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

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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?