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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?

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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