

The drawing of choreographers as performances in museum space. Ideas and excuses for heritage education.

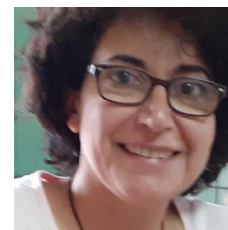
This article examines the choreographic installation *Retranslation I Final Unfinished Portrait (Francis Bacon)*, by William Forsythe and Peter Welz in 2006 with the aim of highlighting that drawing as experience that makes possible to achieve multiple forms of representation: dance and choreography, painting and drawing, video and movement image. The installation will be approached as a case study for an educational reading aimed at giving visibility to the gesture as a mediation tool between drawing and the experience to open access to cultural heritage. At the parallel it will be shown how drawing is a fundamental component of the choreographic creative process and a link that permit to create aesthetic discourses between artistic languages.

It is an interaction between three different disciplines and objects: the pictorial work *Final Unfinished Portrait* by Francis Bacon, the choreographic and performative intervention by Wil-

liam Forsythe and the digital dimension through which Peter Welz presents bodies in space. A further element of interest is that it is a site-specific action within museum environment. At first this choreographic installation was conceived to be part of the exhibition *Corps étrangers. danse, dessin, film* specially designed to be exhibited in the galleries dedicated to antique statuary of Musée du Louvre, subsequently became an itinerant and autonomous exhibition. Furthermore, this production in which visual representation is one of the levels to support greater access and knowledge regeneration, is widely accepted by the scientific community.



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learning space.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from a great exercise of synthesis, at the limits of trivialization, it can be said that cultural production, as well as the educational methodologies and the places assigned to the fruition of these activities, have undergone a process of mutation that follows the change of political, social and cultural contexts.

For the purposes of this treatment, artistic and curatorial practice and educational research will be observed, without any pretension of establishing an absolute criterion, as an intertwining of interests and methodologies that over time have sought solutions that found a possible common response in care and attention to the participation of the publics.

Artistic expression has always been a contaminated and socializing fact, but starting from the events promoted by Dada, art comes out of the contexts for its fruition and at the same time changes the point of view on the value of the work: the process of creation becomes more important than the result. This is the moment that marks the beginning of an indissoluble relationship between artist, spatial and temporal dimension in which the artistic practice and the participation of the audience takes place. From a theoretical point of view, it is considered useful to add a further temporal limit traceable in the reflection on the participatory tendency in art of Walter Benjamin who, in 1931, observing the soviet model, affirmed the need to create an artistic approach that would allow the spectator to be involved in the process of cultural production. Here we are before yet another revolution-evolution in the cultural field: the consumer becomes a co-producer. Since the 1960s, the advent of the performing arts and technological production in the artistic field have offered various opportunities for "physically engaging" the public in works of art, despite the mediation of filmic and photographic documentation, these projects implied a relationship between performer and audience, eliminating the difference in status that elevated the artist in favor of a collaborative and social di-

mension of experience. Since then, contemporary art added an aesthetic measure to participation, deriving from the causal relationship between the experience of artistic work and a collective or individual agent (De Nicola, 2014).

Authors from heterogeneous disciplines such as semiotics (Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes) and the art critique (Nicolas Bourriaud, Lars Bang Larsen, Hans Ulrich Obrist) have focused on this theme. For the purposes of this essay, it is considered useful to briefly report the thought of the art historian and critic, Claire Bishop (2006), who in her book on participatory artistic practices, identifies three elements characterizing this phenomenon: activation, authorship and community. Recognizing in the collaborative authorial model and in the shared creativity, the possibility of the emergence of a positive and not hieratic social model. In this way, the crisis perceived within the community can be a way of identifying and assuming collective responsibility. If it is true that most of the works of art produced today are the result of a collective process (often for economic reasons), the hope is that this methodology will contribute to a better reality. In this tension for the amelioration and transformation of circumstances educational action is relevant. In particular, through the vision of some pedagogues and educators we will observe an installation that has the virtue of interweaving different methodologies, supports and artistic languages in a space-time relationship of a spiral-like type (Zerubavell, 2003). In particular, we will try to demonstrate how the use of drawing in a choreography can offer to educators the possibility to explore the technique as a medium for learning activities. In an extreme synthesis the two disciplines uses drawing with different functions: in the context of research in the pedagogical and educational field, drawing takes on different purpose from narrative to gift, from representation to documentation, from the study of personal evolution to the playful function (Canoni, 2003; Golomb, 2002); choreography uses drawing for different purposes and functions in addition to the traditional function of documenting and sharing the creative process, it evolves into a performance

resource. Here the drawing will be analyzed as a tool for the informal transposition of contents related to the knowledge of a specific cultural heritage, starting from an artistic act of a performative type. In synthesis, what we are about to discuss is the *radical museology* theorized by Claire Bishop (2013), that means the ability of museums, and their curators, to reinterpret the collections by making them dynamic in a transnational key, mixing spaces, objects and actions between past and present. Paying attention to the fact that by "present" we do not mean a contingency detached from a historical path, but as the result of steps that have led to the proposals of the contemporary. Through this reading, the educational action that takes place in the museum passes through horizontal planes and circular paths between the object, the artist, the media and the visitor. Thus, implicitly, there is an active and democratic education (Dewey, 1953) which recalls the model described in Jacques Rancière's *Le Maître ignorant* regarding the "universal teaching method", according to which it is necessary to offer the conditions for learning by allowing those who have this tension to activate their potential

FROM THE INSTALLATION POINT OF VIEW

The video installation *Retranslation /Final Unfinished Portrait (Francis Bacon)* was created by William Forsythe and Peter Welz for the exhibition "*Corps étrangers. Danse, dessin, film*" which took place at the Musée du Louvre in 2006 on the basis of the museum's invitation to the writer Toni Morrison to develop a multidisciplinary programme based on the Morrison's central concept on "the place of belonging".

In this work this concept is expressed through the migration of the modes of creation that allow to "transcribe" the painting to the moving image by means of choreographic actions and the spatialization of the figures.

The spectator is immersed in an environment where the drawing, the gesture and its moving image are intercepted and fragmented through the multiple screens that give shape to the installation.

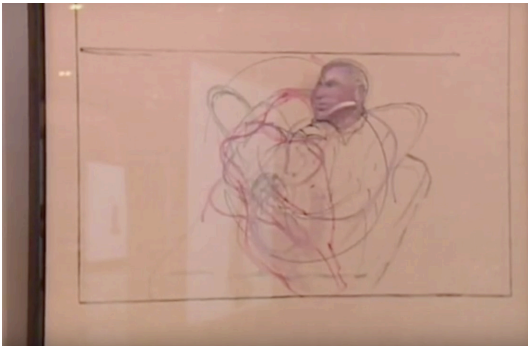


Fig.1 - Frame Installation view Musée du Louvre, *Retranslation I final unfinished portrait (Francis Bacon) / By Peter Welz (1991-92)*. Particular: Bacon Portrait (1991-92).

In order to access the entire work it is necessary to use the body in such a way that the attention can recognize not only the different gestures that compose it, but also the interdependence of figure, scene and space that are already present in Bacon's intention: "I don't construct the space or the stage, then the figure. I go from one to the other [...]. It's in this permanent coming and going that the force of the one engenders the force of the other."

Based on Francis Bacon's last work, an unfinished portrait found in his studio after his death, Forsythe and Welz collaborate again for the realization of a piece that implies the continuation of a study started with "Whenever on know how on/air drawing" where some of the readings from "Retranslation [...]" were experienced (Lista, 2006). The dancer's body is filmed from different points and then projected so that the viewer can see the same action from different points of view at the same time.

This allowed to obtain an image impossible to access for the eye in live dance and only assimilable to the fragmented and changing vision that a performer has of his body in action. In the 2006 piece the dancer wore graphite gloves and anklets that left a trace on the paper on which he moved. In his words "I suppose I am trying to use my body

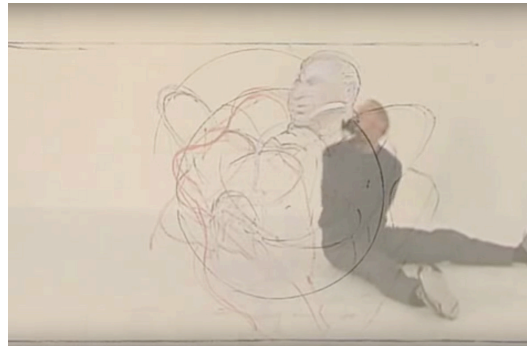


Fig.2 - Frame Installation view Musée du Louvre, *Retranslation I final unfinished portrait (Francis Bacon) / By Peter Welz (1991-92)*. Particular: Forsythe and Bacon.

as an invisible sculptural template" (Lista, 2006, P.14). This action in part resumes a series of works begun by choreographers from the '60s and '70s of the 20th century that were interested in exploring the relationship between dance and drawing as well as the notion of the trace of the body as a residue or document of a performance. The fact that this piece has as its starting point a pictorial work and as a format for the audience the presence of the video is not limited to a visual language. On the contrary, each of the layers that compose it presents a particular dimension of the space inhabited by bodies and forces. Bacon referred to his work as a stenography of sensation (Lista 2006, p.14). For Forsythe in his choreographic work, drawing is a medium to examine the relationship between physical strategies and his body. Welz, in turn, uses video as an element within a spatial construction that aims to multiply the presence of movement in an immersive environment. In both cases these contemporary artists design an experience that is proposed as post-dance and post-sculpture.

IDEAS AND EXCUSES FOR HERITAGE EDUCATION

Since ancient times, teachers, pedagogues and thinkers have highlighted the importance of an

educational process that passed through concrete experience and therefore through the senses. For a quick overview from Socrates to Leonardo, from Rousseau to Dewey, the great masters and philosophers of the past have set up their lessons following the scientific method (often ante litteram), starting from the observation through which it is possible to formulate hypotheses, then research the evidence to formulate theories that become knowledge. In particular, John Dewey, who saw art and cultural heritage as a medium for educating young people to develop reflective thinking, supported the importance of context as a tool for generating suggestions: "Thinking involves [...] the suggestion of a conclusion for acceptance, and also search or inquiry to test the value of the suggestion before finally accepting it. This implies (a) a certain fund or store of experiences and facts from which suggestions proceed; (b) promptness, flexibility, and fertility of suggestions; and (c) orderliness, consecutiveness, appropriateness in what is suggested" (Dewey, p.30). This is because the method for educating to a reflective thought must contemplate the ability to arouse curiosity and "The curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought, as a vigorous and healthy body is on the *qui vive* for nutriment. Eagerness for experience, for new and varied contacts, is found where wonder is found. Such curiosity is the only sure guarantee of the acquisition of the primary facts upon which inference must base itself"(p.31). Once this dynamic has been unveiled, the educator must know the link between body and idea and how this is connected with "The function of suggestion (that) is not one that can be produced by teaching; [...] but the flow of suggestions goes on in spite of our will, quite as surely as "our bodies feel, where'er they be, against or with our will"(p.34).

Retranslation I Final Unfinished Portrait (Francis Bacon) shows how space can be transformed into a mechanism to stimulate the intervention of the functions described above, adding the role of drawing as an instrument of transposition (in a didactic mean). When we talk about didactic transposition we are normally reflecting on the link between

knowledge and teaching and the cognitive aspect represents “the intersection between content and pedagogy, that is, in a teacher’s ability to transform his knowledge into pedagogically powerful forms that adapt to the different skills and backgrounds of the students”. (Shulman, 1987, p.15).

In this case, art and images are not so much intended as cultural objects, but as iconic-symbolic mediators, according to the definition expanded by Pier Giuseppe Rossi of the levels of educational mediation identified by Elio Damiano: “Teaching is literally the replacement of reality with signs. Mediators are exactly the substitutes of reality, it’s different metaphors [...] with the task of making the transfer” (Damiano, 1999, p.229. Free translation by the author).

The iconic-symbolic mediators, that interpose a physical-perceptive relationship with reality

through images, graphs and scales and at the same time are the maximum degree of symbolic abstraction, are a category that well represents the typical introduction of semiotic-semantic elements in contemporary age in relation to digital language. The three different interventions that constitute the installation, place the accent on the relationship between the image and its user; through the decomposition, the multiplication of languages and the displacement of space and time, they generate a sort of detachment from the normal codes of fruition that generate a relationship between man and images of a non-aesthetic-contemplative type, which David Freedberg would define “primitive”.

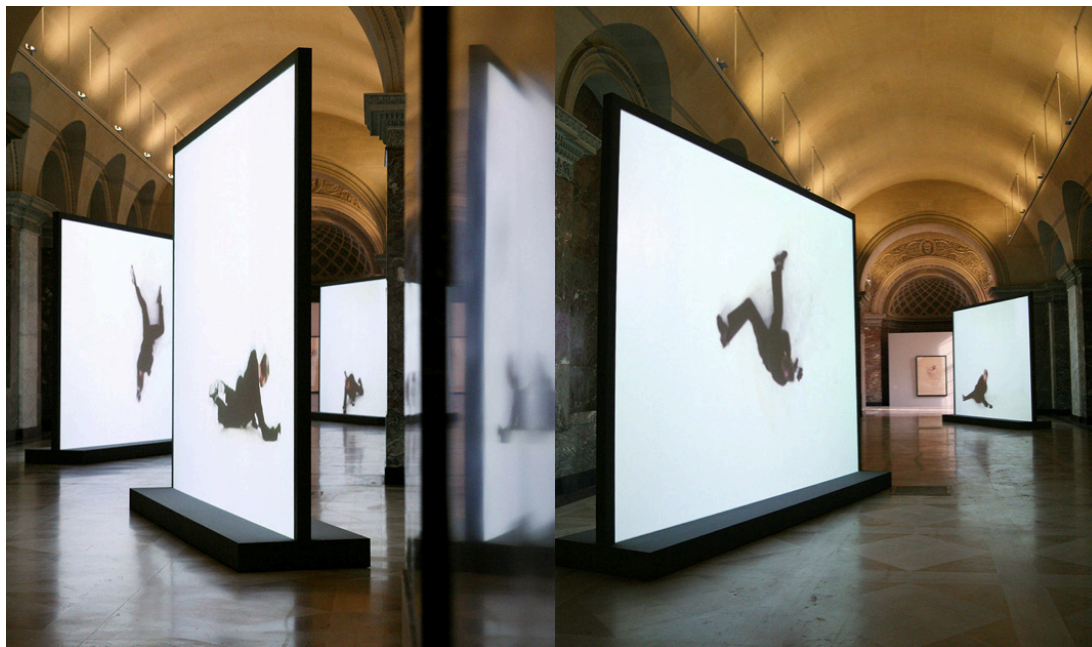
So we are perfectly in the definition of *art as agency* by Alfred Gell: “In place of symbolic communication, I place all the emphasis on *agency, intention, causation, result, and transformation*. I view art as a system of action intended to change the world rather than encoding symbolic propositions about it” (Gell, 1998, p.6). Using the term action we mean the human intervention on things, and the implication on man by things (including artistic objects), within the framework of a theory of ‘things’ as social agents. (p.17-23). Therefore, the image is reified in a sort of object, endowed with its own character, powers and desires, intentionality and motivations, with which the human being has an intersubjective relationship. From this point of view, we can say that even the performative act described here becomes an object. An object with a strong symbolic significance which, due to its relationship with its creator, could assume the function of an index of which Rosalind Kraus speaks: “As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify” (Kraus, p.70). Therefore, with reference to its creator, the installation can be conceived as an index, while with reference to its spectator it can be conceived as a process of exchange that passes through a necessary interpretation of the contents (Tilden, 1957; Hooper Greenhill, 1994, 2007) because, through the guarantee of an authentic process, it allows the questioning of its contents. As John Berger recounts, the act of drawing represents the way to discover and acquire knowledge of reality, often involving the whole body, and the type of fruition that this activity achieves is very different from that which occurs in front of a statue or a painting: “in front of a drawing [the viewer] he identifies himself with the artist, using the images to acquire the conscious experience of seeing through the eyes of the person who created them.” (Berger, 2005, p. 13).

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CONCLUSIONS

In the last century we have seen a radical change in the relationship between the public and the museum. The museum has turned from an elitist

Fig.3 - Frame Installation view Musée du Louvre, *Retranslation / final unfinished portrait (Francis Bacon) / By Peter Welz (1991-92)*. General view of installation.



place into an educational agent with many facets. In 2017 Kataoka Mami, Chef curator of The Mori Art Museum, introduced the international symposium *Can Contemporary Art Museum become New Places of "Learning"?* Affirming that: "the consumption of art has passed from the visual to the cognitive, as well as expanding to the realm of the body as a whole" (p. 236). In the same conference Anna Cutler, Tate' Director of Learning, recounted the passage from a section of interpretation and education to learning, as an authentic political and social act. She explains that the substantial difference is determined by the participatory, inclusive and voluntary aspect. Taking up the words of research in the field of education, the concept of learning applied to these places of culture broadens the definition of informal learning. Starting from a profitable collaboration between curators and educators, Cutler emphasizes the transformative dimension of educational action aimed at all audiences by defining learning as "change through experience" and change is a possibility in every dimension: social and educational methods (contents), time of action and space. With particular attention at "value space represents for learning within institution, the practice lead space for action and activity, and I'm thinking about digital and hoe we use that. So there are at least five space in one to think through". (p. 244).

In conclusion, the role given to contemporary cultural production has been described, but the adjective contemporary in this case does not only qualify a period, but describes a methodological approach characterized by a dialogical relationship between plurality of languages, media and different actions. In particular, it was told how the drawing was used as a relevant part of performance, and as a tool to show elements normally invisible to an expert eye, while the digital device made it possible the preservation and multiplication of the performative act in several locations, transforming spaces in which it happened. This has enabled a change in public perception. This continuous passage between spaces, disciplinary and temporal planes brings us back to the process of acquiring knowledge that Benjamin talks about

in his "Passagenwerk", with a necessary effort of translation that passes from the exploration of the city to the experience in a museum.

"In opposition to knowledge, which proceeds by abstraction, Benjamin's experience wanted to preserve immediate contact with mimetic behavior. He aimed at a "sensed knowledge" that "does not feed only on what impresses his senses", but that is capable of taking possession of mere knowledge, of dead data, as if they were something experienced and lived" (Tiedemann, 2006, p. XVII). With his conscious disorientation, the first Flânerie theorist invites us to immerse ourselves in the things [details and artifacts of the past] that are found in the space we traveled to be able to recompose them, as if they were constellation, in a new discourse that leads to a new awareness. This is how survival (in german *Nachleben*) happens, as Aby Warburg used to say, meaning the persistence of the past in the contemporary world, through gestures and forms.

Fig.4 - Frame Installation view Musée du Louvre, *Retranslation / final unfinished portrait (Francis Bacon) / By Peter Welz (1991-92)*. Particular: one frame for describing the different point of view shown.



NOTE

[1] Bacon in an interview in Le Matin, 1984. Reprinted in *Francis Bacon, Entretiens*. Edited and prefaced by H. Vanel Paris, Editions Carré, 1996. Cited in Lista, M., 2006, 14

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