



Research Centre  
Centre for Drawing  
Project Space

University of the  
Arts London  
Wimbledon

# TRACING SPACE

Research into producing space  
on the two-dimensional plane  
by **Agnieszka Mlicka**

group crit Friday 8 December 2 pm  
open Thursday 7 December 12-2 pm  
5 Dec - 8 Dec 2006

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**Agnieszka Mlicka**

PROPOSAL	3
DOCUMENTATION	
PHOTOGRAPHS	5
NOTES	8
PHOTOGRAPHS	13
CRITICAL REVIEW	18

# PROPOSAL FOR THE CENTRE FOR DRAWING PROJECT SPACE

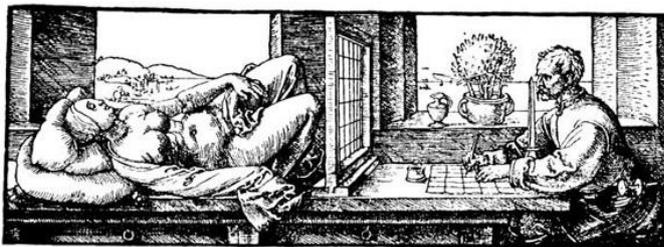
## Research Proposal

“Artists – painters, sculptors or architects – do not show space, they create it” (Paul Klee, from Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*). In this research into creating a two-dimensional work that will be a blending of the surrounding three-dimensional space, I believe in the need for an active encounter with architecture. I find it very restrictive to use collected/found images or photographic documentation to create new work, because you tend to lose the direct impact of an experience that is the basis of your inspiration. It also means less opportunity to question the theme, because you focus on the visual aspects rather than the theoretical.

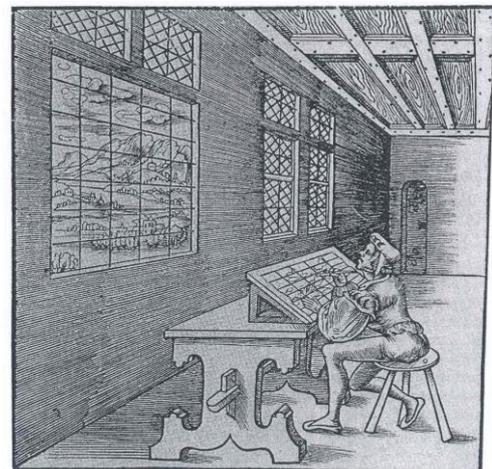
Instead of recreating architectural structures and making the viewer experience a real but artificial space (for example the work of Monika Sosnowska and Gregor Schneider), I would like to explore the possibility of a production of space on the flat plane, similar to the way it is produced in the city between the citizen and the architecture. With this I mean creating an ‘active’ image – an image that is not static in itself, but implies the everyday use and experience of architecture.

My proposal for the Centre for Drawing is to place a big acrylic sheet in the middle of the room, across its width. My intention is to work on both sides of the acrylic, tracing the space on the other side of the sheet. I am particularly interested in the windows, because they link the inside with the outside. The lattice of the windows reminds me of Dürer’s woodcut, in which the artist tries to get the right foreshortening and perspective of the reclining model, using a latticework and a grid on the paper. My idea of using the windows as a kind of raster in mapping the city is even better illustrated by the work ‘How to Make Landscapes through a Window’. The room looks out on two contrasting urban settings: on one side there is a view of natural elements - trees and sky - as well as domestic buildings, on the other side you see machinery and industrial apparatuses. Rather than literally tracing what I see, I hope to explore the two contrasting urban views from within my own private space, not only literally the interior of the room, but also my personal relationship with and experience of the urban environment.

I am curious in what way both sides of the room can meet in one plane. I believe that the transparency of the acrylic sheet will enforce some kind of collaboration or visual relationship between the different views of space. The mark making will be both line and surface, in order to accentuate the spatiality in front of me. With the line (and the transparent left-over space) I can delineate structures and foundations, whereas the opaque or translucent surface stands for the enclosure of walls and screens. In this way, I hope the work will keep the inherent characteristics of architectural form.



*Man Drawing a Reclining Woman*, Albrecht Dürer, woodcut (1538)



*How to Make Landscapes through a Window*  
From Johann II von Pfalz-Simmeren (1531)

### Dates and Duration

One full week, with a preference for the week commencing on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> of December.

### Number of Participants

(1) Agnieszka Mlicka

### The Event

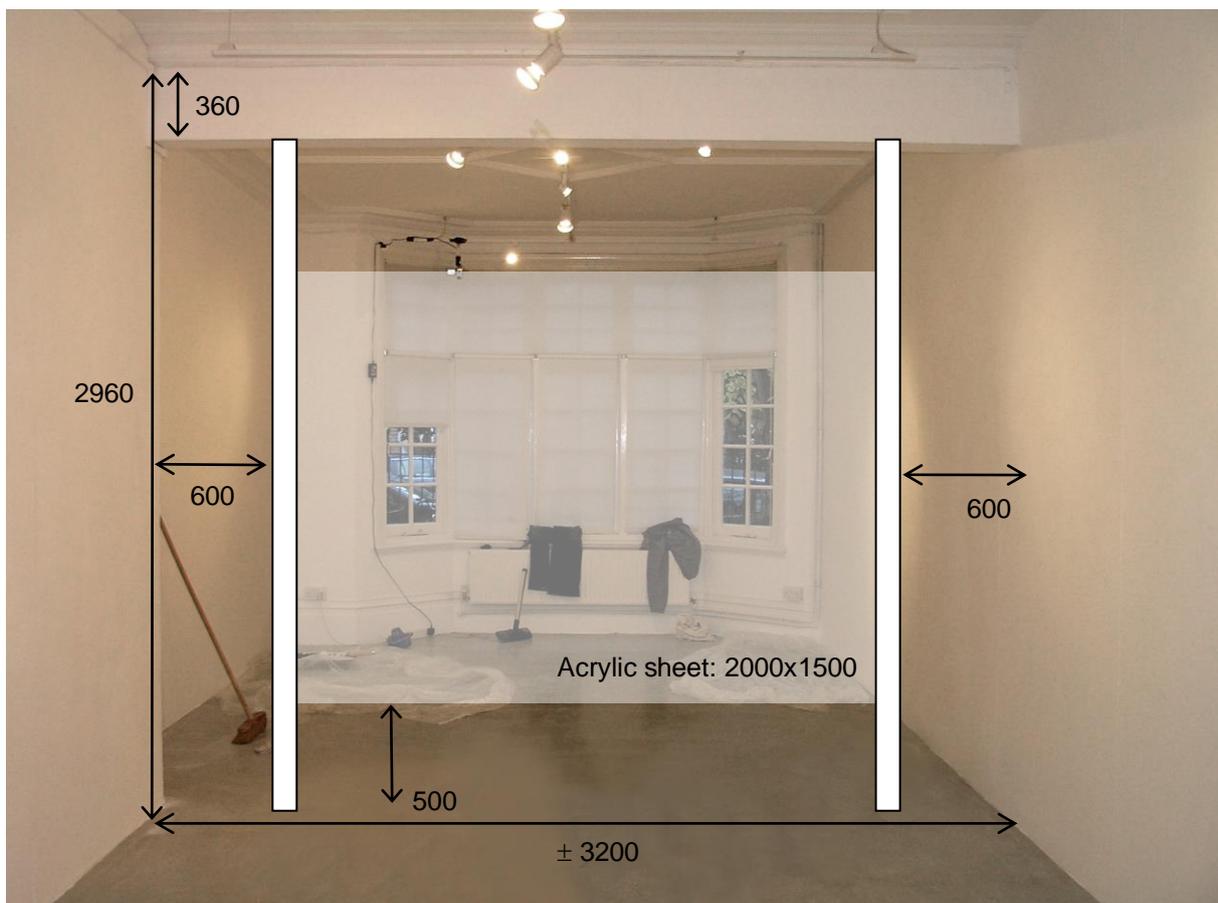
The project space will be open for the public on Thursday 7 December from 12:00 – 2:00. There will be a group crit on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December at 2:00.

### Advertising

I will hang four posters in the places that are most often attended by students. The posters will be printed on translucent paper and hanging on the windows, so that their form and presence reflect my working method. I will also produce flyers to spread around college. Furthermore, I will prepare an email which Claire Foss will send out to students and staff. The design for the posters and flyers will be handed in to Claire as soon as the proposal gets accepted.

### Documentation

The main documentation of the research will be the resulting work. The problematic of photographs as documentation is that they cannot comprise the full scope of such an event. I will consider creating written documentation, perhaps in the form of a diary, which will be accompanied by a photograph of the space and work at the beginning and at the end of the week.



(All measurements are in millimetres)







what is 'abstract space'? can you create it? can you visualise it?

tracing space means that every movement counts, because it changes the whole perspective, and together with distance to the acrylic sheet, they rule the outcome of the work

our perception of three-dimensional space is all about us moving, living, and how we look; one eye, two, the other one, closed

increasing the distance, the drawing becomes bigger, but will lose precision and detail because of the uncontrolled touch of the pencil

use of a transparent sheet speaks in my view better of Lefebvre's production of space, in that the sheet has no 'full' presence, it doesn't occupy full space, therefore it can be easily appropriated - something is projected into the space, and in the process producing that space itself.

working on paper on the other hand implies a pre-existing space that cannot be fully appropriated anymore.

it's almost a statement that everything is relative

tracing space can metaphorically show how miscommunication works - the same issue/thing/space is seen through different views. When tracing, I can either choose to focus my eyes on the sheet, creating a memorised version of the space, or focus on the space beyond, creating a truthful but uncontrolled line. Both views don't entirely correspond with each other, but obviously speak of the same.

focusing on the 2D plane always becomes an interpretation

is it easier to create space in painting because you can see the layering of paint, whereas with drawing it's harder to make distinction?

when is something 'space', and when is it an image of space?

working on transparent material is in a way not wanting to deal with fixed, or solid material - trying to get to an ephemeral state, perhaps like the cave of Plato, turning away from the shadow to see what is between the light and the wall, in the air, hovering.

what kind of space is the one in the reflection of the mirror? we logically know that at daytime we see the exterior, the outside world, when we look through the window, but at night our eyes see another space, a reflection of the interior, an illusion? a doubling?

perception

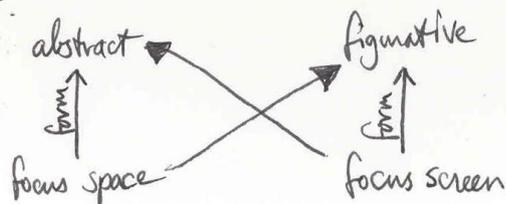
is this space produced or automatically there?

can you imprison a figure on the 2D plane  
by way of putting it between layers of paint,  
perhaps even totally covering it with layers,  
thus actually creating a mini/micro/nano  
space on the surface

in the evening, when it gets dark, the windows become mirrors.  
This means that when I trace the window, I'll also do  
the reflection of the interior rather than an exterior.  
The art work is reflected as well, which means that I'm  
tracing what I'm tracing (that I'm tracing, etc...)  
a perpetuum mobile work?

perceiving space is not just seeing the material world,  
be it architecture or objects, but using the air through  
which the lightwaves travel, from the object to  
the eye, thus the in-between space is as important  
as the material space.

if what I'm doing can be called tracing, then perhaps  
you could say that all art making is actually tracing  
the reality - when abstract your eyes are focus on  
the plane, when figurative your eyes focus on the  
object, but paradoxically the other way round is  
true too; when your eyes are on the space, the  
drawn image loses detail and becomes more  
abstract.



in trying to compress three-dimensional space,  
I have to acknowledge Cubism

is the use and experience of the room  
visible in a solid, fixed two-dimensional  
work?

perhaps, in creating this kind of work, you can reject harmony  
and composition, because these are constantly subject to  
change, it is not a still image anymore

both harmony and composition depend on the viewer  
(the body dictates)

literally tracing space is an extremely physical work,  
because drawing or painting implies the fixing  
of 'space' (= something out there) and the body is  
usually not part of this process if the artist  
only works with the flat plane - working with  
the surroundings and the plane it means you  
have to keep still for periods of time, look  
through one eye (or both) without change,  
to fix only one possible view out of a multitude  
of possibilities.

Lefebvre: space is active, not a passive surface ...  
perceived, conceived and lived space

the transparent sheet is like a web on which the light  
is caught, the light reflected from/off the architecture

the human being is like the spider which catches flies  
into/onto the web; here the human being catches the  
waves onto the plane

perhaps you can only 'produce space' on the flat plane as long as you're doing it, as long as your own body is involved in using the material, the room, the plane, the mind, control etc, but once the work is left, it becomes an image of space, until the viewers come in and start interacting with the work, placing themselves in the context of the work (or other way round) so that another (different) space is being produced at that moment

can 'tracing' then only be done with mark making that is drawing? what if you want to trace the whole floor at once?

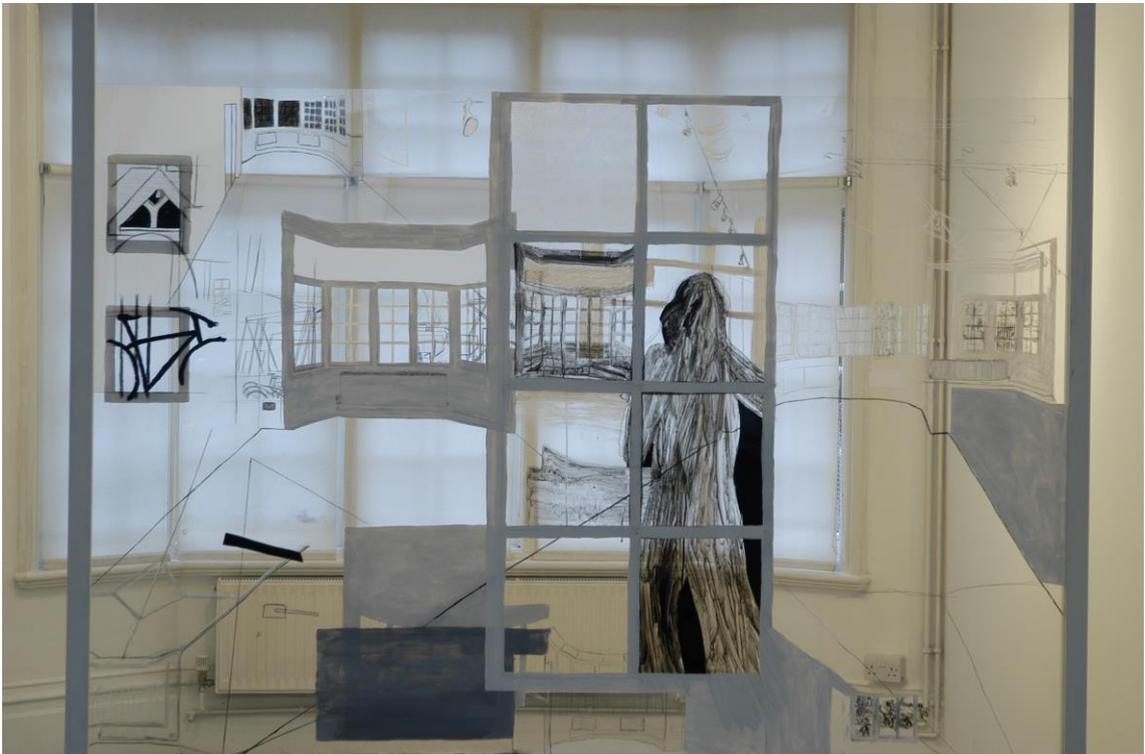
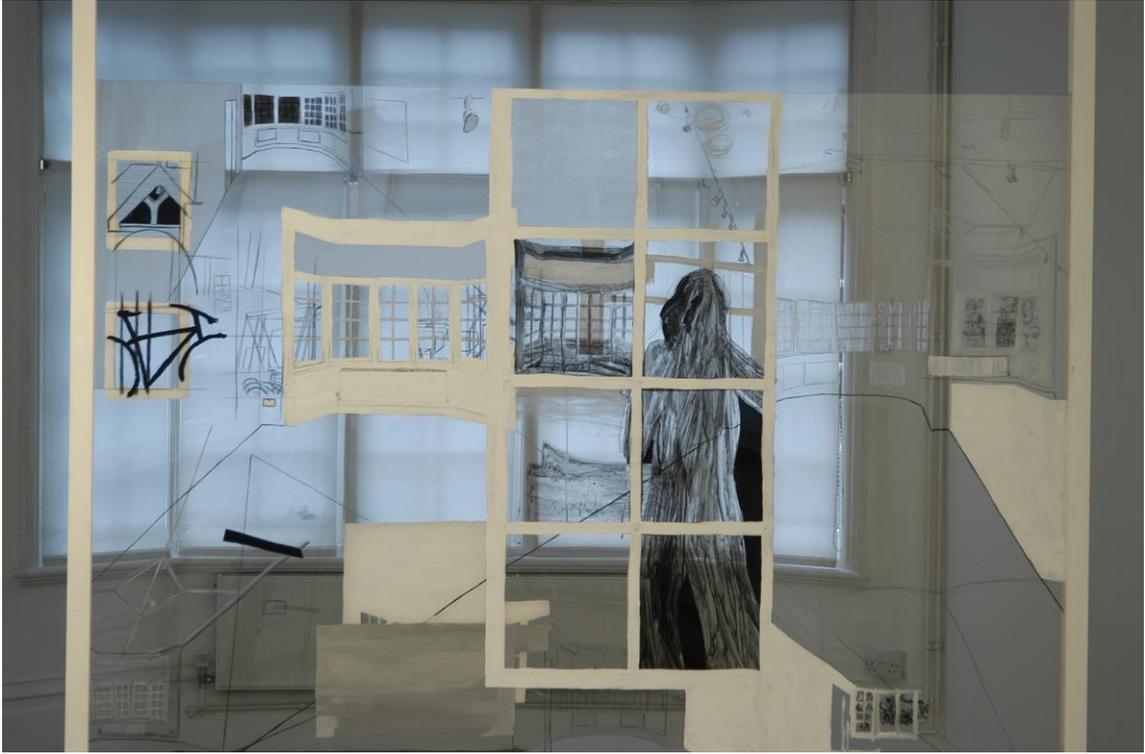
if all space is understood as Lefebvre's human product, what meaning then has architectural art - images depicting architectural spaces. Do these automatically imply that human product? Perhaps art cannot depict Lefebvre's space? Can performance/video do it?

the problem of tracing with paint is that it immediately obscures the view, it denies the reality by covering it and replacing with a simulacrum.

Drawing on the other hand adds to the view, it collaborates with the space, even emphasizes it.









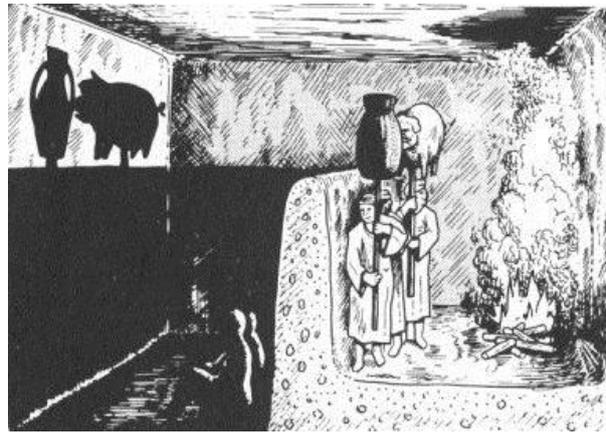


The aim of the research was to challenge the possibility of producing space on the two-dimensional plane. I wanted to test whether it would be possible to put my personal experience of the room, thus the active bodily movement and sensation, onto the acrylic sheet. This would critically challenge Paul Klee's suggestion that artists do not show space but produce it. I believe that his suggestion can be easily applied to, for example, room installations and performances. Nevertheless, I question in which way the medium of painting and drawing is capable of producing space rather than just showing it. In this critical review of my one-week research project I would like to approach the work from the artistic field of performance, photography, sculpture and finally drawing and painting to better understand the characteristics of the work.

The project had a very strong performative character. It was a conscious choice to move the moment of artistic inspiration as close in time as possible to the moment of creating the work. Part of the reason was to remove the need for intermediate documentation like photography. The time spent in the room, both on active observation as well as working on the sheet, proved to be a very physical encounter with the space. I fixed my observations of the room on the acrylic sheet while looking through it, hence the image depended on the exact position of my body and eyes. In the process of tracing the room, the fourth dimension - time - was eliminated. However, the transparency of the sheet involved three rather than just two dimensions. The space behind the sheet stayed part of the drawing. At the same time, the drawing fixed my own bodily location. In fact, this exact location could be indicated with the coordinates x, y and z. My exclusively personal way of perceiving space could be imitated by the viewer afterwards, but only when exactly the same coordinates were found. The public has thus an active, performative role in receiving the work, because it invites the viewer to search for a previously undergone experience (by the artist). Like performance, the work is thus temporal and site-specific. The difference with performance from the 70s is that here the focus is not on the body, but on the architecture. The artist as well as the public is using the body to experience something else, which is the work, and I suggest that at the same time it produces a new kind of space or perhaps a kind of awareness. It can be compared to the work of Monika Sosnowska, Gregor Schneider or for example the massive installation of Goshka Macuga at the Liverpool Biennial in 2006, in which the viewer has to walk through the architectural installations to experience it. The body has thus at the same time an active and a passive role, so that the focus constantly shifts between the body and the surrounding architecture.

The main bodily experience of the space was through optical perception. The process of tracing space resembled photography, in which the body acted as the camera. The body was perceiving, catching light and reproducing it with the hand, and the sheet served as a net on which the light waves coming from the architecture were caught and solidified. The drawing became another layer that took form before it entered the eye and could therefore be called a simulacrum, although not as perfect as a photograph. Again, there is a performative aspect in this 'picture taking' in how the eyes are used to trace the space. There are different focal points which the eyes can adopt: on the sheet or on the space behind it. Each resulted in a different drawing. In the case of focusing on the space behind, the drawing was uncontrolled and therefore disordered. This was nevertheless a truthful way of tracing, because the real space was directly followed and dominant. On the other hand, when I focused on the sheet, the line was organized and perfect, but the tracing became image making for its own sake, hence imposing on the real space. The eyes respond like the lens of the camera, automatically focusing on what is close or nearby. In retrospect, I think that probably a combination of both focuses allows for the best result, in which the line is dictating the space and at the same time emphasizing it, creating a relationship with it.

Both characteristics of the project, the role of the body and the importance of perception, remind me of Plato's allegory of the cave. The prisoners are forced to look at the shadows on the wall, which appear to them as the only reality, whereas the philosophers are able to look back and see that the shadows are merely a production and not the real objects. An interesting interpretation of the cave is that the people who produce the shadows are the artists in society. The artists in the cave produce a



Plato's allegory of the cave

spatial reality, because although it's a flat one, it is the space in which the prisoners live. The bodies have an existence in this purely optical world. The space is as it were dictated by the shadows - this specific consciousness is enforced upon them. In my project, the public is not physically forced to experience another reality, but the acrylic sheet presents a prefabricated vision for the viewer to occupy. The work shows my personal and temporal perception of space, in the same way that the artists produce the shadows on the wall.

As much as the wall is crucial to catch the light in the cave, the acrylic sheet also has a presence in itself. It not only divides the room in two, but also becomes part of the room's architecture. In acknowledging its sculptural character, I have to recognize the immediate impact it has on the space. The work can be compared to Michael Asher's work, in which he for example accentuates the gallery by removing a dividing wall. Here, the sheet accentuates the structure of the empty room. The main difference is that Asher removes, whereas I add. Nevertheless, the sheet's materiality is very ephemeral due to the simple construction and transparency. Rather than taking in space, it provides a frame to look through. In a sense, it doesn't fully acknowledge itself, but guides the gaze through its structure. The sheet works like the viewfinder in the previously mentioned process of photographing. Through his work, Asher questions and challenges the increasingly materialistic nature of artworks and gallery systems. Although this was not the aim of my project, I believe that the positioning of the sheet has potential for a critique of architecture in itself, as a place we live in. The role of the public is in such a case much more important, because the artist only suggests rather than imposes his/her opinion. In line with Lefebvre's ideas, the sheet can serve as a space which human relationships can appropriate, and in the process of inscribing it, a new space is produced. I suggest that to create an art work that can illustrate this theory, an acrylic sheet is more suitable than for example canvas or paper which provide a pre-existing, flat space.

Until now, I have tried to explain in which ways the project could be seen as a performative, a photographic and a sculptural work. To return to the main objective, I would like to question how the work as two-dimensional plane allows for a production of space. Amanda Beech notices that the drawing doesn't create any space, because the real room is still more dominant than the work. The image, as a weaker form of the architecture, is just a visual representation of the real space and is solely dependent on it. Therefore, the architecture imposes a site-specific nature upon the work. Amanda Beech refers to the story of the contest that was held between two renowned painters to see who was the finest. The first painter produced a still life so convincing that birds flew down from the sky to peck at the painted grapes. The master then turned to his opponent in triumph and said, "Draw back the curtains and reveal your painting". The other artist said: "Ha! You fooled the birds with your painted grapes, but I fooled a great master artist!" The second painter knew then that he had won, because the 'curtains' weren't real. They were part of the painting. This example illustrates how such trompe l'oeil painting can produce space for that brief period of time in which the viewer accepts it as part of his normal and real surroundings. Furthermore, it shows that to produce space you don't need a cubist interpretation of the material world. Rather, one focused image of reality can stand for itself - producing space is not in the plural

but in the singular. The aim is to have an image that is so strong that it has value in itself and therefore dictates the viewer. An interesting example of applied trompe l'oeil is the façade of the Saint-Georges Theatre in Paris (right). I believe that the artwork is at first sight so convincing, that it changes the social image of the theatre and consequently



the attitude of the passer-by. Here, a new kind of space is produced that is at first only visual and artificial, but results in a new social space. In this example, apart from the flat image on the wall, one can also recognise other crucial aspects that support the trompe l'oeil, for example the physicality of the building that carries the painting. I believe that to be able to speak of a production of space in art, the work on the plane *has* to be seen in conjunction with the other aspects.

There is in my opinion also another kind of space that is interesting in relationship to my project. Marcel Duchamp has explored the possibility of producing this space with the work *Large Glass*, through which he tries to depict the fourth dimension. From different readings and interpretations of his work it is not clear whether Duchamp indicated 'time' as the fourth dimension, or another spatial reality. Nevertheless, it is often linked to the theories developed by Poincaré (also explained in the book *Flatland* by Edwin Abbott) on the fourth dimension, which cannot be perceived by human beings in the same way that spheres cannot be perceived by two-dimensional figures. The three-dimensions can only express *the existence* of the fourth-dimension. Could this also be applied to Lefebvre's idea of a unity of space, so that the merging of the social, mental and physical space expresses another unperceivable kind of space? And if so, how can you define this fourth dimension if you cannot see it? This again links to the cave, in which the prisoners aren't able to look back and see the fire, let alone to exit the cave to experience the real world. The prisoners are captured in their own reality, and incapable of escaping it. I guess the cave can be used as a metaphor for our incapability to perceive the fourth dimension, but perhaps it is up to the artist to creatively play on the idea of another spatial reality, or utopia.