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SURREALISTIC IMAGE MANIPULATION
in the field of Visual Communication

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SURREALISTIC IMAGE MANIPULATION

in the field of Visual Communication

This thesis is devided not into chapters but phases indicating that
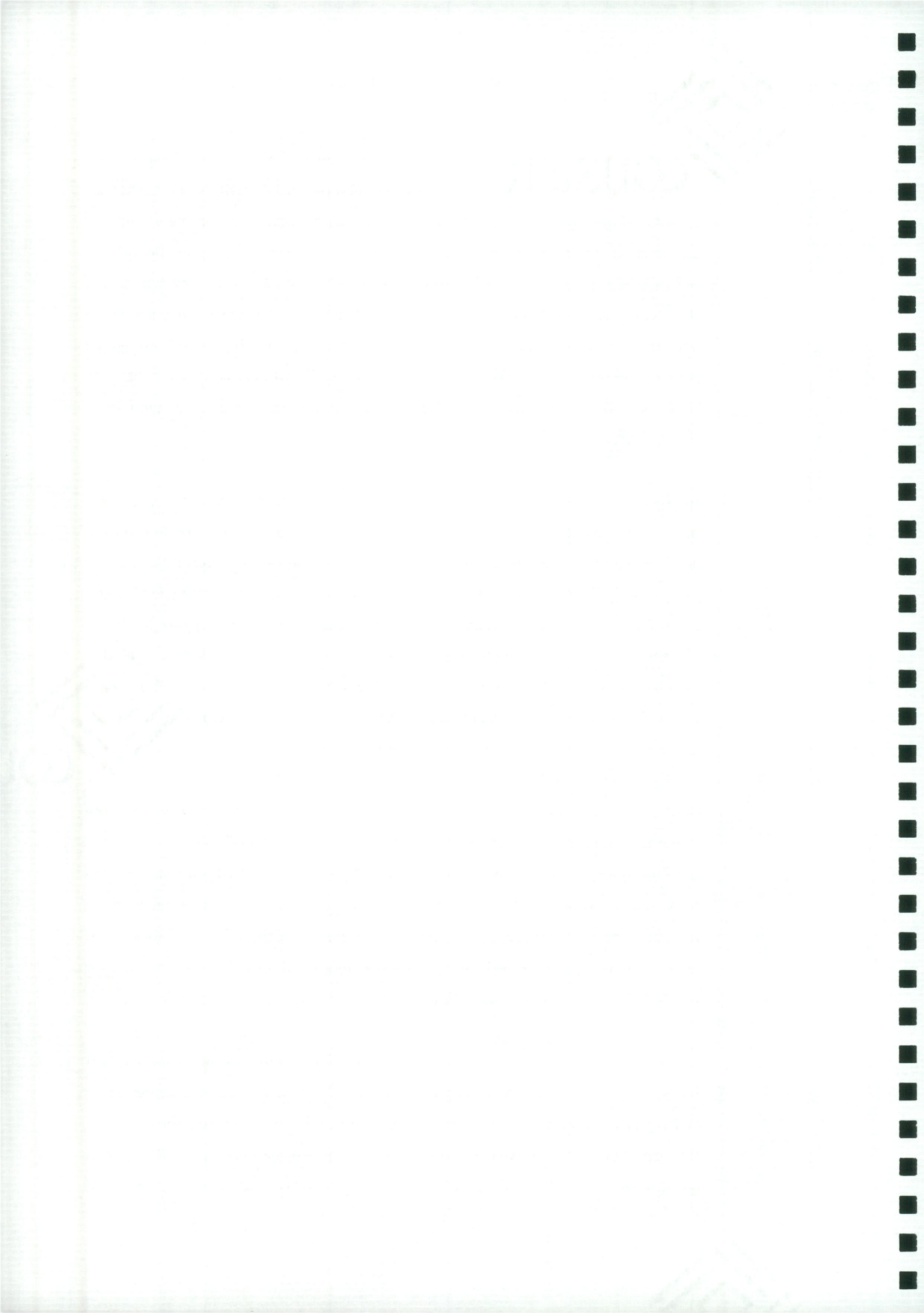Surrealistic Image Manipulation is an active and on-going process

PROLOGUE

The field of visual communication today has expanded rapidly as part of the computer age and other technological advances in media (advertising, films, etc.) When all these combine together, it creates more visual toxicity and saturates the society we are living in with information of all kinds. Most of these communication attempts are out to attract public attention in order to expose or overexpose whatever messages they seek to convey; often they confuse, distract or irritate the viewers they happen to encounter. Therefore, part of the role of a designer in generating these messages or information packages nowadays is to create more public awareness while, at the same time being self critical with regard to the manner in which he conveys these messages.

In recent years, especially toward the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, more and more designers in the field of graphic communication, fuelled by the advancement of modern technology, have moved them toward the area of Surrealistic Image Manipulation. In order to deliver their messages in an ultimately effective and powerful way, graphic designers have made the most of this technology. In fact, their effort was so successful that Surrealistic Image Manipulation expanded beyond commercial endeavour into other related fields such as political propaganda. Therefore, I feel that Surrealistic Image Manipulation has become a major epidemic in this modern technological era, rather than just a fashion trend.

Surrealistic Image Manipulation means the merging or juxtaposition of two or more seemingly unrelated images or scenes, which are re-composed and skillfully put together in a specific way to create a new illusion; an illusion that are visually stunning and often out of the ordinary. An important aspect of Surrealistic Image Manipulation is that it always attempts to convince us of the validity of its subject; i.e.; the representation is never so abstracted as to seem unrealistic. This concern for reality is fundamental to our appreciation of Surrealistic Image Manipulation.

Humankind has always translated complicated issues into simpler metaphorical images or ideas. Poetry is an example of this, and poets have acted as interpreters for as long as we have had civilisation. Today, this society we live in is more complex than ever before; so, we have developed a more sophisticated means of dealing with our environment. We have transcended language and we now refer to pure visual

poetry. Our poets have become visual communicators.

But first we must look at the origins of Surrealistic Image Manipulation. In my thesis, I will trace the roots of Surrealistic Image Manipulation through the outbursts of Dada and the Surrealist Movement in the early Twentieth Century. My investigation will include a case study of the painter Rene Magritte to examine the conceptual theories behind the content of his work. This will involve the use of psychoanalytical theory to explore the subconscious element of his work, with a view to applying what we learn from the Surrealist Movement in particular and to the Dadaist Movement in general.

I will focus on the working relationship between Surrealism and photography, examining why photography was so easily adapted and how it came to prominence. This will include the consideration of the inherent value of the photograph as a document as opposed to the interpretive nature of a painting, which contributed to the universal acceptance of photography as truth.

I will deal with how photography went one step beyond the truth (i.e.; Image Manipulation) through the exploitation of the value of the photographic image. An attempt will be made to put photomontage in context; this will include a case study of the pioneer Soviet film maker Eisenstein, including an investigation of his Montage technique, a technique that is still copied today. Montage later developed into photomontage and the persuasive power of Image Manipulation through photomontage is best seen in the work of John Heartfield's political propaganda. His work will be used to analyse the use and effectiveness of photomontage as communication .

We will see how, by building on the work of the pioneers, later communicators developed more sophisticated methods of image manipulation such as airbrush-photoretouching, multiple exposure and super-imposition techniques. These were employed by communicators over the past two decades and have captivated public attention. This resulted in Image Manipulation becoming a recognised technique in itself. As standards have improved, the distinction between truth and artifice as a result of photographic manipulation has been blurred.

With the advent of the computer, the distinction between reality and fiction has become more ambiguous. Computer graphics now is a rapidly expanding method of

manipulation which is altering the face of visual communication, from graphics and the print medium to motion picture graphics and animation. It even threatens to supersede the film-based method of image processing in the near future. But more importantly, because of computer graphics and technology to date, the way we conceive of perceive, and receive messages is undergoing revolutionary changes.

This leads us to the question of whether Surrealistic Image Manipulation has destroyed the truth or the audience's faith in the photograph as a document, or have people learned to discriminate between fact and photographic fiction?
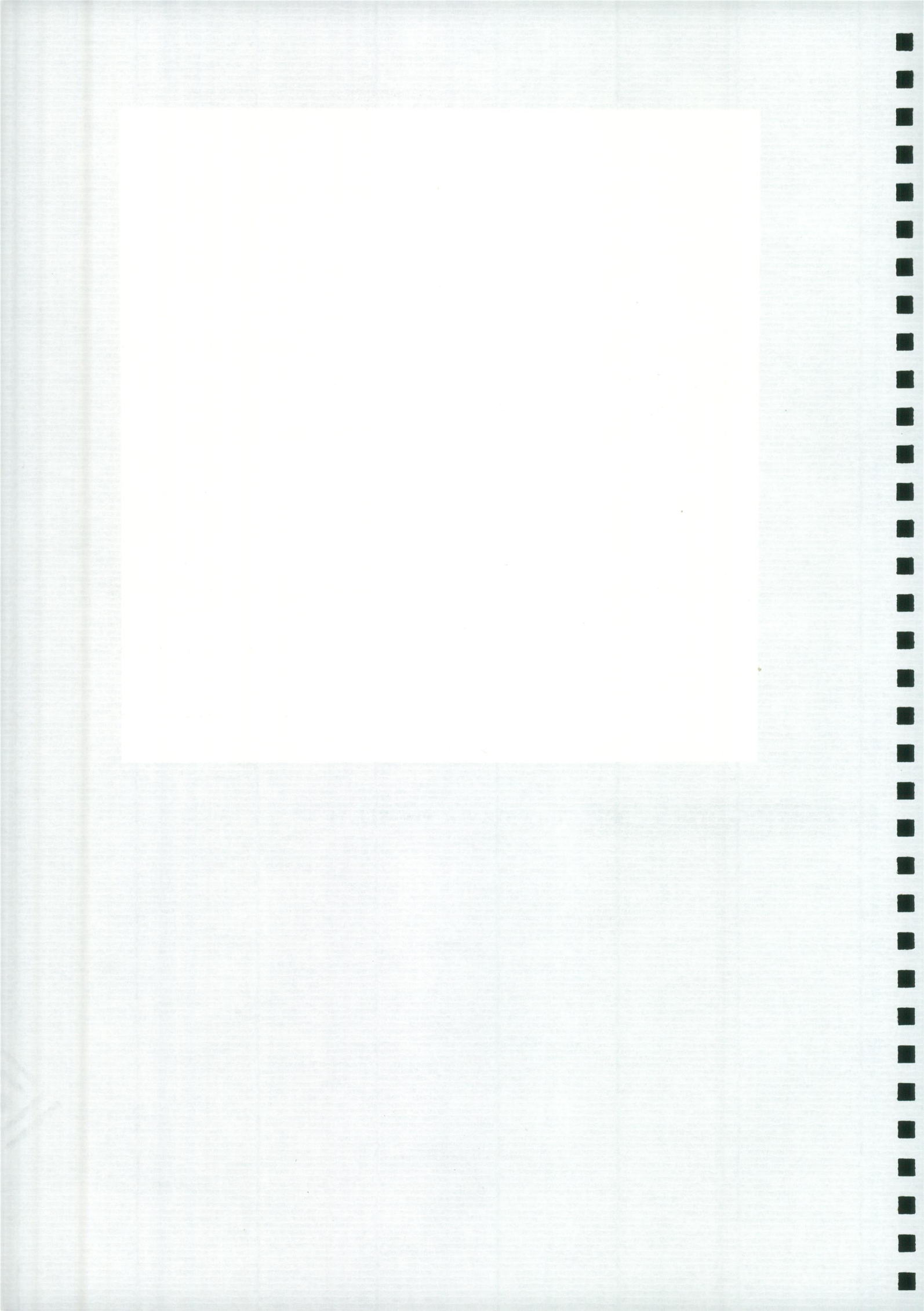
Surrealistic Image Manipulation means the isolation and the juxtaposition of unrelated images or objects in a radical manner, to make the familiar look strange, and the strange look more bizarre.

But even the most successfully manipulated piece of photographic work of today has borrowed the original idea from its predecessors in the Surrealist Movement.

Surrealism was one of the most complex phenomena in Twentieth-Century art to date, embracing literature, painting, sculpture, the theatre and the cinema. Historically it can be seen within a certain cultural, sociological and political framework. The main principle of their manifesto is the rejection of tradition. It is inevitable that Surrealism was from start to finish, a revolutionary movement, a movement which still influences a larger part of the contemporary world we live in today. The Surrealists had two basic guidelines which were based on the theories of great philosophers and poets such as Marx and Rimbaud, that is "to change life" (Rimbaud) and "To transform the world" (Marx). By changing life, they meant to "modify feeling, to guide the spirit in new directions, to wean the individual away from a rational view of the world" — Rimbaud ,(Waldberg,1965, p.18). The poetic requirement included the transformation of the world on a social and moral level.

Andre Breton issued his Surrealist Manifesto in Paris 1924. It's immediate impact attracted an avalanche of prolific writers and artists of different disciplines, most of them former Dadaists. However, this group was quite different in structure and attitude to the Dadaists, with their spontaneous meetings in the Cabaret Voltare (a popular cafe and hang-out for the Avant-Gardists in Zurich to exchange ideas and monitor their progress). The Surrealists had assumed a strong identity as a closed group under the direction of it's founding member and leader Andre Breton (1896 -1966). The movement therefore was motivated by the ever increasing influence of totally new and stimulating ideas extracted from Breton's interpretation of Freud's experiments. In fact, Surrealism has its ideological origins specifically based around Freud's methods, which lead the artists to embark on an exploration of a brand new artistic territory, which was previously uninvestigated by any other movement before. This revealed to them a new world of fantastic images from the subconscious, images that do not normally appear or exists in reality. The authority of Freud's theories also gave support to Breton's statement in the 1924 manifesto; "I believe in the future of these two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality; into a sort of absolute reality,

illus 1. Mark Von Ulrich
— *Allegory.* 1992.

of surreality..."(Chipp,1965,p.370)

The larger part of Surrealist's theoretical writing was concerned with experiments and studies of methods, most from them drawn from psychology, whereby they could stimulate the subconscious mind to open up some of its limitless store of fantastic and dream-like images and transfer them onto canvas. The Surrealist group had a great respect for scientific method, especially that of psychology. They fully accepted the reality of the physical world, even though they believed that they had gone so deeply into it that they had transcended it; they believed in a close interrelationship between their art and revolutionary elements in society. The result of all these factors — a closed group, a powerful leader and a doctrine — had fuelled the formation of a rebellious and revolutionary spirit which set out to destroy and abolish all the conventions of art as they were then known, although within their short existence (approximately 14 years) members of the Surrealist group had issued an enormous body of articles, novels, essays, propaganda brochures and several manifestoes.

The direct effect of such influences on the Surrealist's work was seen in their inventive methods of "automatic writings and drawings". In this procedure, all control by the conscious mind was released, the marvellous and boundless world of images of the subconscious could flow to the surface of the canvas. The writer had only by various means to shock himself free from these controls and then automatically to record whatever thoughts and images presented themselves. The same method for the painter produced "automatic drawings". Surrealism as a movement thus was much broader in scope than either traditional literature or painting, and was, in the words of Breton, "pure psychic automatism" (Chipp, 1965, p.371)

To illustrate this, I have chosen the examples of the paintings of Rene Magritte (1898 - 1967). whom Andre Breton claimed to have been "one of the main pillars of Surrealism" (Meuris, 1988, *cover quote.*). Yet although Magritte was one of the leading figures in this historical movement, he did not follow any Surrealist doctrine; he did not paint spontaneous dreamscapes, but he did use dream mechanisms such as unusual combinations and metamorphoses. Magritte's work was based on a specific intellectual premise; he sought to articulate in images things that has not yet been said; in the artist's words, to paint "what needed painting" (Meuris, 1988, *cover quote.*) His paintings certainly address the subconscious, but they are aimed primarily at the intellect, and their purpose is not so much to create harmony as to pose ques-

tions to irritate, to disturb.

Although Magritte stated that he hated advertising, the artist did have his own advertising agency where he made his living. His daily routine involved design for publicity objects such as posters, photocollages, advertising copy, and so on.(Ferrier, 1988, p.788.) And perhaps, as we know today, advertising requires a skill or a discipline; i.e. the ability to simply communicate to a mass audience. This is why Magritte fitted so perfectly in this category; because, of all painters. Magritte's style which is unlike that of Matisse or Picasso influenced the public the most. At least it is fair to assume so, because his work was commercial it enjoyed greater exposure and thus had greater influence on the public. Magritte looked for the effacing of the "creating hand" so as to let the eye seem unhindered. Magritte used to say; "I would like my paintings to be unnecessary for anyone's thinking of what they represent"(Ferrier, 1988,p.636.) This thought reflects the secret desire of every artist who wishes his work, the work being the vehicle for the product or idea embodied there in, to be as inconspicuous as possible, so that only the product it promotes is seen. This subtle manner of expression is still used by advertisers to enhance the apparent qualities of the product they are trying to sell. In Magritte's art, objects have an unusual presence

illus 2.Magritte — *The Red Model*(*Le Modele Rouge*, painted in 1934.)

that enhances their mystery. His concept is aimed at ambiguity, by employing the method of juxtaposing and isolating ordinary everyday objects and deliberately emphasising them in his paintings to make the familiar strange and the strange become bizarre.

For example, The Red Model (illus 2. Le Modele Rouge, painted in 1934) demonstrates how Magritte, even at an early stage, presented a synthesis of the boot and the foot in a seemingly 'realistic' manner. It simultaneously presents the image of a boot combining it with the image of the foot it contained. Both are very ordinary, but when synthesised the result is an extraordinary image which attacks the viewer on a subconscious level. Not only does this image have immediate impact but it also poses a long term question. In this case we recognise the object as being a foot in a boot, but how do we reconcile its alien representation?

"The Rape" (illus 4.) is another example of Magritte's ambiguity, but its ambiguity is taken a stage further than the previous example. Whereas "The Red Model " seems to be a natural translation, the elements of "The Rape" represent a radical reorganisation of elements not normally seen in conjunction with each other. In other words, although we might expect to see a foot inside a boot, we could never imagine a body constituting a face. Also, "The Rape" has a psychosexual significance which relates to the point I made earlier about the connection between Surrealist art and psychoanalytical research. What "The Rape" painted in 1935) does illustrate, however, is the first step towards what we know as contemporary Surrealistic Image Manipulation. In essence, it is the distortion of reality based on a realistic premise, but often taken to an extreme. This is why Magritte's art was so popular and so easily accepted among the younger generation of graphic artists and commercial designers throughout the world for his conceptual and creative genius. His work was so unique, while simple to understand. That is why it is readily applicable to advertising.
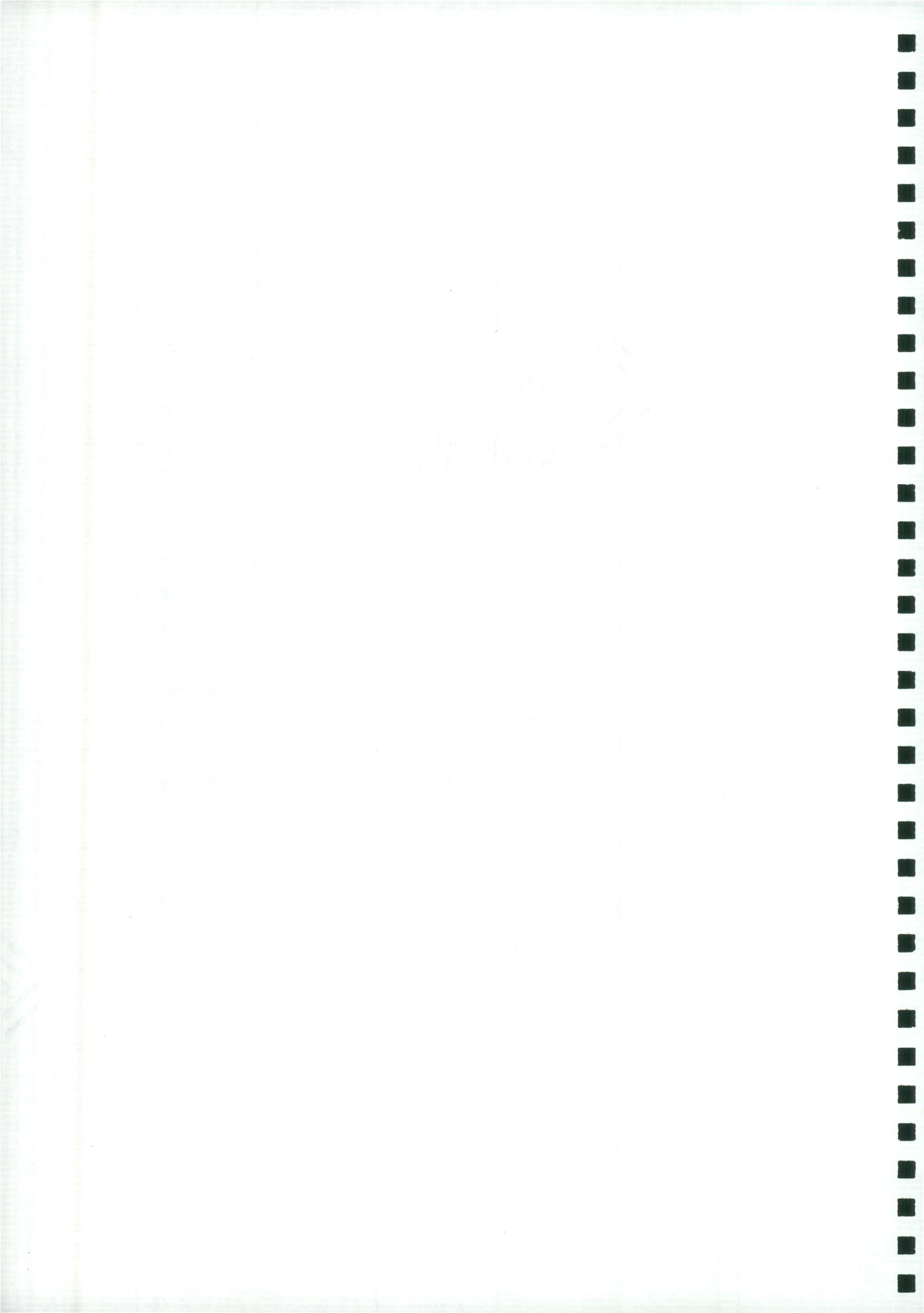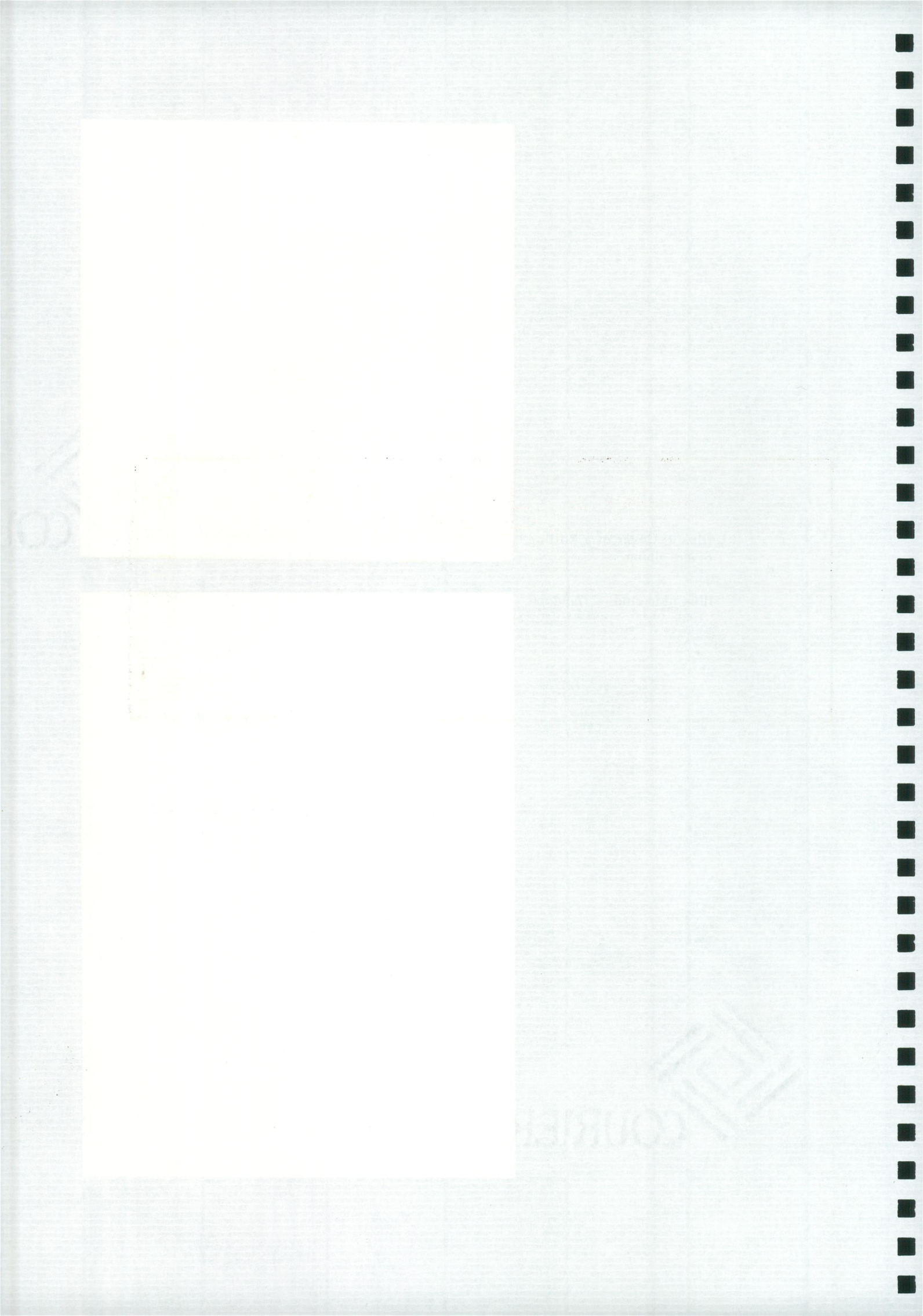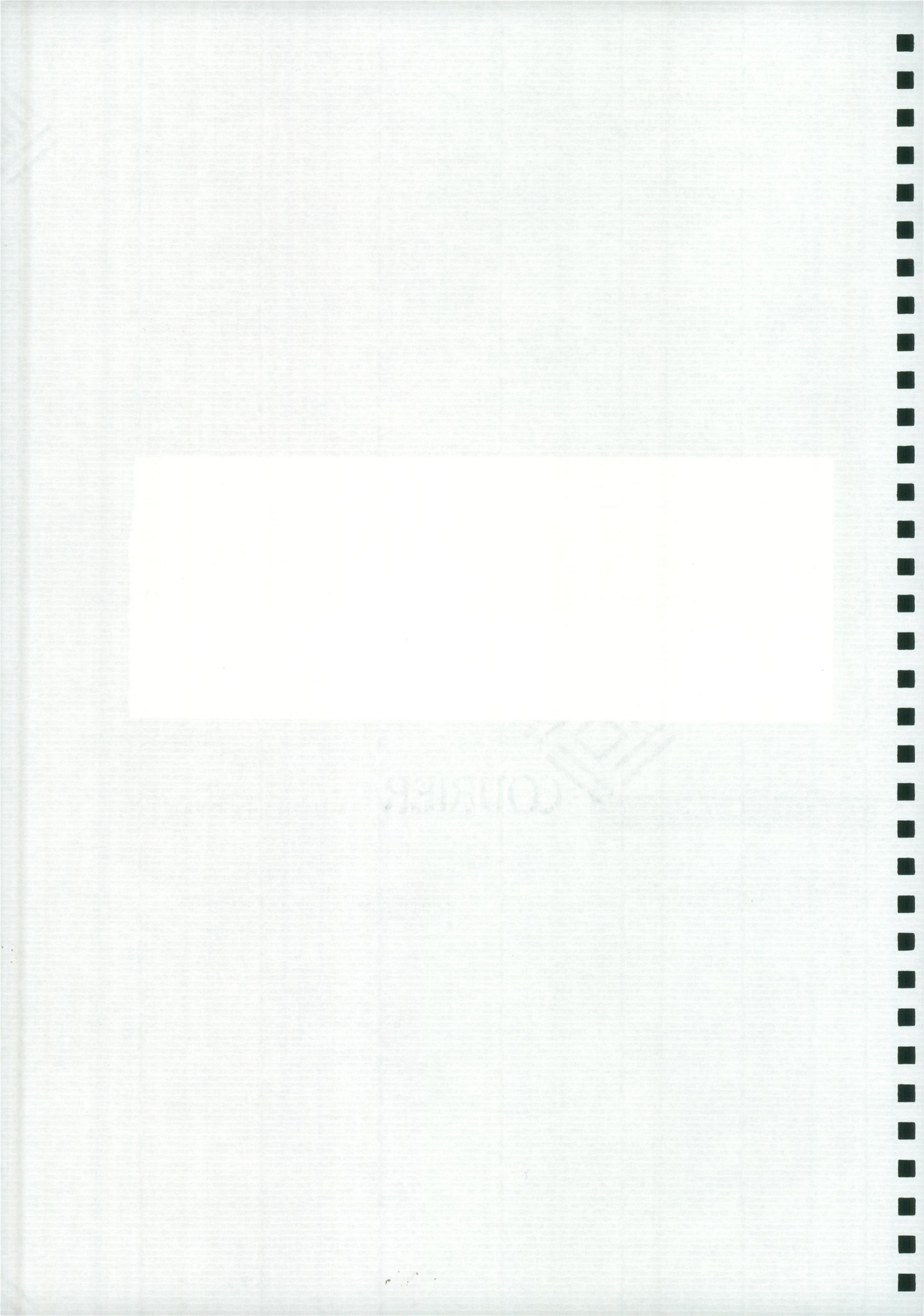
illus 3. Cover of a Rolling Stones album.

illus 4.Magritte — *The Rape* , 1935.

PHASE — 2   **" As From Today, Painting Is Dead ! "**

Although the Surrealist concept of image manipulation worked superbly in relation to what it was supposed to deliver, on visual terms, the image on the canvas could never reach the same persuasive level as that of a photograph. For painting is essentially an artist's personal interpretation of an event, whereas a photograph is recorded and produced mechanically with only directive input from a human source. The only personal involvement is the composition of the shot and the release of the shutter button. The camera records whatever happens in front of its lens and reproduces exactly what it has witnessed in graphic detail; that is the photograph. However accurately it sees still depends on the relationship of the photographer and the camera of course. Therefore, since the phenomenon of photography began in the early 19th century, the inherent value of a photograph has been considered to be much greater than a painting as a document of truth and has quickly become universally accepted for that very characteristic.

As regards the quotation above, that's not to say painting is dead, not totally as yet. Magritte used to say that he only painted "...what needed painting"(Ferrier, 1988,*cover quote.*) Another member of that group, the painter/photographer Man Ray, stated more clearly that he only "...painted what cannot be photographed, and pho-

illus 5. (previous page) Kenneth Tang — *Monuments of Departure.* 1991.

illus 6. Salvador Dali — *The Hallucinogenic Toreador.* 1968 - 70

tographed what cannot be painted..."(Janus,1984, p.5.) What these artists express is that there's room and need for both of these methods. More recently, the thinking process as manifested in Surrealist painting has combined with the persuasive power of photography. The fantastic images of the subconscious which had been laid out on the canvas by the Surrealist artists, combined with the unique quality of photography, resulting in a unique communication experience. The connection with photography has been considered by many members of the Surrealist group who were active around the same time. Salvador Dali's explained how he had tried to give in his paintings the qualities of an "instant colour photograph that you could hold in your hands of super detailed images" (Ferrier,1988, p.8.) Rising out of the depths of a personal or collective subconscious, these manipulated images, however, remain as painting after all.

In 1929, with the co-operation of his Surrealist fellow member Luis Bunuel, Salvador Dali made the very first Surrealist film called "Un chen de Andalou". (Ferrier, 1988, p.286.) They applied shock methods in the Surrealist tradition to create horrifying scenes. They used for example, a mask without a mouth, a mask where the mouth had been replaced with pubic hair, a cut hand with a hole in the middle metamorphosising into a nest of ants, and a naked woman carrying two sea urchins under her arms. Most horrific of all was the opening sequence where a razor blade slicing a calf's eye is contrived in the film to look like the eye of a young woman. The few people who witnessed some of the scenes being filmed reported being very distressed and never recovered, such was the power of the piece. According to film historians, this remains the most horrific opening sequence of any film to date. (Fitzmaurice, Tony, at the screening of Un Chen de Andalou , NCAD Dublin, Circa 1989/90.)

Outstanding and provocative it was, but the film remained in the Surrealist archive as an experimental piece of innovative breakthrough in the history of film making, although it later served as a foundation stone for many other horror movies we see today.

It was not until the mid - 1930's that Surrealistic Image Manipulation took place in the form of photomontage by the former Dada artist John Heartfield. He wasn't the first to pioneer this method, but no one else had ever taken Surrealistic Image Manipulation as far as Heartfield, nor was anybody as effective or as technically competent. The power of his work was opposed to and equal to the power of the Nazi's

war machine, the subject of much of his satirical work. It is important to put Heartfield into perspective. He may have been the greatest exponent of photomontage of his time, but the precedent was set by the pioneering Russian, Sergei Eisenstein.

Montage was first pioneered by the great Soviet film maker Eisenstein, who was also active in the mid - 1920's. He used montage to "put ideas into motion", (Aumont,1979, p.145.) by carefully and calculatedly juxtapositioning two or more unrelated sequences which originally happened at different times in separated places. He revolutionised film. A classic example of his Montage technique is the scene from — The Battleship Potemkin 23 November 1927. The original shots of the Battleship invading the town of Odessa was deliberately interrupted by another jump-cut sequence of people evacuating the town. Simultaneously, another sequence was introduced in a closed-up format, which focused on a mother looking at her baby being shot. (Aumont,1979, pp.157). Eisenstein was the first film maker to present the audience with several concurrent sequences or plots simultaneously. The product of this combination results in a visual and narrative gestalt which creates an effect that is greater than the individual scenes in isolation could have achieved. In compressing the story, he "creates a community of feelings" (Aumont,1979, p.145.) He concentrates the experience and creates cinematic poetry. All of these events were sandwiches to create a new sequence. The result is an entirely new scene and a fresh perspective for the viewer. Eisenstein's montage has allowed the viewer to experience the very core of the concept of cinema, that is to focus on the subject/story in a dynamic way. Sergei Eisenstein's Montage technique still proves to be so popular among cinematographers today due to the way it's unique and powerful presentation affects the audience.

So, Eisenstein set an example which Heartfield took over in his own field. The similarities between the two are apparent; they both juxtapose unrelated images and the result of this fusion creates a new statement. They both are technically efficient in contemporary media, especially the photographic image, still and in motion. They both are politically motivated. Inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917, Heartfield joined the German Communist party in the following year. In turn, he used his Dada theories in the service of Communism against Fascism and the Nazi's under the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler.

The new approach that Heartfield evolved in the ' twenties was heavily based on the

photographic medium. He reckoned that "New political problems demand new means of propaganda. For this task, photography possess the greatest power of persuasion". (John Heartfield's exhibition -IMMA, Dublin, Nov 1992 - Jan 1993.) His faith in the camera as an unrivalled instrument for making an accurate statement of time has speaks for many experimental artist among that era especially in Germany and the Soviet Union., The Soviet Writer Osip Brik's claim in 1926 that "not a single painter, even the most talented, can transmit as close a resemblance as the camera can" was typical of such a common view. (IMMA, Dublin, Jan 1993.) Brik's statement has certainly drawn a clear line between both medium and its values, where photography becomes supreme in the political arena.
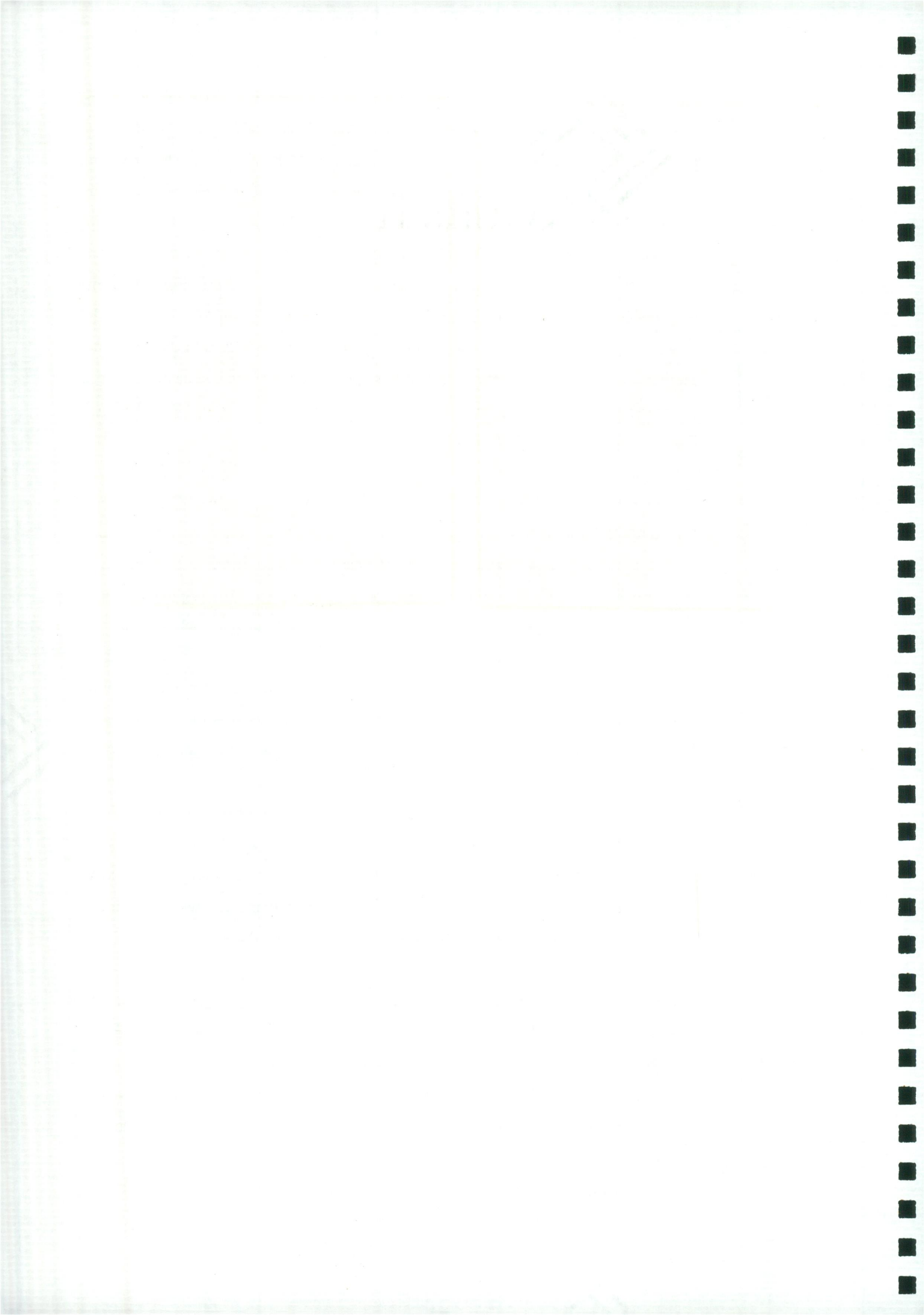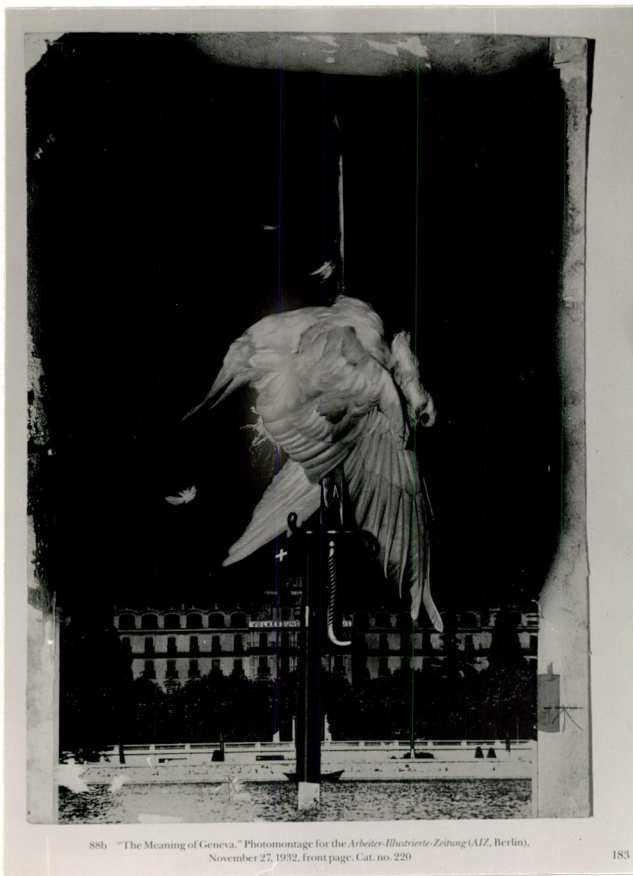
PHASE — 3   " AND PIGS CAN FLY ! "
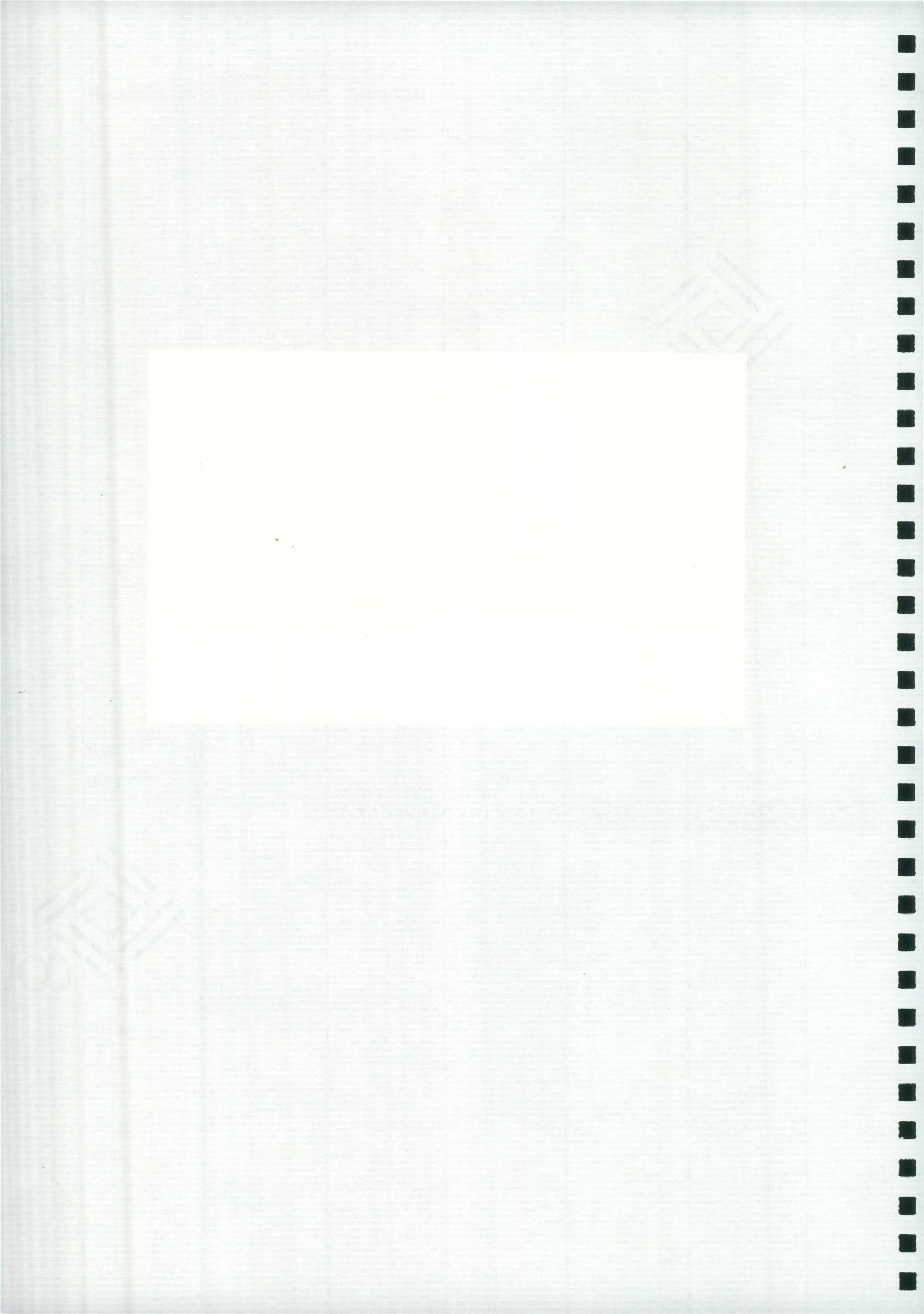
As with Eisenstein, who used montage to put ideas into motion, Heartfield also pursued the same idea. With photography where "one photograph showed an object, a good combination of photographs could show an idea" (IMMA,1993.) This is where Photomontage comes in, for instance, when a visual statement was required by a publisher, whether it was for an advertisement, a book jacket or a political poster. Heartfield often considered photomontage as the most suitable method to tackle the job. Photomontage, which for the Berlin Dadaist was an anti-art joke, was now employed as a way of exploiting the documentary reputation of a photograph. Heartfield quickly took this chance to introduce his photomontage into the press and publicity of the German Communist Party not just because of the persuasiveness of a photograph over a painting, but also because many of the rival parties hadn't realised the potential use of the photographic image.

Between 1930 - 38, Heartfield became the main contributor in AZI (Arbeiter - Illustrierte Zeitung; Worker's Illustrated Paper.) It was a Communist magazine founded by Munzenberg in the Twenties to rival the mainstream publications then flourishing. Heartfield's emphasis on magazine work was in line with the problematic economic and political climate in Germany. In AZI, his photomontage comment on contemporary politics had enabled Heartfield to demonstrated what he described as "How to use photography as a weapon" (IMMA, 1993.) With the help and contribution of many photographers in AZI, combined with thousands of photographic images available, it pushed Heartfield's vision to a state of political surrealism unmatched by any rival party. He combined images and simplified the message to its basic state. Heartfield's photomontage speaks in the most voracious visual language. In turn, his montage technique, combined with elements of a wild Dadaist humour, had made the artist "a new negotiator between painting and photography" (IMMA, 1993.) He offered the German Communist Party an audacious yet powerful political weapon to rattle, and undermined the foundation of the Nazi Party.

In the example of "Adolf the Superman Swallow Gold and Spouts Junk" (illus.9. AZI 17 July 1932). Heartfield presented the viewer with what we first seems like a satirical joke on the surface; but the more one looks at it, the more revealing it becomes. Heartfield manipulated the whole image in a calculated manner, by bridging the gap between two divergent subjects such as greed and corruption. Thematically he dealt a lot with the Seven Deadly Sins, particularly in relation to the Nazis. When apparent moral vices were grouped together under the scrutinise surgical blade of Heartfield,

illus7.(previous page) Kenneth Tang — *Made in Heaven.* 1993.

88b "The Meaning of Geneva." Photomontage for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (AIZ, Berlin), November 27, 1932, front page. Cat. no. 220   183

94 "Adolf, the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk." Photomontage for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (AIZ, Berlin), July 17, 1932, p. 675. Cat. no. 213

illus 8. The intensity of Photomontage. John Heartfield — *The meaning of Geneva* . <u>AZI</u> Berlin Nov 27, 1932.
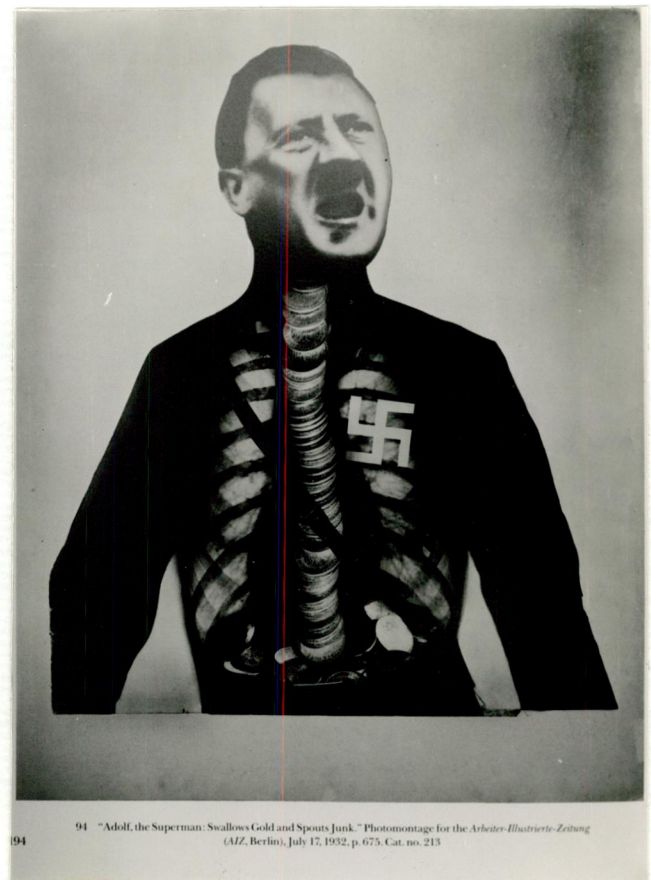
illus 9. John Heartfield — "*Adolf the Superman Swallow Gold and Spouts Junk*" . <u>AZI</u> Berlin 17 July 1932.

he transformed a bland image into an acidic shock to the system. His pictures were like X-rays which revealed the Nazi dictatorship for being the corrupt tyranny that it was.

For Heartfield, the photomontage artist now became the visual surgeon who presented the public with his visual statement in a clinical format. The manipulated image he creates then becomes even more disturbing, its impact sustained in the subconscious mind of the public thereby sowing a profound seed of doubt. It is a testament to the power of his work that Hitler put a hefty price on Heartfield's head. The artist became a main target of the Nazi's which forced him to flee his residence, running from place to place throughout the war. This also certified the effectiveness of Surrealistic Image Manipulation through photomontage in the service of political propaganda.

Because of the effectiveness of Heartfield's political work, and the manner in which it reached a wide audience, his approach was inevitable adopted in the commercial field in the hope of achieving the same result.
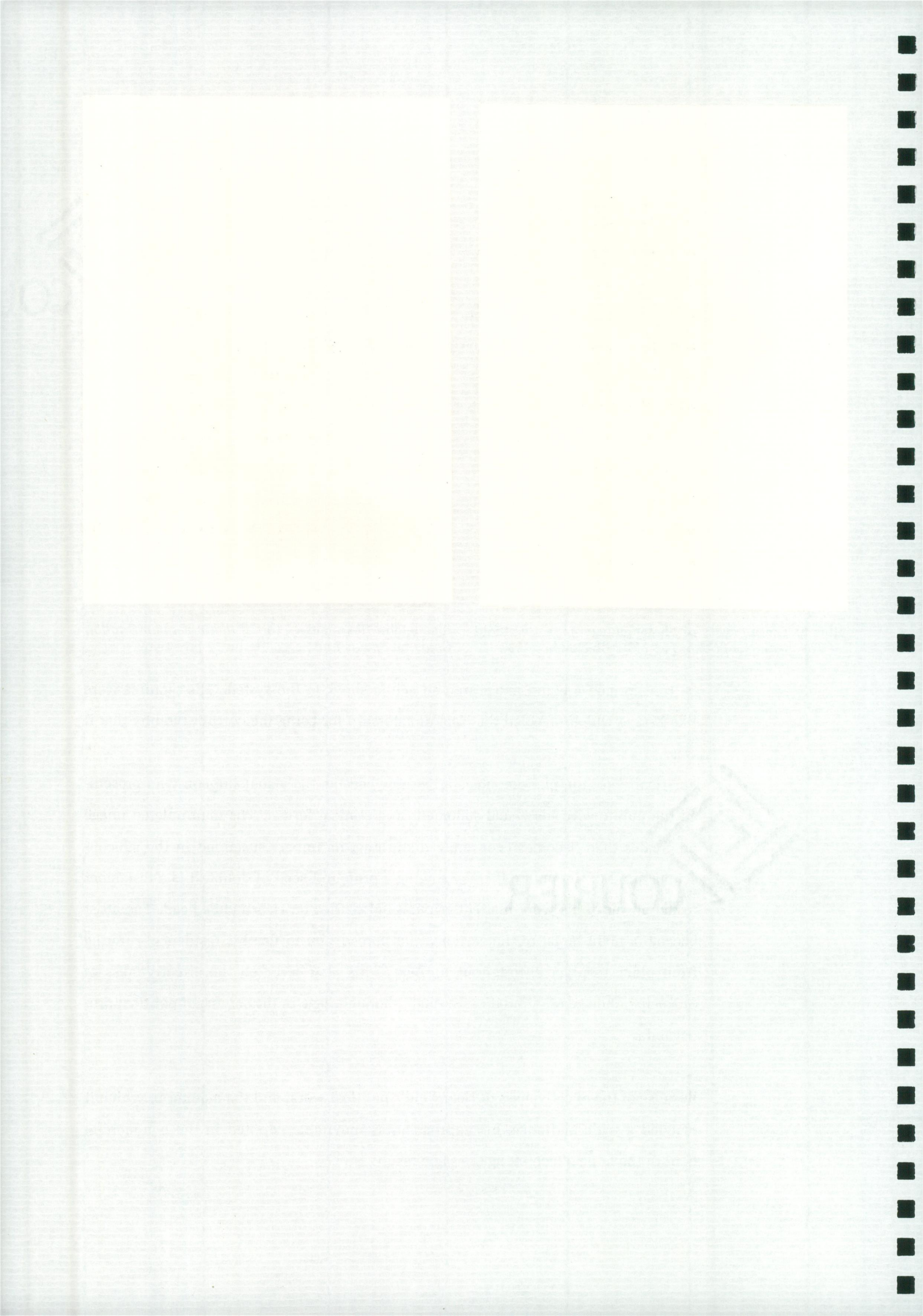
It is in the field of advertising, perhaps, that photomontage has become most familiar today in the creation of strange and marvellous images and in the extraordinary rendering of commonplace images.

After the war, Heartfield's photomontage techniques were quickly put in the service of the consumer society around the world. Photomontage, originally a political weapon, is now employed by designers and advertising communicators to convey their messages and seduce their customers. We live in a very competitive consumer orientated society, this is the arena where Surrealistic Image Manipulation has become a dominant tool. The society we live in is a society that has been oversaturated by the claustrophobic clouds of social pressures, recession, depression, and information. Soon our heads will overload with all of these excesses. We need to stop or get away from them all. That's why Surrealistic Image Manipulation, be it an advertisement or a clip of entertainment, offers the average public a form of escapism which stimulates on the subconscious level and shocks them away from reality momentarily.

Over the past two decades, graphic artists and designers have sought more and more sophisticated ways of manipulating images; the most significant was the introduction of colour photographic materials and techniques. In Heartfield's work, which was predominantly Black and White, seems mundane and monochromatic compared with the new and colourful medium. Not only did colour photography add a new dimension to the field of visual communication, but it also opened up an array of possibilities in manipulation of imagery. Techniques like airbrushing, photo-retouching, multiple-exposure and superimposing had paved their way for artists and designers to a new horizon, where the product of Surrealistic Image Manipulation, as it appears on the final two dimensional art work, is much more convincing than ever before. By manipulating the established truth of the subject, the artist/designer presents the client with a new future, a different potential outcome.

Through Surrealistic Image Manipulation of the advertisement illustrated over page, (illus.# 7.) it is possible for man to have wings, for pigs to fly, for dreams to come true, and you, (the customer) will have to pay for it! These are the typical promises which appear in many of the ads we have seen over the last two decades.

These moments of escapism, however, have a price, Surrealistic Image Manipulation

Even though these ads were horribly assembled through super-imposition, because of their startling quality, they strikes the viewer immediately. But how long they can sustain the viewer's attention depends on the quality of the individual piece.

illus.10 & 11. *Aqua Libra natural solft drinks* — Ayer, London. 1991.

illus 12. *The Cuerve ad* — Young & Rubycam NY.1991.

MONUMENTAL MARGARITAS.

CUERVO GOLD MAKES IT
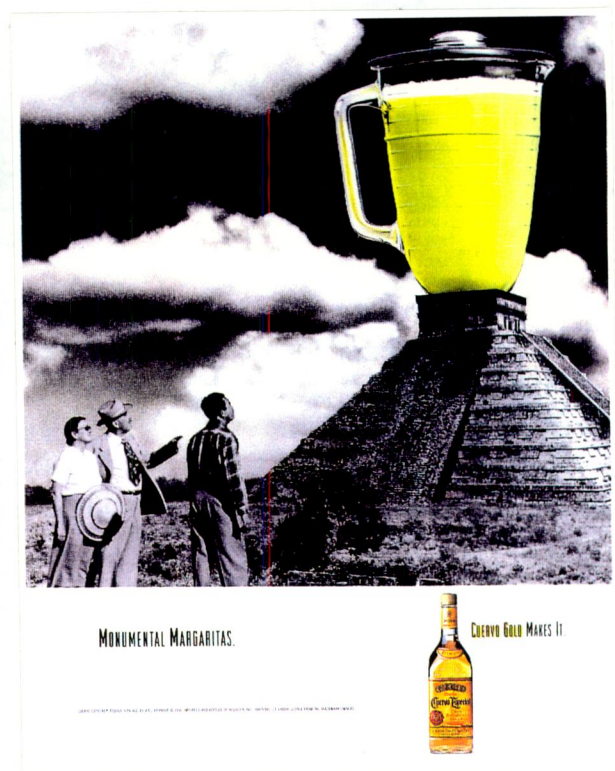
has acted as a shock therapy on the subconscious level and has come to stand for a suppression of the real, a substitution of the fantastic for a 'discredited' world of reality. Whereas it was originally concerned with an extension and deepening of what is understood as 'the real', it now has different concerns. Surrealistic manipulation of a photograph has castrated the only value which made the photographic document so unique, that is Surrealistic Image Manipulation has compromise the inherent value of a photograph as a document of truth; since truth is absolute, it's dissolution has resulted in the diminishing of the photograph's assumed power. Today's photograph you could say has little more status than a "realistic" painting.
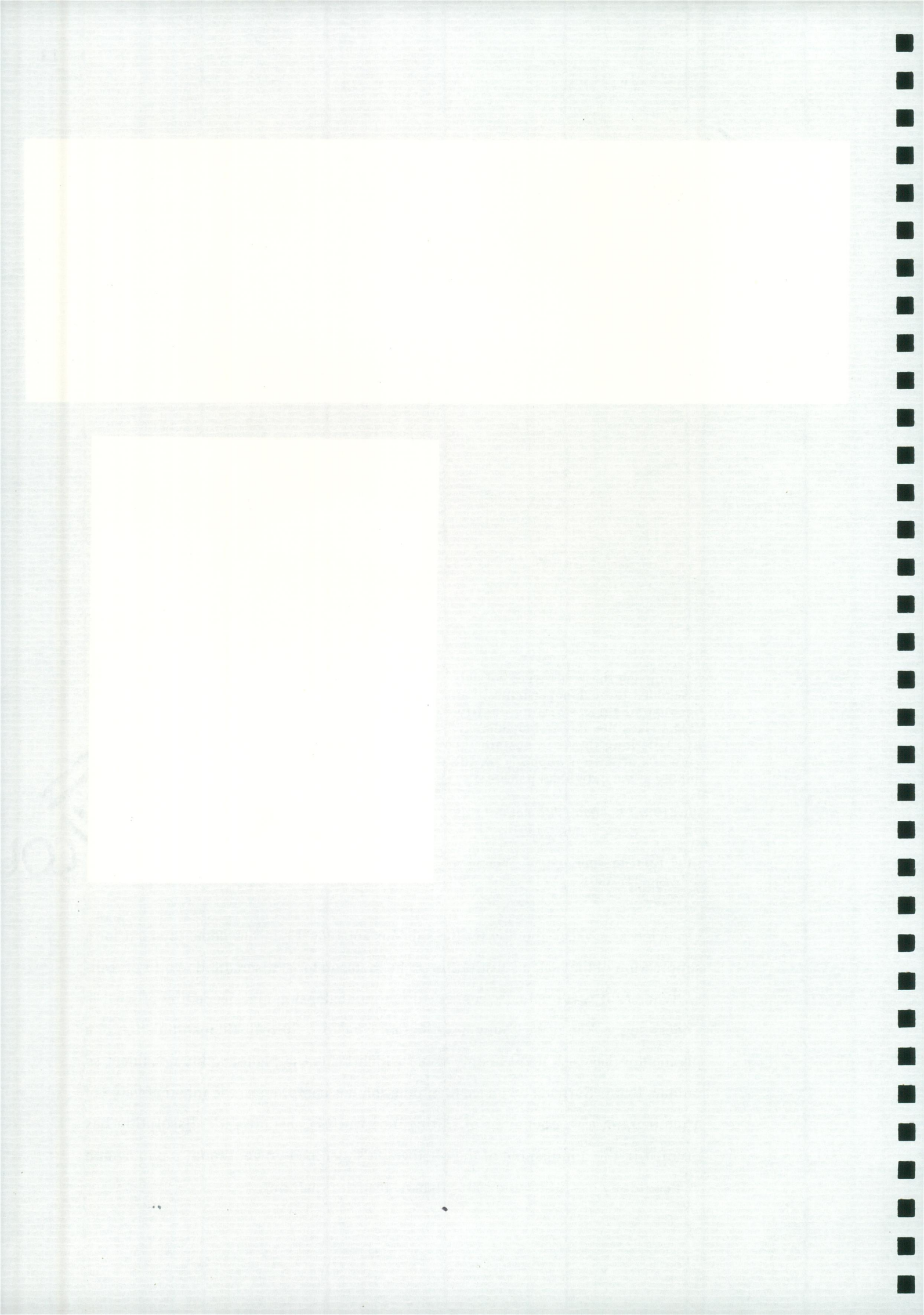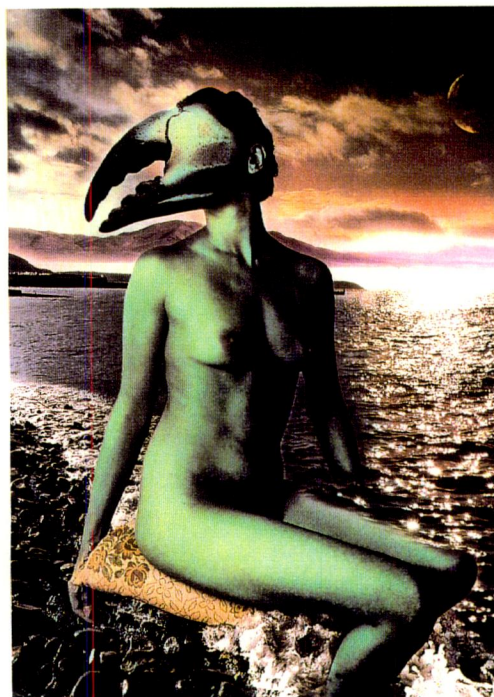
illus.13 — The retouched official Barcelona'92 Olympic poster by Jones Bloom, UK 1992.

illus.14 — Multiple image assemblage through dark-room printing by the English photographer Hag.

illus 15. *A view of the Piza tower as it really should be* — This image was electronically composed and retouched by Lukien Foto & Design .Netherland.1992.

kenneth tang's
Icarus dream #92
BEYOND *deva* STATION

PHASE — 4 **DIGITAL IMAGING :**

Prelude To A Brave New World

With the advent of technology of the '80's. since the introduction of the computer, distortion of reality has reached it's ultimate level. The issue now is one of meaning - the meaning of a technology in relation to image manipulation and the value of truth, especially with regard to photography. How will the computer change our life, our perception of reality? Will it be a good or bad thing? The challenge of new technologies has brought this question to the forefront.

It is often said that the role of computers should be to relieve humans of the need to undertake tedious chores, and there are certainly some repetitive chores involved in almost every area of our daily routine. These include major areas of business, finance, politics and defence, to name a few, which involve enormous labour and time consuming processes to keep them circulating properly. This is why since the invention of the microchip, computers have quickly integrated naturally into our society, increasing the pace of our life dramatically.

Computers can only push numbers around and, in the final analysis, they can only distinguish between zero and one (binary 0,1.) They can, however, do so extremely quickly and, as we have come to understand, as much of our knowledge about the world can be meaningfully reduced to numbers, we are in a position to use computers to manipulate that knowledge. Objects and scenes from the real world, or from an imaginary world, can be conjured out of these numbers, can interact, can be subjected to the application of physical laws and, most importantly, can be made visible and hence accessible. Essentially, the point is that computers make no distinction between reality and unreality, both being reduced to a sequence of electronic pulses and digital codes. Modern communications and the media ensure that the results of this newly acquired technology makes images available, for better or worse, to hundreds of millions of people throughout the globe, even in their very own houses.

In the field of visual communication, the computer has dominated the output of most global Television networks. And in major design consultancies throughout the world, computer graphics are now the foundation, the main pillar of every aspect of their work, from the initial negotiation to the final physical product (the actual design piece) to the financial remuneration stage, the computer is involved. It effortlessly intervenes in the most essential role in any organisation. But one of the most significant contributions of the computer is it's application in a visual context. The visual output of the computer has been in epidemic proportions which have swept the

illus 16.(previous page) Kenneth Tang —*Icarus Dream #92*.

world by storm. For example, we see it everyday in video games and Computer Aided Design (CAD) pieces, to name but just two. But the role of computer technology is lucidly demonstrated in its role of digital imaging which is concerned with Surrealistic Image Manipulation. This has brought traditional film-bases image processes on line with digital imagery; the result is that the future of film-based image processing methods is in doubt and is in danger of becoming obsolete. With digital image manipulation the process not only creates a new perspective which shapes our perception of objects and content, but it also generates a new controversy among photojournalists who are sensitive to the values of truth and the damage that Surrealistic Image Manipulation could cause to their work.

So, welcome to the brave new world of digital imaging, a process that used silicon rather than silver, and a computer instead of a darkroom. Displaced the film-based camera, digital imaging employs a still-video camera to capture and store information on floppy or laser disks. It's the process of using computer technology to capture, create, and or manipulate photo-like pictures in which reality can easily be changed.

Eye popping, jaw dropping visuals is the kind of stuff that digital Surrealistic Image Manipulation is made of.

illus 17. *Poster for the Bristol Animation Festival United Kingdom* — Charles Settrington. 1991.

The most animated character at The Bristol Animation Festival will be you.

The basic technologies used in photography and digital imaging are quite different. Film-based photography consists of a number of chemical reactions to produce a print or transparency, while digital imaging involves capturing an image, uploading it into a computer, manipulating it and, finally, outputting the finished picture.

The first step in digital imaging is to capture a photographic or electronic image. Most professionals involved in digital imaging shoot their initial picture with film for two critical reasons. Firstly, film-based cameras are inherently cheaper than still-video cameras. At the time of writing, top professional 35mm film cameras such as the Nikon F4s model are selling for about IR£1500, while comparable still-video cameras like the FujiX DS-100 cost approximately five times as much. The other reason why the film-based camera is used is for its image quality. The coarsest grained film has a much higher dynamic range — the sum total of resolution, contrast, tonality, and colour fidelity that adds up to overall image quality — than the best still video cameras.

> *The heart and soul of most video devices, whether they are still-video cameras, camcorders, or scanners, is the CCD, or charge coupled device. A CCD is a tiny 0.5 inch light-sensitive silicon chip. On each CCD are hundreds and thousands of sampling points, called pixels, that measure light intensity, colour, and contrast. The more pixels, the better the dynamic range.* (Grotta, 1992, p.64.)

But while a professional still video camera may have a half-million or more pixels, it still doesn't match a comparable standard Kodachrome 100ASA film which has a silver granular structure resolution equivalent to 18 million pixels, which explain why film will probably be around for some time, even if digital imaging becomes universally popular. However, it is just a matter of time until the acceleration of technology allows it to catch up. But for now, one thing for sure is that the computer is about to turn the tables on image processing, with major concerns for important issues like "Global-Warming" and the "Greenhouse" effect. Film-based chemical processing methods such as "E4" and "E6 - Cibachrome", which were praised by professionals and were used as their standard process, are now gradually about to be taken off the market due to their environmental toxicity (The information above was supplied by O'Leary Photolab, Ranelagh, Dublin, Nov 1992.) This surely leaves the future of the darkroom and its chemicals in doubt. It appears that digital-imaging and the filmless concepts are more appropriate for the future.

Regardless of how the image is captured - film or still-video, it must be converted into computer language. All photographs and most video signals are composed of analog information rather than digital data, consisting of continuously variable light, colours, and contrast. On the other hand, digital data exists in two states only - zeros and ones.

> To understand the difference, think of a digital clock in which every second is marked by a change in a digital-emitting-diode (LED) number. The observer receives no information about how much time passes between each second. An analog clock, however has a second sweep, so it's possible to see an infinite, continuously variable representation of time between the seconds. This difference between analog and digital information is critical because computers are strictly digital devices, so analog data must first be converted into digital data (Grotta.1992.p.65.)

Generally, there are three types of devices used to convert analog images to digital data; digitizers, scanners, and frame grabbers. All still-video cameras capture their images on analog CCD's. A digitiser must be used to convert those electrical impulses into digital pulses. Analog still-video cameras save their data on special two-inch analog floppy disks, which are then inserted into a shoebox size external disk drive/digitiser for conversion. So-called digital cameras come equipped with built-in digitizers, but the same analog-to-digital conversion must take place. The same principal applies to scanners, a device with a movable light and lens that passes over an image or object and reflects the light to a CCD, which then converts that visual information into zeros and ones. Frame-grabbers are peripheral boards that fit inside computers. They intercept video signals, whether from a Video Cassette Recorder, a camcorder or a television set and convert them into digital data.

Once the image is digitized, it is fed into a computer. To the untrained eye, the digital image looks exactly like still photographs on a TV screen. A closer inspection reveals that such images are made up of many thousands of pixels. It is then combined with a paint programme such as Quantel Graphic/Video Paintbox, a name which has been associated with computer paint systems for a number of years and is still the yardstick against which others are measured.(Systems such as Adobe Photoshop and a few other paint programmes designed for Apple Macintosh Computers are in this league.) Quantel was identified with the revolution in TV graphics and helped move designers to a more central role in production. Artists and designers at Radio Telefis

Eireann (RTE) in Donnybrook, Dublin, certainly found that it so speeded up their jobs that they were prepared to forsake their families and work during the night if that was when the machine was free. Its relevance to image manipulation was less impressive until connected to the Harry System. Harry is a digital editing suite which gives enormous flexibility in the manipulation of images from a range of sources, including live action video, without the generation loss which inhibits normal video work. The combined system permits the accretion of hand drawn images, images input from photographic sources, and computer generated images together with existing stock in an animated potpourri which is currently popular in pop videos, e.i a stylistic melange in the current Peter Gabriel's "Steam" music video (in the pop chart from Jan. 1993). Quantel, however, it is not a system for the creation of 3-D scenes (though scenes generated on suitable machines can be imported and worked on), but the successive layers of image can be added to construct 2-D scenes. This refers us back again to the same methods of Surrealistic Image Manipulation in the form of collage and photomontage mentioned earlier in John Heartfield's work, but instead of a scalpel and glues, once in the computer the only tools needed for digital manipulation are a computer keyboard and a painting device like a mouse, a tablet, or a light-pen. The user has total control over the whole image, he can zoom in on a fraction of an image - such as a single eyelash — enlarge it, edit in order to eliminate defects or alter it's colour or shape, with enormous accuracy. Every single pixel can be changed, moved, distorted, deleted, or added. Everything is done in broad daylight and with exposed light, in the comfort of a cozy armchair, without breathing in all those dreadful chemicals produced in the darkroom. And unlike painting, the colour pallet in the digital universe is never dry, in fact, the artist can leave the process and come back anytime to continue his work. The powerful and flexible application of digital technology not only opens up endless possibilities for creative artists and designers around the globe, but it also consumes less waste and time while delivering superb quality and stunning effects which have never been achieved by any standard photographic processes before or since.

The example of the " pregnant " actor Bruce Willis on the front cover of Spy magazine's parody pack August 1991(Burn.1991) was put together in only 4 days by its in-house designers. The idea sparked shortly after the release of an article about the actor's wife, Demi Moore, whose pregnant picture appeared on the front cover of Vanity Fair magazine (also in August 1991.) The combination of traditional photographic techniques and the assistance of digital technology has enabled designers at

illus 18. — **The shape of thing to come ?** A step - by - step guide to the "pregnant " Bruce Willis produced by B.W.Honeycutt for <u>SPY</u> magazine,US,1991 ... The composition was made of 2 images only, his famous belly was actually "built - up" using digital technology of the Quantel Paintbox.
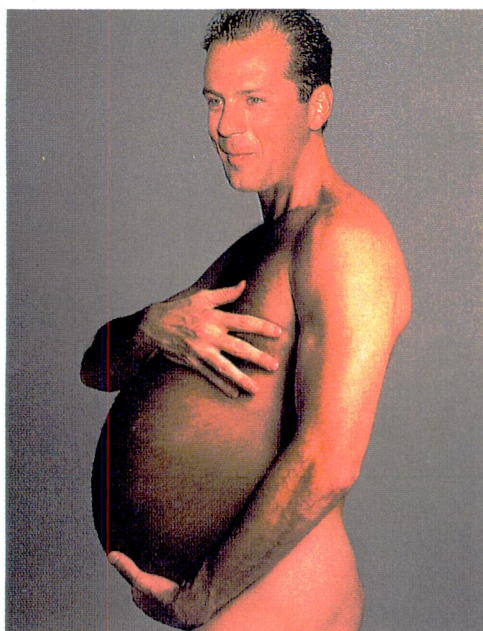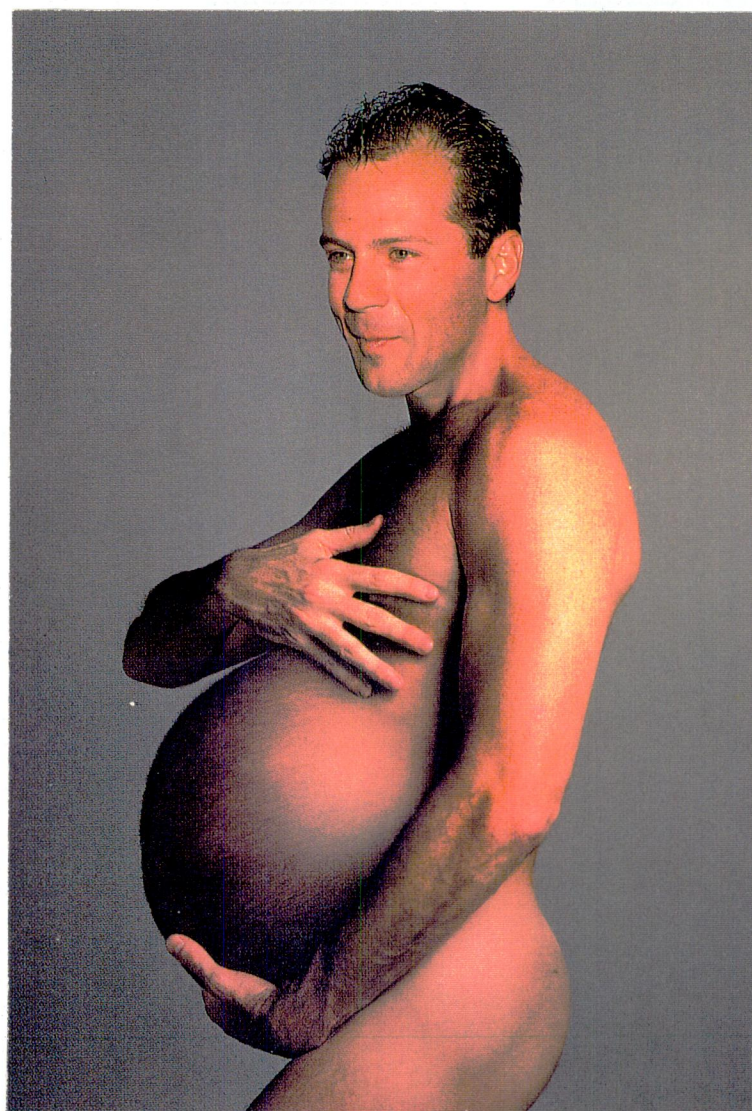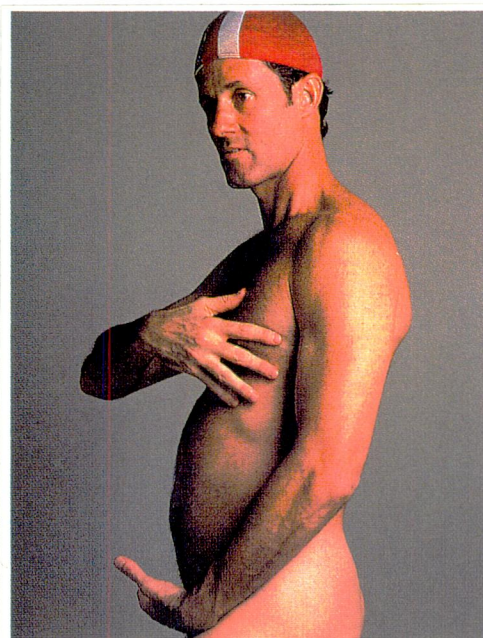
Spy magazine to create a new surrealistic but fully believable image of a pregnant man. The process involved, firstly, taking a photograph of a male torso using a male model. Then this along with a photograph of Bruce Willis' head, were fed into the Quantel digital paintbox, and the designers then used "visual-surgery" capabilities of the computer paintbox to combine the two separate images to create a very believable finished "real" photograph which looks like a very pregnant Bruce Willis.

Another sample of the magic of digital Surrealistic Image Manipulation is displayed in "Odyssey in digital wonderland"(Illus.19. Design World magazine Oct 1990.), an image created for a Washburn Press poster by art director Mark Von Ulrich of Designing. In this picture, Ulrich has turned impossible dreams (like those of Surrealist forerunners Dali or Magritte) into reality, in a staggeringly persuasive example of photorealism made possible through digital manipulation. These images have been done so skillfully with state-of-the-art equipment, that even an expert would have a hard time determining that such images were electronically created. However, common sense should tell your brain that your eyes are being deceived.
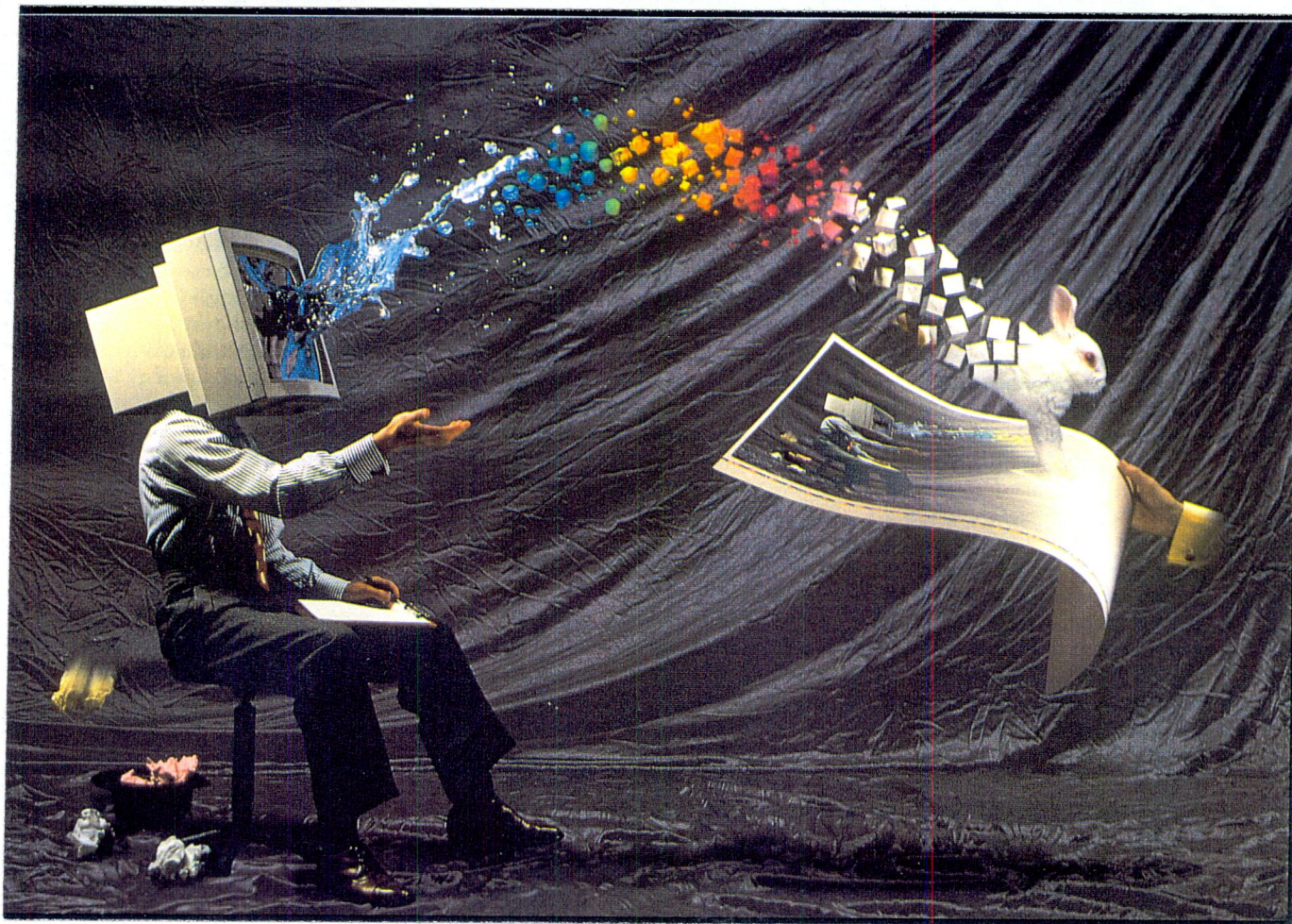

illus 19. The impossible dream made possible "Odyssey in Digital Wonderland" — Mark Von Ulrich, 1992.
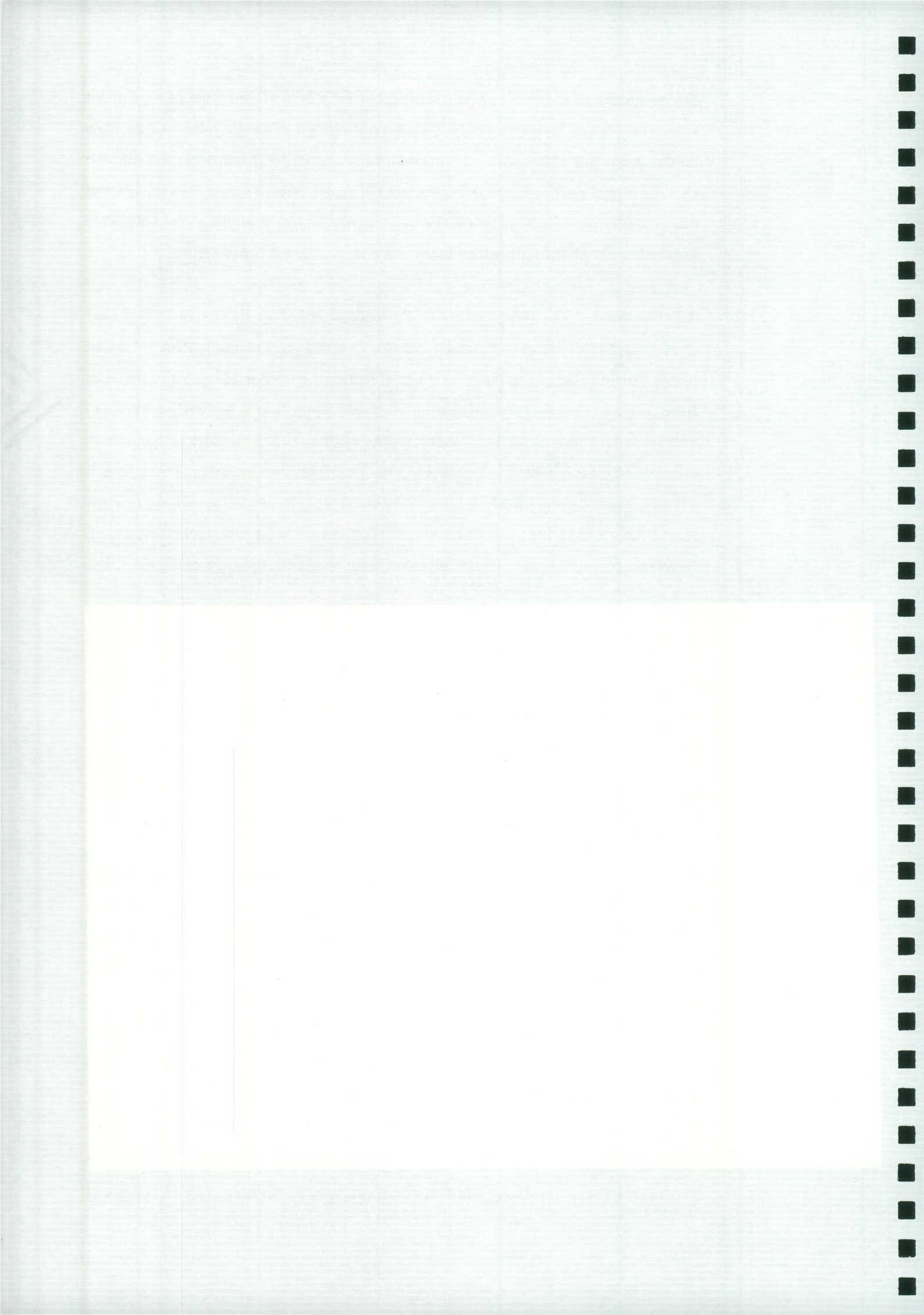
Yet, the persuasive power of the computer is astonishing, a by-product of computer application is the new medium "Virtual-Reality". In hindsight it seems an inevitable progression. The computer can present us with the illusion of a visual "virtual reality" (V.R.) and virtual reality (the 3-D media) is heavily dependent on our sense of sight. It has the ability to simulate physical real life events in a two-dimensional level or in 3-D. Combined with the ultimate distortion of reality produced by Surrealistic Image Manipulation, it creates havoc in the subconscious mental state of the participating public.

The alluring power of digital Surrealistic Image Manipulation. A simulation of the capabilities of computer games acts as a nacortic drug on kids (and even adults !).

illus 20. *Poster campaign for Nintendo Gameboy* — Stephen Glenn & Paul Campion. UK 1992.
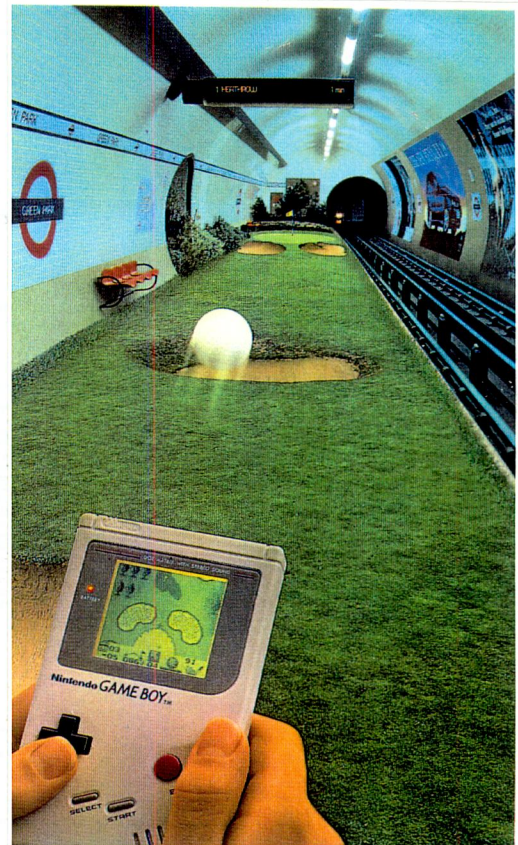
In the early 'seventies, digital images in the form of video and arcade games created a stir and upheaval in our society. Not only do these games stimulate, attract, and make demands of the public on a subconscious level, but arcade games also attack and contribute to the deterioration of the conscious mind of those who involve themselves in what has been described as the "Arcade Games Syndrome". It has even over controlled and re-shaped arcade game users' way of thinking and reaction which may lead to violent responses. An example of this can be seen in Japan, where a new social subclass has evolved, the ATACU. This group of people's lives are so computer mediated that they lost the ability to interact normally; i.e, they live in a surreal world. At least one of them has been proven to be a serial killer, and there is suspicion about all of them in Japan. There is a positive link between computer games and

the inabilities of the ATACU to deal with reality. A psychologist of the ATACU serial killer proposed that his crimes were as a result of his inability to distinguish between video games and real life. ("Reportage", BBC 2, Nov.1992.)

Similarly, at the present, the House of Commons in Britain is investigating the video games industry because of the recent death of a school boy who committed suicide as a result of having failed to complete a Nintendo game. It also creates an upheaval among parents who are worrying because of the computer games which have affected their children's social behaviour. ("World in Action",UTV, Feb.1993.)

While such claims should be met with scepticism (bearing in mind that elements of the youth culture such as Television or Rock and Heavy metal music are constantly being cited as the cause of such tragedies), the claims may be valid in this case. Where music requires only passive appreciation, video games demand an active participation, thus, having greater affect on the participant.

Because digital image manipulation can produce surrealistic, bizarre, and yet fully believable photo-like images, photographic evidence in tomorrow's courtroom may carry no more credibility than today's polygraph results.

EPILOGUE **Departure From Reality :**
Encounter With The Irrational

If a painting is a personal interpretation of an event, and photography is a statement of truth, then Digital-Imaging combines elements of the two. The convenience of the media will insure its succession, but it will take sometime before it replaces its predecessors entirely. It takes important qualities of the two and merges them into a new field. Digital-Imaging has erased the definition between fiction and reality to create and establish a new recognised medium which we, the audience, must learn to accept and live with. We can no longer assume the authenticity of a photograph. Photographic images are no longer guaranteed as visual truth - or even as signifiers with stable meaning and value, because with digital-imaging, truth is diluted everytime it is passed through a computer network. A result of this process is that the original will no longer exist, which puts copyrights in a big grey area because a digital copy of a digital original is every bit as good as the original. After all, this is one of the main attributes of the technology. The danger is, in creative hands technology allows the truth to be distorted. The distorted product has all of the characteristics of being the truth. The real danger is not that the public is presented with a lie, but that this lie discredits the truth and demands that the truth be always greeted with doubt thereafter.

The reprocessing of existing material in documentary media such as Newspapers poses a problem. This repossession means that the original is gone. Without the original we have no truthful point of reference, therefore the final product cannot trusted as truth.

Once upon a time, the expression "a picture is worth a thousand words" might have been true. But now we have to wonder if what the picture saying is worth anything? However, it depends on the picture, and the circumstances. For instance, the Rodney King case was home-videoed showing the whole assault on a black motorist by a gang of police officers in April 1991. "It was fully accepted as evidence of a real event whose meaning was unambiguous and had caused a political and legal uproar in Los Angeles. A human witness would not have had the same authority." (Cameron,1988,p.7.) But if the picture has been manipulated, is the image finished as a document. What's left if we can no longer prove things with pictures.

Most of today's newspapers rely heavily on the technology the computer offers, not only because of it's potential to handle production better but also because of it's value in the creative area where state-of-the-art technology enhanced the paper's

illus 21.
Digital composition
— *Rendezvous in Space and Time*.Kenneth Tang.1993.

Photographs :
Mary Robinson by Kenneth Tang.N.C.A.D.1993.
Sean O'Casey by Gjohn Mili.1964.

illus 22. The gravity of the issue — *Mellotex ad.*1993.

visual appearance. However, by altering the colour and by retouching some part of the photos, they have altered facts of visual reality which eventually devalue newspapers in our society, (as well as deteriorating the relationship between them and their contributors.

An example of this was Eugene.W.Smith, a world-class photojournalist (who has a faithful reputation for his distributors) who has quit Life magazine (twice) over its editor's intention to use some of his photos in ways he did not approve of. The worry is that some editors will start by adjusting the colour or editing the "visual" in some image and go on to a policy of photographic alteration which deliberately takes the truth of the document out of context. Eugene Smith objected to the manner in which, the editor altered the truth/reality of his work in order to make it more aesthetically pleasing.

Therefore, legitimate concerns have arisen about the potential social, economic, and cultural effect of the technology. As photography's 150th Anniversary was celebrated, the National Press Photographer Association of America (NPPA) was calling for a code of ethics to regulate digital image manipulation. The Associated Press was adopting a policy that ensures "the content of a photograph will never be changed or manipulated in any way", and the Norwegian Press Association was proposing that "an international standard warning symbol should be inserted into any manipulated photograph". (The Electronic Times , 1989.). Partly in response to concerns about digital manipulation, the NPPA has distinguished between photojournalism and so-called editorial illustration, and has eliminated the editorial illustration category from its "picture of the year" award, This ironically has raised the value of a photograph to a more prestigious level while at the same time

illus 23.Digital Imaging can diminish space and time even in visual motion. It can bring the dead back to life to play along with those who are still alive in perfect harmony — Picture courtesy of Coke™America.1991.

diminishing the value of the manipulated image.

However, the process of Surrealistic Image Manipulation should maintain its status when confined to the artistic practice in the field of visual communication,

illus 24. Digital Surrealistic Image Manipulation enabled the visual designer to relieve the hectic and serious lifestyle of the business people. — *British Airways ad.* Feb 1993.

From it's origins in the Surrealist Art Movement to its pervasive present in contemporary media. Surrealistic Image Manipulation has undergone generations of development without exhausting it's interest or novelty. Today, we are still exploring the world of Surrealistic Image Manipulation. As we use modern technology to push back the horizon of this curious visual mode of expression. This exploration is as much an investigation of our own perception of existence as it is a creative expression. Whereas once we use words and verbal metaphor to express the unreal or imagined, we now have the means to make surreal-images a visual reality; and each time we do, we come closer to understanding the human condition as more of our psyche is expose for examination.

In conclusion, I think that Surrealistic Image Manipulation should be used with constraint, according to specific guidelines that insure that it is not abused (specifically with regard to journalistic image manipulation.) That Surrealistic Image Manipulation is a powerful instrument for influencing the subconscious has already been demonstrated in this thesis. Therefore, it should be used to the benefit of humankind rather than to its detriment. It's therapeutic and educational potential is as yet to be developed, and I look forward to it's growth in years to come!
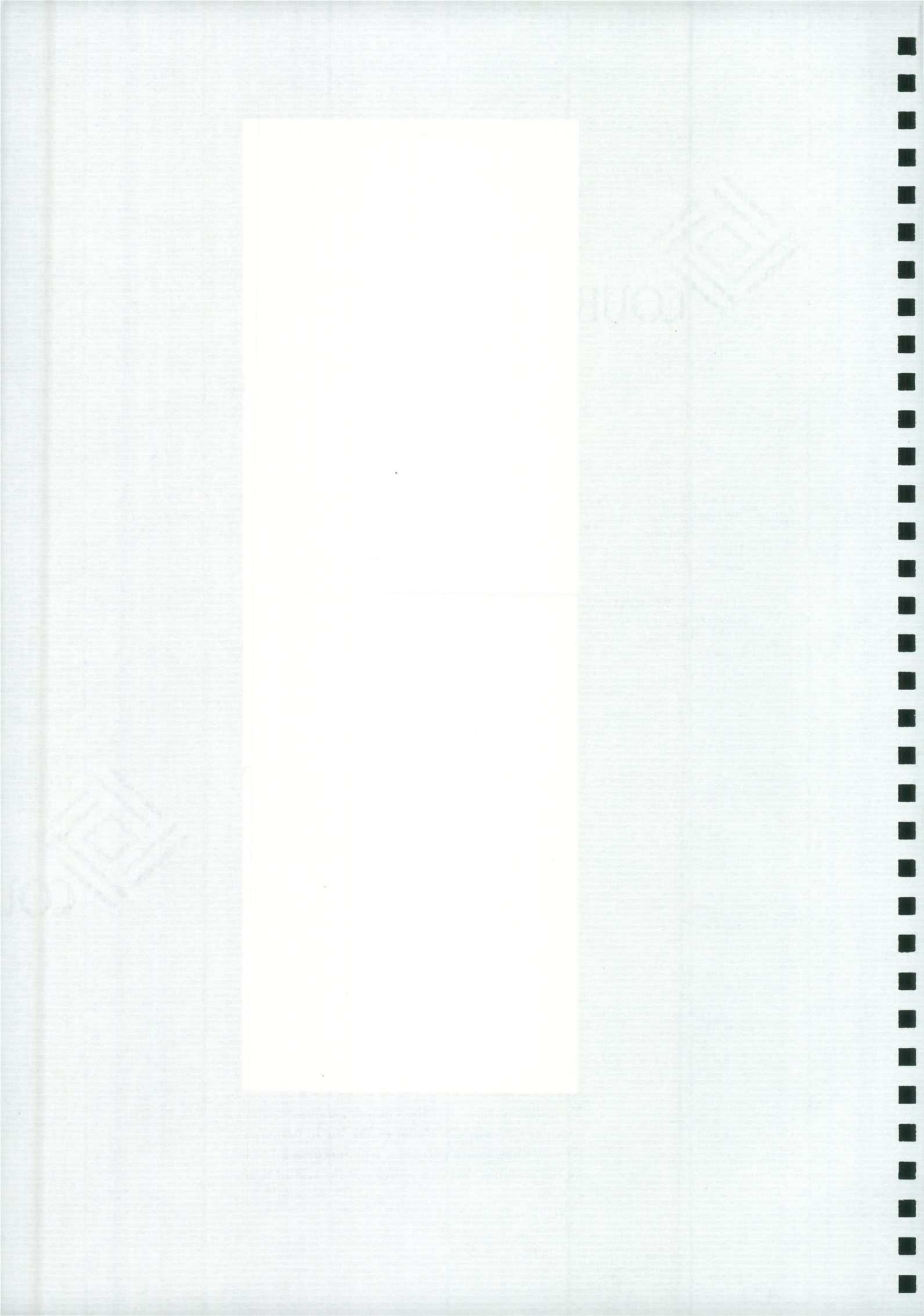
illus.25. Arnold Schwarzenegger, 1991, *Terminator 2* — Half man, half machine.

illus.26. Magritte, 1934, *The Red Model* — Half human, half object.
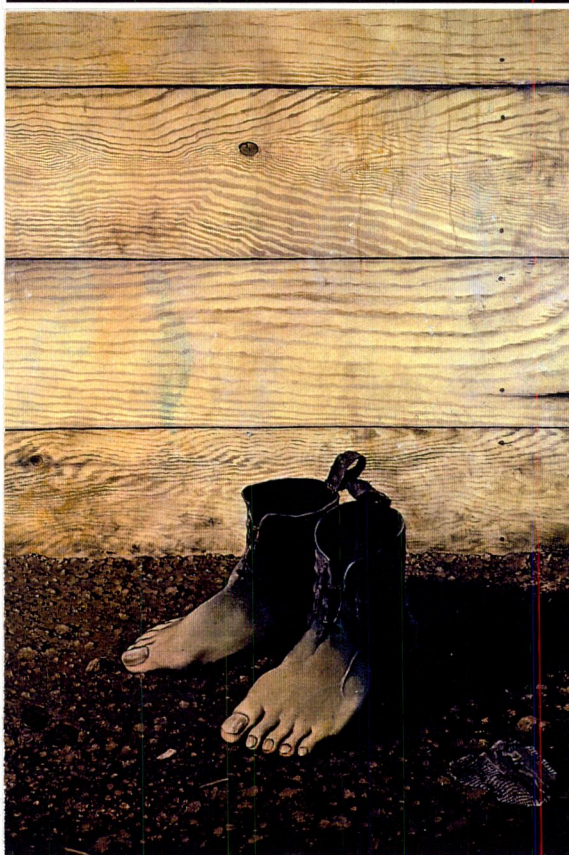
Even the most up - to - the - minute, state - of - the - art piece of work are echoes the basic principal demonstrates many years ago, which proves S.I.M to be the medium that can withstand the test of time.

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