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A Female Gaze

By

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the recent women's movement feminists have been exploring the representation of female sexuality in the arts. One of the main accusations against images of women has been the passive positioning of women as sexual spectacle and the active positioning of the male as bearer of the look. Influenced by psychoanalytic theory some feminists have argued that oedipal processes were central to the production and consumption of art work. The pleasures of viewing the female image have been linked to the phallic phase, the castration complex and the resulting "needs" of the male spectator.

In her classic study "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Laura Mulvey describes pleasure in looking as an outcome of the phallogocentric system in which woman is the bearer and man the maker of the gaze. Although Mulvey's article largely refers to Narrative Cinema, its reliance on psychoanalysis has now deemed it relevant to the visual pleasures of film, art and media.

Mulvey's argument represents an extension of Freud's theories. According to Freud it is the woman's lack of a phallus which obliges the male to re-experience the castration crises. The male lives in constant fear of castration (as a resulting punishment for the sexualised love for his mother he experienced during the oedipal phase). In order to overcome this, patriarchy positions the female so that the threat is mitigated. According to Mulvey the dual structures of voyeurism and fetishism came into play to reduce this threat.

The art of Egon Schiele may be described as being deeply erotic and appealing to both male and female spectators. His obsession with the female figure may seem to privilege the male viewer. Schiele's work is filled with images which can easily be defined in terms of Mulvey's argument. His nudes may be seen as erotic icons staged for the pleasure of the dominant male spectator who escapes the castration threat they evoke by indirectly possessing the female through a voyeuristic gaze or by "complete disavowal of castration" (Mulvey, 1989, p21) turning the female into a fetish. I would like to consider however whether there are alternative ways of looking at Schiele's representations which are informed by a feminist perspective.

A number of writers have expressed some doubt at the line of thought proposed in Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and its relegation of the image of women to absence or lack, controlled by a scopophilic male gaze. And although Mulvey's article paved the way for a great deal of interesting work, unfortunately the



theory of the male gaze as dominant has since become something of an orthodoxy. The question which has arisen from this is that of the female gaze. The gaze theory gives the female no real place to look or to take pleasure when she does look at representations of women's bodies in art such as Egon Schiele's. According to Mulvey's essay the female viewer may only identify with images of women through a masculinised gaze.

Gaylyn Studlar unsatisfied with the assumptions of phallogocentric psychoanalysis in understanding visual pleasure has offered a counter theory. Studlar's theory returns to the pre-oedipal phase. Far from the sadistic male need to dominate and control, within Studlar's theory the mother assumes authority and contrary to the Freudian fear of castration, where woman is posited as lacking the phallus, Studlar's theory conceives her as lacking nothing.

Like Nancy Chodorow in her book "The Reproduction of Mothering" and other major psychoanalysts (Heaney, Klein), Studlar emphasises the enormous importance of the pre-oedipal role of the mother in influencing sexual development. This return to the pre-oedipal period in Studlar's article opens up the possibility of visual pleasure for both male and female spectators.

I would like to examine Egon Schiele's images of women in relation to both of these opposing theories. This is not with the wish to displace the dominant model but in order to investigate the possibilities of a pleasurable female spectatorial position.



Chapter 1 - The Subjugating Gaze

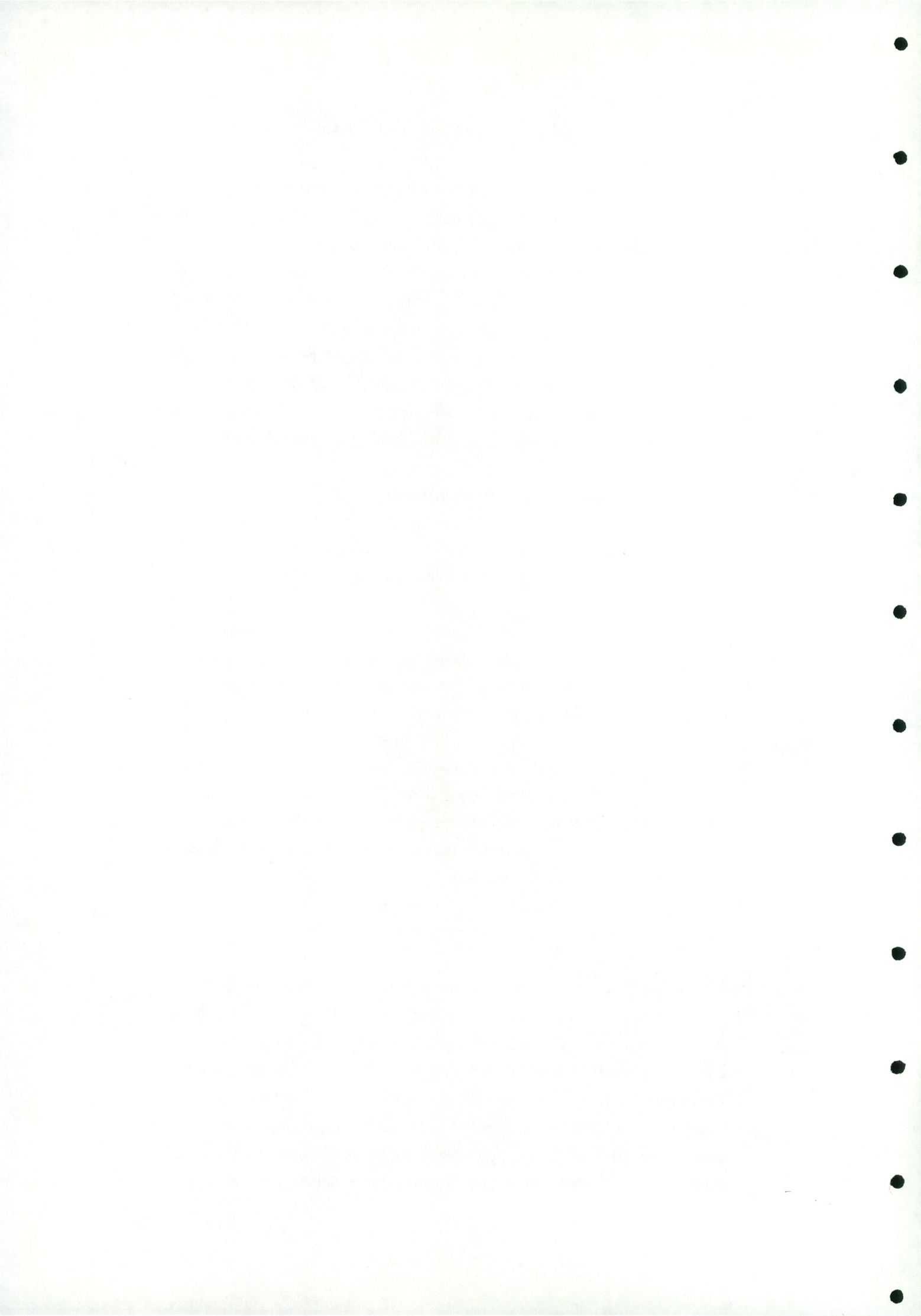
Mulvey's "Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is a feminist essay based on the polarity of binary opposition; active male gaze versus passive female form. For Mulvey there are two types of visual pleasure, one which revolves around an active objectifying look and which requires a distance between image and the viewer, who is presumed male. It involves a scopophilic pleasure which is linked to sexual attraction: "Freud isolated scopophilia (pleasure in looking) as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erogenous zones" (Mulvey, 1989, p16). The other involves a narcissistic identification through same sex identification. Because of the way these looks are generated in Hollywood Cinema the spectator identifies with the male hero and his objectification of the female.

Freud associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects and subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. For Mulvey pleasure in looking is split into active male and passive female. The woman is seen to support masculine desire in that she is positioned as a sexual object through which he can play out his fantasies.

According to Mulvey's theory the gaze is not necessarily male (literally) but, to own and activate the gaze, given our language and structure of unconscious, is from a masculine position. Mulvey asserts that the privileged positioning of the male gaze is based on the sadistic need to dominate and control the female image.

As mentioned earlier, it is the woman's lack of a phallus in Freudian terms which obliges the male to re-experience the castration crisis. The fear of castration crisis is described by Freud as an outcome of the oedipal phase. With the realisation by the male that he cannot possess the mother (whose sexual relation is with the father) he sees the father as a rival. During the oedipal phase the boy's love for the mother becomes sexualised and in order to resist punishment for this he is forced to reject his primary love object. The language of patriarchy is thus initiated in the male.

It is the woman's lack of a penis which makes "the loss of his own penis imaginable and the threat of castration takes its deferred effect (Freud, 1979, p318). Unlike the girl who accepts castration as an accomplished fact, "the boy fears the possibility of its occurrence," (Freud, 1979, p321). The male viewer escapes the castration anxiety either by establishing the woman's guilt, so that her castration seems a just punishment, or by fetishisation where she is transformed through over valuation into a compensatory object (for the phallus): "Fetishistic scopophilia builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself" (Mulvey, 1989,



p27). By the first means voyeurism which Mulvey aligns with sadism the "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration) asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness". (Mulvey, 1989, p22)

These methods created to reduce the threat of castration which the female figure connotes, may be observed in Schiele's work. Voyeurism referring to the active perversion, practised primarily by men with the female body as the object of the gaze" (Kaplan, 1983, p14) and fetishisation "complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (Mulvey, 1989, p21).

Adult female models were difficult for Schiele to find, for he could not afford to pay them much. In early 1910 he was introduced to a gynaecologist, Erwin von Graff, who allowed him to draw his patients. Passive vehicles for the artist's voyeurism, their sexuality was heightened by the occasional incorporation of erotic fetishes such as stockings, garters, and high heeled shoes. Nameless and often virtually faceless (Figs 1 and 2) these models attest to the inner-directed, rather primitive state of Schiele's sexual development.

The subject of 'Girl with Black Hair' (also known as Girl in Black) is the mystery woman of (1911). She is Schiele's most recognisable model of that year but her identity remains in question. Given that Schiele was fully capable of capturing the specifics of a human face with a few bold strokes, the Girl in Black series seems intentionally evasive. The Girl in Black is not an entirely real creature. She is rather a vessel for Schiele's musings, an erotic icon, in studies such as Girl with Black Hair (Fig 3).

Her narrow face and broad mouth suggest the features of Wally Neuzil, Schiele's girlfriend and model. Yet the Girl in Black images are entirely different from the easily identifiable portraits of Wally Neuzil executed in 1912 and later, (Kallir, 1990, p108). It is only at that time that Wally Neuzil emerges with a distinct personality, suggesting that Schiele's prior relationship with her was not especially deep. In the Girl in Black series either he did not want to reveal his model's identity, or he did not care. She is the object of the male gaze and becomes an icon displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look. The lifted skirt, revealing her genitalia and stockings reinforce the idea of fetishisation, effectively cutting up the body. This enables the male viewer to eradicate the sinister sexual difference and the aforementioned fear of castration.



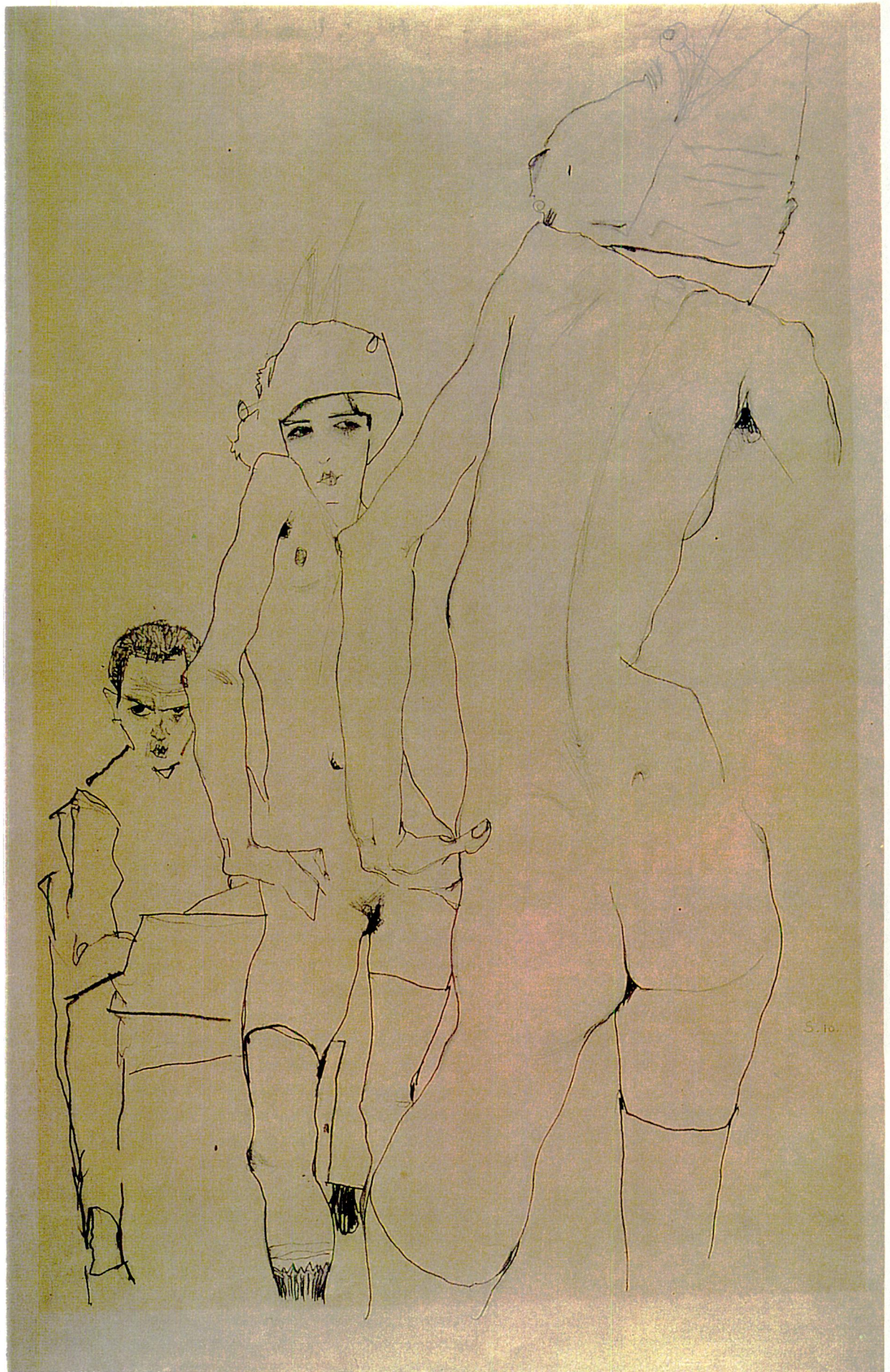


Fig 1. Drawing a Nude Model before a mirror. (1910)





Fig 2. Female Nude. (1910)



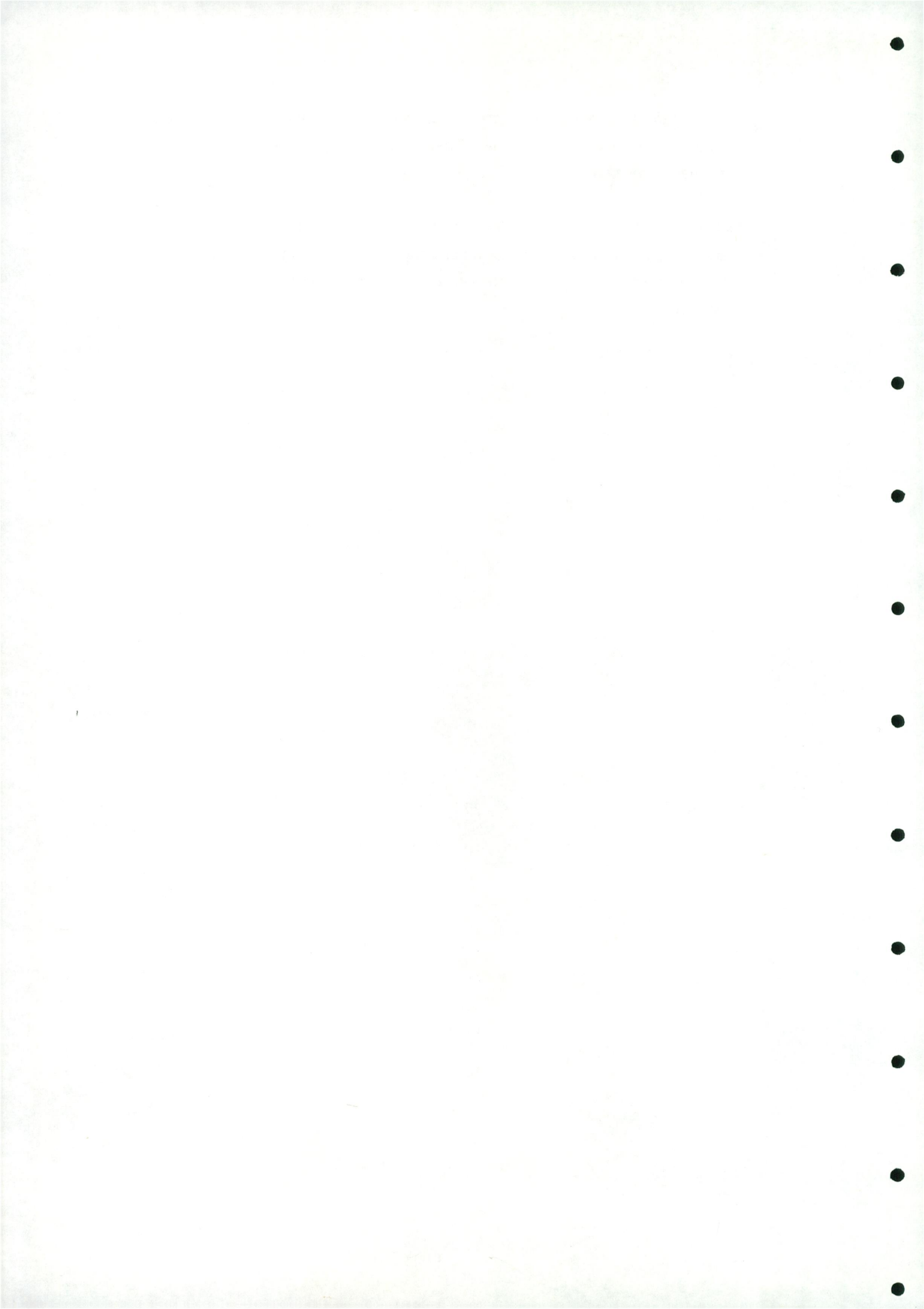


Fig 3. Girl with Black Hair. (1911)



According to Mulvey's argument Schiele's nudes would exemplify women objectified, positioned for the pleasure of the male. They are condemned to feed male appetites but to have none of their own.

Mulvey opens the eyes of her contemporaries to the objectification of women by the male. Although she attempts to uncover an unfair advantage of the male spectator within a patriarchal unconscious, it leaves a feminine gaze and hence pleasure largely redundant.



Chapter 2 - The Pleasure in Submission

In terms of Freudian analysis it would seem that fear of the other (male or female) stems from fear of the mother, the resultant emphasis on strength, power, aggressiveness and frequently expressed contempt for women all serve to keep the male secure in his separate identity. Studlar's model however rejects a stance that has emphasised the phallic phase and the pleasure of control or mastery, and therefore offers an alternative to strict Freudian models.

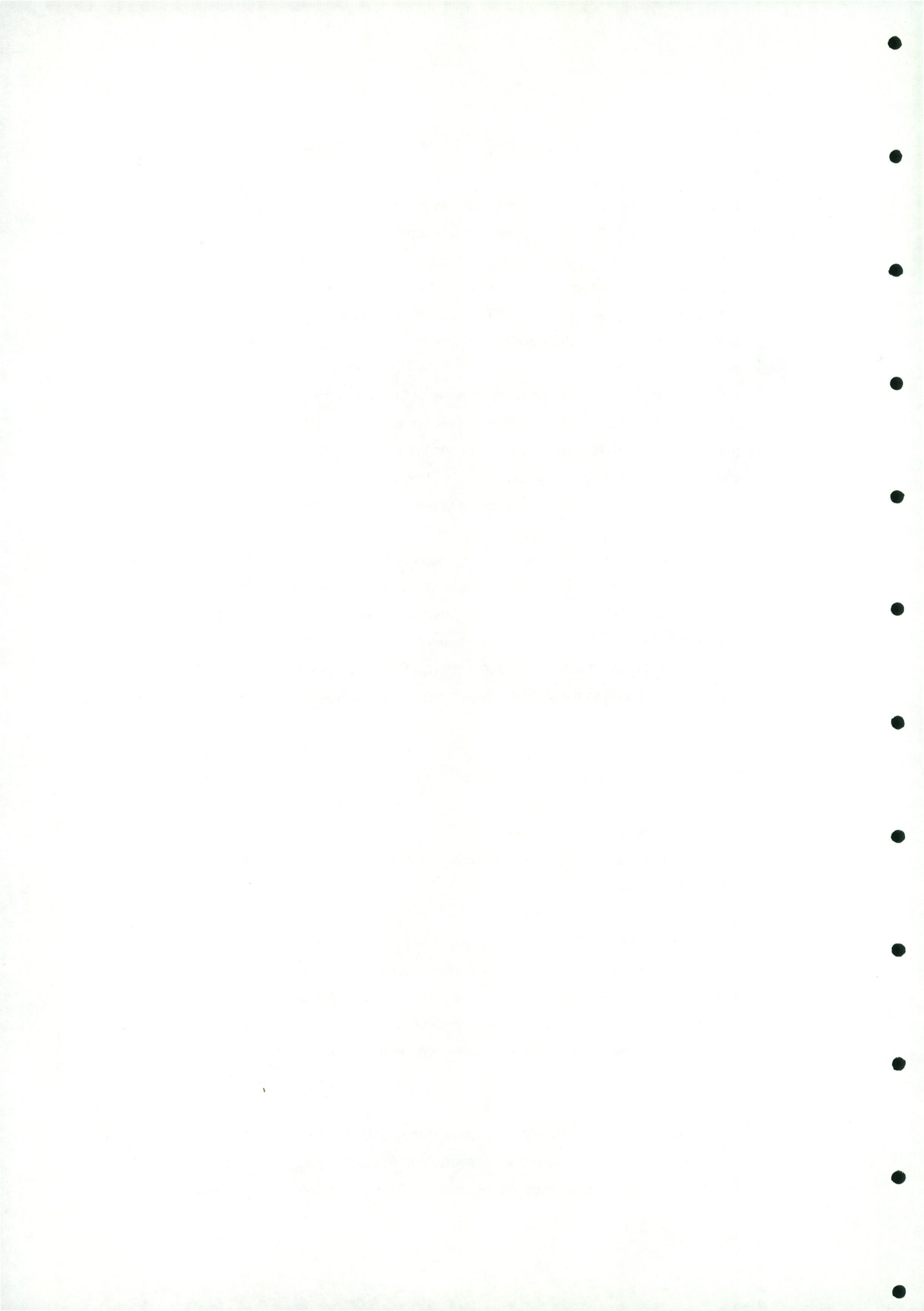
According to Studlar's essay the infant regards the oral mother as "both loving and rejecting frustratingly mobile and yet the essence of rhythmic stability and stillness". (Studlar, 1984, p609). Both love object and controlling agent for the child the mother is viewed in an ambivalent way. Due to the child's own instability of demand, the pleasure associated with the oral mother is joined in masochism with the need for pain.

Studlar thus locates the origins of masochism in the pre-oedipal phase of infancy where its goal is re-union with the mother. Masochism draws on the pleasure of the symbiotic bond, a bond represented ambivalently (since the infant's goal of complete symbiosis, re-incorporation into the mother's body cannot be fulfilled) in the form of "recovery loss, suspense and delay, fantasy and punishment" (Studlar, 1984, p603). Death becomes the fantasy solution to masochistic desire, since dual unity with the mother cannot be achieved.

This theory challenges basic Freudian beliefs regarding sado-masochistic duality and the origin of masochism as a response to the father and fear of castration. (See Appendix A for Studlar's interpretation of Freud's theory on the origin of masochism). Studlar's theory argues that there is a radical difference between sadism and masochism in origin and intent.

The pre-oedipal origins of masochism according to Studlar contrast with the oedipal origins of sadism which desires to dominate or control the other. If masochism precedes sadism as Studlar proposes, its implications for the female are very different for she no longer represents the object of sadistic voyeurism. Instead she represents the promise of plenitude and unity. Studlar argues that masochism like sadism can ground an aesthetic.

The formal structures of the masochistic aesthetic according to Studlar - fantasy, disavowal, fetishism and suspense - overlap with the primary structures that enable narrative cinema art to produce visual pleasure. These similarities raise fundamental



questions about the relationship of visual pleasure to masochism and the representation of the female figure.

But why replace the line of thought in Mulvey's argument with the stress on the similarity between the structures of sadism and visual pleasure, with an emphasis on Studlar's theory of masochism and its relationship to visual pleasure.. The approach suggested brings about a reconsideration of the female image and the masculine position as the only position of pleasurable spectatorship. Studlar's theory of masochistic desire - also challenges the notion that male scopical pleasure must centre around control and never submission to the female.

According to Studlar far from the sadistic need to dominate and control within masochistic structures the mother assumes authority, and contrary to the Freudian fear of castration, where woman is positioned as lacking the phallus she is seen as "lacking nothing" (Studlar, 1984, p606).

According to this theory of masochism which emphasises pre-oedipal conflicts and pleasures the mother assumes her authority in masochism on the basis of her own importance to the child. The child's fear of losing the mother is the prime source of her authority. She is powerful in her own right because she possesses what the male lacks - the breast and the womb. Active nurturer, first source of love and object of desire the oral mother of masochism assumes authority. The ideal goal of the masochistic position is the return to the womb 'symbiotic bond' pleasure associated with the mother.

Studlar suggests that the female image reflect the fantasy of the desiring infant who regards the mother as sacred and loving. It is the loss of the breast, not the lack of the phallus which encourage processes of fetishisation in this masochistic structure of desire. It is thus not a structure played out and against the female image to mitigate male fears and privilege masculine forms of desire, but something shared by the male and female alike. "Most children male and female use transition objects to soothe the separation from the mother, which ultimately lead to fetishisation and thus fetish represents a substitute for the mother's breast body" (Studlar, 1985). The breast, considered in Mulveyan terms to be a fetishisation staged for the male may be seen, according to Studlar's theory as a very statement of the loss perceived by the female and male in masochistic structures.

It is more generally women than men who are texturally placed in positions of passivity and more generally men rather than women that occupy positions of aggressivity. Berger uncovers the female's place in a position of involuntary exhibitionism, "feeding men's appetites having none of their own" (Berger, 1972, p48). What happens is that



the female is constructed as a sex object for the use and appreciation of the other sex - being men. Her sexuality is identified as passivity and exhibitionism becomes erotic gratification staged for male viewers.

“Disregarded is the pleasure derived from showing one’s body or part of it to another person, as is the pleasure of being seen or seeing oneself” (**Kaplan, 1983, p14**). The illusion, that pleasure depicted exists in isolation from the artist who depicts it, is one that Schiele abolishes through his forced emphasis on the model/viewer relationship. Schiele makes the process of observation his theme, the artist is always there. The nudes, even the back views may seem to react with and offer themselves to the viewer. (**Fig 1**).

Voluntary exhibitionism, the woman appropriating that pleasure for herself may be the case with Schiele’s nudes unsecretive exhibitionism, this disputes the “inevitable desirability of the active masculine position, privileging instead what has been marked as the inferior feminine position” (**Silverman, 1979, p6**). If as Berger suggests, “the woman turns herself into an object” (**Berger, 1972, p47**) then exhibitionism becomes a choice on the part of the woman (and a choice on the part of the female spectator) and Mulvey’s object to be looked at becomes pleasurable to the female.

If “she is aware of being seen by the spectator” (**Berger, 1972, p50**) this sadistically gives the male the right to condemn her. In view of Studlar’s argument however it is the very exclamation of women’s right of voluntary exhibitionism and becomes a celebration of female sexual liberation. It is a representation of female emancipation not incorporation into the patriarchal order of things. “It does not call into question the passivity of the female subject, rather it jeopardises the illusion of masculine activity”, (**Silverman, 1979, p6**). This conclusion of voluntary exhibitionism could undermine the idea that Schiele’s portrayal of the naked or semi-naked woman was an effort to place the woman in a position subordinate to the male.

Perhaps the female figure’s presence serve to reinforce the spectator’s masochistic position - uncovering all those pain/pleasure recreations of the moment of loss and remembering the pre-oedipal awe of the mother. The fetish is thus her possession of what the male lacks, the breast, and what the child seeks to recreate, “a substitute for the mother’s breast and the mother’s body.” (**Studlar, 1984, p613**). “In masochism as in the infantile stage of dependence which marks its genesis, pleasure does not involve mastery of the woman but submission to her” (**Studlar, 1984, p610**). The voluntary nature of such exhibitionism, flaunting ones body detaches it from a male sadistic gaze “the fatale attractiveness of the feminine/masochistic position cuts off the male/sadistic position” (**Silverman, 1979, p6**).



What is essentially striking in the masochistic theory is that it reduces effectively the power of the male gaze, it complicates the simple equation of exhibitionism with passivity, and voyeurism with aggression. It also represents responses by spectators of both sexes. In returning to fantasies originated in the oral stage of development, the masochistic aesthetic opens up the entirety of art to the existence of spectatorial pleasures divorced from issues of castration, sexual difference and the female as lack. "Current theory ignores the pleasure in submission which is phylogenetically older than the pleasure of mastery for both sexes". (Studlar, 1984, p610).

The sadistic controlling male spectator of Mulvey's Visual Pleasure may be overturned by a spectatorial position accessible to man and woman alike. The female in the masochistic aesthetic is more than the passive object of the male's desire for possession.



Chapter 3 - Schiele's Button Eyed Nudes

Some images of the female figure which might cause us to strongly question Schiele's representation of female sexuality are his series of button eyed or eyeless nudes created between 1914 and 1915. Depicted singly the button eyed or eyeless nudes suggest an effort to depersonalise female sexuality (**Fig 4**). They may appear as submissive objects, doll-like rigid and defeated, thus reinforcing Mulvey's argument that women are the passive objects of male desire. (**Kallir, 1990, p181**).

It is significant that at this time Schiele was beginning to think about starting a family of his own. Schiele had grown close to his girlfriend Wally Neuzil over the years. Yet Wally Neuzil as his model and illicit lover was too poor, too ignorant and by the standards of the day too promiscuous to be taken seriously as a marital prospect. Schiele was preparing to marry the sweet Viennese bourgeois girl Edith Harms and in doing so he reverted to the prevalent double standards of the day, where women existed as people or sex objects. Schiele declared he would marry a "good" girl or none at all, (**Comini, 1974, p19**).

Yet while Schiele on one level accepted this stereotype he did not immediately embrace it. Especially during this period his depictions of women may be seen to have more than one possible meaning. As previously mentioned the doll-like women with pinprick or button eyes may suggest an effort to depersonalise the female nudes depicted. Another reading however is suggested by two girls lying entwined (**Fig 4**). Here it is the clothed model which appears as the lifeless limp ragdoll while the nude is fully fleshed out and alive. This would suggest that Schiele was not entirely happy with his decision to marry the virtuous Edith and leave his sensual Wally who was more "real". "Edith the product of good petit bourgeois training was initially not prepared to meet or comprehend the libidinous interests of her experienced husband," (**Comini, 1974, p19**). "The hapless embraces between husband and wife, relentlessly recorded by Schiele, provide extraordinary insights into the mutuality of inadequacy and frustration," (**Comini, 1974, p19**). (**Fig 4b**)

In 'Seated Couple' (**Fig 4b**) the subjects are Edith and Egon Schiele. This time it is Schiele who is portrayed as blind. Significantly however Edith again is fully clothed. In this way rather than this series of nudes being faceless projections of the artist's fantasies, Schiele may have been using blindness as a metaphor for a failed struggle to make human contact. For this reason it may be that Schiele's nudes represent a



celebration of female sexuality for without their sensuality they become lifeless creatures.



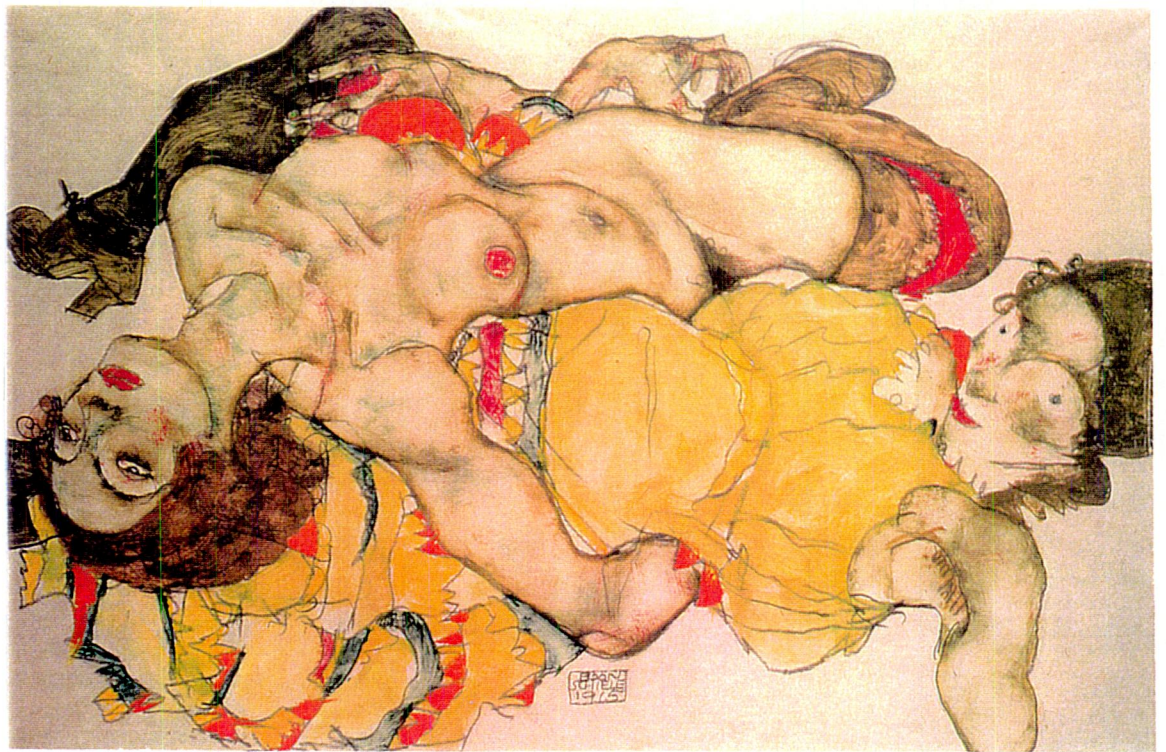
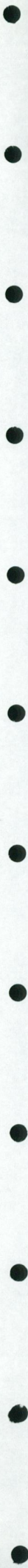


Fig 4. Two Girls, Lying Entwined. (1915)





Fig. 4(b). Seated Couple (Egon and Edith Schiele). (1915)



Chapter 4 - Dead Mother and Child

Comini suggests that the mother assumes her authority in masochism on the basis of her own importance to the child. Schiele's feelings about his mother were extremely complex. He reveals that Schiele had a poor relationship with his mother who tended to whine about his failure to fulfil his filial obligations rather than support him in his artistic pursuits. (Comini, 1986, p21).

The theme of mother and child is a frequent and important one in Schiele's collection. Schiele created numerous paintings on the theme of mother and child. These paintings possess autobiographical significance by providing important insights into the conflictive nature of the artist's relationship with his mother.

Although such portraits are scattered throughout Schiele's career they attained particular strength during the years 1910 and 1911. Schiele employed vision here again as a metaphor of the mother/child relationship. Exaggerated emphasis on eyes which tragically fail to meet perhaps mean to reflect the lack of visual and emotional communication between the pair. (Fig 5), (Kallir, 1990, p181).

In 1910 maternal withdrawal in Schiele's "Mother" portraits become even more complete as death replaced vision as the primary metaphor communicating the lack of responsiveness he sensed from her, (Fig 6).

While bringing his dead father back to life as his alter ego in double self portraits, Schiele was busy 'killing off' his mother in dead mother portraits. As much as his father was idealised by Schiele to that extent his mother served as a focus for all his bad feelings. In his mind it would appear that the wrong parent died. His "Dead Mother" portraits expressed his anger towards his mother it would seem by killing her.

It is indeed hard to imagine the celebration of motherhood with the depiction of women in these paintings. The mother's deathlike appearance would rather seem to suggest the inability of the woman to protect her child.

The Viennese art critic Arthur Roessler tried to convert Schiele's troubled relationship with his mother to the artist's advantage. After Schiele had complained to him of his mother's unsympathetic treatment, he suggested to Schiele a series of paintings on aspects of motherhood. On Christmas Eve Schiele went without sleep and created Dead Mother 1. He rushed to Roessler the next morning with the painting which identified his mother as Mary and himself as Christ, (Comini, 1986, p21).





Fig 5. Mother and Child (Madonna). (1908)





Fig 6. Dead Mother 1. (1910)



Dead Mother 1 led to Dead Mother 2 (**Fig 7**) which Schiele subtitled the "Birth of the Genius" - himself! Both paintings are dramatic representations of a dead mother with a transparent abdomen revealing an unborn foetus. The mother's face is pale, her eyes sealed shut. The baby on the other hand has lively eyes and his body emanates light. From these paintings it would seem that for Schiele his mother - for that matter any mother - was little more than a means to an end. It was the child who represented life and the creative spirit.

This would seem to coincide with Mulvey's definition of a woman's function in forming the "patriarchal unconscious": "she firstly symbolises the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved her meaning in the process is at an end." (**Mulvey, 1989, p14**). The governing sadistic fantasy expressed in Freudian theory exalts the father "beyond all laws" and negates the mother, (**Studlar, 1984, p605**) as Schiele perhaps did. Mulveyan theory aligns voyeurism with sadism and the male controlling gaze as the only position of spectatorial pleasure.

It is possible then to analyse Egon Schiele's psyche and art in terms of Gaylyn Studlar's counter theory which is centred around the idealising, mystical exaltation of the powerful oral mother. Perhaps these mother and child paintings serve to reinforce Schiele's position as negating the female image under a controlling voyeuristic gaze.

If Schiele himself felt that his mother was little more than a useful expedient in his creation, perhaps he was indeed a true product of patriarchal society and his nude's exemplify the subordination of the female image.

The pregnant woman's abdomen and a triangle on the male stand out as the only two illuminated areas against the dark sombre colours of the remainder of the painting in Pregnant Woman and Death. (**Fig 6**). By highlighting his genital area with a glowing elongated (oedipal) triangle, Schiele perhaps connotes sexual feelings towards his mother. It was Freud's contention that during the Oedipal phase the boy's love for his mother becomes sexualised and in order to resist punishment (castration) he is forced to reject his "primary love object" (**Kaplan, 1983, p210**). In rejecting the female he learns to speak the language of domination. It is possible that Schiele was referring to this scenario in this painting, and by portraying himself as dead he punishes himself for his taboo oedipal yearnings.

Schiele's fascination with sickness and death, especially as concerned with babies, could possibly be related to the deaths of his stillborn brothers and sister Elvira. Schiele





Fig 7. Dead Mother 2. (The Birth of the Genius). (1911)





Fig 8. Pregnant Woman and Death (Mother and Death). (1911)



became fixated on the fact that his mother's repeated pregnant state led to the deaths. As the child who survived it is possible that Schiele often felt that he too should be dead. Trying to avoid separation and death, he portrayed himself in a regressed state of merger with his mother. Thus his portraits showing a dead mother include himself (The Birth of Genius) inside the womb in an ultimate state of fusion.

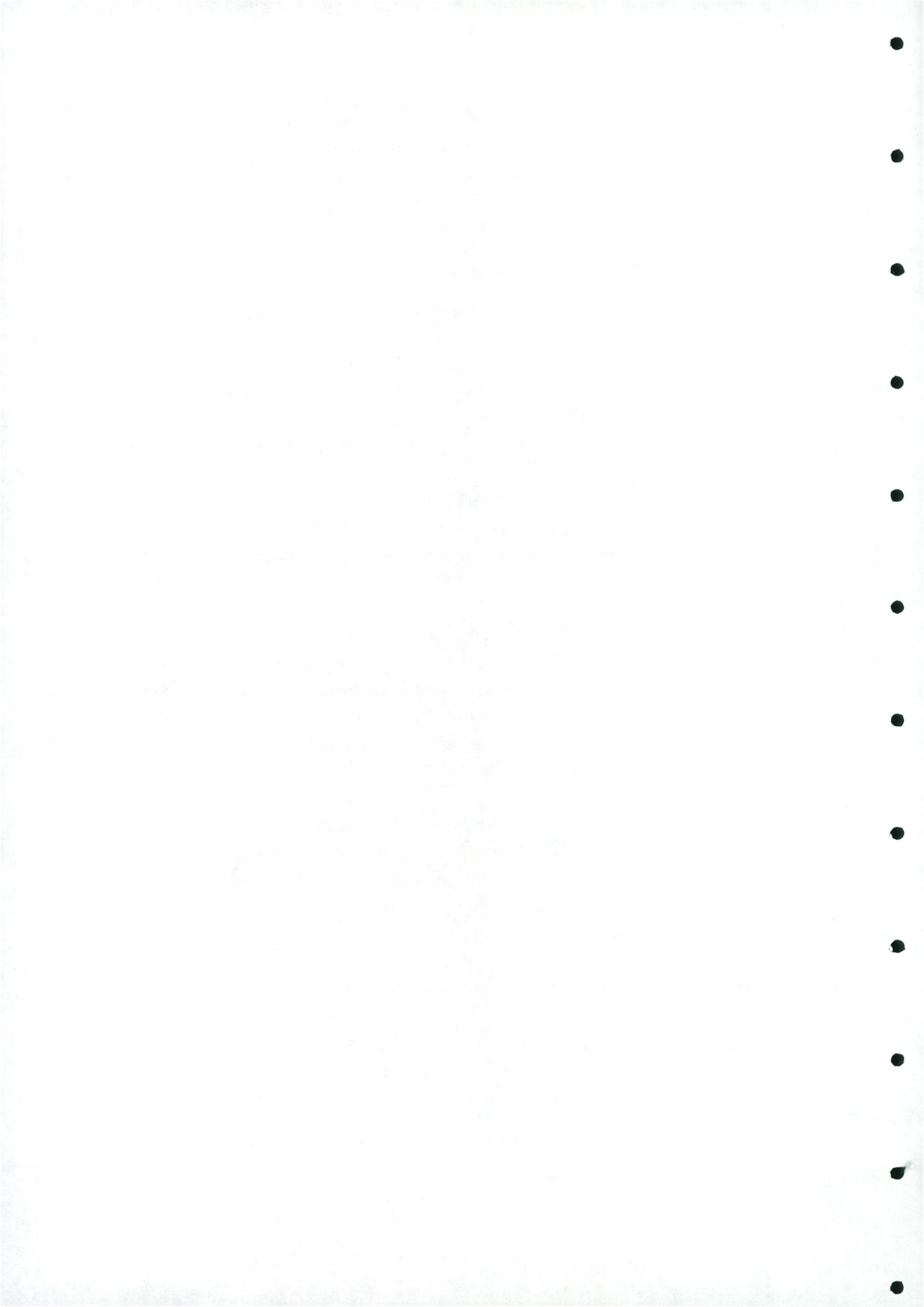
In Pregnant Woman and Death, (Fig 8) Maria Schiele is again predicted in a pregnant state, Schiele as Death disguised as a monk lures her into surrendering her life. Schiele portrays himself like his mother possessing the power to give life as well as take it away. Despising the pregnancy he feels alienated from his mother, he decides to kill her and keep her to himself. It does not matter that they both must die; this may be the price he is willing to pay for togetherness. This perhaps attests to the fact that Schiele too felt the need for the security of the symbiotic bond.

Perhaps these paintings re-enact Schiele's fear of losing the mother which underlies the masochistic structure. They may represent fear of separation from the mother's body to life outside the safe haven of the womb and the perils faced once the symbiotic bond is broken.

As previously mentioned, it was Studlar's contention that as both love object and controlling agent for the helpless child the mother is viewed as an ambivalent figure during the oral period. The masochistic fantasy cannot by its very nature fulfil its most primal desire "dual unity and the complete symbiosis between child and mother" except in the imagination. Only death can hold the final mystical solution to the symbiotic reunion with the idealised oral mother.

Schiele may be trying over and over again to achieve this unity and complete symbiosis by return to the womb fantasies portrayed in his mother and child paintings. Although Schiele's mother did not satisfy his needs in real life, like the oedipal infant he demanded the pleasure associated with the oral mother even if he had to kill her in order to achieve togetherness.

Maria Schiele was indeed a very depressed and narcissistic woman. Although it is indubitable that she suffered greatly from the loss of her children and husband as well as the effects of the syphilis she contracted from him, she nevertheless made no attempt to hide her distress. The infection bestowed upon her aged her rapidly. She continuously complained about her health, her lack of funds and the disregard her children showed for her.

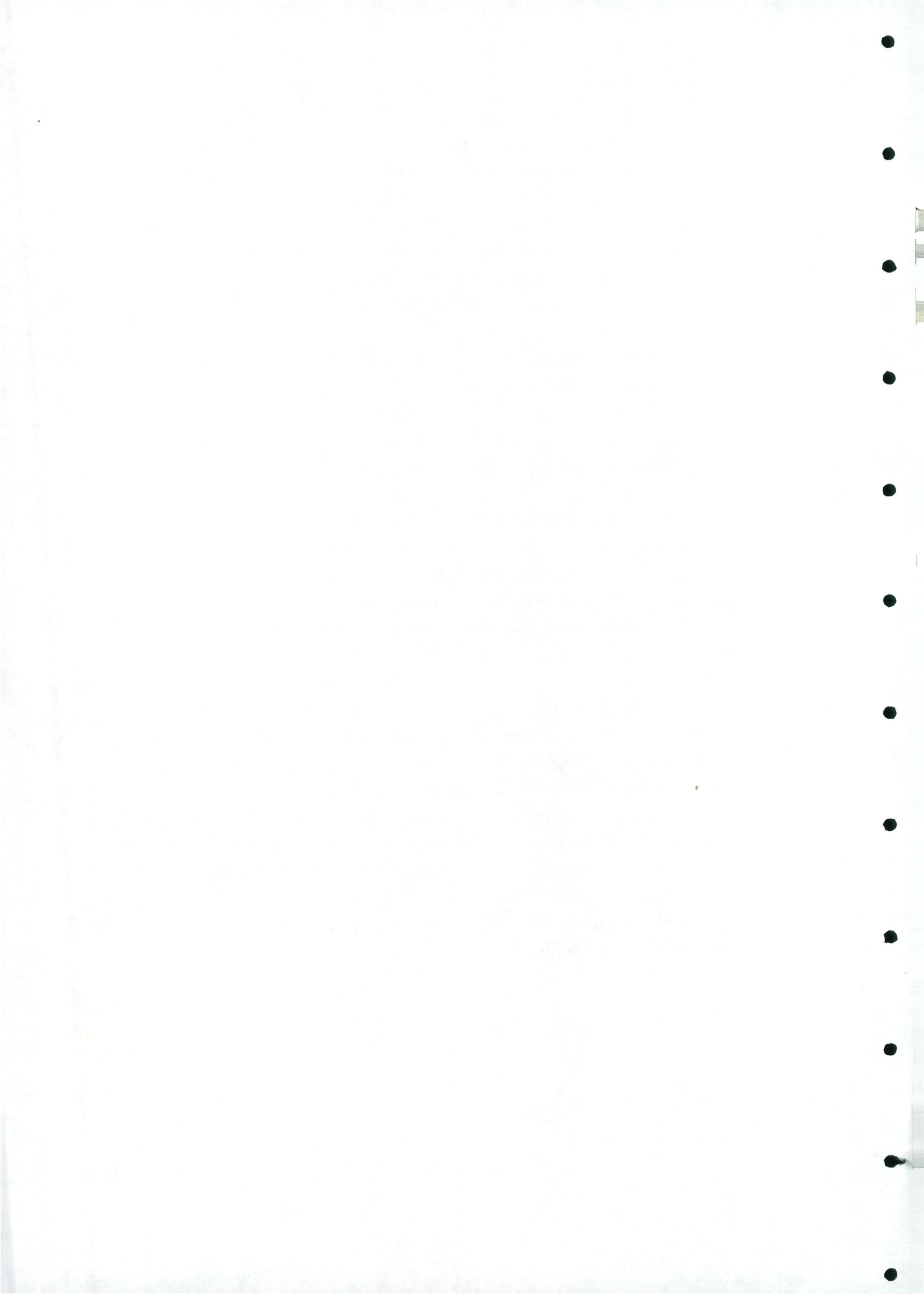


Once again Schiele revealed his mixed feelings towards his mother when in May 1919 he accompanied Wally to live in Kramau, his mother's native town in Bohemia. Whereas Schiele loved Kramau, the city's residents were not impressed with his lifestyle, openly living in sin with his mistress and not attending church. The situation was brought to a climax one day when Schiele brought one of his nude models outside, Schiele was evicted from his dwelling and forced to leave Kramau. His exile from Kramau caused Schiele's suspicion of others to grow. Kramau his mother's town had rejected him just as he felt she had. (Kallir, 1990, p11).

Schiele's ambivalent feelings towards his mother created a corresponding split in himself. He felt on one hand like a frail diseased individual on the other a complete genius. At times he converted his inferior feelings into exaggerated egotism. In his art he went one step further and seemed to imply that he not his mother was responsible for his creation, in his painting "The Birth of the Genius".

Schiele seems to have been haunted with merger fantasies which took the form of return to the womb fantasies with his mother. As stated earlier the infant's fantasy goal of refusion with the mother in the masochistic model is necessarily informed by ambivalence: "The female reflects the fantasy of the desiring infant who regards the mother as both sacred and profane, loving and rejecting, frustratingly mobile yet the essence of rhythmic stability and stillness." (Studlar, 1984, p609).

The repetition of loss, of suffering does not deter or confuse the masochistic desire but influences it. "Contrary to the Freudian view of familial dynamics, in which the mother has little psychological impact on children's development", Studlar regards "the mother's influence and her authority as a major factor in the child's development. The child's view of the powerful, loved but threatening female during the pre-oedipal stage is not obliterated in later stages of life - including the male's passage through the castration complex." (Studlar, 1984, p610). We may conclude from this that there is still a possibility that Schiele's representations of the female figure may reflect the fantasies of their voyeurs, male or female, who assume the passive position of the child desiring to be controlled.



Chapter 5 - At the expense of Autonomy - Schiele's "Everywoman"

Schiele's friends did not know him as a 'practising eroticist'. What drove him to depict erotic scenes from time to time was perhaps the mystery of sex and the fear of loneliness which grew to terrifying proportions. The feeling of loneliness, for him a loneliness that was totally chilling was in him from childhood onwards. This loneliness may have been due to his father's recurring mental illness and death and Schiele's increasingly cool relationship with his mother. The only other surviving family member he had was his sister Melanie, the 'dragon lady' of his youth who had grown to represent all that he considered evil. Gerti on the other hand represented all that he considered good. With Gerti's marriage, Schiele's most enduring childhood bond was broken. In fact it was soon thereafter that Schiele felt the need to start a family of his own. (Whitford, 1981, p88).

Perhaps Schiele selected as his goal exposure of society's hypocritical and regressive attitude towards sex. Of course a specific factor influencing the artist's life long obsession with sexuality was that his childhood years had witnessed the advancing syphilitic insanity of his father. Adolf Schiele died completely insane, and the impact of the tragedy had on the fourteen-year-old Schiele was incalculable. Almost as though in retaliation for the venereal origin of the disease that had shadowed his family, the boy threw himself into a stormy adolescence of sexual exploration. Also given the fact that the establishment of sexual identity is often an important goal during adolescence, it would seem natural that a portion of Schiele's efforts should focus on this process. He was not, of course, entirely alone in his attempt to penetrate the facade of nineteenth century sexual morality. In contemporary Viennese painting sex was also widely celebrated. Klimt's paintings and drawings are dominated by a heady eroticism. Freud's theories (of which Schiele was probably aware) are often cited as a contemporary parallel to the young artist's sexual explorations.

On further reflection through the majority of Schiele's nudes it is difficult to identify the images as representations of female power and strength. There are few controlling decisive femme fatale figures in Schiele's oeuvre who might remind the spectator of his or her passive position in the presence of the oral mother. The "(male or female) assumes the position of the child wishing to be controlled within the dynamics of the fantasy." (Studlar, 1984, p613).

In Schiele's study of Gerti (**Fig 9**) 1910, the focus of the composition and the major vehicle for expression are the sexual parts drawn with exceptional devotion. The turned-head gesture so common in Schiele's nudes from this time suggest a reluctance

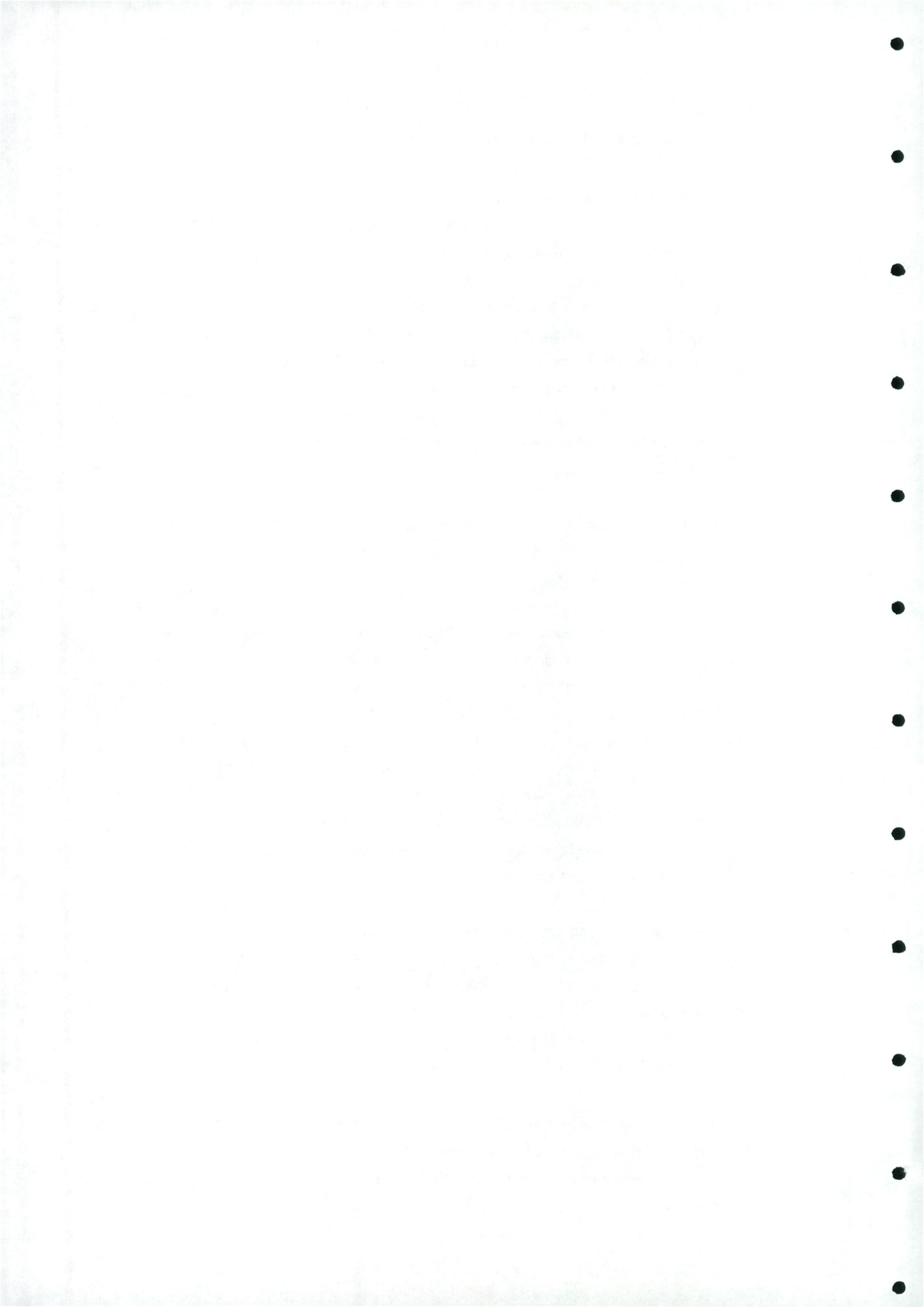




Fig 9. Nude Girl with Folded Arms (Gertrude Schiele). (1910)



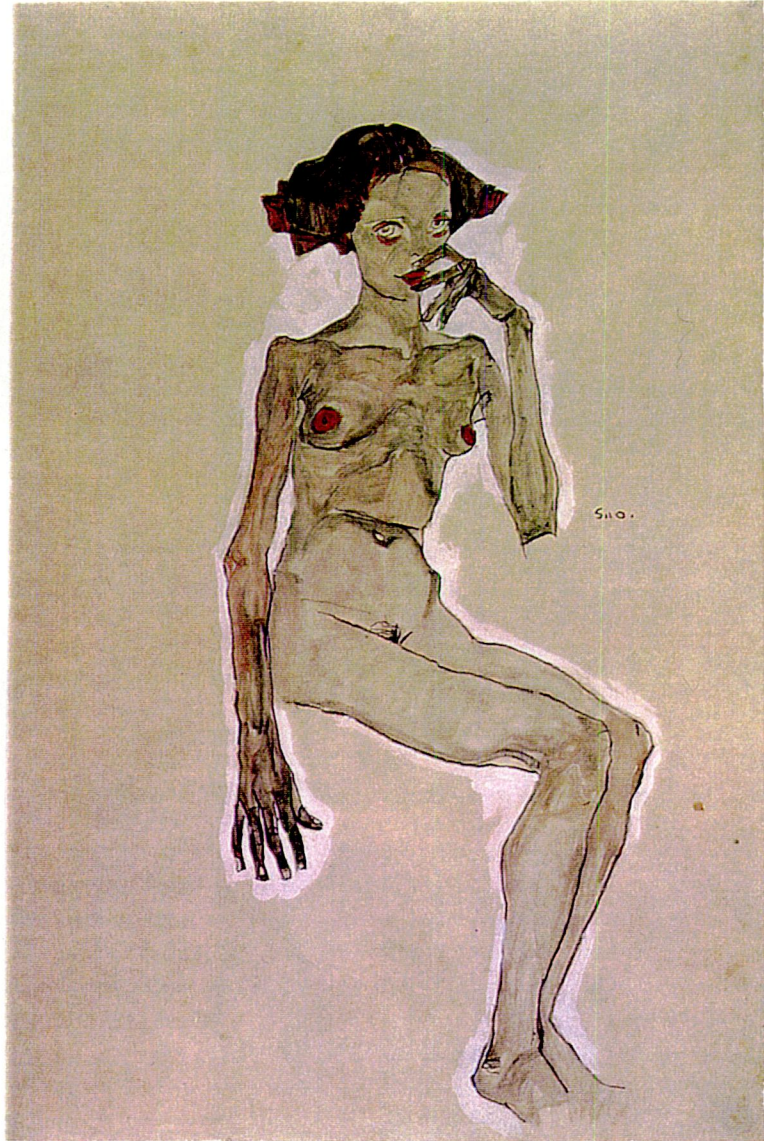
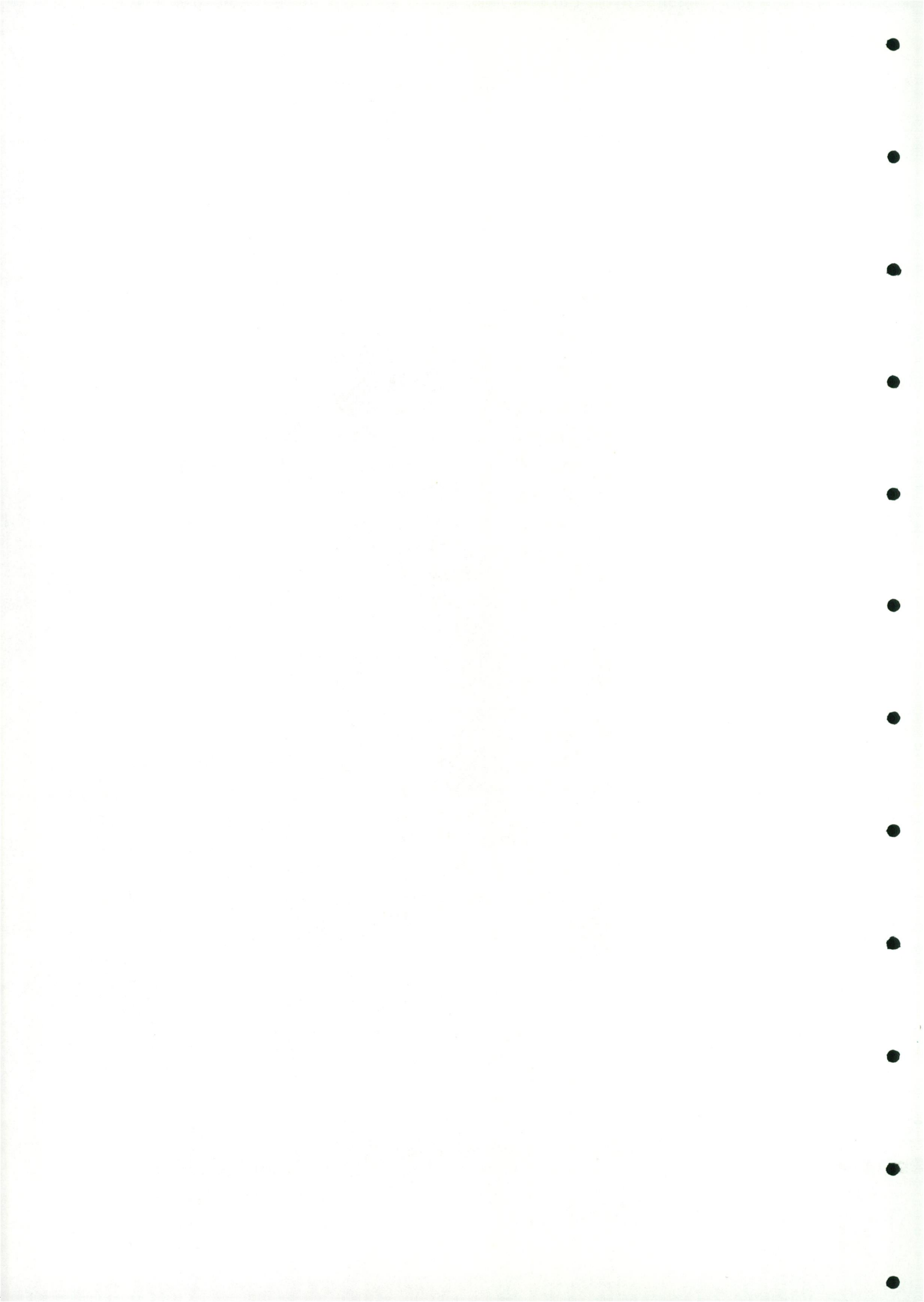


Fig 10. Seated Nude. (1910)



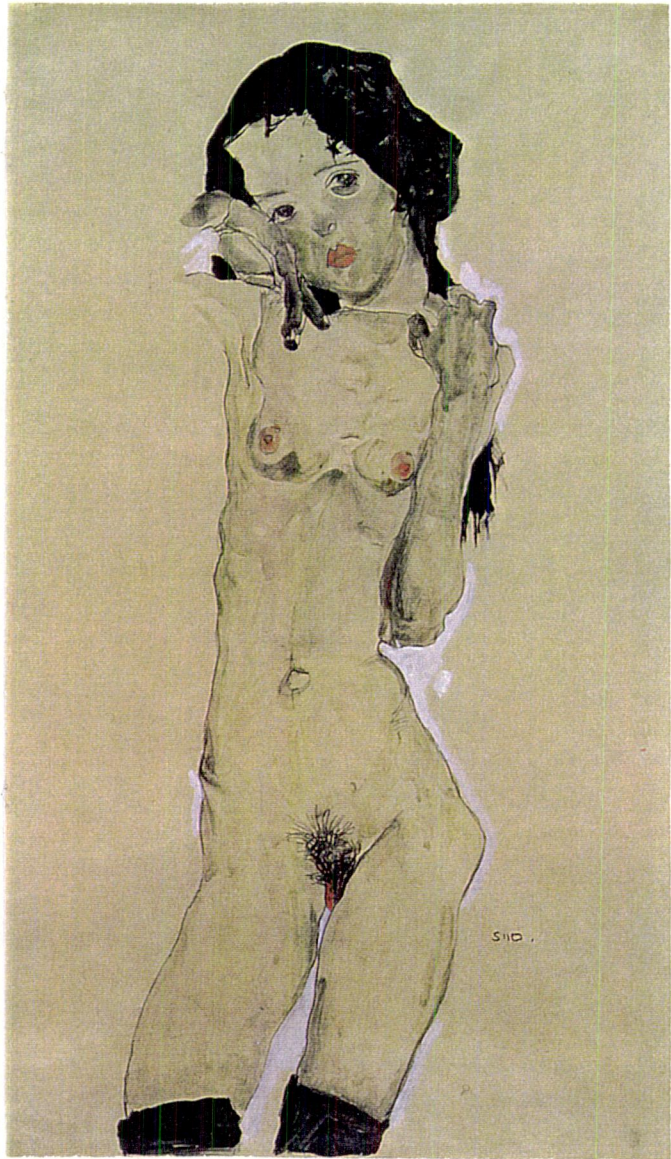


Fig 11. Black-Haired Nude Girl, Standing. (1910)



to confront the female personality. There is a similarity to Schiele's depiction of unrelated models at the time who offer up the most intimate part of their bodies to be viewed, but hide their inner feelings.

Towards the end of 1910 a noticeable change which came about is Schiele's relationship to the nude. Whatever Schiele's personal ties to his models the resultant drawings show a far more forthright engagement with personality. (Fig 10,11).

Schiele's nude series is a study of emergent sexuality. Here again however Schiele's own fantasies and confusions have been intertwined with those of the model. If Schiele saw many of his sitters as isolated beings tortured by some nameless mental anguish it is perhaps because his vision was provoked as much by his own perception of himself as by what he perceived in the models themselves.

Physically immature, thin, wide-eyed and full mouthed these erotic drawings of young girls seem innocent yet lustful. One of them decked out in stockings, neck band and earrings is even shown masturbating (Fig 12). The seductive way these young girls peer from Schiele's drawings even in their less than healthy states reinforce Mulvey's theory that males are the privileged viewers. Perhaps the function of women portrayed here is simply the support of masculine desire. The naked youths satisfying themselves, writhing in all directions ever ready for love making implies the female is always sexually available at least available to be viewed.

In the 'Red Nude' (Fig 13, 1910) the breasts are covered and attention focused on a grotesque leering face and the genital area where Schiele now ruthlessly exposes a pulpy vivid red vulva. The same red has been applied on the face to the single open eye and the grim mouth implying an equivalence of face and genitals. Woman here is portrayed as a mindless sexual beast. 'Two Women' (Fig 14, 1911), where attention is drawn even more sharply to the exposed genitals by the fact of the women being otherwise wholly clothes is another work of this type. Schiele's women are portrayed here submissive and defeated.

After 1911 Schiele seems to have mellowed somewhat and such an extreme view of women does not appear again. By 1914, Schiele had reached the midpoint of his mature career and his style became more realistic. In 'Reclining Nude with Green Stockings' (Fig 15) the model is something more than a sex object, her eyes challenge and although Schiele still controls her body he does not control her soul.

Schiele drew a vast number of nudes during the last two years of his life. Schiele stressed pose and gesture at the expense of personality in many of his (Fig 16) 1917-1918 nudes. The studies however do seem impersonal, the female nude has become



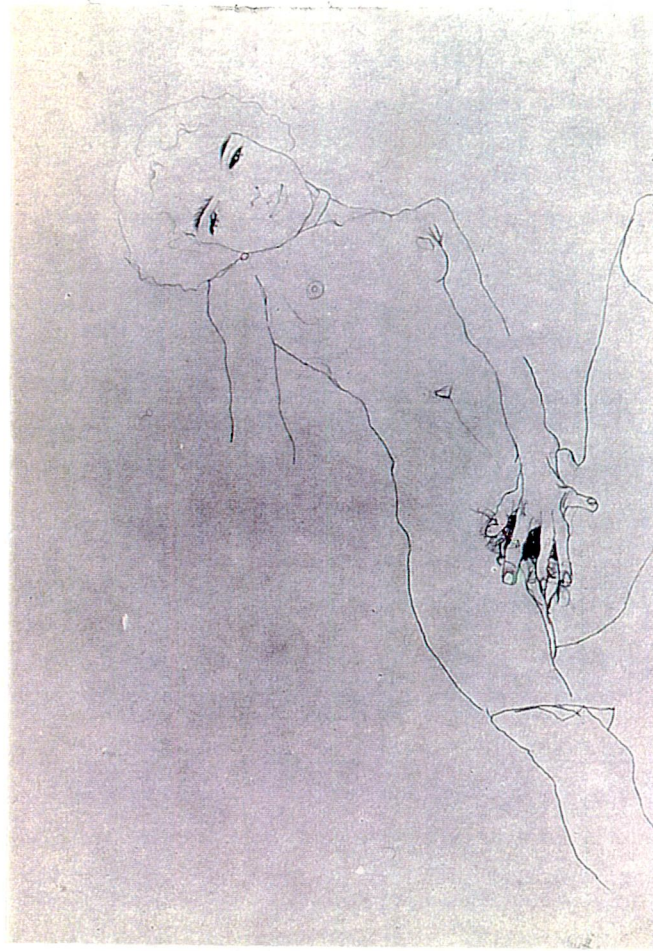


Fig 12. Reclining Girl. (1910)

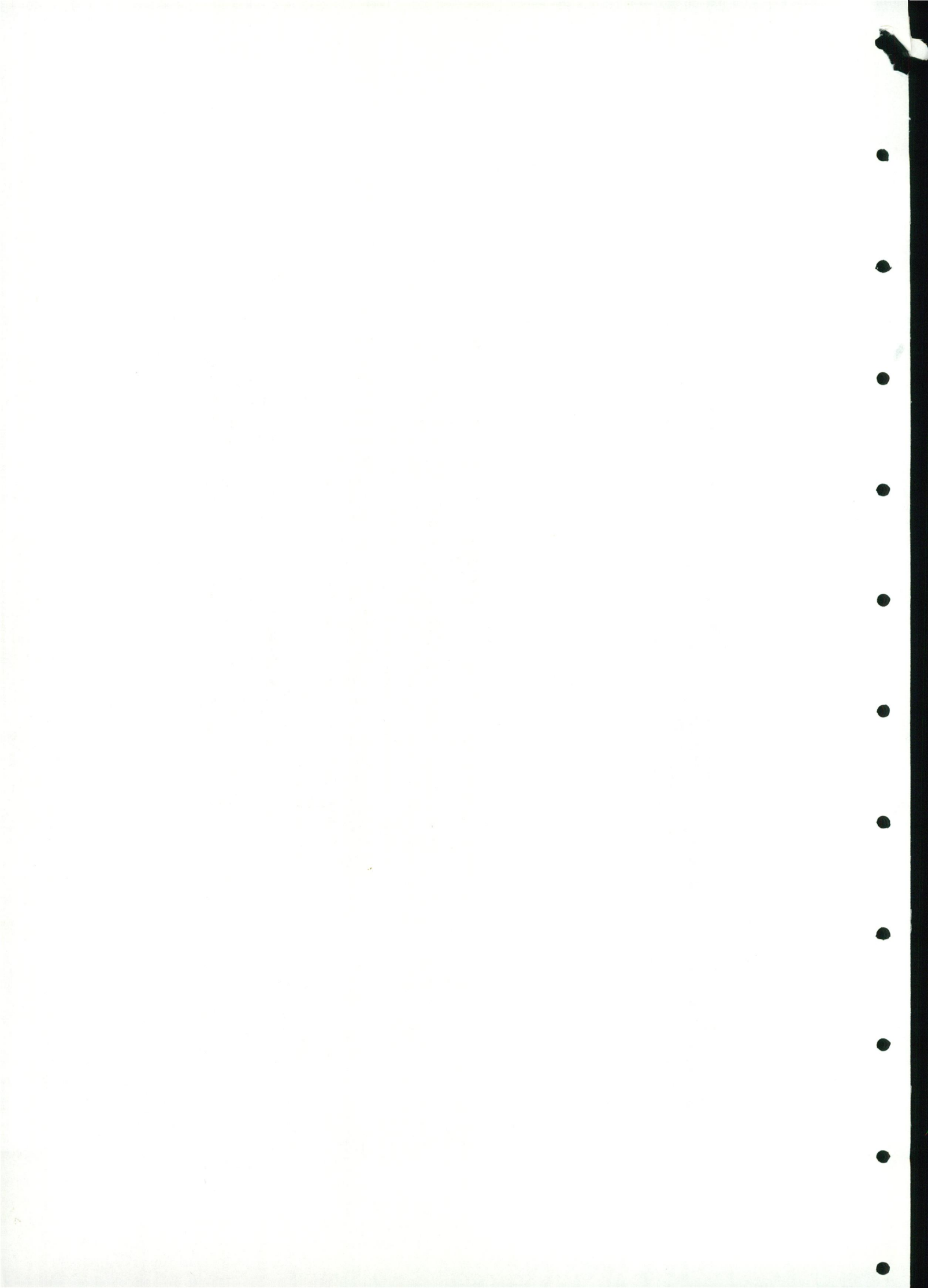




Fig 13. Red Nude. (1910)





Fig 14. Two Women. (1911)



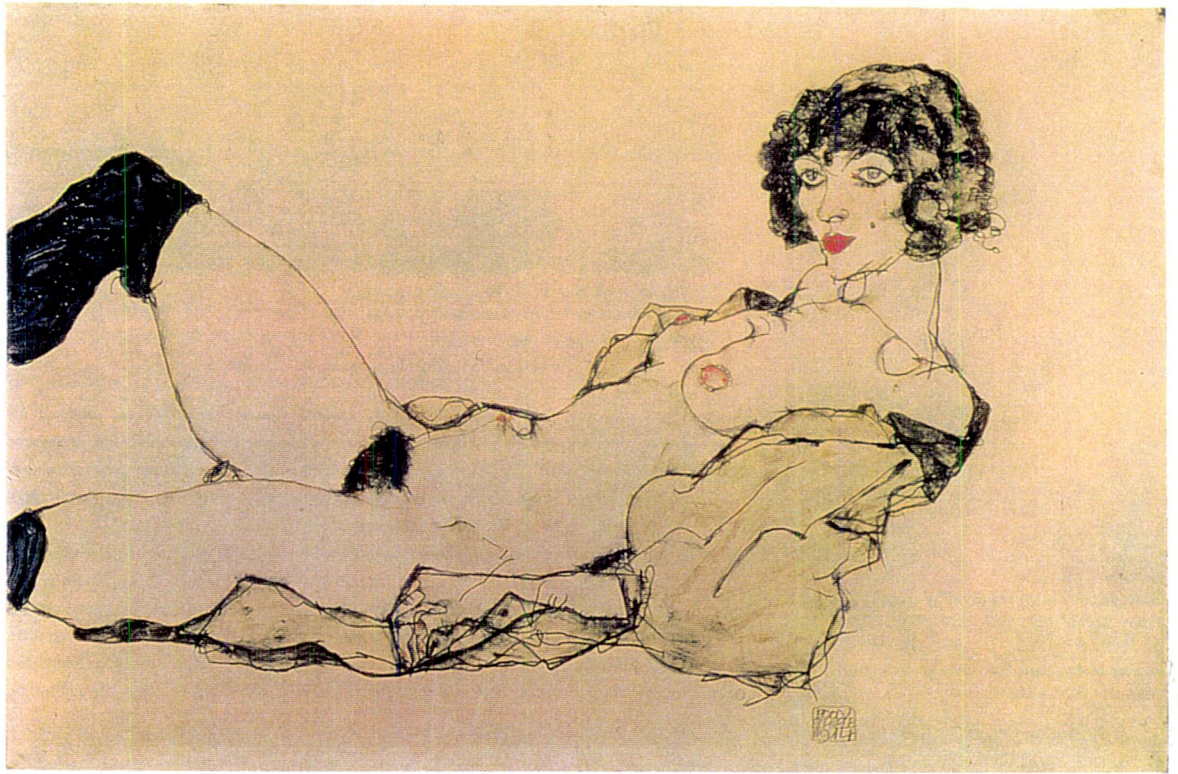


Fig 15. Reclining Nude with Green Stockings (1914)



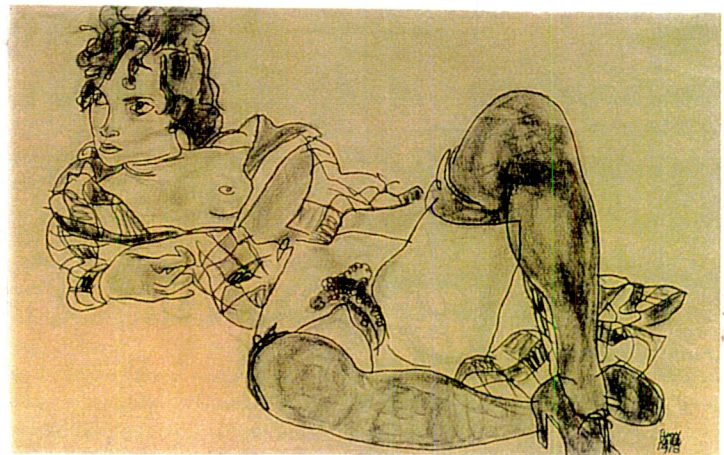


Fig 16. Crouching Woman with Left Arm Forward (1918)
Squatting Woman with Boots. (1918)
Reclining Woman. (1918)



Schiele's everywoman and has little similarity with the female described in Studlar's Theory. "In Masochistic text the female is not one of a countless number of discarded objects but an idealised, powerful figure both dangerous and comforting" (Studlar, 1984, p604).

'The Family' (Fig 17) is the culmination of Schiele's work. It shows a naked man and woman together with a small child. It is not only a picture of motherhood but yet another variation on the cycle of life. The male figure is a remarkable self portrait. As in a previous painting Schiele here is the giver and taker of life, a godlike creator. The female however typical of the bland everywoman, is an empty vessel, a means to an end. As in Schiele's prior depictions of mother and child it is the child who represents the creative goal.





Fig 17. The Family (Squatting Couple). (1918)



Chapter 6 - A Narcissistic or Masculinised Gaze

A body of feminist work has been developed which analyses the relation of the male spectator in relation to the female image as being one of power and control e.g. Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. However an analysis of images which focuses solely on their relationship to the male spectator leaves certain problems unexplained. Certainly it offers no explanation of how women look at images of women.

Gaylyn Studlar's article "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of the Cinema", is a counter theory to the assumptions of phallogentric psychoanalytic theory which relegates the image of women to absence or lack, to the nonmale, controlled by a scopophilic male gaze.

Others however have contributed some helpful critiques without proposing a complete counter theory within the domain of psychoanalysis itself. Some arguments have been put forward to explain the position of women as spectators and to account for women's pleasure in images of women.

On the one hand woman as spectator is offered the position of identification with the heterosexual male gaze, voyeuristic, penetrating and powerful. On the other hand it is argued that women's pleasure is bound up with a narcissistic identification with the image of the female body, usually shown to be desirable but passive.

The first explanation suggests that images of women are attractive because as women we are subject to socialisation. Inhabitants of a patriarchal culture women, no less than men, are socialised into the acceptance of women's bodies as desirable and accessible.

The other kind of explanation draws upon the concept of narcissism. If the male look is characterised by voyeurism, observing and taking pleasure in distance, the female look it is claimed, is narcissistic finding pleasure in closeness, in reflection and in identification with an image. "For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image - she is the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator's desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism - the female look demands a becoming" (Doane, 1982, p78). This also suggests that the notion of the voyeur who, according to Metz, "must maintain a distance between himself and the image" (Doane, 1982, p78) is antithetical to the woman. So too is the concept of possession "Nearness however is not foreign to woman, a nearness so close that any



identification of one or the other and therefore any form of property is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other so near she cannot possess it any more than she can possess herself" (Doane, 1982, p78). Likewise a female spectator may find a narcissistic pleasure in identification with a nude by Egon Schiele.

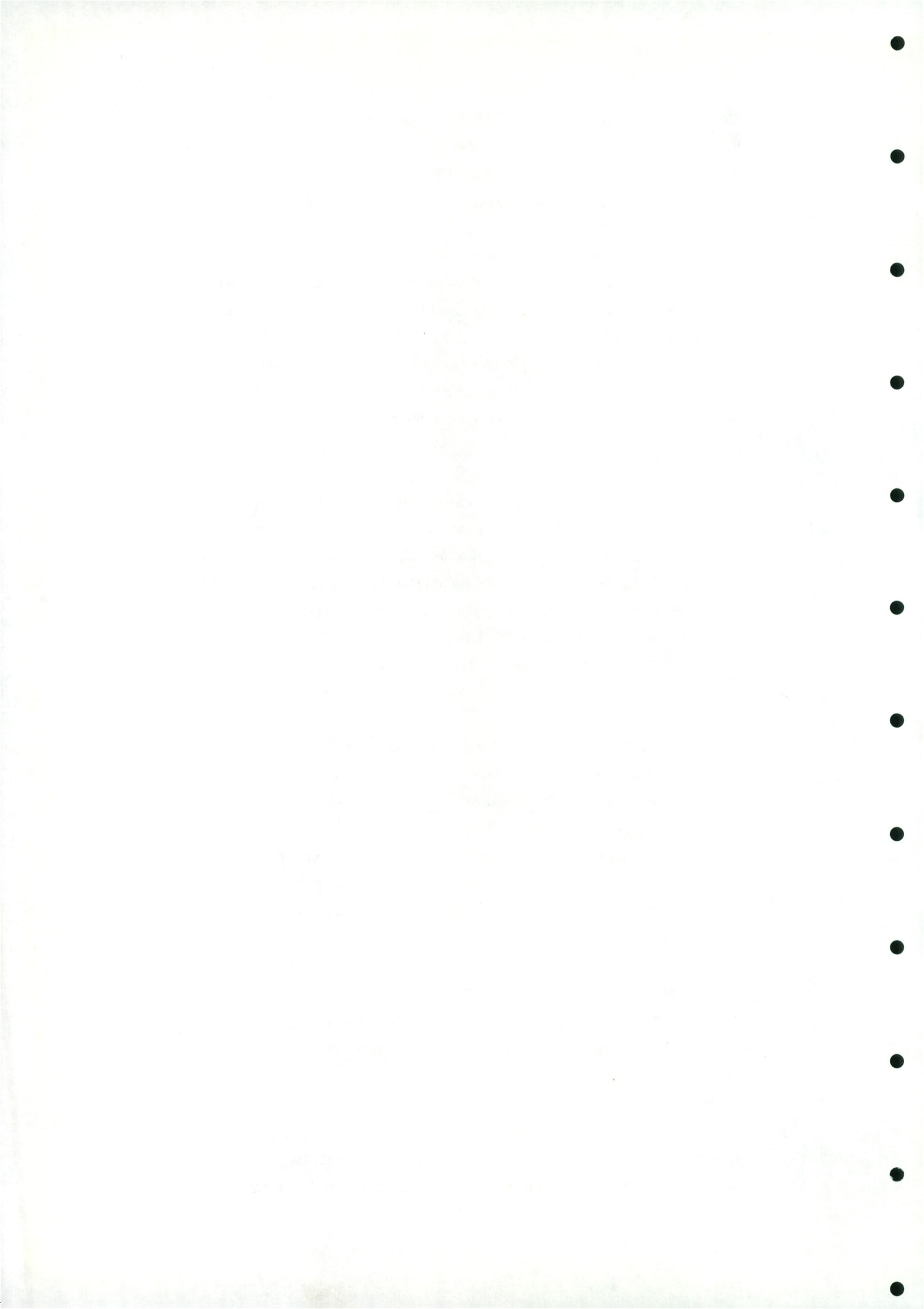
Other attempts to theorise female spectatorship have resulted in the aforementioned tendency to view female spectatorship as the site of oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position. Sex is not necessarily equivalent to gender in considering spectatorial pleasure. In a patriarchal culture it may be the case that women are forced to adopt a masculine viewpoint in the consumption of images far more often than men are required to adopt a feminine one "Inbuilt patterns of pleasure and identification impose patterns of masculinity as a 'point of view'," (Mulvey 1981, p29).

Since gender relations are not equal, women in looking at other images of women may indeed be placed in a position of adopting a voyeuristic gaze. For example a woman could quite easily adopt a position of aesthetic detachment in looking at Schiele's representation of the female, since that is the way we are taught to look at art in this culture. Schiele was a phenomenally skilled draughtsman and a prodigiously talented painter who imbued his representations of people with an unsurpassed psychological intensity. Another feature of Schiele's work which contributes to its appeal is perhaps its sentimentality. His sympathising acknowledgement of the adolescent's body on fire.

With his line Schiele recorded the psychic disturbances of his nudes. The bittersweet treatment of the adolescent psyche racked by awakening desire. The enlarged haunted eyes that stare us down, elongated emancipated torsos that invite pity (Fig 10) rake like fingers and limbs that look like instruments of torture. Voyeurism it was indeed " a spying upon the psyche in its most intimate moments", (Comini, 1986, p14).

But was the anguish and turmoil portrayed in Schiele's models their own or a reflection of his own psyche. Were the dreams that possessed Schiele unique to him or were they the same dreams many others have? "Have adults forgotten how corrupted that is how sexually driven and aroused they themselves were as children?" Schiele once wrote adding, "I have not for I suffered excruciatingly from it," (Wilson, 1980, p28). The genesis of Schiele's father's insanity had most certainly fostered a fixation on Schiele's own sexual drives.

Schiele may be considered as a popular artist among men and women today. He has indeed become somewhat of a cult figure thanks in part to the larger cult of fin de siecle. Whether his work excites people solely due to its artistic appeal may be



questioned. Schiele is indeed known as a master portrayer of anguished adolescent sexuality, he passed into history as an archetype of moral rebellion in an age of sexual repression. This undoubtedly has added to his notoriety.

“At the very period when Freud was finding masturbation a somewhat uncomfortable subject to discuss with his sons, Egon Schiele was ambidexterously staging and drawing the activity for posterity” (Comini, 1986, p14). Schiele’s erotica however may also be seen as anything but an exercise in erotic celebration. It is perhaps compounded of unresolved adolescent male narcissism and a despairing appetite for young female flesh. “His series of nudes during the years 1909 through to 1912 constituted a theatre where exhibitionism, narcissism and sexual gratification battled for centre stage,” (Comini, 1986, p14). Towards the end of his eventful life the urgency of Schiele’s early sexual manifestos did give way to more sedate representations of sexuality, yet the female still remained in a passive position. Although Schiele’s work cannot be seen as pornographic, such is the artist’s obsession with technical virtuosity, it often does place the image of the female in a position subordinate to the male. A woman may therefore take pleasure in the aesthetics of a nude by Schiele. However, if she began to refer the image to her own experience of being treated as a sexual object, the way she looked at the image could change her point of view.

In Mulvey’s re-examination of the structures of spectatorship, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)”, the woman watching the film is caught up in pleasures offered by masculinisation but is unable completely to adopt a masculine viewpoint. Mulvey explains the mobility of the female spectator’s position in Freudian terms. “For Freud, femininity is complicated by the fact that it emerges from a parallel development between the sexes,” a period he sees as masculine or phallic for boys and girls (Mulvey 1981, p30). The woman is torn between memory of her phallic phase before the development of femininity and her assumption of a “correct feminine position” which demands the active phallic phase be repressed, (Mulvey, 1981, p30). “In females too the striving to be masculine is ego syntonic at a certain period namely in the phallic phase, before the development of femininity sets in” (Freud in Mulvey 1981, p30).

In this sense Hollywood cinema/art which is structured around masculine pleasure, offers an identification with an active point of view, which allows the female spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity. However Mulvey believes that this masculinisation of the female spectator is always to some extent at cross purposes with itself. As “desire is given cultural materiality in a text for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second nature. However this nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in borrowed transvestite



clothes" (Mulvey, 1981, p33). The transvestite wears clothes which signify a different sexuality. For women this allows mastery over the image and the very possibility of attaching the gaze to desire although it is an uncomfortable position.

It is quite tempting to foreclose entirely the possibility of female spectatorship given the history of the female image in art which has relied so heavily on voyeurism, fetishism and identification with a masculine gaze. There has indeed been a tendency to theorise femininity and hence the feminine gaze as repressed and irretrievably so. The ability to oscillate between a masculine or feminine position may be seen in a more positive way however. In looking at a nude, women are capable of being both fascinated and attracted by the image and at the same time to be aware of its positioning of the female image within a patriarchal society. This suggests an ability of the female spectator to alternate between and acknowledge different points of view at the same time. Looking as a woman is dependant on a certain consciousness, to look critically while still enjoying the process itself. This is not to suggest that women automatically look in a critical way. Looking as a woman is dependant on a certain consciousness that looking could be different from a masculine viewpoint and that women's experience could be a positive and productive one.



Conclusion

The history of the female nude in the visual arts may be seen as relentlessly placing the female image in a position of passivity, submission and availability. Berger suggests that the female nude of tradition can hardly call her nakedness her own. "Her nakedness is not a function of her own sexuality but the sexuality of those who have access to the painting." It would seem that female imagery and erotic art have been created out of male needs and desires. Schiele's images of the female may be seen as no exception to this rule. The passivity perhaps implied in the imagery of the naked woman may be seen not merely as a function of the spectator's attitude but that of the artist creator himself.

This raises some questions as to what kind of pleasures are offered to women as spectators within forms of representation which, like the nude, have been made mainly by men, for men. If pleasure in looking is split between active/male, passive/female how do I, as a woman, explain my enjoyment of certain images.

If all images of women reinstate the same relationship of sexual power and subordination. This also raises the issue of how women can work within a male tradition of representation to produce images that disrupt the conventions of patriarchy. There are inevitable risks involved in representation of the female body. "The female body has become dense with meaning in patriarchal culture and it is impossible to shake off these connotations entirely," (Nead, 1992, p72). However there is a possibility that perhaps signs and values can be transformed.

This subordination of the female image is not seen to be due to some intrigue on the part of men, but reflects the total situation between men and women in society. Psychoanalysis's significance for feminists lies in the account it gives of the construction of sexual difference. Very broadly speaking, there are those feminist psychoanalysts who build their theoretical base on Freudian thought placing emphasis on the castration and Oedipal complexes and those who concentrate on the early relations between mother and child.

There is a possibility that phallogentric psychoanalysis may operate to confirm women's subordination in society. In Mulvey's construct the female can "exist only in relation to castration" she is either the "bearer of guilt" or the "perfect product", (Mulvey, 1989, p21). This scenario establishes the women as lack and her subsequent subjugation to the symbolic order.



As Mulvey herself points out: "The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated women to give order and meaning to its world" (Mulvey, 1989, p14). The use of phallogentric psychoanalysis may serve to endorse the notion of women as lack. Although, as mentioned earlier, Mulvey's article uncovers an unfair advantage of the male viewer, the very terminology of binary opposition, active male, passive female may encourage the female to see herself in a similar passive light. The female may find it difficult to remove herself from the knowledge of her own negative position in relation to the male. This is not to imply that feminist interest in phallogentric psychoanalysis is in any way responsible for women's lesser life, for this would be a complete misinterpretation of feminism.

However in trying to come to terms with patriarchal society, current theoretical discourse has often reduced the psychoanalytical complexity of spectatorship through a regressive phallogentricism that ignores a wider range of psychological influences on visual pleasure. We should perhaps broaden the focus of psychoanalysis to question guiding theoretical assumptions and to confront the complexity of women's place within patriarchal culture. "The need for a psychology of women which does not treat them simply as castrated men" (Frosh, 1987, p177) is needed. Reintegration of the powerful maternal image that can be viewed as a complex pleasure by both males and females even in a patriarchal society is a possibility.

As mentioned earlier Studlar's theory of masochism does not call into question the passivity of the female position rather it jeopardises the illusion of the masculine gaze as being inevitably one of control. According to Studlar, masochistic fantasy is dominated by oral pleasure, the desire to return to the security of the womb, ("the nondifferentiated body state of the mother/child") (Studlar, 1984, p616), and fear of abandonment. In her ideal form, as representative of the oral mother, the female in masochistic structures is thus all powerful.

The spectator cinema/art may regress to a similar state of orality as the masochist. Rather than being premised on control and mastery, which defines the sadistic form of visual pleasure, in masochistic pleasure "the spectator receives but no object related demands are made," (Studlar, 1984, p613). The female image may still be the object of the look but she also becomes the holder of a "controlling" gaze. Operating within the limitations of patriarchy the female image still has the possibility to fascinate, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off.

Neither is fetishism necessarily used as a defence against castration anxiety in the proposed masochistic structure. It is instead described as being a defensive reaction to



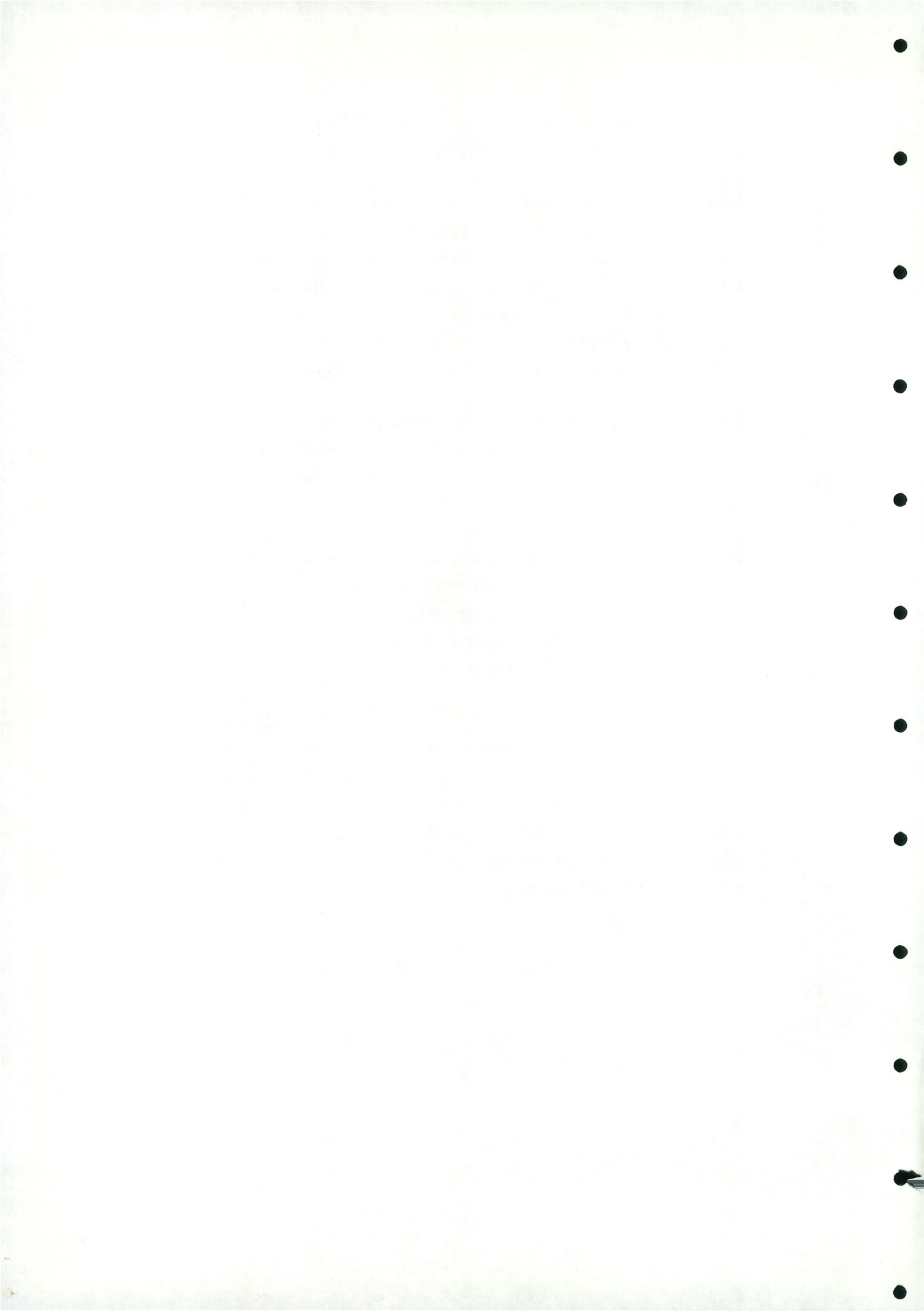
restore the mother's loss. In opposition to Freud the fetish represents more than the female phallus, it represents instead a substitute for the mother's breast and body.

Although it would be naive to assume that the identification of female scopophilia or fetishism could open a gap for the female spectator within dominant forms of erotic art, in art history, a pre-oedipal origin of these manifestations calls into question the views that exclude the female from the fundamental structures of visual pleasure in looking at the female image. In reducing spectatorial pleasures to the workings of the castration complex, Mulvey may be ignoring the existence of the Oedipal desires and ambivalences which may play a part in explaining the pleasures of a female gaze.

There is a crucial political point in feminist arguments that no female image can ever entirely escape reinstating female subordination. There is a chance that patriarchal traditions of representation can however be sufficiently disturbed to create new and different associations and values.

Women today are looking for ways to express and enjoy their own femininity. Reconsideration of the role of pre-oedipal states of psychic development may open areas of exploration. If the female image can also represent the power of the oral mother and become the holder of the controlling gaze this may give rise to possibilities for creating alternative positive images of women.

Perhaps this change is already underway as both men and women become more aware of producing positive images of the female. In the recent film 'Leon' (**Produced by Luc Besson 1995**) the young girl is of a similar age to Schiele's young proletarian models (**Figs 10 and 11**). However she is far from the symbol of male dominance, female passivity/availability portrayed in Schiele's images. Training to be a hitman she portrays both femininity and strength. The feminist movement deserves full acknowledgement for this change.



Appendix A

“Freud dealt with the question of masochism in several essays; his view on the perversion however remained consistent in his belief that oedipal conflict was the cause of the perversion. Guilt and fear of castration by the father led the male child to assume a passive position in order to placate the father and win his love. Being beaten by the father was “not only punishment for the forbidden genital relation with the mother, but also a regressive substitute for it”. The punishment acquired “libidinal excitation” and “here” Freud declared “we have the essence of masochism”. Freud developed a theory of masochism as a primary driving force expressing the Death Instinct but was continually drawn to reaffirming the complimentary status of masochism and sadism”, (Studlar, 1984, p606). “It can often be shown that masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned around upon the subject’s own self”. (Freud, 1979, p72)



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