The Collaborative Drawing Project: Drawings After Sol LeWitt
The Philosophy of Art (Phil 227a/b)
Project Proposal

Proposed Venue: Olin Lobby
Proposed Dates: November 3-5, 2010

Project Description:
The Collaborative Drawing Project: Drawings After Sol LeWitt is an ongoing installation project designed to introduce students from outside the arts to the productive processes of art making. The project was initially conceived under the assumption that an understanding of the process of artistic production is critical for an understanding of art in any media (e.g. an understanding of the way materials, methods, and background knowledge influence the productive choices artists make in the studio). The goal of the project is to provide students with hands-on experience with these processes. Earlier installations of the project were exhibited at the Phillips Art Museum, Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA in the spring and fall of 2007 & the spring of 2008 (FND 182: Art, Meaning, and Perception), The Bates College Museum of Art in the fall 2008 (Philosophy 227a/b: The Philosophy of Art), and Art Commons at Bates College, in the fall of 2009 (FYS 382: The Power of Art).

Sol LeWitt famously stated that, “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work…all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution of the work is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.” (Sol LeWitt, Paragrapshs on Art, repr. In ed. Richard Kostelanetz, Esthetics Contemporary, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987, 432-435). The Collaborative Drawing Project takes this sentiment as a point of departure. Students break out into small groups to produce large scale drawings from randomized sets of abstract geometric instructions (e.g. snap a diagonal chalk line on a tangent to a large circle that divides the drawing unevenly along the horizontal). The formal structure of each of these works is strictly defined by small sets of instructions. However, their realization is determined by uncoordinated (neither pre-determined nor jointly planned) sets of choices made by individual participants with a diverse range of backgrounds and body types. The result is a set of formally identical, but perceptually distinct 8 x 20 foot abstract drawings.

Each iteration of the project has generally been run over the course of a week so that we can meet as a class twice during the course of the installation. However, the duration of the installation is ideally determined only by the availability of appropriate space. Some works are made quickly. We can make 4-5 large scale drawings in a class period. Other works emerge over the course of the installation. In the past we have been able to secure open gallery space for the project. Students generate a schedule to participate in the project outside of class time. This has enabled us to open the project up to a broader audience of gallery visitors and other invited participants.

The project has also included wall text and conference posters produced by the students explaining the connection between the installation and course material in cognitive science & aesthetics. The decision whether or not to include this material in the current proposal is contingent upon the timing of the installation.

We generate our own original sets of drawing instructions for the project.
General Project Goals:

• Provide students in Philosophy of Art (Phil 227) with first hand experience with the productive processes involved in artmaking.

• Enable students in Philosophy of Art (Phil 227) to explore the types of productive constraints that materials and methods impose on the creative process.

• Introduce students in Philosophy of Art (Phil 227) to conceptual art and the use of chance procedures in artistic production.

• Introduce the students in Philosophy of Art (Phil 227) to the dynamics of collaborative research projects.

• Engage the larger Bates Community in the arts.

Materials & Installation Procedures:

4’ & 5’ rolls of poster bond paper
chalk lines (blue, red, black)
oil crayons
8b pencils
4’ straight edge
push pins
string
2 inch masking tape
picture hangers
extra large binder clips
step stools/ladder
1 x 2s

Location Drawings:
- Students construct drawing sheets using masking tape and 4 foot rolls of paper.
- Three lengths of 1 x 2 are rolled into the top edge of each drawing sheet & secured with binder clips.
- Drawing sheets are hung on the binder clips from 7 picture hangers (2x3x2)
- corners & edges are secured with tacks
- marks are made by running lines with the straight edge; generating curves with a string & tack compass; or snapping chalk lines.

Automatic Drawings:
- 5’ x 6’ sheets are hung & gridded into even rows of 1’ squares plum & level
- a random sequence generator is used to generate a long sequence using the numbers 1-6.
- each of 6 marks (two diagonals & four 90° arcs) are each assigned a number from 1-6.
- the number sequence is used to fill in the grid starting in the upper left corner & moving left to right
- the process is repeated 3 times for each sheet creating overlapping patterns & continued until the end of the installation.

Computer Drawing:
- If time & technology permits we will program a computer to continuously generate automatic drawings for the duration of the installation.

Automatic Dancing
- We will also meet for a week with Professor Rachel Boggia at the Plavin Dance Studios in Merrill Gym to learn about Merce Cunningham and the application of automatic and chance procedures in choreography and performance. The goal of these exercises is to continue our discussion of Conceptual Art and explore the potential productive relationship between Cunningham and LeWitt's methods.
Sample Drawings (2007-2008):

111607 #2 (3 mark drawing)
• Draw a large circle on one side of the page.
• Draw an acute triangle whose long point lies inside the circle.
• Draw a line tangent to the circle that crosses the page & divides the triangle into two parts.

111607 #4 (6 mark drawing)
• Draw a series of evenly spaced but unevenly long rays that share a point of origin and define a 90 degree arc
• Draw a series of evenly spaced but unevenly long rays larger than the last that share a point of origin and define a 130 degree arc
• Draw a series of evenly spaced but unevenly long rays that share a point of origin and define a 90 degree arc
• Draw a series of evenly spaced but unevenly long rays, smaller than the rest, that share a point of origin and define a 60 degree arc
• Draw a rectangle, 2/3 of the page long & not too tall so that no corner rests on a point of origin

7-Instruction Drawing #102708b (after Sol Lewitt)
• Draw a big square that is not centered on the page.
• Draw a line through the square that bisects the page diagonally into unequal parts
• That line is a tangent to a large circle that doesn’t overlap the square
• Draw a smaller circle off-center inside this circle.
• Draw a tangent to the smaller circle so that one corner of the square lies on the line
• Draw a triangle that fills one side of the paper whose corner is the center of the square
Automatic Drawing # 030608-1 (3 days)

- Construct a grid of 1’ x 1’ squares on a sheet of paper 5’ w x 6’h.
- The grid should be drawn in lightly so it cannot be seen from a distance.
- Use a tack to construct a compass with a radius the width of one of the grids.
- Start in the upper left corner of the grid.
- Fill in the squares in order row by row using the sequence of marks below.
- Each time you fill a sheet construct a new grid.
- Stack each drawing in a pile on the gallery floor as you finish them.
- Continue drawing for 3 days.
- Construct as many gridded sheets as necessary to complete the drawing.
- When you are done look at one wall of the gallery.
- The top of that wall where you are looking is the first square in a grid.
- Fill the walls of the gallery row by row with completed sheets.
- Lay the rest out in a grid on the floor.
- Allow for a clear row for visitors to walk through.
- Leave open one space for continued automatic drawing.

```
2 5 4 3 6 6 5 1 6 6 3 4 5 5 2 1 4 4 4 6 4 3 5 1 3 1 3 5 5 1 3 3 3 3 1 6 5 6 6 2 5 5 1
2 6 2 3 1 6 6 3 3 4 5 1 6 5 1 1 2 3 2 6 3 3 1 4 3 5 3 1 4 3 4 1 3 2 3 6 6 6 1 3 2 4 6
2 6 2 6 2 4 6 2 1 4 4 5 2 2 1 4 5 1 5 2 2 4 5 6 5 4 5 3 2 5 6 6 4 6 4 6 1 4 5 6 1 1 1
5 2 6 4 1 2 6 5 4 1 6 1 1 4 4 1 5 2 4 5 5 3 4 6 4 2 5 1 2 3 2 2 5 3 3 6 6 2 6 3 1 2
6 2 1 1 3 3 1 4 3 5 5 5 4 1 3 6 3 3 5 6 3 2 2 5 4 2 6 5 2 3 6 4 4 3 4 2 1 6 1 1 6 1
2 2 2 2 2 5 2 4 6 3 1 4 6 5 4 4 2 6 4 5 3 6 4 5 3 1 4 6 2 1 6 6 1 4 5 2 3 4 2 6 1 4 3
1 4 1 2 2 2 4 2 3 4 6 6 1 2 1 3 1 6 1 6 6 1 1 4 5 4 1 5 6 2 2 6 6 5 1 4 2 4 2 1 4 6 2
3 3 4 1 2 1 2 3 4 5 6 4 1 2 4 6 3 6 4 4 1 4 1 1 5 5 1 2 1 2 3 6 1 1 2 1 2 2 5 4 6 6 4 1
6 3 4 2 1 1 6 4 3 5 2 1 6 1 5 2 6 5 5 1 3 6 3 6 4 5 1 1 2 6 3 3 3 4 5 3 5 5 4 3 2 1 4
4 3 2 3 1 5 1 3 4 4 1 5 2 4 5 5 3 4 6 4 2 5 1 2 3 2 2 5 3 3 6 6 2 6 3 1 2 6 2 1 1 3 3
1 4 3 5 5 5 4 1 3 6 3 3 5 6 3 2 2 5 4 2 6 5 2 3 6 4 4 3 4 2 1 6 1 1 6 1 2 2 2 2 2 5
2 4 6 3 1 4 6 5 4 4 2 6 4 5 3 6 4 5 3 1 4 6 2 1 6 6 1 4 5 2 3 4 2 6 1 4 3 1 4 1 2 2 2
4 2 3 4 6 6 1 2 1 3 1 6 1 6 6 1 1 4 5 4 1 5 6 2 2 6 6 5 1 4 2 4 2 1 4 6 2 3 3 4 1 2 2
3 4 5 6 4 1 2 4 6 3 6 4 4 1 4 1 1 4 2 6 1 4 3 1 4 1 1 2 2 2 4 2 3 4 6 6 1 2 1 3 1 6 1 6
6 1 1 4 5 4 1 5 6 2 2 6 6 5 1 4 2 4 2 1 4 6 2 3 3 4 1 2 2 3 4 5 6 4 1 2 4 6 3 6 4 4 1
4 1 1 5 5 1 2 1 2 3 6 1 1 2 1 2 2 5 4 6 6 4 1 6 3 4 2 1 1 6 4 3 5 2 1 6 1 5 2 6 5 5 1
3 6 3 6 4 5 1 1 2 6 3 3 3 4 5 3 5 5 4 3 2 1 4 4 3 2 3 1 5 1 3 4 5 5 1 2 1 2 3 6 1 1 2
1 2 2 5 4 6 6 4 1 6 3 4 2 1 1 6 4 3 5 2 1 6 1 5 2 6 5 5 1 3 6 3 6 4 5 1 1 2 6 3 3 3 4
5 3 5 5 4 3 2 1 4 4 3 2 3 1 5 1 3 4 5 1 5 4 2 5 5 3 4 6 4 2 5 1 2 3 2 2 5 3 3 6 6 2 6 2
3 1 2 6 2 1 1 3 3 1 4 3 5 5 5 5 4 1 3 6 3 3 5 6 3 2 2 5 4 2 6 5 2 3 6 4 4 3 4 2 1 6 1
1 6 1 2 2 2 2 2 5 2 4 6 3 1 4 6 5 4 4 2 6 4 5 3 6 4 5 3 1 4 6 2 1 6 6 1 4 5 2 3
```
We have used the more regimented methodology introduced by Sol LeWitt in his explorations of arcs and lines like Wall Drawing #260 or All Combinations of Arcs from Corners and Sides: Straight, Not-Straight, and Broken Lines to explore his ideas about the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and its realization in a given installation. Sol LeWitt wrote in Sentences on Conceptual Art (0-9, May 1969) that:

7. The artist’s will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion.
28. Once the idea is established in the artist’s mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side effects that the artist can not imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.
29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.

LeWitt’s installations of arcs and lines were presented as table diagrams, or regimented instructions for transferring a discrete vocabulary of marks in a prespecified grid to the gallery walls. Here we have used a (nearly!) random sequence generator and a vocabulary of seven marks (four 90° arcs, two diagonal lines, and a blank) to construct a computerized installation of arcs and lines. Even the process of selecting the series is thereby blind and mechanical. The work is constructed from 5 overlapping passes through the grid, starting in the upper left corner and moving horizontally across the rows from left to right. The total time from start to completion for each iteration of the drawing is 30 minutes. You will notice that patterns emerge as the marks are drawn in over time. One may be tempted to assign aesthetically ideal stopping points or to identify an ideal number of passes through the grid. LeWitt’s writings, of course, ask us to question the relationship between the idea of an artwork and these, sometimes quite compelling, aesthetic intuitions. Our question is whether this is sound advice!

We invite you to experiment with a range of variables in the construction of quick sketch installation of 1 2 3 4 _ 5 6 - Sketch for 1 2 3 4 _ 5 6 (Automatic Drawing 1103040511 - ) at the computer station across the lobby.
**The Collaborative Art Project (Drawings After Sol Lewitt)**

Philosophy 227a/b in collaboration with The Imaging Center

Olin Lobby, Bates College, 2010

Adam Agins, Ned Antell, David Beck, Billy Collins, Douglas Compton, Rory Cosgrove, Olivia DaDalt, Abrittee Dhal, Adam Dolin, Tara Dugan, Mathieu Duvall, Meagan Forsythe, Grace Glasson, Chelsea Graves, Meredith Greenberg, Brianna Hawkins, Joncarl Hersey, Brian Kennedy, Nikhil Krishna, Kelly Kruger, Daniel Lambright, Samantha Landino, Billy Munchuck, Hannah Nienaber, Alana Plaus, Sam Polak, Leah Schmeiler, Bill Seeley, Elizabeth Siegert, Derek Simpson, Alex Streim, Charles Thaxton, Vonetta Trotter, Andrew Wilcox, Andrew Wortham

But I want to repeat that Modernist art does not offer theoretical demonstrations. It can be said, rather, that it happens to convert theoretical possibilities into empirical ones, in doing which it tests many theories about art for their relevance to the actual practice and actual experience of art (Clement Greenberg, Modernist Painting).

Sol Lewitt (1928-2007) was a pioneer in conceptual art which he described as follows: “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical, or illustrative of theories…It is usually free from dependence on the skill of the craftsman” (Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, Artforum, June 1967). He repeated this sentiment in Sentences on Conceptual Art (0-9, May 1969), “the artist’s will is secondary to the process he initiates from the idea to completion.”

Some of LeWitt’s drawings can be thought of as uncontrolled collaborative artworks. LeWitt would write out a series of instructions for realizing a set of carefully planned geometric marks and send them to the museum, gallery, or site where the work was to be installed. He would not, ordinarily, visit the site during the installation process until it the works were almost complete. The drawings would be fit to the gallery space and constructed by installation staff without his supervision.” In the cases that interest us, LeWitt’s location drawings, some aspect of the instructions would be left ambiguous, to be puzzled out by the draftsmen on the fly. Each realization of these works therefore reflects the formal choices and interpretations of the crew that realizes it. Interestingly, the result is a set of drawings that are formally and semantically identical, but compositionally and aesthetically distinct. The only thing that binds each as an instance of the same work is the idea from which it is generated.

Our interest in LeWitt’s location drawings is, in a sense, antithetical to his discussion of conceptual art. The conceptual artist may well be insulated from capricious processes of perceptual discovery that drive production in more traditionally aesthetic art forms. But the installation staff is not. Each group that realizes one of these drawings visualizes it uniquely (as LeWitt noted in Doing Wall Drawings, Art Now, June 1971). The marks made are shaped by their knowledge, expectations, motor coordination, physical size, and even starting position within the architectural space of the gallery. Therefore the process of production for these works is subjective and reflects individual cognitive influences that shape our engagement with, and perception of, artworks in general. We have tried to amplify this effect by borrowing a set of productive strategies from collaborations between John Cage and Merce Cunningham. We have randomized the order of drawing instructions, color choices, and participants for each instantiation of each drawing. No participant has access to the idea of the work as a whole. The process is still mechanical. It runs its course without subjective tampering. However the form of each work emerges from the unique experience of each participating artist; it emerges as a collaborative process of perceptual discovery that reflects each participant’s unique set of cognitive biases, their body size, location, physical orientation, knowledge, understanding, memory, and history, challenging the claim that the (art)object is dematerialization in conceptual art.

Our collaboration with The Imaging Center explores LeWitt’s writing on conceptual art from the opposite direction. These drawings adhere strictly to the maxim that the idea is the machine that drives the work, that the execution of a work should be carried out blindly and mechanically without any modifications. Our goal was to minimize the possible range of particular aesthetic choices available to the artist. The order of the marks is assigned by a random sequence generator. The number of passes through the drawing grid is predetermined. However, patterns emerge as the process unfolds that tempt us to identify ideal compositional strategies or stopping points and demand that we reflect on LeWitt’s claim that the execution of an artwork is a perfunctory affair.

*In later years LeWitt would send assistants to train draftsmen in the procedures for making the drawing.*
Automatic Dancing (1112131411)
Concept and Choreography Rachel Boggia (Dance) and Bill Seeley (Philosophy)
Performed as Part of Things that Travel
Schaeffer Theater, Bates College, Novemebr 12-14, 2011

Automatic Dancing (1112131411) explores a tension in Sol LeWitt's (1928-2007) writings on Conceptual Art. The multimedia performance builds on material and ideas originally developed for automatic drawing by Bill Seeley in collaboration with his philosophy of art students and, more recently, with Rachel Boggia and Matt Duval at Bates College for The Collaborative Drawing Project (2007-2011). LeWitt wrote:

In conceptu al art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art (Paragraphs on Conceptual Art. Artforum, June 1967).

There are decisions that the draftsman makes, within the plan, as part of the plan. Each individual, being unique, if given the same instructions would understand them differently and would carry them out differently…The artist must allow various interpretations of his plan…The draftsman perceives the artist’s plan, then reorders it to his experience and understanding…The artist and the draftsman become collaborators in making the art…All wall drawings contain errors, they are a part of the work (Wall Drawings. Arts Magazine, April 1970).

LeWitt's early location drawings can be thought of as uncontrolled collaborative installations, improvisational performances of a choreographed score, artworks whose ultimate composition depends as much on the interpretive judgments of the draftsmen as on the original recipe itself. Automatic Dancing combines LeWitt's drawing methods with Cunningham/Cage's chance procedures to explore the role and aesthetic potential of the performers’ share in this process. A random sequence generator automatically constructs a unique location drawing score from a vocabulary of seven marks and two phrases for each performance that the dancers read, interpret, and translate on the fly. Live video capture is used to articulate the dynamic relationship between the phrases and the score. What emerges is an understanding of the way process and the structural properties of a range of media push, pull, and shape artistic production and the consumers’ experience of the work.
The scoring technique for Automatic Dancing was originally developed as a hands-on teaching tool for courses in philosophy of art. The goal of the associated exercises was to help non-art students explore the range of ways that artistic media constrain the expressive practices of artists. Students were asked to develop and test sets of instructions for the construction of simple geometric marks and figures. The instructions would be randomly sorted, distributed to groups of draftsmen, and used to make eight by twenty-four foot geometric drawings. Instructions for the scaling, positioning, and orientation of the marks were given relationally, or relativized to the size and orientation of other marks on the page and the current position and orientation of the artists' body, e.g. start at the spot just in front of your nose, look down to the left, and snap a chalk line to the point where your gaze rests, or, use your arm as a compass and draw a smooth but uneven arc from your ankle across to a point above your other shoulder, or draw a long obtuse triangle, neither level nor plumb, that intersects at least 3 other figures on the sheet. The goal in these exercises is to come to understand the constraints set by the medium and method so that one can construct a system that works, a set of formal instructions that yield a coherent composition. The challenge is that the artist cannot amend the system on the fly to accommodate his or her aesthetic intuitions. Once the idea is set it runs to completion.

The instructions for LeWitt's early automatic drawings of arcs and lines can be interpreted as closed formal systems. The drawings would be delivered to the gallery as numeric tables that defined grids of overlapping marks. All of the potential formal relationships are coded in, and can in principle be read off, of these numeric tables. Our strategy for automatic drawing was looser, designed to amplify the influence of the conscious choices, unconscious biases, and different bodies of individual draftsmen. The goal of these exercises was in part to explore the boundaries between freedom and control in the use of automatic and chance procedures. The choreography and scores for Automatic Dancing bear a closer resemblance to LeWitt's formal systems. But the goal is the same, to explore the boundaries between control and freedom in artistic production, to explore the dancers share as a collaborator in the production of the work, and to explore the way the aesthetics of the work emerges from the idiosyncrasies and errors that shape each individual performance.

There is a strong sense in which dance is like what we have called automatic drawing. Both are coordinated collective activities in which the artist generates a recipe for performers to follow. We might say the same about installation art - each installation of the same piece is a performance tagged to the uniqueness of its current context. We might even say the same about a sculptor managing a crew of assistants in the studio. We might also say that consumers play a similar role to performers whenever they approach a work – they use the material existence of the work, along with a range of shared conventions it authorizes, to reconstruct its content/meaning on the fly without any real time oversight or guidance. The transparency of process in Automatic Dancing thereby reflects the interpretive process of the consumer in microcosm. We watch ourselves as we watch the dancers use their closed choreographic system of conventions to interpret the score as it emerges on the stage. Of course the freedom of the performer is different in each of these types of case – and these differences are not trivial. However, and this is the philosophical point, an exploration of the collaborative role played by dancers as they interpret a score is a means to explore the related concepts of art, aesthetics, and artistic production…and ultimately the consumer's share in the (re)construction of the content of the work.
A Narrow Typology of Scores for Automatic Dancing: These fourteen examples demonstrate the potential variance in the scores used for Automatic Dancing (1112131411) - the original automatic drawings from the performances were not preserved. The automatic drawings were projected to encompass the back wall of the stage above the dancers. There are 7 marks in the score associated with two phrases: 4 curves and 2 diagonals at unique orientations along with 1 blank. Dancers read the score as it is drawn in row by row following pre-set rules that determine the accumulation of movements in the piece. The score is replicated as it emerges using motion capture video of the path of each choreographed mark from a set of initial solos. The final set of images in the typology illustrate scores that accumulate the individual movement phrases from the current dance into automatic duets.