

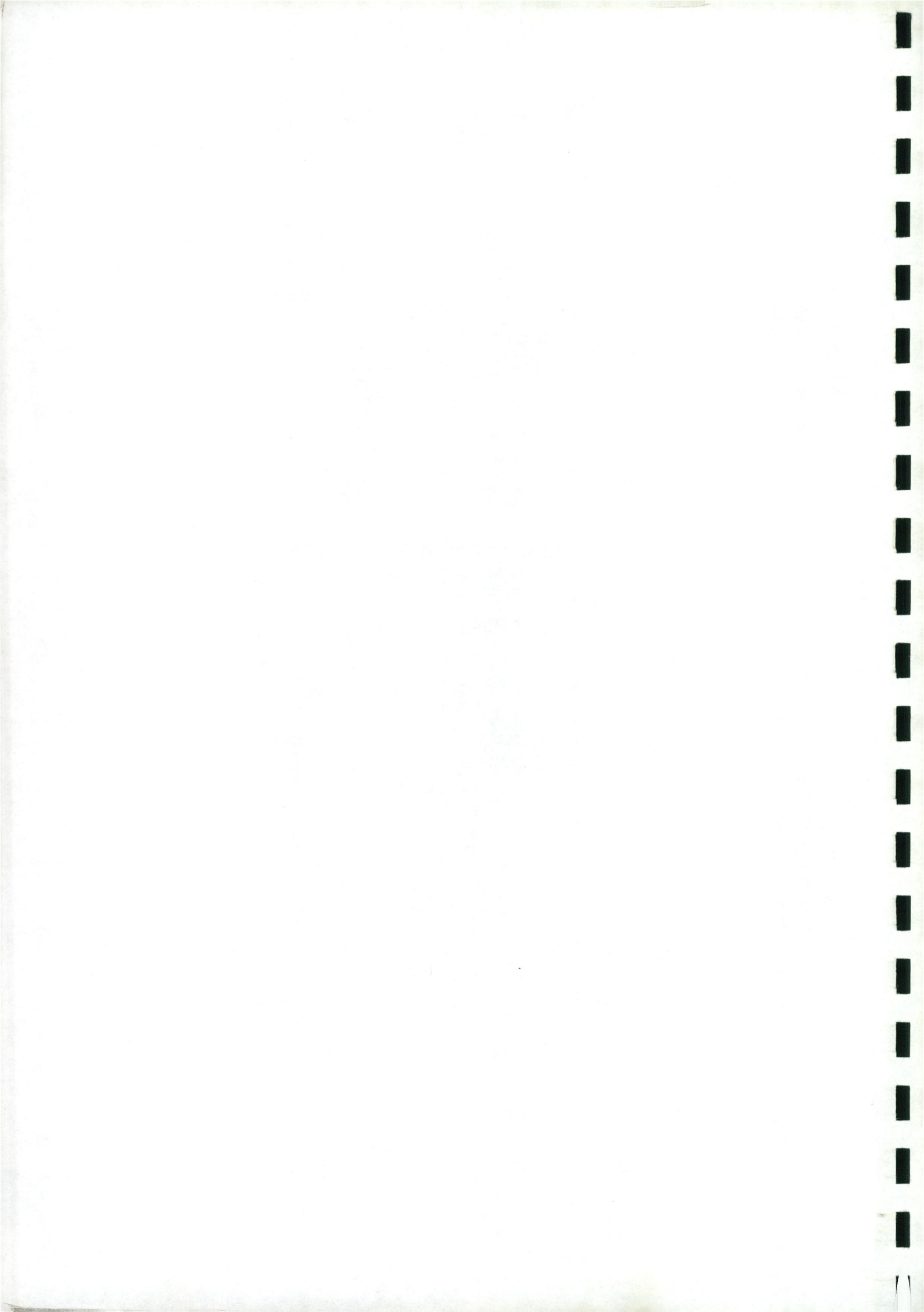
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN  
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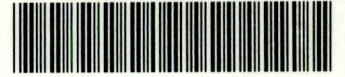
**THE TRUE MEANING OF FORGERY**

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

The subject of forgery is a complex issue which I hope to clarify in this paper. I do not wish merely to give my views on the rights and wrongs of this subject but to provide an insight into something which has frustrated and intrigued the art world for time immemorial.

Many people are unclear about the true meaning of forgery. Forgery and similar terms are often expressed incorrectly. This gives rise to a false dichotomy of the meaning of the subject.

With the help of relevant case studies I will portray the subject in ways in which it is rarely seen or understood.

For reasons of clarification and definition I will give a brief synopsis of this thesis including some important artists who are present within it.

Because of the uncertainty about the meaning of forgery, a concise definition of the different types of forgery will be given. Case studies will be provided to exemplify the types of forgery at work.

In Chapter Two I wish to deal with a particular subject which has long been debated concerning forgery: that of aesthetic value of forgery.

Forgery is often regarded as being of less aesthetic value than authentic works. I believe this is due to the economics of certain situations; the loss of prestige when a forgery is discovered and the feelings of hurt and revenge incurred. As many forgeries are never discovered or indeed never admitted to by proud owners, I propose the hypothesis "that good forgery gives the same aesthetic feeling as authentic work."

I wish to deal also with the reasoning behind the creating of forgery because it is often interesting to see why the forger perpetrated the fraud. Although in many cases this reasoning was economic, there seem in some cases to be underlying factors, most prominent of these being the need for revenge.

Through this investigation I hope to provide a glimpse into the lives and minds of these colourful characters.

In dealing with different types of critical investigation of forgery, some figures appear as recurring examples. This repetition is necessary however, as these are some of the better known cases of forgery which have occurred.

Therefore it is necessary to clarify these characters for they have different levels of importance throughout the paper. These persons include:

**Han Van Meegeren**, a painter of moderate talent who entered into the art world with applause for his fine realistic work. As the art market changed with the advent and popularity of Abstraction, his refusal to accept change led to his dismissal by art critics, and his hounding by the art world. Van Meegeren sought his revenge by creating beautiful

forgeries which he hoped would prove he was a great master, when he revealed the truth (something he failed to do except when faced with prison for another crime, one he did not commit, that of collaboration with the Nazis).

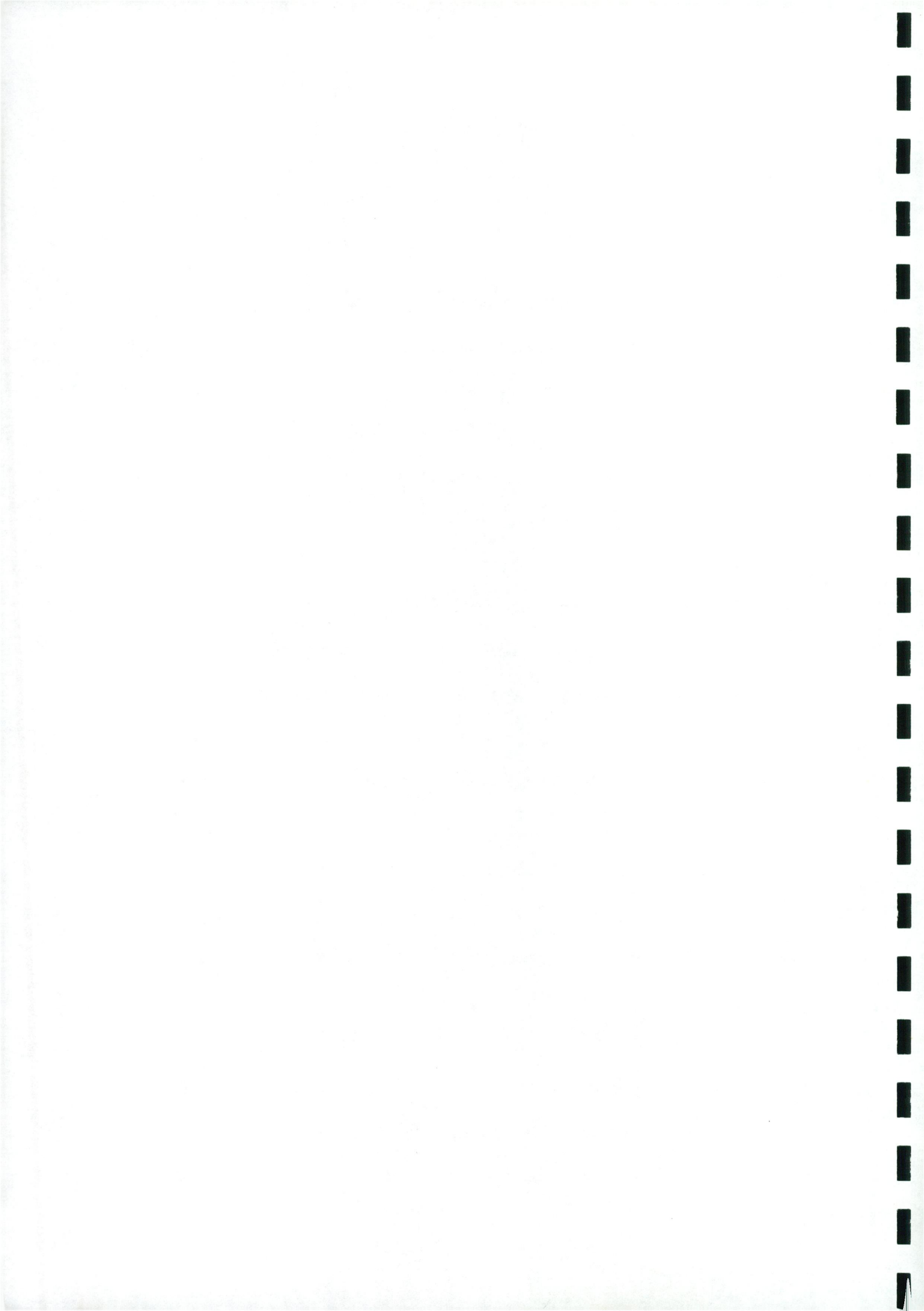
**Giorgio De Chirico**, not unlike Van Meegeren, had initial success in his "metaphysical period", enabling him to be adopted by the surrealists who saw him as their King. De Chirico's lapse into neo-classicism was branded treachery by his one-time friends who described his work as academic at best. De Chirico sought his revenge by forging his previous (quite successful) work and selling it to dealers as being from his "metaphysical period" (1913-1918).

**Alceo Dossena** was a respected craftsman, who despite all his fine work never really came to the attention of the critics. He specialised in creating Renaissance pastiches and other classical work. It appears he was duped by middle men who bought his work at a fraction of the amount for which they were later to be resold as originals. By accident when Dossena took his buyers to court, their fraudulent practises were revealed.

**Tom Keating** is perhaps the best example of recent forgers. Keating sought to challenge a corrupt art world, as he saw it, by producing numerous forgeries of the work of Samuel Palmer. Much of this was revealed when Keating confessed to all to an English newspaper.

The approach to this thesis will be cautious. However there are certain theories and subjects which I want to cover and to prove. Forgery is not a subject which is well examined or written about in books, however there seems to be a great deal of interesting





the subject judging by the reactions of many magazine articles. I wish to tap this interest by providing an eloquent interpretation of forgery by telling the reader how, why and when the subject manifests itself and why forgeries are important as objects of beauty.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A DEFINITION OF FORGERY

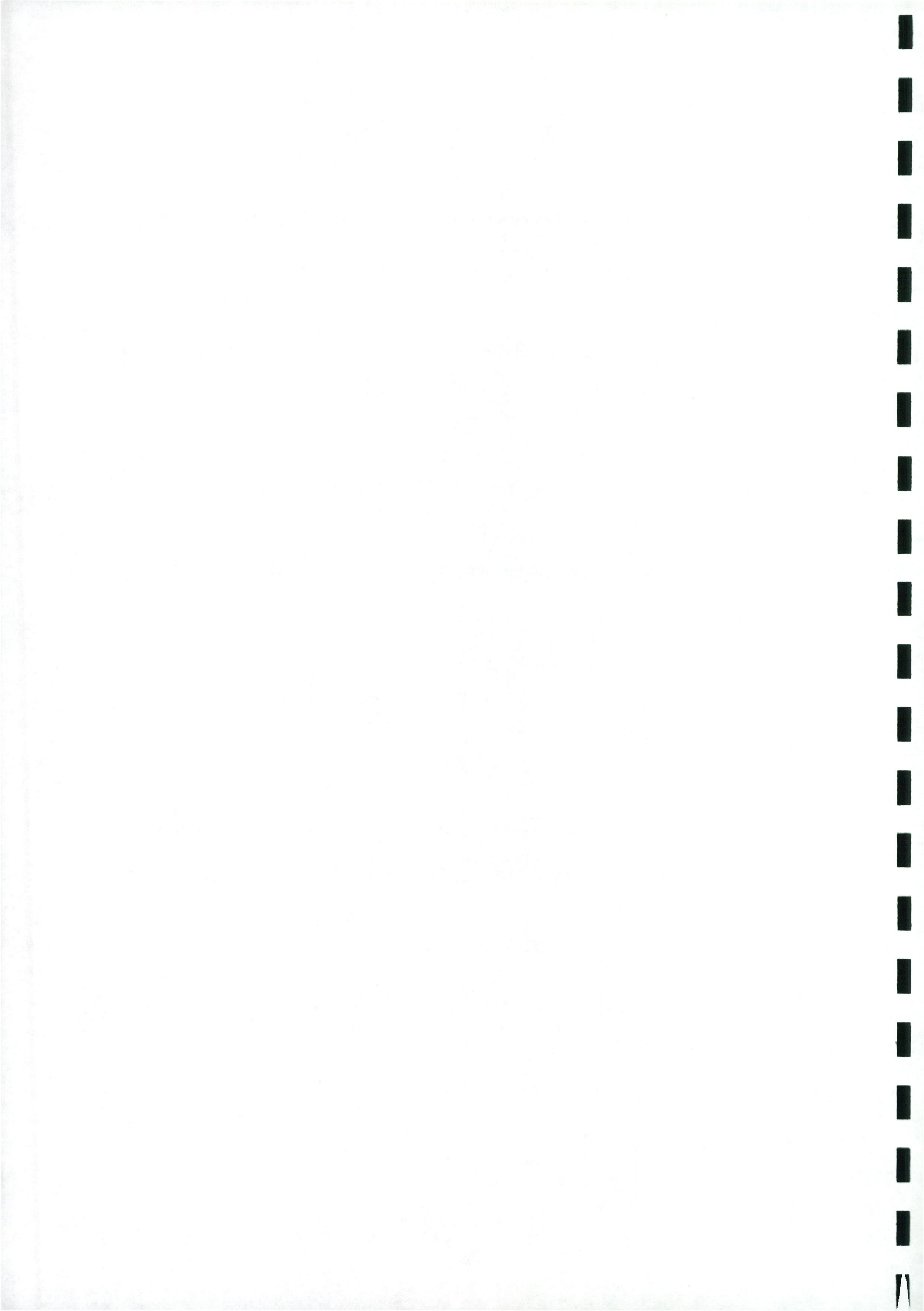
Forgery is perhaps one of the most complex mysteries which exists in the art world today. It is there in every field of art, no matter how intricate or obscure. According to some experts, "*Forgery is the most specific offence concerning works of art and while anyone is open to the practice of fraud or theft only a select few have the skill to carry out a forgery*" (Chatelain, 1979, p11).

The many different interpretations of the word forgery often lead to some confusion. The first task is thus to define the various offences which are said to be forgeries (This I hope will give a better understanding of the subject). obviously it is impossible for me to know for certain that I will include all known types and forms of forgery. I would like to include, and give a reasonable description of works which might appear to be not wholly authentic. These descriptions will take the form of precise interpretations, followed by relevant and appropriate case studies which will deal with events concerning their status as forgery.

It should be remembered that not all inauthentic works are of an illegal nature and not all acts of forgery are spurious.

## Description of Forgery

1. A work based on several elements from different works of art which is represented as the original.
2. A work of an artist with his/her own mark (not previously there) affixed to increase the value.
3. A work not executed by a master but signed by him.
4. A mechanical copy (pastiche) by the master which is not of any particular work of his own but is of his earlier style.
5. A replica, a copy by an artist, perhaps with help from his assistants, of one of his own works.
6. A work in the style of a certain period represented as a genuine artefact of that period. This work might be attributed to the master without the knowledge of the artist.
7. A copy. This is a precise reproduction of the work of an artist, though not always fraudulent are often represented as originals.



8. A work based on a design by an artist but executed without his authorization or permission.

(Sartwell, 1988, pp361-2)

### The de Chirico Affair

The life and work of Giorgio de Chirico gives us a remarkable insight into several different types of forgery:

1. Works of art based on several elements from different works which is represented as the original - pastiche.
2. A work of an artist with his/her own mark (not previously there) affixed to increase its value.
3. A work not executed by a master but signed by him.
4. A mechanical copy (pastiche) by the master which is not of any particular work of his own but of an earlier style.

(Sartwell, 1988, p361)

Throughout his career as an artist, de Chirico made replicas of his own work, but false dates on others and was himself a victim of forgers as we will go on to see.

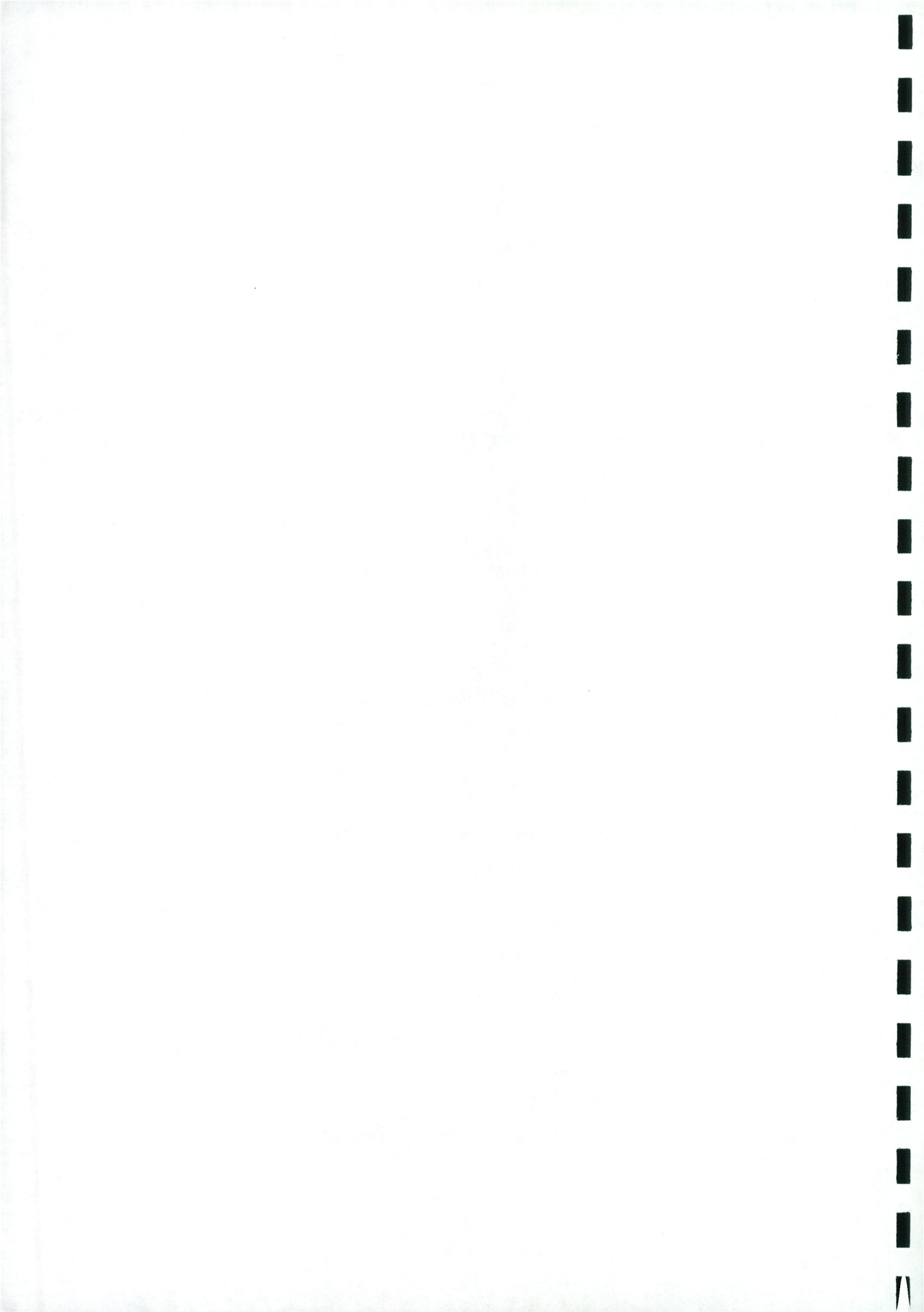




Plate 1

Metaphysical period painting by de Chirico, known to be authentic



De Chirico earned a considerable reputation as a great painter primarily through painting of his "metaphysical period", which he painted from 1909 until 1918. *"This period was epitomised with enigmatic metaphysical pictures with their quiet and deeply shadowed pictures with their quiet and deeply shadowed piazzas inhabited by mannequins, maps, cannons and artichokes"* (Tully, 1994, p154). *"His style was highly individual and emotionally charged art that subsequently became the most important formative influence on the surrealists"* (Bronin, 1982, p209).

The surrealists, recognising his potential readily crowned him their usurper king, adopting him and his ideas and praising these saying they believed a *"veritable modern mythology is being formed"* (Bronin, 1982, p214).

De Chirico's fame didn't last long however. After about 1918, on the completion of his "metaphysical period", and a reversion to a new-classical style the surrealists publicly ostracised him, condemning him as academic at best, they proclaimed themselves true heirs to the legacy which he began.

De Chirico's fall from grace didn't effect eh demand for his work from the "metaphysical period", however. If anything, demand seemed to increase.

In 1926 Jacques Doucet, a Paris collector, enquired with de Chirico about the possible acquisition of a "metaphysical period" work. Unfortunately he now longer owned any. So, according to de Chirico's ex-wife, Raissa Gurievich, de Chirico provided Doulet with a new painting which he back dated and sold as a vintage painting. *"When Georges wants*

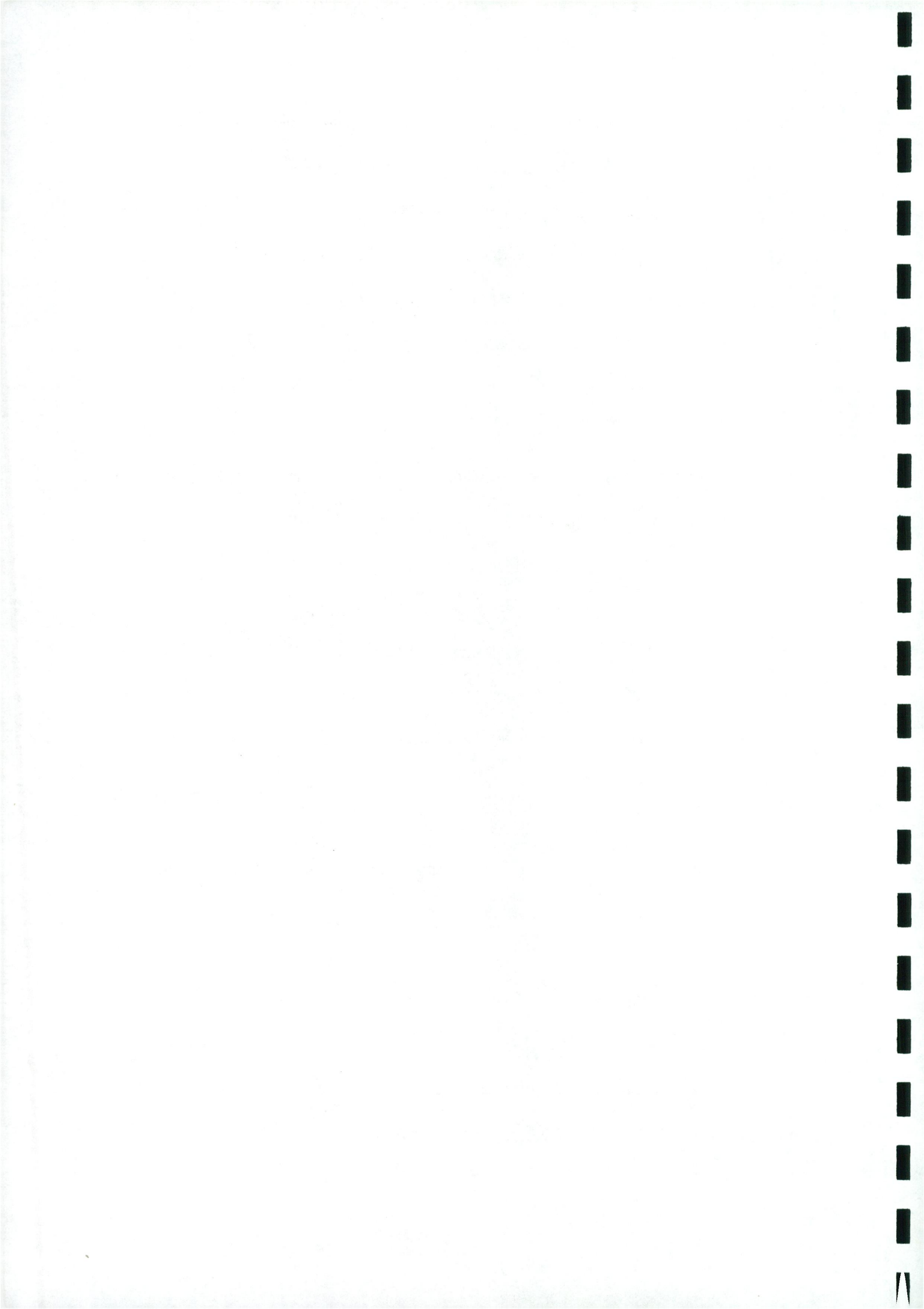




Plate 2

Metaphysical style painting, painted by de Chirico well after  
he had finished his first successful period



*something obstacles don't matter... what interested him was money" (Tully, 1994, p156).*

Perhaps what also interested him was the first way he could revenge himself on an art market which had turned its back on him.

According to Paolo Boldocci (a de Chirico expert and member of the Authentication Committee of the Fondazione Giorgio Isa de Chirico in Rome),

*From the mid '30s until '42 or '43, fifty or sixty paintings had been listed (and painted) that bear earlier dates, 1912 to 1917, all "metaphysical subjects"... From the late '40s to the late '60s de Chirico made a lot of Mannequins and Piazzas, I can't tell how many, only a few are back dated, most have no date. (Tully, 1994, p157)*

So here we see acknowledgement by experts and by his family that de Chirico was wont to fabricate. These statements also go on to prove the point made by Jean Chatelain that *"no objects are fakes in themselves, it is only the fraudulent transaction that makes the object a forgery"* (Chatelain, 1979, p31).

So we see that by de Chirico's own action he created forgeries of his own work, giving us a better notion to the meaning of the fourth type of forgery.

De Chirico also desired revenge on the surrealists. He did this by condemning authentic work in their possession (i.e. by saying that works of his from the "metaphysical period" owned by the surrealists were forgeries). According to his ex-wife, Raissa, *"He liked the game, this idea of being able to deceive and make fun of the surrealists, not thinking that the surrealists were much more cunning than he"* (Tully, 1994, p156).

By the late 1920s and early 1930s surrealists like Max Garst had already begun to poke fun at de Chirico, perhaps because they were aware of what he was doing. Garst did this by purposely faking his work and misspelling his name (something later repeated by Andy Warhol in the 1960s).

The surrealists had in turn begun to commission fakes of de Chirico's work, often painted on materials he could not have used, for example French canvas and stretchers, unobtainable in Italy during the First World War. Paolo Boldocci claims that

*Within the climate of disrepute created by Breton and his friends, fertile terrain was alide for the rendering of the first forgeries, they were produced and sold precisely within surrealist circles. Because of their provenance de Chirico was not believed when he began to denounce copies of his work. (Tully, 1994, p154)*

One favourite method of *pastiche* used by forgers of de Chirico paintings was to reverse the images from his authentic "metaphysical" work and combine different elements from various pictures, thus providing evidence of the first Article of forgery.

According to the German art historian, Weiland Schmied, another member of the Authentication committee of the Fondazione Giorgio Isa de Chirico), another method of forgery used on de Chirico involved blank canvas being "*slipped in flat against the back of authentic de Chirico paintings and then brought to the artist so he could put his notarised seal*" (Tully, 1994, p155). Schmied says that "*Thousands of empty canvases were signed*" (Tully, 1994, p155).

Because of the extent to which blank canvases were signed, it is obvious to the outside viewer that there must have been quite an industry of fake de Chirico paintings, backed by the art establishment and because of the demand for "metaphysical work". In this case we see *"fakes show what people really wanted, they show the shift in market forces"* (Tully, 1994, p155). This case also show how Articles 2 and 3 come together. In this case de Chirico unwittingly signed works that had not been painted by him. Thus forgery had taken place. His notarisation of works increased their value. Although not in the strictest sense a forgery, it remains within the boundary of the subject.

It is important to remember that any tampering with a piece of art can be seen as being forgery. Thus in the strictest sense, even restoration, which deals with the changing of a work, is a form in inauthenticity.

### The Copy

*"A copy is a precise reproduction of a work of an artist but executed without his authorization or permission"* (Sartwell, 1988, p362).

According to Jean Chatelain, author of *Forgeries in the Art World*, copies are a repetition of a work of art by someone other than the original artist. Sometimes, if the copy is good enough, it is hard to distinguish it from a replica, at least when various artists worked in the same studio. Because of this there is an extremely fine dividing line between a replica

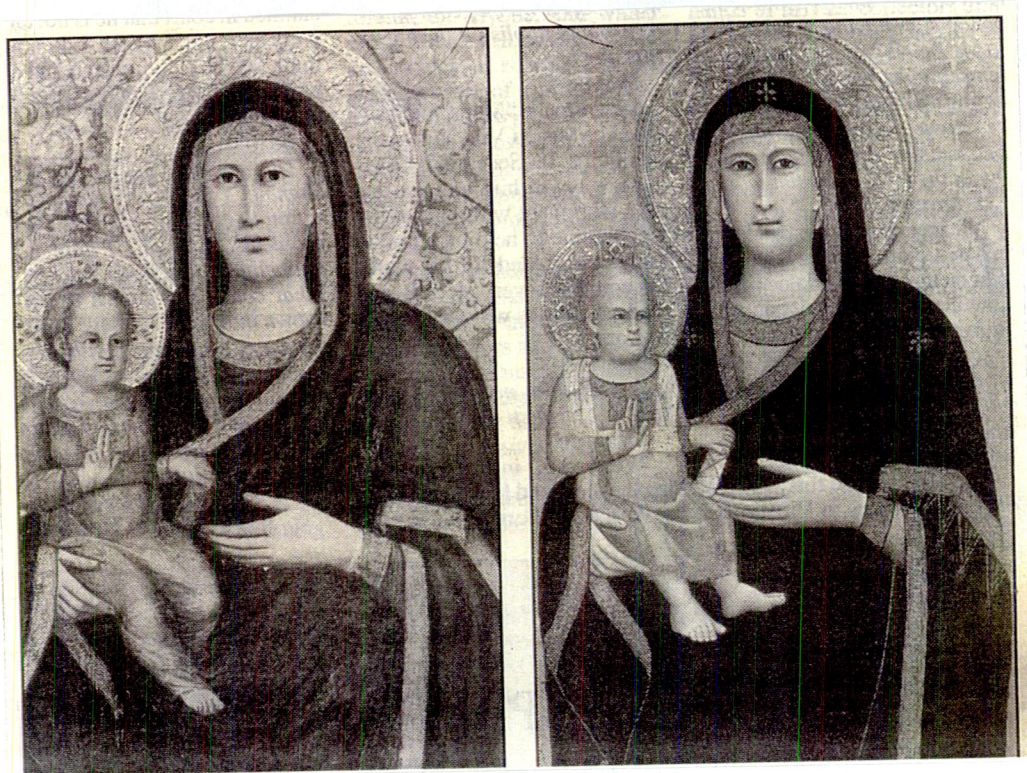


Plate 3

Two paintings featuring *The Madonna and Child*, the second one being a replica of the first. They were painted by the Renaissance painter Giotto



painted by a master with some help from his students and a copy made by a pupil perhaps with some corrections by the original painter (Chatelain, 1979, p33).

Another important detail concerning copies is that few fakes can be copies as the very existence of an original makes the unmasking of the deception relatively easy. Paul Gosling tells us that "*copies are often commissioned by owners who want the original kept safe while having the copy on show*" (Gosling, 1995, p15). The same newspaper article tells us that "*copies are a growing element of the art market*" (Gosling, 1995, p15). Many major collectors cannot buy certain pictures and so it is that they purchase copies.

During the nineteenth century, many paintings were copies. In the way today where we might take a photograph or get a postcard of a certain work, during the at period it was acceptable for art lovers to commission copies of famous work for their homes.

According to *Art in America*,

*Copying was long considered essential to an artist's education, copying well enough to fool an expert was taken as a sign of an artist' expertise... Copies may be made out of respect of devotion or out of a guileless desire to preserve or return to the past. (Tallman, 1990, p76)*

To illustrate how copies sometimes can be mistaken for originals, we have only to look at the painting of *Pope Leo X* by Andrea del Sarto. This was magnificent copy of a painting by Raphael on the same subject. According to Crispin Sartwell the painting was unhesitatingly accepted as a Raphael by some of the most eminent authorities. Both

claimed for centuries to be originals. Improvements in scientific authentication have proven that this is untrue (Sartwell, 1988, p362).

### The Replica

"A copy by an artist, perhaps with the help of his assistants, of one of his own works"  
(Satwell, 1988, p362)

A replica is a work that for whatever reason an artist may repeat quite deliberately. This may be because he is obsessed with a particular theme or because he lacks imagination or for other reasons unknown to anyone but the artist. Today replicas are no longer fashionable but they were for some time and neither artists nor art lovers were shocked by the idea. If we look back to the case of de Chirico we can see that there was demand for his work, although no replicas were officially made. The artists contented himself by creating pastiches of his early work whenever opportunity presented itself. Artists such as Rubens, Rebrandt and Raphael were among the host of other artists who created replicas. It is easy to see that before the advent of photography the demand for the same painting could only be solved by painting more than one copy of the original. We can see this in this example of early renaissance painting featured in *Art Newspaper* , of two paintings of the *Madonna and Child* by Giotto de Bondone.

Another fine example of a replica is that of Mazeppa by Horace Vernat (Mazeppa was a Ukrainian hero who was sent out on to the steppe lashed naked to a wild horse and who

survived). The artists sold this piece to the famous Musée Calvert in Avignon. Vernat being so pleased with his work painted a replica in three days. This he promised to a rich collector. However the Museum hastened to purchase this also. Both paintings were displayed alongside each other so that the visitors might admire the artists amazing skill.

Alceo Dossena was thought to be a modest sculptor. His work was based on free borrowing and pastiche. His was used to the advantage of others and to the passing on of forgery as you will see. The following is the type of forgery used:

*Works of art in the style of a certain period, represented as a genuine artefact of that period. This work might be attributed to master without the knowledge of the artist." (Sartwell, 1988, p362).*

Dossena used great style and taste to evoke the world of antiquity, of Michelangelo and other sculptors of the high renaissance. Outside influences on the sale of Dossena's work took on a malevolent character. According to Jean Chatelain, "*A Renaissance style mausoleum in the manner of Mino Fiesole left his workshop to be sold for 25,000 Lire, to sold of 6 million Lire*" (Chatelain, 1979, p15). This resale was due to a series of transactions which led the sculpture to change hands through a number of reputable dealers and thus there was no doubt as to the provenance of the piece.

Dossena's most famous creation is a one metre 75cm tall statue of Athena which had been authenticated as being of Renaissance period (and later resold) by Jacob Hirsch, one of the most famous antique dealers of the period.

The affair was uncovered after a dispute between Dossena and one of the middlemen. The forgeries were discovered,

*because of pressing need of cash to solve his family problems, he asked for more money than usual. When he was met with a blank refusal, he decided to go to court to get a fairer price for the work, which was so profitable to other people. The legal enquiry led to the discovery of an extremely busy workshop where Dossena perfected his masterpieces.* (Chatelain, 1979, p15)

There was much lingering doubt about the extent of Dossena's knowledge of the affair. Crispin Sartwell in his essay "Art of the Spurious", describes Dossena as "*the greatest forger of sculpture*" (Sartwell, 1988, p361) and even speculates as to whether Dossena had merely repaired Renaissance sculpture.

Dossena's innocence was proved however, according to Jean Chatelain. When Dossena took Jacob Hirsch (the eminent dealer who had bought and authenticated the sculpture) to visit his workshop. Hirsch had refused to believe that the Athena was a fake. It was only when Dossena produced a hand he had broken off the statute to make it look more authentic and showed it to be a perfect fit, that Hirsch finally relented.

Dossena had not been the only artist to claim to have fooled the experts. A sculptor called John Lucas appeared after the Victoria and Albert Museum purchased a Leonardo bust. However, much weight in opinions have turned against his claim. According to Graham Hughes,

*The newest theory is that Lucas may not have been the true maker, but may have wanted to bask in the glory of an early Leonardo original, which Lucas simply repaired and smartened up for sale, just as any furniture*

*restorer will do today to get a better price of eradicating damage on a Chippendale cabinet. (Hughes, 1990, p139)*

It might also be argued that Lucas may just have repaired the piece, though it is equally possible that, as in the case of Dossena, the art establishment were smarting from being fooled and to save face were blaming Lucas.

In both cases though, the work was presented as being of a style of a certain period, i.e. the Renaissance and represented as artifacts from the Renaissance.

As we see, the refusal of experts to acknowledge their mistakes often leads to the continuation of forgery. It is thus sometimes hard to define and show forgery when experts deny its very existence in famous works of art.

Although similar, both cases are opposites. The type of forgery Lucas was involved in was not without his own knowledge. Dossena had no knowledge of the forgery and was seeking to create art for art's sake.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE AESTHETICS OF FORGERY

In this argument the hypothesis taken is 'Good forgery gives the same aesthetic feeling as authentic work'.

Forgery is a topic which inspires an interesting debate in the aesthetic world as to whether the subject (forgery) can be reasoned as having lesser or greater aesthetic worth for whatever reason. In my mind forgery does inspire some change in my feeling towards a particular piece of work. That change however is not in the aesthetic, but something else. I will go on to show, as the great twentieth century connoisseur Giuseppe Cellini points out, "*Beauty, not authenticity, is the first and only criterion in judging art*" (Headington, 1986, p103).

Briefly I would like to say that most experts who claim forgery lessens aesthetic worth go by principles like "*Aesthetic difference is perceived through deeper analysis*" (Goodman, 1983, p95), or claims that "*Forgery lacks originality*" (Wallace, 1987, p358).

It is therefore relevant that, as Mark Jones of the British Museum points out, "*fakes represent a fatal challenge to the notion of a pure aesthetic response to works of art*" (Jones, 1989, p423).

The best known argument against the aesthetics of forgery is that made by Nelson Goodman in his essay, "art and Authenticity". The main thrust of Goodman's argument

is that *"If no-one can find a difference between two pieces by merely looking at them, there is no reason there is not an aesthetic difference between them"* (Goodman, 1983, p99).

Goodman establishes for himself that *"merely looking can never establish that two paintings are aesthetically the same... something that is beyond the reach of looking is admitted by the viewer as an aesthetic difference"*<sup>1</sup> (Goodman, 1983, p95).

After a time, if a difference is found, i.e. that one of the works is a forgery, then,

*the way in which they differ constitutes an aesthetic judgement between them for me now because my knowledge of the way in which they differ bears upon the role of the present looking in training my perception in looking to discriminate between the pictures and between others... This knowledge instructs me to look at these two pictures differently.* (Goodman, 1983, p94)

I would like to take some time to counter the arguments made by Nelson Goodman. I believe that that failure to recognise deceptive forgery may lead Goodman to experience the same aesthetic feeling for forgery and authentic work. I don't believe Goodman has made it clear why he believes a forgery deserves automatic depletion of aesthetic worth. Foster and Morton, in their essay, "Goldman, Forgery and Aesthetics", say *"To answer questions on properties determining how we look at pictures requires an account of aesthetic properties as well as a theory of art. Goodman puts such questions on hold"*

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<sup>1</sup>Nelson Goodman had sought to say that "merely looking", as he called, from the entrenched view point must mean deeper scientific analysis if need be. *"Does merely looking at mean without an instrument... this may be unfair to a man who requires glasses"*. Goodman also cites the example of *"Certain miniature illuminations or Assyrian seals which we can hardly distinguish from the crudest copies without using strong glass"*. Goodman also asks the question, *"And who is supposed to be doing the looking? Is it some cross-eyed wrestler who can see no difference? Or no-one, not even the most skilled expert who can ever tell the pictures apart?"* (Goodman, 1983, p94).

(Foster & Morton, 1991, p156). Therefore there may be something wrong with forgery, but Nelson Goodman hasn't proved it to concern a lessening of aesthetics.<sup>2</sup>

Goodman has also analyzed the term "perceived difference" as being "merely looking at them [the works of art]". He insists we will see that that which is unperceived does have a bearing on aesthetic value of work.

*"If no aesthetic difference between pictures can be perceived, an aesthetic difference between them rests entirely upon what is or is not proved by means of "merely looking at""* (Goodman, 1983, p95). Again, Goodman seeks to say that we are not allowed to receive aesthetic feeling without first scientifically exploring a work's authenticity.

The majority of people who view art, however, are not art educated nor are they scientifically educated, nor would they carry around with them, at all times, the means for the scientific examination of art work. In my view, the viewer takes his aesthetic feeling from casual viewing, with his own eyes. It is not for others to instruct the view on how he can or cannot feel

Even with the knowledge of a forgery it is still possible to extract aesthetic worth from an artwork. One notable example of this is Richard Payne Knight who *"On hearing that the 'Flora Cameo' which he both for a high priced antique was a modern fake by*

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<sup>2</sup>The Entrenched "common Sense Argument" which Goodman sought bring down insisted.

1. That there can be no aesthetic difference without a perceptual difference (this Goodman takes a meaning "by merely looking at").
2. That there is no perceptual difference between an original work and a deceptive forgery.
3. Therefore there is no aesthetic difference between an original artwork and a deceptive forgery.

(Forger's Art, p95)



*Piotrucci... claimed the unique beauty of the stone was sufficient reason for the price"*  
(Jones, 1989, p422).

There are also many examples of dealers and collectors who refuse to believe certain pieces of work are fakes, even when presented with overwhelming scientific evidence. For example in the case of Han Van Meegeren. According to art historian H. B. Werness, "*After his confession he was not believed. How could it be that he [Van Meegeren] had painted some of Holland's most important national treasures?"* (Werness, 1983, p46).

Van Meegeren had successfully passed off a number of paintings most notably seven paintings by the seventeenth century Dutch painter Vermeer.

The French Vermeer expert, Jean Decoen, took the position that two of the Van Meegeren paintings, *The Supper at Emmaus* and *The Last Supper* were actually genuine Vermeers. "*Decoen convinced the owner of "The Last Supper"... who supported Decoens efforts to prove authenticity of his paintings... Even in the face of irrefutable scientific evidence his printed re-iterations kept the issue alive"* (Werness, 1993, p44).

I believe such belief on the part of Decoen should disprove Goodman's statement that knowledge of the forgery will effect aesthetic judgement. The opposite proved to be the case as Decoen denied the possibility of forgery in these works. Alfred Lessings, in his essay, "What is Wrong with Forgery", agrees. "*Decoen was justified in his actions since he tried to preserve a painting which is aesthetically important for the only reason that a painting can be aesthetically important, namely for its beauty"* (Lessings, 1993, p61-61).

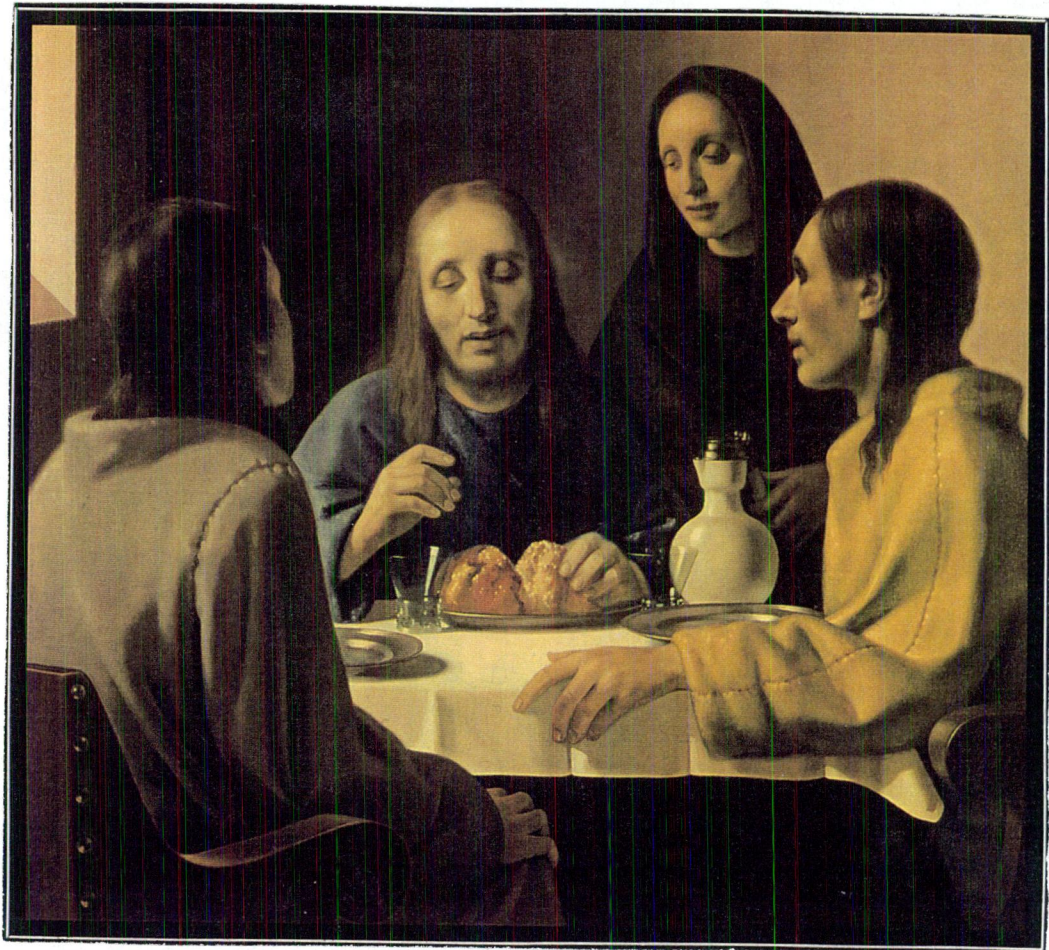


Plate 4

*Christ and His Disciples at Emmaus*, by Van Meegeren, "rediscovered" in 1937.  
This painting was one of a number of successful forgeries produced  
by Van Meegeren from 1932 to 1943.



Plate 5

*The Adulteress*, painted by Van Meegeren in 1943. This was used to swindle Göring, who returned two hundred plundered Dutch masterpieces in its stead.

The case of Van Meegeren is not unique. We have seen already how Dossena's Sculptures had been derided and his honesty questioned.

There is also the case of *The Venus of the Turnips*, made by an Italian sculptor called Gemonese.

*Tired of awaiting the acclaim of critics, in 1937 he sculpted an antique style Venus and buried it in a field, where a few months later a farmer dug it up while harvesting his turnips. Most experts thought it was an antique and refused to believe it was a fake until Cremonese proved them wrong by replacing the statue's nose that he had broken off and kept. (Chatelain, 1979, p14)*

Again, in this example we see how the experts acknowledged the beauty of an art object yet rejected the possibility of forgery as the work was aesthetically beautiful.

Like Alfred Lessing's earlier statement, Mark Jones of the British Museum believes that "*Aesthetic feeling transcends all knowledge or deception concerning forgery*" (Jones, 1989, p423).

In a different attack on the aesthetics of forgery through his essay "Art Forgeries and Inherent Value", Graham Wallace argues this lessening of aesthetic worth is because forgery lacks the originality which Wallace describes as "inherent value". Wallace says,

*We must stop insisting that only visual properties and characteristics can be relevant... we must assume... being derivative or being an original piece of work will be as potentially as relevant as having certain lines of colour. (Wallace, 1987, p361)*

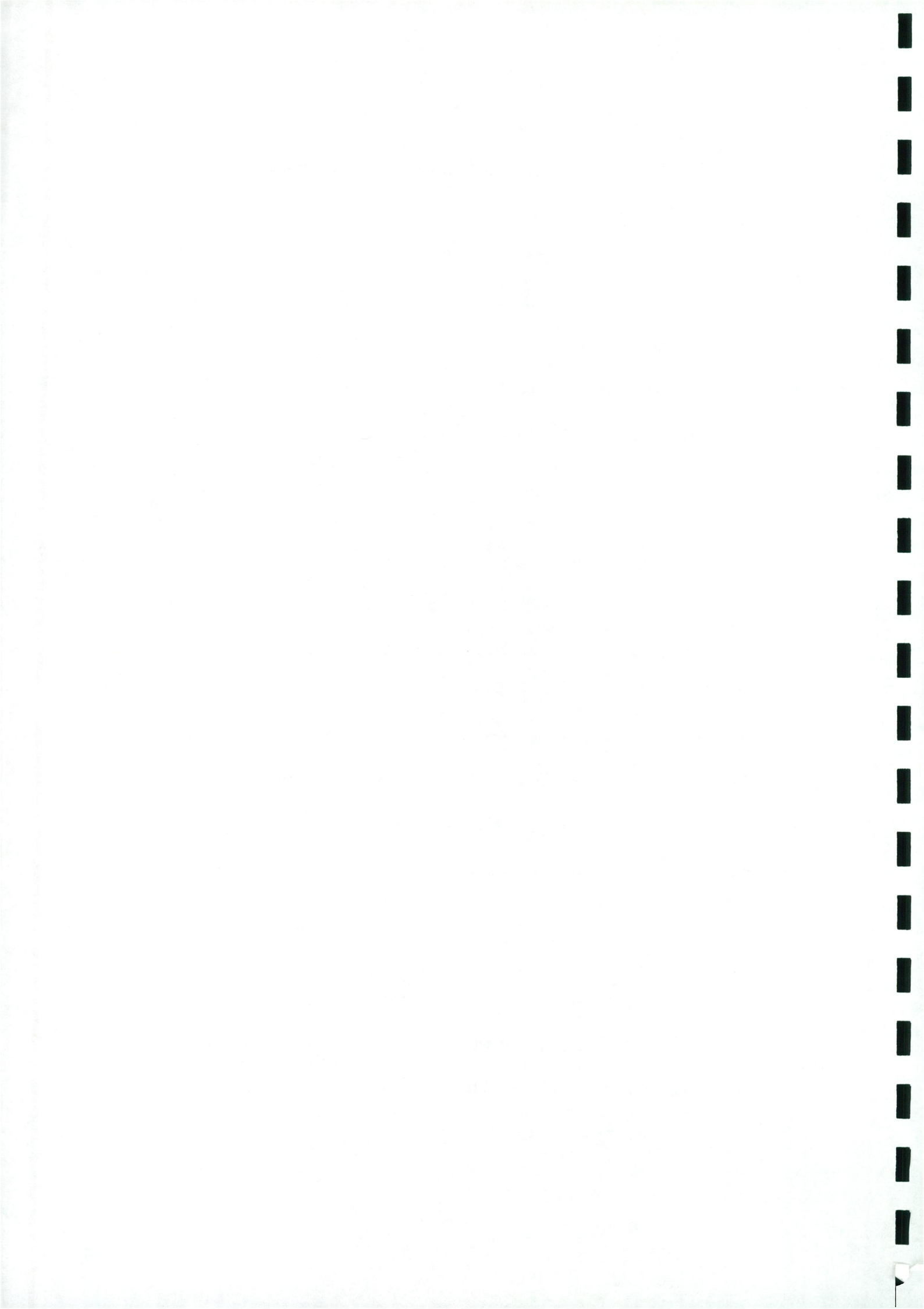
Others, such as J. Elsen of the American Arts Administration agrees, calling faces "*commercial souvenirs, they have as much aesthetic value as paperweights or bookends*" (Hochfield, 1989, p109).

Understandably, it is important to discover if a painting is a fake because it is a fraud and because a differentiation in its properties and characteristics may prove this. This differentiation however only proves fraud or lack of originality. It does not lessen the work's aesthetic impact. According to Mark Jones, who evidently disagrees with Wallace's views on "inherent value",

*This loss of respect [for forgery or copies] derives from the development of the belief that aesthetic value of a work of art derives almost entirely from its originality... As origin became equated with authenticity, a false dichotomy between original and fake was created, one which tends to condemn all non-original work as inauthentic.* (Jones, 1989, p423)

Wallace cites the Tom Keating forgeries of Samuel Palmer's work as a "*prime example of work lacking originality. Wallace claims Palmer drew influence from other sources and even other artists. On the other hand, Keating's artistic debt to Palmer is acknowledged*" (Wallace, 1987, p362). Keating's Palmer's are seen to have little or considerably less value in their own right.

However, Wallace is only aware of this difference because Keating himself came forward to break the news to certain Sunday newspapers. The point must be made that the lack of knowledge of the fake would, presumably, lead Wallace to admire the paintings. Does the knowledge of forgery by a forger lessen his aesthetic appreciation for his own work?



Wallace admits "*Paintings can possess value in their own right to different degrees*", but this he explains as being "*not an all-or-nothing concept because paintings can be more or less original or more or less derivative* (Wallace, 1987, p361).

To explain this, Wallace has shown us the example of how "*a well known contemporary artist [Andy Warhol] had painted derivative paintings [in different colours and signing them in his own name] of Edvard Munch's 'The Cry'.*" Wallace says "*the highly original Munch is aesthetically speaking a much more valuable work*" (Wallace, 1987, p361).

I must point out that this is a matter of opinion and many people find Warhol's interpretation of *The Cry* highly beautiful. Andy Warhol produced silk screen images of consumer goods and images, for example images of Marilyn Monroe, advertisements of Campbell's Soup and Brillo Pads. Warhol transformed the derivative images of mere advertising into modern art. Surely Warhol's interpretation of these products equals and perhaps enhances the aesthetic feeling felt when viewing them.

More recently Jeff Koons was taken to court for infringing the copyright of a post-card photograph. According to *Parkeet* magazine, Koons produced a sculpture based on the image of two German Shepherd breeders and their puppies (Arici, 1994, p162). The matter has yet to be settled, but the case of how one image can be transferred to another setting without loss of aesthetic worth seems to be correct.

It must also be said that the work mentioned of Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol is not strictly forgery, but their subjects remain in the bounds of this discussion. There are some things about aesthetic feeling and authenticity which need clarification.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin states that "*that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of a work of art*" (Benjamin, 1968, p221).

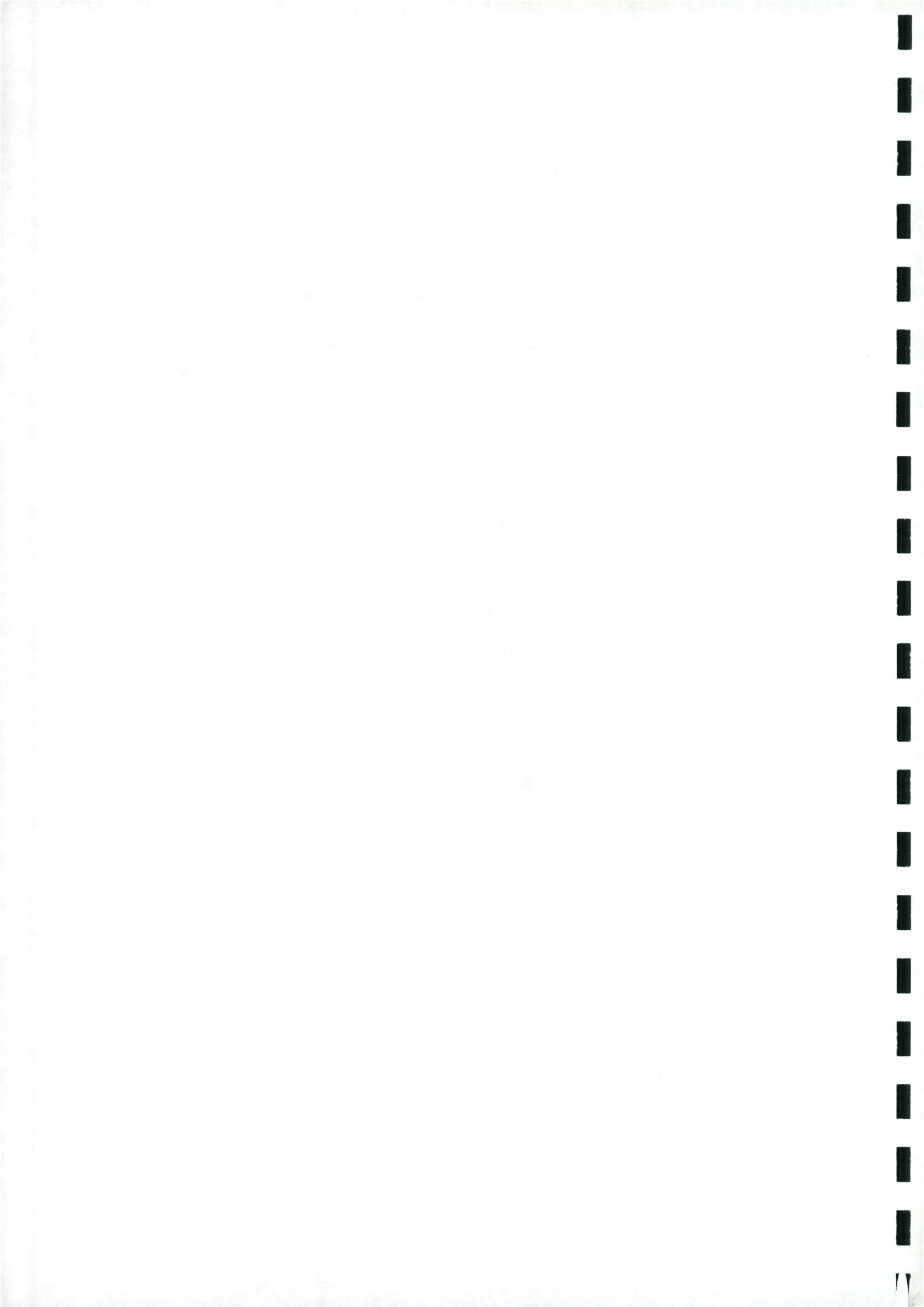
Benjamin defines aura as being something of "*uniqueness and permanence*". He says "*we describe the aura... as the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be. If while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on a horizon... you experience the aura of those mountains*" (Benjamin, 1968, p222). The explanation seems to describe aura as the experience of going to see something wonderful. It is thus much more than aesthetic feeling.

Benjamin defines "mechanical reproduction" as objects of art which are printed material, photographs or lithographs.

Please note that "mechanical reproductions" are not "good forgery" the subject which I have sought to examine.

I have stated earlier that one image can be transferred to another setting without the loss of aesthetic feeling. However, the new work is separate from the uniqueness of the first one. In Benjamin's statement he gives us the example of photography as a form of "mechanical reproduction".



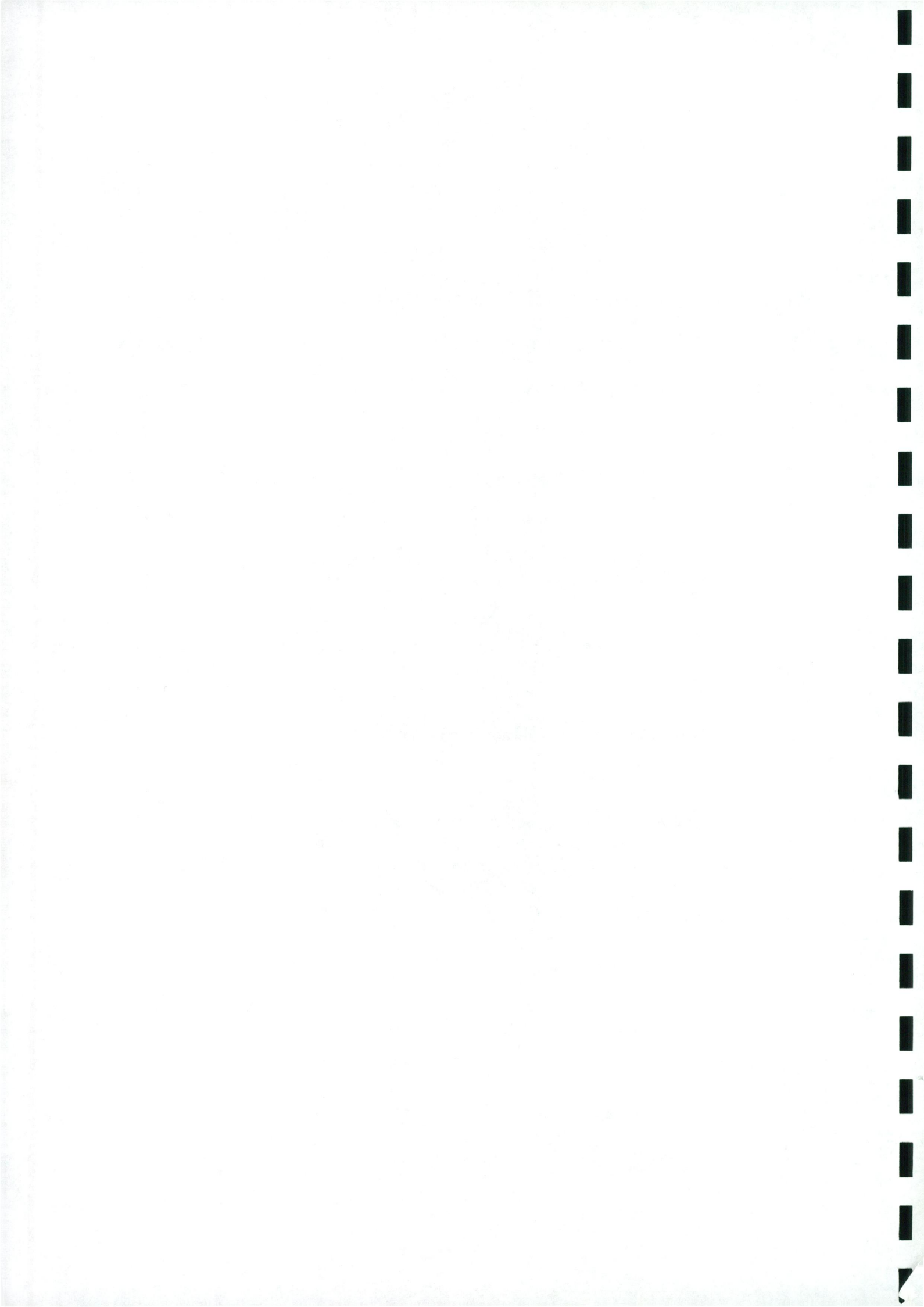


Photographs must be viewed as aesthetically a different entity from the original object. They do not represent the aura which the photographer experienced while viewing the work. Take for example the Getty *Kouros*. A viewer might experience its "aura" in the setting of a museum. It might be cold inside the building, his/her vision would be wider than that of a photograph and he/she could experience the statue from all angles. The photograph does not have the aura of the statue but it may represent the aesthetic value of a view from one angle of the statue.

The difference with forgery is that a painting might have the right patina, the right historical motifs and an substantial and convincing character. As forgeries are rarely copies, the aura experienced by them will have their own, uniqueness and permanence.

It has been shown that originality and perceived difference have no honest correlation with aesthetic value. Forgery has to be seen and treated with equal aesthetic respect to originals in the art world. However this will not happen until

*Appreciation of works of art is divorced from their status as relics or equally improbably, the myth of the pure aesthetic response unhindered by questions of financial value or historic association loses its potency, fakes and forgeries will be seen as threatening subversive objects, treated as enemies rather than objects of beauty. (Koestler, 1964, p76).*



## CHAPTER THREE

### REASONS BEHIND FORGERY

So far we have seen an interpretation and definition of the meaning of forgery and then an analysis of the aesthetic value of forgery. It is now time to look at other influences and implications which effect this subject. It is thus important to determine why forgery is created how it is dealt with by the art market and to provide an insight into those who practise this fraudulent and subversive activity.

It is important to present an ordered reasoning behind the development of forgery. The first and most obvious motive of the creation of forgery is monetary gain obtained from its production. Once a fake/forgery has been successfully sold off tremendous profits can be gained by those responsible for the fraud. You can see this quite distinctively in the case of the Greek Kouros<sup>3</sup> bought by the John Paul Getty Museum. According to *Art News*, "*The museum bought the Kouros from a Swiss dealer for a reputed nine million dollars. Even after tests by scientists there still remains large doubts as to the authenticity of the statue*" (Hochfield, 1991, p41).

Forgery does to just occur in antique art but also in modern painting where artists are still alive.

*Recently a number of paintings purporting to be by the Spanish artist Barceló have been discovered as fakes... The prices paid fro them were*

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<sup>3</sup>The Kouros is a rigid standing statue of a Greek male. Many hundreds of these sculptures were created by Greek craftsmen. They are usually free standing and representative examples cover all three periods of Greek sculpture.

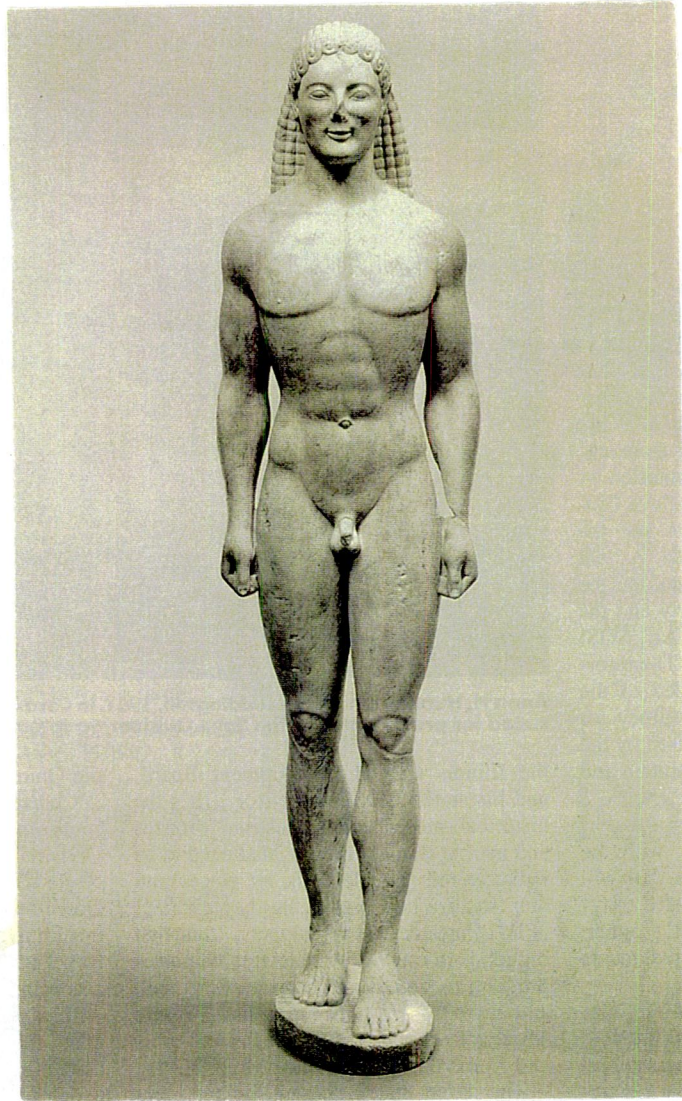
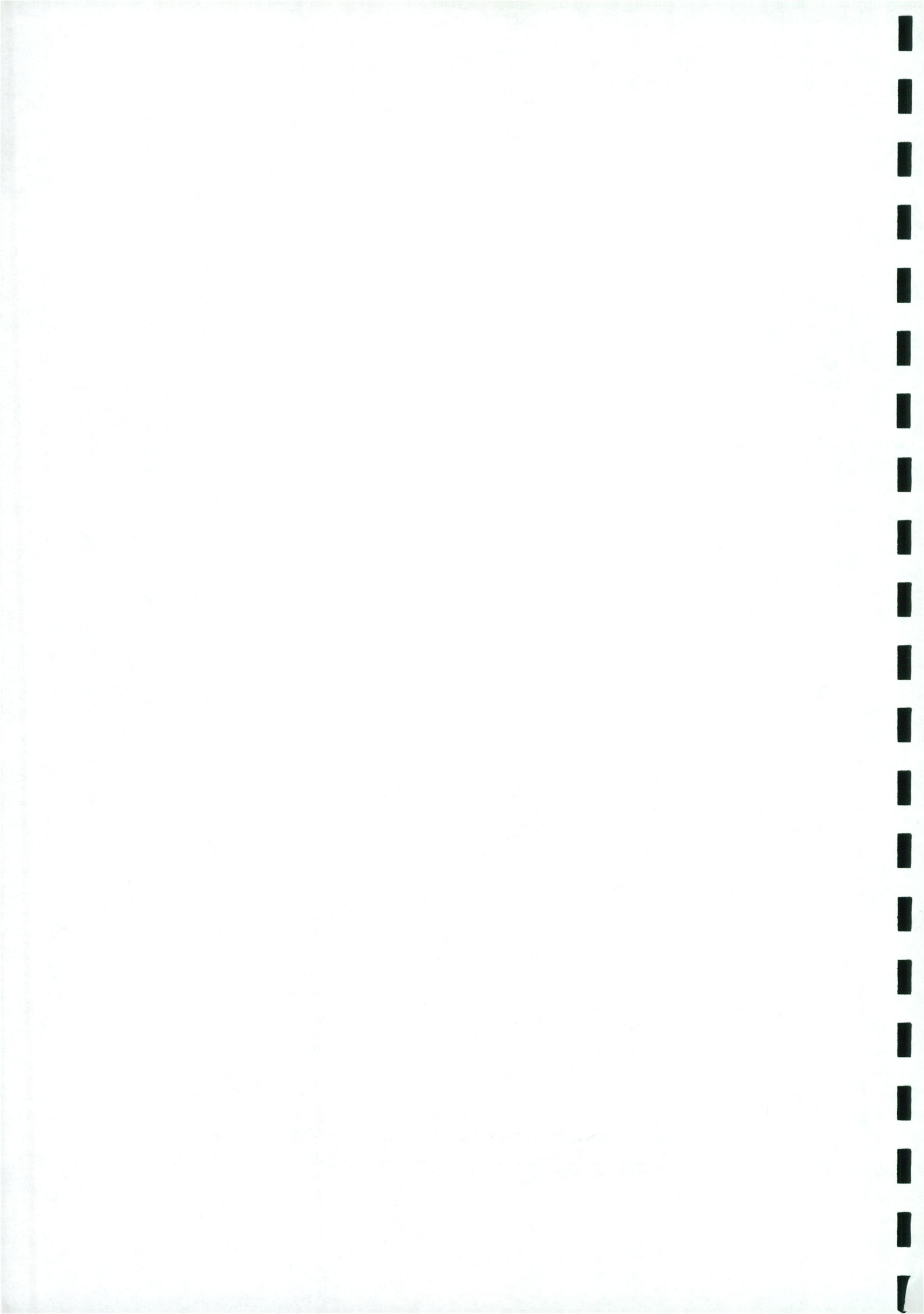


Plate 6

*The Getty Kouros*, bought by the John Paul Getty Museum in 1985  
but whose authenticity is now in doubt



*reported to be in line with Barceló's auction prices, estimated as being 20-25 million pesetas, or US\$200,000 to US\$250,000." (Gambrel, 1991, p37)*

It also must be noted that it is not often that the forger himself receives the tremendous cash benefits received by the middle men. This can be illustrated by the famous case of the Italian sculptor Alceo Dossena (mentioned already).

*Unaware that his Renaissance style sculptures were being passed off as originals... a mausoleum in the style of Mino de Fiesloe left his workshop [in the 1930s] for 25,000 Lire to be sold a few years later for 6 million Lire. (Sox, 1988, p176)*

To resolve the reasons behind it, I was luck to discover a Dublin forger of antiques who was willing to be interviewed. He explained, "*Most guys who forge, they only want their time paid for [that is]... what they feel they as craftsmen deserve for their work... they have to know their work and use the same techniques used when the original was created.*" (Anonymous Forger, Interview, 1995). So perhaps cash benefits received by others is immaterial, so long as forgers receive what they feel they deserve.

The Forger went on to say that he believes the underlying behind forgery is

*Greed... The forger will put his work up for auction, or pass it through the usual channels, he will let it go for the price he needs for it. The buyer is greedy, he thinks he is getting something for nothing. It's interesting to see how far a piece goes before it is discovered. (Anonymous Forger, Interview, 1995)*

The forger is in fact saying it is people's greed which creates forgeries because they desire something for nothing. On this point *Art in America* points out:

*Forgery shows us the desires of the society of the time and the type of art people were comfortable with. Forgery demonstrates to us that when we look at exhibitions of detected fakes, that by wondering how others could have fallen for such a fraud, we are proving less our superior understanding of the truth than our ignorance of pressures and desires of another time. (Tallman, 1990, p75)*

Economic reasons seem to set the tone of an explanation of forgery. It is well for us to remember that in many of the most memorable cases of forgery the acquisition of wealth has only come as a secondary factor.

For some the reasons for forgery were purely patriotic, or so it might seem. In the case of Han van Meegeren, the famous forger of Vermeer, H. B. Werness tells us: "*Van Meegeren became a popular hero in Holland because he swindled the hated Göering and assorted experts*". In exchange for *The Adulteress*, painted in 1943, "*Van Meegeren's patriotism is further applauded because Göering paid for his fake dearly - by returning some two hundred plundered Dutch masterpieces*" (Werness, 1983, p42).

Patriotism was not the only reason that brought Van Meegeren into forgery. Van Meegeren was motivated by a strong desire to avenge himself on an art establishment which he felt dismissed his talents and criticised his work. By creating false Vermeers with such a precise attention to detail, Van Meegeren could equate himself as being as good as previous masters. According to Burlington Magazine, "*Van Meegeren's technique was to plant pictures with antiquarian clues to whet the historians appetite*" (Eds, 1990, p615). These would hanker to the ideas and theories that many of these historians had put forward to add a deliberate bait and guarantee their approval and authenticity.



"He deliberately chose this extreme, perhaps pathological way of exposing what he considered the false aesthetic standards of the Critics" (Lessing, 1983, p60).

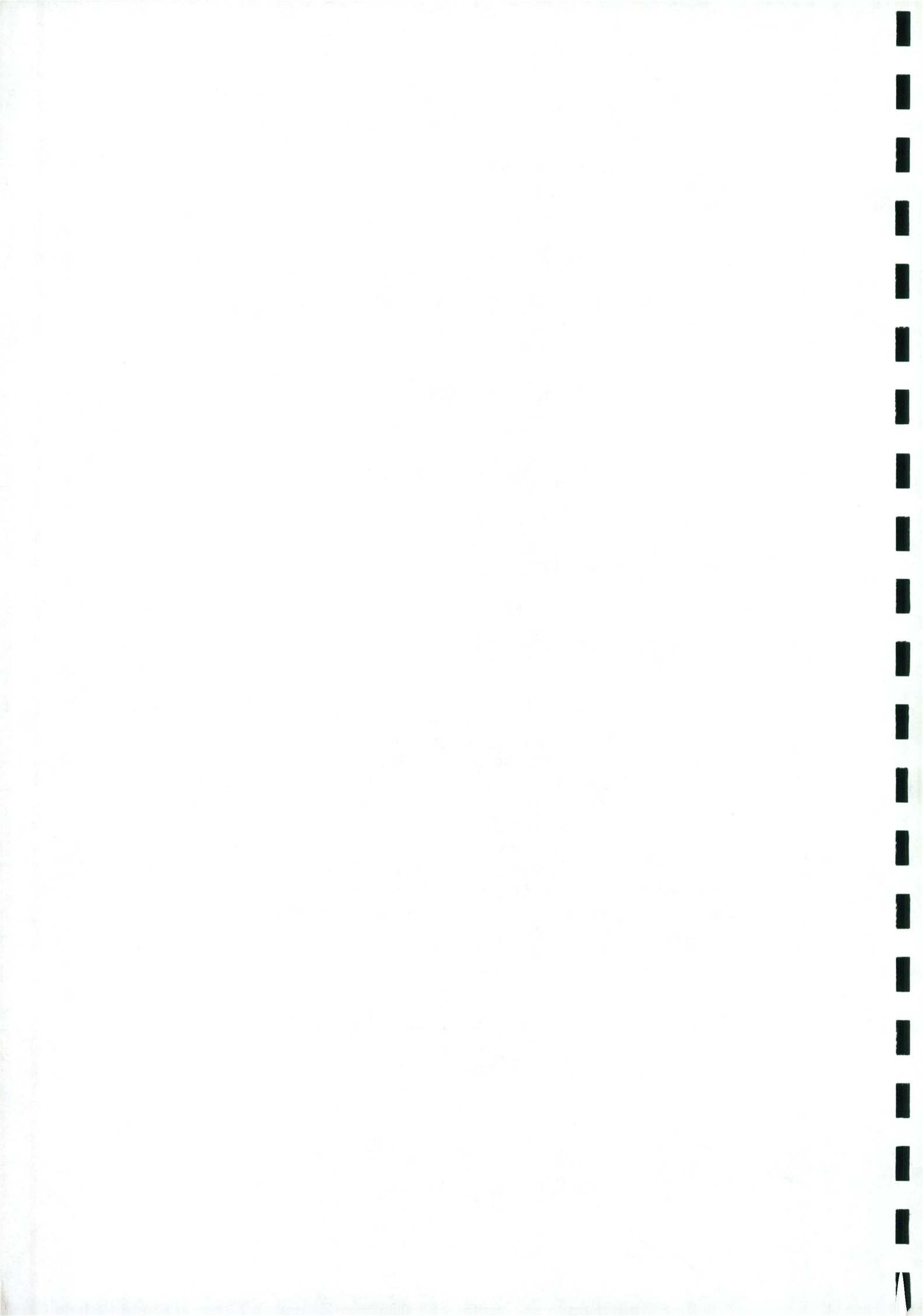
This made it all the more painful for critics, because they had heaped such lavish praise on a picture that had been painted by a second rate contemporary artist.

The fact that Van Meegeren was guilty of forgery probably saved him from being tried for Collaboration. Van Meegeren had been unable to provide satisfactory answers to the question of the origin of *The Adulteress* and how it had gotten into Göering's hands and this had led to his arrest. After two months in jail he confessed. At first he was not believed, but after Van Meegeren managed to forge another painting in jail before police witnesses, of *The Young Christ Teaching in the Temple*, he was eventually believed.

According to H. Be. Werness,

*A commission of experts [was set up]... to study the various claims made by Van Meegeren and test the paintings in scientific laboratories. The results of the commission were as follows: "The age crackle was found to be structurally different from the characteristics of seventeenth century canvases. It was also found to be artificially induced"... "A black substance [later identified as ink] was found in the crackle. The degree of penetration of this substance was variable and its homogeneity was quite different than the dirt normally found in the crevices of old paintings... The paint surface was hard... in comparison to seventeenth century originals...the medium used was classified as a synthetic resin". (Werness, 1983, pp45-46*

Thus all of Van Meegeren's paintings were in fact good forgeries.



Another example of patriotic forgery is that of the *Schleswig Turkeys*. During the restoration of the frescoes in the cathedral in that city, under the co-ordination of Dr Dietrich Fey, birds similar to turkeys were discovered within the painting. According to Jean Chatelain the frescoes were reportedly eleventh century work, yet turkeys had not been introduced to Europe until the sixteenth century. It is important to remember that Germany at the time was caught up in the glorification of the Aryan Third Reich. Thus America had not been discovered by the Spanish but by the Vikings. The fraud came to light when Lothar Malskat, a lowly paid assistant, came clean with the truth to the authorities. (Chatelain, 1979, p21).

Another interesting type of forgery is that undertaken by the eminent nineteenth century collector Richard Payne Knight. Knight had acquired three perfectly authentic bronze Roman sculptures. Believing the marvellous (and completely correct) green patina was incorrect, he changed it to what he thought was a more authentic black one. (Cradock, Interview, 1995).

Another successful forgery was that perpetuated by a group of art students in Livorno, Italy. The students successfully carved a Modigliani sculpture with pneumatic drills. Following a tradition that the great sculptor used to throw works he did not like (of his own, of course) into the canal, the students added authentic green stains to the sculpture by dragging it behind a tractor over a field of grass.

The stains were examined by scientific experts and were said to be authentic, that is as being stains a piece of stone might pick up after remaining under water for thirty years.

After the excitement of the "discovery" died down, much to the dismay of the experts, the forgers came forward with video taped evidence of how they had pulled off the forgery.

The whole exercise had been conducted to expose the laxities and double standards which the forgers saw in the art establishment.

In conclusion, I cannot help but agree with Susan Tallman of *Art in America*, who says

*Forgery seems to attract a particularly engaging type of rogue, partly because greed is often so small a part of the forgers motivation. Arinius for example, worked from a bounding patriotism. Tom Keating, who had a thriving business in phoney Samuel Palmers for much of the sixties and seventies, claimed to be protesting against the exploitation of artists by art dealers. Louis Marcy, a Franco-Italian forger of medieval and Renaissance artifacts, was an anarchist. Van Meegeren was avenging himself on an art establishment that he felt was ignoring his talents. All of them took evident pleasure in pulling the wool over the eyes of "experts", an achievement that strikes a chord in the hearts of most people. (Tallman, 1990, p77)*

## CONCLUSION

In ending this discussion of forgery, it is important to look at the conclusions.

We saw forgery was often the result of pernicious practices and underhand methods which result in fraud. We saw that forgery is often confused with other terms and meanings, that there are many arguments about its value as art and that artists often turn to forgery for motives other than economic gain.

The first chapter dealt with the confusion regarding the meaning of forgery. The term is often mistakenly used in relation to copies, replicas and other similar artistic methods. Forgery has also many different interpretations and exists in diverse forms. Before I could raise any other questions, it was thus necessary to clarify this confusion. Here we saw that copying a work was not usually used in attempts to commit fraud, indeed the existence of an original would probably hasten such a discovery. Evidence was also provided about how one artist, Giorgio de Chirico, forged his own work. I hope this Chapter has provided more understanding about the subject for the reader so he/she could be clear on points raised in the following chapters.

The second chapter dealt with philosophical questions which often arise. Specifically it dealt with the question of aesthetic value of forgery. For this purpose I proposed the hypothesis that "good forgery gives the same aesthetic feeling as authentic work".

To carry out this analysis it was necessary to look at the relevant essays on the subject.

These essays included:

"Art and Authenticity", by Nelson Goodman

"Art Forgeries and Inherent Value" by Graham Wallace

"What is Wrong with Forgery?" by Alfred Lessings

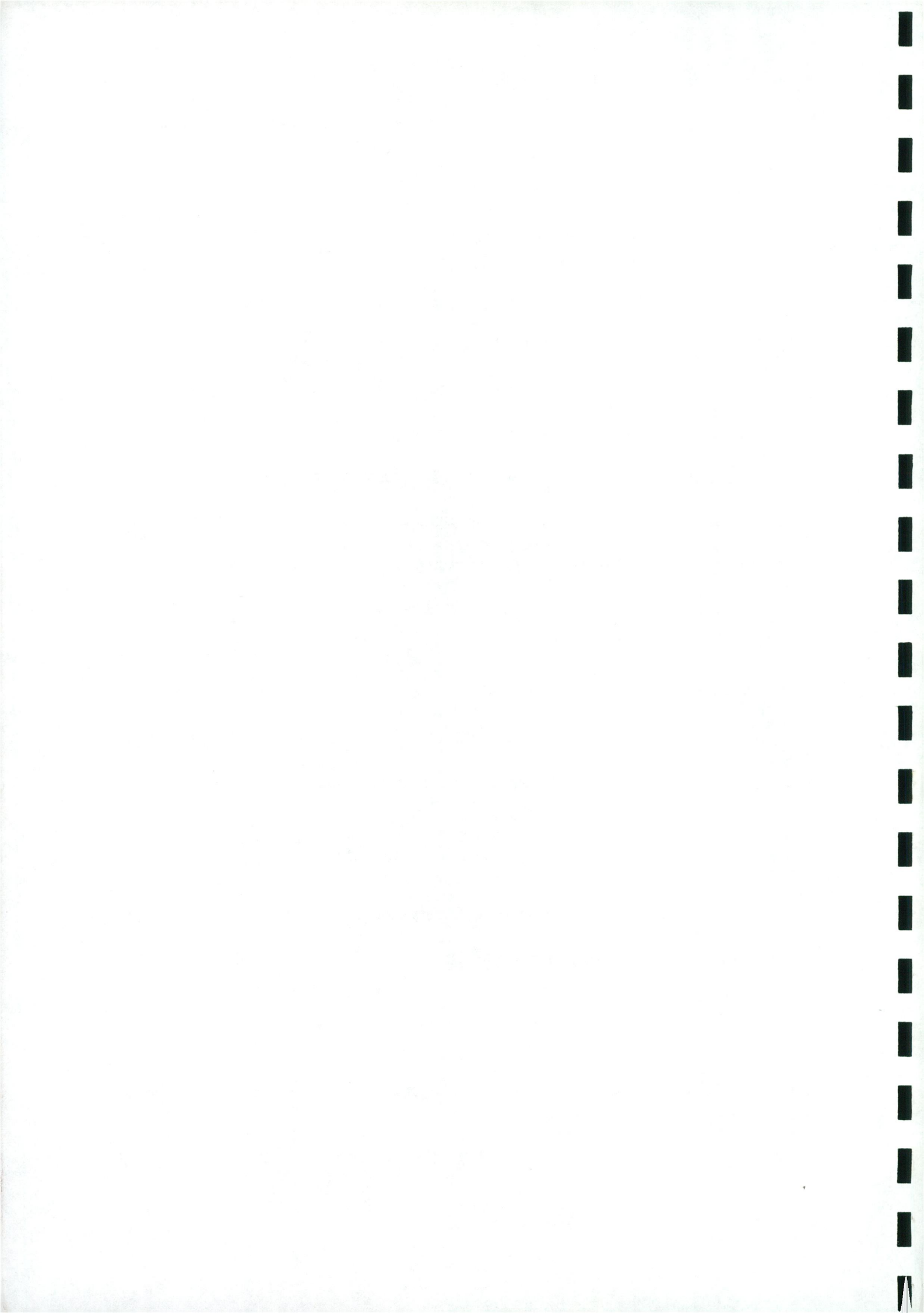
"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by Walter Benjamin

It was necessary to look more closely at the points made in these papers and to discriminate between what I believed was right and wrong. I believe this chapter has clearly shown that there is no difference between good forgery and authentic work and that mechanically reproduced images have a separate aesthetic quality of their own.

The final chapter dealt with the variety of reasons relating to the creation of forgery. These range from revenge on the art world to reasons of patriotism or being duped into production forgery for others. Here two relevant case studies were used to portray the data in a subjective but interesting light.

The overall focus of this paper shows how forgery comes to light and why it is important as an art form. Forgery has its own worth and is a true barometer to the desires and tastes of societies it was created to appease.

While definition is important so too is the value of the art form. Forgery must be valued for what is important, its beauty. Its aesthetic worth is equal to original work but it also



has the added worth as something which is created to deceive. The critical reasoning behind this art form adds importance and intrigue to its worth.



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