

# Real Spaces

World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism

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much in the final revisions, as I have profited over the years from his fine, far-ranging scholarship and critical writing. I also wish to thank Bernard Dod at Phaidon for his scrupulous editing and many useful suggestions. The reader owes him a substantial debt.

My wife Nancy could not know she was marrying this project when she married me. Not only has her patience thus been double, she has risen to the task, as a partner and companion, but also as a most clear-headed and careful critic of the ongoing work. Our three children, Ben, Tim, and Mary, grew up and left home with what must be the vivid memory of their father hunched year in and year out over his books, legal pads and keyboard, rushing off from time to time to see exhibitions of Olmec sculpture, Chinese archaeology or Persian painting. I can only hope it was partly this example that has helped to bend those twigs in the right ways, and I thank them as the adults they have become for their precocious co-operation and understanding.

A trip to Mexico in the summer of 1966 (funded by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation) as one of the participants in a graduate seminar given by George Kubler on the iconography of the art of Teotihuacan planted the questions in my mind around which this undertaking has grown. One day on that trip, away from the museums and archaeological zones, I decided to pick cactus fruit of a kind I had seen in village markets for myself and my friends. We stopped the car, I walked into a thick forest of tall cactus and began to gather the leathery red globes, immediately to find all ten fingers carpeted with tiny spines. As I stood trying to figure out what to do, a woman about forty-five years old, whose ancestors might have built and used the monuments I had come to see, stepped from among the cactus, chuckling, amused to see someone who did not know enough to avoid my predicament. We could say very little to one another; but she took my hands, took chicle from her mouth, and with it began painstakingly and even tenderly to clean my fingers, laughing softly. After some minutes of this she gave my hands to me and sent me on my way, as if certain I would know better in the future. This woman would be old now, and I hope this book contributes to a better world, if not for her, then for her children and grandchildren.

# Introduction

You know that *poiesis* is more than a single thing. For of anything whatever that passes from not being into being the whole cause is composing or poetry; so that the productions of all arts are kinds of poetry, and their craftsmen are all poets ... But ... they are not called poets: they have other names, while a single section disparted from the whole of poetry – merely the business of music and metres – is entitled with the name of the whole.

Plato, *Symposium*, 205B–C

## I. POST-FORMALIST ART HISTORY

However the discipline of the history of art may have changed over the last few decades of theoretical and critical examination, it has continued to be an archival field, concerned with setting its objects in spatial and temporal order, and with relating them to appropriate documents and archaeological evidence. Much of this work has been accomplished; there are more or less firmly established bodies of works in most fields, and it is to be expected that professional attention might turn elsewhere. To be sure, connoisseurship and documentation have continued to authenticate artifacts in order to establish their market value, that is, for more than simply historical purposes; but the same archival and archaeological work also remains fundamental to the discipline of art history as a kind of history, and the 'provenances' of artifacts for sale *do* in fact place them in groups and series. If that is so, what implications are to be drawn from the fact that artifacts lend themselves to such spatiotemporal arrangement? What is the significance of the certainty with which a vessel from Teotihuacan found in a Maya burial may be at once identified as an import rather than the independent invention of some eccentric Maya potter? When human artifacts were assumed to be essentially form, the answer to this question was fairly simple. Artifacts belonged to styles, continuities characteristic of the imaginations of individuals and groups, from the expressions of which certain conclusions might be drawn about individuals and groups themselves. With the decline of formalism in art history, professional interest in such issues has passed from theoretical to practical in the sense that, while artifacts continue to be sorted, grouped and seriated, the interpretative dimensions of these basic activities have been set aside in favour of methodologies from other fields. Art has long been prone to reduction to problems in the psychology of visual perception, which is an obvious extension of the Western assumption that art taken altogether is *about* visual perception. The theories underlying more recent approaches to the interpretation of art, as I shall discuss presently, derive in one way or another from structural linguistics, and their emphasis is synchronic to the exclusion of the diachronic. The chapters of this book, however, proceed from a different starting point. What if historians of art, rather than setting out from one or another borrowed principle, were to reconsider the implications of the continuities and patterns demonstrated in generations of art-historical practice and research? The history of art might in fact turn out to be deeply significant for the very fields from which it has borrow-

ed, thus to contribute in new ways to broader historical and cultural understanding. The study of what we have come to call art, and its many histories, studied in analogy to nothing else, might tell us more about ourselves than it has yet been allowed to do.

It should be clear that in proposing a post-formalist art history I do not mean to suggest a rupture with all that has gone before. Quite to the contrary, I have meant to provide new frameworks, derived from works of art themselves, within which many kinds of scholarship may be incorporated and synthesized in the direction of present interests. The categories I propose are able to engage most art-historical literature and should at the same time open art history to the interest and concerns of students in archaeology, anthropology, history, literature, psychology and the social sciences. It should also make art history interesting to artists in new ways, as in fact post-Abstract Expressionist painting and sculpture and their accompanying criticism have contributed at many points to the issues I shall be treating. Post-formalist art history will allow many more kinds of art to be meaningfully approached, and will at the same time help to ground understanding in the truly foundational universal heritage of the art and architecture that peoples of the world have made for so many different purposes.

It is important to bear in mind that the title of Hans Belting's book *The End of the History of Art?* ends, not with a period, but with a question mark. After reviewing and criticizing the problems of the progressive narrative tradition stemming from Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, Belting finishes the book's essays with the statement that 'we have arrived at the threshold of an anthropologically grounded conception of artistic production as a paradigm of human activity, a possibility which was most recently explored, in a general theory of the historicity of art and its products, by George Kubler.' The core conception of Kubler's *Shape of Time*, stated in the book's wonderful title, is that there is no single 'development' in which all art may be placed, and that there may be many histories of art made up of open numbers of more or less local interactions of what he called 'series'. In Kubler's terms there can be no absolute chronology, and art-historical time, the shapes of time, can only be constituted in each case by these interactions.

Kubler's *Shape of Time* was published in 1962, and his version of 'the history of things' was shaped in its turn by opposition to the growing dominance of iconography in art-historical study. Erwin Panofsky's *Meaning in the Visual Arts* had been published in 1955, immediately becoming required art-historical reading, as well as an important model for art-historical scholarship. Kubler's reactive insistence upon the importance of form as opposed to content still raised the fundamental problems formalism had always raised. How are the shapes of time to be related to iconographic traditions? I will argue that Kubler's historically localized traditions can be usefully modified, and brought into a continuous relation to iconography, by a reconsideration of the uses and purposes of works of art.

When he wrote *Art and Illusion*, first published in 1960, E. H. Gombrich expressly identified his project with the kind of progressive history Belting argued has become exhausted. Gombrich offered a theoretical account of the cumulative history of technical skills as a latterday version of Vasari and Pliny the Elder.

As had been the case with his ancient and Renaissance forebears, Gombrich's narrative moved toward the limit of the 'matching' of appearances, to which he added 'the beholder's share', the skill of the artist in making the observer imaginatively complete images. Unfortunately, the foundation of Gombrich's argument in the psychology of perception had the effect of naturalizing and universalizing what could also be seen (and I think should be seen) as a culturally specific goal, namely the imitation of appearances. But if that is so, then it means there might be other traditions with other culturally specific goals, expressed in other definitions of skill, and in other understandings of the purposes of works of art. If this adjustment is made, any number of histories of art may be written that preserve the integrity of traditions while (as I will argue) making all traditions variations upon what are in principle common possibilities. The naturalistic episodes in Western art simply become 'shapes of time'. This general scheme has the advantage of providing a better means by which discontinuities and interactions within and among traditions may be described and explained. Ends, disruptions and combinations within and among series become as important as beginnings and continuities.

Gombrich tirelessly criticized the overarching, providential historicist schemes he traced to the 'Romantic historiography' of Hegel. These schemes in their idealist and materialist versions have been formative for political thought and practice for the past two hundred years, and theories of progress and inevitable end in history served to justify and magnify collective violence to characteristically modern proportions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Gombrich traced these necessitarian schemes ultimately to Aristotle's idea of final cause, the principle internal to a thing making it develop toward its defining state, an explanation rejected with the rise of scientific method, and thus a relic of premodern Western philosophy preserved in the amber of metahistorical speculation. However that may be, as Gombrich also insisted, there is all the difference between universal purpose and local purpose, or purposes. It does not follow, because history (and histories) cannot be presumed to be analogous to the self-realization of an organism, that there are no human purposes. Rather it is again necessary to investigate evident local continuities (and discontinuities, since purposes may change, and some things about artifacts may continue, while others do not) from the standpoint of the assumption that many purposes are possible. When that is done, it is possible to offer the prospect of cogent histories of all traditions and subtraditions of art without the assumption or implication of a universal scheme of artistic progress. Shapes of time become what Kubler himself called 'linked solutions', which may, however, be related to broader purposes stated in other ways. In these terms, iconographic questions should not be stated in the form 'What did this mean, and how do the forms in which it was realized express that meaning?' but rather 'Why did people continue (or not continue) to make images of the Virgin Mary or Quetzalcoat, or even unidentifiable personages, in the ways they did?'

In the following chapters I will not be centrally concerned with iconography, although I will necessarily use the results of decades of iconographic research. Iconography is now taken for granted either as a standard method of reconstructive art-historical interpretation, or as the available body of results of such

reconstruction in fields far from the beginnings of the method in the art history of the European Renaissance, and we may now, for example, read about the iconography of the royalty of Benin. Iconography, however, was also an important break with what had been a predominantly formalist art history, and an important early mode of contextualization. Iconographic themes are culturally specific, characteristic of cultures at large – we do not find images of the Virgin Mary in ancient American art before historical contact – but they are also more or less local. Within the broad culture in which her images were made, the cult of the Virgin took different forms and had different emphases and interpretations in one place or another – and so may bind works of art to immediate context in ways quite different from formal styles (which, I will argue, may themselves be better described contextually in terms of given formats and essentially arbitrary differences in local craft traditions).

Too much that is obvious about works of art is left unexplained by either form or iconography. It is impossible to explain the historical appearance of a format – the altarpiece or canvas, for example – in formal terms, and it is equally impossible to explain the same thing iconographically, regardless of the degree of detail in which the iconography of any altarpiece or canvas may be explained. What must be omitted – or assumed – in either kind of explanation is the historical significance of format itself. Formats are culturally specific, and they come into existence, and persist, change, disappear, or are revived for equally specific reasons. At the same time, they are necessarily linked to what I shall introduce shortly as social space, that is, to culturally specific spaces and patterns of behaviour, a fairly straightforward definition of context.

The rise of contextualism (including the rise of iconography) presented a deep disciplinary dilemma for the history of art. If art has been regarded as essentially 'form', how do art historians address the objects of their concern once they have given up this idea? This dilemma, however, is also an opportunity to reconsider the idea of form itself, and the explanatory power of the real spatial contextual alternative I will offer suggests that art raises issues substantially different from those raised by the old definition. According to the arguments I will present, 'forms' are simply – and importantly – what people have shaped in one way or another, and for one purpose or another. (Again, 'format', from the past participle of the Latin *formare*, may serve as an example.) As I shall consider in detail in the next section, this definition of form differs radically from the definition corollary to what I shall call *pictorial imagination*, the aesthetic-expressive definition descending principally from Immanuel Kant, which, as I shall argue in the next section, has continued to dominate the discussion of art. This definition of form, however, is itself part of an episode in European intellectual history, and, if this book were compressed into a few questions, one of them would be the following: How did it become possible to think about art as the modern European tradition came to think about it, and what were and are the alternatives to thinking about it in those ways?

In general, the phenomenological principle of 'being-in-the-world' stands in the early ancestry of the ideas of 'real space' and 'context' I will develop. To an extent this simply reveals the point at which I entered the stream of twentieth-century intellectual discussion; but I think it is really more accurate to say that

I have never been failed by the thesis that art records the many ways in which the world at hand has been acknowledged in being shaped by us human beings; the thesis has simply never been falsified.

Although Martin Heidegger's essay on 'The Origin of the Work of Art', written in 1935-6, is mystified, primitivizing, and suspiciously Indo-Eurocentric, it may be usefully adjusted to provide alternative ways of thinking about how social space has been artifactually shaped, thus further to provide a pattern for the beginnings of traditions of artifact- and place-making I shall treat in Chapters 1 and 2. The principle of *arbitrariness*, which I shall define in Section 3 of Chapter 1, presupposes the acknowledgement of what is at hand, but also its potential to take any number of forms; and the principle of *facture*, the subject of Chapter 1, in addition to providing a new basis for the treatment of art as historical evidence, entails the human scale of all art, and thus connection to the parameters of human physical existence, and to the *cardinality* I shall discuss shortly in Section 3. According to the arguments I will make, we are not simply 'being-there', we are being-there in determinate embodied ways, in spaces and times shared with others. As I shall presently discuss in more detail, Heidegger's unrelieved world-historical gloom falls within the kind of late-Hegelian totalization I have tried to avoid on principle, and, dangerous as the modern world has been and remains, and acute as Heidegger's critique of it has been, it still offers positive choices we must learn to make in terms of the values rooted in a revised being-in-the-world.

As I have said, I began this project along two fairly distinct tracks. One was the attempt to formulate a contextual method of description of works of art. The second was an attempt to provide a theoretical basis for a more intercultural art history. The second part of the project began to form in my mind during a trip to Mexico in the summer of 1966, the finale to one of George Kubler's seminars on the iconography of the art of Teotihuacan. We had gone to gather images from the fragments of what must have been the ubiquitous murals at that now stark and stupendous site. In the course of this visit I realized two things with great force. First, although I had studied Precolumbian art and architecture before actually seeing it, nothing I had learned or thought about it, or about art in general, had prepared me to experience this art, or to understand why it had been made. The second realization was broader. In those days there was great scholarly interest in periodization, that is, in the ways in which the periods of European art – now solidly institutionalized in art historians' fields of specialization – are essentially different from one another. The second realization, from which all of my art-historical work has grown, was that, whatever differences there may be, the essentialization of these differences conceals the ways in which, like the traditions of ancient America, the European and broader Western tradition has been deeply continuous. The imitation of nature, the rhetorical tradition and attitudes toward images and illusion, for example, whatever changes they may undergo, remain remarkably similar and characteristic.

Since my primary concern was with addressing art that lay outside the tradition with which I was familiar, I turned to the ways in which such art was in fact addressed by art historians, and I quickly found myself involved with the 'conceptual image', closely related both to memory and to language, formed as a general

definition of something in the mind. Conceptual images (which I shall redefine as hierarchical planar images in Chapter 5; Figure 166 may be taken as an example of what is meant by a conceptual image) are frontal and two-dimensional. The idea of conceptual images, although very little analysed, is encountered fairly often in art-historical writing. Perhaps its boldest statement is to be found in Gombrich's 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse', where the art of the world is characterized as two islands of naturalism (classical and neoclassical Western art and Chinese painting) in a 'vast ocean of conceptual images'. Clearly, this idea, adapted from the late nineteenth-century psychology of perception, is of the deepest political and ideological significance, and around the turn of the twentieth century provided a schema for progressive art history, according to which representation advances from conceptual to perceptual, so that 'conceptual' is early or 'primitive', and perceptual or naturalistic is later. This schema still underlies Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, in which 'making' precedes 'matching'. Again, it should be insisted that this is only true when 'matching' is the goal of art, and provides the standard for artistic skill. Although the conceptual image survives in the chapter of *Art and Illusion* entitled 'Pygmalion's Power', Gombrich abandoned any attempt to make distinctions within the 'vast ocean' of non-naturalistic art.

In order to approach the problem of the 'conceptual image', I suspended Gombrich's assumption that 'the scientific study of art will be psychology.' No one would deny that all human works are discussable in terms of psychology, but in this case the categories are disabling and reductive, and, if art must ultimately be explained psychologically, it will be psychology of a very different kind from the psychology of perception. This conclusion is suggested in Gombrich's own 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse', when he states that *all* images are substitutive, which in the context of his argument means that simple non-resemblant images, like a hobby horse, are comparable to all other images in being substitutive. How does that square with the psychology of perception? How is a simple substitute like a conceptual image? These questions are not easily answered, and examination of the Freudian roots of Gombrich's claim yields quite a different explanation of the conditions both for substitution and for 'conceptual images'. In order to be a substitute, an object must be manageable, and it will serve as what it represents in a correlative space and time. This is the principle of *real metaphor*, which I will treat in Chapter 4. A real metaphor is something at hand that is changed from one context to another in order to be treated as if it were something else. This is the core art-historical idea from which the idea of *real space* began to develop. The making of a real metaphor, I will argue, is irreducible, and more specifically, is not reducible to language, or to the kinds of substitution words and language effect.

When Gombrich wrote his 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse' his example was a boy playing a game, and Freud's example was the more anxiety-determined case of a boy who had invented a game, replacing his absent mother with a substitute that could be tossed away and then retrieved. But the space of substitution need not be supposed to be so solitary; it may also be a space of consensus and literal convention, in which case both real metaphors and their correlative spaces also have more or less shared social and historical meanings. Some spatiotem-

poral context is inseparable from the kinds of meaning proper to simple images, but also to all works of art. It was at this point that the two paths of my project converged, that is, that a revised contextual description dovetailed with the search for categories to address art not easily addressed.

As we shall see, the real spatiotemporal correlative to substitution may be effected in any number of ways, and so falls under the category of the *arbitrary*, which I shall discuss in Chapter 1. A real metaphor is thus as evident as any other object, and so may its correlative space be; but the meaning of a real metaphor, like the exact spatiotemporal situation with which this meaning is integral, can only be culturally specific. Identification of spatial precincts with cultural specificity immediately involves the idea of what I shall call *real space* in a much broader twentieth-century debate. Since one of the texts from which I began was Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, published in 1924, I first expanded the idea of real metaphor and correlative real space in terms of Ernst Cassirer's 'psychophysiological' space, which Panofsky contrasted to the universal metric space of modern Western physics and technology, the space I shall define as *metaoptical* in my final chapter. This contrast, however, is by no means unique to Cassirer and Panofsky. At least since Henri Bergson, co-ordinate space has been characterized as static, opposed to a deeper, living temporal principle, in terms of which a more authentic intuition of local, non-universalizable spatiotemporality is possible. The principal features of modern Western co-ordinate space are homogeneity, divisibility and infinity, relative to which more primordial spaces are qualitative, continuous and unified, and, as wholes, heterogeneous with respect to one another. They are *places* (the title of Chapter 2) as opposed to mere locations, that is, points in a universal metric space. This general distinction has been essential to powerful – and contradictory – definitions of modernity. Metric space is the precondition for the technology in terms of which progress has been measured in the West since the seventeenth century; but the same metric space is also the symbol of Descartes's mechanical nature, the 'objective' world for living 'subjects'.

It would take another large book to sort out the disputed critical history of the idea of space in the twentieth century, an especially difficult project because of the many intersections with the history of science. Still, it is clear what some of the major themes of such a history would be.

The critical and ideological problem of space is nested in still broader issues, going back to the 'quarrel of the ancients and moderns', which turned around questions of aesthetics and technology. Friedrich Schiller was a crucial figure in shaping this debate in ways now so familiar as to seem axiomatic. Schiller's *Naive and Sentimental Poetry* and *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* appeared in 1795, five years after Kant's *Critique of Judgement*; he amended Kant in treating art, not just as the free play of mental faculties, but as free, fully human action around which (at least in principle) free political institutions could be built. Schiller emphatically juxtaposed the realm of such freedom to the rationalized, now disenchanting, modern world. The ancient Greek poet, Schiller maintained, knew nothing of the mechanistic explanation of nature, but rather faced nature 'naively', as if just born; the modern poet, by contrast, could only reflect upon personal experience. Schiller does not deny that the moderns have surpassed the

ancients in providing conveniences for the run of mankind, but, he asks, 'what individual Modern could...engage, man against man, with an individual Athenian for the prize of humanity?' The difference is stark: the Greek took his forms from 'all-unifying Nature', the Modern from the 'all-dividing intellect'. Schiller expanded what might be thought a manifesto for poets into institutional critique. The State has become 'an ingenious clockwork' where mediocre individuals pursue small tasks of specialized labour and thought. Innumerable 'lifeless parts' add up to a mechanical kind of collective life'. Schiller deplored the modern separation of Church and state, complaining that labour had become joyless, that means and ends, effort and reward are sundered. 'Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being.' This is the modern alienation to which Schiller thought art a remedy.

Max Weber followed Schiller closely when he wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published to a scholarly audience in 1904–5 and revised and published again in 1920–1. This short book continued the project of a larger comparative sociology of religion, and part of its purpose was to compare the West to other world cultures. Weber (who launched the phrase 'disenchantment of the world' in an essay of 1918) characterized the West as relentlessly rationalizing. Musical harmony, book-keeping, and, of art-historical interest, the systematization of vaulted architecture and one-point perspective, are some of the many symptoms of the Western will to rational order. The greatest rationalization of all, however, was capitalism, as defined by Karl Marx. In Weber's argument, 'America' comes to exemplify rationalization, technology and, at the deepest level, capitalism itself. Calvinism in its various historical forms provided the ideological base, but Benjamin Franklin is the paradigmatic cultural product. The Schiller/Weber dichotomy has persisted in cultural criticism to the present. In 1944 Horkheimer and Adorno identified 'disenchantment' with 'enlightenment', in turn associated (citing Edmund Husserl) with the 'Galilean mathematization of the world'.

Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, published in 1923, fused Weber's rationalization with Bergson's 'spatialization' to yield what Lukacs called 'reification', the transformation of life into dead objects. Wars come and go, Lukacs had written, but who will save us from Western civilization? Much the same totalizing *geistesgeschichtlich* scheme could be turned to other purposes. Oswald Spengler's enormously popular *Decline of the West*, for example, first published in 1918, defined cultures in spatial terms, and specifically defined the characteristic space of Western civilization as 'Faustian', as infinitely expansive, reducing everything in its path to its own terms. Again, it would take a separate study to locate Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* precisely in a much broader debate.

In high philosophical literature, Martin Heidegger pondered the theme I am tracing through much of his long career, perhaps most pointedly in his 'Age of the World Picture', written in 1938. For Heidegger, the modern Western assumption of a mathematically 'objective' (and technologically exploitable) nature existing as potential experience for 'subjects' was a ruinous metaphysics, prevent-

ing any authentic relation to 'being'. The founder of existentialism thus added (for political reasons very different from those of the other writers) ontological inauthenticity to the alienation and reification following from capitalist production, thus providing another basis for the ongoing critique of Western modernity, and, more specifically, of capitalism. In these terms, the world of metric space is a fungible, culturally homogeneous world of the flow of capital and power, of 'spectacle' and panoptical surveillance. In more narrowly art-historical terms, such ideas have deeply shaped analyses of perspective (a harbinger of rationalization), visuality (the social construction of vision), and urban planning from the beginnings of European modernity. Space has become part of Weber's 'iron cage'.

Within this general discussion, Henri Lefebvre gave currency to the term 'social space'. I will presently use this term quite differently as the definition of architecture in general. While Lefebvre's rejection of the isomorphism of language and space is, in my judgement, on the mark, his 'social space' is historically more specific than the definition I will offer. The 'production of space' of which he writes accompanies the emergence of the bourgeoisie in the early modern period according to the pattern I have just outlined. For Lefebvre, the 'space' underlying this characteristically modern Western order has the transparency of the deepest ideology, and more particularly determines the assumed spatiotemporality of daily life. Insofar as this is a general principle, it is unexceptionable, and is compatible with the relation between social space and what I shall discuss in a later section of the Introduction, not as ideology, but, more neutrally, as *second nature*.

Lukacs used the term 'second nature' to refer to the 'reified' world of modern capitalism, and in these terms Western 'social space' is once again both disenchanted and ideological, the naturalized arena of an alienated consciousness. In this book, *social space* will have a broader meaning. Social space is a *condition* of human existence – we find ourselves among others – and we always do so in culturally specific circumstances. In these terms, social space is second nature in the sense of engrained habit, but, as I shall argue, there is also a sense in which second nature simply *is* 'nature', since given nature is never encountered in itself, but rather from within a culture. In addition, as we shall see, there is a close connection and interplay between social (and political) spatial order and the presumed order of the world at large. Western modernism continues these patterns in some ways, but not in others. There is a close connection between modern Western natural and social order – a three-dimensional grid is determinative in both cases – but this natural order (which I shall define as *metaspatial* in Chapter 7) is inherently centreless and infinitely expansive, and in these respects radically different from its predecessors. The solution I shall offer to the cultural tensions resulting from this difference is not couched in terms of essentialist historical 'spirits' inevitably set against one another, but rather of historical traditions in various kinds of contact, in which case problems are those of negotiation and mutual accommodation. In fact, many such accommodations have been found, and are being found.

There are a number of reasons for such a position. From the deeply habituated assumptions of what has become Western common sense about space and

time (whether one considers these assumptions the results of scientific progress, or is critical of them as ideology), it is impossible to understand places in traditional cultures. As we shall see, for example, sacred spaces are fairly consistent in their basic articulations from one culture to another. It is not necessary to prefer one of these articulations or another to see that traditional centres and precincts continue to figure prominently in contemporary world affairs. As I write this, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is occupied and under siege, hundreds are dead in riots after the destruction of a centuries-old mosque built over a Hindu sacred site, colossal Buddhas have recently crumbled before modern artillery for reasons that might have been given a thousand years ago, and the mere mention of the city of Jerusalem calls to mind an ongoing history of bloody strife. At the same time, of course, these same places anchor the peaceful observances of millions of people, and this behaviour must also be understood.

It should not be supposed that the impulse to reserve the space of extraordinary human events, and to orient subsequent life with respect to them, is simply premodern. To take a near example, the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York City immediately assumed the name 'Ground Zero', the term for the point of atomic detonation. This set the destruction in a very specific succession of modern cataclysms – Hiroshima and Nagasaki – to which Americans themselves have a vexed, contested relationship. Such events 'take place' and are unable to be forgotten *as* places. Even if there is disagreement about how they should be marked, a kind of decorum comes immediately into play. Memorials at these sites have irreducibly different meanings than those away from them, and if the name and design of the World Trade Center announced it as a symbol of economic power and efficiency, it would be entirely inappropriate to reconstruct it as no more than office space on valuable real estate.

As we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3, it is often difficult, or not even useful, to distinguish between what we regard as sacred and political spaces, and this pattern persists into modern times, however much definitions of the sacred and political may have changed. As we shall also see in Chapter 2, divisions of social spaces, from early examples to the present day, very frequently fall along lines compatible with the grammatical distinction of gender, and so contribute in the most basic ways to social definitions of sexuality in concrete, real spatial terms of access, inclusion and exclusion.

I will also argue at the end of Chapter 7 that Western modernism itself has undergone internal transformations. The metaoptical grid, the Newtonian space of classical physics, has been not so much superseded as localized, to become the space of technological and institutional prediction and control rather than the space of nature. Something similar happened in the art of the twentieth century, which became increasingly fundamentally concerned with issues of *place*. This clearly resonates with institutional criticisms of many kinds, and with such important twentieth-century movements as environmentalism; but it also means that Western art at the beginning of the twenty-first century stands in a very different relation to the art of all other traditions, past and present.

In sum, the increasing rationalization of world and life has generated deep nostalgia for more human-scaled places and times; the arguments I have outlined have become issues of 'globalization', and point to a deep sense of threat in ins-

tutions, groups and cultures whose ways of life are more closely founded on principles of place. This book might be described as an essay toward the negotiation, not only of differences between the modern West and other cultures, but between the modern West and its own foundational institutions, as well as its own historical consequences. However such accommodations might be achieved, a simple return to the premodern is not an option. The world in fact *is* smaller, literally for better or for worse, and return to a heterogeneous world of absolute regional differences can only be the prelude to repetition on a global scale of the incalculably vast twentieth-century tragedies of Western history.

Places as I have defined them are compatible with Kubler's 'shapes of time' in ways that universal metric space (and time) are not. In addition to categories of *social space*, the discussion of places will assume dimensions of *personal space* and *cardinality*, of schematic reference to the standing human body. In formulating these last two categories, I have followed the hints in Meyer Schapiro's cautious essay in semiotics, which also provided the important suggestion that planar surfaces are an achievement of human art, an achievement which I will argue has been *conditional* for vast, pervasive and multilayered institutions of the presentation of images and information, as well as social spatial order and practice, to the present. The co-ordinate grid of metaoptical space is itself a development of planarity; it is not simply an abstract framework, but a matrix for places of all kinds, some desirable, some not.

As I suggested earlier, the constitutive interdependence of real metaphors and their real spatial conditions had a second important consequence for the project as a whole: it diverged early on from the so-called 'linguistic turn', which, as I will argue again presently, still, insofar as it bears on art, belongs to the modern Western tradition of pictorial imagination, and so remains fatally ethnocentric. Pictorial imagination has its own history (which I shall outline in the next section), intimately related to the long history of Western representationalism, that is, to the assumption that the mind represents the world to itself. The incorporation of metaphors of pictorial representation into broader psychological representationalism is characteristic of the Western discussion of art and mind from the beginnings of Western philosophy, and, guided partly by the arguments of W. J. T. Mitchell, I have reversed the usual pattern in considering not so much how mind has made art, but how in fundamental respects art has shaped the understanding of mind. This 'representation', and the mental processes associated with it – reflection and abstraction, for example, even imagination itself, which is a capacity to make mental images – are in fact closely related to Western pictorial representation, and to the characteristic development in Western art of what I shall call *virtual space*.

According to Leo Steinberg, Pablo Picasso tried in his drawing to achieve an impossible completeness of presence by twisting the surfaces of virtual forms occluded in vision (and in traditional drawing) back into the surface of the drawing. Both the impossibility of such 'possession' and Picasso's transformative solution to the problem it presents are rooted in the conditions of two-dimensional representation itself. The issue is clear at once in Figure 1, the first illustration in Steinberg's essay; we can see the back of the sculpture and the sculptor's face, but we cannot see the front of the sculpture as the sculptor does.



1 Pablo Picasso, *The Sculptor*,  
4 August 1931. Ink on paper,  
31.8 x 25.4 cm (12½ x 10 in).  
Seattle Art Museum, Leroy M.  
Backus Collection

If images on surfaces cannot have full substitutive value, however, the attempt to give them those values is itself of great art-historical interest, and virtual space, the space we seem to see in surfaces, offers its own vast potentials, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 6. Steinberg's arguments pointedly raised in my mind the issue of the relation between substitution and representation in two dimensions, and thus between real and virtual space.

As these two categories gained analytic and explanatory usefulness, I began to treat semiotics warily. I am persuaded by Umberto Eco's argument that, in the world outside literature, the 'final interpretant' is an action, when we treat the world as if it were one way or another, with a consequent break in the chain of semiosis, and also with real consequences. The wide world of what we call art begins to come into view through those chinks. In the history of art semiotics has often operated from the assumption that works of art are 'texts', which,

however this metaphor might be understood, I have rejected as reductive and ethnocentric. I have argued in a series of essays that, however interestingly and even necessarily the principles of recent theory may fit into the history of Western representationalism, the universalization of the linguistic sign presupposed by structuralism and post-structuralism is by no means beyond question, and in fact makes it impossible to address the issues of real and virtual space around which art is constituted. The linguistic turn, in its various forms, is of course part of the historical fabric of post-modernism, and has shaped the discourses in turn shaping contemporary negotiations of new relations and exchanges among cultures. This situation must not be confused, however, with the historical problems of defining cultures historically (and art-historically) in such a way as to ground them more adequately in present transactions. When the assumptions of Western representationalism in any of its phases – including its latest phase – are brought to traditions of art making to which they have no historical connections, the result can only be fundamental cultural incomprehension.

If this project is stated in the terms of semiotics, however, stress falls upon what Charles Sanders Peirce called the *index*. Peirce called signs referring by resemblance *icons* (a term I will give quite a different definition in Chapter 5), and arbitrary signs referring by convention (like most verbal signs) he called *symbols*. An index refers by existential relation; a footprint implies the former presence of a foot, and a skilled tracker can draw accurate and useful information from a footprint about the foot's owner and the owner's activity. In these terms, my primary concern will be with indexical *inference*, not with symbolic *interpretation*. In formulating the fundamental principle of *facture* set out in Chapter 1, that every artifact – considered indexically – is a record of its own having been made, I have followed the lead of Michael Baxandall, and the principle of *facture* may be understood as Baxandall's 'inferential criticism' set out in the most general terms. The usefulness of indexical (or factual) inferences may be seen by returning to the example of real metaphor. Rather than describing, say, a large stone in the centre of a ring of small stones, then trying to figure out what it might mean, we may infer that someone, or some group of people, moved these stones and set them out in this way, then ask how and why that might have been done, and why it is like other things those or other people have done. To take a modern example, a photograph of the Eagle Nebula taken from an orbiting telescope (Figure 326) does not simply take its place in the millennial series of images, it demands historical explanation in terms of what conditions had to exist in order for it to have been made, and for its making to be repeated. Historical questions about images in general, including what David Freedberg calls 'the power of images', the new iconology proposed by W. J. T. Mitchell as the fundamental project of a galvanized art history, or the work of the 'imagists' proposed by Barbara Stafford, should be approached first of all in terms of the ways images are made and used.

One of my purposes in writing this book has been to insist that art has, and should be acknowledged to have, its own irreducible meanings. I do not, however, wish therefore to suggest that art should become the paradigm for all interpretation (as language has become), but rather that art's meanings should take their places among others. When indexical inference is taken seriously, fundamental

issues begin to arise that must be ignored altogether when the paradigm of language is overgeneralized. The denial of *any* semiotic universalization provides better access to particularity of all kinds.

Most inferences from facture are as basic as they are simple. Artifacts imply agents, styles imply traditions of craft and skill, large works imply concerted effort, all integral with the purposes of some group or subgroup. More broadly, formats – to return to that fundamental example – allow the same inferences, but also imply installation, fit to one or another social space of use. Considered aesthetically or formally, formats are relatively neutral, most attention being given to relationships inside their limits. But formats are culturally specific, and their comparison and contextualization provides access to basic real spatial cultural differences. Formal relations within the limits of a format may of course be of interest in their own right, but considered as material for history, they always risk dissolution into the subjectivity with which the aesthetic is associated. Formats themselves by contrast are relatively objective, more or less precisely locatable culturally and historically, and define the equally specific and literal context within which other culturally specific changes occur. Again, constructions of virtual space are the results of choices and specific historical affiliations and operations before they are more or less accurate representations of vision itself. In these terms, Erwin Panofsky wrote his *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (and devised the method of iconography) as a contextualizing corrective to Alois Riegl's too internal, and therefore too intuitive, analyses of works of art. That is, in the case of perspective, the framework of representation itself could be richly and suggestively contextualized. E. H. Gombrich's essays on allegory in European art and light in European painting are investigations along similar lines. In principle, guided by the link to spaces of use provided by format, similar investigations might be carried out for the characteristics of the art of any tradition. As a final example, the sympathetic understanding of ornament, as we shall see at several points, has been one of the major casualties of Western criticism from Greek antiquity to modernism, and such a study as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's essay on ornament suggests ways in which this important subject might begin to get the many local explications it awaits.

## 2. FORM, PICTORIAL IMAGINATION AND FORMALISM

Before it was linked to historicist ideas of evolution and development (which, as we have seen, incorporated the 'conceptual image'), the idea of form, at least in principle, promised access to all kinds of art. The idea of form, however, also arose together with Western modernism, and for all its admirable reach, has proved to be an unreliable means of engaging the art of cultures outside the European tradition and its tributaries. This failure has become all the more unfortunate as the ever-increasing contact and interaction of cultures has made the need for their sympathetic mutual engagement more urgent. Even in the art of the European tradition itself, the reduction of images to form favours only certain features, obscuring, distorting or passing over others as art-historically irrelevant.

The idea that art is essentially 'formal' emerged only in the late eighteenth century, together with a more radical representationalism, according to which

mind (as I shall discuss in Chapter 7) came to be conceived as a determinate, interactive *counterforce* to the newly mathematically objective space and force of the natural world. This 'representation' entailed a new *pictorial* definition of imagination. In Western psychology before the early modern period, imagination – as the word itself still implies – was the capacity to bring to mind images, the 'forms' of traces of more or less implicitly visual sensations retained from the past in the 'thesaurus' of memory. In ways intimately related to the transformations I shall describe in Chapter 7, this conception of imagination underwent a fundamental shift. Classical discussions of the activities of imagination were typically framed in terms of individual forms, and when imagination recollected forms from memory, it provided the indispensable basis for the higher activities of rational analysis, generalization and classification. Imagination since antiquity had also been the power to manipulate remembered forms, to associate and project them in perception (as when we see camels in the clouds), as well as to dis-member and re-member them to make new images, such as centaurs, sirens and hippogryphs. If imagination in the service of memory further served reason, the associative, projective and recombinatory powers of imagination were identified with irrationality, with pathology, but also with the licence of poets and painters. For the most part, fantastic images in European art respected a similar division, remaining marginal with respect to authoritative texts and structures.

The modern Western pictorialization of imagination took shape together with the rise of optical naturalism, the subject of the final sections of Chapter 6. Landscape (see, for example, Figure 6), in which many forms are summarized and united, is the paradigm of this pictorialization. In ancient Greek painting, what we call landscapes were a kind of *parergon*, an ancillary display of painterly brilliance, and so remained close to the roots of the word fantasy, *phantasia*, which first meant that which appears in the light. Early modern Western optical naturalism depended upon the analysis of vision into elements of light, dark and colour in a field of vision. In the art of painting, this analysis involves one or another system of modelling, and one or another 'perspective' completed the system by at once characterizing the visual field as a whole as light and offering a schematic framework based on the geometric regularity of the activity of light in relation to the organ of sight. The change from form to optical field is vividly exemplified by two of the major ancient and modern metaphors for sensation. Aristotle compared sensation to the impress of a seal; John Locke compared the mind to a *camera obscura*. The *tabula rasa* awaiting sensation is common to both, and both metaphorical images are indexical, the result of an impression made from outside. But again, there is a crucial difference. Aristotle's ring leaves a thinkable form without matter, a first level of abstraction in sensation; Locke's *camera obscura* image, certainly based on the post-Keplerian understanding of the eye and the retina, is a relatively fleeting array of many forms in light, all of whose facing surfaces, selected by a single point, register on a surface. By the time Locke used this metaphor, he was not only appealing to what had come to be the understanding of vision, he was also appealing to what had long since come to be the understanding of painting.

How did this pictorial field of vision become imagination? At the same time

that oil painting and perspective made possible new levels of the transcription of the optical experience of a subject located in space and light, individual artistic 'visions' also began to proliferate. Jan van Eyck (Figures 28 and 145) was soon followed by Hieronymus Bosch (Figure 33), among the first to effect the pictorialization of imagination. Bosch's forms are fantastic, not just in the sense that they combine parts of natural things in impossible ways, but in the deeper sense that these impossible new forms appear as if in natural light; they are as optically credible as Jan van Eyck's forms, but also have a horizon of the world to themselves. Similarly, in fifteenth-century Italy, the development of geometric perspective soon arrived at anamorphosis (Figure 316), the arbitrary transformation of the grid of rationalized vision.

With the pictorialization of imagination, it became more difficult to distinguish the rational from the fantastic by appeal to nature, and the borders between the mental faculties dependent on image metaphors – sensation, memory and imagination – became harder to draw, simply because all had the same optical basis. But however important traditional ambivalences of reality and illusion may have continued to be, there was, as I shall discuss in Chapter 7, the further modern complication of what I shall call *indirectness*, the new assumption that we do not perceive things as they are, but rather that they act upon us and that we apprehend them only in the ways we do. To take a simple and recurrent early modern example, we should not simply infer that something in the apple we call red corresponds to our subjective experience of redness.

Indirectness presupposes the fundamental and now utterly familiar opposition between the 'objective' world of mechanical, mathematically describable nature (including our own mediating bodies) and the 'subjective' experience of individuals, and it was in this context that it began to be argued that the sense we make of the world in which we find ourselves must be attributed to the structure of the subject, or of subjectivity itself, and in these terms, imagination became the first principle of synthesis for the subject. We may consider the vastly influential 'Copernican Revolution' of Immanuel Kant. Whatever may have been the fate of the assumptions and conclusions of his critical philosophy, the basic principle that the mind substantially constitutes its world, and does so by an initial act of imagination, has persisted in many variants to the present, and has been deeply formative for our understanding of art.

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781, the opening section, called the 'transcendental aesthetic', gave an account of the constituting categories, space and time, in terms of which the mind's first intuition of the world and of itself is synthesized. Kant defined this synthesis as 'the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul', bridging the gap between the 'manifold of intuition' (sensation apprehended as spatiotemporal), and the necessary unity of apperception, that is, of self, and of the world as existing for a self. This imagination accomplishes precisely by making an image. Kant expressly rejected the meaning given to the word 'aesthetic' by Alexander Baumgarten in 1750, calling 'futile' the attempt 'to bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles'. By the time he published his third and last *Critique of Judgement*, however, Kant found much greater complexity and significance in the judgement of taste. The activity of the pictorial imagination,

which he first treated as if reflective (or refractive) in the way light behaves predictably in accordance with the surface it strikes or the medium through which it passes, became significant in ways made accessible by aesthetic judgement, critical examination of which reveals the all-important play of imagination both in itself and in its relation to other faculties. In these terms, the 'genius' is able to make art, our judgement of which, experienced as aesthetic pleasure, may make us aware of this free play.

Kant defined the aesthetic, immediate to sensation and integral with intuition, as preconceptual and prepurposeful. Concept and purpose were inseparable in the classical teleological understanding of form Kant wished to reject; he did not simply discard purpose, however, but instead tried to establish a ground for it in subjectivity itself. In aesthetic experience we take pleasure in what might be called pre-purpose, a 'purposefulness without purpose', a free but cogent order, counterposed to mechanical, natural necessity.

The newly defined field of the aesthetic emerged together with the idea of the 'fine arts', that is arts such as poetry, music and painting. Before the late eighteenth century the arts were regarded in Europe as generally useful human pursuits, adult skills with more or less complex procedures and standards, which could be taught, refined and contributed to by successive practitioners and, in higher cases, reduced to theoretical principles. This premodern definition of the arts included the 'mechanical arts', useful crafts, and also what we would now call 'technology'. The opposition of the freedom from purpose of the fine arts to the predictable necessity of the physical world augmented the intellectual freedom of the traditional liberal arts, so named in the ancient Western world because they were purely mental occupations, neither material nor manual, pursued in the leisure time of free men, as opposed to the labour of slaves and craftspeople, who were either forced to work for others or had to work to make a living, and in any case were concerned with the exigencies of everyday life. In the historical circumstances of their emergence, the fine arts were opposed to the 'mechanical' in much broader terms, to the regularity of the great machine of the world posited by modern physics, and to the new machines and factories whose control over power and resources was rapidly and forever transforming the economic, social and natural worlds. Kant's free play of the formative faculties of the mind might thus be seen as opposed both to physical law and to the constraints of the regimentation and repetition of industrial labour. The tremendous expansion of mechanical invention and production during the Industrial Revolution must have made both more vivid and commonplace than ever before the differences between machines, artifacts whose unity of appearance was more or less strictly determined by function (often compared to the forms of a mechanistically conceived nature), and works of art – poems, music, paintings – whose unity arose from some indeterminate and unique internal necessity.

The contrast between the moderns, who were conceded to be technologically superior, and the ancients, whose works were aesthetically normative (no one had ever been a better poet than Homer), identified the aesthetically normative with activities like the 'liberal arts', which became, like their ancient forerunners, the pursuits of those with the time and leisure to cultivate and refine their tastes. At the same time, Kant argued that critical isolation of the judgement of

taste may lead to awareness of a public, common sense once we realize that in principle everyone has the capacity to make and communicate aesthetic judgements (even if we cannot reason about them and may not come to agree about them). We achieve this realization by abstracting from immediate sensation, charm and emotion, and instead 'confining attention to the formal peculiarities of our representation or general state of representative activity'. This turn to form is crucial, and, as distinct from matter, or from what Kant called the 'materiality' of sensation, form provided the basis not only for the explanation of art itself, it also came to explain cultural differences in styles of art. Kant's transcendental definition of imagination made aesthetic experience universal (and universalist); but imagination was also a near-corporeal faculty, closely related to sensation, and to individual constitution, or 'temperament'. As this might suggest, the 'forms' of art in the new aesthetic sense of the word do not simply synthesize what is intuited or 'felt', they also *express* that intuition or feeling, making it evident, available, and experienceable by a 'viewer', that is, by one also assumed to possess a pictorial imagination. Form is presumed to be an adequate 'medium', conveying both personal and collective intuitions through 'style', and would thus seem to provide a clear path for interpersonal and intercultural communication, if not understanding, since everyone may see (or be taught to see) the expressive forms of everyone else's art. The matter, however, is by no means so simple, and the reduction of everything we call 'art' to pre-practical imaginative synthesis, while it embraces artifacts made according to all other understandings, is as culturally specific as any of the understandings it embraces.

Although more than a century separates Kant from Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History*, a century during which many changes occurred in the psychology and philosophy of art and perception and therefore in the understood nature of subjectivity, Wölfflin offers a fully mature and influential example of the relation between form, pictorial imagination and formalist history of art. Four painters set out to paint exactly the same landscape just as they saw it, but came up with four quite different pictures. Wölfflin's point is that art historians must learn to discern, analyse and draw inferences precisely from such differences. If theme is constant and therefore neutral, telling variations are to be seen in comparing the character of the synthesis of the formal means of representation. Again, individual 'style', evident in idiosyncratic treatments of line, shape, and colour, is rooted in the painters' individual temperaments and imaginations, that is, in the formative principles that literally make images of the same but differently intuited world. Properly parsed out, formal differences also indicate supra-individual national and period style, providing a principle of continuity and development linking series of evidently comparable artifacts through biographies and collective histories. Whether its metaphysical context was idealist or materialist, pictorial imagination could easily be vastly expanded by contemporaneous ideas of culture, historicism and evolution to explain collective temperaments, spirits, visions, intuitions, aesthetics, styles, worldviews, or senses of form. Such language, it may be noted, is by no means limited to technical art-historical discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, on the contrary, has become part of everyday language. We now speak freely of the 'lifestyles' and 'worldviews' of individuals and groups.

Works of art, especially those preselected as aesthetically interesting by display in museums, may provide unique and interesting experiences, or even stimulate insights to be gained in no other way; it does not follow from the possibility of such experiences, however, that there must be a symmetry between our feelings in the face of a work of art and the significance it might have had for its makers and users. To make this supposition is to project the assumption of the activity of pictorial imagination as essential to art, and to reduce to form all the elements of the appearance of an artifact, thus in effect to make those elements equivalent. To take a simple example, there are sound reasons for a cup to have the configuration it has, however aesthetically pleasing its realization may be. Elements coming to hand for realization, however, are inevitably social and historical, and, as we shall see at length, are not merely formal in the first instance, even if they provide the opportunity for formal synthesis. It is primarily at the level of the many opportunities for aesthetic synthesis presented by the artifacts of many groups that historical interpretation should proceed.

The later eighteenth-century emergence of the understanding of art as 'fine', aesthetic, expressive form was more than an affirmation of the pleasures of imagination, new patterns of consumption, or a scheme for the education of the passions by taste; it was also a prelude to the emergence of a deeper pre-representational pictorial imagination, closely paralleling artistic concerns with relations of pure form – colours, lines, shapes – as primary carriers of meaning. Painting might be compared to music in these terms, paving the way for the twentieth-century innovations of abstraction and expression. To take another example, the importance of essentially non-representational 'decoration' and 'ornament' in the separation of formal means of representation from subject-matter in the late nineteenth century points again to the close relation of a fully assimilated pre-representational pictorial imagination and the historical appearance of abstraction. Finally, the modernist fascination with 'primitive' or 'archaic' art, regarded as the art of historical and cultural origins, may be seen as an attempt to find and express more immediate intuition and representation of the world, thus to make a kind of art that is superior to academic art based on rule and reason, even surpassing the nature and tradition upon which such rule and reason were based.

In some respects form was deeply and simply revolutionary; 'art' is to be seen everywhere, in all cultures, and, as 'form', its best manifestations are of equal value. According to this view, whether individual 'geniuses' or collective 'spirits' are at work, art makes evident the first impulses in which the world is 'formed' and made into a characteristic unity. In these general terms the new discipline of the history of art was a major means by which the implications of the idea of form were worked out and institutionalized. Once isolated, form could be seen to be systematic – some formal features occurred with others – and to exhibit consistent continuities. The emerging discourse of style defined the familiar 'periods' of European art history, and terms like Gothic, Mannerist, Baroque, and Rococo – all of which had historically been 'decadent' deviations from the classical norm – joined the 'development' of European art as equal participants. But if form provided a principle of inclusion for art – and so for periods and cultures – that had been excluded by classical European critical standards, so

that all European art could take a place in a universal scheme of art and history, this inclusiveness was by no means unproblematical. In the first place, supra-individual 'style' and 'sense of form' could and often did provide an essentialist basis for nationalism and racism, so that what might have been a principle of unity – the human disposition to order the world in one way or another, and to enjoy the awareness of the practice and exercise of that disposition – could become a principle of radical difference. As often as not, however, form was connected to cultural evolutionary schemes, thus to provide a deep ideological basis for the domination of the 'earlier' by the 'later', of the 'primitive' by the 'civilized'. (But this was not a simple situation either, since, as I have just noted, the idea of form gave a powerful priority to the 'primitive'.) And whatever the case, formalism demanded that all art be addressed and understood in the ways European philosophy and criticism had come to think art should be addressed and understood.

Thus, while the idea that 'art' is made by people everywhere has had the positive consequence of broadening awareness of the productions of all cultures, it has had the less positive implication that when all is said and done everyone makes 'art' just as we have come to believe we do. But as we shall see, the modern Western view is deeply rooted in its own traditions, and even if we attribute to all cultures (and craft traditions) their own 'aesthetics' because some traits of artifacts are consistently regarded as more desirable or praiseworthy than others, it cannot be supposed that these traits explain the appearances of artifacts taken altogether, nor can it be presumed that what we see as formal characteristics have the significance we might give to them.

The deepest theme of this section has been pictorial imagination. Kant regarded the 'play' of imagination as both free and unifying, but, as the new terrain of the aesthetic was charted, uniformities emerged in the kinds of synthesis (or composition) affording aesthetic pleasure, or in the relations of formal elements found expressive, both of which could be seen to provide keys to human perception and sense-making taken altogether. This in turn contributed to the idea of a uniquely 'visual language', to be discerned (and taught) through the formal analysis of works of art of quality, and applied (and taught) through principles of design. Accordingly, the rejection of formalist for contextual art history in the last thirty years has meant the rejection of the idea of quality, of the principles of design (which continue, however, to shape commercial art and architecture), and of 'internal' formalist art history, based on the assumption that form itself undergoes 'development' or 'evolution'.

As this change has taken place, the idea of pictorial imagination persists in the assumption that art – whether or not it is regarded aesthetically – exists in and as relations. The assumption that forms and their relations are transparently expressive, however, has collapsed, and these changes have effected a transition to a more literal analogy of art and language. On this view, elements in synthetic relations, rather than being imaginative and expressive forms, are conventional signs, as most words are, in which case these relations may be seen to be analogous to grammar and syntax. Works of art, or styles of works of art, become culturally specialized systems of conventional signs. This paradigm, which holds for both structuralism and post-structuralism, raises issues of translation in an acute form. Having been undercut at the outset by the definition of form itself, the

primacy of iconicity (in less general semiotic terms, the traditional Western aim of the imitation of appearances) is replaced by a new kind of representation pointing interpretation in quite different directions. Structuralism offers the prospect of significant pattern at the level of synchronic relation itself, and post-structuralism, more concerned with the paradoxes of representation, offers the possibility of significant pattern at the level of the felt demand for reference in representation. Post-structuralism thus raises questions in many respects closely related to the question of substitution which I shall consider in Chapter 4, on images, although not in the same terms. Neither structuralism nor post-structuralism depart from the postulate of the pictorial imagination underlying formalism, however, and, especially in post-structuralism, point of view is in fact given new psychoanalytic depth; and both, like formalism, continue to deny the possibility of addressing the values and meanings of the conditions of presentation of works of art.

The virtual space of pictorial imagination is separated from actual size, and may in fact be actualized at any practicable size. Pictorial imagination is treated in terms of relations in a field, analogous to a field of vision. Our retinas – the 'little nets' at the back of our eyes – gather patterns of light, dark and colour, relations among which allow us to make inferences, and to connect these patterns to earlier patterns and inferences. The modelling of inner vision on the conditions of the receptivity of the organ of sight has two fundamentally important implications. First, that form, as the indication of the activity of imagination itself, is always apparent in *relations* of forms, which in themselves have no determinate size; and second, that these relations are determined by point of view. To take a simple example, a painting by Kandinsky (Figure 2) displays a non-referential field of formal or 'visual' elements in free, aesthetically determined relations; the organizing imagination at work (or play) is presumed to be Kandinsky's, his 'point of view' in a higher sense. We may look at Kandinsky's painting in the flesh and talk in formal terms about it as an expression of his imagination, but we may also talk about the same internal relations using smaller or larger reproductions.

The separation – or abstraction – of formal relations from size of course does not wholly separate this representation of imaginative vision from real spatial values. Our retinas are normally vertical surfaces, and we interpret our inverted retinal images with respect to our own uprightiness. We might assume or suppose that what we imagine is also upright, and the rectangular field of Kandinsky's painting so to speak supports and confirms that supposition. As I have just said, the rectangular field of the painting may be viewed abstractly as a quasi-visual field for imagined forms; but, regarded more concretely, it is a 'canvas', a culturally specific format some four hundred years old when Kandinsky took it up. It states a 'right' relation to a physically present observer, at the same time that it states a right relation to wall, floor and ceiling. If this more concrete description of circumstances of viewing is extended, it becomes an account of the social spatial or institutional circumstances of a culturally specific observer, one shaped by the expectation that the art of painting, and art in general, be 'visual'. Thus the actual canvas upon which Kandinsky painted may be of limited interest, but, like all formats for painting – and all art in general – is involved (and always has



2 Wassily Kandinsky,  
*Blue Segment*, 1921.  
 Oil on canvas, 119 x 138 cm  
 (47½ x 55¼ in).  
 Solomon R. Guggenheim  
 Museum, New York

been involved) in a system of external relations and connections, in this case, for example, to institutional circumstances of commerce and display. Having said that, however, it must immediately also be said that these connections are not simply historical, nor are they altogether defined by culturally specific social spaces. Any manifestation of cultural difference is finally rooted in real spatial conditions, in terms of which what we call art is meaningful as nothing else is or can be. And all of these conditions in their turn take their irreducible importance from the conditions of human embodiment.

### 3. REAL SPACE, CONDITIONS AND CARDINALITY

*Real space* is ultimately defined by the human body, more specifically by the body's finite spatiotemporality, its typical structure, capacities and relations. These are what I shall call *conditions* of real space. We are finite in being of one or another extent and in being mortal, and these two finitudes are joined in the

succession of our growth, maturation and decline. Our temporality is inseparable from capacities for sensation and movement, and we have determinate grasps, reaches and strides. What I shall call the *cardinal* structure of the human body – its normative uprightness, symmetry (including the asymmetry of handedness) and facing – is reiterated in much of the basic and assumed meaning we take as given in the world around us. Things 'stand' (or do not stand) in relation to our standing, 'face' in being faced by us, just as they are large in relation to our size, heavy or immovable in relation to our strength, resistant, blunt or sharp in relation to our touch and vulnerability. The permanence of stone may be significant at once in contrast to individual mortality, and as analogous to the relative immortality of the groups to which individuals belong.

The word 'condition' itself seems first to have been a legal term, or to have referred to the kinds of transactions regularized by law. It incorporates a form of the Latin word *dicere*, to speak; *condicere* meant to speak with, and *condicio* means agreement, contract, terms. The core metaphor of *dicere* is to show, indicate, or point, and by extension, to show, indicate, or point *by means of language*. (*Dicere* is related to a cluster of Greek words referring to showing or pointing out, thus to other words like 'index' and 'indicate'.) In these etymological terms, the word 'condition' harbours what I shall call a *real spatial metaphor*, and might be taken to mean something like 'to have spoken with in such a way as to indicate'; what is indicated, however, is not so much the process as the result of conversation, an agreement or pact, and, more specifically, a stipulation making agreement possible. I will do this *on the condition* you will do that. (Again by extension, we might be said to agree 'by convention' – another legal metaphor – that a word refers to something when we both understand a language, and may both act as if this reference is so.) In much more general terms, conditions are states of affairs which must exist in order for something else to occur. So philosophers speak of *necessary* conditions, circumstances in the absence of which something further cannot happen. The apple falls from the tree in a predictable way given that – on the condition that – there is a field – or 'law' – of gravity. I will use the term conditions in something like that general sense, but to refer to the given parameters of a human life. So understood, conditions, rather than being mere limitations, are the positive limits within which a human life is possible, that is, within which an actual human life may be led. To be possible is from the Latin *potere*, to be able, and feasible is from the Latin *facere*, to do or make. Both 'possibility' and 'feasibility' refer to capacities to bring things about, to effect things, in the space we actually share with them.

The conditional basis of human activities is for all intents and purposes common and universal, and at all times we live and act within these limits. Individuals vary in these terms – some cannot stand at all, for example, while others move with extraordinary strength and ease. But conditions are deeper than individual differences, and the specific circumstances of any human existence can finally only add to the definition of the possibilities for human existence taken altogether. Art works both with and against conditions. The skills of dancers and athletes, for example, at once acknowledge, exploit and test the conditions of usual activity and movement, defying gravity, moving with extraordinary, or even seemingly impossible, facility, economy and grace.

The conditions of our own real spatiality entail the broader conditions of our finding ourselves in the world. We do not simply face, but face other people, and things come to 'face' us as we move, but also as they are objects of attention, intention or concern. There is a peculiar, deep, and seemingly absolute certainty about the understandings that take shape around conditions, even though conditions must always be experienced in terms of what I shall discuss in a later section as 'second nature'. This certainty is different both from what we know by logical inference, or from what we know intuitively. Matters at hand are also true in the sense that we may trust them to be much as we find them and have found them, so that we are able to act as if they are what we treat them as being. By far the greater part of our lives is conducted on the basis of such trust, which is in no way abstract, but is continually deepened, solidified and amended by the experience of our own changing bodies and capabilities. The certainties arising from our having walked (and not just talked) among things and people, of having moved ourselves and things, of finding ourselves to have such-and-such capacities in relation to people and things, to be like and unlike them, all these experiential certainties and more, although 'thoughtless' in the normal conduct of our affairs, are the foundations for the most basic meanings we give to space (and inseparable time). The absolute importance of this conditional level of certainty may be quickly grasped by recalling any of the circumstances in which such usually unremarkable actions as rising, standing or walking cannot be taken for granted. We count such circumstances among threats to life itself, the consequences of decline, of misfortune and disaster, accident and cruelty, of disease and famine, punishment and war. At the same time, awareness of conditional deficiencies has an absolute ethical dimension, since it implies a definition of human worth precisely in terms of a full and complete conditionality. This definition is acknowledged in the finest human projects, from simply helping the fallen to their feet, to the prevention and correction of the many possibilities for human limitation and suffering conditionality also entails.

Just as we must more or less tacitly and unconsciously acknowledge the universal conditions of real spatiality throughout our lives, human social spaces and artifacts – the arts taken as a whole – must also acknowledge and respect these same conditions. Because of this fit, all art has a certain universality, even if it is also a principle of difference and division. To be sure, social spaces and artifacts are always formed in specific ways, developing some conditional possibilities more than others, or rather than others, in response to different social purposes. Social spaces and artifacts are also formed in specific ways that distinguish groups from one another, and make distinctions within groups themselves. I shall be concerned in detail with how these differentiations are made. But it is still always necessary to bear in mind their more basic conditionality, the stalk from which these myriad differences grow, and the foundation for the scheme of interpretation I shall be advancing. The world has its primordial everyday life in conditional relations even if it must come to hand in culturally specific forms. The 'anthropomorphism' of the conditions and values of real space provides the irreducible basis for the meanings given to the world in which we must find ourselves in any cultural circumstance, and for our self-understanding *through* that world. It is precisely because we, like any of those who made (and make) places and artifacts

with which we are unfamiliar, in the first instance stand, face, grow, move and die, that we may begin to understand social spaces and their associated practices and values as alternative to our own.

As I have remarked, the conditions of human physical existence, although separable and analysable in themselves, entail external relations, which in turn present their own conditions. Relations to things out of which other things may be made – out of which *art* may be made – present conditions with which I will be concerned through most of this book. To take a simple example, a boulder might be used as part of the boundary of a *social space*, thus to articulate both a place and relations among members of a group (as I shall discuss in Chapter 2). The same boulder, however, might also provide what I shall call *conditions of presentation* (which I shall discuss in detail in the first section of Chapter 1). It might be fractured in order to make tools or weapons; and it might also be used to make images, either as a substitute, a *real metaphor*, or as a *surface* for an image of quite a different kind, an engraving, or a drawing with virtual space and time (both of which I shall discuss in Chapter 4). However much circumstances may vary from place to place, and whatever materials might come to hand, conditions of presentation always come to hand. That is, in one way or another, it is always possible to make, not only social spaces, but substitutes and images on surfaces. To be sure, local exigencies may delimit conditions of presentation in any given case, and images must be made and used in different ways if, for example, only pebbles or bits of bone or wood are available for fashioning. Such necessity, however, simply means once again that external conditions interlock in one way or another with the conditions of human physicality. At the same time, realizations in terms of specific available conditions point not only to the limitations of those conditions, but to distinctly human motivations, needs and desires, and the various histories of art might be seen as fields of accommodation between these drives and the conditions of human life. This continues to be true as conditions of presentation change from the simple examples of given objects and surfaces I have been discussing to much more elaborate and culturally specific formats; the canvases of European painting, like Chinese screens, however differently shaped to social spaces and practices each may be, still respect the cardinality and general conditionality of their observers.

Do conditions have histories? If objects are always present to be used substitutively, and always present surfaces, once used in one way or another they tend to develop in ways compatible with their first uses, as I shall discuss in Chapter 1. At the same time, the other option is always open, and changes from one use to another may also be seen to involve very different relations to observers. Some conditional values are lost as others are gained, and such changes may be desirable or undesirable. For most of human history, the fundamental conditions of presentation have remained much the same, the great exception to this being *planar surfaces*, which, as I will also argue in Chapter I, are themselves products of human making. Planarity provides the conditions of presentation for hierarchical relations and operations involving measure and ratio, as we shall see at length in Chapter 5; it also makes human cardinality and its relations to the world articulatable in new terms. More generally, technology has modified some of the millennial terms of human conditionality, making possible, for example, the

actual experience of weightlessness, of high speed, of instantaneity and simultaneity, or of illumination, animation, and automation, in turn making possible new conditions of presentation. Less positively, technology has also made the human body the potential subject of forces of utterly unprecedented magnitude, and of violation and disintegration of previously unimaginable kinds.

As I have stated in the Introduction, *real space* is to be distinguished from the co-ordinate, mathematical space of classical modern physics, the *metaspatial* space of Chapter 7. This has become the space of modern – now more than Western – technology, commerce and communication; it is fundamental to the prediction and control of forces defining the development of the distinctively modern world, and it has become the space of modern Western common sense. In this space, presumed to be a pre-existent isometric, isotropic container of infinite extent, we may plot the position and movement of any object (or point) in relation to any other. Although any real space may be described relative to this co-ordinate system, the specific origin and configuration of real spaces cannot be understood through such description. It is possible, for example, to measure our position relative to the surface of a painting hanging on the wall of a museum gallery (or anywhere else), to measure the gallery itself, and precisely to plot its location on a map, but these positions in metric space have nothing to do with the historically and culturally determined values of the institutional space in which this encounter takes place. In fact, the description of institutional spaces in metric, technological terms implies the equivalence of real spaces and thus tends positively to conceal their historically and culturally determined values.

Co-ordinate space is not simply a passive container for the marking of relations established in other ways; on the contrary, it is the framework for the channelling and control of modern resources, natural, economic and human. The transformation of the given world effected literally by means of this framework is a continual self-generation of the framework itself, and is anything but abstract in its consequences. The skyline of any modern city, with its glass and steel towers, might be regarded as an image of this matrix for an ideal efficiency, determined in one way or another by available land and the structural capacities of materials, but also inherently limitless and scaleless. And if modern Western co-ordinate space is fundamentally at odds with the values of real space and place (as I will argue at several points that it is), the transformations it makes possible also yield their own intentional and unintentional real spaces, and raise their own issues of place.

Finally, a word should be said about the relations between economic conditions and conditions as I have just defined them. Connections must be close because of the high generality of 'art' as I shall be using the term, and because the word 'economy' applies to everything from subsistence to corporate capitalism. Both art and economy are always there in human groups, and if art is the fashioning of distinctive human social spaces and artifacts, there is generally a correlation between the complexity of the differentiation of these places and artifacts and socio-economic complexity. Art in fact provides the basic indications of social spatial complexity, and, again in general, this complexity is hierarchical. Hierarchy in turn entails differential access to resources and their uses, and therefore further entails relations of power. But in the chapters to follow, art will be seen to be

structural (as opposed to superstructural) in the actual institutionalizations of social relations as social spaces. It would run counter to the rejection of collective 'aesthetics' argued for in the last section to suppose that works of art in themselves 'express' either idealist or materialist 'worldviews'; rather social spaces themselves display inclusions and exclusions, and particular formations of conditions within these divisions. As for the economic conditions for the rise of Western modernism, the closely entwined developments of technology and capitalism cannot be presumed to be one reducible to the other, and modernist art is deeply linked to both. If technology produces wealth, and wealth more and better technology, both tending toward expansion and responding to a logic of efficiency, it cannot be assumed that the possibilities presented by technology for new conditions and conditions of presentation may be defined as expressions of deeper economic circumstances.

#### 4. THE 'VISUAL ARTS' AND THE SPATIAL ARTS

If formalism is rejected must we also reject the general concept of art it provided? I do not believe so, and the arguments of the last section may be extended and expanded by replacing the lingering formalist notion of the 'visual arts' by what I call the *spatial arts*. This change will retain at least the breadth of the general concept, while denying art's exclusive and reductive association with sight and vision, thus shifting the base of art's universality from the presumed constitution of the world by human imagination to the conditions of human corporeality and spatial existence, and to actual world building.

The first section of this chapter might be summarized by saying that when we call the arts 'visual', we do not simply mean that they are about what we see, or, more truisitically still, that they are visible. The 'vision' at issue is the inner imaginative and formative vision I have called pictorial imagination. According to the alternative offered by the spatial arts, works of art are achieved not just in imagination but among real forms involving and shaping human uses; as the immediate results of the more or less specialized activities of makers, works of art are integral both to traditional, habitual activities and to new circumstances. To be sure, forms articulating human space and time may be combined in ways that have the additional significance of being more or less pleasing and satisfying to the eye. The crucial point, however, is that the genesis and meaning of works cannot be explained, nor can the rules of their combination be explained, merely by reference to the character of a visual or formal synthesis. The demand for explanation posed by works of art is more complex and multilayered, and at base all art must acknowledge in making and in use the real spatial conditions of human existence.

The abandonment of the 'visual arts' in favour of the 'spatial arts' involves a corresponding rise in the importance of the other sensory modes by which spaces and times were (and are) both defined and experienced. The ancient past, surviving in skeletal fragments demanding completion and reconstruction, encourages the abstract visual in our mind's eye. Having outlasted their makers, builders and users, the forms of the past persist utterly without their living surroundings and associations of sound, touch, taste and smell. Even colour is lost or changed. But sound is as essential to the definition and use of spaces as the

walls that enclose them – acoustics, for example, has its own absolute personal and social spatial limits and values – and the burning of incense and sacrifices may be as indispensable to distinguish a temple precinct as the less fugitive images or boundaries with which I shall necessarily be mostly concerned.

The rejection of the ‘visual’ as the presumed basis of the address to all art not only separates art from the sense of sight in general, it more specifically separates it from optical naturalism – the traditional European imitation of appearances – and from the more general psychology of visual perception (which might be called abstract vision). As we have seen, identification of art with any of these eliminates at the outset fundamental categories of meaning and factors of historical continuity and change. No less important, the reduction of art to the modelling of perception eliminates the possibility of considering the psychological tradition itself, as well as the relations of this tradition to artmaking, as themselves historical. Most art has been made outside the assumptions of Western representationalist psychology altogether, just as the assumptions of this psychology, and the intellectual and critical principles rooted in it, have exerted continual pressure on Western art from its ancient beginnings as a distinct tradition to the present. As I shall discuss in later chapters, the perennial Western aim of imitation is actually fractured into critical disputes about what kinds of mental images – sensations, concepts, fantasies or ideas, for example – are able to be, or should be, imitated.

The visual arts implied ‘viewers’ who are sensitive to formal relations and expressions. To be sure, some works of art were (and are) meant primarily to be viewed, and many more may be seen with interest or pleasure. In the chapters to follow, however, I will use the word ‘observer’ to refer to those who stand in one or another social spatial relation to works of art. ‘Observe’, unlike the more purely visual terms ‘view’ or ‘behold’, possesses a useful ambivalence; we may use the word as a synonym for ‘see’, or to mean ‘to look closely’ (which is more like its root meanings); but we may also ‘observe’ a rule, a holiday or a custom, meaning that we behave in appropriate ways. ‘Observers’ do not simply *see* the work but rather know and observe the decorum of the work and its setting. This is as true of New York gallery- and museum-goers as it was of those who used Magdalenian cave paintings in whatever ways they did. Such observances have their own social spatial histories, and it tells us, for example, very much about the modern world to explain how we have come to look in the ways we think appropriate at altarpieces or mandalas in national museums.

When we look at European art (around which the discipline of the history of art was founded), even if we do not know much about it, and have not been taught to ‘look’ at it, we bring a more or less focused background to the experience. We may recognize certain works, themes or styles, but much more than that, we bring familiarity with formats, circumstances and conventions of display as well as expectations about the presentation and use of visual information, and attitudes (positive or negative) about the meaning, importance and value of art and its social purposes in general. It is precisely at this level of habit and expectation that some of the most crucial differences (and similarities) in traditions of images and artifacts are to be located and addressed; this is also where we must look to understand why in basic respects works of art were made to appear

to us as they do. This is true in a double sense; because other real spatial habits and expectations than ours determined the fit of works of art from other times and places to their first spaces of use, just as specific institutional histories led to the circumstances in which we encounter these works in the present.

##### 5. REAL SPACE AND VIRTUAL SPACE

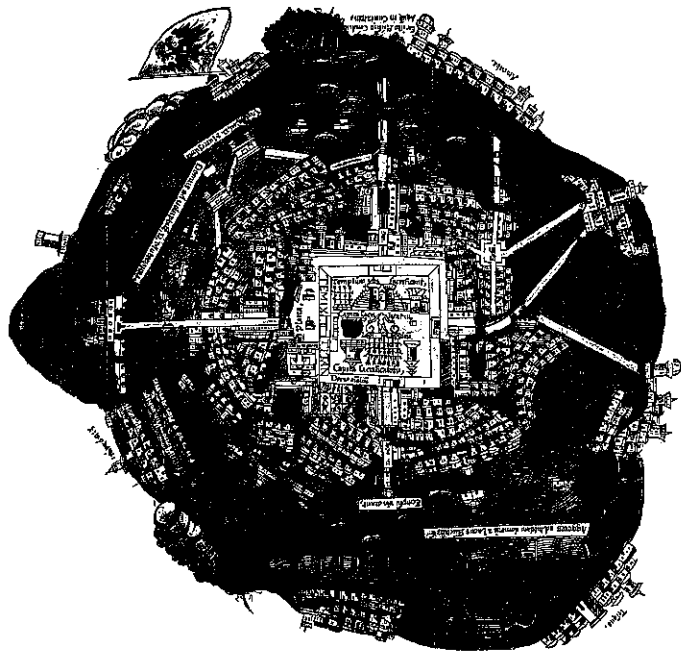
*Real space* is the space we find ourselves sharing with other people and things; *virtual space* is space represented on a surface, space we ‘seem to see’. In fact, space can only be represented visually as virtual, but at the same time we always encounter a virtual space in a real space.

Sculpture and architecture are the principal arts of real space. Within the general category of real space, sculpture is the art of *personal space* and architecture is the art of *social space*.

*Personal space* is articulated by relations of artifacts to the real spatial conditions of our embodied existences, that is, our sizes, uprightness, facing, handedness, vulnerability, temporal finitude, capacities for movement, strengths, reaches and grasps. A marble colossus is fundamentally significant in these terms, but so is a clay figurine or an amulet. Tangibility, manipulability, portability, possessability, and their opposites are also characteristics meaningful in terms of fundamental personal spatial categories. As I shall discuss at length, the formats of painting share some of these values, but in very different terms, and within distinct limitations.

Architecture is the art of social space because it both encloses and includes institutions; it is the means by which human groups are set in their actual arrangements. This definition embraces suburban American houses as well as Maya ritual centres or Chinese imperial capital cities. More specifically, architecture is the shaping and relative distinction of *places* (the subject of Chapter 2). As social space, architecture embraces the specifically articulated personal space of sculpture as well as the formats necessary for virtual spaces, and the conditional categories of personal space are embraced by those of social space, much as individuals belong to groups. Social spaces entail correlative social times, even if the images or texts that also shaped collective and personal conduct in one way or another often survive only in part, if they survive at all. These correlative times – rituals and festivals, for example – if more reconstructable in some cases than in others, can often be only dimly imagined.

Painting and the graphic arts are principal arts of *virtual space*. We may look at a frescoed wall, at painted stone or brick, at a scroll or a sheet of paper or canvas, and seem to look ‘into’ its surface; we may see an apparent three-dimensional reality, a vast panorama, a furious battle, a table with dishes and fruit, or a person in an armchair. A virtual space is always an *image on a surface* (as opposed to a substitute, the primary values of which are real spatial). Virtual spaces are always *representations* of space, and we can see any number of specific representations as spatial. Whatever the differences between them, we immediately see both a Mesolithic rock painting and an Italian Renaissance perspective construction as spatial (and spatiotemporal). In these, and in all cases, virtual spaces have something of the ‘virtue’, or force, of spaces and things we actually experience.



3 Map of Tenochtitlan (detail), from H. Cortez, *Praeclara de Nova Maris Oceani Hispania Narratio*, Nuremberg, 1524. Woodcut, 31 x 46.5 cm (12¼ x 18¼ in). Newberry Library, Chicago

Virtual spaces may be made to describe and record actual places and times, or they may simply seem to do so, projecting and elaborating imaginary ones. In all cases the space itself is credible, occupiable and traversable only in imagination; it can also never adequately represent a real space, or correspond to one. Nor can the 'forms' in virtual space ever be complete; on the contrary, they demand what I shall call *completion* on the part of an observer. Whatever illusionistic force they may have, virtual spaces show what is always at an unbridgeable remove, at a distance in space or time, another present, a past or future. Again, however, this is not a limitation. The same conditions under which virtual spaces cannot fully represent what they show mean that they may be specifically bounded and qualified apparent regions of space and time for an observer, within which things seem to exist in certain ways. That is, virtual spaces are always positively *not* real spaces, even though they seem to refer to spaces that are real, or might be real.

The encounter of an observer with a virtual space, before it is an encounter with a vast panorama or a furious battle, takes place before a culturally specific *format* – a screen, polyptych or book, for example – in personal and social space, as I shall discuss in Chapter 4. The interactions of these real spaces and virtual spaces are in principle endlessly variable adaptations to any number of histori-

cal situations. To return to an earlier example, 'canvas' is a term we use almost as a synonym for painting, and we think of landscapes and still lifes, for example, as more or less indifferent to their surroundings. It is institutionally significant, however, that most canvases were meant from very early on to be bought and used in whatever way a buyer might wish; furthermore, a fairly strict decorum prevails within the bounds of this latitude. We assume that landscapes and still lifes are appropriately destined only for certain spaces – private, gallery or museum spaces – in which certain uses and certain reactions to them are appropriate. This cultural arrangement, however, is itself an example of interaction of virtual space, format and social space.

#### 6. AN IMAGE IN REAL SPACE: THE AZTEC COATLICUE

In this section I will consider an image predominantly significant in terms of real spatial values, the colossal Aztec *Coatlicue*, or Serpent Skirt, which first stood in the central precinct of Tenochtitlan (Figure 3), and is now in the Museo Antropologico in Mexico City. I have chosen it, and have chosen to discuss it first, because it is a rich example of the articulation of the values of real space, but also because the experience of this extraordinary sculpture helped set me on the path that led to this book.

The *Coatlicue* (Figures 4 and 5) is one of the principal survivors of the destruction in 1521 of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (now under Mexico City) by the small army of Hernando Cortez and the allies he had gathered on his march to central Mexico. The sculpture was buried, then unearthed in 1790 when the Zocalo in Mexico City was repaved. At that point the *Coatlicue* began to play an important role in the formation of Mexican national and cultural consciousness. Interesting as these questions of modern use may be (and also explainable in real spatial terms as they may be), I will concentrate on explaining why the sculpture might have been made as it was for its first space of use.

The great mass of volcanic stone necessary to establish the substitutive presence of this terrible deity in the place of Aztec origin also made it possible for her powers to be ritually addressed and supplicated. Such stones are often columnar, but this one has been quarried, that is, cut squared from live rock, in this case with wood and stone tools, and transported to the temple precinct without wheels or draught animals, neither of which the Aztecs used. The *Coatlicue* is thus one with the stones of the earth and like the stones of the structures in its precinct. Not only is the material identity of image, mountain and sacred structures possibly significant, but the working and transportation of the great stone – like the working and transportation of all the stones used in building the precinct – display the power to command and organize labour on behalf of the people and the gods. The squaring of the stone is also all-important because it provides the conditions for the planar presentation of the image, and for its integration with the planar directional order of the sacred place in which it stood.

The shaft of volcanic stone from which *Coatlicue* was carved is about 2.5 metres (8 feet 6 inches) high. This shaft is irregularly shaped, although from the front it looks like a stable rectangle of sturdy proportions, about 8:5 counting the arms in the width. When viewed from the side, the block tilts slightly forward and looms over anyone standing before it, so that the simplest personal spatial



4 *Coatlicue* ('Serpent Skirt'),  
c.1487-1500, from Tenochtitlan.  
Andesite, height 3.45m (11 ft  
4 in), Museo Nacional de  
Antropología, Mexico City

Opposite  
5 *Coatlicue*, back



address to the image is filled with threat and portent. The back of the shaft (Figure 5) slopes even more sharply toward the front, rising like the stairway of an impossibly steep temple platform from the broad foundation of the outsized clawed feet in a truncated wedge to the mask at the top.

Coatlicue, identified by her skirt of living snakes, combines the powers of several deities, and is thus what I shall define in Chapter 4 as an *icon*. Coatlicue was the mythic mother of Huitzilopochtli ('Hummingbird Left' or 'South'; the south is to the left of one facing west, perhaps like the rising sun), the patron war, fire and sun god of the Aztecs. Like all Aztec deities (including Huitzilopochtli), Coatlicue could have many aspects. Here she is associated with earth, water and fertility, but also clearly with sacrifice and the death necessary to life.

Four roads along the cardinal directions led into the great square of the sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan, centre both of the city and of the Aztec empire (Figure 3). Through substitution (Chapter 4) and the planar arrangement (Chapter 5) of iconic elements, Coatlicue's powers were located as fully as possible in this centre, established by Huitzilopochtli himself, and the various sacred platforms in its great square all respected the cardinal alignment. The dominant direction was east and west, an axis defined by the rising of the sun on the vernal equinox, the beginning of spring, marked by a great festival. Coatlicue's image must have stood in some association with its main temple platforms, twin sacred mountains coupling the rites of Huitzilopochtli and those of the much older and more properly indigenous mountain, storm, rain and water god Tlaloc. In Figure 3 this twin temple is shown at the top, the disk of the rising sun just visible between its two halves. The temple of Huitzilopochtli is to our right. The double structure is identified in the Cortez map as 'the temple where they sacrifice' and the *tzompantli*, or skull rack, is shown on the lower, western side of the precinct.

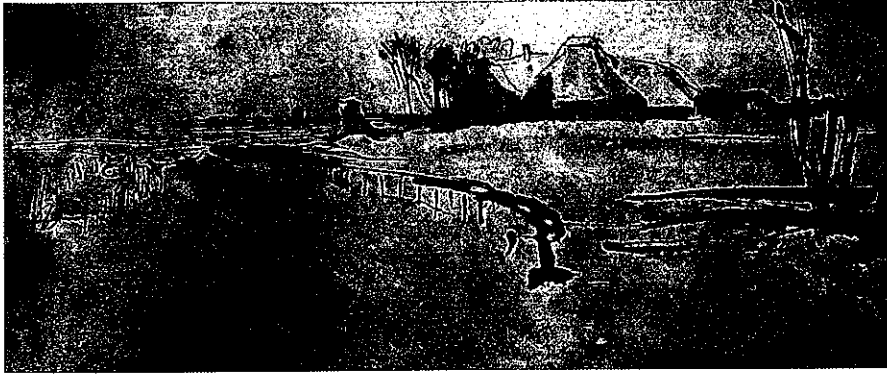
According to the mythical account, Huitzilopochtli had no father. While Coatlicue was tending the shrine in a state of penance on the sacred mountain of Coatepec (Serpent Mountain), a ball of feathers fell on her breast and she became pregnant. Her many children, sometimes identified with the stars, thinking she had been dishonoured, took arms against her and decapitated her. That is how she is shown in the sculpture, with large coral snakes coiling up out of the neck from which her head has been severed. As if to join the necessary polarities of cosmic life and death, Huitzilopochtli was born fully armed at the moment of this grisly matricide. He killed his siblings, his sister Coyolxauqui chief among them. (A large round relief showing in profile the dismembered Coyolxauqui was found at the foot of the temple platform of Huitzilopochtli, just as Huitzilopochtli is described as having thrown her body down from Coatepec.) The story of the birth of Huitzilopochtli has been explained as giving mythic form to the originative rising from the earth of the sun, powerful enough to banish the stars and hide or vitiate the waxing and waning moon; but at a more properly cosmogonic level it might mean that when one god became the sun, and gave orientation to the earth from his centre, the other gods died or were banished; or at a more political level it might mean that the principal Aztec deity not only defined the world from his centre, but that, in becoming central, he asserted dominion over all local deities, at once absorbing their powers and demanding tribute.

For the Aztecs, the rising of the sun could not be taken for granted. The ages

of time were called 'suns', and the completion of a cycle of solar and ritual years was the occasion of great anxiety. Human sacrifice continually nourished the sun. Coatlicue is shown as having herself been sacrificed so that the sun might be born (and so that the sun, and perhaps the rulers who identified with the sun, might be strong and powerful). The sculpture allows this titanic generative force to be faced, addressed, and sacrificed to, thus to be sustained or increased. Coatlicue is not slain, but rather lives in her having been slain; the blood-serpents coiling from the ribbed wound of her neck turn to confront each other, forming a new full-face mask out of their profiles, a single horrible countenance with double fangs and bifid tongue. These confronted profiles obey an anthropomorphic symmetry that governs the whole frontal view of the sculpture, a schematic symmetry that makes her apparent as human, a 'great woman', and states her attributes with maximum fullness. Coatlicue's clavicle and slack breasts are set out with vivid descriptiveness, but the nourishing nipples of her breasts are concealed by a necklace of hearts and hands, from which hangs a skull, frontal and central, its arc echoing the shape of her breasts, its compass-circular eyes like those of the confronted heads of the snakes above. Behind this skull two more serpents are knotted, forming a belt supporting the skirt that gives the deity her name. Coatlicue's arms are flexed upwards, and from her cuffed wrists, perhaps because her hands have also been severed, coiled serpents arise, like those forming the head, but smaller, as if to strike. They face us on either side, above paper strips rendered in stone beneath the cuffs covering her forearms. Her joints, elbows, and shoulders, cruxes of movement and life, are emblazoned and protected by 'demon face' masks, much like the ones on sacrificial knives and at the joints of the earth monster, Tlahtecuhtli ('Earth Lord'), with whom Coatlicue shares attributes (and whose image is on her under side). If the snakes replacing head and hands above are gushing blood, then perhaps the snake between her taloned feet is menses, or the power of menses, once again the blood of the mother sacrificed to the birth of the Aztec patron deity.

The subsidiary side views of the image are identical to one another, although rotated, symmetrical relative to the same axis governing the major front surface. Because the two snakes whose profiles form her face are complete, Coatlicue also has an identical face to the rear (Figure 5). The necklace of hearts and hands is tied between her square, coiled-snake shoulders, and there is a large skull at the waist. The angle of the block as a whole, a pair of superimposed feather aprons, and the shape of the great taloned feet principally distinguish the front and back faces as respectively major and minor. Coatlicue is thus whole in a literally supernatural way, possible because a freestanding planar surface has a back and a front. Not only is one face of her image set out with the same clarity and uniformity as the other, but Coatlicue literally faces in both directions, and if one face is relatively more empowered (with hands, breasts, talons), the same image still 'sees' before and behind, to the east and to the west, along lines defined by the planar surfaces of the block of stone itself.

The anthropomorphic symmetry of Coatlicue's presentation involves her in a larger social spatial order of interpenetrating cosmic, mythic and political significance, set out according to interlocking planar principles of alignment, division and bounding. We do not know exactly where in the sacred precinct



6 Rembrandt, *Landscape with a Farmstead* ('*Winter Landscape*'), c.1648–50. Pen, ink and wash on paper, 6.6 × 15.8 cm (2½ × 6¼ in). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Coatlucue stood, although she must have been associated in some way with the Great Temple. In any case, a version of the significant spatial order of which she and her rituals were certainly a part was repeated on the bottom of her image. There, where it could never have been seen while the sculpture stood in place, is the image of the earth monster Tlahltecutli. Visible or not, this image completed the powers of the larger image, placing it in contact not just with the earth but with the central, oriented and bounded earth of the sacred precinct. The undersides of other images from the temple precinct bear similar images. Tlahltecutli is shown with attributes of Tlaloc. This potent deity of rain and storm, to whom half of the Great Temple was dedicated, mingled, like Coatlicue herself, powers of life and death. Tlahltecutli-Tlaloc has skulls at its joints and extremities, but is also in a birth posture, bearing a glyph meaning 'earth' and 'creation'. As if to mark the core of the planar and axial image of Coatlicue, whose location on the face of the earth Tlahltecutli's image both states and sanctifies, a feathered shield with a quincunx over the torso of the hidden image shows the four directions and the centre. The head of this deity is to the minor 'back' side of Coatlicue, and the act of birth is toward her front, perhaps because she was in the east, facing west, as Huitzilopochtli rose from the earth in the east each day to begin his westward daily course across the heavens, along the path of the unblinking, living death-gaze of his mutilated but ever-regenerative mother. Thus the image of Coatlicue embodies, substitutively and in powerful attributes set out in a planar order integral with a larger ritual, social, political and finally cosmic planar order, the paradoxical forces of the earth, which is the womb of life and the abode of death both for humankind and for the sun. Coatlicue was associated with the west she faced, in its turn associated both with life and death, but gives birth from the east.

#### 7. VIRTUAL SPACE AND THE PRIMACY OF REAL SPACE

As I have stated, and as we shall see in detail in Chapter 6, possibilities for the development of virtual space arise whenever an image is put on a surface, and

these possibilities are especially highly developed in certain traditions. The pen drawing by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Rembrandt (Figure 6) belongs to one of these traditions. When we see this drawing we do not just see a tiny bit of paper with a few marks on it (much less do we see the *reproduction* of a tiny bit of paper and a few marks on the larger page of a printed book). Instead we see the contrast of ink and paper as an optical contrast of light and dark surfaces. 'In' or 'through' this bit of paper and by means of these few marks we might say that we see a cold, still winter landscape, a quiet, icy-silver sky, and snow-covered ground, against whose blank brightness objects stand in dark, dormant contrast. Rembrandt has most skilfully exploited our capacity to see three dimensions in two; that is, he has created a virtual space out of the surface of the paper, a space at once evidently descriptive but perhaps imaginary, into which our eyes may seem to enter, as if through the frame of the little rectangle of paper. He has also transformed the qualities of the simple materials he used into qualities of the prospect he has shown us. Other words might occur to other viewers to describe the sky I called 'quiet' and 'icy-silver', or to describe the snow I called 'blank' and 'bright', but it is most important that we feel such characterization to be legitimate and necessary, and that Rembrandt has made us see these qualities of places and things in nothing more than the off-white of a piece of paper.

The contrast between the actual size of Rembrandt's drawing and the great expanse of Dutch sky and countryside it seems to show us may illustrate both the meaning of virtual space as a category and the strength of our inclination to see spaces in surfaces. But however much the illusion of the virtual space Rembrandt has made may seem to have transformed and even to have denied the bit of paper supporting it, that bit of paper still exists in *real space*; that is, it exists in the space we share with it and has meanings and values – and a history of meanings and values – in that space (or in those spaces).

As we address the drawing now, its real spatial values, and, more specifically, its personal spatial values qualify the character of the virtual space at the deepest level. It is in relation to the size of our bodies and hands that the drawing is small, portable and possessable; it is in relation to our facing that it faces, has a back and front, a top and bottom, a left and right, and it is in relation to our verticality that the horizontality of the landscape is meaningful, and that the rectangle of paper has been cropped. All these simple features establish the evidently 'right' way of looking at the drawing. Again, Rembrandt evidently made the drawing as one might write, on an upward-facing surface, so that the ink has puddled and dried in certain ways. When hung vertically for modern museum display the marks therefore seem suspended, free from gravity, which helps to make the landscape seem hovering, distant, available only to sight. The drawing is cursive and autographic, like the signature of a letter, and in the abbreviated indications of the objects and shadows in the landscape we may sense the actual movements of Rembrandt's eye and hand in making them. At the same time that it is distant, this view was also evidently made by a right-handed person, and the evident hand and handedness of Rembrandt give the drawing 'personality' and intimacy, qualities enhanced by the fragility, even the ephemerality, of the paper itself. The intimate scale of the marks complements the close viewing distance demanded by the small size; and for all its dazzling virtuoso illusionism, which seems at

once to seize the eye, the drawing must be closely examined, like a signature so often repeated that it is not at once legible.

Not only does Rembrandt's drawing have the basic, personal spatial values I have just listed, and not only is it the evident consequence of highly developed skill in exploiting virtuality, but the paper itself, in addition to being the support of the drawing, is also an artifact, if not a work of art as we usually think of one. It (along with the ink used to make the drawing) is a product, with a history in its own right. Although the word 'paper' itself looks back to ancient Egyptian papyrus through Greek and Latin, modern paper came to the West from China, where it was invented, by way of the Arab world, and had only been in use in Europe since the late Middle Ages, replacing parchment. In each episode of its historical life papermaking was (and is) the result of the gathering and preparation of materials, the application of specific technologies, and more or less local and personal processes and techniques. It was also in each case adapted to culturally specific purposes, which it helped to shape and change. Rembrandt no doubt bought the paper, which might have been used for a number of purposes (and which must of course be genuine in order for the drawing upon it to be a 'Rembrandt'). The drawing may thus be placed in a number of economic- and technological-historical contexts through inferences from its most basic features that could not be drawn just by thinking about the character of the illusion, that is, of virtual space as I have described it.

At another level of real spatial significance, Rembrandt's drawing was made in and for certain social and institutional circumstances, which have themselves changed. The drawing was made with the understanding that its virtues might be appreciated by a certain audience, and that, more or less directly, it might have value in a certain market. Such a sketch or study, its relation to some larger, more finished work notwithstanding, was made in circumstances in which drawings were prized and collected, displayed for small groups of connoisseurs, and whatever Rembrandt's own purposes might have been, the drawing and its qualities had value in those circumstances. The simple characteristics of the drawing I have just reviewed also suit it to a history of private ownership finally leading to our viewing it today in a modern public collection. The history of Rembrandt's drawing in real spaces – and, more specifically, its history in *social* spaces, its movement from owner to owner, and from institution to institution – thus determines both the circumstances for which the drawing was made and the circumstances in which we see it now. When we look 'into' the virtual space of Rembrandt's drawing, framed and hung on the wall of a museum, its presentation has already placed us in a specific construction of real space, in what is understood to be the optimal relation to the drawing, which is at 'normal' height and distance, straight with respect to the floor and ceiling and with respect to our presumed uprightness. The circumstances in which we face and view it, however, are not simply those of an ideal 'viewer' because the museum itself is a social space, to which certain kinds of behaviour are appropriate. Contemporary artists make works with gallery and museum spaces expressly in mind, but this is highly unusual historically, and for the most part we do not see works in museums in anything like the real spaces to which they originally belonged. At the same time, part of the historical interest of any work is determined by the

series of real spaces through which it has passed. Much significant history is missed if these elements are overlooked or ignored.

The preceding arguments lead to conclusions that will guide the arguments to follow. First, real space is prior to virtual space because virtual spaces always presuppose determinate real surfaces – *formats* – to support them. Again, an oil painting presupposes a canvas, the canvas is of a certain shape and size, meant for a more or less definite location and a more or less definite use. These locations and uses, these immediate contexts, are always culturally specific. The word 'format' is from the Latin meaning 'formed', and, although some artists might invent new formats, this happens very rarely. Instead, formats are typically already at hand, already shaped by larger social purposes. To return to the example of canvas, the word 'canvas' (from the Latin *cannabis*, hemp, from which such fabric was sometimes woven) became synonymous with 'painting' together with emerging modern patterns of patronage, when painters began to paint speculatively, not for the definite places and occasions of religious and civic patronage, but for private patrons who appreciated new, distinct subject-matter and also appreciated unique displays of individual style and imagination, which were as personally possessable for buyers as they were personal expressions for painters. Oil painting and the format of the canvas admirably lent themselves to these emergent modern purposes. This brief history could be much expanded; the important point is that such a history can always be written, and that the representation of virtual space – in addition to being culturally specific in its own right – is always united with a format and therefore with a construction of real space, which is thus prior to any representation. Both the making and the specific history of works of art are inseparable from the specific historical circumstances, or, in the terms I am using, the real spatial circumstances, in which they were made and used, and much about these circumstances may be inferred from the most basic facture of the works themselves.

#### 8. GIVEN NATURE AND SECOND NATURE

Although they are universal, real spatial conditions never exist in themselves and are always culturally shaped. But because the everyday behaviour set in real spatial conditions simply *is* the fabric and substance of our lives, the substratum of our conscious purposes and actions (as well as our unconscious motivations), the conviction arises that this certainty is rooted in nature, that the things we do with such a degree of thoughtless certainty are natural. To be sure, these certainties *are* grounded in the conditions of our physical existences and in the limits and possibilities of these conditions; but they must just as surely be grounded in the 'second nature' we learn as members of one culture rather than another. Real space, in always being concrete and lived, is thus both *natural and conventional*; that is, it belongs both to nature and to *second nature*. We learn to walk, talk and gesture, but we must also learn these things as members of cultures, and so learn to do so in specific ways, to which certain values and meanings are attached. We may all face, but as members of cultures we habitually 'face' certain tasks and are directed in specific ways to specific goals. Even if these tasks and goals are merely normative, in that there are countless compromises with them and deviations from them, this behaviour is still defined negatively with respect to

them. In general the given conditions of human physical existence are shaped in any number of ways as culture, and, more specifically, as art.

Imitation is not only mimicry or mirroring, as we might think of painting as 'imitating nature', and when Aristotle wrote we are pleased by imitation in painting because we are the most imitative animals he meant that imitation is the primary means of our socialization. In these more general terms, imitation means following examples. We learn to walk as we become able to imitate those who walk, to talk as we become able to imitate those who talk. Imitation involves the deepest and simplest teaching and learning, and is thus a primary means for the transmission and preservation of cultural practices and values and therefore a primary means for the transmission and preservation of cultures themselves.

By the time we learn to speak a language we already possess a deep reservoir of culturally shaped real spatial experience and certainties, more or less implicit goals and values that thoroughly inform our notions of the realities named by nouns and verbs and the grammar and syntax that organize them. Moreover, we learn a language not only by imitating sounds, but by learning the actions and attitudes that accompany sounds, at the same time that we also learn manual skills, manners and mores, thus to become fully communicating and participating members of the 'world' of people to which we belong.

When the term 'world' is used in this way it once again combines given nature and second nature, real spatial conditions and the cultural shaping to which these conditions are always actually subject. In a 'world' – and we all live for the most part in one 'world' or another – the natural and the cultural merge as what can be taken as given, and treated as real, by a group. As we become participants in one or another world we are learning specialized activities and skills, doing work, eating, playing games, performing rites and making music or art. It is fundamentally important to stress that as we learn to perform these activities we also learn, once again by imitation, the decorum, the equally specialized habits and skills of responding competently and appropriately to their performance. This decorum, of course, involves more than competency; we also learn our 'places', where we can and cannot go, what we can and cannot do, the privileges and prohibitions that also define members of a society.

Works of art shape things at hand for the sake of social purposes, and demand appropriate behaviour; but the activities of making and the development and specialization of skills are also themselves articulations of real space. In making and use, art is embraced by shared spaces and purposes and by the values associated with these spaces and purposes. At the same time, artistic skills have their own conditions and proportions, determined by the size of the hand, the possible dexterity of the fingers, the limits of the visible and doable, and by the materials, instruments and tools the hands manipulate. And like all real spatial conditions, the open and multiform possibilities of the hand must take culturally specific forms, and individual hands, and the eyes and mind they lead or follow, must work within these second natures.

We may review the preceding arguments about real space – and also provide a very schematic outline for what is to come – by considering the words 'habit' and 'inhabit'. 'Habit' is from the Latin *habeo, habere*, which does not simply mean 'to have' in some general sense, but, more concretely, to hold or grasp or

wield, to handle, use, manage or control. 'Habits' are things we do as a matter of course, but not simply by nature. Habits, in short, belong to second nature. We 'have' habits because they are *given* to us in the culturally specific circumstances in which we find ourselves. We learn them, not just from experience but from experience in and of a group. Similarly, habits enable us not simply to 'go about our lives', but to behave (a closely related word) appropriately and effectively as a member of a group. When we say we 'inhabit' a place, then, we may not simply mean that we live there, but rather that we do what people do there. We possess and perform learned activities there, are members of a group there. We live our *social* lives there. 'To inhabit', in short, is to live in a social space both formative of and fitted to our second nature.

In the present argument, cultures may be defined as systems of real spatial usages as well as the values and beliefs that are associated with these usages. In these terms, cultures tend to have a high degree of momentum and continuity. But if cultures are enacted, and in important respects defined, by real spatial usages – second nature and habit – then in principle any of us might belong to any other culture; that is, we might have learned any system of real spatial usages and associated values. Once again, this is so because all cultures are variations on the conditions of human real spatiality, and quite independently of one another, cultures may share closely similar real spatial patterns. This does not mean, of course, that all cultures are essentially the same, or that they are even compatible. Quite to the contrary, because of the felt absoluteness of second nature, and because of the sanctions corroborating it, the enactment of other second natures may seem meaningless, deviant or perverse, giving rise to the most violent consequences.

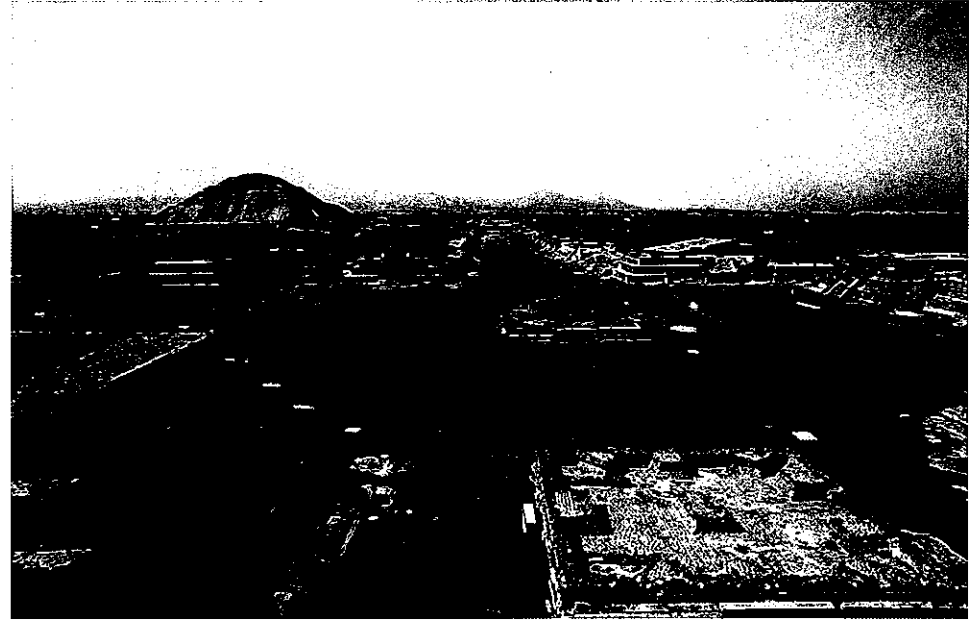
#### 9. REAL SPACE AND ART-HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

Works of art, if always made in and for certain institutional circumstances, do not remain in those circumstances, and, if they survive at all, which relatively few of them do – only the Pyramids survive from the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – they inevitably take their places in new patterns of use and meaning. A fourteenth-century polyptych made for an Italian town cathedral, originally the object of religious veneration – and shaped to the spaces, occasions and usages of religious veneration – might be added to or subtracted from as liturgy changed, then disassembled and sold as piety itself flagged or as churches and convents were secularized, finally to be displayed as fragments in various museums, existing as a whole only as two or three conjectural reconstructions in art-historical monographs. Each of these episodes in the life of this imaginary altarpiece – its transformation from liturgical artifact to 'work of art' – is marked by an alteration of the work itself; it is at least as important, however, that each episode is also marked by a change in the appropriate correlative behaviour of those who use it. Sometimes the institutional circumstances of the work may change, as, for example, when our altarpiece was moved from church to museum; but even if it had remained in its church and chapel, and even if those who come to see it come to see a 'great work of art' rather than to worship, the work – if it is not altogether forgotten, neglected and lost – will continue to be the occasion for what are considered to be appropriate kinds of behaviour by its new obser-

vants. But again, however interesting such historical changes may be, I shall be mostly concerned in this book with the first uses of works of art, and, more specifically, with the fit between works and their *first spaces of use*. We must often reconstruct intervening uses and practices in order to understand changes in the presentation of works of art. But *first* uses are prior if we are to understand in basic terms why works of art were made as they were, and therefore why they appear to us as they do now. The history itself of subsequent uses of works of art implies a first state, a time when it was sufficiently finished; and, by the same token, it must always be assumed that works of art were made for spaces – and thus for purposes – different from those in which we encounter them.

The observance of decorum by users (as opposed to the ‘viewing’ of presumably ‘visual’ works of art) always implies inclusions and exclusions corresponding to social divisions and hierarchies. ‘Viewing’ works of ‘visual art’ is, at least in principle, democratic in the modern manner, more or less corresponding to the transformation of aristocratic, plutocratic and royal collections into national and public collections. Leaving aside the question of who among modern viewers might know how to ‘look at art’ appropriately and why, we may be certain that the art at which we are looking was once fitted to a certain audience and decorum, and that knowing this decorum was a matter both of ‘knowing what to do’ and of ‘knowing one’s place’ in the society in which the art was made. To take a simple example, no ‘average’ ancient Egyptian would have expected to see the image of the god in its own house, the farthest sanctuary of the temple. Usually the image would only have been seen as it was ministered to by a small number of priests, and would have been seen by the great majority of people only in festivals, when carried out of its own precinct in the midst of ritual and jubilation befitting such an occasion. To take a more familiar example, Botticelli’s *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* were hardly intended for the hundreds of people who might now file by or scrutinize them in a single day. Their patronage, original locations and iconographic difficulty all identify them as works made for a highly exclusive audience. We shall see many instances of the controlled access to places, images and the meanings of images; control of access has in fact been a major mode of the construction of social spaces. In general, the making of human places has always involved inclusion and exclusion, differentiation and distinction, and first spaces of use are thus always integral with such broader patterns.

When we walk up the so-called Street of the Dead at Teotihuacan (Figure 7) we can know little or nothing of the habitual behaviour shaped in generation after generation to these spaces. We can be certain, however, that such shaping took place, and that it was foundational for the lives of those who built and used these spaces; moreover, the simple fact and structure of our own physical experience provides some access to ‘ways’ that are not our own. We are guided to some degree by Teotihuacan itself; the great shell of these once living spaces still survives, and its order and arrangement suggest general uses. We will never know when and in what ceremonies the great temple platforms of Teotihuacan were ascended, only that there were such occasions, that ascensions took place, and that any significance must have been fitted to climbing and pausing, rising from level to level, finally to reach a summit. We may repeat these movements ourselves,



with the most minimal sense, however, of the occasions for which this might have been done by the first builders and users of the site.

When I begin to realize the disparity between my customary behaviour and the demands implied by the space of the monument I am visiting, that is, when I realize that both of them are merely possible articulations of real space and its values, then I have begun to think historically in a way that only the history of art allows me to do. To suppose that the alignment of a building (I shall discuss alignment at length in Chapter 2) in which I am standing either has no relation to my own cardinality, or always has the same relation in any building, is not only to eliminate at the outset the many possible significant variations of alignment, it is at the same time to eliminate altogether basic possibilities for historical and cultural understanding. It is to presume that alignments – and the real spatial conditions for which the example of alignment stands – to which we are used and that seem natural to us *are* natural, which is not to think historically at all. On such a view, artifacts from other times and places are simply things we happen to find in the space of our own time rather than potential guides to other worlds, to other human choices and possibilities.

Whether we find a construction of conditions to be familiar or alien, we find it to be in actual relation to our own presence; and we find it at the same time to be an actual and specific historical formation. In the most general terms, as it

7 Teotihuacan, view from the Pyramid of the Moon southward along the Street of the Dead; the Pyramid of the Sun is to our left. 1st century BC – 3rd century AD

becomes possible for me to think of my own real spatial habits and expectations as culturally specific, it also becomes possible for me to think of the conditions of my embodied existence and of the space in which I find myself as analytic categories – and as theoretical categories – over and above their particular historical forms. Comparison yields a third term – a *universally shared* third term – relative to which any number of further particular judgements may be made.

#### 10. ART HISTORY AND AESTHETICS

Aesthetic experience is often characterized as 'disinterested', following a certain thread in Kant's wide-ranging examination of human art and teleology in the *Critique of Judgement*. As we have seen, according to Kant, aesthetic judgements may be sorted out from general perception by reflection upon the pleasures occasioned in us by certain sensations relative to the formative act of imagination itself. As a dimension of the act of imagination, the aesthetic is preconceptual and prepurposeful, a reaction preceding involvement in the complexities of human meanings, motivations, aims and affairs. If we wish to suspend or challenge the assumption of the disinterestedness of art, is it necessary to make the leap from pure reflective unengagement to the immediate conversion of objects of perception into means to ends? Before making this leap, it will be useful to reconsider the idea of interest itself. Art may embody certain 'interests' in a more originary sense of that word. *Interesse* meant 'to stand or lie between', either spatially or temporally; it meant to 'stand in the way', and, by extension, to make a difference, to 'matter'. To be interested is to have to acknowledge in the sense of having actually to deal with. Interest is the inevitable accommodation with what presents itself, with what comes to hand. In this fundamental sense 'interest' does not negate 'disinterest', rather it *precedes* it in that disinterest is a possible consequence of the ongoing *activity* of interest. That is, human acknowledgement of what comes to hand may be considered in itself, apart from the exigencies determining one or another accommodation.

The change from visual to spatial arts means that artifacts, rather than being essentially formal or pictorial syntheses, are articulations and constructions of real spaces, and thus of meanings only statable in real spaces. Works of art are achieved not just in imagination but among real forms made integral with human uses; they are the immediate results of the more or less specialized activities of makers of art and at the same time they are inseparable from the habitual activities of the human societies of which art making and using are always in some way or another part. Works of art, as they may be explained historically, are thus possibly *secondarily* aesthetic, possibly aesthetic literally after the fact. It is of course true that the actual forms defining spaces are visible, and they may be put together in particular ways that are more or less pleasing to the eye. The crucial point, however, is that the genesis and significance of these visible forms cannot be explained, and the rules of their combination cannot be explained, merely with reference to the formal and expressive character of imaginative, pictorial synthesis. The synthesis, and the demand for explanation posed for artifacts, is much more complex and stratified, an adaptation of the real spatial conditions of human life to human use, together with accommodation to past articulations of these conditions. It is this complexity and stratification – this

irreducibility to the 'visual' – that makes the study of art not only interesting and gratifying but essential to humane understanding. As we study the art of any culture we come to understand the traditions of use and meaning to which these forms were fitted, and the visual qualities that may have attracted our interest in the first place become preliminary to our understanding of the practices to which the forms were shaped, so that our understanding is progressively an understanding of those practices, of their significance to those whose lives were shaped by them, and of their broader significance as human possibilities. As I shall present it, then, the history of art cannot be understood as a history of 'great works', or as a chain of works of the 'highest visual quality'. It should not therefore be concluded, however, just because aesthetic quality is not primary for historical explanation, that quality is not a historical issue, or, even worse, that there are no great works of art at all. If the best artists often gather around wealth and power, and their works tend (not always for reasons of quality) to serve as examples for others, that is simply one of a number of historical patterns. To deny quality has the effect of nullifying the many accomplishments of all traditions and denies the validity of the immediate interest taken in the art of one tradition by members of another, interest that may have the most important consequences. If, for example, as is often said, it was the 'formal' characteristics of 'primitive' art that fascinated European artists of the early twentieth century, that initial fascination opened paths of artistic invention that are still being followed; at the same time, this initial aesthetic – that is, formal and expressive – fascination also contributed to the desire to understand other art in its own terms, to locate it in its own cultural and historical spaces, and to gain understandings not simply inferrable from quality and expressive character.

This last example points to a cluster of important conclusions. Aesthetic experience and art history meet in the *particularity* of works of art; each, however, has a different relation to that particularity. Aesthetic experience necessarily takes place both in the *present* and in the *presence* of works of art themselves; it takes place in those times when works themselves seem to be *most* present, or optimally present. It is always as if works of art were made for this experience, which is irreducibly positive, and the opportunity, or demand, for aesthetic response is one of the few institutional occasions in which we are expected to address things in their particularity. (Again, the address is in principle prior to any assimilation to our own purposes, but it is not therefore equivalent to Kantian 'disinterestedness' in the way this seems usually to be understood.) Works of art, however, were *not* made for our aesthetic experience, not at least until it was possible to frame the intention of making 'aesthetic' works of art, a very recent development. Most works of art look the way they do in basic respects because of conditional choices very different from those to which we are accustomed, and very distant from our institutional purposes in addressing them. In order to begin to understand their specific configurations and qualities – the basis for their further *aesthetic* particularity – we must grant them the spatiotemporal particularity of the specific past from which they have come to us. When I see Egyptian glass phials and amulets in a museum display case, I may be unforgettably struck by certain colours, shapes and proportions, and by a certain consistent delicacy and gentleness of scale. On another day I might walk by them, or

even be struck again by the difference between my present experience of them and the memory of my earlier experience, which may still remain 'unforgettable'. If, however, I wish to understand how these objects came to be just as I see them, different from all other kinds of objects people have made – as in fact all kinds of art are different from one another – I must grant them the *occasions* of their making. These occasions were partly predictable in the culturally specific conditional choices and sequences of purpose and activity to which they belonged, but they were also partly unpredictable, the consequences of invention, accident and individual judgement within the bounds of those sequences of purpose and activity. If I do grant these objects their occasions, then I also grant them original real spatial circumstances very different from their present circumstances, and very different from my own habits and expectations. When I do this, I have also granted them the possibility of the history they certainly possess, and I have begun to grasp the variant of human conditionality they represent. I may pause to admire the meticulous carving and polishing of a small serpentine scarab, and my admiration is only deepened, and my scrutiny of it only made more careful, as it is restored in imagination to its place, wrapped in linen strips over the heart of the dead, among the amulets protecting the soul in its journey to the afterlife, to the Coming Forth by Day.

# Facture

## I. I. CONDITIONS OF PRESENTATION

In Section 3 of the Introduction, I briefly introduced the idea of external *conditions of presentation*. We find ourselves in a world among others, and also among objects, which stand in certain relations to our own conditionality. I used the simple example of a boulder, which provides an external conditional alternative: it might serve as a *substitute*, a real metaphor; or it might provide the *surface* for an image of a very different kind. In either case, the presence of the boulder affords the possibility of making something else present, but in very different ways; and, as presentation proceeds in one way or another it necessarily acknowledges, specifies and modifies these given conditions.

The word 'present' comes to us from the Latin *praesens*, a prefix meaning 'before' plus a form of the verb 'to be'. It meant 'in sight of', 'at hand', here, now. It might also mean something that is 'before' in the sense of being prior to, or more important than. In these terms, the 'present' is not just what happens to be there when we are, it is also what we take note of, what interests us, the object of our attention, as we may say that things or circumstances 'present themselves' to us.

Whatever aesthetic interest they might have, artifacts make human purposes present to us. For those who first fashion them, artifacts make purposes present in the sense that they make these purposes realizable by themselves and others. The stone axe makes tasks involving chopping possible, the shrine makes the rites of worship possible. For those of us who come later, the work is still present, but the shaping purpose is often no longer evident together with it. To one degree or another, the work has become the husk or index of a purpose. A contemporary person, even one who recognizes a stone tool as a handaxe, certainly wields it much less deftly or usefully than a Palaeolithic person did, and most of us would have no idea what to do at an Aztec shrine. In such cases, when the artifact has been separated by time from the activities to which it was shaped, we recognize only general purpose – that we are confronted with an implement or a shrine – and in some cases we might only be able to tell that an artifact had *some* purpose or other. Only its bare purposiveness is still evident to us, and in order to understand even its general purpose we must speculate, or do history, or both.

The same holds true for images. If we are accustomed to thinking of images as imitations of the appearances of things, then all images do the same thing, but either well or poorly. From this standpoint, the *Coatlucue* (Figures 4 and 5) is a poor, non-resemblant image, the Arnolfini Wedding (Figure 145) a good one. Both images, however, made different realities available by different means for different purposes, and the historical task is to distinguish those purposes and their requisite conditions. In short, we must explain both implements and images – and indeed all artifacts – first by examining their *conditions of presentation*.

As I have mentioned and will discuss at several points, the *plane* was a uniquely 'new' condition of presentation. As we shall see, human (and hominid) fashioning was indispensable for the definition, isolation, and development of *planarity*, and ultimately of what I shall discuss as *notionality* in Section 14 of this chapter.