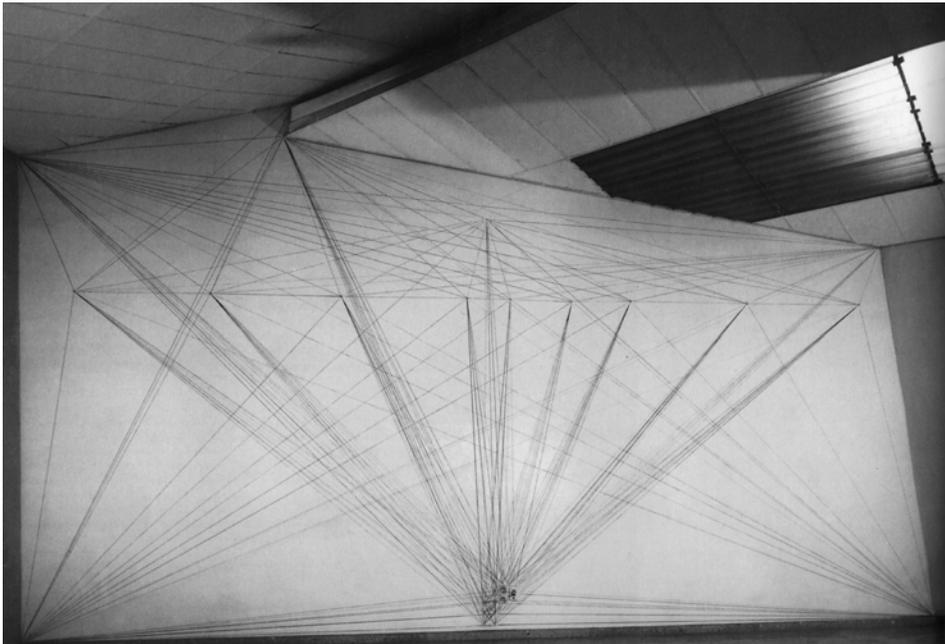


THE INTERMEDIALITY OF DRAWING

Towards a theory of reception?



1. Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #51*, 1970, blue pencil on wall, variable dimensions, first installation: Museo di Torino, Turin. Source: S. LeWitt, G. Garrels (eds.), *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective*, San Francisco etc. 2000, exh.cat. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco/Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago/Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, p. 172.

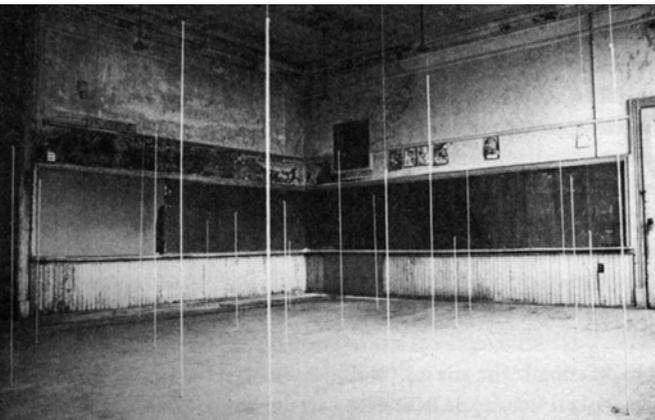
The artistic discipline of drawing has seen a major accumulation of forms and usage since the 1960s. No longer confined to the support of paper, nor even necessarily to the act of inscribing, the notion of 'drawing' has come to be manifested indexically as well as metaphorically. Schmidlin shows through explorations of scale, space and sculpture how drawing has been reframed historically to an intermedial category.

The historical nature of drawing, that is its being exclusively on paper and associated with a certain type of material such as graphite and ink, changed radically in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly in the United States, with works that expanded the traditional definition of the graphic medium.¹ As a counter-reaction to modernism and its distinctive 'medium specificity', artists transgressed borders and critics reported their transgression.

Due to the questioning of painting's legitimacy and collaterally, the rise of new sculptural forms driven by the appeal of three-dimensionality as a non-illusionistic space, the hierarchy between media shifted from the mid-1960s onwards. The redefinition of medial categories, the appearance of new ones (e.g., Donald Judd's 'Specific Objects') and the rejection of all of them (e.g., Robert Smithson) opened new possibilities. Drawing took advantage of the situation and achieved its autonomy by nesting in spaces left by former media. From the moment artists were basically concerned with space, there was no reason for drawing not to be involved as well. And within one double movement, opposite but leading to the same result, sculpture went somewhat two-dimensional – often reduced to its slightest expression – while drawing expanded into space either involving direct marking on a huge scale or developing as a simili-sculpture into the third dimension.²

However, although fundamental to the understanding of further developments of drawing, this metamorphosis of drawing's typology did not draw much critical attention at the time. It was overshadowed by other problems. The dispersion of lines and abstract designs, whether drawn or not, was not considered for itself but as a part of a bigger change in the arts; spatial drawing was only seen as a result of changes that were affecting

all artistic practices. The few art historians in the United States, such as Bernice Rose, who wrote about the transformation of drawing while relying on a historical basis and documented the advent of a new drawing paradigm, focused mostly on drawing's change of scale rather than on the sculptural qualities of drawing.³ The change of scale (e.g., Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawings*) could be considered a more natural extension of drawing than its integrating sculptural elements (e.g., Brian O'Doherty's *Rope Drawings*), by reason of the existence of a support acting as a pictorial plane as well as the interdependency of drawing as a gesture and the surface as a recipient of the marks it leaves (fig. 1, 2). Accordingly, three-dimensional works were not perceived as drawings, especially when their ambivalence vis-à-vis sculpture was too strong. Although the recourse to the term drawing to qualify sculpture, interventions, or installations that displayed graphic aspects, had surprisingly become commonplace in critical discourse, this evokes the difficulty of dealing with intermedial works – does the word 'drawing' really only help in describing a work? Commenting on the last five years of Eva Hesse's work, one of the artists who mingles sculpture and drawing most closely, Lucy Lippard concludes: '[...] the pictorial impetus in sculpture has been dematerialized and has often taken the form of drawing, either literally, on surfaces (LeWitt, Bochner), in space (Robert Barry's nylon threads; Hesse's "icycle," *Right After*, and her last piece; Bollinger's ropes), or on the "ground" (Hesse's mat pieces; Andre's plaques, his *Lever* and related outdoor pieces; Smithson's, Heizer's and Oppenheim's monster-scale landscape sketches) and so forth. The question is whether such drawing or pictorial effects in real space are essentially dishonest, untrue to the internal necessities of something called



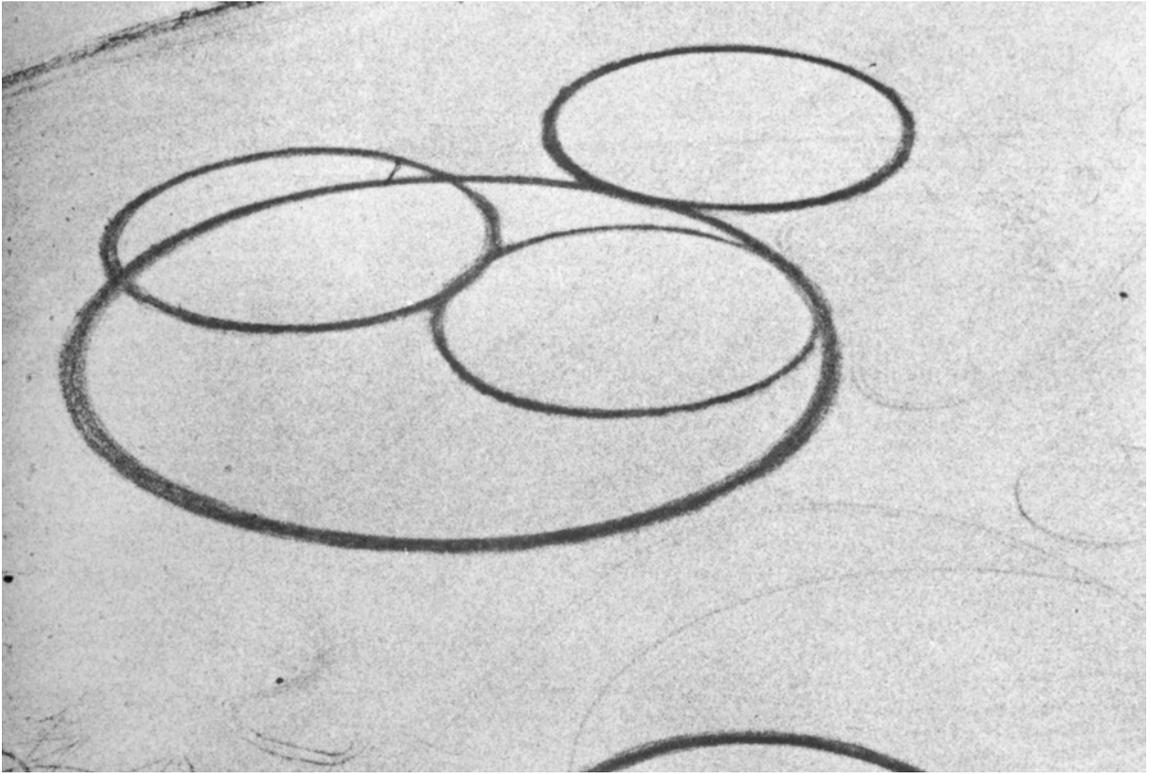
2. Brian O'Doherty, *Standing Magic Square (Rope Drawing no 19)*, 1976, rope, variable dimensions. Source: B. O'Doherty, *White Cube. L'espace de la galerie et son idéologie*, Zürich 2008, p. 18.

sculpture, or whether the “problem” has a way of defusing potential “solutions”.⁴ Lippard's careful use of vocabulary echoed a state of hesitation about the patency of formal means specific to each medium and their redefinition in regard to spatio-temporal circumstances in the broader context of the arts of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. It was still a matter of sculpture, but sculpture was perverted by drawing, destabilizing the audience. Lippard notices drawing as a disturbing ‘effect’ within the medium of sculpture. The notion of ‘dishonesty’ conveys an interesting element. Let us assume the reference to drawing as being a superficial intermediate, unnecessary or artificial. Why then is this reference worth being employed? Only because it partly generates the aesthetic experience of a piece? Does drawing contribute to solving sculpture issues? The displacement of medium delineations raises aesthetic questions of this sort. This can be considered through the following examples of earthworks: are Dennis Oppenheim's *Annual Rings* (1968) dug in the frozen St. John River at Fort Kent, or *Maze* (1970) in a Wisconsin field drawings *in absentia* (or have they ‘literally taken the form of drawing’ as Lippard puts it) (fig. 3)? Does the design of the pieces (the former being a series of broken circles, the latter of pathways) prevail over the sculptural intention, or is it only a consequence of the process resulting in a drawing effect? A distinction may be made between these two works, as the latter itself implies displaying a particular drawing (a labyrinth) – so should drawing be wilful?

The issue is less ambiguous with Michael Heizer's *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Drawing* (1970) inscribed onto the surface of Jean Dry Lake, Nevada, whose title indicates a medium-specificity (language establishes categories), as well as its small-scale replica *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Etching* (1972) carved in a basalt pavement of New York. Both attest to an exploration of material; that is, a testing of process and physicality of and through different media (fig. 4, 5). Again: What differentiates Patrick Ireland's *Rope Drawings* and Fred Sandback's work made out of yarn, with Sandback defining himself a sculptor (fig. 6)? I believe some answers are to be found in the study of intermediality as it offers numerous hybrid models and lays down connections between all media as a condition. It could be that these new territories of drawing are conditioned by this tension of thinking within and outside of categories, without the possibility (and necessity) of renouncing any of them. Conceived as a median lane, intermediality confronts drawing with sculpture and vice versa. I believe, as Werner Wolf did when he argued for an ‘integration’ of intermediality into literary studies, in particular English, that intermediality is one of the methodologies that can serve the understanding of any medium's evolution and its interactions with other fields.⁵ Because the aim of such studies is not to dislodge works from their original conception, intermediality offers a tool to assess the contribution of each medium to a work.



3. Dennis Oppenheim, *Annual Rings*, 1968, at the border of Fort Kent, Maine, USA, and Clair, New Brunswick, Canada. Source: J.-L. Froment, J.-M. Poinsoit (eds.), *Sculpture/nature*, Bordeaux 1978, exh.cat. Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains, Bordeaux/Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou, Paris, n.p.



4. Michael Heizer, *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Drawing*, 1970, Jean Dry Lake, Nevada. (photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni/Contact)

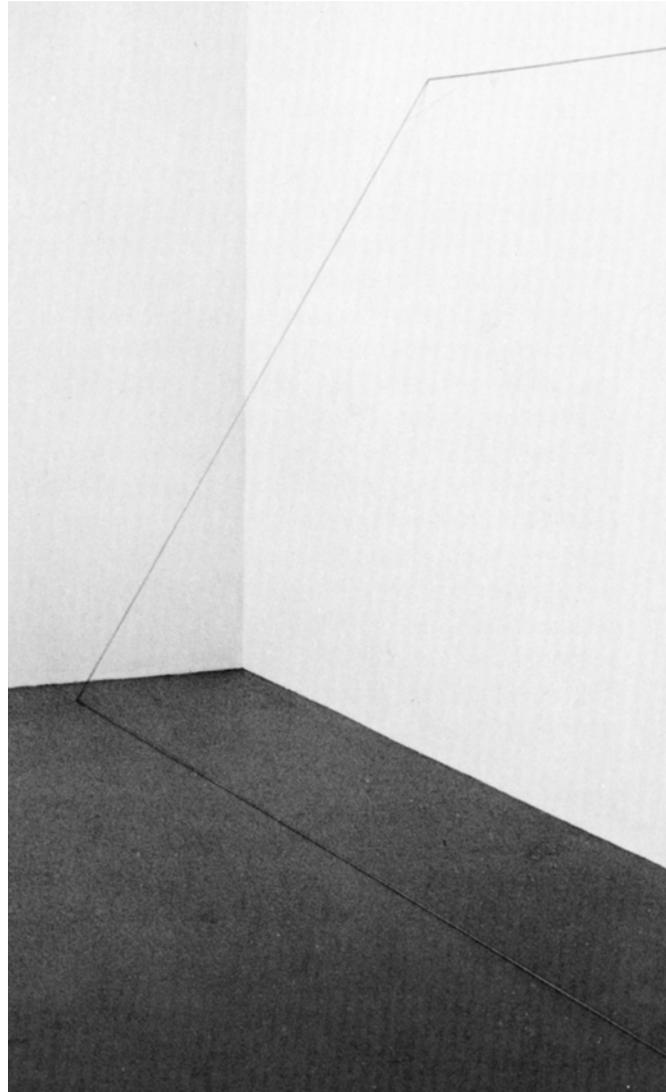
Contemporary practices of drawing (Eleftherios Amiltos, Isabelle Cornaro, Monika Grzymala, Loredana Sperini, Joëlle Tuerlinckx, among others) challenge the historical conventions of the medium, indeed in a divergent artistic context. Spatial drawings which display analogies with works of the 1960s and 1970s have become a recognizable form to us now (fig. 7, 8). On the critics' side, these new works are assigned another status, consecutive with the medium's reception which started to evolve from the mid-1980s, and because of the artists' words. Nowadays, curators naturally explore the intersections of drawing and other media (e.g., sculpture, dance) and include works that use solid materials in their exhibitions dedicated to drawing, claiming the renewal of contemporary drawing.

It would not be of importance if the contemporary reception of these contemporary works did not have any consequence on the reception of works produced in the past. But it does. The reappraisal of works that were produced decades earlier functions as a tool to investigate and sharpen art data, not amending art history, but adding to it a parallel

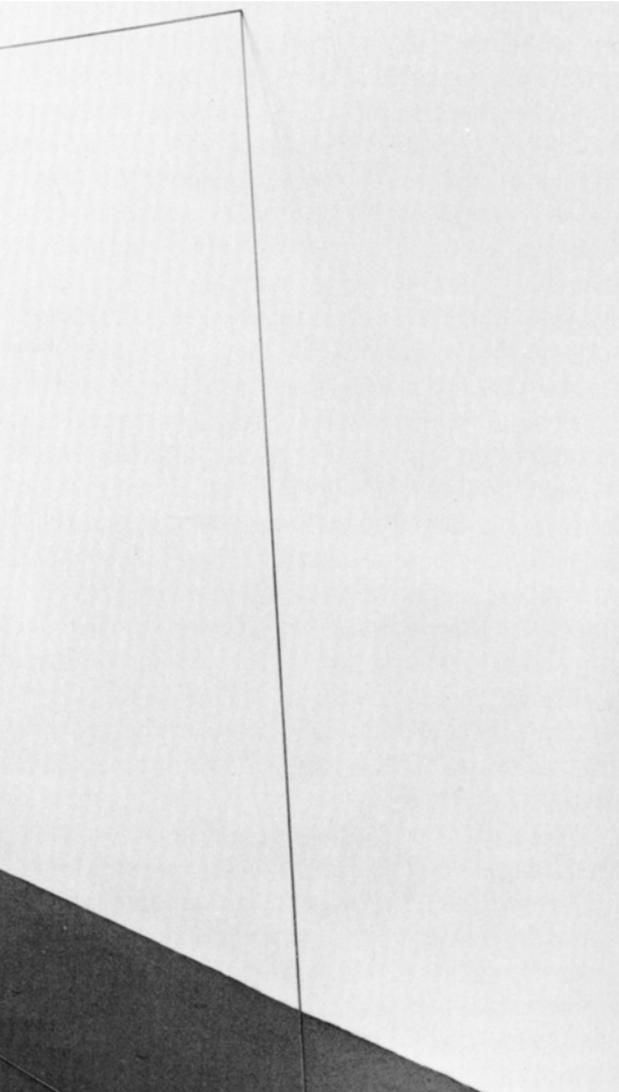
view and complementary analysis. As all history is an ongoing writing process depending on the present, the re-examination of drawing in the light of its contemporary reception seems inevitable and specifies, rather than alters, its historical developments. Perception of art objects changes, and from a distance we get a clearer view of the past. Besides, artists themselves define new drawing conventions and contribute to this conversion. In 1976, Bernice Rose curated *Drawing Now*, a major show on drawing organized at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In her preface to the catalogue of *Allegories of Modernism*, an exhibition she presented at the same institution in 1992, she acknowledged that her newer essay 'may be seen as an extension and re-evaluation of the premises of *Drawing Now* [...]'. By that date [1976] drawing had become a major independent medium, but many of the basic grounds for that phenomenon and its implications were not yet entirely clear. It is now apparent that the shift from the narrow confines of a traditional medium into an expanded field, of which the change in drawing was both a symptom and a cause, was part of the transition from modernism to what is now

characterized as postmodernism. [...] And while they [the present essay and exhibition] extend the premises of *Drawing Now* they also oppose them in focusing not just on 'impurity' of drawing itself in the expanded field.⁶ This last remark is all important. The 'expanded field' is a term found in Rosalind Krauss' seminal 1979 article 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' and has been largely used over the past few years to account for the evolution of drawing, as if there were a gap in the medium's critical history to fill.⁷ Krauss manages to think about sculpture's evolutions while complying with the post-medium context. Her essay begins for example with the words: 'Over the last ten years rather surprising things have come to be called sculpture', probably referring to Michael Heizer, 'temporary lines cut into the floor of the desert.'⁸ She adds: 'Nothing, it would seem, could possibly give to such a motley of effort the right to claim to whatever one might mean by the category of sculpture. Unless, that is, the category can be made to become almost infinitely malleable. The critical operations that have accompanied post-war American art have largely worked in the service of this manipulation. In the hands of criticism categories like sculpture and painting have been kneaded and stretched and twisted in an extraordinary demonstration of elasticity, a display of the way a cultural term can be extended to include just about anything.' What Krauss writes about sculpture also seems to be true regarding the field of drawing. But when Krauss speaks about the expanded field of sculpture, she accounts sculpture as being 'no longer the privileged middle term between two things that it is not. *Sculpture* is rather only a term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities [such as site-constructions].'⁹ On the contrary, it seems nowadays that the 'expanded field' of drawing puts drawing at the centre of the field, almost asserting that formal graphic structures are or were drawings on the sole criterion of their graphic capacity.

As an example of this change in the reception of drawing, let us consider Fred Sandback's work from the perspective of critical discourse. Because of Sandback's own words – he never stopped explaining that he was a sculptor – critics of his time never apprehended his pieces as drawings, though sometimes describing his geometric pat-



5. Michael Heizer, *Circular Surface Planar Displacement Etching*, 1972, New York. (photo: Michael Heizer)



6. Fred Sandback, untitled, 1968, silver rubber strings, 152 x 288,7 x 75 cm. (photo: Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel)

terns as being such.¹⁰ Many recent studies touched on the issue of drawing in Sandback's work. Valérie Mavridorakis argues that due to the 'elementary geometry' and 'plane geometry' it refers to, 'Sandback's art should in the first place be defined as drawing.'¹¹ She then adds that 'we may think that only the idea of sculpture remains, for there is here not any opaque volume, for touch cannot experience any form. However, it is because of its three-dimensional effects that Sandback's work can indeed be qualified as sculptural.'¹² Thierry Davila wonders about Sandback's claim to belong to the

category of sculpture – though without considering it in respect to drawing in particular. He eventually adheres to it because despite the fact that 'many elements are *a priori* fighting this designation [the sculptural] emphasizes, probably better than any other naming, the most essential element Sandback was working on: Void – that means space – that he undertook to make it visually and physically active [...]'.¹³ Finally Davila contends that Sandback 'favours sculpture's linearity'.¹⁴ Interestingly, line is not necessarily seen as the equivalent to drawing here but as an attribute of sculpture, whereas line is generally considered by critics as an equivalent of drawing, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s – a sane conception which can be explained but questioned too. Contrary to these two examples, Fritz Emslander establishes a history of 'drawing in space' starting at the end of the 1920s with Julio González's sculptures made out of wire. Emslander considers Sandback's pieces as a crucial stage in this history, as marking drawing's outbreak into the third dimension, and says that Sandback started to 'shape drawings with tightened rubber bands in real space'.¹⁵ Emslander adds: 'Drawing wins a very new importance in the 1960s. In minimal art, [drawing] goes into an insoluble relation to sculpture.'¹⁶ Also speaking of Sandback, Gabriele Sand explains that 'the linear composition remains in a relation of tension between volume and space, in a state of suspense between three-dimensional drawing and sculpture'.¹⁷ Cornelia H. Butler states that 'his string installations are both drawings in space and spatial constructions made with line'.¹⁸ Thinking about Lippard's cautious approach to the appearance of drawing within other art forms, the need to clarify what happened seems to have been very strong. We are still dealing with the same hesitations and difficulties – medium categories are still productive and misleading at the same time – but now dare to sometimes reevaluate former positions and point out drawing where one may not see it. It doesn't matter whether one thinks sculpture gets the upper hand on drawing or vice versa – both are productive coexistent standpoints. The carefulness with which we express our opinion about it is the same on both sides and recalls Roland Barthes' reference to allusion. In an essay, Barthes speaks about Cy Twombly's use of inscriptions and scribbles in his paintings as 'the allusive field of writing'.¹⁹ In the texts mentioned above



7. Loredana Sperini, *Untitled*, 2007, plexiglass, glass, mirror, elements, 398 x 307 cm. (photo: Hauser & Wirth Collection, Zurich)



8. Joëlle Tuerlinckx, *Elastic Drawing*, black-yellow-red + pink, 2006, found object, rubber band and colour magic marker, variable dimensions. (photo: Cathy Carver, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York)

we find terms such as ‘Sculptural reality’, ‘a kind of drawing’, ‘metaphoric [...] acts of draftsmanship’, ‘both drawings in space and spatial constructions made with line’: these are figures of speech which make indirect references to another thing (here, drawing), without becoming that thing.²⁰ Thinking about drawing in sculpture as an act of alluding seems more relevant here than considering their amalgamation – an option which does not resolve what happens in the artwork itself. The allusion, a play with formerly medium-specific elements, could be considered a figure of intermediality and so, regarding sculpture, there is an ‘allusive field’ of drawing left unexplored and one that needs to be specified.

We continuously face a paradox: on one hand, there is the will to refuse any disciplinary boundaries (internal to and beyond visual arts) whose artificiality originates in an intellectual construction that does not conform to the configuration of artistic practices. On the other hand, there is an ongoing need of a medium-specific categorization. Artists work in all available media (having in mind the adequation of ends and means) but acknowledge their heritage and still refer to former medium categories, just as Sandback insisted he was a sculptor. Furthermore, one notices the continued use of medium categories from an institu-

tional point of view: for example, exhibitions are sometimes devoted to one single medium because, as with any other reading frame, it says something meaningful about the gathered works and their particular history. Museums are structured by departments for historical and conservation reasons. Regarding an artwork as a drawing implies we can understand its elementary conditions of origination, the conditions without which it would have taken another form and conveyed its meaning differently. Thinking in terms of medium is not an end in itself but a tool to face and understand artistic production. And so is intermediality.

- 1 This paper presents in a very condensed way some reflections that underlie the PhD thesis *La spatialisation du dessin dans l'art américain des années 1960 et 1970* (working title) which I am writing for the University of Geneva.
- 2 Other forms of the spatialisation of drawing can be observed in the displaying of the medium; for example through the use of glass cases or frames, or installations with several drawings spread on a wall.
- 3 In Europe, the reception of this new aspect of drawing was slightly more acute, with many debates revolving for instance around the 'functions of drawing' (which was the title of a pioneer exhibition organised by the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands, 1975) although works on paper, still the main production of drawing, remained the predominant purpose of exhibitions and research.
- 4 L. Lippard, 'Eva Hesse: The Circle', *Art in America* 59 (1971) 3, p. 73.
- 5 W. Wolf, 'The Relevance of Mediality and Intermediality to Academic Studies of English Literature', in: A. Fischer, M. Heusser, A.H. Jucker (eds), *Mediality/Intermediality*, Tübingen 2008, pp. 15-43. Wolf's system of intermedial relations deserves attention and could be adapted to visual arts.
- 6 B. Rose, 'Preface and Acknowledgments', in: *Allegories of Modernism: Contemporary Drawing*, New York 1992, exh.cat. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, p. 6.
- 7 R. Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October* 8 (1979) 1, pp. 30-44.
- 8 Idem, p. 30.
- 9 Idem, p. 38. Italics in original.
- 10 See for instance: F. Sandback, 'Untitled', in: anonymous, *Now: Fred Sandback*, exhibition brochure, Leeds 1999. Reprinted in: F. Malsch, C. Meyer-Stoll (eds.), *Fred Sandback*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2005, exh.cat. Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz, p. 152. Note: Sandback writes that his sculpture is 'a drawing that is habitable'. In her review of *Drawing Now* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1976) Roberta Smith criticizes the absence of risks taken in this exhibition. About going beyond drawing's limits and discussing it in the exhibition, she writes: 'At this point, installations by Sandback, Barry Le Va, or Richard Long might have filled out our understanding of how various artists use line in space.' R. Smith, 'Drawing Now (and Then)', *Artforum* 15 (1976) April, p. 58. Smith is one of the first who suggested a convergence of Sandback's sculptural work and drawing practice.
- 11 V. Mavridorakis, *Fred Sandback ou le fil d'Occam*, Brussels 1998, p. 19.
- 12 Idem, p. 20.
- 13 T. Davila, 'Being in a Place. Les sculptures filiformes de Fred Sandback', originally published in *20/27* 1 (2007), pp. 76-91. Reprinted in T. Davila (ed.), *In Extremis. Essais sur l'art et ses déterritorialisations depuis 1960*, Brussels 2009, pp. 102-103. Italics in original.
- 14 Idem, p. 102.
- 15 F. Emslander, 'Raumzeichnungen. Von der Entgrenzung der Zeichnung im Raum. Ein Panorama', *Kunstforum International* 196 (2009) April-May, p. 127.
- 16 Idem, p. 129.
- 17 G. Sand, 'Zeichnung. Positionen. Aspekte der Zeichnung in den 60er und 70er Jahren', in: F. Emslander, M. Heinzelmann (eds.), *Gegen den Strich. Neue Formen der Zeichnung*, Baden-Baden/Nürnberg 2004, exh.cat., Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden, p. 31.
- 18 C.H. Butler, 'Walkaround Time. Dance and Drawing in the Twentieth Century', in: C.H. Butler, C. De Zegher (eds.), *On Line. Drawing through the Twentieth Century*, New York 2010, exh.cat. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, p. 170.
- 19 R. Barthes, 'Non multa sed multum', in: Y. Lambert, C. Twombly, R. Barthes (eds.), *Cy Twombly. Catalogue raisonné des œuvres sur papier de Cy Twombly. Vol. VI (1973-1976)*, Milan 1979, p. 7.
- 20 T. Davila, op.cit. (note 13), p. 89. Italics in original; L. Hoptman, 'Introduction: Drawing Is a Noun', in: L.J. Hoptman (ed.), *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions*, New York 2002, exh.cat. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, p. 11; Ibidem; C.H. Butler, op.cit. (note 18).