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Fine art painting

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The
Crisis Point

by
katharine park

Fine art bachelor degree 1992

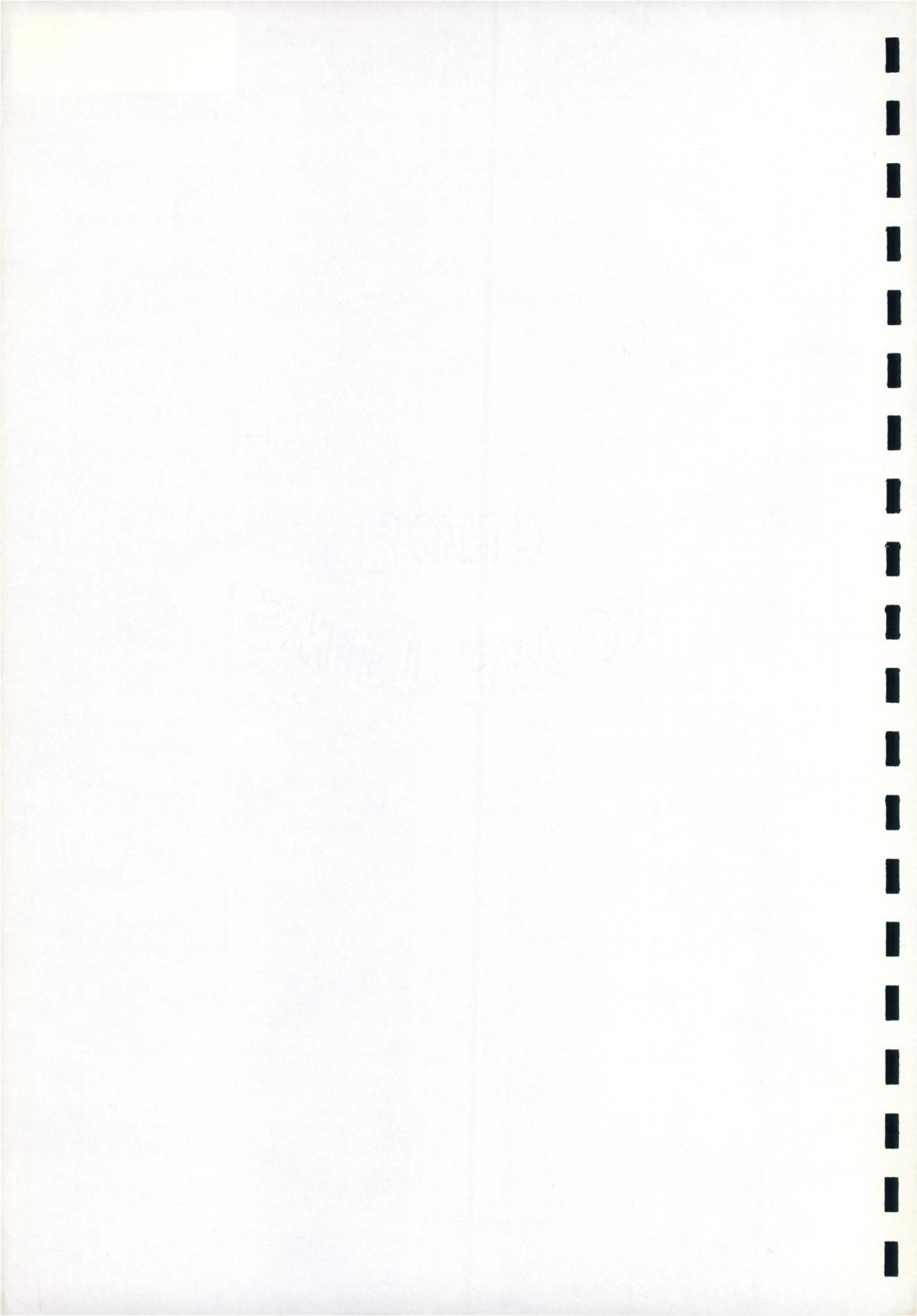


TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 3 |
| <i>Introduction</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 5 |
| <i>Chapter One</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Fragmentation and Modernism</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 9 |
| <i>Chapter Two</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>The Train of Thought</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 18 |
| <i>Chapter Three</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>What Have we Lost?</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 24 |
| <i>Chapter Four</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Postmodernism and Conclusion</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 29 |
| <i>Footnotes</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 36 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | Page 37 |

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Kurt Schwitters - 1915 Collage
- Fig. 2 The Picture Palace - Photograph 1920
- Fig. 3 Andy Warhol - 'Marilyn' Six Pack
- Fig. 4 Richard Hamilton - 'Just what makes today's homes
(Collage) so different - so appealing' 1956
- Fig. 5 Kurt Schwitters - 'The Watchmaker' 1919 - Collage
- Fig. 6 Andy Warhol - 'Marilyn Monroe Diptych' 1962

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RECORDS
1920-1929

WOODS BROTHERS
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INTRODUCTION

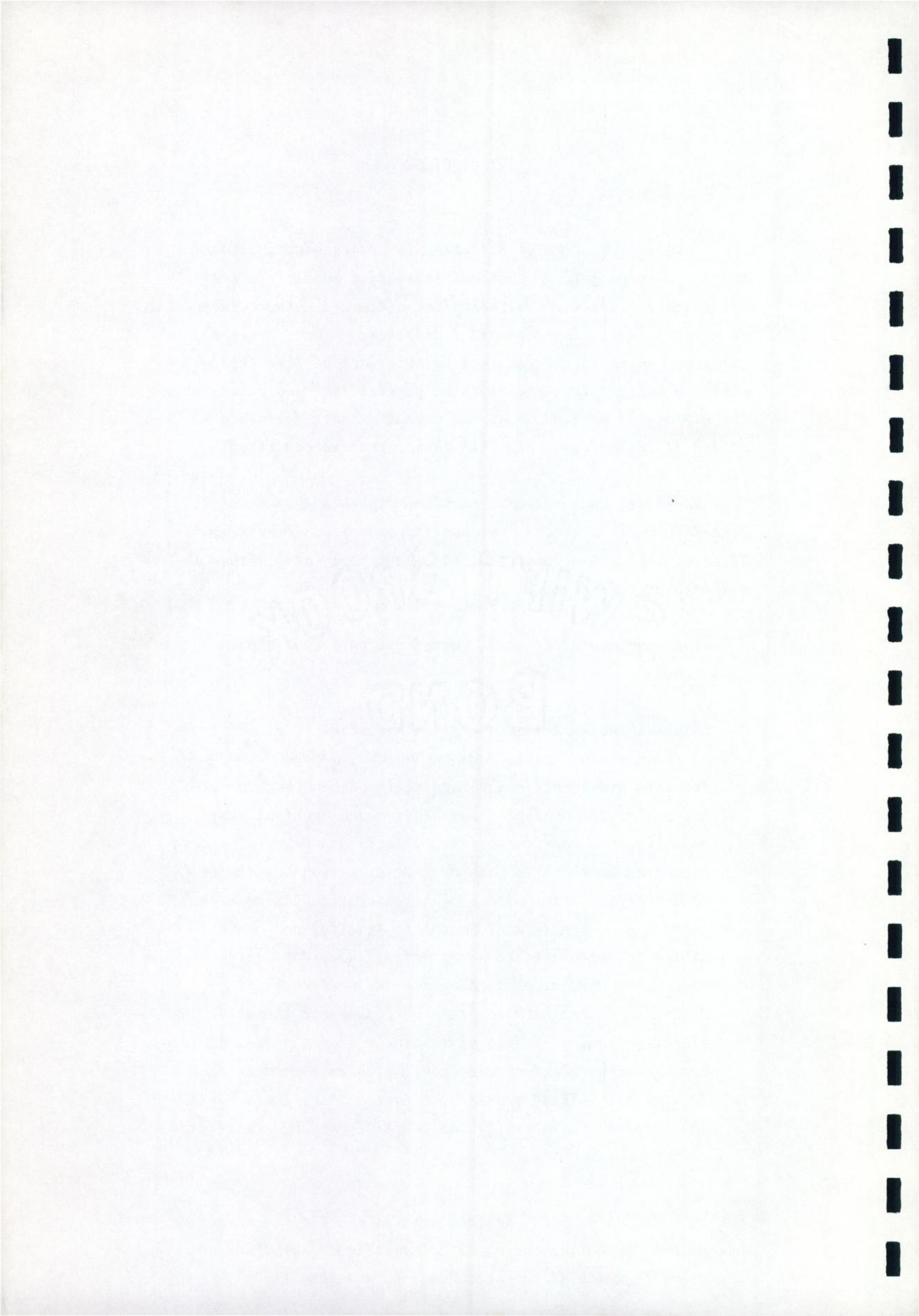
I believe Western Civilization is approaching a crisis point: a point full of abstract subjective words: full of alternatives: full of psychological dilemmas: - the evidence of which is impending ecological disaster. That physical evidence, which is the one indisputable fact of this thesis, makes me believe this crisis to be greater than any other in the history of mankind. At the moment Western decadence is eating itself hollow. Is this the postmodern condition?

My first, and greatest, problem with this thesis was to ascertain what questions I wished to pose of postmodernism. It is a broad topic to attempt to cover, especially within a thesis at this level.

The fundamental lines of investigation I have chosen are as follows:-

1. Establishing what secularization has meant (i.e. the loss of faith and belief in * religion and myth) by looking at the role and function myth and religion have had to date. A study of the gradual fragmentation and eventual demise of religion's role in society, I feel, has given me a good grounding on which to base my interpretations of the post-modern mind. The process of fragmentation can be seen to have four constituent factors: firstly, as I have mentioned, secularization; secondly, individualization, which is a product of theological and philosophical doctrines dating back to Greek philosophical thought; pluralization, a product of modernism from the last century; and, finally, bureaucratization, which is a product of capitalism. These constituent factors have their roots in religious Christianity, which itself may be classified

NOTE: * Religion being defined here as a belief in a supreme being, and the corresponding ritual practice of devotion and appeasement, which it is hoped leads to a richer life.

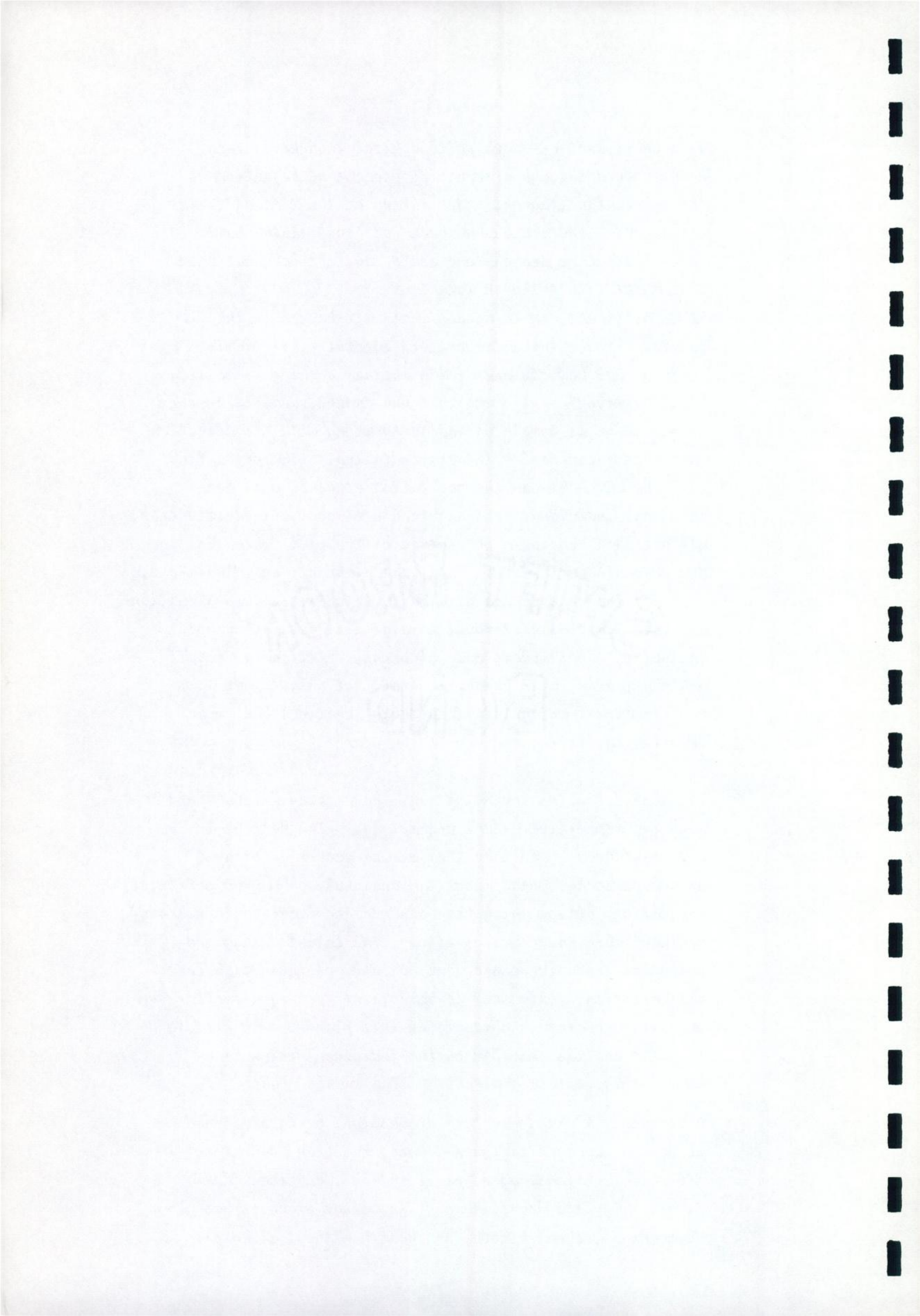


as a by-product of Greek philosophical thought. They have evolved through a recurring process of rejection of the particular stagnant order ruling at the time of their formation. The search has been for 'one' truth, but, in this virulent search, one could say, the baby has been thrown out with the bath water.

It is difficult now to assess what will happen in the future. Since there are no self-evident first premises to judge by, how can one decide whether a thing is morally right or wrong? It seems that one cannot, and, it appears to me, there is something radically wrong with the direction this postmodern capitalist era is taking. The prevailing laws (by which I mean the capitalist ethos of mass consumption, individual self-righteousness and self-preservation, without much regard to the future or the past, which is now pervading all western life) are stagnant, and, therefore, ripe for change once again. Failure to assess this situation and make some positive moves towards a structural change in society's postmodern mode of being, politically, morally, and physically, will be detrimental, not only to our civilization (which will inevitably decline) but, more importantly, to the ecology of the planet.

2. The second line of investigation I have taken is concerned with the repetitive nature of history. The decline I have mentioned could take the form of economic collapse on a huge scale, moral insanity (anarchy), or violent political revolution, all of which have occurred and recurred in history as inevitable processes of life. The latent energy and potential explosiveness of one, or all, of these turbulent possibilities, would seem to be evident to only a small proportion of the inhabitants of this planet. In history such latency was observed by the indigenous thinkers of each era as it rose and fell. 'The end is nigh!'

Decadence, a grand pivot of discussion, being a cliched element of a civilization's demise, has been evident in all eras, periods, ages, civilizations, and individual lives. It is a necessity of life, since sickness has no meaning without health, nor health without sickness.

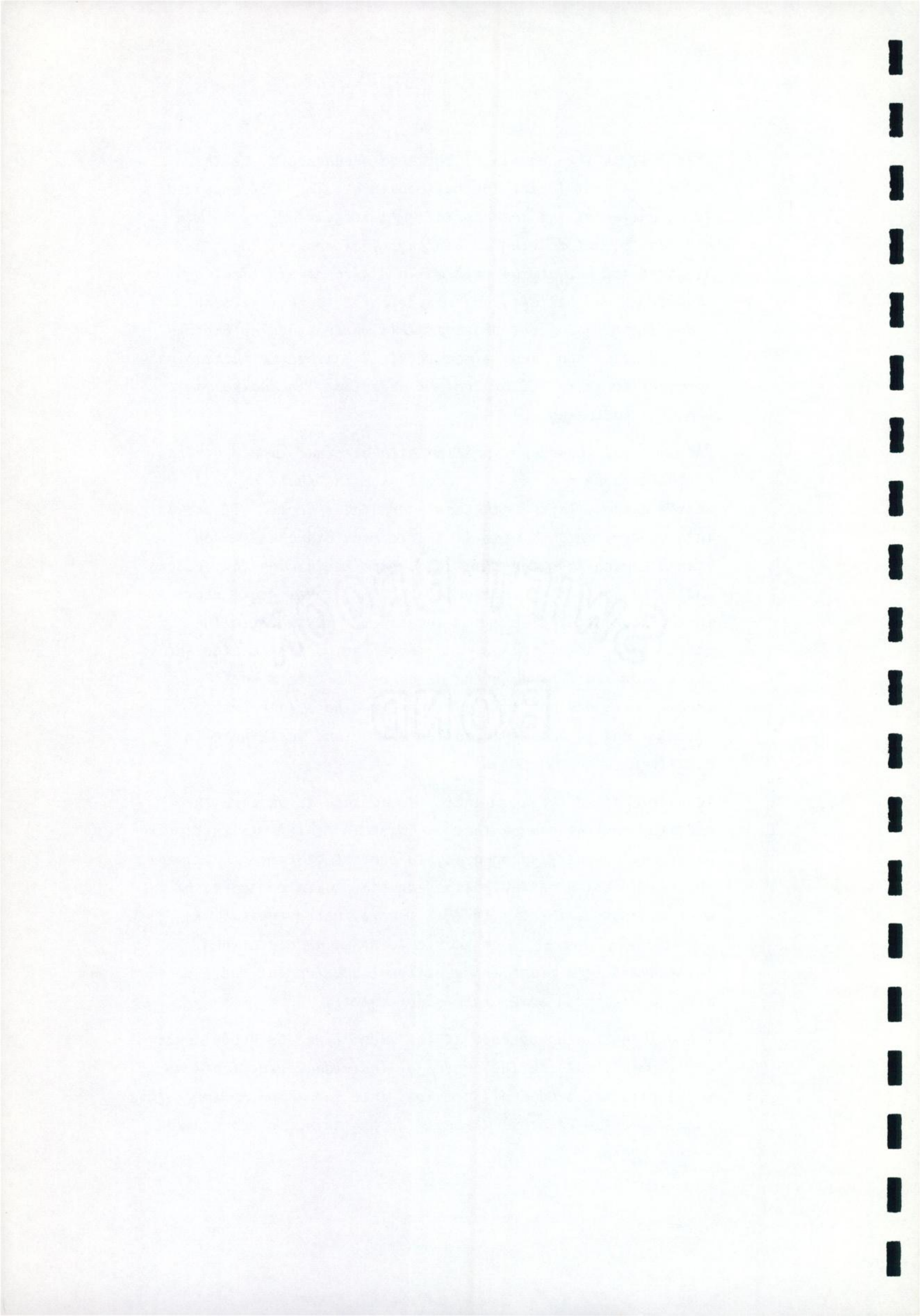


When I began this thesis, I believed decadence to be the culprit of what I call the postmodern crisis. It appeared to be a sign of the rot capitalism's self-indulgent growth had led to, yet looking at history, I discovered that this decadent rot has always existed in different civilizations, traditions and beliefs, and was integral to their rising and falling. I first observed this while studying Biology several years ago, and, since then, it has become increasingly apparent to me in all biological organisms, including man's social structuring.

One analogy, though not particularly original, would be that of the life of a seed. It comes from the fruit of last year's autumn, falls to the earth and takes root. It grows into a stem, which diversifies into many branches - each branch coming from the same seed, growing through the seasons until the arrival of this year's autumn. New fruit grows in the diversity, rich sweet and ripe. It falls to the earth again, rots, decays, and leaves new seeds for the future which grow and thrive in the decay of the tree's fall. Likewise, in one man's life, in one period's fashionable beliefs, and in one civilization's rise and fall there is a pattern.

We have reached the point where we are able to observe the pattern, and the damage that our Western society is inflicting on it daily, but finding a way to control or limit the damage, in the diversity of the postmodern era, would appear to be well-nigh impossible. In this thesis, being typical of a postmodern student, I am unable to offer any solutions. This thesis is a stage in my personal development and I merely wish to establish some clarity for myself.

I have been trying to look at the wider lines of evolutionary development, outside the cycles of individual civilizations - the original seed and the larger tree - perhaps an impossible task. So far it seems there is no beginning, or conclusion - only change.

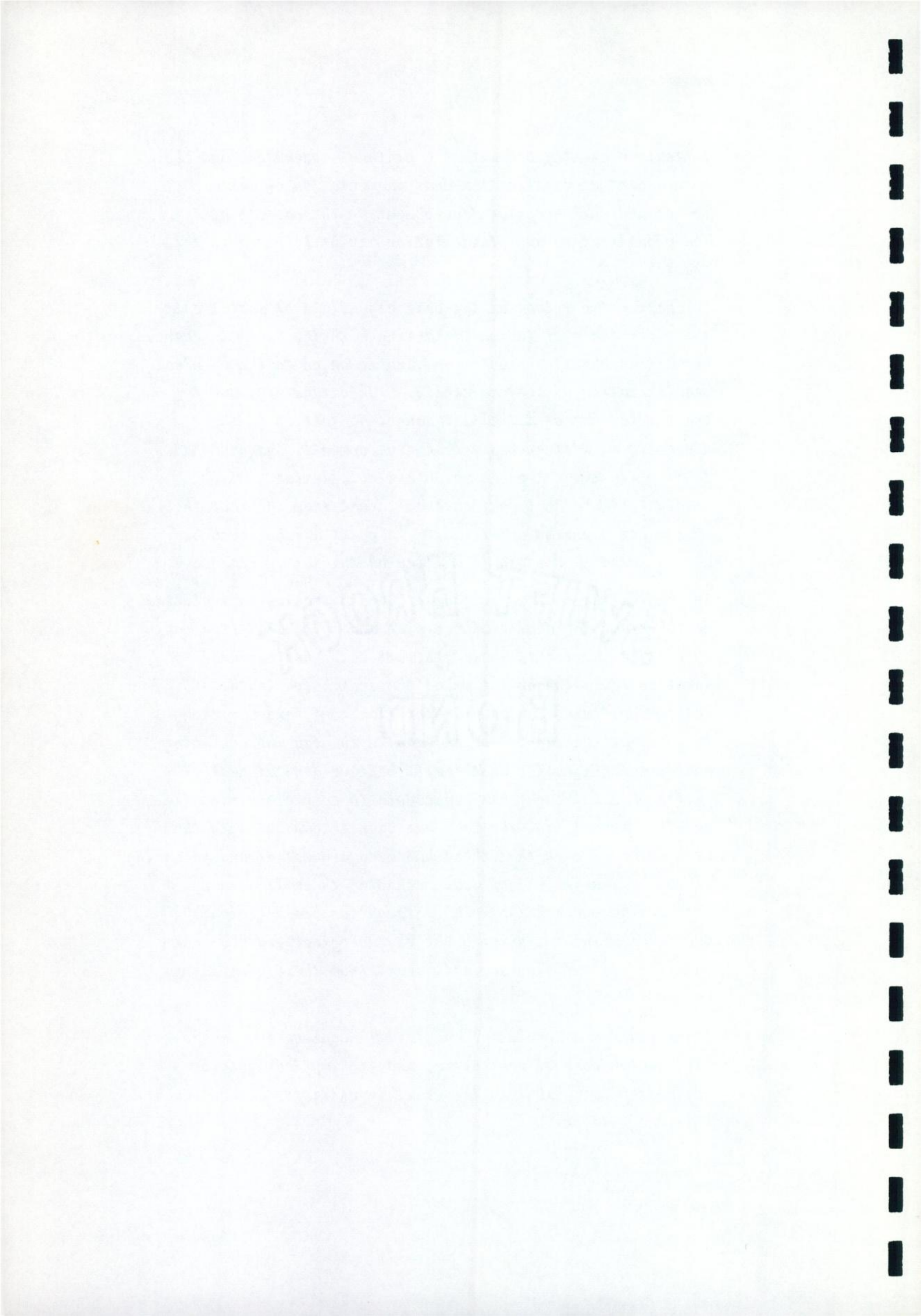


I start in chapter one with the birth of modernism, and the more recent diversification and fragmentation of Western social and philosophical development. The process of individualization and pluralization can be followed in this chapter.

In chapter two I look at the bare essentials of what I call the wider train of thought, starting with the Greek influences on Western Christian evolution, and so on on to the eventual secularization of Western ethics. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of a thesis I cannot do justice to the diversity of Western historical developments, and have had to simplify several cases which are not, in fact, as straightforward as I portray them (apart from the fact that my sources are also ahistorical - a point which should be kept in mind. History is written by the ruling classes.)

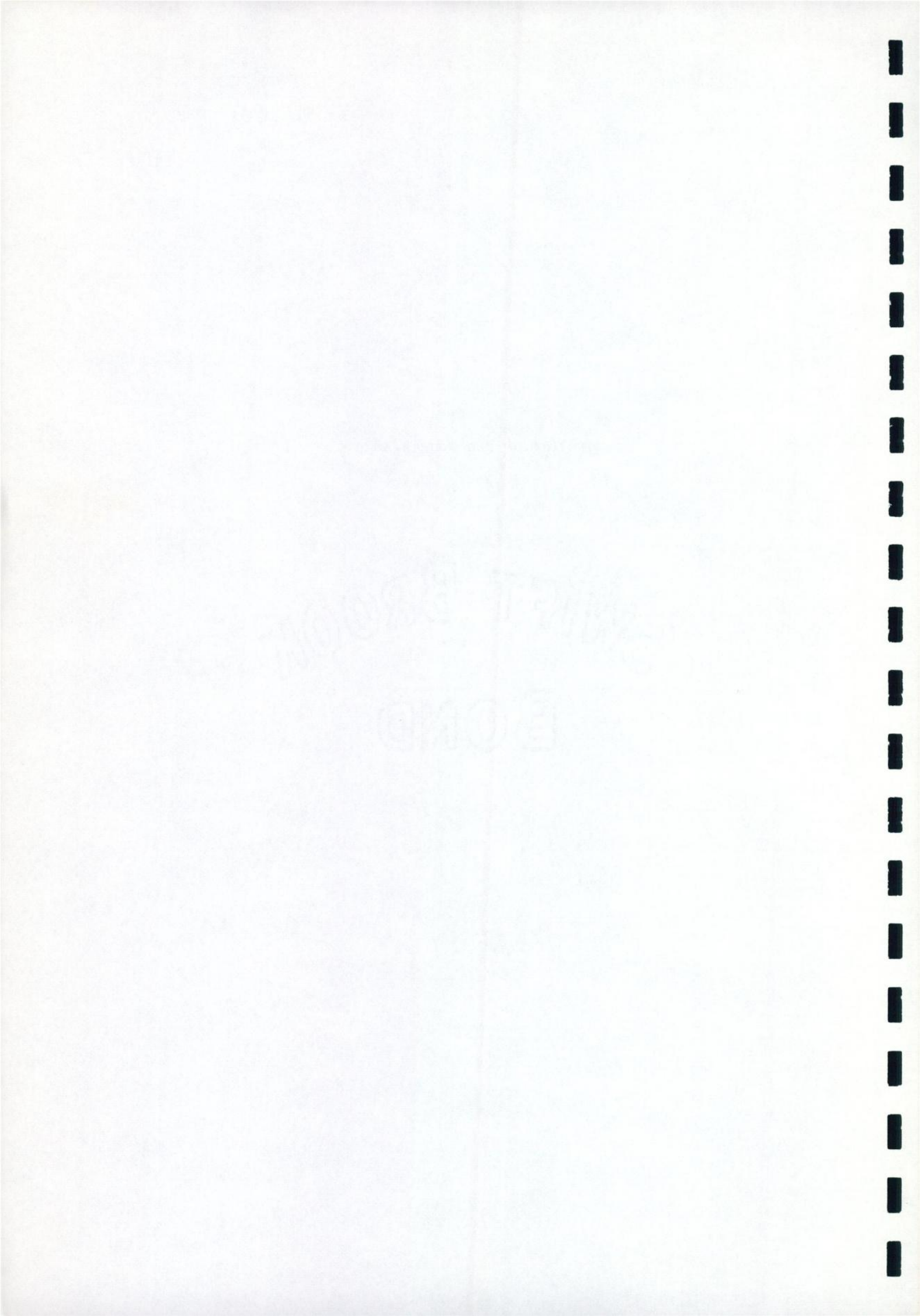
In chapter three I try to look at secularization more closely, as I believe the demise of religion and myth has left a gaping hole at the centre of society's well-being and communal functioning. Though I commend the search for truth, and realise one cannot unlearn 'sophistication', and go back to a 'naive' belief in the old man in the sky who controls and directs life, for instance, I believe a great deal of philosophical thought has led people to completely miss the point. When I say, the baby has been thrown out with the bath water, I mean that there has been a great misunderstanding as to the true nature of God. Chapter three is also a look at the modernist's rash onslaught on old religious doctrines without examining the psychological and physical functions of religion and myth apart from their consolatory nature.

In my final and conclusive chapter, I focus on the bureaucratization born of capitalism, and its implications for postmodernism. What is the fruit we offer to the next cycle - if there is one?



CHAPTER ONE

Fragmentation and Modernism

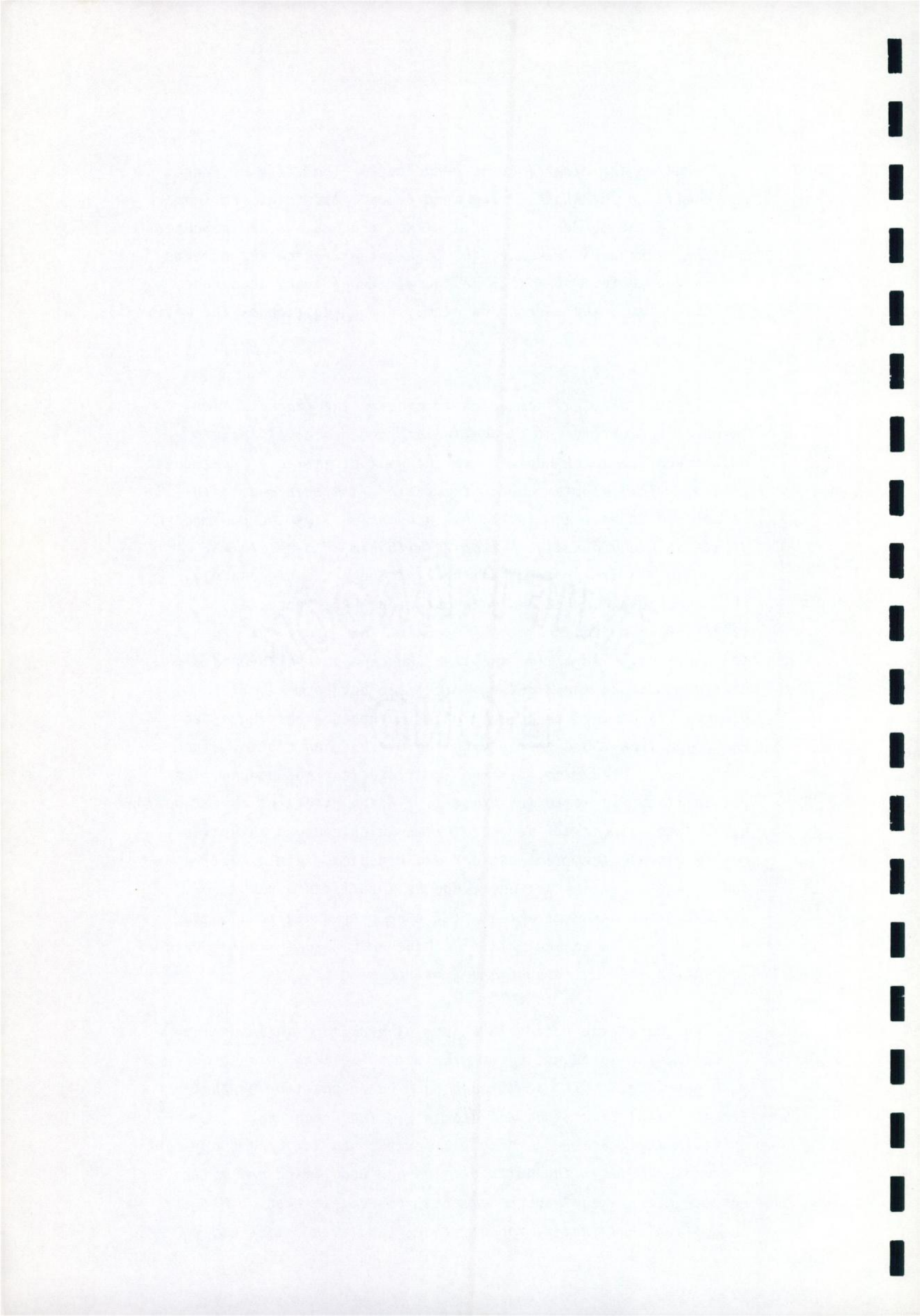


"What is the sign of every decadence? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence. The sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole. But this is the simile of every decadence, every time, the anarchy of atoms, disaggregation of the will." (1)

NEITZCHE

In this chapter I am going to examine the fragmentation (a constitutive element of decline and decadence) of society and its values which have led to the vast diversity of postmodern ethics. This chapter covers the period from when modernity is alleged to have its roots, by such analysts of the postmodern debate as Richard Rorty. I agree with him when he claims modernity has its roots as far back as the sixteenth century. The French philosopher and mathematician, Rene Descartes, (1596-1650), posed a number of problems for future philosophers to ponder on. At a time when the Church's authority became controversial in the light of scientific development, it became evident that there were other methods of seeking after knowledge than those employed by the Greeks, and others, since that time. Descartes, trained in Aristotlean philosophy, set out to study the world for himself. After extensive investigation he came to suspect all accepted views which claimed authority merely because they were ancient and honoured. In an active and energetic search for knowledge he identified a number of psychological dilemmas which still echo profoundly today, and, by resonating throughout history, have shaken faith in the very foundations of our thought and first premises.

The Cartesian cogito is a form of knowledge which desires to master the world not by praying but by working in accordance with knowledge. It was through such basic questioning that for the first time since the decline of the Roman Empire, a split in the sphere of religion, science and art became apparent. A division between the unity of mind and body, mind and matter became intensified through ceaseless objectification. His suggestion that chairs, tables, trees and even ourselves,



might be part of a vast delusion (or dream), yet, at the same time, would seem to be based on something, led to his making the following summary:-

"The I that has been proved to exist from the fact that I think, therefore I exist, while I exist and only then. If I ceased to think then there would be no evidence of my existence. I am a thing that thinks, substance of which the whole nature or essence consists of thinking, and needs no place or material thing for its existence. The soul, therefore, is wholly distinct from the body, and easier to know than the body. It would be what it is even if there was no body." (2)

DESCARTES

The I and its perception became the only reality. One becomes individualized. This brought to completion the idea of dualism of the body and mind which began with Plato: two parallel independent worlds - mind and matter. The material world was perceived rigidly as being deterministic matter, which is governed by 'laws' of physics, with the exception only of the human soul, which by violation of the will could alter the direction of things contrary to the laws of mechanics. This Cartesian cogito has had, I believe, profound repercussions on the direction in which Western civilization has developed. It was Descartes who raised the most harrowing possibility of all with regard to secularization, and that is the question of Deity.

"Nevertheless, I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all-powerful God existed, by whom I have been created, such as I am. But how do I know that He has not brought to pass that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nonetheless, I perceive all these things, and they seem to me to exist just exactly as I see them? And besides, as I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not

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deceived every time that I count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? But, possibly, God has not desired that I should be thus deceived for He is said to be supremely good. If, however, it is contrary to His goodness to have made me such that I constantly deceive myself, it would also appear to be contrary to His goodness to permit me to be sometimes deceived and, nevertheless, I cannot doubt that He permits this." (3)

DESCARTES

(This pre-supposes, of course, that God is a being completely divided from the earth and its inhabitants.) This suggestion, however, admitted the possibility of systematic deception, leading to the postmodern feeling, after secularization has taken place on a large scale, that all appears lost, and even our most 'reliable' information appears dubious. The Cartesian view has served as a major turning point in the fragmentation of Western culture.

It will be easier for me to discuss the evidence of historical fragmentation if I take a specific area and trace its divergence. The field I have chosen for this purpose is hermeneutics, which is defined as the science of interpretation. The discussion of rules of interpretation, which began in the seventeenth century, was dominated by rationalism and hugely influenced by Cartesianism. The modern conception of art and art works was developed with this new philosophical discipline of searching to understand aesthetics and sciences of the arts. Students first used hermeneutics to study the art of antiquity. After the seventeenth century the unity of the social world became increasingly fragmented: art separated from social life: science from religious morality and philosophy, and objective analysis became the predominant route of learning and acquiring knowledge.

In the late eighteenth century interest in the application of hermeneutical principles and rules of art were found among the scholars of classical antiquity. It soon became clear that understanding 'a work of art' did not necessarily account for

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its capacity to arouse aesthetic experience. This brought to light the idea of the aesthetic dimension of art, which became a philosophy in itself. Philosophical aesthetics was concerned with all works of art, but after in depth searching another question arose. Can the same canons and rules be used to look at all art forms (of different heritages and traditions)? Since the manifestations of the hermeneutical mind are manifold this led to the following hermeneutical reflections. These manifestations, speech, writing, painting, sculpture, music, drama, etc, are difficult to understand from differing cultural or temporal viewpoints, and so an interpretative technique was sought. This required further objectification of the 'spirit' when, for instance, one stood in front of an 'alienated' form, where the work was only understood by the spirit of its origination. Such formulations of thought led to and culminated in modernism, as the fields of study became increasingly diverse. If one was to try to establish the approximate time when modernism became a movement, rather than just an idea, one would say, (in art especially) that it began just before the turn of the twentieth century.

The gradual fragmentation of society into its various lesser components, definable quantities, independently functioning entities, was suddenly accelerated into a whirling mass of action and contradictory thought at the turn of the nineteenth century. This sent society speeding into the industrial age. The paradigm of a Christian heaven shifted to a search for Utopia on earth. The forerunners to this shift were such thinkers as Hegel and Marx, who in their philosophical surmising, kindled a desire for Utopia as a reality - now. Hegel, who was said by Richard Rorty to have heralded postmodernity in with his philosophizing, negated theology (paradoxically in a theological manner), and defined God as man divided from himself, thus undermining the authority of the Church's teaching, and highlighting the crisis in religion. Firstly, he pointed out that religion was a representation of values which were, in fact, those of man, and secondly, that the provision of its doctrines justified support for a social and political order which had been outgrown.



Fig. 1 Kurt Schwitters - 1915 Collage

Marx was greatly influenced by Hegelian dialectic thought, although he rejected the idealistic elements of this philosophy, seeing more truth in Feuerbach's (a contemporary of Hegel) view of the social nature of man. From these two roots, Marx formulated his own theory of historical materialism with its contention that human history is governed by economic laws and cannot be altered by individuals inspired by abstract ideals. The abolition of religion, 'the illusory happiness of men', is a demand for real happiness, allowing the values in religious christianity to be attained. This historical materialism is an aspect I will return to in chapter four, as I believe that there is a new element in the cycle of revolution, namely (as I mentioned in the introduction) the danger to the ecological balance of the planet. This, however, is only a point to remember for future reference as I have, so far, only been looking at the chronological fragmentation, secularization and individualization that has occurred in the last five hundred years.

Modernism, as a definition refers to the period of Western thought and art which covers roughly the last hundred years. This period is not characterised by any specific movement, attitude or theory, but precisely by the fact that a plurality of movements, attitudes and theories began to develop, which have in common the fact that they reject earlier concepts of art, tradition and religion. This phenomenon is connected with the fact that art, like science, politics etc. no longer enjoys a close relationship with the life of the community; church or state. The meaning of art through hermeneutical discussion became a topic of controversy. New attempts were made to find a logic that set a frame of validity within which the artist, as an 'individual', could now realise his own freedom. One had to become educated to have an experience with 'a work of art', particularly as artists began to express themselves about the meaning of their work within the work itself.

Modernism in the broad sense reflects an irreconcilable opposition between certain sets of values. Firstly, the objectified socially measurable time of capitalist civilization:



*Fig. 5 - Kurt Schwitters - 'The Watchmaker' 1919 Collage
(Example of Dada Art using chance)*

creative time, on the one hand, being a precious commodity which can be bought and sold, and private and personal time, on the other hand, used for the unfolding of the self. Time and self constitutes the foundation of modernist culture. The supreme cultural experiment of 1880, rejection of the past in a search for Utopia now, had by 1940 refined itself until it was gradually developed and exploited, by a process I will later discuss, to become an 'entropic parody of itself'. (4) At the turn of the century confidence in rational technology was unbounded. Religious decay was a release. People stood in awe as they saw the astounding rate at which culture reinvented itself. From 1881 to 1895, the phonograph, photograph, electricity, the machine gun, synthetic fibre, cinematography, the ford motor car, all had been invented. In 1903, the Wright brothers made their first breakthrough in aviation, and in 1905, Albert Einstein discovered the theory of relativity. This burst of colourful and exciting progress gave way to an air of exuberance and confidence in man's abilities. Art reflected this air.

Under the heading of the 'avant garde' came futurism's ferocious attack on, and desire to destroy, all culture for the sake of the future. The central 'myth' of the avant garde was that by changing the order of language they could reform the order of experience, and so alter the conditions of social life. The Dadaists believed resolutely in the power of art to save mankind, as it was free at last of the hindrance of tradition and religious morality. They believed in Utopia and the future, but they neglected to remember that their thought processes were moulded by tradition and religious morality, and had, in fact, not really changed. It would seem, with hindsight, that their belief in chance, a search for child-like spontaneity and inspiration in more primitive styles of art, was not, in fact, looking to the future, but was rather more of a nostalgic grope into the past - much like the Greek cult of Dionysus, which was a similar form of nostalgia prevalent in the hellenistic period, when, through various rites, participants tried to return to more primitive urges.

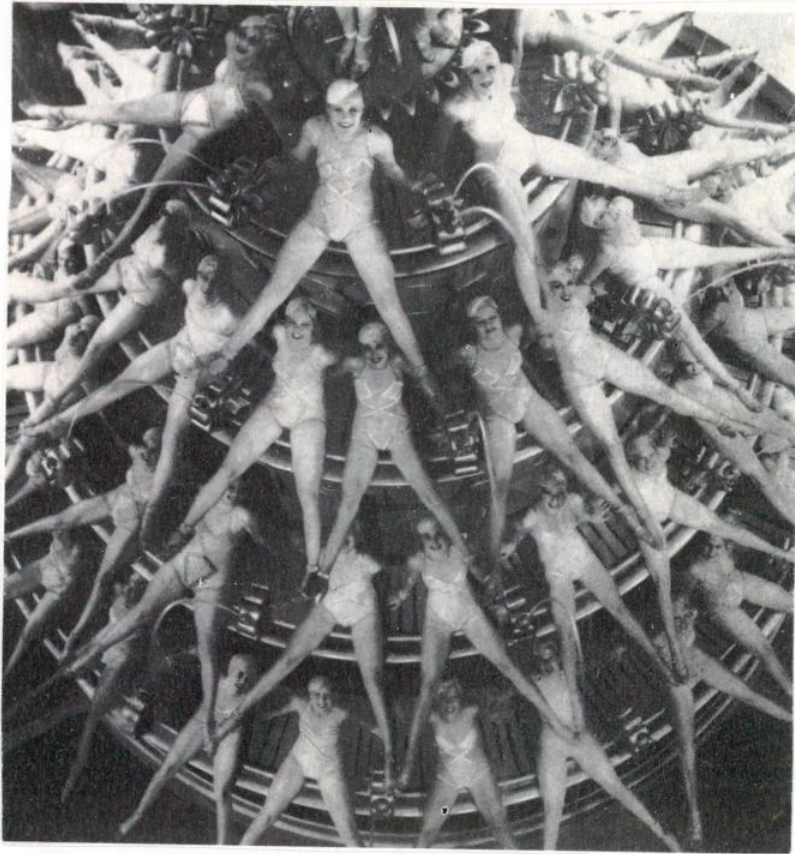


Fig. 2 - The Picture Palace - was a place of escape and enchantment in the 1920's



Fig. 3 - Andy Warhol - 'Marilyn' Six Pack

Their passionate belief that art could play a role in changing the way people thought and felt about power became more emphatic after World War I, which had dramatically doused the celebratory mood of early modernism. It brought our culture into the age of mass produced industrialised death. It further divided young and old. World War II also had a dramatic effect in modifying the western world's hopes and newfound ideals. It ushered in many new realities, in the mould of lost and obsolete traditions and structures. This historical time, with its sweeping social and psychological transformations, brought about by industrial development, turned culture into a saleable commodity. The Mass Media deprived art of its capacity for political speech, and the old, rigidly adhered to values, no longer applied. The idea of Utopia as a reality was fast evaporating, and, in the wake of its collapse, the industrial machine (bureaucracy) moved in, offering money as security, instead of religious doctrine.

Kitsch was the final institutionalization of art, tucking it neatly into a final triviality. The avant garde and decadence are two common terms of modernism, closely related through the common theme of time, and, in Kitsch, these two bitterly conflicting modernites are confronted, as it were, with their own caricature. Kitsch, however, is in no way a direct consequence of aesthetic modernity, but rather in a historical context, emerged as the result of capitalist technology and business interests in the domain of art, as art's role became investment capital.

I believe Kitsch brings us through the door to a new period called postmodernism, which differs from modernism, not only in the extremes of its humanistic contradictions, but in the provisionality of its response to them. Where modernism struggled to find new ways of reaching Utopia and truth, naive as it may now seem to the sceptical eye of the postmodernist, postmodernism abandons the effort and denies the belief.

"If there is no God, everything is permissible." (5)

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
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Postmodernity refuses to posit any master narratives, like myth, for example. It argues these systems are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary, but that does not make them any less illusory. The authorship of moral rules and responsibility for their promotion was shifted to a supra-individual level (the final point of fragmentation), which leads to the ethical paradox of postmodernism. It restores its agents to the fullness of moral choice and responsibility, while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of universal guidance.

I believe fragmentation to be an illusion that began with Plato (as I discuss in chapter two), but with regard to modernism, it was Descartes dualistic thought which reinforced the idea of a division between mind and matter. Out of this division came individualization and secularization, which, in turn, led to further fragmentation of society as a communal functioning unit. With the passing of time, fragmentation became more entrenched and all pervasive; so much so, that communication between the units became well-nigh impossible.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Train of Thought

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Is this the autumn of Western Civilization? Is this when life becomes self conscious of its meaning through decadence? I believe, and history has shown, that with each decline there has been a new rising; whether it be the death of a man, of a nation, or a social system. One dies, another is born of its flesh. This is the cyclic pattern of history, but there is a linear progression of thought that can be traced from the dawn of time. A quest for understanding. In postmodernism, however, the threads of Western history's thought seem to have to come to an impasse.

Marx's concept of decadence, taken in a broad sense as he related it to social evolution, is a constitutive element of his historical materialism. This concept of decadence is conveyed by a large variety of terms suggesting decline, decay and inevitable collapse of the ruling classes, when they no longer play the progressive role that helped their rise to power. History illustrates at every turn the clash between the progressive new and the stagnant old; a product of class struggle. The conflict manifests itself first on the level of material production, which is the determining factor in history. New and more effective means of production appear to promote the rising class. The old social forms (institutional laws) supported by the ruling class become increasingly incompatible with the further development of the means of production. When this incompatibility reaches a crisis the whole society finds itself in the midst of revolutionary turmoil and the new order is established. In his analysis of historical materialism, Marx uses the decline of the Roman Empire as an example. Another such decline is that of the Hellenistic period of Greek civilization.

However, the thoughts and ideas of the old order remain to a greater or lesser extent, being built on and developed, despite the demise of the culture. One can, therefore, follow a train of thought and progression perhaps from the dawn of civilization. European civilization - that of Christianity most certainly - has its roots in classical antiquity, Greek civilization. Much of what makes civilization had already existed for thousands of years in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Greece not only adopted the critical elements which civilization needs

SONG BOOK



to function and mature, but supplied new faculties, especially in the intellectual realm. Though arithmetic and geometry existed among the Egyptians and Babylonians, it was mainly in the form of thumb measurements. Deductive reasoning was a Greek innovation.

The Greeks, in common with other cultures, adopted working philosophies from earlier civilizations and developed them. It could be said that the most influential Greek thought, as far as Western development is concerned, occurred in the Hellenistic period - the decadent decline of the Alexandrian Empire.

Parmenides is said to be the father of logic. He directed Western rational philosophy on its path of dialectic thought. He influenced Socrates' philosophy of permanence and his conception of atoms - as indestructible components of the Universe, always in motion. Plato, a disciple of Socrates and Parmenides, founded the theory of dualism: between reality and appearance, ideas and sensible objects, reason and sense perception, soul and body. These pairs, however, were connected, though the first was presumed to be always superior to the second. It is from Plato that Christianity, in part, adopted its dualistic beliefs; an ascetic self-denying morality. Xenophane believed that there was one permanent God outside of this reality. Hericlitus (who inspired Nietzsche) believed in the unity of all things, which were in a state of constant flux, in war and change. So many of the Greek philosophical thoughts are still relevant components of new evolving ideas (about the source, function and reason of life) which continue to be a battleground of discussion and contention.

The Hellenistic culture in the period of its heightened decadence, rich in philosophical originality, was absorbed by Roman occupation, and a period of peaceful diffusion followed. The Roman Empire's main influence on Western history in this context was the transmission of Greek, Judaic and Christian teachings to the western half of its Empire. At this point, I wish to focus on the development of Christian thought as a culmination of the

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doctrines of Judaism, Platonism, Stoicism, and a new belief in the fulfilment of Judaic Scriptures, the teachings of Jesus Christ.

From Judaism, Christianity derived theories of salvation. Here the conception of time changed from Greek fixed atemporal, archetypal time to the Judean-Christian horizontal interpretation of time, in which the past announces and prepares for the future. The Greeks believed that time was a journey away from the perfection of the past, whereas the Judea-Christian image of perfection lies in the future. This change in the perception of time must have had huge repercussions on the outlook of the individual. This conception of time still holds true in our capitalistic culture despite the subsidence of religious belief.

From Platonism, and other Greek philosophical doctrines, Christianity inherited a belief in dualism - other worldliness. This absorption of dualism into latter church doctrines became more pronounced with the progression of time, until it found, as I mention in chapter one, its absolute definition in Descartes in the sixteenth century.

Stoicism is another very important belief, which merits discussion, not only because of its profound effect on the evolutionary direction of the Western mind through its influence on Christianity, but also because of the consolatory role it played in the crumbling world of Greek sovereignty. This makes it relevant to my initial question, i.e. 'is this the autumn of Western civilization?'

The stoics were tremendously depressed by the collapse of the Greek city states and the Alexandrian Empire. They felt there was no hope of social reconstruction, consequently, their philosophy consisted of advice to the individual regarding the attainment of personal salvation. Stoicism, therefore, became the most influential doctrine of the ancient Western world before Christianity. However, it lost its appeal as it was a consolatory doctrine that offered advice for withstanding the rigours of life only in times of trouble, unlike Christianity which also suggests constructive

SWITZERLAND
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measures to overcome difficulties in less strenuous times.

The main effect of Stoicism was to place the responsibility for becoming a good or bad person directly on the individual. It suggested that it was stultifying to be easily upset by superficial events, and held that by practising indifference to the minor distractions which occur in everyday life, one might avoid considerable unhappiness. This attitude is notably similar to that of the postmodern approach to life, which I discuss in chapter four.

The stoics believed that there are certain principles which are patently obvious, and which all men recognise. The belief in innate ideas and principles of Greek logic was wholly deductive, which raised the question of first premises, which had, in part at least, to be general, and not requiring proof. These could be, as in Euclides' elements, the basis of deduction. Innate ideas, similarly, could be used as a starting point of definitions. This point of view was accepted throughout the Middle Ages up to, and even by, Descartes. Natural law was devised by first principles - the kind held to underlie all knowledge. The Greeks did not believe in chance. In postmodernism, however, nothing has been left unquestioned, including first principles. This has been beneficial to such areas as science, initiating a re-appraisal of first principles. I discuss this in chapter four.

Christianity offered a programme for building a better world, so it became popular and spread rapidly across the world. The subtle controversies which are found in the later writings of the Church Fathers are almost entirely unrepresented in early Christianity, where the emphasis was on morally correct behaviour. As the Catholic Church developed into a social and political institution, Christian ethics became more analytical. The causes for the gradual and numerous changes in 'church ethics' were manifold. One was the growth of the Church as a factor in political and social life, thus causing its ethical doctrine to vary, depending upon the continuing conflict between Church and State over the directing of men's lives. Another was the difficulty

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in interpreting Scripture: which, in the case of Luther, led finally to his withdrawal from the Church. I discuss in chapter four the profound effect this had on the development of capitalism.

The Christian ethic, however, gradually presented difficulties in its assumption that the moral code expressed God's will. A violation of the code was thus equivalent to disobedience towards accepted authority. Immorality equated disobedience. Thus arose such questions as those posed by Descartes - Why obey the prescriptions of a divine being who may be evil? The postmodern dilemma is the result of such arguments which deny, or at least question, the existence of God. If God does not exist, then it is impossible to justify the moral code by saying it expresses his will. But, surely, this depends on one's interpretation of God. This question is, I believe, a legacy of rational thought, and is outside the capacity of this thesis to discuss.

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CHAPTER THREE

*The Function of Myths and their demise.
What have we lost?*

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"We should burn all libraries and allow to remain only that which everyone knows by heart. A beautiful age of legend would begin." (1)

MARINETTI

So rang the battle cry of the futurists, the avant garde, in their crusade against tradition, which with its morality, religion and laws no longer supporting the evolving Western mind and aspirations, was seen only as an obstacle to future development. As a result, a profound sense of crisis and alienation has become apparent in the postmodern era. Modern thought, art and being, for all its objectivity and rationality, after the demise of religion, lacks any compelling justification. The result seems to be unbounded relativism. To quote Nietzsche in his criticism of modernity:-

"Our modern tragedy lies in the fact that man has proved incapable of replacing God, and that we now have to live on the mere pittance of inherited and decaying values." (2)

NIETZSCHE

But what does the loss of religion mean? Certainly it has played a central role in the growth of civilizations to date, but what is the function of myth? As described by Joseph Campbell (anthropologist and sociologist), myth has four major functions. Firstly, to awaken and maintain in the individual a sense of wonder and participation in the mystery of this inscrutable universe: secondly, to fill every atom of the current cosmological image with the myth's measure of importance, creating a sense of unity, purpose and direction. The third, and most important, function of myth, with reference to this thesis, is to validate and maintain the moral code and way of life peculiar to specific cultures, creating social order and harmony. It has become evident in the current postmodern crisis (mentioned in chapter one), that we are not separate entities, independent of the earth, and each other, but interdependent participants of a social and ecological organ. The final function of myth is that of conducting the individual through the vagaries of his life. Religion has

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upheld and promoted myths to coherently co-ordinate the functioning of societies. As Hegel pointed out, however, (and here I am referring to Christian doctrine) it is a representation of values which are, in fact, created by man, and which offer support for an existing social order.

Religion is run for, and by, humans, and thus is subject to all human frailties, yet its function still remains valid. I know that in today's capitalist and rational climate it would be ridiculous to suggest a re-implication of religious doctrines and practices, yet I think it is vitally important for us to understand what we have lost in order to better comprehend today's crisis of determining right from wrong. This point is discussed in chapter four.

Marx stressed the historical nature of man. History is not only the natural framework of human life - man is a product of history, and it is impossible to conceive of him as being outside of this. Christianity is historically built into the framework of postmodern thought. As Jean Francois Lyotard (a postmodern philosopher) points out, the emancipation story of Christianity is inbuilt into everything from secularized capitalism, where the worker ideally emancipates himself from poverty, to Marxist socialism, where the individual emancipates himself from oppression. Our minds are moulded on the physical and mental landscape around us which is a product of evolution. We are social beings and need structures to relate to.

However, in this chapter, I wish to analyse the process of de-mythologizing which has gradually evolved since the renaissance, and, more specifically, I wish to examine the catalysts of secularization.

Lyotard suggests that modernism has its roots in Descartes. Descartes believed that the total quantity of the universe is constant, (not a new thought by any means), and cannot be affected by the soul, but that the soul can alter the direction of the vital spirits.

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"The I that has been proved to exist from the fact that I think therefore I exist..." (3)

DESCARTES

The Cartesian cogito was, therefore, a liberation in the religious context from everything which could to some degree inhibit man; sin, guilt, emotion, etc. Descartes' doubt, by placing the world in parenthesis, put an end to sin and the I is, because of the way in which it was totally self constituted. "Man becomes the virtuoso of his existence." Cartesian thought influenced, to a considerable extent, the dualistic and rational direction of the Western flow of thought.

Though there is a relatively large time gap between Descartes and my next subject, Marx, I feel, as far as modern secularization is concerned, Marxian social theories are extremely relevant. Marx saw in the decline of religion the possibility of the real implementation of the beliefs which in traditional order remain illusory, in the sense that the perfection of life in heaven is a substitute for the possibility of a satisfying existence for all men on earth.

In religion men can participate vicariously in an unreal fantasy world of harmony, beauty and contentment, while living a practical everyday life of pain and misery. Marx relates the state as being similar to an alienated form of political activity, embodying universal rights which are as peripheral as in the idealized world of religion. He points out in his discussion the fact that the political constitution has always been in the religious sphere. The more man gives to God - the less he has for himself. Yet, despite the fact that Marx did offer alternative structures to those offered by religion, both frameworks have collapsed. There remains only the legacy of the individual 'alone', a non-participant in moral social order.

Neitzche's attack on religion was far more specific than that of Marx. In 'The Antichrist', he viciously attacks Christianity as a religion of resentment and of moral decadence which negates

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truth. He talks about different forms of illusion. If we engage our minds in a fruitful discussion of illusion, one that becomes self conscious, it leads to a liberating and enhancing form of life. If, on the other hand, illusion is taken as reality, endowed with the moral prestige of truth (as he believed was the case with Christianity), then people become slaves to lifeless dogma. Morality, he claims, kills the vital aspects of illusion.

So, through modernism, religion and tradition, order was superficially eradicated, and the vital psychological elements of myth and religion were, unfortunately, overlooked. However, in the interests of progress, the cupboard had to be emptied in order for its contents to be re-examined and understood properly.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Postmodernism and Conclusion

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Kitsch, as I mentioned in chapter one, was a product of the culture industry, (which developed as a result of World War II, and such new mediums as cinema and photography, which brought instant images to the public at large), and the rise of capital investment in art. Its characteristics are those of compulsive consumption, the fear of boredom, a need for escape. It is the confusion between self gratification and self realization. In a predominantly service orientated post industrial society, Kitsch has become one of the central facts of life. It is the triumph of the principle of immediacy. The artist, in this crippling situation, has a need to be famous to be heard, yet, as he acquires fame, his work becomes a valuable commodity and accumulates as investment capital. Kitsch is not a direct consequence of the rise of aesthetic modernism, but rather in an historical context, the result of capitalist technology and business interests in the domain of art.

Here I would like to discuss the role played by religion in the evolution of capitalism, as identified by Max Weber. Prior to the reformation, capitalism had a different character, which could be termed 'adventurous' capitalism, where wealth was acquired by piracy or military conquest. After the reformation, in the sixteenth century, a new form of capitalism evolved, along with new forms of devotion. The reformation was not an escape from the controls of the Church, but a movement to a higher degree of individual, personal behavioural regulation.

"Luther freed the body from chains because he chained the heart." (1)

KARL MARX

It would seem that this historical shift of value systems had some considerable influence on modern economic irrationality.

"The acquisition of more and more money combined with strict avoidance of spontaneous enjoyment is thought of so purely in itself, that vis a vis the happiness of, or utility to, the particular individual, appears as quite transcendental and wholly irrational. Man is dominated by acquisition



Fig. 4 - Richard Hamilton - Collage - 1956
'Just what makes today's homes so
different - so appealing.'

as the purpose of his life: no longer as a means to an end of satisfying his material needs. This reversal of what we might call the 'natural' situation is completely senseless from an unprejudiced stand point." (2)

MAX WEBER

To understand at a deeper level the effects of this shift of value systems, it is necessary to look at denominations of Protestantism. Calvinism, for one, is, I believe, particularly relevant to the case in point. Calvinistic doctrine maintained that God does not exist for man, but man for God; that the motives of the Almighty are beyond human comprehension and that only the elite can hope for eternal grace, and salvation. The identity of this elite was not known, and those whose fate it was to be damned could do nothing to save themselves.

This doctrine, due to its finality, caused unprecedented inner loneliness, as its adherents had no control over their destiny. This, in turn, led to a gradual process of disenchantment (which was initiated by rational thought and deduction) with the world and life as a process of achievement where one could control one's destiny. It extinguished the desire, and indeed the necessity, of adhering to moral doctrines. It created enormous apprehension and fear of what was to come in the after life. The outcome of these new value systems was a rational reorganisation of production. Work took one's mind off what was to be, and also, it was pleasing to God. Calvinism, while not necessarily representative of Protestantism as a whole, has been a major influence on postmodernism's capitalistic rational work ethic with its irrational value systems: work to acquire money for the sake of money. Money took the place of God.

Postmodernism as a term was first coined by Arnold Toynbee in the late 1950's. He heralded it as a new age - perhaps the last of Western history.

Postmodernism is an identity crisis. It is a state of mind compulsively self-reflective. It is all deriding, all eroding in its destructiveness. Its political economy is concerned



Fig. 6 - Andy Warhol - 'Marilyn Monroe Diptych' 1962
(Oil on canvas in two panels 82" x 144" - Tate Gallery - London)

mostly with the production and distribution of public attention. Close on the heels of Calvin's dismal predestination creed, came the horror of the modernist revelation.

"If there is no God, everything is permissible." (3)

ZIGMUND BAUMAN

This shifted the authorship of moral rules and their promotion to a supra-individual level, forcing the individual to choose between right and wrong without the assistance of a self-evident first premise; to decide for himself/herself what the purpose of life is, thus creating in people a sense of unprecedented isolation. This process of disenchantment led to chaos as people came to believe that their participation in life had no meaning, purpose or validity. This nightmare situation could be compared to driving in a car on a straight flat road. The car speeds up without you touching the accelerator. You sit there helplessly because you are not driving and you don't know who is. You arrive at what appears to be the edge of a cliff, a precipice of emptiness. Nobody puts their foot on the brakes because there aren't any, and all you are able to do is ask why. Why am I sitting here observing this? Why am I unable to help myself? And, if there is no purpose to all this, why am I cursed with awareness? Religion, be it of a consolatory nature or not, did offer at least a purpose and a validity. It also made the status quo acceptable in that it was seen as God's will that things should be as they were. In its demise, or so Marx believed, there was the possibility of achieving a new state of consciousness.

In this thesis I have traced the path of secularization, the gradual collapse of religion's unquestioned authority; individualization, finding its roots in Plato's theory of dualism; pluralization, through modernist revolt against one tradition; and finally, bureaucratization and the growth of capitalistic intervention in Western political ethics. This fragmentation of society, this privatization of fears and individualism has left us open to the vagaries of short term, short sighted manipulative politics, which serve only the interests of capitalism. This has led to a

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pluralization of defensive doctrines to hide behind. It is true that religion was also used as a crutch, but it offered as well constructive measures for directing the force of life before it became analysed out of existence and viability. Christianity's basic doctrine and fundamental teachings, before discussion of what was meant by particular words and phrases, offered the guidelines for a cohesive structure for social groups to work within, unlike modern crutches or latter church ethics which seemed to miss the point that mankind, and his social being, is an organism in which we all participate.

In Marx's theory of historical materialism, he talks about the inevitable collapse of the ruling class, when they no longer play the progressive role that helped them rise to power, but the determining factor in the present climate of postmodernism would seem to be not only material production, but the very survival of the planet ecologically. In my opinion, religion as we have known it cannot be re-established in postmodern times, but Western political ethics, and capitalist mass production, and consumption for consumption's sake, are also no longer viable propositions. The waste products of such decadence have a catastrophic effect on the rest of the inhabitants of this planet, which are not just 'matter', as believed in Cartesian dualism, but life sources on which we are dependent.

On a more optimistic note, in Nietzsche's analogy of autumn, the ripe apple falls for the "next generation" - the next civilization. There is, without doubt, an evolution of thought which can be traced back to the beginning of time. Postmodernism, because of its plurality of thought, has in contrast to the aggressiveness of modernism, continued a re-examination of the way certain 'sciences' view themselves.

For instance, Heisenburg's principle of indeterminacy and his theory of irreversible time, gave a new view of chance and disorder, opening the door for a new generation of scientists, such as Karl Popper, who reviewed the legitimacy of scientific procedures. He looked at falsifiability, rather than verifiability. The prior theories of determinism and first premises which came

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from the Greek stoics had, at long last, been truly challenged, casting new light on the whole concept of physics and other scientific denominations and leading to the formulation of 'New Science'. The Chaos theory is a new theory for the Western dualistic mode of thought, which, through positive re-evaluation of the old bias against chance, and the subjectified and alienated role of the observer in science, re-appraises the role of irreversibility, and the fact that the observer is a participant in whatever he observes.

"For the whole meaning of self lies within the observer, and its shadow is cast naturally on the observed. The divorce of man into an eternal and temporal half results in the estrangement of man from his creative source and ultimately his fellows and himself." (4)

RUTH NANDA

This is reminiscent of Marx's vision of a society with no dichotomy. This would be conceivable given re-imposition of a persuasive conscious collective (which would, necessarily, entail vast re-extension of the realms of the sacred. The characteristic underlying 'pathology' of modern order, however, is precisely the lack of validation. Such moral validation cannot be restored in the traditional sense, which was the validation religion offered morality. In a rationalised world, the old forms of moral domination have become obsolete.

The twentieth century is a most challenging period, unprecedented in history, in its unlimited personal choice between right and wrong. Today, we are faced with the need to understand more clearly the forces which dominate our world, i.e. the historical philosophical, mystical, religious and scientific spheres of knowledge; and this is precisely the purpose of this thesis. Habermas a contemporary European philosopher, saw in the neo kantian separation of rationality into separate spheres of knowledge, morality and taste, the need to establish a new totality of life, where science, social organisation and art as spheres of learning must re-unite.

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Every man is born and dies; so too, eras and civilizations, but thought, to some degree, is transcendental to this cycle of birth and death. It would seem that there is indeed a crisis in what I call the postmodern era. Jean Francoic Lyotard (contemporary French philosopher) talks about the lack of credibility of what he calls 'metanarratives' (that which I call structures), which he believes legitimizes the acquisition and use of knowledge. He cites postmodernism's search for a convincing answer to the question - what is knowledge good for? I would like to state my belief that knowledge is a process, not a product, and I would hope that the proper use of knowledge will open doors to greater understanding and enable us to direct processes with a view to safeguarding our ecology, and, also, to recognise the difference between knowing and understanding.

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FOOT NOTES

Chapter One

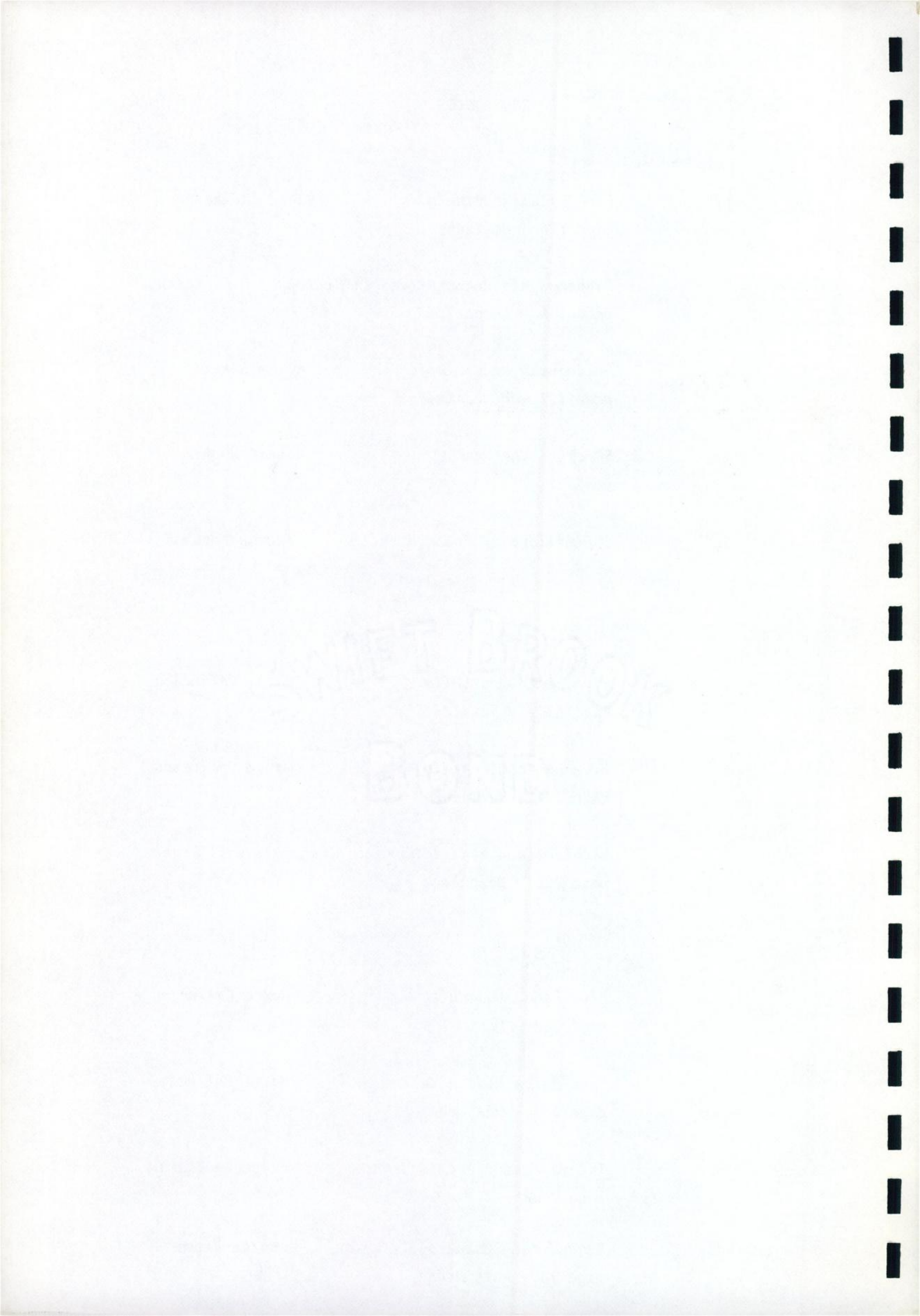
1. *Five Faces Modernity* Matei Calinescu
page 186 - Neitzche
2. *Problems and Perspectives in History* H.F. Kearny
page 138 - Descartes
3. *Philosophy Made Simple* Avrum Stroll
page 171 - Descartes
4. *Shock of the New* Robert Hughes
page 37
5. *Intimations of Postmodernism* Zigmund Bauman
page 17

Chapter Three

1. *Five Faces Modernity* Matei Calinescu
page 63 - Marinetti
2. *Five Faces Modernity* Matei Calinescu
page 238 - Neitzche
3. *Problems and Perspectives in History* H.F. Kearny
page 170 - Descartes

Chapter Four

1. *Five Faces Modernity* Matei Calinescu
page 207 - Marx
2. *Five Faces Modernity* Matei Calinescu
page 126 - Max Weber
3. *Intimations of Postmodernism* Zigmund Bauman
page 17
4. *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* Erich Fromm
page 18 - Ruth Nanda



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