“Lost Space”—
The Notion of Space in Renate Krammer’s Latest Drawings

It may sound strange when an artist who almost exclusively works with horizontal lines on flat surfaces does so in order to address the subject of space. Pencil and paper, two-dimensionality, and the reduction to the absolutely essential are the first things that strike us about Renate Krammer’s art. But she has, of course, also varied her materials and methods on occasions in the past in order to create true spatial structures. We can physically describe these—hexahedra, cubes containing strips of paper arranged in such a way that we are grasped by a haptic impulse. We want to reach inside them in order to not only feel the quality of the strips of soft mulberry paper, but also experience the concrete space. In her larger-scale installations, the artist draws this concept further out into the surrounding volume. Taut threads generate an additional, artificial spatial form within the actual room. Upon entering these zones, we feel as if we are experiencing the transformation from one spatial quality to the next. The question is whether one can expect the public to be capable of such perceptive sensibility.
We tend not to ask questions about space. We experience it as a matter of course, in all its different shapes and forms. Kant’s opinion, as set out in 1786 in his text “Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science,” remains powerful today. This makes it clear that “space, together with the matter of which it is the form, does not contain the world of things in themselves, but only their appearance, and is itself only the form of our outer sensible intuition.”[1] In other words, space is transferred from the outer to the inner world of the subject and we are only truly aware of phenomena whose meaning is determined by the categories of our own understanding. In addition to and taking precedence over this, Kant defines two “pure forms of appearance”: time and space. It is along these two axes that the multiplicity of sensory phenomena can be found. This Kantian understanding of space as an a priori phenomenon prepared the ground for the notion of “absolute space,” as he noted in his 1768 text “Concerning the Ultimate Foundation of the Differentiation of Regions in Space.”[2] This states that “absolute space has its own reality independently of the existence of all matter and […] is itself the ultimate foundation of the possibility of its composition.” The difficulties facing scientists seeking to define the true nature of space were already clear to Aristotle in his *Physics*. In the field of physics, space plays a dual role: firstly, as the framework within which physical phenomena can be recognized—physics, after all, deals with phenomena in space—and, secondly, as an object of inquiry by physics itself, which, in turn, makes empirically-based assertions about space. But this challenges Kant’s a priori view of space, which, for him, is much more than a mere empirical term. More recently, developments in relativity theory, quantum theory, fractal geometry, and chaos theory have shaped the spatial understanding of physics. As a result, our notion of space became more differentiated throughout the 20th century and this process is still continuing today. For example, we investigate space in terms of its geometry, development, origin and future, composition and structure, but also as a human and as a developmental place. This latter aspect was particularly emphasized by Michel Foucault, when he depicted space as something that is neither empty nor homogenous. On the contrary, spaces that we concretely experience are charged with qualities and full of fantasy. And spaces that we experience in our dreams and our emotions are also possible—and these have internal qualities.
This brief foray into the history of the notion of space reveals that this is a question that we may not be able to answer definitively. From Aristotle to today’s theorists of virtual reality, much consideration has been given to the manifestation of external, internal, and illusionistic spatial structures. A more detailed look at even the most important of these theories would far exceed the scope of this text.
It is perhaps helpful here when we consider that, in German, the term “space” (Raum) is derived etymologically from “to evacuate” or “to empty” (räumen). Something must be emptied in order to create space in the first place. John Cage comes to the following conclusion as early as 1965: “Where

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, transl. by Michael Friedman, Cambridge 2004, p. 45.
[2] Immanuel Kant, *Selected Pre-Critical Writings*, transl. by G.B. Kerferd and D.E. Walford, Manchester 1968, p. 37.

there doesn't seem to be any space, know we no longer know what space is. Have faith space is there, giving one the chance to renovate his way of recognizing it, no matter the means, psychic, somatic, or means involving extensions of either."[3] This statement marks our arrival in the media age, in which, given the digital horror vacui, nothing is emptied but, quite the opposite, space appears to be expanded, or at least condensed, in order to create more room. Hegel's notion of the infinite space of the imagination, to which he ascribes the dimension of time, becomes modern again. Digital space knows no fixed boundaries, is immaterial and placeless, and its potential appears to be endless. How else could we distinguish between, or even recognize, all those notions of space that are under discussion, each in its own day—electronic space, kinetic space, atmospheric space, transcendental space, observational space, virtual space, artificial space, etc.?

Given these transformations caused by all these spatial terminologies and levels of meaning, it is no surprise when an artist talks about "Lost Space". But what has been lost? Of course we can speak of space in two dimensions. As well-versed "visual creatures," the power of illusion enables us to combine lines in such a way that they form space. "In front of" and "behind" are also reliable indicators in the depiction of three-dimensionality. But even a line is separated from the next line by something—by a space. If a line is interrupted and becomes two lines, a space is created between them. One sees the lines and is aware of the space—often unconsciously. And yet the lines are no more than the material requirement for being able to perceive the space between them, because the space itself (unless it is filled with a substance—a liquid, mist, steam, etc.) is not visible. We may constantly find ourselves in some form of space—usually in several at the same time—but we aren't consciously aware of this. This recalls Carl Andre's description of a street: We primarily move along it and its visual quality isn't important. We don't see it for its own sake.

We find a similar phenomenon in the drawings of Renate Krammer. The lines are the visual target; it is primarily these that we see. The other components in the drawing are simply generated by these lines and the viewer regards them as secondary.

But this has changed in the latest series of works, *Lost Space*. Here, Krammer is seeking to pick up on such nuances and establish them as her subject. The meanings of the English word "space" and its German counterpart "Raum" aren't identical. For German speakers, the semantic range is extremely narrow and, of the few possible meanings, none stray very far. English speakers, however, have many more options, and not only because they can also use the word "room." "Space" is much more ambiguous—place, universe, room, vacancy, distance, area, field, and opening are just some of the meanings of the word. Hence, rather than being a pragmatic locational detail, this English title must be read in terms of content. Krammer continues to exclusively use horizontal lines. But she suddenly interrupts these lines before continuing them a few millimeters further on. And by repeating such interruptions over several rows of lines she creates a sharp delineation between two (vertically or horizontally) adjacent blocks. The end of one block of lines and the beginning of the next create a further line. Wider, and very different to the pencil lines, this is also a surface, a void, a gap, a place that we don't really perceive. We are only made explicitly aware of it by the fact that the artist is treating it as her subject.

Referring back to the painter Adolf Hölzel (1853–1934), we can also speak of negative space in this context. For Hölzel it was clear that, by lending the same weight to foreground and background elements, one could create abstraction. In the work of Renate Krammer, background features of which we are usually less visually aware (voids and gaps) become central elements. As already noted, these are lines and surface themselves, they divide up the entire picture plane in different ways as a means of creating newly delineated areas.

Whether we can speak of "Räume" here is a matter of opinion that depends upon the contextualization of each work, but we can certainly speak of "spaces." As mentioned above, the English term is broader and more ambiguous—from the universe to the gap between two pencil lines. This extremely simple measure allows the artist to develop an almost unlimited variety of new forms and images. Earlier, Minimal Art offered very pragmatic ways of depicting phenomena such as

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[3] John Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse" (1965), in: *Joglars*, edited by Clark Coolidge, issue 3, 1966.

space. The basic elements of this approach were presence and place, which ultimately functioned as materializations of space. A cube in a room occupies physical space. The amount of physical space that it occupies in the room in which it is placed is exactly equivalent to its own volume. Space can only be made visible by other entities, otherwise it must remain imaginary. Renate Krammer is aware of this fact and, while it may generally be viewed as obvious, she employs it in her art as a highly versatile and intriguing variation.

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