



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FINE ART PAINTING

TITLE

**POST MODERNISM AND
THE FUTURE OF ART.**

BY DAVID WALKER

Submitted to the Faculty of History and Art and Design and
Complimentary Studies in candidacy for the Degree of BA Fine Art
Painting 1993

Table of Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	P. 4 - P 9.
2.	CHAPTER ONE: Culture Crisis	P.10. - P.15.
3.	CHAPTER TWO: New Figuration	P.16. - P.20.
4.	CHAPTER THREE : Artisits reinventing figuration	P.22. - P.29.
5.	CHAPTER FOUR: ORLAN (Taking it to the extreme)	P.30. - P.35.
6.	CONCLUSION	P.36. - P.39.

List of Plates

1. Ronan Point
2. Plight by Joseph Beuys
3. People Weekly
4. Post Human
5. Pitched Crib by Robert Gober
6. Equilibrium by Jeff Koons
7. Untitled by Robert Gober
8. Oh! Charlie, Charlie, Charlie by Charles Ray
9. Instillation view of Post Human
10. Imaginary generic no. 31, taking a risk no.100,
The Mouth of Europa and the Figure of Venus by Orlan
11. A mouth for Grapes, by Orlan

INTRODUCTION

Modernism, which was the principal driving force of the twentieth Century has failed. However, regardless of what people felt about Modernism by the 1960's the beginning of Modernism could have been looked at as having been progressive, optimistic, humanist, and as Hal Foster wrote, "offering a religion of rationalism and economic improvement for the benefit of the whole of mankind." (Foster in Hewison 1990, p179)

In its grand scale Modernism is a term that described the entire thrust of technological, industrial and economic advance that took place in the 20th Century. It also applied on a smaller scale to those new forms in art, literature, music and architecture which developed in parallel (and because of) the social, economic and political changes of the century and which reflected both the liberation and disruptions that were caused by modernisation.

Because of the emergence of an urban culture in the 19th and 20th century the role of the artist changed. Artists gained economic autonomy from the church



Ronan Point



and aristocratic patronage. This marginalised the artist, and set up a sense of alienation of the artist from mass society. In spite of this feeling of alienation, the artists felt that they had to satisfy the demands of the market that mass society represented.

The modernist doctrine on the autonomy of art states that Art exists for arts sake and that its only duty is to achieve its own formal perfection. This doctrine would suggest that art has no social responsibility. This was in opposition to the practice of mass production and mass communication which industrial modernisation demanded. In a sense we can see now that this opposition (is just the opposite side of the same coin). Art for arts sake equals economic individualism. Aesthetic Innovation equals Technological advance.

The doctrine of the autonomy of art would suggest the existence of an avant-garde, which I feel is a contradiction, because the avant-garde movements like the Futurists (Pre World War 1) and the Situationists (Post World War 2) had a political as well as an artistic purpose. They saw art as a means of offering a new vision of society i.e. 'No difference between art and life.'

At the beginning of the century people had great faith in the technological

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It also mentions the results of the various expeditions and the collections made.

The second part of the report deals with the results of the various expeditions and the collections made. It mentions the names of the persons who accompanied the expeditions and the results of their work.

The third part of the report deals with the results of the various expeditions and the collections made. It mentions the names of the persons who accompanied the expeditions and the results of their work.

The fourth part of the report deals with the results of the various expeditions and the collections made. It mentions the names of the persons who accompanied the expeditions and the results of their work.

The fifth part of the report deals with the results of the various expeditions and the collections made. It mentions the names of the persons who accompanied the expeditions and the results of their work.

The sixth part of the report deals with the results of the various expeditions and the collections made. It mentions the names of the persons who accompanied the expeditions and the results of their work.

The seventh part of the report deals with the results of the various expeditions and the collections made. It mentions the names of the persons who accompanied the expeditions and the results of their work.

advances which were released and believed that individuals and societies could benefit from and have control over the vast changes brought about by modernisation.

In the 1926 film by Fritz Lang '*Metropolis*' there was a caption which stated "Those who toiled knew nothing of the dreams of those who planned" (Lang, 1926). We now realise that modernised no longer means improved. Modernisation sought not to improve nature but to control and exploit it. The industrialisation of the cities and countryside and two world wars alike called the supposed benefits of industrial progress into question, it seems impossible to create a mass-movement that also liberated the individual.

As we are about to enter a new century, we have to come to terms with a cultural crisis. It seems impossible to maintain and evolve a living and progressive culture when modernism has failed. Because of this we are now existing in what is called 'Post-Modernism'.

The term post-modern itself is hard to define because in a sense the term defines nothing, or at most an absence. In America in the 1960's the term post-modernism began to be used. The fact that the word Modern was not abandoned, but instead acquired the prefix 'post', shows that we still revolve

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

around the questions raised during the modernists era. There is no general agreement on what the term 'Post-Modern' means.

In a negative light it is viewed as a period of pastiche and parody where the progressive values of modernism have been abandoned. Positively it is seen as a liberation from the constraint of abstract modernist aesthetics and the recovery of earlier styles of art and architecture which can now be used free-style and at will, in a more popular and appealing way. It is neither 'elitist' i.e. accessible only to the educated nor 'popular' i.e. a folk culture. It is a public culture determined by market surveys and opinion poles. Ideas should be immediately accessible, which I feel sometimes leaves the work undemanding.

The screen is the ruling image of the post-modern condition. " Television is the model and medium of this culture" (Hewison, 1990 p94). It is the main communicator of ideas, and it also shapes our perception of those ideas. Television has greatly assisted the growth of the information industry and the ever strengthening tendency for culture and information to be turned into a commodity in the general circulation of commodities. Which in the end turns the individual self into a commodity among others.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names.

3. The third part of the document is a list of names.

4. The fourth part of the document is a list of names.

5. The fifth part of the document is a list of names.

6. The sixth part of the document is a list of names.

7. The seventh part of the document is a list of names.

8. The eighth part of the document is a list of names.

9. The ninth part of the document is a list of names.

10. The tenth part of the document is a list of names.

11. The eleventh part of the document is a list of names.

12. The twelfth part of the document is a list of names.

13. The thirteenth part of the document is a list of names.

14. The fourteenth part of the document is a list of names.

15. The fifteenth part of the document is a list of names.

16. The sixteenth part of the document is a list of names.

17. The seventeenth part of the document is a list of names.

18. The eighteenth part of the document is a list of names.

19. The nineteenth part of the document is a list of names.

20. The twentieth part of the document is a list of names.

21. The twenty-first part of the document is a list of names.

22. The twenty-second part of the document is a list of names.

23. The twenty-third part of the document is a list of names.

24. The twenty-fourth part of the document is a list of names.

25. The twenty-fifth part of the document is a list of names.

Television alters and shapes our world view, the view it gives is both distanced and fragmented. Ideas come second to imagery, images of culture and politics are made accessible, and are offered as a substitute for thought.

This process leaves reality without meaning, all we are left with is a choice of fictitious images. We lost our sense of identity. The decentered television reality that we experience with its fragmentation, multiplicity, and simultaneity, is helping to deepen the sense that there is no absolutely correct or true model of the self. This lack of ability to concert a sense of identity has been called hyper-reality, a screen of images that present perfect copies of originals that never existed, projected by the global systems of the information industry.

However, the crisis of the post-modern condition is also an opportunity. Post modernism has not reached an equilibrium between the personal and public realms, urban life is threatened by the constant privatisation of public space. This is a direct knock on effect of the modernist era, during this era, the spaces in which people had to live and work, were dictated to them. They had no say in the production of their environment.

This may sound very pessimistic, but the acceptance of the transformation of

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is divided into two main sections: the first section deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year, and the second section deals with the specific work done during the year.

2. The second part of the report deals with the specific work done during the year. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the work done in the field, the second section deals with the work done in the laboratory, and the third section deals with the work done in the office.

3. The third part of the report deals with the results of the work done during the year. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the results of the work done in the field, the second section deals with the results of the work done in the laboratory, and the third section deals with the results of the work done in the office.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the conclusions drawn from the work done during the year. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the conclusions drawn from the work done in the field, the second section deals with the conclusions drawn from the work done in the laboratory, and the third section deals with the conclusions drawn from the work done in the office.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the recommendations made for the future work. It is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with the recommendations made for the work done in the field, the second section deals with the recommendations made for the work done in the laboratory, and the third section deals with the recommendations made for the work done in the office.

materials that post-modernism allows gives a glimmer of hope. Nigel Coats of the "Narrative Architecture Today Group" states:

"Both old and new technologies both re-used and brand new materials have the capacity to return control over urban space to those who have the most right to it; the people who live there and whose creative and imaginative needs are most often ignored by the developers and planners who are trying to sterilise the poetry of urban life"
(Coats in Hewison, 1990 p.86).

I feel that post-modernism is a symptom of the crisis that we now live in rather than a solution. This is not to say that the art being produced today is in any way blinkered. I feel that there will have to be (if it has not already happened) a clear transformation of our attitudes towards art and culture as a whole and the post-modern condition that we exist in now will be a spring board to the future. Although city life may be lost, the major weapon against the commodifying of our culture has to be the individual. This battle may seem hopeless and too large scale, but we can take example from the feminist movement who have completely re-structured society as regards, for example, the way we talk about and depict the human body. By doing this, feminists succeeded in changing society on a grand scale. Therefore changing the whole power structure as regards sexuality, economics and culture, thus creating new spaces for women and men. In art, within this new space, it may be possible to transcend the binary oppositions of sexually defined identity altogether, thus creating a sexual equilibrium.

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURE CRISIS

Since the 16th century, people have described themselves and their age as being modern and it is always in recognition that they have reached a new stage of civilisation. It is only now in this post-modern epoch , that we look back on our previous period (modernism) negatively. In the Renaissance, where the idea of modernity began, the present was shaped in terms of a fruitful relationship with the ancient world. Post -modernism must be thinking, not in terms of a new epoch, but only in terms of a period that is over. Modernism has ended, and with no more to locate ourselves by than the prefix post, we are left staring into a void. In the post-modern condition there is no longer belief in any grand system that will embrace and resolve all the problems of the world in a single account. No such 'grand narrative' such as that offered by Marxism, is possible for there are no more large explanations to justify such a totalising and thus, totalitarian system. There are no more Utopias.

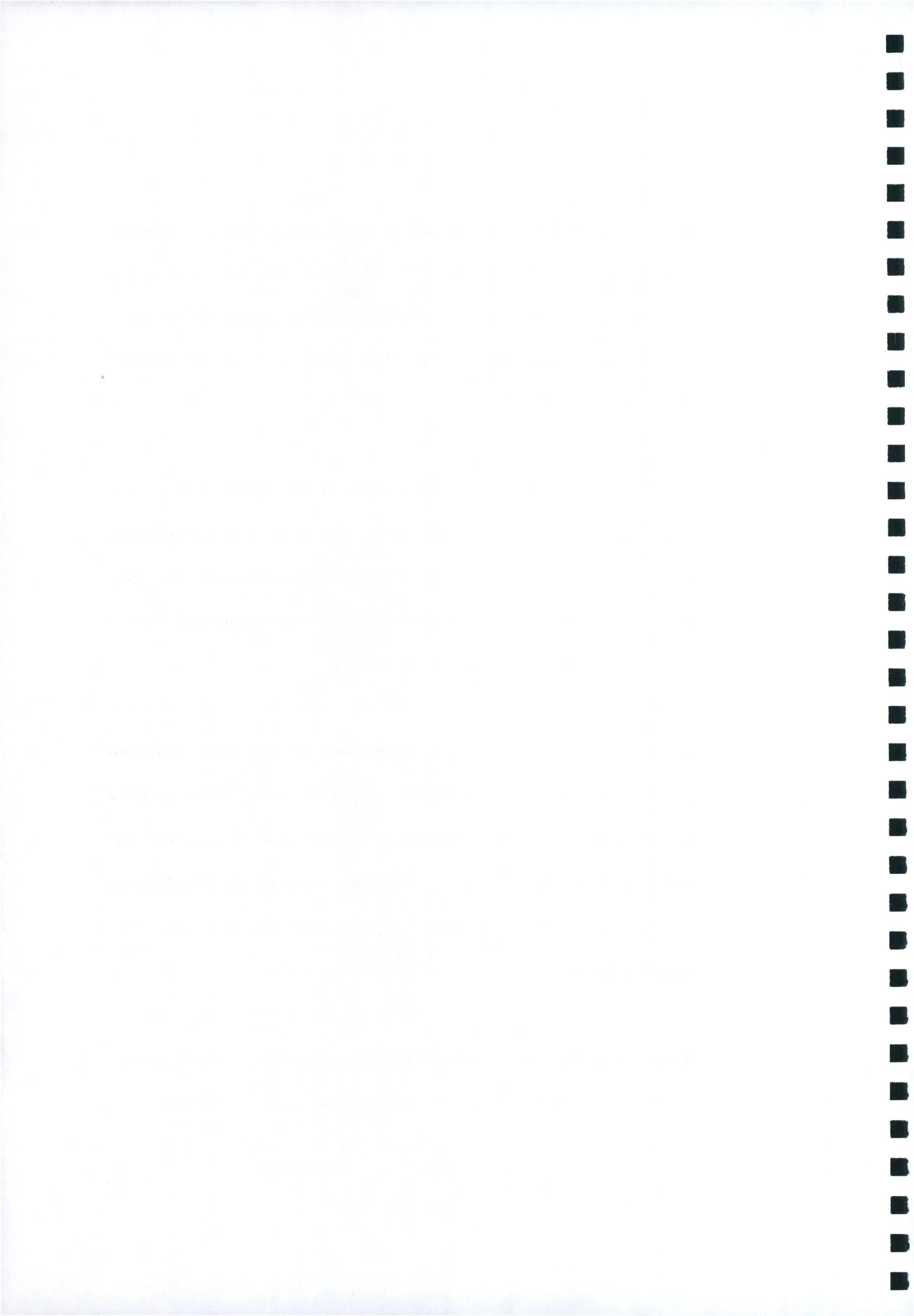
The critic Dick Hebdige has pointed out that the imagery of contemporary thought reveals a profound despair "The discourse of post-modernism is fatal and fatalistic at every turn. The word 'death' opens up to engulf us; 'death of the subject', 'death of art', 'death of reason' and 'end of history'" (Hebdige, 1988 p.45).

According to the philosophers of the post-modern, philosophy is at an end and so are philosophers. Not just individual will, but the very idea of individual identity is discussed as an ideological construction, a necessary fiction during the emergence of nineteenth century capitalism, but redundant in the age of the multi-national corporation.

The prevailing pessimism is a sign of impotence. If no grand narratives are possible, there is no need to attempt to construct them. By denying the identity of the self, the new theorists deny the possibility of thought leading to action. Submission to belief in the existence of an all pervading ideology removes responsibility for our own lives, and for our social inaction.

(Jean Baudrillard.)

The pursuit of the autonomy of art relieves the artist of any social or political commitment. (But then the artist, being an individual, does not exist).



Artists have been the terminal condition of art for some years. Their final endeavours have been to record that state. Artists have made gestures that take form and content to the point of disappearance: Samuel Beckett's play *"Breath"* where drama is reduced to as single gasp and changing lights, Ad Reinhardt's black paintings, Sol Lewitt's instructions for lines to be drawn on a wall, Carl Andre's floorbound arrangements of sheets of metal or bricks.

There are of course residual traces of content and performance in such works. But these traces have not even a faint strain of modernist optimism, their communication is limited to displaying the limits of communication.

An example of this is Josef Beuys installation *"Plight"* in which the gallery walls were lined in thick rolls of felt. The installation turned the room into a tomb entered under a low felt arch. The interior contained nothing, but a closed piano with a black board and a thermometer on its top. The space was protected and warm (the felt and the thermometer) Beuys said of the piece, "This room contains elements similar to those in Beckett's plays; everything is isolated and knocking on the wall has no resonance. Communication is no longer possible". He later said "People ask me what it means, and all I can say is, it means nothing" (Benyis Hewison, 1990, p40).



Plight by Joseph Beuys



If modernism in art was an attempt to understand and control the progress of modernisation in life, post-modernism is an attempt to come to terms with what has been called post-Industrial society. When Daniel Bell first published *"The coming of Post-Industrial Society"* in 1973 he argued that in the new economic system that was developing the ultimate determining factor would be neither raw materials nor production, nor the surplus value created by the exchange of goods. In post industrial society the key would be knowledge, science, technological research. This has now happened. The manufacture, distribution and exchange of information has created a new global pattern of industrial organisation. And as the new economic order has changed to meet these new circumstances, so has society. It is this that has led to the perception that a new epoch has begun. The new technology is itself a new form of perception. The V.D.U. and the television set are the source of our information at the workplace and our recreation at home. Their inner coils and regulations of circuitry offer invisible connections to a network that holds the total sum of human knowledge, past and present. The problem of our present is that it offers no secure image of the future.

Now when money begets money with electronic purity, information is bought and sold in an economy not of production but reproduction. Its value is such that the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard fears that,

"The nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as

they battled in the past for control of territory. The development of information seeking spy satellites has already moved the threat of global war into space. The information industry is reshaping cities. In Britain, in an economy afloat on invisible earnings, the London Docklands Development Corporation has read back its own image into the past" (Lyotard in Hewison, 1990, p86).

When the docks were first built they represented a massive revolution in communications as waterways became the chief means of transportation and communication. Today information is still the vital commodity for any business. And with video screens and the fax machine, physical transportation of information is becoming as obsolete as the docks.

The coming of post-industrial society seem to mean not the end of capitalism, founded on the control of production and raw materials but transcendent capitalism, which through the deployment of international finance capital not only is beyond the control of national states but has invaded the private sphere, where consumption has become the sole purpose of life. The information industry is the vehicle of global capitalism it circles the world. As 'Warner Communications' proudly boasts "Provokes a revolution in the human sense of self: i.e. helplessness is the face of the overwhelming power that masters it" (Hewison, 1990, p88).

The problem with most contemporary galleries like the Saatchi Gallery is - although they contain some of the most radical work of the late twentieth

century - displayed to its very best advantage (the way it is intended to be shown). The stillness, the quiet, the chastity of the space that holds them has a spiritual quality; but it comes from the isolation of the works. Even the most demonstrative pieces seem withdrawn, sharing a strange unrelatedness to the world outside the gallery, to the street, the shops, the housing estates that surround it.

CHAPTER TWO

NEW FIGURATION

In his essay accompanying the '*Post-Human*' exhibition Jeffrey Deitch states that:

"Human evolution may be entering a new phase that Charles Darwin never would have envisioned. The potential of genetic reconstitutes may be quickly propelling us beyond Darwinian natural evolution and into a bold realm of artificial evolution. Our society will soon have access to the biotechnology that will allow us to make direct choices about how we want our species to further evolve. This new techno-evolutionary phase will bring us for beyond eugenics. Our children's generation could very well be the last generation of 'pure' humans" (Deitch, 1990 p30)

This may sound alarmist, but on a smaller scale it is already happening. Television has created a new concept of time and space which in turn had created a new kind of thinking. The television audience is being trained to take in complex subjects through quick successions of images and compact, packaged commentary. According to Jeffrey Deitch "As previous generations learned structures of complex thinking through essays and novels, today's advanced television generation learns how to think through news, anchor

People

weekly

OOH! LA LA...
...OR OOPS?

PLASTIC SURGERY OF THE STARS



ANGELA LANSBURY:
She lifted her face—and spirits



JOAN RIVERS:
Putting on a pretty new look



CHER:
"My breast
operations were a
nightmare!"



MICHAEL JACKSON:
A major work in progress

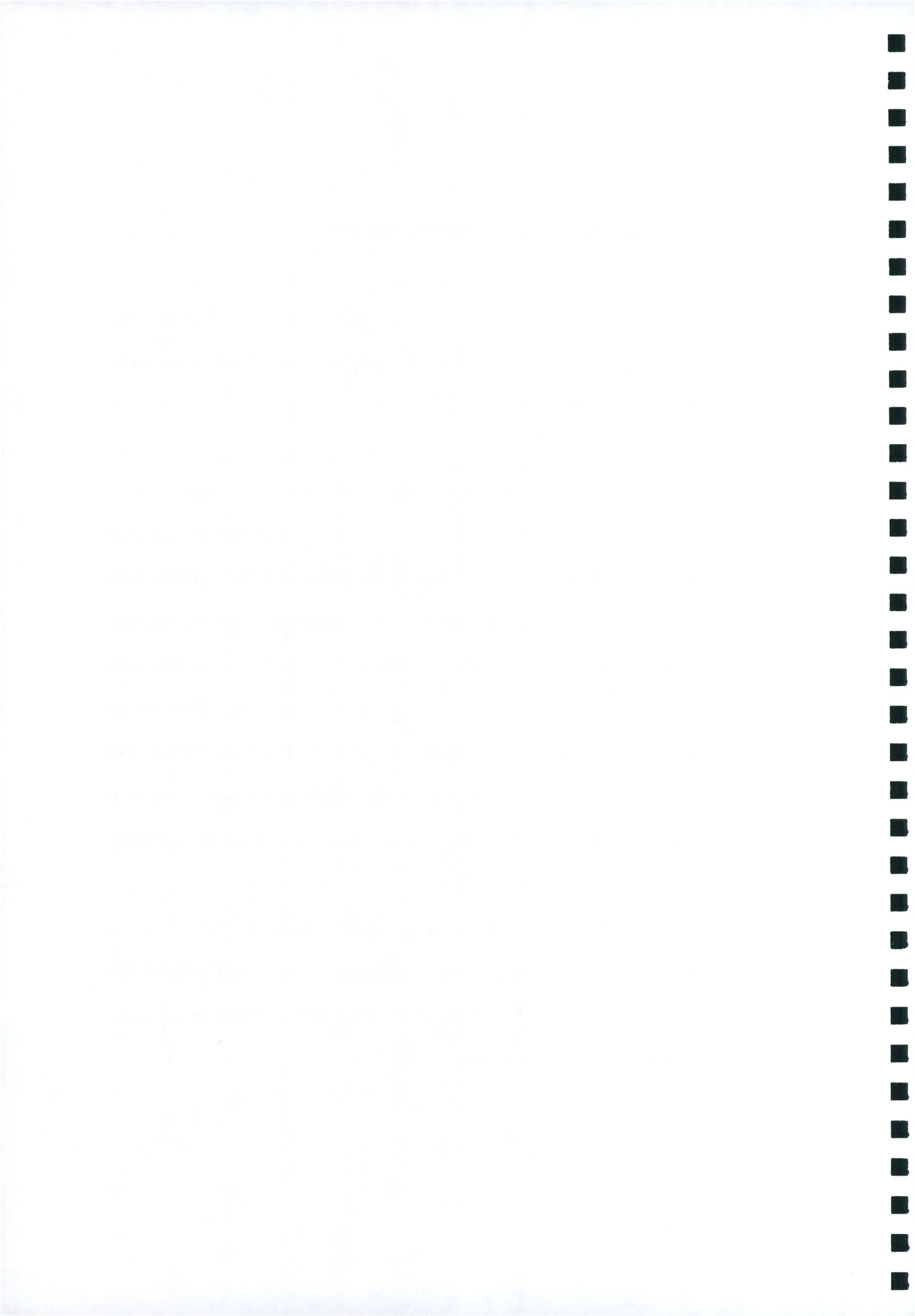
Do they or don't they? Here's an inside report on the miracles, mishaps and real risks of looking forever young.



people and talk show hosts." (Deitch, 1990 p.31)

If the post-modern condition could be described as a transitional period of the disintegration of self, then perhaps the coming period may be characterised by the reconstruction of self.

This new construction of self will be conceptual rather than natural. A major element of this emerging consciousness of personality is that an individual need not be tied to his or hers 'natural' looks, natural abilities or the ghosts of his or her own family history. In the past people were tied to the structure of the family, the individual felt obliged to maintain the tradition and attitudes of their parents, and in turn pass them on to their children. However, as television becomes rooted into society, models of self-construction will increasingly be as likely to be taking from celebrities and other media role models as they will be from parents and grandparents. The Freudian model of the 'psychological' person is dissolving into a new model that encourages individuals to dispose of the anguished analysis of how subconscious childhood experiences moulded their behaviour. There is a new feeling that people are responsible for their own personality freed from the constraints of one's past and one's inherited genetic code.



It is true to say that the present generation have more control over their bodies. The debate over the abortion issue and the outcry over euthanasia may be just the beginning of an enormous social conflict over ones freedom to use the new bio-technology to take greater control over ones body. It will soon be possible to use genetic engineering to 'improve' the foetus. I feel this issue will provoke more outrage than the issue of abortion.

"It may not be an exaggeration to say that it will become the most difficult moral and social issue that the human species has ever faced." (Deitch, 1990 p33). Genetic engineering is not just another life-enhancing technology like aviation or telecommunications. Its continual development and application may force us to redefine the parameters of life. As we continue to embrace the transforming advances in biological and communication technologies, we will have to create a new construction of the self. This in turn will cause a new organization of personality that will reflect peoples' adaption to this new technology and its social economic effects.

Looking back through the history of art we can see how artists have portrayed the changes in models of self-realizations that have accompanied profound changes in the social environment. And if we look at the most prominent art being produced today the majority of it is figurative. However, it is not a

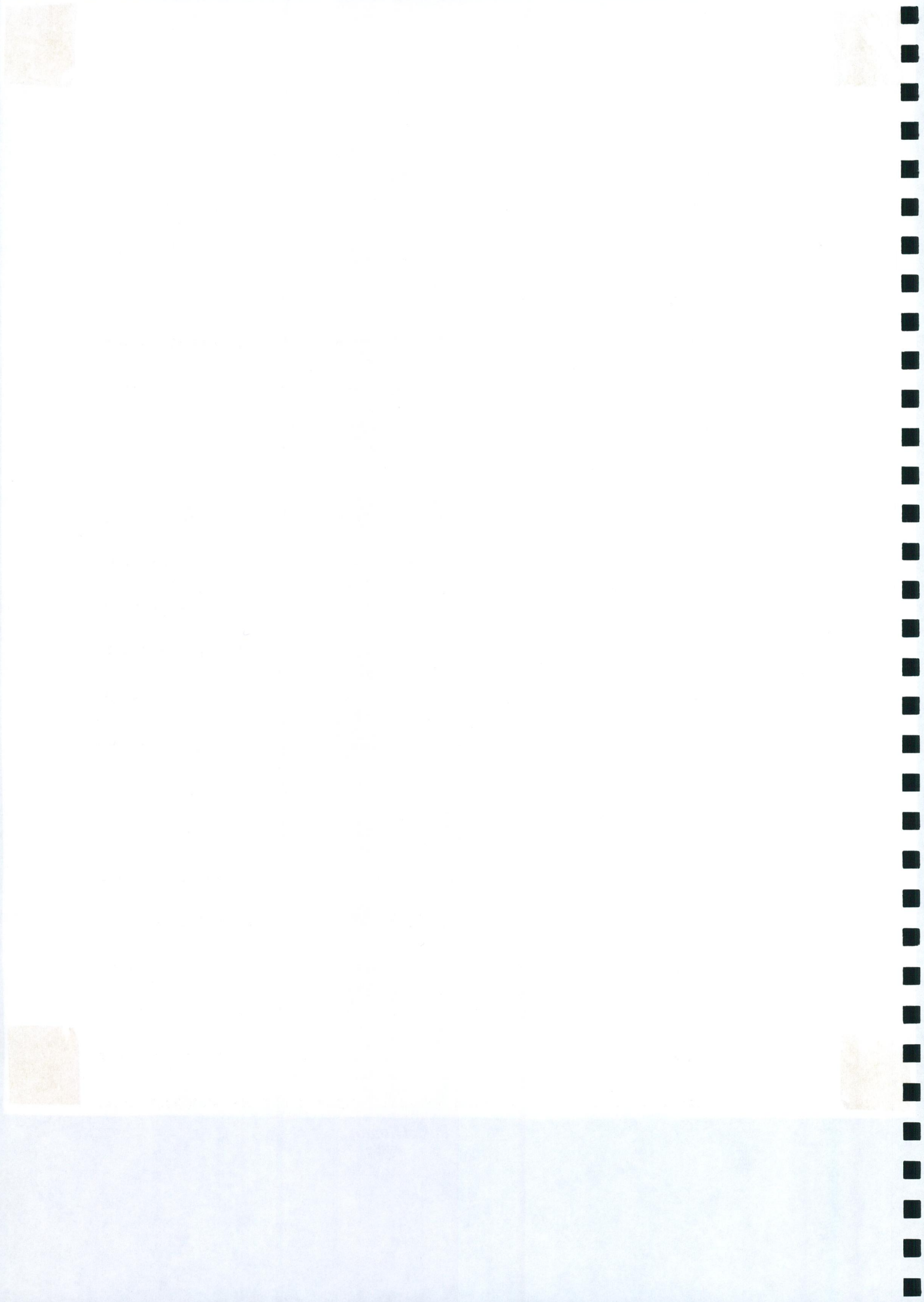


The matter-of-fact acceptance of one's "natural" looks and

one's "natural" personality is being replaced by a growing sense that

it is normal to reinvent oneself.

Post Human



return to traditional figurative art like that of Picasso or Matisse. A new type of figurative art is developing that instead, is heir to the conceptual tradition of Duchamp and Warhol. The figurative art of Charles Ray or Jeff Koons, for example, owes something to pop and to hyper-realism, but its conception is very different. The new figurative art is very much in the tradition of conceptual art.

There is an increasing number of artist and exhibitions making reference to the body. The first wave of this in the early seventies was a subset of performance art, which was essentially a crossbreed or hybrid art form. In some ways body art was an expressionists answer to conceptual arts actualization of space, time and material, and a way to be physically involved. However, it seemed to disappear when the market started to perk up in the late seventies.

At first glance, the new generation of body-orientated artists are a derivative of Acconci, Oppenheim or Gilbert & George. But they're inured to the media. Distempered by AIDS they have a different, deeply personal, often angry political agenda. Artists such as Kiki Smith, Charles Ray, Robert Gober, Matthew Barney, Sue Williams, Lorna Simpson, and many others including Cindy Sherman, with her recent orgiastic carnage montages, echo

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress.

2. The second part is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury on the state of the Union.

3. The third part is a report from the Secretary of the Navy on the state of the Navy.

4. The fourth part is a report from the Secretary of the War on the state of the War.

5. The fifth part is a report from the Secretary of the Interior on the state of the Interior.

6. The sixth part is a report from the Secretary of the Agriculture on the state of the Agriculture.

7. The seventh part is a report from the Secretary of the Commerce on the state of the Commerce.

8. The eighth part is a report from the Secretary of the Education on the state of the Education.

9. The ninth part is a report from the Secretary of the Justice on the state of the Justice.

10. The tenth part is a report from the Secretary of the State on the state of the State.

11. The eleventh part is a report from the Secretary of the War on the state of the War.

12. The twelfth part is a report from the Secretary of the Navy on the state of the Navy.

13. The thirteenth part is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury on the state of the Treasury.

14. The fourteenth part is a report from the Secretary of the Interior on the state of the Interior.

15. The fifteenth part is a report from the Secretary of the Agriculture on the state of the Agriculture.

16. The sixteenth part is a report from the Secretary of the Commerce on the state of the Commerce.

17. The seventeenth part is a report from the Secretary of the Education on the state of the Education.

18. The eighteenth part is a report from the Secretary of the Justice on the state of the Justice.

19. The nineteenth part is a report from the Secretary of the State on the state of the State.

20. The twentieth part is a report from the Secretary of the War on the state of the War.



the psychological and social stress engendered by the commercialisation of atom stacking, mono-technology, AIDS, abortion, genetic engineering, plastic surgery, artificial intelligence and an oversaturation of media. They address global issues of population doubling, atmospheric depletion, pollution and private issues of social and sexual alienation.

On of the strangest things about the recent generation of artists is the division of sexual types, male/female, gay/straight. Indirectly, they ask, "What social guidelines, determine the limits of the self and the nature of what is public and what is private". But one also has to ask, "What information about the self do they know that makes personal identity today different from the past?" (Kroker & Cook, 1986 p183)

Life today is driven by psychology. In processing the self in an environment of surfeits, artists explore the interface between conscious and unconscious process. Buckminster Fuller described the last hundred years of scientific evolution as a transition "From tracked to trackless, from wired to wireless, from visible to invisible." He called this pattern "Ephemerization". As the body politic becomes self-conscious through electronic processing many of the habits that were unconscious for ages, such as history being told through the adventure and misadventures of 'Great Men' now rise to the surface.

CHAPTER THREE

ARTISTS REINVENTING FIGURATION

It was once assumed that we could readily tell the difference between what was abstract and what was real. Now it often seems that illusion is reality and that reality has become just an illusion. In art and the world at large the categories of abstraction and representation and image and substance have been re-shuffled and redefined. The invention of abstract art in the years just after 1910 corresponded to a changing world view brought by the expanding impact of modern science on everyday life and the increasing urge to systematically analyze physical, social and psychological phenomena. The new social mobility of the industrial age also contributed to the breakdown of aesthetic values and the development of a new way of seeing.

There are many who would characterize our own era as one of stagnation, with little scientific or

aesthetic innovation compared to earlier periods. It is true that most of the major scientific and industrial innovations that shaped our society were accomplished decades ago. Airplanes, telephones and television had penetrated the whole world by the 1960's. The Industrial Revolution was already over by the time today's emerging artists were born, but the Communications Revolution of the 1970's and 1980's may have actually transformed the world as much as the advances of earlier decades. Computer-related developments like word processing and computer aided design and telecommunications advances, such as fax machines and satellite television have rapidly changed our world view, even though the changes have been so smooth that many people have hardly noticed them. Younger artists, writers, business executives and politicians all think differently as a result of these tremendous advances in information processing and communications. Satellite video has changed the world's political structure as witnessed by events in the Gulf War. "On line" computerised artificial systems are changing our sense of time. The computerised artificial systems reality of arcade and home video games are changing young peoples perception of their world.

The same type of tremendous transformations in science, economics and society that formed the context for the invention of abstract art at the

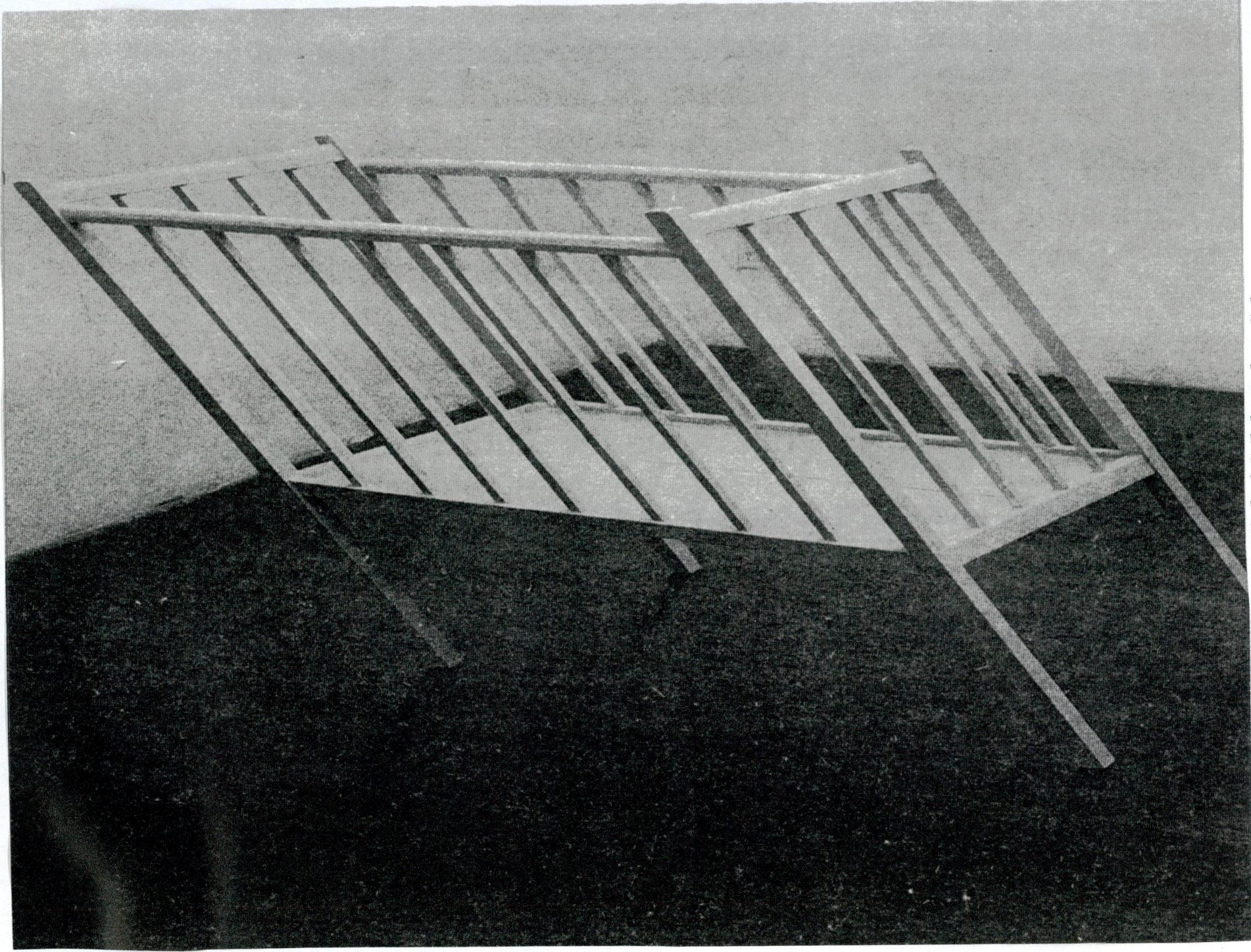
1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject of the study. It discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also provides a brief overview of the methodology used in the study.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the study area. It includes information about the location of the study area, the population of the study area, and the characteristics of the study area. It also discusses the data sources used in the study.

3. The third part of the report is a description of the methodology used in the study. It includes information about the research design, the data collection methods, and the data analysis methods. It also discusses the limitations of the study.

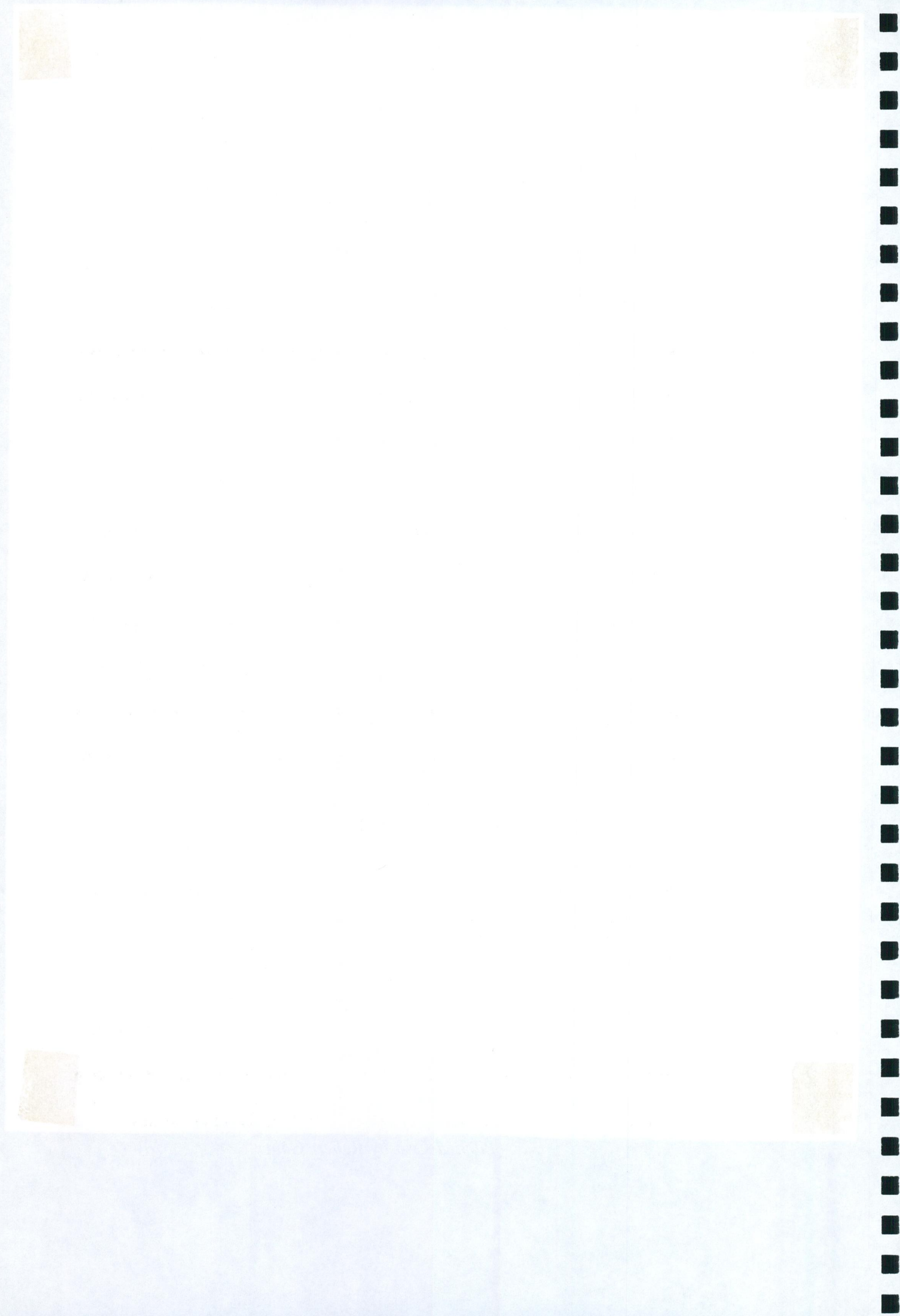
4. The fourth part of the report is a description of the results of the study. It includes information about the findings of the study, the conclusions drawn from the findings, and the implications of the findings. It also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

5. The fifth part of the report is a conclusion. It summarizes the findings of the study and provides a final statement on the importance of the study. It also discusses the future research that is needed in this area.



Pitched Crib by Robert Gober



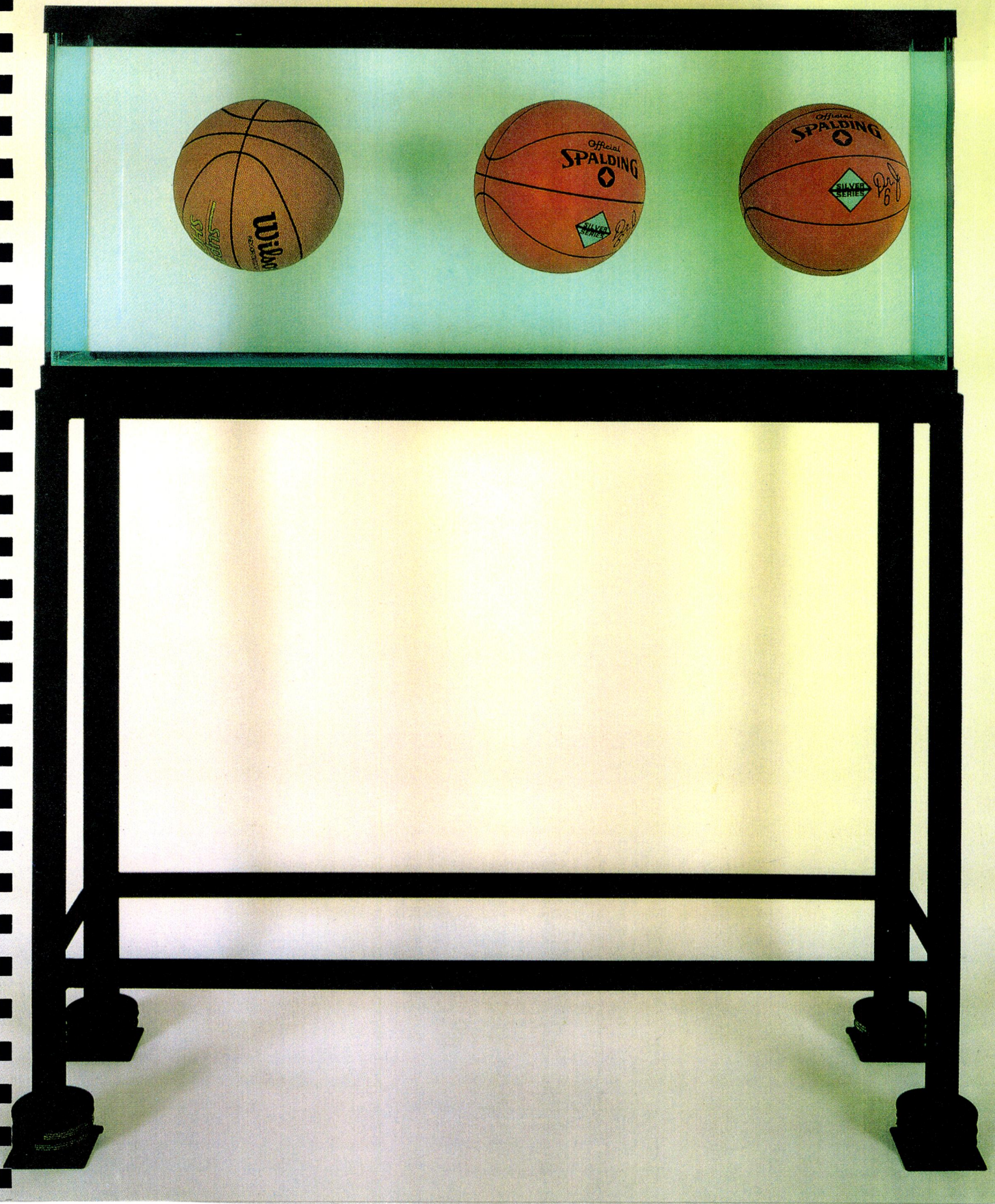


beginning of the century are again providing the foundation for a new vision in art. As the new understanding of basic nuclear and cell structures informed the revolutionary Art of Picasso and Kandinsky the 'alternative realities' and image processing of computer and telecommunications technologies are providing the basis for a new art from that appears to be emerging.

If we look at the early work of Robert Gober or Jeff Koons, for instance. A *Gober crib* is neither abstract nor representational. It is an object not an illustionic image, but it somehow transports the viewer someplace else, to a reality far removed from the materiality of the object. A Jeff Koons equilibrium tank could be described in similar terms it is what it is, a straightforward object, but the suspended ball functions like an illusion. Again the work can not be described as abstract, representational or even as a Duchampian object that functions as art because of the viewers perceptual frame. A *Koons tank* does not need a rarefied high art context like a pristine gallery to function as an arresting work.

In the flood of persuasive images that characterises contemporary culture, a geometric form that once would have been read immediately as abstract may now have so many cultural associations that it is read instead as a





Equilibrium by Jeff Koons



5

representational image, perhaps as a symbol of a progressive corporation. A representational image such as a certain type of cliché sunset may have been repeated so often in magazines, films and on package designs that it is read only as an abstraction. An emerging group of younger artists have been brought up on this type of loaded hybrid imagery. A new art form that has not really been categorised seems to be developing out of this mass-media shaped consciousness.

As the masters of marketing have learned to infuse automobiles, handbags and all kinds of other consumer objects with tremendous emotional symbolism, a new generation of artists have learned to infuse simple objects with a similar emotional appeal. Again, the *Gober crib* is an example of the strong emotional charge that can be embodied in a simple object. The crib has the same physical elements as an austere 'Sol Le Wilt' structure but carries the emotional weight of an expressionistic painting by Edward Munch. There is no image of a terrified child, a worried parent, or a tormented adult who longs to return to his crib. The images and the emotions are real but abstract all emanating from this semi-abstract object.

Perhaps without our really being aware of it, a significant new artistic form neither abstract nor representational has been emerging that parallels elements



Untitled by Robert Gober



of Post-Modern consciousness. I believe that we are seeing only the beginning stages of a new approach to art in which the ever growing art awareness of image manipulation, psychographic marketing and other aspects of the contemporary communication are applied to the traditional art vocabulary.

Contrary to the widespread perception of much new art as 'cool' and 'austere' as opposed to the hot brushwork of the Neo-Expressionists, most of the best new art, despite its outwardly cool appearances, is even more deeply psychologically and emotionally charged. Artists have learned that an everyday object displaced can embody more emotional and cultural associations than a florid oil painting of a tormented figure.

The question of technology usurping nature is commonplace in science fiction and indeed city life. Artists such as Robert Gober and Charles Ray in their recent work create a life like psychological tension, once called the 'Pathetic Fallacy' in both objective and figurative works. Gober's first exhibitions of handmade cribs and oddly placed doors created a physical disequilibrium out of an industrial artifact. These previewed his recent 'body works', which are disquieting, cadaverous sculptures of the lower half of a nude male and weirdly childlike genital wall paper with plumbers spigots and drains. Although homoeroticism is a primary theme, his peculiar way of dissociating

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF ARTS

RECEIVED

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

1964

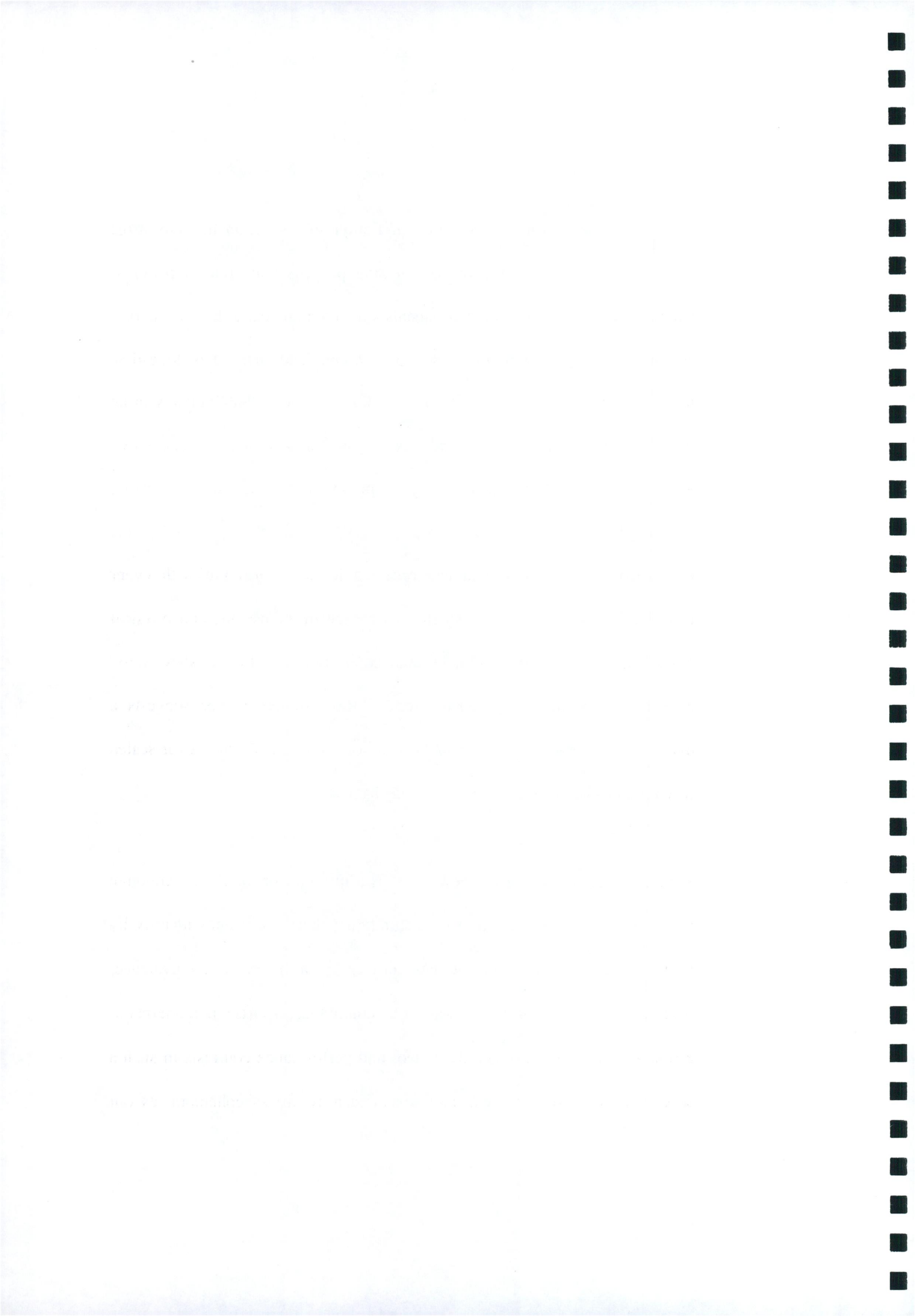
1964

1964

1964

normality recalls today's media mix of fiction an nonfiction like any artist with an aesthetic form attuned to detecting patterns that connect patterns. Charles Ray defies logical consequents and communicates by metaphoric analogy - the symbolic logic of schizophrenia and art. His long-time fascination with automata recalls Samuel Butler's thesis that 'humans in an industrial age are merely the reproductive organs for creating more machines'. Rays themes are deeply self-conscious, involving precariousness, tension, toxicity, brainwashing. He conveys a wry humour about humanity, the regurgiting automation, that can create a logical world but with every progressive thrust creates an equally toxic backfire of psychic and physical pollution. His eightfoot female mannequin blueclad like a stewardess, resembles a mechanical 'uber-mistress'. Rays subject matter suggests a dissociation between the Man/Woman of sense and the over-scaled machinations of an age of molecular mechanics.

A hidden agenda among the new corps is a question of identity. Although self-searching is a natural part of maturation (figuring out ones identity by probing the field) among, the new criteria is a trenchant ambivalence. Matthew Barney's peculiar way of combining sports paraphernalia, crossdressing, clinical materials, video, and performance contrasts in such a way as to suggest that social and sexual identity are as ephemeral as our



technological toys. Televideo sports and sex are the new hypnotic voyeurism. Nothing is shocking any more as fiction blurs with reality. But people still want a label so question as to whether Barney or his art is gay or straight have proliferated. Such questions are moot. After all, art is confirmed and in some ways possibly created, by the audience. Nevertheless, for the voyeur in us all, ambivalence may be the most exciting and familiar element to be expressed in his aggressive and highly aestheticized installation.

For the majority of women ambivalence is not really the issue personal or otherwise. And their social position is profoundly complex since the electron environment makes their history increasingly explicit. Most of us are happy to see the patriarchy flounder and its holdouts Republican conservatives, hanging nostalgically on. Women artists hack away at the senseless patriarchal lout.

Where Barbar Kruger illustrates feminist outrage, Sue Williams uses the female body as a sexual icon to cast an equally explicit barb against men's habitually abusive attitude toward women. However, a veil of humour mediates her ire. In a recent show at New York's 303 Gallery, she covered a sculpture of a woman in a fetal pose with accusatory texts and ironic sex takes. Her paintings aped the cartoon paintings of Richard Prince to critique





Oh! Charlie, Charlie, Charlie by Charles Ray

the prevalence of raunchy humour against women. Partly amusing, partly disturbing she makes us aware of unconscious patterns of behaviour that are continually forced upon women by cultural habit.

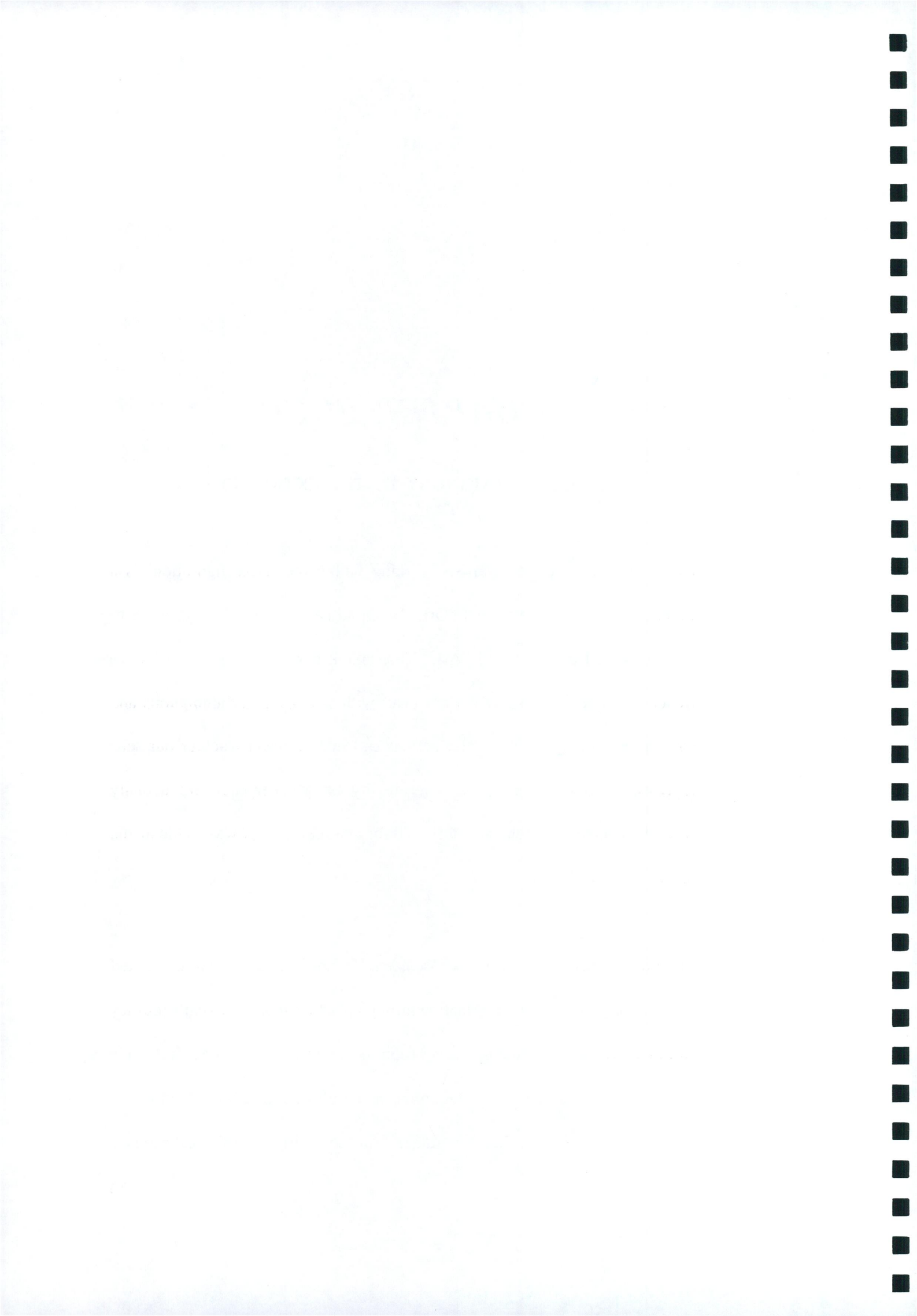
Similarly Kiki Smith's figurative sculptures and paper works portray women's vulnerability. Fetal poses and lacerated or excreting bodies render women as the bearers of emotional duress. In other installations, Smith has labelled urns with various body secretions and has made 2 by 2 inch aluminium casts of the body surface and laid them out in a minimalist grid. She kindles an almost primitive self-consciousness about the corporeal apparatus as a subset of social symbolism. Her political agenda positions the female body as a biological servomechanism for the irascible patriarchy.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORLAN (TAKING IT TO THE EXTREME)

One of the more extreme artists working within the 'New figuration' is a French artist who calls herself 'Orlan'. Orlan calls her work *Carnal art* to distinguish it from 70's Body Art. Throughout her career as a well-known french multimedia artist, Orlan has dealt with notions of an ambiguous and constantly shifting identity. Her actions call into question whether our self-representations conform to an inner reality or whether they are actually carefully contrived falsehoods fabricated for marketing purposes - in the media or in society at large.

The French performance artist whose name 'Orlan' is assumed, has embarked on a campaign of self-transformation through plastic surgery. Orlan's journey from the art gallery to the operating room began in the 60's when she made her first public performance. Orlan has a sense of humour which led her to burlesque the selling of the artist rather than the art in her 1977 performance



'Le Baiser et L'Artiste'. Orlan stationed herself outside the Grand Palais, site of the French Art fair, next to a life size photo of her torso transformed into a slot machine that she identified as an automatic kiss-vending object. Customers who inserted five francs in the slot between the breasts could watch the coin descend to the crotch, at which point the live artist jumped off of her pedestal to reward the purchaser with a real kiss. According to Catherine Millet in her essay *L'Art Contemporain en France* stated "this sexual union was like an x-ray of the frenzy of exchange of contracts in the contemporary art world where the merchandising of the artists personality replaces the merchandising of art". (Millet, 1993, p.87)

In 1990, Orlan had the first of the seven operations the performance requires. These will totally transform her face and body. So far she has had five operations. In her effort to represent an ideal formulated by male desire she does not strive to improve or rejuvenate her original appearance (she has never had a face lift) but uses her body as a medium of transformation. The sculpting or carving up of her body sets up an intentional parallel between religious martyrdom and the contemporary suffering for beauty through plastic surgery that writers like Belgian feminist France Borel have identified as the rite of passage of our epoch.





*Imaginary generic no. 31, taking a risk no.100,
The Mouth of Europa and the Figure of Venus by Orlan*



Each of Orlans' operations is designed to alter a specific feature. Supplying surgeons with computer-generated images of the nose of a famous, unattributed school of Fontainebleau sculpture of Diana, the mouth of Boucher's Europa, the forehead of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, the chin of Botticelli's Venus and the eyes of Gerona's Psyche as guides to her transformation. She also decorates the operating rooms with enlarged reproductions of the relevant details from these same works.

These female prototypes are selected for reasons that go beyond the appearance of their 'ideal features' - reasons involving history and mythology. She chose Diana because the goddess was an aggressive adventuress and did not submit to men; Psyche because of her need for love and spiritual beauty; Europa because she looked to another continent, permitting herself to be carried away into an unknown future. Venus is part of the Orlan myth because of her connection to fertility and creativity and the Mona Lisa because of her supposed androgyny - the legend being that the painting actually represents a man, perhaps Leonardo himself.

The operation/performances are choreographed and directed by the artist herself and involve music poetry and dance. They are costumed if possible, by a famous couturier. Paco Rabanne designed the vestments for the first

1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the project.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the methodology used.

3. The third part of the report is a discussion of the results of the study.

4. The fourth part of the report is a conclusion and a list of references.

5. The fifth part of the report is an appendix containing additional data and figures.

6. The sixth part of the report is a bibliography of the literature cited.

7. The seventh part of the report is a list of the authors' addresses.

8. The eighth part of the report is a list of the authors' affiliations.

9. The ninth part of the report is a list of the authors' contact information.

10. The tenth part of the report is a list of the authors' acknowledgments.

11. The eleventh part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

12. The twelfth part of the report is a list of the authors' conflicts of interest.

13. The thirteenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

14. The fourteenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

15. The fifteenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

16. The sixteenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

17. The seventeenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

18. The eighteenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

19. The nineteenth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

20. The twentieth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

21. The twenty-first part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

22. The twenty-second part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

23. The twenty-third part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

24. The twenty-fourth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

25. The twenty-fifth part of the report is a list of the authors' disclosures.

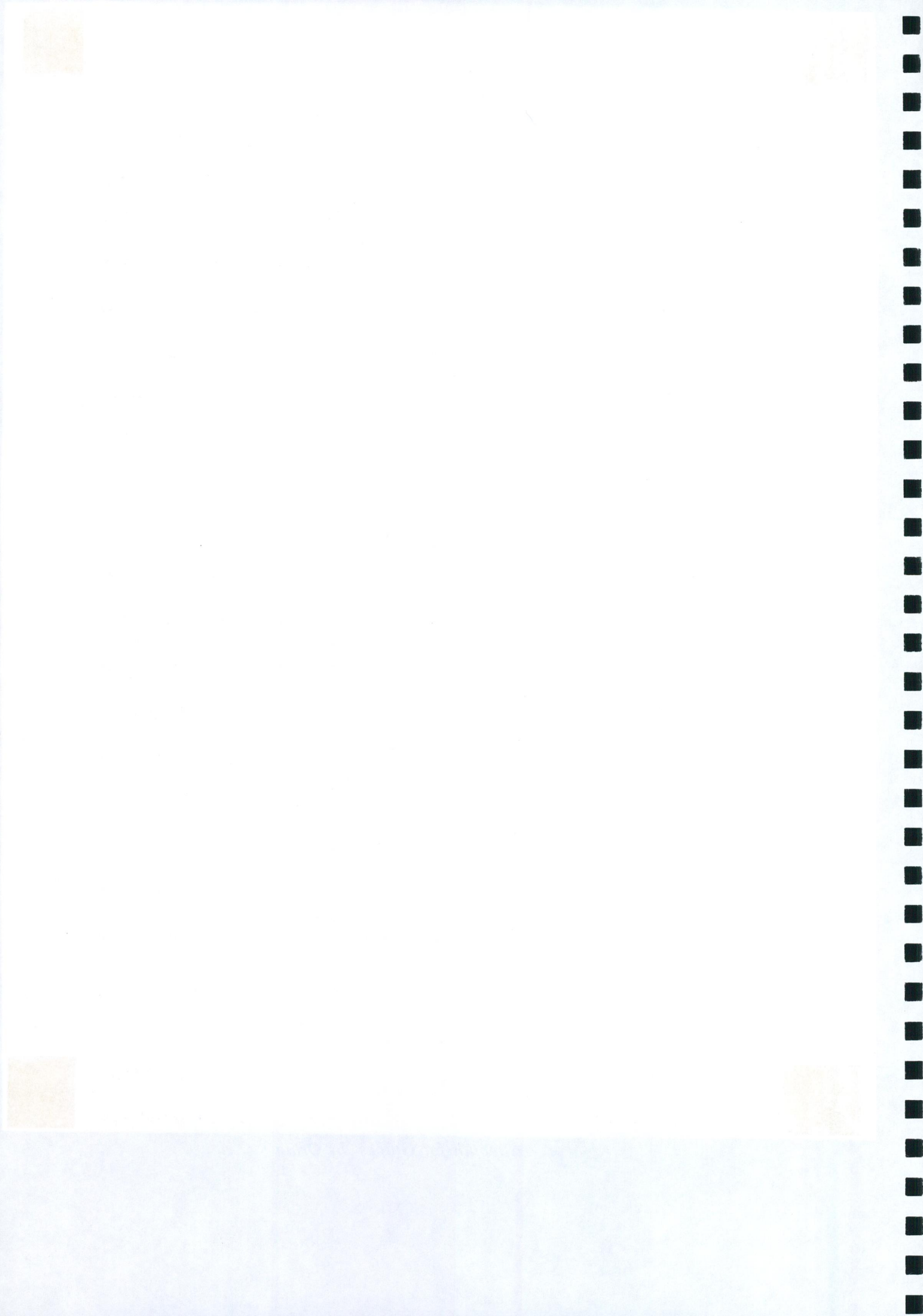
operation. All the accessories , including crucifixes and plastic fruit and flowers are sterilized in accordance with operating room standards, as are the photo blowups of preceding Orlan performances that decorate the operating room.

To support her expensive undertaking, Orlan earns money through the sale of the rights to her photos, videos and requires payment for interview. The production, direction and casting of each operation became fodder for the photos videos and films. As the french representative to the Sydney Beinnial in December 1992, she included in her exhibition vials containing samples of her liquified flesh and blood drained off during the body-sculpting part of the operations. These relics are also intended to be marked to raise funds for the two remaining operations.

Orlan went to India to obtain enormous flashy billboards of the type used to advertise popular Indian films. These have the high-Kitch look of the 1950's Hollywood posters. In addition to the artist herself, the billboards featured the surgeons and operating room technicians, as well as supporting cast actors and dancers. Not all the credits go to literal participants in the operating room, Pierre Restaney, Achille Benito, Olivia and Hans Haacke for example get prominent billing because they have supported Orlans work in the past.



A mouth for Grapes, by Orlan



In India, Orlan studied the cult of Kali and gathered sacred texts describing the body as a sack or costume to be shed. She will read from these texts in her next operation/performance which will transform her own fashionable nose into the long pointed configuration favoured by artists of the School of Fontainebleau. The African male striptease dancer who appeared in the first operation, will be replaced in the next one by a classical Indian dancer.

Orlan's brutal, blunt and sometimes gory imagery neither flatters herself nor the public, it transmits disquieting and alarming signals of profound psychological and social disorder that nobody in his or her right mind wants around the house. Her program also provides a devastating critique of the psychological and physical consequences of the distortions of nature implied in the advanced technologies discovered by scientific research, from microsurgery to organ transplants to potential genetic engineering.

Orlan's insistence that art is a life or death issue involving literal as well as metamorphic risk continues to raise the question of whether she is inspired or crazy.

Her performances might be read as rituals of female submission, analogous to primitive rites involving the cutting up of women's bodies. But actually she



aims to exorcise society's program to deprive women of aggressive instincts of any kind. During the process of planning, enacting and documenting the surgical steps of her transformation, Orlan remains in control of her own destiny. If the parts of seven different ideal women are needed to fulfil Adam's desire for an Eve made in his image, Orlan consciously chooses to undergo the necessary mutilation to reveal that the objective is unattainable and the process horrifying. Orlan the artist and the woman will never play the victim: she is both subject and object, actress and director, passive patient and active organiser.

CONCLUSION

The artists I have mentioned in the previous chapters, like Jeff Koons, Robert Gober, Sue Williams and Orlan are producing art which I feel is radical, relevant and are helping to construct an idea of the self within this void of technological advancements. These artists are continually pushing the boundaries of taste and art, take for example Orlan, who although acknowledges a specific debt to the 60's and 70's Body Artists who startled spectators with their ritualistic staged imitations of blood sacrifices. Of all the artists she is perhaps closest to Rudolf Schwarzkogler, who had himself photographed supposedly slicing off pieces of this penis as if it were salami.

However, there is a crucial difference between these early Body Artists and Orlan's performances, with them there was an element of theatrical fakery. The barnyard and the abattoir not the operating room, provided blood for the early performance artists. 'Documentary' photographs were frequently staged.

Schwarzkogler did not bleed to death, nor did Yves Klein jump out a window. The danger in Orlan's work is very real, however, her work is still bought and sold from commercial galleries like art has been doing since the 19th Century. The same could be said of the '*Post Human*' exhibition, although Helena Kontova said of it.

"It is indeed a rare thing to see a contemporary art exhibition which manages to be both enjoyable and informative. "Post-Human" as conceived of by Jefferey Deitch, manages not only to communicate to the average viewer, but to engage the interest of art specialist as well, offering a view of some of the best works in contemporary art".

(Kontova, 1992, p.66)

Although this might be true, Post-Human is really just an exhibition like many others and Jeffrey Deitch is just a curator/critic like others.

The key to a new beginning must be the acknowledgement that a crisis exists, the struggle is not merely a battle of styles in architecture or art, or even the competition for space in the urban environment, but what these symbolise for the individual, for what Marshall Berman calls "the split and unreconciled character of our lives".

The struggle is personal, but it emerges in the social: those parts of contemporary culture that have not as yet succumbed to the pervasive process

of commodification register the crisis in an acute form. Confronted by a void into which have collapsed the hopes of Modernism and the authority of all grand systems of belief and explanation, much of this culture will be decentred, schizophrenic and pushed to extremes. In the void, there are no limits to anything, nor is there a point of reference from which to begin. If we do not know what is real anymore, how can we know what is right. In a world without values other than those imposed by the ruthless competition of the market, there are no certainties and securities of existence from which a structure might be built. The crisis extends even to the way we perceive the external world and order our experience of it. The evacuation of meaning from 'society' causes a collapse in verbal meaning; the breakdown of narrative contributes to the disorder and anomie of everyday life, which is reflected back by the confusing and disrupted states produced in contemporary art.

To overcome the loss and fragmentation in Post-Modernism we need to recover, not Modernism but a sense of modernity, the consciousness of a new epoch, but one where the past is a source of positive connections, not negative comparisons.

"We need to look positively and critically at the past, and abandon the prevailing mood of nostalgia", (Hewison, 1990, p.19).



And as the art historian Brandon Taylor argues in his case for what he calls a 'critical realism', "It seems that any retrieval of modernism from its position of Post-Modern collapse must answer to the interests of more than just a minority specialist population, a far wider constituency of persons must come to feel themselves part of this renewal of artistic effort. They must be enabled to identify with the process of making, selecting, evaluating and conserving that must mean something other than reverting to the 'popular' culture of crafts, hobbies and sentimentalia - this version of popular culture having been impoverished and endlessly diluted by the passivising process of TV". (Taylor in Hewison, 1990, p.173)

Bibliography

Art Forum Sept 1992

Charles Ray

In the No

Lane Relyea. Pg 62-66

Jeffrey Deitch 1990

Artificial Nature

Book published in conjunction with the Exhibition of Artificial Nature

Jeffrey Deitch 1992

Post Human

Book published in conjunction with the Exhibition Post-Human

Thomas Doherty (Ed)

Post-Modernism, A Reader

Harvester Wheatsheaf, hertfordshire. 1993

Flash Art

No. 166, Oct 1992

Post Human

Helena Kontova, Pg 93

Flash Art

No. 167 Nov/Dec 1992

Post Human

Giancarlo Politi & Helena Kontova, Pg 66-68

Charles Ray, Kiki Smith, Sue Williams, Benjamin Weil, Pg 82 & 83

Flash Art

No. 168, Jan/Feb 1993

A Diary of Fluids and Fears

Kiki Smith, Pg 54 & 55

Dick Hebidge

Hiding in the Light

Routledge. 1988

Robert Hewison

Future Tense

Methuen. 1990

Donald Horne

The Public Culture (The Triumph of Industrialism)

Pluto Press. 1986

Charles Jencks

The Post-Modern Reader

Academy Editors. 1992

Arthur Kroker & David Cook

The Post-Modern Scene

St Martins Press, New York. 1986

Mark Poster (Ed)

Jean Baudrillard - Select Writings

The System of Objects pg 10-29

Consumer Society pg 29-57

The Masses: The Implosion of the Social

in the Media pg 207-220

Stanford University Press. 1988

Margaret A. Rose (Ed)

The Post Modern & The Post Industrial

Cambridge University Press. 1991

Marianne Ryan (Ed)

Double Take

The Southbank Centre & Parkett Publishers, London. 1992

William Stearns & William Chaloupka (Ed)

Jean Baudrillard

The Disappearance of Art & Politics

Macmillan Academic. 1992

Brian Wallis (Ed)

Discussions in Contemporary Culture

(If you lived here)

Bay Press. 1991

