legend. It should also be considered that amnesia subsequent to a violent act against authorities is a recurring theme, worldwide, between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁴⁰

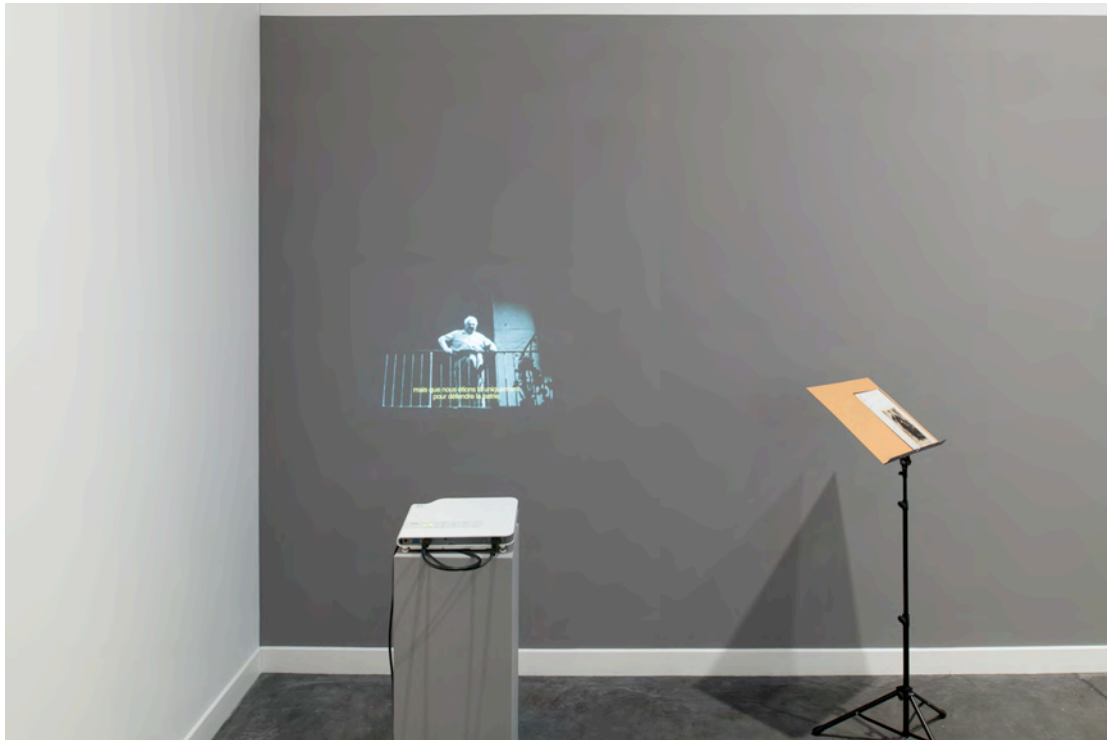
In this chapter, I will analyse Masetti's purported amnesia as a catalyst for a series of questions and conflicts about documents and truth-production mechanisms of power. The case study will be addressed through descriptions of my artistic work, in relation to historical accounts of the events and theoretical considerations. Masetti's story will serve as a paradigm for an *absent document*, that is, for a situation where no power, no legal institution has the possibility to produce a document, to establish a truth, an official version. Such impossibility, however, is completely contrary to Pianetti's case: the latter involves an escape from institutions; the one I will address in this chapter, on the other hand, takes place right at the centre of an institutional facility.

In my exhibition, Masetti's archive film is presented as a paradoxical document of something that cannot be documented – that is, amnesia, an individual's loss of consciousness. In the interview, Masetti confirms an account that he had first given more than 50 years before: the disconnection between his act and what can alternately be called his will, his intention, his integrity, his awareness. Such amnesia was at the centre of a huge controversy in Italy that, in the years before the First World War, would end up questioning no less than the limits of State power. But let us go back and properly introduce Masetti's act.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Cavalletti, Andrea. *Suggestione. Potenza e limiti del fascino politico* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011), *passim*.



Installation view, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano, 2016



Installation view, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, 2017

2. The act

Where Augusto Masetti's act of insubordination and its subsequent events are introduced.

At six in the morning of October 30, 1911, in the Cialdini barracks in Bologna, a platoon of Italian soldiers was preparing to leave for Tripoli, for the invasion war that Italy was conducting in Libya. The regiment had gathered in a large courtyard, waiting for the Colonel's farewell speech. The soldiers who were about to leave had been randomly selected the day before. Among them was a soldier born on April 12, 1888 near Bologna, short and skinny. His name was Augusto Masetti. In the middle of the muster, he suddenly fired a rifle shot at a group of officers, wounding Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Stroppa.

Captain Lisciarelli, in his report,¹⁴¹ stated that Masetti had time to shout, "Live anarchy, down the army!" before being vehemently disarmed. While he was being taken away, he allegedly kept on screaming, "Brothers, rise up!" He was then deprived of his rank, handcuffed and handed over to the barracks' police.

Immediately, newspapers began to come out with special issues about the insubordination act. Maria Ryger, one of the most famous anarchists of the time,

¹⁴¹ Report on Augusto Masetti by Captain Lisciarelli, 30 October 2011. Available at Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana, Imola, Italy.

wrote that many among the activists against the Libyan war expressed their solidarity with Masetti. An article by Ryger appeared on the front page of a special issue of the magazine *L'Agitatore*, titled “Nel delitto della guerra lampeggia la rivolta proletaria” (“The Proletarian Revolt Gleams in the War Crime”), and claimed “unconditional solidarity with Augusto Masetti”. From Switzerland to the United States, demonstrations in Masetti’s favour and against the war started to take place, and publications by Italian and foreign anarchist groups appeared.¹⁴²

Two days after Masetti’s act, an officer and a lawyer were sent to the Cialdini barracks to collect testimonies. Almost all of the soldiers present on October 30 had already left for Libya, and only the remaining officers could testify and describe the shooting from their perspective. By assessing distances and light conditions, the two investigators tried to reconstruct the event, coming to the conclusion that Masetti had probably fired in the direction of the officers without a specific target in mind, wounding Stroppa only by chance. An officer declared that, when Masetti was being handcuffed, he said with an arrogant attitude, “I’m happy with what I did and I regret not having killed him. Put my handcuffs on, I will not escape. I’m glad to have defended my comrades-in-arms. Send the firing squad for me.” Other officers present on October 30 reported that Masetti seemed to assume full responsibility for his act, and to have acted “in full possession of his mental faculties”.¹⁴³

Such alleged statements would demonstrate Masetti’s awareness of the legal consequences of his act. Juridically, we can refer to the military criminal code in force at the time, which had a very strict approach towards insubordination crimes against superiors. The expected punishment for Masetti would have been execution by a firing squad. The military court consisted of an officer, a military lawyer (acting as public prosecutor), and a three-member inquiring committee. The military defendant was entitled to defend himself.

Masetti was quickly transferred to a prison in Venice, and investigators began to look for other episodes of political insubordination in his past. Strangely, many of those who knew him for a long time claimed that he had never expressed anarchist or revolutionary ideas, nor hostile views towards the army and the military discipline. None of his comrades-in-arms had heard him plan, in any way, an act of insubordination. In order to try to understand Masetti’s possible motives, I will trace a summary of the interrogations he underwent after his capture, as well as the reactions by the Italian public opinion.

¹⁴² De Marco, Laura. *Il soldato che disse no alla guerra. Storia dell’anarchico Augusto Masetti (1888-1966)* (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Edizioni Spartaco, 2003), 58-61.

¹⁴³ Saccozzi, Augusto and Petrazzani, Pietro. “Sullo stato di mente dell’imputato Masetti Augusto. Perizia medico-legale”. Medical-legal report on Masetti, carried out on behalf of the military tribunal of Venezia. Reggio Emilia, 15 February 1912. Available at Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana, Imola, Italy. My translation.

3. Interrogations, reports, demonstrations

With a summary of Masetti's interrogations after the act, his declared amnesia, subsequent medical reports of insanity and public demonstrations in his favour.

Augusto Masetti was first questioned the day after the act, on 31 October 1911. He appeared disoriented and answered the questions nonsensically. Many assumed he was in a delusional state. Others wondered if he was only pretending to be in such a state. Newspapers began asking for a psychiatric report.¹⁴⁴

A second, notorious interrogation took place on 13 November. After having reiterated the absence of political involvement in his past, Masetti for the first time declared his amnesia. He stated that he could not remember anything from the moment he fell asleep on the evening of October 29, until he woke up in the Venice prison on 31 December. When questioned, he denied having any memory of himself loading the rifle, shooting against Stroppa, screaming rebellious declarations or being imprisoned. His statement is clear: "I do not know how to respond to the charges against me, of violent insubordination towards a superior officer, and of firing a shotgun bullet that injured Lieutenant Colonel Stroppa – I say this because *I do not recall at all having committed such crime.*"¹⁴⁵

The declaration of amnesia did not fully convince the investigating magistrates, due to incongruities between the different versions. Meanwhile, a report was submitted by Dr. Marzocchi, a physician serving in San Giovanni in Persiceto, where Masetti grew up with his family. Marzocchi suggested the hypothesis of a "neuropathic inheritance", based on alleged "hysterical episodes" involving his mother and sister, and on the "dementia" of a grandmother and a great-grandmother. Such episodes in his mother's side of the family, in addition to one single episode of sleepwalking in Masetti's childhood and to his inclination towards alcohol, were enough to express the first doubts about the mental health of the defendant.

On November 17, 1911, the Venice court decided to submit Masetti to a psychiatric examination, and transferred him to an asylum in Reggio Emilia. The examination had to determine "under which psychological conditions Masetti was at the time the offense was committed" and, above all, if he was to be held "completely responsible, partially responsible, or irresponsible". The experts appointed for the task were Dr. Saccozzi and Dr. Petrazzani, asylum managers. The trial was suspended pending their psychiatric report. At the time, psychiatry was considered a fairly young science in

¹⁴⁴ De Marco, Laura. *Il soldato che disse no alla guerra. Storia dell'anarchico Augusto Masetti (1888-1966)* (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Edizioni Spartaco, 2003), 34.

¹⁴⁵ Second interrogation of Augusto Masetti, 13 October 1911. Available at Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana, Imola, Italy. My emphasis, my translation.

Italy, and had been admitted into legal proceedings only for a short time. Article 46 of the 1889 Italian Penal Code stated:

The one who was, at the time when he committed the act, in a state of insanity such as to take away his consciousness or the freedom of his actions, is not chargeable.¹⁴⁶

This meant that the power to decide the legal consequences of the trial no longer belonged to the judge, but to the psychiatrist, who would decide on the degree of “consciousness” and “freedom” of the defendant at the time of the crime.

The medical commission virtually replaced the legal one, and was called to decide to which degree the examined subject was “in-onself”. However, such decision had a legal character or, more precisely, it was related to a suspension of jurisdiction, since the law could not be applied if one took action without being in oneself. By giving way to the psychiatric decision, the law decided of its own suspension.

The experts studied Masetti for more than two months before submitting a very extensive report. Their declared intention was to establish how Masetti was out of himself, by studying the “overall picture in which the defendant move[d] and operate[d]; by accurately outlining and depicting the two correlated drives of every human action, i.e., the environment and the individual.”¹⁴⁷ Reference was made to the cases of “abnormality” in his mother’s side of the family, and to his one episode of sleepwalking. Subsequently, every portion of Masetti’s body was measured, in order to evaluate, according to Cesare Lombroso’s anthropometric method, in what aspects he would differ from the normal “human type”. Anthropometry aimed at making insanity and propensity for crime physically measurable through bodily traits.

The diagnosis took into account the amnesia declared by Masetti with regards to his action. The psychiatrists doubted its truthfulness, but claimed they were unable to find evidence to entirely refute it; they stated that even if it had been simulated, it would not be proof that Masetti was healthy. The diagnosis stated, quite vaguely, that “in the personality of the defendant *some thing* was out of the laws of normal psychic life”, which “place[d] the subject in a state no longer within healthy limits”. Masetti’s irascible character, his penchant for wine, and his presumed hereditary dementia would allegedly account for such “some thing”.

Masetti was labelled “degenerate”, a term widely used at the time, excerpted from the theories of French physician Bénédict Morel and subsequently adopted by Lombroso. According to the experts Saccozzi and Petrazzani, “the descendants of the degenerate, poorly endowed with the ability to survive, are destined to fade away. A bloodline ends, but the overall species tends to cleanse.” Masetti, “the fruit of a bloodline

¹⁴⁶ “Non è imputabile colui che, nel momento in cui ha commesso il fatto, era in tale stato di infermità di mente da togliergli la coscienza o la libertà dei propri atti.” My translation.

¹⁴⁷ Saccozzi, Augusto and Petrazzani, Pietro. “Sullo stato di mente dell’imputato Masetti Augusto. Perizia medico-legale”. My translation.

largely devastated by nervous degeneration”, had to “be recognized as a true degenerate himself”. As a degenerate subject, he was in an ecstatic state of “morbid rage (*morbooso furore*)” at the time of the offense, and was “*irresponsibile* of the criminal acts he has committed and he is charged with”¹⁴⁸.

The report by Saccozzi and Petrazzani played a specific role within the strategy adopted by the State, which aimed at depriving Masetti’s gesture of any political significance. By scientifically and legally defining him as “degenerate” – irresponsible of his actions (“*non compos mentis*”) –, his act was stripped of its legal consequences: no trial or judgement were to be held. The Italian State, fearing the possibility of Masetti becoming the symbol of a political uprising, decided not to open a legal procedure, but to take his purported amnesia at face value. By avoiding the trial, which would have attracted public attention, the State quietly shut Masetti in a psychiatric hospital. Due to the fact that his act had been performed in a military facility just before the departure of Italian troops for the Libyan war, it could have easily become the spark for a pacifist uprising.

Lombroso had openly formulated such a strategy in his book *Gli anarchici* (“The Anarchists”, 1894), where he stated that violent repression against anarchists contributed to the awareness of their power, while the asylum was “a more practical measure”, as “martyrs are venerated; fools are laughed at – and a ridiculous man is never dangerous”.¹⁴⁹

On March 11, 1912, the Venice court officially stated it was not entitled to act against Masetti: his action was not a crime, as it was committed in a state of “morbid rage” (as attested by the psychiatric report). The judiciary officially gave way to the asylum – law withdrew from Masetti’s case.

Street demonstrations in favour of Masetti continued regularly during his stay at the multiple asylums he was transferred to. At the end of 1913 a national “Pro Masetti” committee was formed. Its leader was Maria Ryger, and it pleaded for his release and for a new psychiatric examination. Several anarchist groups, both in Italy and abroad, began to follow: they demanded a new report that would recognize Masetti as being in his right mind and that, consequently, would open the way for a regular trial. Saccozzi and Petrazzani’s psychiatric diagnosis was defined as a “government trick”, backed up by “mercenaries’ psychiatric science” and by “State anthropology”.¹⁵⁰

Under such pressures, the State ordered a new report, which was commissioned in mid-1914 to two other physicians, Dr. Belmondo and Dr. Nodera. To them, Masetti

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* My translation.

¹⁴⁹ Lombroso, Cesare. *Gli anarchici*, 1894 (Reprinted in 1998, Milano: Claudio Gallone editore), 100. My translation.

¹⁵⁰ De Marco, Laura. *Il soldato che disse no alla guerra. Storia dell’anarchico Augusto Masetti (1888-1966)* (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Edizioni Spartaco, 2003), 120. My translation.

reiterated his statement: he did not have any memories of his act. After nearly a year, the new report was published, endorsing the order already in force: Masetti was assigned to an asylum, and the diagnosis of “degeneration” and “mental abnormality” was confirmed. The diagnosis would be revoked only in 1932, when Masetti was found healed and “no longer socially dangerous”, not having shown “signs of mental alienation”¹⁵¹ during the twelve years of his detention.

To weigh the impact of the public opinion in the case, one has to consider that activists and anarchists did not only use street demonstrations to present their arguments, but also printed materials, especially pamphlets. I studied the pamphlets that were printed about Masetti, in order to make use of the same format in a series of artistic works.

4. Pamphlets

Where two anarchist pamphlets about Masetti are introduced, which inspired a series of publications I produced using a similar format.

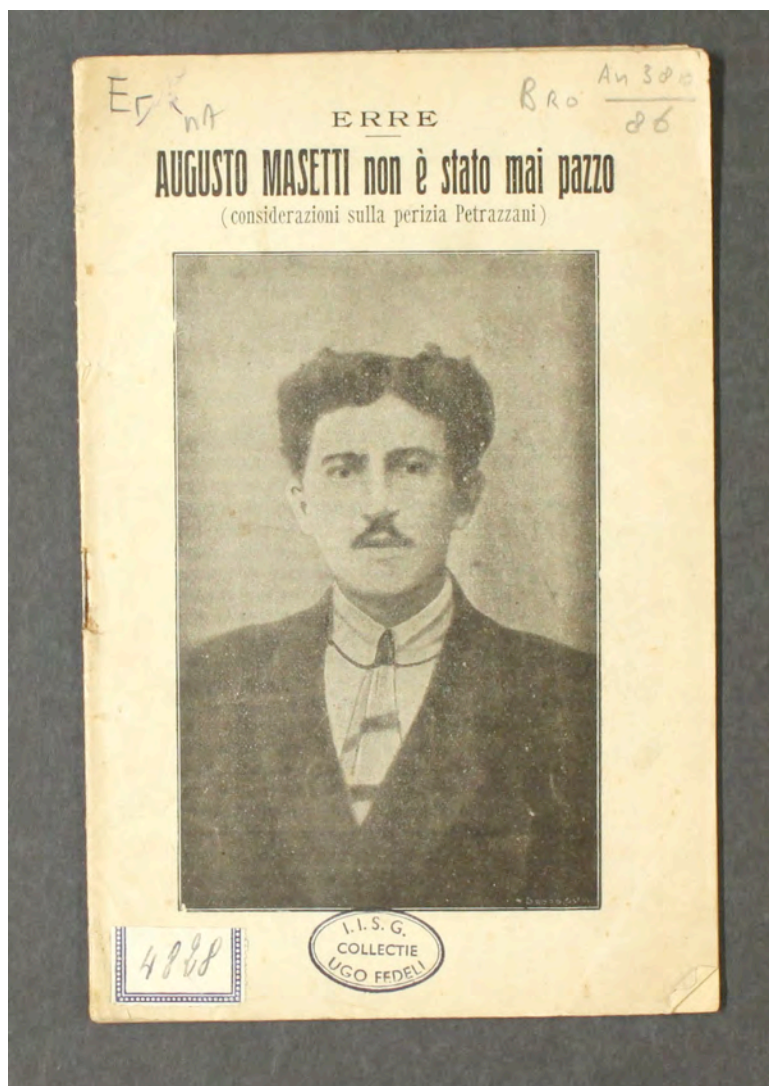
On the initiative of the “Pro Masetti” movement, several pamphlets were published, even outside the Italian borders. Pamphlets were a widespread medium for distributing information and political discourse at the time, extensively used also by anarchist groups. Published in the form of slim black and white booklets, they usually included a single textual intervention and a photographic image on the cover. Below are two examples of “Pro Masetti” anarchist pamphlets. The first one was published in 1913 in Lynn, Massachusetts, USA, by the Italian anarchist group Cronaca Sovversiva in collaboration with the local anarchist group in Plainsville, Pennsylvania. Its title is *Madri d’Italia! (Per Augusto Masetti)* (“Italian Mothers! (For Augusto Masetti)”), and it essentially is a plea against the war addressed to Italian mothers. It portrays Augusto Masetti as a pacifist hero who “must be released”.

¹⁵¹ Order of hospital discharge for Masetti signed by the surveillance judge and addressed to the tribunal of Bologna. 8 July 1932. Available at Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana, Imola, Italy. My translation.



Mentana, *Madri d'Italia!* (Per Augusto Masetti), Lynn (USA), 1913.

A second example is a pamphlet published in 1914 by Tipografia Camerale in Parma, written under the pen name “Erre”. It is titled *Augusto Masetti non è stato mai pazzo. (Considerazioni sulla perizia Petrazzani)* (“Augusto Masetti has never been insane. Consideration on the Petrazzani report”). The content of the text is aptly summarized by the title: the pamphlet puts forward a series of arguments against the psychiatric report, presenting it as a stratagem by the State in order to present Masetti as insane and thereby avoid a trial.



Erre, *Augusto Masetti non è stato mai pazzo. (Considerazioni sulla perizia Petrazzani)*, Parma: Tipografia Camerale, 1914.



Installation view, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano, 2016

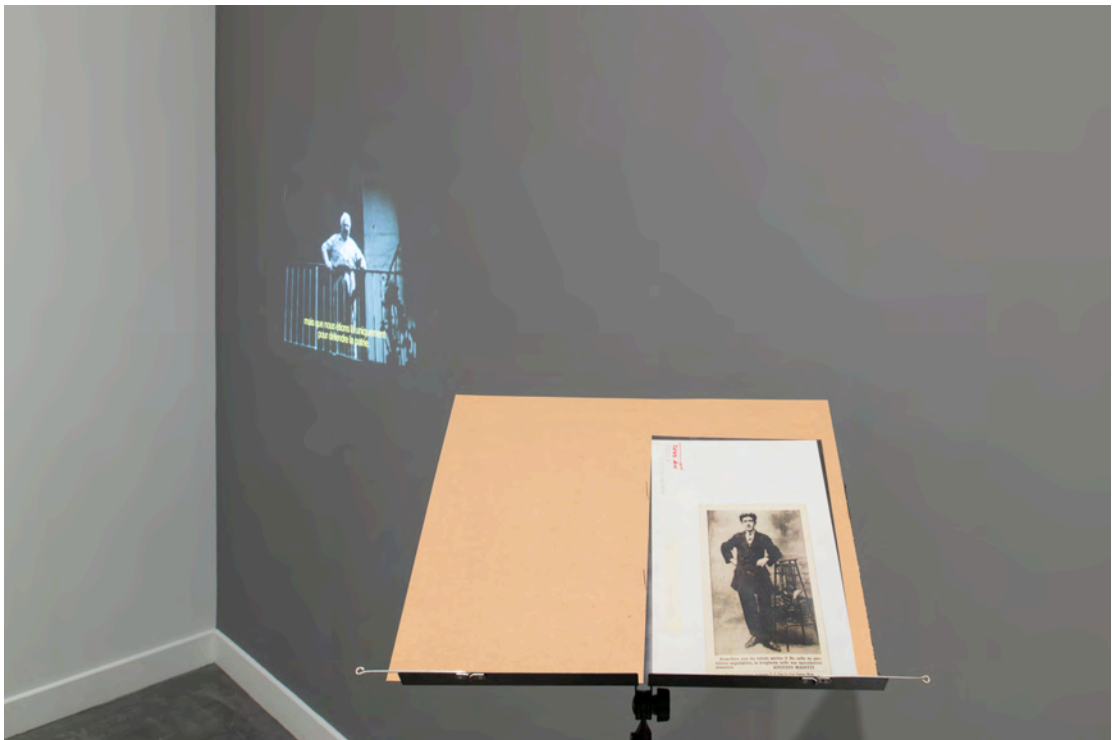
I displayed both pamphlets as part of my exhibition *The Variational Status*, presented at ar/ge kunst and FRAC Champagne-Ardenne. In Bolzano, the pamphlets were presented through a series of photographs I made in the archives where they are kept. Such photographs were displayed in ancient vitrines usually employed for archaeological exhibits, borrowed from the Bolzano Archeological Museum. This decision was taken in order to play with the conventions of exhibiting documents: in this case, the vitrines hosted photographic reproductions, instead of the documents themselves.





Installation views, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano, 2016

In Reims, a selection of the same photographic reproductions was presented on sheet music stands, to suggest a potential “performability” of the materials.



Installation view, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, 2017

As part of my artistic project on Augusto Masetti, I have produced a new series of seven booklets inspired by the format of anarchist pamphlets in 2017. They are 10x20 cm, printed in black and white on white newsprint, stapled. They are 16 or 20 pages long, and their graphic design is inspired by pamphlets from the beginning of the 20th century. Inside, they do not contain ideological texts, but excerpts from the two psychological reports on Augusto Masetti, as well as from his oral testimonies given in several interrogations. Such material was found in the Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana (“Historical Archive of the Italian Anarchist Federation”) in Imola, Italy, which hosts a file containing an extensive amount of records about the Masetti case.

I gave this series of booklets the title “*Affidavit*”.¹⁵² The series was conceived as a commentary on the narrative aspects of judicial evidence, and at the same time it attempts to question its purely judicial function. The booklets include images: re-elaborations of drawings extrapolated from Italian publications from the beginning of the 20th century. In one of the booklets, for example, an excerpt from a medical report on Masetti’s supposed mental illness is accompanied by a pair of drawings: one depicting a group of people hitting a snake with wooden bats, and the other portraying a rural landscape with a gun, a pencil and a can of paint in the foreground. The images are not explanatory: instead of using images to purely illustrate and demonstrate the validity of the texts, I attempted to use imagery as a vehicle for a parallel narrative, opening up suggestions stemming from the juxtaposition of legal/medical jargon with ambiguous, enigmatic drawings.

The short textual sequences in *Affidavit*, composed of documentary and legal elements, are used as narrative material, as an attempt to underline the structural connection between judicial evidence and narration. By using the expression ‘structural connection’, I refer to the status of documents examined in the previous chapter, which has its roots in judicial procedure: an object (a contract, a fingerprint, a photograph) becomes a document (or, in the judicial realm, a piece of evidence) when it is invested with a specific narrative, in a specific conventional/institutional setting (a court), in front of a specific audience (judge, jury, etc). In other words, the structural connection between evidence and narration derives from the *situational* and *relational* status of documents, which comes into being only objects are *used* as such, within a specific procedure.

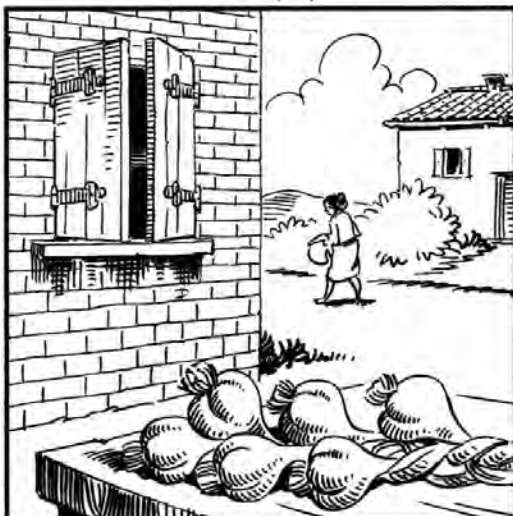
In *Affidavit*, I employed the same elements involved in a legal-documentary construction (the Masetti case) in order to use and animate them in an alternative way,

¹⁵² In Anglo-American legal systems, an affidavit is “a written statement of fact which before being signed, the person signing takes an oath that the contents are, to the best of their knowledge, true. The solemn procedure that verifies the written statements as fact as regards to the *affiant* is variably called an *oath*, or *to swear* or *to be sworn*.” Cfr. Duhaime’s Civil Litigation & Evidence Law Dictionary, <http://www.duhaime.org/LegalDictionary/A/Affidavit.aspx> (accessed 29 March 2019).

maintaining their narrative potential but detaching it from their original purpose (to prove or demonstrate a version of the facts). My claim is that, within an artistic practice, documents and evidence may still function as narrative artifacts, but differently than in a judicial procedure. A different, non-institutional dimension may be opened to them, without withdrawing their original narrative vocation of potential truth-bearers.

The psychological reports and oral testimonies about the Masetti case have been used by legal, military and governmental institutions in order to establish one single, official version about the mental state of the man, as well as to legitimize the procedure to follow about his violent act. However, by using these very same official documents within an artwork, I attempted to present them, *variationally*, as one way of narrating Masetti's case, among other potential ways. In *Affidavit*, the reports and the testimonies are used as narrative elements, but without any claim to propose one single official version.





Details from the series of pamphlets *Affidavit* (2017).

The *Affidavit* series of booklets bears resemblance to the publication *Monti e Mari*, which Andrea Morbio and I produced about the Simone Pianetti case, using the format of the *fogli volanti* as a graphical and narrative reference. Nonetheless, if the textual elements in *Monti e Mari* were manifestly non-official and non-institutional, the texts in *Affidavit* have all been excerpted from legal materials, namely interrogations and medical reports. The similarities and the differences between the two works stem from parallel similarities and differences between the two case studies, for which, however, the same basic questions may be asked: Can an alternative status of documents be conceived, in situations where no official truth, no version of the facts validated by an institution of power can be produced? How can a research project in-and-through art address such alternative status? Through a different, variational use of documentary and legal materials?

The answers to these questions differ between the two case studies. I will outline them in the next sub-chapter, by focusing on the relation between truth and State power, as well as on the political and social devices that demand an ‘act-of-truth’ from individuals.

5. Regime of truth

Where Masetti’s amnesia is studied as a counter-confession, through Foucault’s reflections on the bond between truth and power.

In some respects, the Masetti case shows opposite characteristics to Simone Pianetti’s case. Pianetti’s case has to do with the absence of documents attesting a specific version of the events. To know what happened after his escape, we cannot rely on evidence on which a truth can be constructed; rather, we have to rely on numerous unofficial variations, none of which is officially validated as ‘true’ by State institutions. That is why I introduced the notion of a *variational* status of documents.

Conversely, in the case of Augusto Masetti the event takes place in front of everyone, like in a theatre. His violent act is performed under the eyes of an audience inside a military barracks (a State institution). An entire community (a regiment of the army) is present, able to witness and ratify the only possible version of the facts. However, the situation is paradoxical: in such a theatre-like setting, the only person who can *not* bear witness to the facts is the one who is at the centre of the stage: the protagonist, the author (*auctor*). Masetti declares his amnesia; he does not deny his act (an argument impossible to sustain) but, more subtly, he claims not to remember it. He declares an ecstatic otherness towards his actions.

On the one hand, after Pianetti’s escape, the search for truth and for document certifying it will remain unfulfilled. In his case, truth lies outside the knowability of the facts, beyond the event horizon of the institution, which searches for them in a

centrifugal movement (the various tracks of Pianetti in Venezuela, the United States, Milan or Switzerland).

On the other hand, with regards to Masetti's act, truth is right at the centre of the scene (*skene*), visible and witnessed by everyone, within an institutional building. In a *centripetal* movement, Masetti's gesture is perfectly knowable; the truth is under everyone's eyes. The institution, however, through its "government trick", decides to account for the miniscule zone of non-knowledge at the centre of the scene, right inside the mind of the perpetrator – the performer.

In Pianetti's case, truth is unattainable because it always remains *outside* the documentable zone. In Masetti's case, truth is declared unattainable despite being *at the exact centre* of the events' documentability. In both cases, though for opposite reasons, the possibility to produce a document – to certify and authenticate a version of the facts, to *make truth* – is missing.

In order to read Masetti's act through another lens, and to find a terminology different from that of a historical account, I refer to Michel Foucault's series of lectures at the Collège de France. In them, he famously addresses a topic that he will not cease to go back to, up until his last lectures on the concept of *parresia*, the act of speaking the truth to power. The topic concerns the relationships between power and truth. Foucault clearly traces the geometry of such relationship in a 1976 lecture.

[W]e are obliged to produce the truth by the power that demands truth and needs it in order to function: we are forced to tell the truth, we are constrained, we are condemned to admit the truth or to discover it. Power constantly asks questions and questions us; it constantly investigates and records; it institutionalizes the search for the truth, professionalizes it, and rewards it.¹⁵³

I struggled trying to find a way to apply Foucault's observation to the Masetti affair, however. Masetti is not "forced" or "constrained" by the State to tell the truth. The Italian State decides to suspend the juridical mechanism of confession, accepting the soldier's declaration of amnesia. Leaving aside the truthfulness of such declaration, what is in question is the strategy to suspend judgment, used to preserve power from the threat of an uprising. The production of an official truth is suspended, deactivated, not juridically implemented. According to his statement, Masetti acts while "out of himself", as a sleepwalker, unable to remember his actions. In this way, his amnesia becomes a sort of *counter-confession*, in the sense that the subject, under the demand and the constriction of power, confesses that he is unable to tell the truth.

In a series of lectures in 1980, Foucault uses the concept of *alethurgy*, to indicate a set of procedures aimed at bringing to light what is to be understood as true. Connected

¹⁵³ Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France (1975-1976)*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 45.

to these procedures is always a “subjectivation” mechanism. In order to describe this mechanism, Foucault states that the manifestation of truth is complete only when “the circle of *alethurgy* [...] has passed through individuals who can say “I,” when it has passed through the eyes, hands, memory, testimony, and affirmation of men who say: I was there, I saw, I did, I gave with my own hand, I received into my own hands. So, without what could be called this point of subjectivation in the general procedure and overall cycle of *alethurgy*, the manifestation of the truth would remain incomplete.”¹⁵⁴

In this perspective, each process of truth-making would be structurally connected to a specific individual, who becomes the “subject” of such mechanism. But again, Masetti’s amnesia proposes a counter-paradigm to Foucault’s concept of “subjectivation”, namely that of an individual who is not be able to say “I” – an individual who cannot put itself at the centre of his actions. In short, an individual “outside of himself”. Such a subject (or, more precisely, non-subject, insofar as he lies outside the “subjectivation” mechanism), does not situate itself *against* truth, but suspends the mechanism that ties truth to its manifestation. The absence of a trial for Masetti suspends the manifestation of truth that, according to Foucault, is one of the essential conditions for the exercise of power. When soldier Masetti presents himself as not being able to say “I”, he puts State power in check, since the State cannot but accept his version and suspend its own exercise of power.

Foucault, while tracing a genealogy of the *actus veritatis* (act-of-truth) from the sacrament of penance in the Middle Ages, locates in the *dispositif* of the confession the moment in which an individual is, at the same time, *opérateur* (“operator”), *témoin* (“witness”) and object of the *aveu* (“confession”). He then asks, “why and how does the exercise of power in our society, the exercise of power as government of men, demand not only acts of obedience and submission, but *truth acts* in which individuals who are subjects in the power relationship are also subjects as actors, spectator witnesses, or objects in manifestation of truth procedures?”¹⁵⁵

Soldier Augusto Masetti, through his declaration of amnesia, undermines such demand and, consequently, the confessional mechanism that links power to an individual’s production and manifestation of truth. Foucault uses a terminology akin to theatre when describing such mechanism: a relation between “actor” and “spectator” is involved, albeit such roles may overlap. A reference to the theatricality of institutional truth-production was also introduced in the previous chapter, while trying to define the basic elements that allow a document to function as such. But can we understand the Masetti case as a ‘different’ type of theatre, namely a *counter-theatre*? If so, what would its theatrical logic be? And what different notion of truth would it stage?

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, Michel. *On The Government Of The Living. Lectures at the Collège de France (1979–1980)*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 73.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 82. My emphasis.

It is, indeed, an “act of theatre”¹⁵⁶ that takes place on 30 October 1911: an entire barracks full of soldiers and officers watches Masetti accomplishing his violent act. Everyone is a witness to the event; there can be no doubt about the authenticity of the facts, no divergence between the versions. The only testimony that cannot be collected is the one by the author of the act, who states to be “not in himself”. Such gap in Masetti’s memory is a problem for State power, which (as Foucault posits) needs “subjectivation” through confession. Therefore, the Italian State decides to declare Masetti insane, depriving his action of any legal consequences, suspending the demand for a confession and for a manifestation of truth. Foucault contemplates a similar subtraction: he defines the “regime of truth” as a machine that only functions if subjects are willing to recognize the truth, and to submit to it.

[T]here must be a subject who is not mad. The exclusion of madness is therefore the fundamental act in the organization of the regime of truth [...] There must not be any madman, that is to say, there cannot be any people who do not accept the regime of truth.¹⁵⁷

Precisely through such an “exclusion of madness” is Augusto Masetti withdrawn from the legal consequences of his act, in an attempt to deprive it of its political significance. The government intends to turn his act from political to psychiatric. State power struggles to control similar unexpected gestures, and tries to find a label to group them all together: the word “degeneration” is fit for purpose. Psychiatrists begin investigating Masetti’s family tree. They produce pieces of evidence that, despite not having judiciary value, are instrumental to remove Masetti from the “human consortium” as “degenerate”. The “government trick” dismantles the legal implication of his gesture by describing it as an act of insanity, by depriving the author of his responsibility.

In order to study this case by means other than those offered by history or legal studies, I decided to construct a research method in and through my artistic practice. It consisted of a series of narrative and performative collective gatherings, based on the form of the workshop.

¹⁵⁶ “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged”. Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 7.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

6. Workshops and performances

With a description of participatory performances and workshops, which I organized as research devices on the Masetti case, carried out using the format of the trial as a narrative artifact.

As part of my artistic project on Augusto Masetti, I have developed a series of research workshops that led to the production of participatory performances. The first series of workshops was held in 2016 in a non-profit contemporary art space in Milano, Viafarini. It was attended by groups of archaeologists and cultural heritage curators, as part of the public program *The Artist as Researcher*, conceived by curator Simone Frangi. The second series of workshops was held in 2017 in Reims with students from the Reims Campus of Sciences Po (Political Sciences College), as a parallel program for the second instalment of my exhibition *The Variational Status* at FRAC Champagne-Ardenne.

These workshops aimed at studying the different documentary elements related to the Masetti case (interviews, reports, articles) from a legal perspective. The hypothetical development of the Masetti trial, which never took place, was inquired. The workshops were conceived as moment of collective research, carried out through the procedures of a trial. At the start, I presented the participants with a series of documents (texts, images, videos, sounds) related to Masetti, and I invited them to study his story through such elements. Then, I asked the participants to divide themselves into groups, each with a specific task: some looking for a way to defend Masetti, others acting as prosecution, others acting as a jury, others in charge of documenting the trial. The participants, after studying the documentary elements, attempted to stage a hypothesis of the Masetti trial, embodying different roles (judge, jury, defendants, prosecuting attorneys, lawyers, technical experts, etc.). The performances were not scripted, but evolved according to the improvisational engagement of the participants, in their different roles.

In the second part of the workshops, the groups met in a collective discussion about Masetti, whose format was structured on the Italian rules of criminal procedure. The defendants and the prosecution exposed their ideas, gave explanations, presented hypotheses and ways to read the documents as if they were pieces of evidence. Then, they tried and reach a collective conclusion. The outcome was the delivery of a judgement, and the participants were invited to reflect on the role that the concept of evidence played in the trial, while facing the main question of the Masetti case: his supposed amnesia.



Workshop in Viafarini (Milano)

Such collective discussions were intended as a practical example of a research *in and through* an artistic practice, and of how both may be experienced in a specific form, through which they are conveyed and presented. In this case, such form was the trial, and the question was whether it could be conceivable to practice (to *use*) the trial as an artistic format or, to use Bal's terminology, as a narrative artifact.

Even if carried out in academic contexts as educational sessions, I consider the workshops to be very much related to my artistic practice, as they were developed as a form of performative collective reflection. Within my artistic trajectory, and within the research project on the Masetti case, I view them as an engagement with my research subject *through practice*. Their vocation was more performative than didactic, in the sense that they were not conceived in order to provide information about a subject matter. Instead, they were conceived so that the participants could engage in the subject matter *performatively* (both in the sense of using tools related to theatricality and in the sense of enacting and composing, rather than receiving, available information about the subject matter).

The workshops aimed at addressing such questions through a collective, discussion-based practice. I organized the setting, communicated the narrative and performative framework that the participants were invited to follow, described the different roles the participants were invited to embody. But the point of these workshops was to leave the framework open to the discussion that the Masetti documents would generate.

During the workshops, a series of references was discussed with the participants, among which were films, including:

- Sidney Lumet - *12 Angry Men* (1957)
- Orson Welles - *The Trial* (1962)
- Marcel Hanoun, *L'Authentique Procès de Carl-Emmanuel Jung* (1966)
- Eyal Sivan and Rony Brauman - *The specialist. Portrait of a modern criminal* (1999)
- Abderrahmane Sissako, *Bamako* (2006)
- Hila Peleg, *A Crime Against Art* (2007)
- Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Rubber Coated Steel* (2016)

Each of the films was proposed to address a specific aspect of the judicial procedure: jury deliberation (*12 Angry Men*), evidence (*The specialist, Rubber Coated Steel*), international law (*Bamako*), war legislation (*L'Authentique Procès de Carl-Emmanuel Jung*), etc. The participants were invited to select one of the films from the list and to watch it before the workshop session, which would begin with a collective reflection on the films and on the legal aspects they addressed.

As part of my artistic practice, I consider the workshops and the ensuing performances as attempts to actualize the trial of Augusto Masetti, seen as a potentiality that has remained latent in Italian history. The enactment of a juridical trial after more than 100 years does not aim to be a historical construction, but the search for what Benjamin called a “constellation” between a given moment in the past and its relevance and actuality in the present.¹⁵⁸

One of my research goals was to study, on a practical and collective level, how the documents related to the Masetti case would be read, used and narrated today, and how a community – albeit momentary and non-representative – would deal with them. Through the workshops, the elements related to the case – medical and legal reports, testimonies, pamphlets, newspapers articles, etc. – were actually used as documents, that is, were *performed* as such.

The workshops usually ended with a verdict and a judgment, sometimes in favour and sometimes against Masetti. On a small number of occasions, the participants decided

¹⁵⁸ Agamben, commenting on Benjamin, writes that “every work, every text, contains a historical index which indicates both its belonging to a determinate epoch, as well as its only coming forth to full legibility at a determinate historical moment.” Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time That Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 145.

not to reach an agreement, and the performative framework of the trial was abandoned. In general, however, my main interest was not in the specific decision taken by the group, but in the discussion that the activity sparked. In particular, I observed how the participants often connected elements of the Masetti case to contemporary socio-political events, using the former to shed light on the latter and vice versa.

During the workshops, a series of theoretical issues came up, questioning the status of notions such as “imputability” and “responsibility” with regards to Masetti. In particular, the collective reflections often ended up interrogating the legal and moral devices through which such notions are actualized. How does a system of power establish and validate a connection between an individual and their actions? What does such connection entail and what can it tell us about the status of documents? How may documents be used to uphold (or to question) such connection? I consider such questions as one of the main ‘outcomes’ of the workshops, and I will try to address them in the next sub-chapters, through a brief theoretical excursus.

7. Imputability

Where the longstanding juridical problem of establishing a link between a subject and an action is interrogated by the Masetti case, including considerations by Ricœur and Derrida.

Writing about responsibility, Paul Ricœur argues that “the range of the most recent uses of the term can be unfolded around the pole constituted by the idea of imputation – that is, the idea that action can be assigned to the account of an agent taken to be its actual author”.¹⁵⁹ He writes, however, that assigning an action to an author is an insurmountable problem from a philosophical standpoint. It is the problem of imputability, expressed by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

The transcendental idea of freedom [...] stands only for the absolute spontaneity of an action, as the proper ground of its imputability. This, however, is, for philosophy, the real stumbling block; for there are insurmountable difficulties in the way of admitting any such type of unconditioned causality.¹⁶⁰

Ricœur, in his analysis, goes on to show how establishing responsibility is an enterprise doomed to juridical or moral paradoxes. If responsibility is always based on “an arrow [...] directed at a subject capable of designating himself a the author of its acts”,¹⁶¹ then the problem that Masetti poses on the table is not easy to solve, as it

¹⁵⁹ Ricœur, Paul. *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), XVI.

¹⁶⁰ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 409.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

calls into question one of the great dilemmas in the history of moral philosophy: “the relation of an action to its agent”, which is “largely opaque to reflection”.¹⁶²

Ricœur admits that, on a philosophical level, the very sense of being linked to our own actions cannot be founded on anything other than a kind of sensory illusion:

The fact that we cannot represent to ourselves this hold of the human agent on things within the setting of the course of the world except as a conjunction between several kinds of causality has to be frankly acknowledged as a conceptual constraint tied to the structure of action as a kind of initiative, that is, as the beginning of a series of effects in the world. Certainly we have a lively sense, a confident certitude of “being able to act” every time we make an action in our power coincide with occasions for intervention that some finite and relatively closed physical system may offer. But this immediate comprehension, this attestation of an “ability to act” can only be apprehended conceptually as a coincidence of several casualities.¹⁶³

The opacity of the link between an agent and an action is at the centre of Masetti’s case. It opens the possibility to suspend legal judgment – hence, law enforcement, the production of evidence, a sentence – in favour of a psychological investigation, which may disregard the judiciary aspects in an attempt to disentangle the confused sphere of “human feelings”. Ricœur seems to suggest that a form of possession is at the very centre of human action, a paradox to which the juridical concept of responsibility seeks to respond. But transferring such concept from the legal sphere to morality is an arduous task.

In fact, even law, in its enforcement, does not escape the aporia of “irresponsibility”: enforcement itself depends on a decision. According to Derrida, “at no time can one say *presently* that a decision is just, purely just (that is to say, free and responsible)”.¹⁶⁴ This impossibility to take a purely “free and responsible” decision is an aporia that sits right at the heart of the law, which nonetheless requires such a decision to be enforced: “no justice becomes effective nor does it determine itself in the form of law, without a decision that cuts and divides”.¹⁶⁵ According to Derrida, this arbitrariness inherent to any decision is where the distinction between justice and law lies. The link between irresponsibility in human actions and the production of law is openly articulated when Derrida describes the instant of decision in terms of animation or possession:

The instant of decision is a madness, says Kierkegaard. This is particularly true of the instant of the *just* decision [...] because such decision is both hyper-active and suffered [*sur-active et subie*], it preserves something passive, even unconscious, as if the deciding one was free only by letting himself be affected by his own decision and as if it came to him from the other.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁶⁴ Derrida, Jacques. “Force of Law. The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’”, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 1992), 252.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

As part of the exhibition project *The Variational Status* in Bolzano and Reims, I produced a book with the same name (published by Humboldt Books in 2017). It included a conversation I recorded with Italian philosopher Andrea Cavalletti, author of *Suggestione* (“Suggestion”, 2011), a book about the connections between governmental strategies and techniques of “suggestion”, such as hypnosis, mesmerism and animal magnetism, especially between 1800s and 1900s. In the conversation, we discussed extensively on the Masetti case, which inspired *Suggestione*. According to Cavalletti, the turn of the 20th Century

...was the age of amnesia, depersonalisations and suggestion. [...] the cases of double personalities escalated, as well as women or men disappearing or, with no memories of themselves, starting a new life elsewhere. The episode of the anarchist Masetti is part of the panorama, and thus it has roots that go far back. Just as the word ‘suggestion’ itself at the time stood for that which at the end of the 18th century was called ‘mesmerism’ or ‘animal magnetism’, likewise in the loss and doubling of the personality, the old story of possession re-emerged.¹⁶⁷

Masetti’s declaration of amnesia, therefore, needs to be studied as part of a specific canon of the time: an epistemological framework at the intersection of science (psychology and the nascent psychoanalysis), politics (rhetoric and techniques of mass persuasion), occultism and theatre (hypnosis spectacles, mesmerism, animal magnetism sessions). According to Cavalletti, such intersection deeply shaped the way governmental institutions tackled bodies in public space. In order to better understand what was at stake in Masetti’s case on a political level, and why his declared amnesia touched a nerve of State power, it will be useful to focus on the notion of ‘responsibility’ and to unearth its juridical connotations.

8. Irresponsibility

Where Masetti’s gesture is analysed as a perfect anarchist act, through Agamben’s reflections on proairesis, impropriety and irresponsibility.

Giorgio Agamben is one of the theorists who, in the last years, have reflected on the political implications of connecting an individual to their actions. In his recent book *Karman*, he traces such connection back to Aristotle, who used the word “*proairesis*” and conferred it a specific technical meaning: “the act of choosing. [...] it is for Aristotle above all a question of the possibility of imputing actions to the agent, [and] *proairesis* is thus an apparatus for rendering people responsible for their actions and indissolubly joining the action to its author”¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁷ Andrea Cavalletti in conversation with Riccardo Giacconi, “The Theatre of Sleepwalkers”, in Giacconi, Riccardo. *The Variational Status*, ed. Emanuele Guidi and Antoine Marchand (Milan: Humboldt Books, 2017), 40.

¹⁶⁸ Agamben, Giorgio. *Karman. A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 36-37.

According to Agamben, the concept of “*proairesis*” is an ancestor to the concept of “will”, which acts, in Western culture and especially in Christianity, “as an apparatus whose goal is to render masterable – and therefore imputable – what the human being can do.” The genealogy of the concept traced by Agamben accounts for a transformation of the relation between agent and action. In the Greek world, man was still conceived as a being who *can*, and his action occupied the sphere of “potential” (*dynamis*). Through the notion of “will”, the Christian subject becomes a being who *wills*: their actions will be tied to them through such theoretical device, unknown to the ancient world.¹⁶⁹

In a previous book, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben follows a series of ethical and philosophical questions stemming from the testimonies and documents of Auschwitz survivors. What does it mean to witness something impossible to describe through language? According to Agamben, every “archive” of documents and testimonies related to Auschwitz testifies only of an incapacity to speak. Much more than a “factual truth”, much more than a conformity between language and facts, the “authority” of Auschwitz witnesses is constituted precisely by such “unarchivability”¹⁷⁰, by their impossibility to testify of something that cannot be testified through language.

Agamben quotes Primo Levi’s description of an ethical “grey zone” in Auschwitz, a mode of action in which evil is perpetrated independently “of every establishment of responsibility”¹⁷¹. The book then analyses the etymology of the word “responsibility”, which originally is not a political, moral, ethical or religious concept; rather, it is “inevitably contaminated by law”¹⁷². Agamben traces the concept back to its juridical meaning in Roman law:

The gesture of assuming responsibility is [...] juridical and not ethical. It expresses nothing noble or luminous, but rather simply obligation, the act by which one consigned oneself as a prisoner to guarantee a debt in a context in which the legal bond was considered to inhere in the body of the person responsible. As such, responsibility is closely intertwined with the concept of *culpa* that, in a broad sense, indicates the imputability of damage. [...] It must be recalled that the assumption of moral responsibility has value only if one is ready to assume the relevant legal consequences.¹⁷³

In this perspective, it is clear why the Pro-Masetti movements did not cease to ascribe full awareness and intention to Masetti’s act and to demand a fair trial, through pleas such as the following:

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷⁰ Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 158.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

If the experts did at the time detect [...] agitation and an abnormal state that deprived him of his criminal responsibility, may they now observe that he is perfectly healthy, and that a public trial [*giudizio pubblico*], whatever the outcome, is due.¹⁷⁴

Pro-Masetti movements did not demand the release of the prisoner. On the contrary, they demanded that the responsibility for his act – in its fully juridical meaning – had to be restored. If Masetti had never been never insane in the first place, and if he purposefully and consciously executed his act of revolt, then such act had to be read in its fully insurrectionary potential, and the State would have to face the consequences that such act entailed – be it street demonstrations, revolt or civil war. On the other hand, the absence of a trial, of an official version of the facts validated by the court, left the State *itself* in a state of irresponsibility: it had the possibility to restrain from taking a clear stand. If Masetti was declared insane, both he and the State were irresponsible.

Referring to similar discussions about responsibility that frequently took place at the beginning of the 20th Century, Agamben reflects on the zone of “impropriety” inherent to every human action:

[...] what empathy – but, alongside it, it would be necessary to mention hypnosis, magnetism, and suggestion, which in those years seem to have obsessively captured the attention of psychologists and sociologists – shows is that however much one affirms the originary character of the “propriety” of the body and of lived experience, the intrusiveness of an “impropriety” shows itself to be all the more originary and strong in it, as if the body proper always cast a shadow, which can in no case be separated from it.¹⁷⁵

Masetti’s declaration of amnesia refers precisely to such “impropriety”, to a zone of irresponsibility where the imputations of the juridical system are not overcome nor escaped (as in the Pianetti case): they are suspended. Through his declaration of amnesia, Masetti succeeds in bringing to a halt the legal procedure against his act of revolt. Cavalletti develops this idea:

Masetti has lost the *compos sui*, the mastery of himself. On the other hand, he finds himself in an army barrack, being subjected to military discipline. An action of his own, in that context, would be unlikely: thus in his place there may be nothing but a gap. Masetti’s statement is a very fitting and intelligent one, which turns the tables of possession against the very military power which takes control of the lives of others. Furthermore, it also turns around the issue of the responsibility or irresponsibility of those subjected to that power, transforming and undermining the sentence “I’m not responsible, I’m just following orders” (making us think here of Eichmann, of course, with his “it’s not me who is not obeying”). In short: seeing as you once wanted to subject me, don’t come asking for explanations now. The issue of

¹⁷⁴ *Volontà*, 10 August 1913. *Volontà* was an anarchist journal founded by Errico Malatesta and Luigi Fabbri in Ancona in 1913. Quoted in De Marco, p. 104. My translation.

¹⁷⁵ Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV*, 2, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 84.

responsibility and action leaves room for the theme of the unforeseeableness or duplicity which makes them both unassignable.¹⁷⁶

It is exactly in this sense, with regards to the “impropriety” and “irresponsibility” at the heart of every human action, that some anarchists will later refer to Masetti’s amnesia not as a “government trick” but, conversely, as a *perfect anarchist act*¹⁷⁷ (a position somewhat opposite to the Pro-Masetti movements). Their discourse tends to describe Masetti’s act as the effect of an “intensity”, of an insurrectionary current that takes ecstatic possession of an individual and, at the same time, exceeds such individual, thereby becoming a collective force. Masetti’s ecstatic possession is thus seen as an archaic force, which flows through different individuals, *animates* them without belong to any – an overarching intensity. The term “animation” seems particularly appropriate here, if we take into account that, as curator and writer Anselm Franke points out, “It was only in medieval scholastic theology that the soul [*anima*] was imagined as something firmly situated in the interior of a subject, and hence something that could be *owned*”¹⁷⁸.

The Masetti case was addressed in three different manners:

1. the Italian State judiciary restrained itself from producing a judgment;
2. psychiatry was called to fill such absence through a diagnosis of mental insanity;
3. Pro-Masetti movements demanded to revoke such diagnosis in order to hold a trial.

The position later expressed by those anarchists who saw Masetti’s as a perfect anarchist act differs from the previous positions. It recognizes a genuinely insurrectionary value precisely in the ecstatic irresponsibility of the soldier’s amnesia. Those who share such view are not interested in recognizing responsibility in order to reinstate a political meaning to Masetti’s act; instead, they claim his amnesia to be the element that institutes a counter-paradigm to governmental strategies.

According to this anarchist line of thinking, Masetti’s act would be an insurrection without personal responsibility, in which the *auctor* is nothing more than a means – the catalyst for a current that flows through him and exceeds him. It is in this sense that his gesture may be seen as a perfect incarnation of the anarchist spirit, which seeks to counter any form of representation by the ruling power, even that of personal responsibility, which is nothing else than the legal apparatus to certify and document the link of every individual with their own actions.

¹⁷⁶ Andrea Cavalletti in conversation with Riccardo Giacconi, “The Theatre of Sleepwalkers”, in Giacconi, Riccardo. *The Variational Status*, ed. Emanuele Guidi and Antoine Marchand (Milan: Humboldt Books, 2017), 58.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group “La libelula dorada”. August 2012. Cfr. also De Marco, Laura. *Il soldato che disse no alla guerra. Storia dell’anarchico Augusto Masetti (1888-1966)* (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Edizioni Spartaco, 2003), *passim*.

¹⁷⁸ Franke, Anselm. “Animism: Notes on an Exhibition”, in *e-flux journal* n. 36 - July 2012, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

This raises the questions: if not through responsibility, how can one ‘testify’ to such acts? How to ‘document’ such events that defy documentation and testimony? In order to answer these questions, it will be necessary to evoke the structural proximity between law, force and power, which the Masetti case exemplarily crystallizes. In order to do so, I will follow a specific line of legal reflections, notably articulated in Walter Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence*.

9. Force

With an excursus of considerations by several scholars highlighting how any production of truth – through evidence or documents – is intrinsically backed up by force and power.

Walter Benjamin’s 1921 essay *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* (usually translated as “Critique of Violence”) is a crucial example of a long line of arguments highlighting an intrinsic, structural connection between law, violence and power. Benjamin uses the term “*Gewalt*”, which translates both “violence” and “force.” Here, I prefer to use “force”, since “violence”, etymologically, indicates an *excess* of force, therefore implying a limit. But if, as will be argued, law is itself the origin of such limits, the “*Gewalt*” intrinsic to law cannot be “excessive”, since it would not have anything to exceed outside of itself.¹⁷⁹ In the essay, Benjamin writes,

When the consciousness of the latent presence of force [*Gewalt*] in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay. [...] Lawmaking is powermaking, assumption of power, and to that extent an immediate manifestation of force. [...] For from the point of view of force, which alone can guarantee law, there is no equality, but at the most equally great force.¹⁸⁰

In 1934 jurist and author of the 1920 Austrian Constitution Hans Kelsen published the first edition of his book *Reine Rechtslehre* (which will be translated in English as *Pure Theory of Law*). In it, Kelsen discards the division between “primary norms”, which institute a rule, and “secondary norms”, which determine a sanction: no fact is illegal or criminal *in itself*, that is, independently of the sanction that prohibits it and punishes it. According to his well-known phrase, “There is no *evil in itself*, but only *prohibited evil*”,¹⁸¹ implying that no fundamental, primary moral determination may be found *within* law. The phrase also implies that law can be regarded as the

¹⁷⁹ Derrida: “*Gewalt* also signifies, for Germans, legitimate power, authority, public force. *Gesetzgebende Gewalt* is legislative power, *geistliche Gewalt* the spiritual power of the church, *Staatsgewalt* the authority or power of the state. *Gewalt*, then, is both violence and legitimate power, justified authority.” Jacques Derrida, *Force of Law*, p. 234.

¹⁸⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Critique of Violence”, in *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 244, 248, 249.

¹⁸¹ Kelsen, Hans. *Pure Theory of Law*, trans. Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 112.

application of a *legalized* force, as an authorization, a ratification and a legalization of force.

Following Benjamin's and Kelsen's footsteps, American legal scholar Robert Cover provides a clear-cut definition of legal interpretation, emphasizing its intrinsic bond to force (or, as he calls it, violence):

Legal interpretive acts signal and occasion the imposition of violence upon others: A judge articulates her understanding of a text, and as a result, somebody loses his freedom, his property, his children, even his life. [...] Neither legal interpretation nor the violence it occasions may be properly understood apart from one another. [...] A legal world is built only to the extent that there are commitments that place bodies on the line. The torture of the martyr is an extreme and repulsive form of the organized violence of institutions. It reminds us that the interpretive commitments of officials are realized, indeed, in the flesh. [...] The judges deal pain and death. [...] From John Winthrop through Warren Burger they have sat atop a pyramid of violence [...] Legal interpretation is (1) a practice activity, (2) designed to generate credible threats and actual deeds of violence, (3) in an effective way.¹⁸²

Another American legal scholar, Stanley Fish, in an article named *Force*, similarly argues that law is hardly distinguishable from force, and that something like a "neutral" law does not exist, since law always needs to be interpreted and enforced, "interpretation" being "the force that resides within the law".¹⁸³

The preceding theoretical excursus may shed some light on the Italian State's strategy about Masetti. By accepting his declaration of amnesia, the government decides not to *enforce* any sanction, that is, to suspend the application of force authorized by law. However, it must be clear that force is a concept that acts not only through its actualization, but also through its mere threat.¹⁸⁴ Masetti has never escaped the hands of the law: his amnesia served to trigger a suspension of its enforcement, but the threat of such enforcement followed him until his death, as a glooming shadow. The State decided to suspend the truth-production process, and accepted to lodge a blank (an amnesia) at the centre of its official version of the events occurred in the morning of October 30, 1911 in the Cialdini barracks in Bologna.

A position like Stanley Fish's may be defined as anti-foundationalist, insofar as it stands against such theories, like H. L. A. Hart's and John Rawls' (and also, in part, Kelsen's), which sought to identify fundamental, neutral, primary principles of justice. Fish tried to unveil, behind Rawls' principles as well as Hart's "cores" and

¹⁸² Cover, Robert. "Violence and the Word", in *Yale Law Journal* 95 (8), 1986, pp. 1601-1629.

¹⁸³ Fish, Stanley. "Force", in *Washington and Lee Law Review*, Number 3, Volume 45, Summer 1988, p. 885.

¹⁸⁴ The purely threatening value of force (or violence) is perfectly described by Cover: "The act of sentencing a convicted defendant is among these most routine of acts performed by judges. Yet it is immensely revealing of the way in which interpretation is distinctively shaped by violence. [...] If convicted, the defendant customarily walks – escorted – to prolonged confinement, usually without significant disturbance to the civil appearance of the event. It is, of course, grotesque to assume that the civil facade is "voluntary" except in the sense that it represents the defendant's autonomous recognition of the overwhelming array of violence ranged against him, and of the hopelessness of resistance or outcry." Cover, Robert. "Violence and the Word", in *Violence. A Reader*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 296.

“authoritative marks”, “their status as historical constructions that are in place only so long as a more powerful construction has not yet dislodged them”,¹⁸⁵ since “neutrality is shown to be unavailable, both in its material and psychological forms”.¹⁸⁶ This means that the procedure of investing an object with law and using it to pursue a certain narrative validated as *true* (as with a piece of evidence), is a decision taken by an authoritative institution.

Fish shows that the production of truth in law (in which we can include the use of objects as evidence and, in a larger sense, as documents) is a matter of convention, but a convention validated and certified by institutional power and specific procedures, always backed up by a certain form of force.

in some social structures – and the law is certainly one of them – victory is mandated in the form of the obligation to render a decision. But when victory occurs, [...] it is always provisional; for since it has emerged from argument, from forceful urging of some partisan point of view, it is always provisional; it is always possible, and indeed likely, that what has apparently been settled will become unsettled, and argument will begin again.¹⁸⁷

Two observations can be put forward as corollaries to Fish’s thesis. The first is that, since law is a provisional decision, produced via a conventional procedure sustained by force, also the act of considering an object as a document (both strictly within the juridical procedure – evidence – or without) is to be considered “provisional”. This conventional or, to use a juridical term, “procedural” manner of producing truth is curiously similar to the famous definition of art provided by Dino Formaggio in 1981: “art is everything that mankind calls art”.¹⁸⁸ This is not surprising if we consider that both art and law need a specific, conventional, procedural agreement by specific institutions to certify their existence.

The second observation is linked to Jacques Derrida’s essay *Force of Law*, whose second part is a comment on Benjamin’s essay. Derrida pushes the rejection of “primary principles” of law further than Fish, introducing the key term ‘performative’ (whose resonance with Austin’s theory of performatives should not be missed):

[...] the foundation of law remains suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure *performative* act that would not have to answer to or before anyone. [...] the law is transcendent, violent and nonviolent, because it depends only on who is before it (and so prior to it), on who produces it, founds it, authorizes it in an absolute *performative* whose presence always escapes him.¹⁸⁹

Following this line of thinking, it may be argued that also documents come into being in an absolute *performative*. A performative act is needed in order to invest an object

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 894.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 900.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 900.

¹⁸⁸ See Formaggio, Dino. *L'arte come idea e come esperienza* (Milano: Mondadori, 1981).

¹⁸⁹ Derrida, *Force of Law*, 270.

with a certain narrative presented as *true*. In the case of evidence (of a document certified within a legal system), such a performative act cannot be detached from the force – or violence – at the core of law. As Derrida states with regards to Benjamin’s essay, “every juridical or legal contract is founded on violence. There is no contract that does not have violence as both an origin and an outcome”.¹⁹⁰ Benjamin’s famous sentence from his *Theses on the Concept of History* clearly resonates here: “There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism.”¹⁹¹

Benjamin’s motto can be a provisional note to end this chapter, a stout reminder to never look at a document as an entity, as an object *per se*, but always as an “intensity”, as a certain mode of existence of an object, as a *use*. A reminder to always consider the conditions of a document’s production, validation, transmission – conditions which, usually, are based on force and power. While approaching Masetti’s case study, as well as the other two in this dissertation, the echo of Benjamin’s recommendation to “brush history against the grain” shall not be forgotten.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁹¹ Benjamin, Walter. “On the Concept of History”, in *Gesammelten Schriften* I:2, trans. Dennis Redmond (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

Case III

El espiritado, or how a puppet is born

1. Variations as documents

Where my methodological approach to the case study is introduced.

This chapter will focus on a puppet character from Colombia, the so-called *espiritado*. I will introduce it by relating the development of the field research that led to my first encounter with it. This is necessary to outline the different cultural, historical and geographical layers involved, as well as the complex narrative and political energies encompassed within a single puppet character. Differently from the previous chapters, this case study is not about a real individual, but about a fictional being. So I will not introduce it through its historical traces, but through the story of my exploration, recounting my gradual unveiling of an apparently mysterious triangular constellation linking puppetry, anarchism and an “empty space” (that can either be labelled in terms of sleepwalking, possession or ecstasy).

This chapter will therefore not adopt a historical viewpoint; the *espiritado* case will serve as a paradigm for an investigation on the status of documents, raising the question as to how stories are traversed by different social and political currents. These stories will be studied as intrinsically *not separable from their modalities of transmission*: the puppet character and the narratives it embodies will be explored as a single, complex system, encompassing content and form, story and text. My report on my own research trajectory is also intended as a reflection on *research in and through art*, insofar as:

- it constitutes a study on my own artistic research *and* its presentation through several media (a radio piece, an installation, a series of posters, etc.);
- it constitutes a study on a specific art form – puppetry – and, more specifically, on a character and a script.

This chapter is not separated from the previous ones. Firstly because, as we will see, the *espiritado* character might be viewed as a transformative afterlife of Augusto Masetti, a translation of the real individual into a narrative artifact. Therefore, this study can be considered a follow-up to the Masetti case, taking its cues from the moment when it departs historiography and enters tradition. As in previous chapters, I will continue interrogating the ‘non-confession’ paradox – that is, an act that cannot be subjectivized, assumed in the first person. What kind of ‘text’ would ‘record’ or ‘document’ such an act? If evidence and confession (whether of legal or historical nature) are aimed at establishing a link between an actor and an act, what kind of figure would be able to encompass their disconnection?

Secondly, after Pianetti and Masetti, this chapter aims to provide a third case study about a document not based on official mechanisms of validation backed by institutional power. Compared to the previous ones, the *espirtado* case will be read as a more radical example of what has been hitherto called a *variational status* of documents, and it will raise a series of questions: What does it mean to study a puppet character as a document? What does it document? What narratives does it convey? What social and political currents run through it? Which channels has it been transmitted through? What historical and geographical contexts has it inhabited?

The intention to study a puppet character as a document might seem incongruous at first. A document is usually embodied in a fixed, stable object, certified by an institution of power within a specific system of knowledge. A puppet character, instead, is intrinsically *variational*; it is an ephemeral, polymorphic ‘intensity’ that does not exist *in itself*, but that is actualized every time it is used.¹⁹² It is impossible to catch it in its pure essentiality, or to pinpoint its specific origin, like a signature on a contract. In short, it is hard to define what Roberto Bazlen would have called its “first-timeness” (*primavoltità*).¹⁹³

This chapter takes its cue from two reflections, coming from different fields and methodologies. The first is by historian Carlo Ginzburg, included in his book *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*, where he critically revisits the concept of “microhistory”, with which he has been associated since the beginnings of his career. He warns the reader that “no one will think it useless to study false legends, false events, or false documents, but it is indispensable to take a preliminary stand, on each occasion, about their falsity or authenticity”.¹⁹⁴ Without conceding anything to postmodern relativism, the Italian historian elaborates on the core of his profession: using traces to narrate true stories that “at times have falsehoods as their object”,¹⁹⁵ untangling the notions of true, false and fictional, which compose our experience in the world. He adds that none of these notions can ever be taken for granted.

Against the tendency of postmodern skepticism to blur the borders between fictional and historical narrations, in the name of the constructive element they share, I proposed a view of the relation between the two as a competition for the representation of reality. But rather than trench warfare, I hypothesized a conflict made up of challenges and reciprocal, hybrid borrowings. [...] Fiction, fed by history, becomes material for historical reflection or else for fiction, and so on. This unpredictable intermingling can come together in a knot, or in a name.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² In this sense, the notion of “character” might exhibit some similarities with the notion of “switch”, as theorized by Gregory Bateson. Bateson wrote that “the switch is the thing that is not except at the moments of its change of setting, and the concept ‘switch’ has thus a special relation to time. It is related to the notion ‘change’ rather than to the notion ‘object.’” Bateson, Gregory. “Criteria of Mental Process 1-4,” in *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: Dutton, 1979), 109.

¹⁹³ Bazlen, Roberto. *Scritti* (Milano: Adelphi, 1984), 230.

¹⁹⁴ Ginzburg, Carlo. *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*, trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2-5.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

Later in the book, Ginzburg adds:

Precisely because it is important to distinguish between reality and fiction, we must learn to recognize when one becomes joined to the other, each transmitting something that we might call “energy”.¹⁹⁷

The character of the *espiritado* is itself a result of the intersection of narrative and historical relations and, following Ginzburg’s insight, it will be used to reflect on such a “knot” of reality and fiction (or, more precisely, of reality and forms of transmission).

The second cue comes from a recent preface by anthropologist Michael Taussig to his 1980 book *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Taussig states that “only literature, meaning fiction and forms of documentary overlapping with fiction” (what he calls “fictocriticism”) is able to reflect on “how ideas work emotionally and paint a picture of the world on account of the way they are put into language”¹⁹⁸. The figure of the *espiritado* will be analysed precisely in this way: as an object of study that intrinsically encompasses fictional and documentary elements.

I will start by relating the beginnings of my research in Colombia, when I decided to work on an audio-documentary about the contemporary puppetry scene in Bogotá.

2. Research-in-the-making as an artistic format

Where my radio-documentary on Bogotan puppeteers is introduced, motivating the choice of the medium.

On 3 December 2012 I presented an hour-long audio-documentary in the movie theatre of La Tertulia, the contemporary art museum of Cali, Colombia. It was the first presentation of a work I had carried out in the previous four months, since I arrived in Colombia as an artist-in-residence at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá. The piece was titled *Indagación sobre la forma de los milagros* (“Investigation on the shape of miracles”), and the audience was mainly composed of puppeteers from Cali and Bogotá, who came to listen to their own voices and those of their colleagues.

The audio-documentary presents a montage of testimonies by several puppeteers. They talk about their practice, they recall the occupation of a theatre in Bogotá in the 1970s, and they provide a series of (often contradicting) hypotheses around a puppet character, *el espiritado*, and its mysterious origin. Along the development of the vocal

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁹⁸ Taussig, Michael. “Preface to the Thirtieth Anniversary Edition”, in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xii.

texture, latent connections emerge between themes such as sleepwalking, anarchy and puppetry.

The audio-only format referenced puppeteers' mastery in producing different voices, in order to give life and personality to their different characters. My main artistic reference was Glenn Gould's utilization of documentary materials in his radio documentaries for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, notably in his 'Solitude Trilogy' (1967–1977). Gould employed a radiophonic electronic-music technique that he called "contrapuntal radio", in which several people are heard speaking at once – much like the voices in a fugue, making a wide use of mono and stereo juxtapositions. There is no narration; each of the interviewees speaks to an unheard interviewer. In particular, I referred to Glenn Gould's first and most famous of his radio documentaries, *The Idea of North* (1967), in which five speakers provide contrasting views of Northern Canada. Gould's editing style is a powerful technique to construct a portrait of an array of people that share a socio-geographic context; such a technique is able to account for the complexity and the discrepancies of multiple voices, without over-simplifying their differences in the name of fictitious or superficial 'identity traits'. That is why I took his radio-documentary work as a reference, when I decided to construct a mosaic of different accounts of a puppeteer's work in today's Bogotá.

<https://vimeo.com/58816066>

Link to the radio-documentary *Indagaciòn sobre la forma de los milagros* (60', Spanish, English subtitles)¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Some audio fragments of my interviews with Bogotan puppeteers were also presented in a series of performative lectures that I gave, on different occasions, about the *espiritado* research project. One of these lectures was part of the *Unfixing Images* symposium, which I organized, together with Mikala Hyldig Dal and Andrea Stultiens, on 19-20 March 2015 at KABK, Den Haag, as part of the PhDArts research program.



Poster advertising the presentation of the radio-documentary at the Universidad Nacional, Bogotá (design by Giulia Marzin)

The choice of the audio-only format was also the result of the field research I had carried out. When I arrived in Bogotá in August 2012, I had a vague intention to continue my investigation into animation and puppetry, which I had started in Italy. So, without a specific route to follow, I started meeting different puppeteers from the city and recording interviews with them.

Only later did I consciously decide to work on an audio-documentary, when I already had a lot of recorded audio footage from the interviews I had conducted. I started wondering about how I could use this footage without hiding the research process that led me to its collection. That was when I started reflecting about the possibility to use

such research material as the primary component of an artwork. What interested me about the audio-documentary format was the fact that it would allow me to use the research material *in itself*, without transforming it into something else. The testimonies would not be transposed into another medium (they would not be transcribed, related in other words, nor transposed into images): the audio recording themselves would serve as the working material to construct the piece. My intervention would consist in the editing of such material, and I decided that my audio montage was going to develop narratively as a progressive unveiling, evoking the process of my own ‘research in the making’.

In short, the audio-documentary form allowed me to use my own ‘research in the making’ as the very same artistic medium through which I would present such research. If I were to write a book about the research, or to produce a series of drawings or a film animation, I would have needed to perform an act of translation from a medium to another. The audio-documentary format, on the other hand, allowed me to present the audio recordings of my interviews in the very same medium in which I had recorded them.

After a couple of weeks in Bogotá, I started collaborating with what at the time was called the ‘Fonoteca Nacional’, the audio archive of RTVC, the Colombian national TV and radio.²⁰⁰ The director of the Fonoteca proposed me to present my audio-documentary on their radio station. Such collaboration, which ended up being very fruitful, was another significant factor in the choice of an audio-only medium.

Both in order to provide a more specific overview of my audio piece, and of how I gradually encountered my research subjects, I will recount the field investigation I carried out on Bogotan puppeteers, quoting excerpts from testimonies included in the radio-documentary.

3. Recording interviews

With a summary of my conversations with puppeteers in Bogotá, including testimonies on the city’s leftist/anarchist cultural milieu during the 1970s.

Most of the puppeteers I interviewed work mainly for children nowadays. During the conversations, I gradually found out that most of them started working with puppets around the beginning of the 1970s, within the cultural context of the Teatro Cultural del Parque Nacional (‘Cultural Theatre of the National Park’). The Teatro del Parque

²⁰⁰ Today, its name is Señal Memoria: <https://www.senalmemoria.co/> (accessed 30 March 2019). My work was also presented on the website of the institution: <https://www.senalmemoria.co/articulos/documental-indagaci%C3%B3n-sobre-la-forma-de-los-milagros> (accessed 30 March 2019). An interview I gave about the radio piece: <https://www.senalmemoria.co/articulos/entrevista-que-indaga-sobre-una-indagaci%C3%B3n-riccardo-giacconi> (accessed 30 March 2019).

was inaugurated in 1936, and since then served as the main location where Bogotan puppeteers would present children's works. The theatre lived a watershed period between 1970 and 1976, under the direction of Beatriz Caballero Holguín (b. 1948), at the time a 21 years old young puppeteer and energetic organizer. Caballero started with the intention of organizing a 'national summit of puppeteers', which then turned into a sort of *golpe*. Her testimony serves as a precious account about the moment when Colombian puppeteers got interested in the relation between puppet theatre and class struggle.

In 1970 we decided to organize a national puppet theatre festival, so we started using that theatre [Teatro del Parque] which, at the time, was squatted by homeless people. [...] I was 20, pretty and long-haired. I went to meet several enterprises asking for money, and I even managed to have a military airplane going all around Colombia, picking up the different puppeteers everywhere. In the end, twenty puppet companies showed up. [...] But it was the beginning of the Seventies: university theatre was very politicized, and the puppets too. So a group of puppeteers, linked to the 'MOIR' leftist movement ('Movimiento Obrero Independiente y Revolucionario'), literally took over the festival. They declared, "No! This festival is pure demagoguery. No more performances around the city. We'll rather lock ourselves up in the theatre and discuss the role of the puppet in the historical moment's class struggle. I had no clue what class struggle or the historical moment were. I only knew about witches, dragons and princesses – that is, traditional puppetry. But I was carried away by this hurricane; it was a revelation."²⁰¹

A short time later, Caballero started a close and long-lasting collaboration with El Biombo Latino, a leftist puppet company, which intensified the political approach of the theatre's program. Caballero, ironically, recounts:

I got politicized. [...] I didn't know what it meant, but I was a Trotskyist, because the others were too. I had a Maoist friend, who wanted to make a Maoist out of me, so I would make my Trotskyist friends turn Maoist. In our group, there was a friend who was all the time founding groups that were more and more to the Left. The Left was pulverized in the 70s. Some parties had only five members! We ourselves founded a party, the CRM: the Revolutionary Marxist Commando. And we were seven! Eventually, this political work started to merge with puppetry and children's theatre.²⁰²

After the Cuban revolution, socialist and communist ideologies took hold in Bogotá. The cultural scenario of the city, at the beginning of the Seventies, was extremely politicized. Theatre was increasingly militant and heavily influenced by leftist movements. A series of excerpts from my interviews with Bogotan puppeteers will serve as a fragmentary account of the situation.

At first, groups of all tendencies were together; then, they split up between the pro-Chinese, the pro-Soviets, the pro-Cubans, the pro-something-else...²⁰³

²⁰¹ Interview with Beatriz Caballero: playwright, puppeteer, writer, educator and former director of the Teatro Cultural del Parque Nacional. September 2012. My translation.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Interview with Carlos José Reyes: playwright, performing arts historian and former director of the National Library of Colombia. August 2012. My translation.

Each movement had its own artistic expression. Everyone was talking all the time about ‘the message’. Obviously, ‘the message’ meant ‘the political message’.²⁰⁴

I remember that all I used to watch, read or listen to, was revolutionary. There was a magazine called ‘Sputnik’, which we always had at home, and I used to read its comics. Many artists used to study in Moscow, subsidized by the USSR government.²⁰⁵

The theatre movement in Bogotá was very influenced by the recent Cuban revolution. It was a militant theatre. [...] USSR distributed funding. Of course, funding is never for free: it came with ideology included. Puppetry groups started to appear, and many shared that ideology. [...] A puppeteer told us that, at the end of his shows, the audience would stand up and sing the ‘Internationale’. Together with the puppets!²⁰⁶

Puppeteers were *guerrilleros* without rifles. I spent twelve years doing revolutionary puppetry: we spoke about revolution, imperialism, class struggle... I travelled all around Colombia bringing about the revolution with puppets. Of course, I was in prison and everything...²⁰⁷

In those years, theatre was very politicized. We can even say that some theatre groups directly stemmed out of leftist parties. [...] It was a very ideological situation. Some plays were considered useless for the proletarian cause; some authors were not well regarded. The theatre of the absurd was considered petit bourgeois: Arrabal, Beckett, Ionesco were banned. Brecht, on the other hand, was the Marxists’ patron saint, and his works were read in a quite dogmatic way. [...]

There were Marxists, Marxist-Maoists, Marxist-Leninists, Marxist-Trotskyists... All the Marxist tendencies had their own cultural group. Nonetheless, a smaller minority started to disagree with Marxist cultural tendencies: among them were the anarchists. [...] With my friends, especially the Maoists, we got more militant: we made pamphlets; we distributed propaganda materials outside factories, in schools... We were infused with all the workers’ and farmers’ struggles in the country. Eventually, I started to get interested in anarchism, because I wasn’t fond of Marxist dogmatism. In the anarchist ideology, I felt more comfortable as an artist and as a person.²⁰⁸

One of the main results of the collaboration between Beatriz Caballero and the Biombo Latino company was the establishment of a puppetry school in the Teatro del Parque, the first of its kind in Colombia. The school, named Centro Latino de Cultura, focused on the participatory aspects of puppet theatre; it fostered a climate of continuous dialogue on social and cultural issues, as well as a form of living together often described as an actual commune. The school was initially inspired by Marxist ideology but, as Bogotan puppeteer Ivan Alvarez Escobar points out, “both in discussions and in the plays we produced, anarchist ideas increasingly started to come

²⁰⁴ Interview with Ivan Cardozo: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group ‘El Acto Latino’. August 2012. My translation.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Rebeca Castro: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group ‘El Submarino Invisible del Capitán Nemo’. August 2012. My translation.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Mauricio Galeano: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group ‘Materile’. August 2012. My translation.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Camilo de la Espriella: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group ‘Hilos’. September 2012. My translation.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group ‘La libelula dorada’. August 2012. My translation.

to the fore. The Biombo Latino had a Marxist and Trotskyist background, but over time they moved towards anarchism²⁰⁹. In the hyper-politicized Bogotan cultural panorama of the Seventies, puppeteers were the practitioners most related to anarchist ideologies, much more than the other theatre groups. The connection between anarchism and puppetry has a long and rich story worldwide, including figures and movements as Alfred Jarry, Dada, Karel Čapek, Bread and Puppet, Dario Fo.²¹⁰ In disparate cultural traditions, puppets have been used countless times to convey satire or political protest, including in collective rites such as carnivals, processions or parades. Due to their object-quality, puppets have been often used to embody messages of revolt or resistance against authorities, without tying them to a human enunciation, to a speaking subject. Alvarez Escobar explains such connection in these terms:

Historically, puppeteers have often dedicated themselves to different causes of liberation. There is an iconoclastic spirit to puppet theatre, very much akin to anarchism in its irreverent stance towards authorities and power. [...] A puppet can say things that wouldn't be allowed to an actor. The puppet is blameless. Even in political satire, the puppet can do things that an actor cannot. The police would hardly bring a puppet to prison.²¹¹

This period of collective experimentation ended abruptly in 1978 when, following a change of government, playwright and historian Carlos José Reyes was appointed director of the Teatro del Parque. Reyes recounts when he first entered the theatre as the new director:

In the basement, there were several people living and smoking marijuana. The whole theatre smelled like marijuana. When I entered, there was still someone living there, a mime artist. I told him, "I'm so sorry, but you cannot live here as a clandestine, this is an official theatre." [...] The theatre was literally falling apart, the rain leaked down on the audience during the shows. I had to shut the theatre down for some time in order to rescue it.²¹²

Such change preannounced the beginning of a new era in Colombian politics. Under the mandates of Julio César Turbay (1978-1982) and Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), Colombian theatre became subject to a much stricter censorship. Most of the puppeteers who started off at the school of the Teatro del Parque were compelled to give up performances with openly political messages. This resulted in a long-term retreat of Bogotan puppet theatre from leftist or anarchist positions. Puppeteers started focusing on children's puppet shows with a pedagogical and didactic approach. It was the end of an era.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ A brief history of radical puppetry is sketched in K. Ruby Blume's article *History of Radical Puppetry*: <https://www.rogueruby.com/radpup.html> (accessed 12 March 2019). See also Stourac, Richard and McCreery Kathleen. *Theatre As a Weapon: Workers' Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain, 1917-1934* (Abingdon: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1986), and Bell, John. *Strings, Hands, Shadows: A Modern Puppet History* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002).

²¹¹ Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar, 2012.

²¹² Interview with Carlos José Reyes, 2012.

These developments account for the peculiar situation in present-day Bogotá, where most puppeteers, despite sharing the same anarchist/communist background, mainly perform puppet shows for children devoid of any openly political message.²¹³ A few of them, whom I had the chance to interview, are Ivan Cardozo, Fabio Correa, Camilo de la Espriella and the brothers Cesar and Ivan Alvarez Escobar.

My conversations with Bogotan puppeteers took an unexpected turn when they started mentioning a specific puppet character, whose mysterious and controversial origin immediately grabbed my attention, due to its striking similarities with the stories of Pianetti and Masetti.

4. Enter the *espiritado*

Where I find out about a Colombian puppet character, together with multiple variations of the real events that supposedly inspired its invention.

During the interviews, a recurring question I asked the puppeteers was if, in their shows, their political engagement was in any way symbolized through a specific character. More in general, I wanted to find out if the Colombian puppetry tradition gave birth to an archetypical stock character, such as Pulcinella in the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, or its equivalent Punch (in England), Guignol (in France) or Kasperle (in German-speaking countries).

Carlos José Reyes, Cesar Alvarez Escobar and several other historians of Colombian puppet theatre, consider certain pre-Columbian rituals, as well as some aspects of Carnival parades and Catholic solemnities – like the Corpus Christi and nativity scenes as the so-called ‘Pesebres Santaferenos’ – as actual pre-figurations of what we call ‘puppetry’.²¹⁴ Nonetheless, actual puppet theatre in Colombia is relatively recent (especially if compared to the Western tradition), having being spread in the 19th Century by European puppeteers who started touring Latin America. The first puppeteer who started working in Colombia on a permanent basis arrived to Cali from Spain in 1798, while the first operating Colombian puppet theatre was the so-called ‘pesebre Espina’, founded by Antonio Espina in 1877, which presented adaptations from juvenile literature classics.²¹⁵

²¹³ With some notable exceptions, among which the puppet play *Tomando el tè con Marx y Bakunin* (“Having tea with Marx and Bakunin”, 2007), by Ivan Alvarez Escobar and his group ‘El submarino invisible del capitán Nemo’.

²¹⁴ Interviews with Carlos José Reyes and Cesar Alvarez Escobar, 2012.

²¹⁵ Robledo, Beatriz Helena. “Hilos para una historia. Los títeres en Colombia”, in *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* Vol. 24, n. 12. Bogotá, 1987.

The first truly Colombian stock character for puppets was originated in 1914,²¹⁶ when puppeteer Sergio Londoño Orozco (1882-1944) created, in the city of Manizales, Manuelucho Sepulveda. A Pulcinella-like character, Manuelucho was “a restless and mischievous joker, lover, wanderer and trickster”²¹⁷, and became an ironic synthesis of the Colombian *paisa*, the inhabitant of Antioquia, a department in the northwestern part of the country. The spreading success of the Manuelucho character derives from its being the caricature of a specifically Colombian idiosyncratic identity. However, apart from occasional revivals by other performers,²¹⁸ Manuelucho died with its creator.

A second example of an authentically Colombian puppet character is ‘el Tío Conejo’ (‘Uncle Rabbit’), embodied by a rabbit. It was made famous by puppeteer Hugo Alvarez Bermudes (1940?-1984), from the Tolima department, who wrote and performed several plays featuring it. Alvarez Bermudes toured extensively throughout Colombian villages, spreading the puppetry tradition all around the country. According to puppeteer Gerardo Potes, who nowadays incorporates it in his own performances, “el Tío Conejo is a truly Colombian character, stemming from our oral traditions. Many puppeteers and playwrights have adopted it. He is rogue, cheerful, clever and at the same time he embodies the desire for freedom that characterizes our people”.²¹⁹

A third and more mysterious recurring figure that I ran into during the research is a character without a specific name, called by some “*el espiritado*” (‘the spirited one’, or ‘the possessed one’²²⁰). It does not possess the clearly defined features of a typical stock character, except for a specific defining quality: its constant amnesia. According to Bogotan actor Gabriel Vanegas, the *espiritado* is “basically a comic figure: he’s the one who cannot remember. He cannot remember his actions; he remembers nothing of what he has done”²²¹. The character appears in puppet shows mainly between 1920 and 1950. Cesar Alvarez Escobar recounts:

²¹⁶ According to Cesar Alvarez Escobar, Manuelucho was created in 1918. See Alvarez, César Santiago. *Infancia e historia del teatro de muñecos en Colombia: proyecto, informe uno, dos y tres* (Bogotá: Becas de Investigación en Artes Escénicas de Colcultura, 1991).

²¹⁷ Robledo, 1987.

²¹⁸ Such as the ‘Manuelucho Festival’, organized by the Libelula Dorada group.

²¹⁹ Interview with Gerardo Potes: puppeteer and founder/director of the Casa de los Titeres puppet theatre in Cali. October 2012.

²²⁰ The term “*espiritado*” may be found in a version of Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón’s translation of Nahuatl invocations, incantations and spells, included in his 1629 *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions*, one of the most important sources of early colonial Mexico dealing with native religion, beliefs and medicine. Since the original manuscript was lost, Alarcón’s *Treatise* exists in different versions. One has been transmitted by Jacinto de la Serna, a contemporary of Ruiz de Alarcón: his version of the *Treatise* uses “*el espiritado*” to translate a Nahuatl term used in one of the invocations included in the treatise, that has alternatively been translated also as “spirit” or as “priest”. According to Andrews and Hassig, *el espiritado* (“the possessed one”) is “a more likely reading”. Alarcón’s *Treatise* is one of the sources justifying the hypothesis of a pre-Colombian origin of the *espiritado* character. Ruiz de Alarcón, Hernando. *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions that Today Live Among the Indians Native to this New Spain, 1629*, trans. and ed. Andrews, J. Richard and Hassig, Ross (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 100 and 337 (notes n. 57 and 61).

²²¹ Interview with Gabriel Vanegas: actor, sound artist and frequent collaborator for Colombian National Television and Radio. August 2012. My translation.

Analysing the few scripts for puppets still available from those years, we notice that one specific character recurs in different authors: ‘the one who cannot remember’. His typical gag goes like that: he did something wrong, all the other characters know it, but he cannot remember anything. [...] I think he’s referred to as ‘*el espiritado*’ in the sense that he is possessed by something – a phantom, a current – something other than him. He lives as if in a constant state of ecstasy. It became a kind of repertoire mask, a stock character. Stock characters, such as those of the Italian *Commedia dell’arte*, are not frequent in Colombia, where puppetry is a relatively recent tradition.²²²

According to puppeteer Fabio Correa, instead, the *espiritado* “cannot be considered a stock character, as it appears in the Colombian puppetry tradition for too little time. Then it disappears, and today almost no one remembers it; its traces remain only in some archives”.²²³ Ivan Alvarez Escobar recounts:

Usually, he was represented by a red puppet with eyes turned upwards, but there were several versions. He was often used as a comic character, but not like a village idiot. He was more like a zombie, a sleepwalker. His ridiculousness lied in his impossible desire to escape from his actions and, we could say, from himself.²²⁴

Camilo de la Espriella, a Bogotan puppeteer that sometimes still revives the *espiritado* in his shows, mentions the lack of detailed information on it:

There are only short notes about it, but we don’t know much about the content of the plays. [...] I see it as a talkative, astute character: all heart and womanizer – quite a womanizer. I see in him some sort of fight against the power. He is constantly hung over, and nobody feels well when they’re hung over; you imagine many things. [...] In some of my shows, I try to recreate him from scratch, because there’s no information on him.²²⁵

As the last passage shows, the *espiritado* expresses a political stance much more clearly than Manuelucho or the Tío Conejo. It embodies the figure of the outsider, of the one who does not fit into social conventions, who – through its amnesia – disregards norms and overlooks authorities. The *espiritado*’s amnesia is a vehicle for making fun of institutions, by questioning their very foundations. The character often finds itself in comic situations where it has no clue about who is who: it ignores the identities and the social status of other characters, and confuses the powerful with the poor, the weak with the strong. Those are its typical gags.

Despite being the least famous of the three, the transmission of the *espiritado* has been cherished by – and accommodated in – anarchist discourse. In the 1970s, puppeteers associated with the Teatro del Parque summoned the character back from oblivion, and regarded it as a significant symbolic reference for a political puppet theatre. Some of them even started including the character in their shows and a few,

²²² Interview with Cesar Alvarez Escobar, 2012.

²²³ Interview with Fabio Correa: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group ‘Paciencia de Guayaba’. August 2012. My translation.

²²⁴ Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar, 2012.

²²⁵ Interview with Camilo de la Espriella, 2012.

as Camilo de la Espriella, still occasionally do. Such enigmatic relation between anarchism and a puppet character might find its cause in a particular hypothesis: the *espiritado* is said to have been inspired by a real event.

So, this character was created, as well as many stories about him. He was atheist, free-thinking, drunkard. [...] It is quite reasonable to suspect that the *espiritado* character was inspired by a real person. [...] It was a very sad event. Some people were shooting their hunting rifles in the air to celebrate, to make some noise. One of these people shot the Police Chief dead. When interrogated, the citizen stated he couldn't remember anything, and therefore he couldn't repent.²²⁶

Several puppeteers and historians of folk traditions share the hypothesis that such allegedly real episode gave birth to the *espiritado*. The actual facts are not easy to retrace, since indications of time and location vary among the different sources (written or oral), or are extremely vague. Estimating from the various versions, the events might have occurred between 1910 and 1930 in a small village in the Andean region (between the departments of Antioquia, Santander, Caldas and Tolima). According to Gabriel Vanegas,

It happened during a village celebration. People were singing and dancing. Suddenly, a man shot his rifle and killed the Police Chief.

– *When and where did this happen?*

– My very personal idea is: I think that those who knew about this story are dead. Or they don't care anymore. [...] But, as far as I know, it happened in the 1920s in a village in Antioquia. But I never knew the details. Anyway, after the killing the man continued to hold on to his version for the rest of his life: he kept saying he couldn't remember what he did. That night, he was out of himself for some reason. He was not himself – perhaps he was someone else. Or perhaps he was sleepwalking, and that's why he could never remember a thing.²²⁷

Camilo de la Espriella recounts the episode in a similar manner:

What happened is that a person shot a policeman dead – in the presence of many witnesses – and then always said he couldn't remember having done it. Please note that he didn't declare himself innocent; he never said he didn't commit the murder. No. That person, in that moment, then in prison, and until he died, always said he couldn't remember what happened that night.²²⁸

The relevance of this story for Bogotan radical puppeteers in the Seventies lied also in the rebellion against the police, a subject that is still central to the current Colombian leftist discourse. Puppeteer Fabio Correa states that

[I]n Colombia there is an ambivalent feeling towards the police: it seems public, but it's quite merged with corruption. [...] This country, Colombia, went through a huge violence. There has been a lot of... death, let's say. And there hasn't been a recovery, a healing process. The

²²⁶ Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar, 2012.

²²⁷ Interview with Gabriel Vanegas, 2012.

²²⁸ Interview with Camilo de la Espriella, 2012.

wounds are still open, they haven't been cured. [...] Police always had a very strong and authoritarian presence. It had much power. It represented the power of the State, and at the end of the Seventies authoritarianism was becoming a big issue.²²⁹

In this sense, both the *espiritado* and the facts that purportedly inspired its creation, could perfectly serve to express a stance against the authorities, a disdainful attitude towards police. Nonetheless, the variability of the accounts and the lack of accessible documentation, make it reasonable to question the truth status of the episode that supposedly inspired the *espiritado* character. Declaring amnesia after having accomplished a riotous or violent act against the authorities, was a recurring strategy within anarchist movements worldwide, especially at the beginning of 20th Century.²³⁰ In fact, it is not difficult to notice the striking similarity between the Augusto Masetti case and the story of the unknown amnesiac Colombian murderer. This is what immediately struck me when I heard about the *espiritado* character.

As analysed in the previous chapter, Masetti's amnesia came to represent a paradigm for a perfectly anarchist act of rebellion. By not remembering having accomplished their action, the subject detaches from it, as if instituting a model for a pre-political gesture situated outside any framework of responsibility – a perfect emblem for an anarchist act. When asked whether he repented having shot at his superior officer, Masetti replied, “I cannot have regrets. How can you regret something you don't know you have done?”²³¹

Considering the worldwide attention received by Masetti's gesture, it is not unlikely that his story reached anarchist circles in Colombia. During my interview, Bogotan puppeteer Ivan Alvarez Escobar, also a historian of Latin American anarchism, put forward the hypothesis that Masetti's gesture might be at the origin of the *espiritado* character, in two possible ways:

- *indirectly*, Masetti's gesture might have inspired acts of revolt against the authorities, therefore serving as a model for the 'amnesiac' killer of a policeman [in the Colombian village] that, in turn, inspired the puppet character;
- *directly*: the episode of the 'amnesiac' killer of the policeman in Colombia could be a distortion of the Masetti story, which was transmitted and adapted to our geographical context, becoming a sort of legend.²³²

²²⁹ Interview with Fabio Correa, 2012.

²³⁰ A series of examples are provided by Andrea Cavalletti in “The Theatre of Sleepwalkers”, in Giacconi, Riccardo. *The Variational Status*, ed. Emanuele Guidi and Antoine Marchand (Milan: Humboldt Books, 2017). See also Cavalletti, Andrea. *Suggestione. Potenza e limiti del fascino politico* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011); Reyes, Carlos José. *Teatro y violencia en dos siglos de historia de Colombia* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 2014); Roca, Juan Manuel and Alvarez, Ivan Dario. *Diccionario anarquista de emergencia* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2008); Sciascia, Leonardo. *Il teatro della memoria* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981); Go, Gawon. “Amnesia and criminal responsibility”, in *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*, Volume 4, Issue 1, 1 April 2017, 194–204.

²³¹ De Marco, Laura. *Il soldato che disse no alla guerra. Storia dell'anarchico Augusto Masetti (1888-1966)* (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Edizioni Spartaco, 2003). My translation.

²³² Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar, 2012. My emphasis.

Due to the high number of similar violent acts against the police between 1910 and 1930 in Colombia, it is almost impossible to rule out the possibility that an ‘amnesiac’ killer had really existed. Thus, both hypotheses put forward by Ivan Alvarez Escobar seem equally acceptable.

If we do not lose sight of the resolution with which this chapter began, that is, to study a puppet character as a document, the hypothesis of Masetti having inspired the *espiritado* character appears as particularly significant. If, despite the lack of indisputable proof, one accepts to contemplate such hypothesis, one could argue that the Masetti character, by travelling to South America and subsequently being converted into a stock character for puppets, points to an alternative definition of ‘documents’. Obviously it cannot be considered a document in the standard meaning, since it does not exist as a stable object: the very nature of its substrate is transformed altogether (a real individual becomes a fictional character). However, it is neither simply a *variational* document (as in the Pianetti case), since its transformation depends not only on a plurality of variations, but also on a socio-geographical translation of context. The Masetti/*espiritado* dual character functions as a paradigm of what might be called a *travelling document*, that is, a document that exists only when considered in its drifting nature – an ‘intensity’ encompassing two states and the transition between the two.

Only studying a *travelling document* in its entire trajectory can one unearth information about the two systems of knowledge that it links, as well as about the connections and disconnections between them. If, as posited at the beginning, a document comes into being through the interaction between an object and a narrative, in the case of a *travelling document* the object needs to be regarded as a transformative being. Borrowing Bal’s words, one can state that a *travelling document* may be grasped “precisely *through its movement*”: after travelling, it “has received a meaning that overlaps neither with the old one [...] nor with the new one”.²³³

Research in and through art, like the project outlined here, is well suited for this kind of endeavour, since it is able not only to take into account the information about the two contexts inhabited by the *travelling document* in its dual nature (as a purely historical research would), but also to study, account for, and *use* the very forms (narrative and artistic) through which such information has travelled.

Following the working postulation that a puppet character could be studied as a document, I will now relate my further research into the *espiritado*, which led me to investigate a script for puppets I encountered in an archive, and to work on it extensively within my artistic practice.

²³³ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 39. My emphasis.

5. *El Diablo en el Pozo*

Where a Colombian puppet script, as well as my artistic works inspired by it, are described.

As already mentioned, the *espiritado* character appears in Colombian puppet shows mainly between 1920 and 1950. During my research, I was able to retrieve only one puppet script written before 1950 that featured the character.²³⁴ It is a puppet comedy in two acts, titled *El Diablo en el Pozo* ('The Devil in the Well'), probably written before 1930. The *espiritado* character is not explicitly named as such in the script, but after a careful analysis, little space for doubt is left.

El Diablo en el Pozo is a story full of comical gags, but whose overall tone is rather dark. It concerns the misadventure of a small village that gradually destroys itself, falling into a vortex of self-induced delirium. What follows is my synopsis of the script.

FIRST ACT

A resident of a small village, that everyone mockingly calls "*el espiritado*" [the mad one, or the possessed one] one day stutters that the night before he heard the voice of the devil coming from the well in his yard. The villagers make fun of him, thinking it is due to a hangover.

The next day, the *espiritado* says that the night before he heard the voice of the devil coming from the well, again. The reaction of his fellow villagers is the same: they make fun of him, calling him crazy.

The following morning, the *espiritado* stutters that the night before he heard the voice of the devil coming from the well yet again. The villagers, by now accustomed to the story, remain indifferent. But comes an old lady, desperate, who tells everyone that her dog has inexplicably died, and blames the devil in the well for this disgrace. The villagers welcome this explanation with disdain and scepticism, but the revelations uttered through prophecies increase rapidly. In the following days several people start to blame the devil in the well for a hole in the roof, a fall, a tree not flowering, the breaking of a wagon wheel, a hailstorm, the sting of an insect. The whole village is convinced of a negative presence, which they begin to blame for every little incident.

One day, the villagers decide to ask the *espiritado* to enter the well in order to speak with the devil. The *espiritado* is the only one who has heard the voice of the devil, and no one else dares to go down into the well. He reluctantly accepts the task. The villagers lower the *espiritado*, in a bucket, into the well, around which all the villagers have gathered. After not too long, he gives the signal asking to come back up. Once out, the villagers ask him questions. The *espiritado* stutters that he has spoken with the devil, and describes it incoherently.

²³⁴ I found a copy of the script in the Historical Archive of the Universidad del Valle, thanks to the research indications by Gerardo Potes.

- *Tenía cola?*
- *Sí, una cola larga, larga.*
- *Tenía cuernos?*
- *Sí, tenía cuernos.*
- *Cuántos cuernos tenía el diablo?*
- *Veinticuatro!*
- *Ay, qué diablo más exagerado!*

Then, the *espiritado* stutters that the devil will leave the village in peace only after receiving one thing as a sacrifice. However, to the pushy questions of his fellow citizens the *espiritado* confesses he cannot remember what the devil has asked for in sacrifice. The enraged villagers start beating him, to the point of leaving him lying dead on the ground.

SECOND ACT

The same evening, the villagers realize that, now that the *espiritado* is dead, no one else is able to communicate with the devil. Some try to shout into the well, but they get no response. Someone, then, starts to conjecture alone on the last words pronounced by the *espiritado*: by interpreting them in a certain way, he believes he has understood what the sacrifice required by the devil is. That same night, secretly, he destroys all the fruit of the village trees, confident his act will satisfy the devil's request. The next morning, the owners of the village trees realize that all the fruit has been destroyed. They blame the devil for such a misdeed. The real author of the action, scared of the villagers' reaction, is careful not to confess his act and his intentions.

The tree owners gather in secret to solve the devil problem. After a long conversation, they are confident to have understood the devil's request. Secretly, they sneak into the pig sheds and kill all the pigs of the village, without leaving a single one alive. When they return to their homes, the tree owners are sure they have satisfied the devil's demand.

In the morning, the pig owners realize their animals are all dead. They come together to discuss how to stop the evil acts of the devil in the well. They agree on a remedy to end the problem. At night, secretly, the pig owners set fire to all the fields around the village. When they return to their homes, they are sure they have satisfied the devil's demand.

The next morning, the villagers wake up amidst the scorched fields. By now nobody has any doubts about the presence of the devil, who inflicts a different calamity upon the village every night. All the villagers come together. They agree on the last sacrifice to be offered to the devil: "Not an animal of any herd must be left living; every grain of corn in the granaries must be destroyed." The decision is quickly executed in the same day. The villagers do not listen to arguments or tolerate opposition. There are some who do not believe in the devil, but nevertheless destroy every last particle of food. Many do so, in contrast to their reason.

In the following days the devil leaves the village in peace. But the villagers turn to deepest despair. They hunt for plants to eat, even for the roots of trees. Brothers fight against brothers for the last scraps of food. The old, the sick and the weak are left to their fates. Skeletons will be found later under the scorched trees: parents who starved to death with their children. Amongst the skeletons is that of the *espiritado*, lying next to the well. Inside the well remains the reflection of the moon.

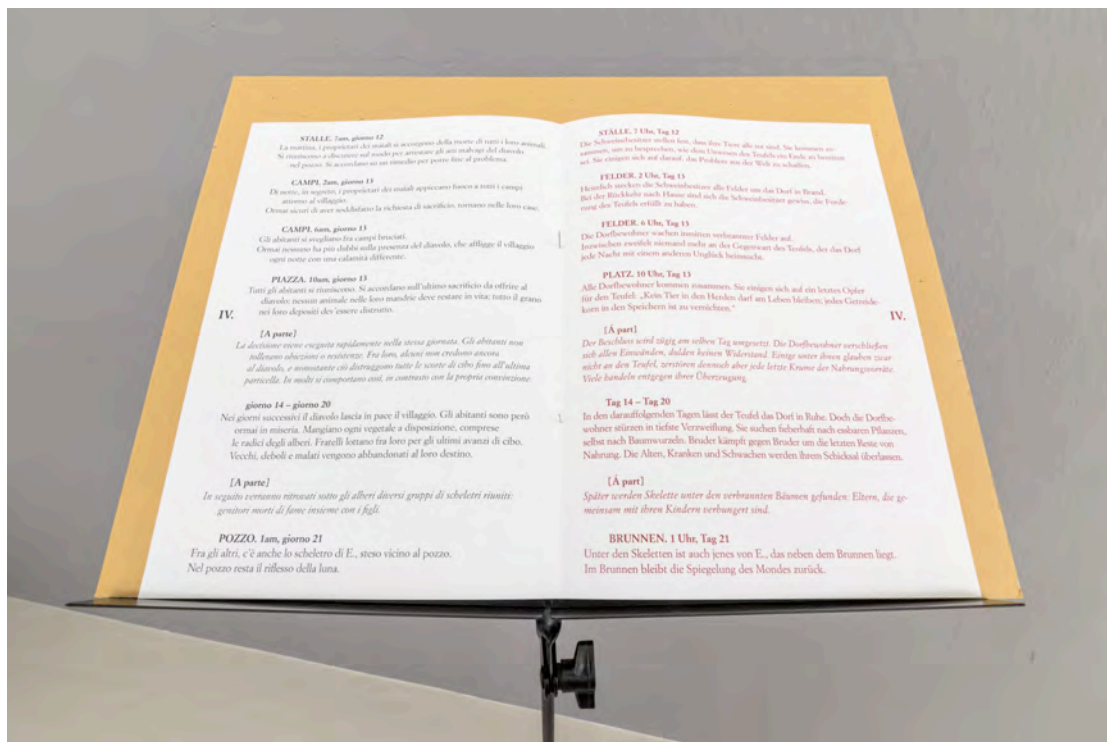
The puppet script was the main inspiration for my solo exhibition *The Variational Status*, which I presented in December 2016 at ar/ge kunst in Bolzano, and which travelled, in the following year, to the Metropolitan Arts Centre (Belfast, UK), Centrale Fies (Dro, Italy) and to FRAC Champagne-Ardenne (Reims, France).

The exhibition was conceived following two parallel directions:

- as a “cutaway view” of a puppet show, with its basic elements exposed and ‘exploded’ in space (puppet, background, script, props, advertising posters);
- as an overall narrative artifact, where each of the objects was *animated* as part of a single storytelling, distributed in space.

Every element of the exhibition could be regarded as a self-standing artwork in itself, but it acquired its full potential when it was experienced as part of a bigger artwork: a narrative *mise-en-scène*,²³⁵ which was the exhibition as a whole.

The exhibition featured a series of music stands, where segments of the *El Diablo en el Pozo* script were presented. The stands were spread all along the exhibition, serving as a visual punctuation for the other works on view and establishing a narrative thread throughout in the display. The choice to use music stands was made in order to evoke a potential “performability” of the script.



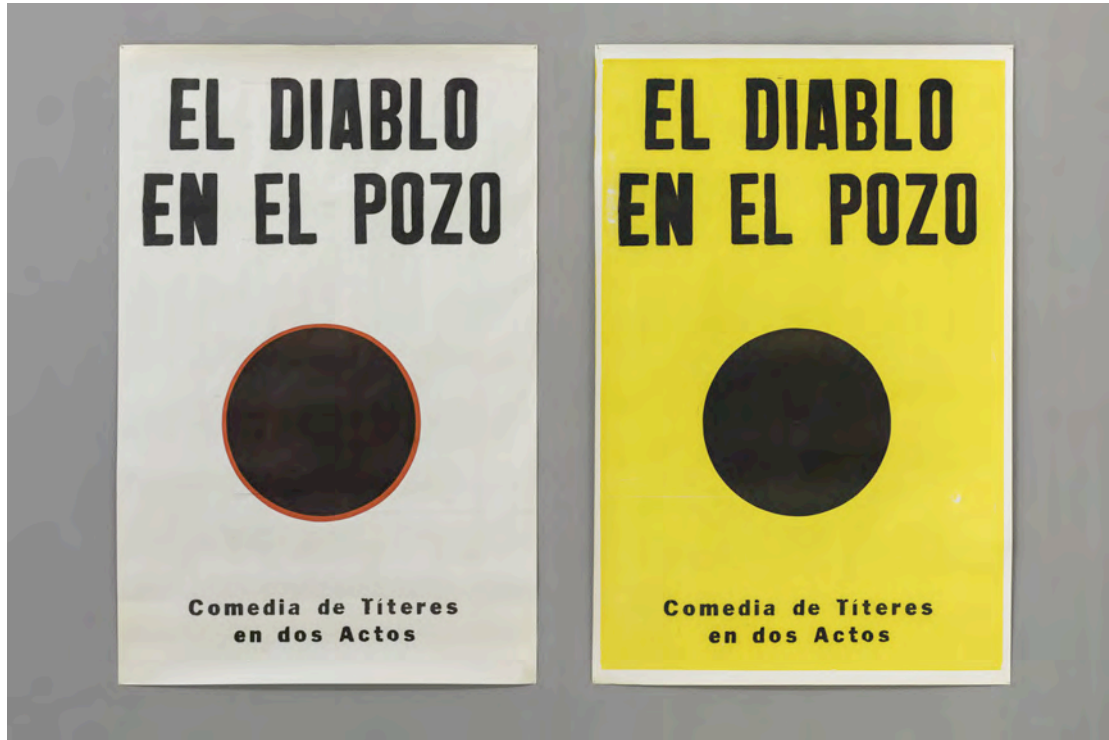
²³⁵ For a study on the concept of *mise-en-scène*, see Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), chapter 3.



Installation view, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims.

While in Colombia, together with the script, I found a photograph (probably from the 40s) of a poster advertising the *Diablo en el pozo* puppet show. I tried to reproduce the poster following as faithfully as possible the original design, using letterpress printing machines from the beginning of the 20th Century, in collaboration with the printing workshop “Carteles La Linterna Edigraphos”, in the city of Cali. In the

exhibition I presented two possible versions on the poster, with different colours. It was a practice-based example of a *variational* approach to documents: since the archive photograph was in black and white, both posters can be considered as equally valid hypotheses about the original. The caption line reads “Puppet Comedy in Two Acts”.



Installation view, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano.

I collaborated with the “Carteles La Linterna” printing workshop also on a series of other posters included in the exhibition, produced in collaboration with Colombian artist Herlyng Ferla. After having studied several examples of Colombian graphic design from the first half of the 20th Century, we produced a series of letterpress posters inspired by specific episodes from the *Diablo en el pozo* script. For instance, a poster is dedicated to *diabluras* (‘devilries’), that is, all the little accidents the villagers blame the *espiritado* for.



Another poster is dedicated to the death of the character (*La Muerte*, “The Death”); another is dedicated to the offerings the community makes to the devil in the well (*Ofrendas*, “Offers”); another to the epilogue, with the reflection of the moon in the well (*La Luna*, “The Moon”).

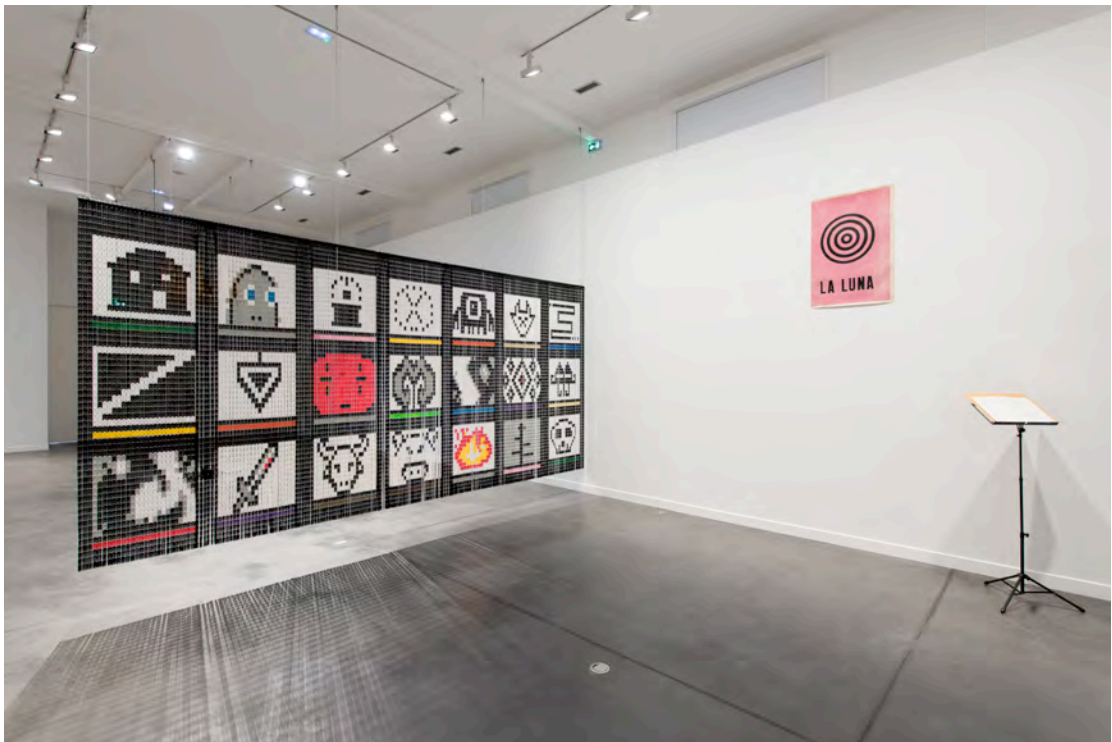
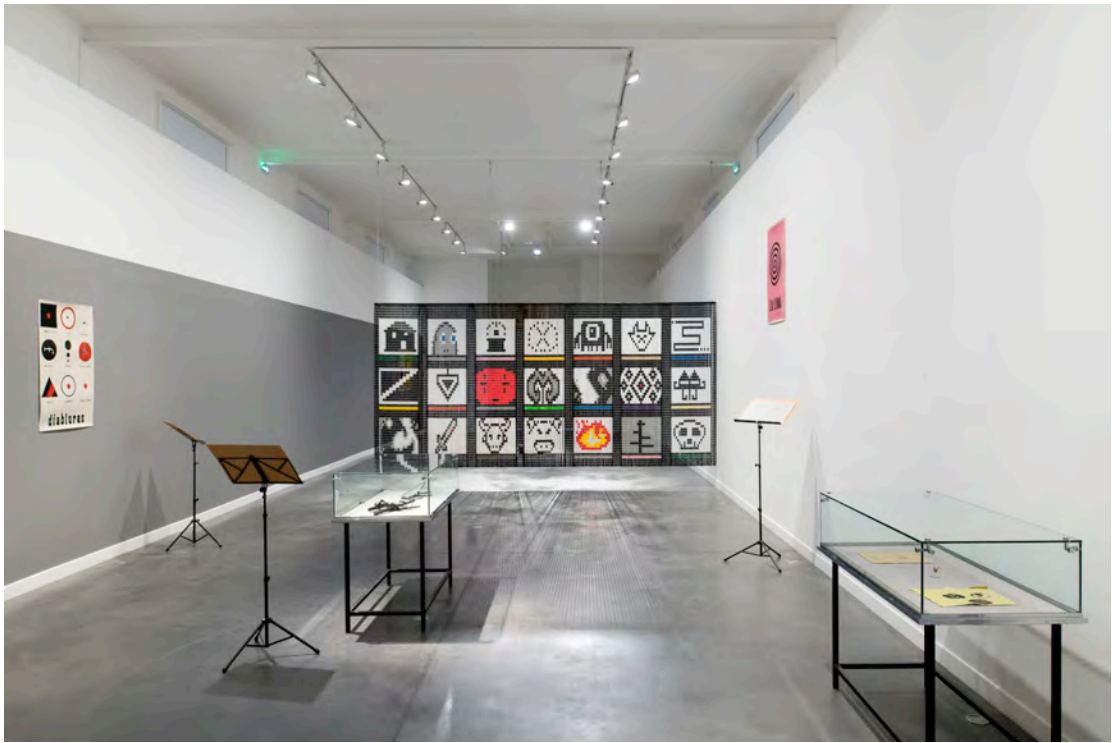




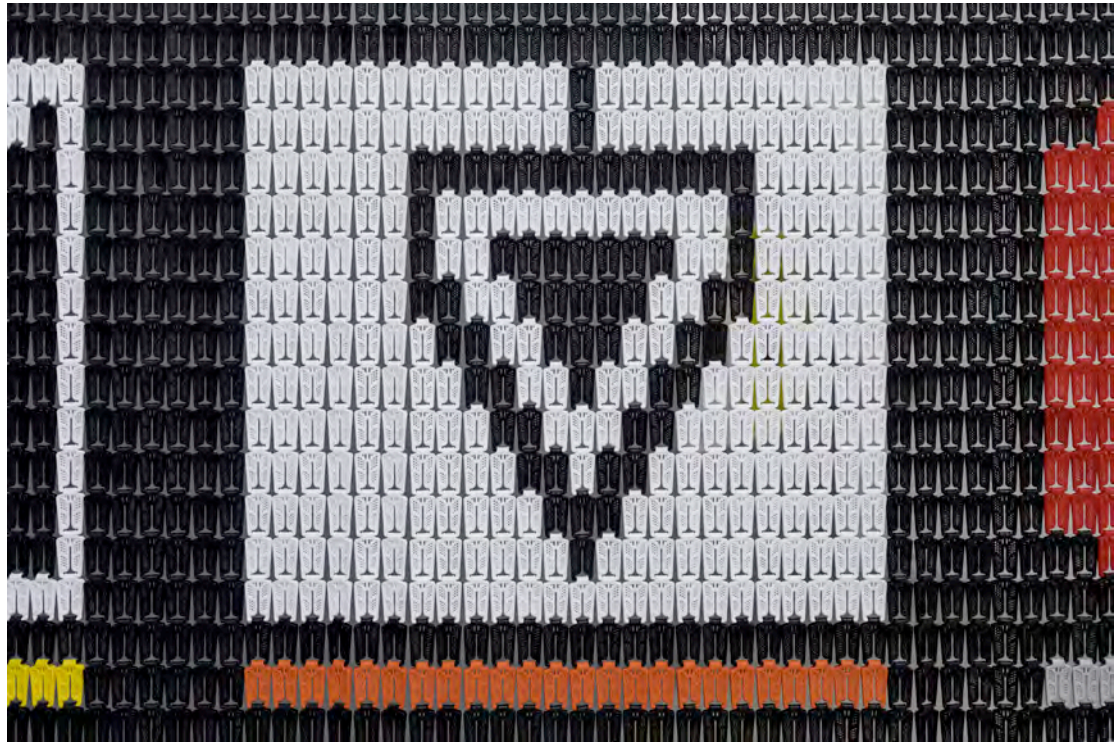
Installation view, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano.

The exhibition also included a large plastic curtain (5 x 2.20 m), functioning both as a storyboard for the different episodes of the *Diablo en el pozo* script, and as a visual reference to traditional backdrops used in puppetry.





Installation view, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims.



Each of the 21 squares composing the curtain epitomizes a specific passage in the puppet script, so the whole tapestry can be read as a graphic synopsis of the story. The design of some of the different squares was inspired by traditional indigenous textile patterns from Colombia, especially from Wayúu communities. I decided to refer to this ancient tradition since its iconography is very present in Colombian imagery, but also because Wayúu patterns have a symbolic function, as part of an archaic visual

language. When I conceived the curtain as a storyboard, a timeline/array of symbols, I was interested in referring to an existing symbology connected to the Colombian cultural context.

In the life of indigenous Wayúu communities, which live in the Colombian peninsula of La Guajira, weaving is much more than a cultural activity and heritage of their ancestors. Weaving is an art form conveying intelligence, wisdom and visual hermeneutics. Wayúu textiles are rich in traditional patterns, called *kaanás* (art of weaving-drawing). This ancestral technique goes back to pre-Columbian times. The traditional motifs are an expression of how the Wayúu interpret and abstract elements of their material world and their daily life, in order to compose stylized figures: among them are donkeys' genitals, turtles' shells, constellations of stars, cows' bowels, fishes' eyes. These are generally geometric compositions that are repeated as a fretwork all along the textiles.²³⁶

²³⁶ See, for example, Ramírez, Marta and Rojas, Héctor. *Arte Wayuu, Artesanías de Colombia* (Gobernación de la Guajira, Organización Indígena "Yanama", 1990); Barragán Pardo, Julio Marino. *Situación de la artesanía en las comunidades indígenas de la vertiente norte de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* (Artesanías de Colombia, 1990); "La mochila Wayúu, parte de la tradición de Colombia", in the Artesanías de Colombia website, March 2014, http://www.artesantiasdecolombia.com.co/PortalAC/C_noticias/la-mochila-wayu-parte-de-la-tradicion-de-colombia_5070 (accessed 12 March 2019).



Traditional Wayuu textiles

The curtain was also conceived as a reference to painted backdrops in traditional puppet shows, for example those used by puppeteer Giacomo Onofrio's family. Each backdrop was used to indicate a specific spatial setting, which the audience could immediately recognize, like in the following examples.



Puppeteer Giacomo Onofrio next to puppet backdrops from 1920s, belonging to his family

In order to give an example of how a puppet character can be studied as a document, I will make a thematic analysis of the *Diablo en el pozo* script. I will refer to Ginzburg's idea of a "knot" of history and fiction, as well as Taussig's notion of "fictocriticism", using them as cues and theoretical tools. Michal Taussig's deep and long-standing engagement with Colombian society, history and culture render his work an essential reference. In particular, I will refer to his study on the devil and animation in Colombia, both with regards to the puppet script, and to my artistic interventions about it.

6. Animating the devil

With an analysis of the puppet script El Diablo en el Pozo, referencing Michael Taussig's observations about animation, commodity fetishism and the figure of the devil in Colombia.

The devil is a central and complex figure in Colombian folk traditions. As Ivan Alvarez Escobar states, it can even be considered a proto-anarchist character:

The Church has persecuted puppeteers a lot, because of their irreverence and because they were accused of inciting fetishism. They invoked the adoration of certain figures, such as the devil, which is a classical character in puppet theatre. This is related to anarchism, since we can symbolically consider the devil as the first freethinker of humanity – the first who rebels against the established order envisaged by the Church.²³⁷

According to Taussig's book *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, the figure of the devil in Colombia has functioned as a catalyst for a culture clash, also embodying the capitalist economic system's impact on traditional peasant communities.

The concept of animation recurs throughout Taussig's essay, deploying a crucial role in his argument. It is discussed both in connection with the notion of "commodity fetishism", and with the figure of the devil as a means to respond to the newly established market economy in peasant communities. Taussig's study suggests that animation is intrinsically political, an insight that might help understand the connection between puppetry and anarchism. *El Diablo en el pozo* can be read in this perspective: how does animation act as a political concept?

Taussig opens his analysis of the figure of the devil in South America by disclosing his "strategy [...] to view certain fantastic and magical reactions to our nonfantastic reality as part of a critique of the modern mode of production".²³⁸ The Marxist notion

²³⁷ Interview with Ivan Alvarez Escobar, 2012.

²³⁸ Taussig, Michael. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 10.

of commodity fetishism is explained in connection to the idea of animation, as the following three excerpts suggest:

[W]e attribute to commodities a reality so substantial that they acquire the appearance of natural beings, so natural in fact that they appear to take on a life-force of their own.²³⁹

[T]he market system of modern capitalism engenders a marketing mentality in which people tend to be seen as commodities and commodities tend to be seen as *animated* entities that can dominate persons.²⁴⁰

The commodity assumes an autonomy apart from human social activities, and in transcending that activity the relations between commodities subjugate persons, who become dominated by a world of things – things that they themselves created.²⁴¹

A form of possession is outlined in Taussig's description of commodity fetishism, which can be connected to puppetry, and with the *Diablo en el pozo* script in particular: "The product of man's creative imagination enthalls the creator. Man becomes the passive offspring of a power that he himself creates, a power that is anthropomorphized and animated to the degree that man denies authorship of his own creation"²⁴².

The notion of animation is strictly associated to the way Marx introduced the concept of commodity fetishism: "the *animate* appearance of commodities provides testimony to the thing-like appearance of people"²⁴³. It is a two-faced process: while commodities appear as animate, man becomes the object that gets animated. What Marx describes, is nothing but a metaphorical form of puppetry, of self-animation by the hand of commodities, which man inaugurates by entering the capitalist economy. To provide a concrete example, Taussig writes about a peculiar kind of contract among Colombian peasants:

Male plantation workers sometimes make secret contracts with the devil in order to increase productivity, and hence their wage. Furthermore, it is believed that the individual who makes the contract is likely to die prematurely and in great pain. While alive, he is but a *puppet* in the hands of the devil, and the money obtained from such a contract is barren. [...] The contract is supposed to be made in the deepest secrecy, individually, and with the aid of a sorcerer. A small anthropomorphic figurine, referred to as a *muñeco* (doll), is prepared, usually from flour, and spells are cast.²⁴⁴

The devil contract is "an indictment of an economic system which forces men to barter their souls for the destructive powers of commodities."²⁴⁵ The devil is

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xii.

structurally connected to agricultural cycles; it is both a symbol of dissolution and decomposition, as well as of growth, transformation, and renewal.

In *El Diablo en el pozo*, just as in Taussig's analysis, the devil is the cause of a deformation in the natural cycle; through his latent, potential presence, the villagers embark on the endeavour of systematically destroying the totality of their natural resources. The presence – or, better, the latency – of the devil in the village seems to point exactly at the deformation of life rhythms in Colombian peasant communities caused by the imposition of the capitalist mode of production. Such communities “just beginning to experience capitalism [...] are anthropomorphizing their subjugation in the figure of the devil, redolent of the power of evil”²⁴⁶. This process is “not testimony to the force of tradition or the glorious mythology and ritual of the unadulterated and precapitalist past. Rather, it is the creative response to an enormously deep-seated conflict between use-value and exchange-value orientations”²⁴⁷.

The devil is a powerful and complex image, which mediates contrasting ways of viewing the human significance of economy. In *El Diablo en el pozo*, the devil does not so much determine specific actions; rather, it provides the patterns through which people create interpretations. Through the devil, the community seeks to explain something that logic by itself cannot explain, and that therefore requires a hermeneutical ability.

The devil can be identified as the catalyst for the double, two-way process that allows animation to take place. Its invisible presence ignites the process of self-suggestion and self-destruction in the village. It allows action to take place; it possesses all the characters and drives their deeds. The villagers locate him in the well, that is, in a space *below*, underneath the stage. And who inhabits the space below the stage, in hand puppetry? None other than the puppeteer: the animator. From this investigation, one can draw a working hypothesis: in the *Diablo en el pozo* script, the devil embodies animation itself.

I have addressed the complex, multi-faceted notion of animation in my artistic practice, especially in the creation of an automated marionette, inspired by the *espiritado* character in the *Diablo en el pozo* script.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

7. *Hypnic myoclonia*

With a description of the automatic marionette included in my exhibition The Variational Status.



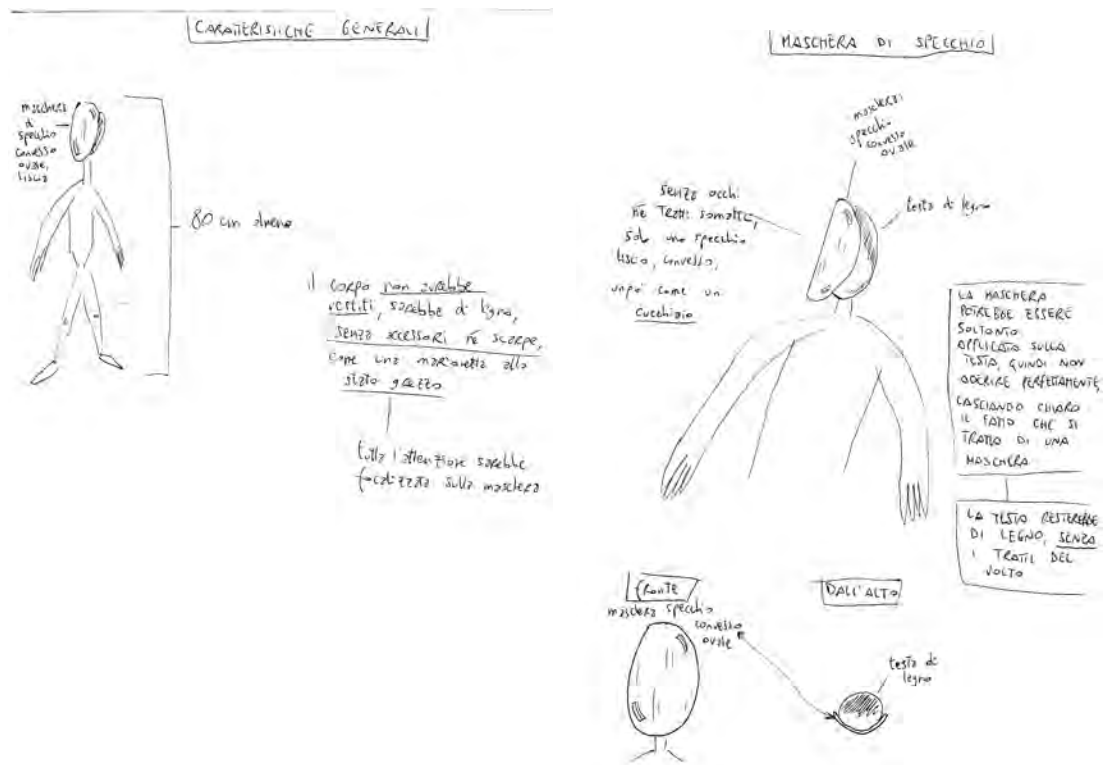
The first element visitors encountered in my exhibition *The Variational Status* was a wooden marionette, specifically produced in dialogue with the Milan-based Compagnia Marionettistica Carlo Colla & Figli, one of the most renowned marionette companies in the world, with nearly three centuries of activity to their name. Since there are almost no visual traces of the *espiritado*, I asked the Colla company to produce a puppet that could function as a variation on the character, playing on the very absence of documentation of it. Franco Citterio, the company's main artisan, decided to produce a *naked* marionette, with no clothes and its junctions left bare. The marionette was built from driftwood, so each limb was made with a different kind of wood, with dissimilar textures and shapes; that is why it looks slightly misshapen, not perfectly anthropomorphic in its proportions. The head, for instance, is an uncarved root, found near the Garda lake.



Marionette constructed by the Compagnia Marionettistica Carlo Colla & Figli for my exhibition *The Variational Status*, 2016.

The character's amnesia may be read as an indication of its proximity to the devil, as if it was constantly possessed, controlled by an outside force. In fact, the devil is often associated with the mirror (for instance in several, not only South American, legends), an object both magical and violent, but also a symbol and fetish of the colonizing power.²⁴⁸ Sometimes the devil is depicted without a face, or rather, with a mirror-face, which reflects what stands before it.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Gallaga, Emiliano and Blainey, Marc G. *Manufactured Light: Mirrors in the Mesoamerican Realm* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2016); Nordenskiöld, Erland. "Miroirs Convexes et Concaves en Amérique", in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, n. 18 (Paris: Société des Américanistes, 1926), 103–110; Rivera Dorado, Miguel. *Espejos de Poder: un aspecto de la civilización maya* (Madrid: Miraguano Ediciones, 2004).



Preparatory sketches for the construction of the marionette

So, for the *espiritado* marionette I intended to use a mirror mask, which I conceived as a reference to the character's amnesia and, ultimately, to its detachment from its own personality (the Latin "persona" is etymologically connected to the theatrical mask). But in the end I was amazed by the piece of driftwood that Franco Citterio used as the marionette's "non-head", and I decided to include the mirror mask in the exhibition only as an accessory, displayed in a vitrine. Next to it, I placed the control bar, the tool used by puppeteers to control the puppets' strings. The presence of the bare control bar, disconnected from any strings, suggested the absence of a human puppeteer, as well as that of any human presence in the animation process. Indeed, the marionette in the exhibition moved by itself, without the intervention of any puppeteers.



Mirror mask



Control bar



Installation view, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims.

At the entrance of the exposition, the marionette is abandoned on the floor. Animated by a mechanism that pulls its strings from above, it performs a series of movements inspired by *hypnic myoclonia*, the involuntary twitches that occur as a person is just about to fall asleep. The choreography (about 30 minutes, in loop) is composed of sudden spasms, tremors, seizures and slow adjustments, intertwined with long pauses of dormancy. My aim was to overturn the idea of a marionette exhibiting itself on a stage in front of an audience: in this case, the visitors were invited to watch a marionette while it simply sleeps, in the same way as they would watch an animal in a zoo.

I also intended to provoke a clash between an old-fashioned artifact, built by a long-standing puppet company following an ancient tradition, and a contemporary electronic mechanism connected to a software running on a computer. The software controlled the mechanism and determined the marionette's choreography. In this way, the animated object situates itself between the notions of puppet and marionette on the one hand, and those of automaton and robot on the other.

The choreography was conceived, in collaboration with set designer/inventor Paola Villani and writer/educator Carolina Valencia Caicedo, as a study on those movements that the human body performs unconsciously or unwillingly, without a mindful intention. I was interested in having the marionette embodying a series of gestures that could encompass – and somehow short-circuit – the (human) notion of possession and the (object-based) notion of animation. The piece, and the whole

exhibition, aimed to evoke a multi-layered constellation linking sleepwalking, puppetry and anarchism, along four main lines:

- the *espiritado* character's typical trait: his constant state of amnesia, of detachment from his own actions;
- Masetti's political amnesia, purportedly a possible origin of the Colombian character;
- the concept of puppetry as an empty space, as a two-way relationship between animator and object;
- the *El Diablo en el pozo* script, as a case of collective self-possession and, at the same time, as a meta-commentary on puppetry itself.

In order to exemplify how this puppet script may help to envisage an alternative definition of documents, I will engage in a brief analysis of its structural elements, where I will try to point out this narrative artifact may be viewed as a commentary on the concept of animation itself.



Installation view, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims.



Installation view, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano.

8. The empty space

With a series of further reflections on El Diablo en el Pozo, involving the notions of ecstasy, trance and self-destruction, with references to Eliade, Rouget and Canetti's works.

A series of excerpts from my conversations with Bogotan puppeteers might help clarify why the entire puppet script *El Diablo en el pozo* can be read as a commentary on possession, animation and puppetry itself.

Who controls who? Does the puppet control me – the puppeteer – or do I control it? There's a degree of confusion. Who controls who? These things happen with puppets. They carry me away. I create the puppet, but when it becomes alive...²⁴⁹

Sleepwalking is a different state of consciousness. You are not completely conscious. I feel that puppetry is like getting out of yourself in order to be what the puppet needs you to be. Many puppeteers told us that, when the play begins, they let themselves go, in order to be there for the puppet.²⁵⁰

The interesting thing about sleepwalking is that you give things the possibility to happen. It's an interstice, an empty space. It is neither the actor nor his physical presence: it's a potentiality. And that is where art is, in the space that needs to be filled. In puppetry, this space is filled both by the audience and by the puppeteer. There's an empty space – I think the puppet is an empty space.²⁵¹

The sleepwalker is the one who walks asleep, who acts asleep. The sleepwalker acts in their dreams. I think the puppet is, somehow, a dream of the human being.²⁵²

El Diablo en el Pozzo tells the story of a collective sleepwalking. A community is possessed by a force that is not only invisible, but that may not even be there. I associate such potential force to the aforementioned idea of an *empty space*, a crucial component of theatrical action famously formulated by Peter Brook. Similarly, an empty puppet stage is at the centre of a print that I have produced, based on an illustration found in the archives of the Biblioteca Departamental Jorge Garces Borrero, in Cali. The caption reads: “all is ready to represent”.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Interview with Mari Olarte: puppeteer and professor at the Universidad Nacional, Bogotá. August 2012. My translation.

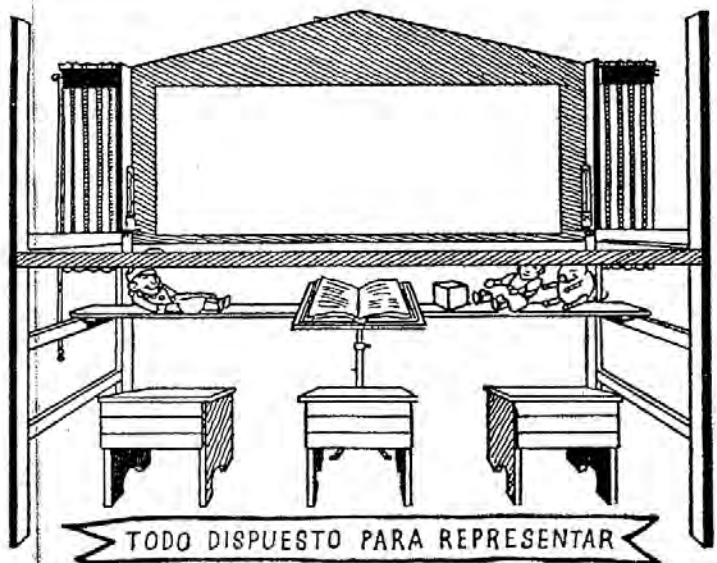
²⁵⁰ Interview with Liliana Martin: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group 'Materile'. August 2012. My translation.

²⁵¹ Interview with Mauricio Galeano: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group 'Materile'. August 2012. My translation.

²⁵² Interview with Carlos José Reyes, 2012.

²⁵³ Carlo Ginzburg published a study on the notion of representation, demonstrating the historical thread that links notions such as “imago” (wax mortuary mask), “kolossos” (funerary statue), “eidolos” (simulacrum of the king for funerary rites) and other concepts such as figure, person and mask. See Ginzburg, Carlo. “Representation”, in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 63.

2



TUDO DISPUESTO PARA REPRESENTAR



Installation view, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano.

Nonetheless, what Bogotan puppeteers mention is not a spatial entity, a physical space (like a stage). Rather, it is a latency, a clearing within oneself, a space left open as a possibility for an external intensity to take possession. For what regards the *espiritado* and his constant state of amnesia, as well as for what regards the self-induced possession affecting the villagers in *El Diablo en el Pozo*, the empty space that allows animation to take place is a potential for ecstasy, that is, for standing outside oneself.

In his well-known study on archaic techniques of ecstasy, Mircea Eliade clarifies that what is somewhat vaguely defined as “ecstasy” may take myriads of different forms, within totally different cultural contexts, and that the religious interpretation is only one among many.

As an experience, ecstasy is a non-historical phenomenon; it is a primordial phenomenon in the sense that it is coextensive with human nature. Only the religious interpretation given to ecstasy and the techniques designed to prepare it or facilitate it are historical data. That is to say, they are dependent on various cultural contexts, and they change in the course of history.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Eliade, Mircea. “Recent Works on Shamanism. A Review Article”, in *History of Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Summer, 1961), 152-186.

Nonetheless, if we follow Gilbert Rouget's attempt at clarifying Eliade's notions,²⁵⁵ the *espiritado*'s amnesiac state would not be defined as *ecstasy* (a state connected with memory and hallucinatory visions), but as *trance* (a state accompanied by amnesia and without hallucinatory visions).

In addition to the notions of ecstasy and trance, a series of religious concepts may be identified in the puppet script, in an inverted form:

- If a prophet is "one who utters divinely inspired revelations",²⁵⁶ the *espiritado* embodies an *anti-prophet*: a subject who claims to have been contacted by a supernatural power, and to serve as a medium through which such power addresses the community. He succeeds in convincing the village of the existence of such power, which, nonetheless, will never be seen at all in the play. His prophecy of a diabolical presence in the village is perfectly described as a self-fulfilling prophecy. To use Foucault's distinction, it is more of a *performative*, self-accomplishing utterance than an act of truth (a *parrhesia*)²⁵⁷.
- If an oracle is "a person through whom a deity is believed to speak",²⁵⁸ the *espiritado* embodies an *anti-oracle*. When he is asked to effectively serve as a medium to communicate with the devil by entering the well and transmitting the devil's request, his oracle response is completely empty, due to his amnesia. His fellow villagers kill him, enraged by the lack of a real response. His subsequent absence precludes any connections to the supernatural, which triggers the unending cascade of destruction in the second part of the play. His oracular function, in the end, is itself nothing else than an absence – the spectator is left wondering if the devil was ever there at all.

There are further questions and remarks that can be drawn from the study of this Colombian puppet character. The *espiritado* is characterized by his constant amnesia: he does not remember his actions, which is the spark for his comical gags. Such distinguishing trait would be, according to some sources, a reference to the real event that supposedly inspired the character: a man allegedly not remembering the murder he committed, as if possessed by an external intensity. The puppet-object itself resonates with the narrative of the ecstatic murderer: what is a puppet, if not a body manipulated by an external intensity? The medium is thus intrinsically shaped by the narrative it conveys. It is in this sense that the *espiritado* has been frequently denoted as a *meta-puppet* – that is, a commentary on animation, on puppetry itself.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Rouget, Gilbert. *La musique et la transe: Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), *passim*.

²⁵⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prophet> (accessed 30 March 2019).

²⁵⁷ Cfr Foucault, Michel. *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres : Cours au Collège de France (1982-1983)*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard; Seuil, 2008), 59-63.

²⁵⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oracle> (accessed 30 March 2019).

²⁵⁹ For example, in Alvarez, 1991 and in González Cajiao, 1985.

Following a similar line of reflection, we can also look at *El Diablo en el pozo* as a comment on animation. Following the death of the *espiritado* by the hand of the whole community halfway through the script, the very same community becomes just like him: possessed, animated by an external intensity. If a messiah is “a leader regarded as the saviour of a particular country, group, or cause”²⁶⁰, the *espiritado* embodies an *anti-messiah* (a third inversion of a religious concept), gifted with an upturned messianic power: through his death, he changes the state of worldly things and inaugurates another time, not of redemption, but of self-destruction. As a misinterpreted presage, his death prefigures the death of the whole village, which becomes *espiritado* itself, possessed by a power that it itself created. It is no coincidence that, throughout the whole play, the devil exercises its control without ever appearing, without ever showing a sign of its existence to the characters or to the audience. If a *deus ex machina* is “an unexpected power saving a seemingly hopeless situation”²⁶¹, the devil in the well acts as an *anti-deus ex machina*.

The collective self-destruction in *El Diablo en el pozo* can be viewed as a form of mass hysteria, not different from the self-destruction of the Xhosa people described in Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power* (1960). Historical episodes of mass suicide often occurred in defeated communities under the menace of being conquered or enslaved (they are called “Jauhar” in India, or “puputan” in Balinese culture). Reading *El Diablo en el pozo* as the story of the collective suicide of a community under menace of slavery, we are reminded of Taussig’s description of the devil as the embodiment of the new capitalist system in peasant Colombian communities. Following such premise, the puppet script can be read as a denunciation of capitalist production:

- a community destroys itself by trying to satisfy the devil, which embodies the new economic system;
- the collective hysteria of the community is a form of possession, of the kind of “animation” that Taussig links to commodity fetishism.

Within the framework that links animation, possession and the figure of the devil, a last hypothesis can be put forward, namely that puppets are used as a reaction to an oppressive power. Perhaps the reason why such art form is historically linked to political activism (the commune in the Teatro del Parque in Bogotá is just a recent example) is that puppets propose another relationship to objects, more complex and multifaceted than capitalist commodity fetishism. Puppets claim *another* form of animation; they suggest a liberation of the object from the domination of the economic system, implying a liberation of the individuals from the yoke of the market. This is what Taussig himself suggests when he quotes Marcuse: “All reification is a process of forgetting. Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance”.²⁶² Puppets open up a space; they bring about an

²⁶⁰ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/messiah> (accessed 30 March 2019).

²⁶¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deus%20ex%20machina> (accessed 30 March 2019).

²⁶² Taussig, Michael. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 154.

idling of the economic machine. And that is also how fiction may assume its full political vocation, that is, not simply to lie (what the term ‘fake news’ has come to indicate in the last years), but to challenge institutional violence and power, through the rich and complex tradition of storytelling.

The task of the storyteller who wishes to break the chain is to step up to the plate and come up with a new story, knowing full well that the chain can never be stopped and that sooner or later another story will displace yours. Such is the world of violence and memory, bound necessarily to fiction. [...] maybe, just maybe, the tension of this interval between your displacing story and the next story that will displace it can create a force field in which the violence can be transmuted into healing.²⁶³

After such a long journey – started from conversations with Bogotan puppeteers, through the encounter and the hypotheses of a mysterious origin to a stock character for puppets, until the analysis of a puppet script involving such character – how can the question opening this chapters be addressed? What does it entail to study a puppet character as a document?

9. Curtain falls

Where the attempt to study a puppet character as a document is evaluated, via closing remarks and open questions.

One of the most peculiar aspects of the research just presented is the way in which a series of different narratives and socio-political contexts are encompassed (or, perhaps more appropriately said, *animated*) by a simple puppet character. Such character acts as a catalyst, as the centre of a constellation linking puppetry, anarchism and animation.

This chapter began by proposing to test the idea that a puppet character may be studied, analysed, used as a document, based on the concept of *variational status*, exemplified in the previous chapters. More specifically, the notion of *travelling document* was subsequently put forward when talking about the hypothetical connection between the *espiritado* character and the story of Augusto Masetti. Suzanne Briet, in her definition, highlights the connections between the documentary performance of an object and *a* truth: according to her, a document is “any concrete or symbolic indication, preserved or recorded, for reconstructing or for proving a phenomenon, whether physical or mental”.²⁶⁴ The word “reconstructing” points directly to a narrative act, while the term “proving” points to the juridical production

²⁶³ Taussig, Michael. “Preface to the Thirtieth Anniversary Edition”, in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xiii.

²⁶⁴ Briet, Suzanne. *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* (Paris: Éditions documentaires, industrielles et techniques, 1951), 2.

of a truth: these are the two components of the current, of the ‘intensity’ that, when it invests an object, allows us to call it a document.

If a character is “the combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person or thing”,²⁶⁵ therefore constituting a set of differentiating marks, the research on the *espiritado* can be seen as an attempt to consider such marks as “indications for reconstructing a phenomenon”. In the case of a puppet character, obviously, such indications are not stable; they are intrinsically variable and adaptable to the different contexts the character inhabits and the different narratives it is involved in. Nonetheless, their overall set must remain “distinguishable” in order for the character to endure and, from this research’s viewpoint, to be studied as a document. This chapter aimed to be an indication of the possibility to trail a pre-political tension through the study of a *travelling document*, rather than through macro-historiographical constructions.

The amnesia of the *espiritado* points to the impossibility to tie a subject to its actions, which in turn precludes the possibility of a *confession*, a traditionally religious *dispositif*.²⁶⁶ Several Bogotan puppeteers recall the utilization of puppets as tools for political messages during the 1970s, insofar as they were granted more possibility to speak compared to human actors. A striking evidence of the connection between puppetry and politics is the fact that most of the Bogotan puppeteers I encountered come from an anarchist background. Apart from puppet theatre, the story of the amnesiac assassin was transmitted among anarchist movements as a symbol for a “perfectly anarchist act”. Such ‘ecstatic’ murder claims *irresponsibility*; it manages to dismantle any guilt dynamics essential to any ideological claims. By not remembering having accomplished his killing, the murderer detaches himself from his actions, as if instituting the model for a pre-political act situated outside any framework of responsibility.

Such questions resonate with those aroused by the study of Italian ‘amnesiac’ anarchist Augusto Masetti, whose salient similarities with the *espiritado* story have been highlighted. Even in Masetti’s case, the impossibility of a confession put the State power in check, depriving it of the possibility to produce a truth, to endorse an official narrative. Such impossibility, in turn, resonates with the escape of Simone Pianetti, which no institution of power could provide any official version of. It does not surprise, then, that for these three case studies, one has to rely on unofficial, marginal modalities of transmission, such as puppets, street storytellers, anarchist pamphlets, etc. These narrative and artistic artifacts call for a definition of documents no longer based on official institutions of power, such as governments, courtrooms or

²⁶⁵ *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, 12th Edition. Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2014.

²⁶⁶ This topic was tackled in the previous chapter. See, for example, Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France (1975-1976)*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), as well as Foucault, Michel. *On The Government Of The Living. Lectures at the Collège de France (1979–1980)*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

academies, but instead based on their intrinsic *variability*. A *variational document* does not aim to provide a stable, certified, neutralized, exclusive truth. And yet, *variational documents* act, even if outside of any official validating procedure: they still testify of their existence and of their resilient, mysterious and irrepressible drive to convey a story.

Epilogue

Pure Documents

1.

Throughout this dissertation, I have adopted a definition of ‘documents’ based on the interaction between an object and a narrative. An object (a contract, a photograph, a fingerprint, a digital record, etc.) is animated by a narrative ‘intensity’ (an alibi to prove in a courtroom, the proof of a purchase in a store, etc.): the existence of documents is entirely defined by such ‘use’.²⁶⁷

If we accept this definition based on interaction, we may try to envision *liminal* examples of documents. Liminal examples may be conceived within a hypothetical situation, where one of the terms of the interaction (‘object’ or ‘narrative’) is absent, yet it keeps the interaction alive *through its absence*. So, considering the two polar opposites, two different kinds of liminal examples may be envisaged:

1. a document consisting of a narrative investing an *absent* object;
2. a document consisting of an object invested by an *absent* narrative.

Let us envision the first case. One could try to visualize it as a piece of legal evidence devoid of any material form, unembodied in any tangible object. Such a document would be constituted by a narrative investing an object that *is not there*, but whose presence still affirms itself through its absence. A similar paradox may be better grasped through an example.

William Faulkner published *Smoke* in 1932. The short story relates the homicides of both Anselm Holland and Judge Dukinfield, the magistrate charged with validating Holland’s will. Granby Dodge, a cousin of Holland’s sons, ultimately is revealed to be the culprit in this tortuous mystery. He had engaged a “thug” from Memphis to kill Anselm, and intended to murder his son Virginius as well in order to take control of the family farm. During the inquest, prosecuting attorney Gavin Stevens establishes that the killer smoked an unfamiliar and easily identifiable brand of cigarette right after having shot Judge Dukinfield. The judge’s servant recalls sniffing the smoke when he discovered the body, and he also remembers closing the small metal box that the judge used as a paperweight when it “jumped off the table” in the room filled with smoke. During the trial, investigator Stevens argues that, if his version is true, the metal box will still contain that specific smoke. Dodge, the cousin, gives himself away when he starts up and flaps at the fading smoke that emerges from the box when Stevens opens it. Stevens then acknowledges in front of the narrator and other

²⁶⁷ Such use-based definition coincides, in part, with Ferraris’ concept of ‘social objects’, which includes documents *and* artworks. As stated above, social objects “exist only in so far as there are men thinking that they exist”. Ferraris, Maurizio. “Social Ontology and Documentality”, 84.

members of the jury, that he had manufactured the smoke in the box – that is, the supposed evidence – in order to trigger a confession.

Faulkner's story presents a liminal case of a judicial procedure. A puff of smoke used as evidence produces a powerful example of the literally evanescent condition of the document. What is considered a document is almost a pure performance. As the smoke vanishes, the piece of evidence loses its material substrate altogether. It serves its purpose – it performs – and then it disappears forever, without leaving a single physical trace. Nonetheless, as a legal bluff, as a trick, it works perfectly. The manufactured evidence activates the production of truth in the judicial theatre supposed to host it: the smoke triggers a public, legal confession.

Using the words of literary scholar Michael Lahey,

An issue that immediately arises out of the story is the presentation of law and legal technique as dubiously self-legitimizing, self-authorizing. As a provisional fiction attempting to establish first itself as authority and then what it hopes to explore as factual, objective, the logical product of considered procedures, legal technique in *Smoke* exposes itself by exposing the difference between law and ethics, practice and aim.²⁶⁸

Smoke provides with the paradigm of a 'pure document': a piece of evidence that performs only when it is considered – *used* – as such. Evidence, in this case, is only smoke: it is nothing more than the fact itself of its contemplation. As a document, Faulkner's smoke is almost a purely narrative intensity; it is virtually *nothing more than its performance* – its use. And, once used, it disappears forever and it is nowhere to exist again. In this sense, it can be properly considered a liminal example of documents: an ephemeral animation of a fading entity. In Lahey's words:

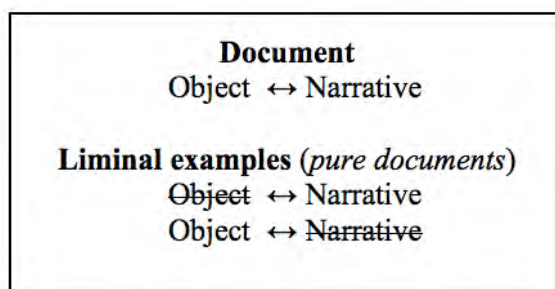
The greatest test of evidence is to verify whether in fact there is any. To conduct before trial such a test of the possibility of smoke in a sealed brass box is to destroy immediately the evidence, or its *possibility*, by *looking*. [...] The exploration of how justice can or cannot achieve itself – or how justly justice is pursued – and how, possibly, the legal system seems capable of collapsing in on itself to achieve its ends, or, conversely, to produce itself in order to produce its by-products of verdict and seeming catharsis, are, I think, the story's fascinating concerns.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Lahey, Michael E. "Trying Emotions: Unpredictable Justice in Faulkner's 'Smoke' and 'Tomorrow'", in *Mississippi Quarterly* n. 46, iii, Summer 1993, 447-462, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Trying+emotions%3A+unpredictable+justice+in+Faulkner's+%22Smoke%22+and...-a014696161> (accessed 29 March 2019)

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

2.

Let us now consider the other pole of the interaction. The idea of a ‘pure document’ may be tackled from the reverse perspective: not as a narrative investing an absent object (as in *Smoke*), but as an object that acts as a document even in the absence of any narratives to convey, prove or validate.



But how can an object act – be used – as a document if it has *nothing to document*? How can the narrative intensity that defines a document continue to flow, in the absence of a story to invest the object with? These questions, which may appear as pure speculation, have operated as a guiding light for the ‘research in and through art’ that I have tried to outline in this dissertation. My practical investigation into an alternative, variational, non-institutional use of documents ultimately led me to a working hypothesis, which I will attempt to sketch here.

In his *Zur Kritik der Gewalt*, Walter Benjamin refers to violence as “a ‘pure means,’ namely, a means that appears as such, only insofar as it emancipates itself from every relation to an end. Violence as pure means is never a means with regard to an end: it is attested only as exposition and destitution of the relationship between violence and juridical order, between means and end.”²⁷⁰

Considering the structural connection between documents and power highlighted in the previous chapters, we may regard a document as a ‘means to an end’. In its standard mode of existence, a document is defined precisely by its use, that is, by the fact that it is invested with a narrative aimed at validating a specific truth: the ‘end’ to which it is ‘means’. However, following Benjamin’s line of thinking, could one conceive a document as “a means that, while remaining such, has been emancipated

²⁷⁰ Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV*, 2 trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 269.

from the relation with an end”²⁷¹ As a means that “shows itself as such in the very act in which it interrupts and suspends its relation to the end”²⁷²

Coming back to the aforementioned definition of documents by Suzanne Briet (“any concrete or symbolic indication, preserved or recorded, for reconstructing or for proving a phenomenon, whether physical or mental”),²⁷³ one could propose the paradoxical hypothesis of a document that does not have anything to reconstruct or prove. How to imagine a document that *does not document* anything? How to imagine a document in the absence of any narrative to prove, any hypothesis to validate, any truth to confirm? What would remain of such a document?

One option would be to describe such *document of nothing* with the same words used by Scholem in a well-known letter to Benjamin: “it does not signify, yet still affirms itself by the fact that it is in force”²⁷⁴. A document is invested by an *absent* narrative, and yet it still affirms itself as “in force” in its documentary mode – it still affirms its narrative vocation to document, albeit devoid of any narrative to convey or to document. Even if devoid of anything to document, an object would still carry an ineradicable narrative core – an intrinsic vocation to be used as a narrative artifact.

Still, such definitions keep seeming paradoxical: how could an object act as a document if it does not have anything to document? I will propose an answer. It does so through a *gesture*. Just like in dance, when

the movements usually directed at a certain goal are repeated and exhibited as such – that is, as means – without there being any more connection to their presumed end and, in this way, they acquire a new and unexpected efficacy, [...] to the extent that [they] expose and render inoperative [their] relation to that purposiveness.²⁷⁵

If Agamben defines a gesture as a “special activity through the neutralization of the works to which it is linked as means (the creation and conservation of law for pure violence, quotidian movements directed at an end in the case of dance)”²⁷⁶, we may

²⁷¹ Agamben, Giorgio. *Karman. A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 81.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷³ Briet, Suzanne. *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*, Éditions documentaires, industrielles et techniques, Paris, 1951.

²⁷⁴ Benjamin, Walter and Scholem, Gershom. *Briefwechsel 1933-40* (Frankfurt am Main 1988), 163. “In a letter to Benjamin dated September 20, 1934, Gerschom Scholem defines the relation to law described in Kafka’s Trial as “the Nothing of Revelation” (*Nichts der Offenbarung*), intending this expression to name “a stage in which revelation does not signify [*bedeuten*], yet still affirms itself by the fact that it is in force. Where the wealth of significance is gone and what appears, reduced, so to speak, to the zero point of its own content, still does not disappear (and Revelation is something that appears), there the Nothing appears” (Benjamin and Scholem, *Briefwechsel*, 163). According to Scholem, a law that finds itself in such a condition is not absent but rather appears in the form of its unrealizability. “The students of whom you speak,” he objects to his friend, “are not students who have lost the Scripture ... but students who cannot decipher it” (*ibid.*, 147).” Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 34-35.

²⁷⁵ Agamben, Giorgio. *Karman. A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 81-82.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

try to conceive a *pure document* as an object whose documentary purpose (to reconstruct or prove a phenomenon) is suspended, “exposed” and “rendered inoperative”. A *pure document*, as a gesture, is “an activity or a potential that consists in deactivating human works and rendering them inoperative, and in this way, it opens them to a new, possible use.”²⁷⁷

3.

In this dissertation, ‘research in and through art’ has been regarded as one possible way to open up and envision such a ‘new use’ for documents. This research mode is capable of producing a resonance between the concepts of ‘artwork’ and ‘document’: the hypothesis of *pure documents*, seemingly so remote and paradoxical, may find a possible actualization right in that resonance. In the perspective of ‘research in and through art’, an object (for instance, a narrative artifact like a puppet play) may exist (and be used) at the same time as an artwork and as a document. The two modes of existence co-inhere in it. In order to clarify how I attempted to explore this resonance of artworks and documents within my artistic practice, I will refer to three pieces I have described before.

- I. The re-enactment of the puppet play about Simone Pianetti (*Il Vendicatore*), performed by Giacomo Onofrio in the village square where Pianetti killed some of his victims, was regarded by me and Andrea Morbio as the paramount occasion in which a document and an artwork could be embodied in the very same narrative artifact (the puppet play). This artifact, moreover, was to be presented in the very same location where the events it narrated (the killings) took place, about a century before. So, it seemed like a perfect occasion for a reflection on the status of documents, carried out through an artistic practice.

However, that re-enactment did not live up to our big expectations. It did not trigger any major reaction from the (scarce) local audience; it was not the occasion for a reconciliation – or a conflict – between past and present mindsets. It ended up being perceived ‘only’ as an artwork: a simple puppet show, devoid of the theoretical superstructure we wanted to impose on it.

- II. The performative workshops I organized in France and Italy, based on documents and records connected to the Augusto Masetti case, and aimed at enacting a trial that never took place, worked on multiple

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

levels. First, they functioned as an occasion to read, activate, *use* documents from the past in a way that they had never been used, therefore hinting at – and reflecting upon – their unexpressed political potentiality.

Second, the collective and unrehearsed performances that the workshop participants presented, functioned not only as a reflection on documents and historical records, not only as educational gatherings, but as live performances, artworks in their own right – narrating past events but also embodying and animating their traces in the here and now. For me, these performances were an example of the potential documents might express when used within an artistic practice, a use alternative to that of official, institutional validation procedures.

- III. The *The Variational Status* solo exhibition, which I presented in Bolzano and Reims in 2016-2017, was conceived in order to produce resonances between the concepts of ‘artwork’ and ‘document’. Such an attempt received a mixed reception. As an exhibition to be experienced alone, or in small groups, I received disparate feedbacks from different visitors. Some would tell me that they could follow the display as if it was a performance, in which artworks and documents were ceaselessly moving on and off the stage in a continuous narrative path. Some visitors told me that the exhibition engaged them insofar as it questioned the boundaries between artwork and document, which jointly inhabited the same narrative platform, throughout the exhibition space. Such comments were in line with my claim that art has the potentiality to propose an alternative use for documents: the comments described such a use. They also confirmed that my will to construct an exhibition as an overall narrative artifact, a ‘cutaway view’ of a puppet show exploded in space, actually went through.

However, other visitors told me that their experience of the exhibition was that of a disparate array of objects (puppets, props, reproductions of books, photographs, posters, etc.) that did not relate to each other very much, apart from a superficial aesthetic kinship and a common connection to a vague idea of ‘animation’. To them, the different objects did not come together as a single narrative artifact, but were displayed in a conceptual grey zone between ‘artwork’ and ‘non-artwork’, therefore rendering their visit an uncomfortable and unsatisfying experience. To them, the displayed objects were not situated in an aesthetic or conceptual framework that would allow them to be ‘read’ in a clear way.

I believe that all of these experiences were an essential part of the research project described in this dissertation. More than to propose a one-size-fits-all demonstration of the research hypotheses I started with, I believe that ‘research in and through art’ has the potentiality to present different results to different experiments, accounting for both attainments and failures – as it should be when one deals with a study anchored in practice, and even more, in an artistic practice.

Addenda

- Endplay. A recapitulation
- The Theatre of Sleepwalkers. Conversation with Andrea Cavalletti
- Glossary

Endplay²⁷⁸

A recapitulation

Are artworks and documents the same thing, according to you? Or, if they are not, can you elaborate on the relationship between them?

Both artworks and documents may be studied as situational and relational modes of existence of objects, insofar as both are based on the use a community makes of them. Both in artworks and in documents, the object is suspended from its everyday use in order to be contemplated, involved in an *other* use. If the status of the artwork and that of the document really share such a mode of existence, research in and through art is able to address the two concepts through an approach that encompasses both.

An artwork, or a document, is not a thing substantial or pre-established, but corresponds completely with the use that one makes of it. Both documents and artworks may be regarded as ‘intensities’, as *modes* of existence of objects – rather than objects ‘in themselves’. Their definition is not therefore ontological, but performative: they need to be *used, animated* in a specific way in order to exist as such.

In my practice, the concepts of ‘use’ and ‘animation’ proved effective not only to study ‘documents’ and ‘artworks’ separately, but also to put forward a *variational mode*, which encompasses both. Through the concept of a *variational mode* I have referred to narrative artifacts capable of acting *both* as artworks and as documents – puppet shows, songs, illustrations, tales, etc.

In my cycle on Simone Pianetti, for instance, the idea of an interchangeability of positions can be applied to documents and artworks. The story of the murderer from Camerata Cornello was not transmitted through official, authenticated documents but, rather, through artistic forms such as flyers or performances by *burattinai* or *cantastorie*. In this specific case, the concepts of ‘document’ and ‘artwork’ are two modes of existence of the very same objects, according to the use one makes of them. I have tried to demonstrate how such *variational* artifacts would be better described – through a bipolar model – as *both* documents and artworks since, in them, the two modes co-exist. Rather than through the categories of history, anthropology or legal studies, ‘research in and through art’ constitutes a powerful way to address this ‘knot’ of documents and artworks, by developing a theoretical and practical approach, able to encompass the concepts of ‘artwork’ and ‘document’, and *use* them, *practice* them at the same time.

²⁷⁸ In order to conclude this dissertation, I would like to answer some questions I have been asked by my supervisors towards the end of the writing process. I will do so by recapitulating some of the points I have addressed throughout the text.

About the notion of narrative: this notion presupposes the perspective of one particular narrator. However, you argue for plural perspectives. Can you explain that?

My practice, as that of a *metteur en scene*,²⁷⁹ includes staging multiple narrations (variations) of a specific fact, for example Pianetti's massacre, for which there is no single, official version. I do not think that the notion of narrative necessarily presupposes a single narrator; rather, I believe that, by studying stories and their modalities of transmission over time, one has to account for multiple variations, multiple ways of telling the same story by different narrators, in different formats, to different audiences.

For example, Pianetti's trial was conducted *in absentia*, since the authorities never caught him. So, they did not provide a single, certified version about his escape. On the other hand, his story was transmitted through unofficial narrative formats, such as *burattini*, *cantastorie* and *fogli volanti*. Those artifacts were able to tell Pianetti's story through intrinsically multiple perspectives, without affirming any official and validated truth, but only *variations*. In my cycle of works on Pianetti, I aimed at presenting his story without hiding the manifold, contradictory narrations through which it had been transmitted over time. As an artist, I aimed to *mettre en scene* – to stage, re-enact, (re)perform – those different narrations, without choosing a single perspective. And I believe that 'research in and through art', compared to other disciplines, has a wider spectrum of potentialities to explore this multiplicity, this openness.

Are you implying that art works narrate something (something else than themselves)?

If we refer to formats as films, puppet shows or radio-documentaries, this may seem evident. But even exhibitions may be conceived, in their entirety, as narrative artifacts, which is what I have tried to do in my solo show *The Variational Status*. However, I am not stating that every artwork is a narrative artifact: clearly, not all art can be described as narrative. The artworks I included in this dissertation, however, were presented and studied in relation to their narrative potential.

²⁷⁹ For a study on the concept of *mise-en-scène*, I remind again to Mieke Bal's study in chapter 3 of *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

I have tried to address this connection between artworks and narrative potential through the notion of a *variational mode*. In cases such as Onofrio's puppet play *Il Vendicatore*, the narrative borne by the artwork (Pianetti's story) and the artwork itself (the puppet play) are inseparable, and therefore are to be studied as a single organism – what I called a *variational document*. A *variational mode* emerges, then, when a document refers to an inaccessible truth and, yet, still documents of its relational, narrative function, without excluding other possible variations, without proposing itself as the sole, official bearer of a single truth.

I believe that the concept of a *variational mode* of documents is important to reflect upon today also from a political perspective, since it sheds light on the use-based character of documents, always open to the potentiality of being revoked, debarred, misused, abused or disused.

An aesthetic reflection on your artistic practice: why, and how are your artworks used in an exhibition?

My exhibition *The Variational Status* was conceived:

- as a 'cutaway view' of a puppet show, with its basic elements exposed and 'exploded' in space (puppet, background, script, props, advertising posters);
- as an overall narrative artifact, where each of the objects was *animated* as part of a single storytelling, distributed in space.

Every element in the exhibition could be regarded as a self-standing artwork in itself, but it acquired its full potential when it was experienced as part of a bigger artwork: a narrative *mise-en scène*, constituted by the exhibition as a whole.

So, to answer the question, my artworks are used to tell stories, and to investigate on the conditions of existence and transmission of stories. In my practice the collection of information, the production and presentation of artworks, the delineation of new concepts are all intertwined. The narrative formats I study (puppets, *cantastorie*, flyers, etc.) are also the very same formats I use in my artworks. That is why I like to think of my artworks as aimed towards what Jan Verwoert calls "a *performative critique*, that is, [...] a practice which criticizes the logic of a medium in the process of using it".²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Verwoert, Jan. "Research and Display. Transformations of the Documentary Practice in Recent Art", in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, ed. Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 204.

What makes you excited in your artistic practice?

I believe that re-enacting, rather than reading or interpreting documents, is a powerful method to identify and study their 'performative' dimension. In and through an artistic practice, I seek to 'revive' documents, rather than simply using them as sources of information. By animating them, blowing new life into them, one has the chance to see these narrative artifacts again *at work*, instead of studying them as dead, inert objects.

So, what makes me excited in my artistic practice? To tell stories, especially if they regard facts for which there is no official version, no certified truth. And to study documents, especially exploring their (often unexpressed) narrative and political potential.

The Theatre of Sleepwalkers

Andrea Cavalletti²⁸¹ in conversation with Riccardo Giacconi

RG: On the morning of 30 October 1911, while in the courtyard of the Cialdini barracks in Bologna, waiting to leave for the war in Libya, the soldier Augusto Masetti shot his rifle at Lieutenant Colonel Stroppa, wounding him in the shoulder. On being interrogated, Masetti would say he had no recollection of the incident, and that for this reason he could not repent. I would like to start off by talking about your book, *Suggestione* (Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2011), and in particular about this episode, linked to the themes of the book, yet which you actually decided to omit.

AC: Actually, this was the age of amnesia, depersonalisations and suggestion. Around the turn of the 20th century, the cases of double personalities escalated, as well as women or men disappearing or, with no memories of themselves, starting a new life elsewhere. The episode of the anarchist Masetti is part of the panorama, and thus it has roots that go far back. Just as the word ‘suggestion’ itself at the time stood for that which at the end of the 18th century was called ‘mesmerism’ or ‘animal magnetism’, likewise in the loss and doubling of the personality, the old story of possession re-emerged. That said, rather than insisting on the issue of responsibility, I believe it to be more important to highlight the political component of suggestive possession, and its unforeseeableness.

RG: It would appear that in Colombia, a case similar to that of Masetti may have given rise to a marionette figure, known as *el espiritado*. During a series of interviews that I carried out, many of the puppeteers of Bogotá told me that in order to be a good puppeteer, you have to let yourself go to the object that you’re bringing to life. This is a kind of two-way possession: it’s also the object that is animating you. It seems to be a similar idea to a passage found in your book when you write: “The voice of the character is undetermined in that of the magnetiser. Yet at the same time, even the influence of the magnetiser is lost in the genius of the magnetised. A perfect co-existence is created, an unsurpassable duplicity and a total indeterminacy.” I would like you to talk about this idea of a power which, while it acts, must also in some way let itself go. You define it as the paradigm of the uncertainty of power.

²⁸¹ Andrea Cavalletti is Professor of Aesthetics and Contemporary Literature at the IUAV University of Venice. He has published essays on literature, philosophy, political philosophy and urbanism.

AC: Yes, I also draw on the Hegelian theory of the ‘double genius’, according to which activity and passivity are indeterminate. But let us go one step at a time: the great psychiatrist Hippolyte Bernheim stated that everything is suggestion. Then Freud raised his objections: if suggestion is the explanation for everything, what is it that explains suggestion? This wry rhetorical question introduces the need for a new theory: that of psychoanalysis of course. Instead, my book attempts to take Bernheim’s motto seriously: everything really is suggestion, and it is so in the biopolitical/securitarian context that still governs us. The biopolitical model is in fact historically and logically evocative, and this is because ultimately it is not based on anything: or rather, it is based on an uncertainty or a constitutive indeterminacy.

Now, the interpretation of ‘animal magnetism’ that Hegel offers in a few dense pages of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (which Jean-Luc Nancy had already dealt with from a different point of view) highlights this aspect. What’s more, these pages are bound together by very close relationships (and by a perfect terminological correspondence) to those renowned ones on the dialectics between the servant and the master. Hence, Hegel illustrates the relationship between the magnetiser and the magnetised starting from the immediate, ‘magic’ link that would seem to bond the foetus, a purely passive being, to the mother, or rather to the maternal genius, capable of influencing the foetus by determining several of its dispositions – in terms of character, for example or also physical, somatic ones. Instead, in the case of the ‘malaise of the soul’ known as ‘animal magnetism’, this relationship with the tangible sphere is exercised by an external individual or genius: thus it is no longer an internal, immediate, magical relationship, but a genuine relationship of the subjection or ‘power’ (*Macht*).

Nevertheless, it is exercised on the same sphere of sensitivity on which the first maternal influx made its impression, the sphere which now lies under the genius or character of the subject, i.e. all that which sediments after birth: habits, inclinations etc. In other words, with regard to the sensitivity of the magnetised, two influences, two geniuses remain: the magnetiser and the character. The influx is thus two-sided: external (that of the magnetiser) and not just external (that of the character), and it is by virtue of this very duplicity that it is impossible to determine whether an action has been induced, favoured, or ordered by one or the other. It’s impossible to establish whether a given behaviour is rooted in character or in external conditioning. The same goes for the magnetiser: despite everything, he will never know whether the sleepwalker obeys him or his own character, and he can never really know whether the subject is carrying out an order or seconding an inclination of his own genius.

There is an insuperable uncertainty or indeterminacy in suggestive power relationships. And it’s for this reason that, in the book, where I do not speak directly about Masetti but about Mario, the figure in the story by Thomas Mann *Mario and the Magician* who kills Cipolla, the hypnotist and magician (the alter ego of Mussolini), I proposed substituting the paradigm of the resistant animated by self-awareness and

free will. To counter the classical reading by Hans Mayer, based on the concepts of free will and resistance, I set out to present an interpretation based on indeterminacy and the ambiguity of the suggestion game. In actual fact, the opposition between will/suggestion is not to be taken for granted. While will cannot generate suggestion, as one of Bernheim's epigones said, suggestion generates will. Which also goes for resistance: this is aroused, provoked by the suggester, who must first of all understand what orders the subject will not carry out and to which, on the other hand, he will be sensitive: while not everyone will do everything, everyone will do something. And so, in order to explain Mario's (or Masetti's) gesture, I tried to illuminate that which is completely outside the magician's control. By animating desires, provoking resistances, he believes he can control the subjects, dominate them and manage an orderly, vertical, hierarchical relationship. In order to be strong, the magician has to believe in his strength and thus he does not recognise the duplicity of genius, nor does he contemplate the possibility that those who appear to carry out his orders are in actual fact following another voice, that nothing is so clean-cut, and that everything in the end is indeterminate and unforeseeable.

That which remains obscure to the suggesting magician instead appears perfectly clear to the puppeteers you mentioned: for them it's a matter of letting themselves go, along with the voice of their own genius and that of the genius-puppeteer – or rather the character – to reach the state of indeterminacy in which puppet and puppeteer are one and the same thing.

RG: In fact, in my conversations with puppeteers, the notion of 'empty space' often came up, of that space to be left free in order for the animation process to take place. I was reminded of the book of the same name by Peter Brook, published in 1968, which opens thus: *"I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged."*

AC: Ultimately, it's an empty space of consciousness, of will: it's the moment in which the sphere of passivity, of the openness to influence and of indeterminacy emerges. Just as the puppeteer may himself be brought to life, it is for the same reason that Cipolla the magician fails: because we don't know who is animating whom, nor do we expect to know it. The political magician – i.e. the dictator as the 'great actor', to cite the definition of Mussolini offered by Camillo Berneri – aims to establish a relationship of subordination and subjection and exercise a form of control about which the puppeteer is rightly unconcerned, instead keeping to the indeterminacy of the suggestive relationship and the duplicity of possession. We might say that the political magician really is, in every sense, a wicked puppeteer.

In Brook's terms, as you rightly understand them, we might say instead that he who stands as a leader or 'great actor' vainly attempts to use his commands to fill what remains an 'empty space' for the real puppeteer. Of course, here we're talking about a theory of inspiration (or indeed of genius), which however reveals – like all our aesthetic concepts – a decidedly political edge. The void in question is an absence of *arché*. Thus the possession of the masses by the leader is countered by the anarchic inspiration of your puppeteers, or of the two-sided, indeterminable geniuses. That's it, we need to become puppeteers, artists, to reach and nourish the duplicity or ambiguity of the genius, the perfect inseparability of subjectivation and subjection, in order not to subject and not simply be subjected ourselves.

RG: How did the idea come about of writing a book on suggestion? It seems to me that, in the political analysis, you're hinting at a lack of reflection on the concept of will, which is not something given but which is constructed.

AC: I might pick up on the idea of will as construction – and as a product of suggestion – from the great French psychologists of the 19th Century: I cite it to contest the theory of Mayer (and implicitly all the theories on will as the first, underivable element on which there was and still is the belief of being able to construct a form of ethics and politics).

Now, the character of Cipolla the magician in *Mario and the Magician*, clearly inspired by Mussolini, is also modelled on the famous Cesare Gabrielli, the hypnotist who performed in Italian theatres in that period, and who is also portrayed in *The Children are Watching Us* by De Sica (the film came out in 1943, and Gabrielli is shown here as a tired figure, in decline, just like the Fascist dictatorship). By the end of the 19th century, however, hypnotisers had put together a canon to be deployed not only in their shows but also in the scientific study of the phenomena of sleepwalking, animal magnetism and hysteria. Charcot, for example, in his theatre-cum-lecture hall at the Salpêtrière, as Joseph Delboeuf noted, put together outright spectacles in which imitation played a key role, and – as his critics would point out – did nothing but copy the model of sideshow hypnotists, with a few variations here and there. And so Mann, in his story, thumbs through the vast catalogue of suggestive techniques offered by figures such as the famous Donato (the genuine founder, of whom Gabrielli was a worthy descendent) and by others, who instead practised their arts in the most prestigious of clinics. In particular, Cipolla uses the alternation of the persuasive invitation and the imperious command, which was a technique developed by Bernheim himself. And as a matter of fact, Mann must have known his theories: if not directly, at least through the essays by Freud (who had in fact been a translator of Bernheim's works), first and foremost through *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921).

The importance of Bernheim, at any rate, is fundamental in all respects. One of the most interesting and contemporary aspects of his theory is the idea that suggestion is not carried out in a precisely vertical manner, but as it were, circular, with a return effect or conditioning, meaning that the suggester issues orders while undergoing the effects of those orders himself. In other words, I command, I can command if I react suitably to the responses of the suggestee. That is, the real order is triggered by the reaction to the order; it's a suggestion which, depending on how it is perceived and on the effect of the return, triggers a certain power game, a game which the suggester may dominate in the measure to which he shows himself to be happily sensitive to the answers. In other words, the commander is the one who is convinced he is commanding. Thus there is no vertical position of power given once and for all; rather, there is a complex relationship, one in which the position of command must be built time after time (just as the will is constructed). The suggester must therefore remain in a state of grace, and it is charismatic power itself that always requires feedback.

We might say that political power works on the basis of this circularity, in which the enchanter is happily the victim of his own charm, in which every suggestion is an autosuggestion, and we might thus explain the role of opinion polls, methods of checking which may help but may also betray, for they are at any rate cumbersome and cannot substitute pure sensitivity and the unconditioned response. This game, which as I said before always remains indeterminable and uncertain, is shown by Mann "under a magnifying glass and in slow motion" (Lukács), rendering it in its micrological dimension.

RG: In that case, it is also a matter of how power acts on an individual level, how the magician Cipolla acts on a specific person.

AC: Exactly. This is the great issue of the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. The young Fromm, for example, pointed out that in Freud (i.e. in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*) this relationship is a pure and simple analogy, i.e. it remains unresolved. In 1884, to give another example, Gabriel Tarde, the master of sociology, the first real theorist of imitation and fashion, defined life in society as a state of sleepwalking ("To have only received ideas while believing them to be spontaneous: this is the illusion to which both sleepwalkers and social man are prey"), stating that in order to explain the phenomena of general imitation, the sociologist must make way for the psychologist, i.e. examine the specific case of the relationship between the therapist and the patient. Tarde was thus able to cite the contemporary theorists of suggestion ("Bernheim et al.") because in his system, the passage from psychology to sociology, from the individual to the collectivity, is only possible on the basis of 'universal sociomorphism', i.e. the idea that everything is immediately social, that every being and every phenomenon is an association (an

imitative one, according to Tarde) of beings and phenomena. But let us consider the Hegelian theory of the 'two-fold genius' from this point of view: not only does the indeterminacy of the influences confuse two geniuses, understood as two individuals, but every order and every response over the long series of collective influences. The command of the magnetiser is confused with other inclinations which come from the 'second nature', from education, from a personal history which is not exclusively personal. Hence there is no two-sided relationship which, be it by multiplying or by analogical transposition, becomes a mass relationship. In actual fact, the suggester is nothing but the spokesman of a much longer-standing power, of a suggestive game which coincides with its own tradition. Bernheim always spoke in terms of previous conditioning.

RG: You write that the totalitarian state is “not only the most lethal, but also the most hypnotic and suggestive,” and that “authoritarian suggestion is the necessary outcome and the never-fading ghost of every state.”

AC: The explanation of Bernheim's words, according to which “everything is suggestion” comes from the history of biopolitics: biopower is suggestive. According to Foucault's thesis, biopower takes care of and is responsible for the living conditions of the population, if it is the power to manage and look after people's lives and do as it wishes with them, rejecting them through death, and totalitarianism is simply its paroxysmal development: it is the most protective power, the one which most takes care of individuals' lives, which most aims to protect them and fortify them; on the other hand, it is also the most lethal power, exposing the population to the risk of death (for death may purify and strengthen the race). What I'm trying to add, as I mentioned before, is that the biopolitical/securitarian system is originally (historically and logically) a suggestive framework, and that totalitarianism (both logically and historically) therefore represents an extreme development of the same devices and techniques of suggestion: it is both the most intensely bio-thanatopolitical and suggestive system.

I cited the book by the philosopher and militant anarchist Camillo Berneri, *Mussolini grande attore* (1934), the first analysis of the 'actorial' performance of the leader. The leading figures of the political scene of the early 20th century in fact used radio shows, cinema and newsreels. After all, their scripts drew heavily on the mass psychologists of the late 19th Century: *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind* by Gustave Bon had become a paradoxically inspiring text, and the underlying concept of these analyses was that of 'prestige'. According to Tarde, the leader is prestigious, and this is enough to make him a leader. It is no coincidence that Cipolla the magician is also an actor, a hypnotiser and a conjurer.

RG: Within this biopolitical horizon, what paradigm did the figure of Masetti represent? I have often examined his vicissitude through the notions of confession, *alethurgia* and *parrhesia*, analysed by Foucault in his last lecture cycles at the Collège de France. If the state deploys a system according to which a subject must ultimately be bound to his own actions, might we then look at Masetti's presumed amnesia as an attempt to question the state-approved device of confession? In his case, a subject is declared separate from his actions by virtue of his being amnesic, ecstatic, out of mind. If at the same time the powers that be wish to reach a truth which links the subject to his own actions, the counterexample of Masetti offers an individual divorced from such actions.

AC: In his last course at the Collège de France, in 1984, Foucault identified a number of examples of modern cynicism in the artist and in the political militant. The issue of the relationship between the nihilist that Foucault refers to and the figure of Masetti needs to be thoroughly investigated. On the other hand, suggestion is a definition of subjects. Just as Foucault said that there are no subjects but processes of subjectivation, we might say – *pace* Bernheim – that there are no subjects but just games of suggestion. These tend to determine, to establish the resistances and thus the weaknesses, the variables of character. The construction of the subject-patient is a sort of dressage, of training, of education. But its very nature is ungraspable and the whole construction may – like in Masetti's case – give way suddenly. Military discipline, which as Jarry said is the final brutalisation in the hypnotic state, may thus give voice to the unforeseeable genius.

Let us go back to Bernheim and to his clinic in Nancy. Is everything really suggestion? Is there really nothing but suggestion? Yes and no. Delboeuf, whom I have already mentioned, shared Bernheim's motto. Like Freud, he made a visit to Nancy and witnessed the remarkable success of suggestive therapy. But he had also recognised that just where everything is suggestion, that is where a non-suggestable subject may actually appear. Bernheim himself. Any way you try to place him under suggestion, says Delboeuf, he shows himself to be resistant: indeed, if the suggester attempted to make him concentrate on something (even then, certain hypnotists used a luminous dot or diadem), he would remain focused exclusively on the technique that the other person was trying to use. I would say that beyond the power dynamics (and death) that bind Cipolla and Mario, Stroppa and Masetti, a different level emerges, one we might define as being of pure technique. A non-suggestive, non-violent level, which Walter Benjamin called that of 'pure means'. To contrast those spectacles propped up by forms of totalitarianism, Benjamin and Brecht actually called on the use of technique. The epic Brechtian theatre draws on a technique capable of destroying the effects of rapture, of fascination on which classical theatre is based. According to Brecht, like to Benjamin, cinema or classical theatre audiences are a

mass in a state of hypnosis, following the leader or the actor in awe. Old theatre – said Brecht – is one of suggestion, while epic theatre is made using arguments.

RG: At the end of the book, you also speak of the idea of tradition in Benjamin, i.e. of a life in which “there are no real masters or leaders, for everything is always education.” Is this just another paradigm to counter suggestive power?

AC: Yes, ultimately it’s the same thing I was talking about before. Benjamin wanted to remove the suggestive figure of the master from education, or rather the hierarchy that separates the teacher from the student, proposing a form of teaching which is at the same time a form of learning (or a form of learning which is also teaching). Like in the book, I’m quoting a letter written in his youth to Gershom Scholem, but the coherence between the Benjamin of a more anarchic inspiration of the 1910s and ‘20s and the heterodox Marxist of the later years is very close. In his major 1921 essay, *A Critique of Violence*, the technique is classed in the sphere of the nonviolent ‘pure means’ (which of course does not mean neutral. While by virtue of its presumed neutrality, the technique irremediably ends up in the hands of the strongest, instead for Benjamin it is a matter of isolating the technique from the *Gewalt*, from power, from violence, from the force of authority). The theme of technique is then taken up again and elaborated from the middle of the ‘30s in the famous essay dedicated to *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and in those, of course, on Brecht’s theatre. In a very important note to the essay on reproducibility, Benjamin deals with the theme of the suggested mass, of Le Bon, of crowd psychology and of the revolutionary class. The crowd, the raw material of forms of fascism, which is always compressed in a state of both tension and panic, scared and dangerous, with a taste for the thrill of war and willing to partake in racist follies, is countered by an absolutely original notion of class. Indeed, class is not conceived in terms of a mass labour base (factory workers or farmers), but by a destructive moment, one of the dissolution or loosening of the crowd, of the tensions running through it, i.e. as the loosening and distension (*Auflockerung*) of the hypnotised mass.

Now, epic theatre is also a technique of distension, of *Auflockerung*. Just when the audience would tend to follow the story, spellbound, Brecht interrupts it sharply, only to make way for an analysis of the facts. Thus various possibilities are studied: why something happened, what didn’t happen, how and why everything could have gone otherwise... In other words, the story shows the spectrum of possibilities; it is *loosened*, just as the ballet instructor – says Benjamin – loosens the joints of the ballerina to make her carry out unexpected steps. And so together with the story, the audience also relaxes, *loosens up*, i.e. becomes a collaborator, no longer following the show in a state of passivity or almost hypnotic tension: it observes events with detachment and analyses them critically. The ‘fourth wall’ is thus also done away

with, the immaterial wall which physically separates the spectators from the stage, doing away with all boundaries between the dramaturge, the actor and the audience. The revolutionary, as Benjamin in fact said, does not rise up above the masses like a star, but instead is capable of letting himself be continually reabsorbed by them. His is an anti-suggestive performance, based on technique, and the fitting political orientation for him lies in the right technical orientation. In other words, where the fourth wall falls, it is also easy for us to recognise a different declination of the themes of that letter to Scholem on education.

RG: Many puppeteers in Colombia told me that they are interested in Masetti's amnesia: on one hand because it is in some way a paradigm of the practices of the puppeteer; on the other because it may be seen as a 'perfect act of anarchy'. Amnesia attempts to dismantle responsibility, i.e. those mechanisms that the state deploys to bind an individual to his actions. In a short 1964 film in which he is interviewed by Sergio Zavoli, Masetti continues to claim that he can only draw a blank over a period of thirty-six hours, and asks: "How can one repent something he has no memory of?"

AC: Masetti has lost the *compos sui*, the mastery of himself. On the other hand, he finds himself in an army barrack, being subjected to military discipline. An action of *his own*, in that context, would be unlikely: thus in his place there may be nothing but a gap. Masetti's statement is a very fitting and intelligent one, which turns the tables of possession against the very military power which takes control of the lives of others. Furthermore, it also turns around the issue of responsibility or irresponsibility of those subjected to that power, transforming and undermining the sentence "I'm not responsible, I'm just following orders" (making us think here of Eichmann of course with his "it's not me who is not obeying"). In short: seeing as you once wanted to subject me, don't come asking for explanations now. The issue of responsibility and action leaves room for the theme of the unforeseeableness or duplicity which makes them both unassignable.

RG: Masetti was then interned and declared mad by the state which, so as not to turn him into a hero, could not execute him. The judiciary mechanism thus gives way before the psychiatric one; his gesture is transformed from a political act to a 'degenerate' one, or – to use a term typical of Foucault, 'abnormal'. You write that the biopolitical government, as a machine of mass suggestion, "captures the population by drawing a line between the healthy and the unhealthy, the normal and the abnormal."

AC: Yes, and it does so in the name of the categories of consciousness, will and self-control. Instead it would be only fitting to show that consciousness, will and self-control are in actual fact nothing but products of a game of suggestion.

Glossary

An inter-disciplinary, fragmentary, heterogeneous and at times contradictory list of concepts included in the dissertation, conceived both as an imaginary gathering of authors and as a toolbox for the reader.

“While groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a concept may mean”, Mieke Bal once pointed out, “we gain insight into what it can do”²⁸²

Before her, Theodor Adorno half-jokingly wrote, “the longing for strict definitions has long offered, through fixating manipulations of the meanings of concepts, to eliminate the irritating and dangerous elements of things that live within concepts.”²⁸³ It is in this spirit that this list of terms was drawn up, since concepts live “not because they mean the same thing for everyone, but because they don’t.”²⁸⁴

– anarchism

“(from the Gr. *ἀν*, and *ἀρχή*, contrary to authority), the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.” (Pëtr Kropotkin²⁸⁵)



²⁸² Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 11.

²⁸³ Adorno, Theodor W. “The Essay as Form”, translation by Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, in *New German Critique*, No. 32 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984), 160. My emphasis.

²⁸⁴ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 11.

²⁸⁵ Kropotkin, Pëtr. “Anarchism”, in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London: 1910).

– *animation*

(1) “Odradek. At first glance it looks like a flat star-shaped spool for thread, and indeed it does seem to have thread wound upon it; to be sure, they are only old, broken-off bits of thread, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied sorts and colors. But it is not only a spool, for a small wooden crossbar sticks out of the middle of the star, and another small rod is joined to that at a right angle. By means of this latter rod on one side and one of the points of the star on the other, the whole thing can stand upright as if on two legs. [...] the whole thing looks senseless enough, but in its own way perfectly finished. In any case, closer scrutiny is impossible, since Odradek is extraordinarily nimble and can never be laid hold of.” (Franz Kafka²⁸⁶)

(2) “What if the soul is not a substance, not a “thing,” but a function (not unlike the “zero” in mathematics)? What if “soul” (*anima* in Latin) is another name for the very medium that makes reciprocal exchange possible, for what happens in the very in-between, the event of communication? [...] the *fact of animation* and the *event of communication* are one and the same. There is no being-in-communication that is not also a form of animation, even if this is a *negative animation*, the absence of a certain sovereignty and agency, as in the case of “objectification” or “reification.” Animism then becomes the point of departure, the most common thing in the world – a world in which there is nothing outside of the relations that constitute it. Where there is communication, there is animation. Animation is always a form of entanglement with an environment and with *otherness*. This otherness is incommensurable and can never be fully objectified; it always escapes positivist knowledge to some degree, implicating such knowledge instead within situated practice. This point of departure hence also suggests that there aren’t – there cannot possibly be – non-animist societies. Animism is a different name for the primacy of relationality, for social immanence. [...] Museums make objects to be looked at by subjects – and this is already a “relational diagram” in which one side talks *about* the other.” (Anselm Franke²⁸⁷)

(3) “Marx [...] derives his concept of commodity fetishism as a critique of capitalist culture: the animate appearance of commodities provides testimony to the thing-like appearance of persons, appearances that dissolve once it is pointed out that the definitions of man and of society are market inspired. [...] the market system of modern capitalism engenders a marketing mentality in which people tend to be seen as commodities and commodities tend to be seen as animated entities that can dominate persons. [...] we attribute to commodities a reality so substantial that they acquire the appearance of natural beings, so natural in fact that they appear to take on a life-force of their own. [...] Man becomes the passive offspring of a power that he himself creates, a

²⁸⁶ Kafka, Franz. “The Cares of a Family Man”, in *The Complete Stories*, translation by Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

²⁸⁷ Franke, Anselm. “Animism: Notes on an Exhibition”, in *e-flux journal* n. 36 - July 2012, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

power that is anthropomorphized and animated to the degree that man denies authorship of his own creation.” (Michael Taussig²⁸⁸)

– *cantastorie*

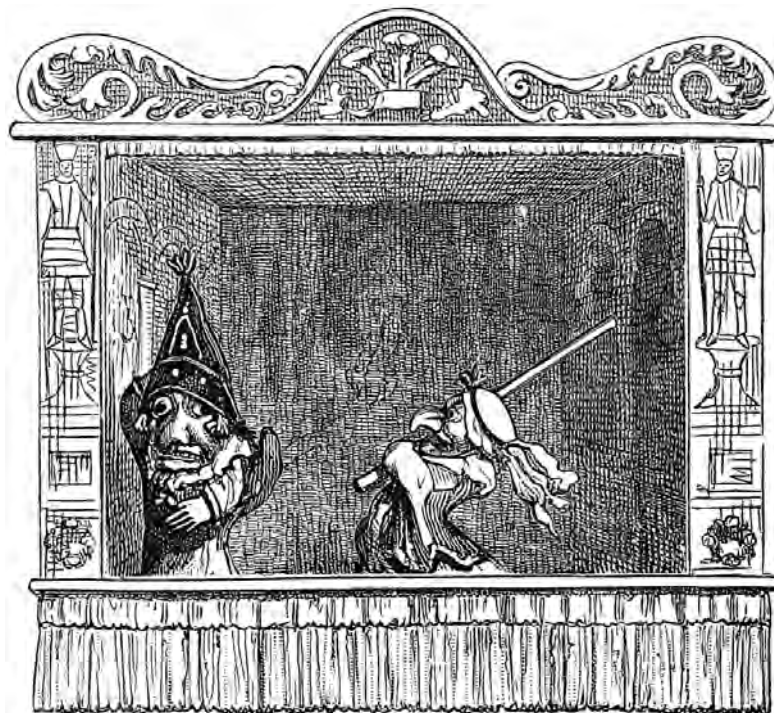
(Italian for “singer-storyteller”): Wandering divulgator, sometimes also composer, of stories in verse, generally with a dramatic or romantic subject. On the occasion of fairs or village festivals, *cantastorie* performed in public squares, often commenting on real events. The *cantastorie* is the heir to the medieval jester, who can be considered the ancestor of the whole family of ‘street artists’, experts in the art of entertaining the audience with music, dance and acting. Due to the advent of modern forms of entertainment (cinema, radio and television) the figure of the *cantastorie* became increasingly rare until it disappeared altogether.²⁸⁹

– *character*

“the combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person or thing” (Collins English Dictionary²⁹⁰)

* *stock character*

“A stereotyped character easily recognized by readers or audiences from recurrent appearances in literary or folk tradition, usually within a specific genre such as comedy or fairy tale.” (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms²⁹¹)



²⁸⁸ Taussig, Michael. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 8, 25-30, 120.

²⁸⁹ See also http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cantastorie_%28Enciclopedia-dei-ragazzi%29/ (accessed 29 March, 2019).

²⁹⁰ *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, 12th Edition (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2014).

²⁹¹ <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100533855> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

– **document**

(1) “early 15c., “a doctrine;” late 15c., “teaching, instruction” (senses now obsolete), from Old French *document* (13c.) “lesson, written evidence” and directly from Latin *documentum* “example, proof, lesson,” in Medieval Latin “official written instrument, authoritative paper,” from *docere* “to show, teach, cause to know,” originally “make to appear right,” causative of *decere* “be seemly, fitting,” from PIE root **dek-* “to take, accept.” Meaning “written or printed paper that provides proof or evidence” is from early 18c., hence “anything bearing legible writing or inscription.” (Online Etymology Dictionary²⁹²)

(2) “any concrete or symbolic indexical sign [*indice*], preserved or recorded towards the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a physical or intellectual phenomenon” (Suzanne Briet²⁹³)

(3) “Any material object that can represent and make known a certain historical fact.” (Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti “Treccani”²⁹⁴)

(4) “How does a text become a document? It has to be certified as a valuable piece of information. Something worth reading and keeping. [...] But what is a text before it becomes a document? Maybe you could call the text in this raw state “material.” [...] our relationship towards documents, as producers or readers, takes on the form of a performance of selection guided by specific interests. Moreover, the certification of a text as a document is based on authority. If you read a document, you know it has been authorized as a document by someone with the authority to do so (usually indicated by a seal or signature).” (Jan Verwoert²⁹⁵)

* **variational document**

Variational documents are narrative artifacts that do not claim an official, validated and certified link to any truth (unlike legal evidence), but which exist as variations on a truth that is inaccessible, and therefore unprovable. Unlike standard documents, a variational document performs its narrative and relational function without excluding other possible variations, without proposing itself as the official bearer of a single truth. Variational documents act outside validation procedures of enforcing institutions of power. *Il Vendicatore*, a puppet adaptation of the story of Simone Pianetti’s 1914 massacre and following events, is an example of a variational document.

²⁹² <https://www.etymonline.com/word/document> (accessed 25 April, 2019).

²⁹³ Briet, Suzanne. *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?* (Paris: Éditions documentaires, industrielles et techniques, 1951), 2. My translation.

²⁹⁴ “Qualsiasi oggetto materiale in grado di rappresentare e far conoscere un determinato fatto storico.” See Enciclopedia Treccani, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/documento> (accessed 29 March, 2019). My translation.

²⁹⁵ Verwoert, Jan. “Transformations of the Documentary Practice in Recent Art”, in *The Greenroom*.

Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 187-188.

*** *travelling document***

A special case of *variational document*: its specificity lies not only on the possibility of other variations, but also on a socio-geographical translation of context. The dual character of Augusto Masetti/*el espiritado* is an example of a travelling document: a document that can be regarded as such only when considered in its drifting nature – an entity encompassing two states and the transition between the two. Only studying a travelling document in its entire trajectory can one unearth information about the two systems of knowledge that the document links, as well as about the connections and disconnections between them. ‘Research in and through art’ is well suited for this kind of endeavour, since not only it can take into account the information about the two contexts inhabited by the travelling document in its dual nature (as a purely historical research would), but it can also study, account for, and use the very forms (narrative and artistic) through which such information has travelled. Using Mieke Bal’s words, the concept can be articulated “precisely through its movement. After travelling, [...] having arrived at its new destination [it] has received a meaning that overlaps neither with the old one [...] nor with the new one”.²⁹⁶

*** *pure document (or bare document)***

A hypothetical ‘degree zero of the document’. How to imagine a document that does not document anything, but that keeps its status nonetheless? In which form could a document exist without any link to any narrative to prove, to any hypothesis to validate, to any truth to confirm? What would remain? One option would be to describe this *document of nothing* with the same words used by Scholem in a well-known letter to Benjamin: “it does not signify, yet still affirms itself by the fact that it is in force”. The expression pure document indicates a hypothetical document unlinked to any act of speech, unlinked to *logos*.²⁹⁷

– *documentality*

(1) “Does truth determine politics or politics truth? It is a question of how the production of truth has always been influenced and standardized by social power relations [...] Michel Foucault called this process the “politics of truth”. He describes it as a set of rules that determine the production of truth, distinguishing true statements from false ones, and fixing procedures of the production of truth. Truth is thus always also politically regulated. I call this interface between governmentality and documentary truth production “documentality”. Documentality describes the permeation of a specific documentary politics of truth with superordinated political, social and epistemological formations. Documentality is the pivotal point, where forms of documentary truth production turn into government – or vice versa. It describes the complicity with dominant forms of a politics of truth, just as it can describe a critical stance with regard to these forms.” (Hito Steyerl²⁹⁸)

²⁹⁶ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 39.

²⁹⁷ See Benjamin, Walter and Scholem, Gershom. *Briefwechsel 1933-40* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), quoted in Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995).

²⁹⁸ Steyerl, Hito. “Documentarism as Politics of Truth”, translated by Aileen Derieg, in *transversal*, Vienna: Eipcp, May 2003. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1003/steyerl2/en> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

(2) “a theory of social objects develops naturally into a theory of the document, understood as an inquire centered on the definition of what I call “documentality”, namely the properties that constitute, in each case, the necessary and sufficient conditions (starting from two very general conditions: being an inscription and being a document or a “documental” thing) to be a social object. At last, there is no society if there are no documents, and documents are records with a particular social value. On this ground, a theory of documentality can develop along three directions. The ontological dimension, answering the question: what is a document? The technological dimension, concerning the means through which documentality can be spread in a complex society. The pragmatic (and forensic) dimension, which concerns the care of documents in a society characterized by the explosion of writing, and in world dominated by information technology.” (Maurizio Ferraris²⁹⁹)

– **documentary**

(1) “To give documentary back its relevance, to enable it to develop the barren space it represents and signifies in its variety, is to first accept that it is not the vehicle of supposed transparency. It means understanding that, contrary to this, documentary only contains opacity and thickness, and that it is in itself object of study, document among documents, link in a process of interpretation offered to the political freedom of the spectator. [...] What it pursues is to bring a substance out into the light. In other words, rather than being satisfied at collecting a so-called intact raw material, which, moreover, would surely have to be brought in a “pure” state from reality to its representation in images and sound, documentaries produce the whole of this material and also the conditions in which it appears. This is why the opposition between fiction and documentary becomes something inoperative, as the two introduce a manufacture of what is visible and intelligible.” (Jean-Pierre Rehm³⁰⁰)

(2) “the closer to reality we get, the less intelligible it becomes. Let us call this ‘the uncertainty principle of modern documentarism’. [...] The only thing we can say for sure about the documentary mode in our times is that we always already doubt if it is true.” “in certain situations the rupture of the documentary image from the bonds of knowledge and power happens. And this event is even capable of paradoxically and temporarily liberating the documentary image from its ties to power, usefulness, pedagogy and knowledge. This truth is not produced. It cannot be calculated, manufactured or anticipated. It becomes a *factum verum*, a true fact precisely by being unmade, so to speak, by happening, being contingent and uncountable. [...] *Factum verum* not only means that facts are produced. Simultaneously it also means: a fact can be true, precisely because it cannot fully be contained by the power relations of its production. [...] It means that some documentary articulations cannot be wholly controlled by dominant discourses. (Hito Steyerl³⁰¹)

²⁹⁹ Ferraris, Maurizio. “Social Ontology and Documentality”, in *Approaches to Legal Ontologies: Theories, Domains, Methodologies*, ed. Giovanni Sartor, Pompeu Casanovas, Mariangela Biasiotti, Meritxell Fernández-Barrera (New York: Springer, 2011), 92.

³⁰⁰ Rehm, Jean-Pierre. “The Plays of the Witnesses”, in *The Greenroom. Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 41-44.

³⁰¹ Steyerl, Hito. “Documentary Uncertainty”, in *A Prior* #15, 2007,

– *ecstasy*

(1) “Ecstasy always involves a trance, whether “symbolic” or pretended or real, and the trance is interpreted as a temporary abandonment of the body by the soul of the shaman. [...] Since the “ecstasy” (trance, “losing one’s soul,” losing consciousness) seems to form an integral part of the human condition, just like anxiety, dream, imagination, etc., we did not deem it necessary to look for its “origin” in a particular culture or in a particular historical moment. As an experience, ecstasy is a non-historical phenomenon; it is a primordial phenomenon in the sense that it is coextensive with human nature. Only the religious interpretation given to ecstasy and the techniques designed to prepare it or facilitate it are historical data. That is to say, they are dependent on various cultural contexts, and they change in the course of history.” (Mircea Eliade³⁰²)

(2) “The madness lies in the hidden movements of the hand, the curious impulse and skill by which a person’s hand can make itself into the animating impulse, the intelligence or soul, of an inanimate object —it is an extension of that more basic wonder by which we can let this one part of our body become a separate, articulate whole, capable of surprising its owner with its movements, the stories it tells. I call it madness, but it is perhaps better called an ecstasy. It lies in the hand’s power and pleasure in giving itself over to the demands of the object, our curious will to make the object into an actor, something capable of gesture and voice. What strikes me here is the need for a made thing to tell a story, to become a vehicle for a voice, an impulse of character — something very old, and very early. The thing acquires a life.” (Kenneth Gross³⁰³)

(3) “Sleepwalking is a different state of consciousness. You are not completely conscious. I feel that puppetry is like getting out of yourself in order to be what the puppet needs you to be.” (Liliana Martin³⁰⁴) – see also *possession*

– *evidence*

(1) “in law, any of the material items or assertions of fact that may be submitted to a competent tribunal as a means of ascertaining the truth of any alleged matter of fact under investigation before it. To the end that court decisions are to be based on truth founded on evidence, a primary duty of courts is to conduct proper proceedings so as to hear and consider evidence. The so-called law of evidence is made up largely of procedural regulations concerning the proof and presentation of facts, whether involving the

<http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html> (accessed 29 March, 2019); Steyerl, Hito. “Truth Unmade. Productivism and Factography”, in *transversal*, Vienna: Eipc, March 2009, <http://eipc.net/transversal/0910/steyerl/en> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

³⁰² Eliade, Mircea. “Recent Works on Shamanism. A Review Article”, in *History of Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1, The University of Chicago Press, Summer, 1961, 153-154.

³⁰³ Gross, Kenneth. *Puppet: an essay on uncanny life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 9.

³⁰⁴ Interview I recorded in Bogotá, August 2012, with Liliana Martin: puppeteer, founding member of the puppet group “Materile”.

testimony of witnesses, the presentation of documents or physical objects, or the assertion of a foreign law.” (The Encyclopaedia Britannica³⁰⁵)

(2) “Evidence [...] is divided conventionally into three main categories: *oral* evidence (the testimony given in court by witnesses), *documentary* evidence (documents produced for inspection by the court), and “*real* evidence”; the first two are self-explanatory and the third captures things other than documents such as a knife allegedly used in committing a crime.” (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy³⁰⁶) – see also *trial*

* *evidential*

“the group of disciplines which we have called evidential and conjectural (medicine included) are totally unrelated to the scientific criteria that can be claimed for the Galileian paradigm. In fact, they are highly qualitative disciplines, in which the object is the study of individual cases, situations, and documents, precisely because they are individual, and for this reason get results that have an unsuppressible speculative margin: just think of the importance of conjecture (the term itself originates in divination) in medicine or in philology, and in divining. Galileian science, which could have taken as its own the Scholastic motto *Individuum est inefabile* (“We cannot speak about what is individual”), is endowed with totally different characteristics. Mathematics and the empirical method implied, respectively, quantification and the repetition of phenomena, while the individualizing perspective by definition excluded the latter and admitted the former only as mere instrument. All this explains why history never became a Galileian science.” (Carlo Ginzburg³⁰⁷)

– *fact*

(1) “Some philosophers take it to be obvious that if something is true, there must be something that makes it true, a truth-maker. Facts are truth-makers. Like sentences and thoughts, facts are taken to be complex objects. The constituents of (atomic) facts are not words or modes of presentation, but particulars and properties [...] The fact that Socrates is wise exists if, and only if Socrates *is* wise. The sentence “Socrates is wise” is not only said to express the thought that Socrates is wise that is made true by the fact that Socrates is wise, but also to describe the *state of affairs* Socrates’ *being* wise.” (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy³⁰⁸)

(2) “There are people who imagine in good faith that a document can be an expression of reality. [...] As if a document could express something different from *itself*. [...] A document is a fact. The battle is another fact (an infinity of other facts). The two cannot become *one*. [...] The person who acts is *a fact*. The person who tells a story is *another fact*. [...] Every piece of testimony is

³⁰⁵ “Evidence”, in *The Encyclopædia Britannica* (London, 1985).

³⁰⁶ Lai Ho, Hock. “The Legal Concept of Evidence”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2015 Edition: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evidence-legal/> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

³⁰⁷ Ginzburg, Carlo. “Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm”, in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 106.

³⁰⁸ Textor, Mark. “States of Affairs”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, first published 27 March 2012: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/states-of-affairs/#FactTrutMakeRegrStop> (accessed 29 March, 2019).

only a testimony of itself; of its immediate moment, of its own origin, of its own purpose, and of nothing more.” (Renato Serra³⁰⁹) – see also *microhistory*

* *alternative facts*

“Two plus two is four. Three plus one is four. Partly cloudy, partly sunny. Glass half full, glass half empty. Those are alternative facts [...] additional facts and alternative information.” (Kellyanne Conway³¹⁰)

– *fiction*

“Against the tendency of postmodern skepticism to blur the borders between fictional and historical narrations, in the name of the constructive element they share, I proposed a view of the relation between the two as a competition for the representation of reality. But rather than trench warfare, I hypothesized a conflict made up of challenges and reciprocal, hybrid borrowings. [...] Fiction, fed by history, becomes material for historical reflection or else for fiction, and so on. This unpredictable intermingling can come together in a knot, or in a name³¹¹ [...] Precisely because it is important to distinguish between reality and fiction, we must learn to recognize when one becomes joined to the other, each transmitting something that we might call *energy*.” (Carlo Ginzburg³¹²)

* *fictocriticism*

“ideas work emotionally and paint a picture of the world on account of the way they are put into language. Today I would say that only literature, meaning fiction and forms of documentary overlapping with fiction – what I have called “fictocriticism” – can do this.” (Michael Taussig³¹³)

* *fake news*

“Wow, so many Fake News stories today. No matter what I do or say, they will not write or speak truth. The Fake News Media is out of control!”

“The Fake News is working overtime. Just reported that, despite the tremendous success we are having with the economy & all things else, 91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?” (Donald Trump³¹⁴)

– *foglio volante*

(Italian for “flyer”): printed flimsy flyer containing the lyrics of the song, usually performed by a *cantastorie*. As well as words, there were often one or more illustrations summing up the main theme of the song: they were either vignettes printed on the top or single pictures placed to the side of the lyrics.³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ Serra, Renato. *Scritti letterari, morali e politici*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), 286-287. My translation.

³¹⁰ Nuzzi, Olivia. “Kellyanne Conway Is the Real First Lady of Trump's America”, in *Daily Intelligencer*, March 2017.

³¹¹ Ginzburg, Carlo. *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*, trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2-4.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 136.

³¹³ Taussig, Michael. “Preface to the Thirtieth Anniversary Edition”, in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xii.

³¹⁴ Trump, Donald. Twitter posts, 4 Oct 2017, 4:29 AM and 9 May 2018, 4:38 AM,

<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/915539424406114304> and

<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/994179864436596736> (accessed 26 March, 2019).

³¹⁵ See also Leydi, Roberto and Vinati, Paolo. *Tanti fatti succedono al mondo: fogli volanti nell'Italia settentrionale dell'Otto e del Novecento* (Brescia: Grafo, 2001).



– force

(1) “When the consciousness of the latent presence of force [*Gewalt*] in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay. [...] Lawmaking is powermaking, assumption of power, and to that extent an immediate manifestation of force. [...] For from the point of view of force, which alone can guarantee law, there is no equality, but at the most equally great force.” (Walter Benjamin³¹⁶)

(2) “If the gunman is the paradigmatic instance of force outside the law, interpretation is the force that resides within the law, and like the gunman it

³¹⁶ Benjamin, Walter. “Critique of Violence”, in *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 244, 248, 249. Benjamin’s term is *Gewalt*, which means both “violence” and “force.” Here I preferred to use “force”, since violence, etymologically, indicates an excess of force, but such excess implies the existence of limits. If law is itself the origin of such limits, *Gewalt* intrinsic to law cannot be “excessive”, since it precedes the limits imposed by law. Derrida: “*Gewalt* also signifies, for Germans, legitimate power, authority, public force. *Gesetzgebende Gewalt* is legislative power, *geistliche Gewalt* the spiritual power of the church. *Staatsgewalt* the authority or power of the state. *Gewalt*, then, is both violence and legitimate power, justified authority.” Derrida, Jacques. *Force of Law*, p. 234.

must be regulated and policed lest it subvert the law's claim to enact the dictates of general principles of justice and equity. [...] a mechanism is proposed with the claim that it will keep force – whether in the form of the gunman or the interpreter – at bay; and in each instance force turns out to be the content of the mechanism designed to control it. [...] The force of the law is always and already indistinguishable from the forces it would oppose. Or to put the matter another way: there is always a gun at your head. Sometimes the gun is, in literal fact, a gun. Sometimes it is a reason, an assertion whose weight is inseparable from some already assumed purpose. Sometimes it is a desire, the urging of a state of affairs to which you are already predisposed. Sometimes it is a need you already feel. Sometimes it is a name – country, justice, honor, love, God – whose power you have already internalized. Whatever it is, it will always be a form of coercion, of an imperative whose source is an interest which speaks to the interest in you.” (Stanley Fish³¹⁷)

(3) “Legal interpretive acts signal and occasion the imposition of violence upon others: A judge articulates her understanding of a text, and as a result, somebody loses his freedom, his property, his children, even his life. [...] When interpreters have finished their work, they frequently leave behind victims whose lives have been torn apart by these organized social practices of violence. Neither legal interpretation nor the violence it occasions may be properly understood apart from one another. [...] The judges deal pain and death. [...] From John Winthrop through Warren Burger they have sat atop a pyramid of violence [...] Legal interpretation is (1) a practice activity, (2) designed to generate credible threats and actual deeds of violence, (3) in an effective way.” (Robert M. Cover³¹⁸)

(4) “law is always an authorized force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself, even if this justification may be judged from elsewhere to be unjust or unjustifiable. No law without force, as Immanuel Kant recalled with the greatest rigor. [...] there is no law that does not imply *in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its concept*, the possibility of being “enforced,” applied by force. [...] the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law, to *making law*, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no earlier and previously founding law, no pre-existing foundation, could, by definition, guarantee or contradict or invalidate.” (Jacques Derrida³¹⁹) – see also *institution*

– *history*

“There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far

³¹⁷ Fish, Stanley. “Force”, in *Washington and Lee Law Review*, Number 3, Volume 45, Summer 1988, 885, 895, 898.

³¹⁸ Cover, Robert. “Violence and the Word”, in *Violence. A Reader*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 293, 298.

³¹⁹ Derrida, Jacques. “Force of Law. The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’”, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 1992), 233, 241.

as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.”
(Walter Benjamin³²⁰)

* *microhistory*

“Tolstoy leaps over the inevitable gap between the fragmentary and distorted traces of an event (a battle, for instance) and the event itself. But this leap, this direct contact with reality, can take place only on the terrain of invention. It is precluded by definition from the historian, who has at his disposal only fragments of things and documents. The historiographical frescoes that seek to communicate to the reader, through frequently mediocre expedients, the illusion of a vanished reality tacitly remove this constituent limitation of the historical vocation. Microhistory chooses the opposite approach. It accepts the limitations while exploring their gnoseological implications and transforming them into a narrative element.” (Carlo Ginzburg³²¹) – see also *fact*

– *institution*

(1) “a complex of positions, roles, norms and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organising relatively stable patterns of human activity with respect to fundamental problems in producing life-sustaining resources, in reproducing individuals, and in sustaining viable societal structures within a given environment.” (Jonathan Turner³²²)

(2) What makes a discourse a philosophical discourse and not just a political discourse is that when it poses the question of the *politeia* (of the political institution, of the distribution and organization of relations of power), at the same time it poses the question of truth and true discourse on the basis of which these relations of power and their organization will be able to be defined, and it also poses the question of the *ethos*, that is to say, of the ethical differentiation to which these political structures can and must give space. (Michel Foucault³²³)

(3) “if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a “totally administered society,” or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of ourselves.” (Andrea Fraser³²⁴)

(4) “A legal world is built only to the extent that there are commitments that place bodies on the line. The torture of the martyr is an extreme and repulsive form of the organized violence of institutions. It reminds us that the interpretive commitments of officials are realized, indeed, in the flesh. As long as that is so, the interpretive commitments of a community which resists

³²⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, transl. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256-257.

³²¹ Ginzburg, Carlo. “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It”, in *Threads and Traces. True False Fictive*, trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012), 209.

³²² Turner, Jonathan. *The Institutional Order* (New York: Longman, 1997), 6.

³²³ Foucault, Michel. *Le Courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II. Cours au Collège de France (1984)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2009). Lecture of 8 February 1984.

³²⁴ Fraser, Andrea. “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” in *Artforum* n. 44, September 2005, 282.

official law must also be realized in the flesh, even if it be the flesh of its own adherents.” (Robert M. Cover³²⁵) – see also *force*

– *intensity*

(1) “I divide the field of experience into two main categories: substances on one hand, and on the other hand, intensity. As for substances, it is possible to establish their boundaries, to define their themes and subject, to trace their cartography; intensity, on the other hand, doesn’t have a unique place. [...] Philosophy – thought – is in this sense an intensity that can activate, animate and run through any field. It shares this character of tension with politics. Even politics is an intensity; even politics [...] doesn’t have a unique place: it is evident, not only in recent history, that suddenly religion, economics and even aesthetics may acquire a decisive political intensity, and become an occurrence of hostility and strife. It goes without saying that intensities are more interesting than essences. [...]

Philosophy isn’t a substance, but an intensity that can suddenly animate any field: art, religion, economics, poetry, passion, love, even boredom. It resembles something like the wind, the clouds, or a storm: like these, it suddenly shakes, transforms and even destroys the place where it takes place, but just as unpredictably, it passes and disappears. [...] I have always thought that philosophy and poetry aren’t two separate substances, but two intensities that animate the same field of language in two opposite directions: pure sense and pure sound. There’s no poetry without thought, just as there’s no thought without a poetic moment.” (Giorgio Agamben³²⁶)

(2) “the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. [...] The essence of univocal being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence and do not change the essence of being – just as white includes various intensities, while remaining essentially the same white.” (Gilles Deleuze³²⁷)

– *mode*

(1) “Mode is [...] an affection of the thing, «which determines its ultimate state and its reason for existing, without, however, adding to it a new essence but only by modifying it». [...] it is a question of defining a paradoxical state of being, insofar as it is totally deprived of an essence of its own and yet is really distinct from that to which it adheres as a mode, namely, by modifying it. [...] «modal being cannot subsist by itself nor be separated from that of which it is a mode» [...] We are accustomed to think in a *substantival* way, while mode has a constitutively *adverbial* nature, it expresses not “what” but “how” being is. [...] Common nature and singularity, essence and existence are only the two appearances generated by the incessant *ductus* of substance.

³²⁵ Cover, Robert. “Violence and the Word”, in *Violence. A Reader*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 295.

³²⁶ Giorgio Agamben interviewed by Antonio Gnoli. “Credo nel legame tra filosofia e poesia. Ho sempre amato la verità e la parola”, in *La Repubblica*, Milano, 15 May 2016. My translation.

³²⁷ Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001), 36.

And singular existence – the mode – is neither a substance nor a precise fact but an infinite series of modal oscillations, by means of which substance always constitutes and expresses itself. [...] Mode expresses this “rhythmic” and not “schematic” nature of being: being is a flux, and substance “modulates” itself and beats out its rhythm – it does not fix and schematize itself – in the modes. Not the individuating of itself but the beating out of the rhythm of substance defines the ontology that we are here seeking to define.” (Giorgio Agamben³²⁸)

(2) “I considered the theory of narrative a relevant area of study precisely because it is *not* confined to any one academic discipline. For narrative is a mode, not a genre. It is alive and active as a cultural force, not just as a kind of literature. It constitutes a major reservoir of the cultural baggage that enables us to make meaning out of a chaotic world and the incomprehensible events taking place in it. And, not to be forgotten, narrative can be used to manipulate. In short, it is a cultural force to be reckoned with.” (Mieke Bal³²⁹)

– *narrative*

(1) “any report of connected events, real or imaginary, presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, and/or still or moving images” (Wikipedia³³⁰)

(2) We currently use the word *narrative* without paying attention to, even at times without noticing, its ambiguity, and some of the difficulties of narratology are perhaps due to this confusion. [...] A first meaning [...] has narrative refer to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events [...] A second meaning [...] has *narrative* refer to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse. A third meaning [...] has narrative refer [to] the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself. [...]

I propose [...] to use the word *story* [‘histoire’] for the signified or narrative content [...], to use the word narrative [‘récit’] for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word *narrating* [‘narration’] for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place. [...] Story and narrating thus exist for me only by means of the intermediary of the narrative. But reciprocally the narrative (the narrated discourse) can only be such to the extent that it tells a story, without which it would not be narrative [...], and to the extent that it is uttered by someone, without which (like, for example, a collection of archeological documents) it would not in itself be a discourse. As narrative, it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it. Analysis of narrative discourse will thus be for me, essentially, a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that

³²⁸ Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV*, 2, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 155, 164, 172-173. Agamben quotes Francisco Suárez, in *Francisci Suárez e Societate Jesu Opera omnia*, vol. 25 (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1861), 256, 263.

³²⁹ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 24, 25.

³³⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative> (accessed March 29, 2019).

they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating. (Gérard Genette³³¹) – see also *story*

* *narrative artifact*

“a *text* is a finite, structured whole composed of language signs. [...] A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent relates (‘tells’) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A *story* is a *fabula* that is presented in a certain manner. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An *event* is the transition from one state to another state. *Actors* are agents that perform actions. *To act* is defined here as to cause or to experience an event. [...] Since ‘text’ refers to narratives in any medium, I will use this word with an emphasis on the structuredness, not the linguistic nature of it; to keep this in mind I will use it interchangeably with ‘*artifact*’”. (Mieke Bal³³²) – see also *form*

– *past*

(1) “What really matters about the past is what we cannot remember. The rest, what memory conserves or retrieves, is mere sediment. A part of time passed has really become part, like a digested nutrient, of the living organism; it continues to be past but it is the only true living past and it lives in the brain and the blood, ignored by memory.” (Furio Jesi³³³)

(2) “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” (William Faulkner³³⁴)

(3) “Memory is not a record of a fixed past that can ever be fully or simply erased, written over, or recovered. [...] And remembering is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual. Remembering and re-cognizing do not take care of, or satisfy, or in any other way reduce one’s responsibilities; rather, like all intra-actions, they extend the entanglements and responsibilities of which one is a part. The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgment; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind.” (Karen Barad³³⁵)

– *performative*

“To name the ship is to say (in the appropriate circumstances) the words ‘I name, &c.’. When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., ‘I do’, I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it. What are we to call a sentence or an utterance of this type? I propose to call it a performative sentence or a performative utterance, or, for short, ‘a performative’. The term ‘performative’ will be used in a variety of cognate ways and constructions, much as the term

³³¹ Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 25-29.

³³² Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, second edition), 5-6.

³³³ Jesi, Furio. *Spartakus. The Symbology of Revolt*, ed. Andrea Cavalletti, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 119.

³³⁴ Faulkner, William. *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 73.

³³⁵ Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), ix.

‘imperative’ is. The name [...] indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something.” (J. L. Austin³³⁶)

– *possession*

“The modernist subject preferred to conceive of itself as the *active* figure facing a *passive* world of matter that is acted upon. [...] Consequently, the most abject figure of savagery to the modern subject – the symptom of the exclusion and asymmetry – was “possession”, the condition of passive experience where the subject fully became a medium, and was fundamentally made, animated, and moved. [...] Animism was explained by a primitive incapacity to distinguish between object and subject, reality and fiction, the inside and the outside, which allegedly led primitive people to project human qualities onto objects.” (Anselm Franke³³⁷) – see also *ecstasy*

– *power*

“power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and [...] it only exists in action. [...] power is not primarily the maintenance and reproduction of economic relations, but is above all a relation of force. [...] power is properly speaking the way in which relations of forces are deployed and given concrete expression”.

“Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. [...] One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society”. (Michel Foucault³³⁸)

– *pre-political*

“the world of people who neither write nor read many books – often because they are illiterate –, who are rarely known by name to anybody except their friends, and then often only by nickname, who are normally inarticulate, and rarely understood even when they express themselves. Moreover, they are *pre-political* people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world. Though their movements are thus in many respects blind and groping, by the standards of modern ones, they are neither unimportant nor marginal. [Such] men and women form the large majority in many, perhaps in most, countries even today, and their acquisition of political consciousness has made our century the most revolutionary in history. For this reason the study of their movements is not merely curious, or interesting, or moving for anyone who cares about the fate of men, but also of practical importance.” (Eric Hobsbawm³³⁹)

³³⁶ Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 6-7.

³³⁷ Franke, Anselm. “Animism: Notes on an Exhibition”, in *e-flux journal* n. 36 - July 2012, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³³⁸ Foucault, Michel. “Lecture 7 January 1976”, in *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books 1980), 89-90; Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 93.

³³⁹ Hobsbawm, Eric. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 2-3.



– *puppet*

(1) “Characters human and inhuman, close to objects. What looks like a wooden block or ball, a bundle of rags, a thin silhouette of perforated leather, assumes a voice and personality. In the right hands, a mere strip of paper moved by a string, yielded to accidents of air, can do it. All acquire intentions, what looks like will, even if this belongs to things we think can have no will. All acquire different souls and spirits, all have different stories to tell. [...] The word derives from the Latin *pupa*, for little girl or doll, a word still used in entomology to describe the mysterious, more passive middle stage of an insect’s metamorphosis, as the larva is covered in a chrysalis, and awaits reemergence as a winged thing. [...] English Protestant reformers employed the word to mock the Roman Catholic use of images and relics, the ceremony of the Mass, indeed, the whole architecture of Catholic ritual. The homemade dolls found in the possession of accused witches, allegedly used to inflict harm by magic, were also called puppets.” (Kenneth Gross³⁴⁰)

(2) “Male plantation workers sometimes make secret contracts with the devil in order to increase productivity, and hence their wage. Furthermore, it is believed that the individual who makes the contract is likely to die prematurely and in great pain. While alive, he is but a puppet in the hands of the devil, and the money obtained from such a contract is barren. [...] The contract is supposed to be made in the deepest secrecy, individually, and with the aid of a sorcerer. A small anthropomorphic figurine, referred to as a *muñeco* (doll), is prepared, usually from flour, and spells are cast.” (Michael Taussig³⁴¹)

³⁴⁰ Gross, Kenneth. *Puppet: an essay on uncanny life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 10-11.

³⁴¹ Taussig, Michael. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 94-95.

(3) “Ernst Kantorowicz argued that the figurines exhibited at the funerals of English and French sovereigns gave palpable expression to the legal doctrine of the king’s double body; The effigy was the eternal body of the king inasmuch as he was associated with a public institution (*dignitas*); the corpse was his ephemeral body inasmuch as he was an individual.” (Carlo Ginzburg³⁴²)

* *burattino*

(Italian for “hand puppet” or “glove puppet”): “a doll with a hollow head of a person or animal and a cloth body; intended to fit over the hand and be manipulated with the fingers”.³⁴³

* *marionette*

(1) “also called “string puppet”, any of several types of puppet figures manipulated from above by strings or threads attached to a control. In a simple marionette, the strings are attached in nine places: to each leg, hand, shoulder, and ear and at the base of the spine. By adding strings, more sensitive control of movement is achieved. Among European puppets, marionettes are considered the most delicate and difficult to master; some are capable of imitating almost every human and animal action.” (The Encyclopaedia Britannica³⁴⁴)

(2) “as the image in a concave mirror turns up again right in front of us after dwindling into the distance, so grace itself returns when knowledge has as it were gone through an infinity. Grace appears most purely in that human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness. That is, in the puppet or in the god.” (Heinrich von Kleist³⁴⁵)

– *relational*

(1) “*Reality is relational*. [Quantum mechanics] does not describe things as they are: it describes how things occur and how they interact with each other. It doesn’t describe where there is a particle but how the particle shows itself to others. The world of existent things is reduced to a realm of possible interactions. Reality is reduced to interaction. Reality is reduced to relation.” “we must not confuse what we know about a system with the absolute state of the same system. What we know is something concerning the relation between the system and ourselves. Knowledge is intrinsically relational; it depends just as much on its object as upon its subject. The notion of the ‘state’ of a system refers, explicitly or implicitly, to another system. Classical mechanics misled us into thinking that we could do without taking account of this simple truth, and that we could access, at least in theory, a vision of reality entirely independent of the observer. But the development of physics has shown that, at the end of the day, this is impossible.”

“The physical world is thus seen as a net of interacting components, where there is no meaning to the state of an isolated system. A physical system (or,

³⁴² Ginzburg, Carlo. “Representation”, in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 64.

³⁴³ <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/it/burattino> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁴⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/art/marionette> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁴⁵ Kleist, Heinrich von. “Über das Marionettentheater”, in *Berliner Abendblätter*, Berlin, 12-15 January 1810 (English translation: “Essay on the puppet theatre”, in *Partisan Review*, January-February 1947).

more precisely, its contingent state) is reduced to the net of relations it entertains with the surrounding systems, and the physical structure of the world is identified as this net of relationships.” (Carlo Rovelli³⁴⁶)

(2) “A *medium*, however, is not a *realm*, because its distinctively spatial quality – its status “in between” – indicates that it can never be construed as self-contained or self-regulating. Rather, it is relational and situational, depending decisively on alien or extraneous instances that, in the case of theater, are generally identified with the spectators or audiences.” (Samuel Weber³⁴⁷) – see also *situational*

– *research*

(1) “a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding” (Cambridge Dictionary³⁴⁸)

(2) “«Research» [...] is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.” (Research Assessment Exercise³⁴⁹)

* *artistic research*

(1) “Art practice – both the art object and the creative process – embodies situated, tacit knowledge that can be revealed and articulated by means of experimentation and interpretation. [...] Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and the wider public.” (Henk Borgdorff³⁵⁰)

³⁴⁶ Rovelli, Carlo. *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, trans. Simon Carnell and Erica Segre (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 91, 170; Rovelli, Carlo and Laudisa, Federico. “Relational Quantum Mechanics”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2013 Edition <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qm-relational/> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁴⁷ Weber, Samuel. *Theatricality as Medium* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2004), 43.

³⁴⁸ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/research> (accessed 29 March 2019). According to the same dictionary: “Study: to learn about a subject, especially in an educational course or by reading books”, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/study> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁴⁹ The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is conducted jointly by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL). The RAE is managed by the RAE team, based at HEFCE, on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies. Research Assessment Exercise, “RAE 2008: Guidance on Submissions” <http://www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2005/03/rae0305.pdf> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁵⁰ Borgdorff, Henk. *The Conflict of the Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012), 53.

(2) “a claim to specificity clashes with a claim to singularity. What does this mean? One aspect of the work claims to participate in a general paradigm, within a discourse that can be shared and which is manufactured according to certain criteria. More often than not, scientific, legalistic or journalistic truth procedures underly this method of research. These methodologies are pervaded by power relations as many theorists have demonstrated. On the other hand, artistic research projects in many cases also lay claim to singularity. They create a certain artistic set up, which claims to be relatively unique and produces its own field of reference and logic. This provides it with a certain autonomy, in some cases an edge of resistance against dominant modes of knowledge production. [...] While specific methods generate a shared terrain of knowledge – which is consequently pervaded by power structures – singular methods follow their own logic. While this may avoid the replication of existing structures of power/knowledge, it also creates the problem of the proliferation of parallel universes, which each speak their own, untranslatable language. Practices of artistic research usually partake in both registers, the singular as well as the specific; they speak several languages at once.” (Hito Steyerl³⁵¹)

*** *research in and through art***

“The exceptional thing about research in and through art is that practical action (the making) and theoretical reflection (the thinking) go hand in hand. The one cannot exist without the other, in the same way action and thought are inextricably linked in artistic practice. This stands in contradistinction to ‘research *into* art’, such as art history and cultural studies.” (Janneke Wesseling³⁵²)

*** *practice as research***

“Practice as Research involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry.” (Robin Nelson³⁵³)

– *responsibility*

“The Latin verb *spondeo*, which is the origin of our term “responsibility,” means “to become the guarantor of something for someone (or for oneself) with respect to someone.” [...] In archaic Roman law, in fact, the custom was that a free man could consign himself as a hostage – that is, in a state of imprisonment, from which the term *obligatio* derives – to guarantee the compensation of a wrong or the fulfillment of an obligation. The gesture of assuming responsibility is therefore genuinely juridical and not ethical. It expresses nothing noble or luminous, but rather simply obligation, the act by

³⁵¹ Steyerl, Hito. “Aesthetics of Resistance? Artistic Research as Discipline and Conflict”, in *transversal*, Vienna: Eijpcp, January 2010. <http://eijpcp.net/transversal/0311/steyerl/en> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁵² Wesseling, Janneke. “Introduction”, in *See It Again, Say It Again: The Artist as Researcher*, ed. Janneke Wesseling (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), 2.

³⁵³ Nelson, Robin. “Introduction: The What, Where, When and Why of ‘Practice as Research’”, in *Practice as Research in the Arts. Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, ed. Robin Nelson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8-9.

which one consigned one-self as a prisoner to guarantee: a debt in a context in which the legal bond was considered to inhere in the body of the person responsible.” (Giorgio Agamben³⁵⁴)

– *revolt*

“I use the word *revolt* to designate an insurrectional movement that differs from revolution. The difference between *revolt* and revolution should not be sought in their respective aims; they can both have the same aim – to seize power. What principally distinguishes *revolt* from revolution is, instead, a different experience of time. If, following the ordinary meaning of the two words, *revolt* is a sudden insurrectional explosion, which can be placed within a strategic horizon but which does not in itself imply a long-distance strategy, and revolution is a strategic complex of insurrectional movements, coordinated and oriented over the mid- to long term towards ultimate objectives, then we could say that *revolt* suspends historical time. It suddenly institutes a time in which everything that is done has a value in itself, independently of its consequences and of its relations with the transitory or perennial complex that constitutes history. Revolution would, instead, be wholly and deliberately immersed in historical time.” (Furio Jesi³⁵⁵)

– *situational*

“The primary interest of Peking Opera is not to present a meaningful action through a coherent plot, but rather to use both action and plot to foreground the significance of the performance. This alters the function of both narrative and its staging. [...] the ‘thread’ refers to the general plot of the play, while the ‘pearls’ are the specific scenes of the play. Each scene is an integral part of the play. This suggests that the scenic “pearls” can be separated from, and are therefore not entirely dependent upon, the “thread.” Judging from the performance I saw, such independence could well be described as “*situational*” – with the proviso that “situation” here includes not merely the actions represented on stage but their presentation as well. The latter deploys its own significance, one that is neither separable from nor reducible to an extra-theatrical, referential “plot.”” (Samuel Weber³⁵⁶) – see also *relational*

– *story*

(1) “When the Baal Schem, the founder of Hasidism, had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer; and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later, the Maggid of Meseritz was faced with the same task, he would go to the same place in the woods, and say: “We can no longer light a fire, but we can pray.” And everything happened according to his will. When another generation had passed, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov was faced with the same task, [and] he would go to the same place in the woods, and say: “We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayers, but we know the place in the woods, and that can be

³⁵⁴ Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Zone Books, New York 1999), 21-22.

³⁵⁵ Jesi, Furio. *Spartakus. The Symbolology of Revolt*, ed. Andrea Cavalletti, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Seagull Books, 2014), 46.

³⁵⁶ Weber, Samuel. *Theatricality as Medium* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2004), 25.

sufficient.” And sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down in his golden chair, in his castle, and said: “We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of all this.” And, once again, this was sufficient.” (Gershom Scholem³⁵⁷)

(2) “the art of storytelling is coming to an end. Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences.” (Walter Benjamin³⁵⁸)

(3) “Meaning “recital of true events” first recorded late 14c.; sense of “narrative of fictitious events meant to entertain” is from c. 1500. Not differentiated from *history* until 1500s. As a euphemism for “a lie” it dates from 1690s.” (Online Etymology Dictionary³⁵⁹) – see also *narrative*

– *theatre*

(1) “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.” (Peter Brook³⁶⁰)

(2) “When an event or series of events takes place without reducing the place it “taken” to a purely neutral site, then that place reveals itself to be a “stage,” and those events become theatrical happenings. [...] Theater is [...] considered to be a place not just of dissimulation and delusion but, worse, self-dissimulation and self-delusion. It is a place of fixity and unfreedom, but also of fascination and desire. A prison, to be sure, but one that confines through assent and consensus rather than through constraint and oppression.” (Samuel Weber³⁶¹)

(3) from Greek *theatron*, literally ‘place for viewing,’ from *theasthai* ‘to behold’, akin to Greek *thauma*, ‘miracle.’³⁶²

– *tradition*

(1) “Tradition as the discontinuum of the past in contradiction to history as the continuum of events.” – “The history of the oppressed is a discontinuum.” – “The task of history is to get hold of the tradition of the oppressed.” – “The continuum of history is the one of the oppressors. Whereas the idea of the continuum levels everything to the ground, the idea of the discontinuum is the foundation of real tradition.” (Walter Benjamin³⁶³)

³⁵⁷ Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 349–50.

³⁵⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov”, in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books 1969), 83.

³⁵⁹ https://www.etymonline.com/word/story#etymonline_v_22128 (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁶⁰ Brook, Peter. *The empty space* (New York: Touchstone 1968), 7.

³⁶¹ Weber, Samuel. *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 7–8.

³⁶² See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/theater> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theater> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁶³ Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, 7 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 1236. See also Benjamin, Walter. *Paralipomena and Notes of the Theses On*

(2) “Inventing traditions [...] is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition” “in spite of much invention, new traditions have not filled more than a small part of the space left by the secular decline of both old tradition and custom; as might indeed be expected in societies in which the past becomes increasingly less relevant as a model or precedent for most forms of human behaviour” (Eric Hobsbawm³⁶⁴)

(3) “contrary to what one might think at first sight, the breaking of tradition does not at all mean the loss or devaluation of the past: it is, rather, likely that only now the past can reveal itself with a weight and an influence it never had before. Loss of tradition means that the past has lost its transmissibility, and so long as no new way has been found to enter into a relation with it, it can only be the object of accumulation from now on.” (Giorgio Agamben³⁶⁵) – see also *transmission*

– *transmission*

(1) “Whoever until this day emerges victorious, marches in the triumphal procession in which today’s rulers tread over those who are sprawled underfoot. The spoils are, as was ever the case, carried along in the triumphal procession. They are known as the cultural heritage. In the historical materialist they have to reckon with a distanced observer. For what he surveys as the cultural heritage is part and parcel of a lineage which he cannot contemplate without horror. It owes its existence not only to the toil of the great geniuses, who created it, but also to the nameless drudgery of its contemporaries. There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism. And just as it is itself not free from barbarism, neither is it free from the process of transmission, in which it falls from one set of hands into another. The historical materialist thus moves as far away from this as measurably possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.” (Walter Benjamin³⁶⁶)

(2) “An old man, who was an executioner in 1937, once asked me, “how long can a person hang on? How long a man is a man? I’ll tell you: the leg of a Viennese chair in the anus or a nail to the scrotum, and the man is gone.” And here is the question I ask myself, after listening to an executioner and his torture practices. Why have the leg of a Viennese chair in the anus or a plastic bag on the head in prison passed on from generation to generation? Why is Dostoevsky not transmitted? We do not have an answer for such a question.” (Svetlana Alexievich³⁶⁷)

the Concept of History (1940), trans. Sami Khatib in collaboration with Jacob Bard-Rosenberg, 2015, <http://anthropologicalmaterialism.hypotheses.org/2128> (accessed 29 March 2019).

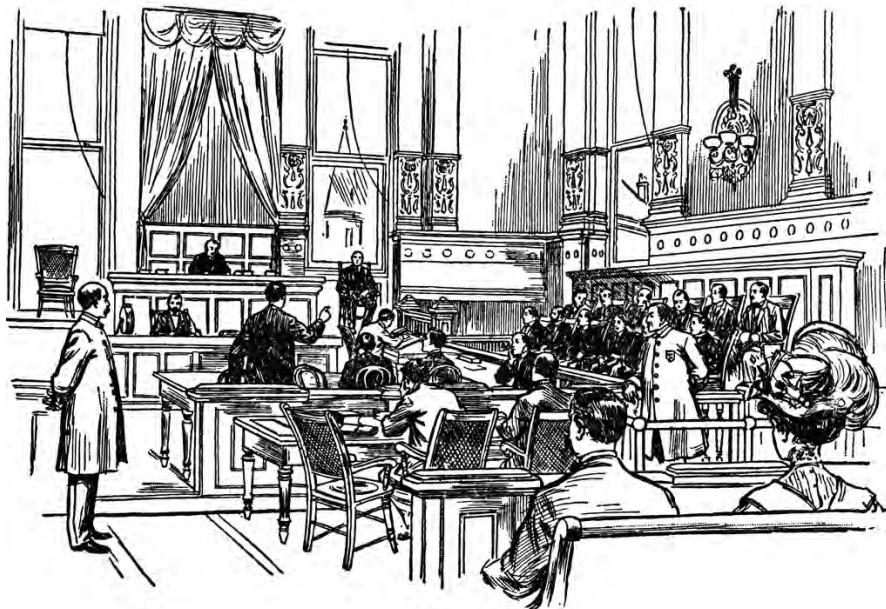
³⁶⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric. “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4, 11.

³⁶⁵ Agamben, Giorgio. *L'uomo senza contenuto* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1994), 162.

³⁶⁶ Benjamin, Walter. *Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen. Zur Kritik der Gewalt und andere Aufsätze* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1978). English translation by Dennis Redmond, 2005, available at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁶⁷ Svetlana Alexievich interviewed by Francesca Mannocchi, “Svetlana Aleksievic: «La paura fa scegliere governanti primitivi»”, in *L'Espresso*, Milano: 18 October 2018,

(3) “art abolishes the gap between the thing to be transmitted and the act of transmission and again comes closer to the mythic-traditional system, in which a perfect identity existed between the two terms.” (Giorgio Agamben³⁶⁸) – see also *tradition*



– *trial*

(1) A formal examination of evidence by a judge, typically before a jury, in order to decide guilt in a case of criminal or civil proceedings. (Oxford Dictionary³⁶⁹)

(2) “Ideally, a jury trial creates a separate, isolated information space, which is insulated from the outside. The jury is presented with a crafted body of evidence and called upon to make a decision.” (Charles Nesson³⁷⁰) – see also *evidence*

– *truth*

(1) “We intuitively know that truth – reality, no-nonsense hard fact – has to do with a contract, an agreement, a convention. It does not belong to a person, but to a society, a group of people who have agreed that things are a given way because that way is more convenient to their present interest or more conducive to their survival. This convenient truth could be about the flat shape of the Earth, the existence of God, the indissolubility of marriage, the need for (and characteristics of) progress, the superiority of European culture, or the need for the total destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to end

<http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2018/10/18/news/la-paura-fa-scegliere-governanti-primitivi-parla-la-scrivitrice-premio-nobel-svetlana-aleksievic-1.327908> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁶⁸ Agamben, Giorgio. *L'uomo senza contenuto* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1994), 171.

³⁶⁹ Oxford Dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/trial> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁷⁰ Nesson, Charles. “What You Have Said in the Dark: The Evolution of Media in the Courtroom and the New Challenges of Containing the Jury's Information Space”, in *St. Thomas Law Review* n. 24, 2012, 385-386.

the war. In the face of such commonly accepted truths – and it is from these that the tissue of history is formed – to propose, to present, to describe and to tell a different version of the story, a different truth, is sometimes a courageous act of dissidence and resistance. Or an act of lunacy. Or both. This resistance has its source in the need to protect ourselves from the truth. But not, or not only, because this truth is too painful or too boring to bear, but because it is imposed on us”. (Dora García³⁷¹)

(2) “There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. [...] I would say that we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit.” (Michel Foucault³⁷²)

(3) “When you tell me [Trump] should testify because he’s going to tell the truth so he shouldn’t worry, well that’s so silly because it’s somebody’s version of the truth, not the truth. [...] Truth isn’t truth.” (Rudy Giuliani³⁷³)

* *post-truth*

“relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” (Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016³⁷⁴)

– *use*

(1) “a zone of indetermination between subject and object (the agent is in some way also object and place of action) and between active and passive (the agent receives an affection from his own action). [...] *it expresses the relation that one has with oneself, the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with a determinate being.* [...] every use is first of all use of self: to enter into a relation of use with something, I must be affected by it, constitute myself as one who makes use of it. Human being and world are, in use, in a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence; in the using of something, it is the very being of the one using that is first of all at stake. [...] To the affection that the agent receives from his action there corresponds the affection that the patient receives from his passion. Subject and object are thus deactivated and rendered inoperative, and, in their place, there follows use as a new figure of human praxis.”

“just like the poet, so also are the carpenter, the cobbler, the flute player, and

³⁷¹ García, Dora. “To Protect Us From the Truth”, in *Fiction as Method*, ed. Jon K. Shaw and Theo Reeves-Everson (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 172.

³⁷² Foucault, Michel. *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2014), Lecture of 14 January 1976.

³⁷³ Rudy Giuliani talking to Chuck Todd, host of NBC’s *Meet the Press* TV program on 19 August 2018. See <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/aug/19/truth-isnt-truth-rudy-giuliani-trump-alternative-facts-orwellian> (accessed 29 March 2019).

³⁷⁴ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016> (accessed 29 March 2019).

those who, with a term of theological origin, we call professionals – and, in the end, every human being – not transcendent title holders of a capacity to act or make: rather, they are living beings that, in the use and only in the use of their body parts as of the world that surrounds them, have self-experience and constitute-themselves as using (themselves and the world).” (Giorgio Agamben³⁷⁵)

(2) “The shift in methodology I am arguing for here is founded on a particular relationship between subject and object, one that is not predicated on a vertical and binary opposition between the two. Instead, the model for this relationship is interaction, as in ‘interactivity’. It is because of this potential interactivity – not because of an obsession with ‘proper’ usage – that every academic field, but especially one like the humanities that has so little in the way of binding traditions, can gain from taking concepts seriously. [...] Depending on the background in which the analyst was initially trained and the cultural genre to which the object belongs, each analysis tends to take for granted a certain use of concepts.”

“It is meaningful to activate the look only in the use of objects. Unread, a novel remains a mute object; unread, an image remains an equally mute object.” (Mieke Bal³⁷⁶)

³⁷⁵ Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV*, 2, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 28-30, 62.

³⁷⁶ Bal, Mieke. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 24, 25, 49-50.

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Summary (English)

My artistic practice deals with documents and, more specifically, with the use and the exploration of their narrative potential. This dissertation is about three different cycles of artworks I produced as part of the research project. Each cycle focuses on a different person. Every ‘cycle’ provides as a conceptual framework related to a specific case study, as well as embodying a concrete ensemble of artworks, objects and presentations thereof.

Both documents and artworks may be studied as ‘intensities’, as modes of existence of objects rather than as objects ‘in themselves’: they need to be used, *animated* in a specific way in order to exist as such. The notion of animation inheres in each of the three case studies:

- Case 1 focuses on my artworks about Simone Pianetti (1858-?), an Italian mass murderer who escaped and disappeared, and who then became a puppet character, *animated* as a stock character.
- Case 2 focuses on Augusto Masetti (1888-1966), an Italian soldier who shot at his superior officer and declared not to remember having done it, as if in a state of ecstatic possession, as if *animated* by an external entity. Mainly using publications and workshops, I produced a series of artworks related to legal, medical and anarchist records on his case.
- Case 3 follows the appearance of a puppet character in Colombia, *el espiritado*, and its supposed connections to the Masetti case. I describe a series of artistic works I produced, starting from a puppet script about the self-destruction of a village, which can be read as a commentary on puppetry, anarchism and *animation*.

The documents I found about these three case studies are of a very peculiar nature: there is no official version, no certified truth for the real events they refer to. They deal with acts of solitary, inarticulate and “pre-political” resistance, transmitted through outmoded narrative formats. In order to investigate such stories, one has to rely on *variations* – on the mysterious, unofficial, marginal and latent ways in which they have been transmitted. This is why I attempt to conceive an alternative mode of existence of documents: a *variational* mode.

Starting from this notion, I address two questions:

- Is it possible to conceive a mode of documents not based on official validation by institutions of power?

Could such a mode be identified and studied *in and through* an art practice?

Samenvatting

In mijn artistieke praktijk onderzoek ik documenten, in het bijzonder de manier waarop ze worden gebruikt en het narratieve potentieel van documenten. Dit proefschrift behandelt drie verschillende 'cycli' kunstwerken, waarbij in iedere cyclus één persoon centraal staat. Iedere cyclus biedt een conceptueel kader voor een specifieke casus en elke cyclus bestaat uit een verzameling kunstwerken, objecten en presentaties daarvan.

Zowel documenten als kunstwerken kunnen worden bestudeerd als 'intensiteiten', als wijze van bestaan van objecten, meer dan objecten 'op zichzelf'. Ze moeten worden gebruikt, op een speciale manier worden 'beziel' om te kunnen bestaan. De notie 'beziel' staat centraal in ieder van de drie casussen.

- Casus 1 gaat over Simone Pianetti (1858-?). Hij was een Italiaanse massamoordenaar, die vluchtte en verdween en later een bekend poppenspelkarakter werd, 'tot leven gebracht' als terugkerend personage.
- Casus 2 richt zich op Augusto Masetti (1888-1966), een Italiaanse soldaat die zijn meerdere neerschoot en verklaarde dat hij zich niet meer herinnert dit te hebben gedaan, alsof hij door een externe entiteit bezeten was geraakt en hij in extase had gehandeld. Met gebruik van publicaties en bijeenkomsten, heb ik een serie kunstwerken gemaakt, gerelateerd aan juridische, medische en anarchistische optekeningen over deze zaak.
- Casus 3 volgt de opkomst van een poppenspelkarakter in Columbia: *el espiritado*, en de veronderstelde relatie met de Masetti-zaak. In deze casus beschrijf ik een serie door mij gemaakte kunstwerken op basis van een poppenspelscript over de zelfvernietiging van een dorp, dat gelezen kan worden als commentaar op het poppenspel, anarchisme en 'bezieling'.

De documenten die ik vond over deze drie casussen waren bijzonder van aard: er bestaat geen officiële versie, geen controleerbare waarheid die de echtheid van de gebeurtenissen waarnaar ze verwijzen bewijst. De casussen hebben te maken met eenzaamheid, en met onuitgesproken en 'pre-politiek' verzet; alle overgedragen door middel van ouderwetse verhalende vormen. Om zulke verhalen te onderzoeken moet men vertrouwen op 'variëties' – op mysterieuze, niet-officiële, in de marge en latent aanwezig zijnde manieren waarop die verhalen zijn overgedragen. Met mijn onderzoek heb ik een alternatieve bestaanswijze voor dit soort documenten ontwikkeld: *een variatiemodus*.

Dit soort documenten hebben te maken met daden van solitair, onduidelijk en "pre-politiek" verzet, overgedragen via verouderde vertelformaten. Om dergelijke verhalen te onderzoeken, moet men vertrouwen op variëties - op de mysterieuze, niet-officiële, marginale en latente manieren waarop ze zijn overgedragen. Daarom probeer ik een alternatieve bestaanswijze van documenten te bedenken: een variatiemodus.

Uitgaand van dit idee, stel ik twee vragen:

1. Is het mogelijk om een modus van documenten te bedenken die niet is gebaseerd op officiële erkenning door instituties?
2. Kan een dergelijke modus worden geïdentificeerd en bestudeerd *in en door* een kunstpraktijk?

Curriculum vitae

Riccardo Giacconi was born on 18 January 1985 in San Severino Marche (Italy).

In 2004 he began his studies at the IUAV University of Venezia (Italy), where he obtained his MA in Visual Arts *cum laude* in March 2010.

His work as a visual artist and filmmaker has been exhibited in various institutions, including Grazer Kunstverein (Graz), ar/ge kunst (Bolzano), MAC (Belfast), WUK Kunsthalle Exnergasse (Vienna), FRAC Champagne-Ardenne (Reims), tranzitdisplay (Prague), Kunstpavillon (Innsbruck), Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin).

He was artist-in-residence at: Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen (Innsbruck, Austria), Centre international d'art et du paysage (Vassivière, France), lugar a dudas (Cali, Colombia), MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art (Rome, Italy) and La Box (Bourges, France).

His films have been presented at several festivals, including the New York Film Festival, the Venice International Film Festival, the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the Torino Film Festival, Visions du Réel and the FID Marseille International Film Festival, where he won the Grand Prix of the International Competition in 2015.

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