

Mousse Publishing

Dora Garcia
Mousse Magazine
December 29th, 2013
By Barbara Casavecchia

Dora Garcia, *The Sinthome Score* at Kunsthau Bregenz



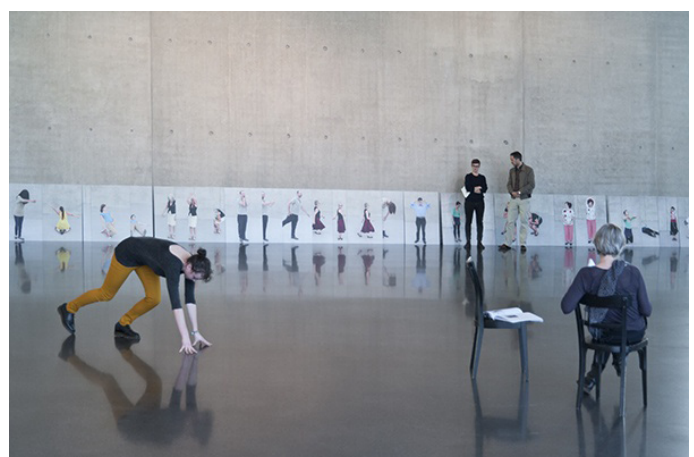
The entrance is a small iron door at the back of the Kunsthau, like a stage door. The sign says: Sinthome. The walls are lined with wallpaper and life-size pictures of dancers. Two empty chairs wait quietly. By reversing the standard, functional perspective of the lobby of the Kunsthau Bregenz—its so-called Arena, used as an experimental space, curated by Eva Birkenstock—Dora García turns it into a stage. Her project duly fulfills the institutional need to present the museum as an arena for (literally) underground experimentation, while cleverly analyzing (or psychoanalyzing) the grammar of the context in which “live arts” are presented to the public.

On her first walk around Bregenz, García passed in front of the Lacan Archives in Belruptstraße, round the corner from the KUB—a research library created in 1993 by a group of psychoanalysts and amateurs to promote the reception of Lacan’s oeuvre in German-speaking countries. The members meet up on a regular basis to study and discuss the French psychoanalyst’s Seminars. For a number of years, while awaiting the official stamp of approval, “clandestine” German translations were circulated among the participants, privately distributed and thoroughly debated. “I’m fascinated by the idea of the secret society and such devotion for a text,” says the artist. But why Lacan? Because of James Joyce. “I have always been attracted to Joyce in relation to concepts such as ‘the destruction of the English language’, the ‘explosion of language’, ‘the end of literature’. This had, of course, a punk, countercultural quality I was very attracted to. But my interest was renewed when I found out that Ulysses had been started in Trieste,” writes García in a letter to Chantal Pontbriand (from her project *UlysseswasborninTrieste*, 2013). From Trieste, the Joycean thread brought her to Zurich, where for 30 years the members of the local Joycean Society have met regularly to read Finnegans Wake, Joyce’s last book: it takes them over a decade, and once they get through the last page and the last word (“the”), they start reading the Wake all over again, from the first word (“riverrun”), thus echoing the endless, circular structure of the book. García attended the meetings for a year, resulting in her film and eponymous book *The Joycean Society* (2013), presented in Venice as a side event of the last Biennale.



Joyce and Lacan collide in Seminar XXIII, where Portrait of an Artist is the starting point for investigating the mutual relations between the three realms of subjectivity (Symbolic, Imaginary and Real), and Joyce’s subversion of language becomes a way of knotting them together, as well as avoiding their collapse into madness: it is the *synthome* (symptom; *synthome* is spelled in old French, in homage to the Irish writer’s penchant for etymology, portmanteaus and polyglotism). Language and interpretation are key words, in García’s work, where the roles of the performing artist (or performing institution, or performing—institutional—critique) and those of the audience are constantly redefined, looped, fed back, negotiated and questioned. Translations are key as well (for instance, her Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, in 2011, had a trilingual title: *L’Inadeguato, Lo Inadecuado, The Inadequate*), in part as a means of “site-specifying” each project. In Bregenz, Seminar XXIII is presented in the German translation provided by the Lacan Archives, whose members, since the beginning of the exhibition, have used the KUB Arena as a meeting point. A series of conferences and readings have been held there. Every day, all day, two performers follow the *Score Symphonon*. One reads the text aloud (the Seminars are a transcription of the “lessons” held by Lacan at the law school in Place du Panthéon, in Paris, so that the resonance of the spoken word is crucial to their understanding), while the other translates it into body movements. García has created ten series of drawings, one for each chapter of the Seminar, to be used as open-ended choreographic notation. In some ways, she echoes John Cage’s compositions based on Finnegans Wake, a recurring theme in the composer’s output (the songs “The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs”, 1942, and “Nowth Upon Nacht”, 1984, adapted from parts of the book; *Roaratorio*, 1979 and its libretto, *Writing for the Second Time Through Finnegans Wake*, spoken by Cage; the radio play *Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, Eric Satie: An Alphabet*, 1982). “In Fluxian terms,” says García, “anything can be and can be used as a score.”

at Kunsthau Bregenz
until 12 January 2014



Dora García, *The Synthome Score*, at Kunsthau Bregenz, 2013