

4. AN ARRAY OF AMBIGUOUS ANGLES AND ASSEMBLAGES: Text

The ambiguity within Manet's art involving spatial illusion was neither one of form nor content. It was to do with a spatial manipulation that created uncertainty in the spatial reading of his works and provided a non-narrative means by which clear and direct images could be imbued with ambiguity. What seem to be spatially straightforward works are often underlaid with an apparently alternative spatial reading, seen or sensed at various levels of visibility or camouflage, and with the work itself set ambiguously somewhere between the two contradictory positions. Nuances of such a relationship are many, with often what seems obvious to have been made simultaneously uncertain, and often what should be certain seems impossible or disturbingly incorrect. Although the two most important techniques used by Manet to create this ambiguity involve spatial shaping and spatial cohesion, they are structured by the geometries of perspective or parallel projections and accompanied by a range of other spatial manipulations. Manet's oeuvre is considered here in terms of those manipulations, geometries, and strategies.

The spatial geometry of most relevance in Manet's work is that of perspective and the analysis of perspective within a work provides the means to check the extent and accuracy of the use of its geometry, to establish viewpoints, lines of vision, and configuration of the spaces depicted, and to thus reveal information about the process of a painting's development or production. Although it has been shown that the physical examination of Manet's works in the past has provided valuable information for scholars, there is little evidence of perspectival analyses. The only published perspectival analysis found by this writer is one produced by Professor William Conger and incorporated by Mary Mathews Gedo into her consideration in 1994 of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.¹

Notwithstanding this limited application of perspectival analysis to Manet's oeuvre, it has often been used in other art historical research as an appropriate and effective technique of investigation. Scholars such as Martin Kemp² and James Elkins³ have produced many such analyses to varying degrees of complexity, and some paintings such as Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation of Christ* (c.1460),⁴ and Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656),⁵ have received concentrated analytical attention over many years. The results of these various analyses confirm it to be a valid technique and, despite the apparent lack of perspectival coherence in many of his works, it is no less appropriate to use it in a consideration of Manet as it is of any other artist.

One needs to be mindful, however, of the perceived problems inherent in such a procedure of superimposed examination. At its crudest, a perspectival analysis can constitute an arbitrary and very narrow examination of a work's complex dynamics, applied only to one aspect of its process, almost abjuring the artifice of the work it is examining. In such circumstances an analysis could be seen, at best, as a limited measure rather than an assessment. Doubts in the process have also been raised by scholars at a more conceptual level. In *The Poetics of Perspective*,⁶ James Elkins, for example, was critical of the present-day view of perspective's history as the development of a unified system of spatial illusion from its invention in the Renaissance and of the notions of "an 'ideal geometry' somehow 'in' or 'behind' perspective pictures",⁷ and questions the validity of art historical perspectival analysis. Notwithstanding the paradox that he himself uses the technique extensively in the book, Elkins sees the use of such analyses to erroneously imply "a single, 'homogeneous, isotropic' space"⁸ and that it assumes too much of the artist's intent and practice.⁹

Irrespective of how perspective has been perceived, the methodology of perspective, including that as published in educational manuals in Manet's time, has been based on a 'homogeneous, isotropic' space. This basic condition of the system as practised exists irrespective of the shaping of actual space, or of the acknowledged fact that rarely do paintings display uniform accuracy. A work is examined as evidence of a process, not as something of interest only to the extent to which it may match an ideal

geometry. And perspectival analysis provides a genuine means to establish the existence and configuration of its geometry and to note the degree of consistency of that geometry within its theoretical parameters. Such identification also reveals the possible existence of other spatial geometries. With appropriate caution, such has been the approach used for the perspectival and other spatial geometry assessments made in this Chapter 4 and the case studies in Chapter 5. A description of relevant underlying theoretical aspects of surface order and spatial shaping, and of the application of that theory in artistic practice, is set out in Appendix 1.

a) Spatial Geometries

The identified geometries described below are generally treated as discrete characteristics and the existence of secondary geometries or spatial systems is only raised where necessary. The full consideration of contradictory spatial systems involved in one work, together with their ambiguities, are brought together in (d) below.

i) Linear Perspective

Evidence of any underlying perspectival geometry in many of Manet's works is noticeable by its absence. In terms of the existence of visual cues, such as straight lines or forms of regular geometry as evidence of a structured perspectival space, the majority of Manet's paintings, and particularly those of the 1860s, either have none (e.g. *The Fifer*), avoid showing any (e.g. *Olympia*), or reveal only a few (e.g. *The Luncheon*). To a certain extent, then, it is very difficult in these situations to assess any underlying geometry, even though other cues such as diminution may confirm its existence. Nevertheless, Manet's trained eye certainly saw the world in perspectival terms and most of his works take perspective, either wholly or in part, into account in their creation. The articulation of his figures, for example, are generally established within the basic sense of perspective, with their constituent parts, such as the heads, correctly formed in perspective and the features of the faces to those heads correctly aligned in perspective, as seen in all the figures in *Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers* and *Café-Concert* (1878–79, Fig.69). And the use of linear perspective as the approximate equivalence to natural

perspective is at least implicit, if not obvious, in his more panoramic views (e.g. *The Swallows*, 1873, Fig.55).

Those works with obvious and direct indicators of cohesive one-point or two-point perspective as their underlying spatial structures are certainly not numerous. A clear use of one-point perspective is seen in *Races at Longchamp in the Bois de Boulogne* (1867?, Fig.38), and with the deeply recessed space of the race track set against the frontally viewed group of horses moving out towards the viewer, its geometry is used to its fullest potential. The only examples of architectonic perspectival frameworks used to similarly create dynamic spaces plunging away from the surface involve the three views of Rue Mosnier painted from Manet's studio in Rue de Saint-Petersbourg in 1878, including *Rue Mosnier Decorated with Flags, with a Man on Crutches* (Fig.63), *Rue Mosnier Decorated with Flags* (Fig.64), and *Rue Mosnier with Paviers* (Fig.65). Although similar views of the same subject, these three canvases provide interesting comparisons in terms of surface indicators, as discussed in (c) below, and frontal or offset views, as discussed in (d.i) below.

Characteristically for Manet, the number of paintings with clearly angled two-point perspective views is also limited. It is very evident in *Léon on the Balcony, Oloron-Sainte-Marie* (1871, Fig.49), but can be seen in only a few other works, including *Portrait of George Moore* (1879, Fig.74), and to a less-angled extent in *The Spanish Singer* (1860, Fig.4) and *Café-Concert*. Within the slightly angled basic shaping of the space in *Café-Concert*, Manet has created, however, a rich array of angled counterpoints of figures, heads, and gazes which, although not ambiguous, layer the work with spatial nuances.

In between those works with an absence of perspectival indicators and those which are clearly structured on its geometry lies the majority of the works in Manet's oeuvre. They provide a sufficient mix of cues, such as the actual or implied lines projected from vanishing points for a part of the work, correct use of an eye level for those vanishing points or the overall spatial sense of the work, diminution of size related to the extent of

illusionistic depth, or overlapping of forms, for an underlying geometry to be confirmed or established.

Whereas a centre-point perspective clearly seems the geometry in *Interior at Arcachon* (1871, Fig.50), *The Luncheon* provides an example of a one-point perspective with its centre of vision not set centrally within the image. With the table and back wall set parallel to the picture plane the frontal view is established and the one visible side edge of the table set in angled recession positions the offset centre of vision to the right (Fig.44a).¹⁰ The extent of the offset, however, still enables the scene to be set within a cone of vision without distortion but is not enough to create a concurrent sense of frontal and angled views, as described in (d.i), below. Other works with inferred one-point perspective shaping include: *Music in the Tuileries*, *The Street Singer* (c.1862, Fig.14), *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (see (d.i) for shaping alternatives), *Olympia* (see (d.i) for shaping alternatives), *The Execution of Maximilian* (1867–69?, Fig.36, see (d.i) for shaping alternatives), *Portrait of Émile Zola*, *Masked Ball at the Opera*, *Argenteuil*, *La Prune* (c.1876–78, Fig.62, see (d.i) for shaping alternative), *In the Conservatory* (1879, Fig.72), and *Singer in a Café-Concert* (1880?, Fig.71). Some works, such as *Reading* (c.1866–75?, Fig.32), appear to use only a two-point perspective, and others, such as *Chez le Père Lathuille* (1879, Fig.75), uses a two-point angled perspective for its background and a two-point offset perspective for its foreground, as discussed in (d.i) below.

In some other works the apparent use of perspective seems not consistent, simply creating confusion rather than ambiguity. The angled, apparently two-point perspective, view of *The Music Lesson* (1868–70, Fig.48), for example, seems to have two quite separate viewpoints, set at different heights and with different centres of vision, for both of the seated figures. The figure of the guitarist, as posed by Zacharie Astruc, is seen from above, whereas the figure of the woman, with the tell-tale level of her shoulders, is seen from a much lower level, and a fracture in the painting occurs along the line of least resistance, that strange area between the similarly contoured outlines of the two figures. With the uncertain foreshortening of the upper legs of the guitarist also adding confusion to the depicted three-dimensional forms, this is one of the very few paintings which this

writer believes could, in isolation, be used to suggest that Manet had difficulties with perspective. Other examples are less pictorially disruptive. In *Mme Manet at the Piano* (c.1867–70, Fig.33), for example, what seems to be a direct one-point perspective construction is confused by the lack of a single vanishing point for the parallel lines of the piano. And in *The Street Singer*, the perspective given to the swing door on the [viewer's] left is notional and confusing, with the upper part of the door opening outwards with the movement of the singer, but with the lower part apparently not in unison.

Such inconsistencies are seen as individual pictorial anomalies rather than as elements purposefully set within spatial shapings different to their own or as strategies used by Manet to create ambiguity. And these few examples also highlight the fact, made evident elsewhere, that Manet understood perspective and used its pictorial potential to its fullest in the context of his own unique artistic program. They neither support nor diminish the proposals of this dissertation.

ii) Parallel Projection

The works of Manet in which parallel projection is used for their spatial geometry are not numerous, suggesting that, as noted in Chapter 2, the greatest influence of Japanese prints on Manet was not with their spatial geometries, but more with their compositional or stylistic techniques. Any use of such geometries usually involved only part of a work, but in a number of his paintings it can be seen as an alternative to a presumed perspectival geometry. This can be seen, for example, in *The Absinthe Drinker* (c.1858–59, Fig.1), *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* (1863, Fig.15), and *Still Life with Fish* (1864, Fig.26). In the first two of these works, the walls set parallel to the picture plane establish a frontal view, but in *The Absinthe Drinker* with the man's head turned to his right and the alignment of his head and right foot (Fig.1a), and in *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* with the alignment of the man's right foot (Fig.15a), an alternative sense of angled oblique shaping is also implied. The horizontal edges of the table in *Still Life with Fish* similarly suggest a frontal view, but no indicators of a centre-point perspective exist. And although the angled alignment of the pot, the

various fish, the carefully placed knife, and the edge of the turned cloth in the lower right corner give a clearer suggestion of an angled parallel projection shaping (Fig.26a), the frontality of the setting creates an intriguing spatial ambiguity for a work of such apparent simplicity.¹¹

The Absinthe Drinker is also one of a series of works, which includes *Boy with Cherries* (c.1858–59, Fig.2) and *Soap Bubbles* (1867, Fig.30), in which Manet used low walls to both establish the space parallel to the picture plane and act as a spatial 'prop' for ambiguous alignments of single figures. The head of the boy in *Boy with Cherries* is set frontally to match the parallel wall as if in a frontal view, but his torso and arm positions suggest an oblique angling. A clearer sense of an angled projection exists in *Soap Bubbles*, with the boy's torso set parallel to the wall and the angled alignment of the boy's arms, head and bubble pipe, together with the visible angled joins at the top of the stone wall (Fig.30a).

The use of a low wall reappeared, although in a slightly different form as a rail, in the later work, *Portrait of Clemenceau at the Tribune* (1879–80, Fig.76). And an angled geometry seems to underlie the whole work. The papers on the rail in front of Clemenceau are depicted with parallel edges at an oblique angle to the picture plane, probably as an oblique parallel projection, possibly as an offset one-point perspective, but certainly not as a frontal one-point or centre-point perspective. This oblique angling establishes a spatial key for the whole work. Although it is suggested in the description of parallel projection in Appendix 1 that in Japanese woodcuts the figures set within these kinds of spaces were not forced to fit the constraints of the geometry involved, the figure of Clemenceau almost does that without undue distortion. Rather than being in perspective, the front planes of his torso and head are set parallel to the picture plane, and their side planes are set at the oblique angle established by the edges of the papers. Even the top of his head follows the geometry, as can be seen in comparison with the head of Clemenceau in Manet's other *Portrait of Clemenceau* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) which is clearly structured on the geometry of perspective. Obviously it is all not as extreme and disfiguring as such a description implies, but the angling of the forms is

quite clear. With these cues at work, the top of the rail is easily read as projected obliquely at the same angle (Fig.76a).

Some instances of the perception in Manet's work of an incorrect use of perspective can alternatively be read as the use of a parallel projection. In his *Portrait of Théodore Duret* (1868, Fig.43), for example, the legs of the stool in the lower right corner do not match a coherent perspectival geometry, even if two of the sides of the stool were in fact splayed as they would need to be. All the lines in recession forming the stool and the tray are parallel for each object, suggesting that, although the figure of Duret is clearly constructed in perspective with Manet's eye level approximately at that of Duret's, Manet used a completely different geometry for this addition to the painting.¹² The apparent angles of the floor beneath the stool and that beneath the figure of Duret also do not relate illusionistically and confirm the difference in the geometries used. Interestingly, the shadows formed by the stool perversely fit neither geometry nor, for that matter, any other. None of this seems by accident, is too obvious to be ambiguous or even considered an inconsistency, and appears to be a purposeful disjunction of contradictory systems.

b) Manipulation of space

Apart from his use of linear perspective or pictorial projections as generators of spatial order, there are many other ways in which Manet organised and manipulated illusionistic space, whether intuitively or by intent. The identification of a space in one of his works and its configuration, be it parallel to the picture plane or angled, is influenced mainly by those elements such as walls, floors and ground surfaces, or other dominant elements within the picture. It can also be determined with the identification of the direction of view (centre of vision), and often by the orientation of smaller elements and objects with their capacity to articulate the illusionistic space to a greater extent than the larger framing elements. Within such parameters the spaces within some images are therefore relatively straightforward and can be clearly defined while others are much more complex.

i) Parallel Space

As has often been noted by scholars, a dominant characteristic of Manet's paintings is the placement of the depicted space parallel to the picture plane. It is evident throughout his oeuvre, from his early years with paintings such as *The Absinthe Drinker* and *Boy with Cherries*, through the intermediate years with works such as *Mme Manet at the Piano*, *The Balcony*, and *Lady with Fans* (1873–74, Fig.56), to his last years during which he produced works such as *In the Conservatory* and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. In this last work the expansive mirror reflection becomes his most dramatic use of layered parallel spaces. With whatever the choice of subject, from *Still-life with Fish* to *Masked Ball at the Opera*, the medium used, be it drawing, print or painting, or the size of the work, the spaces are arranged as if aligned, both literally and symbolically, with the painting's surface, and the frequency of Manet's use of such a device suggests that it was an integral and essential aspect of his creative process.

The forms by which this alignment was established are many and varied, with: low foreground walls as in *Soap Bubbles*; walls or surfaces as backdrops in close proximity behind figures as seen in *Young Man in the Costume of a Major*; walls, surfaces or structures in the middle- or long-distance as in *Jetty at Boulogne* (1868, Fig.39); the alignment of a group of figures as in *The Spanish Ballet* (1862, Fig.10); the alignment of furniture, such as the bench seat *In the Conservatory*; the use of horizontal lines to align delineators of space with upper and lower edges of a work, as with the table in *La Prune*; or, the frontality of a figure, as seen in the *Dead Christ with Angels* (1864, Fig.25). Additionally, it can be proposed that in some instances this setting of space parallel to the picture plane was a manipulation from an original angled space in a pictorial source, as described in Chapter 5(E) with *The Masked Ball at the Opera*.

Manet's alignments of parallel space give evidence of his efforts to limit seamless spatial illusion away from the picture plane, and to establish a real connection between the two. Although illusion exists within such parallel spaces, their generating planes resonate with the surface in which they are articulated, and Manet does seem to have made a conscious decision to not introduce spatially dynamic elements and to limit his spatial palette to allow the directness of his work to be heightened and not diminished by

spatial complexity, at least at a superficial level. This meant that his ambiguous manipulations were not subsumed with spatial configurations of great complexity or dynamism. His strategies for spatial ambiguity were also influences on this alignment. Although superficially such an alignment would seem to involve, or imply, frontal perspective views or an oblique parallel projection, Manet's use of the offset one-point viewpoint indicates that this characteristic of setting the space parallel to the picture plane in fact involved another, often hidden, implication.

ii) Layered space

A characteristic mode involving the parallel configuration discussed in (i) above is the controlled layering of space as if in a series of receding planes, and as evident, for example, in *The Balcony* with its primary layers established by the railing, the shutters, and finally the back wall of the room behind, and its intermediate punctuations created with the seated figure modelled by Berthe Morisot, the flower pot and the dog just behind the railing, the figure modelled by Fanny Claus standing further back, the figure modelled by Antoine Guillemet hovering somewhere just inside the space of the room behind the plane of the shutters, and the boy with the tray hidden within the room's darkness. The layering of space evident in *The Street Singer* is similar in nature to that of *The Balcony* but is not as detailed or nuanced. A layering is also apparent in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, with the primary layers existing at the foreground with the seated group, at the middle ground with the woman bathing, and at the background with small area of light-drenched landscape, and with intermediate articulations provided by the tree trunks and their irregular spacing and different shapes. Spatial recessions in these paintings are neither sudden nor extended, but rather, are paced by the discrete intervals established within the cohesive whole.¹³ A gentle layering by intervals is also achieved in *Chez le Père Lathuille*, from the front group, through the interval markers of the waiter, the lamp-post, the tree, and finally the building at the upper left, but with a filtering of space around those elements. A more drastic, but still progressive, layering occurs with works such as *Interior at Arcachon*, in which the foreground space is connected by means of

the intermediate vertical door frames behind it to the expansive space beyond indicated by the opposing line of the horizon.

Controlled layering also occurs in those works in which the primary space is not rigidly set parallel to the picture plane, as seen in *M. and Mme Auguste Manet* (1860, Fig.3), with its hybrid space established by the angled table in the immediate foreground and the figures of M. and Mme Manet aligned at that same angle, but with the figures themselves set frontally. The intervals established by M. Manet's hand, head and figure, Mme Manet's sewing basket and her head and figure, modulate the recession of the illusionistic space in layers set parallel to the picture plane but at an angle from left to right. This duality of angled and parallel elements is a recurring theme throughout these considerations of Manet's pictorial space and its possible inclusion in the pictorial dynamics of such an early work, albeit in a somewhat experimental mode, suggests that from the very beginning of his artistic endeavours Manet's art was set on a path of spatial ambiguity.

In contrast to these stepped intervals, the foreground spaces in a number of canvases are separated quite dramatically, without intermediate layers, from their background spaces. The two most extreme examples of this occur in *The Railway* and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, as discussed in Chapter 5(D) and 5(F), respectively. This lack of intermediate layers allows ambiguous adjustments of scale to be made without causing an obvious pictorial disjunction.

iii) Compressed space

Some of the works with spaces parallel to the picture plane achieve varying degrees of spatial compression between the plane establishing the space and the notional picture plane, as well as with the apparent proximity of Manet, as artist, to his subject. This is shown in works such as *The Street Singer*, *Lola de Valence*, *Olympia*, *Portrait of Émile Zola*, *The Balcony*, *The Railway*, *The Masked Ball at the Opera*, and *In the Conservatory*. A compression is also achieved by the upwards tilting of the space to reduce the extent of apparent recession in, for example, *Portrait of M. and Mme Auguste Manet*. But the tilting is most evident in a work such as *Mlle V...in the Costume of an*

Espada, in which the mixture of viewpoints provides no cohesive spatial recession and results in the ground plane being read, at one and the same time, as a tilted, but feasible, surface on which the various groups are set, and as a pictorial field within the painting's surface in which the disparate parts exist. In such a context the ground seems almost as a backdrop directly behind the figure of the model, Victorine Meurent.

iv) Angled space

Manet's use of clearly articulated angled spaces in isolation, not in interplay with other spatial modes, is limited to works such as *The Picadors* (1866) with its angled barricade and shaded area of bullring, *Léon on the Balcony*, *Oloron-Sainte-Marie* and its dominant balcony balustrade set in perspective, and *Portrait of George Moore* with its angled backdrop of fence and lattice. Less clearly articulated angled spaces occur with many of Manet's three-quarter view portraits but, as is so often the case with his still-lives and flower paintings, in those portraits which depict only the head and shoulders, often isolated on the canvas without a suggestion of their surrounds, the spatial illusion involves the three-dimensionality of the forms rather than any illusionistic space. An isolated figure such as the *Matador Saluting* (1866-1867, Fig.29) articulates its angled space, however, with the devices of the direction of the sword extending the angled plane of the matador's figure and his saluting arm defining the angled plane set perpendicular to it (Fig.29.a). But in some works in which the three-quarter views of figures are not isolated, the angled spaces are more dominant than the three-dimensional forms, as seen in *Woman Reading* (1879, Fig.73), with its spaces articulated by the background of the *brasserie* and the perspective of the journal read by the woman.

v) Expansive space

The more traditional use of expansive spaces of cohesive evenness are certainly used by Manet, and provide confirmation of Manet's use of linear perspective as an equivalence of natural perspective. This is evident in such works as *Swallows*, *The Seine at Argenteuil* (1874, Fig.58), and his many marine paintings at Arcachon and Berck. But this consistency can be contrasted with other works of an expansive view in which the space and the surface seem fragmented, dictated to, and unevenly articulated by, objects

and figures. Even though *Music in the Tuileries*, for example, seems to use the characteristics of perspective such as the connection of diminution of size to spatial recession, its patterning of figures, faces, chairs and trees set across its surface, with varied but not hierarchical emphasis, introduces a counter to that spatial structure.

vi) Leakage of space

The relative compression of space in a number of works is relieved by a subtle spatial manipulation that could be described as a 'leakage'. Examples of a direct leakage are apparent through the half-open doorway behind the singer in *The Street Singer*, through the doorway, partly filled with the figure of the man, at the rear of the balcony in *The Balcony*, through the pictorial gap between the edges of the stage sets and the right hand frame of the painting in *Lola de Valence*, through the uncertain gaps between the screens behind the maid with the flowers in *Olympia*, through the railing at the upper level balcony in *Masked Ball at the Opera*, and through the pictorial gap between the top of the barricade and the upper frame of the painting in *Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada* (a gap through which one of the bullfighters also seems to be using as a means of entry into, or exit from, the painting!). In this last work, and in addition to the spatial play involved, the placement of the slightly curved line of the top of the barricade near the upper edge of the painting confirms Manet's very careful indication of the perspective involved, with the eye level (at least for the barricade) set at a level above the barricade at a position near, or just above, the upper edge of the painting, and providing an interesting comparison with a similar relationship in the very different context of *On the Beach* (1873). In that work, the slightly curved horizon line has often been noted but its placement also provides a leakage of space from that of the scene, in contrast to the containment achieved with the lower horizon line in *On the Beach at Boulogne* (1868, Fig.40).

Indirect leakages through secondary images were also used by Manet as both pictorial and spatial devices, as seen with the images of the prints and paintings on the wall in *Portrait of Émile Zola*, and the mirror reflection in *Mme Manet at the Piano*. A mixture of 'leakage' and 'layering' modes is evident in *Portrait of Zacharie Astruc* (1866,

Fig.31), with its illusion of the layered middle-distance, in which the small figure of the woman is ambiguously positioned, existing either as an improbable actual space behind the seated figure of Astruc or as the more likely secondary space of a painting hung on the wall or resting on the table.¹⁴ This leakage through secondary images was one of a number of traditions in Western painting, particularly as developed in Venice in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, to which Manet gave regard. Titian's *Portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga delle Rovere* (1536–37, Fig.83), for example, not only gives evidence of the same compositional structure, but also poses the same uncertainty about the secondary image being either a distant view framed by a window or a framed painting.

vii) Geometries within a work

Those aspects of subject and content, such as physical relationships, gaze, cast shadows, and mirrors and reflections, involve spatial geometries which are intrinsic to the work rather than being part of those geometries upon which the work may be structured. But rather than using them as complementary and direct confirmations of the main spaces as they might normally be, at times Manet used their geometries almost as contradictions or modulations, making the works even more spatially uncertain and in the process inflecting on their often puzzling or limited narrative.

Spatial geometries of the physical relationships and gazes between the players in Manet's paintings are extremely varied, but rather than provide confirmation or explanation, they invariably added a further unsettling dimension to the work. This is seen in works such as *The Old Musician*, *Music in the Tuileries*, *The Spanish Ballet*, *Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada*, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, *The Execution of Maximilian*, *The Luncheon*, *The Balcony*, *The Music Lesson*, *Café-Concert*, *Chez le Père Lathuille*, and, above all, in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.

Manet's use of cast shadows (as distinct from the shading involved in the three-dimensional description of form) was in itself, as was his use of perspective, something of a contradiction. Even though they can be seen at times to be variously inconsistent, incorrect, and indeed perversely indifferent to conventions of spatial geometry, there is

sufficient evidence to make it clear that those discrepancies are, in fact, intentional. What Manet normally disrupted was the spatial geometry involving the light source, the object, and the surface on which the shadow is cast. This apparently arbitrary approach is evident, for example, in: *The Absinthe Drinker*, with its array of wholly inconsistent shadows cast by the figure of the man on the ground, against the low wall and possibly on a wall set further back, by the bottle on the ground, and none by the glass; *The Fifer* (1866), with the shadow on the ground behind the boy's left foot set like a *tache* within the work's surface; *The Execution of Maximilian*, with the strangely shaped and silhouetted shadows of the standing figures seen to have an apparent life of their own; and, *The Tragic Actor* (1865–66, Fig.28), with the odd shadows of Philibert Rouvière's figure cast, possibly as an in-joke, from completely unrelated light sources (even allowing for theatre lighting) and combined with the sword and one of Rouvière's legs to form the monogram 'M'.¹⁵ What is also evident is that Manet clearly understood shadow projection, as can be seen in *Rue Mosnier with Paviers* and *Incident in a Bullfight* (see Chapter 5(A)), and applied it correctly whenever it was artistically required. As with Manet's whole artistic approach, the use of a convention for its own sake, was of little interest to him.

Internal geometries made available by mirrors and their reflections were used by Manet to their fullest effect in the double-reflected world of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, but their limited use in earlier works suggests that there was no detailed program of experimentation with mirrors prior to that complex work. He may have considered that, unless handled with some care, such a device had the potential to make a pictorial 'double-play' far too obvious. With the discounting of the use of a mirror in *Portrait of Zacharie Astruc*, the direct inclusion of a mirror in other works is limited to the reflection of a mantelpiece clock in *Mme Manet at the Piano*, the apparent use of mirrors for double-reflection in the background of *A Café on the Place du Théâtre Français* (c.1876–78, Fig.70), the suggestion of a reflection of the model in *Before the Mirror* (c.1876–79), the depiction of the mirror without an identifiable reflected image in *Nana* (1877), and the reflected image of a singer in a background mirror in *Café-Concert*.

Nonetheless, a progression of a kind towards *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* can be seen in *A Café on the Place du Théâtre Français* and *Café-Concert*, with the double-reflection of chandeliers in the former, and the spatial interplay between the reflected image of the singer and the gaze of the male customer in the direction of where the singer might actually be performing in the latter. In contrast, such dynamics are not involved with *Self-Portrait with a Palette* (1878–79) in which the use of a mirror, as the surface in which the complete image is seen, is implied.

viii) Spaces that are not

Whether intentionally or otherwise and in only a few works, Manet created pictorial spaces which seem to either remain on the surface of the work or exist as a fantastic mirage. In his *Gypsy with Cigarette* (1862?, Fig.6), for example, the audacious overlapping and interlocking shapes of the gypsy and the two horses (with the gypsy leaning on the hindquarters of the dark-coloured horse facing to the right, and the head of the white horse behind her left shoulder facing to the left) creates a space directly behind the gypsy which has no apparent depth, with the canopy of the sky above the group appearing as something of a shock.¹⁶ In *Monet in His Studio Boat* (1874, Fig.60), and in spite of the overlapping of forms, the figure of Monet's wife, Camille, and the space inside the boat in which she sits, read as an unrelated vignette attached directly to the surface of the painting itself. The spatial handling of other elements in the painting, such as the boat's canopy and fringe, suggests that this inverse connection of a recessed space to the work's surface is not by accident. And in *Portrait of M. Pertuiset, the Lion Hunter*, the background space, either because of its colouring or the rather 'odd' context for which it exists, appears as an actual space but with an unreal depth – and as the only expression of *real* fantasy in Manet's oeuvre.

c) Manipulation of surface

The engagement of Manet's pictorial space within the surface of his paintings was an important aspect of his spatial ambiguity. Part of this engagement is seen in (d) below

with the interaction between spaces set both parallel and angled to the picture plane. Additionally, more formal means and techniques of practice were used to limit the extent of spatial illusion within the surface, and therefore to introduce a spatial contradiction, rather than an ambiguity. These formal means have all been noted previously by scholars, and include: the reduction in the modelling of forms with the elimination of half-tones, as in *Olympia*; the lifting or elimination of the horizon with the illusion of space compressed between the 'uplifted' horizontal plane and the surface, as in *Boating* (1874–76, Fig.59); the abstracted use of colour set within both the illusion of space and the surface of the work, as in *Argenteuil*; the lack, or reduction, of foreshortening to those forms with potential to exaggerate spatial recession, as in *Repose* (1869–70, Fig.46);¹⁷ and, the frank evidence of the paint and its application in the surface, as in *Faure in the Role of Hamlet at the Opera* (1877).

Some other aspects of Manet's practice, however, have not been previously noted in the context of his spatial manipulations. It is evident that Manet used a linear technique with receding planes to tie their spatial illusion to the work's surface and to limit the 'speed' of their illusionistic recession. Invariably he painted or drew the surfaces of horizontal receding planes, be they floors, tables, roads or water surfaces, with textures made up of horizontal strokes or lines. Similarly, the surfaces of his vertical receding planes, such as walls, are invariably built up with vertical strokes or lines. Although linear elements such as gutters and window sills are depicted with strokes or lines along their length, those strokes or lines used to depict a surface are rarely set in the direction of the perspectival recession. Such a technique can be seen throughout Manet's work, including within his prints, as in the lithograph, *The Barricade* (1871?, Fig.52), his paintings as in *Rue Mosnier Decorated with Flags, with a Man on Crutches*, and to a lesser extent his drawings and watercolours, as in *Interior at Arcachon, Mme Manet and Léon* (1871, Fig.51). Horizontal strokes or lines are also particularly evident in those situations where a receding horizontal plane occurs at the base of a work, with their use seen almost as gestures to 'ground' the work into its own surface, rather than allow it to establish the spatial recession. This is seen in many of his etchings, such as *The Gypsies*

(1862, Fig.5), and in his lithographs, such as *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868, Fig.37). Certainly the technique can be seen to have been influenced by the work of Goya,¹⁸ but the particular way in which Manet applied it to adjust space was one that was completely his own.

d) Strategies of spatial ambiguity

As stated above, Manet's techniques to create spatial ambiguity involved the interplay between the way in which a work appeared to be spatially read and an alternative means which was either visible or camouflaged. This strategy used two different devices, one involving directions of spatial shaping and the other spatial cohesion.

i) Spatial shaping

Manet's strategy of spatial shaping made use of the fact that particular geometries enabled a depicted view to be concurrently sensed as both frontal or angled, and involved an adjustment of emphasis between the two shapings. The use of this strategy throughout his career ranged from works which displayed both shapings as a pictorial interplay without any real sense of ambiguity to those in which he used the offset viewpoint in a one-point perspective to provide the means for an apparently concurrent angled and frontal views. His most spatially ambiguous works employed this technique, and their ambiguity lies in the *possibility* of the alternative shaping, a possibility that only lies within the artifice, or illusion, of the work. An alternative shaping cannot actually exist simultaneously with that used for the painting itself. These aspects are explained in Appendix 1.

An interplay between a frontal and angled spatial shaping, in its simplest form with a horizontal element which is also parallel to the picture plane set against an angled one, is evident throughout Manet's oeuvre. Seen almost as a signature pictorial motif, the interplay was sometimes a clearly visible device, as with the alignment of the sailing boats in *Sea View, Calm Weather* (1864-65) or the angled path in *The Bench* (1881, Fig.78), or in a similarly simple but less obvious form, as with the angled space between

the figures of Suzanne Manet and Eugène Manet in *On the Beach* (1873). But it was also incorporated to differing levels of disclosure within much more complex strategies.

Idiosyncratic applications of the device are displayed in two of Manet's earlier works, *Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada* and *Baudelaire's Mistress Reclining* (c.1862, Fig.13). Although its disparate parts and mix of perspectives have always been noted, *Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada* also incorporates a dominant parallel space, established by the barrier to the bullring and the uplifted ground surface, and two angled and symbolically colliding spaces with the introduction of Goya's image of the mounted *picador* and the charging bull.¹⁹ The angled shaping established by the *picador* and articulated by his *pica* prevails, extended with a deft touch and wit by the outstretched sword held by the figure of Victorine Meurent upwards and to her right, and set against the parallel space both in its illusion and at the surface of the painting at the barrier in the upper left corner (Fig.12a). Rather than being ambiguous in itself, the spatial interplay in *Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada* involves the ambiguous disjunctions of imagery and meaning. *Baudelaire's Mistress Reclining* has its parallel space and frontal view, established by the background wall and echoed by the object on which Jeanne Duval's feet are placed, set against an angled view from the right, articulated by the sofa and the reclining figure of Duval. In this instance its geometry, constructed either as a parallel projection or a perspective projection, is uncertain. But nothing seems certain. The three-dimensional form of the sofa and its angling, the way in which Duval reclines on the sofa or has her feet supported on a possible separate platform, as well as the relative angle of the back wall, are all camouflaged and confused by the indefinite form and spatial position of the diaphanous lace of the billowing curtains, and the ballooned and uncertain form of Duval's crinoline skirt. Although the ambiguity, even the spatial ambiguity, in *Baudelaire's Mistress Reclining* involves much more than the interplay between perceived frontal and angled views, the integration of that interplay into the wider ambiguous implications of the work are complete, and in Manet's oeuvre, almost unmatched until the orchestration of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.²⁰

The most complex and insistently ambiguous angled shaping in Manet's oeuvre is that involving the offset viewpoint, as part of either a one-point or a two-point perspective. As illustrated in Chapter 2 with Uccello's predella panel, *Miracle of the Host*, and as described in Appendix 1, those sections of a view which are offset to the left or right of the centre of vision in a one-point perspective have the potential to be concurrently seen as if both frontal and angled. Although the greatest potential for ambiguity exists when the frontal view involves a one-point perspective, it is also evident, but to a lesser extent, when the perspective is a slightly angled two-point perspective. As the basic spatial shaping in such a situation is already seen to be angled, even if only slightly, any offset space has less potential to create an ambiguous spatial interplay, even if appearing to be a more natural space rather than the, at times, somewhat artificial geometry of the one-point perspective.

It is proposed that Manet made use of both types of the offset viewpoint technique, with variations, throughout his career, culminating in its most complex application in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. And as discussed in Chapter 2 it is proposed that Manet's understanding of its potential for ambiguity was influenced by the capacity of the *chambre photographique* to produce an equivalent image. Such a circumstance not only provides the most potent explanation for the supposed inconsistencies in so many of Manet's works, but also for their spatial ambiguity. Until photographic evidence is found, the extent to which Manet actually used photographs taken with a *chambre photographique* or for which paintings it provided an available image, must remain speculative. There is, however, an alternative explanation for the geometry of these works, and one which fits the popular notion that Manet kept on 'flattening' his perspective. Rather than making use of the offset one-point geometry to produce the ambiguity, it could be proposed that he had actually created the views as typically angled two-point perspectives and then 'flattened' the least angled plane to be approximately parallel to the picture plane, and thus enabling the angled view to be seen to have the shaping related to a centre-point or, more particularly, an offset one-point perspective. That is, to create the ambiguity in a reverse order. Distortions exist in both arrangements,

with those in the proposed system existing in the diagonals furthest from the centre of vision, and those in the alternative system existing in the flattening of the angled plane. But the arbitrary nature of the alternative procedure and the detailed transpositions required of it make this a less convincing explanation for the ambiguity of the concurrent views. Comparison of these two systems is made in a number of the case studies in Chapter 5. The evidence of Manet's application of the offset viewpoint geometry, or the potential for its application, is considered here in a number of his works, at times in the context of other spatial implications or other related works, and in a general chronological sequence.

In amongst the interplay between spatial illusion and surface in *Music in the Tuileries* (1862) concurrent frontal and angled readings of the space can be identified. Its frontal view is established by the front edge of the crowd set parallel to the picture plane, and reinforced by the vista between the trees to the central patch of sky. An angled reading from an offset viewpoint at the right is intimated by the angled area of seated women in the foreground, and the tell-tale, angled edge of the path in the lower left corner of the painting, the same angle at which the identified figure of Manet stands, partly out of frame, at the painting's left edge. The intimation of an alternative shaping is also seen in *Lola de Valence* (1862/after 1867), with a two-point frontal view, established by the slightly angled floorboards (Fig.11a), and an alternative angled reading from a two-point offset viewpoint to the right suggested by the pose of the figure and the alignment of the edges of the scenery panels (Fig.11b).²¹

Another early work, *Guitar and Hat* (1862), provides an intriguing insight into Manet's interest in the interplay between a frontal and angled sense of the same space. Created as a *dessus de porte* painting in his studio at Rue Guyot,²² and with its motif of guitar, hat, and basket used in the various cover designs for etching albums,²³ it was obviously an important work to Manet. It is proposed that part of its importance is related to it being an almost seminal model for all of his later applications of the offset viewpoint. With a back plane set parallel to the picture plane establishing a on-point perspective, a series of rounded forms employed to reduce the effect of distortion when

set at a lateral distance from a centre of vision, and the neck of the guitar used to signal the possibility of the angled shaping, the painting can be seen as Manet's exposition of the geometry's potential and a model to which he could continually make reference. It is no surprise that as a symbol of, and a testament to, his hidden strategies, the painting remained with him throughout his life. The perception that the central design motif in the back plane 'rug' and the crown of the hat are aligned provides an excellent demonstration of the implications of the offset viewpoint. In an assumed frontal view (Fig.17a), the motif would be positioned directly behind the hat, whereas in an assumed offset view from the left the motif would be positioned to the right of the hat (Fig.17b). Theoretically, the guitar, hat, and basket would have to be distorted to provide such a view, but *Guitar and Hat* shows that the ambiguously different spatial shapings of the one image only exist within the illusion of the work's artifice, and cannot be replicated in reality.

The importance that this spatial interplay held for Manet can be demonstrated by its apparent inclusion in his two major works painted in 1863, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*. In *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, the frontal view is established by the parallel alignment of the seated group in the foreground through to the bather in the middle distance, and the landscape and sky in the background (Fig.18a). An angled view, with an offset viewpoint to the right, sees the same space shaped through the three figures in the same direction as the river bank towards the dinghy (Fig.18b), and in doing so changes the relationships of the figures and the sense of size diminution. Whereas the still-life of basket, food, and clothes in the frontal shaping is seen to the viewer's left of the seated group, in an angled shaping it is seen to be in front of the seated group. And in the frontal view, the woman bather is seen to be only slightly closer to the viewer than the dinghy, but seems too large a figure for the size of the craft. In the offset view the dinghy is further back beyond the bather and their relative sizes fit the required perspectival diminution much more accurately – suggesting that the painting was structured by Manet on the offset view but that it was understated to allow the more natural reading of an alternative frontal view to generate the spatial ambiguity.

With the seated group borrowed by Manet from Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael's *Judgment of Paris*, and the overall work inspired by Titian's *Concert champêtre* (c.1508, Fig.84),²⁴ the spatial shaping in both of those works is of some interest. The overall composition of Raimondi's *Judgment of Paris* is a collection of separate spatial vignettes combined to be seen from a frontal position, with no sense of an alternative shaping in the borrowed group of two river gods and a water nymph. In the *Concert champêtre* the interplay is more complex, with a frontal view through to the building set centrally at the middle distance established by the parallel alignment of the foreground figures and the well at the left (Fig.84a), and an alternative angled view from an offset viewpoint to the right, with its shaping set through the seated figures in the direction towards the shepherd in the middle distance (Fig.84b). In exactly the same way that the position of the still-life in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* takes up a different position to the seated group with the alternative shaping, the standing nude at the well in *Concert champêtre* can be seen to be at the viewer's left of the seated group in the frontal view but in front of the group with the angled view. As noted in Chapter 2, Titian's use of the offset viewpoint in *Madonna of the Pesaro Family*, albeit for non-ambiguous purposes, would not have been an isolated instance and, without evidence, can be speculated to have been used by him in other works such as *Concert champêtre* to experiment with spatial manipulation, if not ambiguity.

An examination of *Olympia* provides clear evidence of Manet's conscious manipulation of spatial shaping, with a subtly created alternative to the centre-point view taken from one of the work's major sources, Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538, Figs.85 and Fig.85a), a copy of which he had made in the Uffizi.²⁵ To the knowledge of this writer no discussion has been previously made about the pictorial space of *Olympia* in terms other than its derivation from the *Venus of Urbino* as a similar centre-point perspective (Fig.19a), but the shaping of the space in which the figure of Victorine Meurent and the bed on which she reclines is not from a central vanishing point, but from an offset viewpoint to the right (Fig.19b). Notwithstanding that Victorine's torso is turned slightly towards the artist, the perspective of her complete figure, with the relative visible

positions of her feet and knees, is undoubtedly seen from a viewpoint beyond her feet, and all the indicators of perspective related to the bed, such as the curvature of the folds of the sheet at the vertical face of the mattress and the lateral folds to the cover beneath Victorine's knees, also indicate such a viewpoint. And the figure of the maid is also in accord with this offset shaping. From what is seen of the mattress corner at the right edge of the painting, the perspective of the end of the bed is, however, uncertain and reinforces neither the centre-point or offset geometries. Related images to the final painting nonetheless confirm the offset proposition, with the angled brushstrokes evident in the X-radiograph (Fig.20), the angled lines of the sheet seen in the wash drawing, *The Woman with the Cat* (1862–63, Fig.21), and the series of curved lines at the right-hand end of the bed seen in the subsequent etching, *Olympia* (1867, Fig.22), providing the clearest indication possible that the view was angled from a vanishing point offset to the right.

Manet's project to paint a large 'history' painting of the execution in Mexico of Emperor Maximilian in 1867 seems to have caused a change in his approach to spatial shaping. Each of the possible frontal and angled views in *The Execution of Maximilian*,²⁶ are each so dynamically depicted, so overstated, that the interplay between them is almost contradictory, rather than ambiguous. The alignment of the large background wall asserts a frontal view (Fig.36a), while the alignment of the groups of the victims and the firing squad equally defines an angled view across the uplifted ground plane shaped as either an oblique parallel projection or an offset one-point perspective (Fig.36b) – but the diminution in height of the victims in relation to the firing squad and of the figures within the two groups confirms the geometry to be that of perspective. In the context of the overt spatial dynamics, the alignment of the rifles, fluctuating between the two shapings, seems to present the only ambiguous element. Although obviously unable to resolve the issue in his series of paintings, it seems that Manet later addressed the problem in the lithograph of 1868 (Fig.37), and without changing the basic arrangement reconfigured the wall with a return face at the left aligned with, or set in same general

direction as, the angled shaping. The divide between the two had been reduced, and some sense of uncertainty, rather than ambiguity, was achieved.

It is clear that many important lessons were learnt by Manet from the difficulties encountered in *The Execution of Maximilian*, with a number of works providing evidence of a continued experimentation with the offset viewpoint through to the summation of its potential in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* in 1881–82. In *Departure of the Folkestone Boat, Boulogne* (1868–71?, Fig.41), for example, the apparently angled view across the wharf is seen to be an offset view from the left (Fig.41a). Although the offset shaping has been signalled to some extent by the shadows formed by the sun as light source, the spatial ambiguity has also been manipulated by an almost extreme disjunction of scale, with the size of the men, funnels and paddle housings in the upper right corner unrelated to that of the stern of the boat and the remainder of the painting.

Within Manet's oeuvre, *Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé* (1876, Fig.61) is a work which uses the ambiguous spatial interplay of the offset viewpoint in subtle and nuanced ways. For such a touching portrait of Manet's good friend, its use seems apposite. The frontal view is suggested by the horizontal line at the back of the couch at the wall set parallel to the picture plane, and the cushion against which Mallarmé, turned to his right, rests (Fig.61a). The offset view is articulated by the angle of the edge of the cushion on which the books are placed, the general angling of Mallarmé's figure, and the particular alignment of his head, gaze and lower arms. There are, however, many subtle manipulations within these shapings. As is demonstrated in Appendix 1, and also illustrated in paintings such as *La Prune* (c.1876–8, Fig.62) and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, the forms which least display the distortion implicit in the geometry of offset viewpoints are those which are rounded rather than rectilinear. If the books were set within the offset shaping of the cushion beneath them, and with one of their edges already set parallel to the picture plane, then the other edge should be approximately parallel in perspective to the angled edge of the cushion. But it is not. Instead, it is set within the shaping of the one-point perspective geometry of a frontal view. Three unseen items are also involved in the interplay. First, Mallarmé's unseen left leg is suggested to

be angled to his right beneath the covering right leg in the frontal view, but to be perpendicular to the wall as an extension of his upper body in the offset view. Second, the shadow of Mallarmé's head on the wall and pillow behind him indicates that the alignment of the unseen light source, his head, and the resultant shadow is the same as for the offset shaping. And third, at the viewer's left of Mallarmé's head, there is a strange area of thin overpainting which has deleted some of the wallpaper pattern, and which can be seen to have been painted up to the then existing edge of Mallarmé's right cheek and ear. In addition, visible across Mallarmé's lower lip is a curved line of paint correctly depicting the shadow of a non-existent element protruding from his mouth. It is known from later photographs that he used a cigarette holder,²⁷ and it is proposed here that Manet initially painted the portrait with Mallarmé smoking a cigarette in a holder, and that he subsequently deleted it (but not the tell-tale shadow) because it would have pointedly emphasised the angled shaping and reduced the potential for ambiguity. The overpainting covers whatever smoke had been shown. If this proposal is correct, then, in a typical Manet touch, the replacement cigar in Mallarmé's right hand has been set parallel to the wall and the picture plane, ambiguously set into both the frontal and offset shapings.

A painting which could be seen to present a spatial interplay little different to *The Absinthe Drinker* or *Soap Bubbles*, is proposed to be an important step in Manet's application of the offset viewpoint. *La Prune* seems to present a frontal view of the woman seated at the table and turned to her left, with the bowl set to the left of her centre, and with the table, bench seat, and rear partition set parallel to the picture plane (Fig.62a). But no lines or indicators of the spatial shaping of a centre-point perspective exist to confirm this assumption. Without them, the painting could therefore also be seen to have an angled shaping as an offset view from the left (Fig.62b). In such a shaping her head is facing directly across the table and not turned to the left, her right arm sits naturally in front of her rather than into a forced position as in a frontal view and the bowl with the plum now sits directly in front of her. With the use only of the rounded forms of the plum and its glass bowl, rather than rectilinear forms, the visibility of any

distortion of the angled shaping is therefore reduced. Such an arrangement can be seen to have an important and direct relationship with that in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* of 1881–82, but with important differences which are discussed in Chapter 5(F).

Two late and major projects, the *Café-concert de Reichshoffen* which Manet commenced in c.1878 and quickly cut down into at least two smaller canvases, and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* provide important spatial connections which are best considered together. Set chronologically in between those two projects are two paintings which are of interest for their unusual use of the offset shaping. As noted above, *Chez le Père Lathuille* employs both a two-point perspective view for its background and an offset view for its foreground (Fig.75a). The shaping of the background has eliminated the potential for the space of the foreground to be ambiguously seen as both frontal and angled, but this interplay, possibly unique in Manet's oeuvre, gives evidence of Manet's continued experimentation with the offset strategy. *The Suicide* (1881, Fig.79) also provides evidence of this experimentation, with the spatial uncertainty used to enhance the unease of the subject. But rather than using shapings created by frontal and offset viewpoints, its interplay involves an angled view read as either a two-point perspective or an offset one-point perspective from the same viewpoint. With the nearly horizontal angling of the side of the bed suggesting the two-point shaping, the flattened perspective of the bed head frame suggesting the shaping of an offset one-point, and the foreshortened view of the prone figure of the dead man adding a strange frontal element fluctuating between the two shapings, the spatial complexity adds a potent dimension to the work.

In the context of Manet's spatial strategies, the painting which can be seen to have been an important prelude to *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, by the very fact of its failure, is the *Café-concert de Reichshoffen*. By means of detailed scientific examinations, it was established by David Bomford and Ashok Roy²⁸ that the two extant paintings, *Au Café*, (1878, Fig.66) and *Corner in a Café-Concert* (1878 or 1879, Fig.67) were, in part, fragments from the original canvas for *Café-concert de Reichshoffen*. They showed that the right edge of *Au Café* and the left edge of *Corner in a Café-Concert* were once joined

and that the original canvas had been larger than their combined canvases. The relative positions of the two extant canvases, as initially established by Bomford and Roy²⁹ and later refined by Juliet Wilson-Bareau,³⁰ are shown in Fig.68. Although the full details of the original canvas are not known, the long table of the co-ordinated image, as the common element between the two smaller works, certainly was the basic element of its overall composition. It also gives the clearest evidence possible of Manet's spatial intentions. The use of the offset viewpoint, as shown with the overlay in Fig.68, is clear and unequivocal, with no attempt to conceal its shaping. And in doing so an interplay between frontal and angled views has been produced which is little different to the shaping in *The Execution of Maximilian*, as discussed above. Certainly there is no ambiguity, the very aspect that the offset viewpoint had the potential to create. Obviously the original canvas had not achieved what Manet wished, and in cutting down the canvas he may have seen merit in setting the spatial interplay into more compact, restricted surfaces. In terms of ambiguity, the reformed and reworked canvases achieved little beyond that of the original work, for the most part devoid of the mediating play of integrated internal geometries.

The culmination of Manet's employment of the offset viewpoint geometry occurred in the relatively large work, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, painted some three years later, and it provides evidence of the re-assessments and transformations that Manet had made after the difficulties of *Café-concert de Reichshoffen*. A detailed explanation of the shapings and strategies used in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is given in Chapter 5(F). His re-think of the problem involved the turning of the low table of *Café-concert de Reichshoffen* through ninety-degrees to become the bar, a retention of the offset viewpoint to the right but with it camouflaged so that the frontal view was, at one and the same time, both enhanced and subverted, and the use of subtle internal geometries and interplays, such as those seen in *Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé*, to modulate the overall space and to nuance the ambiguity. He had clearly learnt from *Café-concert de Reichshoffen* that the potential for ambiguity was not possible with a dynamic

disclosure of the offset viewpoint geometry, but rather, it was required to be crafted within the artifice of the work's surface.

ii) Spatial cohesion

The second technique used by Manet for spatial ambiguity involved the interplay between the apparent cohesion of a view's spatial illusion and the degree of visibility of its actual construction as a composite of disparate spaces. A painting as a composite of different views was in itself not original and, as discussed in Chapter 2, such a technique had developed earlier in photography. However, without the presence of a spatial ambiguity, the image would normally become either a seamless compilation with no evidence of the parts, or one without pictorial unity with the disparate parts creating disjunctions of space and scale. Manet, in a wholly unconventional manner for his time, created within the surface of his paintings a new kind of cohesion, in which disjunctions and fragmentations were to varying degrees still evident.

The disjunctions of space in Manet's works appear in many guises, to various levels of visibility, and with different kinds of interaction with the perceived pictorial space. Works in which the disjunctions are overt, for example, include *The Old Musician* and *The Music Lesson*. As has been noted by many scholars previously, the figures or groups of figures in *The Old Musician* seem to exist in their own separate spaces and, as described in (a) above, *The Music Lesson* is fractured in two with different perspectives used for the two figures. Neither work involves a spatial ambiguity. The disjunctions in a painting such as *La pêche* are less overt but the work appears as a series of interlocked fragments creating a view of only partial spatial cohesion.³¹ Some of those fragments, such as the double portrait in the lower right corner of Manet and his wife-to-be Suzanne Leenhoff, the hound, and the rainbow had been 'borrowed' from Rubens, or prints after Rubens, but they remained as disparate fragments, and the landscape, thought to depict the area around Île Saint-Ouen,³² does not pictorially unify them. Apart from the incongruous mix of images, the slippages and disjunctions between these fragments also involve perspective and scale. The viewpoint and therefore the perspective, for example, of the group in the lower right corner is very different to that for the adjacent fragment of

the two fishermen in the boat, and certainly no spatial ambiguity exists to conjoin them to be part of a cohesive image.

Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada, however, presents a much more complex set of fractures and disjunctions – and a very different result. If the image did not include the group of the mounted *picador* and bull borrowed from Goya, the eye level for the painting could be reasonably positioned just above the barrier, and the ground could consequently be seen not to rise as sharply. A cohesive space may still have been problematic but, in addition, it would not have been ambiguous. The introduction of the grouping with the *picador*, set at a scale too small for the transitional middle-distance and viewed from a higher relative level than for the remainder of the painting, changes the dynamics of the painting completely, forcing the parts into their separate spaces and relative extent of spatial recessions. The group of standing men, for instance, is no longer held into the larger space, but moves forward towards the notional picture plane. The painting is ambiguous rather than just disjointed. Although the disjunctions are obvious, the ambiguity exists in the dynamics of the spaces at the surface of the work, and paradoxically provides a cohesion for this incongruous mix of a costumed and staged female figure, in a possibly borrowed pose,³³ placed without any spatial connectors into the setting of a bullring, and in the midst of borrowed groupings of static and active figures.

Whereas the perspectives in both *La pêche* and *Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada* are uneven in whole and in part, a work such as *On the Beach at Boulogne* provides an overview of its disparate fragments in a way which provides a pictorial cohesion rather than a spatial cohesion. Notwithstanding that the small size of the work has meant that subtle changes of posture and orientation may not have been contemplated by Manet, most of the figures, or groups of figures, seem to have been depicted either as elevations, or seen from separate viewpoints. Although each separate view has then been set into the overview of the beach and seascape, their independence has been maintained. Photography produced images in which the parts were actually connected by the unseen geometry of perspective but also appeared as isolated entities,

in their own world, in the surface of the photograph.³⁴ Such is the nature of the spatial ambiguity in *On the Beach at Boulogne*.

The Balcony, for which no perspective geometry seems to have been used by Manet across the width of the canvas, provides a very different kind of spatial cohesion. At least the standing figure of Fanny Claus and the flower pot have been painted as if seen from separate frontal viewpoints, and if a one-point perspective had been used for the spatial shaping of the whole painting, then she would be turned slightly to her right to confirm the purely frontal way she has been depicted. But her placement on the balcony doesn't suggest that to be the case, with the sense of the painting seen as a sequence of one-point perspectives set across its width. Oddly, the fact that the upper surface of the flower pot can also be seen indicates that the separate viewpoints for that sequence of one-point perspectives have been set at approximately the same height across the painting and that a cohesive perspective geometry has at least been used vertically. This odd hybrid construction seems to account for both the painting's spatial ambiguity as well as its apparent spatial cohesion.

A different kind of disjunction, and one which occurs in a number of Manet's important paintings, involves the collaging or overlaying of different views, taken from the same or different viewpoints and set at the same or different scales, into what appears in a work's artifice as a cohesive whole. The process is different to the one used in *La pêche* in that, with an overlay of views, parts of one view are at times seen as isolated elements set within a different view, and the concept of the final cohesive image seems to have determined the nature of the mix of fragments rather than the apparent summation of fragments as in *La pêche*. Such a process has been identified in a number of paintings that are considered and explained in detail in Chapter 5. These include two paintings of the 1860s which had not been exhibited during Manet's lifetime, *View of the 1867 Exposition Universelle* and *The Burial*, as well as the later canvases, *The Railway* and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. Part of their ambiguity lies in the fact that they each seem to not relate to the reality of the locales which they depict. Manet has in fact created composite images formed from direct views of the motifs, and each of those

views is structured by perspective. The pictorial cohesion of each of the paintings is not achieved by means of one over-arching perspectival geometry, as the original spatial shapings of the separate parts are usually maintained. Rather, the spatial cohesion is one that was uniquely achieved by Manet with those spaces brought together within the painterly flatness of their surfaces. Although both *View of the 1867 Exposition Universelle* and *The Burial* can be seen as canvases considered by Manet to be incomplete, the evident use of the composite technique as a working method confirms Manet's constant experimentation with pictorial space. That he also integrated this technique with the strategies involving the offset viewpoint in works such as *The Railway* and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, also suggests that Manet had wished to make the fullest use of its potential for spatial ambiguity.

4. AN ARRAY OF AMBIGUOUS ANGLES AND ASSEMBLAGES: Notes

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NOTES

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1. Mary Mathews Gedo, 'Final Reflections: *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* as Manet's Adieu to Art and Life', in Looking at Art from the Inside Out: The Psychoiconographic Approach to Modern Art, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Mass., New York, and Melbourne, 1994, pp.1–55, 247–246. See a detailed consideration in Chapter 5(F) of the analysis and proposals of Conger and Gedo.
2. Martin Kemp, The Science of Art: Optical themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, passim: including perspectival analyses of works by Giotto, Pietro Lorenzetti, Masaccio, Donatello (relief sculptures), Lorenzo Ghiberti (relief sculptures), Piero della Francesca, Domenico Veneziano, Paolo Uccello, Andrea Mantegna, Jacopo Bellini, Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Durer, Diego Velázquez, Pieter Saenredam, Gerard Houckgeest, Nicolas Poussin, and Jacques-Louis David.
3. James Elkins, 'On the Arnolfini Portrait and the Lucca Madonna: Did Jan Van Eyck Have a Perspectival System?', The Art Bulletin, v.73, no.1, March, 1991, pp.53–62; and, The Poetics of Perspective, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1996 (1994), passim, including detailed discussion of perspectival manipulations in works by , Masaccio, Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Vincenzo Foppa, Fernando Gallego, Ercole de' Roberti, Vincenzo Catena, Pontormo, Bronzino, and Leonardo Parasole; and perspectival analyses of works by Donatello (relief sculpture), Jan van Eyck, Andrea Castagno, Giorgione, and Tintoretto.
4. See Chapter 2, n.13.
5. Including: José Guidol (1973), Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen (1980), John F. Moffitt (1983), Joel Snyder (1985), Martin Kemp (1990), and Frederic Chordá (1991).
6. Elkins 1996 (as in n.3).
7. *ibid.*, p.219.
8. *ibid.*, p.244.
9. *ibid.*, pp.219–47. Also, see the implications of artists' practice in terms of perspective in Appendix 1.
10. The end of the reflected image of the bar in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* presents a similar indicator of perspective, but is shown in the analysis in Chapter 5(F) to be a subterfuge. There are no circumstances in *The Luncheon* that indicate the use of the angle of the table as such a device.
11. Charles S. Moffett discusses these alignments rather in compositional terms of diagonals and axes, suggesting that the large fish had been placed on the opposite axis to the knife "in order to both enliven and balance the compositional structure" (in, Françoise Cachin, et al., Manet 1832–1883, exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1983, pp.214–16). As a confirmation that the manipulation is spatial and not compositional, the interplay

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- in this painting between the parallel and angled spaces is little different to that used to create the spatial confusion with the bottles, fruit-bowl and flowers on the bar, and their reflection, in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.
12. The process by which Manet, in an additional sitting, painted these elements in the lower right corner of the painting, adding the still-life items as he progressed, was described by Duret as Manet's "manière instinctive", and explained as an issue of colour: "Evidemment le tableau tout entier gris et monochrome ne lui plaisait pas. Il lui manquait les couleurs qui pussent contenter son œil et, ne les ayant pas mises d'abord, il les avait ajoutées ensuite, sous la forme de nature morte." (Théodore Duret, *Histoire de Edouard Manet et de son œuvre, avec un catalogue des Peintures et des Pastels*, Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1919, pp.88–9).
 13. Such intervals have a resonance with the layering of spaces evident in the viewing of stereoscopes, which in Manet's time were extremely popular. These layered spaces at intervals of stereoscopes have been described, however, by Jonathan Crary as an "assemblage of local zones of three-dimensionality,... which... never coalesce into a homogeneous field" (*Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990, p.126).
 14. As proposed by Françoise Cachin, in Cachin, et al., 1983 (as in n.11), p.251.
 15. An identification possibly as speculative as Michael Fried's identification of "the engraved monogram (an *E* and an *M* superimposed?) on the coffeepot the maid holds in the *Luncheon...*" (Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996, p.497-n.169).
 16. Charles S. Moffett has noted that "The composition, subject, and technique would have been considerably astonishing in 1862" (Cachin, et al. 1983 (as in n.13), p.94), and there is no noting of the work before it appeared in the 'Inventaire après décès' in 1883, listed in 'Estimation des tableaux et études' as 'No.47. *Femme mexicaine*' (Denis Rouart, and Daniel Wildenstein, *Edouard Manet: Catalogue raisonné*, La Bibliothèque des Arts, Lausanne and Paris, 1975, v.1, p.27).
 17. Such a reduction in foreshortening is certainly not an indication of Manet's limited technique. His wholly convincing, and very beautiful, rendering of the foreshortened large fish in *Still Life with Fish* (1864, Fig.26) provides testament to the contrary.
 18. This technique is particularly evident in Goya's prints and drawings, e.g. the series of prints *Los Caprichos*, plate 7 (*Ni así la distingue*), 1797-98, etching and aquatint, and its preparatory drawing (*Por aberle yo dicho, q.^e tenia buen movimiento no puede ablar sin colear*, pen and sepia ink with Indian ink wash); and the series of prints illustrating *La Tauromaquia*, plate 30 (*Pedro Romero matando a toro parado*, 1815-16, etching and aquatint).
 19. The image of the picador and the charging bull had been taken from Goya's *La Tauromaquia* (see n.18), plate 5 (*El animoso moro Gazul es el primero que lanceó toros en regla*, 1815-16, etching and aquatint). The group of standing figures in front of the barrier in the upper right of the painting had been derived from other images in *La Tauromaquia*, including plate 19 (*Otra locura suta en la misma*, 1815, etching and aquatint), and plate 16 (*E mismo vuelca un toro en la plaza de Madrid*, 1815-16, etching and aquatint). Derivations cited in Beatrice Farwell, 'Manet's *Espada* and Marcantonio', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, v.2, 1969, pp.200, 202.
 20. Any sense of the painting's spatial shapings or ambiguities are simply non-existent in the watercolour claimed to be Manet's study for the painting (see: Cachin, et al. 1983, cat.no.28, p.98). Even apart from its clumsy transcription of the two-dimensional composition, it cannot be attributed to Manet.

21. Adolphe Tabarant had suggested that "Le fond... qui originellement était neutre, représente les portants d'un théâtre, côté coulisses, ajoutés par Manet sur les conseils de ses amis" (Adolphe Tabarant, *Manet: Histoire catalographique*, Éditions Montaigne, Paris, 1931, p.81). A suggestion that Manet added the stage scenery panels, with the angled shadow on the stage floor between them, as an afterthought, adds an intriguing aspect to a proposal for an implicit offset viewpoint. It could be seen as a purposeful experiment in such an early work by Manet to reveal to a certain extent the offset shaping of the painting's space.
22. In the 'Inventaire après décès', listed in 'Estimation des tableaux et études' as 'No.22. Dessus de porte, nature morte ' (Rouart, and Wildenstein 1975 (as in n.16), v.1, p.27).
23. For a detailed description of the use of the painting's motif in the various cover designs for etching albums see: Juliet Wilson-Bareau, in Cachin, et al. 1983, cat. nos. 45, 46, 47, pp.136–141.

The details of the painting itself have received little scholarly attention, with the vertical plane described by Henri Loyrette as recently as 1994 as "a painted and carved ledge with a cartouche that confirms the function of the painting – a trompe l'œil designed to feature a number of studio props, arranged on a shelf above a door." (Gary Tinterow, and Henri Loyrette, *Origins of Impressionism*, exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, cat. no. 85, p.395). There is, in fact, little other than the cartouche in the painting which could be described as a *trompe l'œil*. It is proposed that, rather than being a carved ledge, the decorative elements behind the guitar, hat, and basket, are the edge designs of a wall 'rug' or 'hanging', doubled over at a high level, and which is also the very fabric depicted by Manet as a curtain in the cover design etching *Eaux-fortes par Edouard Manet*, of 1862 (illustrated in Cachin, et al., 1983, cat. no.45, p.137). At the left edge of the painting an angled fold in the outer layer of the hanging is visible, in front of either its angled return or the layer behind. The unevenness of the 'straight' lines of the background

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design is caused by the way in which the fabric is hanging. The hanging touches the floor with a fringe. In addition, the guitar and basket have been set into the surface of the outer layer of the hanging, forming a slight, but discernible, hollow. Manet, therefore, had not taken the design from a painted and carved panel in the painting and placed it at the lower edge of curtain in the etching, but had painted only the lower edge of the hanging seen in the painting and depicted the complete hanging in the etching. As always, Manet had not created the object. This proposal was developed in conjunction with Julia McLaren, *documentaliste* in Paris, who suggested the possibility of the forms at the left edge being a fabric. From that suggestion, the other aspects of this proposal were jointly developed and realised. We were fortunate that at the time of our deliberations the painting was in Paris as part of the *Manet: les natures mortes* exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay. Julia McLaren was able to examine the work and confirmed that the back surface is clearly painted as a fabric, that the fabric is indeed pushed in by the guitar, and that the bottom strip of the hanging is a fringe. One could almost imagine that an actual tear in the wall hanging in his studio may have been transformed by Manet, with a wry touch, into the opening between the curtains through which the head of Polichinelle appears in the etching.

[\[I was unaware at the time that Juliet Wilson-Bareau had identified the background "from a rare etching... as the lower border of a stage curtain" \(*Edouard Manet \(1832–1883\)*, exh. cat., Art Life Ltd, Japan, 1986, p.152\).\]](#)

24. The claim by Antonin Proust that Manet had said he wanted to redo the work that he had copied, "les femmes de Giorgione, les femmes avec les musiciens", and "le

- faire dans la transparence de l'atmosphère" (Antonin Proust, Édouard Manet souvenirs (with 1897 text), L'Échoppe, Paris, 1996, p.30) has received a cautionary commentary from Françoise Cachin (Cachin, et al. 1883, p.166).
25. Edouard Manet, after Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1857?, panel, 24 x 37, Private Collection.
 26. For a detailed consideration of the series of related works, see: Juliet Wilson-Bareau, Manet: The Execution of Maximilian: Painting, Politics & Censorship, exh. cat., National Gallery Publications, London, 1992.
 27. See: Anon., *Stéphane Mallarmé et sa collection de tableaux, 89, rue de Rome*, c.1894–95, photograph, Estampes, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, illustrated in Jean-Michel Nectoux, Mallarmé: peinture, musique, poésie, Adam Biro, Paris, 1998, p.203; and, Dornac, *Stéphane Mallarmé dans le salon des "Mardis"*, 89, Rue de Rome, c.1894, photograph, Documentation du Musée d'Orsay, Paris, illustrated in *ibid.*, p.206.
 28. David Bomford, and Ashok Roy, 'Manet's *The Waitress*: An Investigation into its Origin and Development', National Gallery Technical Bulletin, v.7, 1983, pp.3–19. For a developed discussion on the background of the *Café-concert de Reichshoffen* painting, the procedures and deliberations involved in the reworking of the *Au Café* and *Corner in a Café-concert* paintings, see: Juliet Wilson-Bareau, 'The Hidden Face of Manet: An investigation of the artist's working processes', exh. cat., The Burlington Magazine, v.128, no.997, April, 1986, pp.65–71.
 29. Bomford and Roy 1983 (as in n.28), Figure 8, p.10.
 30. Wilson-Bareau 1986 (as in n.28), Figure 77, p.66.
 31. The disparate, but interlocked, fragments include: the group portrait in the lower right corner, together with the foliage and trees at the right edge of the painting; the foreground in the lower left corner; the fishermen in the boat; the area of water to the left of the boat; the area of water to the right of the boat; the boy (noted by Adolphe Tabarant to be Suzanne Leenhoff's ten-year old son, Léon Koëlla-Leenhoff (Manet: Histoire catalographique, Éditions Mouton, Paris, 1931, p.61)) fishing on the opposite bank and the sun-lit area around him; the middle distance terrain and the trees to the left, the grove of trees with the diminutive figures of bathers in the upper right corner; and the scene in the distance with the town's roofs, the sky, and rainbow.
 32. For a coverage of the literature regarding various sources, see: Charles S. Moffett, 'La pêche', in Cachin, et al. 1983, cat. no.12, pp.70–72.
 33. For a review of proposals for sources of the pose, see: Charles S. Moffett, 'Mlle V...in the Costume of an Espada', in Cachin, et al. 1983, cat.no.33, pp.110–114.
 34. e.g. as seen in a stereoscopic photograph of 1860–65, *Le Pont Neuf*, by Hippolyte Jouvin (illustrated as a complete image and detail, in Aaron Scharf, Art and Photography, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1968, ill.113 and 114, p.134.
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