PROJECT: SPANNING THE SPACE OF DISLOCATION

by

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Painting

December 2005
This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for
the degree of Master of Visual Arts at the Sydney College of the Arts
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Debra Dawes my supervisor who assisted me throughout the difficult years of my Masters. Without her encouragement and sharp criticism, I would not have come this far in understanding and achievement. In particular, I would like to thank two other persons who made a difference to the completion of this dissertation: Gavin Harris for his excellent help in editing my first draft and Linda Fienberg for her sound advice and the use of equipment in the workshop at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney. I am also grateful to my wife, Yah Lian without whom this paper and the birth of our baby girl Rui Xi in the middle of my research would not have been possible. Finally I thank my Lord and saviour Jesus Christ for guiding and pulling me through these two years of anguish, homesickness and back-breaking work.
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SUMMARY

Studio work

The Postgraduate Degree Show is held from 6th December 2005 to 17th December 2005 and my work is installed in the Sculpture Studio (as a gallery space) at Building 29 of Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney. There are three installations of work, each with a series of paintings and object-models. The media I am using are oil on canvas for the paintings and wood for the models. The titles of my exhibition pieces are Project Studio (Stairs), Project Rented Room (Chair), Project Rented Room (Bed), and Project Object. Together they are entitled Project: Spanning the Space of Dislocation.

The project explores the perception of space and its representation through painting and installation. The starting point is the image of familiar architectural objects to which I displace the experience of it from one site (my painting studio) to another (the gallery space) through painting as index. I use the technique of ambiguous linear forms in painting and the reflexive reading of orthogonal projective planes in installation to further extend the viewer’s perception of space and objects. The aim is to show that space has a meaningful relationship to objects and bring about a renewed awareness of habitual practice in seeing and representing space.

Research paper

I have divided my research paper in two chapters. Chapter one explores the issue of spatial representation through ambiguity of simple linear forms and painting as index. My concern is on space being less important to objects in the distinction between space as ground and object as figure. Within this chapter I argue for an extended and a reflexive mode of seeing and representing space and objects instead of for a ground-figure contrast. By mapping my experience on a usual working site and displacing it to another space, I show that my perception of space is extended such that the boundary between the familiar and foreign (that is, space-object distinction) is blurred. Chapter two explores the method of presentation through painting and installation in a gallery and addresses the viewer’s space of perception with the work. I also discuss possible reflexive readings on the projective planes of the work which further extend the perception of it.
INTRODUCTION

I studied architecture from 1991 to 1997. The final year project, the investigation of space and its relationship of the inside and outside to the architectural form, left an indelible mark on me. It became a preoccupation for five years as I pursued the issue of spatial problems and the representation of form. It came to a point when I realised that my architectural research must cross paths with art and so I took up the brush to paint, to see what potential it held for me. In preparation for this Masters degree, I sought not so much to learn technique or style as to resolve the questions of space that linger in me.

Initially I thought of confronting the questions through a formalist approach in the work, that is, by exploring elements of space per se: structure, form, objects etc. That was an assumption from my architectural training. But in painting, I saw a different mode of operational process at work – that of an analytical approach to the framing of thoughts and expressions through the artwork. Though I knew form and structure from my study in architecture, I was not satisfied with the product of the construct. What was the meaning to my practice? How does it involve the viewer? If space was to be experienced, how do I make its representation effective, because finally the construct must be exhibited?

In the representation of form, I saw space to be less important than objects in the distinction between space as ground and object as figure. Therefore, for this research, I will investigate this aspect and link it to the issue of perception of space and the viewer’s experience of it. I started on a site where there are objects I could associate with. Through the displacement of my experience in a studio space from its actual site to the gallery space, I aim to ‘resee’ the figure-ground contrast and intensify a perception of space which is to be read as extended and reflexive in representation. The viewer at the gallery will encounter a reading of space that is mapped by my reading of another space, so that by extension, this leads to a blurring of the boundary between an experience of the familiar and that of the foreign.

A fundamental aspect of my work is to pull space out of any reading, that is, to see beyond the plain appearance of things. I see it as a form of play in structural relationship. Structuralism’s concern with a system of signs interests me. I am not concerned with its link to languages but I wish to explore its logical approach to
analysing the condition of a system. I also refer to the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose concept of “aspect-dawning”, and the art critic, Rosalind Krauss whose notion of indexicality will frame the basis of my thoughts for the project.

Artists that I will be referring to are Piet Mondrian, Robert Ryman, Frank Stella and Sarah Robson. They formed their own critique on the discourse of the figure-ground dichotomy, and appropriately defined their art according to what they had discovered. Other artists include Margaret Roberts and Gordon Matta-Clark who referred to architecture in their art. They also set a unique approach to the making of art through installation in relation to the site and call for interactive participation from the viewer with the work, making the presentation not so much a passive reception but a thoroughly engaging intellectual exercise.

In this paper I have divided my topic into two parts to mark the structural approach in setting out my thoughts. Chapter one explores the issue of spatial representation through ambiguity of form and painting as index. As mentioned, my concern is on space being secondary to objects in terms of a ground-figure analogy and I argue for an extended and a reflexive mode of seeing and representing space and objects. By mapping my experience on the studio site and displacing it to another space, I will show my perception of space is extended such that the boundary between the familiar and foreign (that is, space-object distinction) is made indistinct. Chapter two explores the method of presentation through painting and installation in a gallery and addresses the viewer’s space of perception with the work. I also discuss further readings into my work in terms of a perceptual and material context which underpin the relationship to a close-distant viewing of the artwork.

Finally, I present this paper in a piecemeal fashion by first explaining the theory and then discussing its conception and possible readings. I also constructed the text to reflect the methodology I applied in my artwork and, more so, to cross-index each part of my argument with one another and to a larger whole.
CHAPTER ONE:

REPRESENTATION OF SPACE

In the current project I look at how reality is shaped by the relationship between familiar objects and the habits formed from daily use of space. I am interested in the effect of habitual action on the experience of the viewer, especially on the presentation (on site) and representation (in work) of space and objects. Can the work be seen as other than what is given? Do our habits of experience allow us to perceive space and objects differently? How are we keyed to read space when confronted with objects? At a deeper level, it is an inquiry into the context of the gallery space as an aesthetic limit and also questions the relationship of one space to another, where displacement of experience demands a reflexive reading of the familiar onto the foreign and vice versa.

I look first at the things close to me, especially in the space of habits making up most of our life, that is, the space of working, sleeping and transiting. The studio I work in, its architectural layout, is the site of my investigation. The place I am in, the objects in that space, are documented to show my perception of them. Being new to this place thus provides a catalyst for my research. For one, the same object placed in a different location becomes unfamiliar to me; on another, being in a foreign place causes me to see familiar objects in a different way. It seems the meaning of space and objects has somehow changed through a displacement of my habitual perception, as if a sense of dislocation is set in place.

A representation of space and objects, as I have come to know, is the distinction between ground and figure. Space is relegated to the role of a ground in relation to the object as figure. According to Michel De Certeau, this representation inhabits the idea of a legible form as a “map”. However, he advocates “a logic of ambiguity” to reading space that is marked by an operational one, as a “tour” because he says most people never remember a place as an ordered form but one of an alternating relation between “seeing” and “going”. He says that when we describe a place, we represent it in a grid format (as figure versus ground in distinction) but by habit, we identify space with our action and movement through it. Further, he distinguishes certain landmarks that invert or displace original functions, like a door that closes can also open, a tree that blocks a path can also mark its stage of advance, and a bridge that connects can also divide. Thus
for De Certeau, representation is a “spatial practice” of operations that activates the reading of a textualised place that is “constituted as a system of signs”.¹

I envisage habit as the re-experiencing of actions on objects (as signs) that we have established in a certain space. We don’t organise space in any conscious way in our mind but only through the way we encounter space in everyday experience. An example of this peculiarity is as mentioned when I feel detached from the familiar objects I come across in a new place, no longer touching them knowingly or sensing they belong to that space at all. Or in another instance, we are called to describe a familiar space of which words may fail us. Similarly, when we read a familiar sign, we know it for what it is but cannot explain it explicitly. In a way, it seems we cannot grasp the sense of space as a definite entity.

When we see an object, that is, to represent it, we forget its space, tending to make figure appear more important than the ground. However, I am saying that space operates rather than being. Rosalind Krauss suggests this feature of space draws a parallel to Robert Caillois’s idea of animal mimicry: the body of an insect imitates its background, like the praying mantis which blends with grass. Caillois thinks it is not defence mechanism at work but likens it to a form of “psychotic yielding to the call of space. It is a failure to maintain the boundaries between inside and outside, between, that is, figure and ground.”² The figure is now a ground, which is to say a ground on ground. There is an extended perception of space which reflexes on itself.

**Space in ambiguous form**

For De Certeau, space is the experiential difference between a viewer acting on an object and the object surrounding the viewer, such that an awareness of the oscillating relation of spatial perception in movement and function is made. For Callois, space as ground becomes univocal with object as figure, even displacing that object in space. In both cases, I equate habit as a factor in representing space and objects for the process of perception and experience by the viewer. The way we read space is influenced by our habit of movement, but when we come to represent or see it as an image, we focus more on the representation of objects which is the easiest and, in De Certeau’s words, the most “legible form”. We must then reclaim the misreading of this representation and refocus on space. The questions are: if space operates rather than being, what does it
mean when the viewer sees this space in the mind? What form should this seeing take if space has always, by habit, been thought of as a projection played out to an inner eye?

I started to study how artists and architects represent space for the viewer. To an architect, the viewer’s perception plays an important role in the experience of the object. The form of representation must correspond to the viewer’s ability to assimilate. In architectural representation, the solution is to make the specialised notation of drawing come as close as possible to actual experience of built form. This requires exactness in abstraction and a familiarity with the reading of such representation. In contrast, the architect, Daniel Libeskind highlights his work as a participatory process for *Three Lessons in Architecture*, 1987 (Figure 1), also called the Reading Machine, the Memory Machine and the Writing Machine. “The objects,” he says, “do not interest me. I think that the objects in architecture are only residues of something which is really important, the participatory experience.” The machines are hand-made, manually powered models of gears and cams so that by turning a wheel, for example in the Reading Machine, the text of architecture as discourse ‘turned’ for the viewer.

![Figure 1](image)

Libeskind shows that the perception of a work depends on the viewer’s participation and reading of it. In the Reading Machine, we can sense the weight of the work as books on the top shelf appear to fall on us and then they get swept away at our feet only if we sit down and turn the device. The reading of architecture through the machine is especially clear here as he reduces the notation of architectural
representation to elements of planar projection, like the reading of a horizontal plan in the Writing Machine, and that of a projective section in the Memory Machine. More importantly, though, is his critique of the work of architecture and its form of representation as being linear and precise. Since precision in measurement, drawing and execution is the operation of an architect’s work, the form that is set out by lines now takes precedence to space. However, as he has said, the focus is not on the object, so we are called not to see representation by form as an end. The work is asking us if this one-to-one linear representation of object as projected image is enough.5

Similarly, I had tried to ask this question by making a work that had more focus on participation than on visual impression. I began to use the concept of a model that would allow the viewer to see it in projection and still be able to interact with it. Therefore, I made Passivity and Influence, 2000 – 2003 (Figure 2 and 3) as the model for an imagined architectural construct. I saw the form as a plan of stairs and landings, which I repeated throughout and ended with a vertical space pulled out of that single surface. The parts are movable; in fact, they respond to a turn of the crank and piston. To me, a model should become an invitation to participate; it must work to mediate between space and the viewer. The idea is to see space and object as one unity through a direct experience of the work.

Figure 2

Figure 3
However, as my research is to investigate a form of representation for space that operates, I realise the difficulties a viewer will face with a complexity in composition such as in the work above. It must be a form that is immediately recognisable such that the experience of it is immediately accepted, like the praying mantis in its natural habitat. Minimalism in art advocates the simplicity of form given by a “singleness” of shape or gestalt and heightened by the awareness of the viewer to the perception of space and objects.\(^6\) If a form can be reduced to a simplified gestalt, I can then explore the limits of experience on the planes of projection without having to worry about a lack in understanding of the form and thus confusing the viewer.

As such, to extend a viewer’s perception of space, it is necessary to reduce the complexity of the object’s represented form. James M. Rosen writes, “The more limited or economical a configuration, the greater the prospect for a particular within the set of an ambiguity.”\(^7\) Sarah Robson’s work shows ambiguity in simple forms. In \textit{Eclipse}, 2002 (Figure 4), her spray-painted timber in the form of crescents are arranged in circular clusters. They appear as either shapes or objects, floating out as two-dimensional geometric forms seen frontally or as three-dimensional natural objects in a skewed perspective.\(^8\) Her works play with our expectations which contradict the experience of our eyes. We can see first the crescents not as apart from each other but as “circles within circles”, and where their gestalt relies on the relationship between the parts and to the overall context. It seems the form remains unchanged even though our perception of it has altered, shifting between seeing half-moons or a full circle.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\caption{Figure 4}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{Figure 5}
\end{figure}
On a similar scale, Margaret Roberts plays with the three-dimensional expectations our minds detect from the two-dimensional visual impression and somehow reconstruct in us as overlapping flat planes which we take for granted and see as volumes. For example, in *Untitled (coloured cube)*, 1995 (Figure 5), she creates the illusion of a cube rising up from the ground when in fact it is only a plaster block lying adjacent to two oblique oxide-coated drawings. Seeing from one vantage point, the drawings become the sides of the cube in three-dimensional form but in actual fact the work is still flat. Mia Campioni suggests that Roberts’ work reminds us of what we have forgotten in our perception because of the focus we individuate on details such that we lose the overall wholeness and connectedness of things.9 Her principle is one of pushing us “against the plane of experience” in her art, to refocus us back to what has been absent in the things we habitually see by making unfamiliar presented “parts” become suddenly a distinct “whole”.10

Another example is *Untitled (long square)*, 1994, where two adjacent sides are drawn short while the opposite sides are stretched to a long thin point. On the short side of the diamond shape (Figure 6) the perspective reveals a near square balanced on its bottom apex but once the viewer moves to the other end of the shape (Figure 7), it is an inverted triangle or tapering tail.11 Ambiguous space plays an important role in the experience of the work for which form is not perceived by pre-conceived expectation, that is, one is confronted with the absence of its parts, and given to the presence of the whole. By using different vantage points and even views that do not give recognisable forms, she inquires into the issue of perception through the theme of displacement.
What I have tried to uncover so far is that simplicity of form implies an ambiguity in reading representation that is necessary for a richer experience of the work. Thus a form that is more easily assimilated will give a greater interpretation of its spatial context. Even so, the form must correspond to a linear relation with that reality. What is the best method to represent that form? Here I rely on the architectural notation of plan/section to investigate the form of representation in a way which calls for, as Catherine Ingraham puts it, participation of “a more persistent and active action on objects and whereby reality can be renewed through a reinterpretation of the representation system.”

Space in perceptual context

Catherine Ingraham believes that representation by linear projection should not be revoked in its presentation of reality but she wants us to go back and reinvestigate the idea of this framing of space. The mistake, she says, is trying to replace the linearity offered by the framing rather than discover more of its potential. She measures representation according to the horizontality and verticality of the line, in modes given by drawing and model-building. In another essay, she suggests the art of perspectival drawing is already a form of formalised operation, a habit of seeing what is projective. To ‘resee’ is to question the viewer’s location and determine what is seen or unseen within the system of projective representation.

I also find that Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his structuralist way, holds the same view. Judith Genova, in analysing Wittgenstein, shows his case of ‘reseeing’ as a form of comparing relationships (as differences) more than that of a linear ‘imprint’ process in the mind (as one-to-one sameness). Seeing, as Genova explains for Wittgenstein, demonstrates the associative similarities between concepts, the connections that “criss-cross the conceptual domain” by comparing differences between familiar forms. One form can then be substituted with another through the viewer’s perception and the projective representation (as a structure of operation on signs) for a multiple experience of the same space and objects.

In fact if we bring this “way of seeing” (Wittgenstein calls it “seeing-as”) into the context of art criticism, it opposes the ideas of Clement Greenberg. What I want to point out is Greenberg’s condemnation of illusionistic perspectives (drawing) and
space-figure contrast (painting) as outmoded forms of representation in preference for flatness on canvas. However, I see his argument as citing another form of projection, that of the position of the subject and work as frontal and axially opposite. I do not intend to press on with defining an all-encompassing representational notation but I want to choose a form of representation that the viewer is familiar with and yet sees more in what is presented. It should extend the ‘space’ (between perceptions) of representation as the path of reading is traced and retraced.

With *Wall Wrap*, 2004 (Figure 8 and 9), I took the studio site as an integral element that refers to my space of movement in an everyday routine. I wished to express the line in the work as a ‘reseeing’ on the basis of ‘movement’, re-enacting the paths I made and the trace I left in the studio. It is not so much the gestalt (figure) of what the mind sees in as it is the space that surrounds the gestalt. For one, the lines evoke illusory and represented space in an architectural notation of plan and section that makes the viewer perceive motion through them. On another, the trace of lines on paper marks the possible trajectory of my action in the limit of the studio space which is doubled by a retrace in the sensation of paper wrapping across the wall space. This is especially self-referential in the physical turning of paper as it aligned with the perpendicular rounding of the wall corners.

I drew inspiration from Frank Stella’s repeated patterns in his *Black Paintings* (Figure 10 and 11) but I stopped short of his intention to get rid of illusionistic space from painting. Stella’s work was to flatten space on the canvas by setting out the bands of black house paint separated by narrow lines of raw canvas at a constant interval. He
purposely painted only the figure of space instead of a figure-ground contrast of forms. He also inverts our normal way of reading paint by making the underpainting which is seen as lines become the ‘positive’ area, and the painted parts which are black become the ‘shadow of forms’. William Rubin puts it succinctly, saying that this method “runs against the grain of optical expectation” as the viewer habitually reads the ‘positive’ image first but is not aware of the artist’s purpose to make the bands lift out as space from the picture plane instead of setting them into the painting. The viewer is asked to ‘resee’ space in the double reading of the figure as both the lines and the bands.

![Figure 10](image1.png)  ![Figure 11](image2.png)

In fact, I see that he is engaged in a play of visual presentation (of ambiguity) with the viewer by making expectation differ from his intent. The ambiguity of a viewer’s perception to the artist’s is given by the viewer’s focus in lines of pattern whilst the artist only saw the bands of space. Furthermore, by overt design structures that underpin his composition, it is a critique of the actuality of space in the picture plane as the bands spaced evenly from the edges, are simultaneously stating a negation of illusionism (setting back from picture plane) and asserting an identity forthright (projecting forward from picture plane). The bands of space now begin to fluctuate between ground and figure of the picture plane.

Likewise, I intend to ‘resee’ the perception of space through the segmenting effect of plan and section in my work. Movement is now defined in either mode of spatial projection because it can so be sequenced. As such, there is a shift in perceiving what is at first, a space of illusionary depth to a view of another orientation suggested
by the immediacy of the image and the ambiguity of spatial form. In Wall Study, 2004 (Figure 12 and 13), I extended this ambiguity into the reading of the architectural notation given by ‘sectioning’ which is the technique of pulling space (as section) out of the surface of reading (as plan) on the wall. Here, a silhouetted window became the focal point of a horizontal reading of plan-space formed by the veiling effect of rice paper in contrast with the vertical composition of paint determined by the paper on wall. So I projected that form into space as I wanted the viewer to get more involved with the reading. This resulted in the drawing-like structure of a model rising from a horizontal plane that refers back to the vertical element of a hidden form. The viewer is slowly brought to realise the play of horizontality and verticality in the model, one that is always a changing view between that of a flat vertical section of the structural grid reinforced by the drip paint and that of a deep horizontal plan of solid block enhanced by the shelf-like boxes.

What I have discovered so far in pulling form out from space is that space refers to the reading of a material surface. Space is not a ‘surfaceless’ ground on which objects ‘float’ aimlessly. There is an on-going relationship between the surface of reading (that is, wall/ floor as surface) and the viewer, which has bearing on Stella’s understatement
of “what you see is what you see”. The walls and floors are important elements which we tend to overlook in the perception and representation of space. In that distance between a surface and the viewer, objects are seen as either projecting from or merging into it. Therefore I see it necessary to review the perception of space starting from the form on two-dimensional surfaces.

Returning to Krauss’s interpretation of Callois’s mimicry, she points out that the object is no longer under the scrutiny of a fixed and unique eye set in an “optico-geometric mastery of space” but one of multiple views which I deem to be linked by a reflexive trace on a surface of reading. It is an analogy of one distinct insect amongst many similar ones like a “tesserae in mosaic pattern”, an element in a picture seen as more of another (being reflexive to itself), a picture into which the insect as a part becomes a relationship to the whole, becoming camouflage-like, into a surface of “seamless invisibility”.

For perception of space, it is one of a constant shift between views where one view is as good as the other. The common denominator is a surface from which space is projected and to which we refer. Other than an imprint in the mind, perception of space is a play of surfaces between a ‘mould’ which is the surface that space holds out to the form of objects (scaffolding) and a ‘cast’ which is how that form is projected (imprint) for our experience of it. An object can appear familiar or foreign to me by virtue of the ‘mould’ that recasts the object as figure-figure (close) or ground-ground (distant) to space. In this, space is the mediating operation for a reversal of focus in perception.

To represent space that operates, there is no longer a pure sustained reading of exactness (imprint/sameness) but an inexactness (dislocation/differences) that we abstract to represent and perceive that space to reality. Once again I draw on Wittgenstein. Seeing, to him is not just projection-like, as a one-to-one relation to reality, but actively differentiated by “contexts and patterns”. Because seeing is interrelated to the surround and our thoughts, Wittgenstein is asking us to see something in difference (extension), to see it as but limited by the sameness of form (reflexive). Therefore, it is a continuous reminder that meaning is always experienced through a comparison of signs in the process of representing space to the viewer.
My work is a plan-like view of an architectural object that can also be seen as a section. The image is set out by ‘sectioning’ (where the form is outlined as either plan or section) and oscillates between the surface of a horizontal and a vertical reading. Both notions are inseparable in an extended and reflexive way of seeing, and they convey the characteristics of how I perceive space and objects in representation.

One artist who explored a similar mode of seeing is Piet Mondrian. He manipulated the surface of the canvas with paint to bring the ground up to the figure or the figure down to ground, to destroy the opposition between figure and ground. By using canvas surface as a generative, he shows us that our minds do not emphasise a one-sided perception nor focus on a single important area but perhaps of a constant fluctuation. According to Yve-Alain Bois, Mondrian was the first to turn painting into an object viewed in section by installing white strips of wood around the edges of the canvas and setting it on another backing of frame, which, so to speak, builds up the surface in front instead of pulling the viewer into its space. This is not a critique of illusionism but rather the play of axes in the position of the viewer to the verticality of the work (surface) and the horizontality of its reading (depth), as seen in his Composition work (Figure 14), where he lays black stripes over an emanating background of white.20

I also turn to an unpublished article by Eiichi Tosaki on visualised rhythm perceived in Mondrian’s compositions of a static geometric design. She suggests a kind of “flashing moment” experienced on the thickened surface of the embossed white
squares and rectangles in conjunction with the black strips. She suggests a tension (between the velvety thick white planes and shiny concave black strips) that activates rhythm in which we begin to see the white ground reconstituted as figure and the black figure as ground. Mondrian played with the opposition between depth and surface by layering paint such that the black glossy strips are seen more sunken than the white matte planes, and yet by their materiality, the perception of their difference works in opposite to this tension of surface play (Figure 15). It follows that because of the persistence of perception, each image of a particular plane is impressed in successive displacement as ‘image’ in the mind. There is an incessant switching from a locality (from “one plane”) to totality (to the “relationships which produce the total impression”), and vice versa: one plane to its oppositions and from these, back to the plane21 – a reading that extends perception and is also reflexive.

I compare Tosaki’s analysis of Mondrian’s rhythm as a rereading of Wittgenstein’s notion of “aspect-dawning”: the viewer is subjected to two visual experiences which are not caused by a physical change of the object (sameness) but as given between perceptions, they are caused by their appropriate contexts (difference).22 It is a seeing of likeness that we recognise meaning only with a ‘switch’ in perception of the mind. To see rhythm in Mondrian’s supposedly static composition, according to Tosaki, requires that experience of “aspect-dawning” on Jastrow’s “duck and rabbit” diagram in which one sees “a sudden change in aspect of a picture-duck to a picture-rabbit (or both images seen at the same time).”

Therefore I envision my painting to generate this ‘switch’ in the orientation of different views, such as an opposition of vertical/ horizontal, penetration/ frontal, up/ down or traverse/ rotation. Noting Project Studio (Stairs), 2005, for example, Figure 16 alludes to a viewer looking frontally at the stairs climbing up, as in a section, and also downward with the stairs descending, as in a plan. In Figure 17, the viewer can ascend across the sectional cut of the stairs from left to right or penetrate into the picture plane by twisting up with each segment of the climb. In Figure 18, the viewer can ascend the steps from right to left or descend from the left, having the top flight of the stairs going down over but the bottom flight being cropped off the frame.
In response to this ‘switch’, the viewer is displaced from a certain viewing position (perceptually not physically). This intensifies an awareness of the visual field’s ‘index’ to the body and its habit of moving through space or around objects. I am showing that space is more than planes perceived in depth, either receding or advancing on the surface of a visual field, it is now conceived as a ‘mould’ by the mind. And since our mind abstracts through reduction, the solidity of object is ‘recast’ onto the surface of this ‘mould’ and seen as another surface, as a ‘cast’, similar yet distinct from the former. We can have an extended form of perception in which the mould is mapped onto the cast and a reflexive one in which there is a switch occurring between readings. The only condition is the presence of a surface of reading and that space operates on it.

**Space as indexicality**

By setting space as operational, I now read it as a sign. In “Notes on the Index”, Rosalind Krauss describes painting as a shifting sign which “empties” itself of formal or structural meaning but by pointing to an external physical presence (a cause that relates to it), painting is filled with meaning. My concern is to return to painting but to see it as an index that marks the space of where I habitually stay. My presence and the experience of a place are now indexed by the images of familiar architectural objects which are presented as work that can be relocated to another site.

For me, however, painting is not just a record or documentary evidence as Krauss likens it to the photographic sign – an imprint – it is now a visual diary of transcription, a sign to mark my experience (non-material) on a surface film (material), to transpose experience from actual site of occurrence (relational) to gallery space (non-relational), and to map the viewer’s experience (unfamiliar) onto a delimiting plane of experience as set by the geometricised space of projective representation (familiar).

In my work, the internal division (drawing) ‘empties’ its single meaning (sameness) and projects space that oscillates or reverses orientation (difference) with each moment of perception. Whereas a painting in perspectival form distances the viewer and creates as illusion a gap of entry (separation), painting as index now minimises (maps) the distance by bringing the viewer’s perception into play, substituting on its shifting surface one view for another. In making painting act as a
conduit by displacing it from its site of recording to the gallery site, I show that there is no separation between the sites but rather a blurring of what is familiar and what is new.

This indexicality could be found in Mondrian’s work for which he reorganised the studio’s layout before proceeding to paint, to make his painting conform to its context and vice versa. Also Mondrian’s black bars on white can be seen to index certain architectural elements as they, suggested in Stella’s “Working Space”, became structures that “successfully spanned the surface of painting: by spanning the pictorial surface rather than dividing it, the structural bars became the infinitely flexible and extendable supports of abstraction.” They are likened to “live-wire armatures” and “hot-blooded structure” which are called on to scaffold the “collapsing space of shapeless materiality” – the white of the background. Also, Stella mentions that “the white rectangle steps out of the background into its own space.” It would seem the black bars operate as an index to ‘empty’ the meaning of the white as background and in that absence, assume the spatiality of ground or structure to the surface of white.

Another artist whose work is based on the investigation of space as an index is Gordon Matta-Clark. In Bronx Floors, 1972 (Figure 19, 20 and 21), he cut open space between domestic rooms that were otherwise separated, such as between the floor of one room above and the ceiling of the other below. The cut segments of floor were displayed standing upright along with photographs indexing the site of cut. Pamela Lee, in her review, was interested in the positioning of the object now seen anew off its actual site. With its stratified sections of cut linoleum on floorboards set subsequently on joists and the underside of a ceiling surface, the normal condition of its operation is, in the author’s words, “expanded outward, so that what was once architecturally oriented along a horizontal axis was now flipped within the space of the gallery.” By placing the cut object in another orientation, Matta-Clark indexed the space of walking by its absence in the new position.
To me, the operation of an index displaces the original condition of an object or site it is pointing at to itself. As a sign, it becomes the identity of that cause but is not a part of it (in Stella’s word, a division). The index has “expanded outward” and shifts between the perception of its own form and that of another it has assumed (as Stella put it, a ‘span’). In my work, I use this effect of the index to ‘span’ by displacing my work from studio space to gallery space, from actual site to a new site of presentation. The painting is “emptied” of its original meaning as a record of my experience (but still a record) and now maps the viewer’s presence onto itself at the new site of installation. Further, through the reading of ambiguous forms that ‘span’ between horizontality and verticality of spatial experience, the viewer pulls out ‘space’ from the surface of the work just like I did for the reading in Wall Study, 2004. I thus relate this to an extended perception of space which can be presented as a ‘span’ between one surface (painting) and another (object). Painting as index is ‘expanded’ to one of an installation such that the viewer’s participation on the object’s parts, by analogy of this same ‘span’, indexes the habitual use of the depicted architectural objects (Figure 22 and 23).
To read further into indexicality in Matta-Clark’s work, I look at *Pipes*, 1971 (Figure 24), an installation piece to displace a building’s functional interior by extending a gas line from behind the gallery wall into exhibition space and indexing it as a photomontage that eventually covered its existence. The index records the pipe’s journey from the streets into the building, marking it as a physical cause but returning it to a hidden state (from viewer) mediated by its photographic sign. Matta-Clark even alluded to its logical path of operation by tracing the vertical and horizontal line of travel with a hinged plank sculpture perpendicular to the vertical recess in the wall. As Thomas Crow remarks, *Pipes* “managed a semiological interplay between actual referent and photograph-as-sign.”27
Along with *Pipes*, a similar analogy of the indexed sign is played out in *Walls Paper*, 1972 (Figure 25 and 26). Whereas the former is an external logic of operation by his exposing the gas line from its functional concealed state, the latter took on an internalised representational mode by having multiple print-like photos of cropped images of outside facades laid in a grid fashion on the inside of the gallery wall. Adjacent were bundles of prints of similar images stacked up like an object, which, in Crow’s view, act as a counterpoint to the wallprints’ cascading effect.²⁸

I see his work as orthogonal representation of space that marks his experience of the facades as he took their photos in a standing frontal position. When the viewer positions next to the object-pile, with the wallprint in front, it indexes to Matta-Clark’s first-hand experience of being at that point in space. This may work differently than Pipes wherein the path of its travel can be traced from a non-specified viewing position. However, both works reflect the total experience of space given by an indexicality of its immediate position of reference, in one marking the ground above and the other the ground under.

To summarise this chapter, I began with the problem of space being represented as secondary to objects in the distinction between ground and figure. I have shown that space should operate as a sign to extend the viewer’s perception of it through an ambiguity of simple linear form. By reseeing the architectural notation of projective representation, that is plan and section, as a reflexive reading of familiar movement set over the site of work, I am indexing the space of my passing on the form of ordinary architectural objects through the process of painting and perhaps, also of installation. By
displacing the work to a new site, the work becomes an index for the viewer to extend the perception of space seen in it. Therefore my work aims to connect the viewer to an awareness of habitual experience that would otherwise be slighted over.

The wall/ floor elements are not definitively expressed and the viewer is made to realise that space as a sign is read against these surfaces. Similarly, the experience of an “aspect-dawning” when the wall/ floor are finally inferred becomes the essence of the work. Here I also introduce a further gain in perception by indexing a coplanar reading of the spatial manipulation of the objects through installation. For one, the sculptural object though unfamiliar, may, through the viewer’s repeated action on it, become familiar. On another, the object’s form may appear as similar to things experienced habitually but, by its unrelated function, it has a new meaning now. In both cases, the space and objects are same and different at once. This is further compounded by the spanning of two sites when I move the work from one to the other, so that each is read off one another.
CHAPTER TWO:

PRESENTATION OF SPACE

This second chapter looks at the process of application to the perception and representation of space in my work. More importantly, I begin to see installation as an extended reading to the ‘space’ of perception. I also see the relations between plan and section as a way of reading space in orthogonal projective representation that is already familiar to most viewers.

On the progress of my work from Passivity and Influence to Wall Study, I was actually making use of the dimensional constraint in orthographic notation. By eliminating an indication of depth but still maintaining a progressive diminishing of size (a receding space in perspective term) I could capture the perception of ambiguous space on a surface of representation. I was eager to experiment more in this aspect. Stella took away adjoining lines between bands of paint, thereby flattening out space without sacrificing the recognition of it being one (space as much as pattern is seen). But it is with Mondrian that I see at work the idea of a reductive linear projection through the destruction of the serial progression of the grid structure (from the grid of cross intersections to braiding of single lapping planes to islands of floating planes).29

In addition, perception is extended by indexing the painted surface to the site of actual experience and mapping the viewer’s participation into the work at a new site. However this extension is limited by a need to refer to signs that bear, in Wittgenstein’s term, similar and yet “differentiated context and patterns”. In other words, the form of representation must subscribe to a recognisable operation which I equate as setting the installation space against an architectural context of reading. Lines set in space become ambiguous, either read as abstract or material, as structure or object. Paint too can be read as skin or space within the canvas’ frame as the site of activity. Moreover, by setting two or more paintings in a simultaneous view, an architectural projective space is read reflexively to the site, and intensified by an installation of objects marking the perception of the same space.
For *Project Studio (Stairs)*, 2005 (Figure 27), I set the object in front of the painting to create a space of projection, both reading off each other. I chose orthogonality as the structure of operation in this indexical sign of the work as it sets in situ an equivalent space for a “seeing-as” of a form that is familiar and yet also new through the reading of opposing planes between the object and painting. Subsequently, when the viewer walks around the work, a displacement of sites is felt in the very perception and action on site. When the slab-like shelves are pulled out or pushed in, the viewer is reminded of the labour of climbing and ease of descending a step. Similarly the painting projects the gallery space to that condition of habitual action at work. Here the ordinary use of gallery space as an installation is not abstracted but rather indexed by a transposed presence of an absent space. On another level of reading, I visualise a mapping of my personal experience in studio (of familiar space) onto that of impersonal walls/ floors of the gallery (non-related space). In opposite, from the perception of a gallery viewer, unfamiliar elements (a staying place) are mapped onto familiar ones (the gallery as not a staying place).

I shall point to Margaret Robert’s *Mirror Room*, 2002 (Figure 28 and 29), which I see as a work on indexicality by referencing the surface of gallery walls against
itself. She took the centre of each four gallery walls and built a new set of walls at diagonal on one of these points before “mirroring” off to its adjacent points. In fact the walls are built to surround, signifying an inaccessible interior, and offering partial views of its outside if one circles them. The blank walls do not function as symbolic or representational registers, but as index, its presence (seen on the outside) points to the inside of the work as an absence (unseen by viewer). What matters is the viewer’s experience of passing through the work. The viewer is always shifting between two perceptions of space at once: one as being on the inside where the gallery walls are incorporated as the work’s outer enclosure; or the other as being on the outside of the work looking in.

Figure 28

Figure 29
Responding to the site, the viewer’s perception is moulded and extended by its spatial context. By comparing between signs (here indicating the viewer’s action and position in space) through indexing, the work succeeds on the ground that space operating through a structural play of opposing frames of reference, affects the viewer’s perception and enhances the awareness of it.

**Space in material context**

I also look at Ryman’s work whose use of indexicality in painting defines a way of relating or representing the gallery wall space. “The painting is exactly what you see” refers to how Ryman treats paint as pure physical substance (that is, made of canvas, support, medium, paint etc) by emphasising the presence of painting.\(^3^2\) By playing with familiar context such as a presence needing a comparison for its existence, as one that is “seen against something”, Ryman encourages us to look beyond a painting’s space/ site/ frame to the gallery wall. Paint as an object has an extended field of play in this system of presentational signs. In a sense, the viewer is called to experience the painting as part of the wall or room.

To Ryman, lines are real, the space is real, the surface is real, and there is interaction between the painting and the wall plane aside from abstraction and representation within the frame. I link this to a way of extending the reading of space: the ‘real’ being what is before our eyes and nothing else, the lines are physical presence that demands equal visual density as the wall. Therefore there is one way to look at a painting as either a perspectival (illusionistic) or projective form which invents space at the point of viewing. However, another way is to look at it as an indexical reference to the site of experience, as a material realness that transposes the ‘space’ of observation to a perceptual participation of reality.

Ryman takes painting beyond its pictorial constraint to assert an identity of its own. The installation space is transformed by the presence of a painting when the latter sets its formal elements in opposition to the former. Rightly, Andrew Benjamin argues for Ryman’s work as, on one hand, distinguishing an internality set up by the operation of paint that defines the work’s site and limit, and, on the other hand, bringing it into an externality of materials outside of painting, that is, using tapes, hanging bolts.\(^3^3\) His work is set as an external/ internal structure of wall/ painting dialogue.
Commenting on *Paramount*, 1981 (Figure 30), Ryman used metal fasteners to project the work from the wall making it appear actually closer to the wall because of its immediate relationship to the wall plane (see my italics below), as the artist explained:

I approach painting beginning with material...when I approach a painting, I say the surface that I’m using, whether it’s canvas or whatever it is, isn’t empty; it’s something in itself. It’s up to the paint to clarify it, in a sense. And also to make an image, yes. *But to make the surface or the structure something to see.* It’s a slightly different way of beginning with a painting. So sometimes I go back and work more with just paint, to let the paint become an image of its own.

Mondrian too did make reference of space in his work to an architectural origin. Whereas Ryman literalised the wall context, Mondrian alluded to the wall as an architectural ground, one whose structure can be subjected to excavation (that is, possible newer views of seeing). This is shown by Harry Cooper’s analysis of Mondrian reworking seventeen pieces named as Transalantic painting that spanned between two continents (Europe – America) and two periods (1935/1940) from start to completion. First the artist took the work (Figure 31) finished in Europe at an earlier stage and revised it by incising into the dried paint, to clear the area before depositing new paint into it. Cooper gives definitive reading of Mondrian’s materiality with such terms as “effects of construction (the extension of a black line around the edge creating..."
the effect of wrapping)” or “of damming and overflow” by treatment of paint edges.35 Mondrian’s paintings are set against the wall as one of temporal construction, to be mined or rebuilt. Ryman’s concern for a structural opposition in his painting extends to a relationship between the wall and his work.

Ryman’s series VII, 1969 (Figure 32 and 33) demonstrates this observation. He joined three paintings together and painted them in continuous brushstrokes before he exhibited them (as a series of seven paintings) with a gap in between that shows the wall space behind. Each panel shows horizontal bands of white enamelac painted from thick to thin at different points such that the corrugated support also shows through. Where one edge of a panel ends and the edge of an adjacent panel begins there is a
blank space, signifying discontinuity within the bands’ continuity and thus proving Ryman’s affinity with the structural paradigm.

In *Classico V, 1968* (Figure 34), the presence and absence of paint relates to the corrugated paper. Twelve sheets of paper form a ‘grid’ of which the space in between the edges of each piece create wall lines that mark the absence of paint. We find here an engagement of the work with the wall, as well as the dialectics of *seen* and *unseen*.36

![Figure 34](image)

Figure 34

![Figure 35](image)

Figure 35
And it is in the trace of the masking tape removed from the wall as illustrated by Prototypes, 1969 – 70 (Figure 35), that affirms his critique of painting as index to the wall. Simply executed, thin plastic squares attached to the wall with four tape hinges were painted with polymer white, such that the paint film exceeded the edges and over the tapes to the wall. Ryman spoke of the paint surface as a framing structure, now as the ‘support’ of the tape, now as a fastening device to the wall. He wanted the paint and wall to be seen as one surface with the interstices of the removed tape providing the hard edges to the surface and the flow of paint over the plastic support as one of soft edge, and further enhanced by the light-reflecting glossiness of paint and light-absorbing wall plane.

Further, Ryman has distorted his painting’s reading grid which, as John Yau argues, is now a formal structural element. It is like a scaffold which paint would strive to cover. His signature and date are orthogonal device written sideways up and having an internal logic of a grid such that they are no longer seen as writings but as formal structures that must now be read solely with respect to the wall. In fact there is no other reading to the painting without calling to attention the presence of the wall. In demystifying the status of painting as a figure-ground opposition, he has made the wall sacrosanct.

For Mondrian, painting, as discussed, is also an indexical object. In New York City I, 1942 (Figure 36), by braiding the coloured lines of yellow, red and blue in a grid over white plane, the entire construct carries the device of flatness as a wrapping. I see this as an index to the actuality of the wall on which the work is hung. The process is a trace of what is not seen, that is, indexing the plastering which covers the wall, as demonstrated by the literalisation of surface where the braiding ribbons of coloured tapes stretches across the canvas in the unfinished New York City III, 1942 (Figure 37), before paint is supposedly to be applied beneath the outlined tape marks. It is also a trace that indicates a horizontal reading on a vertical support, as given by Leo Steinberg’s criticism. This contrasts with Ryman’s index of the paint as a fastening system and a support surface which is always read as a verticality.
It is in this material aspect of painting as an index to an architectural surface of reading that I make comparison between the work of Ryman and Mondrian. Whereas Ryman made visible the materials of painting in its definition of attachment to wall as structure, Mondrian revealed the mechanism of his working through revision and excavation of paint in relation to structure. Ryman took the wall and attached things to it, fasteners, paint, tapes, mesh, etc, treating the verticality of the wall as a given. I believe then that painting for him is a “mental” activity much akin to projection. Mondrian, however, makes us see the wall-to-floor impasse as a fluctuation, one image as appearing in succession to the other.

I would like my work to be read as the process of horizontality and verticality, either indexing the act of linear or painterly application of material. I point to both Andrea Kahn’s and Catherine Ingraham’s notion of orthogonality as a form of architectural notation for representing space. Kahn and Ingraham have visualised a projection of space that displaces the viewer to another space not in the same field. This is an orthographic approach, wherein the image and points of view oscillate between the horizontal and the vertical, between the floor and the wall. It situates (maps) the viewer at once on the outside and inside of the image, on plan and in section. It is a sign of indexicality (connection) in space, producing the lines of inflexion where orthogonality shifts between its planes of projective representation. Therefore, the foot of the gallery wall, its corner or its protrusion into space can become an index to that reading, mapping one surface on another and the experience of one site to that of the other.
Space as derived

This brings us to the question of the significance of space operating as a sign in its projective representation. Krauss sees the necessity of configuring her art criticism to a formal structural rule that reinforces or negates its terms for the new generation of meaning. She introduces A.J. Greimas’s semiotic square as the code used to establish the logic of operation in any proposition:

Empirical vision must be cancelled, in favour of something understood as the precondition for the very emergence of the perceptual object to vision. To a higher, more formal order of vision, something we could call the structure of the visual field as such.

In the development of my work, the semiotic square provides the framework of identifying the relevant elements in the critique of contextual space and related objects. This structure of delimiting positions an argument for a closed programmatic form that alternates between two modes of reading meaning which, in Krauss’s words, “by showing me the system whole, it showed me my own outsideness to it. But it also gave me a way of picturing what it had been like to be inside, where its choices seemed to compose a whole universe: the universe of ‘vision.’”

According to Krauss, the semiotic square describes relationships which play off the logical possibilities of binary opposition. For example, taking any unit of meaning, let us call it \( S_1 \), we structurally assign a related absence of that meaning \(-S_1\); at the same time, this generates an opposing system of meaning \( S_2 \) which in turn implies its own related absence \(-S_2\). Here I am abstracting a system of relationship which I can construct for the form of projective representation and the necessary operation of signs related to the site of my work. What I did was to look at the condition of the studio space instead of the function of architectural objects, for instance, a door’s function is to permit entry/exit (open/close) but its condition to our perception is one of marking a spot. I am implying that the conditional status of space leads to the ritualistic performance (habit) at the place. It is condition which makes me decide on the corresponding architectural elements – window, door, stairs, and floor – because they support my most frequent habit of moving through that space.
For *Project Studio (Stairs)*, 2005 (Diagram 1), I have derived the ‘land/ lift’ as the opposing condition at the studio stairwell because I am really moving up a shaft. ‘Land/ lift’ implies the category of ‘cut/ plane’ which divides the up/ down perception of space, and alludes to the corner turning at each landing. For *Project Studio (Floor)*, 2005 (Diagram 2), the condition is ‘perimeter/ posit’ which implies a ‘stabilising/ framing’ effect of viewpoint and coordinates. For *Project Studio (Window)*, 2005 (Diagram 3), it is ‘reveal/ veil’ which implies a ‘withholding/ holding’ sensation of assimilated or collective lookouts. Finally, for *Project Studio (Door)*, 2005 (Diagram 4), the condition is ‘cross/ stand’ which implies a ‘marking/ shifting’ of one spot.

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**Space in projection**

To read the work as an installation, the viewer’s orientation to it is important. The set-up corresponds to an architectural context of conceptualising space, that is, the object is presented as a model placed in front of a painting presented as a plan. The presentation encourages participation, with the painting serving as a planar reading that switches between the orthogonal planes of horizontal/ vertical, front/ back, and sectional/ aerial.

I employ the technique of ambiguous linear forms in painting and the reflexive reading of orthogonal projections in installation to extend the viewer’s perception of space and objects. Further this ambiguity leads to an extension in the meaning of
painting, as the distinction of seeing flat or solid forms and the tension of material paint and illusory image played over a surface. By flip-flopping so fast between seeing the same image as horizontal and then, another moment, as vertical or as front and then as back (much akin to Mondrian’s ‘switch’ between depth and surface), we can deny both of these images and see in distinction the material itself – of paint or wood or even light (Figure 38, 39, 40 and 41).
Ryman saw this distinction but employed a different way of working towards the materiality of painting, by addressing the wall. He distinguished between seeing an internal frame of activity (painting) against an external frame of reference (wall) by playing the operation of paint (internal) against the support of the painting (external). He used time to compress that distinction into a single seeing in the process of applying the paint. Time became a factor in the viewer’s participatory experience represented in his strokes. He also critiqued the relationship of painting and sculpture through the experience of the spaces activated within and without the frame.

I use the architectural distinction of the horizontal (linearity) and vertical (paint) in a play of space (also installation versus architectural presentation), demonstrating the tension between painting scaffolds on the wall and drawing models on the floor, as play between surface and structure. Through the simulation of material vertical (paint’s strokes) onto structural horizontal (residue of paint) expressed by the mark of the strokes, the painting addresses the unifying tendency of these two elements in orthogonality, akin to Ryman’s *Winsor 6*, 1966 (Figure 42) wherein the horizontal brushstrokes left behind vertical striations of thickened paint between the start of the pull and end of the lift. In addition, my work also alludes to the idea of sameness (familiarity) set in the vertical brushstrokes repeated in rhythmic sequence throughout the canvas and that of difference (non-familiarity) evoked by the uneven horizontal paint residue as each layer of paint merges together.

![Figure 42](image-url)
The use of glaze medium is to express a quality of translucency. I see space like a layer extending from the existing structure, including even the studio’s architectonic objects (such as window, corners, beams etc). To index this layer, I made the painting in oil which is transparent enough to capture the effect. It also reinserts the viewer’s presence onto the painting’s surface by its glossy reflection, thus dislocating the viewing position and complicating the space of reading.

Moreover, the colour I used is conditioned by the photographic sign of painting as index, recording on its surface the trace of an event in space in negative. Light and space also play a key role in my selection of colour, with the warm-white of the line giving reference to the condition of the lighting. It points to the light source as an emanating form at the actual and gallery site, thus spanning the work between sites (Figure 43).

Similarly my model pieces are indexes to the space of the objects. Whereas the painting plays with the marks, the model marks the act of play by activating the potentiality of space and transiting the viewer from habit to play. The model resembles familiar architectural objects and in fact, they do reference as such but behaves differently. For Window, it opens like a closet; for Door, it slides like a box-lid; for Floor, it provides a peephole; and for Stairs, it retracts like a shelf. Everything is the same and different through association and overlapping of meaning with familiar objects and unfamiliar functions, everything is conditional to reseeing. Even the selection of material corresponds to the lighting condition that reflects the source at site.

Another installation, Project Object (Figure 44 and 45) relates to a play of inside/ outside, contrasting what is external scaffold and what is internal support structure. Four bolts demarcating an inner square on each canvas board of glaze medium extend the perception of site as frame and support as perimeter. There is a wall of canvas boards referenced by a stack-up of the same boards. Painting construct now becomes construction with the paint achieving materiality as structure more than skin, pushing up the bolts as points of contact between canvas boards.

The work also plays on the idea of front/ back, over/ underneath, inside/ outside, alluded by the relation of the seen underpainting lines and the imagined lines traced by the four bolts. Material-wise, the underpainting lines are straight and unwavering.
However, perceptually, they appear to expand and contract in width because of the light/dark contrast in relation to the surrounding glaze. This fluctuation in spatial expanse of the lines acts to extend (difference) and reflex (sameness) on experience ‘incised’ at the site. Also the four bolts seem to lift those lines off the surface of reading as if suspended by the former. This alludes to my notion of the viewer’s perception being mapped to the ‘space’ of representation. The process is indexed by the line of inflexion seen in the break between the vertical frame of the canvas boards and their horizontal stack-up. That line is now read as an axis for a ‘switch’ in perception that marks the totality of the work to be either the inside of a structure (as the ‘mould’) or the outside of a façade (as the ‘cast’) and where one surface is mapped onto the other.
CONCLUSION

The investigation of space through painting and installation as indexical sign in representing space and objects has extended my practice in art and architecture. Rather than relying on a straight-forward depiction of space, I engage the viewer in an inquiry of spatial representation given by horizontality and verticality that are reflected in the perception of space, the surface materiality and even the model as they relate to plan and section. Space is no longer secondary to objects in the ground-figure analogy but it is seen as operational to a surface of reading. Thus perception of space is extended and also reflexes onto itself.

On hindsight, I see my work as reflecting life. Just as we would take up an object to look at from different angles, the work on a larger scale alludes to this experience. Through the reading of orthogonality in the projective planes of representation, it points to the shape of the site as containment. Finally we are called to think of habit as containing us, one that would appear as detached (reading outside the image as in a plan) or personal (reading inside it as in a section). Life is only a matter of inspecting it as far off or as close up as we habitually allow ourselves to do so.

I also realise the need to merge my practice with the discipline of both the artist and architect. My foray into art has strengthened my conception of architectural theory and prompted me into more experimentation and critique. It has revealed the importance of installation space for art and architectural work. By analysing the site to its reductive components, reseeing the conditions of space in structural terms and invoking an architectural technique of ‘sectioning’, I learn to approach the research through a structurally logical way that appeals to the mode of my practice.

In conclusion, this research in the mode of architectural presentation is an attempt to examine the issue of cross-disciplinary concerns in both art and architecture. I will continue to explore the possibility on art and architectural practice. A future project is to study the architectural objects as a narrative stage for different sets of performative conditions. Instead of recording and indexing my experience solely, I will look into the scope of social roles practiced in determined spaces and index these to a displaced site. It is only in placing the examined context out of its familiar surround that the possibility of extending and sharpening the awareness of it become possible.


APPENDIX A

In conversation with Margaret Roberts
on 4th October 2005, Tuesday at Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney

Questions 1: Why are you interested in space and perception?

I am not interested in perception as much as in interpretation. In works which are made from a single set-up point, viewers are usually able to see the work from that position and from many other positions as well, which – given that these works are ‘flat’ shapes over three dimensional planes of architecture – means the shapes change as the viewer moves around, and thus viewer-position is as important in the work as the single set-up point.

I am also interested in the relationship between recognisable and unrecognisable form.

(Cropping of photos is a part of the process of presenting documentation, in collaborative work I have done with Stephen Sullivan.)

(See Mia Campioni, Plane Thinking, pp. 16 – 17).

Question 2: What is your list of artists’ reference? How are they connected to your thoughts and ideas?

One reference is Helena Almeida (Portuguese artist), who creates fictional continuities between real and represented space.

I prefer work which acknowledges the body’s occupancy of real space, without it needing to be ‘tortured’ as occurs in some Bruce Nauman works, in which awkward movements and gestures are used to sharpen viewers’ awareness of their occupation of real space.
Question 3: What makes you change direction from “plane thinking” to “mirror room”? I see two different approaches to work.

The difference is partly of scale only. Viewers interpreted “Mirror room” in various ways, for example, seeing the long wall as curved, or thinking there were five corners instead of four. My own interest was in criticising the architectural conventions of gallery spaces as non-spaces (see newsletter text below). The “mirror room” incorporates the experiences of the viewers into the work.

Question 4: Are you a structuralist? If so, how? Does space as a sign mean anything to you? If not a structuralist, what school of thoughts do you consider yourself as?

It is more a matter of learning to see, guided by a principle of “what will happen if I do this?” I questioned gallery space as not a real space; by working within architectural conventions, I created space off the work, perhaps making my space more real than the gallery’s. [The author sees this as a work on indexicality, of referencing the gallery wall to itself with another wall, like Gordon Matta-Clark’s “Pipes”, “Wallpaper”. Ann Finegan (Mirror Room, pp. 10) says the wall is not symbolic nor representational, but that it points by its presence (seen on outside) to an inside as an absence (unseen by the viewer), like an object pointed to by a finger which then replaces it.]

Question 5: Do you consider architecture as part of your research field? Do you manipulate space or find space that comes ready for work?

I use architectural space because it is space we commonly occupy. Architecturally-formed space is also more practical to work with than the non-built environment. I think the body needs a sense of stability in the space it occupies, for if it is faced with too much ambiguity within that space, it will switch to ‘panic’ mode causing the conscious mind to be over-ridden.

I am interested in a more balanced relationship between body and conscious mind, not the domination of one over the other. I also use ‘found space’ and develop artwork which exposes or addresses problems found within it.
Below is a text from the Artspace newsletter, which may explain more about Margaret Robert’s idea on the relationship and problems between architecture and space:

MARGARET ROBERTS, MIRROR ROOM

Mirror Room addresses the assumptions underlying the architectural reconstruction of the Gunnery building into an art gallery. Artspace, Sydney was made in the ground floor of the Gunnery with (real or implied) sections of the white-cube wall conventionally used to create the indeterminate space of art. White-cube art-walls are designed for their blankness, easily able to absent themselves in the presence of the positive art object or image. Mirror Room is intended to acknowledge their presence by incorporating them, and the conventions they represent, into the artwork, through the construction of walls within one of the gallery spaces. The position and shape of this wall-construction is determined by the length and position of the gallery walls. As a mirror image seems to look back at what it reflects, the wall-construction may also be seen as a reflection of a kind, turning around to address where it came from.

The two sets of walls (the wall-construction and the gallery walls) hide spaces behind them – the street, toilets, lifts etc behind the white gallery walls, and the part of the gallery space inside the constructed-wall enclosure. In between, they create a varying space. This is the space of viewers, who bring in the outside world, who carry the conventions around with them, and who, though normally as 'invisible' in a gallery as any gallery wall, may see that it is their presence which completes the work.
APPENDIX B

Resume

YAP, Kheng Kin; Born Singapore, 1970, E-mail: khengkin@yahoo.com.sg

Education

2004 – 2006 Candidate, Master of Visual Arts by Research
    Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney
1999 – 2000 Postgraduate Diploma, Education
    National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore
1991 – 1997 Bachelor of Architecture
    National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore

Solo Exhibitions

2005  Project Studio, Exit Gallery, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney

Selected Group Exhibitions

2005  Postgraduate Degree Show, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney
2002  Saint John and Margaret Church Exhibition, Singapore (C.art Group)
2002  Kampung Kapor Church Exhibition, Singapore (C.art Group)
2000  Slip, The Red Door Gallery, NIE, Singapore
1997  Bachelor of Architecture Graduate Show, NUS, Singapore
1996  RAW, Architecture Society and the school of Architecture, NUS, Singapore
1994  Interim Upgrading Programme, East Coast Town Council, Singapore

Selected Seminars

2005  Project Studio, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney (on 25th October 2005)
2004  AHCCA Postgraduate Association Conference, University of Melbourne
    (on 4th November 2004)

Awards

2003  Project Search Arts Competition (Painting) Merit Award
    South East Community Development Council, Singapore
APPENDIX C

Artist Statement for the PostGraduate Degree Show 2005

My interest is in investigating the condition of a place and blurring the boundary between familiar use and its unfamiliar past. My method is through a contextual critique of forms by perceptual and material representation, and by dislocating the position of how the work is to be viewed such that there is a blurring in the recognition of form on representation. This effect is achieved through close and distant viewing of the work and by mapping the form onto a surface of representation that blurs the reading between a plan (horizontal) and section (vertical).

Kirkbride was originally a psychiatric asylum now readapted for use by Sydney College of the Arts (see the booklet – Kirkbride: Past and Present). The site is Building 29: Sculpture Studio which was once the hospital Laundry. My work indexes this past use of space as well as that of the present and blurs the distinction between the two.

In Project Studio (Stairs), I index the walking planks that are suspended mid-way above the hall space. Clearly the absence of any stairs makes the narrow walkways seem out of place. Did the wardens in the past use them as lookouts to inspect the progress of work by the patients? Or were the walkways used for just maintaining the laundry’s machinery? What are they used for now? My stairs recreate the original condition of the space and critique the walkways’ new use as part of the gallery aesthetics.

In Project Rented Room, I question the original existential condition of the mental patients. Were they given sufficient rest from work? What accidents occurred from using the machinery (hot press, washing machine, steam-powered dryers)? What, now, is the respite given to the College’s students? My bed and chair index the hopes and dreams of both the past and present inhabitants of this space.

For Project Object, it looks at the state of condition of a human being. Were the patients treated more as an object of study or differently? Were they given enough freedom in treatment? What is the state of condition of our students now? My work here indexes the space of the hall’s layout, seen as both in section (height of the hall) and plan (area of use of space). But the work also critiques the state of mind of the inhabitants both past and present.
LIST OF SLIDES

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CATALOGUE OF WORK PRESENTED FOR EXAMINATION

Untitled (study II), 2005. Etchings, each 28 x 28 cm. Group exhibition, Postgraduate Degree Show, 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2005 – 17\textsuperscript{th} December 2005, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney.

*Project Studio (Stairs)* No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, 2004 – 5. Oil on canvas, each 152.5 x 152.5 cm. *Untitled [Project Studio (Stairs)],* 2005. Wood, 19.5 x 19.5 x 129 cm. Group exhibition, Postgraduate Degree Show, 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2005 – 17\textsuperscript{th} December 2005, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney.

*Project Rented Room (Chair)* No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, 2005. Oil on canvas, each 100 x 100 cm. *Untitled [Project Rented Room (Chair)],* 2005. Wood, 19.5 x 19.5 x 150 cm. Group exhibition, Postgraduate Degree Show, 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2005 – 17\textsuperscript{th} December 2005, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney.

*Project Rented Room (Bed)* No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, 2005. Oil on canvas, each 100 x 100 cm. *Untitled [Project Rented Room (Bed)],* 2005. Wood, 19.5 x 35 x 125 cm. Group exhibition, Postgraduate Degree Show, 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2005 – 17\textsuperscript{th} December 2005, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney.

*Project Object,* 2005. Oil on canvas on wood with bolts and nuts, dimensions variable. Group exhibition, Postgraduate Degree Show, 6\textsuperscript{th} December 2005 – 17\textsuperscript{th} December 2005, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney.
ENDNOTES


10 In my conversation with her (see Appendix A), Margaret Roberts suggests an interest in the cropping effect given by the documented photos which eliminated the contextual references, forcing us to see only the details and expressing in this work what we often see by habit.


17 Geoffrey Battecock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 157 – 58. In “Questions to Stella and Judd”, Stella made this remark regarding paint seen by itself without perspectival illusion; certainly he was implying that we tend to forget the obvious and instead focus on other formal aspect. Here I allude to wall/ floor as elements we generally discount in seeing objects against space.

19 Genova, *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing*, pp. 76 – 82, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. Rush Rhees (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 140. In an example of two arrows pointing head to head, Wittgenstein suggests two ways of seeing: the convention of one thinking from the outside seeing the arrow pointing in opposite direction as that; but if as on the inside, with the arrows still pointing at each other, the viewer can assume the head as meeting in a mirror plane as seeing a reflection and hence of pointing in the same direction.


28 Ibid., pp. 58.


30 In my conversation with her (see Appendix A), Roberts wants the viewer to read her work as a reference to the gallery wall by signifying its construction through a direct presence in the ‘mirroring’.


Bois, *Painting as Model*, pp. 169 – 71, Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 81 – 84. Arguing on the issue of the picture plane, Steinberg proposed the "flatbed" analogy (horizontal) as one against the "high" or common (vertical) way of projecting visual experience. He envisaged the painted surface orientated to a visual experience that is no longer an analogue of nature (in man's normal erect posture) but one of an operational process.


Ibid., pp. 189 – 90.

Benjamin, *Object Painting*, pp. 91 – 93.

Ibid., pp. 85. Benjamin alludes to a "double setting of line and paint" in this work, whereby “the lines of paint, white paint, create within them the setting for/ of other lines.”