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FACULTY OF DESIGN

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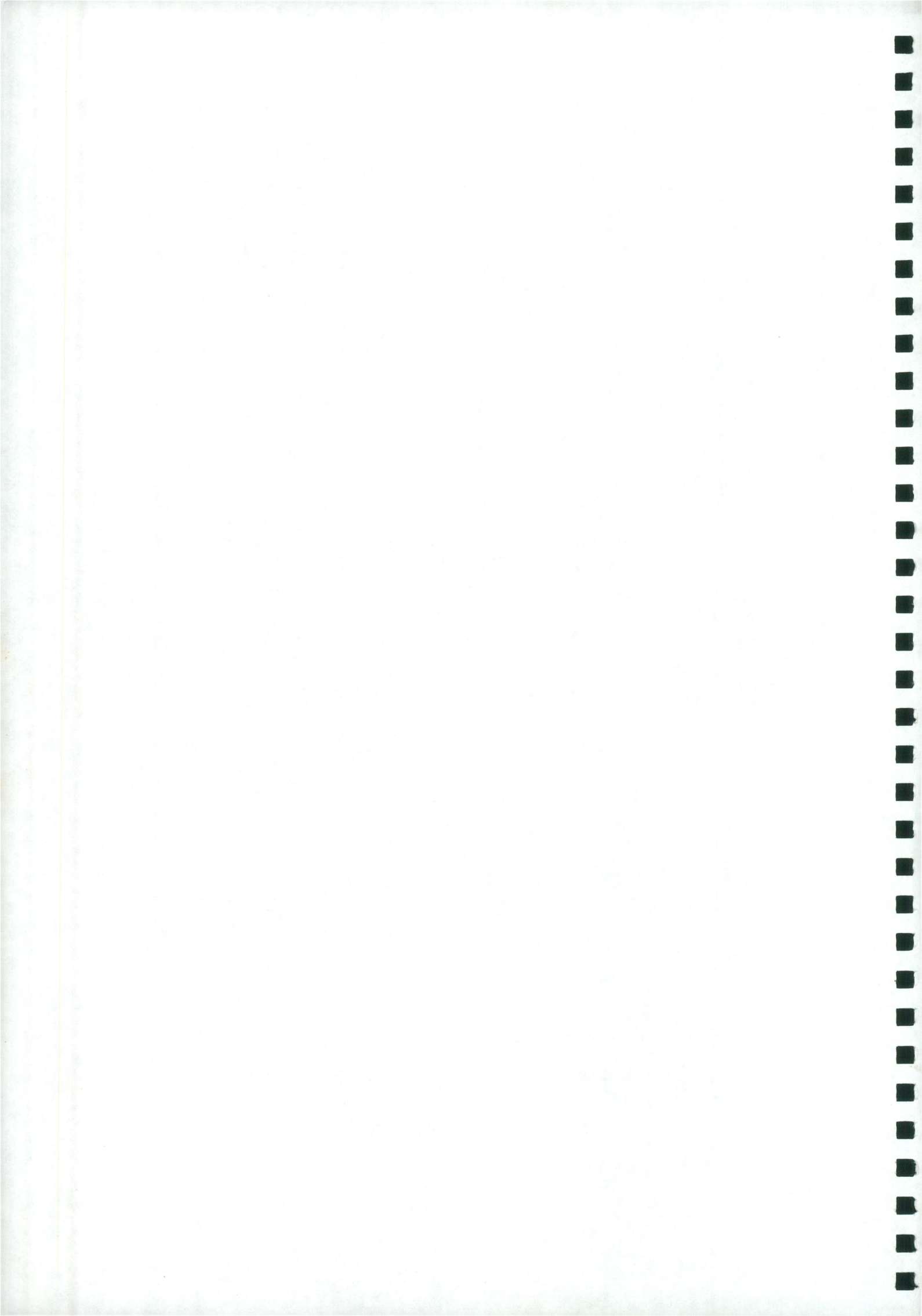
THE  
ISOLATING GAZE

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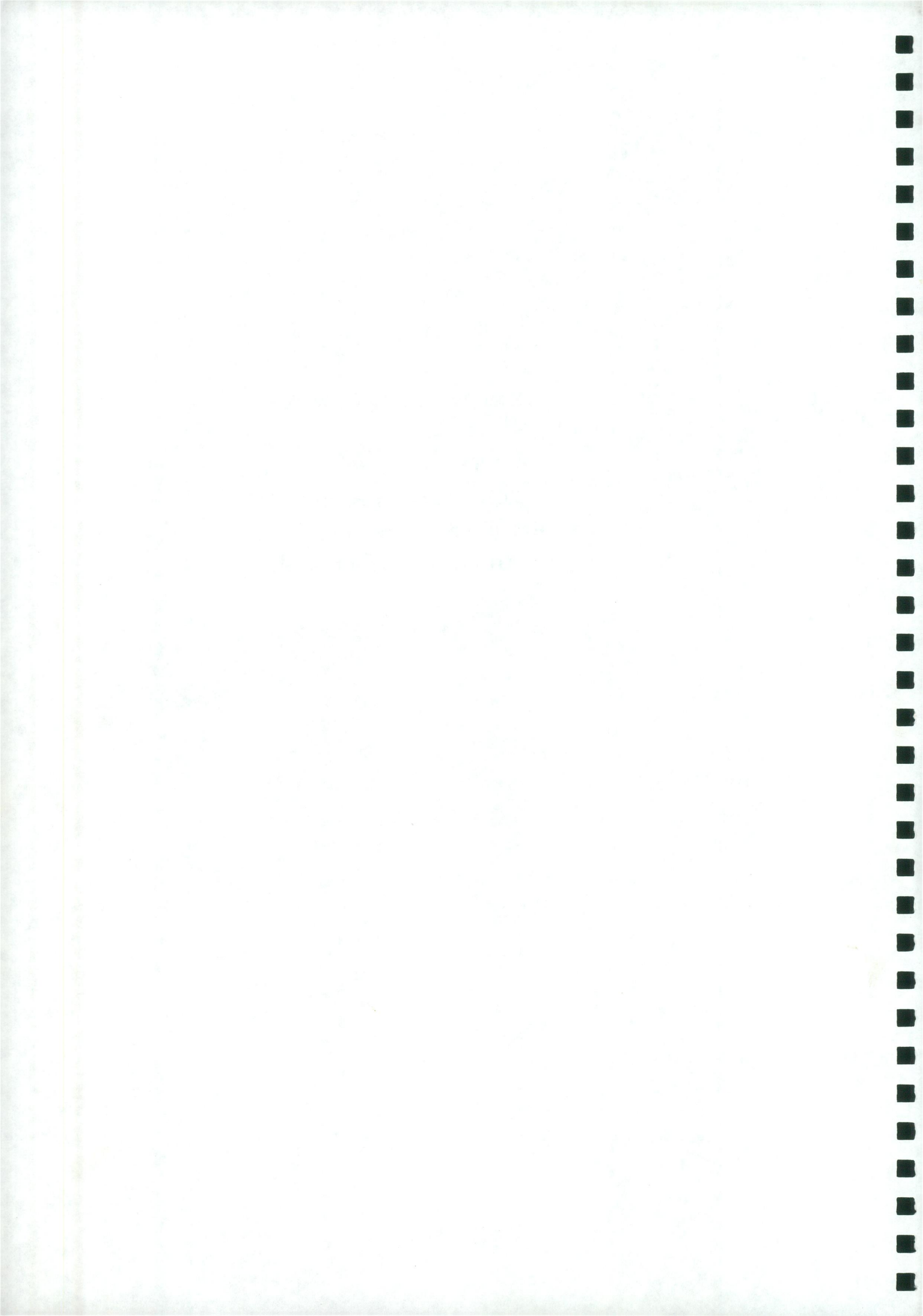
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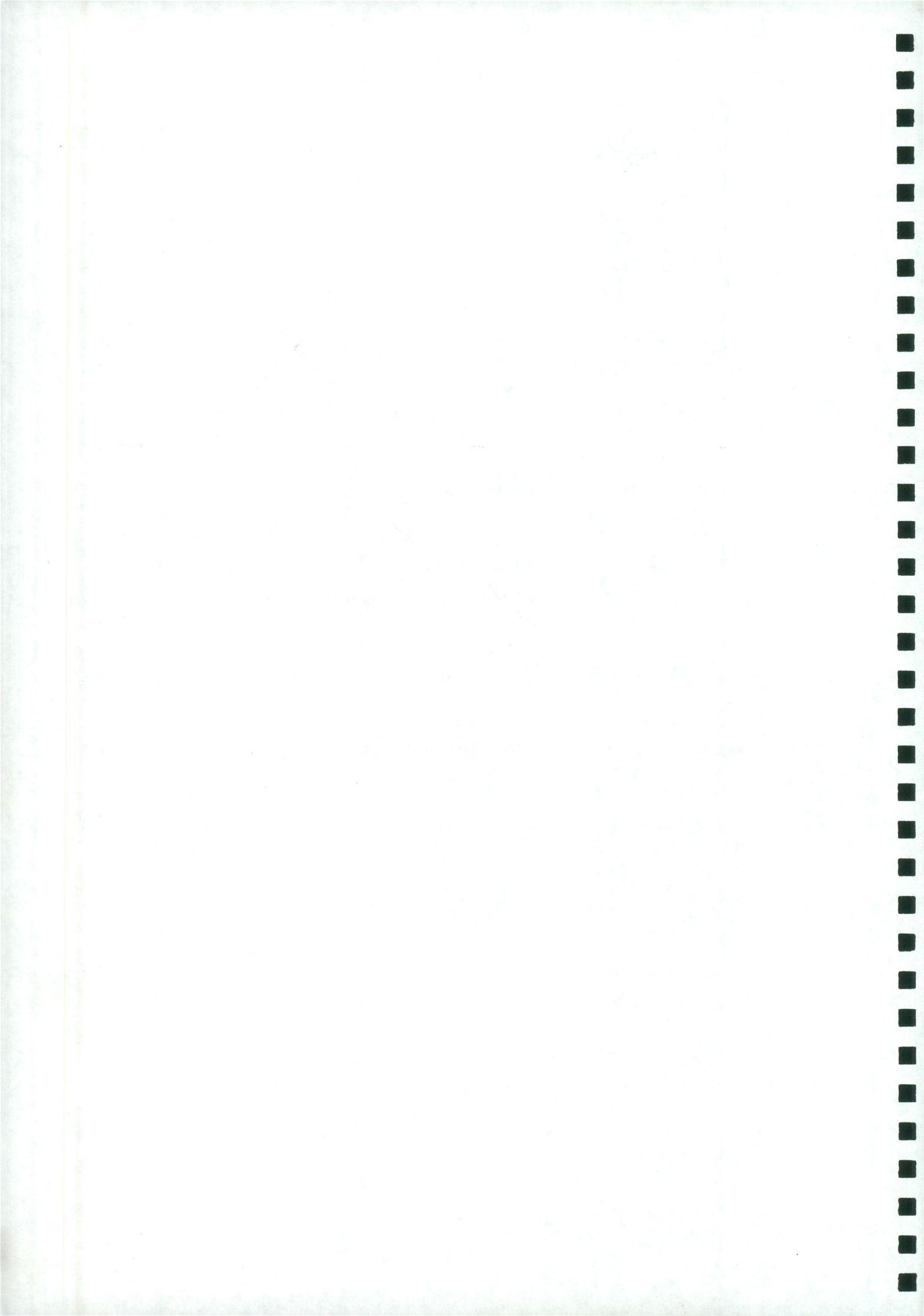
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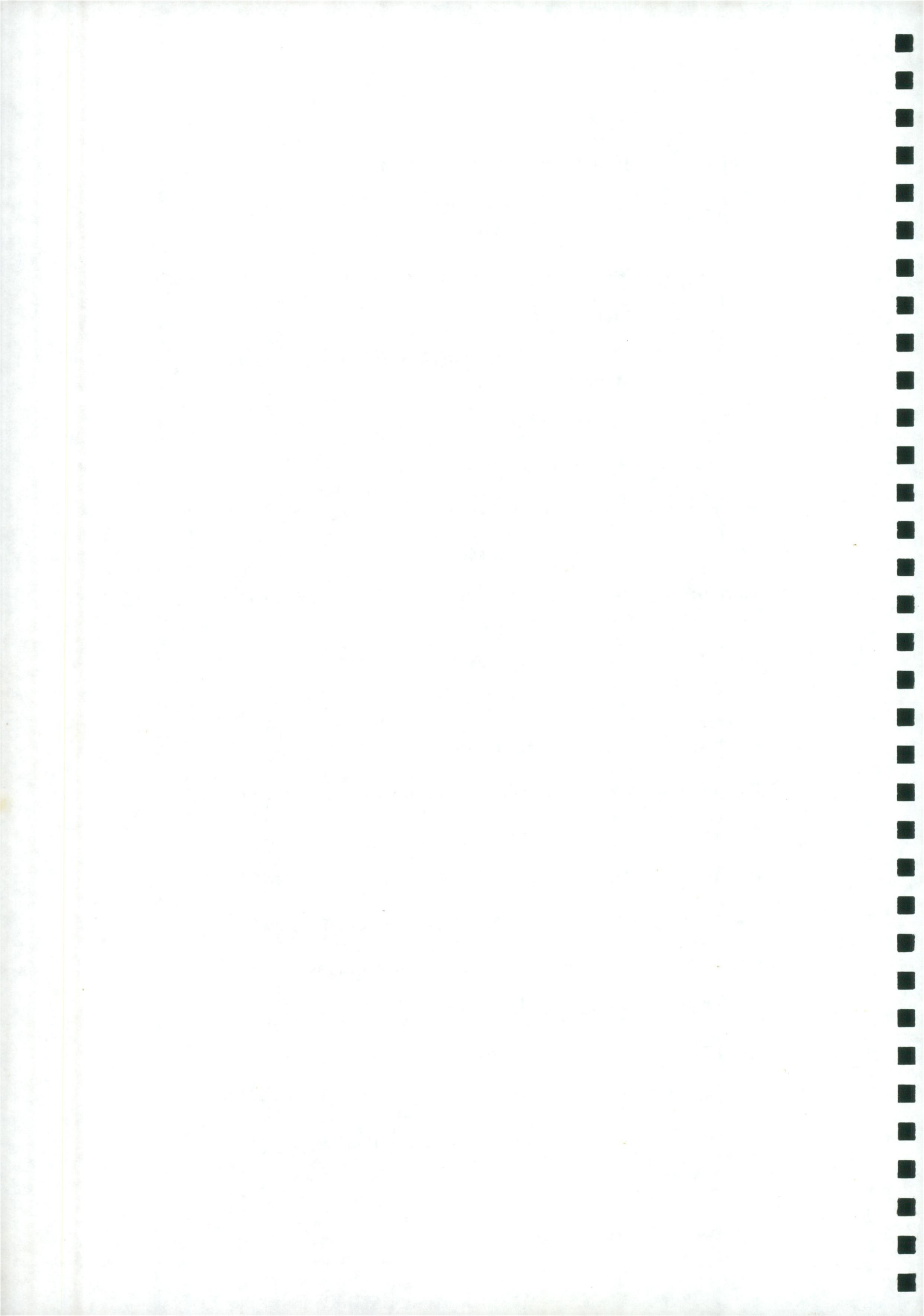
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## INTRODUCTION

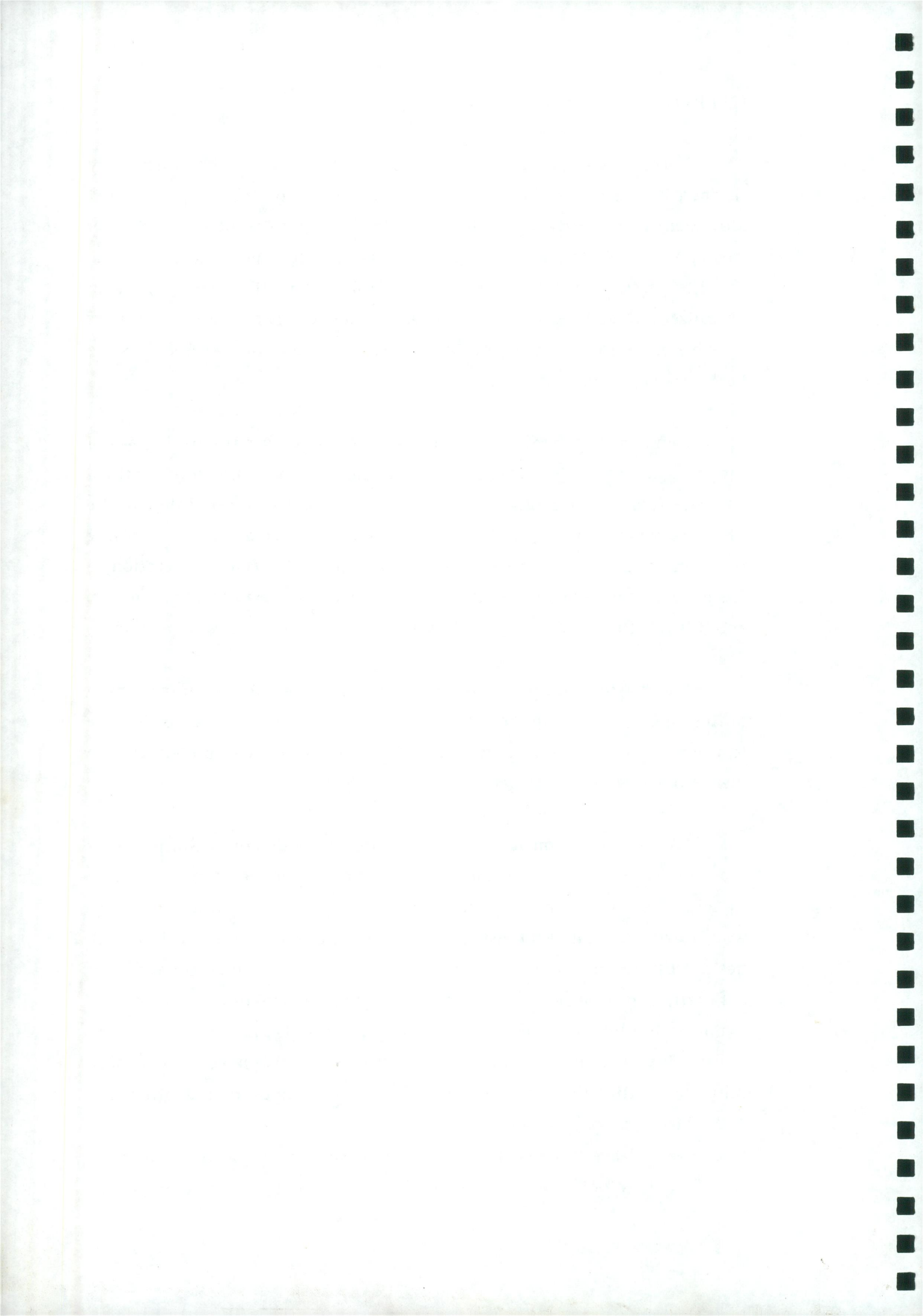
If Feminism has liberated woman in some ways it has ultimately trapped her in others for it represents her own isolation. The Feminist Movement of the early '70s called for fuller emancipation of women; better pay, opportunities and status in a society that privileges men. It is undeniable that the necessity of a form of feminism still remains (thus feminism is an unrealized project), but the legacy of the movement is such that "it attacks the very nature of women, and in the guise of liberation, seeks to enslave her" (Stassinopoulos, 1973, p.11).

Feminist theory resulting from psychoanalysis gives rise to the idea of the male gaze versus the female gaze, that being the masculine form gratified and the female form ignored, makes it practically impossible for the (informed) woman to enjoy her depiction in art and media without regarding that female representation in an almost paranoid light. Feminist reaction to the male gaze is so extreme that her own enjoyment is greatly compromised, and it is this that reflects real-life isolation between men and women today.

Men are seen as the enemy, not as human beings, and the introduction of this language of politics into personal relationships is totally objectionable to women today who do not wish to adhere to this concept of conflict with men, women who want to get equal - not even.

Women's isolation results from almost savage determination to never again return to a position of submission. "The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe," (Berger, 1972, p.8) and to those women who advocate Feminist teachings, the idea of being seen as beautiful, desired by the man, instills fear that acceptance or acknowledgement of admiration may be seen by the male as a form of weakness. A doctrinaire feminism inhibits her freedom to be content at the pleasure it gives her and replaces it with contempt and guilt for that pleasure. "We have (rightly) been wary of admitting the degree to which the pleasure comes from identification with objectification." (Kaplin, 1983, p.34)

Gaze Theory leaves the female with no real place 'to look', or to take pleasure when she does look. The theory asserts that the privileged positioning of the



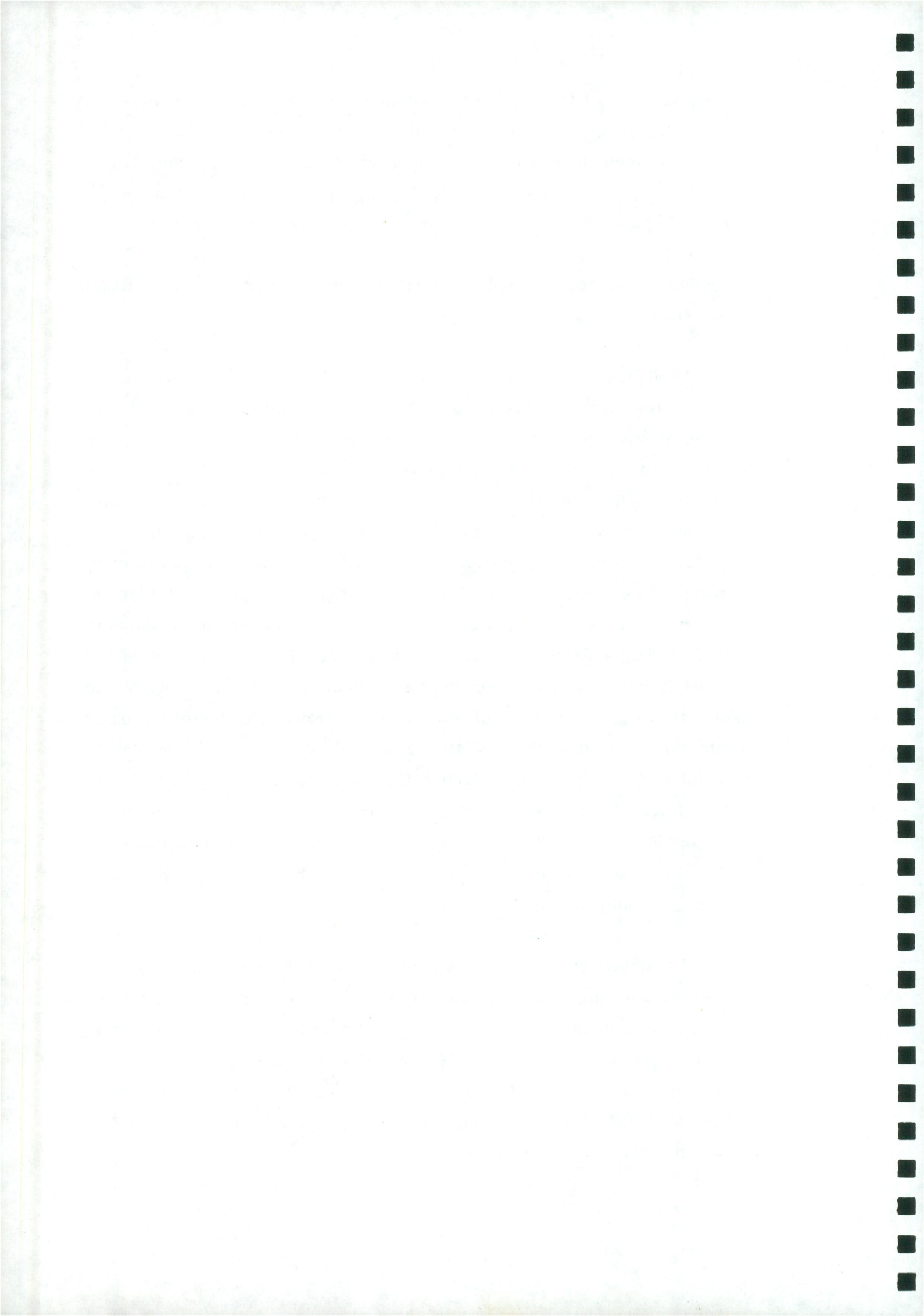
male spectator is based on the sadistic need to dominate the female - as - image. Men look, women are looked at, "men are shown to be in control of the gaze, women are controlled by it. Men act; women are acted upon. This is patriarchy." (Marshment, Gamman, 1988, p1). "The word patriarchy in its currently accepted general sense, [is] the domination of society by men" (Dyer, 1986, p 106).

Where does this need for male domination come from and why are woman so negatively represented within this regime?

It might be wise to return to the mother/child relationship to discover why the feminine has been repressed, why patriarchy seeks to control women. It was Freud's contention that the woman represents for man a fear of castration because she does not possess a penis. With the realisation by the male-child that he cannot possess the mother (whose sexual relation is with the father) he sees the father as a rival. During the Oedipal phase the boy's love for his mother becomes sexualised and in order to resist punishment (castration) he is forced to reject his "primary love object" (Kaplan, 1983, p210) and ally himself with the father, thus "in rejecting the female he learns to speak the language of domination" (Fitzmaurice, 1987, p3). Where the girl accepts castration as a fact (for she has no phallus to lose) the boy lives in constant horror at the threat of its occurrence. Because male identity is based on fear of the woman there is "the patriarchal need to position woman so that the threat they offer is mitigated" (Kaplan, 1983, p210). In order to reduce female threat to male order of things, they are subsequently treated as objects (to give pleasure, present as support of male desire) and fetishised where the male seeks to find the phallus in the woman to undermine this threat of castration. Woman is the Guilty Object.

The dependence of feminist theory on a set of 'binary oppositions' is repressive and unhelpful, and almost certainly counterproductive for the female viewer. It leads the woman to see the relationship between the sexes "purely in terms of confrontation." (Stassinopoulos, 1973, p14)

"If rigidly defined sexual differences have been constructed around fear of the Other, we need to think of ways of transcending a polarity, that has caused us so much pain" (Kaplan, 1983, p58)

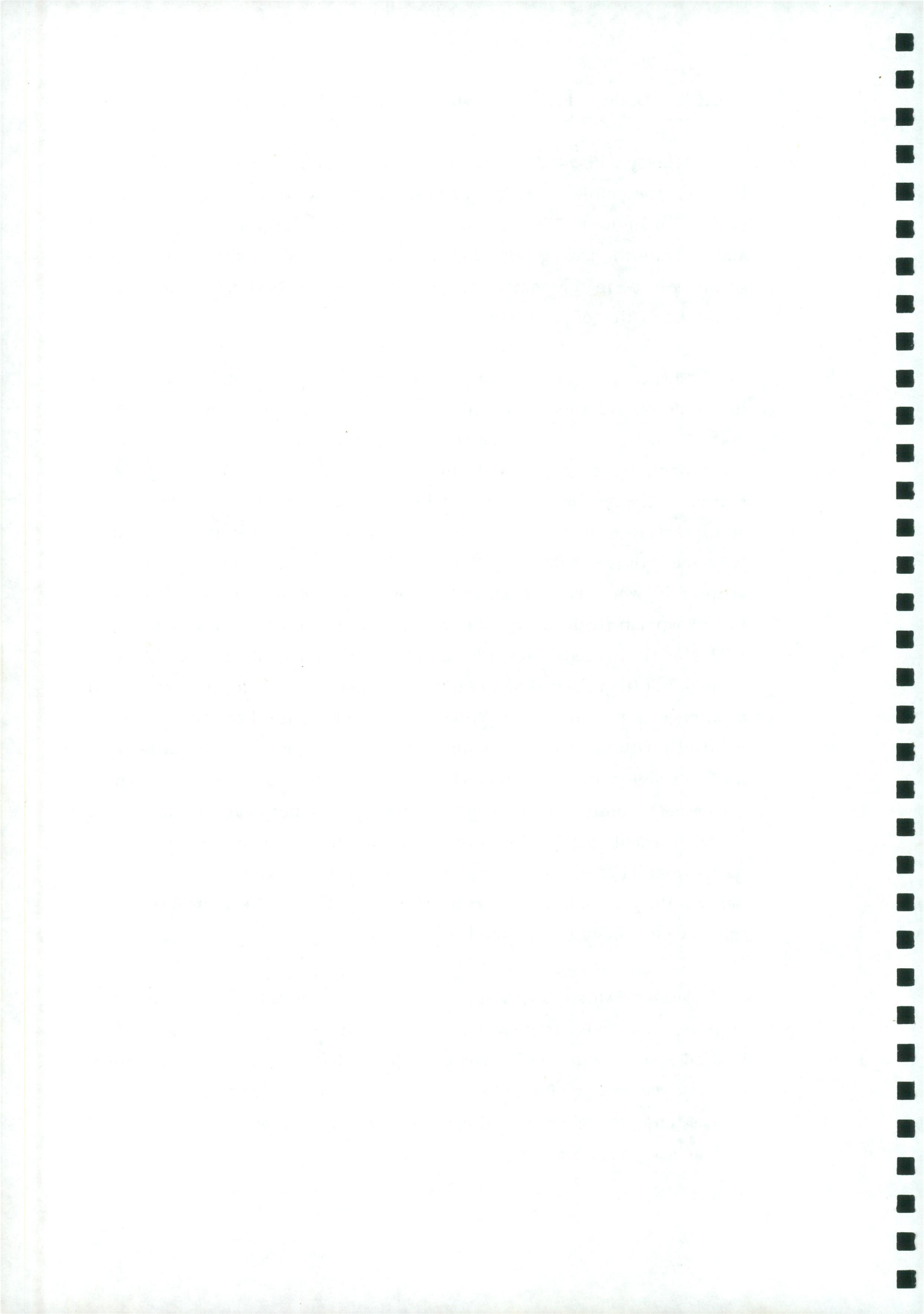


## CHAPTER ONE: FEMINISM AND THE SADISTIC MALE GAZE

Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* is a feminist theory based on the politics of binary opposition : the active male gaze versus the passive female form. "The gaze is not necessarily male (literally) but to own and activate the gaze given our language and the structure of the unconscious is to be in the 'masculine' position" (Kaplan, 1983, p30), the 'unconscious' being that of patriarchy.

This chapter looks at the erotic works of Gustav Klimt, an art which is highly decorative and deeply erotic, one which is undoubtedly appealing to both the male and female spectator, yet his curious obsession with erotic sources and preoccupation with the image of women may seem to privilege the masculine spectator. "In the art form of the European nude the painters and spectator- owners were usually men and persons treated as objects usually women" (Berger, 1972, p63). The use of the Mulvey/Freudian argument to analyse the work of Klimt establishes how one-sided and limiting this text is for the woman particularly in her reaction to the portrayal of women in art. It relates the tragedy of a movement supposedly created to emancipate women, but has in actual fact restricted her freedom to enjoy a sexualised art as Klimt's. The use of Klimt's work to examine the gaze theory is essential as it is filled with images of the female which can be easily defined in terms of Mulvey's argument and others who follow suit. For the purpose of relating the desperate position of woman, knowledgeable of her image on canvas, the reader is asked to take that position as she/he is carried through Klimt's pieces reacting as in ways Mulvey and others would have us react. This piece 'sets up' the gaze theory in order to 'show it up' to be a theory which negates the very pleasure of the women it represents.

Suzanne Moore, states in her book, *Looking for Trouble*, however, "This argument has been tremendously influential and important in getting beyond a simple 'images of women' type criticism" (1991, p33). As Kaplan denotes: "the raising of questions is the first step to establishing a female discourse", and for the writer of this thesis, the Mulvey theory has commanded such an asking of questions.

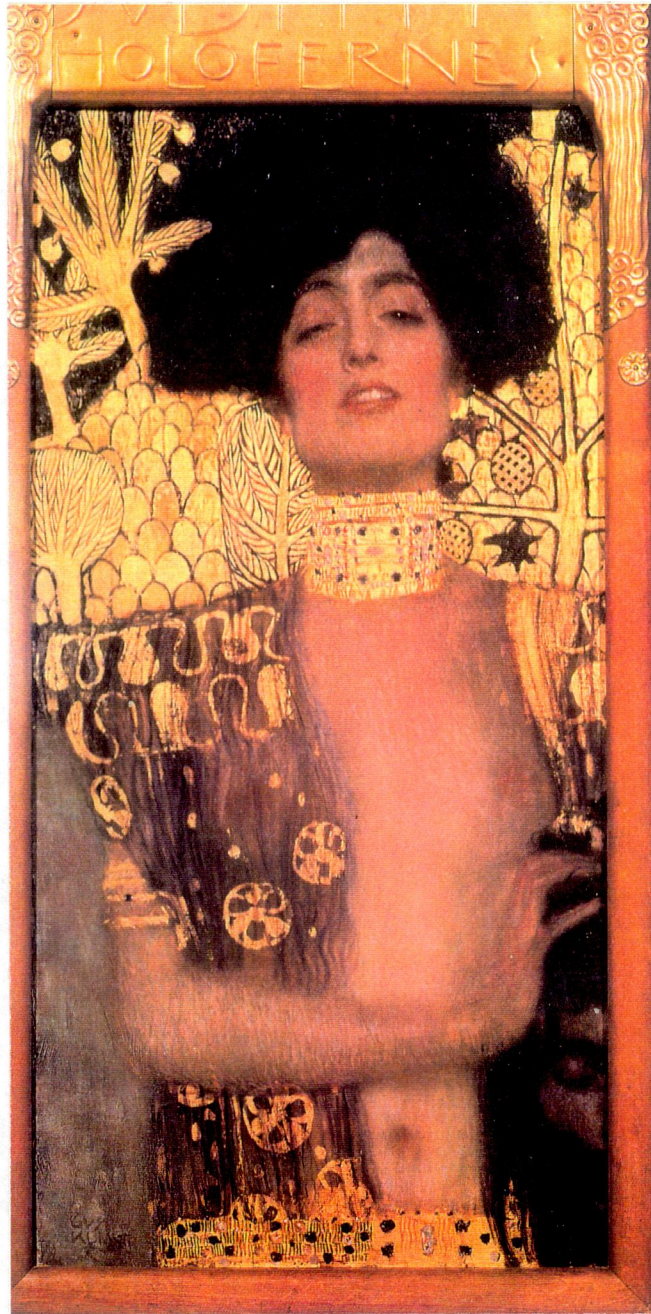


For Mulvey there are two types of visual pleasure, one which revolves around an active objectifying look that requires a distance between the viewer (presumed masculine) - "a scopophilic pleasure that is linked to sexual attraction (voyeurism in extremis)" (Nichols, 1985, p304). The other involves a narcissistic identification through same - sex identification. These processes are structured in such a way that the spectator identifies with the male hero and with his objectification of the female. "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning." (Mulvey, 1975, p305).

For Mulvey "pleasure in looking has been split into active/male and passive/female." (1975, p309). The woman is seen to support masculine desire positioned as sexual object through which he can play out his fantasies. The male spectator identifies with this more perfect image self (the hero and active male figure) and "through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her [the female character] too" (Mulvey, 1975, p.310).

The female's lack of a penis in psychoanalytic terms, implies the aforementioned threat of castration and therefore unpleasure. In order to reduce this threat the dual structures of Voyeurism and Fetishism come into play. The male attempts to demystify her mystery (the bleeding wound) by the effective mutilation of the female form to make up for her lack of phallus (and thus reduce her threat of castration) and create her as perfect product. Mulvey couples Voyeurism ("a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (1975, p307)) with sadism where "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (1975, p311).

These methods created to reduce feminine power can be observed in Klimt's work, voyeurism referring to the "active perversion, practiced primarily by men with the female body as the object of the gaze." (Kaplan, 1983, p14). The idea outlined by Berger of the female feeding an appetite of sexual pleasure (1972, p.55) is significant in Klimt's portrayal of the 'femme fatale', as is



Judith and Holofernes I (1901)



Mulvey's concept of the "Guilty Object" (1975, p.311). It is the depiction of woman as temptress, seductress which places woman in a sexually defined role of sex object, the ultimate embodiment of male fantasy. "The sex object is superficially diversified, radically, physically and perhaps socially, but nevertheless the patterns of (male) gratification are simple and seem to fall into two patterns, the Great Bitch and the Poison Maiden" (Greer, 1970, p194). Klimt's work includes both these elements - "The women in Klimt's pictures are both Madonna's and Femmes Fatales" (Gregory, 1986, p2504) and the femme fatale, (The Great Bitch) is a "worthy opponent for the omnipotent hero to exercise his powers upon and through. She is desirous, greedy, clever, dishonest" (Greer, 1970, p194).

*Judith I* (1901) (Fig. 1) is a prime example of woman possessing power despite herself. Here stands Judith, Jewish heroine, who decapitated Holofernes an enemy general, clutching his severed head. Her eyes are half-closed, her lips slightly parted, one breast uncovered, and the expression on her face is almost rapturous. "The man-threatening sexuality of the woman turned back on her: being perceived as one overcome by her own feelings facilitated the metamorphosis of mythical threat to sex object" (Partsch, 1989, p251). The preservation of woman as powerful dominator of man, the idea of "the female of the species is more deadly than the male" (Rudyard Kipling) is meaningless when woman is portrayed with power displayed only by her ability to manipulate men through her sexuality. The female image as "a controlling, decisive one" (Belli, 1989, p22), indicating strength and dominance is mitigated by her being objectified and sexualised. "Her power is of a peculiar sort in so far as it is usually not subject to her conscious will, hence appearing to blur the opposition between passivity and activity" (Doane, 1991, p2). Hence the depiction of women as femme fatale, creature of desire has nothing to do with her own image of herself, it is one enforced on her to reduce any real threat to masculine ideology. "The femme fatale is an articulation of fears surrounding the loss of stability and centrality of the self, the I', the ego. These anxieties appear quite explicitly in the process of representation as castration anxiety" (Doane, 1991, p2). According to Lacan the woman occupies the negative position in language (born with desire) (Mulvey, 1975, p.304) and Freud's theory of the Oedipal, ensures the woman's sexual duplicity whereby sexual gratification for the male is possible, yet simultaneously

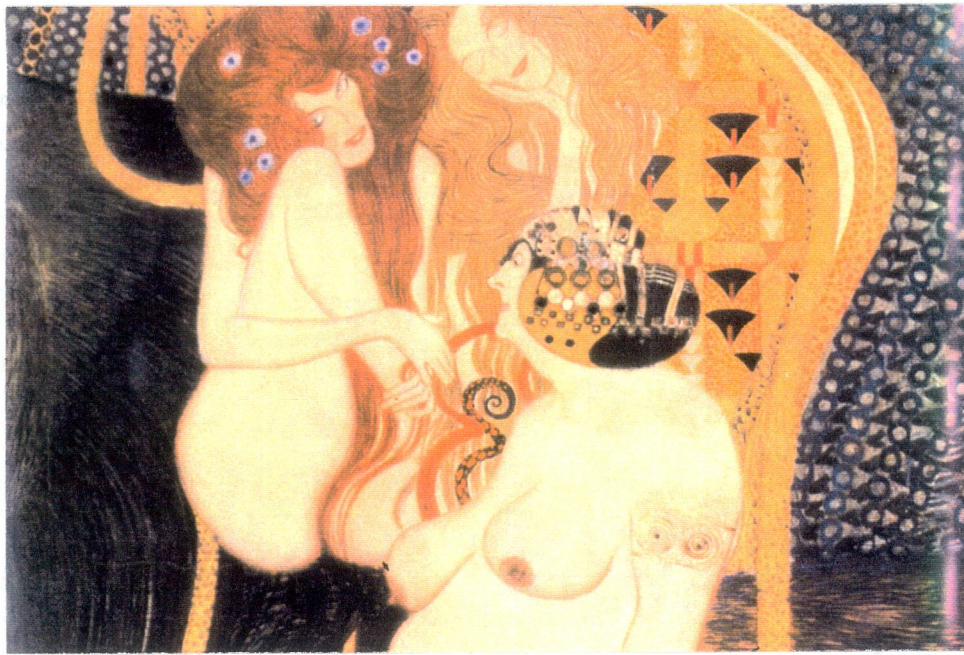


Fig. 2. Beethoven Frieze (1902) Detail The Hostile Powers

Fig. 3. Beethoven Frieze (1902) Detail Lewdness, Lust, Excess

reducing his fear of her power to destroy. The femme fatale is situated evil, represented by the murder of the male, thus giving the male the moral right to destroy her, or at the very least morally condemn her for eliciting desire in the male.

The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery) counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the 'guilty object', or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish.

(Mulvey, 1975, p311).

*Judith I* the jewelled choker, which usually suggests decapitation perhaps is an indication of that punishment for her betrayal and her attempt to lure man to destruction. "Her textural eradication involves a desperate reassertion of control of the part of the threatened male subject," (Doane, 1991, p2), thus she is not a subject of female power and strength, but rather a symptom of male fear of that power. The choker and the revealed breast, reinforces that idea of fetishisation, effectively cutting her body up, as the male searches for the phallus in the female so that the sinister sexual difference and fear of it is eradicated. The idea of women as evil is portrayed in the *Beethoven Frieze* (1902) (Fig. 2) with *Weak Humanity, Sickness, Madness, Death* (Fig. 2), *Lewdness, Lust and Excess* (Fig. 3) represented in the female form.

The dual nightmare of the female who castrates (by her actual sex this time and no longer by the indirect symbolism of *Judith I* of 1901) and of the 'lustful' woman in whose case the pleasure suggested is primarily intended for herself (*Lewdness*) and several erotic drawings by Klimt constitute a threat to man.

(Bouillon, 1987, p72).

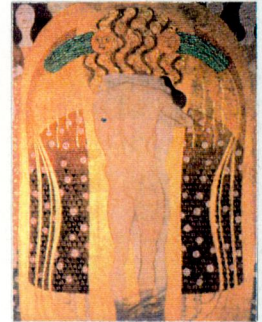
The striking red-head, *Lewdness*, with flowers in her hair which flows carressingly down her body and between her legs and *Lust's* blond hair which caresses the thigh of *Lewdness*, is in fact more gratifying for the voyeuristic look of the male, than the uncomfortable look of the female as defined by Mulvey.

The idea that the woman is "aware of being seen by a spectator"



Fig.4. Medicine (1900-07)

(Berger, 1972, p50) almost legitimises a male right to watch, as in *Medicine* (1900 - 07) (Fig.4) one of the panels for the Vienna University, or indeed *Judith I* where "the threatening goddess becomes the man-killing object of lust" (Hofmann, 1971, p255). She turns her back on humanity, with a look of almost sexual invitation to the male viewer. An interesting point may be that, like Hygia (main female image in *Medicine*), the women in the 'column of human life' face the spectator (assumed male - Berger), significantly the men turn their backs to the male gaze as in *A Kiss for the Whole World* (*Beethoven Frieze* 1902). "The male figure cannot bare the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like," (Mulvey, 1975, p310) and again the woman is forced to offer up her femininity as the surveyed.



(Fig.5) *A Kiss for the Whole World*  
Beethoven Frieze (1902)

In *Goldfish* (1901-02) (Fig. 12, chap. 3 ) the girl bends with her back to the viewer and turns her head with a blatant look of sexual invitation similar to that of *Judith I*. Here woman is ravished by the male gaze, she embodies male fantasy as she beckons to the male spectator. She is the object of the male eye and becomes "an icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look" (Mulvey, 1975, p311). The seductive way in which the women peer from a Klimt work, reinforces Mulvey's implication that it is the males who are the privileged voyeurs. Perhaps the function of woman is simply the support of masculine desire.

Klimt's nudes show the women to be objectified positioned for the pleasure of the male. "The nude is dressed in clothes of the owner-spectator's expectations and desires. She is condemned to feed appetites, but to have none of her own". (Dyer, 1986, p107). In Klimt's portrayal her nakedness is not necessarily a function of her own sexuality, where "the determining male gaze projects it's fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey, 1975, p309) but more likely the sexuality of those who have access to the painting, thus woman appears for the male, and he is the active voyeur. "The naked woman, surrounding herself, falling asleep after love-making, satisfying herself, alluring, waiting for her man with legs apart and lips half open, writhing in all directions, ever-ready for love-making" (Baumer, 1986, p12) implies the female is always sexually available at least available to

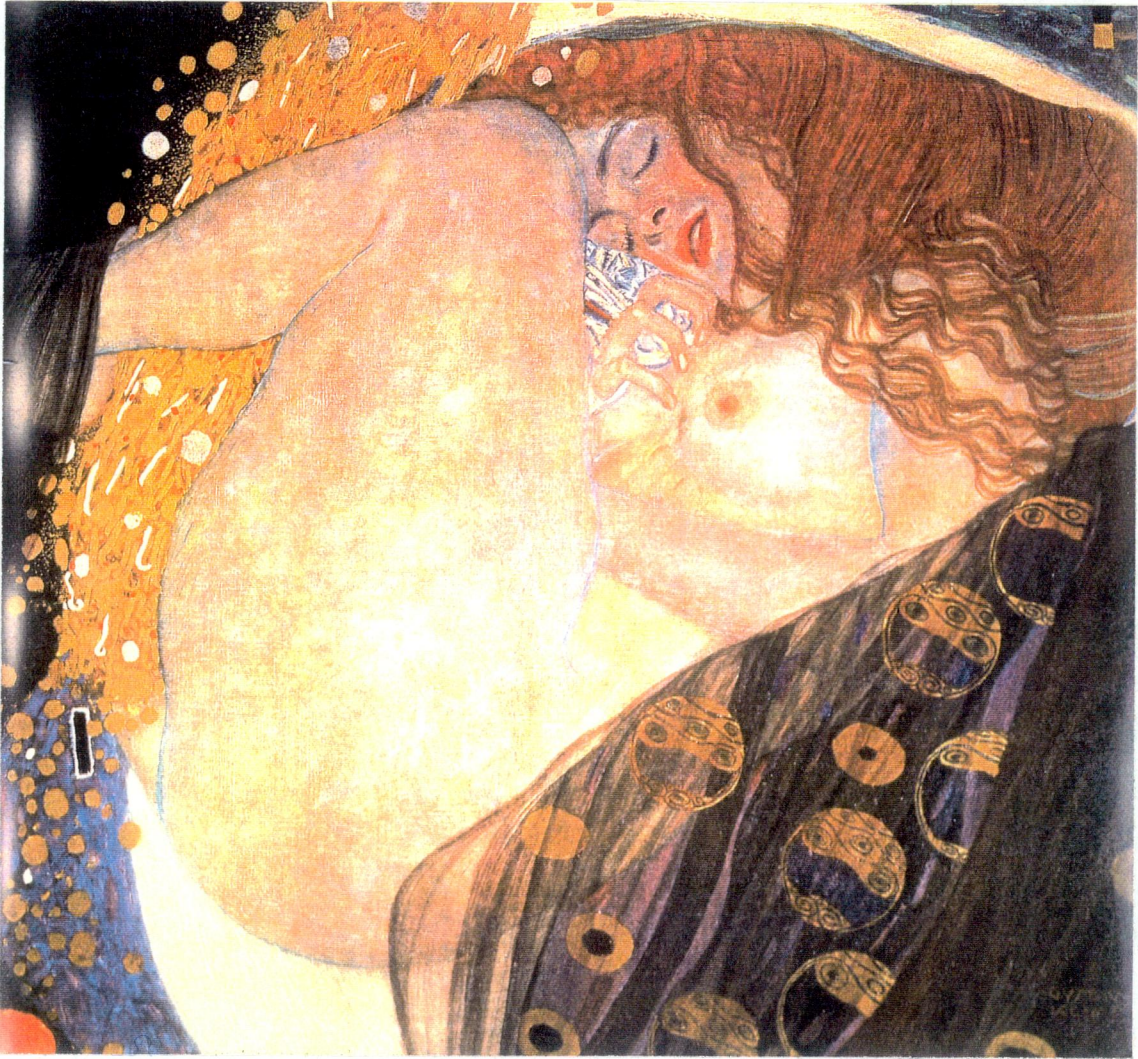


Fig.6. Danae (1907-08)

be viewed.

The painting *Danae* (1907-08) (Fig. 6) is male dominance, female passivity/availability all too clearly portrayed. The sleeping Danae is ravished by Jupiter in the form of a shower of phallic shaped pieces of gold and according to Partsch, "there can be no more cogent display of the availability of women and the dominance of man"(1989, p252). The look on Danae's face of sexual satisfaction even in slumber is yet another implication of the legitimacy of the male to take that pleasure as his unquestionable right and "ravishment remains a sadofetishistic fantasy inherent in the masculine structures of desire" (de Lauretis, 1984, p.90).

In terms of Freudian analysis, and the Oedipus Complex mentioned earlier, it would seem that fear of the 'Other' (the male of the female) stems from fear of the Mother - "the resultant emphasis on competitiveness, strength, power, position, aggressiveness and frequently expressed contempt for women all serve to keep the male secure in his separate identity" (Ryan, 1985, in, Fitzmaurice, 1987, p4). "Klimt's pictures of females suggest a view of woman, located somewhere between, 'Mother of God', 'Costly plaything', 'Femme Fatale', and 'sexual object' (Partsch,1989, p254). Klimt portrays the pregnant woman and motherhood in many of his paintings including *Hope I* (1903), *Hope II* (1907 -08), and *Medicine* (1900 - 07, University of Vienna ceiling).

*Hope I* (Fig. 7) is the most startling of these portrayals. The young woman stands facing the right, showing the full roundness of her belly far on in pregnancy and according to Gabriella Belli, takes "the form of a simultaneously erotic and macabre view of a pregnant mother seen from right up close" (1989, p25). It is hard to imagine the celebration of motherhood with the depiction of women in this painting for there are too many exterior factors to diminish this idea. Behind her, threatening figures look on suggesting all the perils the unborn child will have to face and the roundness of her voluptuously curved belly contrasts with her spindly limbs and seem to suggest the inability of the woman to protect her child when born, giving rise to the idea that the fear of the mother reduced by rendering her powerless in the ability to protect. The need to diminish her power perhaps lies in the males envy at the feminine ability to give life and that obvious power vested

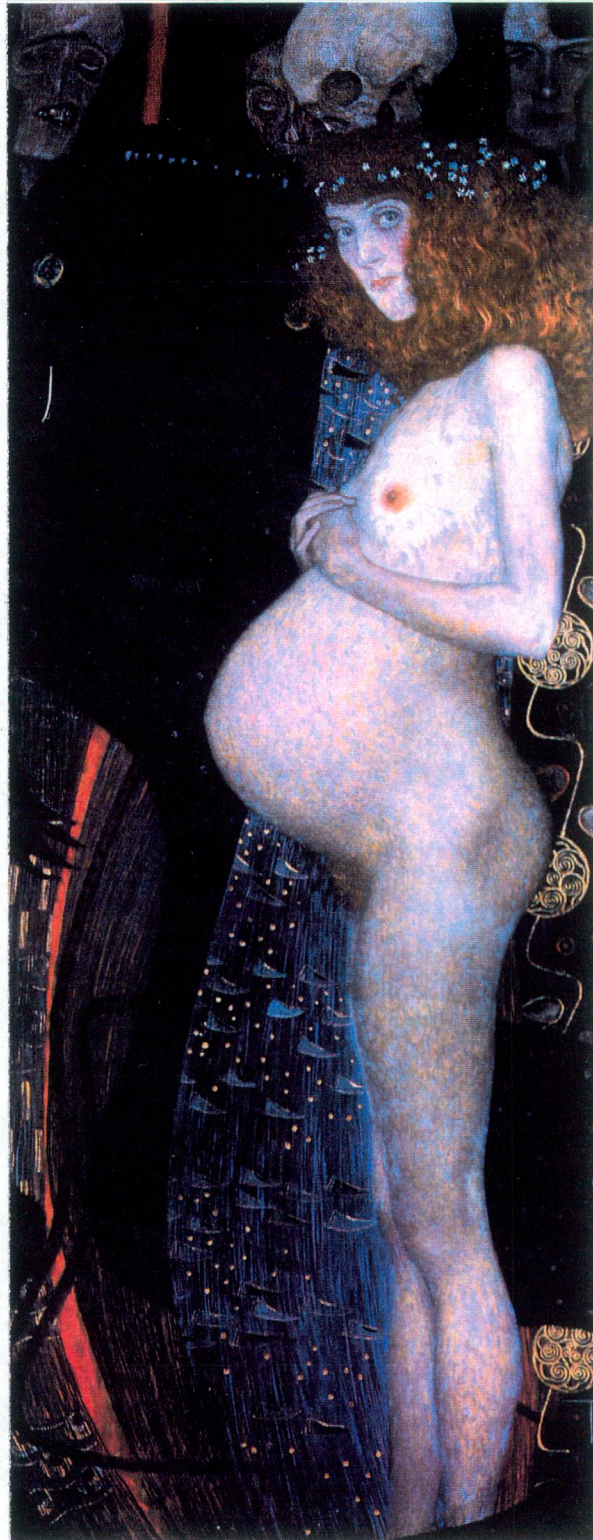


Fig.7. Hope I (1903)



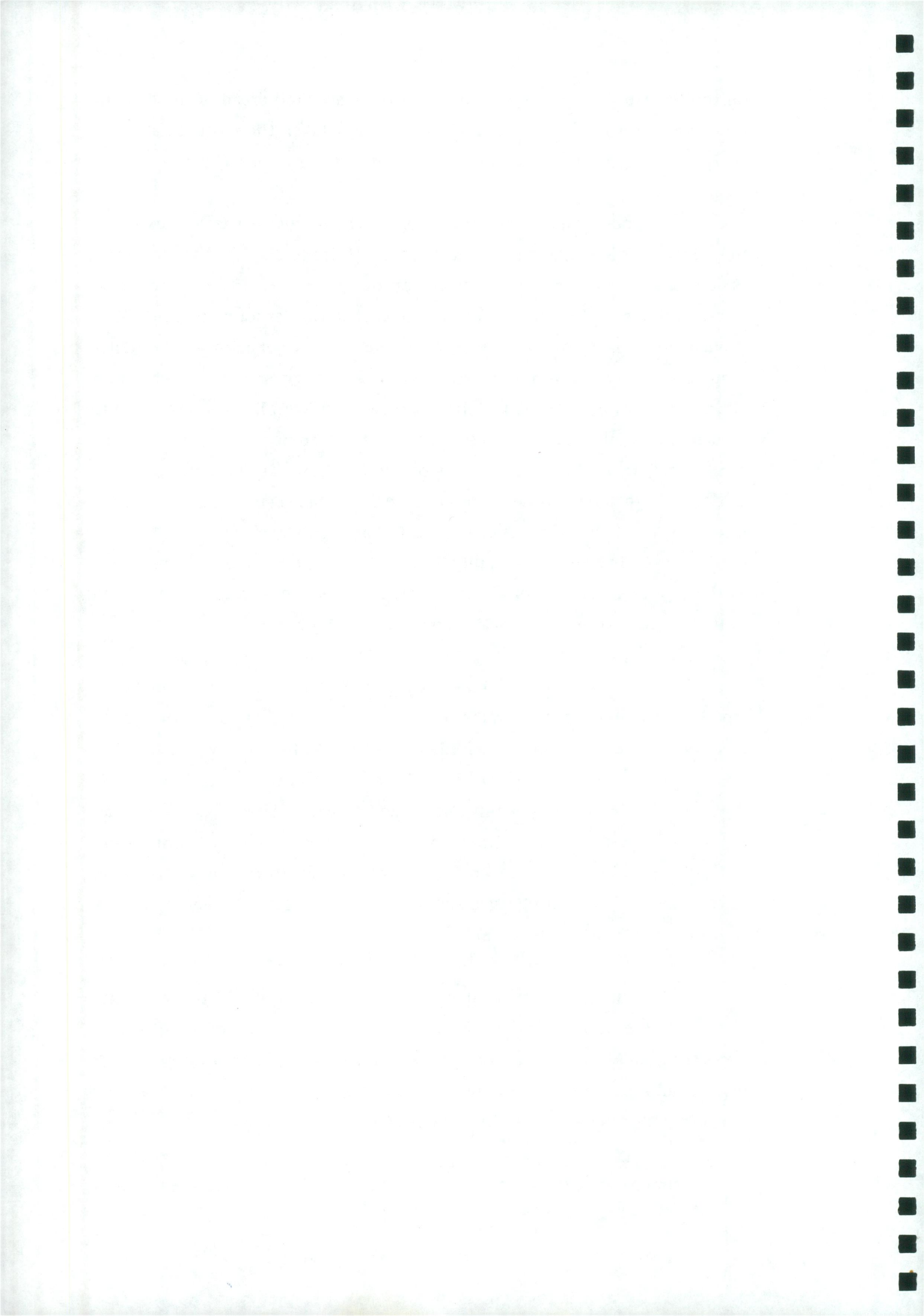
on the woman, "the ancient, continuing envy, awe and dread of the male for the female's capacity to create life has repeatedly taken the form of hatred for every other female aspect of creativity" (Rich, in Kaplan, 1983, p.202),

She is portrayed in the naked form, which from earlier discussion of the female nude, suggests she is erotic body of desire displayed for the male. "The extremity of patriarchal domination of female sexuality may be a reaction to helplessness in the face of the threat that motherhood represents" (Kaplan, 1983, p205). She fixes the male who regards her with a look that is almost sexually challenging, which may well suggest the femme fatale. "Klimt removes motherhood to the distance of an icon. Even though his previously noted fondness for curves encourages him to portray pregnancy without inhibitions to the point of being offensive" (Hofmann, 1971, p47). The figure of the pregnant mother is reminiscent of "the negative figure of *Excess* (Beethoven Frieze) also reminds us the 'lustful' and 'perverse' woman is the bearer of life even in her very sexuality" (Bouillion, 1987, p76). She is almost as evil as the creatures behind her if she is seen to be as femme fatale for the child in her womb is "the fruit of active lust" (Partsch, 1989, p255).

In *Hope II* (1907-08) (Fig.8, chap. 2) the woman is almost completely covered by the patterned cloth that envelops her, but only her breasts are uncovered. Like *Hope I*, the pregnant nude in *Medicine* is turned towards the right so that her abdomen is displayed in full profile, again surrounded by the perils of mankind such as sickness and death, to which she and her child are vulnerable. Thus, "the thought of hopelessness forces itself on our attention, to be disarmed by the expression on the face of the woman who offers herself in complete unquestioning surrender, (to the male gaze) transcending all possible doubt" (Partsch, 1989, p256).

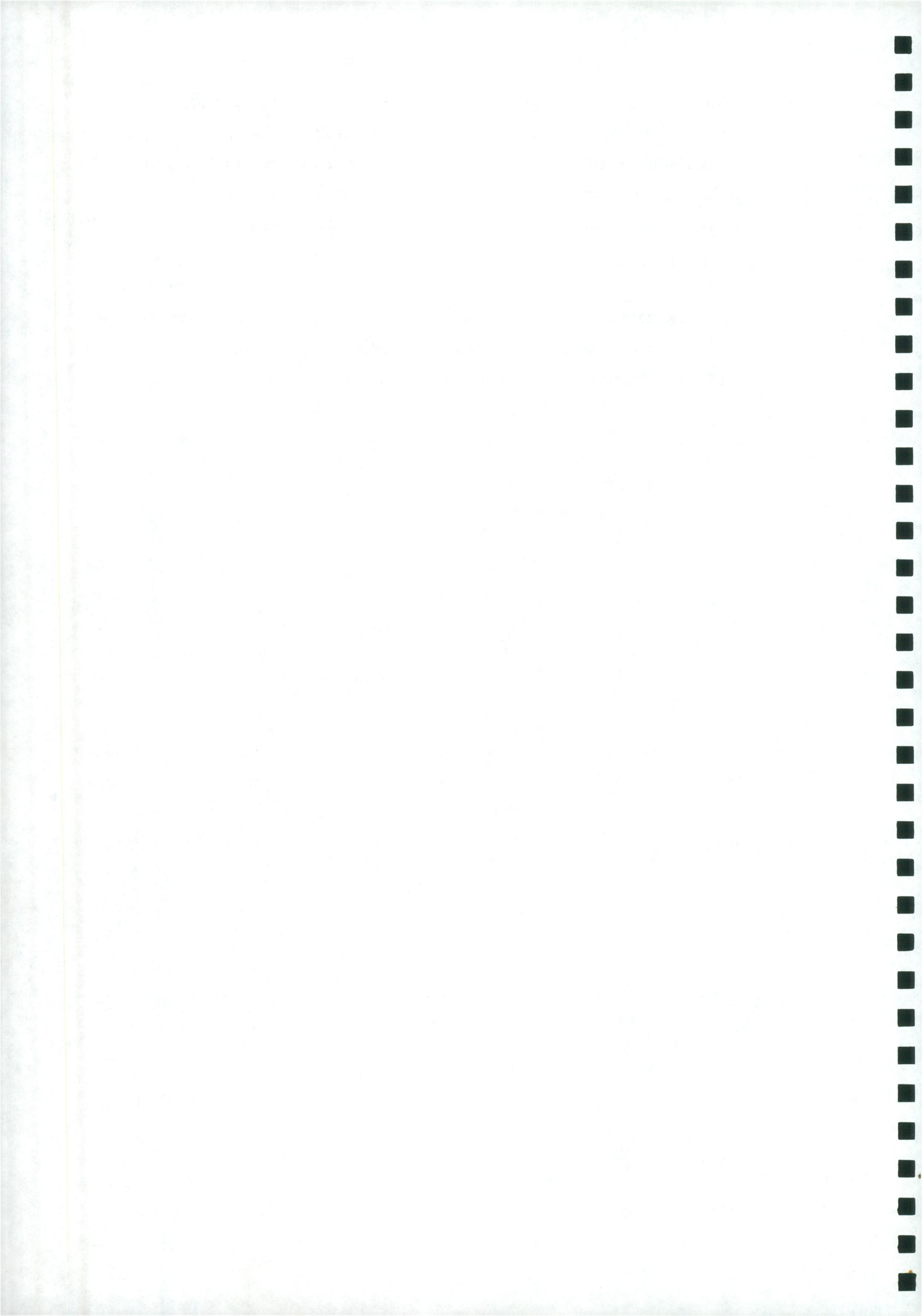
If "the spectator in front of the picture is presumed to be a man" (Berger, 1972, p54) and the female spectators position is one of identificatory narcissism, and if that position is construed negatively, then it only serves to negate feminine pleasure altogether. How can the female gaze be satisfied when that gaze is systematically excluded?

Laura Mulvey herself admits that "It is said that analysing pleasure, or



beauty, destroys it" and claims further that, "That is the intention of this article" (1975, p306). Her article's intention was to open the eyes of her female contemporaries to the objectification of women by their male counterparts and in this light the article has served its purpose. What this theory also produced was a condition of isolation or guilt: isolation from pleasure or guilt for that pleasure.

The following chapters attempt to deconstruct the concept of an almighty male gaze predicated on sadism, and in an effort to describe a 'legitimate' female pleasure I will look at theories predicated on masochism and explore the possibilities of cross - gender identification.



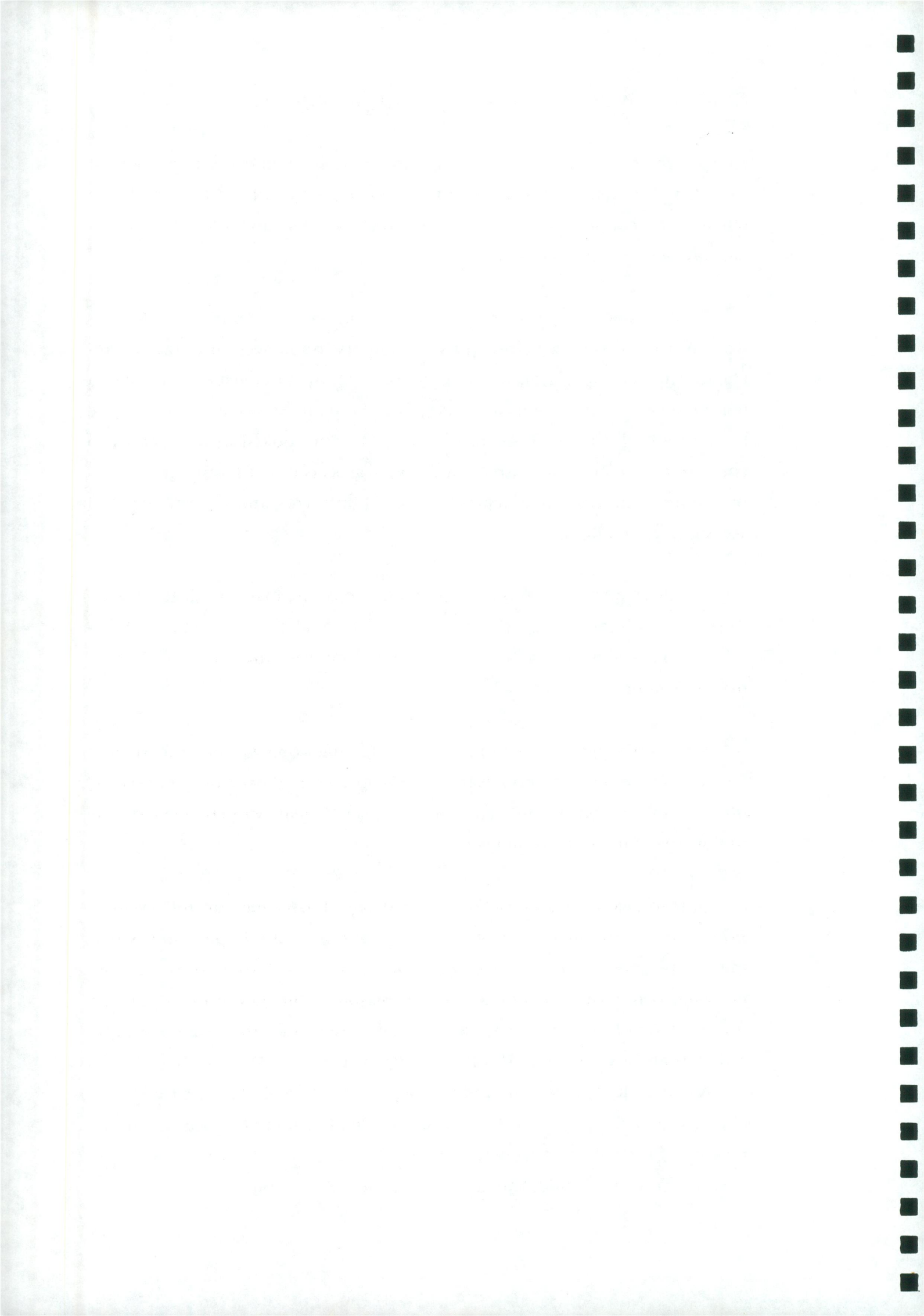
## CHAPTER TWO: MASOCHISM AND MOTHERHOOD

"Women are treated as objects, not as persons, and the key aspect of sexuality is sadistic domination by the male. For the hard-line Women's Libbers, the connection is not an occasional one but an inevitable and all persuasive one." (Stassinopoulos, 1973, p40).

This aspect is the very reason, the Mulvey argument fails the very women it represents, for although she attempts to uncover an unfair advantage of the male spectator, within a 'patriarchal unconsciousness', it leaves a feminine gaze and hence pleasure largely redundant. She creates a non-space for woman who takes pleasure in being the one looked at and serves to encourage woman to reject some of the very aspects of her nature, particularly motherhood, so strongly represented in Klimt's work and so easily rejected as seen in chapter one.

This chapter focuses on a deconstruction of the male privileged spectatorship and discovers that the idea of a one-sided, clearly divided 'gaze theory' has no place in the reading of images for either the female or the male spectator.

Mulvey's theory based on a system of 'binary opposition', in particular "masculine = aggressivity, sadism, voyeurism; feminine = passivity, masochism, exhibitionism" (Silverman, 1979, p.2), leaves unchallenged "the notion that for the male subject pleasure involves mastery" (1979, p.2), that being pleasure derived from sadistic sources where "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt immediately associated with castration) asserting control" (Mulvey, 1975, p311). If the male is assigned the sadistic role, the implication is that the female must assume a complementary masochistic role. The equation, however, is not quite so simple, for this reason. "Mulvey cannot admit that the masculine look contains passive elements and can signify submission to, rather than possession of the female" (Studlar, 1984, p611). By referring to arguments of Kaja Silverman and Gaylyn Studlar, I would suggest that possibilities of female spectatorship (and not to the exclusion of masculine spectatorship - for to attempt to discover a female gaze in opposition to the supposed male form, would only serve to replace one problem with an equally



divided other) in theories founded in masochistic sources.

A masculine spectatoral position is not necessarily privileged, particularly because "the ambivalence of separation/union from the mother, formalised in masochistic repetition and suspension, is an ambivalence shared by all human beings" (Studlar, 1984, p609), forming implications for a 'look' that privileges/unprivileges the male and female equally.

Where Mulvey's theory had a basis in the Oedipal phase of the child's development, the masochistic form is concerned with the pre-Oedipal, allowing for possibilities for visual pleasure for the woman. The Oedipal stage, it should be pointed out is a secondary construct, that is, a phase which follows the pre-Oedipal, which is the primary construct, hence considered to be of primary importance and because of the relative weakness of the castration scenario for women, the 'active' fantasies of the non-gender specific pre-Oedipal phase are never entirely repressed" (Cook, 1985, p70) "including the males passage through the castration complex" (Studlar, 1984, p610).

The pre-Oedipal stage of development is of infinite importance in the deconstruction of theories based in the Oedipal and resulting castration complex reproducing male fears, for it is in itself concerned with an entirely different form of castration, Symbolic Castration, which in turn makes way for a more positive reaction of the woman, particularly to Klimt's portrayal of the mother and pregnancy, and the positioning of the male and female spectator in relation to the mothering figure.

Resulting from her studies of Gilles Deleuze's writings on Sacher - Masoch's novels, Studlar discovers that far from the sadistic need to dominate and control, within masochistic structures the mother assumes authority, and contrary to the Freudian fear of castration, woman positioned as lacking the phallus, she is positioned as "lacking nothing" (Studlar, 1984, p606). The woman is fetishised "whereby men strive to discover the penis in the woman in order to grant themselves erotic satisfaction. Fear of castration underlies fetishism" (Kaplan, 1983, p14) Symbolic Castration, has nothing to do with the phallus, it refers to "the act of birth itself (consisting as it does in the separation of the child from his/her mother, with whom he/she had hith-



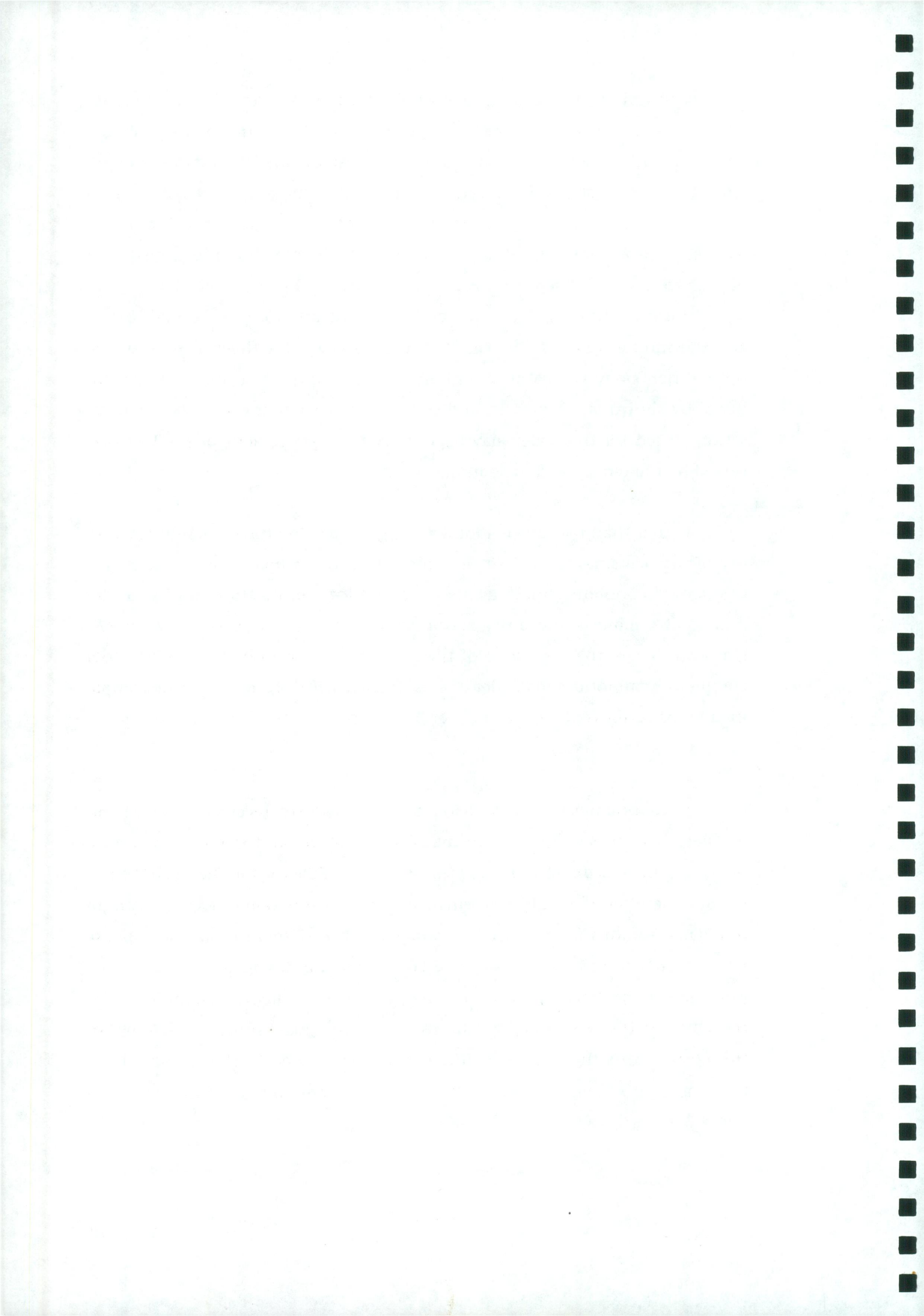
Fig.8. Hope II (1907-08)



er to been united) is the prototype of all castration" (Freud in Creed, 1990, p134). It is a loss of the breast, not loss of or lack of the phallus, which encourages the process of fetishisation in the masochistic structure of desire and is thus not a structure played out and against the female image, to mitigate male fears and privilege masculine forms of desire, but something shared by male and female alike. "Most children regardless of sex, use transitional objects to soothe the separation from the mother, which may ultimately lead to fetishisation and this fetish represents a substitute for the mother's breast and the mother's body" (Studlar, 1984, p613). In Klimt's *Hope II* (Fig. 8) where the mother's body is almost entirely surrounded in cloth, the only part of her body shown is her breasts, and considered in chapter one to be a fetishisation staged for the male, may be seen as a very statement of the loss perceived by the female and male in masochistic structures.

Rather than fear of the mother being the driving force, in Studlar's theory of masochism, fear of *losing* the mother is the primary force. The mother's body "represents simultaneously a desire for reunification, a reassurance that total symbiosis and unity are possible" (Silverman, in Creed, 1990, p137). However, where the ideal goal of the masochistic position is the return to a complete 'symbiotic bond', pleasure associated with the mother is accompanied by pain, for that wish can never be fulfilled with the "true mothering figure" (Studlar, 1984, p603).

Symbiotic pleasure, is a pleasure simultaneously, received by child and mother alike. It is significant in masochistic desire, and is removed from a one-sided male sadistic form of pleasure, thus allowing for the exchange of pleasure between the male and female equally. "It is in some sense, the desire of a small infant for its mother or a mother for her small infant, at a phase when sexuality has not yet become conscious and gendered." (Lesser, 1991, p79). *Hope I* and *Hope II*, far from being positioned as 'lustful and perverse' or the child in the womb being "the fruit of active lust" (Partsch, 1989, p255), (which uncovers the bitterness and animosity involved in the feminist reactions of chapter one), the portrayal of the pregnant woman is the desire, to quote Barbara Creed:



a time beyond that of symbiotic union with the mother, a time beyond even that of the beginnings of consciousness and awareness of objects, a time which reaches back to pre-birth when the embryo existed in total harmony with the body of the mother, suspended in the waters of the womb - an intrauterine haven.

(1990, p144).

"The mother assumes her authority in masochism on the basis of her own importance to the child" (Studlar, 1984, p606). Returning to the gaze of the male child, Silverman contends that this glance "induces fear of having been seen while seeing what is forbidden ie: the fear of a gaze capable of punishing a child's gaze" (1979, p5) and "it also confronts the child with his own passivity" (1979, p5) This "threat challenges the fiction of his authoritative position" (1979, p 5).

If we look at *Hope I*, (fig.7, chap.1) in the light of this, the idea outlined in the previous chapter: that she fixes the spectator with a look thought to be one of sexual challenge or invitation, may instead be seen as the mother who enforces her authoritative presence and the power of her stare ensures the passivity of the spectator, "the mother of plenitude whose gaze meets the infants as it asserts her presence and her power" (Studlar, 1984, p610), male or female enacting a pre-Oedipal nostalgia.

"The masochistic fantasy cannot by its very nature fulfil its most primal desire - dual unity and the complete symbiosis between child and mother except in the imagination. As a consequence death becomes the fantasy solution to masochistic desire" (Studlar, 1984, p606). The looming figures that surround the mother in *Hope I* now are not representative of her inability to protect, but a reminder to the spectator of that 'Death Instinct', and of the pleasure/pain resulting from the inability to become one with the mother. They reenact that fear of losing the mother which underlies the masochistic structure. They represent that fear of separation from the mother's body, of the threat that awaits the unborn child in life outside the safe haven of the womb, the perils faced by every human once that symbiotic bond is broken.

What is most significant in that structure is that "If the female child can take the same position (as the male) in relation to the oral mother"

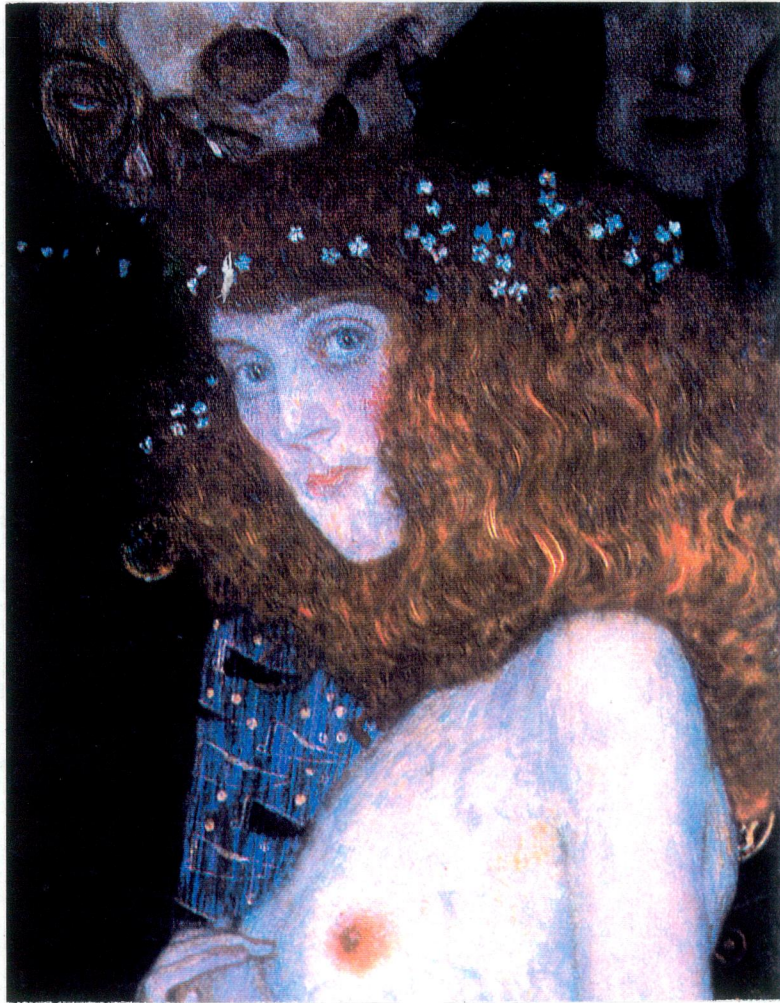
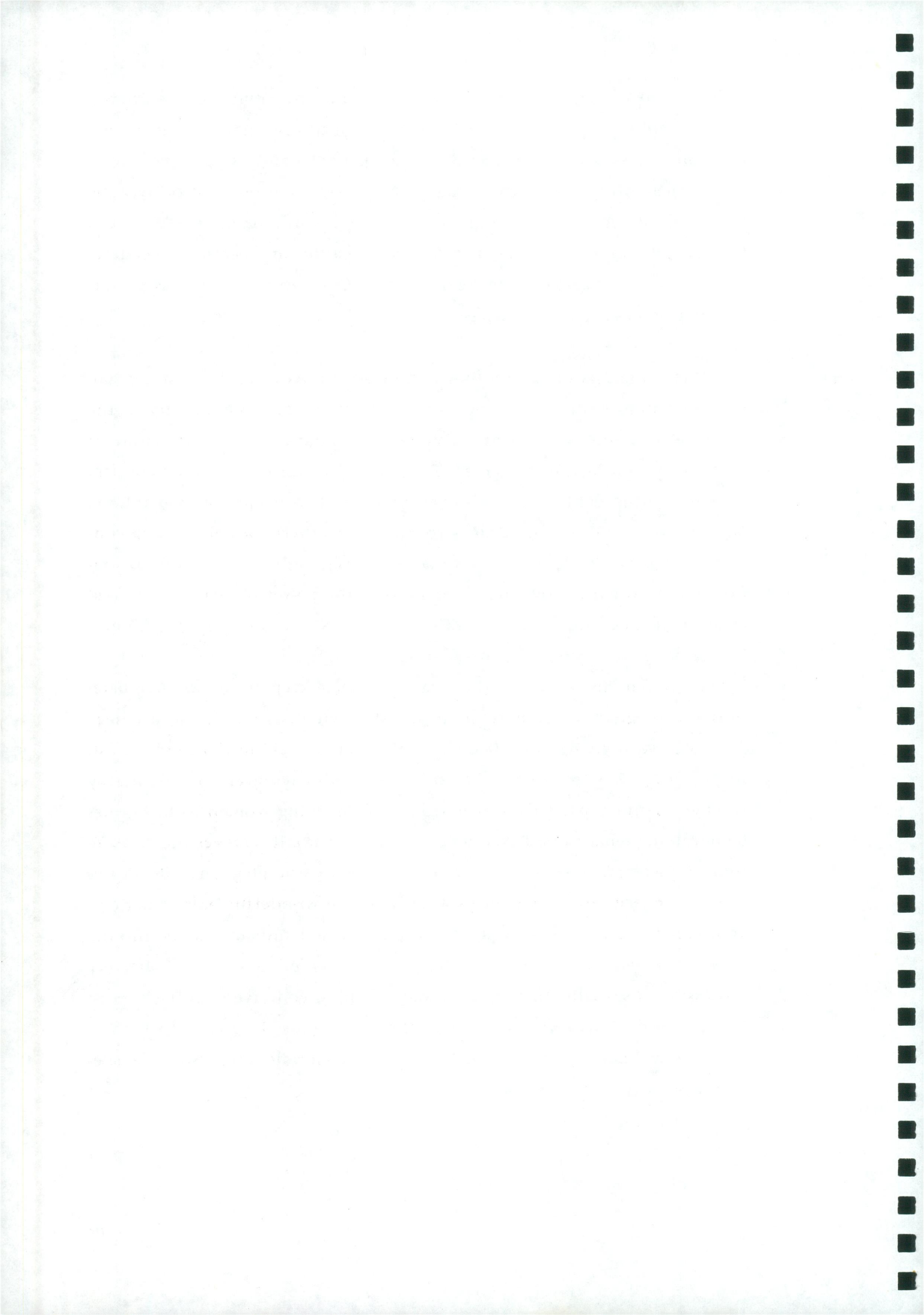


Fig.9 Hope I (1903) detail

(Studlar, 1984, p607), and the spectatoral position may be considered masochistic "the possibilities for spectator positions that have not been determined by the consequences of the oedipal crisis and its patriarchal solution" (Nichols, 1985, p603) then that sadistic need to assert control over the female, no longer has a function and the female can look guiltlessly, as can the male, at Klimt's portrayal of motherhood, particularly because spectatoral pleasure itself comes from the "recreating the first fetish - mother as nurturing environment" (Studlar, 1984, p614).

The analysis of the mother relationship uncovered by a Mulveyian form of feminist theory goes beyond a description of the animosity in the male order of things: it unwittingly makes an attack on the very nature of women by feminists themselves. The idea of situating woman as victim reveals a "deep contempt for women and for all concepts of womanhood (Stassinopoulos, 1973, p13), particularly that of motherhood, and it is a contempt not of the male for "only a man can envy, with a futility and frustration and eventually prove in fictional terms, the power to give birth to and create a creature other than oneself" (Lesser, 1991, p35) as perhaps was Klimt's intention. A feminine reaction to the image of mother may be negative because of feminist paranoia, the idea of the male keeping the woman 'bare-foot and pregnant', and is reacted against so vigorously that the privilege associated with giving birth, being a mother is to be rejected by the feminist, so preoccupied with being equal to the male: the achievement of equality through identical patterns of behaviour - "compelling women to male roles by devaluing female ones" (Stassinopoulos, 1973, p 15). It removes the pleasure from the woman who in Klimt's *Hope I* relates to "the pregnant woman full of erotic charm and her delicate face with the wonderful hair that flows around it like a halo, looks openly and proudly defiantly and nobly into the eyes of the beholder" (Beaumer, 1986, p16) and that 'erotic charm' is the very possession of sexuality in pregnancy and should be conceived positively as an indication that the woman does not forfeit her identity in becoming a mother, but is still her own person, that there is no contradiction between femaleness and independence (Fig. 9).



CHAPTER THREE: VOLUNTARY EXHIBITIONISM;  
SEDUCING THE PATRIARCHAL MALE

"How has the female's positioning as the one looked at come to be pleasurable to the female?" (Marshment, 1988, p5). The realms of masochistic desire allow for such pleasure, particularly if one considers that "Woman as erotic spectacle brings both pleasure and pain" (Moore, 1991, p35) to the female.

"The intimate junction of pleasure and pain - suggests that pleasure proceeds not from our mastery of painful experiences, but from their mastery of us: in short from passivity...masochistic bliss" (Silverman, 1979, p3). It might seem that this is not far removed from the Mulvey experience but as Silverman goes on to say "the subject whether male or female - is passively positioned and is taught to take pleasure in his/her pain," (1979, p5), reinforced by Studlar's belief that the masochistic model "questions the pre-eminence of a pleasure based on a position of control rather than submission" (Studlar, 1984, p607).

The femme fatale in Klimt's paintings, revealed as the guilty object, subject to punishment for leading the male to destruction, guilty of castration, positioned as perfect product, placed as support to masculine structures of desire, victim of the male controlling gaze - has no place in the masochistic story. Mulvey, Mary Anne Doanne and others uncover the concept of the female figure placed in a position of involuntary exhibitionism, feeding appetites of sexual passion, having none of her own (Berger, 1972, p48). "What happens is that the female is considered as a sexual object for the use and appreciation of other sexual beings, men. Her sexuality is both denied and misrepresented by being identified as passivity" (Greer, 1970, p15) and exhibitionism becomes erotic gratification staged for the male viewer.

Disregarded is that pleasure "derived from showing one's body - or part of it to another person, as in the pleasure of being seen, or seeing oneself" (Kaplan, 1983, p14). 'Voluntary exhibitionism', the woman appropriating that pleasure for herself, "disputes the inevitable desirability of the active masculine position, privileging instead what has been marked as the inferior femi-



Fig.10. Burg Theatre Actor Joseph Lewinsky as Carlos. Drama (1895) detail



nine position." (Silverman, 1979, p6). If as Berger suggest "the woman turns herself into an object" (1972, p47), then exhibitionism becomes a choice on the part of the woman (and a choice on the part of the female spectator) and Mulvey's object-to-be-looked-at-ness becomes pleasurable to the female.

The implication discovered in the first chapter of this thesis, Berger's "she is aware of being seen by the spectator" (1972, p50) (See *Goldfish*, Fig. 12) which sadistically gives man the moral right to condemn her, but masochistically is the very exclamation of the woman's right of voluntary exhibitionism and becomes a celebration of female sexual liberation. It is a representation of feminine emancipation, not of incorporation in to the patriarchal order of things "it does not call into question the passivity of the female subject. Rather it jeopardises the illusion of masculine activity" (Silverman, 1979, p6). The concept of voluntary exhibitionism undermines the idea that Klimt's portrayal of the naked or semi-naked woman, was to place the female in a position subordinate to the male for at the time Klimt created these paintings as Angela Baumer points out "Was there no revolt against man's dominance, against his possessive claim? Or were there women in the 1900's actually grateful for a deliverance which at least permitted them to admit to themselves their own sexuality to experience their bodies and their nakedness as a source of happiness." (1986, p12) .

Kaplan suggests that "playing with her own objectification is a step beyond simply being objectified" (1983, p59) a concept which calls to mind the theory of the 'Masquerade' (Fig. 10), first described by Joan Riviere in *Womanliness as a Masquerade* (1929). According to Doanne "To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image." This works to "effect a separation between the cause of desire and oneself" (1982, p82). Riviere's article is concerned with a number of aspects of the masquerade: "the mask of womanliness" (Riviere, quoted in Burgin et al (eds.), 1986, p38), "disguising herself as merely a castrated woman" (p38) as " a way of dealing with "sadistic castration wishes" (p43). Exhibitionism, at least the exhibition of femininity "proffers the masquerade, take it or leave it holding and flaunting the male gaze; not as a defence against but a derision of masculinity" (Heath, in Burgin et al (eds.), 1986, p57) in short by "destablising the image, the masquerade confounds the masculine



Fig.11. Judith and Holofernes II (1909)

structure of the look" (Doanne, 1982, p82).

The idea of woman using her femininity for specific gains is of particular importance in female participation in her own objectification.

Feminism as an opposition to patriarchy would be precisely the inoculation upon which masculinism thrives and continues to sustain itself. If this is the case then perhaps the best thing possible for feminism would be for women to adopt the position of Object via seduction, thereby seducing masculinism and the patriarchal male towards an 'objectionable' condition. Clearly for many feminists the suggestion is nothing less than outrageous

(Docherty, 1993, p365)

If as Doanne claims "masquerade, an excess of femininity, is aligned with the femme fatale" (1982, p82), then Klimt's *Judith I* and *Judith II* (fig. 11) is representative of reasons why objectification is acceptable, indeed productive; for if the male is responsible for creating devices aimed at and against the female, then he is in a sense, "hoist by his own petar" (Shakespeare, in Oxford, 1964, p187).

The femme fatale figure is a "controlling decisive one" (Belli, 1989, p22) and may remind the spectator of his/her passive positioning in the presence of the mother "The masochistic fantasy may be viewed as a situation in which the subject (male or female) assumes the position of the child who wishes to be controlled within the dynamics of fantasy" (Studlar, 1984, p607). The ascertainment of guilt was in chapter one associated with her lack, and the choker and uncovered breast in *Judith I* were fetishisations reducing her threat, but instead Judith's presence serves to reinforce the spectators masochistic position - she incorporates all those painful/pleasurable recreations of the moment of loss, the remembering of the pre Oedipal awe of the mother. The fetishisation is thus her possession of what the male lacks, the breast, and what the child seeks to recreate a "substitute for the mother's breast and mothers body" (Studlar, 1984, p613). Perhaps Holohoferne's head which Judith clutches is a representation of the death solution of masochistic desire, if the extreme condition in which the fantasy of union with the mother is satisfied. "In masochism, as in the infantile stage of helpless dependence that marks it's genesis, pleasure does not involve mastery of the female but submission to her" (Studlar, 1984, p610). If Judith is conceived to

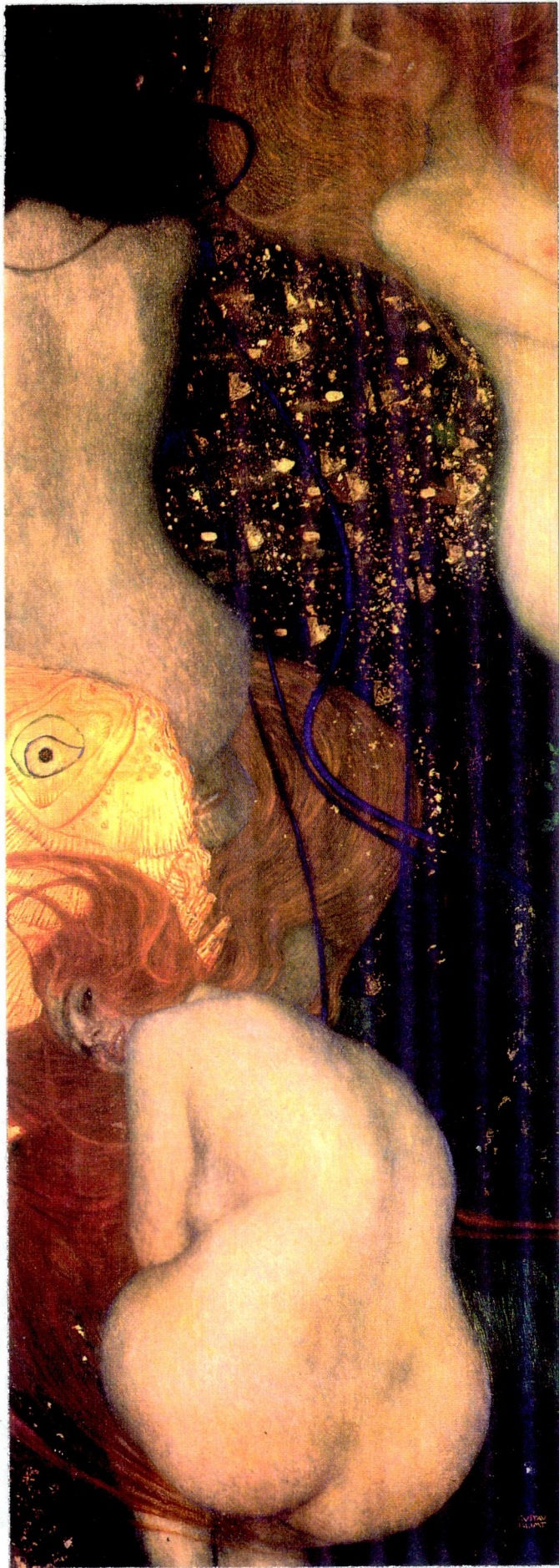
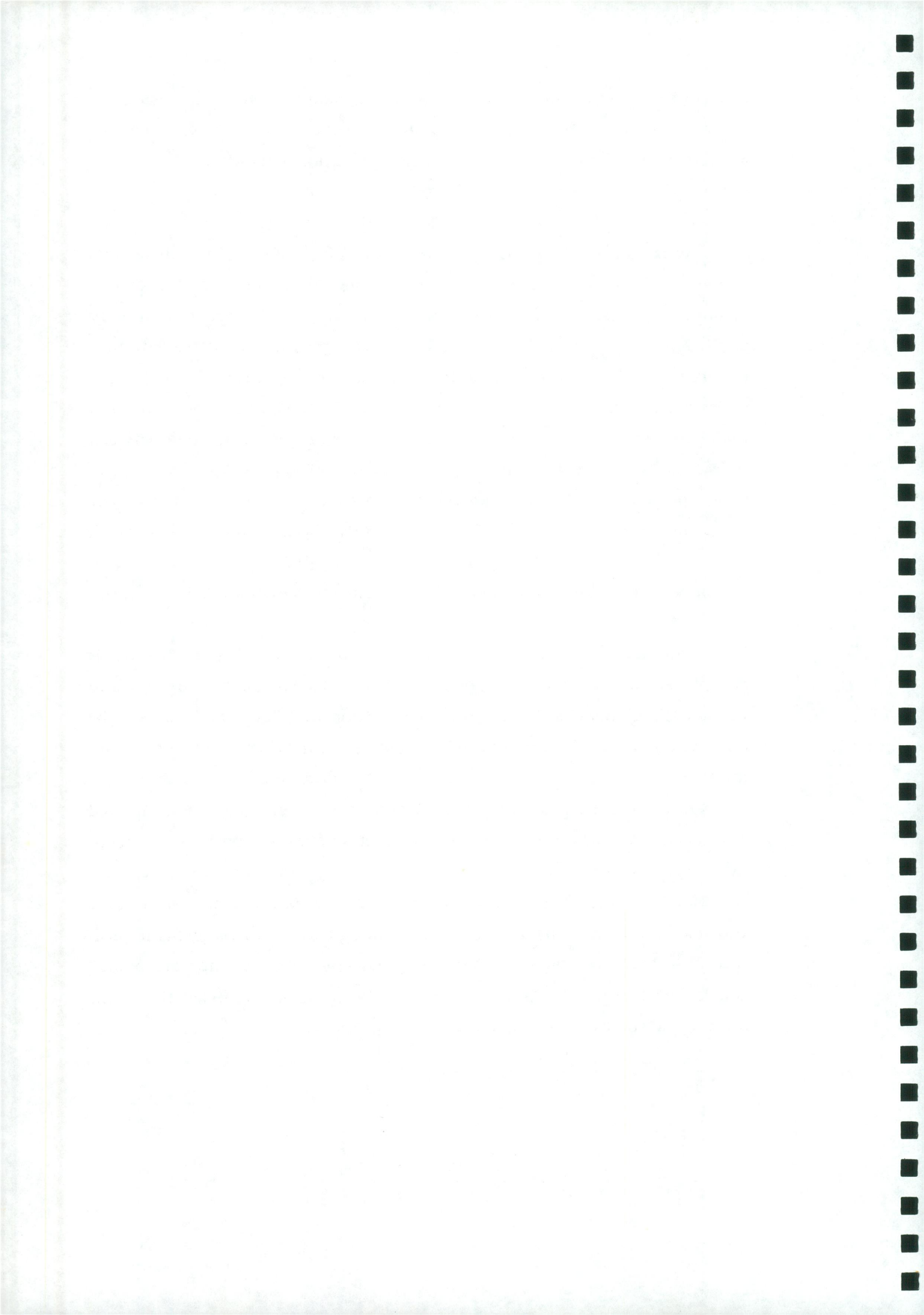


Fig.12. Goldfish (1901-02)

enact the process of voluntary exhibitionism, flaunting her body, using her sexuality, then she effectively castrates the concept of a male gaze: "the fatale attractiveness of the feminine/masochistic position cuts off the masculine sadistic position" (Silverman, 1979, p.6).

What is essentially striking in the masochistic theory is that it reduces effectively the power of the male gaze. It represents responses by "spectators of both sexes" (Studlar, 1984, p607) and questions indirectly feminist theory and its use of psychoanalysis as it relentlessly reproduces a passive femininity. Centred on the castration complex and lack of phallus, it is implacably sexist and the "absence within psychoanalysis of a satisfactory explanation of feminine sexuality...restricts its value in understanding exchange between image and women spectators" (Lapsley, Westlake, 1988, p75) Spectatorial pleasure representing a unified spectator, with total disregard for half of the potential spectators is an idealisation "attractive because we could so much more easily talk about the 'female gaze' as though it were an attribute of anatomy - the national retina, the iris free of ideology" (Moore, 1991, p35).

The sadistic controlling male spectator of Mulvey's Visual Pleasure, is completely overturned by a spectatorial position accessible to men and women alike. This disputes Doanne's contention that "everyone wants to be elsewhere than the feminine position" (1982, p81), for if the passive positioning is the privileged position (because of that "inevitable desirability" for the passive, masochistic position (Silverman, 1979, p6)), then what was conceived as a spectatorial 'masculine' position is in fact a 'feminine' position - a "feminine experience" (Clover, 1987, p220). Rather than being premised on control and mastery, which defines the sadistic form of pleasure as uniformly cold and rejecting in its consideration of feminine pleasure, in masochistic pleasure "the spectator receives, but no object - related demands are made" (Studlar, 1984, p613). It exposes the Mulvey theory to be one that builds walls from which the woman is encouraged not to escape.



## CHAPTER FOUR: GENDER FLUIDITY AND IDENTIFICATION.

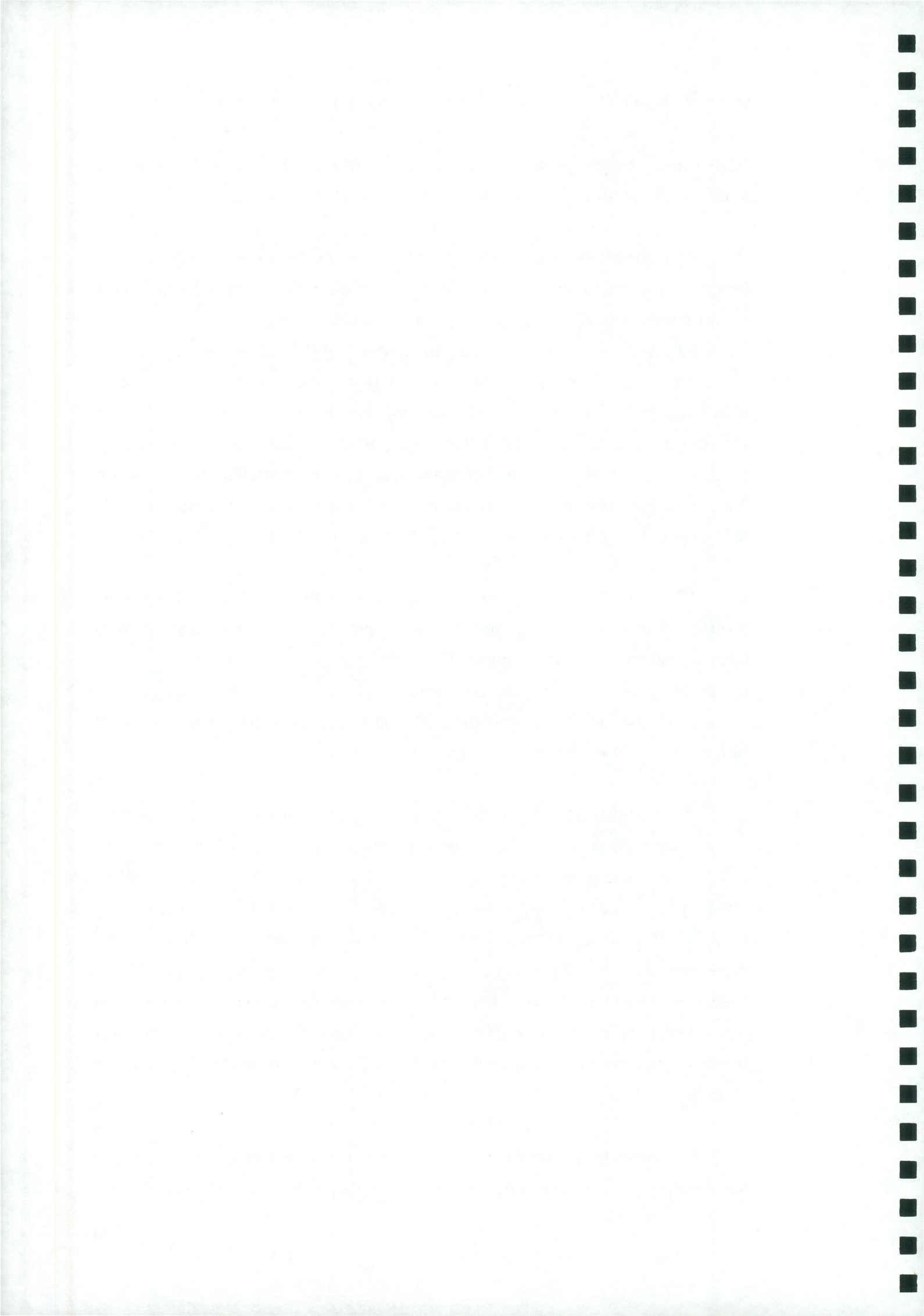
"Great Art, whether produced by men or by women, leaves behind the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (Lesser, 1991, p266).

The problems with identity and orthodox Freudian psychoanalytic feminism caught in single-minded exposing of man's oppression of women is that it neglects to challenge assumptions of essential masculine and feminine identities, and the possibility of cross-gender identification. Mulvey's almost blind contention in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that "same-sex identification" (1975, p304) is the only avenue open to spectatoral pleasure; the notion of omnipotent heros for men, passive victims for the women, is a product of the limitations in her argument, and she herself is forced to confront her own problemisation of the female spectatoral position and the negation of feminine pleasure in her follow up article *Afterthoughts* (1981).

This chapter concentrates on gender mobility ie: "Identifications are multiple, fluid," (Neale, 1983, p4) for the purpose of discovering ways of pleasurable spectatorship and for the female and reduce the paranoia that accompanies feminist belief in male objectification and self righteous absorption of pleasure to the exclusion of women, indeed to discover that same sex identification is not the only position open to either of the sexes.

"The ability simultaneously to desire and identify with the opposite sex has important implications for film spectatorship" (Studlar, 1984, p615) and for any form of spectatorship. The equation sex = gender does not necessarily apply in considering spectatoral pleasure, for in watching a film or a piece of art we become "both male and female - or more accurately neither male or female, since the issue of sexuality has been entirely divorced from the issue of gender" (Lesser, 1991, p78). Thus if gender is a state separate from actual sexuality, then the spectator may receive pleasure in a way far removed from the realms of binary opposition, and the positions 'active/passive', 'masculine'/'feminine' become more diffuse.

Problems may arise for the female in her reaction to Klimt's work, perhaps simply because it is impossible for her to divorce herself from the fact





that Klimt was a man and would hence represent a male point of view. As Lesser points out "there is still a tendency among certain feminist critics to view with suspicion any work of art or criticism produced by a man" (1991, p3). Woman's reaction to her image on canvas may be one of "identificatory narcissism" (Lapsley, Westlake, 1988, p98), a position placed on her by the execution of a work created by a male artist. Not so, for "the artist inevitably produces work from within his own sex, while absorbing it, can cross boundaries and become either male or female" (Lesser, 1991, p1)

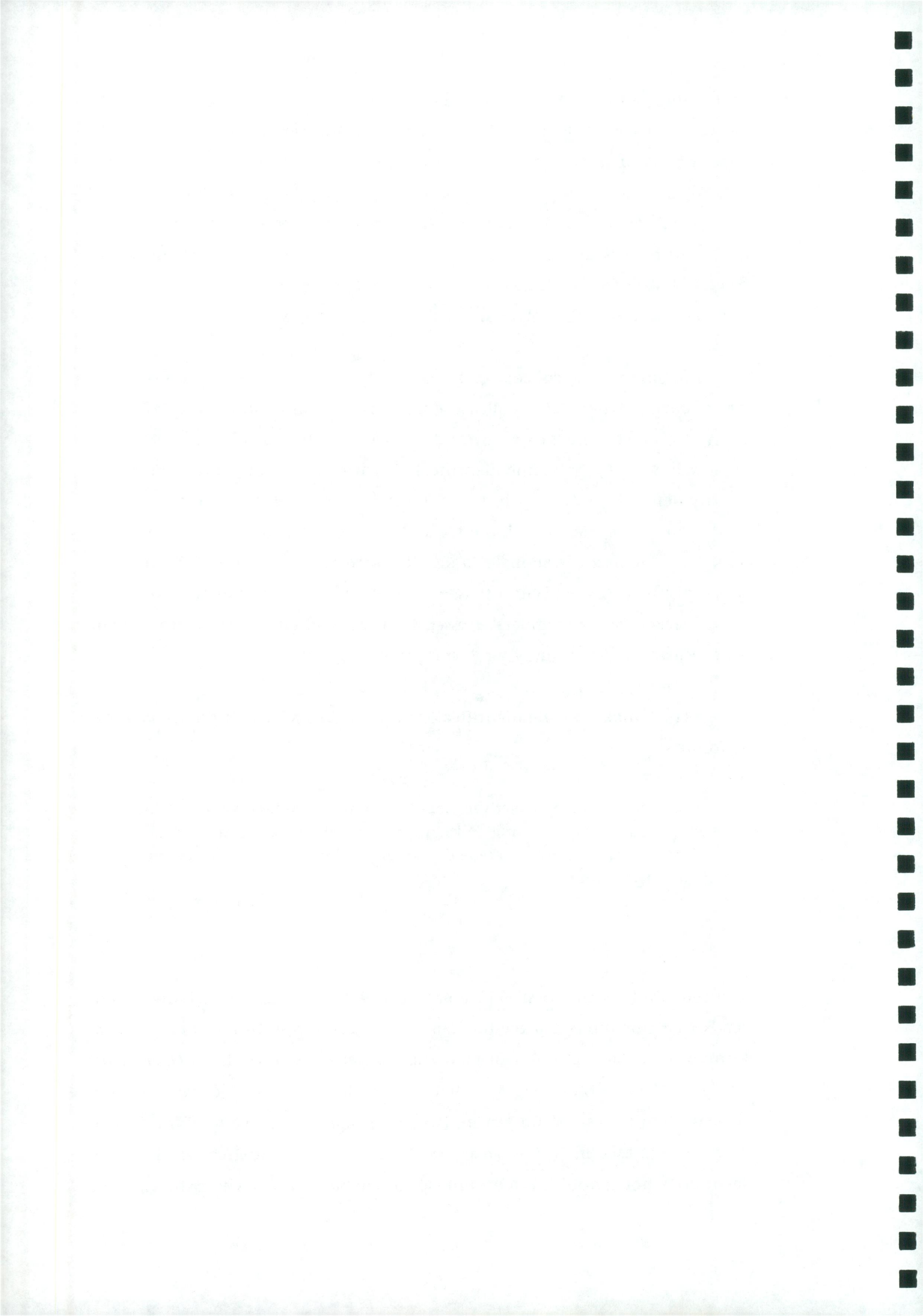
To explore the concept of gender fluidity I will draw on Mulvey's own *Afterthoughts* where female pleasure may result from feminine identification with the masculine position, and Clover's, (1987) Studlar's (1984) and Silverman's (1979) masculine identification with the feminine position, not to overtly define Klimt's work in those terms, rather to discover female reaction to the notion of male omnipotence and privilege, has led her to ignore any ability on the part of the male to identify with the female image rather than to simply objectify it. Feminist rejection of such possibilities thus weaves a "strait jacket for its members" (Lesser, 1991, p1) content to complain of male objectification, yet seemingly reluctant to change.

The female to male identification outlined in Mulvey's *Afterthoughts* is as follows:

female pleasure may be derived from its offering to women identification with a male figure asserting desire in pre Oedipal terms, the male fantasy of self sufficiency serving women's own ambivalence towards the 'correct' feminine position.

(Cook, 1985, p70).

Still remaining within a structure based on masculine pleasure, Mulvey contends that this offers a place for feminine pleasure resulting from identification with the 'active' point of view. Taking her inspiration from *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor 1947) she decides that the female character is "caught between two conflicting desires" (in Kaplan, 1990, p31) that of "passive femininity" and "regressive masculinity"(in Kaplan, 1990, p26). The film/text/canvas it would seem does not ignore the feminine spectator but addresses her through the



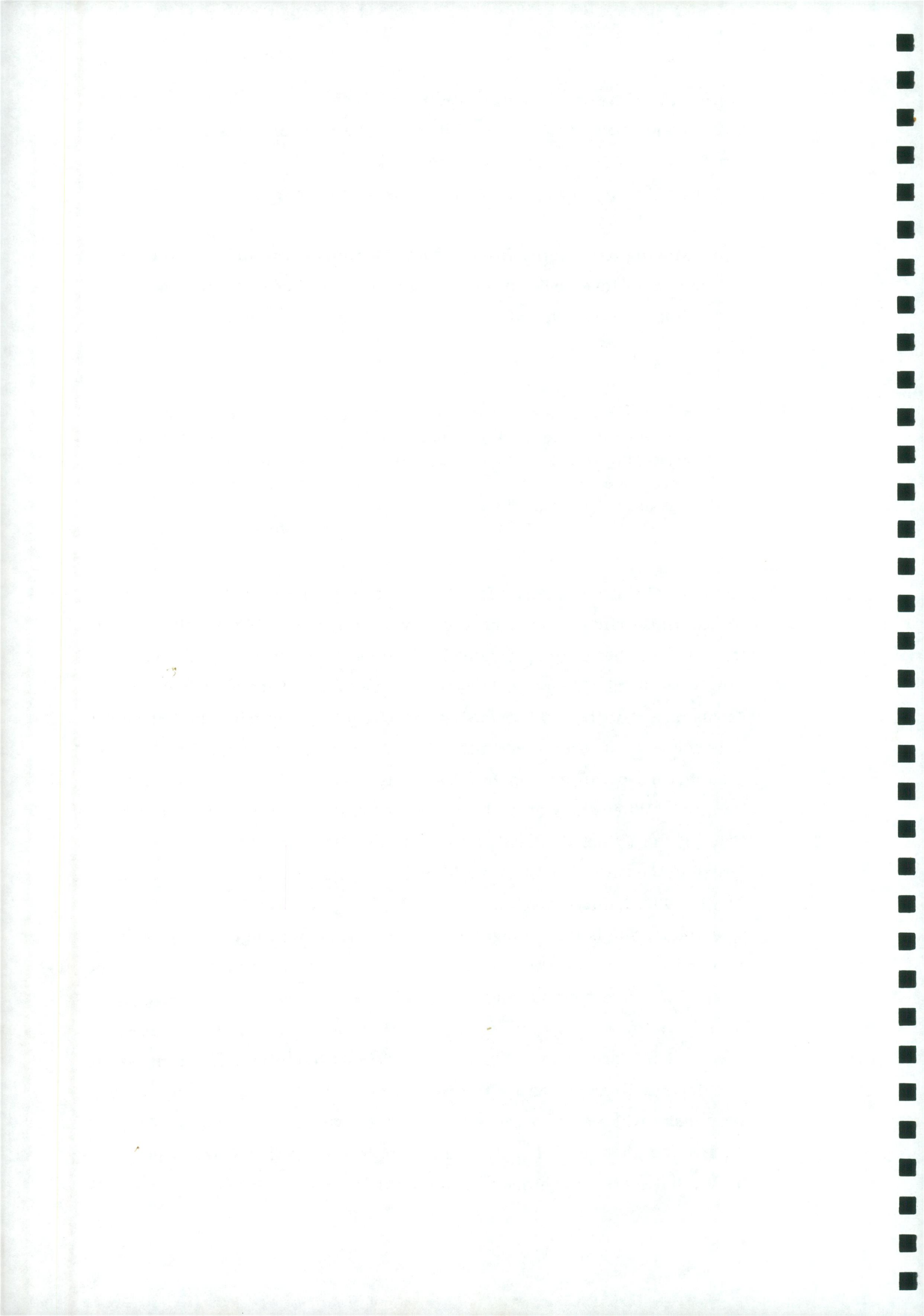
process of trans-sexual identification, in which "boys and girls are able to take up one another's positions. This forms the basis of transexual identification" (Cook, 1985, p70) and the normally dormant "fantasy of omnipotence" (Mulvey, in Kaplan, 1990, p35) may be awakened in the female.

Moving temporarily from Mulvey's argument, I would like to consider that of Carol Clover, who in her lengthy article on *Her Body Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film* (1987) discovers a masculinised female in her 'Final Girl' where:

male viewers seem to engage with ease...(no one) can doubt the phenomenon of cross-gender identification. This fluidity of engaged perspective is in keeping with the universal claims of the psychoanalytic model: the threat function and the victim function coexist in the same unconscious, regardless of anatomical sex

(Clover, 1987, p209).

The Final Girl is essentially a female who throws off assumed aspects of femininity, those circulating around passivity, and is capable of self-salvation from the clutches of the psychopathic murderer. However, the Final Girl may simply be dismissed as a male - created masculinised female which poses a problem in that it would seem that male identification with the female can only come about when she is masculinised. Conventional feminism contends that this masculinised female takes on the role of the so-called 'Hardcore Heroine': "When the woman takes on the 'masculine' role as bearer and initiator of the action, she nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics". According to Suzanne Moore, writing about the film 'Blue Steel' (U.S.A. 1990, Kathryn Bigelow) in which Jamie Lee Curtis plays a kind of 'Everyman'. She is the protagonist of the film, taking the position normally assumed by a man in this type of violent movie, and manages to be "feline physical and androgynous all at the same time", (Moore, 1991, p70) just as the femme fatal figures of Klimt's paintings "have a certain androgynous beauty about them." (Belli, 1989, p26). Thus, traditional feminine characteristics are not necessarily replaced by traditional masculine characteristics. Power, action, survival are universal features and not gender specific. "To represent the hero an anatomical female would seem to suggest that at least one of the traditional marks of heroism, triumphant self-rescue, is no longer strictly



gendered masculine" (Clover, 1987, p219), that the categories termed 'masculine' and 'feminine' have no real place in conjunction with spectatoral identification.

There is only one libido, which serves both the masculine and feminine functions. To it itself we cannot assign any sex, if, following the conventional equation of activity and masculinity, we are inclined to describe it as masculine, we must not forget that it also covers a passive aim.

(Freud, in Mulvey, in Kaplan, 1990, p26)

For Mulvey, that Freud positions masculine and feminine as 'metaphorical' is problematic, for his use of masculine as 'conventional' indicates that the feminine is conceived "as an opposition (passivity) in an anatomic sense, or as similarity (the phallic phase)" (Mulvey, in Kaplan, 1990, p26), pointing towards a masculine experience. However, as Suzanne Moore points out, "While Freud discusses the need for the ego to fantasise itself in an active manner, Mulvey maps this onto a cultural masculinity, thus dramatically limiting the options of the female spectator." (1991, p35). It is undeniable that there is an absence in Freudian psychoanalysis of a satisfactory definition of the feminine, but that he produces the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' to be metaphorical and shifting, indicates that although the labels 'active' and 'passive' remain stable "femininity and masculinity are processes of constant negotiation, not static categories from which there is no escape." (Moore, 1991, p25).

On the question of differential identity positions Clover asks, do men and women read texts differently?

Male identification with the female as female cannot be, and the male viewer/reader who adjoins the feminine experience does so only by homosexual conversion. But does the female identification with the male experience then similarly indicate a lesbian conversion?

(1987, p209)

If the male identifies with a masculinised female (Clover, 1987), and the female identifies with an omnipotent male (Mulvey, 1981), it still indicates a masculine experience.

The problem inherent in Mulvey's female identification with the male hero is that her pleasure comes only from 'masculinisation' or her identifica-

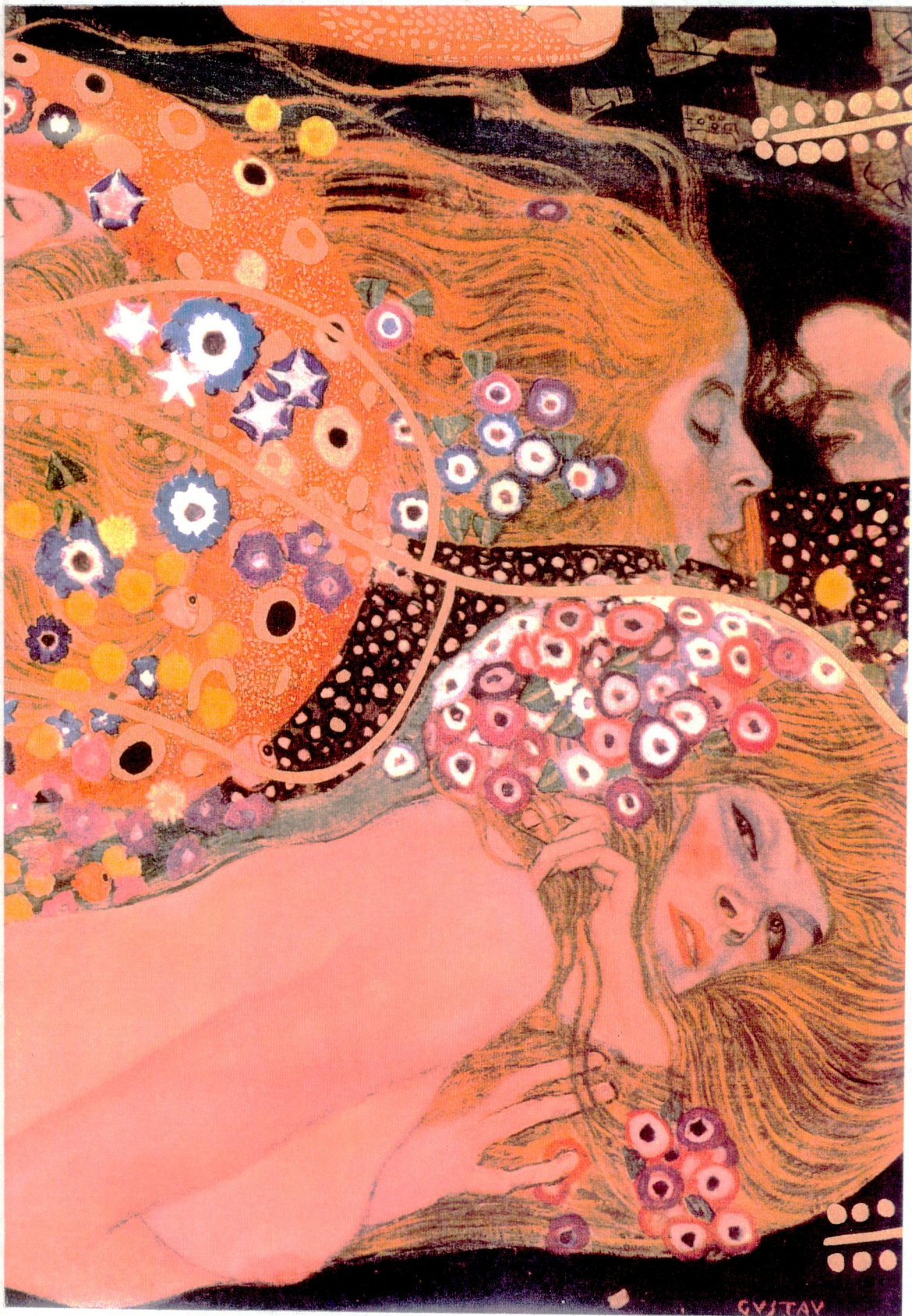


Fig.13. Water Snakes II (1904)

tion with a 'masculinised' and therefore 'active' female<sup>1</sup>. Although these terms may be considered metaphorical, for Mulvey and her followers they tend to be essentially defining categories. "The female spectator's phantasy of masculinisation [is] at cross purposes with itself, restless in transvestite clothes" (in Kaplan, 1990, p35). If the female takes the position of the male spectator, "the surveyor of woman in herself is male" (Berger, 1972, p47), it would seem to disregard female desire for the female image, by simply assuming that if she identifies with the male experience (as spectator) she does so through the the masculine structure of desire, which serves only to "masculinise female homosexuality" (Stacey, in Gamman, Marshment, 1988, p121), ie: "the transvestite wears clothes which signify a different sexuality, a sexuality which for the woman, allows a mastery over the image and the very possibility of attaching the gaze to desire" (Doanne, 1982, p81).

So how can the woman appreciate the image of the female, without narcissistic identification, and not assume masculine desires? According to Doanne the woman "seems to be more bisexual than the man" (1982, p81) and the possible spectatorial pleasures for the female may derive not only from her ability to identify with the male experience but simultaneously to desire and identify with a female experience. If the woman is more bisexual than the male then surely this can only be seen as an advantage to the female? This is not to say that our primary identificatory engagement with a character is ultimately sexual, rather reference to female bisexuality in relation to images on screen/canvas serves to show that relationship does not necessarily have to be one of narcissistic identification, nor can it be "simply reduced to a masculine heterosexual equivalent". (Stacey, 1988, p122).

Jackie Stacey produces Freud's argument of the females journey through the Oedipal:

the mother is the girls first love object. Her path to heterosexuality is therefore difficult and complex since it requires her not only to relinquish her first object, like the boy, but to transform both it's gender (female to male) and the aim (active to passive) directed at it. Up to this point, active desire towards a woman is an experience of all women.

(in Gamman, Marshment, 1988, p123)

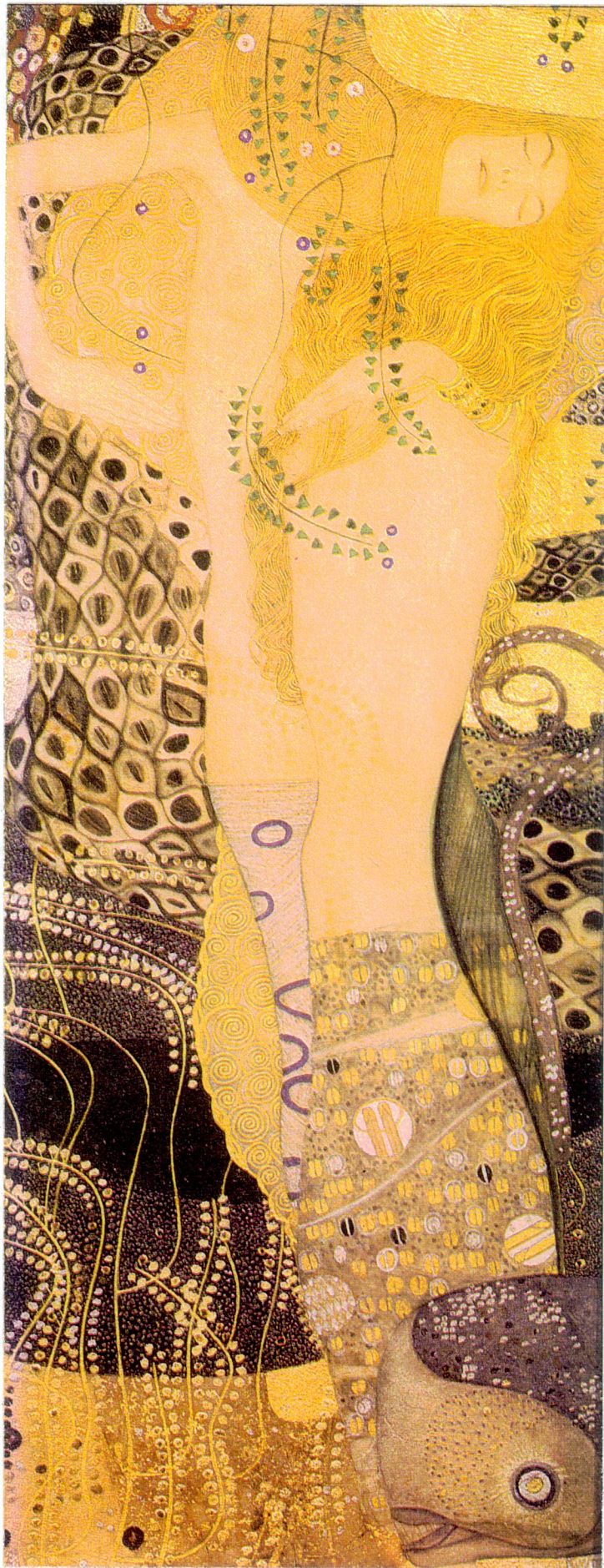


Fig.14. Water Serpents II (Women Friends) (1904-07)



Considering Klimt's paintings *Water Snakes II* (1904) and *Water Serpents* (1904 -07) in light of conventional feminist approaches for a moment, it would seem that "it is man's fantasies not woman's that are excited by those displays including those of lesbian love, "(Partsch 1989, p258).

The construction of the look as male, the representation of the woman as object and spectacle and the use of lesbianism in pornography are some of the factors which present themselves as built in connotations which are carried into any scene conveying sexual passion between women  
(Murphy, 1986, p107)

However, the desire of one women for another - "the narrativisation of her desires positions her as the central figure of a spectator identification" (Stacey, 1988, p126) (the desire of the women in Klimt's *Water Snakes* (Fig. 13) or *Water Serpents* (Fig. 14) for each other may narrativise erotic contemplation for the female spectator), raises the question

How can we understand the construction of the female protagonist as the agent and articulator of desire for another women in the narrative within existing psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference? The limitations of a dichotomy which offers only two significant categories for understanding the complex interplay of gender, sexual aim and object choice, is clearly demonstrated here.

(Stacey, 1988, p127).

That feminism is seemingly reluctant to recognise male ability to identify with a female character through the process of psychic transvestisism ("male transvestisism is a occasion for laughter" Doanne, 1982, p81), only produces a feminist theory which is essentially self-defeating. To reject the idea that men can identify with the woman, albeit a masculinised female, is a rejection of the concept that identification is "multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent part of the spectator own psyche paraded before him/her" (Ellis quoted by Moore, 1991, p35). It is an indication of a feminist wish to retain a gender separatist stance, a "polarity between masculine and feminine, a polarity that has infiltrated feminist psychoanalytic approaches" (Studlar, 1984, p615).

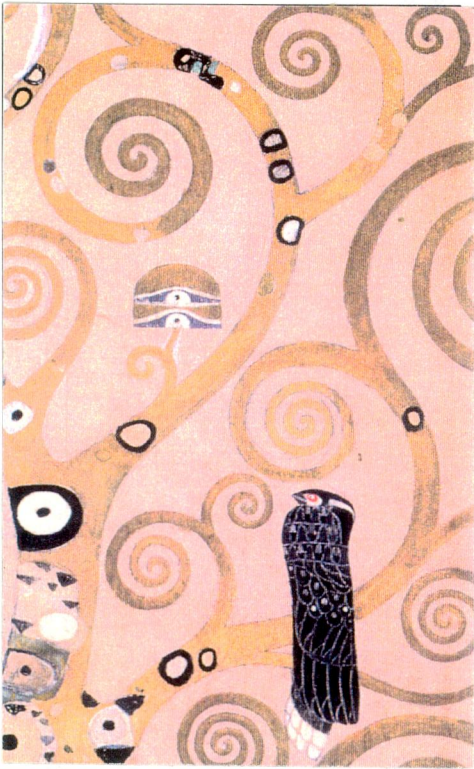
Male identification with the female may come about when "primary



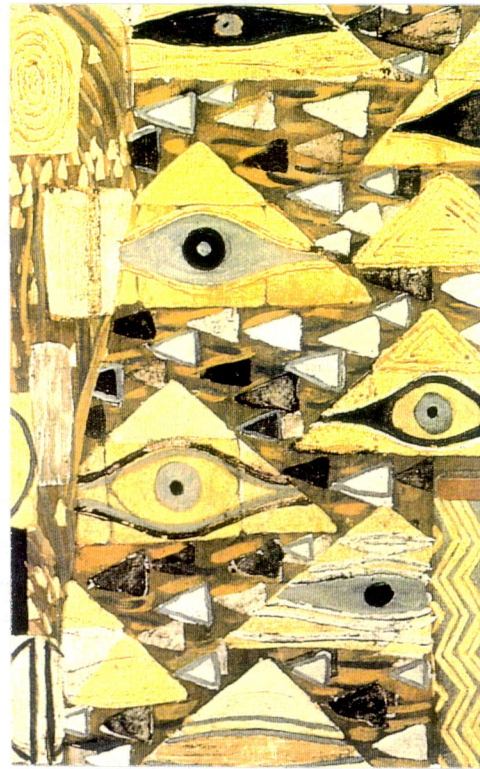
Fig.15. Danae (1907-08) detail

and acknowledged identification maybe with the victim" (Clover, 1987, p191). If we return to the ravishment of *Danae* discussed in chapter one, and to the idea that spectatorial pleasure is one of sadofetishistic desire for dominance and control, this completely ignores the possibility that "it could be the subject was identifying with the female victim" (Segal, 1991, p34), rather than identifying with the male aggressor (Jupiter who ravishes Danae) (Fig. 15).

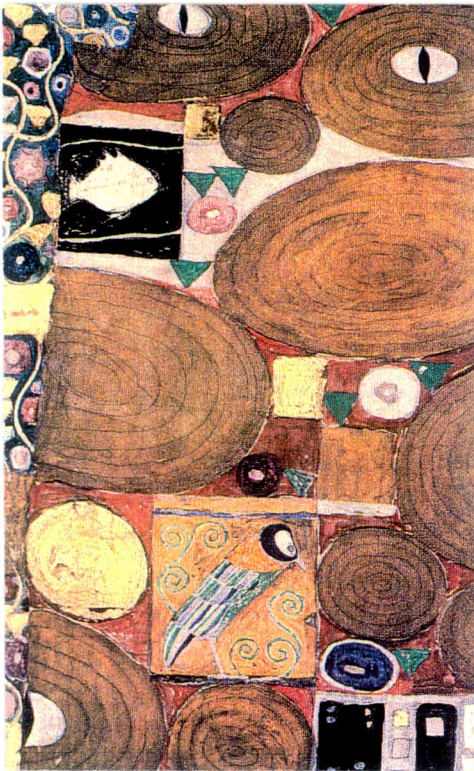
This constitutes, as Clover reminds us, "a visible adjustment in the terms of gender representation. That is an adjustment largely on the male side" (1987, p211) and more than that his ability to identify with feminine pain "he identifies with that pain" (Silverman, 1979, p5). It challenges the core assumptions of identity politics, (Butler, 1992, p83) including the very notions of sexual identity, particularly because it shows that feminist psychoanalytic theory has the grave tendency to produce the female as the one victimised, narrativising the male as aggressor. "The viewers identificatory powers are unbelievably elastic" (Clover, 1987, p208), particularly if we remember the pleasures of re-experiencing the primary identifications with the mother and the pleasurable possibilities of gender mobility through identification" (Studlar, 1984, p615). Thus gender becomes less a wall than a surmountable barrier. That women are assigned to identification with victimised roles (as described by orthodox feminist theory), is unsatisfactory to the female spectator. "Conventional feminism might have to give up its insistence on a gender based subject position, "(Butler, 1992, p85) for it offers nothing positive for women beyond that of passivity and victimisation.



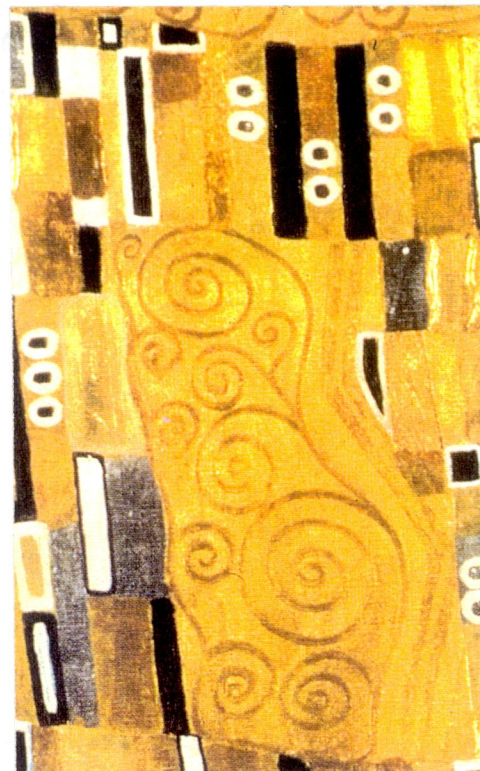
a



b



c



d

Fig.16a. Tree of Life (1905-09) detail

Fig.16b. Portrait of Adrie Bloch-Bauer I (1907), detail of dress

Fig.16c. Fulfilment (1907-09) detail

Fig.16d. The Kiss (1907-09) detail

## CHAPTER FIVE: SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

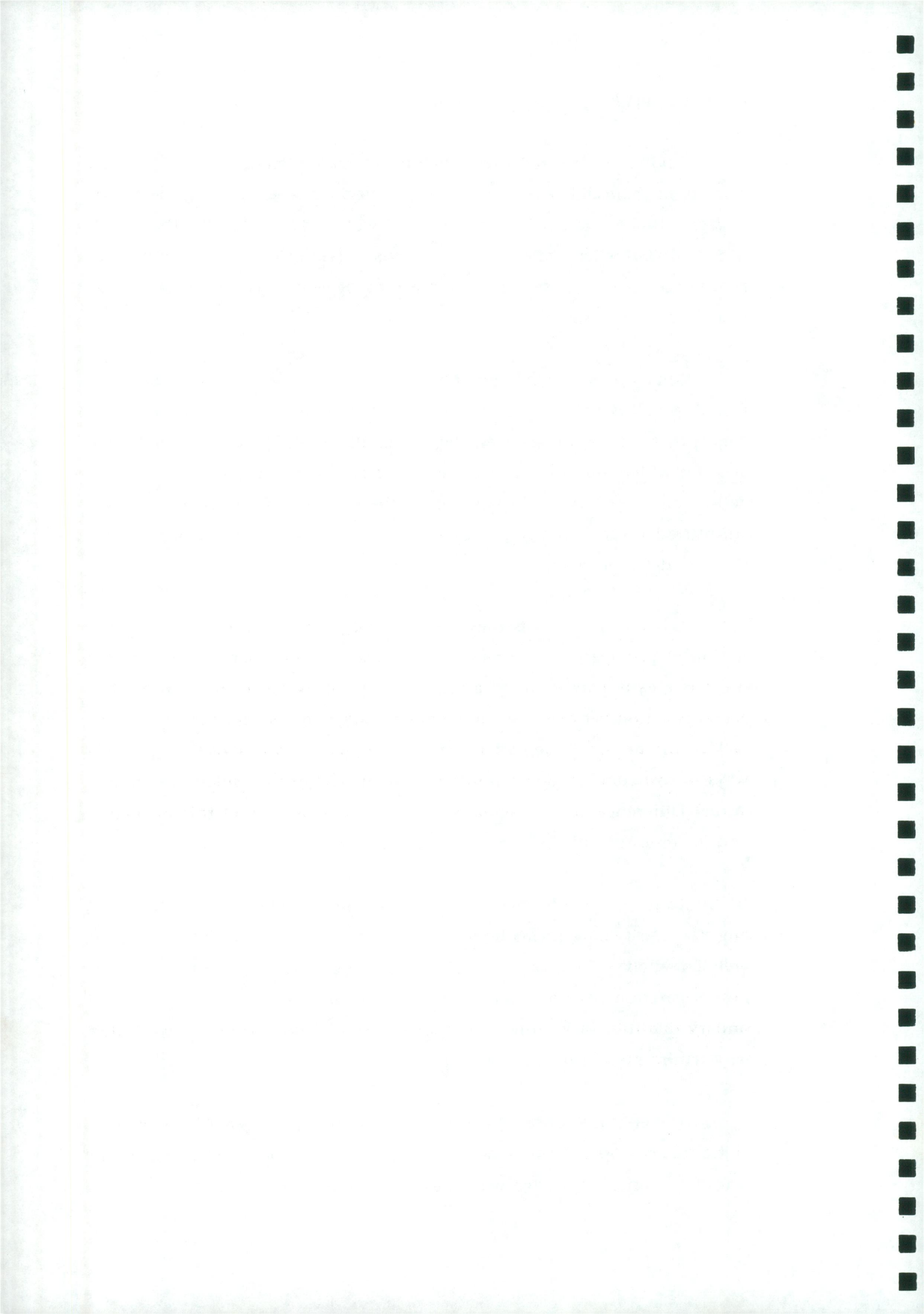
Having established the possibility of gender mobility of men and women, in their ability to identify with the opposite sex, and that gender is in fact entirely different from actual sex, I would like to consider the notion of Sexual Difference, which forms the basis of feminist psychoanalytic theory: the notion that "ultimately the meaning of woman is sexual difference" (Mulvey, 1975, p311).

Klimt's uses of symbolic and decorative images are used to enhance meaning in his paintings. One's eye is continually drawn to ornamental details that can be read as eyes, spirals, cellular forms, tendrils, spermatozoa and ova which enforce the meaning of sexual difference through their suggestive qualities. "The interpretation of the shapes depends on almost over simplified visual equation with traditional male and female symbols" (Parsons, 1987, p58) (Fig. 16 a - d)

At the outset of this thesis, I suggested that feminist reaction to the notion of privileged male spectatorship is so extreme that her own enjoyment is greatly compromised and reflects not only her own isolation, but actual isolation between men and women today. The previous chapters have tackled the negatively represented feminine pleasure and looked at possible ways of overcoming such a positioning. This chapter considers the idea of Sexual Difference and particularly the feminist emphasis of this in theory, and the resulting animosity between men and women.

In Klimt's paintings the male represented rectangles and square are harsh and angular, the female forms being rounded and soft which "calls to mind Freudian analysis," (Parsons, 1987, p65), that being perhaps, "Qualities of hardness, separation and domination are associated with masculinity and the secondary qualities of kindness, protectiveness and nurturing are associated with femininity" (Fitzmaurice, 1987, p1)

Women's difference may be seen on two particular levels in psychoanalytic theory - Sexual Difference stemming from the Oedipus Complex and fear of castration associated with the phallus and woman's 'lack'; and Denial



of Difference: fear of the woman's 'sinister' genital organ and the mystery associated with the womb<sup>2</sup>. Returning to things Oedipal:

with the mother as initial object, the child seeks to be the phallus she wants, lacks desires (the phallic phase). With the father as law the child is forbidden that fantasy and pushed into division, sexual difference, the castration complex

(Heath, in Burgin, 1982, p52,).

The woman is situated as subject, vis a vis the symbolic, she is lacking and the phallus is seen as the mark of sexual difference and "it is her lack that produces the phallus a symbolic presence" (Mulvey, 1975, p305). Woman is thus a signifier of the symbolic, but she is denied access to it, the "image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey, 1975, p305).

Denial of Difference is associated with the idea that "no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of the female genital" (Creed, 1990, P131). The woman's 'bleeding wound' (Mulvey, 1975 p305) and the existence of the womb are representative of woman's sexual identity and problematic for the male because their presence indicate the female's separate identity, one which cannot be defined in terms of her lack of phallus. Considering that "the man's masculinity, his male world, is the assertion of the phallus to support his having it," (Heath, 1986, p55), thus the female's possession of her own sexual identity threatens the importance of the phallus, for if the woman "lacks nothing" (Studlar, 1984, p606) then the masculine symbol lacks significance and a process of denial ensues. According to Doanne, with the male's first glance at the woman's genitals "he sees nothing or disowns what he has seen" (1982, p79). This process may be reflected in Mulvey's contention "The paradox of phallogentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world." (Mulvey, 1975, p305).

The use of psychoanalysis in Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure* only serves to endorse the "anatomical literalness on the Freudian theory of castration" (Silverman, in Creed, 1990, p136) and compounds the notion of woman-as- dif-



Fig. 17. The Kiss (1907-09)



ference, woman-as-lacking, - woman-as-object. Although psychoanalytic theory offers a representation of social subjects in sexual difference, there is a real and underlying "problem of psychoanalysis in the arena of the social" (Burgin, 1982, p3). The very terminology used, for example 'binary opposition', 'polarity of the sexes'; 'active male', 'passive female', etc., encourages the female to see her relationships in a similar light. The female cannot remove herself from the knowledge of her negative position in relation to the male which can only result in bitter conflict (opposition, polarity). It leads women to see the relationship between the sexes purely in terms of confrontation - "as soon as the relationship between the sexes is treated merely as an arena for politics between two hostile parties, enjoyment is no longer possible" (Stassinopoulos, 1973, p43). Bitter confrontation and the taking of sides, not only isolates women from men, but weaves a strait-jacket for women themselves, fearful that the admission of pleasure (even to themselves) is "an act of collusion with the oppressor" (Clover, 1987, p214).

If a work of art reflects the era in which it is received (considering the reactions to it by the spectator) then Klimt's painting *The Kiss* (1907-08) (Fig. 17) is an exclamation of isolation stemming from that 'sexual difference', defined by feminist theory. Normally assumed to be the complete fusion of man and woman in love, a partnership, the union of bodies as one is in fact one of isolation. "This painting is perhaps not a testimony of total fusion but actually one of total alienation between man and woman" (Beumer, 1986, p.13). The woman's hand is cramped around his neck, it almost forms a fist and as the confused male bends to kiss her, she turns her head away (Fig. 18). The expression on her face is one of melancholic reluctance: she denies herself the pleasure of touching and being touched.

Perhaps Klimt's symbols warn that over emphasis on difference leads only to isolation. On the decorative clothes that drape the man and woman, the man's rectangles and squares and the woman's circles and spirals would seem to be the very declaration of difference.

There are innate differences between men and women and sexual difference is probably one of the easier to define. That feminist theory continually emphasises sexual difference as the overriding problem, producing an

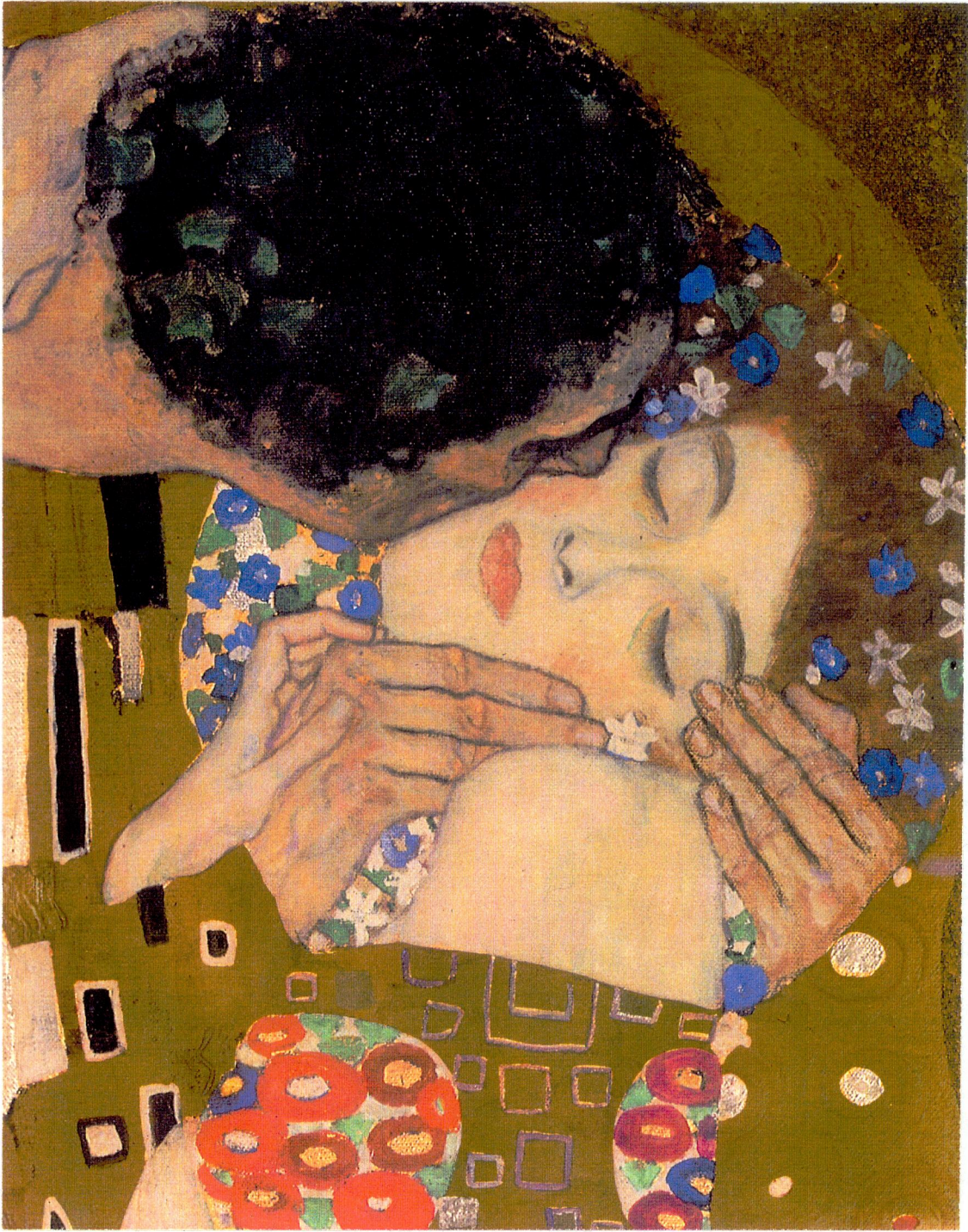


Fig.18. The Kiss (1907-09) detail

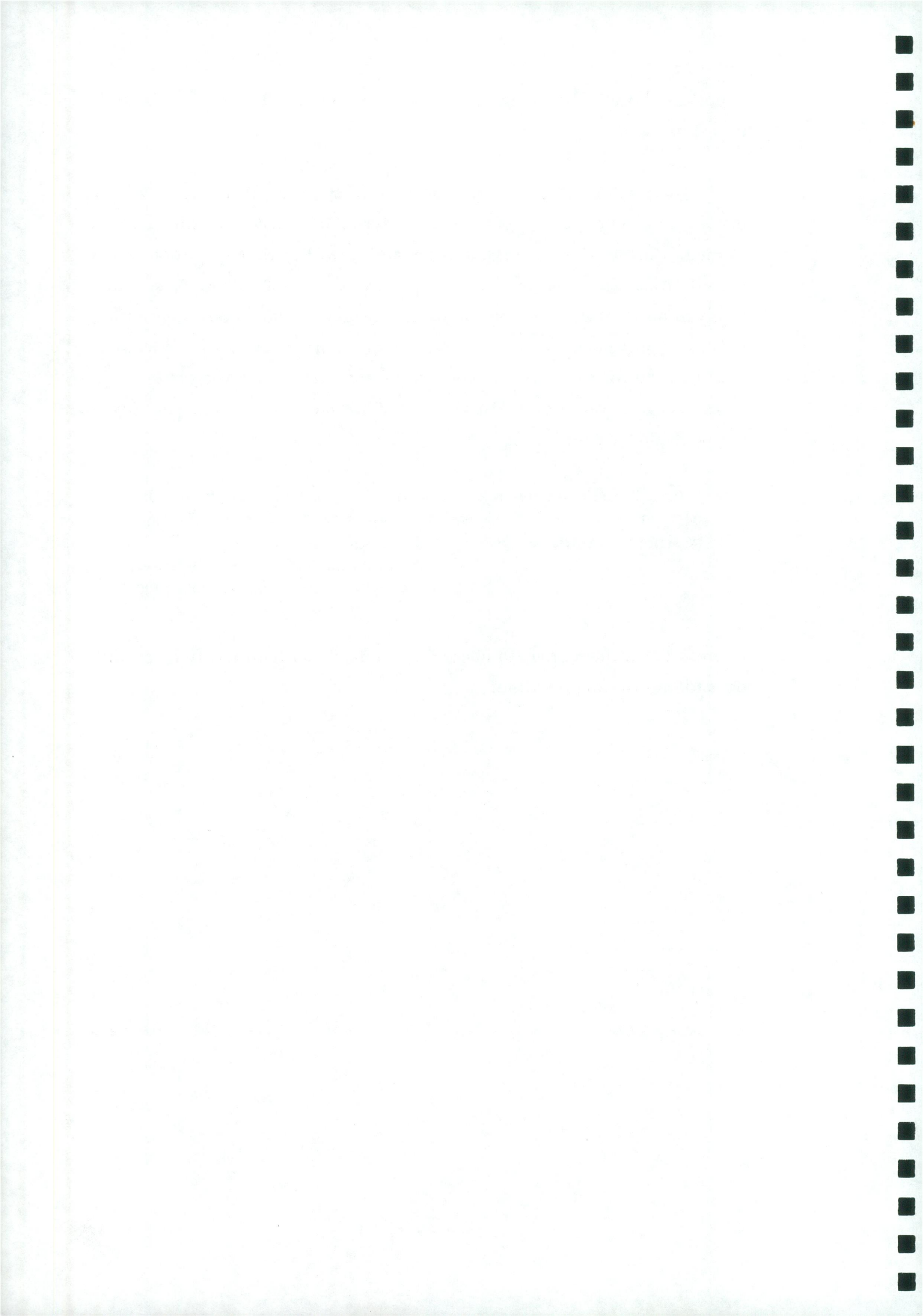
opposition, locating the male as enemy, is an elaborate denial of responsibility, a shifting of blame.

The feminist theorist "can continue to analyse and interpret various instances of the repression of woman, of her radical absence in the discourse of men, a prose which necessitates remaining within that very problematic herself" (Doanne, in Stacey, in Gamman, Marshment, 1988, p119). To continue thus can only enforce divisions between male and female, producing nothing to aids improvement or reform. To maintain a stance of hatred, alienation and loathing for the other is futile. "One must rise above the battle of the sexes and get away from sexist alienation" (Moore , 1991, p274). The way to escape this binary prison may be

neither to destroy difference nor to valorize it, but to multiply and disperse differences, to move towards a world where differences would not be synonymous with exclusion

(Doanne, Mellencamp, Williams, in Stacey,  
in Gamman, Marshment, 1988, p120)

to break down the barriers to liberating union, rather than fortifying existing ones to imprisoning isolation.



## CONCLUSION

In her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, (1992) Susan Faludi discusses the real and terrifying wave of anti-feminism in the 'post-feminist' era: bitter opposition and alarm at the progress of women in the social, work and home scene. However, it is clear that the fight for equality has not been won and for this reason Feminism remains an unrealized mission despite the efforts of the Liberation Movement.

I cannot and will not denounce feminism to be as a complete failure nor do I wish to join the rank of male 'backlashers' who almost gleefully rejoice at the slow advancement of feminist aims, who advocate such opinions as "was it really necessary to pass through all the storm and stress of the feminist era in order to arrive at ideas that were generally available forty years ago?" (Davidson, in Faludi, 1992, p365) The 'strait-jacket', entrapment, isolation I cite in previous chapters relate to *reactions* induced in women bombarded with feminist psychoanalytical texts, relentlessly repeating messages of opposition and polarity, and is not an attack on the women who have fought endlessly to improve the position of fellow women in society. If the problems facing feminists are still much the same today as they were 20 years ago, then the reason may be that the methods in which they address these problems remain the same.

What is incredible to Faludi is that "A handful of authors whose best-selling books helped to popularise the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s were busy issuing retractions". (Faludi, 1992, p352) Included in this handful were writers such as Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*) (1963), a radical and essential feminist book of its time, who in 1981, (*The Second Stage*) stated "The feminist campaign, often mistakenly concentrated on 'direct' and 'confrontational' political tactics" (in Faludi, 1992, p352). Germaine Greer, who in her follow-up to *The Female Eunuch* (1970) *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (1984), withdraws some of her more hardcore sentiments of the early days. Even in *The Female Eunuch* she warned, "Insofar as such movements demand of men, or *force* men to grant their liberty, they perpetuate the estrangement of the sexes." (1970, p17). For Faludi, these revi-



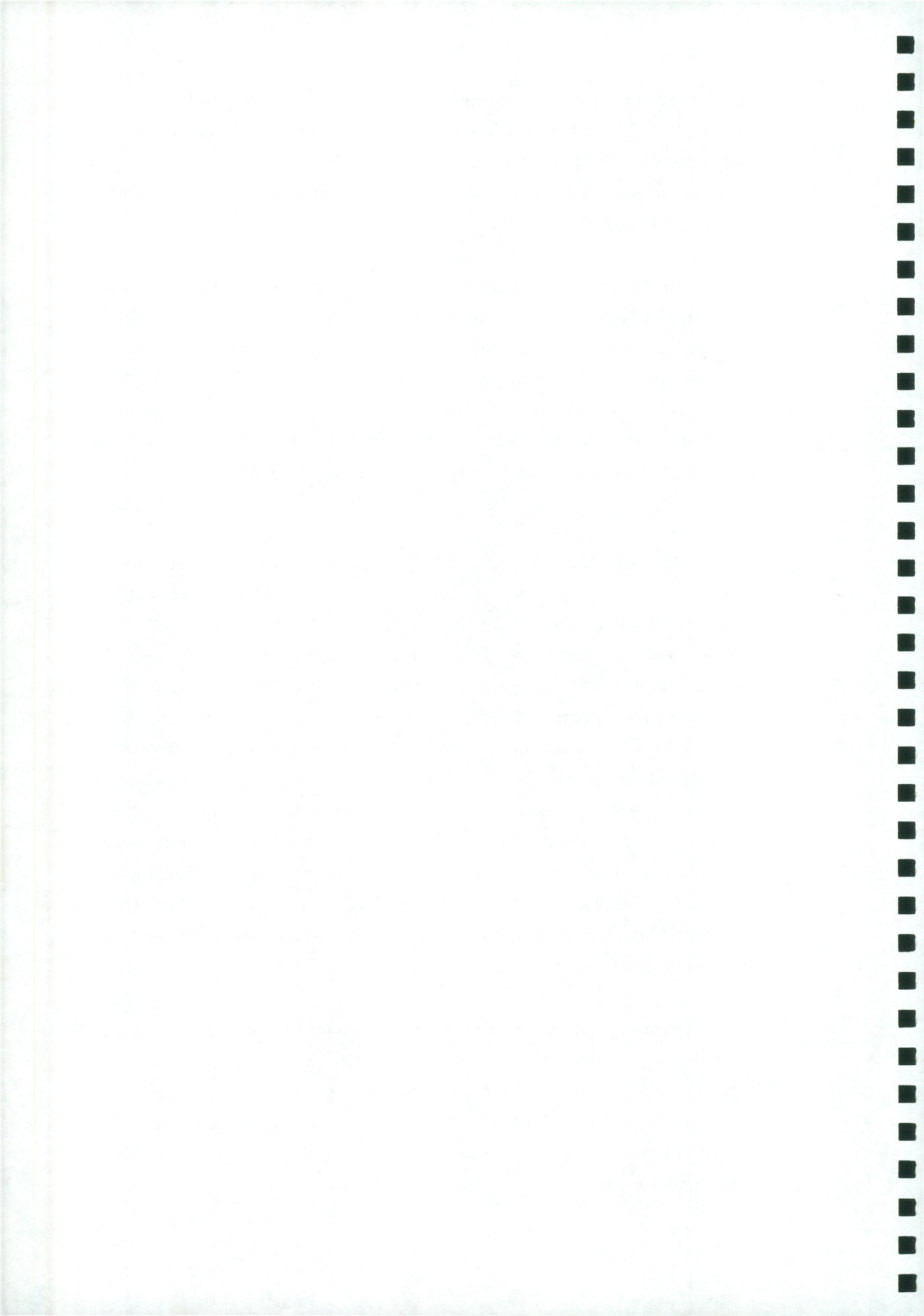
Fig.19 The Pussy Posse (1992)

sionist texts position these once pioneering feminists as traitors. However, for me the fact that ex-hard - line feminists are attempting to reassess answers to the problems still facing women indicates a realisation, perhaps, that radical actions induce equally radical reactions, and almost certainly stand in the way of positive advancement.

"To blame feminism for women's 'lesser life' is entirely to miss the point of feminism, which is to win women a wider range of experience" (Faludi, 1992, p17) yet how can our experience be widened when feminist theory ensures that 'pleasurable' experiences when watching film or studying a canvas are to be rejected by the female because that experience is meant to appeal to the masculine viewer? As I stated in the introduction, feminist reaction to the male gaze is so extreme that her own enjoyment is greatly compromised.

*The Pussy Posse*, Farika and Sara (Fig. 19), two young women active in the London 'club scene', mixing safe-sex education and sexual celebration, describe their philosophy as a "new kind of feminism." (Mosam, 1992, p37) These women are "strong, sexy and not at all passive." (Garratt, 1992 p52) The relationship between *The Pussy Posse* and feminism is "an uneasy one though not unusual for women in the 1990s" (Mosam, 1992, p38). Women today are looking for ways to express and enjoy their femininity without bitter confrontation from the more hardcore of feminists, who relentlessly link femaleness to a lack of independence. "Emancipation means the removal of all barriers to female opportunities - it does not mean compelling women to male roles by devaluing female ones." (Stassinopoulous, 1973, p 15). "I really hate this modern woman idea that women are as good as men and that they can do everything men do. It misses the point - that women should do whatever they want to do" (Farika, Mosam, 1992, p37).

Questions may arise as to the ultimate aim of women like this - are they fighting fire with fire? (Remember that concept of Object via seduction, chapter three, page 18). Is their approach just as harsh as the feminists whose attitudes they reject? Whatever their ultimate goal, they represent a more balanced approach to the acquisition of equality. They represent a movement that insists on the pleasure of women, on their freedom to be what they





want, to dress how they wish, to be free of guilt and not by excluding men.

The efforts of the feminist movement have not gone unnoticed, nor have these efforts been entirely futile: those women paved the way for this generation to make improvements on improvements achieved, in society, in the work place, in raising consciousness. The consequences are such that it caused the alienation of the people it represents, and created a huge divide between the sexes.

Even though Faludi does not seem to advocate a change in approach of feminist tactics, she does realise that:

men need women as much as women need men. The bonds between the sexes may chafe, and they can be, and have been used to constrain women. But they can also promote mutually beneficial growth and change

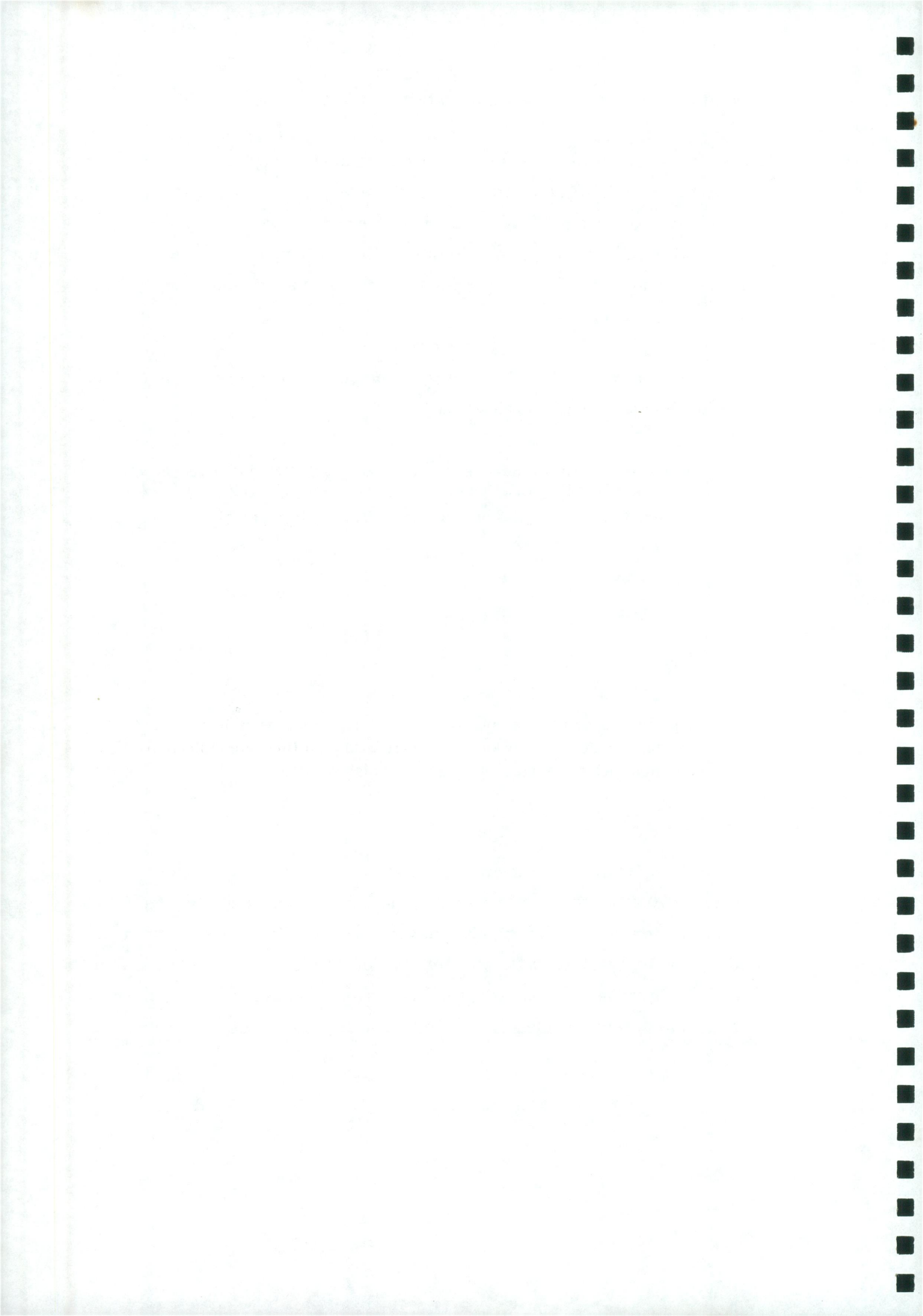
(1992, p496)

and Greer:

It might be expected that men would resist female liberation because it threatens the foundations of phallic narcissism, but there are indications that men themselves are seeking a more satisfying role.

(1970, p18)

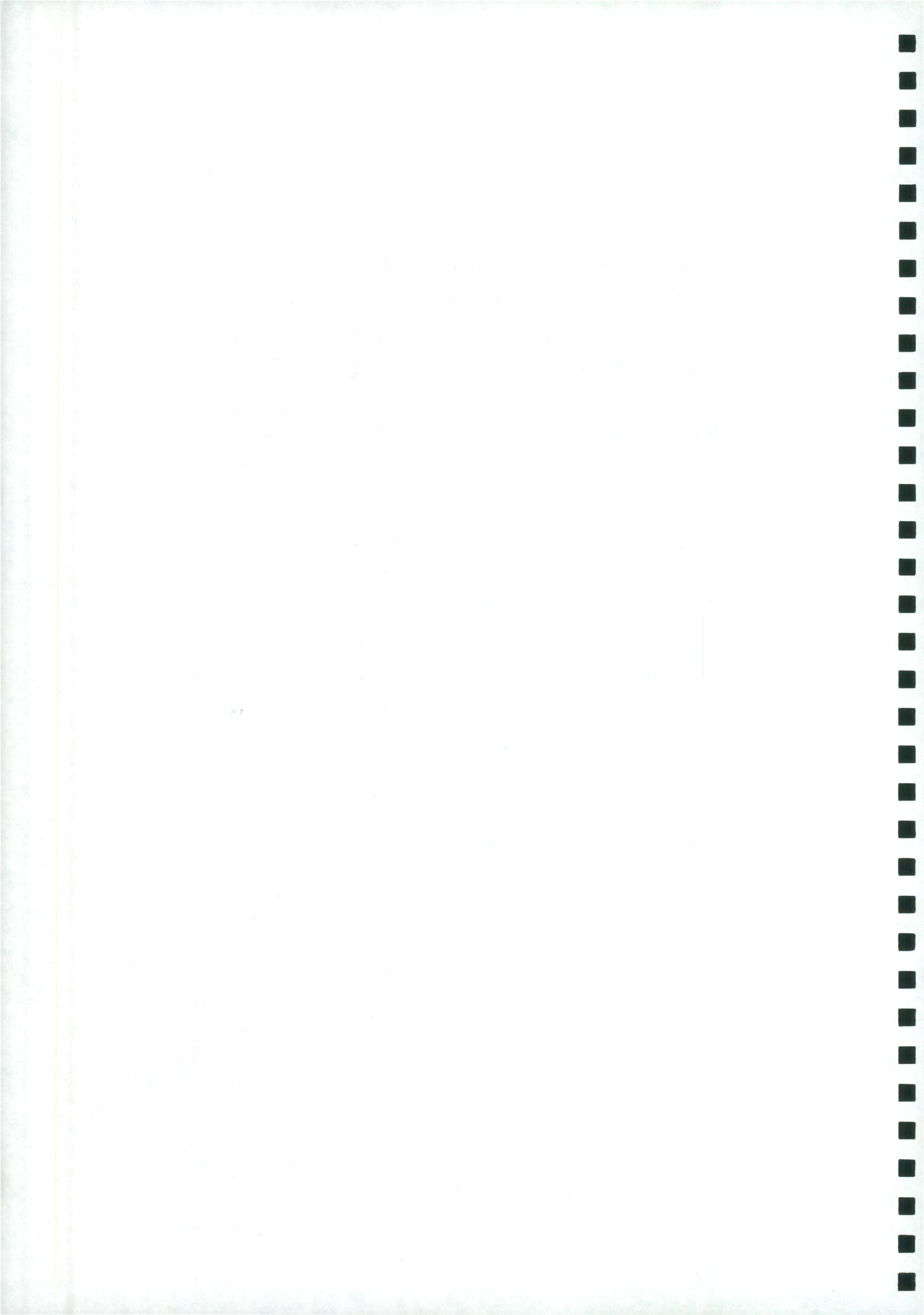
That "men have shown a willingness to share share responsibility" (Greer, 1970, p18), seems only to be rejected by women themselves fearful of returning to a position of submission, yet the the call for a new form of feminism, one that represents the true interests of women, has at last begun to be answered by women in the 90s, who realise that the task at hand is the education of not only the men in their lives, but their sisters too.



## NOTES:

1. There is the possibility of a 'feminised male'. Clover talks of the psychopathic murder in *Gender in the Slasher Film* being feminised: "we have In the killer a feminine male" (1987, p120). Whether he is 'active' or 'passive' seems to be constantly shifting throughout the narrative. However, "the combination masculine female repeatedly prevails over the combination feminine male" (1987, p221). For Clover the masculinisation of the female is not a derogatory condition: "It is not masculinity per se that is being privileged, but masculinity in conjunction with a female body - indeed, as the term victim-hero contemplates, masculinity in conjunction with femininity" (1987, p221).

2. If knowledge of sexual difference is structured around "the visibility of the penis" (Doanne, 1982, p79), then perhaps the problem is located around the female symbol. The penis is visible, the womb is hidden from male AND female sight. Considering too the idea of symbolic castration: that separation from the womb at birth, is shared by all human beings (Studlar), then the womb is a mystery to the female too. The uterus is an "unheimlich place", but is the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time.....In this case the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, familiar" (Freud, Clover, 1987, p209). Perhaps Klimt, by making the womb/ova/ female symbol visible, makes what was once familiar - unfamiliar, familiar again.



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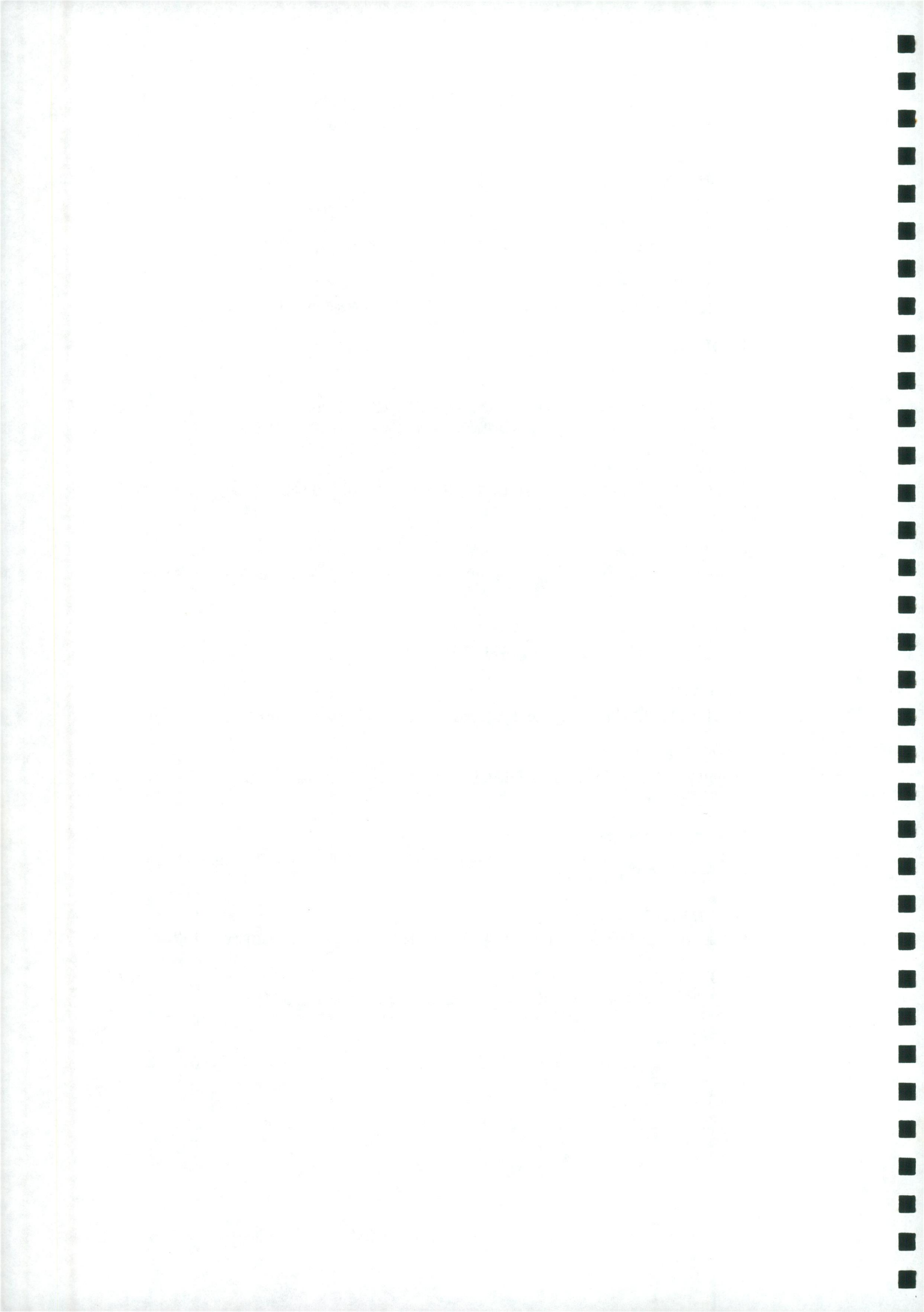
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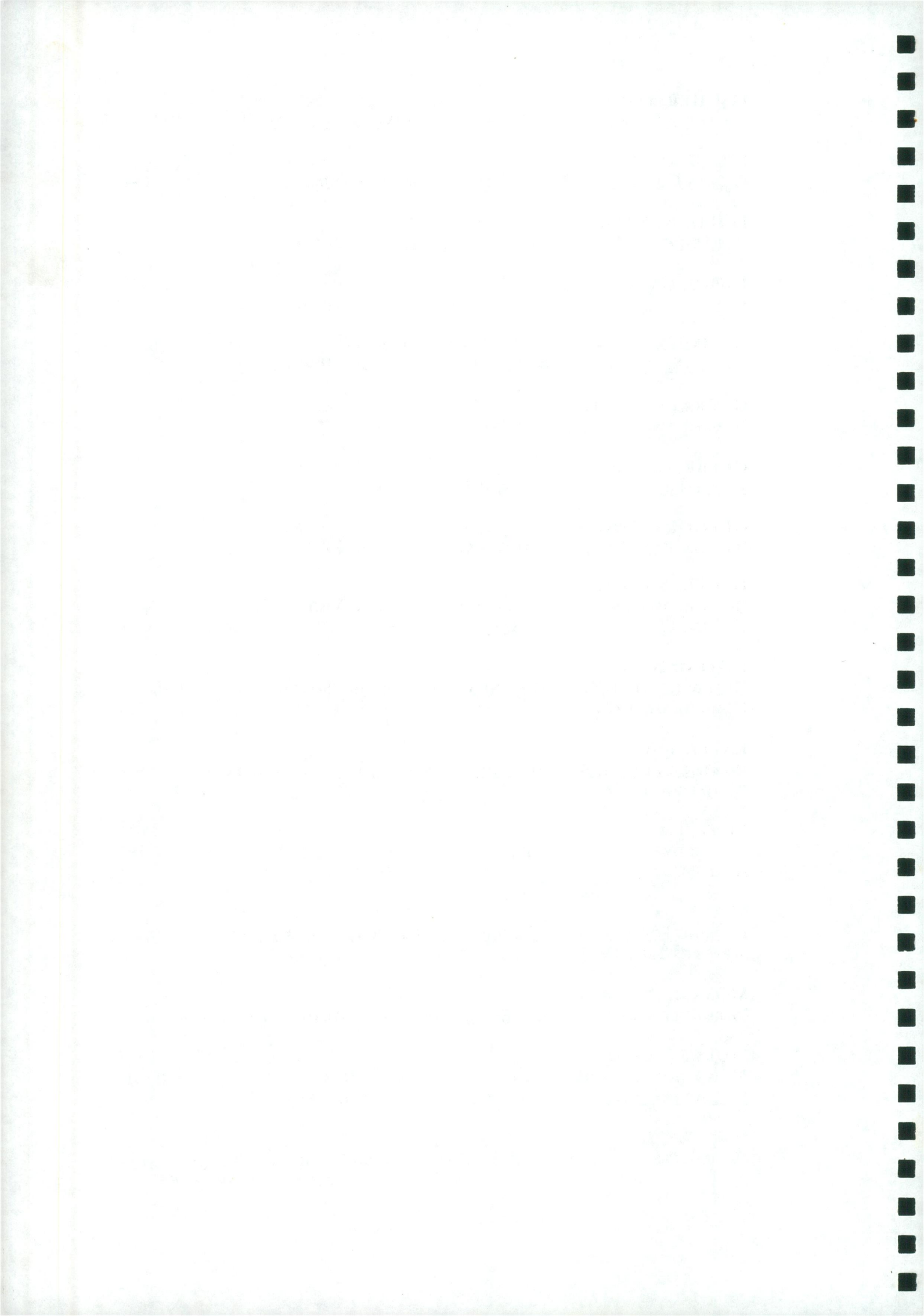
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