

NOBODY IS SLEEPING IN THE SKY

The artists Geoffrey Farmer and Dora García discuss shared memories, James Joyce, Jacques Lacan, Allan Kaprow, and many more influences and references in a grid that offers a perspective on their own work.

GEOFFREY FARMER AND DORA GARCÍA
IN CONVERSATION



Geoffrey Farmer, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 2008, installation view at Het Gebouw, Leidsche Rijn, Utrecht, 2008. Courtesy: the artist

Geoffrey Farmer (1967) is an artist who lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia. Group and solo exhibitions include, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, The Stanley Brouwn Pavillon, Utrecht (2008), Sydney Biennial (2008), Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City (2010) Mondegreen (with Jeremy Millar), Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2011), dOCUMENTA 13 (2012) Kunstverein in Hamburg (2014). He is currently working towards a project to be presented in the Canada Pavilion at the 57 International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, in 2017.

Dora García is an artist living in Barcelona now after almost two decades of residence in Brussels. She is a teacher in Oslo National Academy of the Arts and HEAD Geneva, and co-director of Les Laboratoires D'Aubervilliers Paris. She has exhibited her work since the late 90s and among these exhibitions she specially remembers Münster Sculpture Projects (2007), Venice Biennale (2011, 13, 15), dOCUMENTA (13) (2012), and Toronto Power Plant (2015).

GEOFFREY FARMER

Early this morning I forwarded an interview you did with Sandrine Meats to the staff I'm working with at the National Gallery of Canada with the subject: "PLEASE READ!" It's a conversation about your occupation of the Spanish Pavilion during the Venice Biennale in 2011 with *The Inadequate*. In it you clarify that you were commissioned to present your work in the pavilion, not commissioned to represent Spain. You talk about the relationship between author and audience, between the one who speaks and the one who listens, and about the contradiction of expectations.

It was helpful to read something like this when I myself have so many unformulated thoughts and feelings about being asked to do something with the Canada Pavilion next year. It made me happy that because of the NGC's invitation, and being flown to Venice to meet with them, I was able to participate in your work *The Sinthome Score* (2014–2015), which was part of Okwui Enwezor's *All The World's Futures*.

And now that I have arrived back in Europe to begin some preliminary work, I keep thinking back to the experience I had in the Arsenale, leaning against the post and reading out loud from *The Sinthome Score*. I knew something of your work before; I wasn't certain if I saw it in Münster, or I was told about it, or thought I had seen it. I have your *All the Stories* close to my worktable in the studio, and I have read things, but participating was different. I write this to explain how you came to my mind when *Mousse* proposed a conversation with another artist. Now as I approach Venice (we are driving there from St. Gallen) I am thinking about *The Sinthome Score*.

Do you think it makes sense to begin here?

I am waking up quite early and so I write you from a soccer field at 6 a.m. where people are being walked on leashes by dogs and other people are walking in the way you do when you need to arrive somewhere at a specific time.

DORA GARCÍA

"People are being walked on leashes by dogs" sounds very Austrian. Did you say you were in Graz? Yes, in Austria I have the feeling people are being strapped with leather all the time. When you wrote to me I remembered, indeed—I live in a sort of haze where I remember nothing very clearly, and I often realize in the middle of a book that I have already read that book. There is this specific book, *Nine Stories* by J. D. Salinger, that I always remember I've read before when I arrive at a very specific point in a very specific story, which is, curiously, about a boy being able to predict the future, "Teddy."

When you wrote to me I remembered indeed that Michelangelo Miccolis told me "Geoffrey Farmer was here." And it took me a moment to collect what that name meant to me. It meant Sydney, Kassel, and a very nice show in Utrecht, the Netherlands, with this wonderful title *Master Humphrey's Clock*, where I did not meet you—I think I never met you in person—but I met two great people, Virginija Januskeviciute and Inti Guerrero. To name them is not vain because since then (almost nine years now) I have worked a lot with them; with Virginija I made the only performance where I was an actress. I played Gertrude Stein.

So this little note by Michelangelo opened a lot of memories of things I had seen and heard but did not remember presently. I would very much like to discuss with you notions of theater and stage, since as perhaps you can imagine I seem to be bound to character and plot, which is something quite different from the stage, but I love archives, libraries, cemeteries, abandoned houses, ruins, and dystopian narratives. So I think there is a strong connection there. How did you like *The Sinthome Score*? I have mixed feelings about it because it was one of those works that are inevitable, and therefore it is as if I was never in full command of it. I look forward to going where you want this conversation to go.

GF

I just arrived in Austria. I saw a photograph on my way of Valie Export walking Peter Weibel as if he was a dog. The picture is from the *Portfolio of Dogness* (1968). She has a great smirk in the photograph. Strangely, the couple that I am working with in Graz have a reenactment of the picture up in their house, this time with two men.

I'm not sure if it works as well as the first. So you are right that there is something going on here. It was once the home of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch!

I was strapped once with leather. It was in the 1990s when I was studying in San Francisco and I went on a date with a racecar driver, and later in the evening he wanted to strap me with his leather belt. I don't know how he asked me, but I remember that each time he struck me, he wanted me to thank him. I realized that I had wished for that kind of punishment when I was a kid, something... structured... not just a storm of fists.

I mention this because I had been in Lacanian analysis for about a year before reading *The Sinthome Score* that time in Venice. I had gone into analysis with the hope of being cured of compulsively retelling a story. It was a story about what I said once when I got struck in the face. It had gotten to the point that if I ever got drunk, the story would put me on a leash and walk me around in circles. In the process of analysis I experienced the story as a kind of planet around which other stories orbited. And with some effort of boring holes through it, the planet broke into pieces. The gravitational pull lessened and the orbits of the other stories shifted.



Dora García, *Just Because Everything is Different It Does Not Mean That Anything Has Changed, Lenny Bruce In Sydney* (still from video documentation), 2008. Performed by Harli Ammouchi at the 16th Sydney Biennale, Sydney 2008. © Dora García. Courtesy: the artist

DG

Somehow upon reading this I had to think of Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014). The world is divided among people who think it's the most unbearable movie ever and people who think it's the fifth Gospel. And then of course there are those who could not care less. In any case I belong to the first: unbearable. But it takes some reasoning to explain why I think it is unbearable, as many friends I respect a lot think it is the fifth Gospel. As usual, I think the blame is on the extremely bad script and dialogue. Pretentious, absurd, out of tempo, sometimes completely ridiculous. And the overacting is very irritating.

In saying this I am revealing what kind of storytelling school I belong to: one that privileges stories, plotlines, character building, and dialogue over atmosphere, color, sentiment, and emotion. One could say I belong to the cerebral school. There was this lovely expression invented by Gene Swenson in "The Other Tradition" (1966). He claimed that there was indeed a formal tradition in Modernism that went from Pablo Picasso to Jackson Pollock, which is the story told by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And then there was the "other tradition" that went from Dada to Surrealism and Situationism and (as he called them) the sign painters, meaning Pop. I always felt closer to the "other tradition." In theater this meant Bertolt Brecht sometimes, and sometimes Antonin Artaud. In movies this meant Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder but also of course lots of others, the type who said: "I have made the movie, now I am going to film it"; I think it was Alfred Hitchcock who said that.

So indeed plot and character have always been my main concerns, over stage design, atmosphere, and props. I am not proud of it; I think I suffer an important lack there in *form*. But I do not seem to be able to get enthusiastic about form—only about words, words, and who says the words. And how those words build the character.

GF

I have definitely been accused of overacting, and I have had a bit of a preoccupation with props and staging. I think I get



Top - Dora García, *The Inadequate*, 2011. Performed by Jakob Tamm at the Spanish Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, Venice, 2011. © Dora García. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Roman Mensing

Bottom - Dora García, *The Sinhome Score*, 2013-2015. Performed by Adriano Wilfert Jensen and Simon Asencio at the 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, 2015. © Dora García. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Giovanni Pancino

myself into trouble by not knowing what school I belong to. I would choose the “other tradition,” instantly, but I hope this can also include kabuki, Robert Altman, and one of Frank O’Hara’s poems, “Lana Turner Has Collapsed!” I am the person who, at the dinner table, when Billy Wilder’s name comes up, says, “I love *Funny Girl!*” with everyone looking at me strangely. And it’s not because I don’t care—I do, very much, it is as you say about reading a book and halfway through realizing that you have read it before. So there is some confusion and I am in envy of Hitchcock’s statement. I once read that Samuel Beckett’s work evolved out his resignation to James Joyce’s genius.

So in this regard I suffer from slippages, inconsonant behavior, maximalism, and bad tempo, but with a deep commitment to everything you describe above.

But back to *The Sinthome Score*. I came to the Arsénale that day fresh from analysis, reading out loud about Jacques Lacan’s Borromean knot. I was leaning against a post, with people stopping to listen, and as the words were coming out of my mouth I had the sensation that they were my thoughts (which they were.) And there was suddenly a twist; the thoughts went from being on the outside, an observer, to the inside, a participant. And the movement of Ana Valter made me aware of my body and what was being said. Not by a leash but embodied. Like the story I couldn’t stop repeating and I am sure that what I said couldn’t have been said, unless I was struck on the head. They were words that could have only been rung out of me like a bell. I can’t say that I haven’t fully grasped the moment in the Arsénale. I thought about it for some time afterward. I’m still thinking about it now here in Graz on a trampoline. And I’m thinking here about what you say about being bound to character and plot. This feels important to ask you to talk a little bit about.

And a footnote: I wanted to mention something about Gertrude Stein, and speaking text out loud. Back again to the 1990s, when my teacher Kathy Acker read out loud Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, something in my mind clicked when she read:

“The care with which the rain is wrong and the green is wrong and the white is wrong, the care with which there is a chair and plenty of breathing. The care with which there is incredible justice and likeness, all this makes a magnificent asparagus, and also a fountain.”

DG So indeed I have prepared the terrain with my last paragraph, which split in two your entry in this dialogue that is done in several tempos. What you describe about your Arsénale experience with *The Sinthome Score* is very much what I was hoping for from my Ideal Observer/Participant. Many of my obsessions come together in *The Sinthome Score*. Indeed, there comes this idea of language (“The Unconscious is the body pierced by language”—this was the sentence, in the XXIII seminar, that triggered *The Sinthome Score*) and how words, *through the body*, build a character, a persona inside a representation, more real than real people.

But there are other obsessions at play, for instance the audience. How to get rid of the audience, how to make the audience disappear? This is an idea that has haunted me forever, since I saw Dan Graham’s *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1975), and some time later with Allan Kaprow’s pieces and as well with the theater works of Peter Handke, his *Insulting the Audience* (1971) being a major influence.

Another obsession would be the notion of looking and identifying representation. What kinds of social protocols and cultural conventions govern our behavior as spectators? How do we identify performer and viewer, and what is the behavior they have in relation to each other? This was as well very present in the text of *The Sinthome Score*, practice being what keeps subjectivity together, safe from collapse. *Practice*, and not *product*.

I have never been a fan of Gertrude Stein. I think she was extremely unkind to women and a collaborator (yes, this is a paradox, but she was a collaborator, or at least a sympathizer, of the Vichy regime). Certainly she knew what she was doing as a writer, although what I find most enjoyable in her biography is her resentment toward James Joyce. She thought he had stolen something from her, the crown of Modernist literary king, I guess. Sometimes I feel like a traitor criticizing Gertrude Stein and taking so much the side of

Joyce. But I love Joyce, and he has moved me in ways that Stein is incapable of. Let me quote what I think are the most beautiful lines ever in English (the word *English* hurts here) literature:

“If I seen him bearing down on me now under whitespread wings like he’d come from Arkangels, I sink I’d die down over his feet, humbly dumbly, only to washup. Yes, tid. There’s where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussofilthee, mememormee! Till thousandsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved along the”



Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1959-2024, Allan Kaprow. *Other Ways* performance at Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain, 2014. Reinvention by Dora Garcia in cooperation with Students of the Haute École D’art et de Design, Geneva, Switzerland. Courtesy: Allan Kaprow Estate and Hauser & Wirth

GF It is certainly beautiful. I read this while hanging onto a small boat in the marshes of the lagoon.

Stein’s relationship with Bernard Faÿ is troubling and hard to understand. And I have to admit that I don’t know enough about it or her life. I completely agree with you, though, about what Joyce’s writing does as opposed to what Stein’s does. For me Stein’s is a mantra and Joyce’s is a cosmology.

But it was *Tender Buttons* read out loud that opened a gate for me to understand literature in a different way. I am humbly dumbly. But I know of this speaking body. I seem to come to things vis-à-vis something else. Like discovering Philip K. Dick because of my obsession with *Blade Runner* as a teenager.

Around the same time as the *Tender Buttons* moment, I heard Allen Ginsberg lecture on cadence and then sing out loud one of his poems, which I found shocking. And then Allan Kaprow came to work with us. The set of movements that you created to be performed with *The Sinthome Score* reminded me of the squeezebox that Kaprow produced to sing his poem. How did these develop? It certainly created a sense of accompaniment, a conversation between word and body. They were at once something for spectators to experience, but also eliciting something uncomfortable. Do they link to your feelings on the social protocols and cultural conventions of the spectator?

DG Starting from this sentence “The Unconscious is the body pierced by language” (a sentence I discovered while participating in a psychoanalytical reading circle in Bregenz, Austria, where German-speaking psychoanalysts wanted to collectively translate Lacan from French to German), I thought I wanted to do a live act for two characters (à la Beckett): a *reader* and a *mover*. And that they would dance to each other, not paying attention to the audience. They would play for each other, their rhythms adjusting gradually until finding harmony, going together, synchronized. This was the first idea. Then I started to fine tune and I thought, this is the text, *Joyce Le Sinthome*, seminar XXIII Jacques Lacan, the same we were reading in Bregenz, and where the original sentence comes from, a text that is beautiful enough to be read and arcane enough to create around a secret community.

And as for movements, I took another sentence from the same text:



Dan Graham, *Performer / Audience / Mirror*, 1975. Performed at De Appel, Amsterdam, 1977.
© Dan Graham. Courtesy: the artist



VALIE EXPORT and Peter Weibel, *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit* (Documentation of the action), 1968.
© Generali Foundation Collection—Permanent loan to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg. Photo: Josef Tandl

“There is something all the same. There is something all the same that one is quite surprised about: that this not serve more, not the body, but that it does serve more the body as such: it is dance. This would allow to be written differently the term *condensation*. You see that I am letting myself go on this occasion... Yeah!”

So I started to look at contemporary dance, iconic contemporary dance, but of this special type that anyone can do it. I was looking for non-virtuosity. Yvonne Rainer and Jonathan Burrows were the first that came to mind, and I started to draw the positions from those drawings. The idea was to do more gymnastic routines than choreography, and ideally (this was the idea of a score) anyone could pick up the book, the score, and play—no need for training, no concept of “good” performance, as all renditions would be equally good.

This notion is clearly coming from Kaprow, who was very fresh in my mind since I spent 2014 studying *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), and obviously I tried so hard to decipher his choreographic drawings that *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* completely colored *The Sinthome Score*. But yes, to round it up, there is something about the protocols of spectatorship. Different degrees of spectatorship offered to the visitor until turning that visitor into a performer, perhaps. It was important the little circle of chairs, the limit of the space, the claiming of a part of that room as a space for *The Sinthome Score*. And the idea, very important, that anyone could join in, in various degrees of involvement. And I can also say that, while I often despair of understanding what the audience wants, or knowing if I care, discomfort is something I actively seek to provoke.

GF I had to circle around the sentences “There is something all the same. There is something all the same that one is quite surprised about.” I stopped at the word *condensation* (my phone now trying to turn it into *condensation*) and wondering if it was a homophone and also thinking it was *you* saying, “You see that I am letting myself go on this occasion... Yeah!” I associated “letting go” with dance although I know dance gets unfairly put into this category, when in fact it can be highly structured, as I know Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was. Wasn’t it? I have looked many times at the documentation of the piece, with its transparent walls and the spaces with the folding chairs but not of the choreographic drawings.

It surprises me to know that this work rests in *The Sinthome Score* somehow. Of course it makes absolute sense now. It is a happy discovery for me. I know Kaprow studied composition with John Cage early on. Cage came to perform at the San Francisco Art Institute a year before his death. I had to stand outside the auditorium because it was completely full. So I listened to the performance on a set of speakers set up on tripods. I couldn’t understand what I was hearing. Students began to leave the performance before it was over, and eventually I was able to get in just as Cage was finishing. The audience was somewhat agitated, as it seemed like he was just yelping and clearing his throat for forty-five minutes. But when he began to answer questions about the structure of the work, the energy in the room quickly shifted. His answers were surprising, and humorous. He talking about mushrooms being like sound, that they neither lasts very long. And I have always liked the story of how Morton Feldman met Cage in a lobby once because of being agitated by the audience’s negative response to Anton Webern’s work.

I think it was important, this circle of chairs and claiming part of that room for the activity involved in *The Sinthome Score*. I know I haven’t spoken much about how I approach the subject of the audience, and I fear for myself that I seek too much to try and anticipate what will please *them*. I admire that you complicate expectation, if not sometimes in despair of understanding what they want, but I feel it is absolutely necessary to do this, to defy the conventions of this relationship. I feel the necessity to move in this direction, and your work gives me encouragement.

When you say that *The Sinthome Score* was a kind of work that was inevitable, what do you mean? I have felt the same way about certain works of mine.

DG Before this conversation ends and I forget to say this (I am afraid my entries in this conversation make me look more upright than I really am), I want to tell you that I have also been greatly influenced by stand-up comedy. Or something that is not really stand-up comedy, Lenny Bruce (I did this one-hour performance at the Biennale of Sydney in 2008, *Just Because Everything Is Different It Does Not Mean That Anything Has Changed*) and Andy Kaufman. Robert Altman as well: I made a theater piece in Korean, an adaptation of *M*A*S*H**. So, yes, humor—weird humor—is very important. Black humor specifically.

Inevitability—this is a favorite subject of mine. When I worked on *Finnegans Wake*, the question I wanted to ask to all those Joyceans, because it touches so much on this enigma of the relation of an author and his or her audience, was: How could such a sophisticated writer as Joyce, who, with *Ulysses*, was well on his way toward the Nobel Prize perhaps, spend seventeen years writing *Finnegans Wake*, a book he had to know would not be a success and would probably ostracize him forever from the successful writers’ community?

I got one answer I liked and another one that now I think is the closest to the truth. The one I liked was: Well, when Joyce wrote the bordello chapter in *Ulysses* he kind of saw, or had an intuition of, this strange region where “language speaks” liberated from any function. Language only governed by language. He saw this region and he had no other choice but to walk toward it and get to the very end of it. He had to explore that dark place, own it, and only afterward could he write something else.

This was the answer I liked, because it kind of confirmed my sense of the inevitability of making certain things, certain works, even if I know they will not “succeed.” But then an even greater Joycean gave me another answer, that to my great regret I feel is closer to the truth—not only to Joyce’s truth, but to my own truth as well. It is: Joyce was really convinced that *Finnegans Wake* would have incredible success among readers and enjoy great critical acclaim. Naïveté or heroism?

GF I am just getting on a plane to go home and it has “Dreamliner” written on the side of it, and now suddenly I remember the night in Venice after I was in your work and with Michelangelo where I read to him a poem by Federico García Lorca. And I connect it to the experience I had that day in your work. The poem ends with:

Nobody is sleeping in the sky. Nobody, nobody.
Nobody is sleeping.
If someone does close his eyes,
a whip, boys, a whip!
Let there be a landscape of open eyes
and bitter wounds on fire.
No one is sleeping in this world. No one, no one.
I have said it before.

No one is sleeping.
But if someone grows too much moss on his temples during
the night,
open the stage trapdoors so he can see in the moonlight
the lying goblets, and the poison, and the skull of the theaters.

DG No duerme nadie por el cielo. Nadie, nadie.
No duerme nadie.
Pero si alguien cierra los ojos,
¡azotadlo, hijos míos, azotadlo!

Haya un panorama de ojos abiertos
y amargas llagas encendidas.

No duerme nadie por el mundo. Nadie, nadie.
Ya lo he dicho.
No duerme nadie.
Pero si alguien tiene por la noche exceso de musgo en las
sienes,
abrid los escotillones para que vea bajo la luna
las copas falsas, el veneno y la calavera de los teatros.



Geoffrey Farmer and Jeremy Millar, *Mondegreen*, 2011, installation view at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2011. Courtesy: the artists

una conversazione fra
Geoffrey Farmer e Dora García

Gli artisti **Geoffrey Farmer** e **Dora García** discutono di memorie condivise, di **James Joyce**, **Jacques Lacan**, **Allan Kaprow** e di molte altre influenze e riferimenti in una griglia che offre chiavi di lettura per il loro lavoro.

GEOFFREY FARMER Questa mattina presto ho inoltrato una tua intervista con Sandrine Meats allo staff con cui sto lavorando alla National Gallery of Canada, scrivendo come oggetto dell'e-mail: "LEGGETE, PER FAVORE!" Si tratta di una conversazione sulla tua presenza al padiglione spagnolo per la Biennale di Venezia del 2011 con l'o-

pera *The Inadequate*. Nell'intervista metti in chiaro che ti era stato chiesto di presentare il tuo lavoro nel padiglione e non di rappresentare la Spagna. Parli anche del rapporto tra autore e pubblico, tra colui che parla e colui che ascolta e delle aspettative disattese. È stato di aiuto leggere un testo simile nel momento in cui anche io mi trovo con tanti pensieri non formulati e sentimenti non espressi riguardo al fatto che mi sia stato chiesto di realizzare qualcosa per il padiglione del Canada il prossimo anno. Sono felice di aver potuto partecipare, grazie all'invito della National Gallery of Canada e al fatto di essere volato a Venezia per incontrarmi con loro, al tuo lavoro *The Sinthome Score* (2014-2015), che faceva parte di "All The World's Futures" di Okwui Enwezor.

E ora che sono tornato in Europa per cominciare alcuni lavori preliminari, non faccio altro che pensare all'esperienza vissuta all'Arsenale... stare appoggiato al palo leggendo ad alta voce una parte di *The Sinthome Score*. Conoscevo qualcosa del tuo lavoro precedente. Non ero sicuro se l'avessi visto a Monaco, se me ne avessero parlato, o se solo pensassi di averlo visto. Ho il tuo *All The Stories* vicino al mio tavolo da lavoro nello studio. Ho anche letto delle cose, ma partecipare è stato diverso.

Scrivo questo per spiegare come tu mi sia venuta in mente quando *Mousse* ha proposto una conversazione con un altro artista. Ora, mentre mi sto avvicinando a Venezia (ci stiamo arrivando in auto da San Gallo), ripenso a *The Sinthome Score*.

Credi che abbia senso cominciare da qui? Mi sto svegliando abbastanza presto, per cui ti scrivo alle sei del mattino da un campo da calcio dove alcune persone vengono portate a passeggio al guinzaglio da dei cani e altre persone camminano nel modo in cui si cammina quando si deve arrivare da qualche parte a un'ora specifica.

DORA GARCÍA "Le persone vengono portate a passeggio al guinzaglio da dei cani" suona molto austriaco. Hai detto che ti trovavi a Graz? Sì, in Austria ho la sensazione che le persone vengano continuamente prese a cinghiate. Quando mi hai scritto mi sono ricordata - vivo in una specie di condizione di annebbiamento, per cui non ricordo nulla con grande chiarezza, e spesso mentre sono a metà di un libro mi accorgo che l'ho già letto; in particolare c'è questo libro di J.D. Salinger, *Nove racconti*, che ricordo sempre di avere già letto quando giungo a un punto ben preciso di un racconto ben specifico, "Teddy", che curiosamente tratta di un ragazzo capace di prevedere il futuro. Quando mi hai scritto mi sono ricordata che Michelangelo Miccolis mi ha detto: "Geoffrey Farmer è stato qui". Mi ci è voluto un attimo per capire che cosa mi rammentasse quel nome. Significava Sydney, Kassel e una mostra molto bella a Utrecht, nei Paesi Bassi, con un titolo meraviglioso, "Master Humphrey's Clock", dove non ho incontrato te - penso di non averti mai incontrato di persona - ma ho incontrato due persone fantastiche, Virginia Januskeviciute e Inti Guerrero. Non li cito senza motivo, perché da allora (quasi nove anni fa) ho lavorato molto con loro; con Virginia ho realizzato l'unica performance in cui sono stata attrice, interpretando la parte di Gertrude Stein. Quindi quella piccola nota di Michelangelo ha scatenato molte memorie di cose che avevo visto e sentito, ma che non ricordavo in quel momento. Mi piacerebbe molto discutere con te di teatro e di messa in scena, perché forse ti sembro legata alle nozioni di personaggio e intreccio, il che è completamente diverso dalla messa in scena; ma mi piacciono molto gli archivi, le biblioteche, i cimiteri, le case abbandonate, le rovine e i racconti distopici. Per cui credo che in questo si possa trovare una forte connessione. Ti è piaciuto *The Sinthome Score*? Provo sentimenti contrastanti riguardo a quell'opera, perché è una di quelle opere inevitabili e perciò è come se non avessi mai avuto il pieno controllo su di essa. Non vedo l'ora di seguirti là dove vuoi condurre la conversazione.

GF Sì, sono appena arrivato in Austria. Mentre ero in viaggio ho visto una foto di Valie Export che portava a passeggio Peter Weibel come un cane. La foto era tratta da *From the Portfolio of Dogness*, 1968. Lei ha un sorrisetto fantastico nella fotografia. Stranamente, la coppia con cui sto lavorando a Graz ha un remake di quell'immagine nella propria casa, questa volta con due uomini. Non sono sicuro che funzioni bene quanto la prima versione. Hai ragione

259 Questa è stata la prima idea. Poi ho cominciato a mettere a punto il progetto e ho pensato che il testo giusto fosse *Joyce Le Sinthome*, il seminario XXIII di Jacques Lacan, lo stesso che stavamo leggendo a Bregenz e da cui proviene la frase originale: un testo abbastanza bello da leggere e abbastanza arcano da creare intorno a sé una comunità segreta. Per quanto riguarda i movimenti, ho preso un'altra frase dallo stesso testo:

"C'è qualcosa, comunque, che restiamo sorpresi nello scoprire non essere più di alcuna utilità per il corpo: non un corpo, ma il corpo in quanto tale: si tratta della danza. Questo mi consentirebbe di scrivere in modo diverso il termine *condansazione* (*condensation*)".

Vedi, in questa occasione mi sto lasciando andare... Sì!

Così ho cominciato a guardare alla danza contemporanea, alla danza contemporanea iconica, ma di un tipo speciale, che chiunque fosse in grado di eseguire: cercavo il non-virtuosismo. I primi a venirmi in mente sono stati Yvonne Rainer e Jonathan Burrows e ho cominciato a disegnare delle posizioni a partire da quei disegni. L'idea era quella di creare qualcosa che somigliasse più a una *routine* ginnica che a una coreografia. Idealmente, inoltre (per questo l'idea di una colonna sonora), chiunque poteva raccogliere il libro, la colonna sonora e recitare: nessun bisogno di prove, nessun concetto di "buona performance", perché tutte le rese erano ugualmente valide. Questa nozione è chiaramente derivata da Kaprow, che avevo ben presente perché avevo trascorso il 2014 studiando *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* e ovviamente avevo cercato così intensamente di decifrare i suoi disegni coreografici che *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* ha finito per colorire completamente *The Sinthome Score*. Per tornare al punto, in effetti c'è qualcosa che riguarda i protocolli dell'essere spettatori. Forse i diversi livelli di partecipazione offerti al visitatore prima di trasformarlo in un performer. Era importante il piccolo cerchio di sedie, il delimitare lo spazio, reclamare una parte di quella stanza per *The Sinthome Score*. E l'idea, molto importante, che chiunque potesse partecipare, a vari livelli di coinvolgimento. E posso anche dire che, benché io spesso disperdi di capire ciò che il pubblico vuole, o di sapere se mi interessa, il disagio è un effetto che cerco consapevolmente di provocare.

GF Ho dovuto girare intorno alla frase "C'è qualcosa, comunque, che restiamo sorpresi nello scoprire". Mi sono fermato alla parola *condansation* (il mio telefono adesso sta cercando di trasformarla in *condensation*, condensazione), chiedendomi se fosse un omofono e pensando anche che eri tu a dire: "Vedi, in questa occasione mi sto lasciando andare... Sì!" Ho associato il "lasciarsi andare" alla danza, benché io sappia che la danza venga ingiustamente messa in questa categoria, quando di fatto può essere altamente strutturata, come lo erano i *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* di Kaprow. Non è vero? Ho guardato molte volte la documentazione dell'opera, con le sue pareti trasparenti e gli spazi con le sedie pieghevoli, ma non ho visto quella dei disegni coreografici. Mi ha sorpreso scoprire che vi è qualcosa di quest'opera in *The Sinthome Score* in qualche modo. Ovviamente appare molto sensato adesso che lo so. È una felice scoperta per me. So che Kaprow ha studiato composizione con Cage agli inizi. John Cage venne ad esibirsi al San Francisco Art Institute un anno prima della sua morte. Dovetti rimanere in piedi fuori dall'auditorium perché era pieno zeppo. Per cui ascoltavi la performance attraverso degli altoparlanti posizionati su treppiedi. Non riuscivo a capire ciò che stavo sentendo. Gli studenti cominciarono ad andarsene prima che la performance fosse finita, per cui alla fine riuscii a entrare, proprio quando stava per finire. Il pubblico

era piuttosto agitato, in quanto lui sembrò limitarsi a strillare e a schiarirsi la gola per 45 minuti. Ma quando cominciò a rispondere alle domande sulla struttura dell'opera, l'energia nella sala cambiò rapidamente. Le sue risposte furono sorprendenti, e divertenti. Disse che i funghi sono come il suono, perché entrambi hanno una breve durata. E mi è sempre piaciuto il racconto di come Morton Feldman incontrò John Cage una volta nella lobby, perché era agitato a causa della reazione negativa del pubblico al lavoro di Anton Webern.

Penso che il cerchio di sedie e il fatto di reclamare una parte di quella stanza per l'attività di *The Sinthome Score* sia stato importante. So di non avere parlato molto del mio approccio con il pubblico, e temo, per quanto mi riguarda, di cercare troppo di anticipare quello che piacerà agli spettatori. Ammiro il fatto che tu cerchi di complicare le aspettative, se non altro, talvolta, perché disperdi di riuscire a capire ciò che vuole il pubblico, ma ritengo assolutamente necessario farlo, per smantellare le convenzioni di questo rapporto. Sento il bisogno di muovermi in questa direzione e il tuo lavoro mi è d'incoraggiamento.

Quando dici che *The Sinthome Score* era un tipo di lavoro inevitabile, che cosa intendi? Provo lo stesso riguardo ad alcune mie opere.

DG Prima che questa conversazione finisca e che me ne dimentichi (temo che i miei contributi in questa conversazione mi facciano apparire più austera di quanto non sia realmente), volevo dirti che sono stata molto influenzata anche dalla *stand-up comedy*. O meglio, da qualcosa che non è realmente *stand-up comedy*: Lenny Bruce (ho fatto una performance di un'ora alla Biennale di Sydney del 2008 intitolata *Just Because Everything Is Different It Does Not Mean That Anything Has Changed*) e Andy Kaufman. Ma anche da Robert Altman: ho realizzato una pièce teatrale in coreano, un adattamento di *M*A*S*H**. Per cui, sì, l'umorismo – l'umorismo strambo – è molto importante per me. Nello specifico lo *humour* nero.

L'inevitabilità: questo è uno dei miei argomenti preferiti. Quando ho lavorato sul *Finnegans Wake*, la domanda che ho voluto porre a tutti i joyciani, perché affronta in modo deciso l'enigma del rapporto tra un autore e il suo pubblico, era: come ha fatto un autore sofisticato come Joyce, che, con *Ulisse*, si era forse ben avviato sulla strada per il Premio Nobel, a trascorrere diciassette anni scrivendo *Finnegans Wake*, un libro che doveva essere consapevole che non sarebbe stato un trionfo e che probabilmente gli avrebbe portato l'ostracismo della comunità degli scrittori di successo? Ho ottenuto una risposta che mi è piaciuta e un'altra che ora credo sia quella che si avvicina maggiormente alla verità. Quella che mi è piaciuta è stata: "Beh, quando Joyce scrisse il capitolo sul bordello in *Ulisse*, egli vide o ebbe un'intuizione riguardo a quella strana regione dove 'il linguaggio parla' libero da ogni funzione, dove il linguaggio è governato solamente dal linguaggio stesso. Vide quella regione e non ebbe altra scelta se non quella di incamminarsi verso di essa e attraversarla fino al suo limite più estremo. Dovette esplorare quel luogo oscuro, possederlo, e solo dopo poté scrivere qualcosa di diverso." Questa è la risposta che mi è piaciuta, perché in un certo senso mi ha offerto una conferma riguardo alla sensazione dell'inevitabilità di fare certe cose, di realizzare certe opere, anche quando so che non "avranno successo". Ma poi un joyciano ancora più grande mi ha dato un'altra risposta, che, con mio sommo dispiacere, ritengo essere la più vicina alla verità, non solo quella di Joyce, ma anche la mia: "Beh, era davvero convinto che *Finnegans Wake* avrebbe ottenuto un incredibile successo di pubblico e che sarebbe stato acclamato dalla critica". Ingenuità o eroismo?

GF Sto salendo su un aereo per tornare a casa e l'aereo ha la parola *Dreamliner* scritta sulla fiancata. Improvvisamente mi viene in mente la sera trascorsa a Venezia dopo aver preso parte al tuo lavoro. Ero con Michelangelo e gli ho letto una poesia di Federico García Lorca. La collego all'esperienza fatta quel giorno nella tua opera. La poesia termina con:

Non dorme nessuno nel cielo. Nessuno, nessuno / Non dorme nessuno / Ma se qualcuno chiude gli occhi / frustatelo, figli miei, frustatelo! / Permanga un panorama di occhi aperti / e amare piaghe accese.

Non dorme nessuno / Ma se qualcuno nella notte ha troppo muschio alle tempie / aprite le botole affinché veda sotto la luna / i falsi calici, il veleno e il teschio dei teatri.

DG No duerme nadie por el cielo. Nadie, nadie / No duerme nadie / Pero si alguien cierra los ojos, / jazotadlo, hijos míos, azotadlo! / Haya un panorama de ojos abiertos / y amargas llagas encendidas / No duerme nadie por el mundo. Nadie, nadie / Ya lo he dicho / No duerme nadie / Pero si alguien tiene por la noche exceso de musgo en las sienes / abrid los escotillones para que vea bajo la luna / las copas falsas, el veneno y la calavera de los teatros.