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Fine Art Sculpture

“The Movements of Rebecca Horn”

by

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Introduction

The recent upsurge in awareness of the predominance of the figure within contemporary art has led to a reevaluation of the importance of the works of Rebecca Horn. Constantly referred to as a sculptor, Horn has produced works that vary from performance and installation to, more recently, feature length films. Rebecca Horn was born in 1944, in Germany, in the forest region of Odenwald. She studied at the Akademie der Künste in Hamburg. She was subsequently ill and spent a year (1967) in a sanatorium after which she spent a year as a student in Barcelona. She has travelled continually over the past two decades until her recent acceptance of a Professorship in the Academy of Arts, Berlin. Her work began to receive critical attention in the mid sixties and early seventies. This period is characterised by artists moving to break down the barriers of the art world and move out of the gallery context, producing non commercial and ground breaking work. This evolved through new directions such as Earth Art, Environment Art and Happenings. Horn's early work consisted of performances based around soft sculptures designed to be worn on the body. This subsequently developed to in the production of machines with the ability to mimic a set of human gestures. Horn's use of photographic and film media to document her activities combined with an interest in cinema led towards



the removal of a classification in which to place her work. She also succeeded in crossing over the boundaries between art and reality, in blending her own life into the fundamental structure of her work.

Her work is built upon a repertoire of ideas and objects that has been with her since her early beginnings. This has enabled her to be extremely prolific, producing smaller works to sell in order to provide funds for large scale work, in particular her feature films. The use of similar imagery within different contexts has allowed Horn to explore various narratives, of both personal and historical significance. The use of space in Horn's work is not a passive one. She is aware of the limitations of spatial occupation. This is something which is a constant preoccupation in her work.

Difficulty arises in trying to find a dialogue within which to discuss Horn's work when so much of it has an overriding similarity in both content and context. There is a constant Kinetic element to Horn's work whether it is produced by a human body in her performance work or by mechanical means through her machines or film work. Many of her works, be they writings or objects, are populated by images of ballet dancers which coincide with her interest in both music and an awareness of the physical capabilities of the body. Ballet has its foundations in a strict set of rules which govern the movements of the figure and allow for precise repetition of specific gestures. Just as ballet dancer has to be aware of this

discipline before improvisation can take place so a sculptor must be aware of the properties governing the media which can be used. Horn has knowledge of such a vast array of materials that the initial reaction to her work is to be impressed by her technical prowess. In applying the term "Movements" to define Horn's work, there is a reliance on both senses of the word; use of motion and also as the musical term for divisions within a larger body of work. Within a symphony the various movements contain similar themes and motifs explored through a series of variations and styles. Each movement therefore contains variations on the central theme. It allows for a clear dialogue within which Horn's work can be discussed. The pool of objects that Horn works from is immense and her oeuvre so vast that it would be tedious and confusing to discuss her art in relation to repertoire alone. Instead the variation in Horn's use of spatial occupation becomes the central theme examined through the exploratory systems she uses. Primarily, Horn was interested in the space the body occupied, which she explored through performance. She then moved on to replace the body with object, producing gestural machines, where they can be seen beginning to mimic the role of the body. This is concurrent with her constant use of an implied narrative within a space, which Horn uses to give a diversity to her reoccurring motifs and also to control the reading of a given space.

And by the same token we talked a lot about the filling of space -indeed that one can make a space by filling it, as though space was simply an idea to house the things in - and of the difference between filling space and filling time. He had never thought of himself as someone who filled time, but of course, being a painter meant he was, in a sense, filling space all the time (Phillips, 1996, p.6).

The human body is the most basic tool that any artist has; its capacity to absorb information and at the same time formulate ideas and exchange them is the fundamental basis of communication. When physical capability is tied to that notion we see painters, writers and sculptors communicating through mediums external to the body such as the use of the brush or chisel. Performance Art uses this most basic of building blocks, the body, as object, as creator of pure action, as communication and ties it within a partial time frame to allow for close scrutiny. Performance Art is often classed as sculpture, as it has elements of form, shape and mass and involves spatial relationships. In the words of Gabo, one of the forefathers of the Kinetic art movement:

Constructive sculpture is not only three-dimensional; it is four dimensional, insofar as we are trying to bring the element of time into it. By time I mean movement, rhythm: the actual movement as well as the illusionary one which is perceived through the flow of lines and shapes in the sculpture or the painting. In my opinion, rhythm in a work of Art is as important as space structure and image (Barrett.C. 1974, p.214).

Performance art may be seen by many as a recent arrival within the art world. In fact roots of performance art can be traced back as far as the Renaissance and the art experiments of Leonardo da Vinci, and even beyond that to the artistic rituals of the ancient Greeks.



For primitive man dance or simple movement of the body were the primary means of expression. The accessibility of modern consumer electronics allows performance artists to document work within a coherent time frame. Rebecca Horn has said

I wanted to preserve a record of it [body-art performance] beyond the rough sketches and notes I had made. I began with Super-8 by filming the 12 minute "Unicorn" action in 1971, graduating to 16-millimetre, used videotape occasionally and now, of course I only use 35-millimetre (Dornberg.J. 1991, p.98).

Rebecca Horn started making "Body-Sculptures" after a long period of convalescence during which she had remained bedridden. When a student she had poisoned herself while using a combination of polyester and fibreglass which caused her lungs to collapse. She was incapacitated for little under a year after which she still remained in delicate health. This had a limiting affect on the type of work she could produce. Sewing became an accessible medium in which to work. Due to the nature of her illness she was advised against lifting anything that might cause her strain. Awareness of the vulnerability and inadequacy of the body can come with illness. Similarly the regaining of health can awaken a fascination with the body's capability to restore itself and produce a revaluation of what was once taken for granted -

" the absolute reality of the body, and of life as a condition of being present in the body" (Watson.G. 1995, p3.)

This sense of rehabilitation and relearning is evident in all of Rebecca Horn's early work, as though she was attempting to look at the world with fresh eyes, like a child learning what it is she is capable of as she grows, allowing her to become in tune with her surroundings through exploration. As "grown ups" we no longer need the constant exploration that helped us to learn as children. We have acknowledged, measured and tested the physical capabilities of our bodies. We do not need to touch, taste and climb on everything because we have built up a knowledge of these sensations. Through her body sculptures Horn strives to disorientate the body. In an attempt to reassess the individual's own, unique, spatial relationships and to revalidate and experience the sense and knowledge of touch, that can become so unappreciated or dormant.

In "Arm Extensions"¹ Rebecca Horn created two large fabric cylinders that attached to the upper arms just above the elbow and rested on the floor; these were attached to the naked body with a series of straps (Plate one). This construction encumbered instead of utilised the possibility of exploration through bodily movement. This image of the exaggerated limbs was developed and explored to a greater success in

¹ 1968 Arm-Extensionen, made from red fabric.

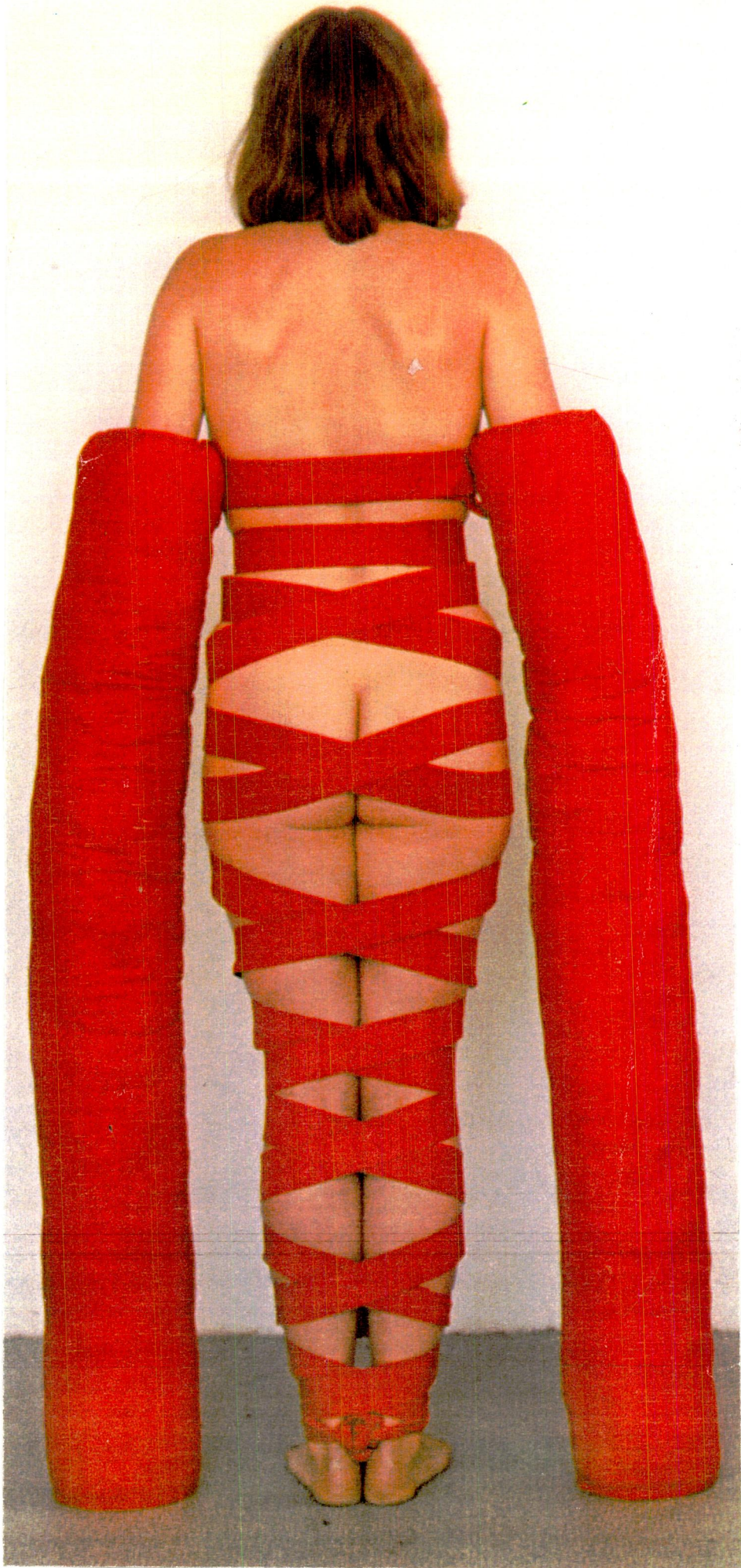
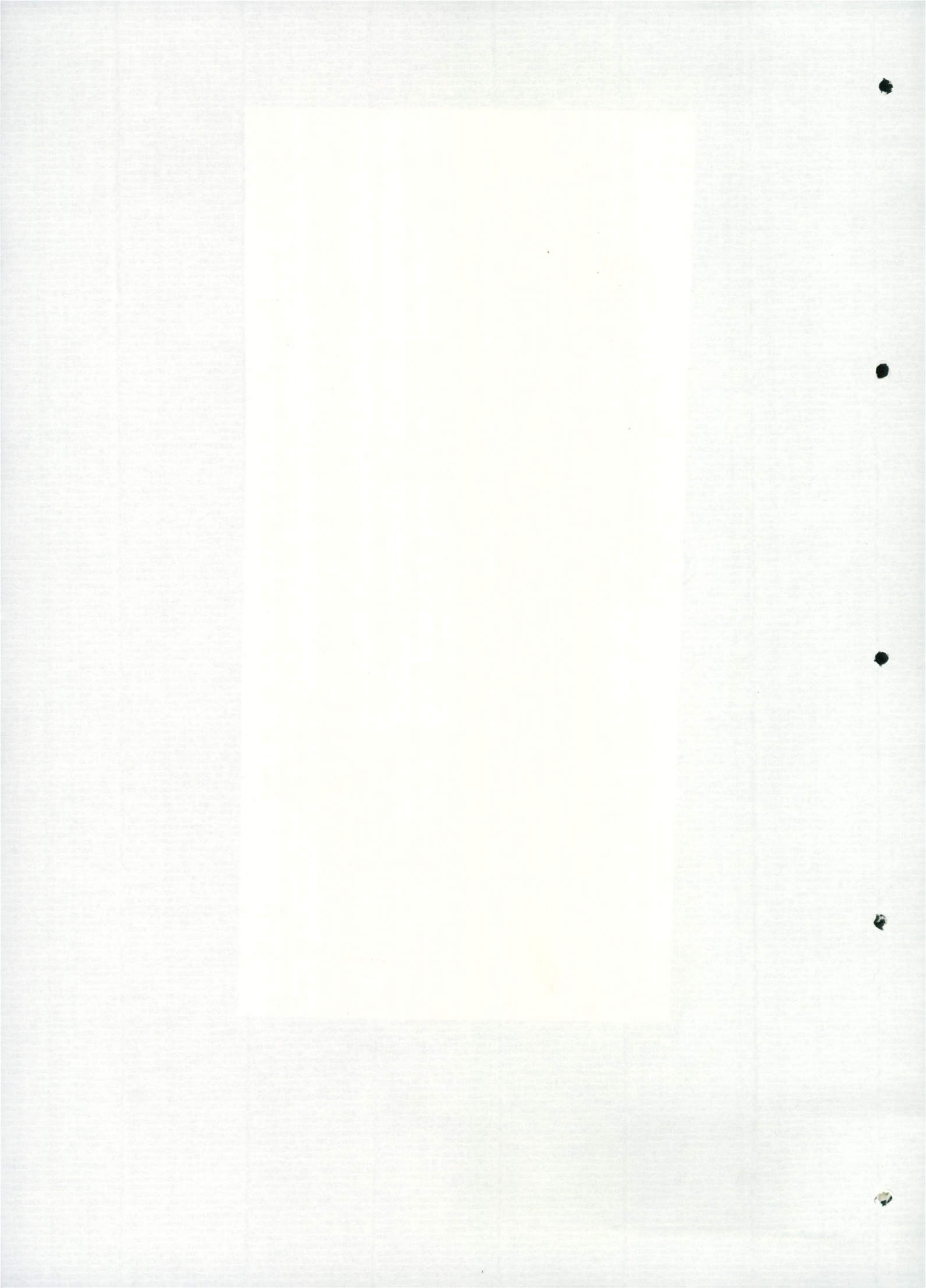


Plate one:
Arm Extensions



Plate two: Finger gloves



"Finger gloves"² (Plate two). This was an instrument to increase manual sensitivity; each finger was extended by several feet by a balsa wood construction. As part of the performance Horn explored touch. She attempted simple tasks such as picking up balls of paper. She also stroked the naked flesh, possibly to demonstrate the frustration at being able to touch yet not feel. In her extension of the hands she expanded what was in reach and removed sensation from what she could touch.

As performance observers we can only guess at the sensations being felt by the performer. The sensation is lost in translation as it steps from performer, to audience, to documentation. The work can be read as somewhat selfish in its experimental, internal nature, being only of value to the performer or instigator of the image. Horn defines the value in these acts:

During the Performance the person (performer) is isolated from his every-day environment. This specialised area is to further self perception. These performances, then are attempts at creating new models of interaction rituals (cited by Curiger, 1983, p.26.).

This device was also used in the performance "Two hands scratching the respective walls"³ from the film "Berlin-Exercises in nine pieces"⁴ (Plate three). This was a development in that the arm and hand were used as extensions to explore a space. In this instance Horn attempted to scratch

² 1972 Fingerhandschuhe appears as a section in the film Performances II (1973) as Handschuhfinger

It consisted of, fabric and balsa wood. Each finger was 70cm long.

³ Mit beider Hände gleichzeitig die wände berühren

⁴ 1975 Berlin- Exercises in nine pieces: Dreaming under water
Berlin Übungen in neun stücken: Unter dem Wasser schlafen.

It consisted of nine separate performances dating from 1974-1975



Plate three: Two hands scratching the Respective walls

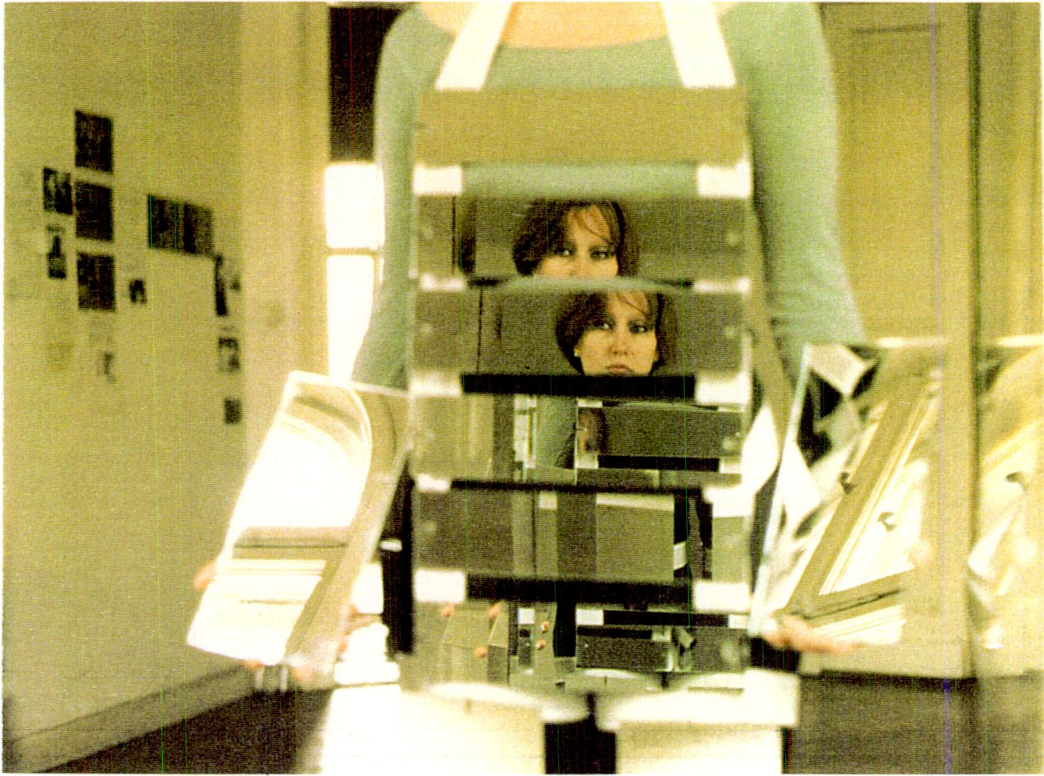
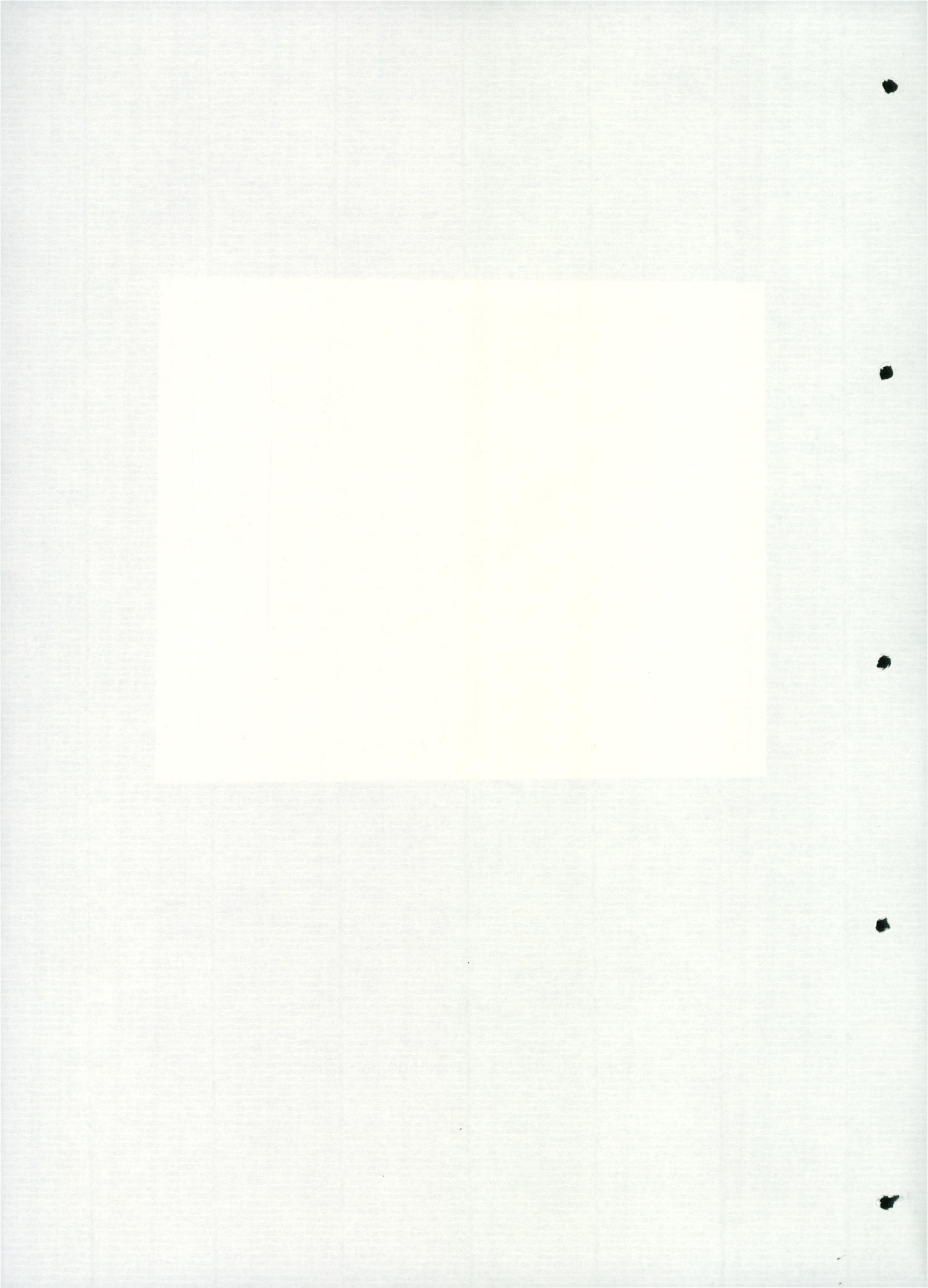


Plate four: Room's Encountering Each Other



opposite walls of a room at the same time, thereby not only measuring it perceptively but tracing the very surface of the wall. This indicated the ability of the body to draw in space, leaving an invisible trace, as if this touching contextualised the wall, familiarised the performer with it. This simple movement excites a moment of fantasy, that a single figure outstretched can occupy a room. This echoes the experience of Lewis Carroll's character Alice while in Wonderland, in particular in the white rabbits home,⁵

Alas! It was too late to wish that! She went on growing, and growing, and very soon had to kneel down on the floor: in another minute there was not even room for this, and she tried the effect of lying down with one elbow against the door, and the other arm curled round her head. Still she went on growing, and as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself "Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What will become of me?" (Carroll.L. 1865, p.46).

The fingers were tipped with metal, adding to the severity of the action. As the metal grated along the surface of the wall they produced noise, this noise added to Horn's filling of the space with energy as if those places touched by the performer became charged, positive, leaving those untouched to remain empty and negative. The image of a single body encompassing a whole space is reiterated in the Performance "Room's

⁵ In 1994 Horn produced a work entitled Through the Looking Glass which is the title of Carroll's second book with Alice as a main character. The piece consisted of a pair of binoculars on a pole and a mirror glass on the other, sporadically both would spin and the binoculars would try to locate the looking glass.





Plate five: Unicorn



Encountering Each Other"⁶ where Horn uses mirrors to express the body immersed within a space, all absorbing ,all seeing (Plate four).

"Unicorn"(1971)⁷ was one of the first pieces of performance that Horn devised with the particular intention to have them performed by another, leaving her free to control the image directly (Plate five). The girl that this particular performance is created around had been under Horn's observation for quite a while before finally being approached to participate in the project. Originally Horn was intrigued by her posture and presence. When they became engaged in conversation Horn found herself in awe at the different worlds they lived in. The girl in question had just turned twenty one, was engaged to be married in the near the future and was in the process of spending her live savings on a bedroom suite. In medieval mythology unicorns were free spirits roaming the forests that could only be tamed by a virgin. Horn applies this metaphor to the girl as a wild naive creature that has been tamed. For "Unicorn", the performer wears a white horn made of fabric and wood and is naked except for the white strapping system which secures the headpiece to her body. The action consists of the performer walking isolated and in her distinctive manner though a hay field in the early morning. The style of her movement could be described as a pavane, that is to say a slow, stately dance.

⁶ "Räume berühren sich in den Spiegeln" appears as a section in "Berlin-Exercises in nine Pieces" (1974-1975)

It consisted of Mirrors and fabric, dimensions variable.

⁷ "Einhorn" appears in the film of the same name (1970) and also in the film performances II (1973) super 8mm, colour 12 minutes.

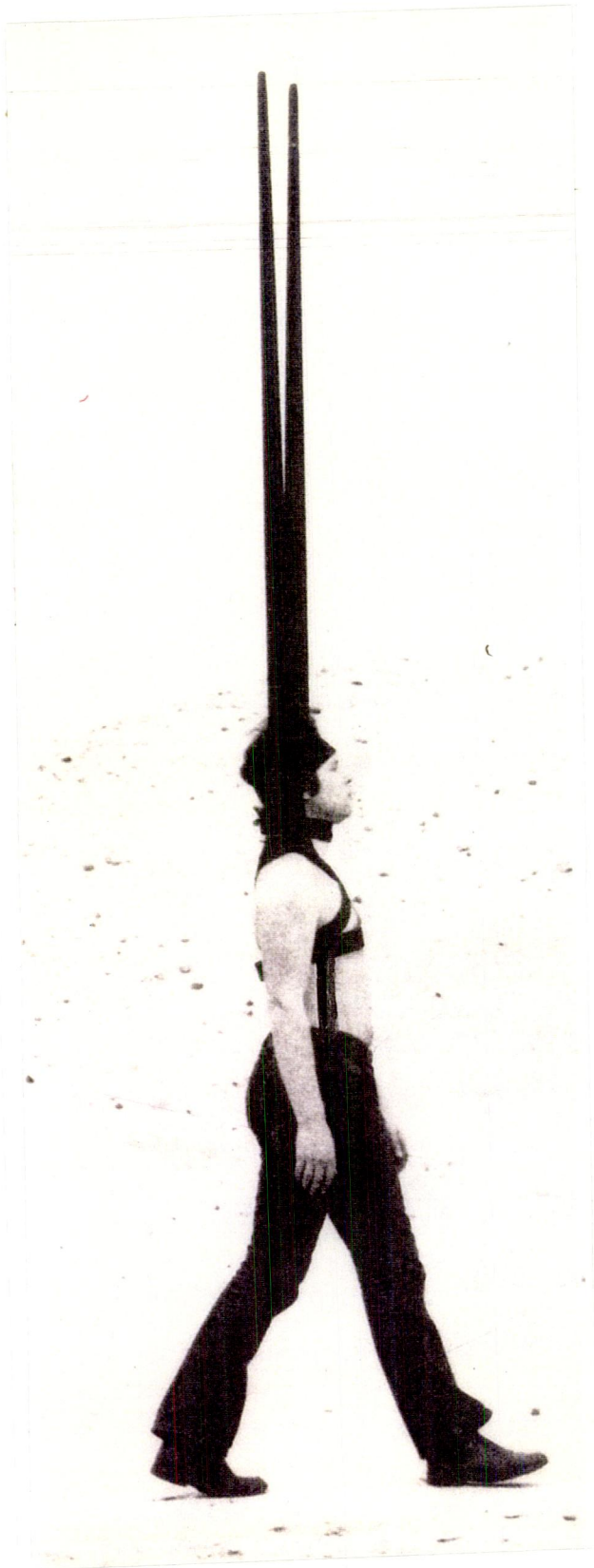
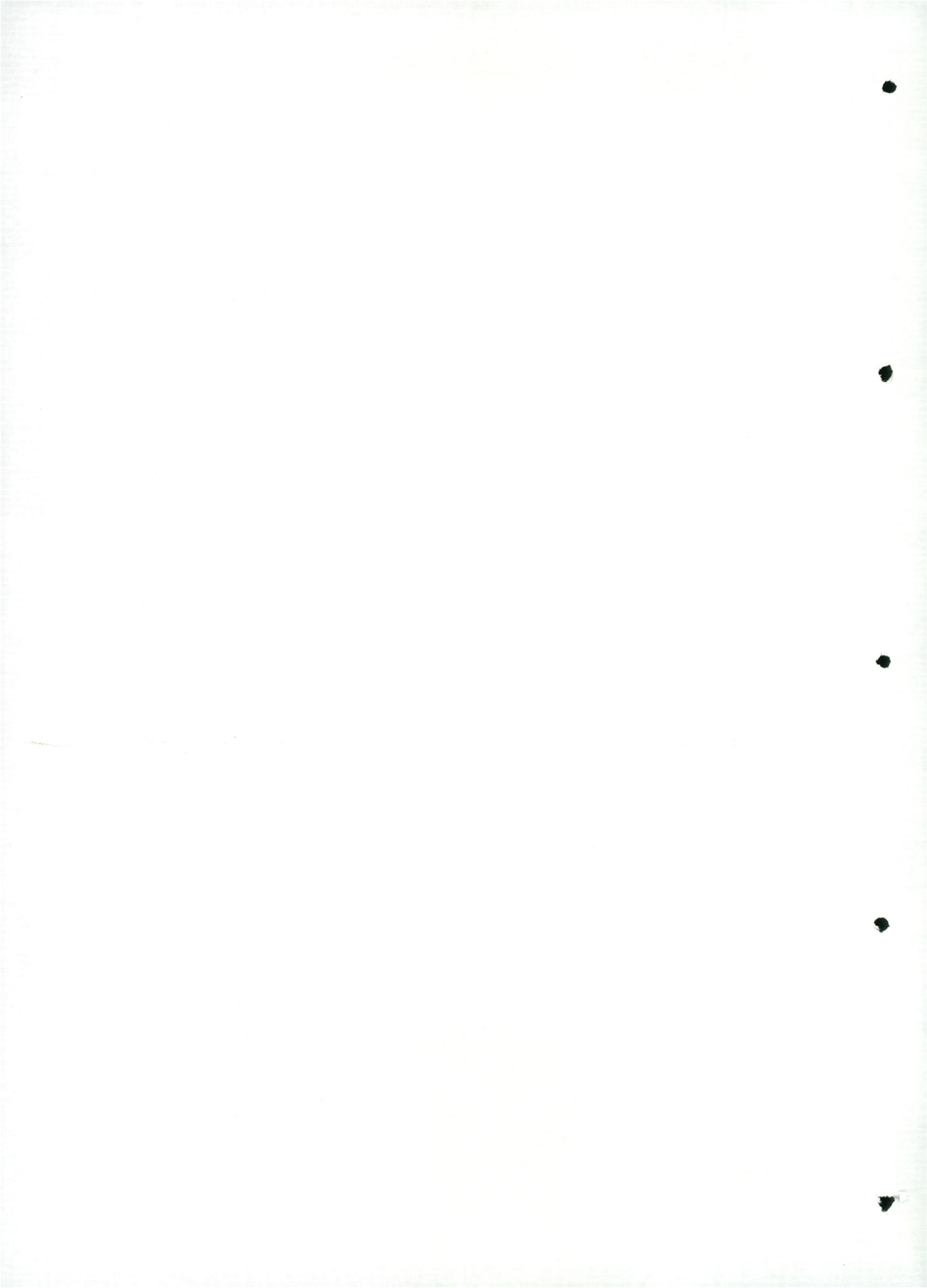


Plate six: Shoulder Extensions



The use of an encumbering costume in "Unicorn" and its sculptural properties connects Horn to Dadaist notions of performance. As Richard Layzell has said,

There is a line between costume and sculpture where artists have so much to say. Dada knew this and thanks to a few grimy photos we know Dada (Cottell and Schoettle, 1986, p34.).

Hugo Ball's costume for the recital of "Karawane" in the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 also extended the space that the performer occupied with a high hat, a wide cape and tubes for his legs. Made from cardboard it was restrictive to the extent that he had to be carried on stage. This use of costume reiterates the performance ideal that the performer does not act the emotion he means to express but is placed within a situation which allows those sensations to come to the fore.

The horn in "Unicorn" serves to emphasise the distinct posture of the performer which was one of the key reasons why Horn chose this particular subject. We also see this as a characteristic of works such as "Shoulder Extensions"⁸ in which we see the movement of the body emphasised through the use of Body-Sculptures (Plate six). These pieces also serve to widen the scope of the performance space by gathering attention from an audience quite a distance away. The piece exaggerates the space that the performer occupies, not only physically but through casting huge shadows in the surrounding area.

⁸ 1970 "Schwarze Hörner" Appears in the film of the same name (1971) and in the film Performances I (1972). It consisted of fabric and wood.





Plate seven: Pencil Mask



Plate eight: "Cockfeathermask"



Each object is tailored for the individual physically, the straps being cut to size and in the case of "Cockfeathermask" (1973)⁹ and "Pencil Mask"¹⁰ making an exact replica of Horn's profile. The term mask is misleading as they don't render the wear unrecognisable instead they serve a similar function to the Body sculpture in altering and extending of the face¹¹. "Pencil Mask " consists of twenty one pencils attached to strips of fabric which are criss crossed over Horn's face (Plate seven). While wearing this apparatus Horn made a series of marks on a flat white wall. Harnessing a need for communication, it was as if bringing the writing instruments so close to the mind could ease the process. For "Cockfeathermask " a copy of the profile of Horn's face was made using wire and feathers (Plate eight). When this projection was worn by Horn, she only had peripheral vision similar to that of a bird. During the performance she stroked the face of a man standing directly in front of her. This caused what Horn has described as "The intimate space between us to be filled with tactile tension" (cited by Curiger, 1983 p.28.).

This use of tactile tension links "Cockfeather mask" to "Finger Gloves" Extensions" where Horn is seen to stroke naked flesh with elongated fingers. This highlights the frustration at a body attempting to express all

⁹ 1973 "Haknenmaske" appears in the film Performances II (1973)
It consisted of fabric and feathers dimensions variable.

¹⁰ "Bleistiftmaske" appears in the film Performances II (1973)

It consisted of fabric and twenty one pencils, the length of each pencil being 5.1cm .

¹¹ Although Horn did produce masks that hid the identity of the performer, "Hair Mask" 1971 appears in the film "Gavin" and "Cockatoo Mask" which appears in the film performances II.



Plate nine: Keeping Those Legs from Touching Each Other



the emotions held in the mind. Later work of Horn's focuses on the kiss which is the meeting point of the most sensitive part of the human body¹².

In work such as "Unicorn" and "Keeping Those Legs from touching Each Other"¹³ the performer's individual measurements and physical ability are fundamental to the success of the piece. In "Keeping Those Legs from touching Each Other" the performers are a man and a woman who have a series of magnets bandaged to their legs, the man to his right leg and the woman to her left. As they stand beside each other their legs are drawn together to form a third leg (Plate nine). The employment of bandages or strips of cloth in this and other performances makes reference to the passing of Horn's illness. This piece relies on the magnets aligning with each other. The "garments" are also constructed to take into account the individual's personality. Horn is not asking her performers to act. The two people involved in "Keeping Those Legs from touching Each Other" are in reality a couple and therefore at ease with each other, just as the girl in "Unicorn" is calm and has a certain outwardly aspect; both groups were chosen by Horn for this reason. An attempt to remake "Unicorn" using the same girl but with more technical assistance failed because the performer became anxious and therefore self-conscious, losing her important sense of presence.

¹² Kiss of the Rhinoceros 1989 It consisted of steel aluminium and a motor 250x500x28

¹³ "Die untreuen Beine festalten"

Appears in the film Berlin Exercises in nine pieces(1974-75)

It consisted of fabric and magnets, dimensions variable.

The image of the Body-Sculptures as tailored garments or props was reinforced by Horn when she went on to construct customised suitcases for many of the pieces. By doing this she has reiterated the importance she placed on the objects as sculpture in their own right, apart from their use in the performance. The cases not only protected them but made them easily transportable. Horn constantly travels as if it were a reflex action to being institutionalised for such a long period. She also regenerates the same themes and objects continually in her work. In securing them in this way Horn is ensuring that the body sculptures will be in a condition to be used again.

Placing someone in a strait jacket is either to stop them from damaging themselves or someone else. Yet in this act of protection, the wearer is also rendered vulnerable to others. This exchange of power through clothing or objects is a key factor within Rebecca Horn's work. In many of her performance works Horn places the body instruments on top of the naked figure raising the question is the participant nude or clothed? She has given her Body-sculptures undertones of bondage visible in their restrictive qualities and in that they say more about what is revealed as opposed to what is covered. Her objects become a shield between the performer and the audience, although the element of nudity only heightens the fragility of the performer. This is typical of the contradictions Rebecca Horn enjoys raising in her work: strong yet vulnerable, hard but soft, revealing and at the same time containing

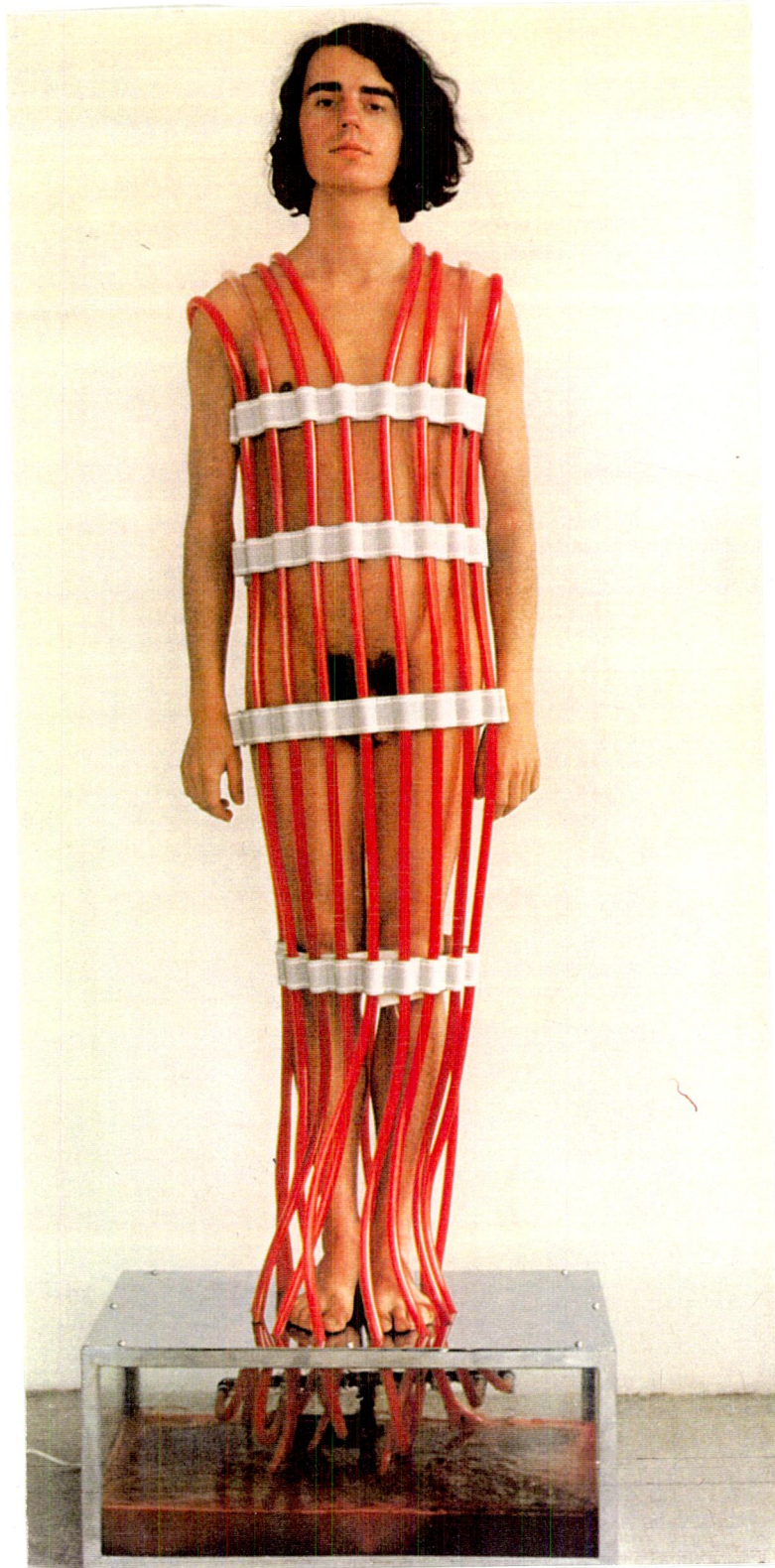
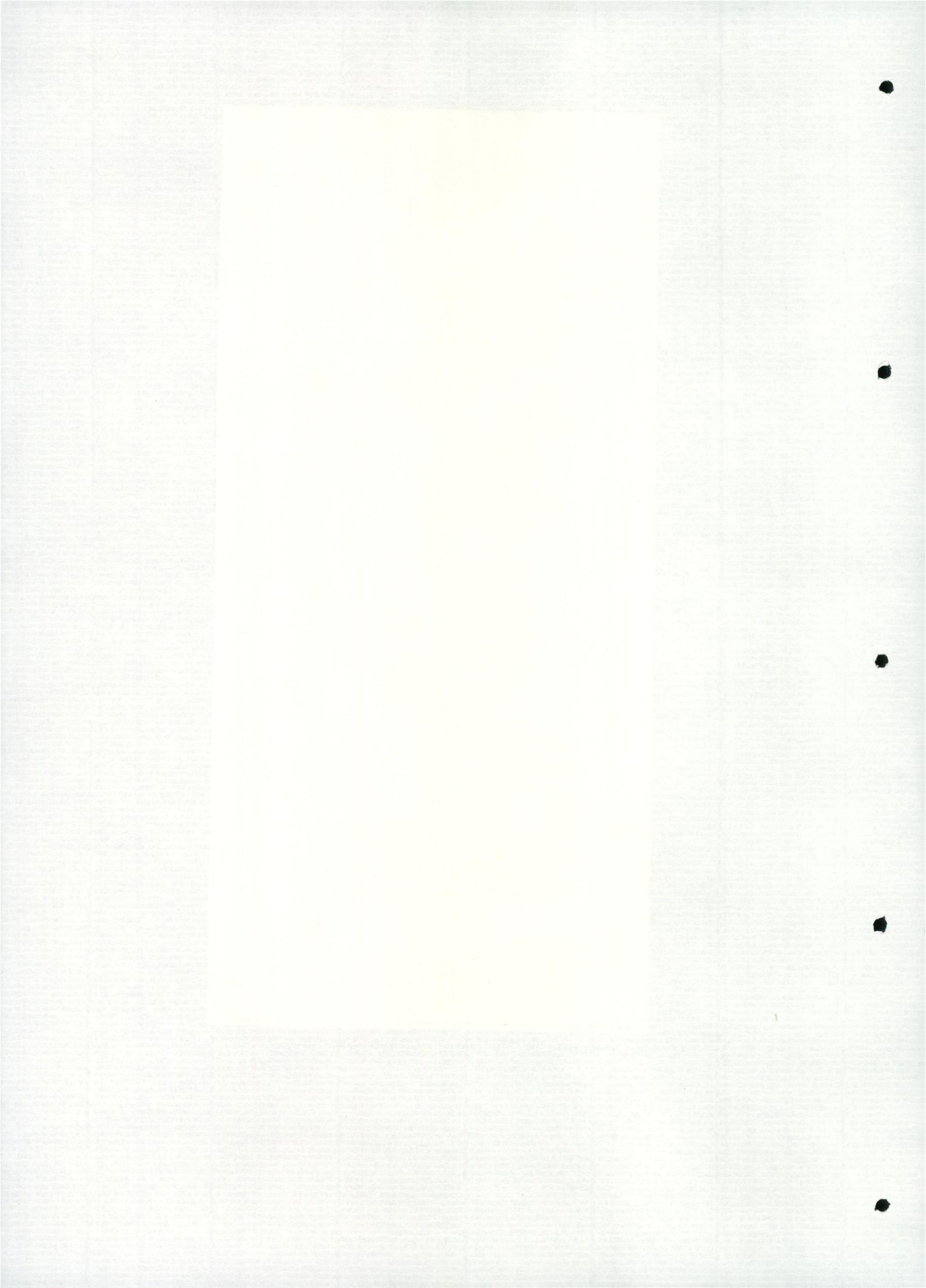


Plate ten: Overflowing Blood Machine



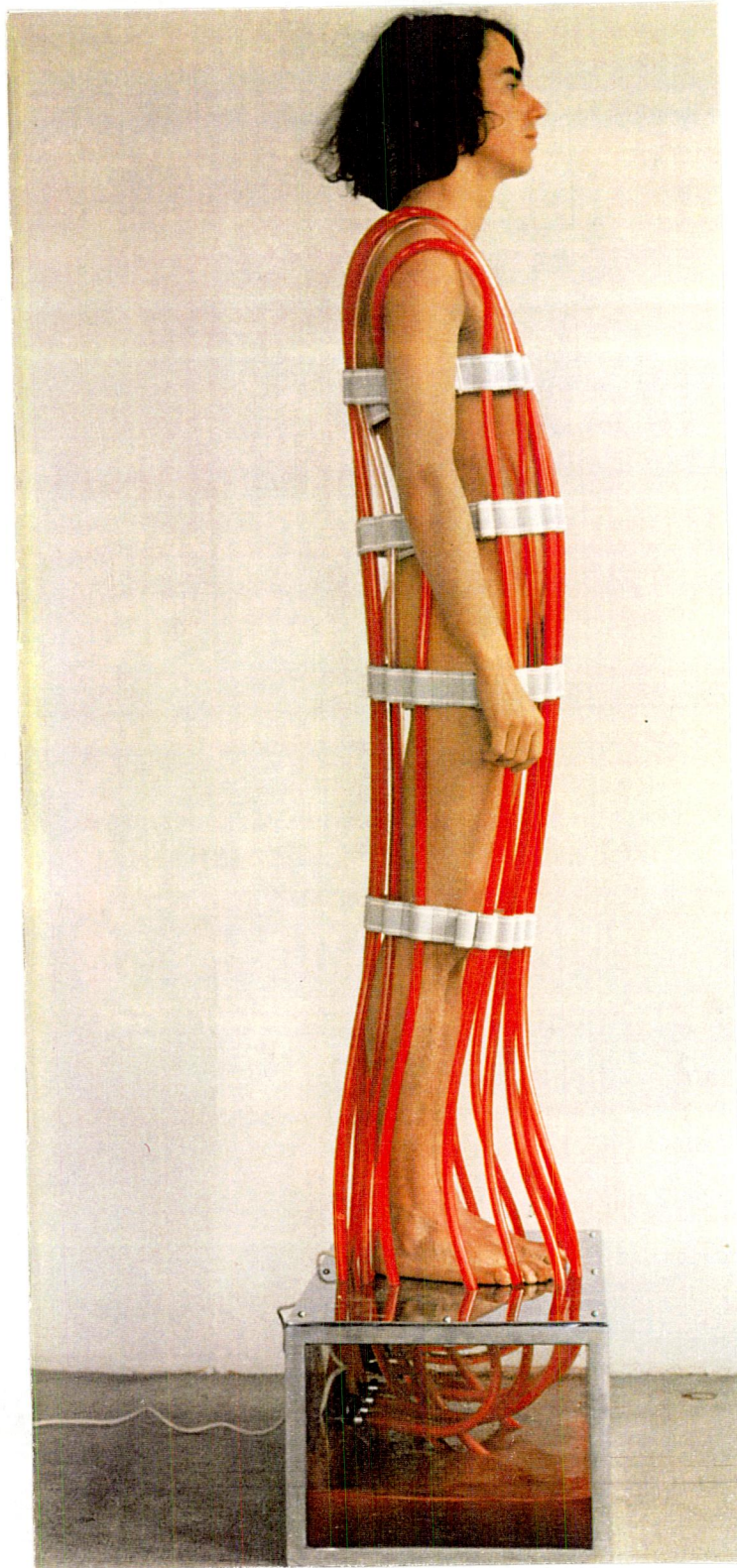
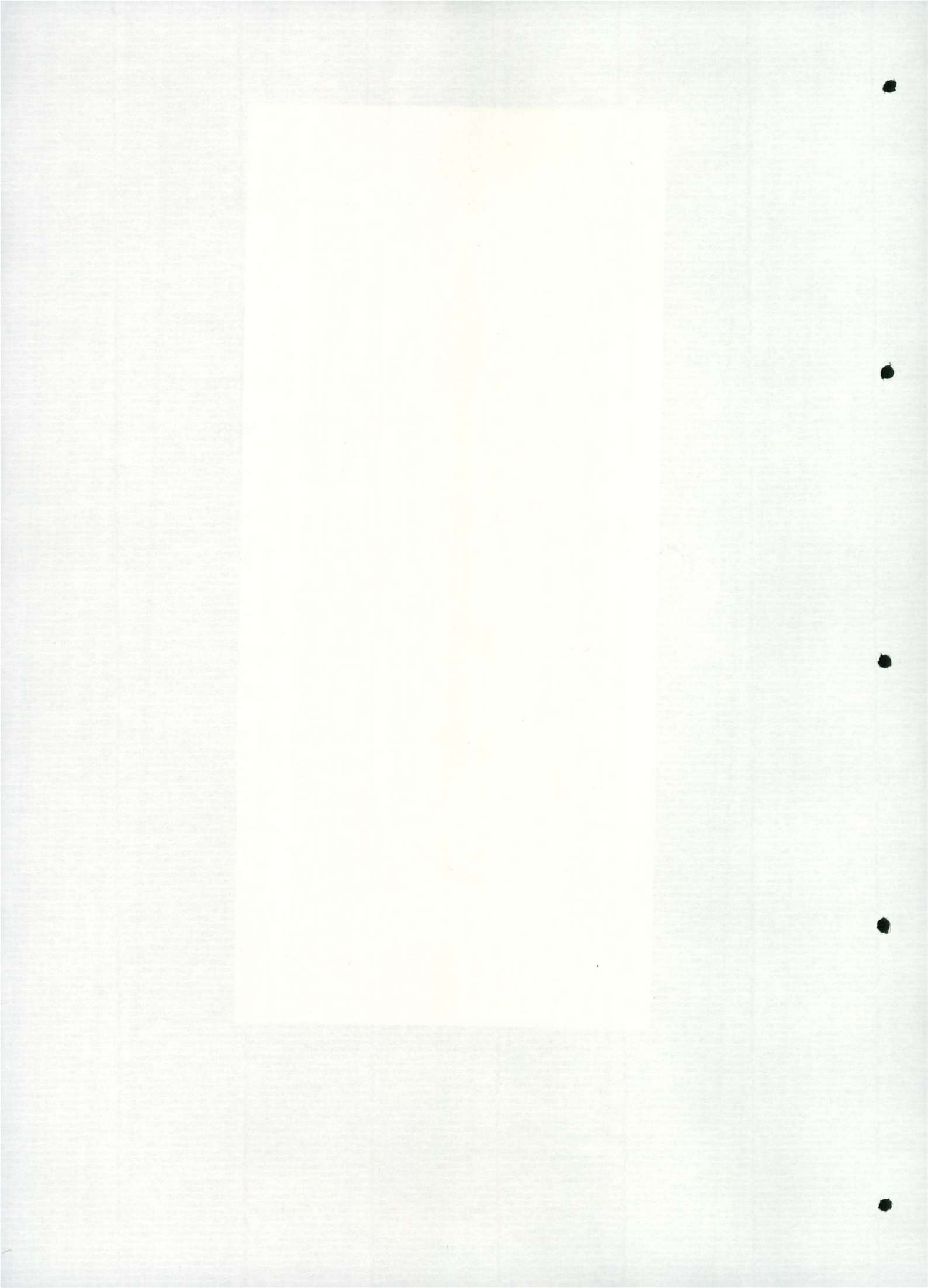


Plate ten: Overflowing Blood Machine



secrets. The woman in "Unicorn" is naked but wears an object which elongates her figure and therefore draws attention upon her but yet she walks through the field alone. This creates a contradiction between what is designed to be seen and what is private.

In "Overflowing Blood Machine"¹⁴ (1970) we see the internal being externalised (Plate ten). Here again Horn attempts to familiarise us with a sensation that normally goes unheeded. We are more aware of the external forces on our skin, which contains our main sensory receptors, than we are of our internal activities. We are complacent within our own environment and our bodies. Horn is attempting to stretch the limitations of our spatial occupation. The flowing of blood, the life force, surrounds the body and is represented in a series of tubes circulating red fluid through them and over the surface of the performer. Here also the figure is naked not only to remove from it any sense of social coding but to demonstrate the biological nature of the motion. The movement in this piece doesn't emanate from the body itself but from a machine, the body serves only to represent itself as a physical form.

Horn's performances are about sensual experience as well as being a carefully finished visual act. There is an element of frustration in that the aspect of actual touch fails to come across in the documentation. An ability to touch is intrinsic to all human beings. There is an understanding

¹⁴ "Überströmer" (1970)

It consisted of a box, plastic tubing, and electrical pump system, dimensions variable

of its discourse that we are all aware of. Yet touch is a response within an individual and therefore can only be expressed through description. In Horn's performances the element of touch is being absorbed by the performer and not translated to the spectator leaving a gap in the level of understanding. Possibly this frustration is heightened because the performance is reliant on the experience of human touch, which cannot be conveyed. When Horn begins to place this touch in the "hands" of machines the body no longer obscures the understanding. In the viewer's attempt to decipher the gesture of the machine they call on their own knowledge of sensation.

In Rebecca Horn's performance work the performer could be seen as the kinetic force behind the body sculptures. It is a natural progression then that moves her towards sculptural objects that have an ability to move of their own accord. Where she was fascinated by the energy generated through performance she now tries to harness it in a mechanical element. Her concerns and approach remain similar, but it is now these objects that impose themselves on a space through their expansion and noise. Their moving parts serve to outline and define the confines of the space they are placed in. As these machines become more refined they begin to take on unique personalities. Within this development towards the complete removal of the body, Horn's discourse is changing from body as object to object as body.

A recurring problem with Performance Art is that it crosses over into the arena of Theatre. There are many differences between the two, the fundamental one being that Theatre is devised to be repeated. There is a certain framework into which all theatrical productions fit, based on an embedded grammar that is implicitly understood by both performers and audience. In contrast Performances tend to be devised as one-off events, and although they may be repeated, each performance is thought of as

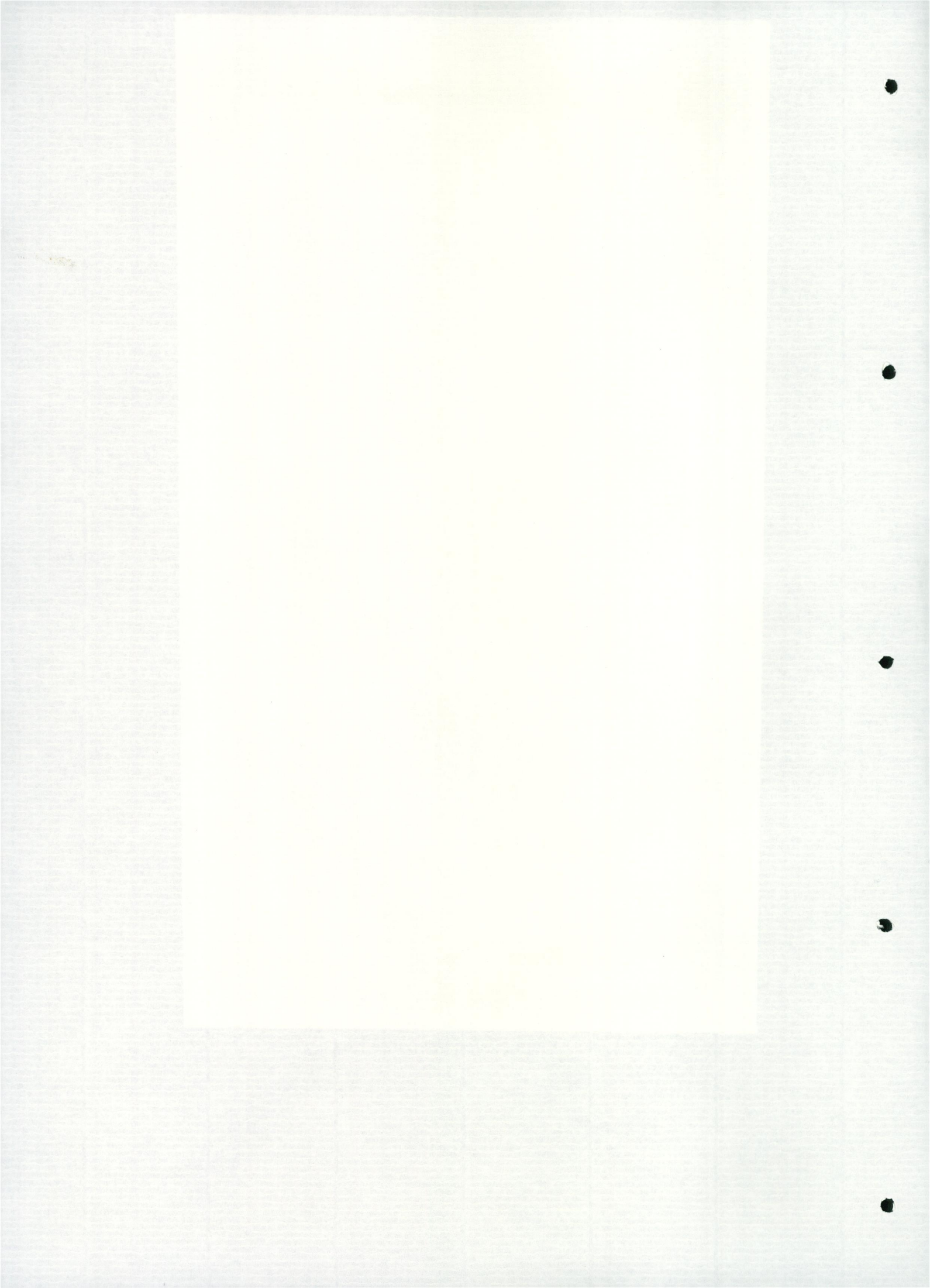


unique. Its experimental nature means that it has no such governing rules. This can lead to the situation where an audience has its theatrical preconceptions upset and can therefore perceive there to be mistakes. Spectators can be distracted by factors not seen in theatre such as obvious nervousness on the part of the performer, unexpected objects falling etc. This can take the focus of their attention away from what the artist considers to be the main elements. Due to the need on the part of Horn to capture certain key moments and gestures within the performance she began using other people as performers and collaborators. This gave her a wide base from which to work and the ability to exercise more control. She then took on the role of director or choreographer. As she became more involved in the decision process surrounding the documenting of the work, Horn began to close in on particular gestures, images and movements, removing any distracting information. The breaking down of the performance into simple factors paves the way for animated machines where the machine's gestural aspect is completely at Horn's command.

The body sculptures that Horn produced were tailored for each individual involved in the various performances. Horn's interest in customising and the precision needed in addressing individual criteria gave rise to an awareness of the subtle differences between the unique physicality of people and the importance of accommodating this. A constant theme throughout her performance work is the exploration of how the body span



Plate eleven: Measure Box



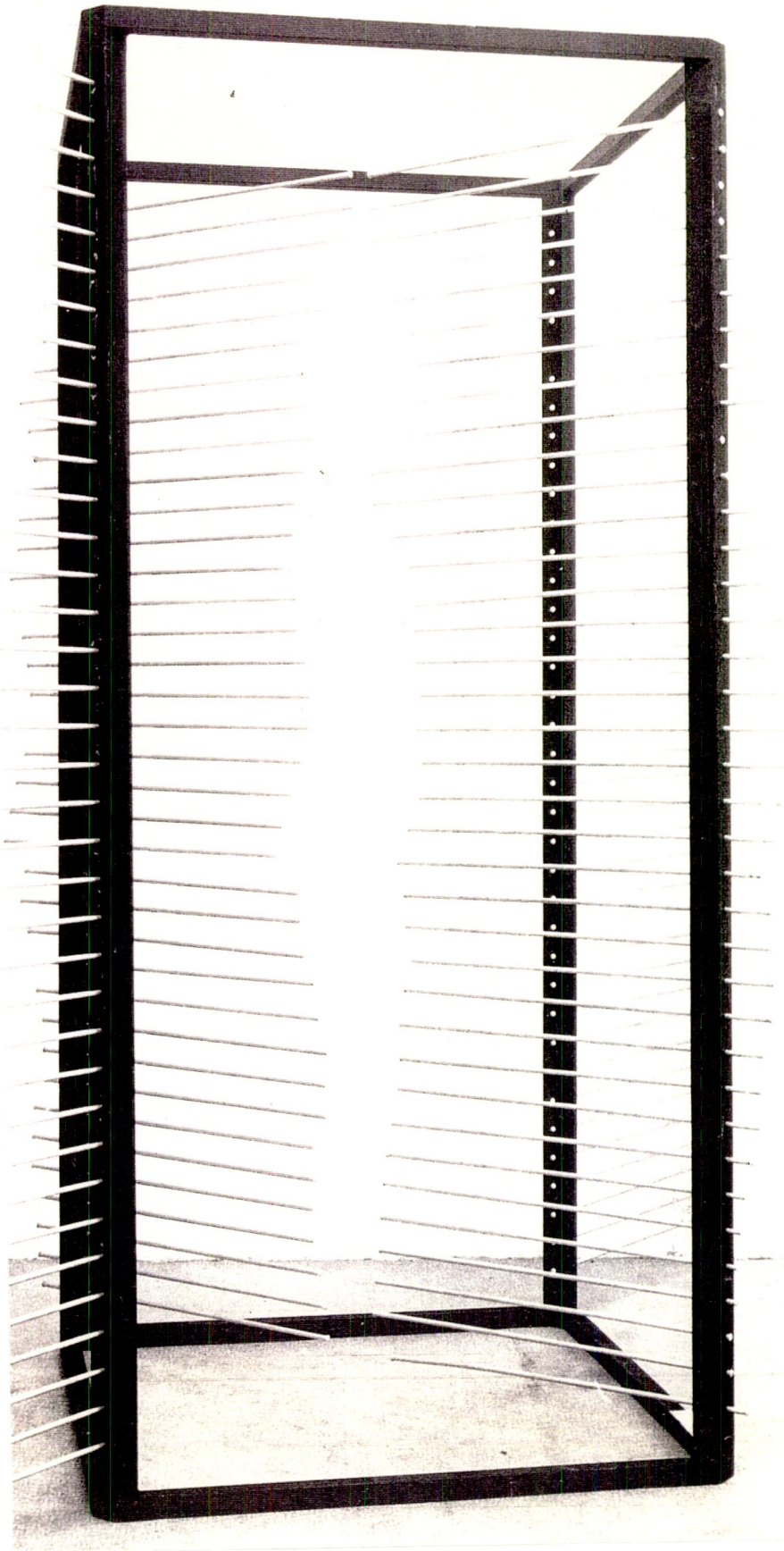
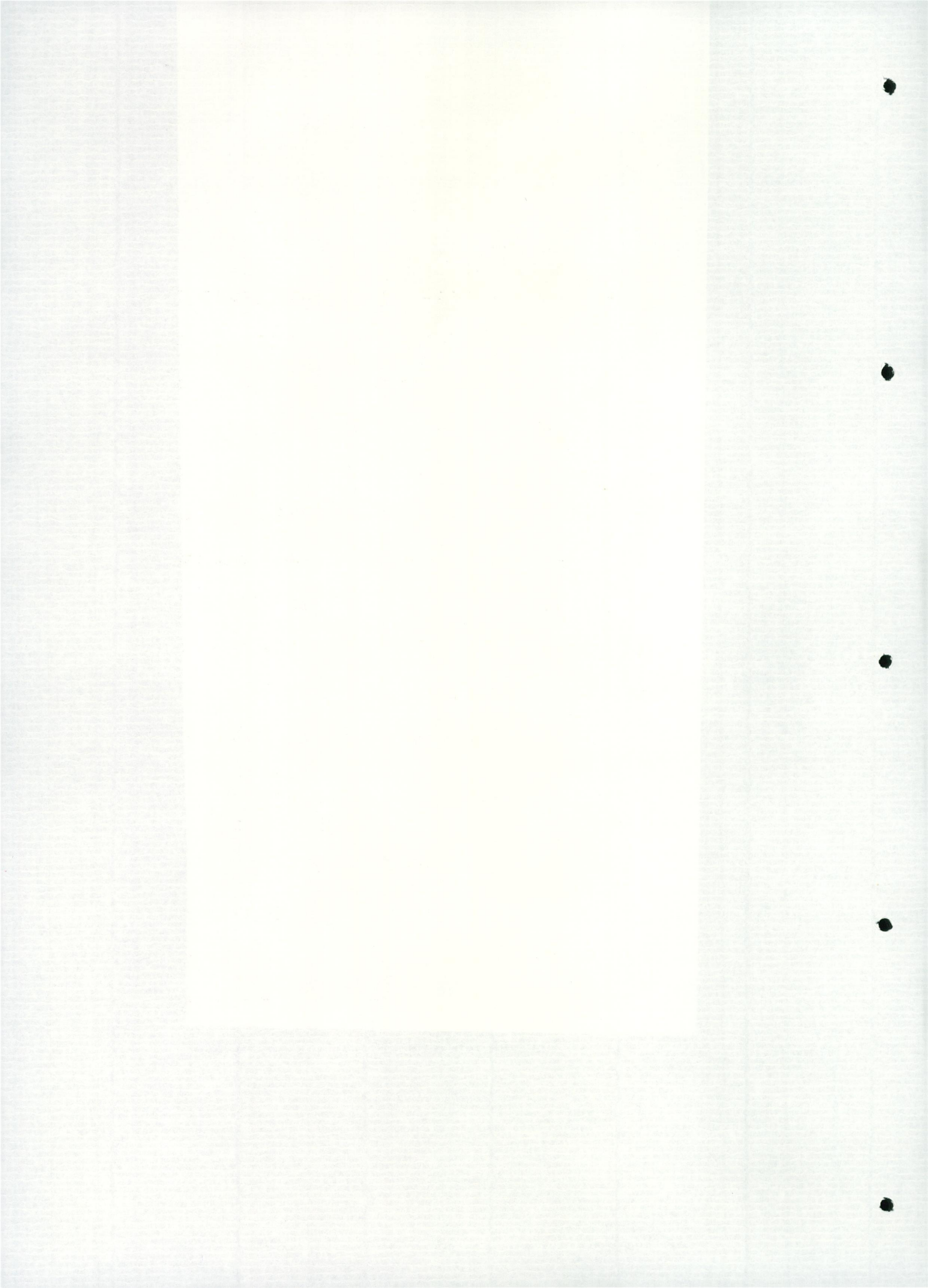


Plate eleven: Measure Box



surrounding the mind affects its perception of the world. This concern can also be seen in the production of "Measure Box "¹⁵. This piece consisted of a metal box with a series of equal length metal poles dissecting the central area diagonally, each of the poles being adjustable (Plate eleven). Horn used this device to take an accurate account of the contours of a human figure. This is done by placing the figure at the centre of the box, moving each pole inwards until it presses against the figure, then making a note of the length of the poles. At this stage the figure can be removed and the poles repositioned to the individual measurements as marked. The body is integral to the success of the piece although it is devised in such a way as to obviate its permanent presence. The space that remains is a replica of an individual's form. This contrasts with the "Blood Flowing Machine" where the figure served only to represent itself. This represents the turning point where Horn started to consider the possible space that could be occupied by a body as sufficiently representational in itself. It is here that Rebecca Horn began to move away from body as object towards object as body.

In her removal of the figure in "Measure Box " Horn left an image of positive negative space. That is to say that where there once was life there is nothing, only a memory of its existence at one time. The space is

¹⁵ 1970 **Meßkasten**
It consisted of metal 194.5 x 90 x 90 cm

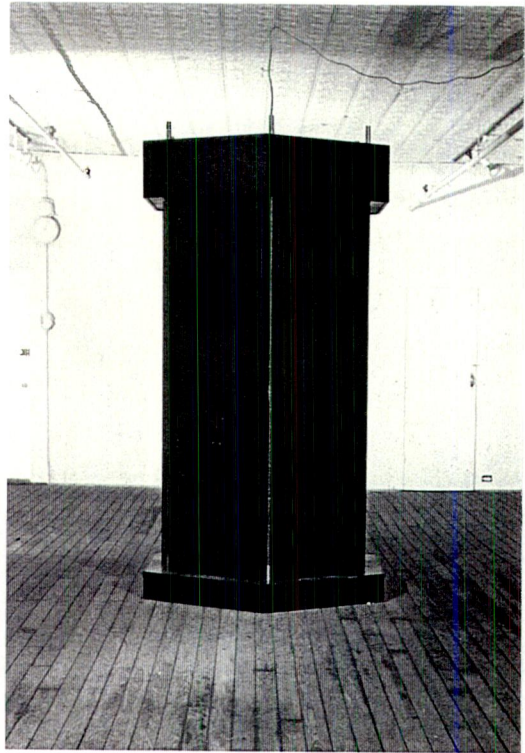
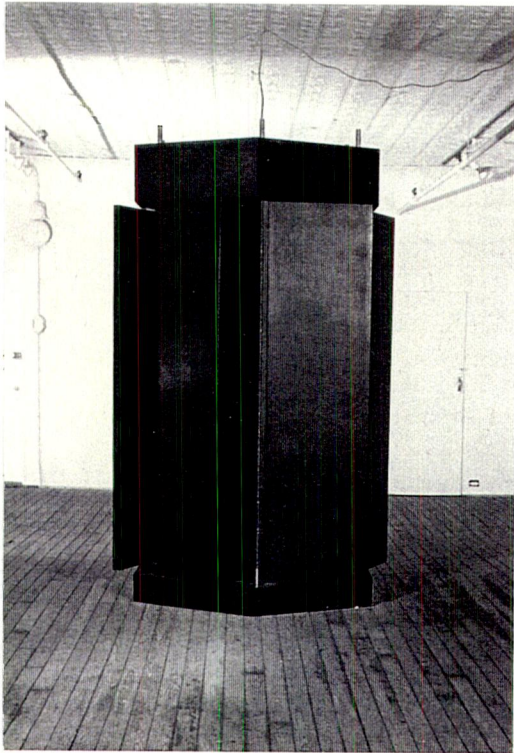


Plate twelve: The Chinese Fiancée



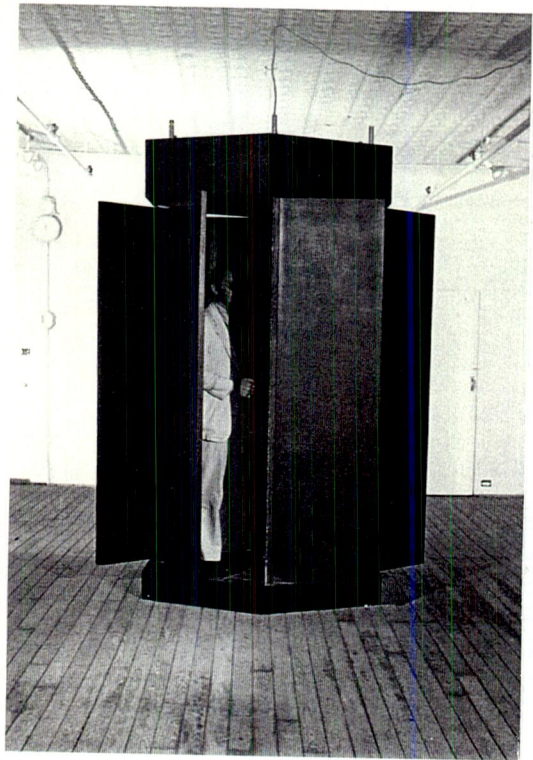
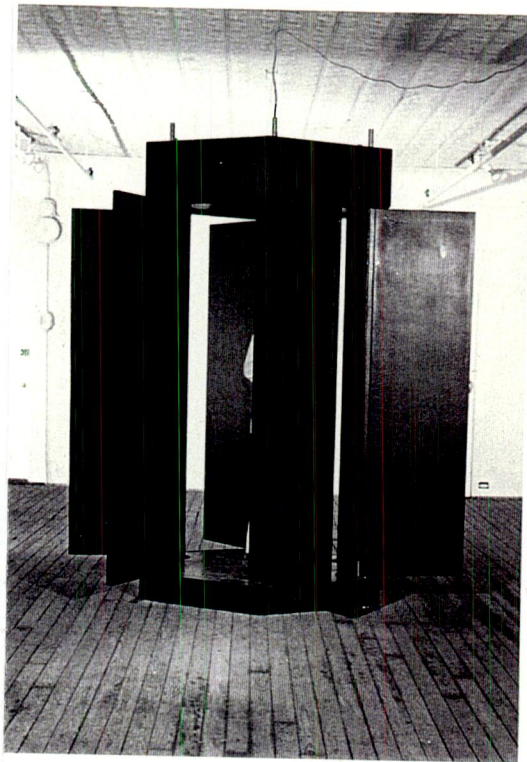


Plate twelve: The Chinese Fiancée



not a void, but rather remains the encapsulated energy of the previous form similar to the energy that was formed in her performance work.

Twentieth-century physics going full circle back to Heraclitus, postulates that all matter is in motion. In other words there is no thing only energy (Paglia, 1990, p.5.).

One of the first objects that Horn produced that completely relies on electromechanics was "The Chinese Fiancée"¹⁶. This consisted of an eight foot high, hexagonal box with six doors, each leading to the small inner chamber (Plate twelve). A large scale piece, it could be considered as an installation in itself. Each of the doors remain open until a viewer enters the chamber, then all the doors close. The lights begin to fade until there is complete darkness. The viewer finds himself in the confines of this disorienting environment, listening to the whispers of young Chinese girls until without warning the doors fly open, exposing the squinting viewer again to the now stark bright light.

With this work Horn began to explore how the confines of spaces can act upon a body, as opposed to how a body can impose itself on a space. The latter idea had been expressed in her earlier performance work, such as "Finger Extensions", where she investigated spatial relationships in a exaggerated fashion and "Head Extension"¹⁷, where she expanded the space the body demands (Plate thirteen).

¹⁶ 1972 Die chinesische Verlobte appeared in the film of the same name in 1976 .
It consisted of :Black lacquered wood metal motor and Audio tape 248 x 238 cm

¹⁷ 1972 Kopt-Extensions appears in the film performances II 1973
It consisted of : Fabric styrofoam and wire dimensions variable

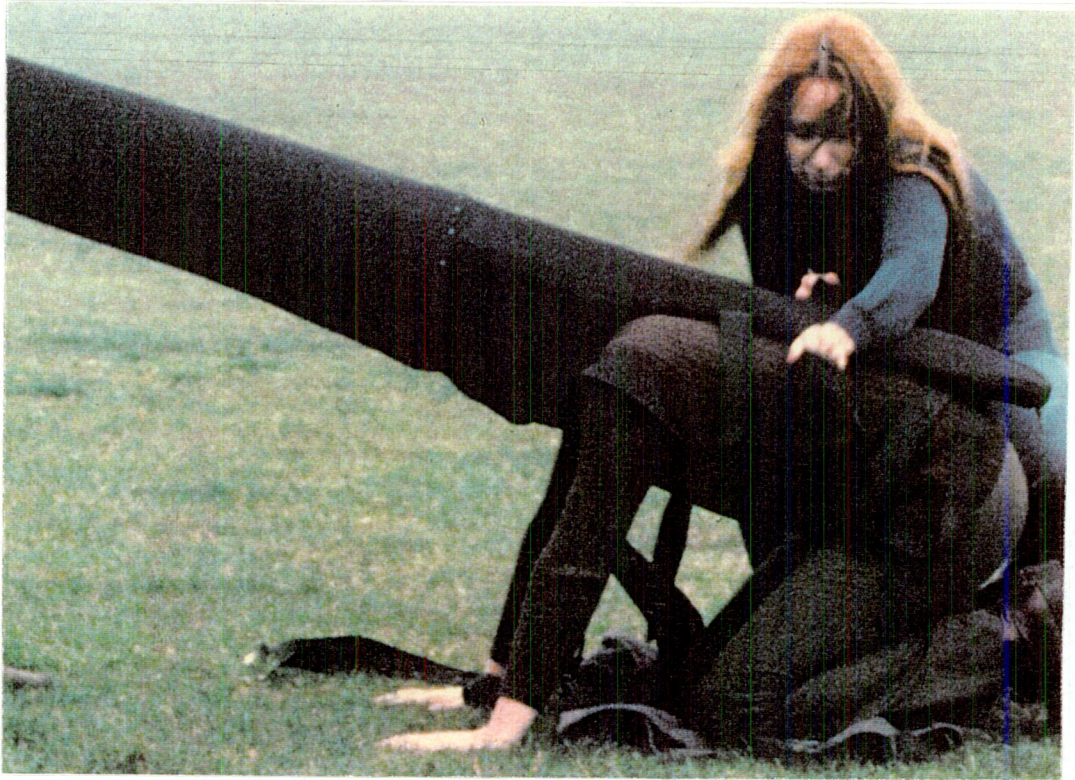


Plate thirteen: Head Extension



In "The Chinese Fiancée" and "Measure Box" Horn created the environment. This ensures that control of location and the energy within the space remains within her own creative process. This theme of enclosing the body in such an obvious way recurs in her later work, albeit in a diluted manner.

Rebecca Horn is experimental in her use of materials and is interested in texture and feeling in context. She is a director of sensations in that she is intrigued by the formation of perception. Sensation cannot be created as they are responses formed within the individual. Horn merely attempts to manipulate this response with her conscious use of stimuli. She attempts to create an environment which fine tunes the sensations that the individual feels. In the case of "The Chinese Fiancée", by blocking out the light she removes an aspect of sight and therefore heightens the sensitivity to sound, at the same giving no indication as to what might happen next.

There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown. He wants to see what is reaching towards him and be able to recognise or at least classify it (Canetti, 1960, p15).

There is a preoccupation with movement in all of Rebecca Horn's work. This movement serves not only to attract the viewer's attention but is an integral part of her methodology. In the case of such pieces as "Concert for Anarchy" or the aforementioned "The Chinese Fiancée" where the movement happens in an unexpected or unforeseen way, it could be





Plate fourteen: Concert for Anarchy



described as threatening or shocking. In "Concert for Anarchy"¹⁸ a grand piano is suspended from a ceiling, looking serene (Plate fourteen). The only indication that something is askew is the jumbled keyboard. Then without warning all of the keys are spat out in a cacophony of crashing notes and the lid is violently released. As the keys fall they threaten to come away completely, but just as they draw on the full length of the piano strings they make a hasty retreat back to their former position. Horn uses these short, sharp gestures to brush aside any preoccupations a spectator might have in regard to the seemingly passive object. Horn is continually playing with contradictions and sensations, and in works such as these she unites the two, investing the objects with an irony that produces something that is beautiful and yet dangerous. In using such an aggressive movement Horn bombards the senses and at the same time imprints the sculpture on the viewer's memory. She is meticulous in the movements she employs and is aware of their value in adding to the effect of a piece. Horn's confrontational works play on the tension created by fear which is considered to be the among the strongest of human emotions.

In "The Feathered Prison Fan"¹⁹ the movement used is graceful and poised. The fan, which is motorised, spreads out gently from a semicircle to a full circle.(Plate fifteen) This piece was originally devised for the film

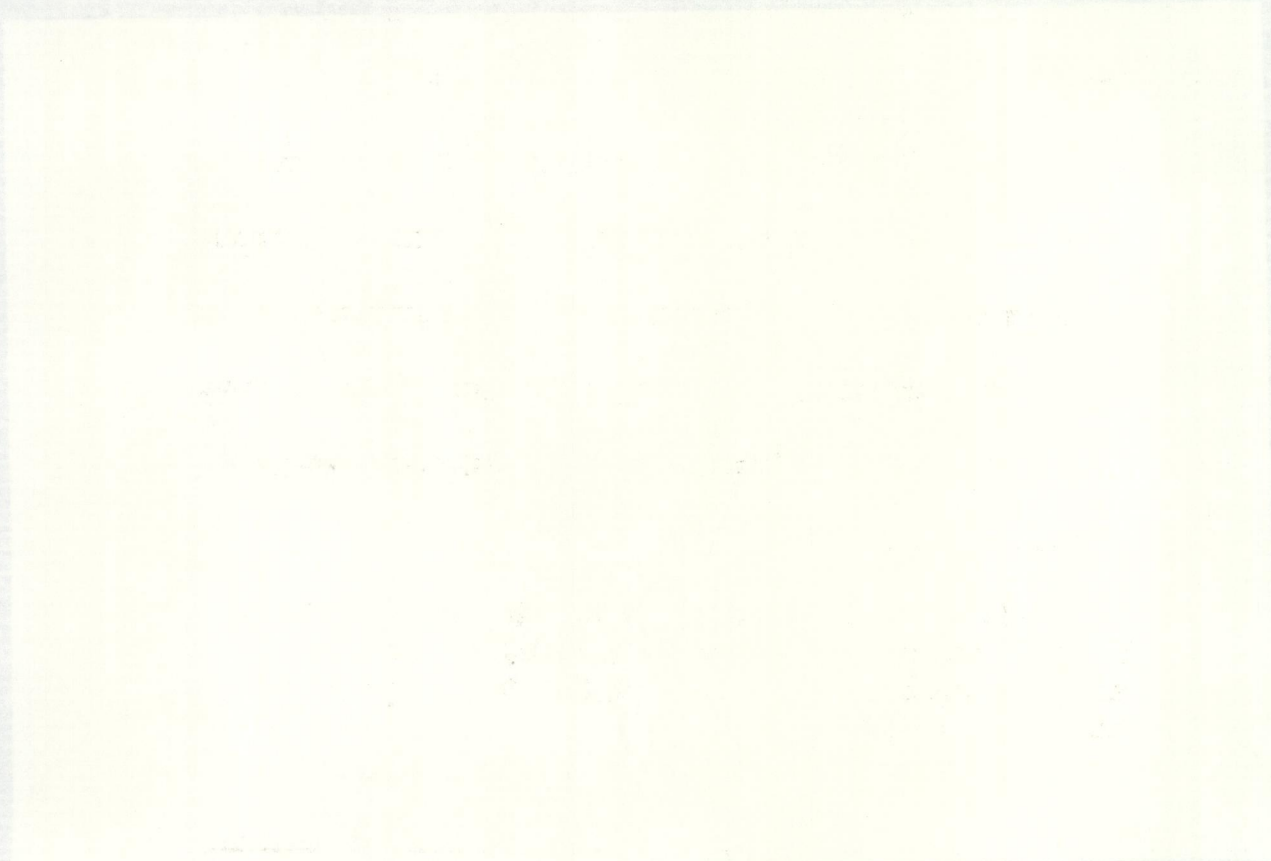
¹⁸ 1990 Grand piano and motor 166 x 137 x178 cm appears in the film "Buster's Bedroom"

¹⁹ 1978 Die Sanfle Gefanger appears in the film Der Eintänzer It consisted of white peacock feathers, metal, motor and wood .When closed 100 x 83 x 32 cm





Plate fifteen: The Feathered Prison Fan



“Der Eintänzer”²⁰ in which the person at the centre is a young ballet dancer. Similar to a suit of armour this piece can act as a Body sculpture or a free standing object. The use of feathers within this shield plays on the delicate nature and sophisticated design of a feather, which when massed together become incredibly strong and at the same time remain elegant. At this stage the person at the interior is camouflaged completely. The fan disguises the human form and substitutes that of a bird. When this motion is concluded it slowly returns back to its former position. Images of dancers and reference to dance populate Horn’s ideology. She commonly refers to the movement within her works using dance or musical terms and employs dancers and musical instruments as recurring themes. In her own words:

Dance- I always say music -because the things move and of course, the sounds are also very important or the coming together of various sounds are important for me (cited by Genenger, 1994, p.24.).

Another object which also has a part in “Der Eintänzer” is “Dancing Table”²¹ (Plate sixteen). It is a round table that Rebecca Horn has endowed with the ability to dance a perfect tango. In the film the only noise stemming from the object comes from its own tapping and gentle dipping. In later exhibitions Horn placed a musical source underneath the table as this gentle sound might have been lost within the context of the

²⁰ The Dancing Chalveir 1978 16mm colour, sound 47 minutes

²¹ 1978 It consisted of wood ,motor and audiotape diameter 100 cm , height 70 cm



Plate sixteen: Dancing Table



gallery²². During the course of the film the "Dancing Table" teaches a blind man to dance the tango. This man is one of the main characters in this film and also in the later film "La Ferdinanda: Sonata for a Medici Villa"²³. Scripting a character such as this is typical of Horn's continuing interest in perception as she invested him with certain attributes - not only a greater sensitivity to touch and sound but an acutely aware sense of smell and a vivid imagination. In 1993 Rebecca Horn produced "Blind Stick"²⁴ (plate seventeen). This work is similar on first impressions to her other works which consisted of metal rods acting as radii²⁵ or pendulums²⁶ that serve to outline and define the confines of the space they are in. The difference between these works and "Blind Stick" is that Horn placed the stick at hand height and its movement is not regular but has the eerie characteristics of a white stick searching out surfaces. With a virtually invisible thread connecting the rod to the motor suspended on the ceiling above, the stick appears to move as if by telekinesis.

In using machines in this manner Horn is participating in a tradition that dates back to the silent movies of Buster Keaton. The giving of life to inanimate objects is reminiscent of the simplest of camera and magic

²² Horn also made a larger, dining table which trembled. This trembling table appeared in the film *La Ferdinanda* 1981

²³ *La Ferdinanda: Sonate für eine Medici Villa*
35mm colour, sound, 85 minutes.

²⁴ 1993 It consisted of a motor and white stick.

²⁵ 1982 "Radius Insciber" Radienzeichner
It consisted of aluminum and motor height 200cm diameter 400 cm

²⁶ 1985 "Pendulum with Black Bath"
It consisted of aluminum, steel, motor, water and dye 30 x420x 220 cm



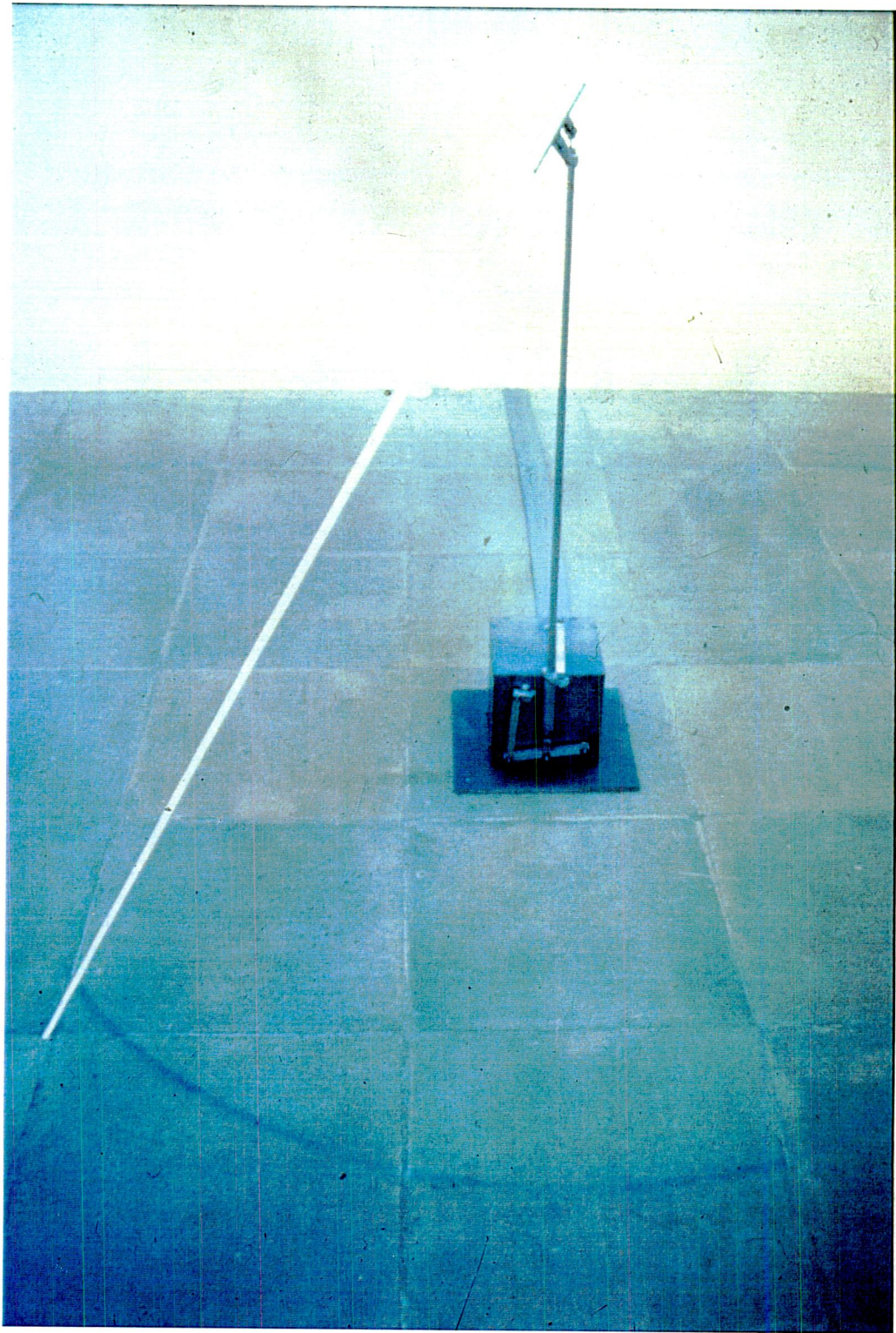


Plate seventeen: Blind Stick



tricks. Horn has not only replaced the body but has managed to give her machines a human quality. These machines have personalities, in that they quiver and shake. What makes them inherently different from other machines is that they make mistakes and fail at their tasks. It is as if they are exhibiting that to err is human. As Horn has stated:

My machines are not washing machines or cars. They have a human quality and they must change. They get nervous and must stop sometimes...The tragic or melancholic aspect of the machines is very important to me. I don't want them to run for ever. It's part of their life that they stop and faint (Cited by Szulakoska, 1994 ,p.18.).

This not to confuse Horn's machines with those of Jean Tinguely, such as "Homage to New York" 1960, which are design to self destruct. Horn is simply aware of the fragile nature of her constructions.

Horn has always been intrigued by certain individuals. We know this from such works as "Unicorn", her continuing obsession with Buster Keaton, and also the devising of Body sculptures for specific people. In giving these machines human attributes Horn releases herself from the need to avail of existing people. Through these mechanical objects she removes the corporal aspect and the associated social coding. No longer is the spectator distracted by the human form but instead can observe the gesture as a unique event, leaving her machines to become performances or sculpture in their own right. Horn does not remove the value she places in personality traits that permeates in her earlier work but creates new narratives to apply to these objects.

There is a preoccupation throughout the History of Art with the stories that surround the personal lives of certain artists and to connect them to their work, such as Picasso's women and the insanity of both Caravaggio and Van Gogh. These scenarios are seen to detract from a true understanding of the value of an artist's work, which many feel should be seen within the context of the history of their time. Rebecca Horn interweaves her own personal and imagined histories within her work. As previously mentioned Rebecca Horn is not easily placed within one particular classification. She is an artist with various different guises a poet, sculptor, performer and film director. No matter which role she plays all her activities are arrived at through her habitual use of drawing and writing. This writing, be it poetry or prose, tends to take the form of a narrative.

I always start with an idea, a story, which develops into a text, go from the text into sketches, then a film and out of that come the sculptures and installations. (Cited by Dornberg, 1991, p.99.)

In doing this Horn is tying in to a history of allegory and fables that has been part of German Culture for centuries. A considerable amount of what we now consider to be classic fairy tales have their origins in Germany. Hansel and Gretel was originally set in the Black Forest. Horn

has talked about the fact that during her childhood in Odenwald she was terrified of witches.

Horn does not rely on the connection between the narrative and the physical work being made by the public themselves but volunteers the narratives which run alongside her various undertakings. This reliance on narrative gives continuity to her work. The use of invented narrative has become such a predominant motif that it is even applicable to Horn's own personal life; it is not that she tells lies, but rather that she is selective in the truths she tells. She gives the impression that her life is made up of a series of poetic images.

The idea for the blind person's stick came when Rebecca Horn went out into the corridor of a dance school following a tango lesson, where she encountered many blind people using their sticks to find their way (Genenger, 1994, p.17).

An inquiry into the interviews Horn has given quickly reveals that a few associated stories are continually reiterated with little discerning difference by the artist. Horn is cautious in what she chooses to become part of her repertoire, what is to be revealed about herself and what is to remain hidden. This is the role of the Post Modern artist - that of selector and decision maker.

She is constantly regurgitating parts of her personal history and also the lives of people who influence her. Notably her most famous infatuation with Buster Keaton is a recurring motif throughout her work. There are

certain attributes of Keaton's that tie in to all of her work, to the extent that Horn has dedicated films to his memory thus placing him in the position of mentor. His influence is not only visible in the conception but also the production of the work. Horn's ingenious machines are on a par with the ones Keaton used himself. To quote Rebecca Horn:

His wife told me that, in their garden, he had constructed a railway track for a little train. It went around the swimming pool, coming back into the garage through the kitchen. He had parties where he made hamburgers, and each little wagon would have a hamburger or a banana or something on it. He would cook all day and would serve people in this way. (Morgan, 1993, p.29.).

Her mechanical works have elements of timing and quirkiness that are reminiscent of the silent film era. It is not only the films of this period that hold a fascination for Horn but 1920s Hollywood also.

The people Horn uses in her performances were chosen for particular reasons, for example the couple in "Keep those legs from touching each other" and the girl in "Unicorn". Each of these performances has elements of the performers' personal lives attached. This, as we know from "Unicorn", can affect how the work is viewed. The production and subsequent showing can also lead to the building up of a history. Rebecca Horn's Guggenheim Retrospective was shown in New York, Eindhoven, Berlin, Vienna and finally London. Each time the show moved it took on a new appearance as it was altered to accommodate the new site. Due to the wide variety of technical difficulties Horn faced when

moving the exhibition from New York to Berlin Horn retitled the show "Berlin Earthbound" as an explanation that even on the opening night many of the exhibits refused to function. In particular there was a problem with a piece which she had devised purely for the Berlin show. This was made from a suitcase that she had found in a flea market in Berlin and had used for many years when travelling around the world. Its rarity value lay in the fact that inside the lid was painted a Star of David. Horn had decided that this object was of such great historical importance that it should remain in Berlin permanently. This decision is an example of Horn creating her own narrative as this object is also reminiscent of her personal history over the last thirty years during which she has been travelling continually. Her biographical notes for the 1988 Rosc exhibition read as follows "Rebecca Horn b.1944 Michelstadt, Germany, Travels ". Horn created a structure which drew the case from the floor towards the ceiling of the exhibition space at the same time causing the suitcase to flap. This was her intention but for the majority of her exhibition, this piece (and also "The Mechanical Prison Fan ") remained static.

In the piece "Inferno", which Horn devised as part of her Guggenheim Retrospective show "Inferno Paradiso Switch" she tell the story of a cycle of life force(Plate eighteen). Horn installed "Inferno" in the lobby of the Guggenheim's Soho building where the second part of the show was being shown²⁷. In the background two metronomes run out of sync with

²⁷ In London the show was divided between the Tate Gallery and the Serpentine Museum



each other, making a gentle ticking sound. For the Berlin show these metronomes were replaced with a large pendulum swinging against the wall to the side of the piece. In front of this, drips of water fall from a wet mattress suspended close to ceiling. These drips gather in a dark murky pool on the floor over which Horn placed a metal snake which shudders across the surface. With the drips falling from so high above the surface of the water, it is always in motion. Combined with the image of the snake, the liquid takes on the impression of primeval soup. To quote Camille Paglia:

There are, I said no objects in nature, only the gruelling erosion of natural force, flecking, dilapidating, grinding down, reducing all matter to fluid, the thick primal soup from which new forms bob, gasping for life. Dionysius was identified with liquids - blood, sap, milk, wine (Paglia, 1990, p.30.).

The pool in Inferno gives rise then to an energy source, a flicker of light dashes up a copper wire which is encased in a glass tube, which in turn is threaded through a series of spiralled rusted Hospital beds. These conjure up images of incontinence and nightmarish sleep. It also brings to mind archaic medical treatment such as electro shock therapy. The animated nature of their movement upwards could be read as the dynamic movement of a single bed through the space, giving the piece a dangerous and tortuous quality, heightened by the lethal combination of electricity and water. The use of hospital beds links into the idiom of Horn's convalescence. This is another trait of Horn - she has been seen to discuss without reservation her illness, intentionally juxtaposing its



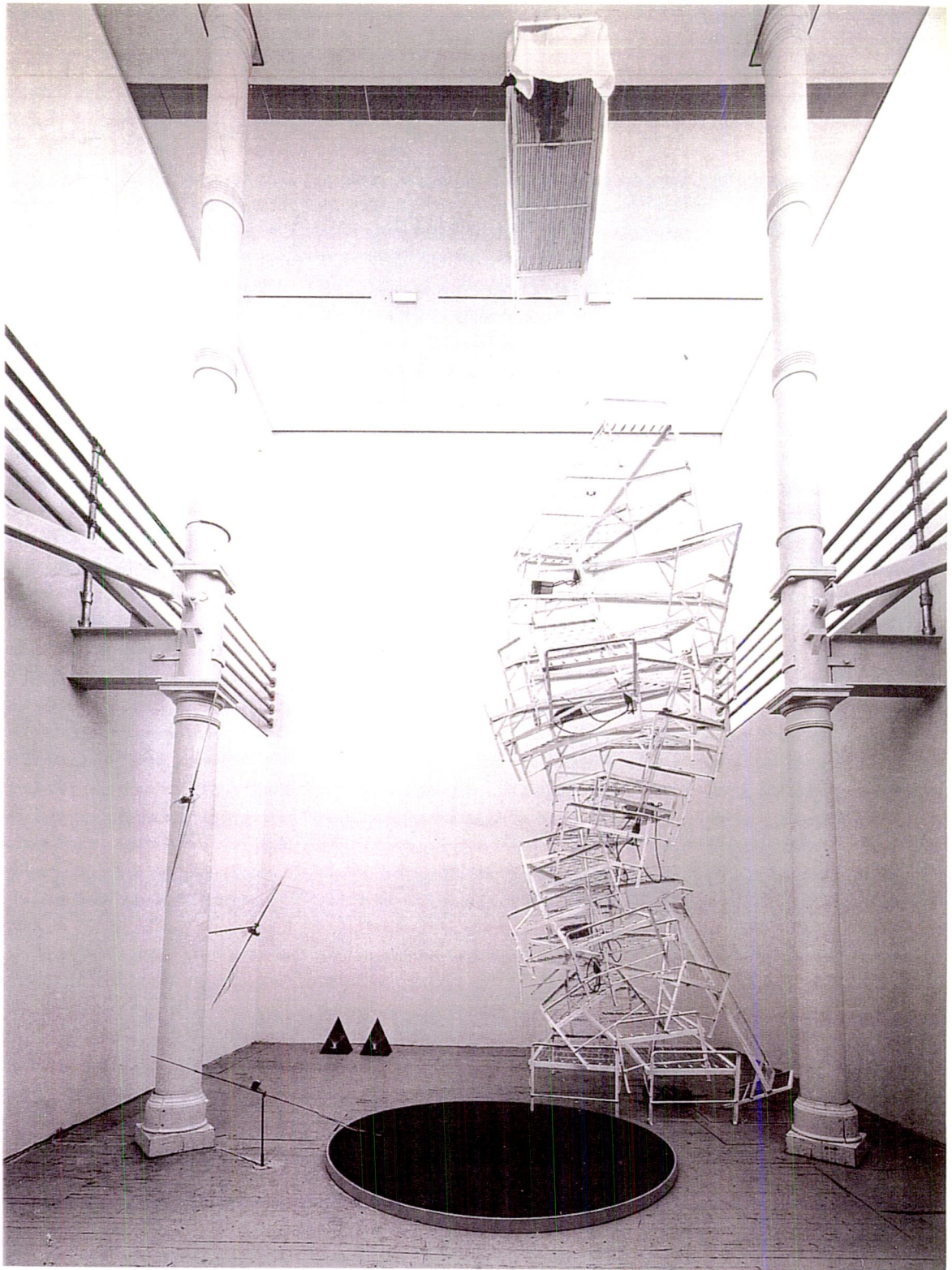


Plate eighteen: Inferno





Plate nineteen: Paradiso Switch



imagery and story with particular work .She appears to have made a conscious decision about its role within her work.

The identification of Rebecca Horn with the circulation of fluids can be seen in many of her works, such as "Blood Flowing Machine". The other piece that was specially made for the show was the "Paradiso Switch" which also used falling liquids (Plate nineteen). Here the drops made their way through the building, culminating finally in a pool. These drops of milky white liquid emanate from two breast shaped plexiglass funnels hanging from below the domed skylight in the Guggenheim's main building. This is not the first time Horn has used images of lactation within her work²⁸. Between the funnel and the glass of the skylight lies a series of metal lighting rods which zigzag across the space in a sharp and threatening manner. Behind the funnels, metal conductors, similar to the ones seen in "Inferno", are attached to the wall and electrical charges crackle upwards intermittently from them. All this electrical activity appears to build up and culminate in the release, precisely every twenty seconds, of a drop of precious liquid which is then forced by gravity to make its journey through the building, ending in the fountain in the foyer. The omnipresent copper snake, in a similar motion to it's "Inferno" counterpart, lunges at the surface of the aquamarine pool, only to dragged backwards in an awkward repetitive motion.

²⁸ "Cornucopia-Seance for Two breasts" 1970

It consisted of two felt horn shapes each covering a breast joined to form a mouth piece. The complete Body- sculpture was attached to the performer by fabric straps around her back and across her head.

The mysterious dynamism of the snake, its extraordinary vitality and periodic rejuvenation, must have provoked a powerful emotional response in Neolithic agriculture and the snake was consequently mythologized attributed with a power that can move the entire cosmos (Gimbutas, 1974, p94.).

The plexiglass funnels are similar to the ones used in both "The Hybrid"²⁹ and the site specific installation "Concert in Reverse"³⁰. In "The Hybrid" a pair of glass funnels hang side by side, one containing sulphur and the other coal (Plate twenty). The latter has released its contents through a hole at its tip onto the floor below creating a reversed conical shape in coal. The funnel used in "Concert in Reverse", similarly to "Inferno", released a drop of liquid every twenty seconds although here it is in an outdoor setting with the funnel suspended in a way that is similar to that of a laboratory tripod made from steel rods.

This use of flowing and changing of a complete environment is also seen in the "The River of the Moon"³¹ which stems from the year Horn spent as a student studying in Barcelona (Plate twenty one). While there she lived in pay by the hour hotels which were inhabited by people from all walks of life. Here, as in her retrospective, Horn has devised two installations to run consecutively in two different locations on either side

²⁹ Der Zwitter 1987

It consisted of Coal ,sulphur, glass funnels and metal width 148cm each cone height 54cm, diameter 54cm.

³⁰ Däs gegenläufige Konzert 1987

Site specific installation for Skulptur-projekte in Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum Für Kunst und Kultergeschichte Münster.

It consisted of amongst other things: Plexiglas funnel height 60cm diameter 120cm thickness of circumference 1cm

³¹ El rio de la luna 1992. Installed at Fundació Espai Pablenau, Barcelona. It consisted of a pumping machine, lead piping mercury boxes and fountains, mixed mediums.



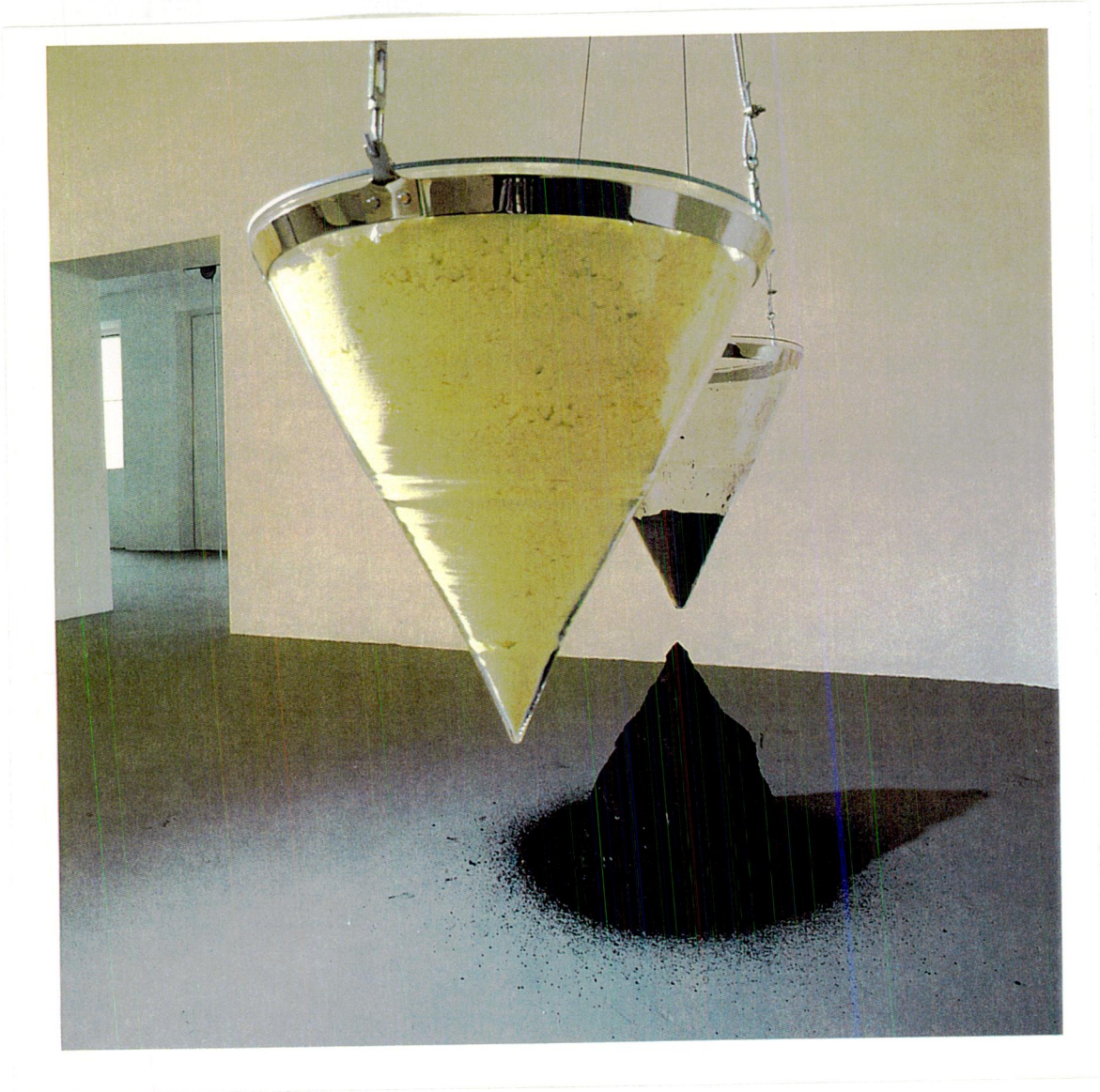


Plate Twenty: The Hybrid



of the city. The title piece "The River of the Moon" was installed in a disused hat factory, while in the centre of the city she rented seven rooms in one of the hotels she once lived in, creating a unique ambience in each room. "The River of the Moon" is made up of a series of lead pipes that carry the "liquid mercury moonlight"(Horn, Guggenheim,1993, p.290) throughout the space. This use of flowing quick silver is reminiscent of Joan Miró's "Mercury Fountain" which is on permanent exhibition at The Fundació Joan Miró also in Barcelona. Starting at the wall, there is a large steel box with a glass front, on top of this are connected three glass funnels. These feed into the box just above the three conductors it contains, which flash with energy. These then feed the mass of tangled pipes which connect into the contraption. The pipes weave their way across the floor until they reach the "seven heart chambers" (Horn, Guggenheim, 1993 p.290) where they separate. Each chamber represents one of the rooms in the Hotel Peninsular. The chambers are made up of black rectangular boxes with glass lids. Inside a snake of mercury winds its way across the surface revealing the substance that the pipes carry. The pipes continue their journey at the other side of the chambers, again becoming entangled with each other and flowing through the room. "The River of the Moon" was used as part of the touring retrospective. On each occasion the complete structure was smelted down and recast at the next destination to allow for variations in each location. This is similar to the piece Horn produced for Documenta 9 in Kassel in 1992 entitled "The Moon, The Child and The



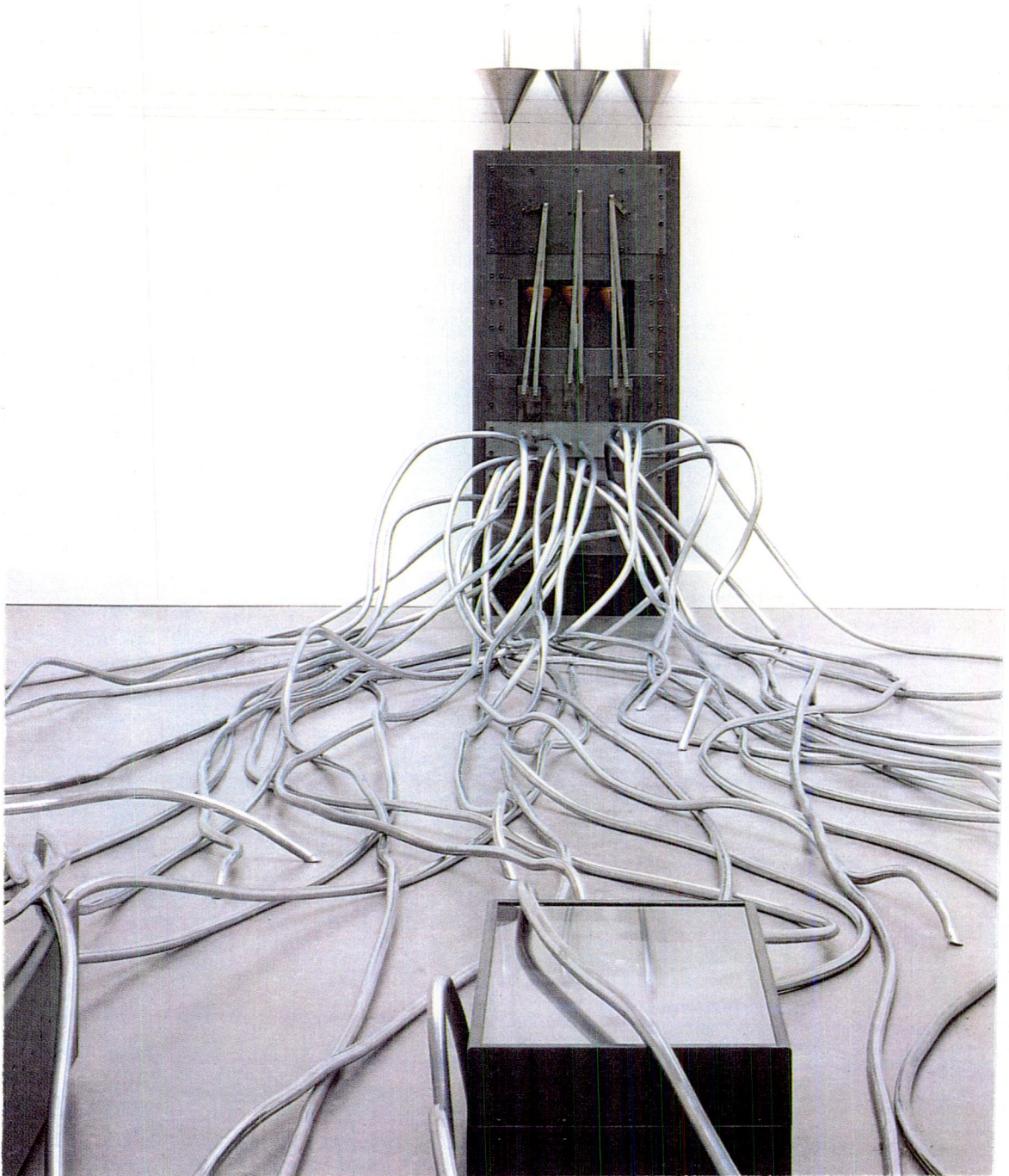


Plate twenty one: The River of the Moon



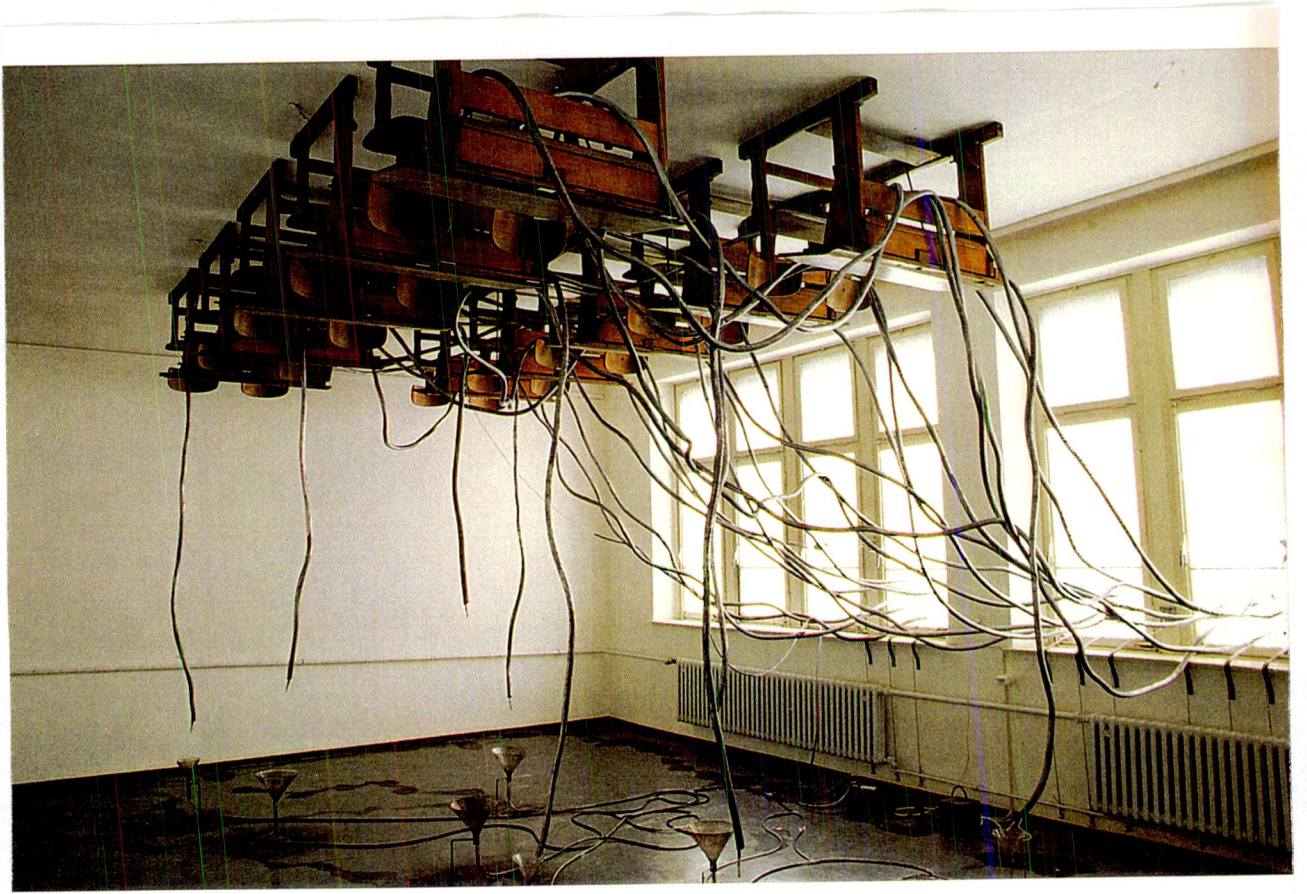


Plate twenty two: The Moon, The Child and The River of Anarchy



River of Anarchy"³² (Plate twenty two). It held similar imagery in that the river in this context consisted of the same lead pipes although instead of mercury here they contained black ink. Also using both an internal and external location, the flowing lead pipes were sourced in a suspended class room, each pipe leading from an ink well belonging to one of a clutter of school desks Horn had attached to the ceiling. Some of these pipes were severed and dripped into glass funnels on the floors, which in turn were connected to further pipes. The remaining piping became tangled and ran across the floor towards the window where on the exterior of the building they crawled like ivy until they reached the ground. Here the pipes ran their course into the playground where they disappeared into the ground. It is typical of Horn to kill two birds with the one stone; by replacing mercury with ink she is linking into an established symbol of school days nostalgia. She is using similar imagery to relate opposing narratives.

We got these old school benches-cum-desks like the ones I had in School, which was in a little village in the mountains near Heidelberg. We had a teacher with a wooden leg and gold glasses. Every day at the end of class, one child or other had to lead in the prayers. I was five years old and did not know how to pray because I lived with a Romanian governess and she had never taught me how. One day it was my turn. I was standing there sweating and stammering and I started to pee. The little warm river trickled down in front of the class forming a small lake around the big, black, boot of the teacher's wooden leg. Later, I was made to walk home with him, uphill for miles, carrying his heavy books (Horn, Guggenheim, 1993, p28.).

³² Der Mond ,das Kind, und der anarchistische Fluß 1992

It consisted of school desks, plastic tubes, ink, glass funnels, lead tubes and mercury, dimensions variable.

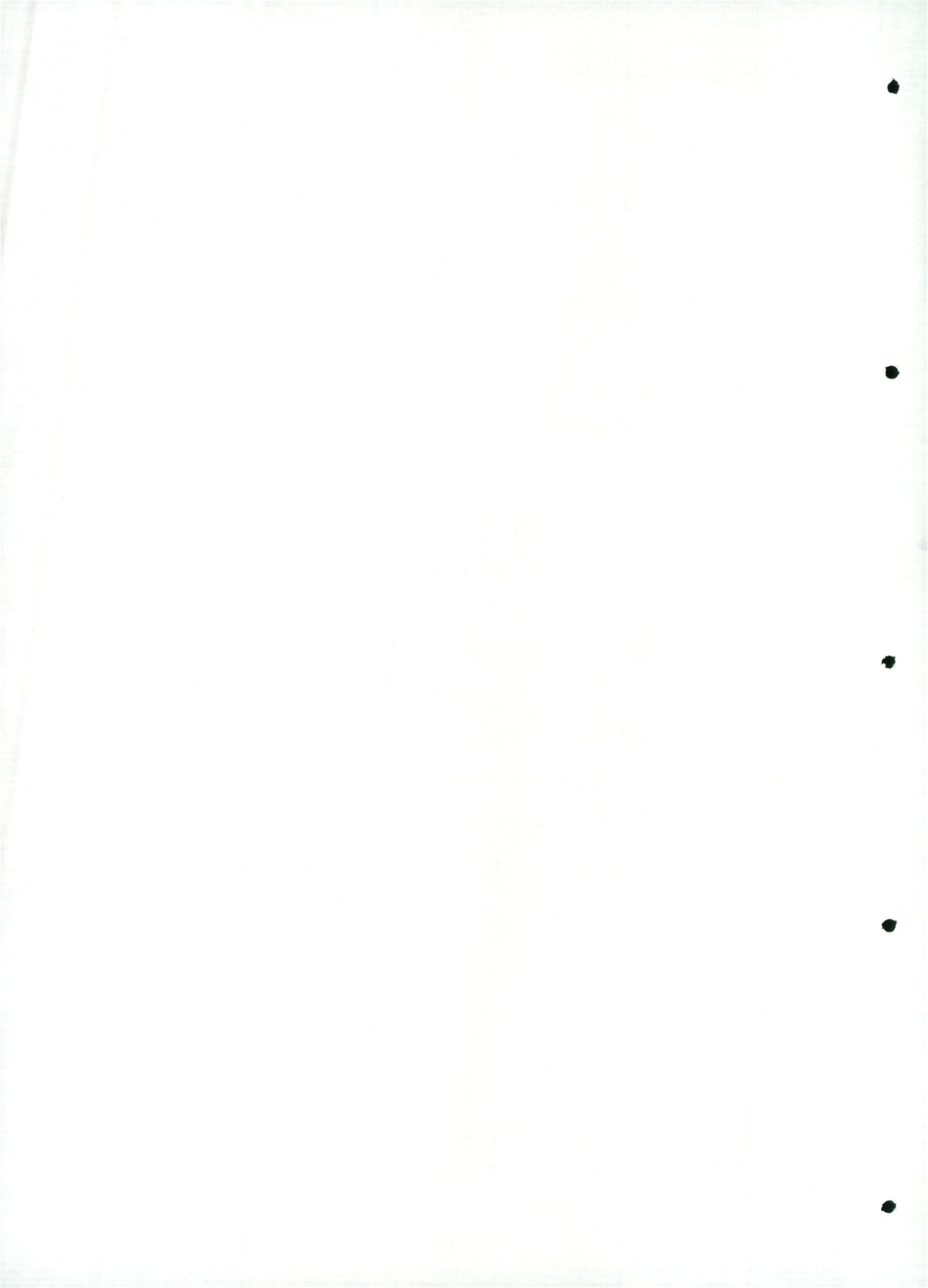
To the work "High Moon"³³ Rebecca Horn has applied the following narrative,

I've always wanted to make two rival guns shoot each other with bullets that melt, like a kiss of death. (cited by Lascault, 1994, p.105).

"High Moon" consists of two plexiglass funnels, which could be seen as breast shaped. They are each filled with red liquid and connected by rubber tubing to one of a pair of Winchester rifles. (Plate twenty three) The Rifles are hung at heart height. This acknowledges Horn's interest in cinema. "High Moon" could be a play on the spaghetti western, duel at high noon. As spectators enter the gallery the rifles follow their movements until they turn and begin to track each other before firing the red liquid simultaneously towards each other³⁴. This action is accompanied by a loud recording of guns being fired. This heightens the threatening effect of the piece, although the action of the guns is less dramatic, more of a harmless squirting than a dangerous shooting. To add to effect of a murder scene Horn had splattered the blood-like substance onto the two gallery walls behind the guns, a metal trough filled with red liquid also ran the length of the space perhaps signifying a

³³ 1991 It consisted of : two Winchester rifles, two glass funnels, metal, water and dye, dimensions variable.

³⁴ This use of guns combined with motion dictators was also seen in Hotel Peninsular Barcelona 1992 "River of the Moon: Rooms of mutual destruction" consisting of Two mirrors, two pistols, motors and two beds dimensions variable. Here also two the pistol's follow the viewer as they enter and leave the room.



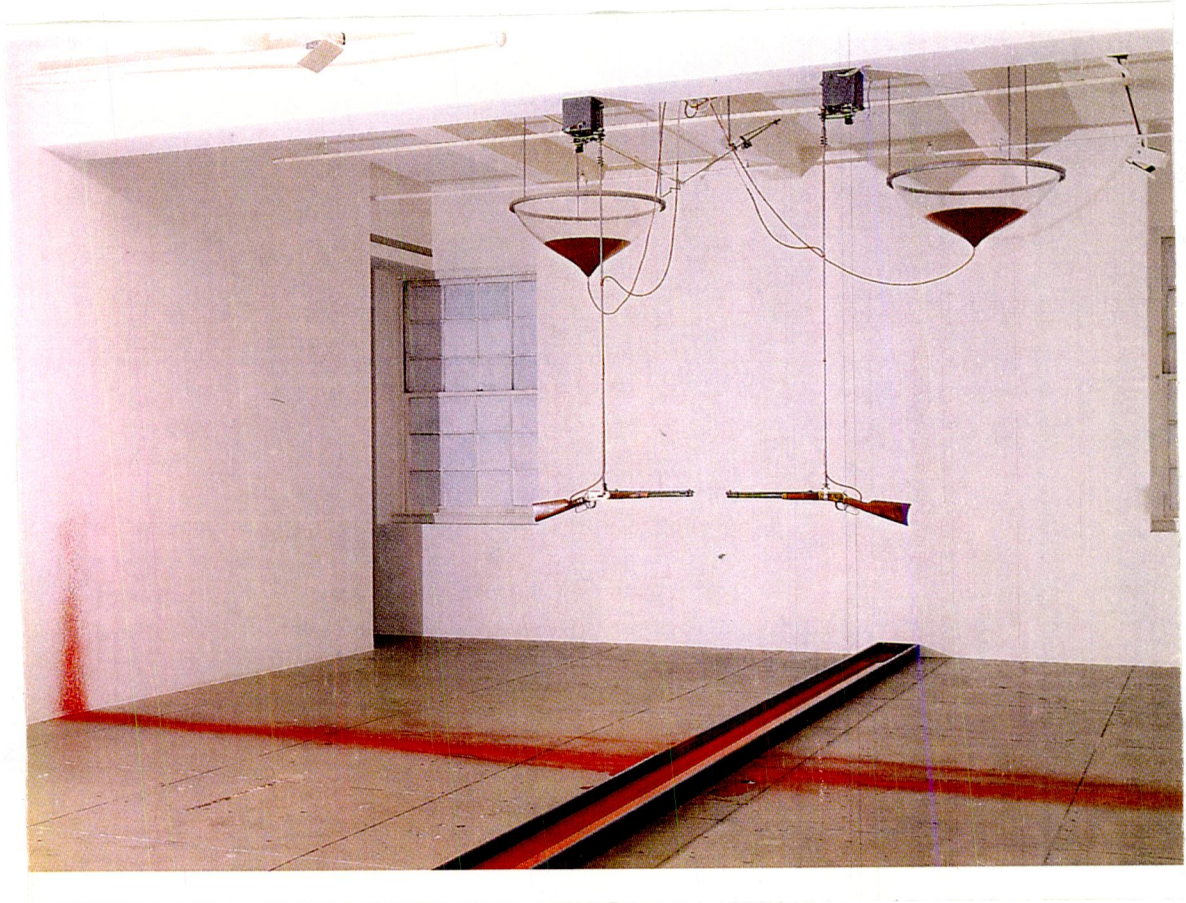


Plate Twenty three: High Moon



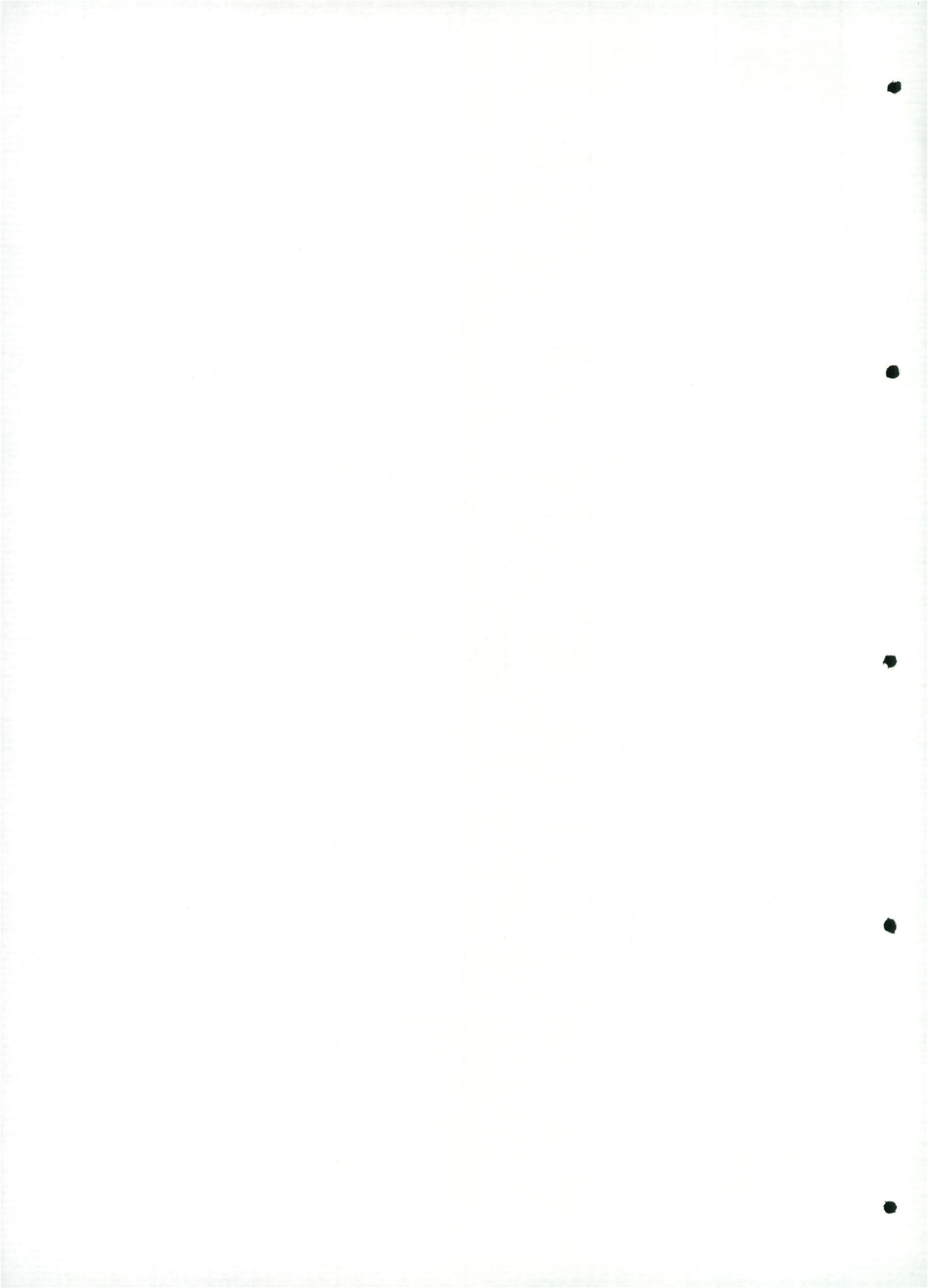
blood bath³⁵. This use of liquid, symbolic of life force, is a recurring motif in Horn's work, here its actions indicate death in their carelessness whereas previously in "Overflowing Blood Machine" they were seen to be a signifier of life. Movement is commonly employed by artists and advertisers to grab the attention of the viewer. In this work Horn uses the movement of her audience to create the subsequent movement of the piece. It raises question of the increased use of surveillance equipment in the public domain, possibly culminating in a sophisticated device that can punish an intruder instantly.

Here Horn demonstrates one of the flaws in implied narrative, the mental image she has given is infinitely more intriguing than the one she presents. It is possible that Horn should have set aside this mental image until she fulfilled her goal and not whet her viewer's appetite with such a weak substitute. In placing image and narrative so closely together she controls the way in which they are viewed. In the case of "Unicorn" the image of the lone female walking through the fields is powerful in itself without the inclusion of the context in which Horn created it. Horn talks constantly of the potential of various ideas. Never allowing herself to be restricted by present technology she continually explores the realm of the impossible. Many artists are remembered as innovator's whose concepts have yet to be fulfilled. Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International " never succeeded in being anything more than a maquette,

³⁵ The poem High Moon by Rebecca Horn, written in September 1991, published in the collection of Horn's writings "La Luna Rebella".



made from the Czar's cigar boxes and it is still considered one of the greatest accomplishments of the Constructivist era. Only time will tell whether Horn's musings contain such stamina.



Conclusion

Rebecca Horn has stated recently that she now intends to concentrate solely on the production of feature length films. The two feature length films³⁶ she has made to date have received a certain amount of critical acclaim but this reading has stemmed from an art basis and takes into account the broader spectrum of her work. Her past films have served to tie into not only her ideas but her various means of expression. Based on a narrative by Horn and containing characters and machines of Horn's creation, they are reflective of all of the aspects of her work that have been discussed previously. Film is considered to be a Kinetic form, with its movement of images on a two dimensional surface. The use of the cinema space is similar to Horn's other works. The darkness of the auditorium drawing the eye and subsequently the mind towards the images is reminiscent of Horn's use of absent light in "The Chinese Fiancée" in which the darkness served to raise the sensitivity of the viewer to the new surroundings. The disadvantage of this move on the part of the artist lies in the use of the medium of cinema which is

³⁶ 1981, La Ferdinanda: Sonata für eine Medici Villa (La Ferdinanda : Sonata for a Medici Villa)
35mm, colour, sound 85 minutes.
Direction and book Rebecca Horn.
1990 Buster's bedroom
35mm, colour ,sound 104 minutes
Director: Rebecca Horn
Screenplay: Rebecca Horn And Martin Mosebach , Based on a story by Rebecca Horn



considered a component of popular culture under the influence of the mass media.

Horn's previous efforts were only seen in Art Cinemas and gallery spaces. Due to a difficulty with distribution licensing laws, during the European showings of her retrospective exhibition Horn's films could only be seen on video. This medium inadequately conveyed their full impact. The restricted nature of the places in which Horn's films were viewed meant that they did not reach a large circulation of people and this kept an appreciation of her work limited to an artistically literate few. This also meant Horn subsequently failed to make a significant profit on the whole endeavour. The production costs of 35 mm films are high, Horn raised a proportional amount of the capital for "Busters Bedroom" through the sale of her other works which many felt led to the production of somewhat incidental or "throw away" works. This need for immediate turn over could account for the repetition of ideas and objects that has become apparent in Horn's recent work. Many pieces consist only of minimal interchanging components as the only means of differentiating one production from another.

In film all the various elements of Horn's work, the performances, machines and narrative all become blended into one package removing the need for any interaction by the audience to connect the ideas intrinsic to the various components. Often when something is too highly



blended the individual aspects disappear to become one. One of the intriguing elements of Horn's work is the mechanical aspect of her machines, causing a puzzle to form in the mind of the viewer: how does it work? Within the context of film this element will be lost in the world of camera effects and trickery. Unless she continues to exhibit the props from the films as objects in their own right they will lose any tangible qualities they have. By the same token the individuality of the person ceases to be significant in film. No longer does Horn have to search out a particular person who has the attribute needed for Horn's performances, as in "The Unicorn" piece, instead she can create work with the use of actors and a tight reliance on narrative which further removes the work from reality.

If Horn continues her career only in film format, in what environment are we going to see her work ? In the elusiveness of the art gallery space or within the entertainment arena of general cinema release? The implications of the difference between these spaces is great. There is a limitation of possibilities within film which fluctuates in relation to the finances available. To raise these funds eventually Horn must produce works which are financially viable. This may in time mean that her work must appeal to a greater audience and therefore be under the influence of mass culture.



There is an understanding of the reading of cinema which is set aside from an understanding of art. There are expectations to be met and preconceptions to be understood. The public are aware of the framework of cinema with its use of props and actors and special effects. Film remains a component of the mass media, and as such will Horn be able to say anything new within this medium without pressure to conform to universally accepted ideals?

In producing works based on her life and imagination, Horn had managed to leave a gap within the transition between the two. It is this gap which allows the spectator to gain access to the work from their own perspective. Horn's films tend to be a literal translation of her ideas. In a world saturated by the moving image, with applications of multimedia used as commonplace tools of communication in everyday life, it maybe that the general public will become immune to the impact of such work. It remains to be seen whether Horn's audience will remain intrigued. Horn may have something to say but will her work scream loud enough to get anyone interested?

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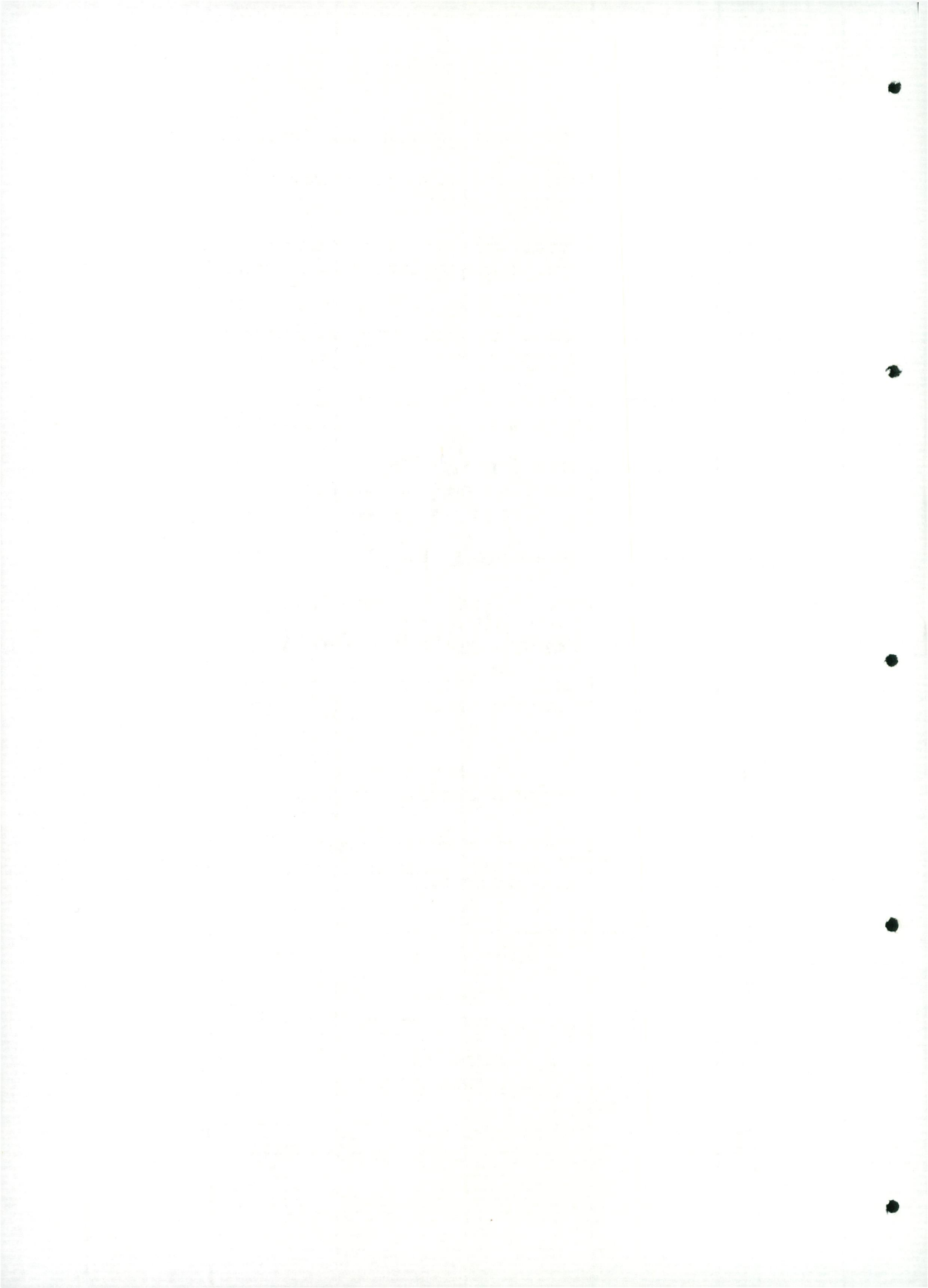
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