

## ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTION

# Ulysses Was Born in Trieste

Story/dérive of a Workshop for the Students Option Construction of Haute École d'Art et de Design Genève, 16–18 April, 2012

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## Introduction

The central motif of Dora García's work is the analysis of the paradigms and conventions of art. She often uses texts and stories as a basis for scenarios that raise complex ethical questions, examining the boundaries between life, performance, literature and psychoanalysis, among other subjects. Her sources have included the stand-up comedy of Lenny Bruce, the work of underground filmmaker Jack Smith and writer James Joyce. The work published here for the first time consists of a story/dérive entitled Ulysses was born in Trieste, used by Garcia in a workshop with students of the Haute École d'Art et de Design in Geneva in 2012, during which the accompanying photographs were taken.

### 1.

'Joyce explained to me that the bread a child dreams of eating can't be the same as the bread he eats when he's awake; the child can't transfer all the qualities of the bread to the dream. Therefore, the bread in the dream wouldn't be made of everyday flour but rather of 'flower', a word that would take away certain qualities of the bread and give it others better suited to a dream.'

Italo Svevo, *Ulysse est né à Trieste*. Bordeaux, Finitude, 2003, p. 78.

I read this quote in French in the book mentioned above. It struck me immediately as what I was looking for: the language of dreams, deviant literature, poetry as language anomaly, drift (dérive) from convention. The English translation above is my translation from French.

I bought recently a beautiful English language version (translated by Stanislaus Joyce from the original Italian) of this mythic lecture Italo Svevo gave on the work of James Joyce, delivered in Milan in 1927: "Ulysses was born in Trieste". Mysteriously, the quote is not there! Or at least I cannot find it. I could, of course, check the quote in the original French language book where I read it the first time – unfortunately, that rare book is now part of an artwork of mine and is therefore unavailable for consultation. I am now doing my best to buy a new copy of this very rare book and open page 78 – very much hoping the quote will still be there.

### 2.

It would not be the first time in my life that I experience an *epiphany* triggered by something that only exists in my dreams. Only in my dreams, apparently, exists a video by John Baldessari titled "Rock Music". For when I told him how much I had appreciated that work, he replied half irritated half amused that he never made such a video. Only in my dreams, apparently, a video by Stanley Broun titled "300 meters" occurred; since when I called the gallery to loan it for an exhibition they replied this video was never shown in the gallery nor had they ever heard of it.

Worse still: I distinctly remember having in my office, above the radiator, a thin sheet of paper, a printed multiple by Stanley Broun stating: "at this moment stanley broun is at a distance of x foot" ... I used to

contemplate it in deep reverie while it moved up and down because of the radiator's heat. Then I moved to Barcelona, the paper seemed lost, I called then the publisher: Could I get a new one? The answer: they never published such a thing, not as far as he could remember.

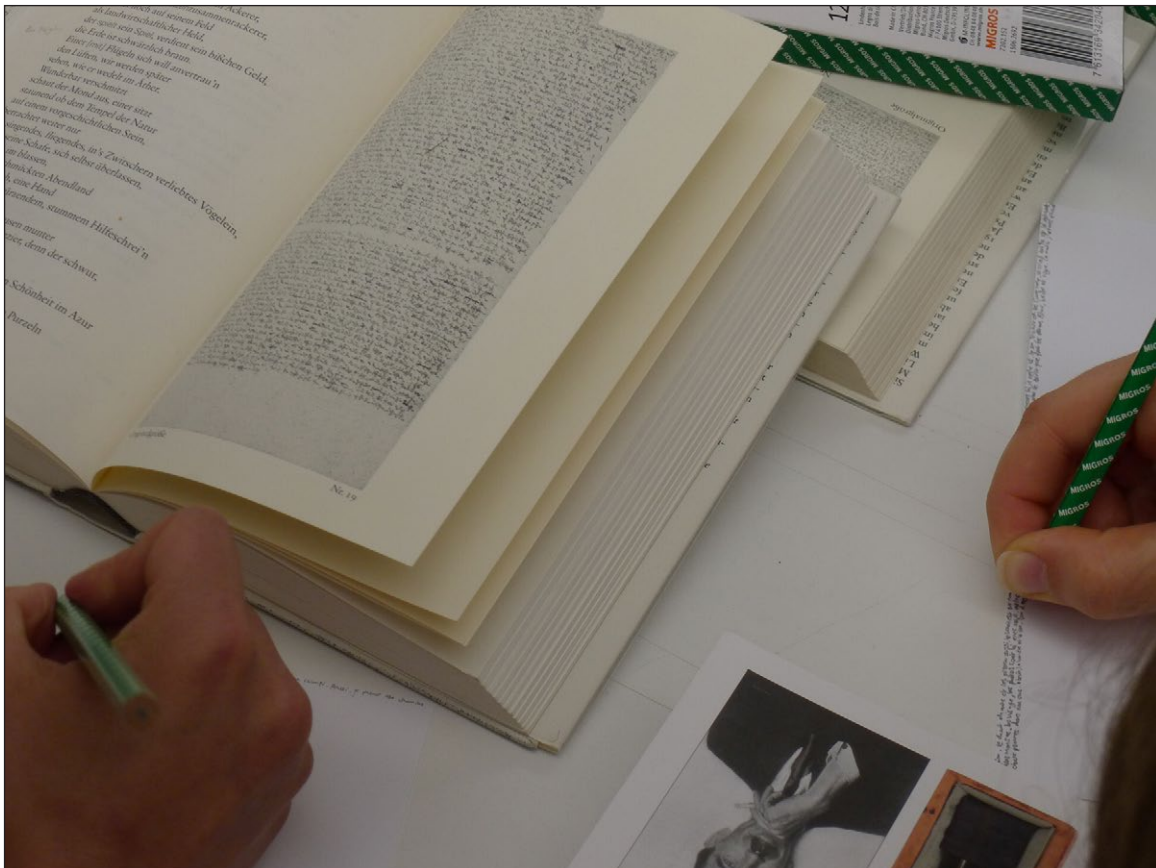
### 3.

Madness? A second artistic life in a parallel universe? Or *dérive* (drift)? Some time later I found this interesting quote in the seminar XXIII of Jacques Lacan, "Le Sinthome", on the work of Joyce:

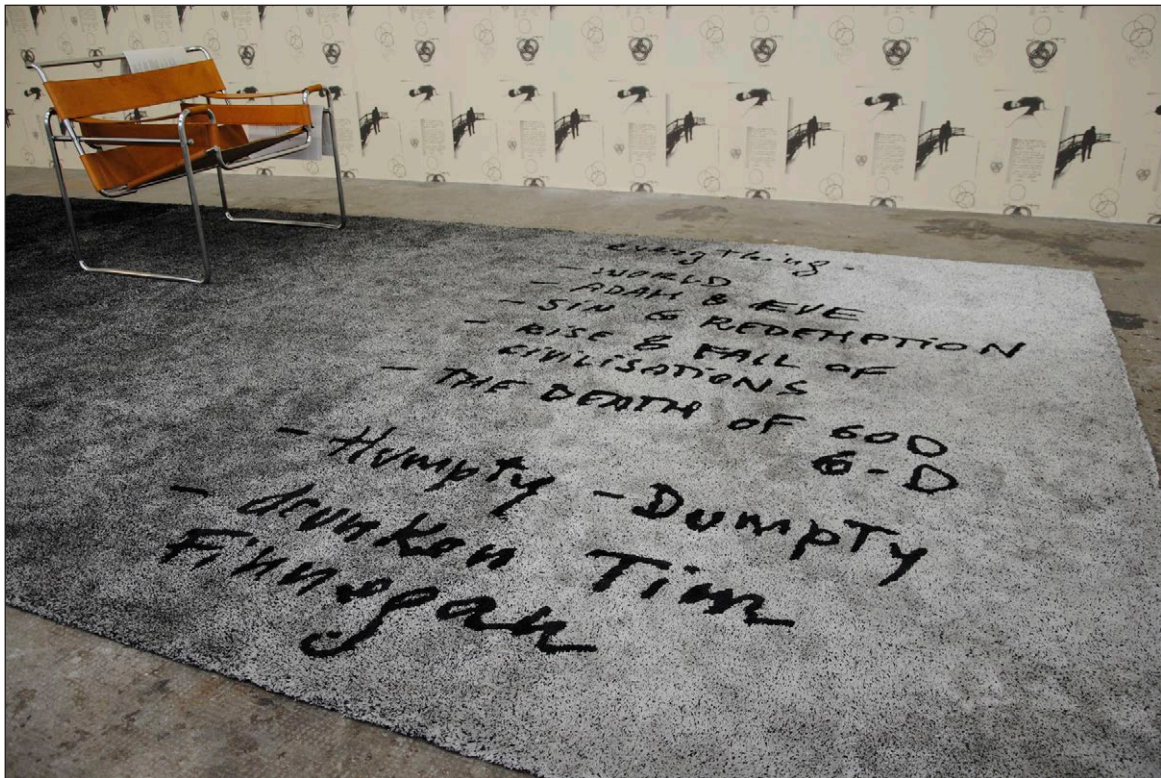
"What Freud underlines about this death, if I may express myself thus, is to *trieb* it, to make a *Trieb* of it. This has been translated into French by, I do not know why, the *pulsion* or the *pulsion de mort*. A better translation was not found even though there was the word **dérive**, the death drive is the Real inasmuch as it can only be thought of as impossible. Namely, that every time it shows the tip of its nose, it is unthinkable. To tackle this impossible does not constitute a hope. Since this unthinkable is death, and the foundation of the Real is that it cannot be thought."

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, pp 125, Éditions du Seuil, mars 2005)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Il y a peut-être tout de même une autre façon d'expliquer qu'il n'y ait pas de progrès. C'est qu'il n'y a de progrès que marqué de la mort, ce que Freud souligne de *trieber* cette mort, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi, d'en faire un *Trieb*. On a traduit en français par *pulsion* ou *pulsion de mort*. Je ne sais pourquoi on n'a pas trouvé une meilleure traduction alors qu'il y avait le mot **dérive**. La *pulsion de mort*, c'est le réel en tant qu'il ne peut être pensé que comme impossible. C'est-à-dire que, chaque fois qu'il



Exercises with Robert Walser's micrograms, "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012.



Dora García, "What is *Finnegans Wake* About?" carpet, "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012.



Lauren Huret & Andrea Marioni, "I trusted you" performance within "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012.



Exhibition view "Ulysses was born in Trieste", with works by Olivia Roulet, Julie Sas and Loan Nguyen, 2012.



Adva Zakai, "Opening" performance within "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012.



ESPAHOR LEDET KO U LUNER, 1973, Guy de Cointet, performed by Sophie Bonnet-Pourpet within "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012



Costanza Candeloro, "Goodbye Speech", performance within "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012.



Adva Zakai, "The Pointer", performance within "Ulysses was born in Trieste", 2012

#### 4.

This is how things started to get together. Dérive of thought.

First we have an extremely enigmatic writer, James Joyce, who after being crowned as the author of the most relevant book of the XXth century, *Ulysses*, spends twenty years writing another book, *Finnegans Wake*, qualified by a majority as "a waste", while for others it became something short of the rewriting of the Bible: a circular, self generating text, an abnormal 1.001 Nights. Then this book awakes the interest and devotion of a psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, who understands the Unconscious as The Language of The Other and who sees in Joyce's writing the best possible substitute for psychosis: *Le sinthome*. Then, we have a second author, Italo Svevo/Ettore Schmitz, a Triestian/Austro-Hungarian Jew converted to Catholicism and to Italianism, who undergoes psychoanalysis by the first disciples of Sigmund Freud. We have a city, Trieste, where one can put together Joyce, Psychoanalysis, Fascism, and Shoah. We have a psychiatrist, Franco Basaglia, who finishes off psychiatric hospitals and the notion/stigma of social dangerousness of the insane, an achievement that many describe as "the last victory of the antifascist movement in Italy". We have the astonishing coincidence of two names, Freud and Joyce, both meaning joy – *jouissance* in Lacanian. We have a suspicious formal similarity between the painstakingly composed pages of the *Finnegans Wake* and the spontaneous productions of schizophrenic speech. In short, we have the history of the world; or rather, the *dérive* of the world's narrative.

#### 5.

"With books as with people I consider complete understanding to be somewhat uninteresting."

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montre le bout de son nez, il est impensable. Aborder à cet impossible ne saurait constituer un espoir, puisque cet impensable, c'est la mort, dont c'est le fondement du réel qu'elle ne puisse être pensée."

(Robert Walser, "Speaking to the Rose, Writings 1912–1932", selected and translated by Christopher Middleton, University of Nebraska Press, 2005, p. 101).

Unraveling the world's narrative. With such a modest purpose in mind, the students of option construction and some workmaster students of the Haute Ecole d'Art et de Design Genève met for a four-day-workshop under the title "Ulysses was born in Trieste". It was 16–18 April 2012.

The unfathomable figure of Robert Walser opened the workshop with a lecture by Bernhard Echte. Bernhard Echte spent twenty years "translating" the micrograms of Robert Walser into legible script. How much this means for mankind cannot be acknowledged enough.

A microgram is a form of handwritten script extremely small, impossible to read with the naked eye; Robert Walser used this system, drawn with a pencil, from 1924 to 1933. "Secrets, not code" was the title Susan Bernofsky gave to her introduction to the publishing of Walser's micrograms. Secrets ... Echte pointed out that Walser and Kafka once did publish together in a small literary magazine. Kafka was a declared fan of Walser, and he often cried of laughter when reading Walser's texts aloud to Max Brod ... but we do not know if Walser had any awareness of Kafka. We know of the — luckily unsuccessful — wish of Franz Kafka to have his texts burnt after his death.

Why would a talented writer (Kafka, Walser) want to keep his writings **secret**?

A text that cannot be read, either because it is too small (Walser), because it is burnt (Kafka), or because it is written in a language that is strange to all of us (Joyce). Illegibility. Lacan says in the seminar XXIII, *Le Sinthome*:

"Because one must really try to imagine for oneself why, why Joyce is so unreadable. If he is unreadable, it is perhaps because he evokes no sympathy in us. But could something not be suggested in our affair by, on the contrary, the obvious fact that he has an ego of a quite different nature than the one that does not function, precisely at the moment of his, of his **revolt**. Which does not function immediately, just after the aforesaid revolt, because he manages to disengage himself, that's a fact. But after that, I would say that he does not retain any gratitude to anyone whatsoever for having received this beating."

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, pp 151, Éditions du Seuil, March 2005)<sup>2</sup>

Jacques Aubert, the man who led the translation of *Ulysses* into French and who introduced the work of Joyce to Jacques Lacan, was there in the workshop, in conversation with curator Marie de Brugerolle. According to this talk, the **illegibility** of Joyce was latent already in Joyce's very legible *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The illegibility of *Finnegans Wake* is not a caprice, an accident, but the end of a natural course of things, the unavoidable **end/explosion of language** that was already very much present in *Ulysses*.

One cannot help but think of what Lacan called "La petite histoire": Kafka's unfinished novel *The Process*, written on the eve of Nazism, Walser's microscripts ending — he would never write again — in 1933, and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* published in 1939. Kafka's trouble with the father, Walser hearing voices, Joyce struggling with a schizophrenia-diagnosed daughter.

Laura Pelaschiar, director of the Trieste Joyce School, and Peter MacKenna, psychiatrist and author with Tomasina Oh of the book *Schizophrenic Speech, Making Sense of Bathrooms and Ponds that Fall in Doorways*,

<sup>2</sup> "Pourquoi Joyce est-il si illisible? Il faut tâcher de s'imaginer pourquoi. C'est peut-être parce qu'il n'évoque en nous aucune sympathie. Mais quelque chose ne pourrait-il pas être suggéré dans notre affaire par le fait, lui patent, qu'il a un ego d'une tout autre nature?"

Au moment de sa révolte — car c'est un fait qu'il arrive à se dégager de ses camarades — précisément, cet ego ne fonctionne pas, pas tout de suite, mais fonctionne tout juste après, au moment où Joyce témoigne ne plus garder aucune reconnaissance, si je puis dire, à qui que ce soit d'avoir reçu cette raclée."

directed, on the last day of the workshop, the exchange towards this correspondence of dreams (madness, deviancy) and crimes (war, fascism).

Ulysses was born in Trieste, adventured Laura Pelaschiar, because in Trieste a strong population of highly educated and cosmopolitan German-speaking Jews brought psychoanalysis to Italy and to the Latin world. And there was as well a numerous, less affluent and refined population of Jews from Eastern Europe: Hungary, Slovenia. Bloom (Virag) was more Triestino than Dubliner.

Trieste ceased to have a Jewish population *and* being cosmopolitan the very moment Benito Mussolini proclaimed the racial laws in the imposing Piazza de L'Unità de Italia in Trieste. Jews could not work any more for the state (no teachers, no doctors, no psychiatrists) and most decided to leave. Trieste became then "the most fascist city in Italy". A war, a postwar and many years were gone by since, but racism survived to this day, though, and Laura Pelaschiar herself was deeply troubled when she discovered as a child that a part of her family was not Italian but Slovenian. She discovered this when she went to visit her dying aunt in the psychiatric hospital ... where Franco Basaglia was soon going to end with psychiatric hospitals and the concept of the social dangerousness of the psychiatry troubled. Serendipity or *dérive*?

But the real *momentum* of Laura's Pelaschiar intervention was her reading of the last page of *Finnegans Wake*, the monologue of Anna Livia Plurabelle:

So soft this morning, ours. Yes. Carry me along, taddy, like you done through the toy fair! 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. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thous- endsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the

*Finnegans Wake*, page 628

Which brings us to the last lecture of the workshop, *Schizophrenic Speech* by Peter McKenna. A lecture that started with a rather troubling statement:

'Any psychiatrist not familiar with the work, if given a representative section of *Finnegans Wake* and asked to make a diagnosis of its author, would almost invariably conclude that it was the product of a clever schizophrenic.'

(Andreasen 1973)

So here we come! to the big question that has obsessed psychiatrists and scientists since the birth of modern psychiatry, now 100 years: madness and creativity. Let us remember that Robert Walser's doctor in Herisau (who used to be a literary critic!!) tried to force Walser into writing, to study the relation between madness and creativity, only to meet Walser's contempt. As he confided to Carl Seelig, freedom is a necessary condition to writing.

McKenna reassures us: Joyce was not mad, in any possible meaning of this word. But there is a relation between madness and creativity. According to McKenna, madness is the "unsuccessful" version of a genetic inclination to creativity. We need creativity to survive, therefore this genetic variation survives in mankind, but when it goes wrong, it goes *very* wrong. Sometimes, the wrong side of creativity hits the close relatives of the creative person: siblings, children; but often, wrong and right side are together, as in this rather disquieting words of the Mathematician John Nash:

Silvia Nasar: How could you believe that you were recruited by aliens from outer space to save the world?



John Nash: Because the ideas I have about supernatural beings came to me the same way that my mathematical ideas did, so I took them seriously.

(Nasar S, *A Beautiful Mind*)

## 6.

This genetic view on madness is seriously disliked by both the psychoanalytic (Freudian and Lacanian) view and the social (Basaglian) view. Typically, they would ask – The knowledge that madness is genetic would help in any way a mad person? Answer: No.

Joyce had the greatest contempt for psychiatry, probably due to a double frustration: it was interfering in what he considered his domain, the language of dreams and night, and, he was desperately dependent on it to help his daughter Lucia. Lucia's madness was the bitterest thing that ever happened to Joyce, even more so because, according to Jung, he was responsible for it.

When asked if his daughter was mad, Joyce would answer: No, she is telepathic.

“What pushed me today to speak to you about the daughter Lucia, is very exactly the fact, I was really careful about it the last time, in order not to get involved in gossip, is that Joyce, Joyce fiercely defended his daughter, his daughter the schizophrenic, what is called a schizophrenic, from being taken over by doctors. Joyce only articulated a single thing, which was that his daughter was a telepath. I mean that, in the letters that he wrote about her, he formulated that she is much more intelligent than anybody else, that **she informs him, miraculously is the word to be understood, about everything that is happening to a certain number of people, that for her these people have no secrets.**”

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, pp 96, Éditions du Seuil, mars 2005)<sup>3</sup>

There were not only theorists in this workshop; we had with us as well the artists Adva Zakai, Barbara Manzetti, Sophie Bonnet-Pourpet and all the young artists students of option construction. And we had as well curator Eva Fabbris speaking on a rather unusual subject: deviant art criticism.

Eva Fabbris spoke about the nearly forgotten but not less fundamental figure of Gene Swenson, an art critic that in his twenties dared to question the monolithic version of art history offered by the MoMA, with its succession of formalist isms, to propose what he called “The Other Tradition”, a lineage in modern art starting with dada and surrealist and ending with his contemporary pop art. Swenson proposed a method, based in Dalí and Duchamp, where the viewer was able to invest the art object with his/her subjectivity. Western linguistics and logical thinking do not convey ways of thought suitable to this transfer of subjectivity. “The Other Tradition” should be told in an “other” language. He adopted therefore the Dalinian concept of Paranoiac Critical method, where paranoia was used in its original meaning: **“Other” mind**. And Swenson adopted as well the Duchampian notion of “Delay in Glass” as a substitute for painting:

“Duchamp’s term “delay in glass” situates our thoughts in space or rather takes the thought process out of its lineal root. We begin to throw our ideas up into the air like a juggler, instead of placing them on a logical line.”

(Gene R. Swenson, *The Other Tradition*, exhibition catalogue (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1966), page 26.

<sup>3</sup> “Ce qui me pousse aujourd’hui à vous parler de Lucia est très exactement ceci, à savoir que Joyce, qui l’a défendue farouchement contre la prise des médecins, n’articulait qu’une chose, c’est qu’elle était une télépathe. Dans les lettres qu’il écrit à son propos, il formule qu’elle est beaucoup plus intelligente que tout le monde, qu’elle l’informe – miraculeusement est le mot sous-entendu – de tout ce qui arrive à un certain nombre de gens, que pour elle ces gens n’ont pas de secrets.”

The promising career of the young and brilliant Gene R. Swenson was hampered by his rapidly deteriorating mental health. After a series of professional disappointments and psychiatric internments, he returned to his native Kansas where he died in a car accident at the age of 35.

It could be, as Peter McKenna explained to us, that the dark side and the bright side of creativity sometimes converge in the same *person*.

### Competing Interests

The artist has no competing interests to declare.

### Artist Biography

Dora García (Valladolid, 1965) studied at the University of Salamanca and the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam. Recent solo exhibitions include *These books were alive; They spoke to me!* At The Teetley, Leeds (2017) and *I SEE WORDS, I HEAR VOICES* at The Power Plant, Toronto (2015–16) with further exhibitions at MACBA, Barcelona; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; MUSAC, León, Spain; SMAK, Ghent, Belgium; GfZK, Leipzig, Germany; CGAC, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Galeria Civica di Trento, Italy; SFMOMA, San Francisco, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Darling Foundry, Montreal, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland and Index, Stockholm. García has participated in such prestigious events as the Manifesta 2, the 8th Istanbul Biennial, 17th Biennale of Sydney, Xe Biennale of Lyon, 2nd Athens Biennale, 29th Bienal de São Paulo. She represented Spain at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), participated in the 56th Venice Biennale (2015) and presented a solo exhibition, *The Joycean Society*, as part of the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) as recipient of the Foundation Prince Pierre de Monaco prize for contemporary art.

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