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MOOS7271NC

The National College of Art and Design.

Fine Art (Painting)

The Hero: Organic and Synthetic.

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting).

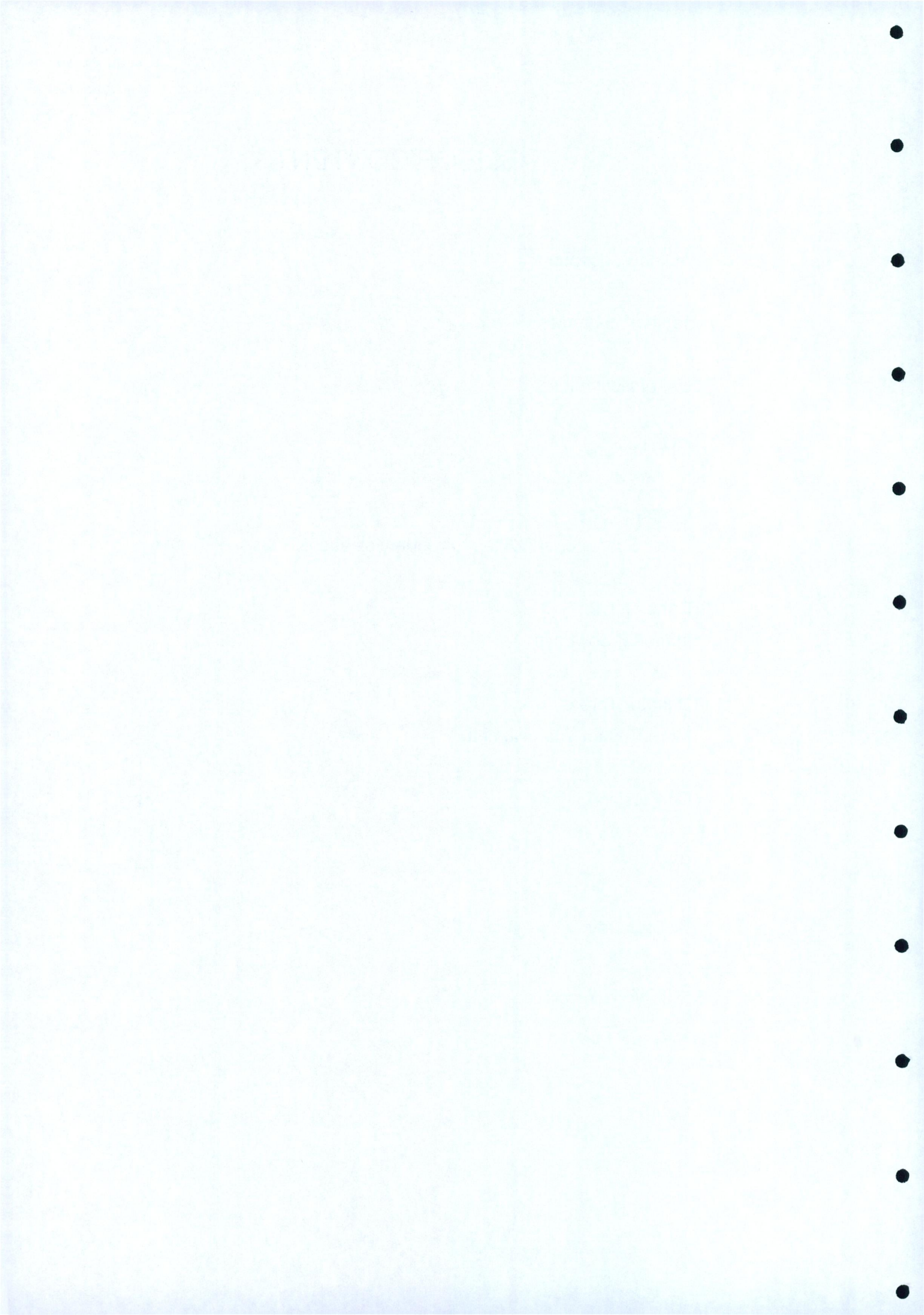
1997.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis tutor Emer Williams for her continuous support and supply of material.

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INTRODUCTION

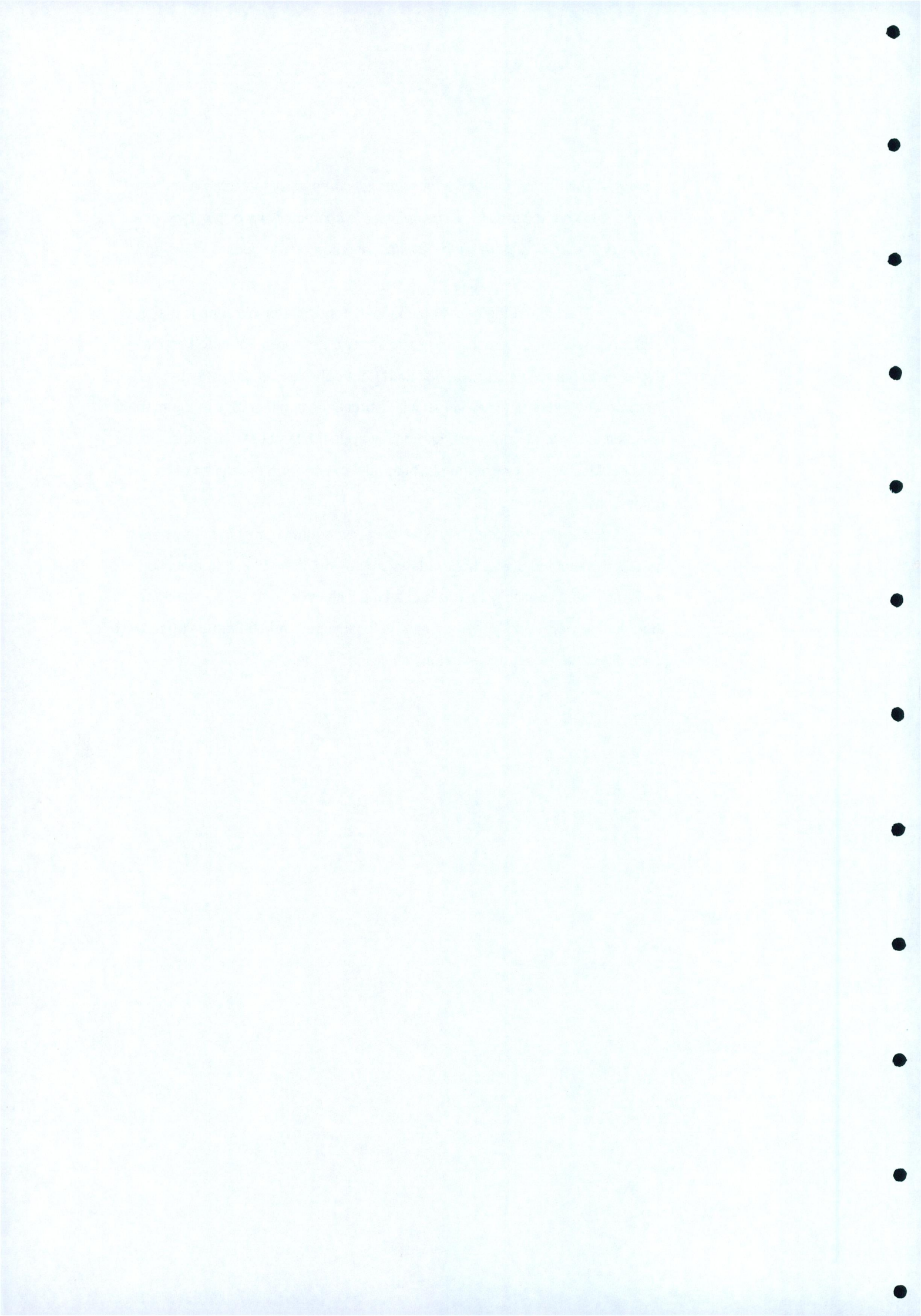


INTRODUCTION

Hero: A man noted or admired for nobility, courage, outstanding achievements. (b) A great warrior. (c) The chief male character in a poem, play or story. (d) A man of superhuman qualities favoured by the gods; a demi-god.¹

The idea of the hero has changed considerably over the last sixty years; as Hollywood's pursuit and appetite for a new breed of hero has introduced us to heroes who have originated from galaxies, far, far away, terminators from the future who are virtually indestructible, sentient toys in the manifestation of computer graphics, and omnivorous hoofed bristly mammals of the family suidae who possess the ability to talk and perform the duties of a trained sheep dog. (Fig 1)

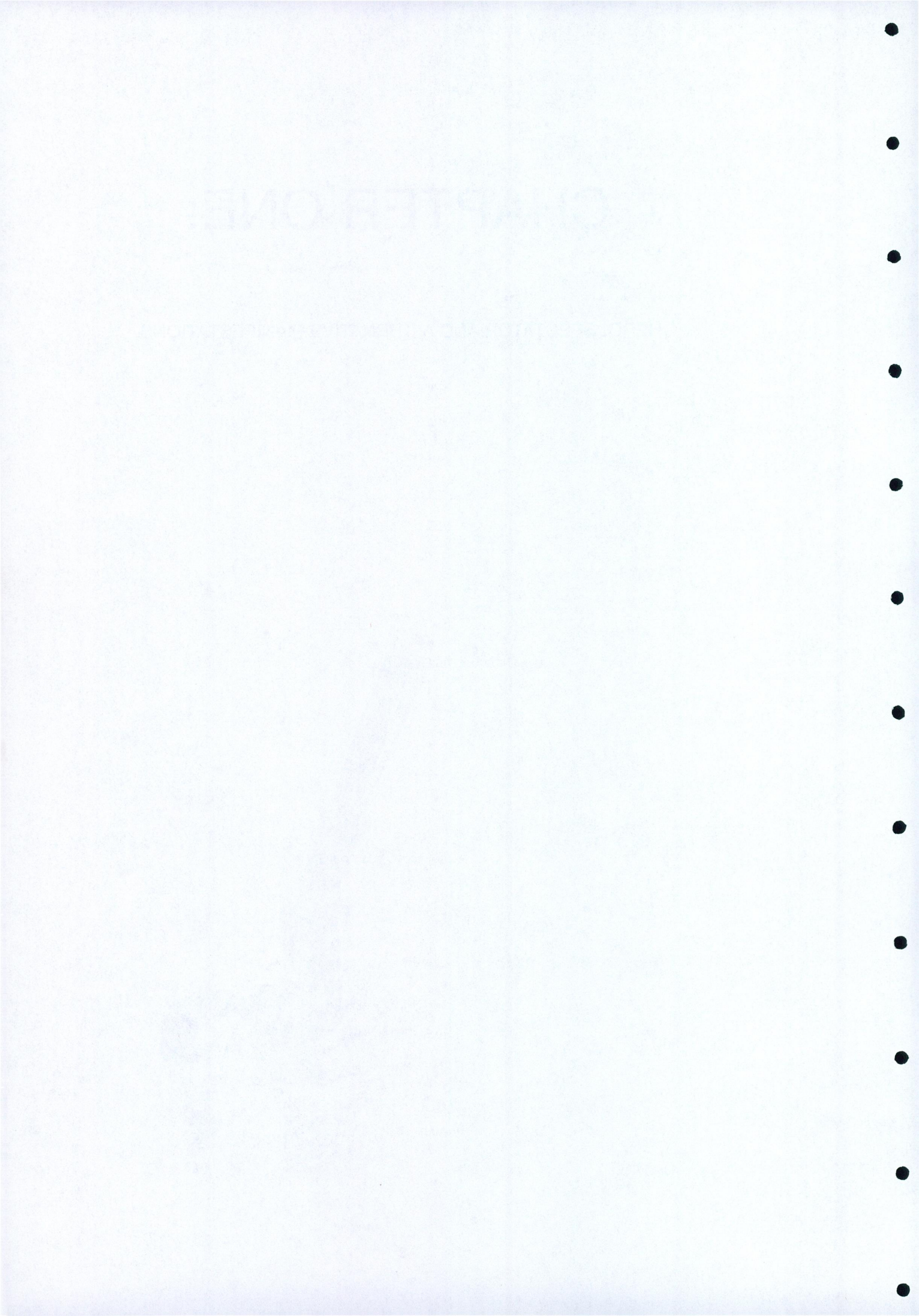
To discuss more accurately how we arrived at this point in time where a hero can download over a hundred megabytes of information into a section of his brain or prosthetically reconstruct a limb with cybernetic components as though they were readily available in the local supermarket; I am going to trace the path of the hero from when he was still just a man.



CHAPTER ONE:

HERO, SPECTATOR AND ALTERNATIVE MANIFESTATIONS.





The hero is more or less a reflection or mirror image of what society wishes him to be. Freud explored ~~the~~ and observed the human unconscious in an attempt to provide a vocabulary that would answer the questions of gender identities. Psychoanalysis provided access to the political unconscious² through this vocabulary.

Accepting the fact that all cultural societies evolved to allow improved conditions for women, it's still arguable that we have encoded in our DNA an idea of what masculinity and femininity are. These psychological notions of gender are not in synch with the rate of social change and are quite inequitable. The structure of these sexual differences are familiar to most western societies.

The qualities associated with masculinity are ones of domination, separation and toughness. While femininity possess the qualities of protectiveness, kindness and nurturing. This structuring on a social ladder has placed man at the top, with women in second place. Despite this advantageous social positioning, it's usually the men more often than the women who feel insecure about their sexuality. They too must fight against this constructed image of themselves. Therapists generally agree that it's mostly men who suffer from transexualism and transvestism. These are extreme cases of confusion among men relating to their fundamental origins.

Thomas J Ryan provides a summary of Freud's Oedipus complex in the 'Roots of Masculinity'. Boys are seen to have an advantage over girls in that they have a heterosexual love object. The father becomes a rival as the mother becomes sexualised. The boy must give up his mother as a sexual object and then identify with his father under the threat of castration. This establishes the boy's masculinity and preserves his heterosexuality.

The path of the girl is more complex. The love object is of the same sex. For her to establish her heterosexuality, she must transfer her love from her mother to her father. This change is completed through defeat, as she accepts the fact that she lacks a penis and can never possess the mother. She blames her mother for this inadequacy and the transferal of love from mother to father is motivated by resentment. This supports the stereotypical definition of masculinity and femininity; the female accepts her destiny and the passive role she is meant to play.



The male must identify with the father and other men. It is repression and fear that forms this masculine sexuality and identification. The move from the mother to father is a violent process and it's this rejection of the mother that leads to a devaluation of the female and ultimately the problematic intimate encounters with adult women in later life. It's this process that allows the male to achieve/create a dominant position for himself in a masculine world. Ryan posits that:

"masculinity can be viewed as a defensive construction developed over the years out of a need to emphasise a difference, a separateness from the mother"³

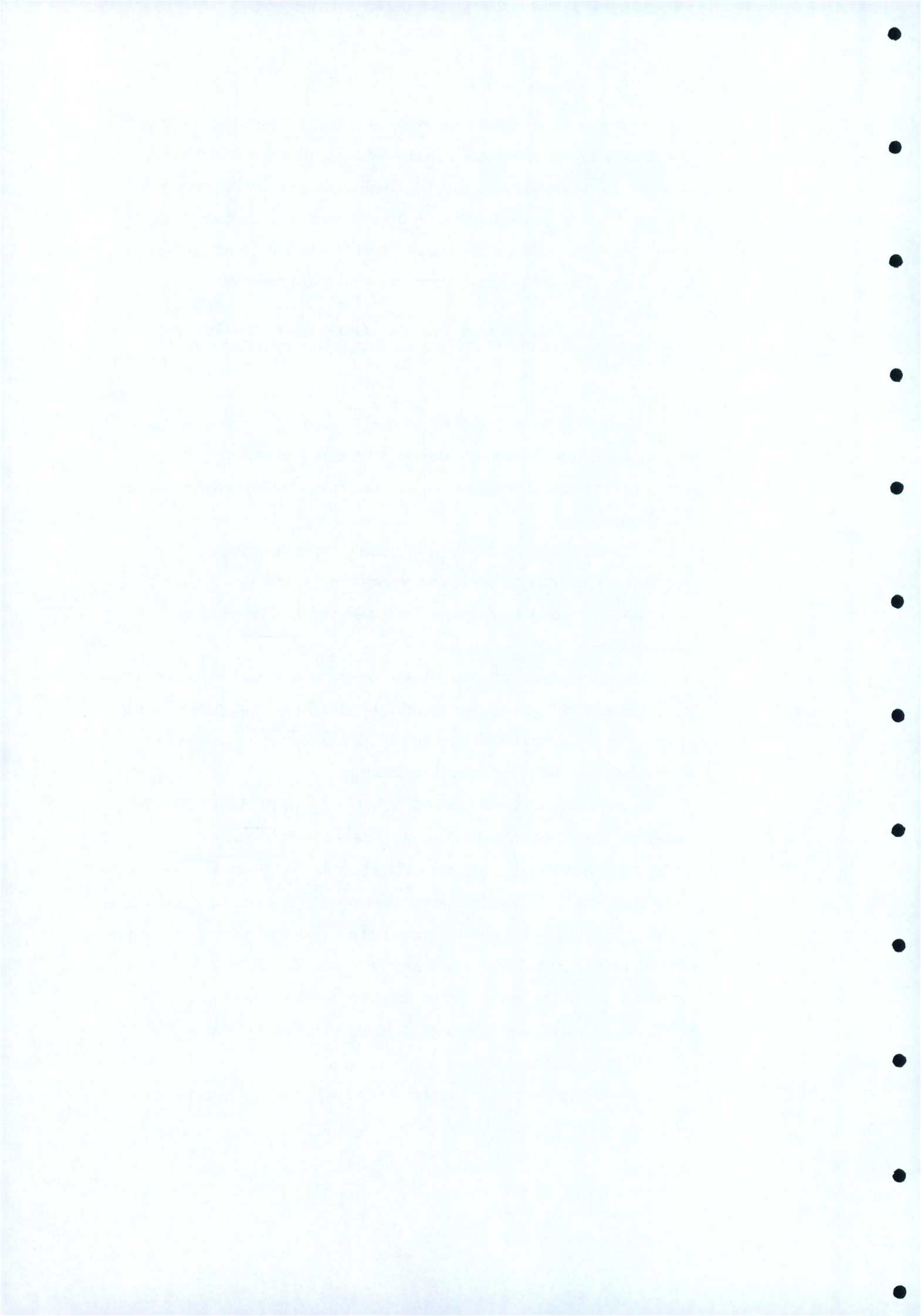
The end result displays the strength, position, power and competitiveness of the male, the qualities he needs to secure his identity. It's this male identity which leads me to discuss the relationship between the on-screen protagonist and the off-screen spectator.

John Ellis argues that the relationship between the protagonist and spectator is more than just the male identifying with the male hero and women with female heroines. He believes that there are a variety of individual forms of identification.

Specifically in this case, fantasies, dreams and narcissism. He puts forward that cinematic identification involves two different tendencies. First, there is the construction of the individual, which contains multiple and contradictory tendencies through the involvement of phantasy and dreaming.

Second, there is narcissistic identification with the image of a human figure which is perceived as another. It is the conditions of entertainment cinema that invoke these two processes. The males do not simply identify with the male heroes, nor do the females identify with the women heroines, it is more complex than this, as one must recognise the self and the image that is on the screen. It involves the narcissistic identification and self-identifications with the various positions that are presented in any one film, (hero and villain, active and passive roles etc). Therefore, identification is multiple and fragmented, segments of the viewer's own psyche are presented to themselves on screen.⁴

In 'Masculinity as Spectacle', Steve Neale supports the notion that identification is specifically categorised to display sexual division:



"Every film thus tends to specify identification in accordance with the socially defined and categories of male and female"⁵

Neale looks at the male in particular and explores the idea of narcissistic identification and narcissism, which compare with the ideals of omnipotence and fantasy. This demonstrates the extent to which the male protagonist's image is reliant on the perfectly ideal ego; a narcissistic fantasy.

Laura Mulvey's argument runs tangential to that of Neale. The spectator projects his own self onto his screen surrogate so that he may experience the power and control possessed by the main protagonist, which gives a self-satisfying sense of omnipotence.

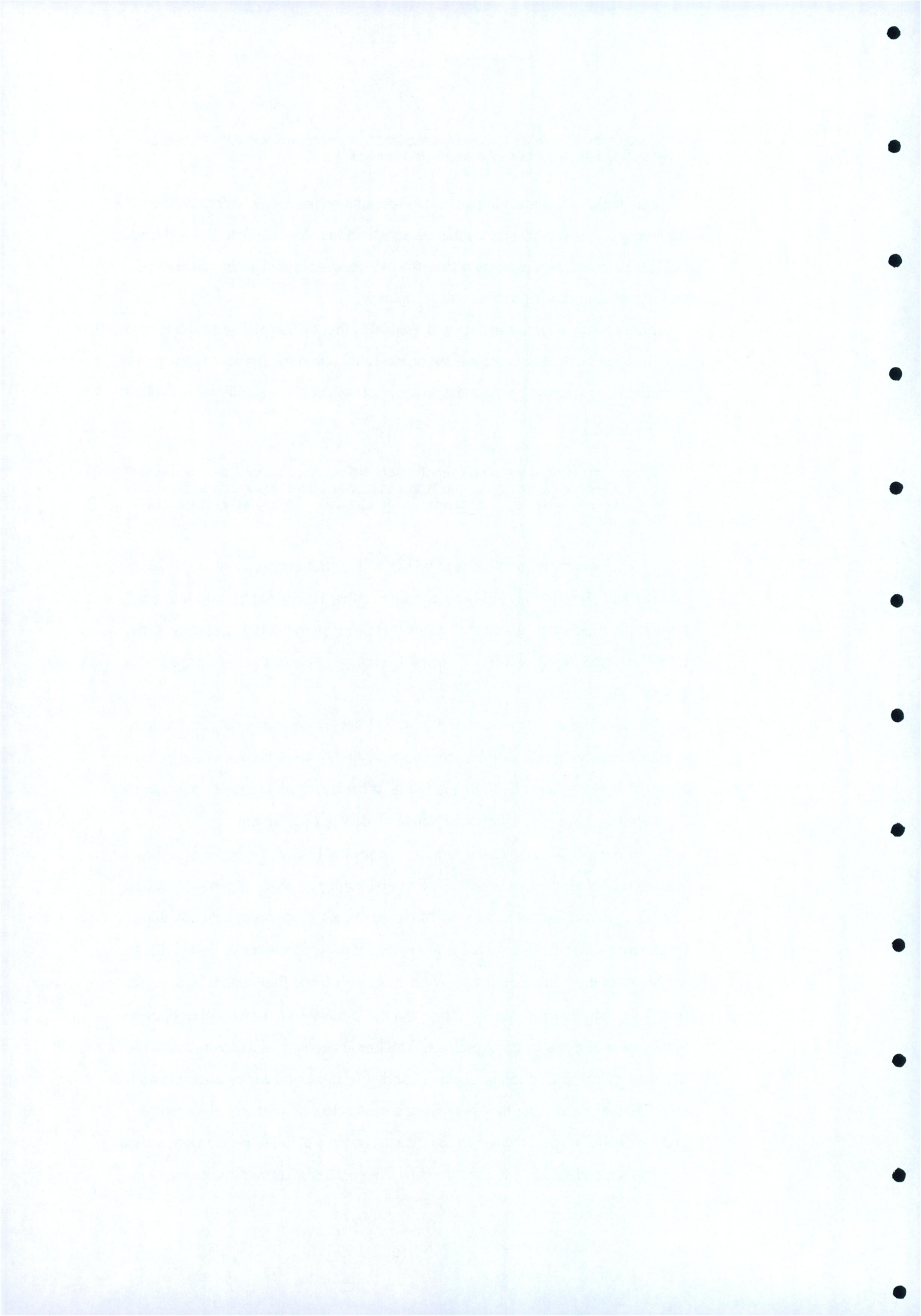
"A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of his gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the moment of recognition in front of the mirror."⁶

These notions can be observed in the films Superman (Benton - 1978) and Batman (Tim Burton -1989), where Christopher Reeve (fig 2) and Micheal Keaton (fig 3) respectively depict heroes that are superhuman and almost godlike. Clint Eastwood (fig 4) similarly portrays these characteristics in the Sergio Leone spaghetti western trilogy.

Whether the hero is an officer of the law killed in the line of duty and reborn as an invincible cyborg, or a woman who suddenly finds herself being hunted by an unstoppable killing machine from the future, is irrelevant with regards to the journey they both must take to re-affirm their sense of identity and value.

In Joseph Campbell's "Hero with a Thousand Faces", he posits that despite the diversity of characters or settings that their journey's share a common structure. The journey can be separated into three stages, Departure, Initiation and Return. In the first stage the hero is presented in an ordinary world. The plot normally plucks them from a familiar environment and drops them into a bizarre alien one. This occurs after they have been called to adventure, which either appears in the guise of a challenge or problem. The hero becomes reluctant and is generally not fully committed to the quest at hand. It is at this point they are encouraged by a mentor or character they respect and associate with wisdom. The mentor provides either a special weapon or advice that is crucial to the mission's success.

The second stage compares the new alien environment with the ordinary



world and it is here that the hero is presented with new challenges, resulting in the formation of enemies and allies. The most dangerous place in the new world is finally reached (the inmost cave) and the hero faces his/her supreme ordeal. During the ordeal the hero's luck usually runs out and escape seems futile. This allows a rebirth of the hero.

The final stage depicts the hero recovering from near death and successfully taking possession of the item he/she had come in search for in the beginning. Increased wisdom can be bestowed upon the hero at this time and reconciliation with a loved one may also occur. The journey home begins and several obstacles are encountered and overcome. When home is reached the hero must have a treasure, elixir or vital knowledge for the adventure to succeed. If not the hero may be doomed to repeat the task.

The film Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven - 1990) illustrates the last three stages quite well. First, Quaid is seen working in an ordinary construction job on earth. He has an unusual fascination with Mars and goes to the Recall company to have fake memories implanted of a holiday there. During the implantation procedure an alter-ego is discovered by Recall and proven by Quaid when he kills the agents/work comrades in self-defense. Quaid's mentor is in the form of a pre-recorded electronic image of himself in the silver suitcase. It's this image he trusts and takes advice from.

Second, he makes the trip to the alien world, in this case Mars. In Venusville he makes his allies (Melina, Quato) and his enemies (Cohagen).

The inmost cave is where the alien device is concealed and where Quaid is captured. He faces his supreme ordeal and discovers he was once Howser, Cohagen's friend and part of a plot to destroy Quato and the resistance. Cohagen plans to revive Howser's persona which results in the death of Quaid's consciousness.

Finally, Quaid seizes the sword and escapes to activate the alien technology. His love with Melina is reconciled and they both survive the vacuum after Cohagen's attempt to kill them. Quaid reaches home with the treasure which manifests itself as an atmosphere for Mars and freedom for the colonists.

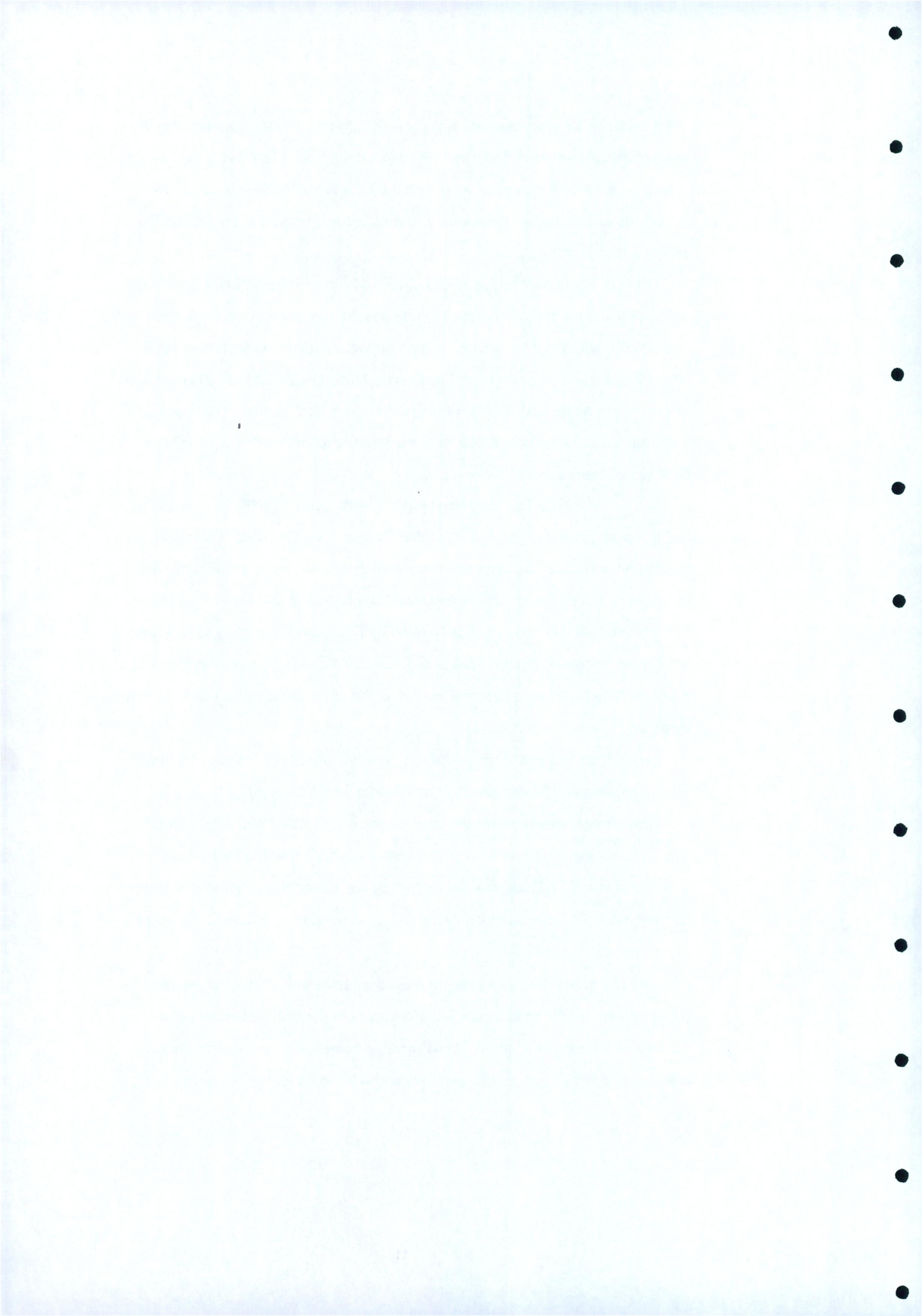




Figure 1

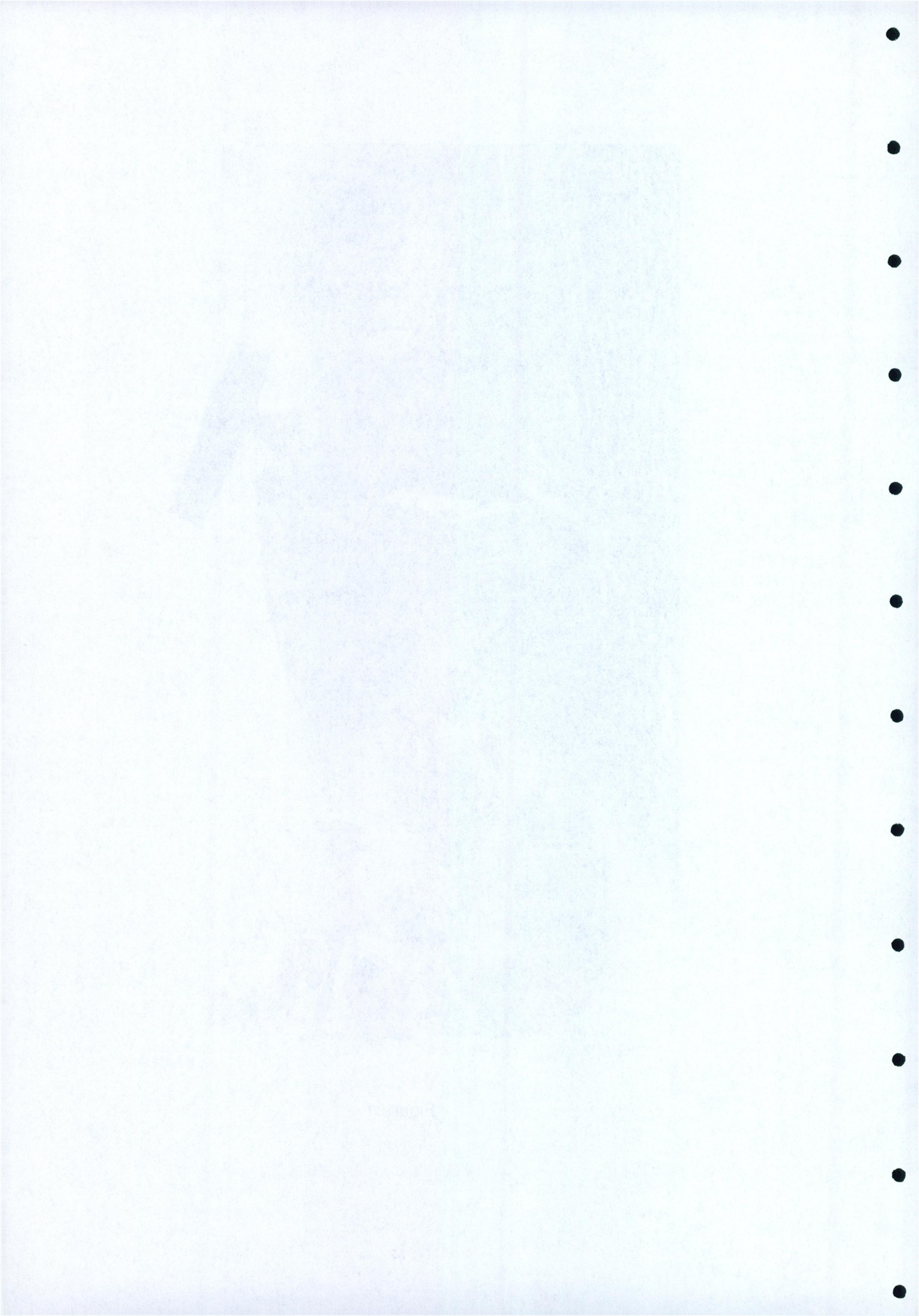




Figure 2

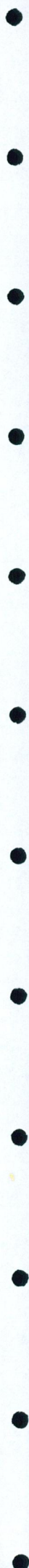
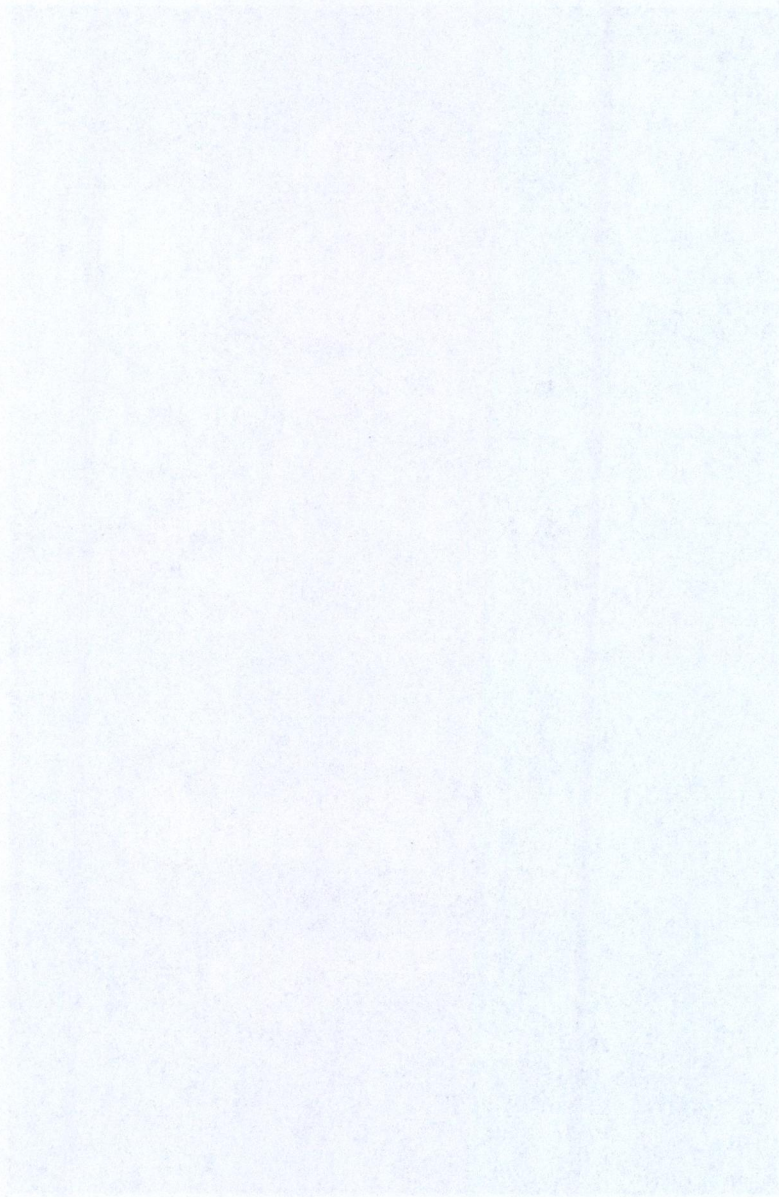




Figure 3

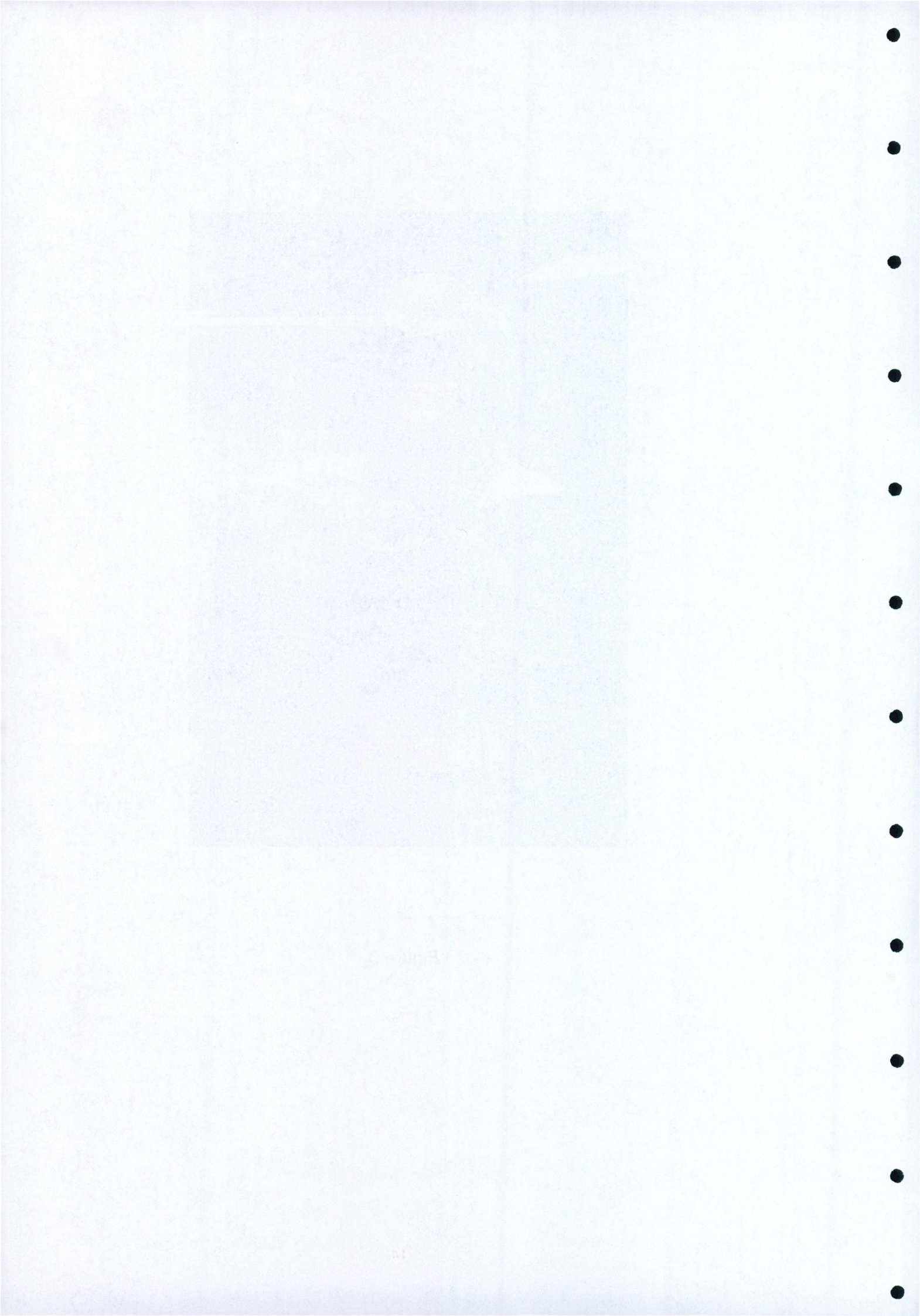
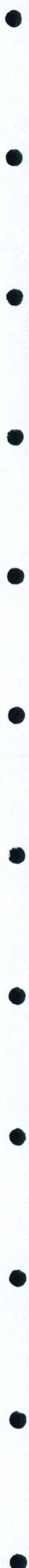
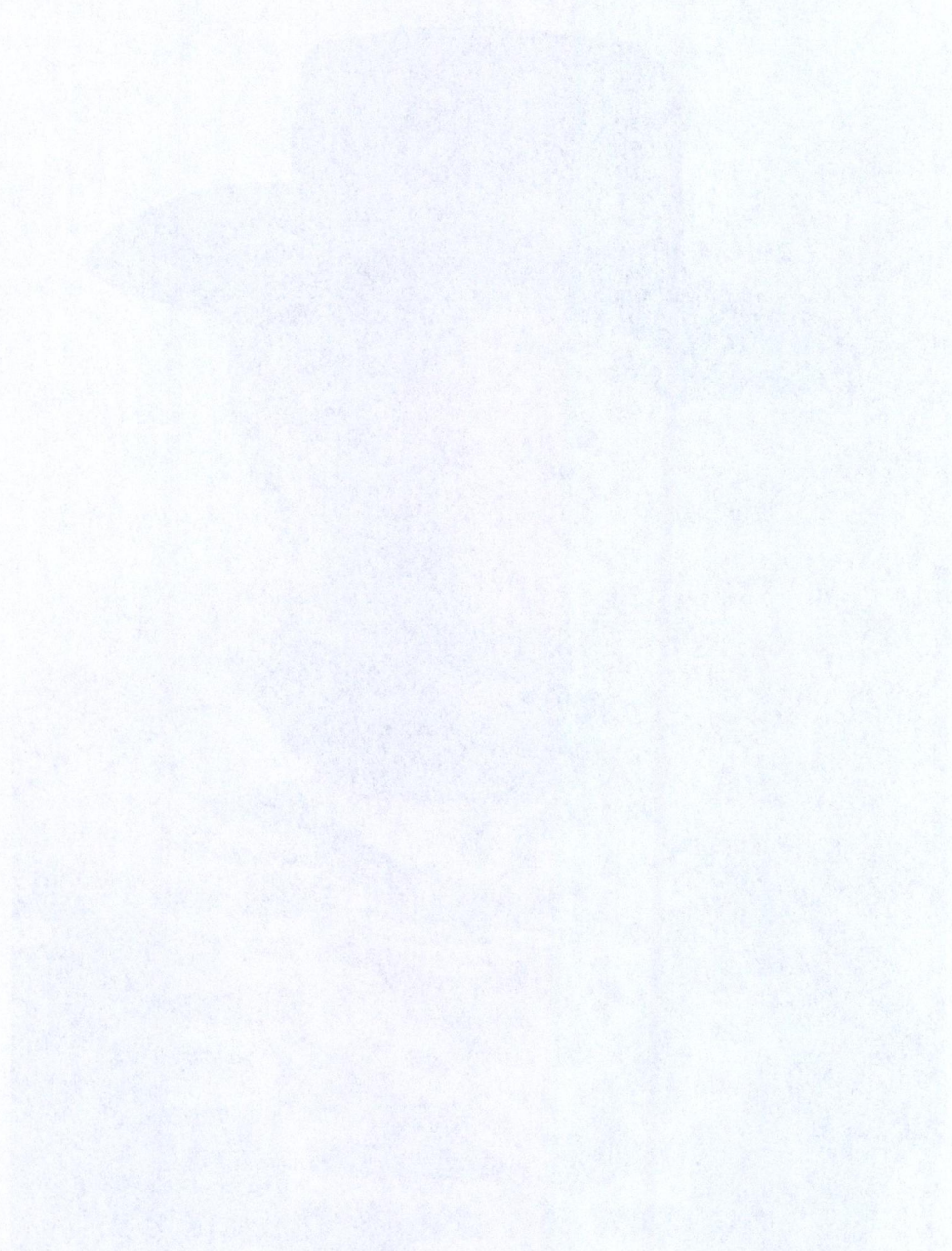




Figure 4



CHAPTER TWO:

IMMORTAL COWBOYS.



CHAPTER TWO

The western, being one of the most distinctive genres, has been a source of inspiration over the years for contemporary film. Cawelti argues that "there is nothing particularly new in recent films". ⁷¹ That contemporary film discovered nothing that hadn't already been explored in earlier films like the western. What sets contemporary films apart is the use of the latest technology to produce new visual and sound effects. It is this reckoning that the majority of modern films are considered to be disguised westerns; and by that reasoning, the hero is a cowboy, regardless of his appearance.

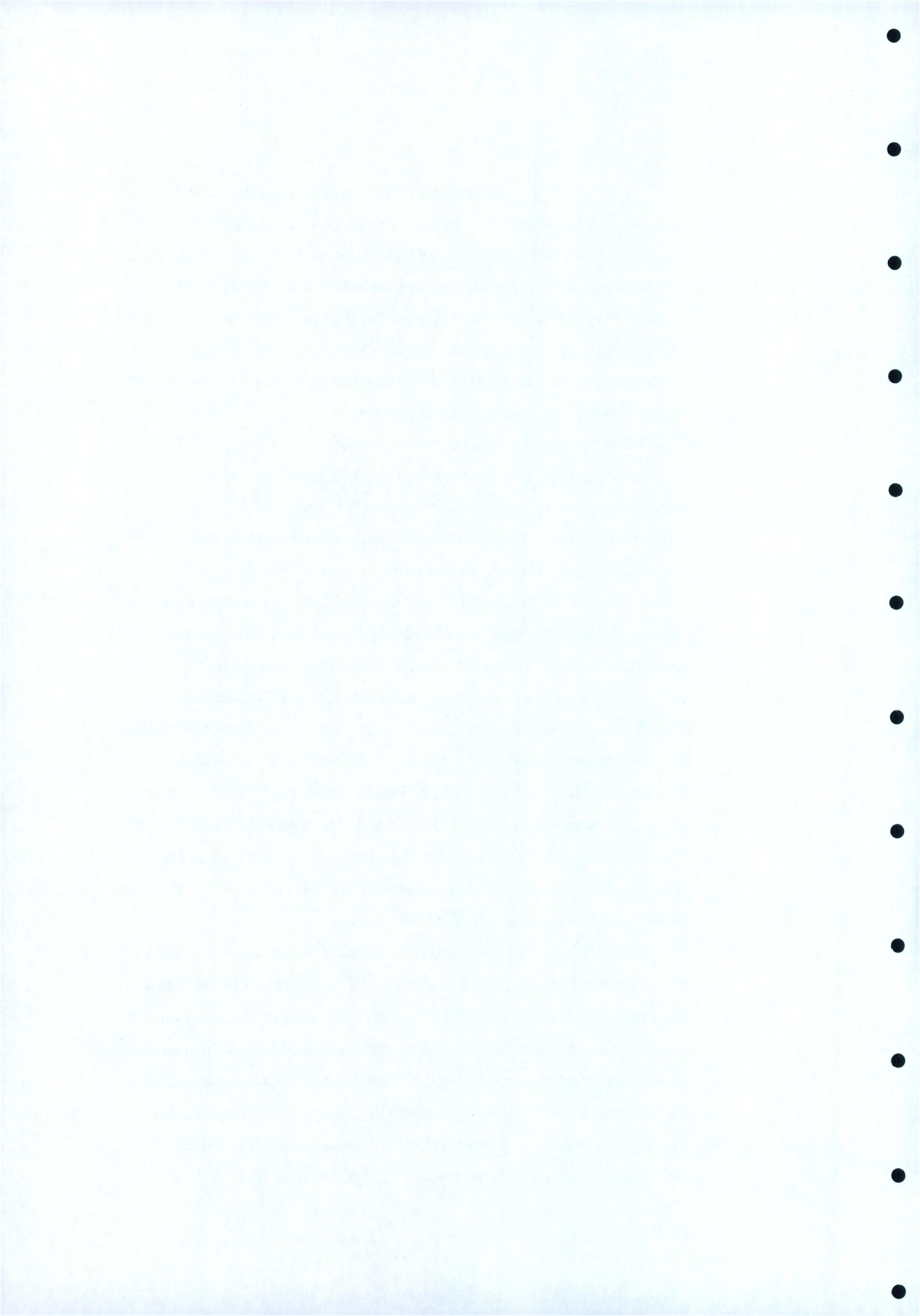
Will Wright, in his analysis of the western, describes how the hero is surrounded by a variety of environments and structural plots. He proceeds to label these under specific categories. First, he gives a description of the classical plot. This contains criteria relevant to the movements and actions of the hero and are the fundamental requirements of the narrative structure.

It begins with the hero entering a particular social group. He is generally a stranger and unknown to society. The hero has a special ability or perspective, which sets him apart from society and gives him an important status. He has still not been fully accepted by society, regardless of his status. The villains are stronger than the society, which is usually weak. A close friendship or respect can be found between the hero and villain. Normally the hero avoids the conflict between the society and villains until a close acquaintance of the hero is endangered by the situation. The hero engages the villains in combat and defeats them.

The society, now in a safe position accepts the hero. He must then give up his special position as he has become integrated into the society. (How the west was Won -Ford -(1964), Dodge City -Curtiz - (1939)).

Second, he discusses the vengeance variation. The structure is similar to that of the classical plot and contains several differences, here the hero has previously been or is currently a member of society. The society is in a position where they are unable to punish the villains for crimes committed against the hero and/or themselves. In order to reap revenge, the hero must go outside of society. An important member of society asks the hero to give up his desire for revenge.

Despite this request, the hero completes his mission and defeats the villains. Only after this, can the hero re-enter society (Stagecoach, John Ford - 1939).



Thirdly, is the transition theme, which is an inversion of the classical plot. The hero begins inside of society and finishes up on the outside. In this case, society is stronger than the hero and the villains, which forces the hero to fight both (Broken Arrow - Daves - (1950), Johnny Guitar - Ray - (1954)).

Finally, in the professional plot, there are several heroes, all of whom are professionals hired for their unique talents. The heroes form a group for the task and have respect for each other. Once the villains are defeated they either remain together or die together (The Wild Bunch - Peckinpah - (1969)).

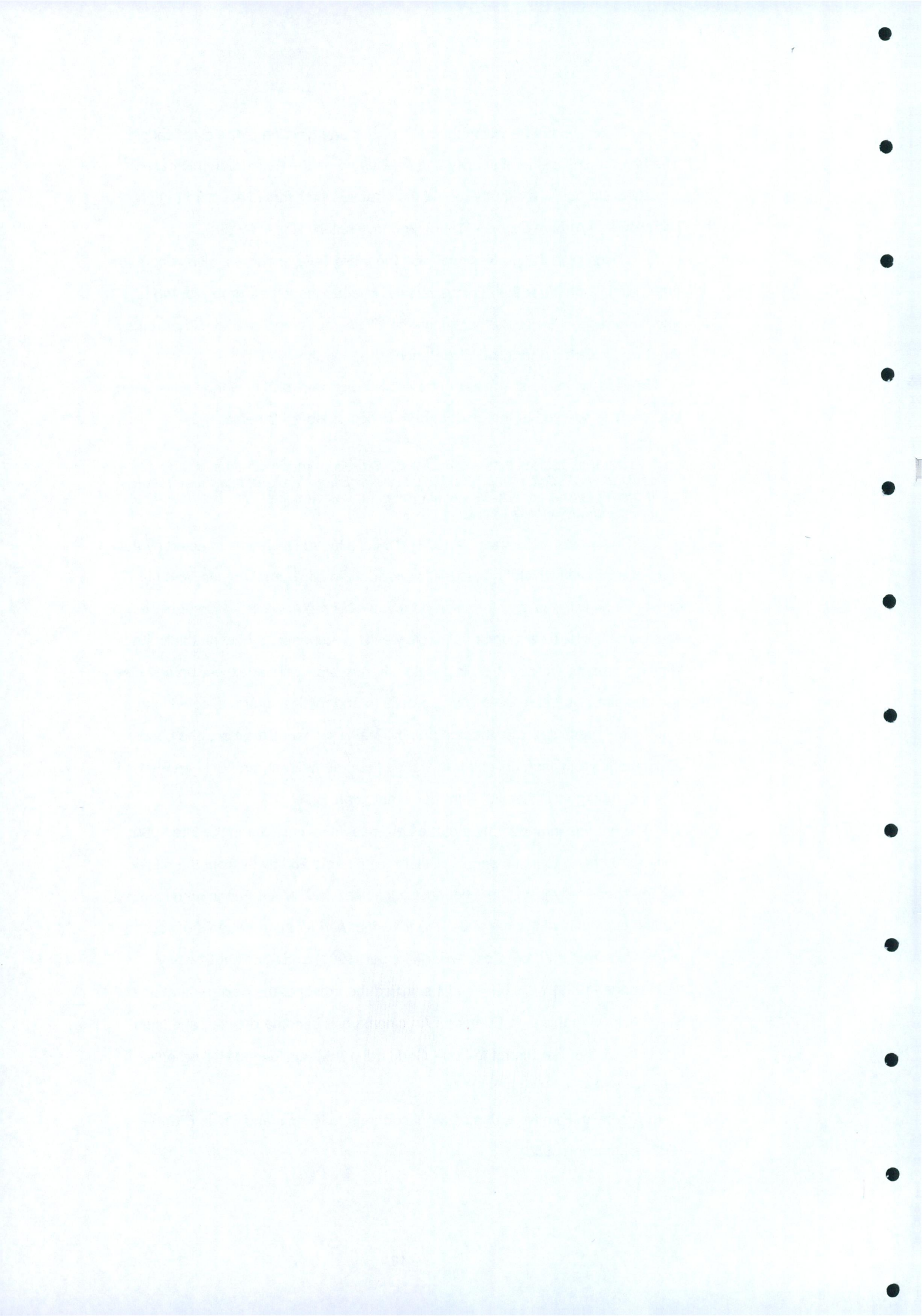
He believes these structures to be easily adaptable, and how they have been successfully adapted to the modern hero in contemporary cinema:

"We have seen how these narrative structures change with time, creating new ideas of society and [the] individual's relationship to it. It is these ideas in the myth that essentially reveal [to society] what society is, and how they as individuals should act in it"⁸

In Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese - 1975), Travis (Robert DeNiro) is affected by the state of society in which he lives. This is evident in his journal entries, and his conversation with the senator when he reveals his repulsion with his surrounding environment. He, as a member of society acts in response to how he thinks he should act as an individual in his position. In this case, he wages war on a selection of pimps. He befriends a young prostitute and realises that she could lead a better life if presented with the opportunity. Travis proceeds to attack the pimps with savage motivation until he has erased them all. With no one to keep her captive, the young girl is free to return home and start over.

The change in appearance of the hero became significant in the late 1960°. Hollywood began to move people back to the cinema and away from the television by specifically targeting a younger audience. Critic Mitch Fuchman described the last examples of the genre as *"the films that had all the ear-marks of youth market pictures"*.⁹ When Easy Rider (Hopper -1969) and Midnight Cowboy (Schlesinger-1969) were released it signified the arrival of the next generation of film directors. At this time European Art cinema had become popular, and films that were violent like Pierrot le Fou (Goddard -1965) challenged Hollywood's notions of cinema.

In American Film Now, James Monaco refers to Bonnie and Clyde (Penn - 1967) suggesting that:



*"violence, too, is a key to it's success, both commercially and artistically" ¹⁰.
"The final scene of Bonnie and Clyde worked [for] audiences and critics alike. Slow motion death in a hail of bullets soon became a cliché" ¹¹*

As audiences grew, so too did the films and in the age of post-classical cinema the seventies produced the blockbuster. The hero would never appear to be the same again. This brought genre into question and the hero being subject to generic transformation.

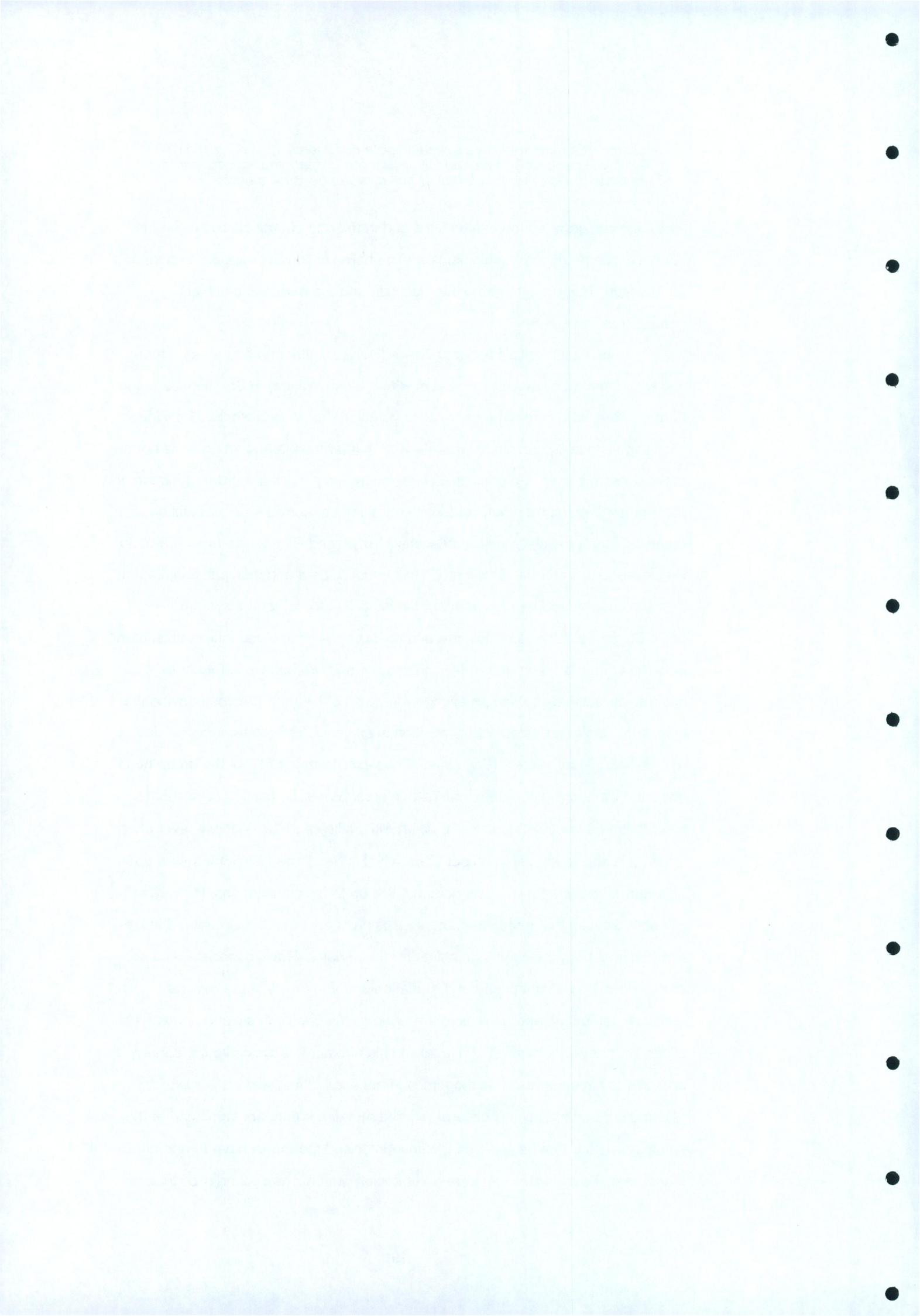
In *Taxi Driver* we find that Travis (DeNiro), although figured as the/an anti-hero is not that dissimilar to that of Ringo (John Wayne) in *Stagecoach*. (John Ford - 1939). Both fit into the vengeance variation theme as described by Wright.

Ringo is a self-proclaimed vigilante with murderous intent; though he is not an anti-hero as his actions are justified. He seeks revenge for the murder of his father and brother. If the afore mentioned incident had not occurred, he would still be a respected and peaceful member of society. Travis and Ringo alike measure up to Helen Stoddart's criteria of the hero.¹² They endure pain and manipulation, search their inner-selves and emerge with abilities sufficient to defeat the system.

In *Stagecoach* the townsfolk are unable to dispense justice and inflict punishment onto the criminals that murdered Ringo's father and brother. He is forced to become an outsider, so he can avenge the death of his family. Accompanying the loss of his family is the loss of his position in society. The hero remains outside until his task is completed. Ringo is kept separate from the rest of the group he is travelling with, including Dallas, the love interest. When he finally accomplishes his mission he is permitted to settle down with Dallas and "live happily" ever after.

Travis is also a working member of society. He has toured in Vietnam and upon his return discovers that society does not live up to his expectations. He views the city as a disease that needs to be cured. His personal pain that is endured is the rejected love from the campaign officer for the senator. Travis associates the senator and his kind as the cause of dilapidation and immorality in the city. He demands retribution and "*reverts to a more primitive mohican style to become an urban warrior with a mission*".¹³ He fails in his attempt to assassinate the senator and diverts his anger towards the pimps in the area. His mission is a success.

During the battle, Travis is severely injured and death appears imminent. In the epilogue we find that he survives the encounter and the media have turned him into a hero. This enables him to re-enter society with his new-found recognition.



Despite our ability to apply Wright's western themes to practically any film, it is still open to debate. Rick Altman posits that a western is simply a film that takes place in the American west, like a musical is a film that contains diegetic music.

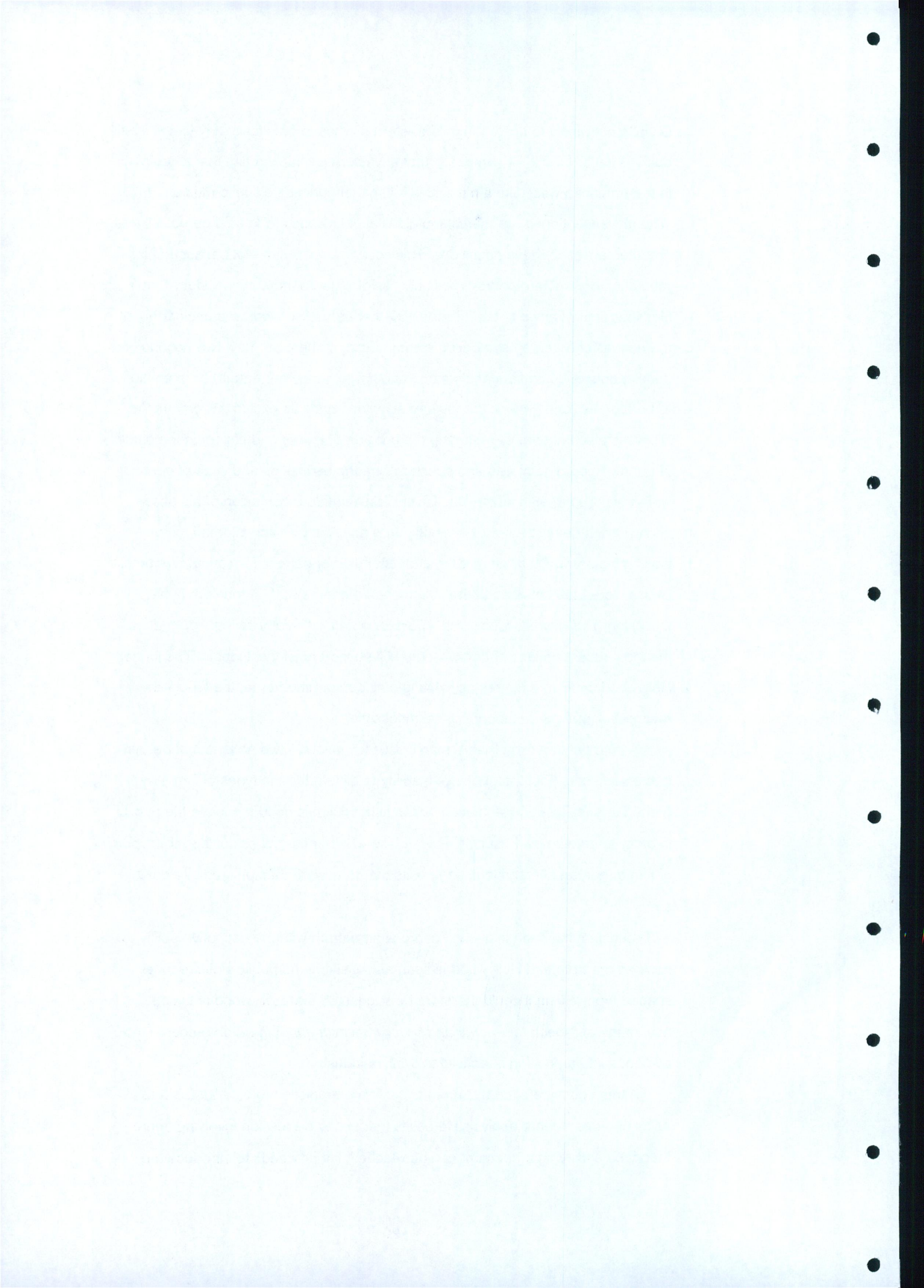
The aforementioned are merely tautological definitions of the said genres. There are alternatives to these definitions. This occurs when a film, not because of its reputation or structure portrays the qualities of a genre more successfully than a film specifically known to be affiliated with that genre. So what was unclear about the notions of a genre have become contradictory. There are now two notions of a generic corpus competing against one another; yet they are equally both entitled to be a part of one generic corpus and simultaneously be excluded from another.

There is also uncertainty regarding the position of theory and history in the study of genre. Prior to semiotics and structuralism, the definitions and titles of genre were reliant upon the industry itself. This resulted in the confusion of historical analysis with generic theory. Semiotic genre analysis was accustomed to overlooking history which prevented an understanding of generic formation over time. Critics were then oblivious to the influence that genres had on the community; mistaking "*Hollywood's ideological effect for a natural ahistorical cause*".¹⁴ Even the most recent notions of genre theory still support ahistorical ideals. The longer Hollywood considers genres as existing outside our time frame, the longer the reconciliation of genre theory will be impossible.

A third contradiction that Altman discusses involves two notions that pertain to the audience. First, the audience's ability to dictate the the types of film they wished to see. This was achieved by the film industry's need to please the public in order to obtain new business. Regardless whether the public decided the type of film or not, an alternative notion posits that they were manipulated into doing so.

Theorising that each individual genre is an untruth with the deceptive ability to pose as the truth and Hollywood is seen as satisfying the public's desire for a specific type of film; it could therefore be suggested that Hollywood is taking advantage of "*spectator energy and psychic investment*"¹⁵ in order to coerce the audience into a position beneficial to the film industry.

Altman considers the last three cases of contradiction to be applicable to all fields of current genre analysis. He posits that in any discussion involving genre theory no satisfying agreement can be reached. He proceeds to introduce the



semantic and syntactic approach to genre. Location, shots, sets and characters define the former's attributes, while the syntactic stresses the manner in which a genre is structured. To illustrate this point, Altman compares the ideals of the western as seen by Jean Mitry (semantic) and John Cawelti (syntactic).

Mitry proposes a tautological definition of the western. A film based in the far west of frontier America that takes place roughly between the 1840° and 1900°. A semantic approach to the genre. Cawelti, on the other hand supports the notion of the western being:

*"always near or on a frontier. It takes place between two lands, two eras, and a hero that remains divided between two value systems"*¹⁶

A syntactic approach. This allows us to specifically define meaning to the structure of the genre. While the semantic lacks the power to fully explain structure, it compensates by having access to a wider range of films. This leaves us to consider the following questions:

*"Are films that share the syntax of westerns, really westerns?, or are they not because they don't fit Mitry's definition?"*¹⁷

To answer these questions, Altman suggests an amalgamation of the two generic analysis. He considers them complementary, and when combined, enable one to ask questions of genre study that can only be posited when in this joint fashion. In short, he proposes a semantic/syntactic approach to genre analysis and to use one without the other is neglecting the duality of a generic corpus.

Recognition that all films do not relate in the same manner to their specific genre is also important. Using the semantic/syntactic approach permits us to function more efficiently while critically analysing alternating notions of genericity.

Additionally, it serves as a more accurate analysis, as opposed to a single-minded approach to the study of a generic corpus. Altman considers it impossible to construct an accurate vision of Hollywood films without amalgamating the semantics of one genre with the syntax of another. There are two methods from which genre arises. First, there is an existing set of semantics which evolve through the experimentation of syntactic nature that develop into a new set of semantic building blocks.

An example of this inter-mixing of syntax and semantics is provided by looking at the development of science fiction in film. The existing syntax established



by the horror genre provided a suitable beginning for science fiction. Since then it evolved to represent the syntax of the western. By this reasoning, Altman maintains that by using the semantic/syntactic approach that the status of films, such as disguised westerns (Star Wars - George Lucas, 1977) is challenged; regardless whether they contain certain elements equated with the afore mentioned genre. Understanding this, we can assume that the combining of syntax and semantics provide us with the ability to relate the analysis of film with that of genre theory and genre history.

However, it is the syntax of a genre is finally privileged, in that genres with a stable syntax (westerns) out-live those which depend on semantics or a particular style and/or look (catastrophe films).

Is it not then possible to apply such a dual approach to better understanding the hero?.



CHAPTER THREE:

MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN.



CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER THREE

*"A lone rider, sitting easily in the saddle of his dusty horse, and travels across the plains towards a new town with muddy streets and lively saloons. He wears a tattered wide-brimmed hat, a loose hanging vest with a bandanna around his neck and one gun rests naturally at his side in a smooth well worn holster."*¹⁸

The hero can appear to us in a variety of guises, the familiar image of the cowboy is just one of them. Next to him is the hard boiled detective. Both are quite similar with the exception of appearance. A saddle has merely been swapped for a trench coat. Cawelti describes the detective's quest as one "for justice through the ambiguous landscape of the modern American city"¹⁹. He discusses the application of style to the visual icons and settings that are recognised with the genre and gives a description of the hard boiled myth's world:

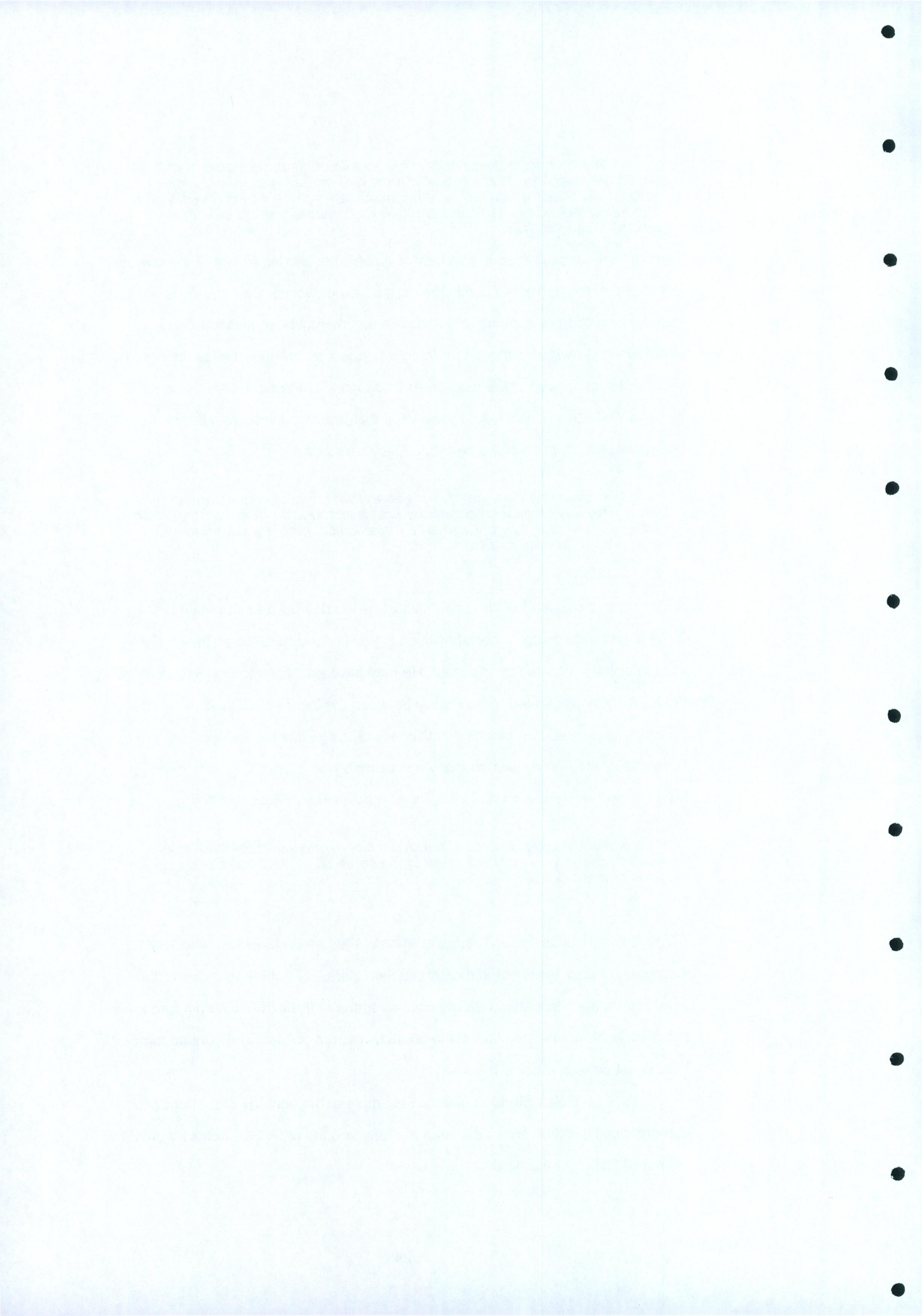
*"[It] is preeminently a world of black and white [that possess an] ambience [which] is compound of angular light and shadow . [A genre] that grew out of the visual legacy of German Expressionism [and] transformed into what is now [known] as Film Noir"*²⁰

The narrative structure of film noir establishes the detective as the main protagonist. He has a respectable social position in society and possess a Private Eye license which is granted by the state. He may have past links to law enforcement but is normally positioned ambiguously between the law and crime. This reflects his ability to succeed and the ineffectiveness of the justice authorities. Regardless, the detective is normally a poor man who makes very little money from his career. He is a man of integrity who believes in what he is doing.

*"He is a compelling American hero type, clearly related to the traditional western hero who manifests many of the same characteristics and conditions of marginality"*²¹

This image depicts society's interpretation of the hero in the 1920^s and 1930^s through the public's interest in the short action stories of pulp magazines of the time, just as the fascination with the cowboy truths of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century reflected interest in popular western culture. The contemporary hero is not an exception to the rule.

Helen Stoddart gives an example of the contemporary hero and demonstrates the differences between the new and the old. She begins by providing her definition of the hero:



*"The protagonist, almost entirely cut off from others, endures the most hideous forms of manipulation and pain, reaches into the primordial levels of the self and emerges as a hero with powers sufficient to fight the system to the point of catastrophe"*²²

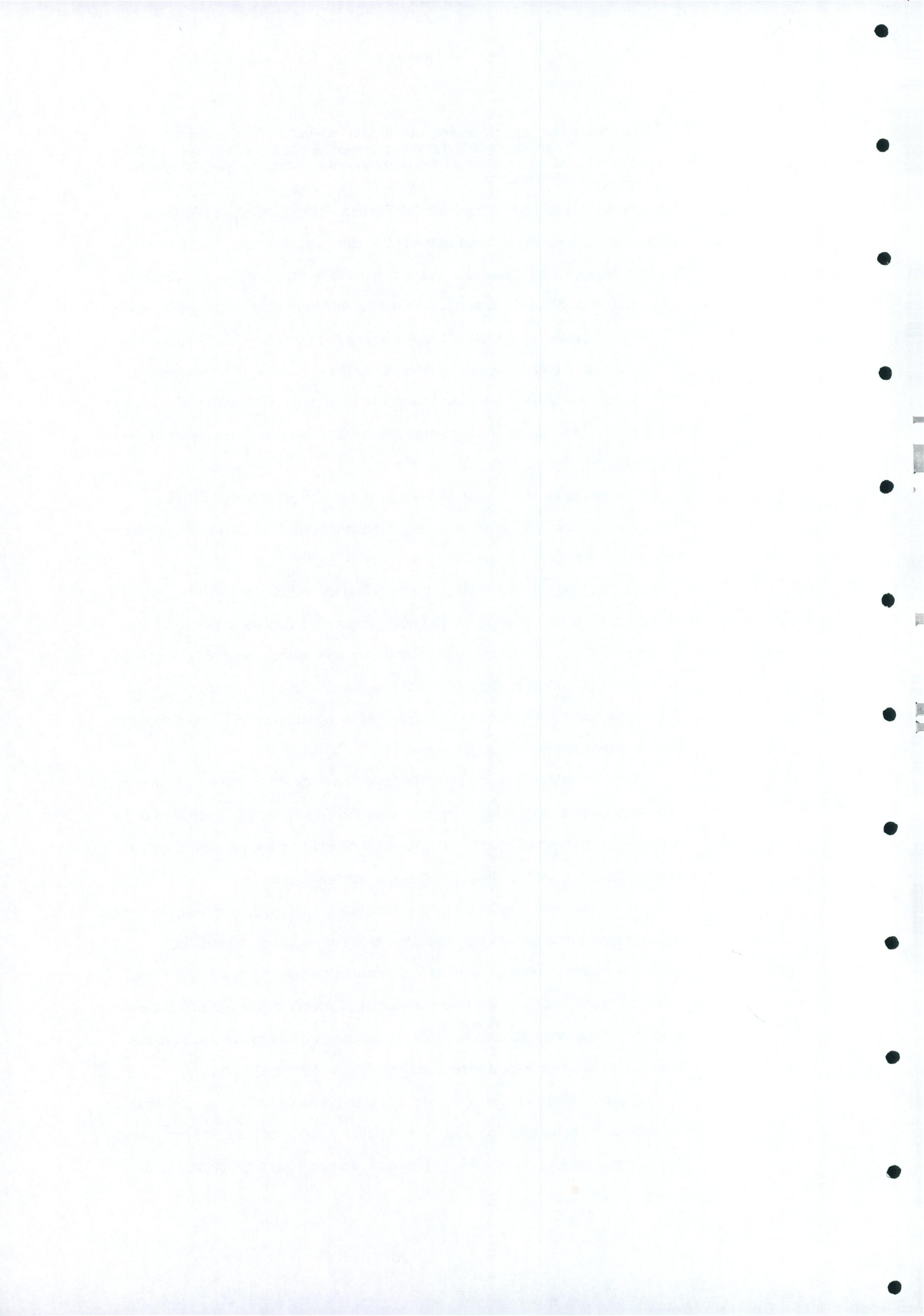
She applies this to the film *Die Hard* (McTiernan - 1988). Detective McClane (Bruce Willis) is portrayed to be defending society and combating forms of authority. This being a near impossible task is compared to his painful ordeal of running barefoot over shattered glass. It is also pointed out that even though he's wearing a white vest (a cliched symbol of his position as the good guy), that he has a tattoo and a scar. The scar symbolises his ability to experience and endure pain, while the tattoo represents a sadomasochistic strength, an indicator of the price of his heroism. The cost of which is figured/manifest in his status as an outsider and his inability to communicate with his wife.

It is evident that the appearance and surroundings of the hero have changed, yet Stoddart's aspects of the protagonist holds true to Wright's description of what a hero is.

Ringo (Stagecoach) has endured the pain and loss associated with the death of his family, while Alex Murphy (Peter Weller) loses his family through his own murder and rebirth as a cyborg police officer (*Robocop* - Verhoevan-1987). They both even spin a gun into their respective holders after the use of their weapons. These similarities suggest that *Robocop* could be a cowboy and Ringo a cyborg (*Westworld* - Crichton-1973).²³

Similarly to the semantic/syntactic approach to genre, a semantic/syntactic can be made towards the hero. By combining Wright's semantic description of the hero with an account of Stoddart's syntactic approach, we are presented with a more complex and rich understanding of the hero's structure.

The hero is reflective of the society in which we live, consequently as we push further into the electronic era, the hero undergoes transformation. Johnny Mnemonic²⁴ (Keanu Reeves) is the constructed embodiment of our fascination and fetishisation with the new technological times that we live in. If the western hero's *"loneliness [i]s organic [and] not imposed on him by his situation, but belong[s] to him intimately and testif[ies] to his completeness"*²⁵, Johnny Mnemonic's loneliness results from the lack of the organic and a corresponding increase of the synthetic. The price he has paid for giving up his childhood memories in exchange for an electronic chip that allows him to be a highly paid data



courier (a soft tissue smuggler)(Fig 5).

The newest of our heroes have emerged in a possible future that represents our present. Johnny Mnemonic's (future) world holds infinite electronic possibilities that stem from our own present. The internet by today's standards could conceivably become the super information highway/cyberspace that is depicted in Johnny Mnemonic (Longo - 1995). The more familiar and most cited description of cyberspace is found in William Gibson's novel Neuromancer:

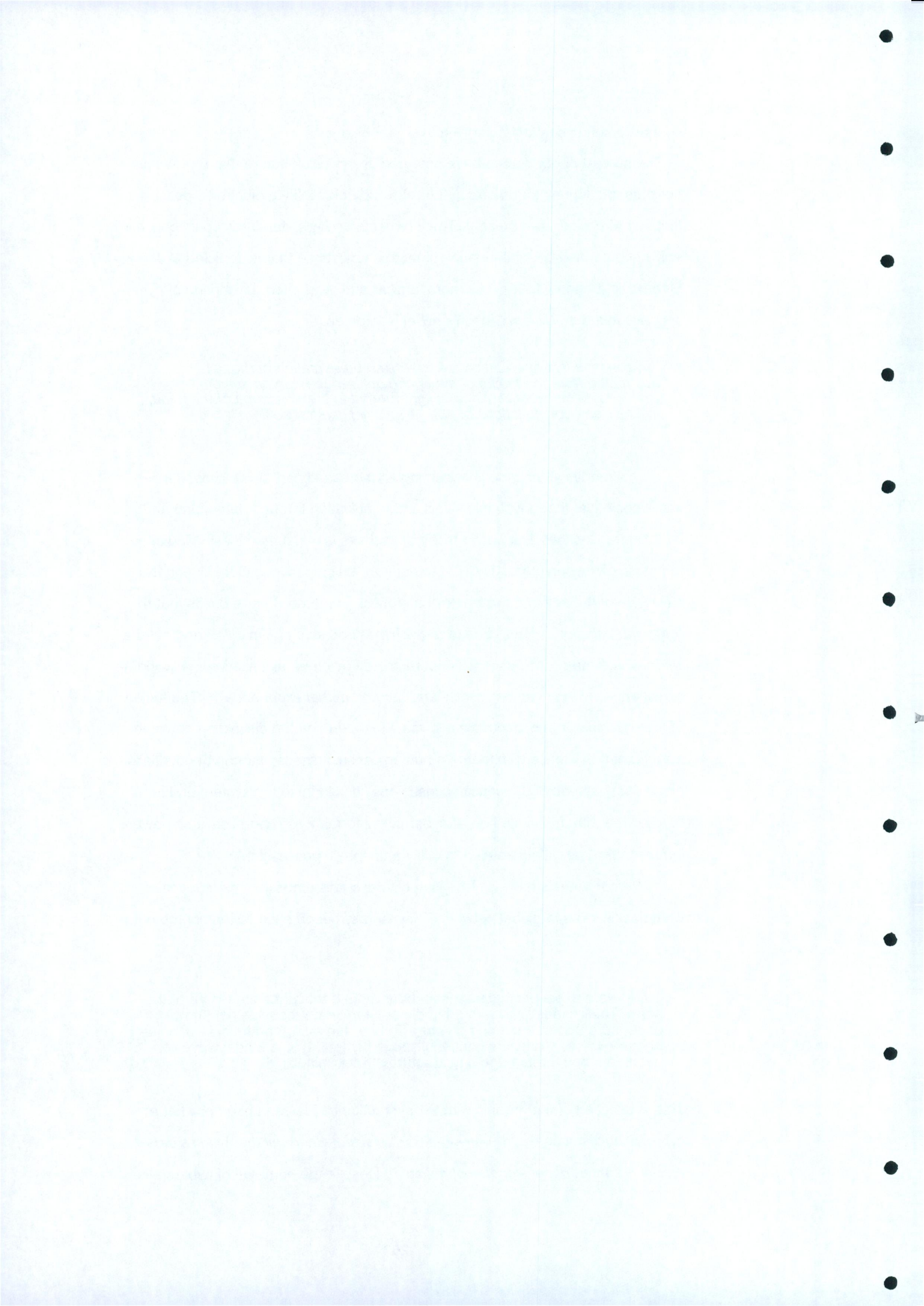
*[a] consensual hallucination....A graphic representation of the data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights receding....*²⁶

Already cyberspace is becoming an increased part of our lives. It infiltrates society at the most basic levels, communication through telephone and banking transactions. The power that it possesses is that it enables its audience to not simply observe a reality, but to enter and experience it. Considering the existence of the self and the limitations of flesh, George Bataille posits that the "one who sacrifices is free, free to throw himself outside of himself"²⁷ and enter a world where the consciousness is not restricted by physical limitations. A world he considers "beyond everyday reality and our perceptual experience"²⁸. The fusion of the organic with the electronic allows us to determine the distinction between pure human existence with that of a human consciousness entering the bodiless plane of cyberspace. The consciousness has 'jacked in' to the system and is bombarded with an infinite flow of cybernetic information. Theoretically empowering the individual with increased "motility and spatial possession".²⁹

Vernor Vinge's novella 'True Names' describes a possible experience of what jacking in to a global network. They literally become extensions of the data net:

"they were experiencing a sensory bandwidth a thousand times that of the norm. Their minds filled with a jumble of information that was not knowledge, data that was verging on pain. To hear ten million phonecalls simultaneously, to see the entire continent's video output. It was a tidal wave of detail rammed through the tiny aperture of their minds."³⁰

This imbrication of the organic with the synthetic provides an image of what a cybernetic existence could present to us, "a [place] where all the world's data exists in a three dimensional abstraction"³¹. Despite the portrayal of cyberspace



as a place of existence for pure consciousness,³¹ it's important to note that the negotiation of cyberspace is achieved by the use of a body.

Johnny Mnemonic's persona travels through cyberspace as a manifestation of his human body in electronic form. This prevents denial of the body, by placing a literal bodily form in cyberspace. Scott Bukatman proposes that characters such as Iron Man (Fig 6) and Robocop are appropriate citizens for cyberspace as they are already part man and machine: "*as much vehicle as driver*".³² This suggests the human body is not obsolete and our reluctance to believe that thought can exist without the body. A compromise is more satisfactory; the fusion of metal and meat, the union of living tissue with mechanical/electronic technology. Resulting in what is known as a cybernetic organism or cyborg, when a human body is endowed with superior physicality and heightened sexuality via the incorporation of electronic parts.

The fascination with the cyborg has been a popular theme in cinema and television. There was Metropolis (Fritz Lang - 1926) and then the Cybermen (BBC - 1966) in the Dr Who television series. The Six Million Dollar Man (Lee Majors) was introduced as the seventies cyborg while the eighties brought us the Terminator (Cameron - 1984) and Robocop. This decade, the neurally augmented Johnny Mnemonic and *mimetic polyalloy*³³ T-1000 have graced our screens alongside the Mean Machine (Judge Dredd. Cannon -1995) and a variety of animated cyborgs from the Manga video series (Ghost in the Shell).

As technology becomes increasingly significant to everyday life it's interesting to note that we are already in the process of becoming cyborgs. "*The traditional distance between people and machines has become harder to maintain*"³⁴ as we become more technologically enmeshed with the synthetic. Pacemakers, hearing aids, prosthetic limbs and contact lenses are just a few internal artifacts that are already in use. It's conceivable that in the near future we will all possess an internal neuro device that will provide permanent access to cyberspace. Already, there are blueprints for in built personal radios similar to those of nano-technology, that would place a microscopic device in our bodies which would perform medical maintenance on a daily basis and possibly increase our life span.

Cyborgs are part of the information age, "*huge thrusting machines have been replaced with the circuitry maze of the microchip*".³⁵ The computer console itself can be described as a prosthetic extension, a "*technological intrusion into human*



genetic structures".³⁶ It is the metamorphosis of the self into another form. A fusion of human and technological identity which would in the alteration of human subjectivity, not the loss of it.

The cyborg presents the utopian ideal of gender as it provides the opportunity to render the genders of both sexes obsolete while at the same time privileging the woman. In actuality, cyborgs depict a definite gender difference and masculinity and femininity are exaggerated in their manifestations.

*"We find giant pumped up pectoral muscles on the males and enormous breasts on the females"*³⁷ (Fig 7)

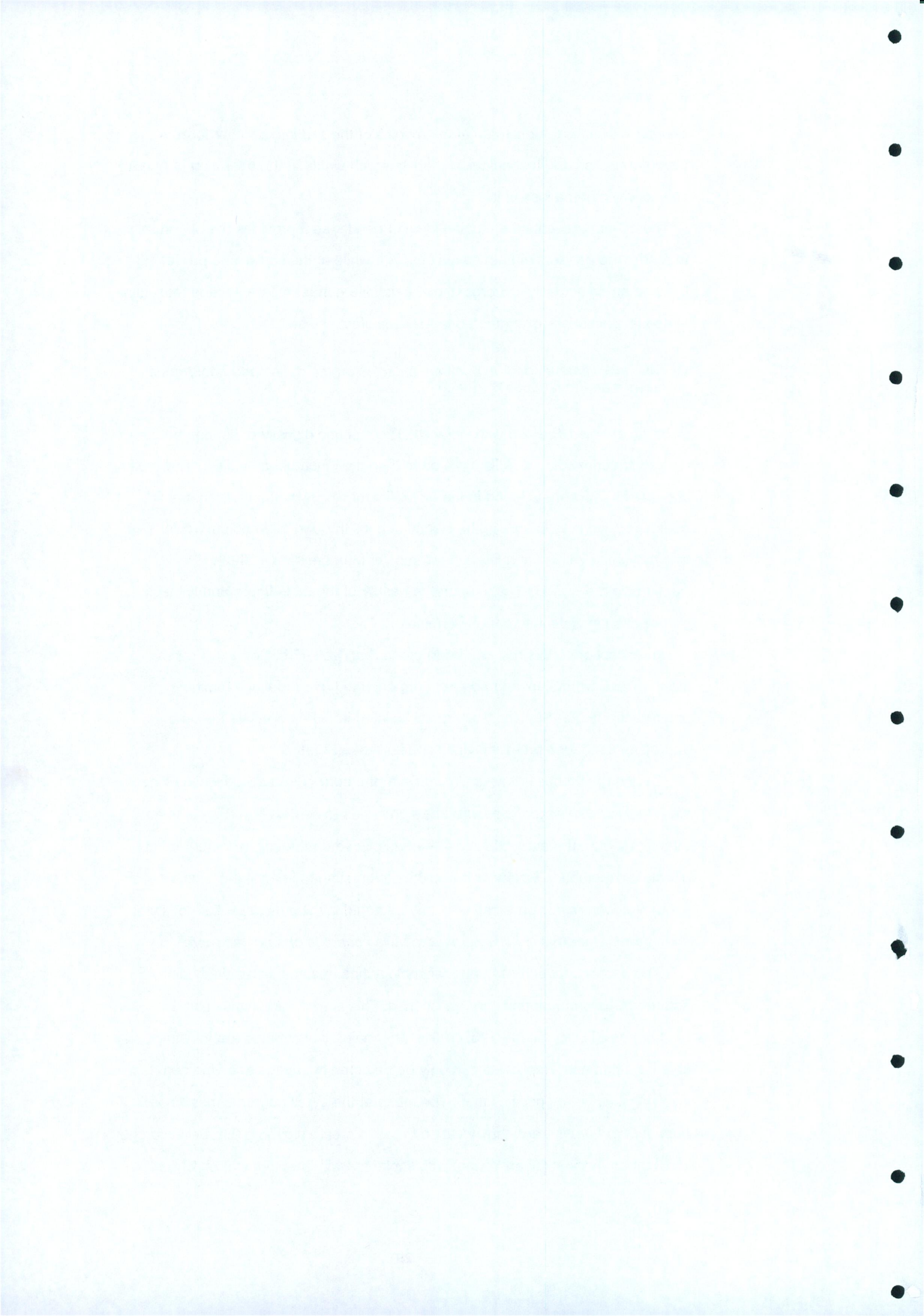
Cyborgs are also equated with violence. Their technologically enhanced bodies display superior combat skills more often than their increased intellect. The erotic appeal of the cyborg is found in the embodiment of physique, their enhanced bodies receive no pleasure in the sexual act. It's through the medium of violence that they achieve sexual release (Lawnmower Man Leonard - 1992).

In film we are invited to gaze upon the beauty of the male figure and witness its participation in violent acts (The Terminator).

An exception to this rule can be found in Star Trek: First Contact (Frakes - 1996). The Borg queen is the only cyborg seen to have a definite feminine appearance (Fig8). Species that are assimilated into the collective become androgynous though pre-dominantly appear male (Fig9).

During the process of assimilating Data, the borg queen asked whether he was *"familiar with sexual pleasure"*. She proceeds to seduce him (Fig10) in an attempt to learn the encryption code he has placed on the ship's computer. An alternative method to violence. It would be interesting to know if this sexual encounter was purely physical, or if they engaged in cybersex simultaneously as she informs Data that *"[his] android brain was capable of so much more"*.

The border between flesh and technology has become increasingly blurred and the notions of humanity are questioned. This is evident in films such as Bladerunner (Ridley Scott - 1982/1991). The majority of cyborgs are indistinguishable from humans. Replicants can only be detected by means of a void com test involving involuntary pupil dilation. The motto at the Tyrell corporation is *"more human than human"* and they went so far as to create a cyborg that believed she was human. Rachel (Sean Young) was implanted with memories of childhood.



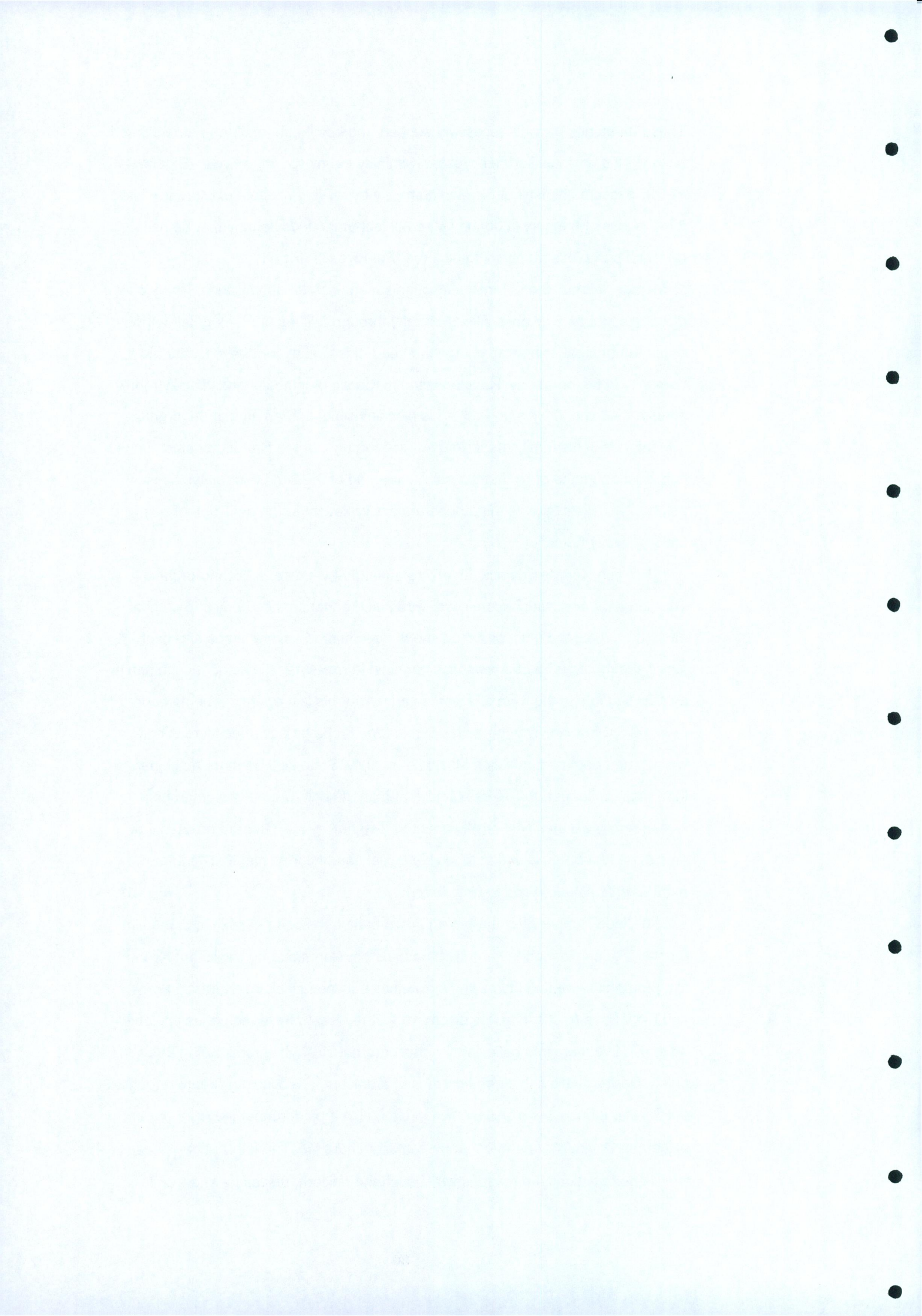
These memories provide necessary support and belief in herself, an authenticated history. This past justified her present. Similarly Lenny (Strange Days - Bigelow - 1996) reassures himself of his own humanity by reliving his past existence; while it is the loss of memory in Johnny Mnemonic that reminds Johnny that he has given up part of his humanity to become 'wet-wired'.³⁸ (Fig 11)

Memory becomes a defensive mechanism against dehumanisation. Robocop discovers that he was once Alex J Murphy through flashes of memory left imprinted on the brain after he was shot in the head. It is difficult for him to locate his humanity in his new body. He is encased in robotic prostheses and visually represents a machine. Only a portion of his face is visible, the remains of the organic.

Memories of his family and killers surface throughout the film and enable him to construct an image of his human self. At the end of the film he identifies himself as Murphy. This suggests that appearance is irrelevant to the definition of being fundamentally human.

The film Nemesis depicts an environment that is primarily techno-organic. The heroes and villains become 'wet-wired' and enhance their bodies to combat each other. Alex, the main protagonist has been injured several times and each time he is repaired he becomes less human. He reassures himself of his humanity by referring to it in the form of a percentage. After his last operation he measured up at 86.5% human. Though as his percentage drops he becomes increasingly worried and begins to question his own humanity. Soon he'll be more machine than man, no longer able to call himself human. It's only when the woman he loves (a fully synthetic cyborg) is about to lose her 'ghost'³⁹ that he realises that he can be human. She understands his anxiety and informs him that *"It takes more than flesh and blood to be human"* .

In Blade Runner after the protagonist's traits have been established, the film proceeds to challenge the central character's development and depiction. As the film progresses we find increasing similarities between Deckard (Harrison Ford) and the villains (replicants). He discovers that replicants have memories implanted to deceive them into believing that they are human. While reminiscing at his piano, Deckard falls asleep and dreams of a unicorn, a reoccurring ^{SP} dream throughout his life. It becomes significant when Gaff, also a bladerunner leaves a paper unicorn in Deckard's apartment and spares Rachel's life. The implication arises when one questions the reasons why he left the unicorn, unless he knew of its



significance to Deckard. This suggests that Deckard himself is exactly that which he is hunting, a replicant.

In *Star Trek: First Contact* the notion of humanity is portrayed in an ironic manner. The relationship between Picard (Patrick Stewart) and Data (Brent Spiner) is fashioned in such a way that Picard possess more of the qualities associated with an android than Data is. Both character's human traits are continually tested throughout the film. The more human qualities are expressed through Data, while Picard appears cold and calculating; ironic, considering Picard is human (Fig12) and Data is a machine (Fig13).

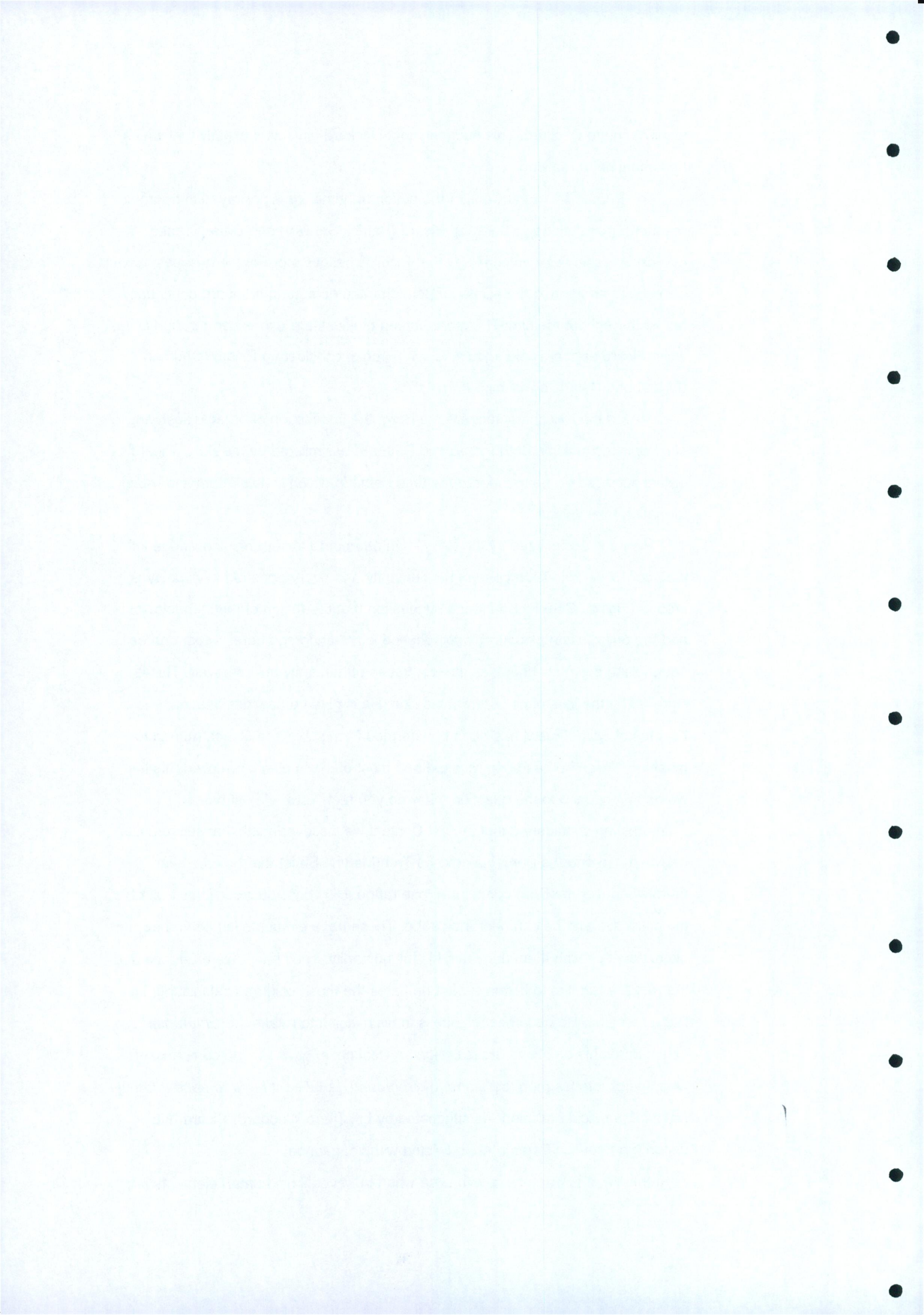
Between the two characters are the Borg, the imbrication of organic flesh and electronic technology. Both Picard and Data are assimilated by the Borg; Picard's ordeal occurred six years prior to the time frame in which Data's attempted transformation takes place.

Picard is assimilated by the Borg in an attempt to absorb his knowledge into their collective.⁴⁰ He is stripped of his humanity and every trace of individuality is erased (Fig14). Claudia Springer's suggestion that the fusion of the technological and the organic is a pleasurable experience is not endorsed here. A tear can be seen rolling down his cheek as the last traces of humanity are removed. This is signified by the loss of colour from his skin. He is given a new designation, Locutus of Borg. Picard has been transformed from subject to object, human to machine. When he has been rescued and most of the implants removed, his first words in response to the question "How do you feel?" are "almost human".

Interesting considering that in *First Contact* we discover a link that still remains between him and the Borg. He advises Troi (Martina Sirtis) that he can 'hear' them whenever the Borg come into close range. His consciousness joins that of the collective and he can hear their song. These trace elements left behind from his experience with them deny him his full humanity. They haunt his existence and the result leads him to become what he hates the most, cold and calculating, just like a machine. He becomes relentless in his mission to retake the *Enterprise*⁴¹.

He ignores his emotions (traits of human weakness) and feels no compassion when he orders his men to *"stand [their] ground, [and] fight hand to hand if [they] have to"*, a suicide mission. As suggested by Lily (Alfre Woodard) Picard had become a futuristic Captain Ahab twisted with vengeance.

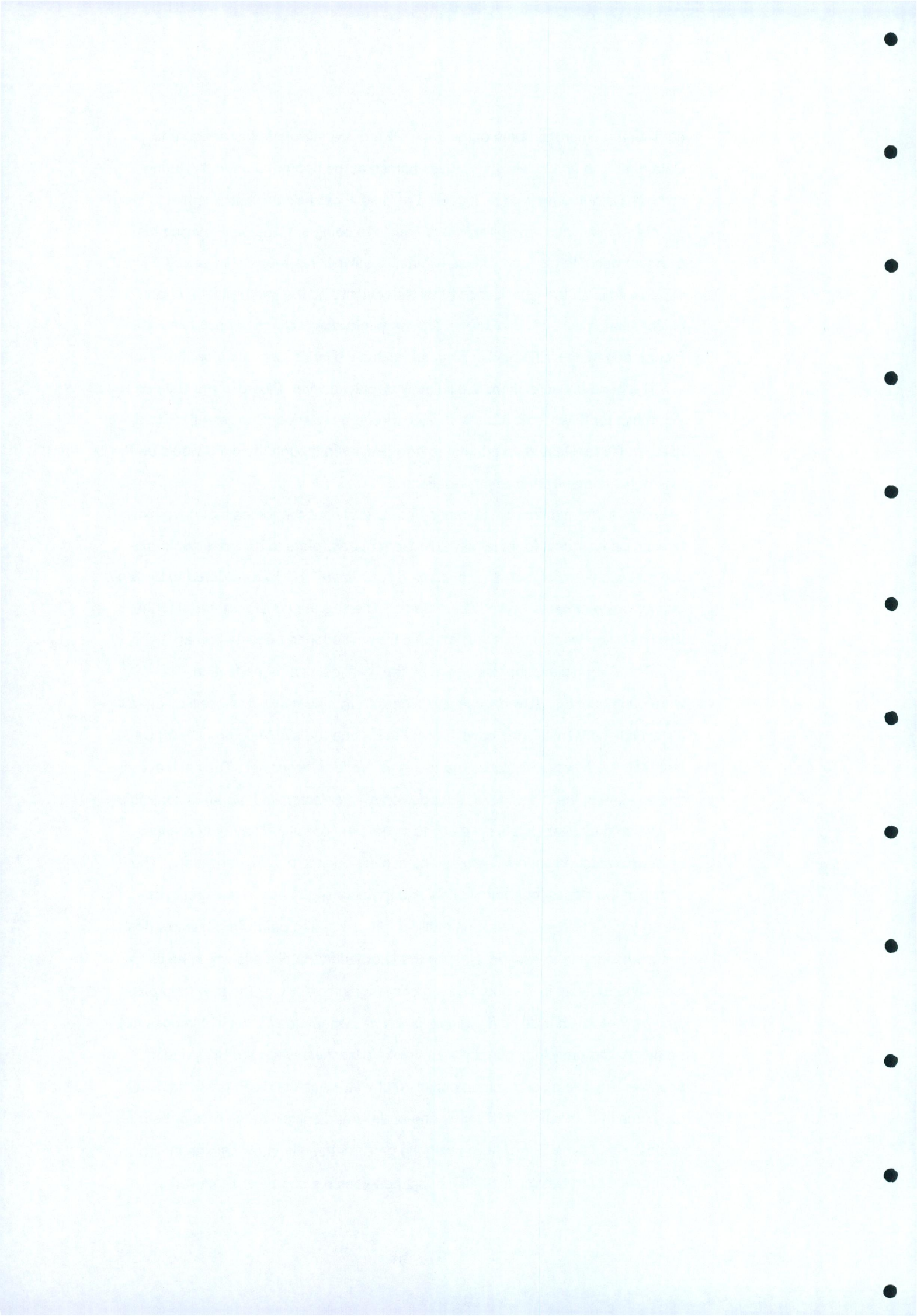
Ironically, it is when he is with Data when he reveals his human elements and



not with the other members of the crew. Picard is a surrogate father figure to Data, teaching him to be more or less human at the appropriate times. During combat, Data informs that he is feeling anxiety. Picard simply instructs him to 'turn off' his emotion chip, an ability Picard admits to being envious of, signifying his own fear beneath his emotionless exterior. Similarly, in a moment of peace, Picard explains to Data the significance of tactile contact and the interpretation of an object altering with physical touch. The warpship stirs feelings of nostalgia within Picard, and it's the 'little boy' in him that relates to Data's innocence on these topics. The bond between them is ultimately displayed when Picard hears Data calling to him for help through means which the Borg provided (Borg song). Picard risks his life for Data in an attempt to free him, even though the price would be the loss of his humanity and re-assimilation.

Data's aforementioned innocence and curiosity are the forces that drive him forward on his quest for humanity. The Borg queen refers to him as a contradiction, "*a machine that wishes to become more human*". He is considered to be "*an inferior being, created by an inferior being*". There is the constant referral to the flesh as being weak. Data's weakness is his aspiration to become human.

The Borg believe themselves to be the manifestation of perfection. They were once human, "*flawed, weak and organic*", that humanity has been taken to its evolutionary limit. They have evolved to include the synthetic and inform Data that they "*wish only to improve the quality of life for all species*". They achieve this by altering the organic with the addition of the electronic. It appears contradictory when they alter Data's synthetic to include the organic. They graft organic epidermis onto his endo-skeleton so he can experience human sensations. They offer him the closest opportunity he ^{has} had to becoming human. He experiences sensory input from an organic hair follicle (pleasure) and pain when his new flesh is cut when trying to escape. Despite the knowledge that flesh is weak, he cherishes and protects it. The Borg queen challenges him to "*tear the skin from [his] limb as [he] would a defective circuit, [and not] be tempted by flesh*". He does not, he has tasted precious humanity. He is at his weakest when the Borg queen seduces him, the most common depiction of weakness that flesh presents. She promotes the attraction of being techno-organic and achieving the best of both worlds. Yet, it's the Borg's fusion with the organic that ultimately causes their own destruction, and Data's lack of flesh that becomes his and Picard's salvation.



Data destroys a plasma conduit to release gas that eats organic material, resulting in the destruction of the Borg. Their perfected inter-dependency between the organic and the synthetic is discovered to be their vulnerability.

Data's successful defeat of the Borg saves all of humanity from assimilation, the synthetic saves the organic. This simultaneously deprives him of his opportunity to become human. The plasma gas destroyed the flesh that he possessed. All traces of the organic was removed only to leave his endo-skeleton exposed, serving as a reminder to him and the spectator that he is not human.

Norman Spinrad endorses the notion that the distinction between human and android produces an ontology grounded in morality and not biology.⁴² In *Measure of a Man*⁴³ Data wins the right to exist as a sentient being on the grounds of morality during a Judge Advocate General (J.A.G) court hearing. The argument on Data's behalf runs parallel to that of Bernard Wolfe: "*The human skin is an artificial boundary; the world wanders into it and the self wanders out of it*".⁴⁴ Morality and organic structure do not define the limitations to human qualities. In *Deja Q*⁴⁵ an omnipotent being achieves in disgrace what Data aspires to be, he is transformed into a human male. It's ironic that Data now becomes mentor to 'Q' in his journey to become human; and under this tutelage he informs Data "*you are a better human than I*".

Despite the ongoing battle between the Borg and the Federation to retain their humanity, it is interesting to note that the champion of their cause (Picard), is by his very existence, supporting the Borg motto of superiority through techno-organic interdependency. In *Tapestry*⁴⁶, it is revealed that Picard relies on an implant. His heart is prosthetic and he cannot exist without it. Geordie (Levar Burton), another member of Picard's crew possess the ability of sight through cybernetic implants. The terminology that he uses in association with his sight is perceived as technological. He uses his implants to 'detect' an image, he does not 'see' it. It is conceivable through these examples that the Federation themselves may yet become what they fear the most. The beginnings of Borg manifestation within humanity.





Figure 5

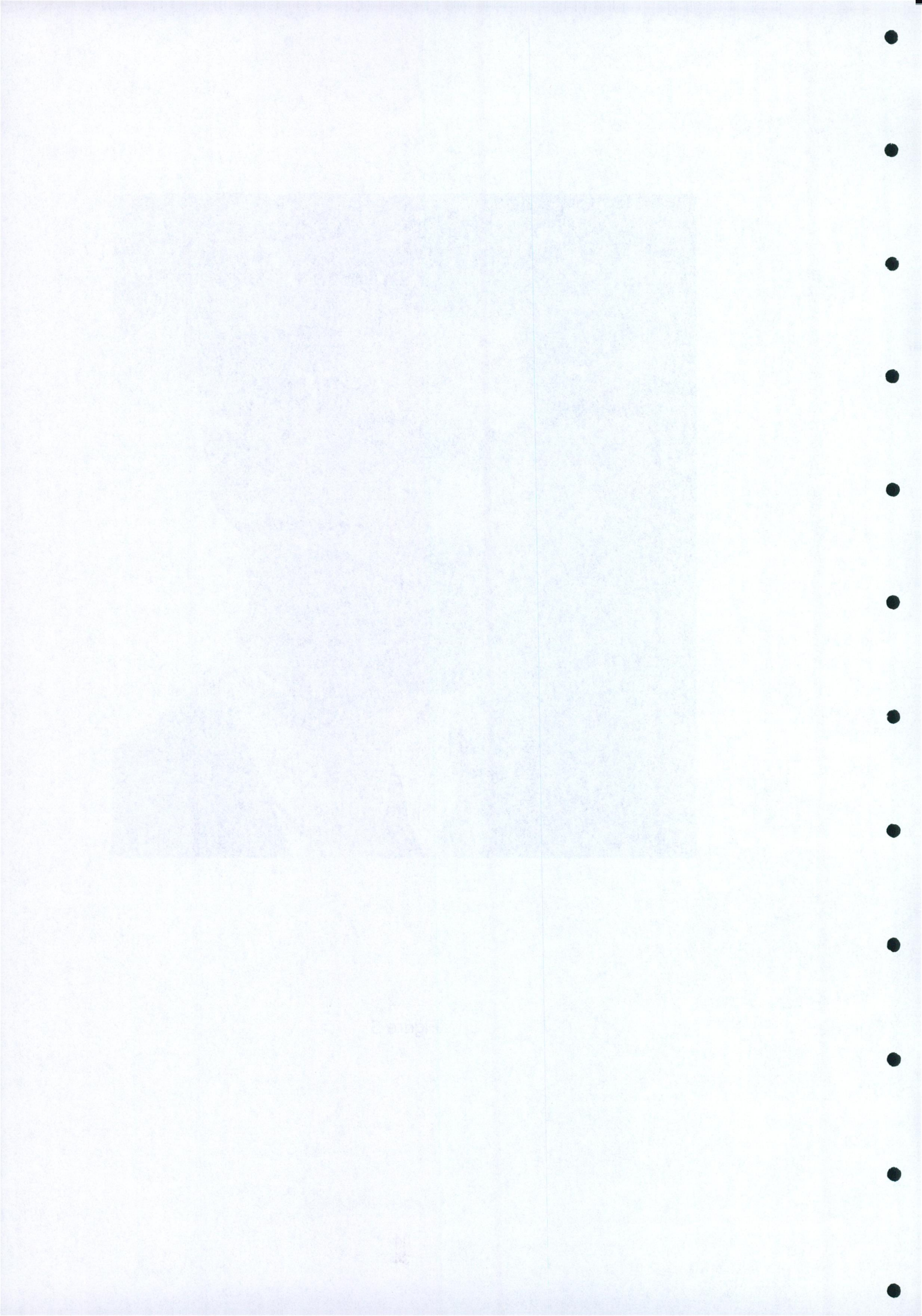
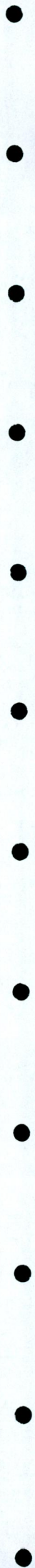
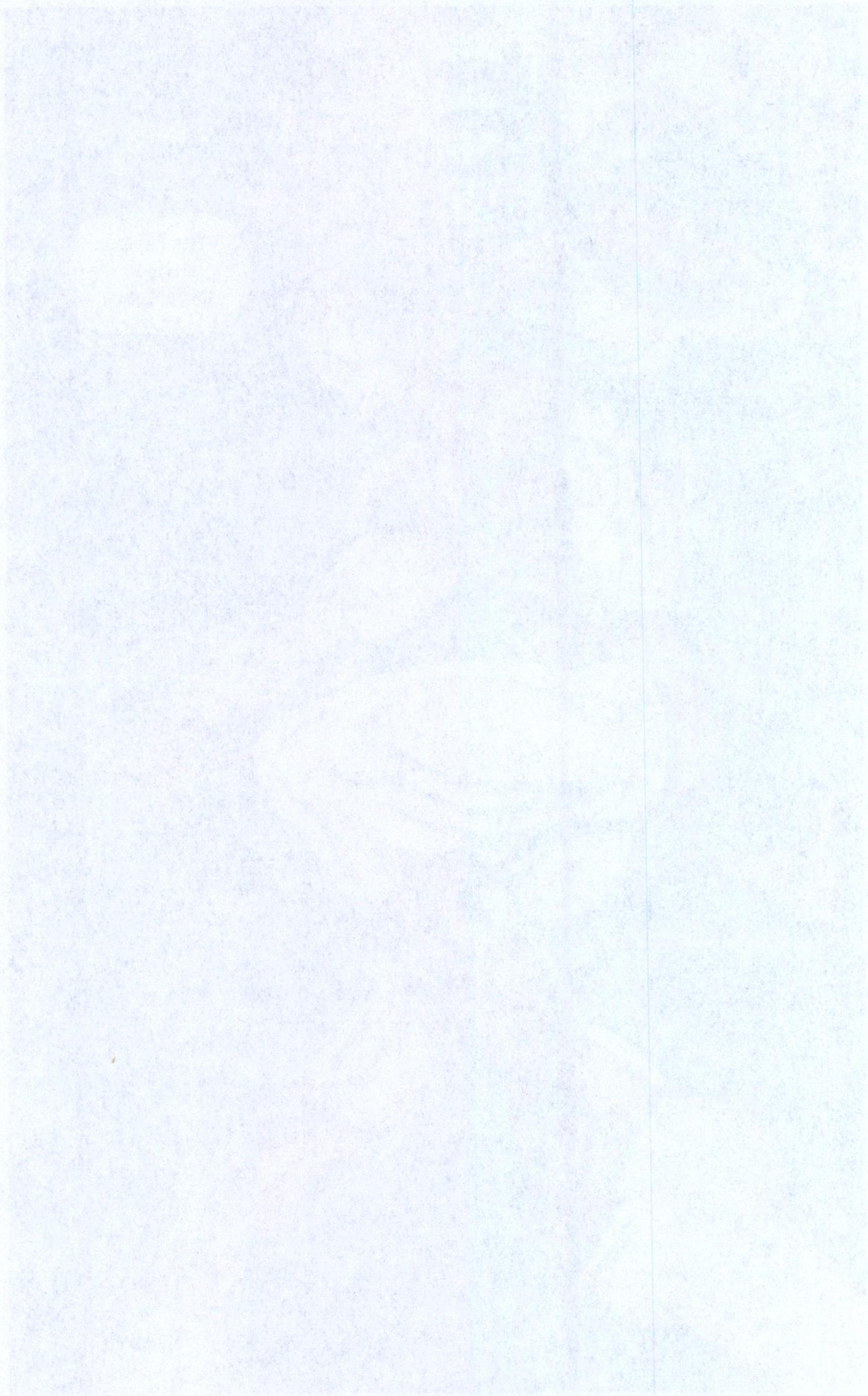




Figure 6



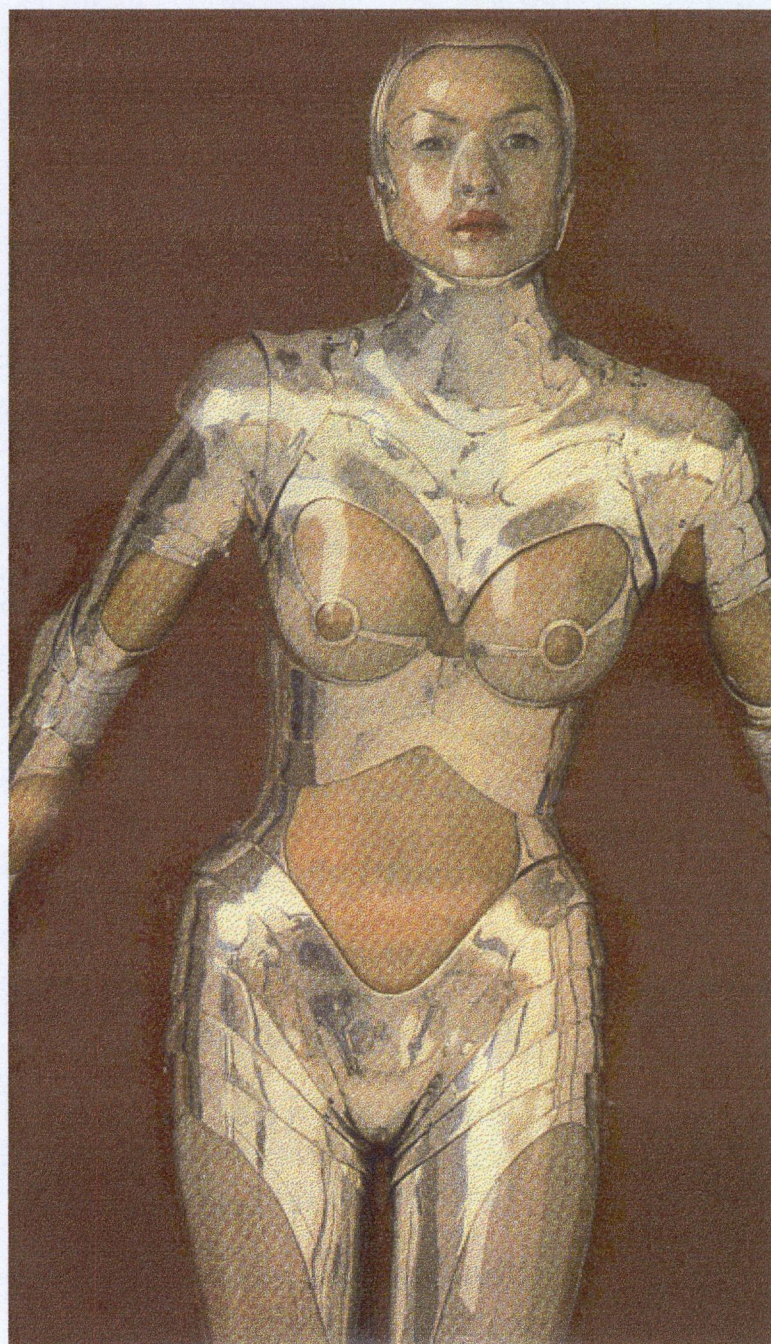
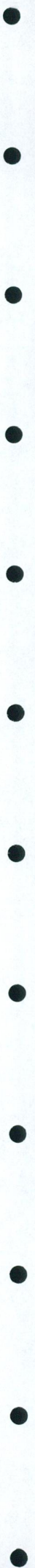
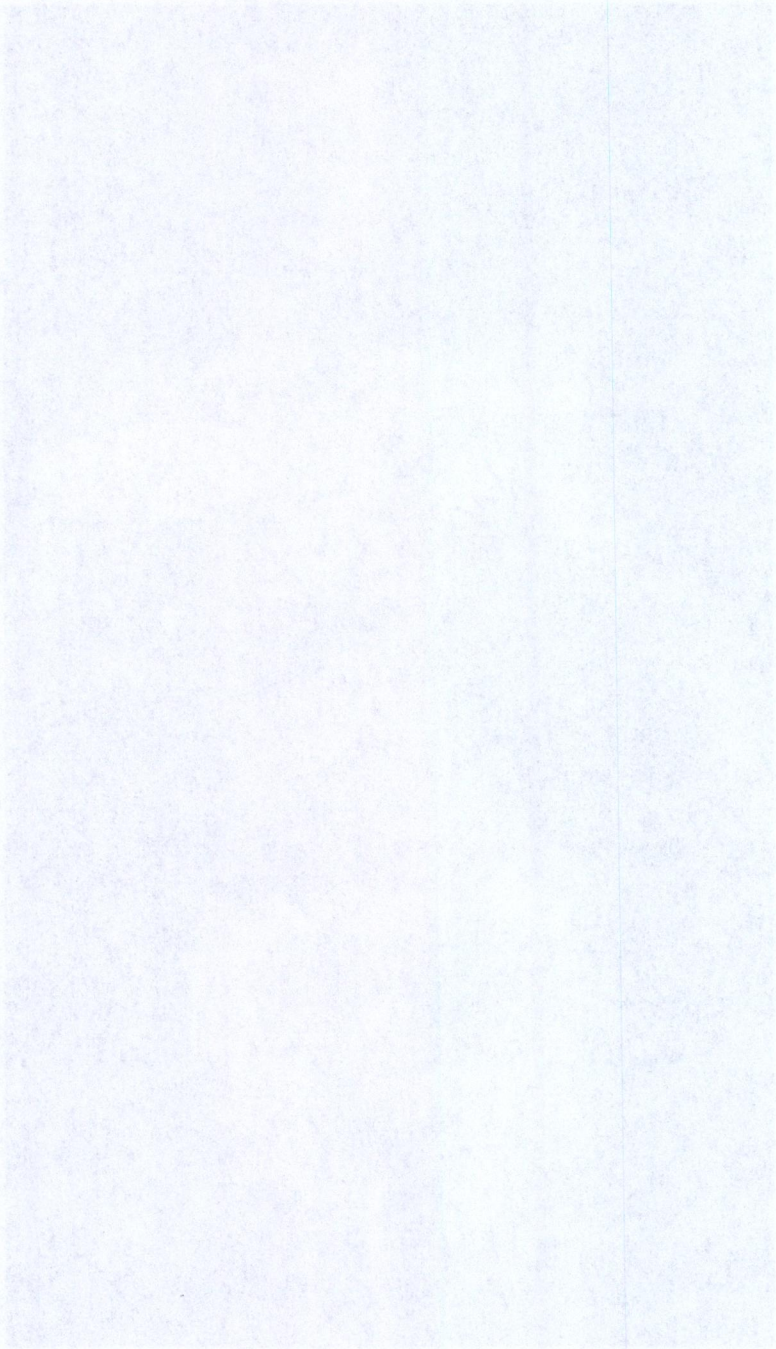


Figure 7



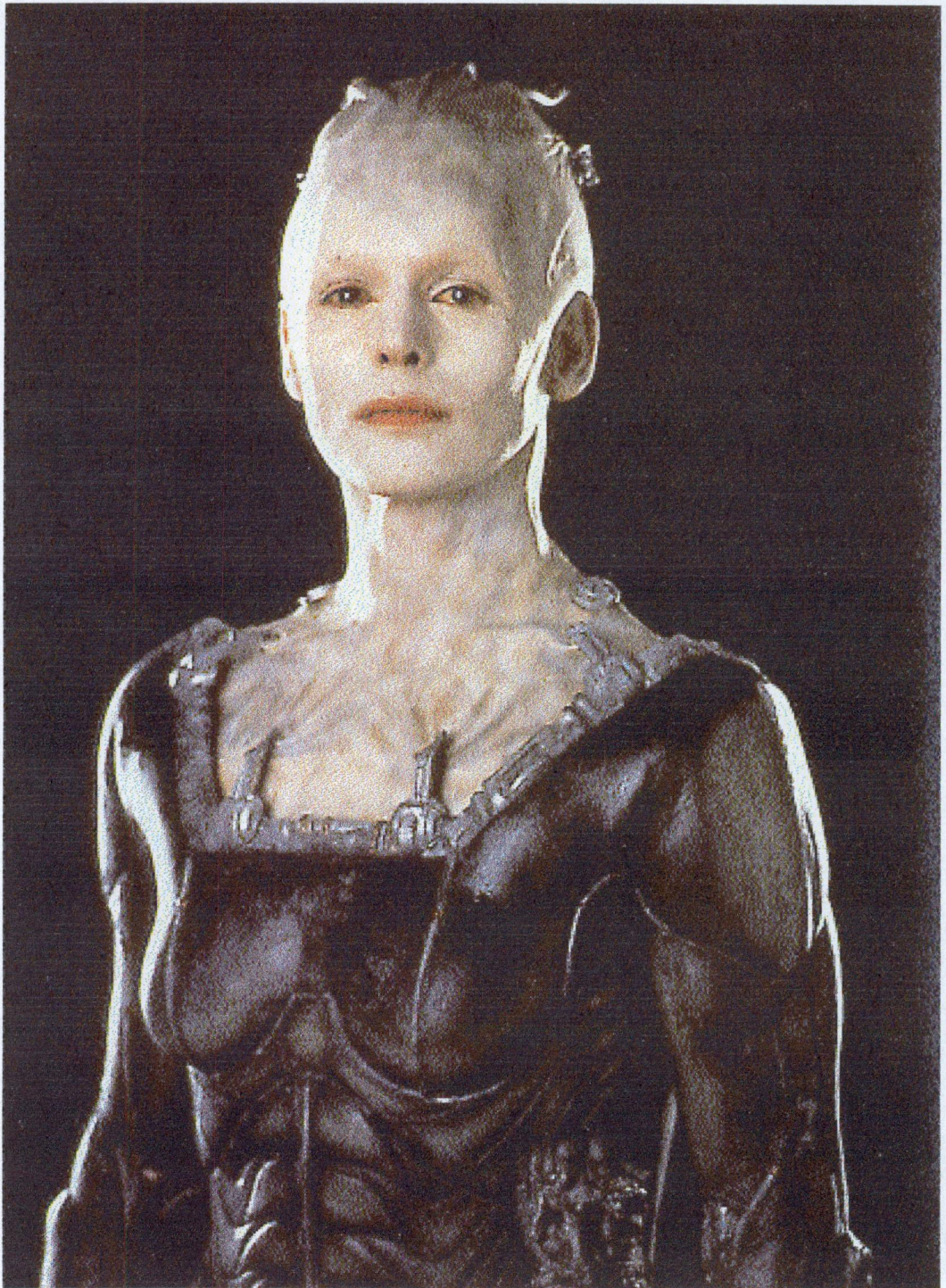
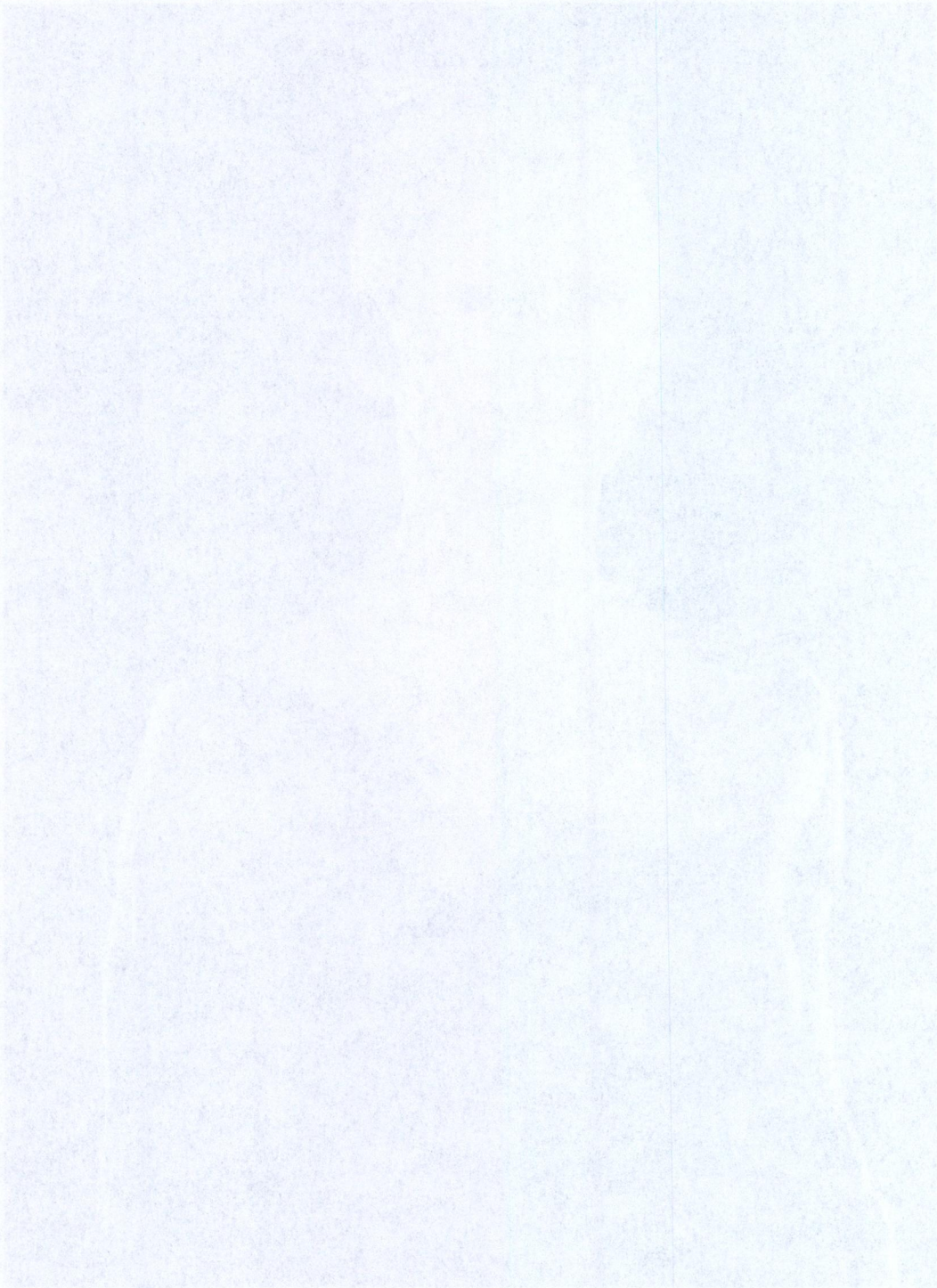


Figure 8



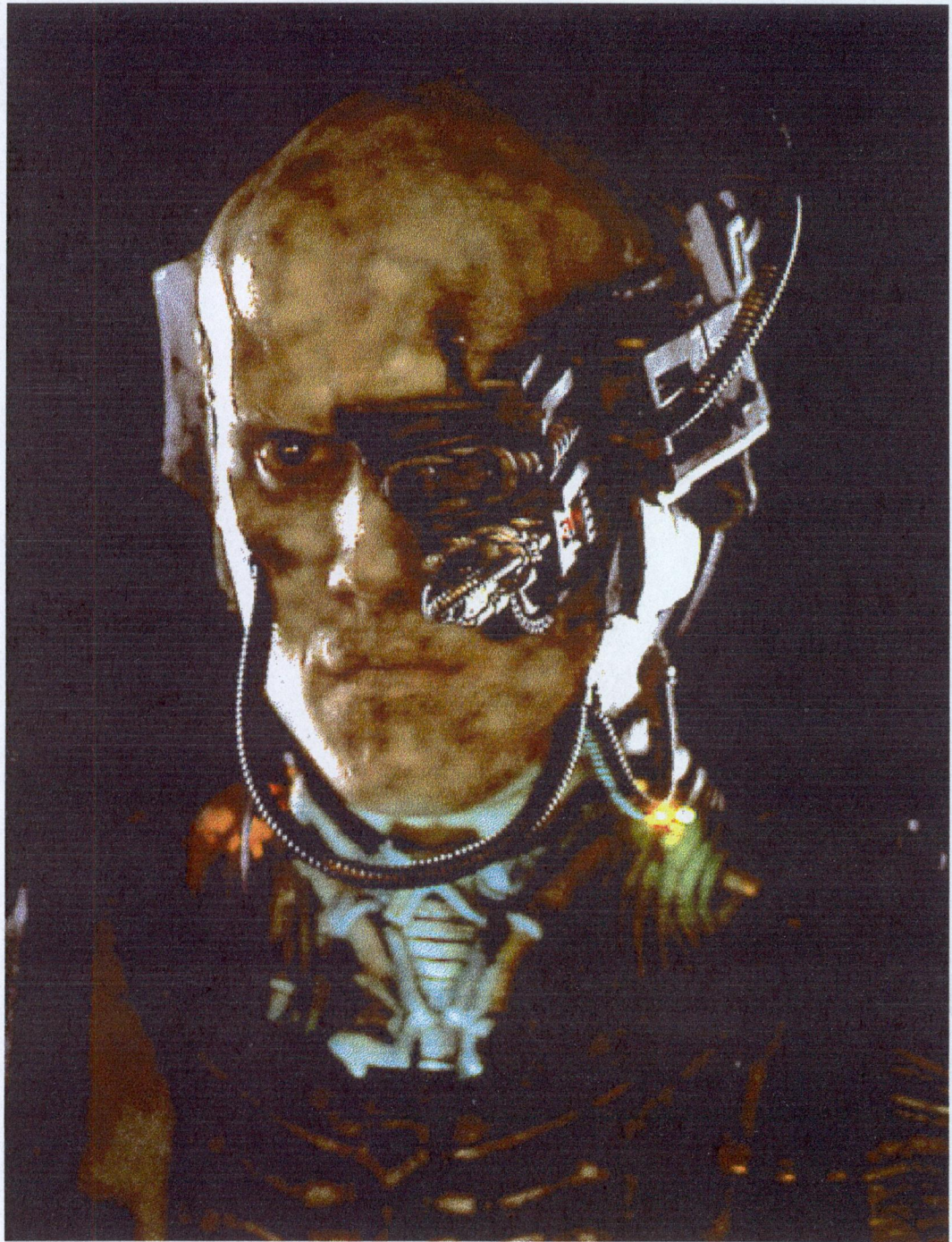


Figure 9

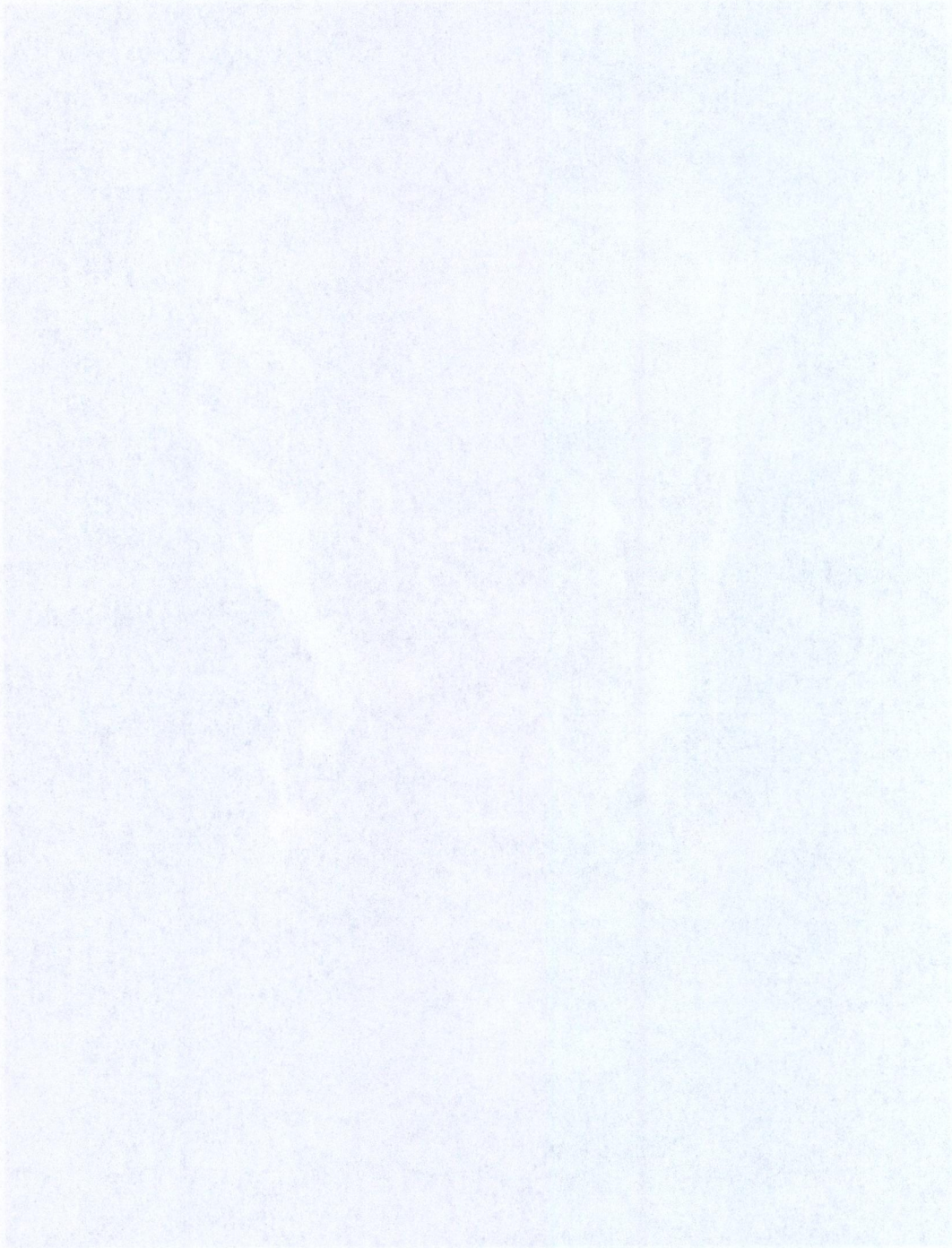
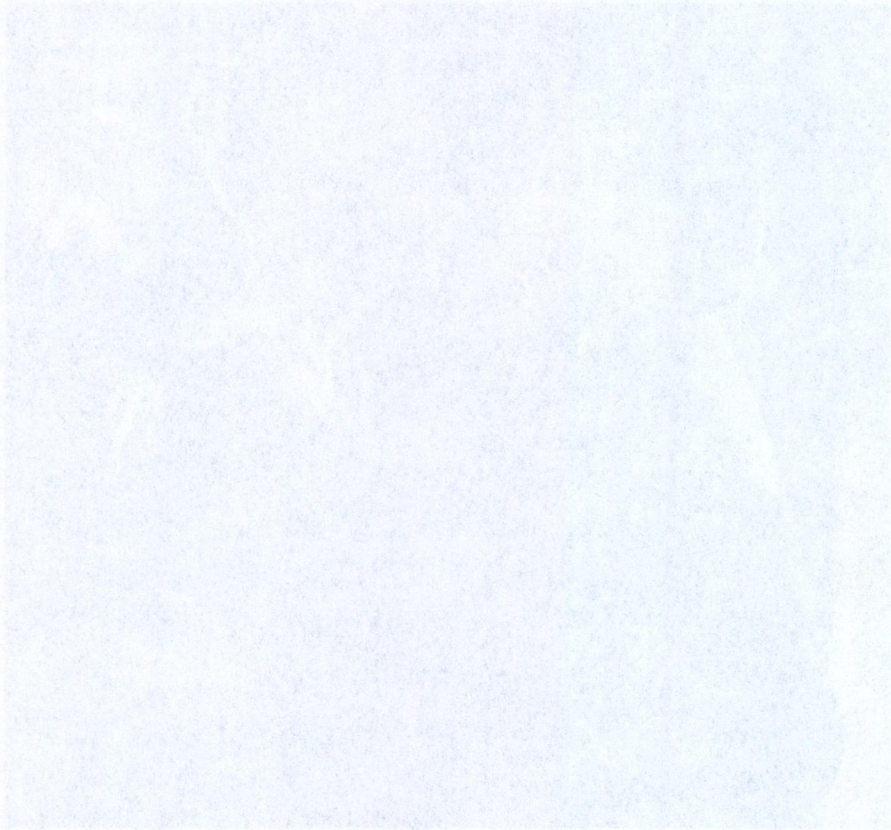




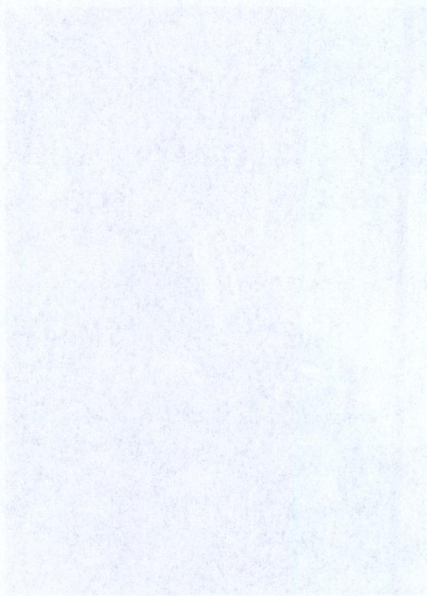
Figure 10



Figure 11



PHOTOGRAPH



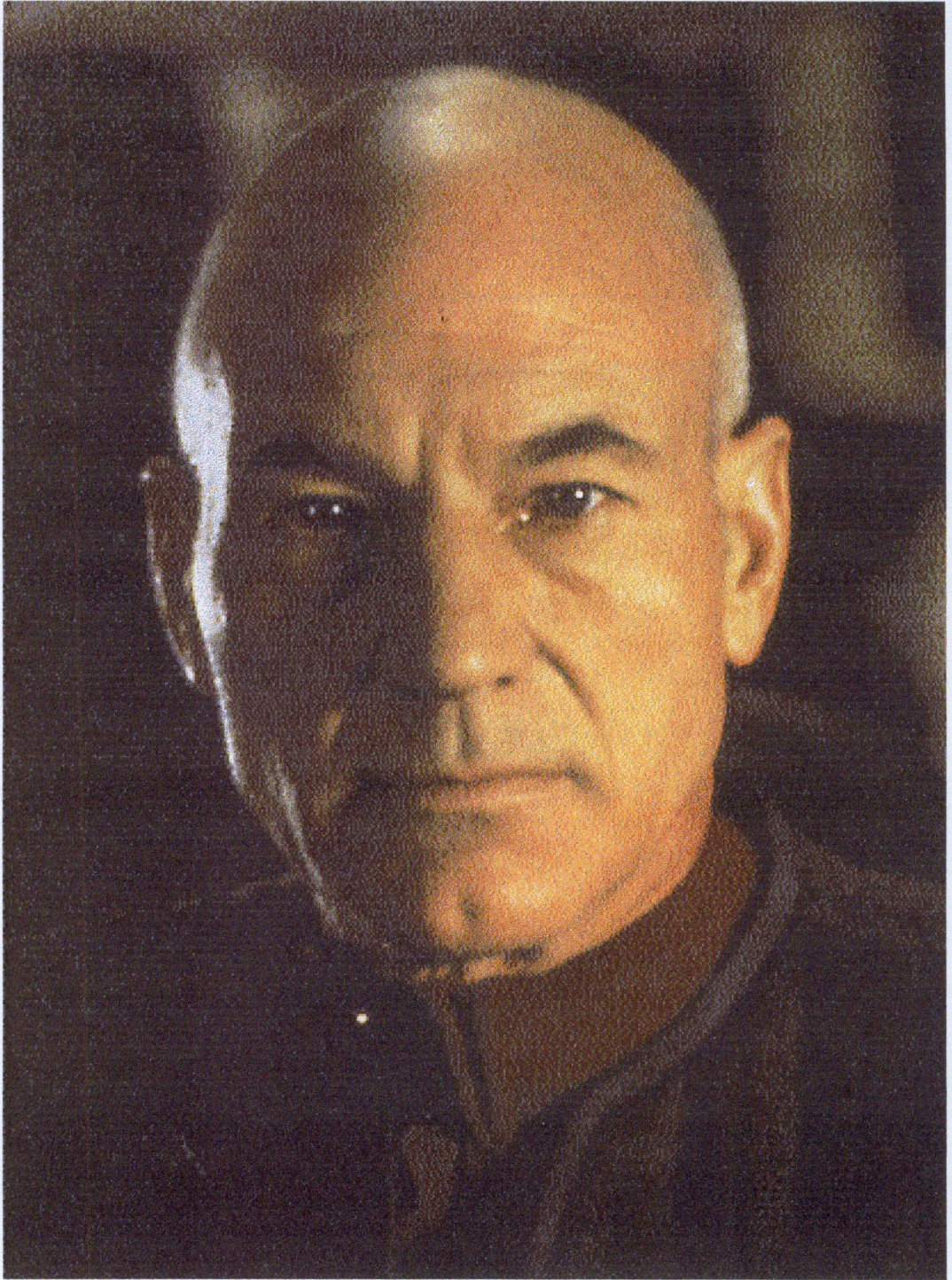


Figure 12

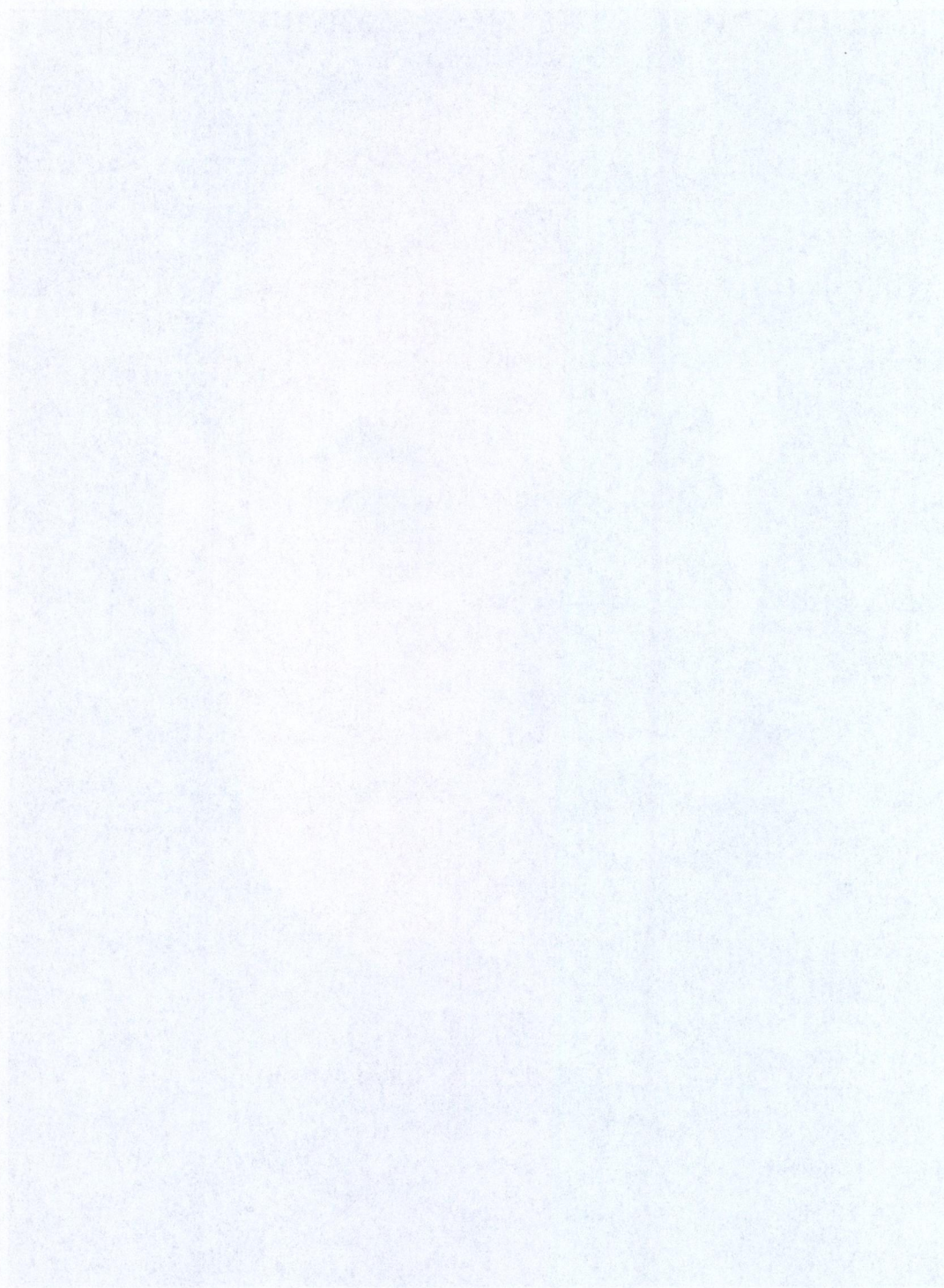
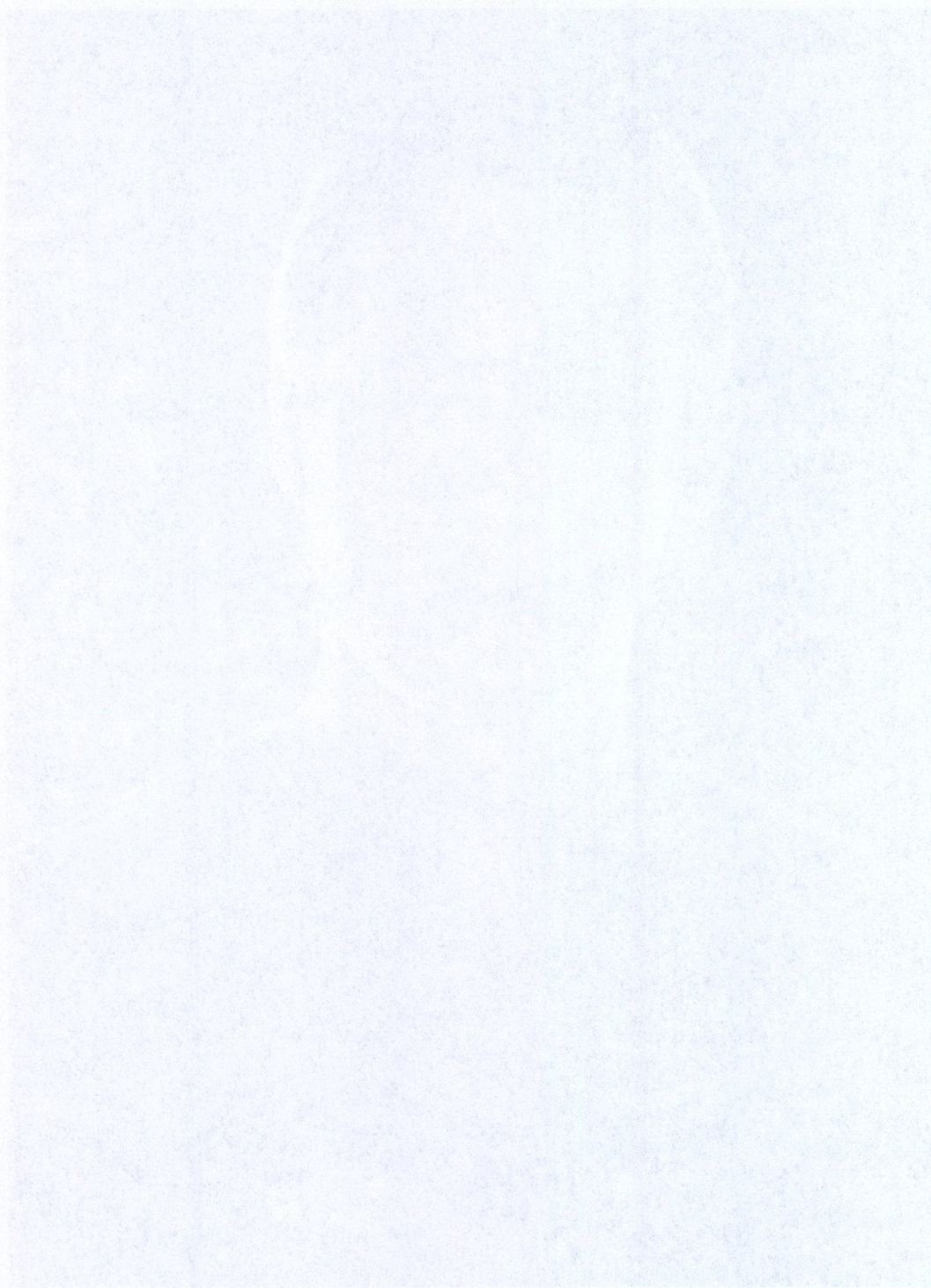




Figure 13



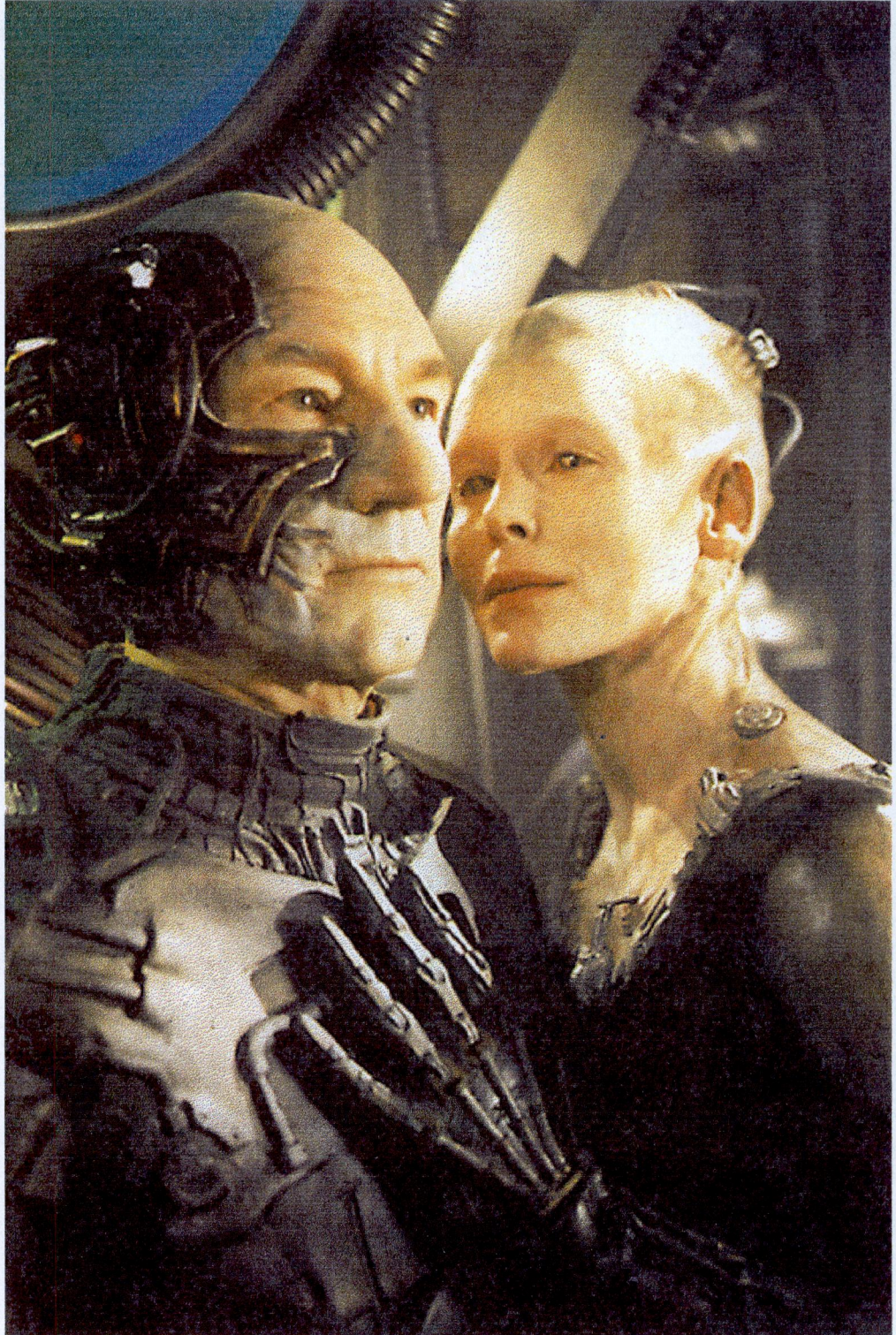
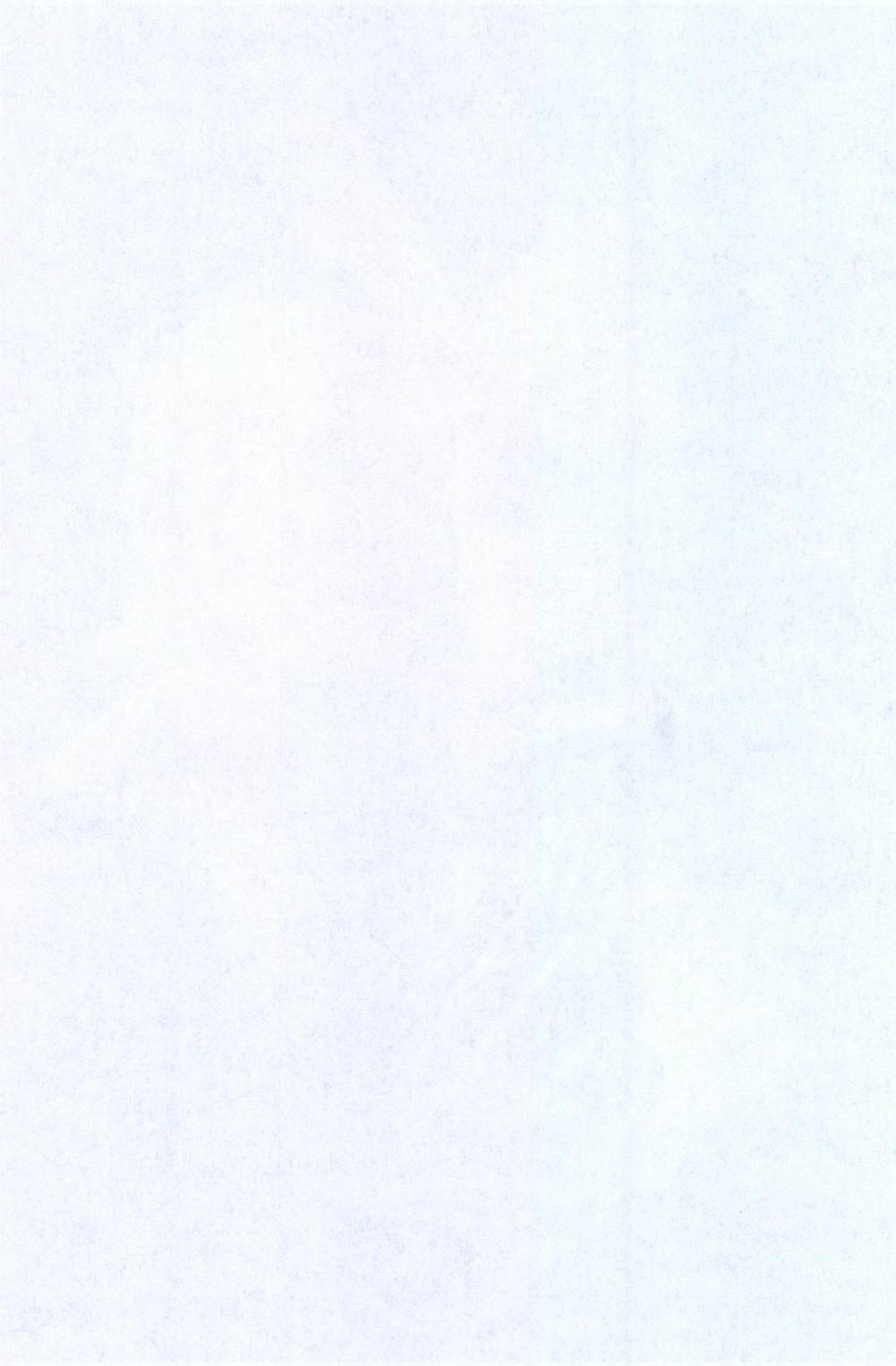


Figure 14



CONCLUSION



COMMISSION

A surprisingly large amount of the human body is redundant. According to the Department of Surgery in U.C.L.⁴⁷ the human body can survive without the sexual organs, the spleen, appendix, one of the kidneys, most of the intestines and all four limbs. The only essential organs are the heart, lungs and brain; though sections of the brain can be removed without causing severe damage, and survival with only one lung is also possible.

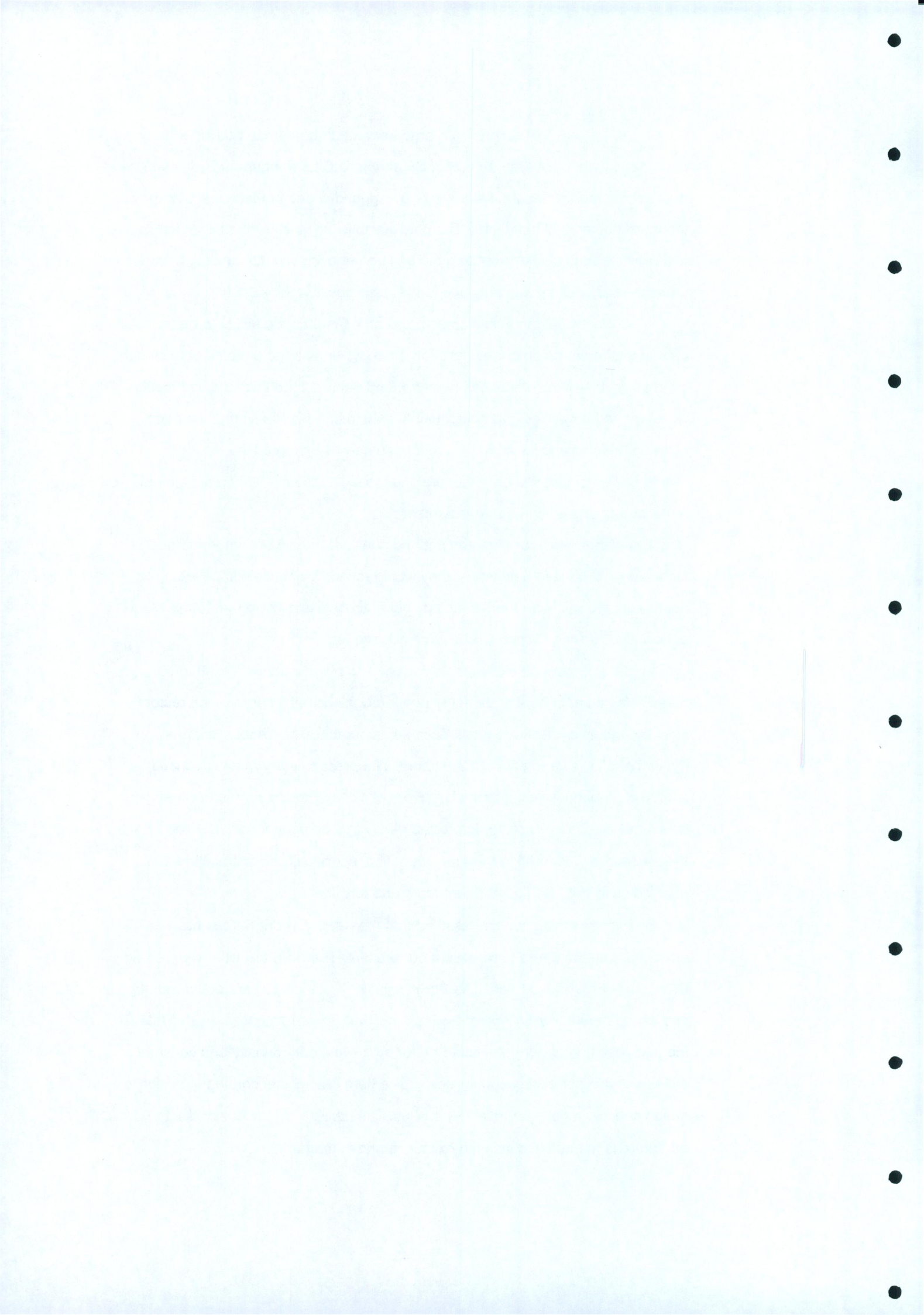
We are an incredible organic machine that has the ability to better itself and adapt. To aid us on our evolutionary journey, we use the benefits of technology to assist in the maintenance of comfort and health. If the loss of a limb occurs, we have the knowledge and equipment to construct a prosthetic replacement; allowing the continuation of what would have been a disrupted life.

If the heart or lungs fail, we can prolong the existence of life by machine until replacement organs can be transplanted.

If one were to pause for a moment and consider the advancement of medical technology in the last thirty years, they would realise it's conceivable that in the near future we will have the technology not entirely dissimilar to that found in science fiction. Science fiction will become science fact.

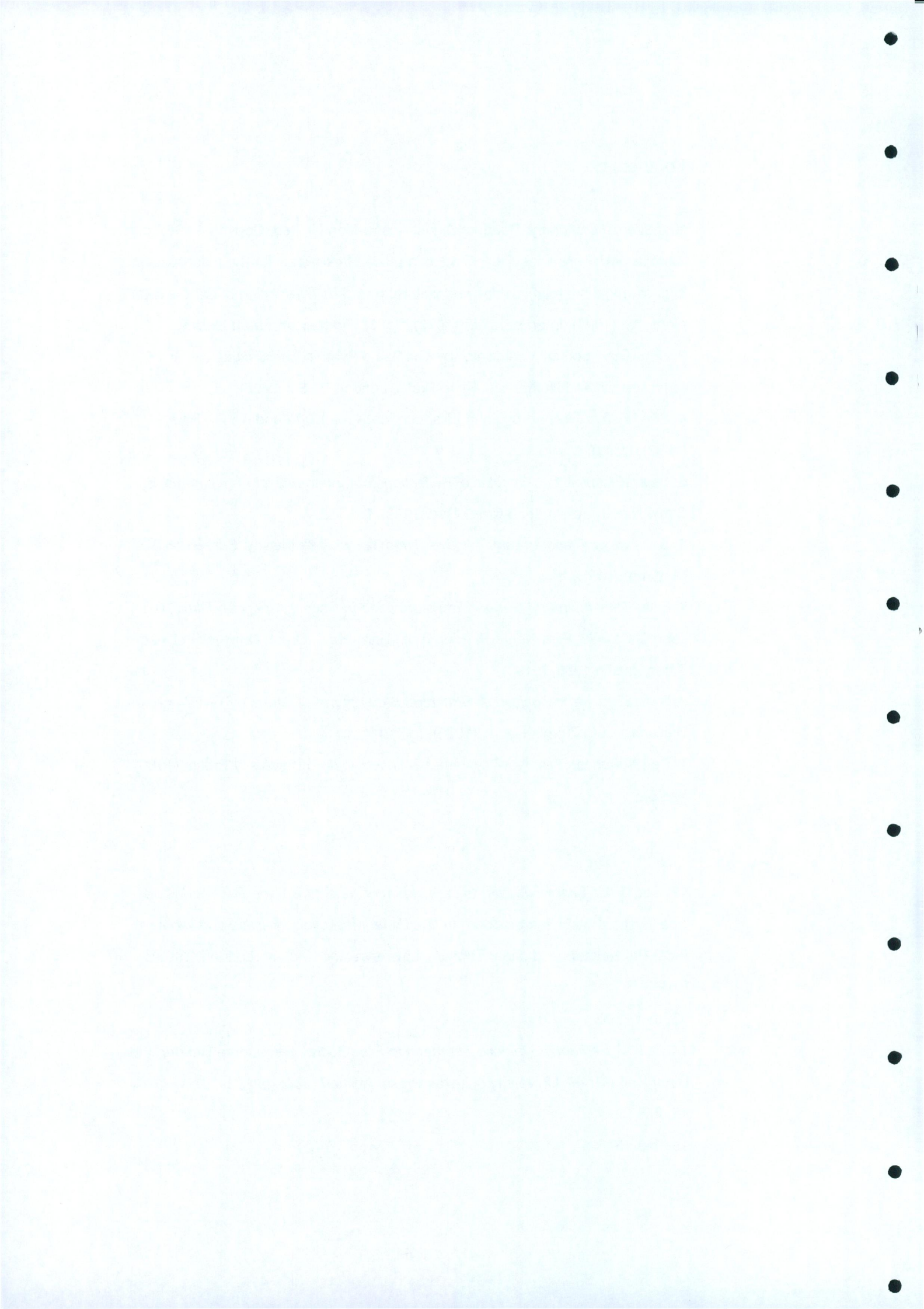
The development of this technology begins to place immortality within our grasp. We can alter appearance and age through cosmetic surgery and restore sight by means of electrode implantation. It is our current technological position today that allows us to envision the future. The present is the most advanced source of inspiration and information at our disposal. Fredric Jameson's theory posits that the "*images of our future are reconstructed experiences derived from the present*".⁴⁸ It is through the medium of film, specifically science fiction, that enables us to deal with our present fears and anxieties.

By this reasoning, we can assume that the newest of our heroes have emerged from the future to represent our present. The Borg are what we are and Data is what we aspire to be. The Borg assimilate relentlessly, are power hungry and cause the near extinction of any species they come into contact with. Data is the manifestation of our potential to better ourselves, our curiosity and constant self-questioning of our reason for being. The hero changes according to society's needs and aspirations, fears and anxieties. The hero's future is our present and our future is the hero's continued existence and immortality.

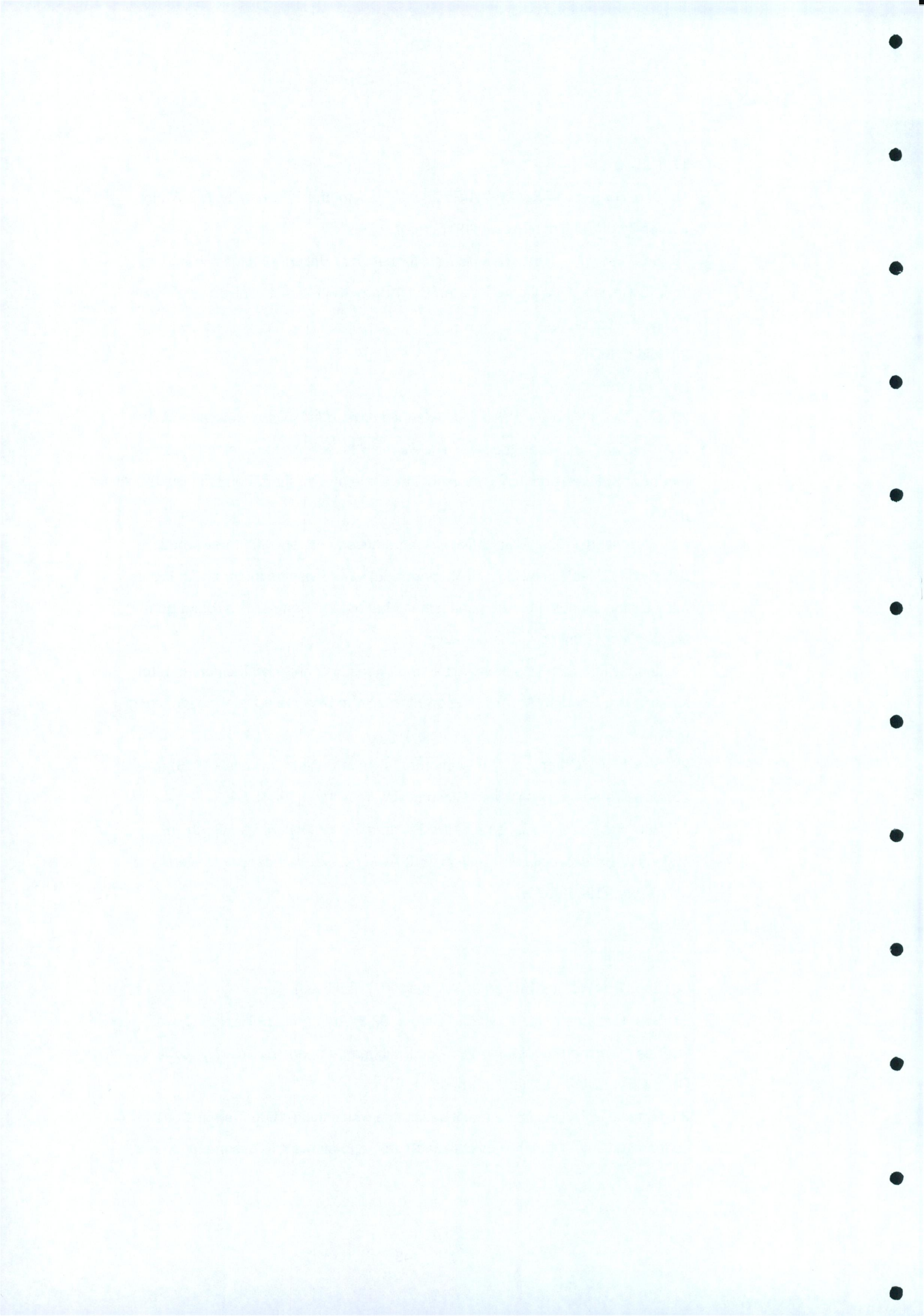


Footnotes:

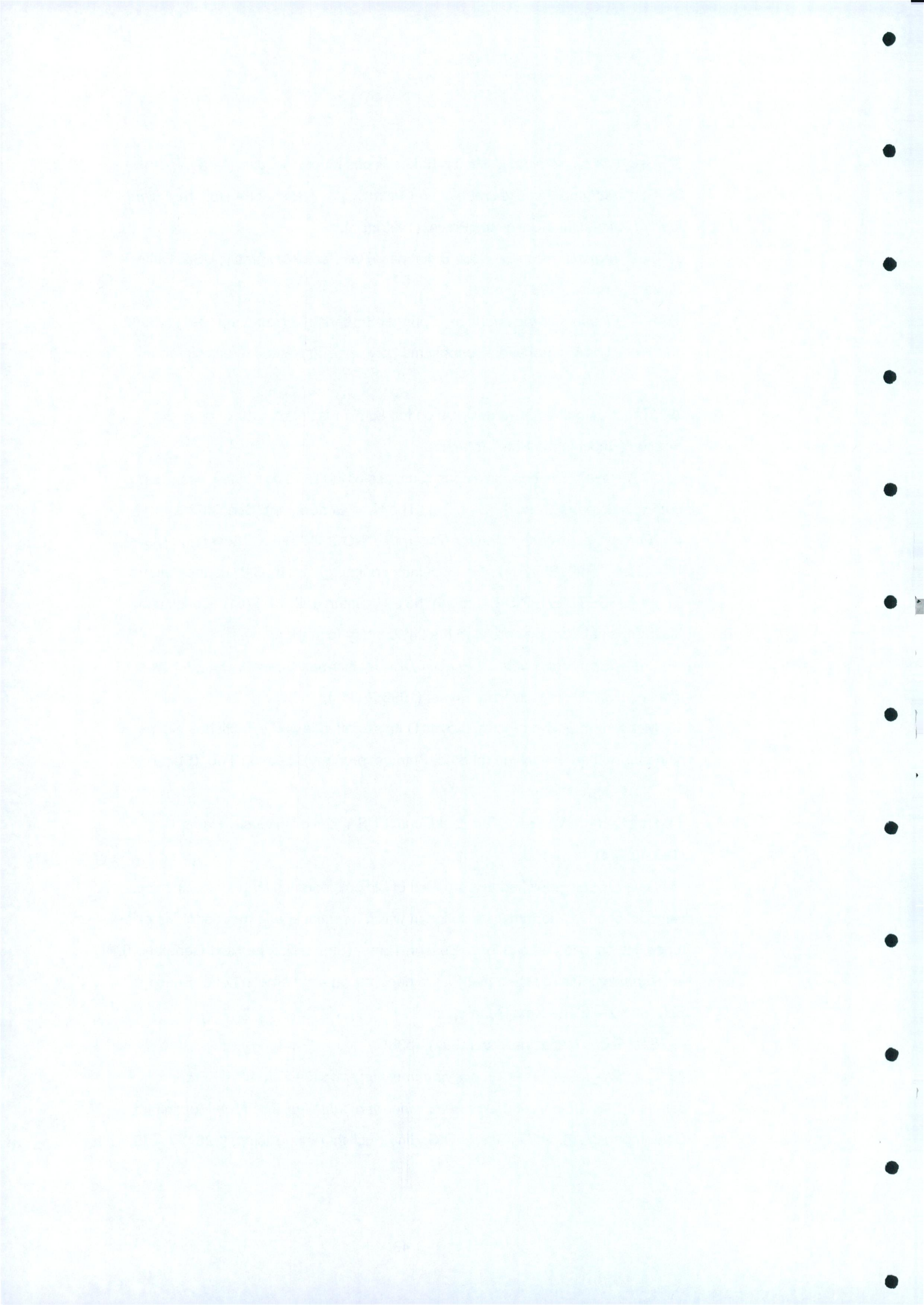
1. *Universal Dictionary*, Readers Digest Association Limited. Copyright 1987.
2. Political Unconscious: Described as a place of existence for the hidden meanings of emotional relationships and culture. See *'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex'* (1924), in *on sexuality* (1977), Vol 7, The Pelican Freud Library.
3. See *'The Roots of Masculinity'* by Thomas J Ryan in *The Sexuality of Men*, (eds) Metcalf and Humphries, Pluto Press, London (1985) (p 26).
4. See *'Visible Fictions'* by John Ellis, London Routeledge and Kegan Paul, (1982), (p 43).
5. See *'Masculinity as Spectacle' Reflections of men in mainstream cinema*, by Steve Neale, *Screen* 24:6 Nov. - Dec (1983), (p5)
6. See *'Visual Pleasure and Narritive Cinema'*, by Laura Mulvey, *Screen* 16:3 (Autumn) (p12).
7. See *'Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films'*, by John G Cawelti, *Film Genre Reader*, (eds) Barry Keith Grant, University of Texas Press, Austin 1986, (p193).
8. See *'Sixgus and Society': A Structural Study of the Western*, by Will Wright. University of California Press, (1975), (p122).
9. See *'American Film Now'* by James Monaco, Oxford University Press, (1980) (p265).
10. *Ibid* : 265.
11. *Ibid* : 265.
12. See *'I don't know whether to look at him or read him, Cape Fear and Male Scarification'*, by Helen Stoddart. In *'Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women'*, (eds) Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1995) (p195).
13. *Ibid* : 200.
14. See *'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre'*, *Film Genre Reader*, (eds) Barry Keith Grant, University of Texas Press, Austin (1984) (p28).
15. *Ibid* : 29.
16. *Ibid* : 31.



17. Ibid : 31.
18. See '*Sixguns and Society*': *A Structural Study of the Western*, by Will Wright. University of California Press, (1975), (p4).
19. See '*Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films*', by John G Cawelti, *Film Genre Reader*, (eds) Barry Keith Grant, University of Texas Press, Austin 1986, (p184).
20. Ibid : 184.
21. Ibid : 185.
22. See '*I don't know whether to look at him or read him, Cape Fear and Male Scarification*', by Helen Stoddart. In '*Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women*', (eds) Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim, Lawrence and Wishart, London (1995) (p195).
23. 'Westworld' (1973; MGM): Delos is an amusement park with three worlds; (Westworld, Medieval world and Romanworld) where visitors interact with robots. (only distinguishable from humans by their hands) Yul Brynner is a rogue gun-slinging robot hunting a lone human survivor.
24. Johnny Mnemonic: is a character who trades his childhood memory in return for R.A..M. (Random Access Memory) implants to become an information smuggler.
25. See 'Movie Chronicle; The Westerner', (Uni of California Press - 1975) (p471).
26. See '*Neuromancer*' William Gibson, New York Ace, (1984), 51.
27. See '*Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh*' in *Visions of Excess: selected writings*, (ed) Allan Stoekl. Minneapolis University of Minnesota, (1985) (p70).
28. Ibid : 295.
29. Ibid : 296.
30. See '*True Names*' by Vernor Vinge, (1981), (p95 -96).
31. See '*Pleasure of the Interface*', *Screen 32:3* (Autumn), (1991), (p308).
32. See '*Terminal Penetration*' by Scott Bukatman. In *Terminal Identity, USA*, Duke University Press, (1993), (p208).
33. Mimetic Polyalloy: is the metal substance which the T-1000 (*Terminator 2: - Judgement Day* - Cameron) is constructed of, and allows it to assume alternate forms.



34. See 'Life on Screen' by Sherry Turkle, Focus Magazine, Jan (1997), (p56).
35. See 'Technophilia: Cyberpunk and Cinema' by D'Alessandro. Ref: *Terminal Identity*, USA, Duke University Press, (1993),(p1).
36. See 'Terminal Flesh' by Scott Bukatman. Ref: *Terminal Identity*, USA, Duke University Press, (1993), (p309).
37. See 'Pleasure of the Interface', Springer Screen 32:3 (Autumn)(1991),(p309).
38. 'Wet - Wired' : To have electronic memory chips implanted directly into the brain.
39. 'Ghost' : An alternative designation for 'soul' or 'spirit'. Normally used by cyborgs (Ghost in the Shell) (Manga).
40. 'Collective' : The collective consciousness of the Borg combined. Ref 'Best of Both Worlds parts 1 and 2, (Star Trek: The Next Generation) (Season 3 & 4).
41. 'Enterprise' : Ref: the starship 'Enterprise' NCC - 1701 - E. (Sovereign Class). The latest model (Star Trek: First Contact) spanning from the 20th century aircraft carrier (USS ENTERPRISE) through the 23rd century (NCC - 1701) (Constitution Class)(original Star Trek crew) to the 24th century (current crew).
42. See 'Transmogrification of Philip K Dick' by Norman Spinrad. Ref : *Terminal Identity*, USA, Duke University Press, (1993) (p248).
43. *Measure of a Man* : Picard proves Data's sentience and establishes him as being more than a machine (and not Starfleet property). Season Two. (Star Trek: The Next Generation).
44. Ref: Bernard Wolfe in *Terminal Identity*, USA, Duke University Press, (1993)(p244).
45. *Deja Q* : Q is punished and stripped of his omnipotence by his own species. He must choose a form/manifestation in which he must spend the rest of his existence. He chooses human form. Season Three, (Star Trek: The Next Generation).
46. *Tapestry* : It is revealed that Picard depends on a cybernetic heart. Season Six, (Star Trek: The Next Generation).
47. See *Focus Magazine*, Jan (1997), (p38).
48. See 'Progress Verses Utopia; or can we imagine the Future?' by Fredric Jameson. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking representation*. The New Museum of Contemporary Art, N.Y in Assoc. D Godine Publisher Inc, Boston, (1984), (p249).



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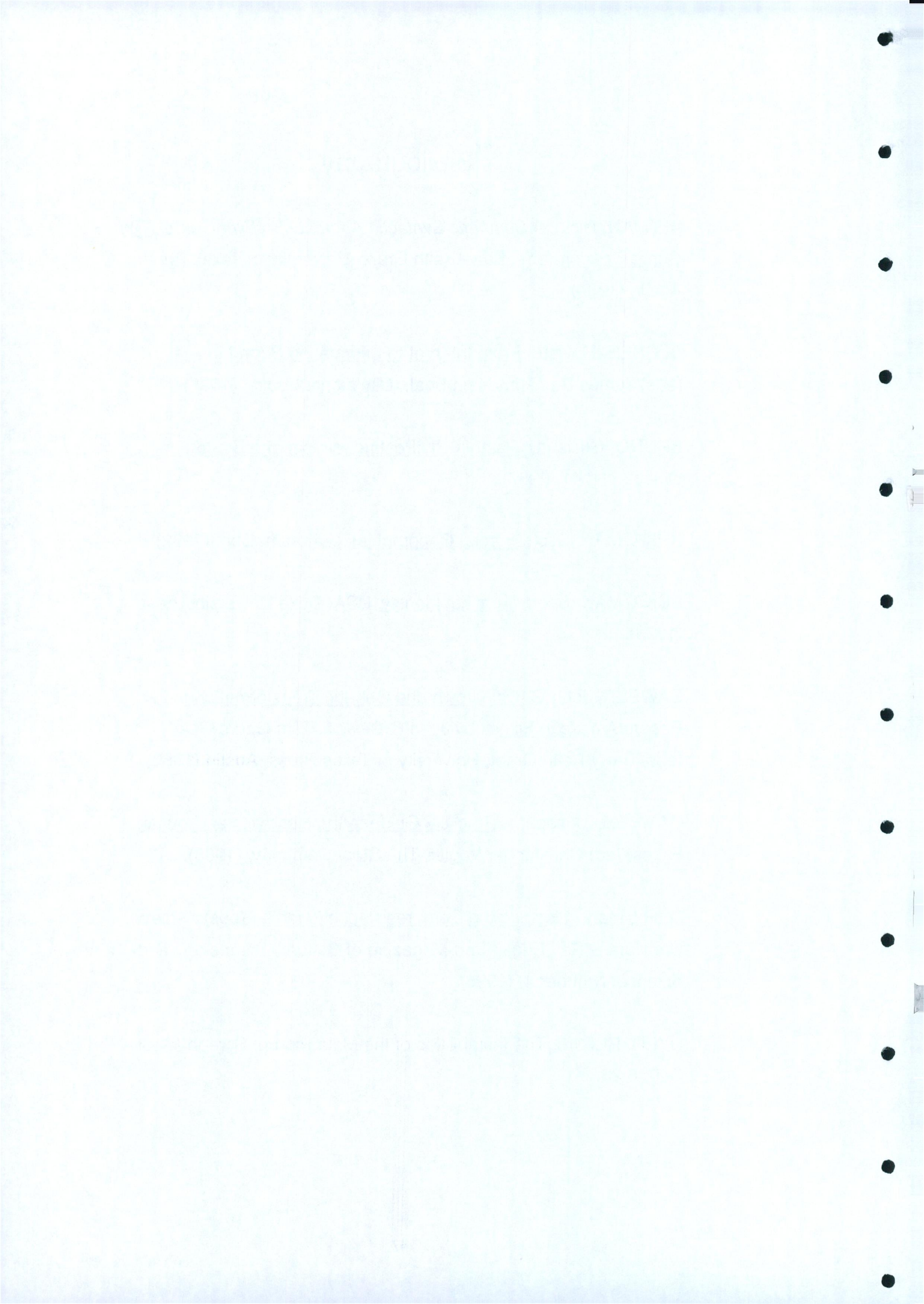
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