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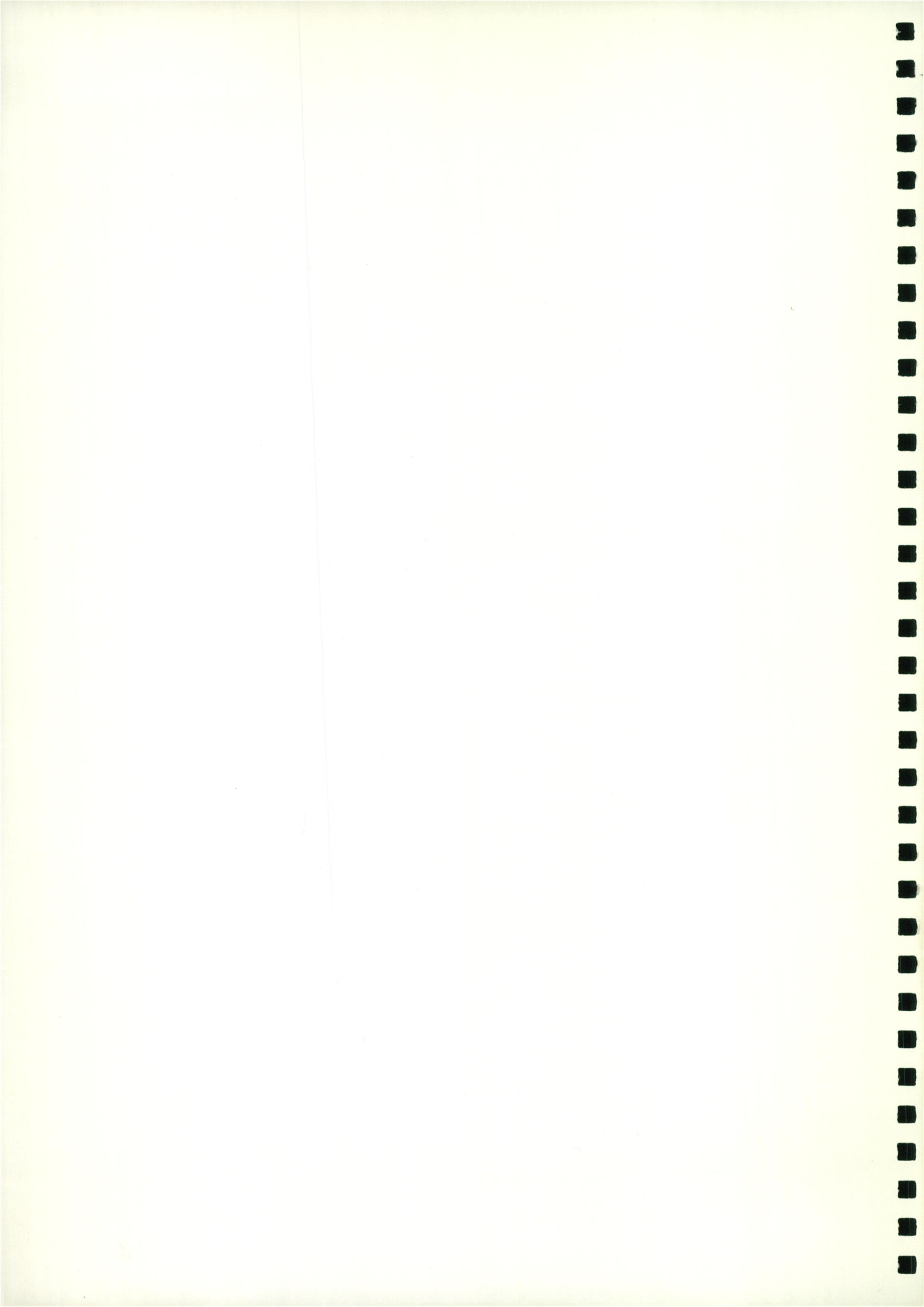
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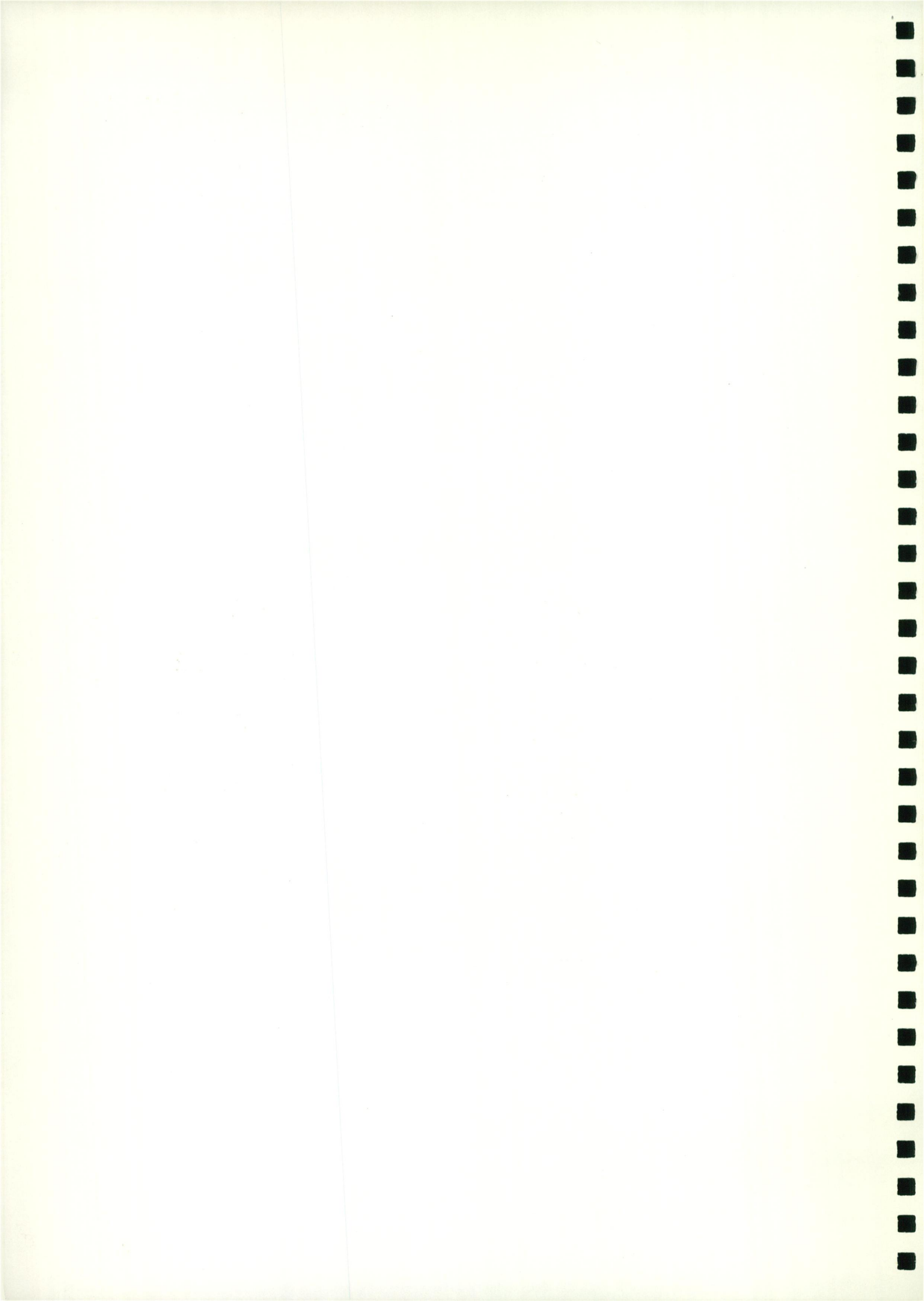
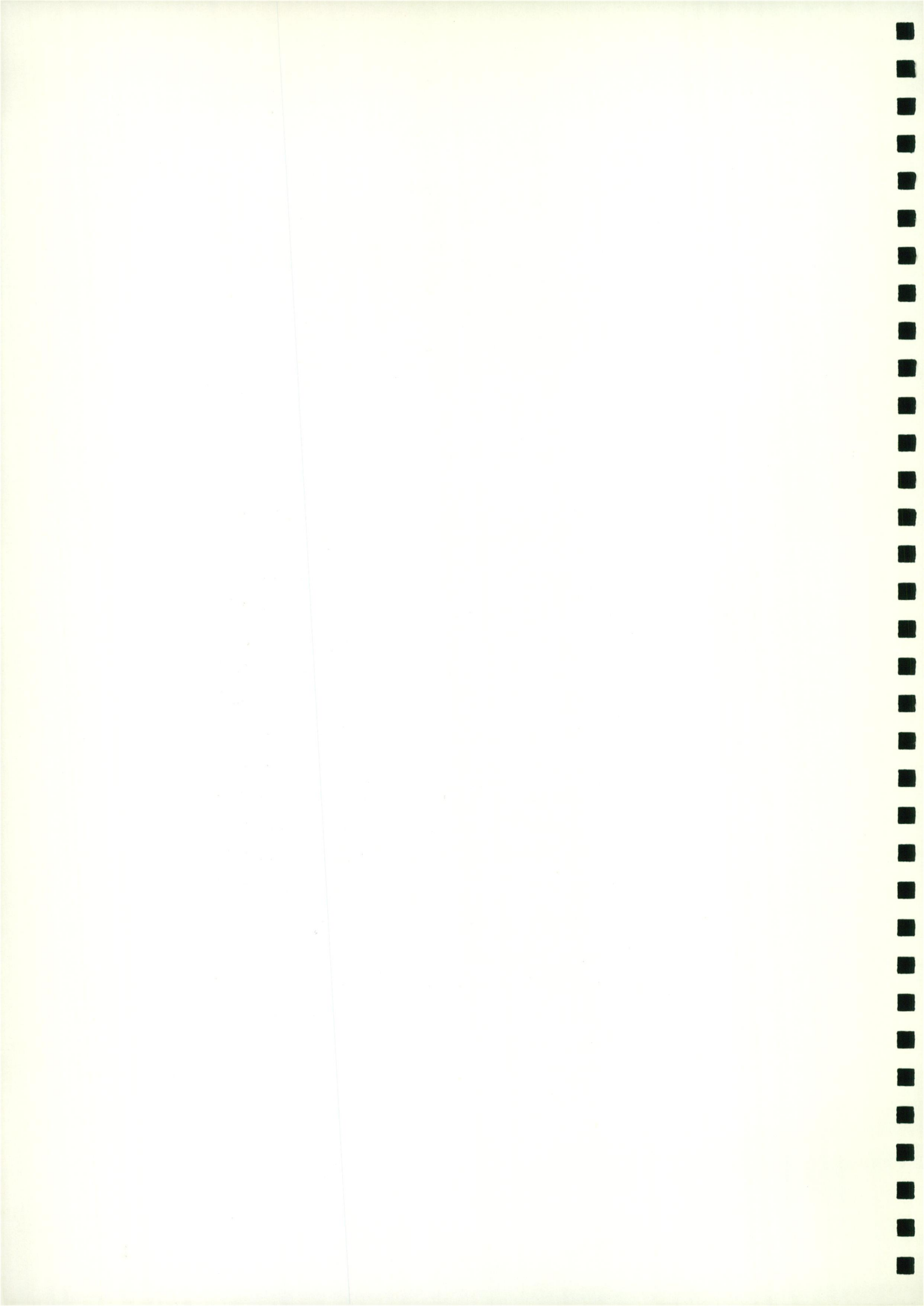


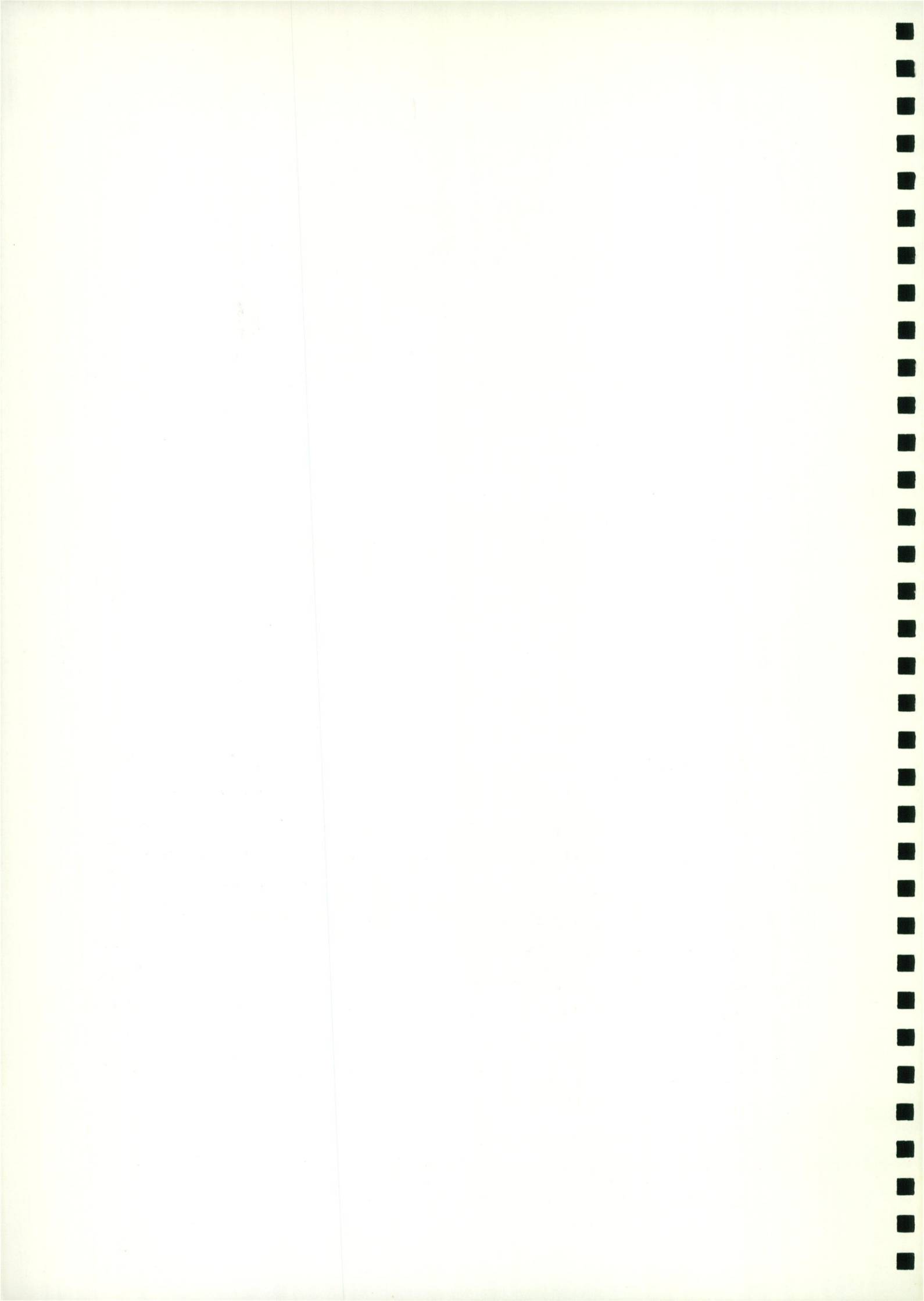
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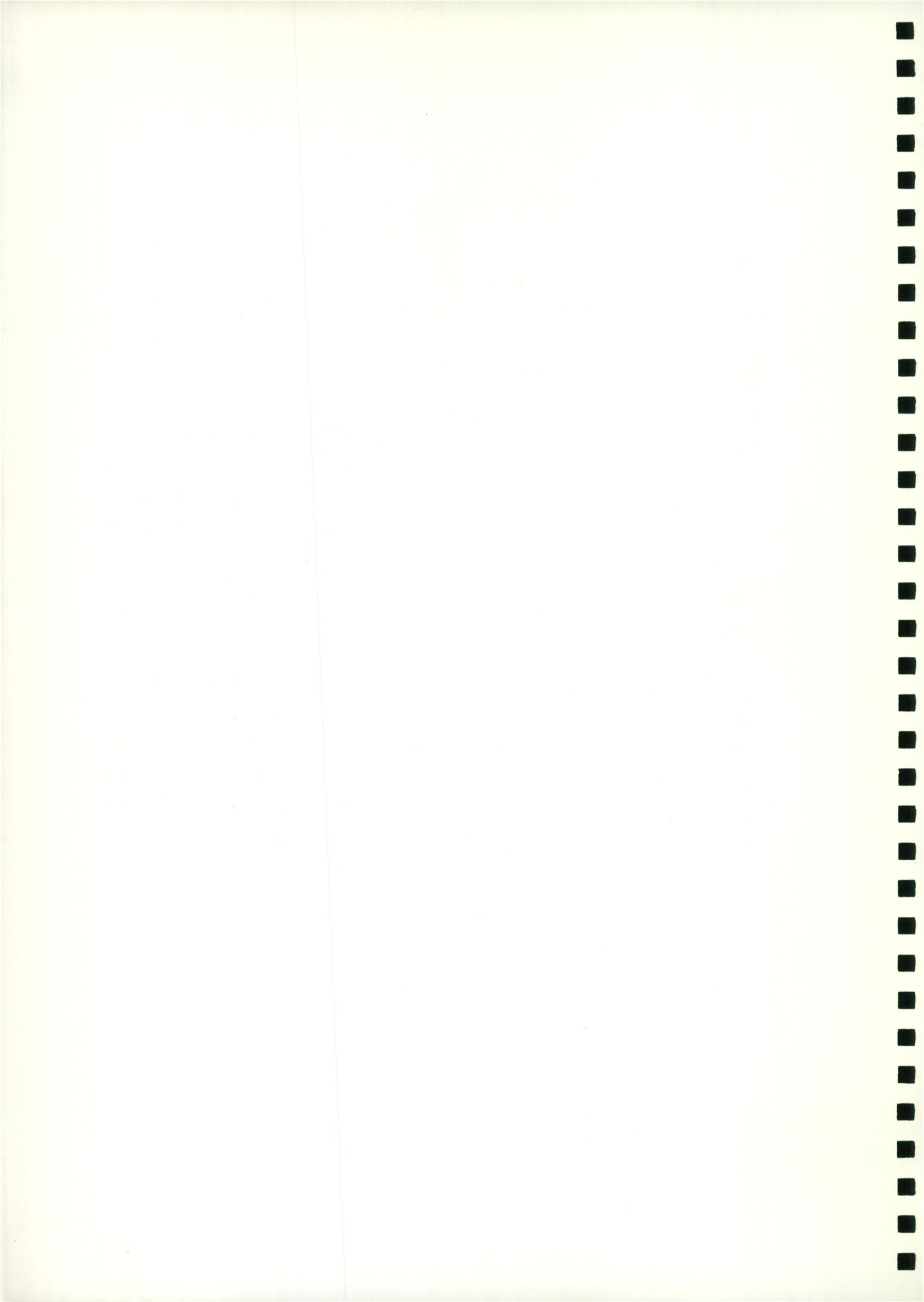
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Introduction

The works of William Shakespeare are some of the most famous pieces of literature known to the Western hemisphere. They are also some of the least known. People often have had a fixed opinion on this body of work. It has been approached with caution and has often been dropped for being tiresome. In recent times though, the Bard's work has been appearing in the form of film, thereby bringing a new discourse into his work. In this thesis, I hope to discover what film, as a medium, can bring to the work of Shakespeare, and try to discover what happens in this transfer from theatre to film. I have constrained my research to films which have approached Shakespeare with a new vision. I have taken a look at Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* and *Angelic Conversations*, Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, Fred Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo & Juliet*. As case studies, I have set them against critical and theoretical analysis. My research entailed viewing the actual films and reading transcripts of interviews with the directors and others involved in the production of these films. I have also studied critical journals and magazines such as Artforum and Sight & Sound for different opinions on these movies. I found Jack Jorgen's book Shakespeare on



Film to be of huge help and I draw on a lot of his ideas. I have shown them in context with new film adaptations of Shakespeare, which have been made since his writings. In these case studies I have shown how many of his writings have come into practice. Also I have read relevant theatrical and cinematic theorists and writers.

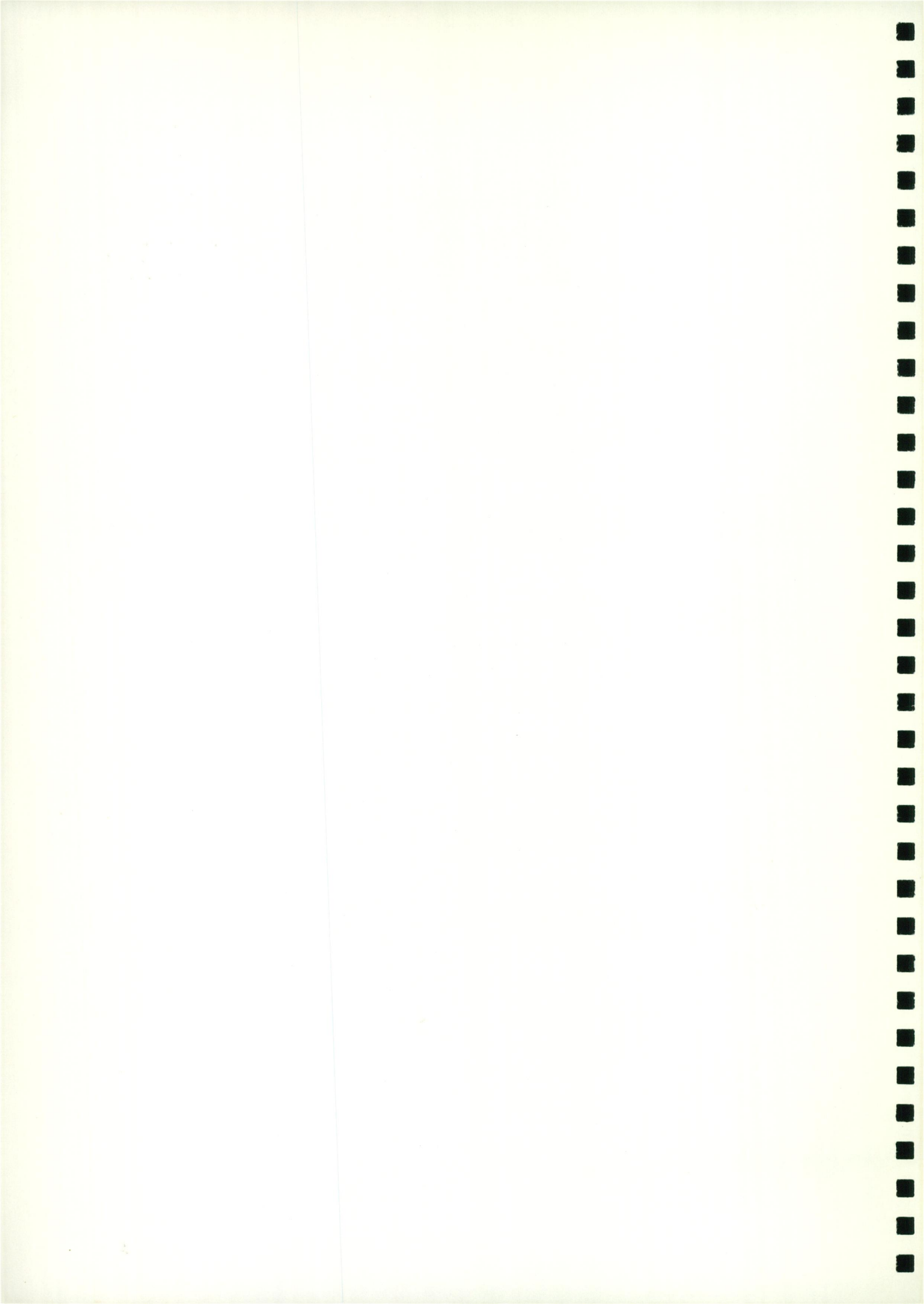
Though William Shakespeare died over three hundred years ago, within the last two years there have been over ten films produced based on his work.

Shakespeare's plays have been adapted by film-makers ever since the dawn of cinema, that is, the silent movie. The earliest example is a film, by director James Barrie, named *The Real Thing At Last* in 1916. It was a take on *Macbeth* which the director subtitled *A Suggestion For Artists Of The Future*. The basic idea was a humorous contrast between a polite British production of "the Scottish murder mystery" and an energetically brash American one. Barrie, who thought the screenwriter Leslie Henson looked like Shakespeare, added a frame story in which Henson is seen pacing up and down in Shakespeare's house in Stratford-upon-Avon, waiting for a telephone call from New York. In the finished picture, the conversation appeared in subtitles:

"Yes! Shakespeare speaking. How did they like *Macbeth* in New York?"

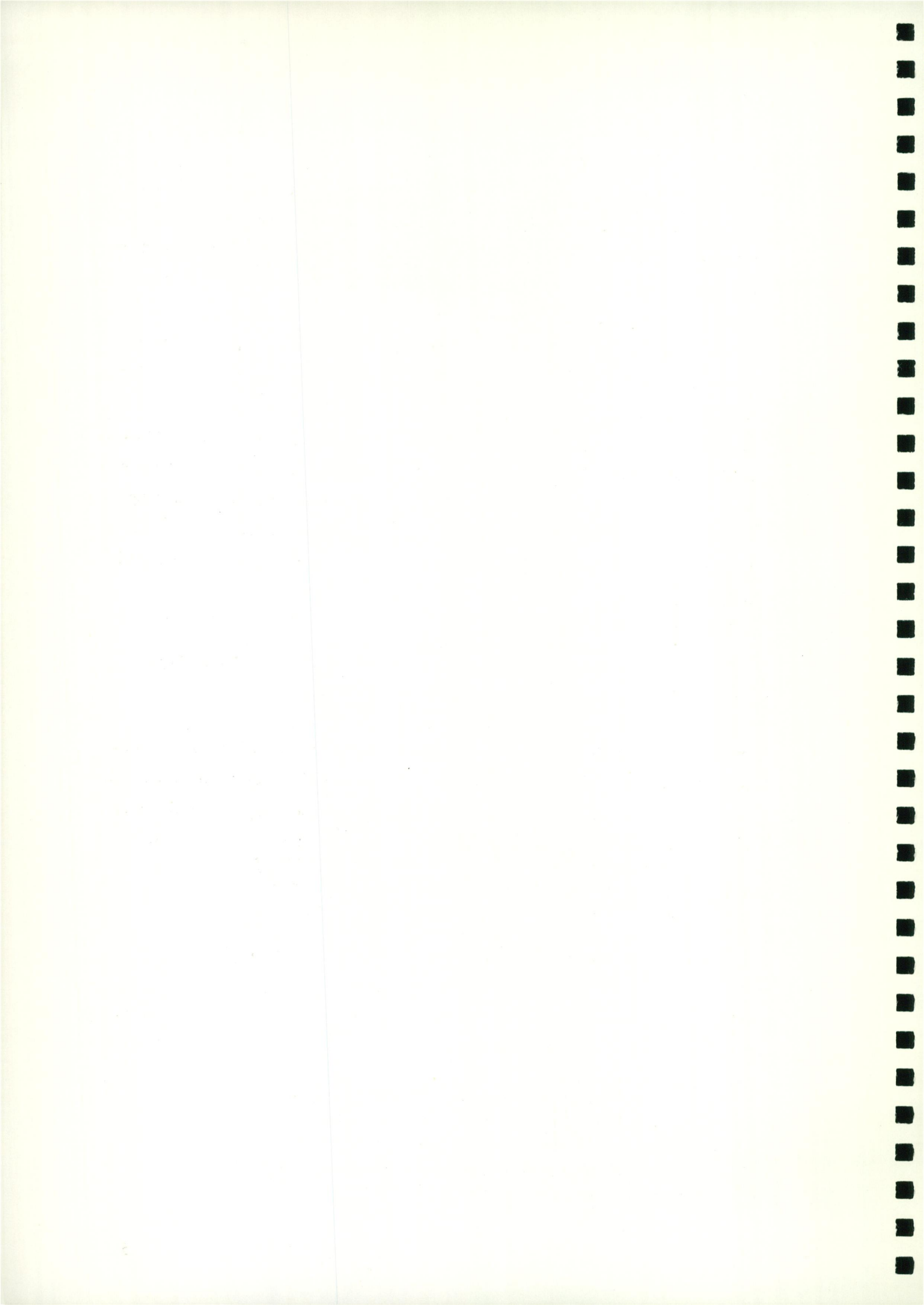
"*Macbeth* is sure-fire! What price for your next play?"

The British version ended with genteel understatement: "The elegant home of the *Macbeth*'s is no longer a happy one", while the American one concluded more optimistically, "The *Macbeth*s repent and all ends happily." The film provoked stern criticism from film trade papers which described it as "unsuitable entertainment for royalty in war time and an unfair lampoon of both the film industry and American attitudes to Shakespeare." (Christie, 1994, p.138) Unfortunately no copies of the film exist any longer.



Chapter 1

In this chapter I have looked mainly at the writings of Jack Jorgens and his ideas on adapting Shakespeare to cinema.



From Text to Film

Shakespeare's work is known for being very literary based. The texts are studied the world over, and have become an institution. This is why there is very often a narrow viewpoint of Shakespeare's work. People automatically avoid getting into his work, as it were. And yet a very populist based medium such as film has always been enamoured with trying to adapt his works. Surely there must be something in this tradition that shows a link between the art of Shakespeare and the art of film. A link between theatre and cinema, an interface between stage play and screen play. Many film adaptations have been made; many are good, even more are terrible. Many adaptations have tackled transfer in a traditional way; others have approached it from a more innovative and interesting angle. I am more interested in the latter. It is far more interesting to go see something new and expressive, rather than seeing an old rendition of something which has been done a million times before. Many people have a set idea of how a Shakespeare play should be adapted to film and therefore are ready to dismiss experimentation.

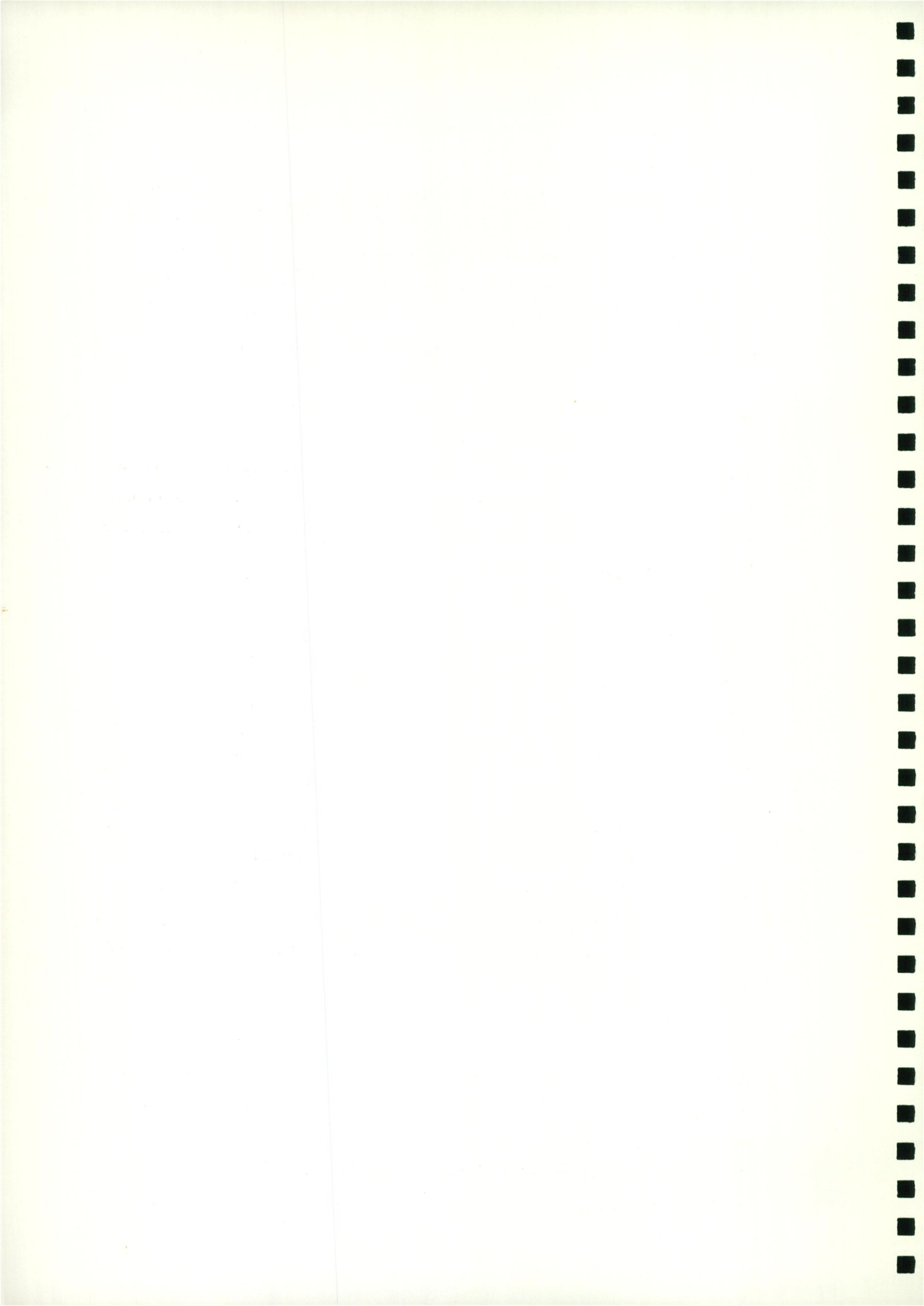
We do not go to the concert hall to listen for errors, or the sound of traffic outside; and we should not come to Shakespeare films to demand impossible perfections and 'definitive' interpretations or to be clever at what is done badly (Jorgens, 1991, p.ix)

"Many have written on the problems of rendering Shakespeare on film, but few of the possibilities." (Jorgens, 1991, p.ix) Film is probably one of the best mediums through which to rediscover and explore the work of Shakespeare. So many ideas and scenes can be shown in a fleeting moment far more effectively than on a theatrical stage.

Films perhaps offer the best possibility of rediscovering Shakespeare's popularity, in the best sense of that word. In a more utopian mood; possibly 'the psychic energy created by a superb movie version of a classic play is greater (quantitatively and qualitatively) than can usually be achieved by modern stage versions of the plays.(Jorgens, 1991, p.3)

Shakespeare is best known for his rich language, but essentially he was a dramatist. So many people place all importance on his words, but words were only used to surround a sound dramatic structure.

If Shakespeare had been no more gifted with words than say, I am, the depth and liveliness of his interest in people and predicaments, and his incredible hardness, practicality, and resource as a craftsman and a maker of moods, rhythms and points, could still have made him almost his actual equal as a playwright.(Agee, 1958, p.209)



And it is with things like moods and drama which film can conquer. Basically what James Agee is saying is that Shakespeare is not great only for his language, a point people often forget about. They let a wall of rich text prevent any further investigation into his plays. He was also a genius with dramatic effect and content- the definite core of what the majority of cinema is about. Foakes expressed the same idea in saying that "We cannot rest easy with a view of the plays which give complete emphasis to the word and denies the essentially collaborative nature of the drama." (Foakes, 1952, pp. 85-86)

A New Look at Shakespeare

Shakespeare is not about sitting in a room and studying his words, although a lot can be gained from doing so. His work is primarily about drama and the execution of it. It was all written for the stage, for people to sit and look at, just like a film, which is also made to be played and looked at .

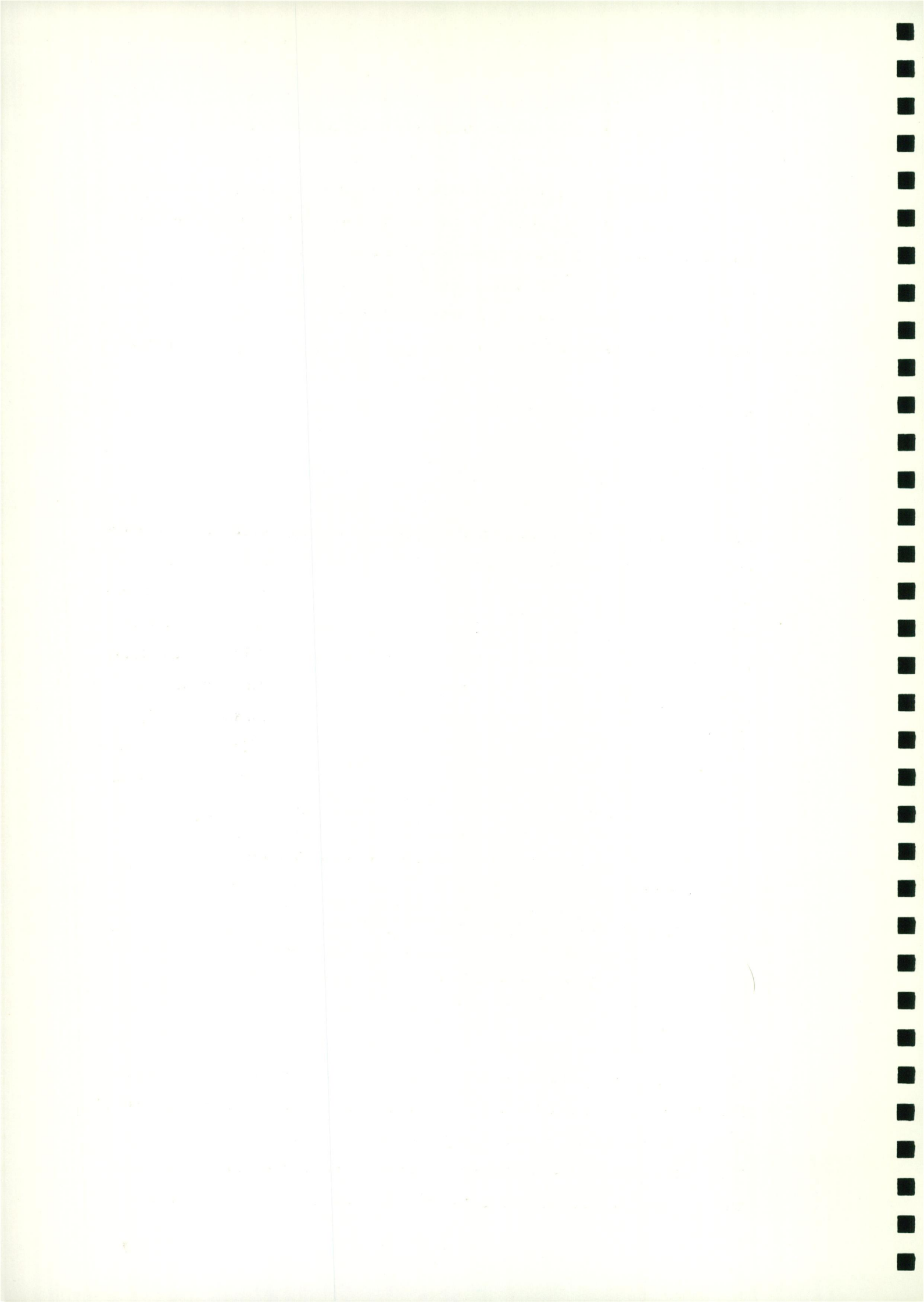
If criticism can ever hope to encompass Shakespeare's art it must do so by recognising that a play is not a thing , but a complex process incorporating the verbal and the non verbal. Very different incarnations of a work on stage or screen may be equally true and help to spring us loose from a singleness of vision so that we can see other possibilities, other dimensions.

(Jorgens, 1991, p.4)

Film is only one hundred years old. It is still such a modern media, but it reaches so many people . Its roots are in theatre and therefore, there are many similarities. Jorgens points to the tendency of both media to draw on the other arts: "Similarities between theatre and film , two greedy art forms constantly devouring their neighbours: fiction, poetry, dance , music, painting, sculpture, architecture."(Jorgens, 1991, p.4)

Shakespeare-based films are interesting as films because, according to Lawson, "they stretch the capabilities and challenge the inhibitions of the art. They suggest that symptomatic dialogue is not the only effective kind , that verbal poetry is an essential aspect of cinematic expression and the present lack of poetry in film impoverishes and depletes the art ."(Jorgens, 1991, p.9)

Maybe this would explain the recent upsurge in the number of Shakespearian adaptations in Hollywood, a need to portray something other than another run of the mill action movies, a script with a bit of depth and intelligence. According to Alexander Knox, Shakespearian scripts "provide actors with complex, challenging roles of the kind that, according to their own testimony, they seldom get in other films. The best of



those films suggest that it is possible to have good film acting which is not only behaving but behaving plus interpretation.” In other words, from an actor’s and director’s point of view there is a lot more room for artistic interpretation in the Bard’s plays, rather than just plain old narrative. According to Jorgens, by undermining established notions of what is intrinsically filmic, Shakespeare films help us to see the truly liberating implications of Bazin’s assertion that : “to adapt is no longer to betray but to respect.” (Jorgens, 1991, p.6) He sees a lot more interesting possibilities for film and the play through adaption, bringing both to a higher level. Jorgens goes on to say: “ We require the patience to study films as we do books and live performance. The result I believe will be that we discover that film is no enemy to Shakespeare and that Shakespeare no enemy to film.” (Jorgens, 1991, p.7)

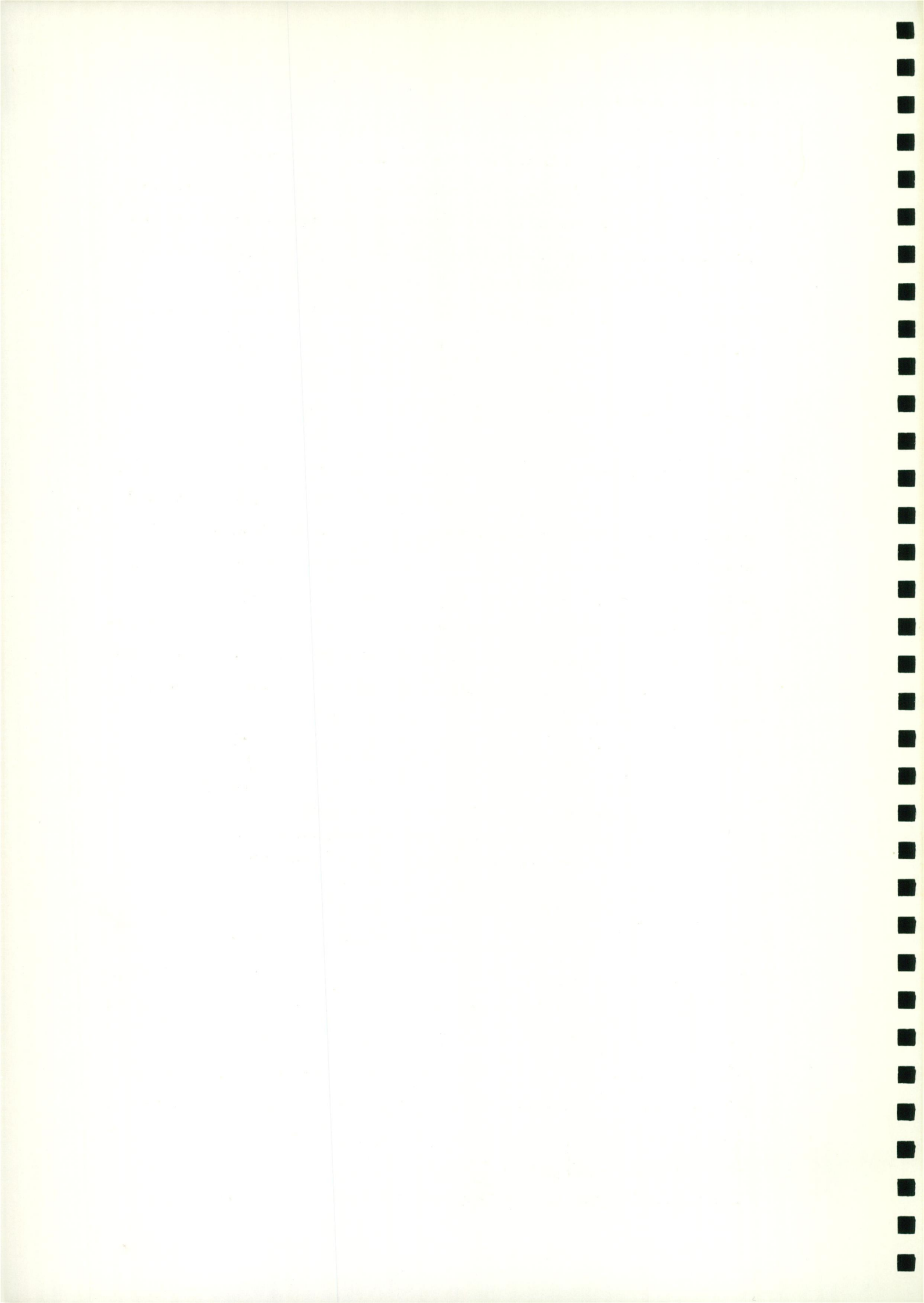
The Deadly Theatre

People often judge a film based on a Shakespearean drama by how faithful it is to the text or on how traditional it is. To quote Roger Manwell, “Critics often sort out Shakespeare films by measuring their relative distance from the language and conventions of the theatre.” Hence an awful lot of Shakespearean adaptations end up leaving people cold. It is the act of filming a play as opposed to making a film. Some of these adaptations have the look and feel of a performance worked out for a static theatrical space and a live audience. This is against what Bazin was saying, it shows, wrongly, that cinema should somehow be subserviant to theatre. In fact, to film in this way actually undermines both media. Peter Brook describes how this form of drama can work and how it fails. When it fails he calls it *The Deadly Theatre* :

The great strength of the theatrical mode is that because the performance is conceived in terms of the theatre , the text need not be heavily cut or rearranged its great weaknesses are that superficially it seems to be cheap and easy to capture the essence of a theatrical performance on film. . . The Deadly Theatre takes easily to Shakespeare. We see his plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way - they look lively and colourful, there is music and everyone is all dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best classical theatres. Yet secretly we find it excruciatingly boring - and in our hearts we either blame Shakespeare, or theatre as such, or even ourselves. (Brook, 1969, p.10)

This form of adapting Shakespeare to film has been the unfortunate norm in the past. Everything is done in a simple straightforward film method. This method just tries and seems to be happy to have people acting in real time on film.

“The realistic mode takes advantage of the camera’s unique ability to show us things - great sweeping landscapes, or the corner of a friars cell all in the flash of a



moment.” (Jorgens, 1991, p.9)

Unfortunately, this realistic approach nearly always looks either embarrassing or pompous. Or, as Roy Walker states, “the poetic drama does not thrive on the photographic realism . . . which has the effect of making the poetry sound unnatural and self - conscious.”(Jorgens, 1991, p.9) This is proved when we look at all those stale school B.B.C. educational videos. This is the reason I feel so many people turn off once they hear those dreaded words “A play by Shakespeare”. People have grown to associate images of men in thoughts harping on an unintelligible verse and, above all, “acting”!

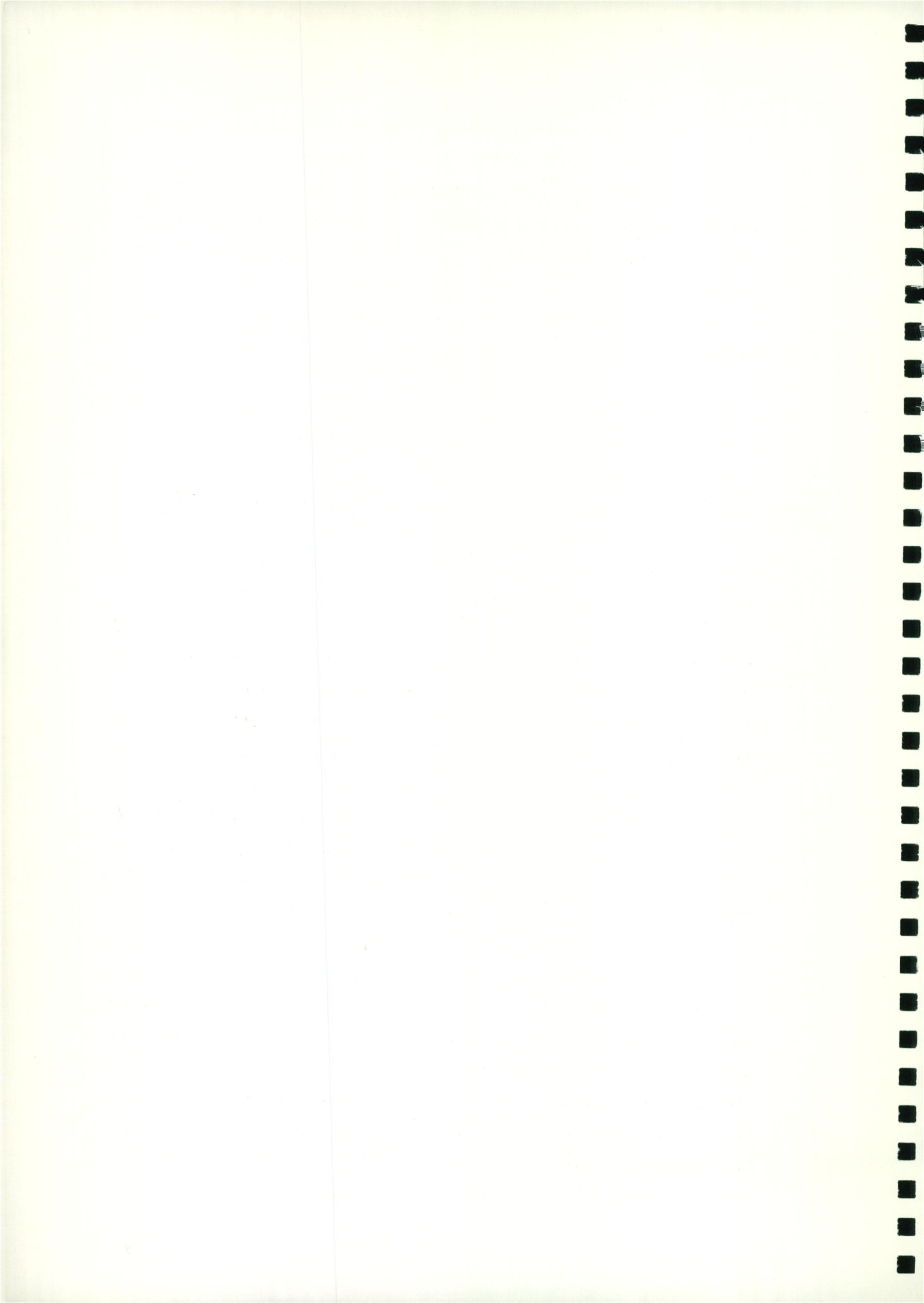
A Filmic Rendering

“A playwright who juxtaposes several levels of illusion and creates highly subjective dramatic worlds often finds realist collaborators who can deal with but one level of illusion and do not always succeed in avoiding a neutral and unaffecting objectivity.”(Jorgens, 1991, p.10) In other words, it is not enough just to film people acting out the words of Shakespeare in front of a camera. According to Jorgens: “Details must be given the proper emphasis, be powerful and significant, yet also subordinate to an overall design, lest they obscure what is important. The filmic mode is the mode of the film poet, whose works bear the same relation to the surfaces of reality that poems do to ordinary conversation.” (Jorgens, 1991, p.10)

A filmic rendering of Shakespeare according to the Russian film maker Kozintev, shifts the stress from the audial to the visual. The problem is not one of finding means to speak the verse in front of the camera, in realistic circumstances ranging from long -shot to close-up. The aural has to be made visual. The poetic texture itself has to be transformed into a visual poetry into the dynamic organisation of film imagery.(Leech, 1972, p.191)

A brilliant example of this is Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo & Juliet*^{vr} which we will look at later. Shakespeare used words and theatrical technique to get his concepts across. To communicate ideas using cinema, you have to use imagery and filmic techniques, not theatrical techniques: “a great variety of angles and distances, camera movement...substitutes for the classical style of playing on the lines, the modern style of playing between the lines.”(Jorgens, 1991, p.10) This style of filming puts emphasis on what Jorgens calls the artifice of film “on the expressive possibilities of distorting the surfaces of reality.” (Jorgens, 1991, p.10)

These anti-realist techniques are used to express important aspects of the plays. The



great strength of the filmic mode is that it takes advantage of the film's power to tell a story "by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely space, time and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely attention, memory, imagination and emotion." (Munsterburg, 1970, p.74) This means that rather than the basic text and narrative of plays being used exclusively, a whole network of images and sounds is used to explore what Stanislavsky calls the sub-text of Shakespeare's plays.

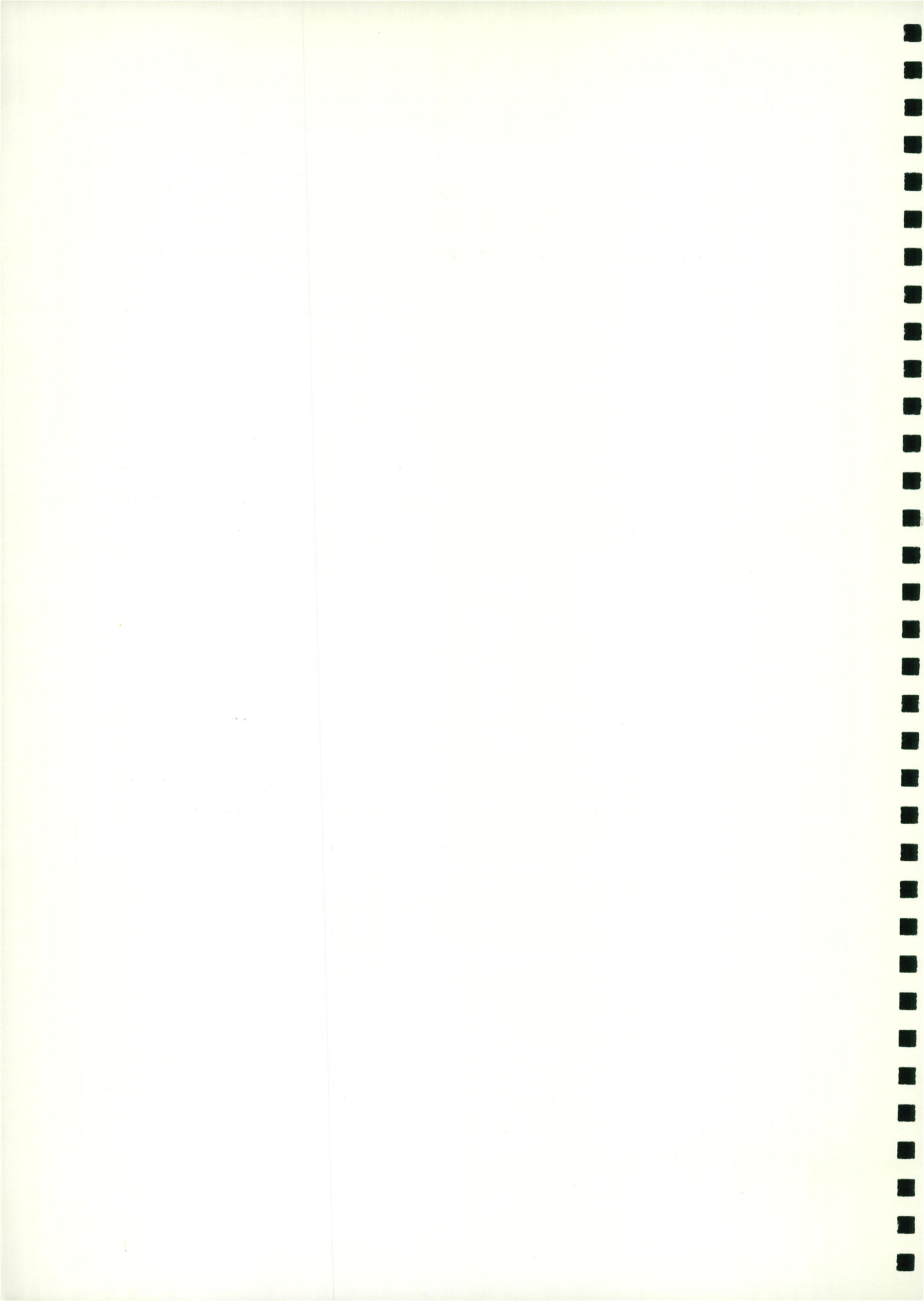
Through these methods the full meaning of the plays may come out. Peter Brook has written:

if you could extract the mental impression made by the Shakespearean strategy of images, you would get a piece of pop collage.... the background that Shakespeare can conjure in one line evaporates in the next and new images take over.... The non localized stage means that every single thing under the sun is possible, not only quick changes of location: a man can turn into twins, change sex , be his past , his present ,his future, be a comic version of himself, and be none of them all at the same time. (Brook, 1966, p.118)

As far as Jorgens is concerned, what he calls the filmic mode is the best form in which to bring Shakespeare to film, "despite the dangers of dazzling technique for its own sake, wooden performances and decimated texts." (Jorgens, 1991, p.12) This method leaves a lot of room for reinterpreting texts, an idea which reviles the purists. Susan Sontag sees interpretation as a bad thing... "to interpret is to impoverish." (Sontag, 1969, p.17) I would tend to agree more with the theorist Bluestone: "With regard to Shakespeare films it is accurate to say that the true test is not whether the filmmaker has respected his model, but whether he has respected his own vision." (Jorgens, 1991, p.15) Or to quote Ezra Pound : "Don't translate what I wrote, translate what I meant to write." (Kenner, 1971, p.150) I believe since the work of Shakespeare is so well known and many of the people going to see a film will already know something of the work , a certain amount of the Bard's own vision should be carried through at least, "lest adaption become travesty." (Jorgens, 1991, p.15)

I believe the traditional way of portraying Shakespeare to be outmoded. "There can no more be a set of rules or principles for filming Shakespeare than there can be a set of rules or principles for staging him." (Jorgens, 1991, p.15)

"Good Shakespeare films often move fluidly between modes and styles, merge several simultaneously, so it is not possible to make simple judgements." (Dehn, 1954,p.174) Simple judgements like, a film is a bad interpretation of Shakespeare simply because the adaption is set in a non- historical context, or all the text is not there, are not entire-

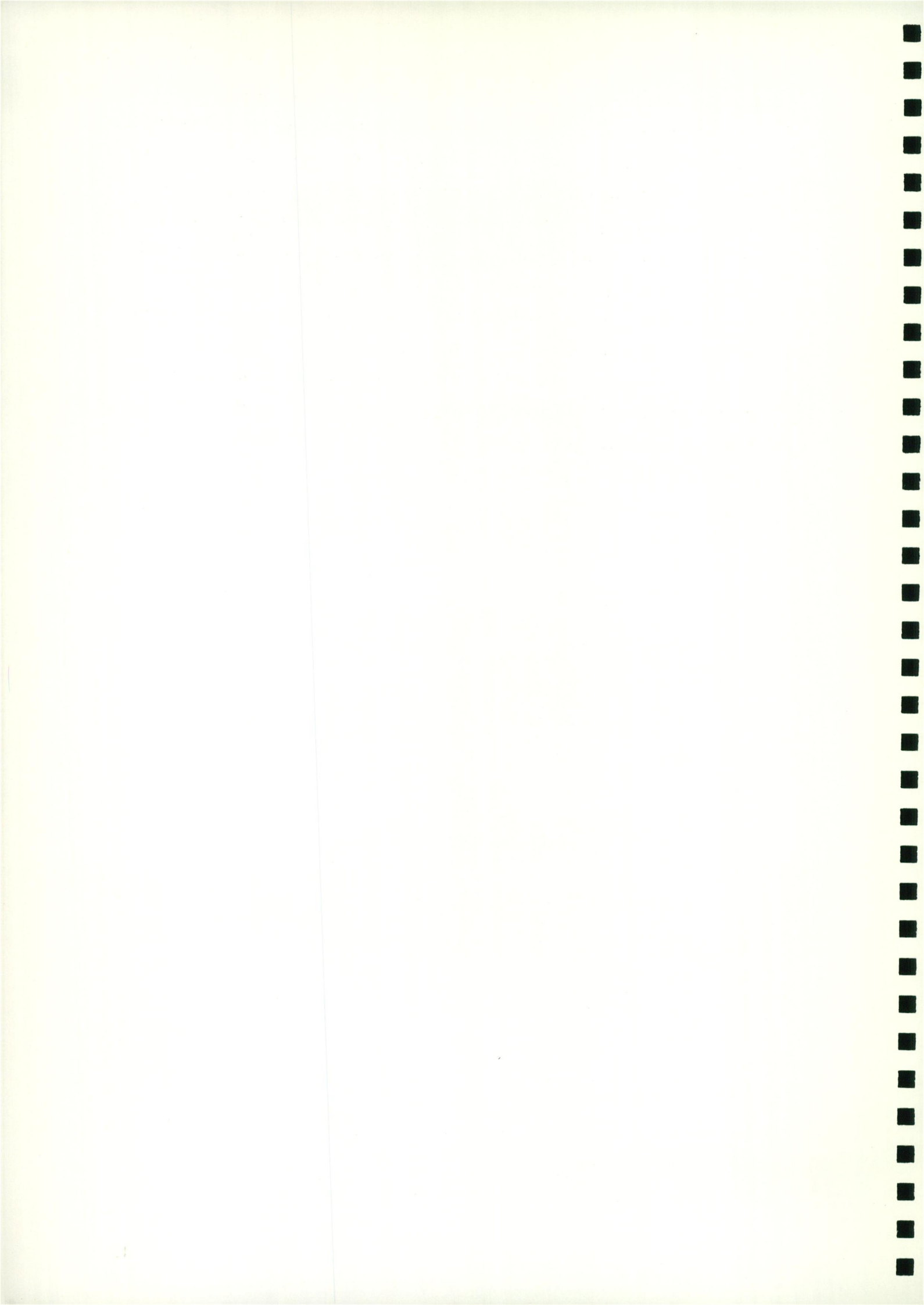


ly appropriate. According to Jorgens, the richest moment in films nearly always come from the "expressive possibilities" of shifting relations, words and images. Often as not whole passages may be signified by visuals alone. "The visual image may exclude speaker and even more directly work to embody the lines ." (Jorgens, 1991, p.17) A good example of this is Greenaway's use of visual symbolism in *Prospero's Books* . Some would say he does so to such an extent that each frame is bursting with visual language and information. →

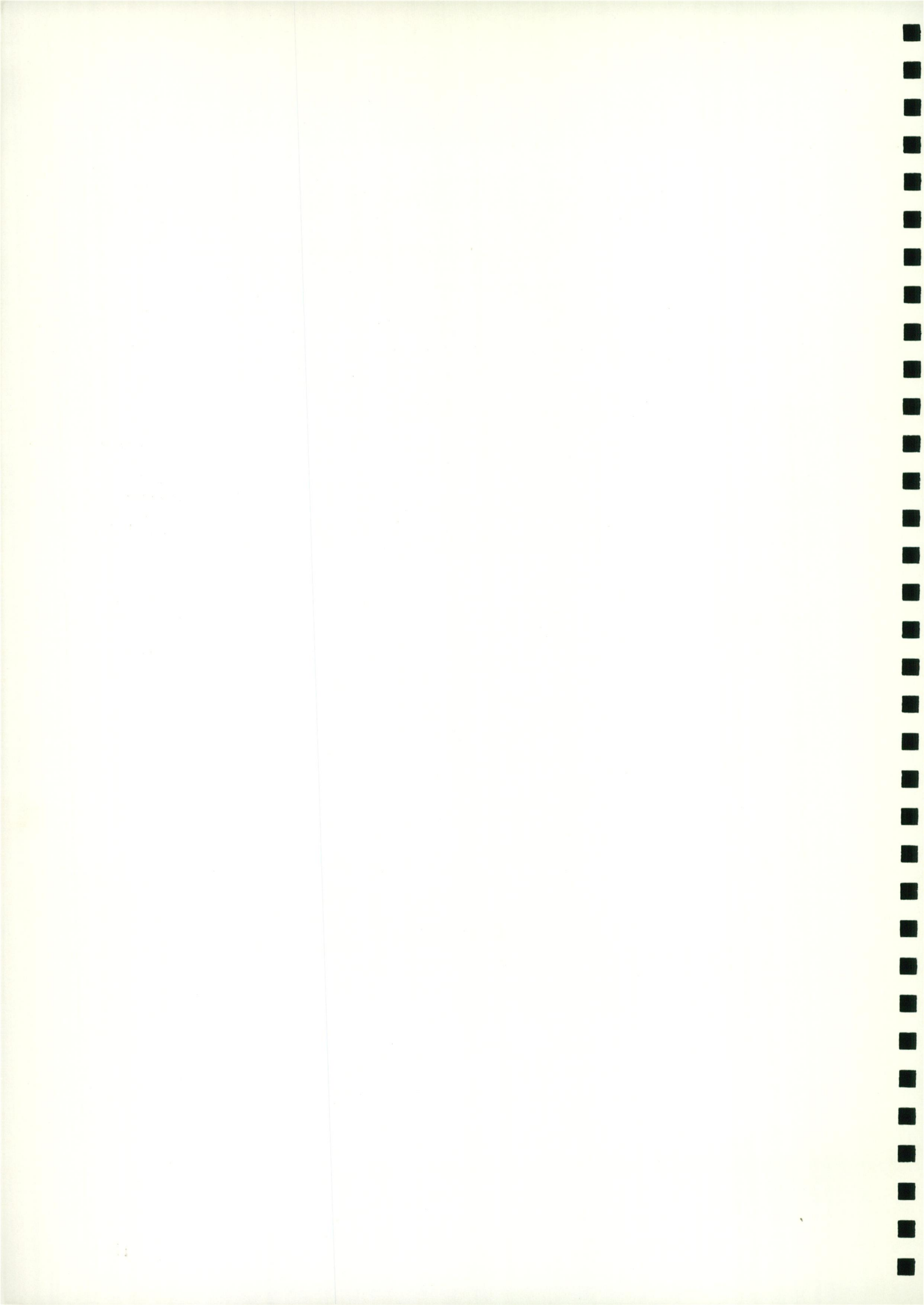
Part of the interest in seeing various different adaptations is in seeing the different ways in which the directors have tackled the works and have brought them into the realms of cinema. "If we are concerned with the art of filming Shakespeare and not merely with the craft of photographing actors, we must be sensitive to such varied and often complex relations between words and images." (Jorgens, 1991, p.20) Each director brings their own vision, and a new angle on old ideas, each using their own art form to bring something new to an older one. "As in poetry and in fiction, rooms, buildings, streets and landscapes may be saturated with ideals, associations, and emotions in film." (Jorgens, 1991, p.25)

Theatrical Space/Cinematic Space

As in theatre, spatial arrangements and relationships can become metaphoric. The way lines, shapes, textures, music and image construct into montages are used to develop the play's scenes in a manner that can become the artform in itself. According to Peter Weiss, Shakespeare's use of "free verse on the open stage enabled him to cut the inessential detail and irrelevant realistic action: in their place he could cram sounds and ideas, thoughts and images which make each instant a stunning mobile." (Weiss, 1966, pp.5-6) In film, so much of what Shakespeare communicates can be done visually by creative juxtaposition of image with image, like a montage. Jorgens called for a new way of looking on film adaptations of Shakespeare: "We must gauge the truth of the actors' performances and the power of the directors' aural and visual images, which often must be thought of as free translations, cinematic equivalents or re-creations rather than attempts at transparent presentations of Shakespeare's poetic and theatrical images." (Jorgens, 1991, p.34) According to Anthony Davies the difference between cinematic space and theatrical space is that "the cinema frame does not encapsulate action within a microcosm. It isolates a central element in the action, but the full extent of that action - and of the spatial and social contexts of that action - must be credible

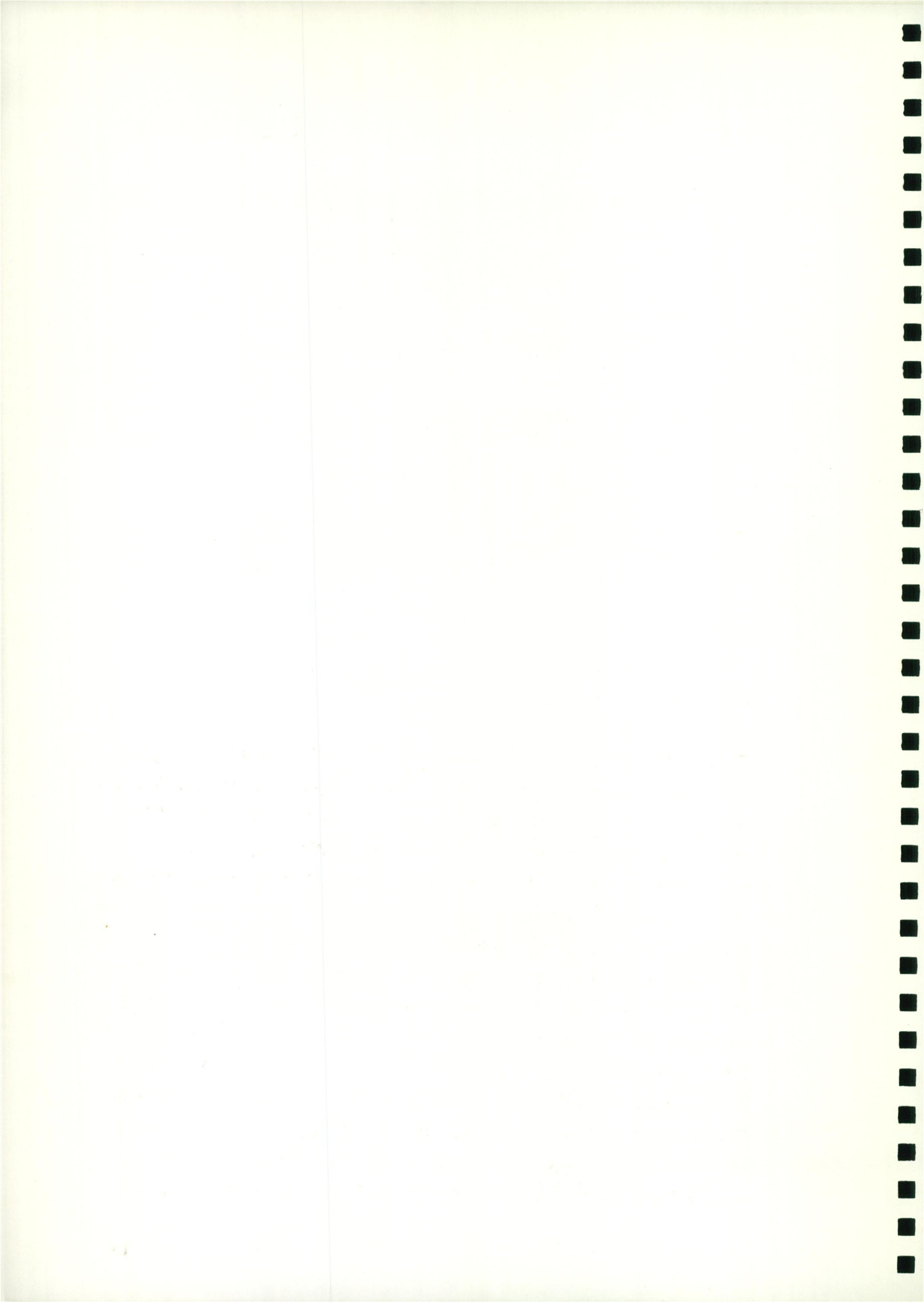


beyond the constraints of the frame” (Davies, 1988, p.6). Therefore the authority for the film is not a text, but the organisation and control of the cinematic image. When we watch a film it is made up of many little bits of information, placed in a certain order or structure from which we draw a visual and intellectual conclusion. Orson Welles believed in the film “as a poetic medium....poetry should make your hair stand up on your skin, should suggest things, evoke more than you see. The danger in cinema is that you can see everything, because it’s a camera. So what you have to do is to manage to evoke, to incant, to raise up things which are not really there.” (Jorgens, 1991, p.35) Theatre also does this, but with cinema it is compounded. After having considered the ability of cinema to portray Shakespeare in a new and exiting way, we can now look at certain films which attempt to achieve this often shaky transition from text, to theatre, to cinema.



Chapter 2

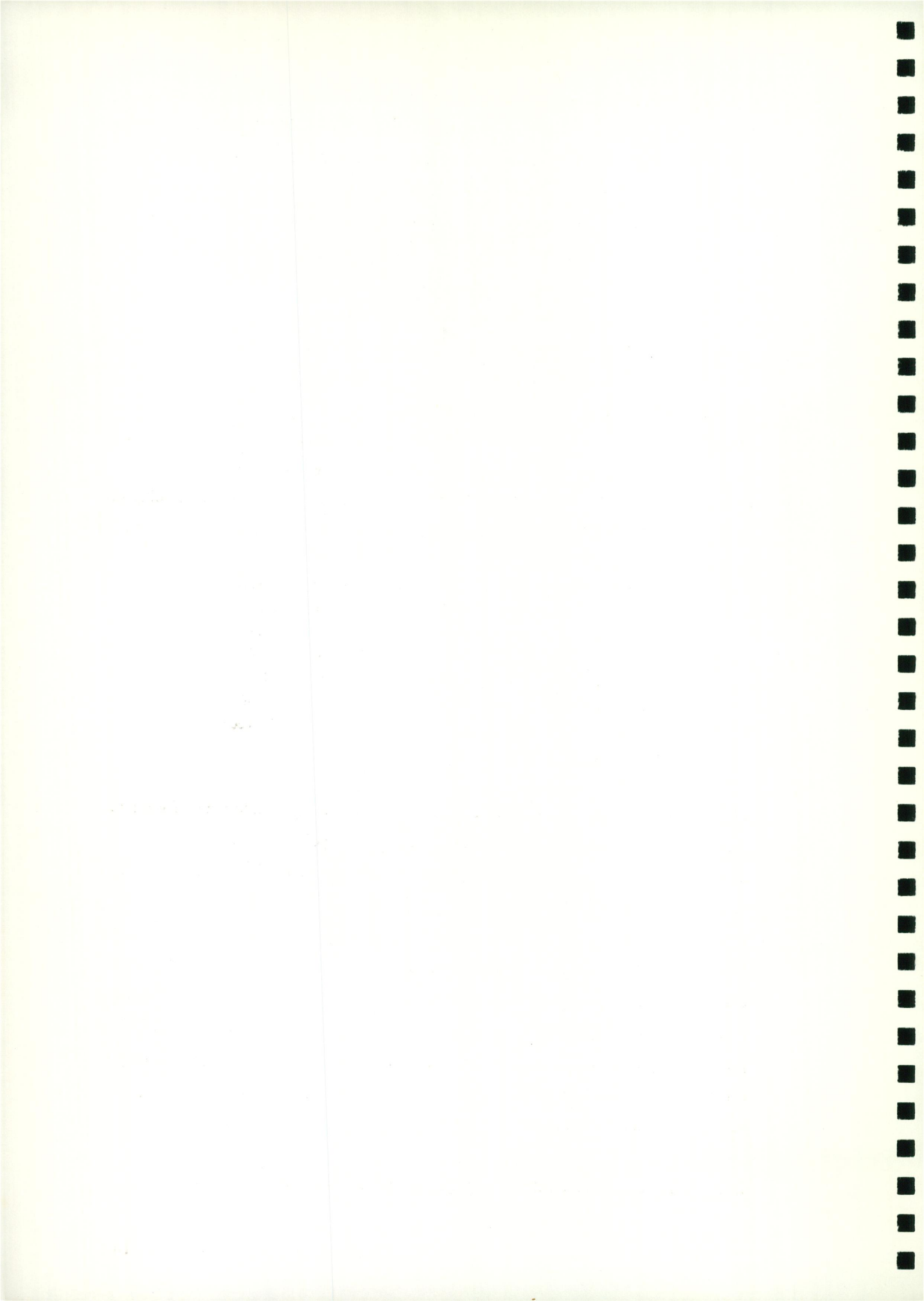
In this chapter I have taken a look at the films *Romeo & Juliet*, *Prospero's Books*, *Forbidden Planet*, *Angelic Conversations* and *The Tempest*. I have taken each as a case study. I chose these films, from a wide array of movies, because I felt they best illustrated how many of the theories of adaption which are discussed in the previous chapter. The fact that these films have been borne from a filmic form.



Case Studies

The Tempest

The late artist / director Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1980) is a low budget, highly personal and idiosyncratic treatment of Shakespeare's play of the same name. Jarman's *Tempest* along with Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (another adaptation of the same play), are probably the most personal and individualistic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to film. Its approach is one of youthful energy and contemporary analysis. To quote Samuel Crowl, "It shares, in the energy and direction of its approach to Shakespeare's text, the critical assumptions of the post-modernists mirroring ideas from such disparate camps as the deconstructionists and the cultural materialists." (Crowl, 1992, p.19) Crowl is referring to the way in which Jarman has made the film as being all within Prospero's dream, and deconstructing the basic text and looking at it from a modern day perspective as well as drawing aesthetically from different eras. In a way Baz Lurhmann's *Romeo & Juliet*, a film we will look at later, also does this. This version of *The Tempest* came as a breath of fresh air, particularly when we consider that at that time the only adaptations of Shakespeare were the stale B.B.C. productions. *The Tempest*, which is a ninety minute colour film, was shot almost entirely in



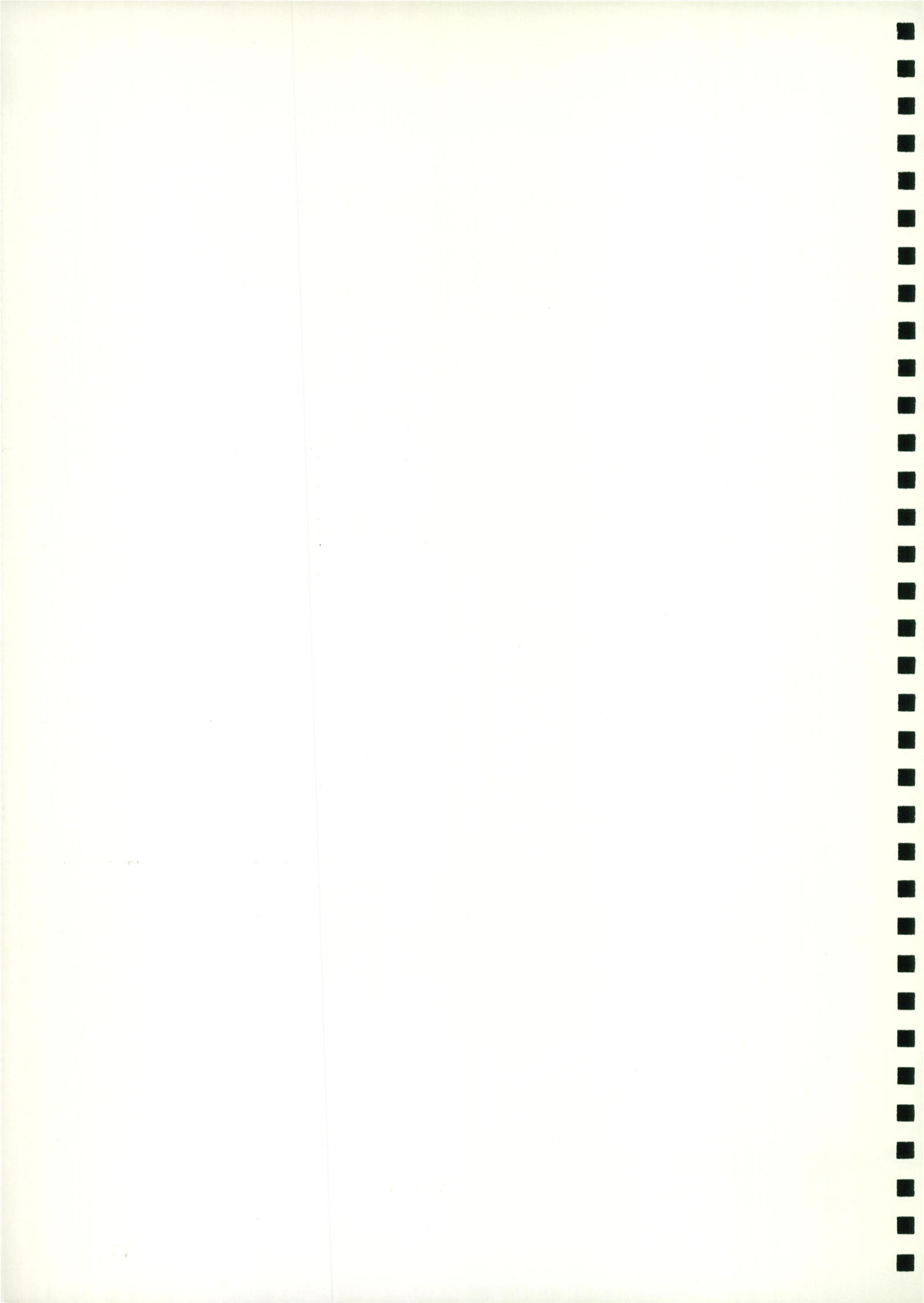
the interior of the Palladian Stoneleigh Abby in Warwickshire, and the exteriors on the Northumbrian coast near Banburgh Castle on a budget of £325,000, quite a small budget in film terms. Over half of the original text is used, but it has been rearranged, while the plot remains the same. Samuel Crowl sees the film as definitely being Jarman's re-creation of the text in his own individual style, while using elements of the work of filmmakers such as Cocteau, Welles, Kenneth Anger and Ken Russell.

Imprisonment, dreams and nightmares are the main themes being approached both visually and textually. The tempest itself comes from the nightmare of the main character, Prospero, with the cries of sailors echoing as Prospero tries to wake up. In this the opening scene, the images inter cut between Prospero tossing and turning in bed and shots of a boat being tossed about on a stormy sea. Sounds of heavy breathing are heard on the soundtrack as well as a group of mariner's shouts for help. This sound returns throughout the film any time Prospero is in contemplation or is summoning his spirit servant Ariel. This is used to remind us that this whole play/film is a product of Prospero's dreaming. According to Crowl:

This notion is rounded off neatly at the conclusion of the film which ends not with Prospero's epilogue [as it does in the play], but with 'Our revels are now ended', Jarman's means of under lining that this tempest has progressed from the nightmare of Prospero's revenge through his dream of Miranda [his daughter], and Ferdinand's [the king's son] meeting and marriage, to the gentle and generous realization that we all 'are made of such stuff/ as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep' (Crowl, 1992, p.78).

I feel this is showing how Jarman has set to change this old play into a new form and perspective. By setting the main scenes of the film in the old decaying rooms of Stoneleigh Abby, instead of an open island, Jarman "extends his framing nightmare, dream -sleep device into the heart of the Shakespearean tale and discovers there an imprisoning claustrophobia". (Crowl, 1992, p.78) He has used the method of cinema and its ability to frame things in a multiple of different ways, to draw out certain conclusions. The play itself is often considered to be about colonialism, a sense of entrapment. "Even his magic cannot make Jarman's Prospero a king of infinite space, for he progressively covers every inch of wall and floor space with chalked diagrams, astrological chartings, and geometrical designs and formulas, ever increasingly finding himself in a closed universe of his own devising." (Crowl, 1992, p.78) **see Fig.1**

Interestingly enough, the actor who plays Prospero, Heathcote Williams **see Fig.2**, was



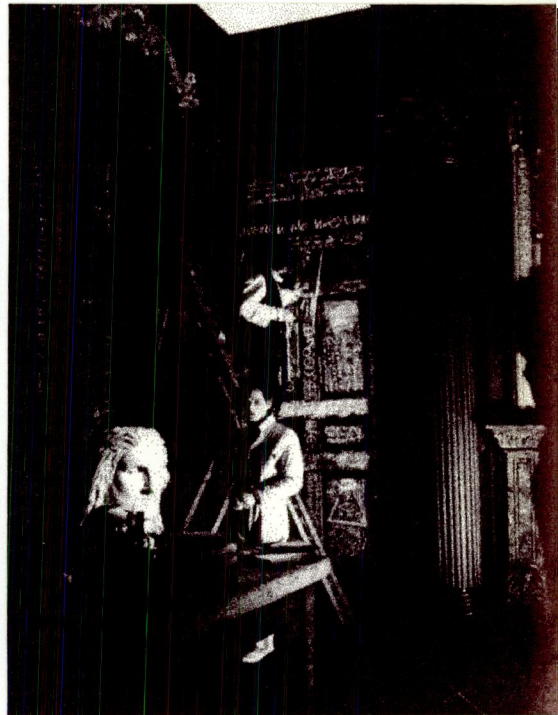


Fig. 1

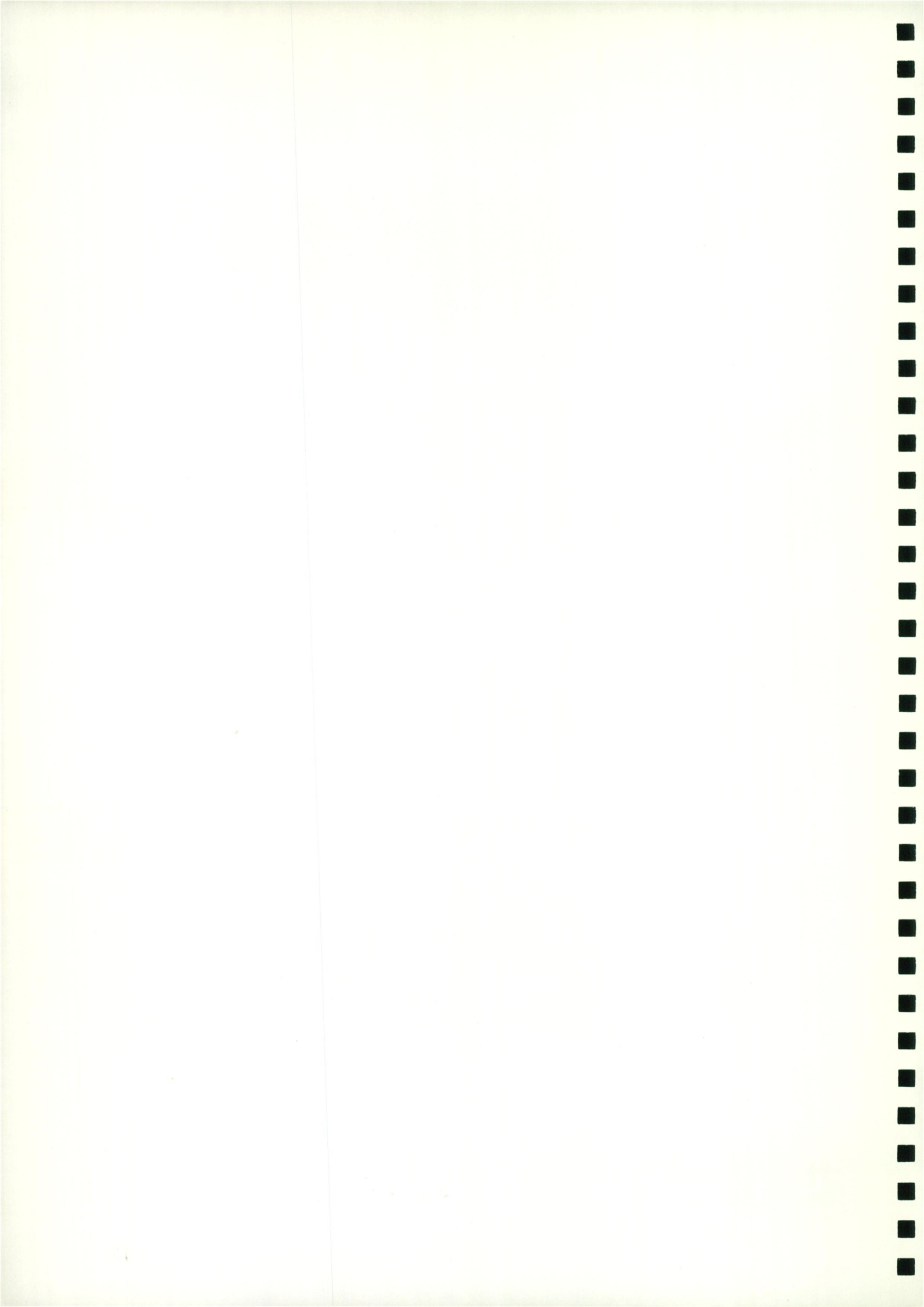
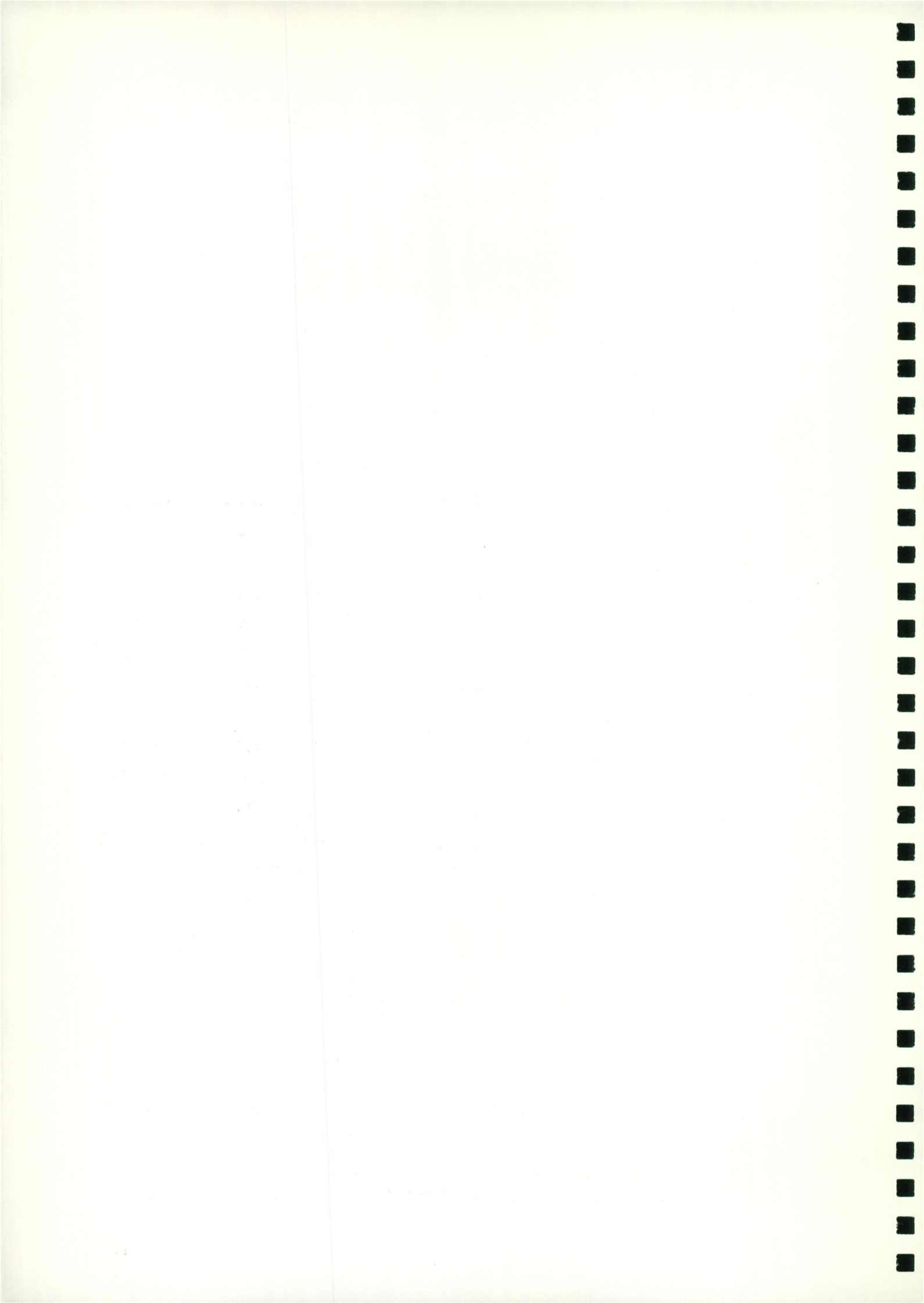




Fig. 2



in real life, a professional magician as well as being an actor. His character comes across like a strange mixture of mathematician and magician. According to Samuel Crowl, when one disappointed interviewer asked why Prospero did not break his magic staff like he does in the play, Jarman responded "Ah but you see he does break his piece of chalk".

Jack Birkett, who plays the slave Caliban, looks suitably mentally unstable, shaved bald with huge manic eyes and lunatic laughter. In one scene where Prospero is threatening the captive Ferdinand, Caliban stands in the background manically turning a hurdy-gurdy blaring out carnival music accompanied by his mad laughter. Often this character was played with serventile humility, whereas Birkett's performance comes as a nice change. Ariel, played by Karl Johnson **see Fig.3**, is played as a sad, quiet, intelligent gentleman.

Two scenes in the film are of Jarman's invention entirely. These are the ones for which the film is best known. The first portrays a silent flashback to the time before Prospero came to the island, with Sycorax as ruler. It shows the naked obese witch breastfeeding the spoilt Caliban with Ariel looking on in chains in the background **see Fig.4**. I personally thought this scene was just for shock value. The second scene involved a huge musical production number, with a chorus line of dancing sailors, all done to set off blues singer Elizabeth Welch's rendition of the old Harold Arlen song *Stormy Weather* **see Fig.5**

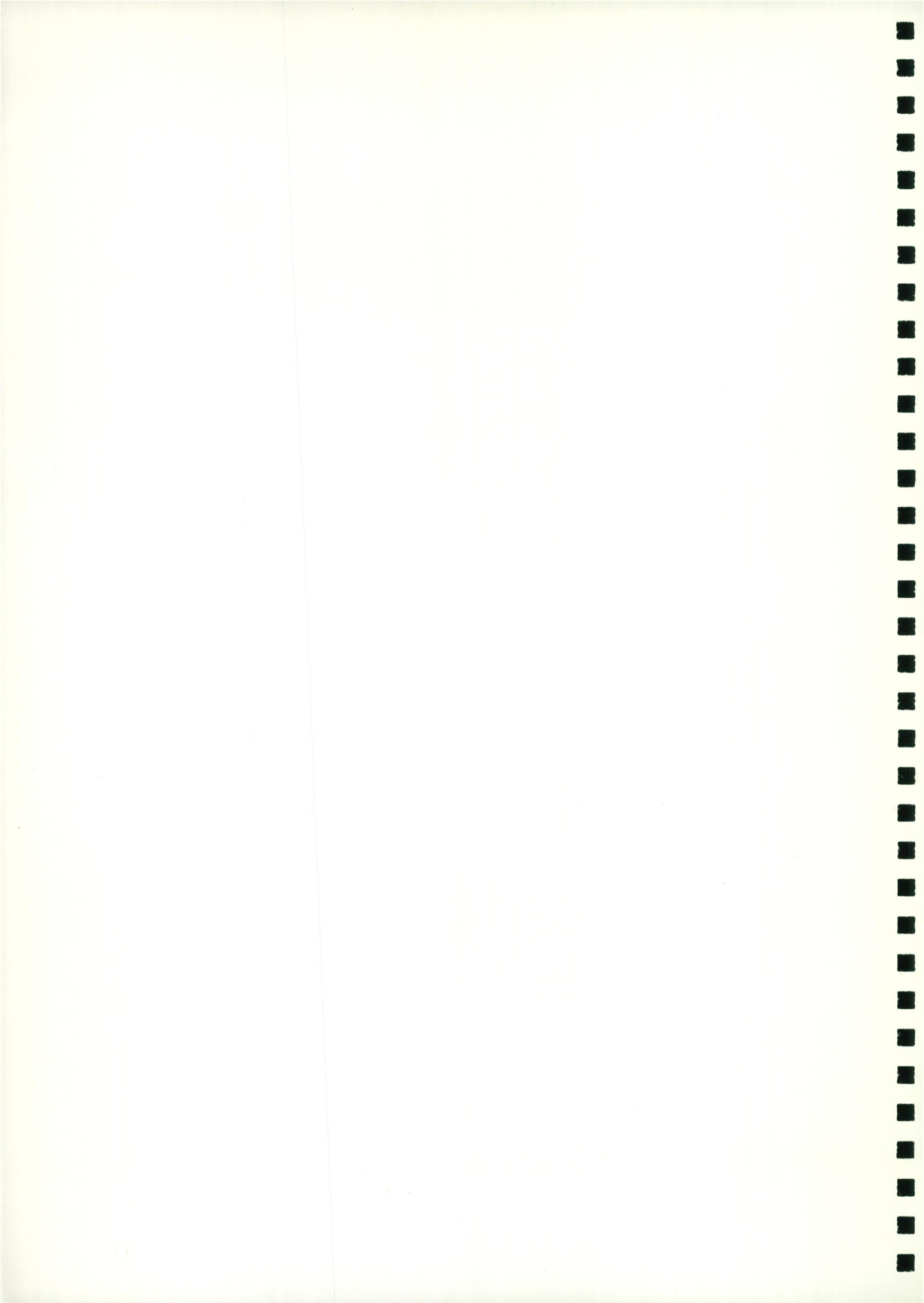
Samuel Crowl saw this scene as inspired. "It's refrain of 'keeps rainin' all the time' became a wonderful modern equivalent for Feste's corrective to Twelfth Nights mid-summer madness: 'the rain it raineth everyday'" (Crowl, 1992, p.79).

The only problem critics have seems to be that of the portrayal of Miranda, Prospero's daughter. She comes across as a punk, but seems to have very little relevance to the rest of the film.

Jarman who sees so much so well in his film, cannot translate Miranda into a modern idiom. In brazenly trying to avoid the sentimental, he allows his art here to become petulant rather than playful. His treatment of Miranda becomes, for all its attempts to be hip, curiously akin to the patterns I traced in the 1930's efforts to first capture Shakespeare on film in words and images. (Crowl, 1992, p.79)

According to Yolanda Sonnabend, the set designer and stage designer, this was intentional.

Miranda's ball dress was another bizarre concoction. A heady Hollywood 14th century, it nonetheless had a certain unity. Derek was ahead of his time.



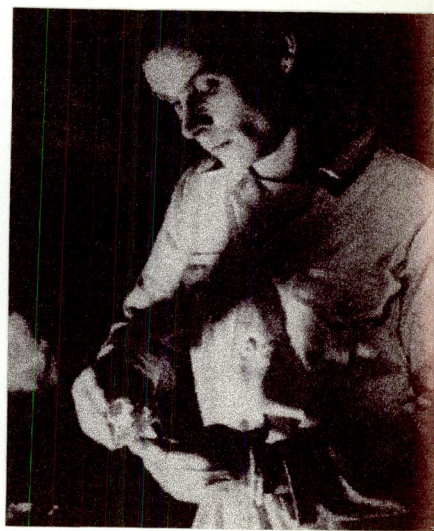


Fig. 3

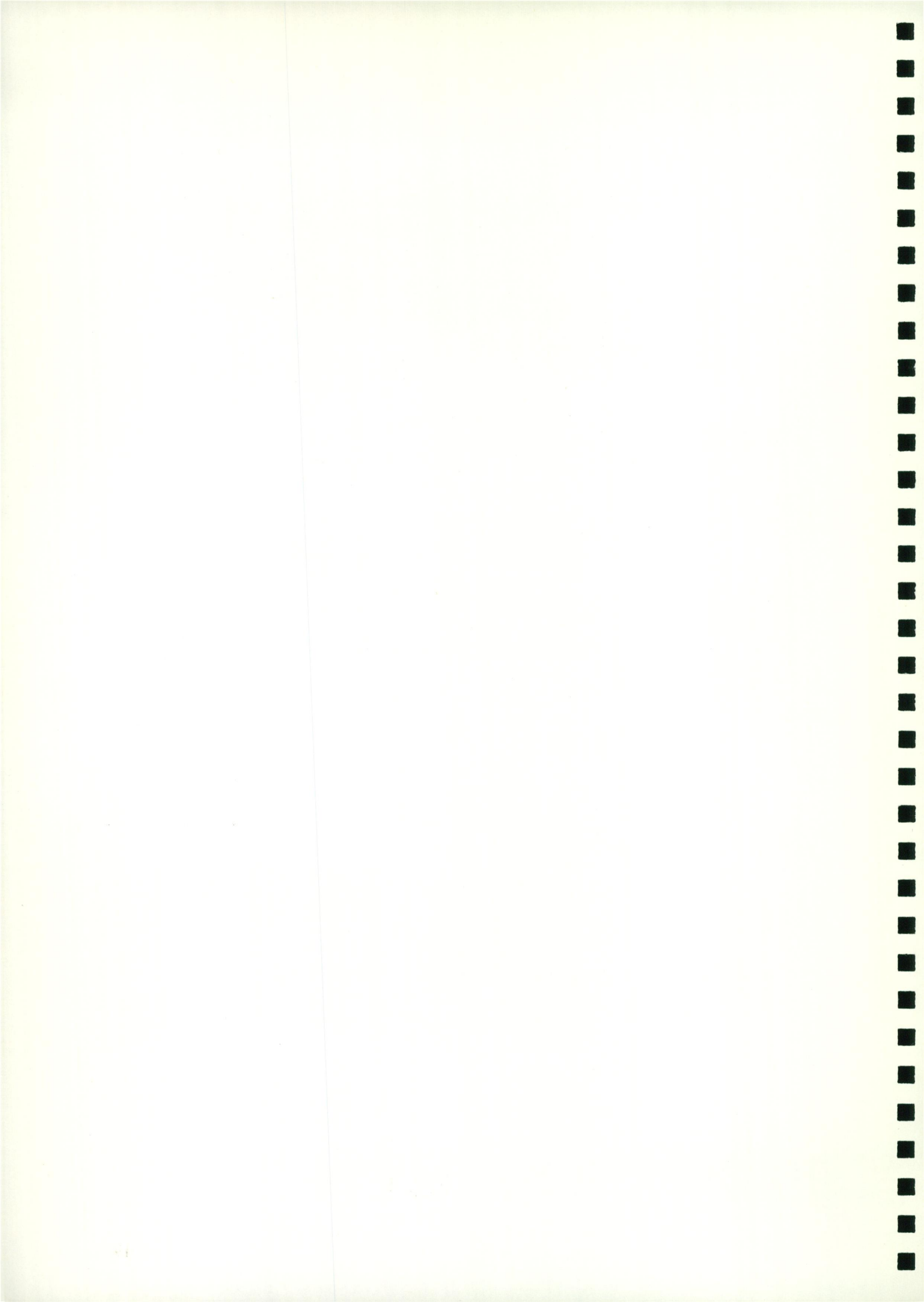




Fig. 4

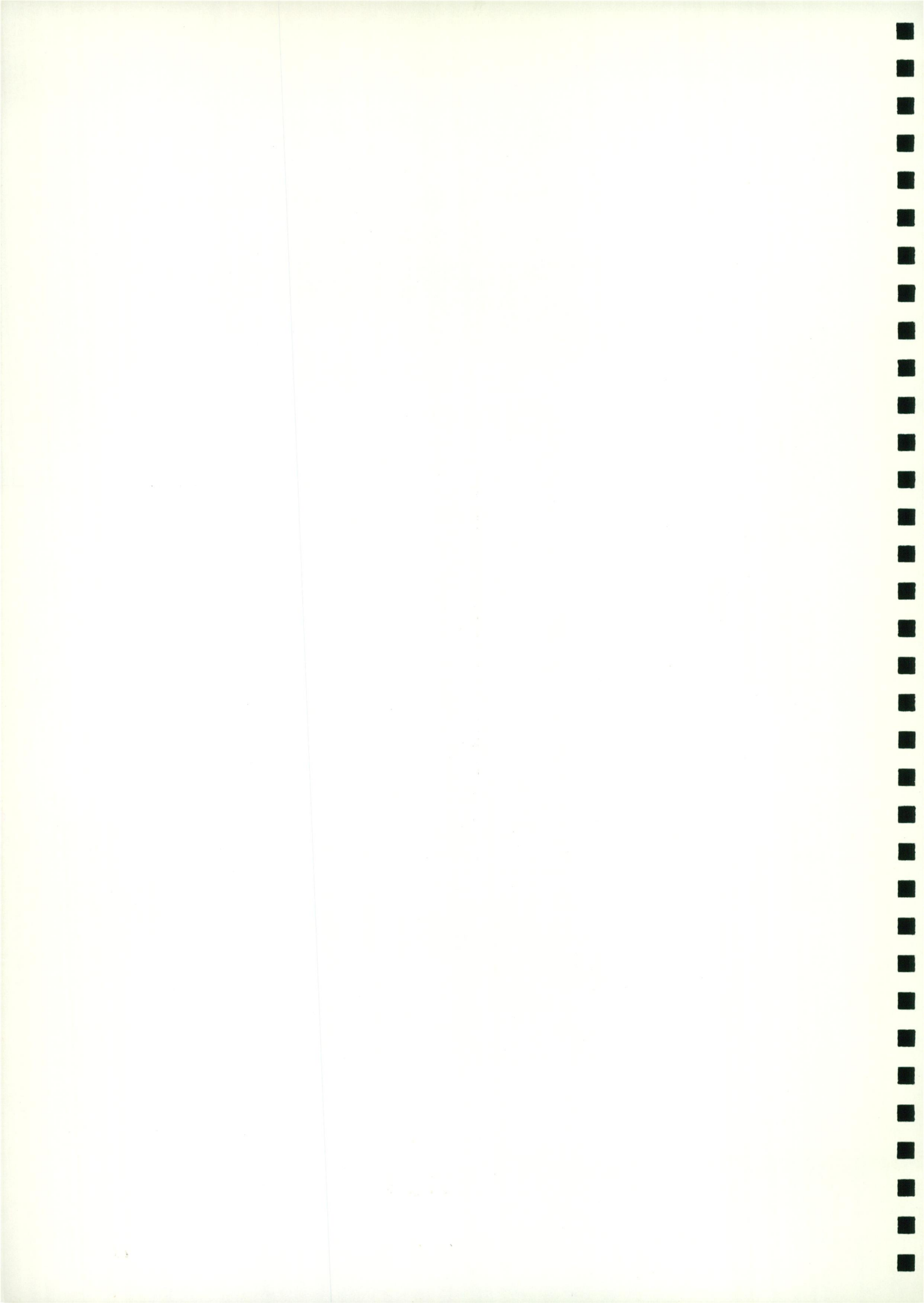
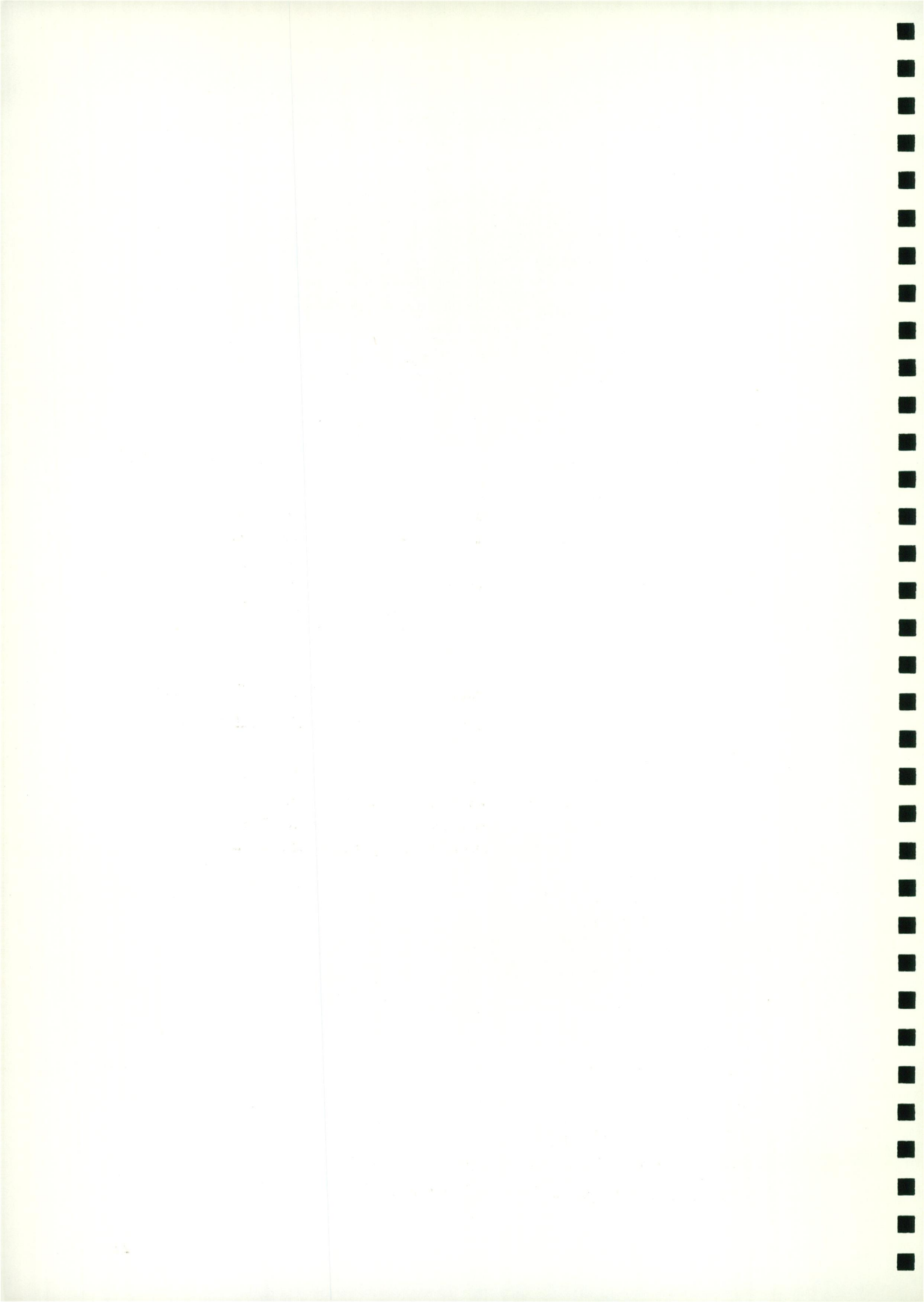




Fig. 5



publishing?

It is fashionable now to combine periods, psychologically and satirically. Derek anticipated this.....It was hardly a commercial venture, more like an adventure of the spirit- A young man's film of an old man's thoughts. (Sonnabend, 1996, pp.78-79) **see Fig.6**

Just as the designer took on the importance of the director's ideas, the director took on the importance of the design.

The key to a film can be its design - too often left to designers who dress the film in a kind of wrapping, like a doily around a birthday cake. Audiences see nothing beyond the surface, are willingly dazzled by the roses and silver balls, but when design is intergrated into the intentional structure and forms part of the dialectic, the work begins to sing. (Jarman, 1984, p.186)

This understanding of design and its ability to communicate is apparent in his use of setting and structure in *The Tempest*.

For *The Tempest* we needed an island of the mind, that opened mysterious -ly like chinese boxes: an abstract landscape so that the delicate description in the poetry, full of sound and sweet airs, would not be destroyed by any Martini Lagoons. The budget was only £150,000. Britain was the magic isle. I sailed as far away from tropical realism as possible. (Jarman, 1984, p.186)

Rather than going over the top in what has almost always been a lushly overdone magic play, Jarman has stripped it down into an almost psychological study of the minds of its characters.

Having decided on the format of a dream film, one which enabled me to take the greatest possible freedom with the text... Then the play was rearranged and opened up: the theatrical magic had to be replaced... The endless corridors and lost rooms of Stoneleigh suggested servants, romantic scholars with opium pipes, young girls with dresses spun from gossamer and frosted with shells and feathers. By the time filming was commenced, on the the fourteenth of Februrary, we were living in another world. (Jarman, 1984, p.188)

The whole film is very dark, intentionally done so by lighting designer Peter Middelton. "The film is constructed extremely simply with masters, mid-shots, and close-ups. The camera hardly ever goes on a wander. This is deliberate, as I've noticed that if one deals with unconventional subject matter, experimental camera work can push a film over into incoherence"(Jarman, 1984, p.194)

"In *The Tempest* we paint pictures, frame each static shot and allow the play to unfold in them as within a proscenium arch". (Jarman, 1984, p.194) When *The Tempest*

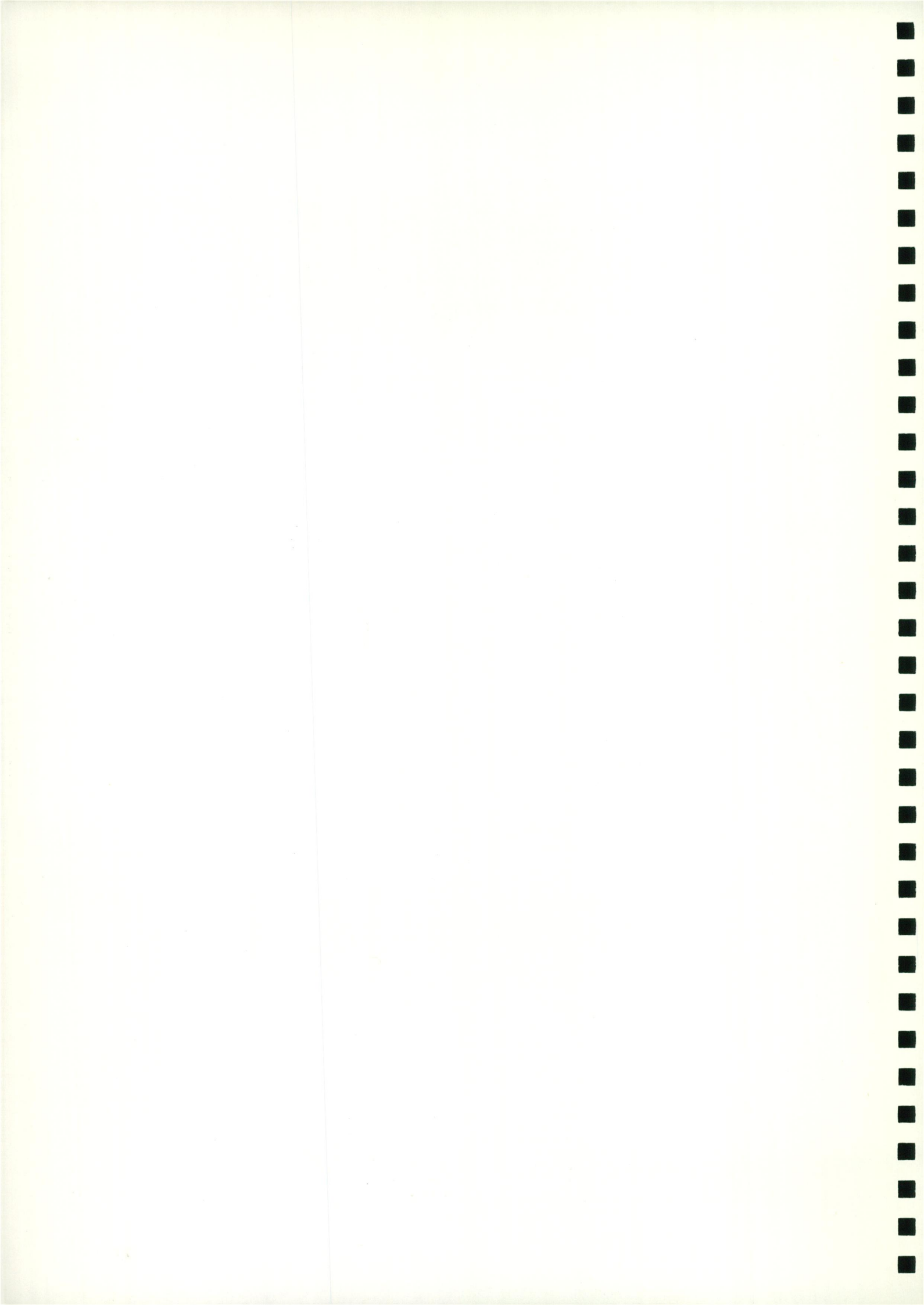
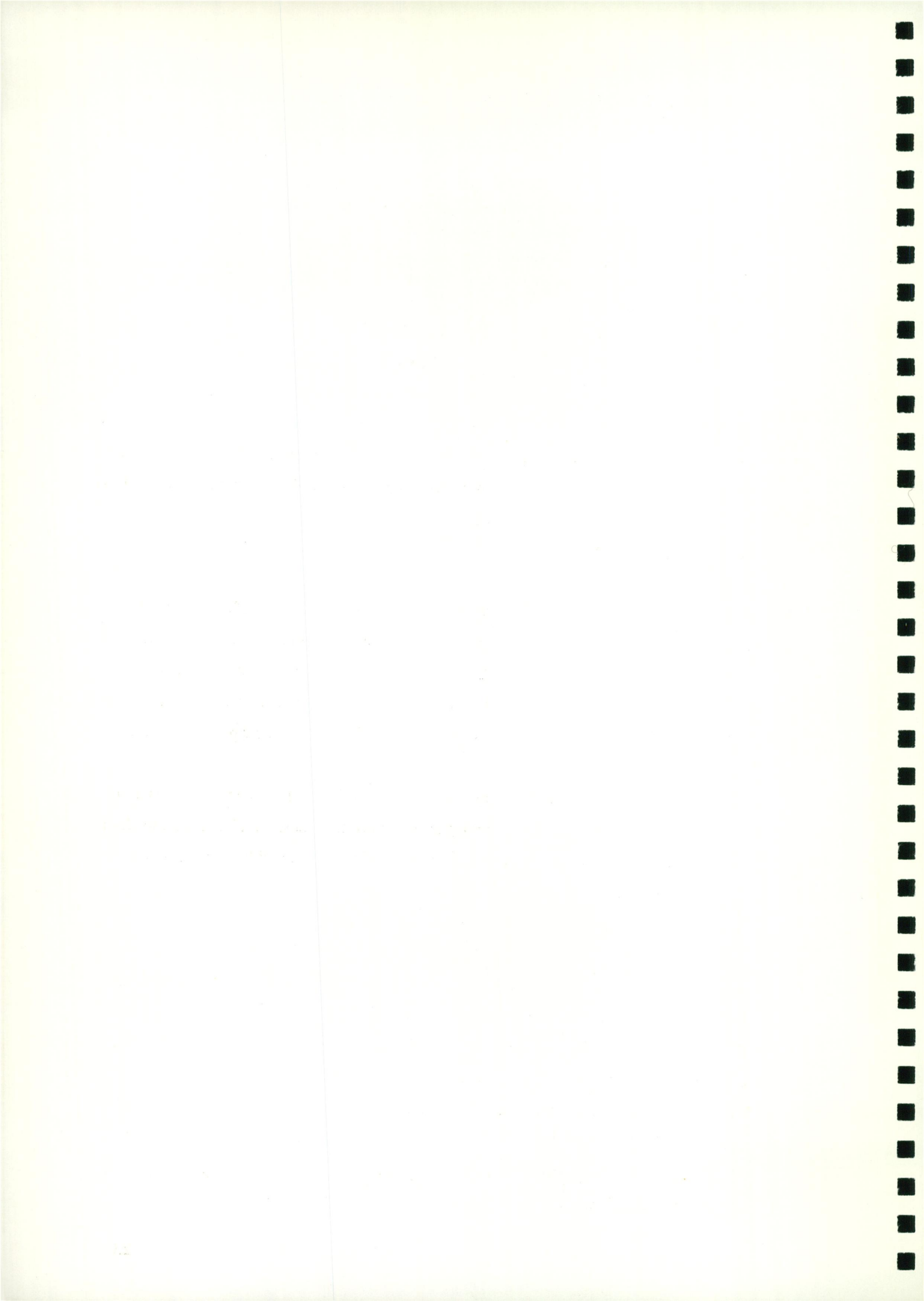




Fig. 6



opened at the Edinburgh film festival it got a good reception; it was a breath of fresh air. Unfortunately it did not go down too well in America. Derek Jarman's reasoning for this was:

The reaction in America was very different. Many saw it as deliberately wilful and the *New York Times* mounted an attack which destroyed it in the cinemas there. In such a fragmented culture messing with Will Shakespeare is not allowed. The Anglo-Saxon tradition has to be defended and putting my scissors in was like an axe-blow to the last redwood.
(Jarman, 1984, p.206)

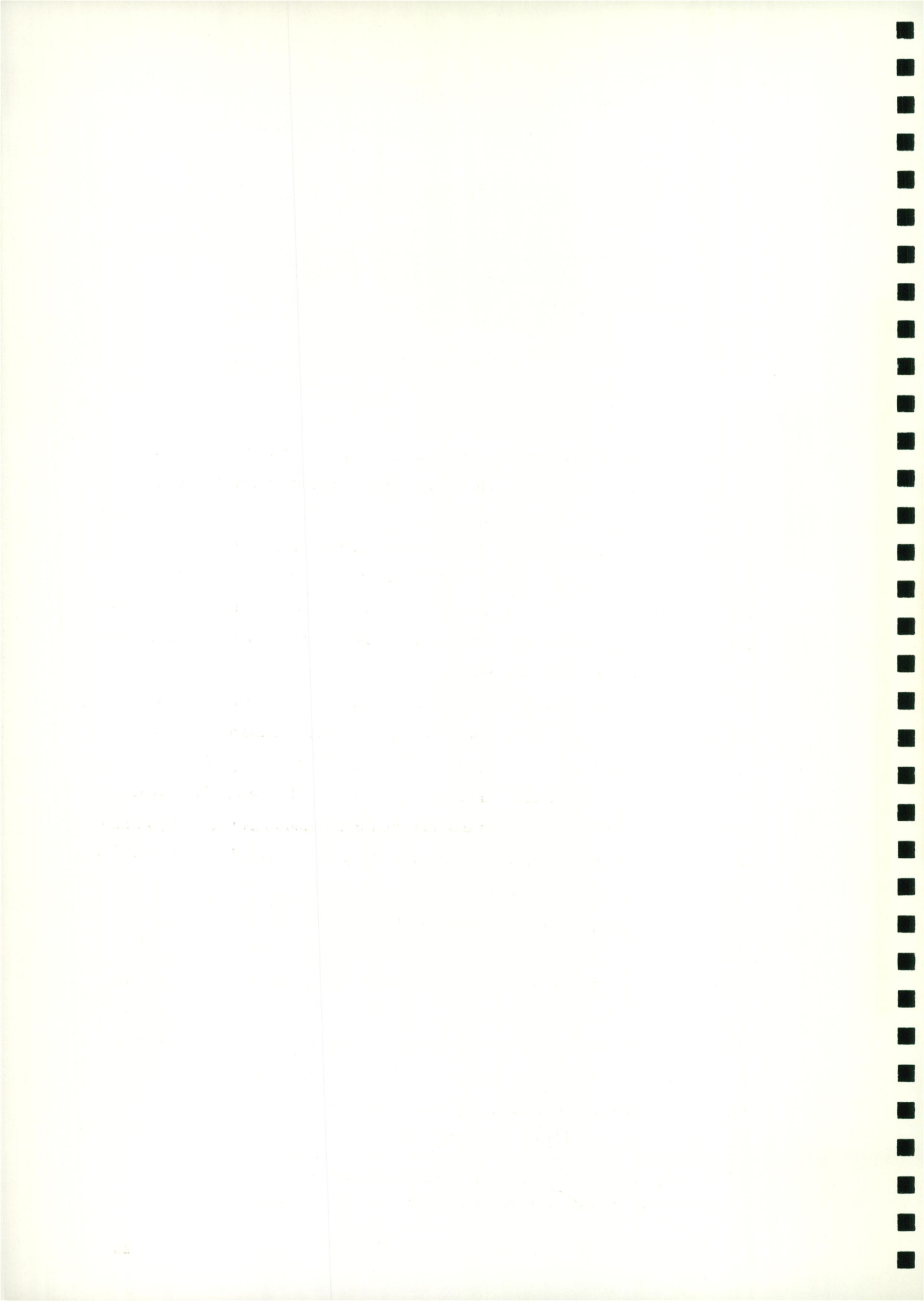
The Tempest is not Jarman's only rendition of Shakespeare's work. He obviously had a great interest in the playwright's work. "*The Tempest* obsesses me. I would like to make it again , would be happy to make it three times. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well, but that will wait as the resources needed are greater. The Russians have done the *Lear* and *Hamlet* , but the *Dream* waits to be put on film". (Jarman, 1984, p.203)

Angelic Conversations

Jarman also did *Angelic Conversations* , another very personal film. It is based on fourteen Shakespeare love sonnets rather than a play. The sonnets themselves are famous for their mystery. Most of them are addressed to a male friend whose identity is still argued over by scholars. The first publication of the sonnets was dedicated to a certain "Mr. H". Jarman brings the sonnets in the film back to their probable homosexual roots.

He presents them in a dreamlike way, by constantly shifting landscapes, images and light. Images are abstracted, flowing to the rhythm of the lines, which are read by Judi Densch. "The effect is at once disturbing and soothing, in tune with the poetry and resolutely modern: a revelation, in fact, for anyone who still thinks of Shakespeare as having a musty, schoolbook aura." (<http://152.175.1.205/c1> Jarman.html)

Jarman's films are often quite challenging. They are frequently revisionist, with him looking back at history with a modern- day viewpoint, thereby turning it into something new. I feel this is needed to get something from the work of Shakespeare. "Our culture is backward looking and always has been. What interested me is that Elizabethan England is our cultural Arcadia, as Shakespeare is the essential pivot of our culture." (Murray, 1993, p.105) Therefore it makes sense to study the work of Shakespeare in a new and fresh way. Shakespeare is undoubtedly an important part of our culture, and his work is there for us to gain from. I think the best way is to



approach his work with freshness and relevancy. “A movie method need not be ratified because Shakespeare did the same thing. Any new understanding should potentially illuminate in both directions.” (Braudy, 1976, p.12) Film has learned a lot from theatre and Shakespeare. Why not let theatre and Shakespeare get something from film.

The methods of the western, the musical, the detective film, or the science fiction film are also reminiscent of the way Shakespeare infuses old stories with new characters to express the tension between past and present. All pay homage to past works even while they vary their elements and comment on their meaning. (Braudy, 1976, p.108)

Forbidden Planet

The actual work of Shakespeare is in itself, adaptations of older stories. He took what already existed and brought them a new slant. Film, I feel, can do this also, with Shakespeare as the base. The best example of this has to be the film *Forbidden Planet* (1956), by Fred Wilcox. It is what could be described as a sci-fi B movie. The events happen several centuries in the future, with humanity having achieved the ability to go into ‘inner-space’, a point which led many film critics to apply a Freudian reading to the film. What interests me though is the fact that it draws a lot of its inspiration from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* .

It tells the story of a party sent into inner-space to find out what has happened to a group who have attempted to colonise a planet known as Altair, about four hundred and twenty years before. When the party lands they are warned off by Captain Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), leader of the original expedition. He says he is the only member of the party left alive and needs no help. He turns out to live in the lap of luxury surrounded by technology. His daughter Altairia, played by Ann Francis and whom Captain Morbius has been trying to keep away from men, turns up unexpectedly and falls for one of the spacemen, Commander Adams, played by a young Leslie Nielsen. **see Fig.7**

After a while, a monster starts to kill the men one by one. It turns out the monster is a product of Captain Morbius’s subconscious which is rallying against the loss of his daughter to the Commander. It has become a monster from the ID (the sub-conscious) through using a machine that is known as his ‘brain booster’. Soon all is resolved and they all return to earth. It was Kingsley Adams who pointed out:

this film has strong structural and thematic connections with Shakespeare’s *Tempest* - especially in its distrust of advanced science and its influence on human beings. In *Forbidden Planet* science has advanced to a point at which it has become the equivalent to Prospero’s occult study. Morbius has

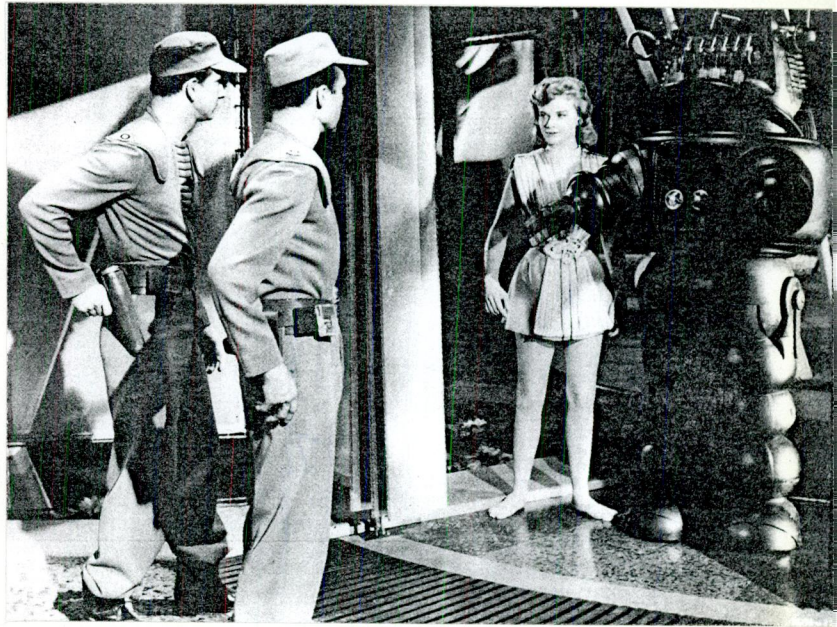


Fig. 7

entered the realm of forbidden knowledge, both sexually and intellectually, a realm both enticing and fearful to characters such as Baron Frankenstein. (Tarrett, 1995, p.330)

We can equate the character of Captain Morbius to that of Prospero, his daughter Altaira to that of Miranda, Commander Adams to that of Ferdinand and servant of Morbius Robby the Robot to that of Caliban, Prospero's servant. It is interesting to note that this film that drew inspiration from a Shakespearean play has in turn preceded to influence films such as *2001*, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* .

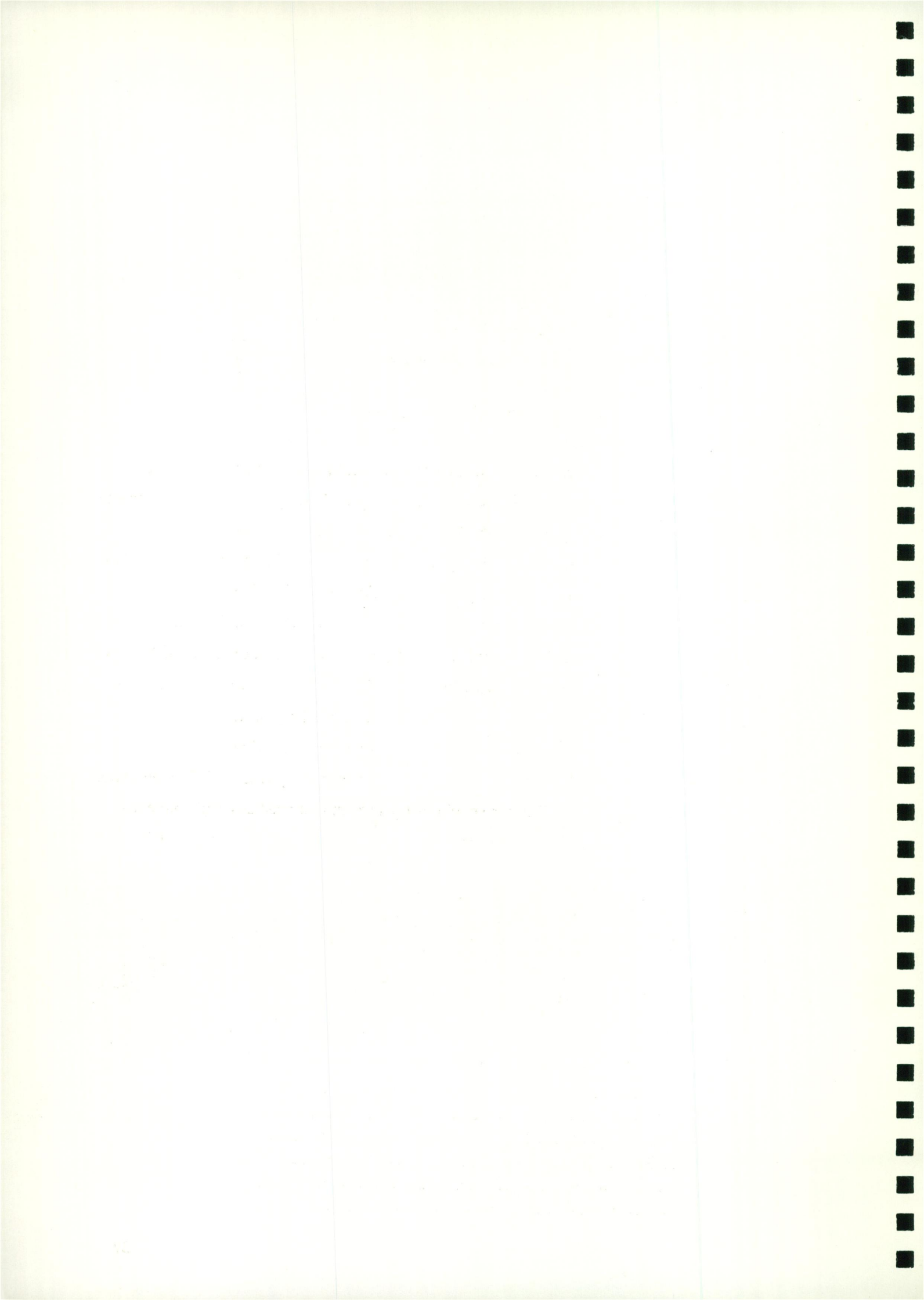
I am sure many traditionalist critics would reel in shock at such an analogy of Shakespearean drama with science fiction, but when we read Geoffrey Wagner's writing on adaptations, one might be swayed. To judge whether or not a film is a successful adaptation of a novel", or in this case a play,

is to evaluate the skill of its makers in striking analogous attitudes and in finding rhetorical techniques... analogy cannot be indicated as a violation of a literary original since the director has not attempted (or has only minimally attempted) to reproduce the original. (Wagner, , 1975, pp.222-31)

Prospero's Books

Another director, Peter Greenaway, has done a version of *The Tempest*, one very different from the others, even though Greenaway and Derek Jarman are often mentioned in the same breath. Like Jarman, he is also a painter turned director. Greenaway is a very controversial director, who has often avoided traditional forms of filmmaking, mainly, rejecting standard narrative structural forms. Many of his films deal with representations of sex and violence, which as often as not have caused uproar. His films are highly visual, full of symbols and detail. Many detractors have called his work pretentious or candy for the eyes. However, Greenaway has often compared cinema to opera. This is obvious in his film *Prospero's Books* , his version of *The Tempest*, which involves contemporary dancers and opera. Greenaway has said that cinema has always fed off other artforms: theatre, the novel and also painting. But he has always wanted to use cinema as a medium in itself.

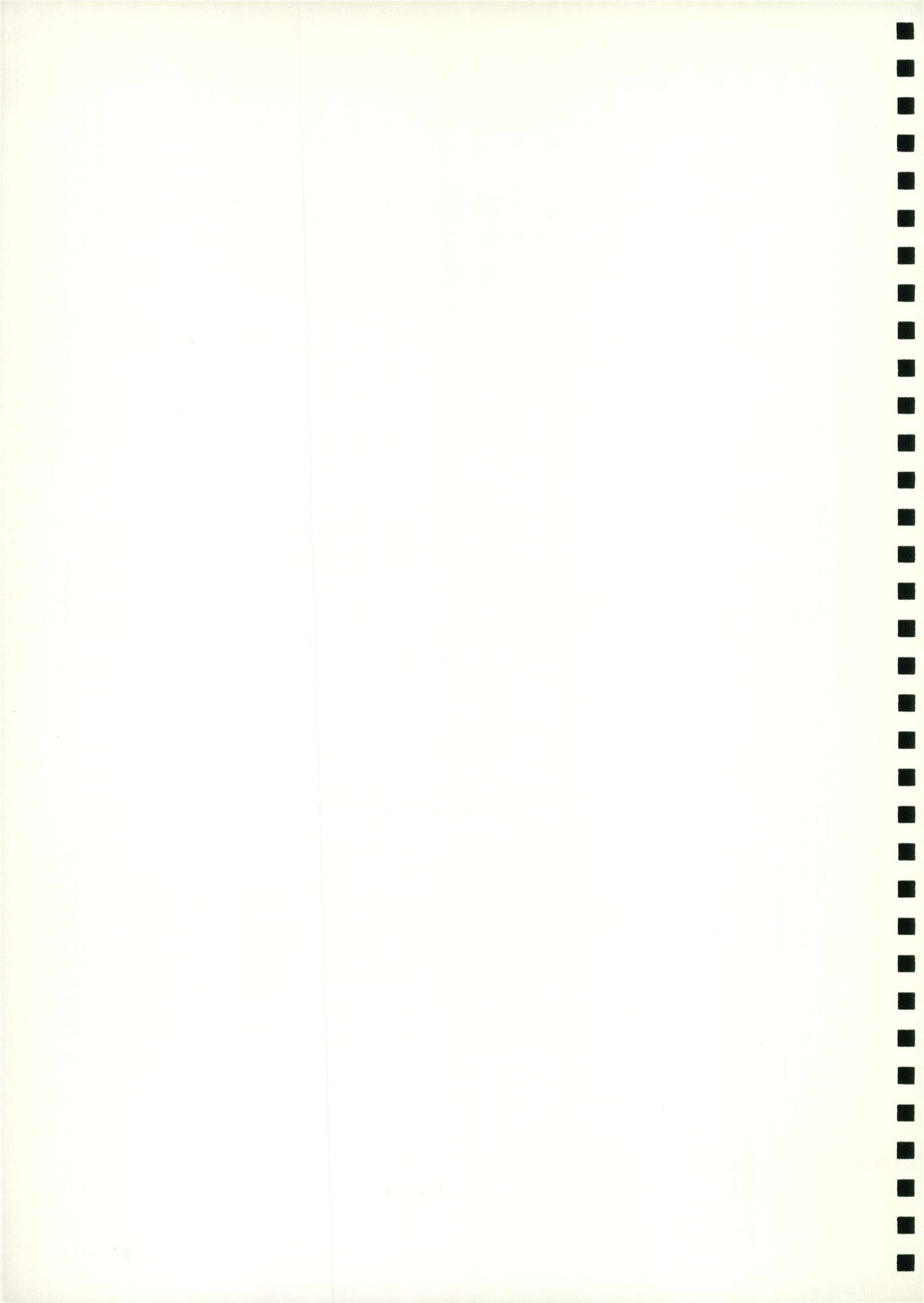
I wanted to make films that were not illustrations of already existing text, or vehicles for actors, or slaves to a plot, or an excuse to provide material for any emotional catharsis... My ambitions were to see if I could make films that acknowledged cinema's artifices and illusions, and demonstrate that however fascinating that they were- artifices and illusions. (Wood,



Greenaway's film *Prospero's Books* is based on the Shakespearean *Tempest*, but Greenaway sees it only as a starting point. Perhaps Greenaway borrows from Eric Rohmer's essay "Celluloid and Marble": "If the ambitions of the new art were confined to producing a skimmed version of what its elders have brought to perfection, I wouldn't really give much for it..." (Woods, 1996, p.79) In other words, what's the use in making a mere rendition of a play on film, when it brings nothing new and exciting to it. Greenaway's film definitely brings new things to an old play.

In this very rich film, Caliban's island is a recreation of eighteenth century English Shakespeare illustrations. Architecture is very prominent, as with most Greenaway films either recreated as sets or in model form. In this film Greenaway has made his own reading into the play and has gone on from there. "Because it has two texts, Greenaway's own account of the books and Shakespeare's script, there is a comparable peripheralisation in *Prospero's Books*. *The Tempest* is lost like a lead vocal too far down in the mix, but not lost sufficiently to be replaced, a starting point left behind". (Woods, 1996, p.86) I think this is a good explanation of the film. The outlines of Shakespeare's plot remain dimly visible. Prospero, Duke of Milan, and his daughter Miranda, are victims of a conspiracy led by Prospero's brother and the King of Naples. Set adrift on a rotting boat, Prospero with his daughter and books eventually land on an enchanted island. On this new island Prospero, with the help of his magic books, sets up a magical kingdom with himself as king with servants, including two original inhabitants of the island, the good spirit Ariel and an extremely resentful Caliban. After twelve years on the island Prospero conjures up a storm that washes up his old enemies onto the island. **see Fig.8** Prospero is looking for vengeance, but in the end forgives. Miranda marries the King's son Ferdinand, and all is reconciled. Greenaway, instead of telling this story straight off, instantly confronts us with a torrent of visuals and sounds accompanied with neoclassical sets, gyrating dancers, computer generated video images and Elizabethan verse read by John Guilgud's character Prospero. Guilgud speaks almost every single line for all the characters. The basic idea of the film is that Prospero is the author as well as the main character of the play, which is actually being written in front of us throughout the film. All the other characters are his creation, a part of his imagination. To quote Herbert Klein,

All the other characters are his creation and he gives each his own voice - a technique possible only in the film - or at least, he does so up to the crucial turning point. He is, at the same time, a participant of the drama and an observer, creator and creature, and a creative artist as well as a created character. In creating a work of art, he creates a world and thus



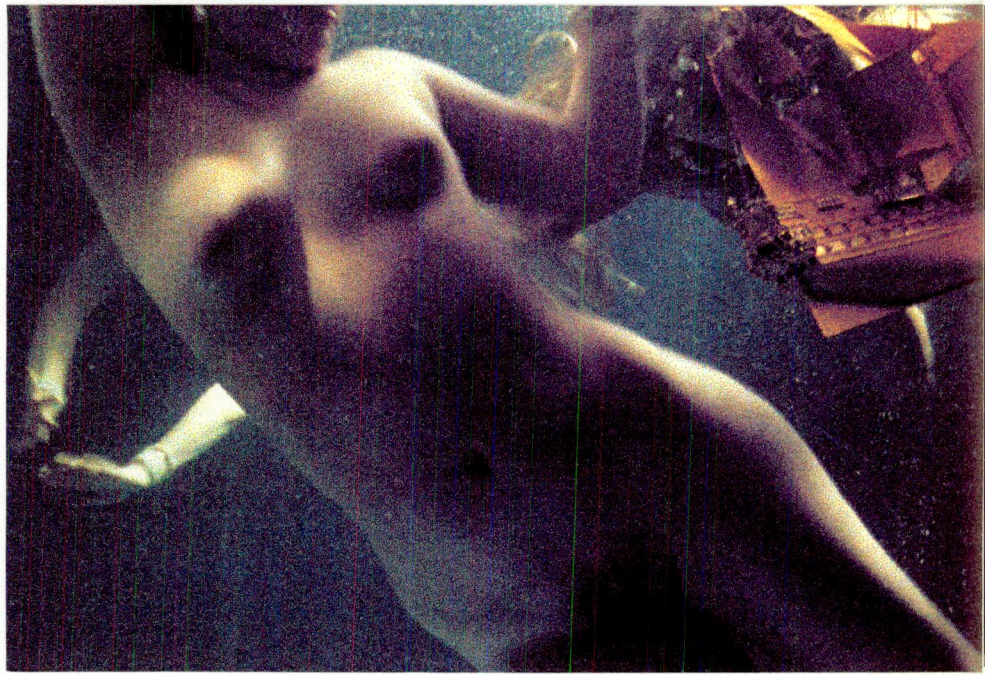
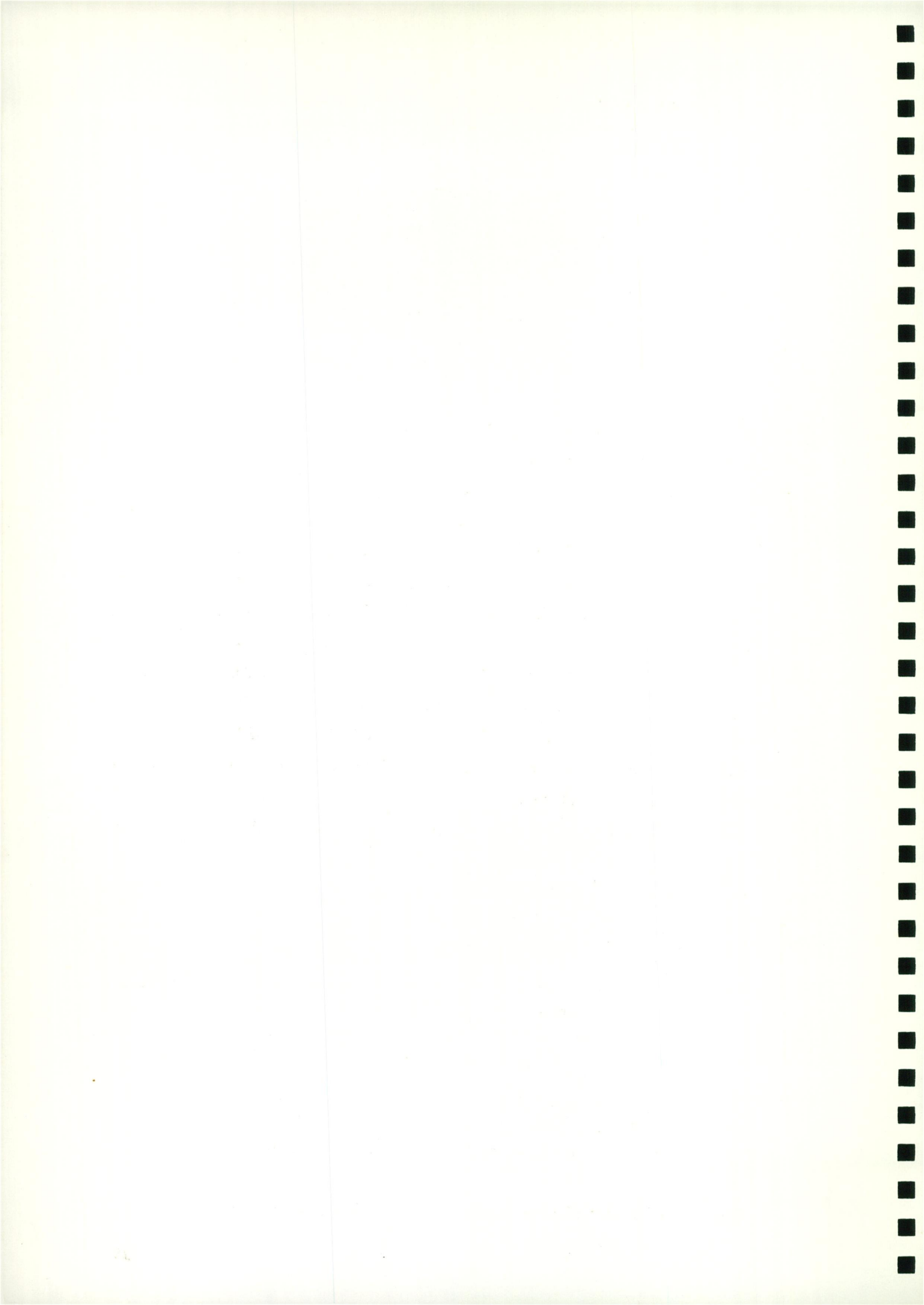


Fig. 8



changes it and in creating himself, he thereby becomes a different person. This apparent paradox is solved at the end of the film at a self-referential meta-level because, just as in the theatre version, Prospero addresses the audience directly and reveals himself as a character of fiction who has, however, by this very action, transcended the barriers between fiction and reality, thus challenging the viewer to rethink his own role with regard to reality and to the self. (Klein, 1996, p.1)

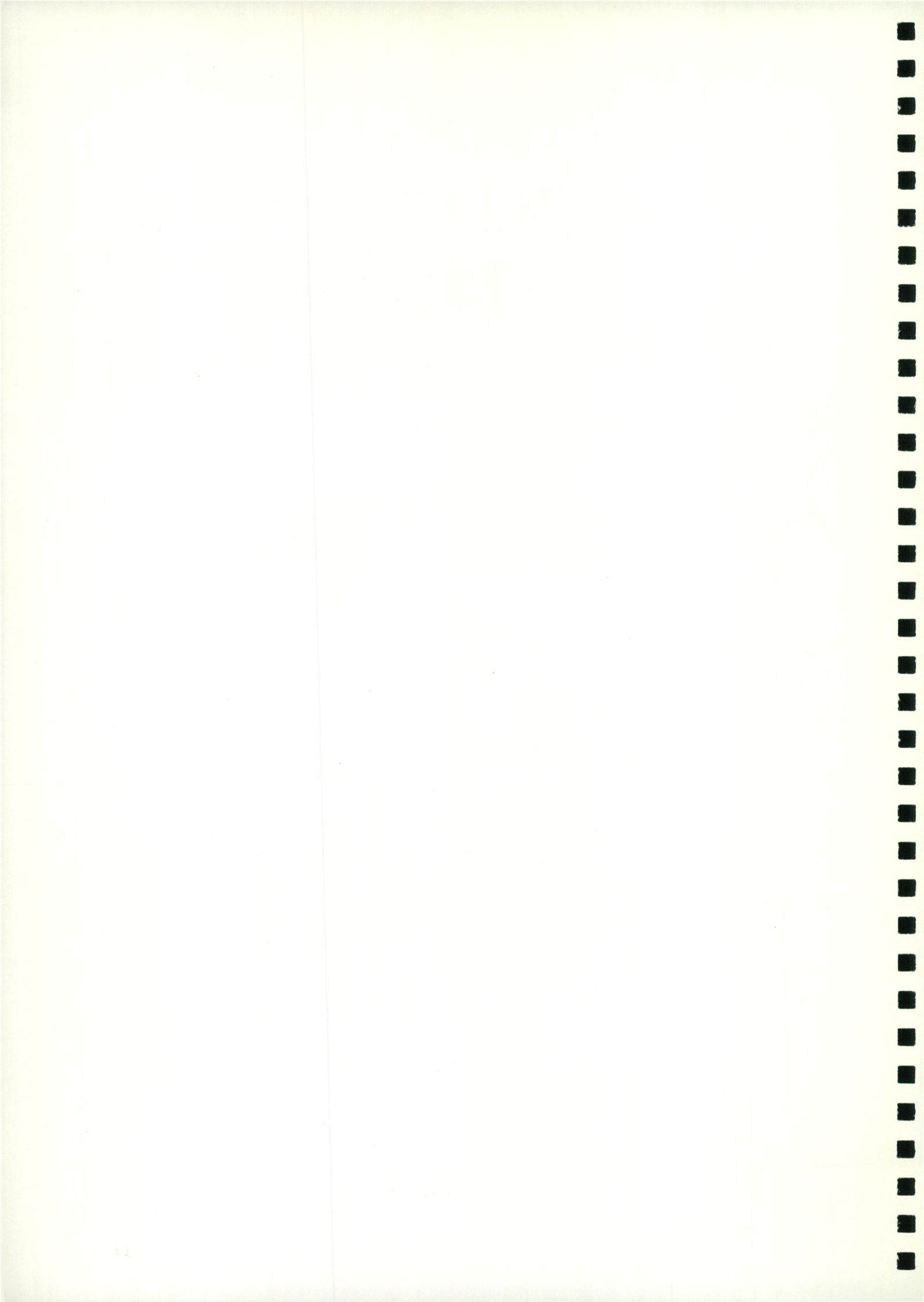
We are constantly reminded of Prospero's role by being shown shots of a pen writing out the spoken words, or hearing the sound of the pen scratching them on paper.

Greenaway has made Prospero's books the hub of the whole film. **see Fig.9** In this version there are twenty four books. Books and words are referred to everywhere in the film. "It represents the very essence of Shakespearean theatre. For that theatre relied first and foremost on the word"(Steinmetz, 1995, p.109). For the film, Greenaway actually created Prospero's library, books he thought the ex-duke of Milan would actually have and need **see Fig.10** : *A Book of Mirrors* with mirrored pages, a *Book of Mythologies*, a *Book of Water* illustrated by da Vinci style drawings, an *Atlas Belonging to Orpheus*, with maps of hell, a *Harsh Book of Geometry* **see Fig.11**, *The Book of Colours* **see Fig.12**, a *Book of Travellers Tales*, *The Book of the Earth*, a *Book of Architecture and Other Music*, a *Book of Love* and a *Bestiary of Past, Present and Future Animals...* "Prospero's books, they are magic, animated objects in which the boundaries between words and images and that thing words and images stand for or represent have been blurred or abolished". (Woods, 1996, p.102) Greenaway is seemingly more interested in the visual nature of the books than any exploration into the themes arising from the play.

Greenaway did not shoot this film on celluloid but on videotape. Also he did not use the standard picture format for cinema screens, but what is known as HDTV format. By using this format, Greenaway was enabled to manipulate freely the images with the aid of the Quantel computer *Paint Box*. With the *Paint Box* , previously recorded images can be altered, linked and merged. Many of the animated features of the books were constructed this way by changing, combining and superimposing various details.

Film is no longer restricted to mere reproduction of once- recorded images: with this technique new images are created and the filmmaker becomes a painter. The old becomes new, Shakespeare becomes Prospero - a cycle whose individual parts seamlessly overlap, intermingle and bring forth entirely new combinations. The linking of various pictorial elements is only made possible by the *Paint Box*, which no longer shows differences among them but only similarities. (Klein, 1996, pp.3-4) **see Fig.13**

The result of this technique is that the viewers are forced to get their own meaning



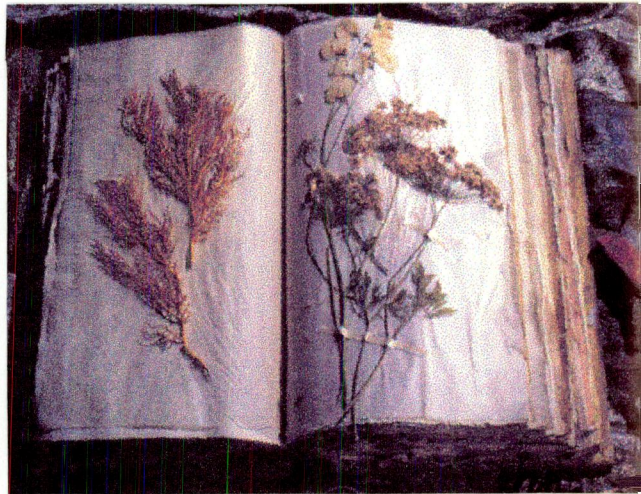


Fig. 9

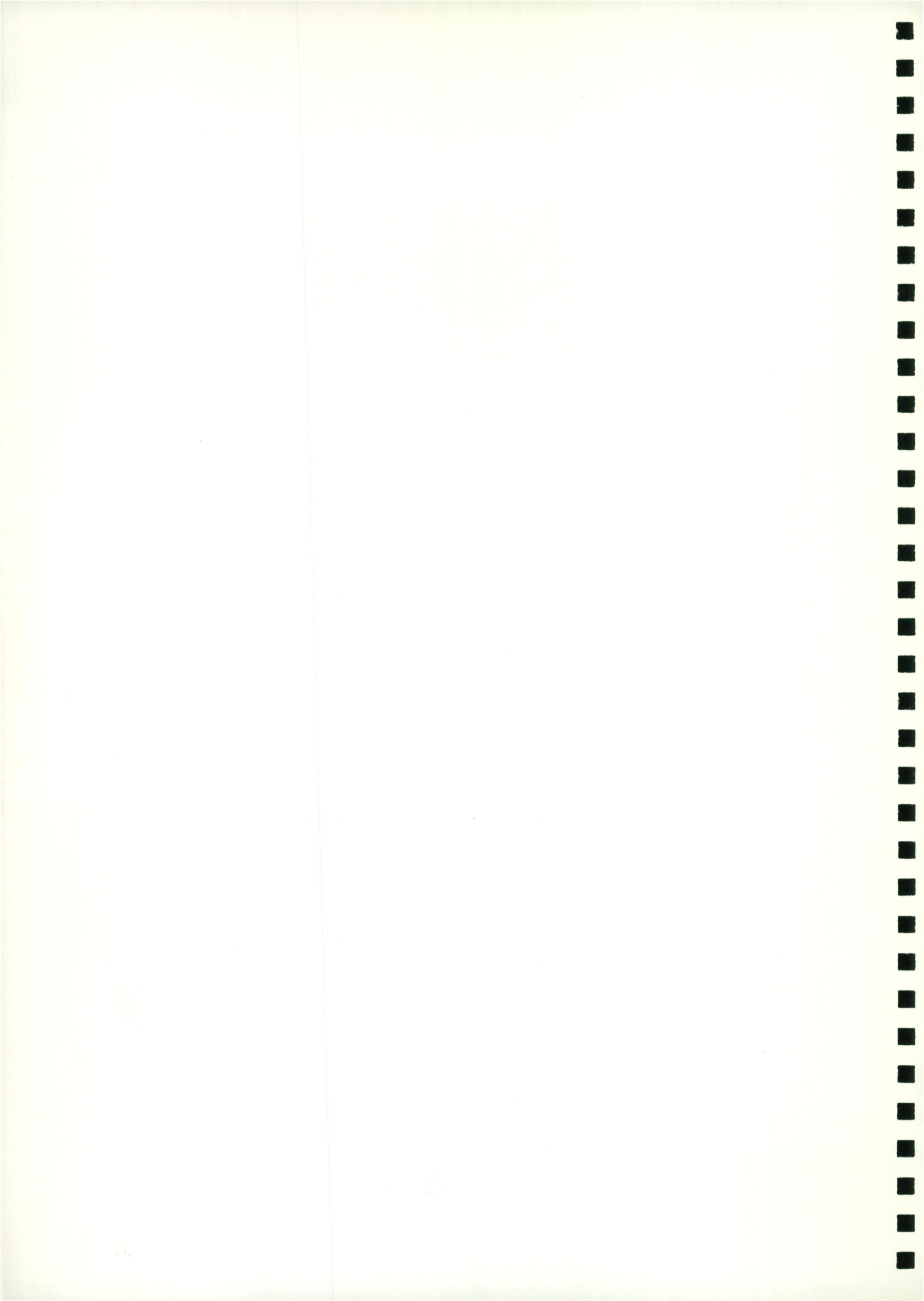
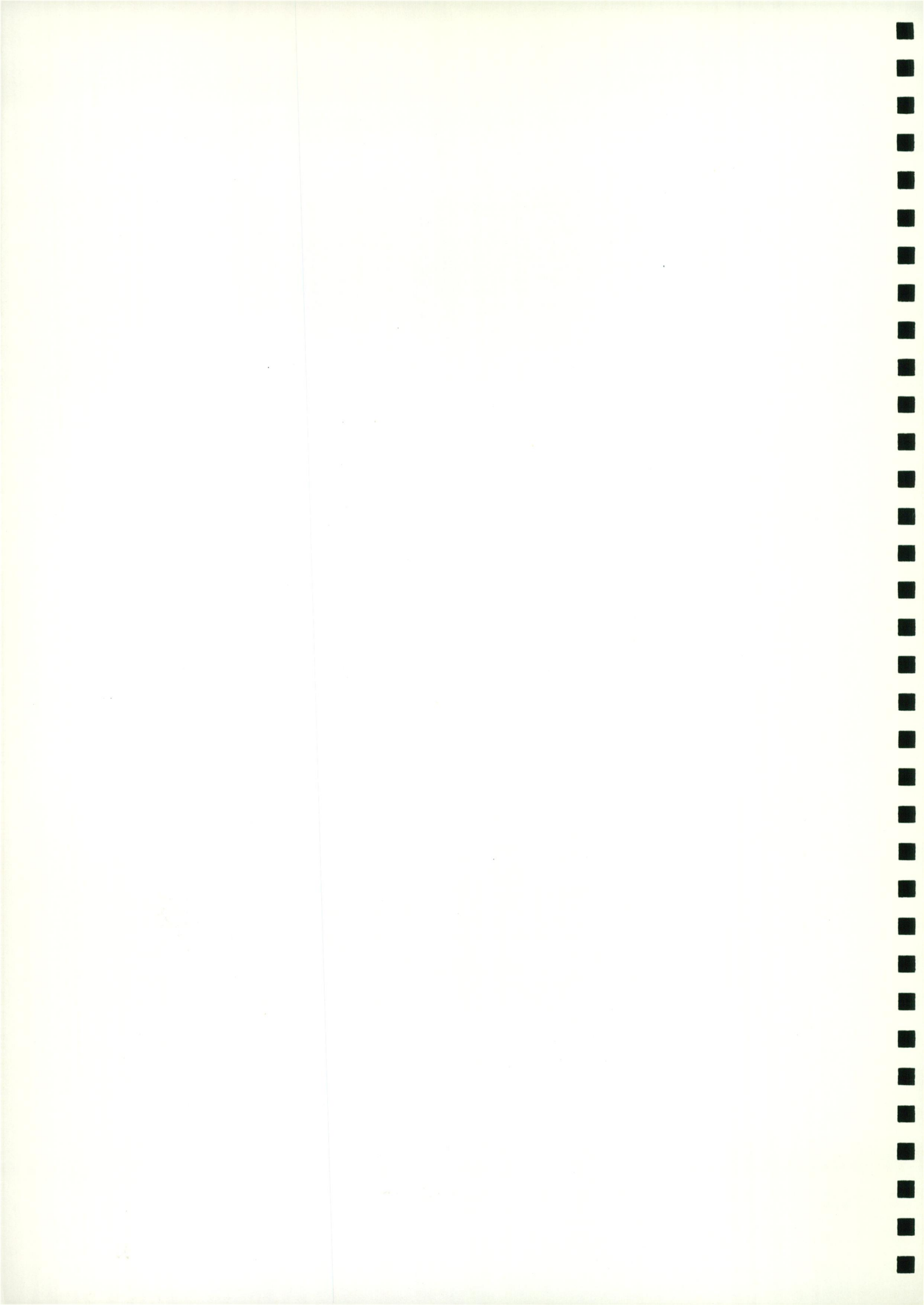




Fig. 10



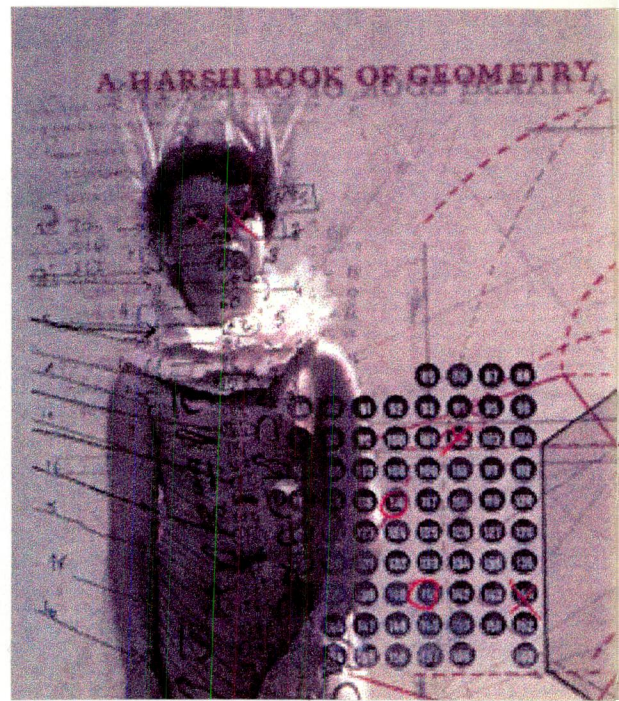


Fig. 11

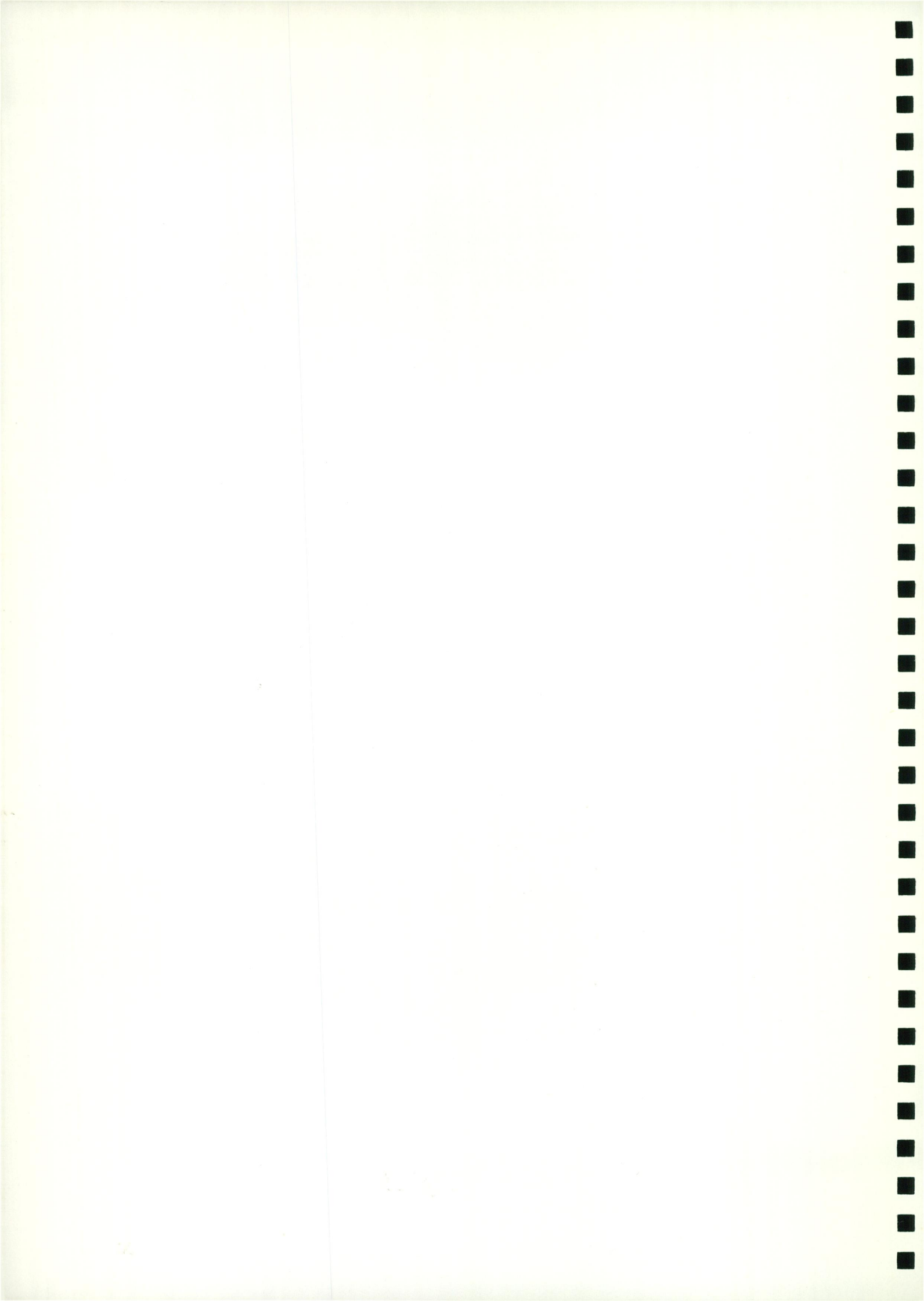




Fig. 12

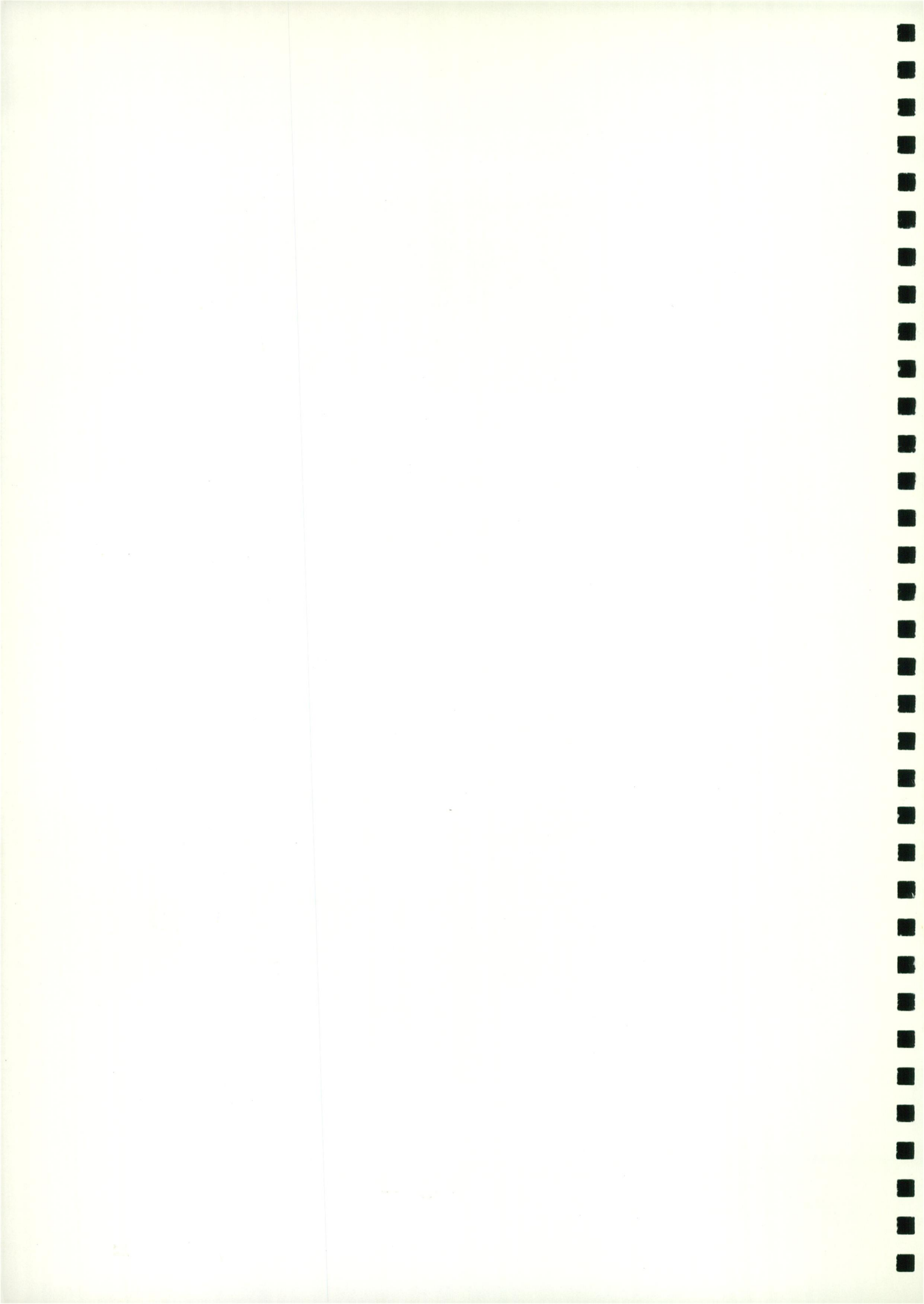
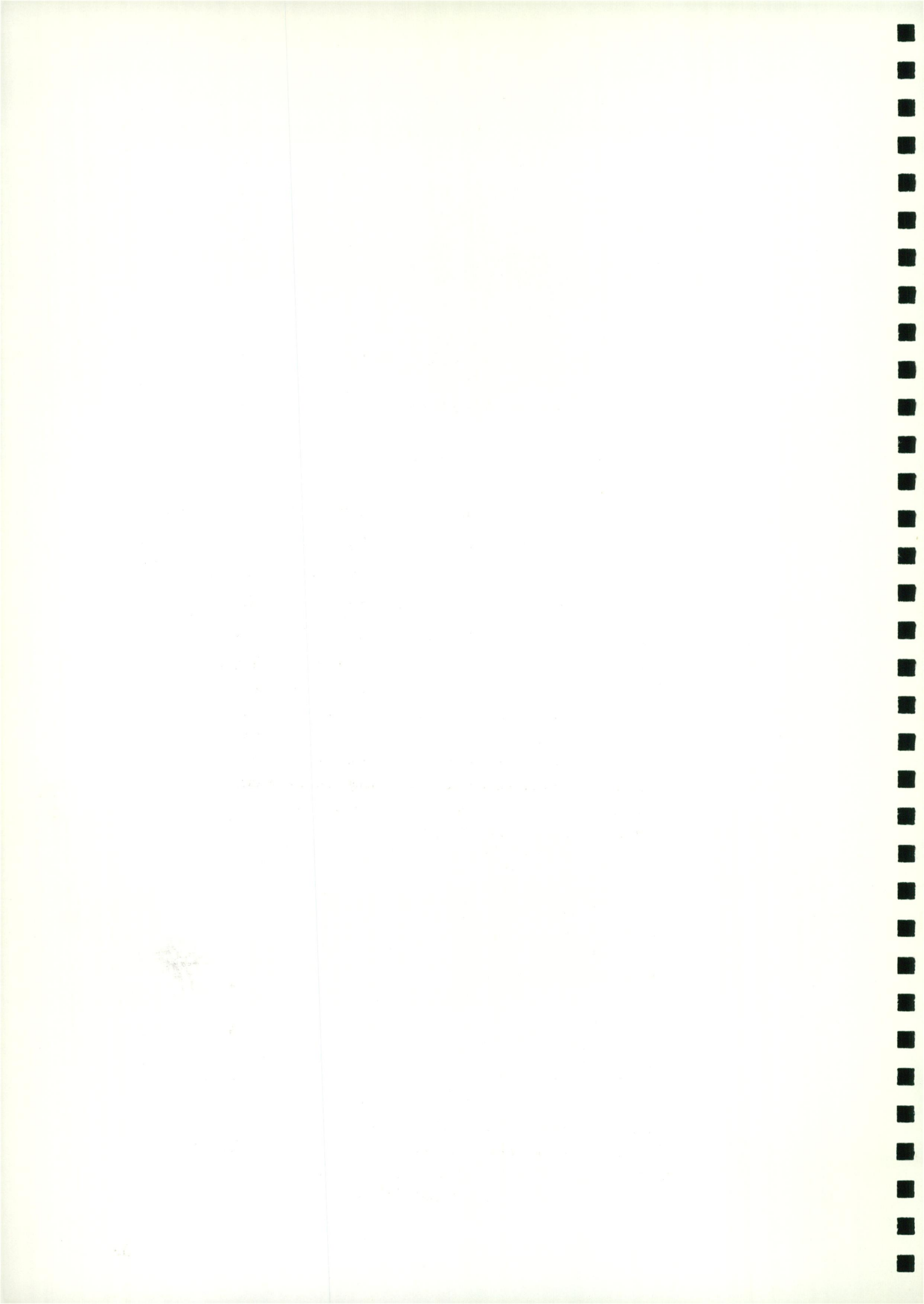




Fig. 13



from the film. Rather than being concerned with total originality, Greenaway is much more concerned with taking what is already there, giving it a new order, "to establish new relationships, bring disparate elements together and thereby create new insights". (Klein, 1996, p.4) Greenaway approaches the film like a painter, something I feel is very useful as cinema is a very visual medium. Much of the text is represented as image. He has not only borrowed from Shakespeare but also from many visual sources. The way Herbert Klein sees it :

as Prospero scribens bring forth the drama through the manipulation of his ideas, the film arises through the manipulation of images. While no image is without its predecessor, the two are never identical: one may be a variation on the other, it may be rearranged or 'alienated', but in every case it is newly interpreted. Although it clearly reveals (and should reveal) its dependence, it allows new references and correlations to emerge. (Klein, 1996, p.4)

I feel the danger for this film is it could sink into an incomprehensible mess. Every frame is like a beautiful painting see **Fig.14**, but as this is a film and will be watched as a film, these beautiful stills become too much to take in. Unlike Jarman's version which had the basics emerging from the shadows for much of his film, leaving us to imagine, Greenaway has perhaps given us too much. Mary Nadotti sees this as an example of a contemporary problem of adapting older works, finding a

deep split between those who find pleasure and freedom in altering and amplifying a work, and who thus risk a kind of necrophilia, irresponsible and paralysing; and those with the nerve to stick to clarity and simplicity (not, mind you, simplification). Those who don't so much as stir up the waters through endless addition, who equate everything with its opposite, who refuse a critical principle, and those who make clear, unequivocal, unprotected choices, who search for recognisable meaning, without, however falling into authoritarianism or schematisation. (Nadotti, 1990, p.21)

Greenaway I think, falls into the former category. He has added layer upon layer of different meaning that things have almost become indistinguishable, in the sense of a film. Greenaway, rather than adapting the ideas of a Shakespearean play into a film, seems to have attempted to turn a film into a form of book.

This graphic density leads to the ultimate variation on the book theme, which is that Greenaway's film functions ideally as a 'video book'. Having spent years as a film editor, he was perhaps overly primed for the video age, in which one scrutinises movies again and again frame by frame. *Prospero's Books* demands to be 'read' and reread, flipped forward, turned back and stopped on video tape. In fact, many of the movie's finer images - a silvery rendering of Neptune and a sea nymph

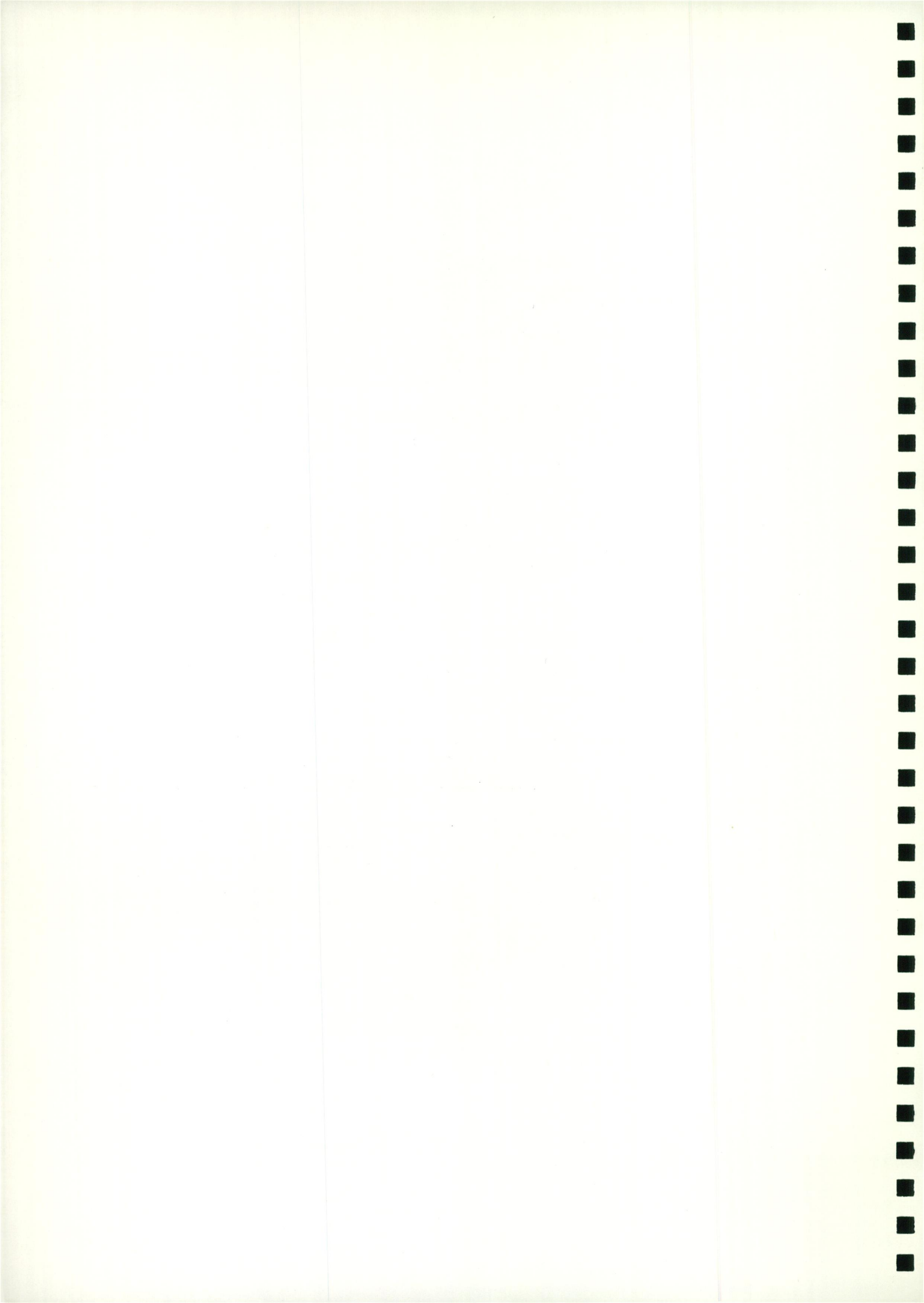
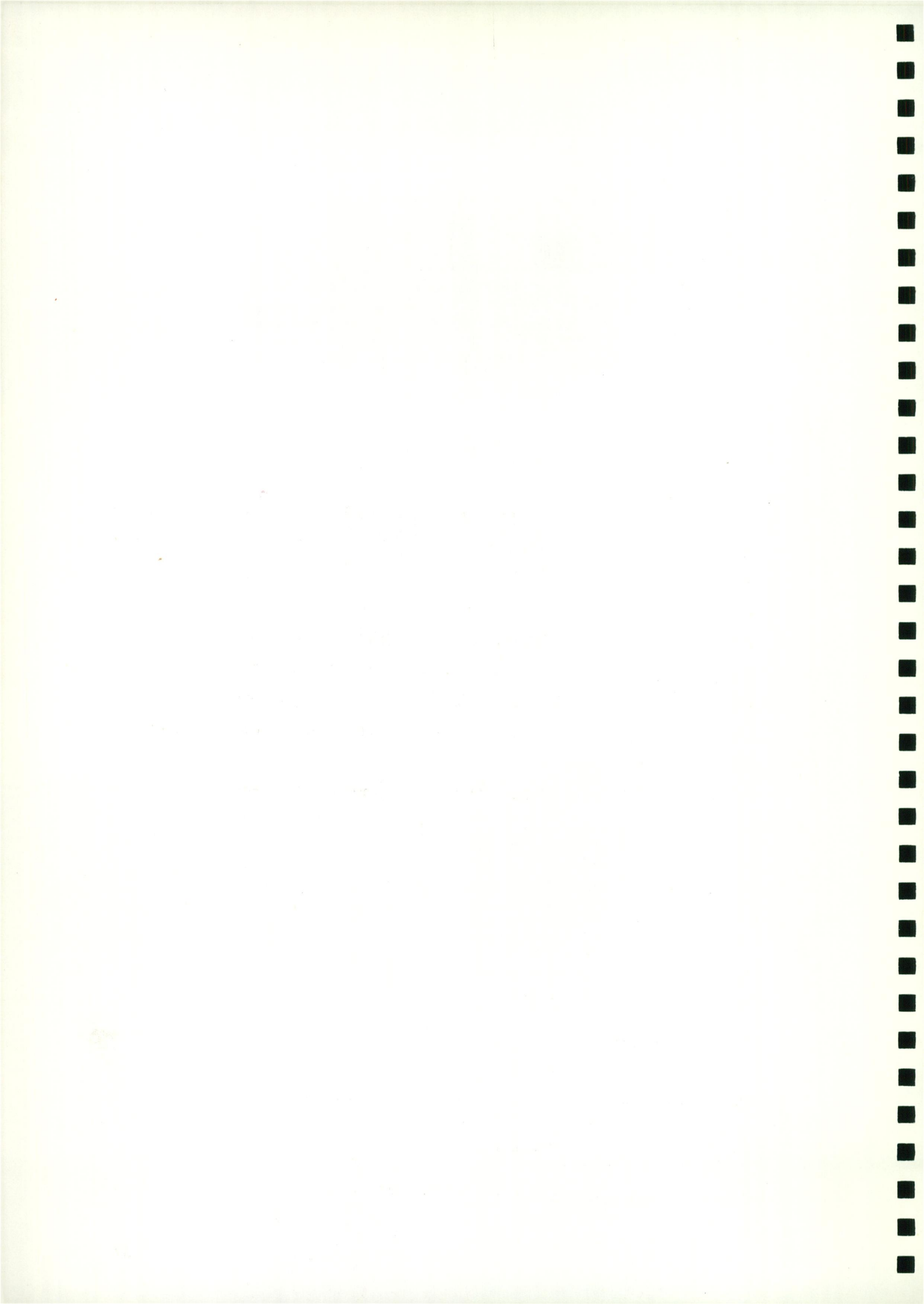




Fig. 14



from the *Book of Water*, for example - are fully legible only with a VCR freeze frame (and are perfectly legible only on the same high definition television with which Greenaway worked during production). (Collins, &.Collins, 1992, p.54)

According to Herbert Klein, Greenaway's presentation derives from a "new art of seeing, a visual literacy". He says that Greenaway was taking his lead from the visual structures of video clips, or music videos. This may be so, but it does not seem to work too well when instead of juggling with simple brash pop iconography, Greenaway attempts to do so with high -brow concepts and references from far too wide a ranging scheme to be taken in within the time of a three second jump -cut.

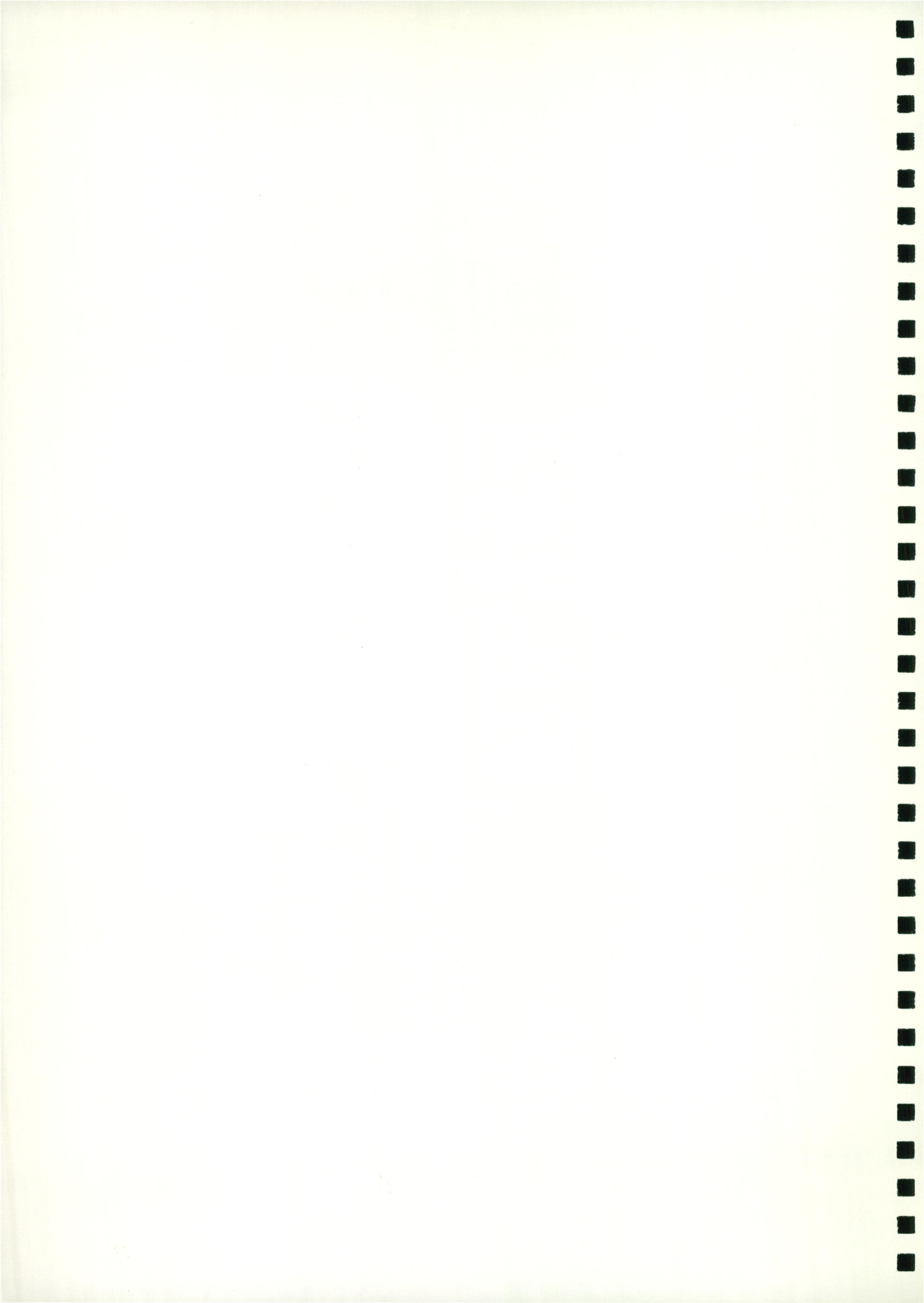
Romeo & Juliet

A Shakespearean film that works better with the film medium is Australian director Baz Lurhmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* . Although Lurhmann denies strongly that recent film is just 'MTV Romeo and Juliet', it undoubtedly has drawn heavily from the energy and brashness of the pop world culture. The outcome, as Jose Arroyo puts it, is a kiss-kiss, bang-bang movie **Fig.15**. It has action, spectacle, romance and aims to entertain. This is why it has been such a success, but it most definitely does not make it a throwaway piece of pop. Not merely because it is based on a Shakespearean play, but because of the cleverness and dexterity in which it has used the basic material.

Romeo and Juliet does not salaam to Shakespeare's language. The words are all there as glorious as always, but they are not the *raison d'etre* of the film. If most other Shakespeare films nullify the expressive power of *mise en scene* by subordinating it, in the service of language, the Australian director Baz Lurhmann (who made the high -camp dance film *Strictly Ballroom*) elevates Shakespeare cinematically. (Arroyo, 1997, p.83)

Lurhmann has gone and attempted to make Shakespearean text relevant rather than idolised, by merely treating them as normal dialouge.

The words are heard and performed not only by the actors but also in and through the way the cameras move, music is used and the use of meaningful imagery. The camera performs acrobatics as it whirls around the characters and story. Slow motion, fast motion, crazy zoom in and outs, all with quick-fire editing and a rock and techno sound track. According Pauline Adamek this highly stylised and frenetic, gangland version of this world famous story was to show the power of Shakespeare's play, which is



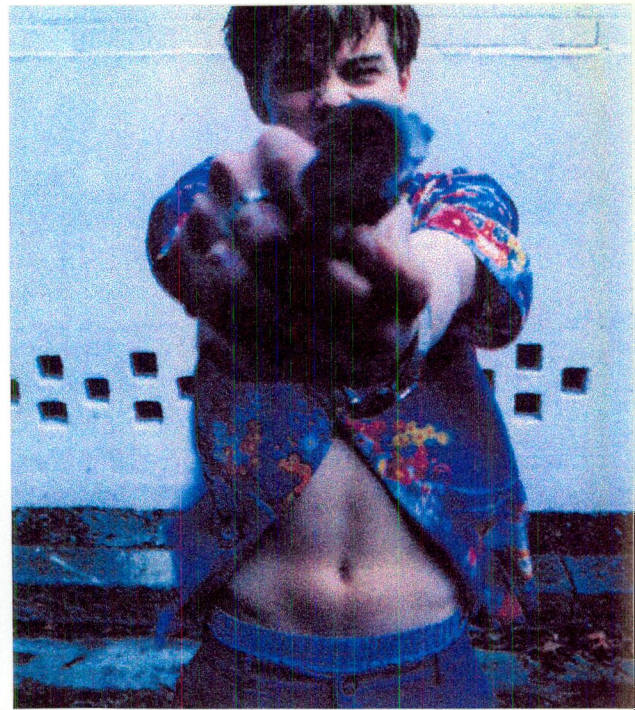
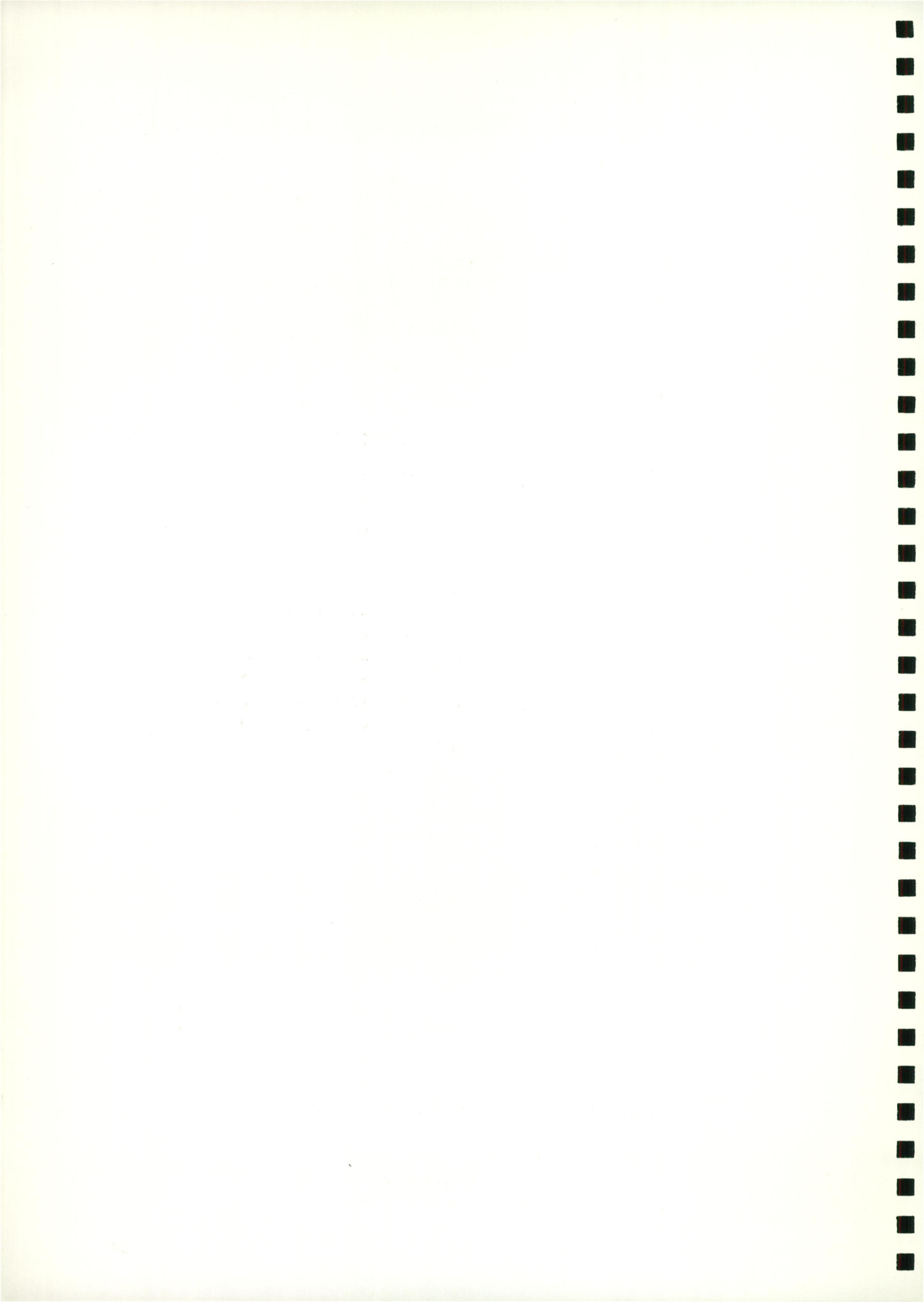


Fig. 15



not so much about love as the belief that the inheritance of hatred and bitterness within a culture or family leads inevitably to tragedy. *Romeo and Juliet* takes place in a constructed world, one which allows for different ways of being and knowing. Baz Lurhmann explains:

When we started to describe the created world we considered Shakespeare's views on Verona. In the research we found that he was not historically or geographically accurate in his depiction of Verona. To Shakespeare and to Elizabethan audiences, Verona was a hot, sexy, violent, Catholic country. So we needed to find a place that exists in an equivalent way for our audience. It did not necessarily have to be naturalistic, but we wanted it to ring true. Essentially we wanted to create heightened circumstances where the characters do real things. (Lurhmann, 1997, p.4)

Much of the film was filmed in Mexico City, it has the look of this urban sprawl that is very important to the film. At the centre of this huge industrial mess is a huge statue of Christ with outstretched arms, surrounded by huge skyscrapers bearing the corporate style logos of the two warring families the Montagues and the Capulets. Lurhmann chose Mexico City for definite reasons:

There are textual facts in *Romeo and Juliet* connected with Elizabethan society that exist in Mexico. For instance, during Shakespeare's time, religion was involved in politics and there was a very small percentage of great wealth with a large population of poor. It was violent and people were openly armed **see Fig.16**. We've interpreted all of these Elizabethan things in the context of the modern created world. In fact much of this occurs in modern day Mexico, in varying degrees... It has a mysticism about it and for me it's exotic. (Lurhmann, 1997, p.4)

According to Leonardo DiCaprio **see Fig.17**, the actor who plays Romeo, the created world really helped him as an actor: "It heightened everything which made it more dangerous, more interesting and more liberating. It gave me more freedom to try different things with the character and the scene because we were not held down by traditional rules". (DiCaprio, 1997, p.5) According to the cinematographer Donald McAlpine, there was no traditional rules applied to in his cinematography either.

I guess the problem in doing Shakespeare is that most people know it as a highbrow stage piece called a 'classic'. We wanted to get away from any hint of a stage. We also tried to develop as much movement and change of perspective as possible using every cinematic trick we can think of to make it look as much like a movie as we can. What we were not using is the classic two shot followed by an over-the-shoulder type coverage. We rarely used the usual Hollywood language of classic, matching singles. The movie while true to the story and language of *Romeo and Juliet*, flies in the face of what is considered classical Shakespeare and we attempted to echo that in the construction of cinematography. We

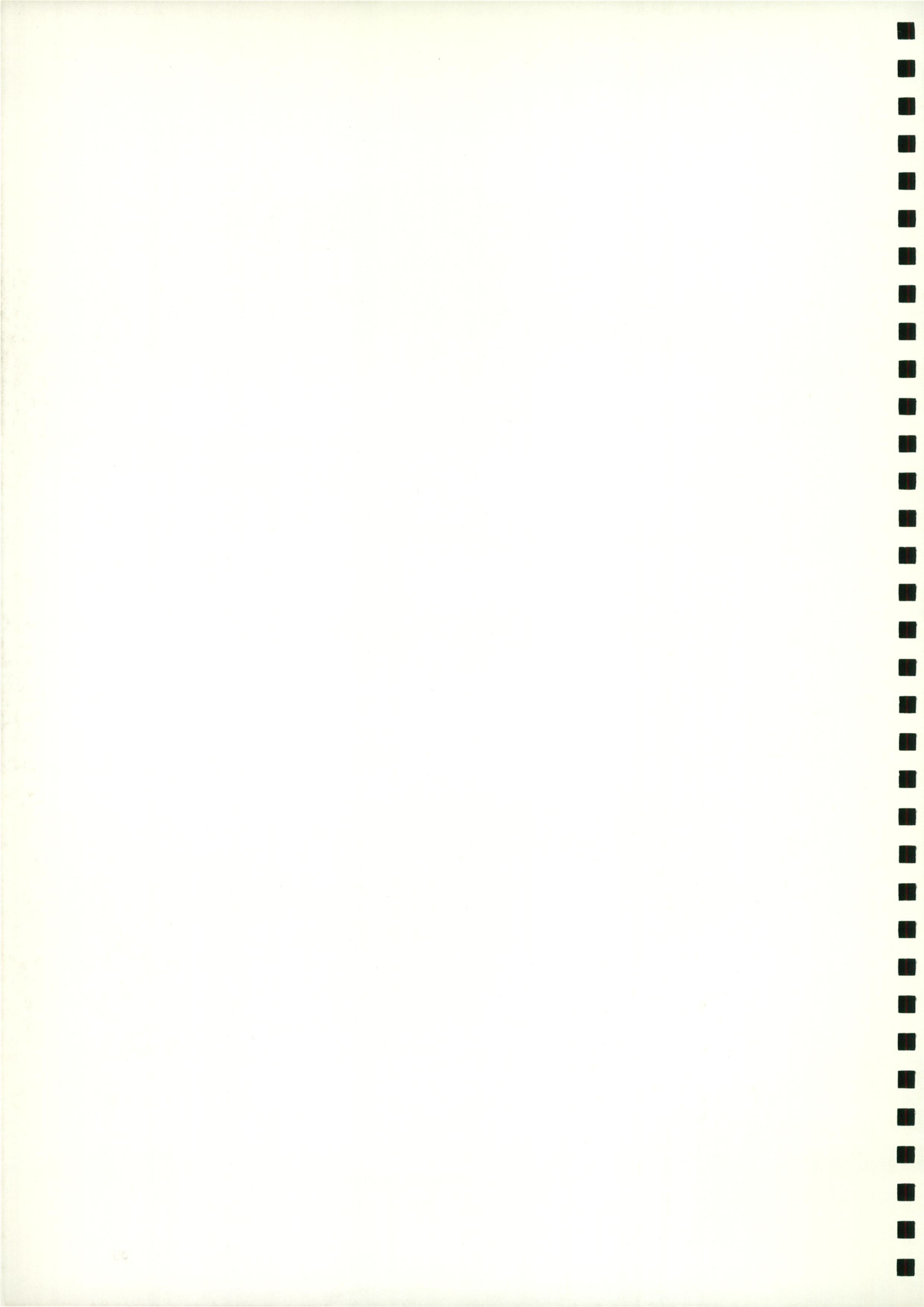




Fig. 16

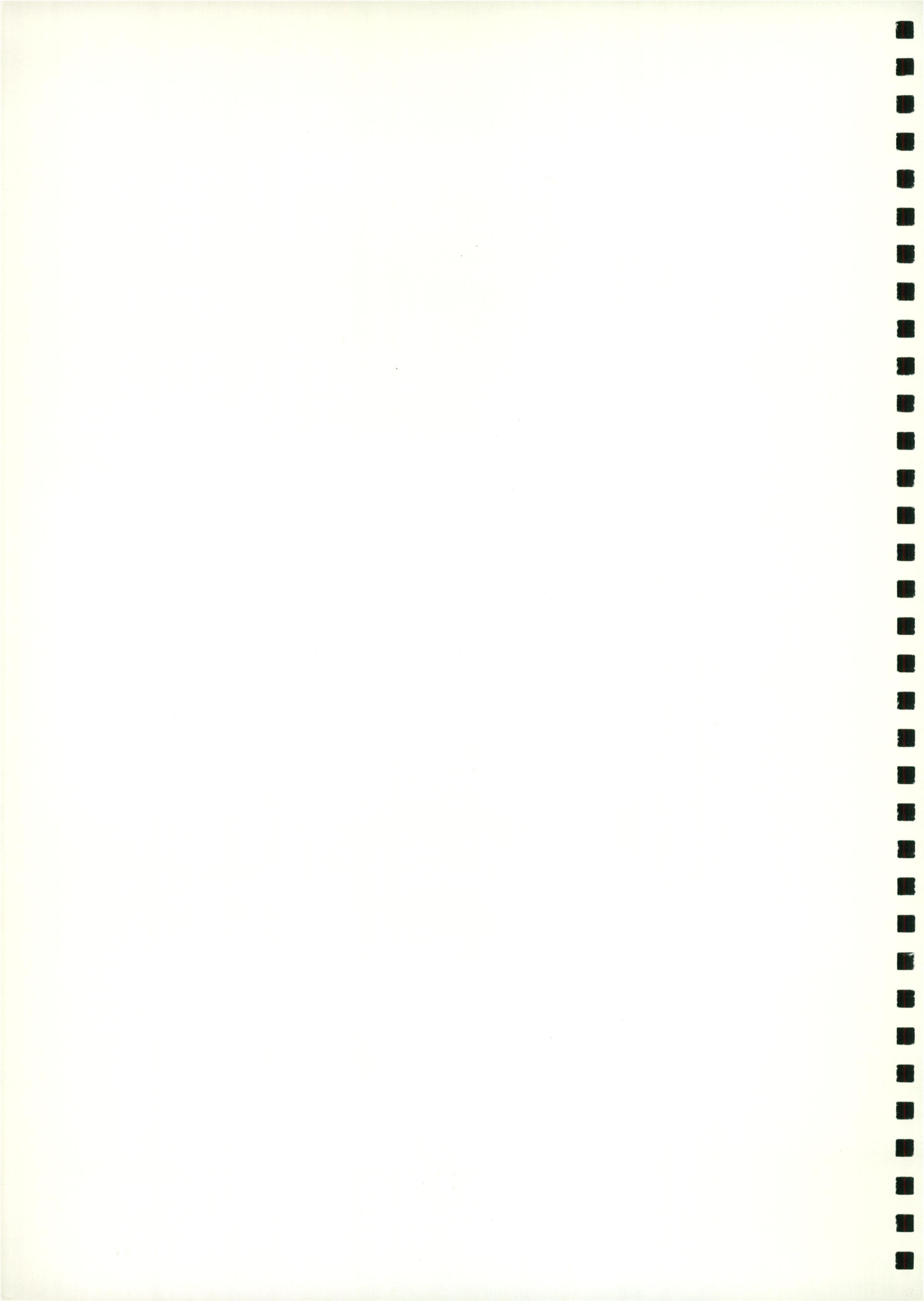
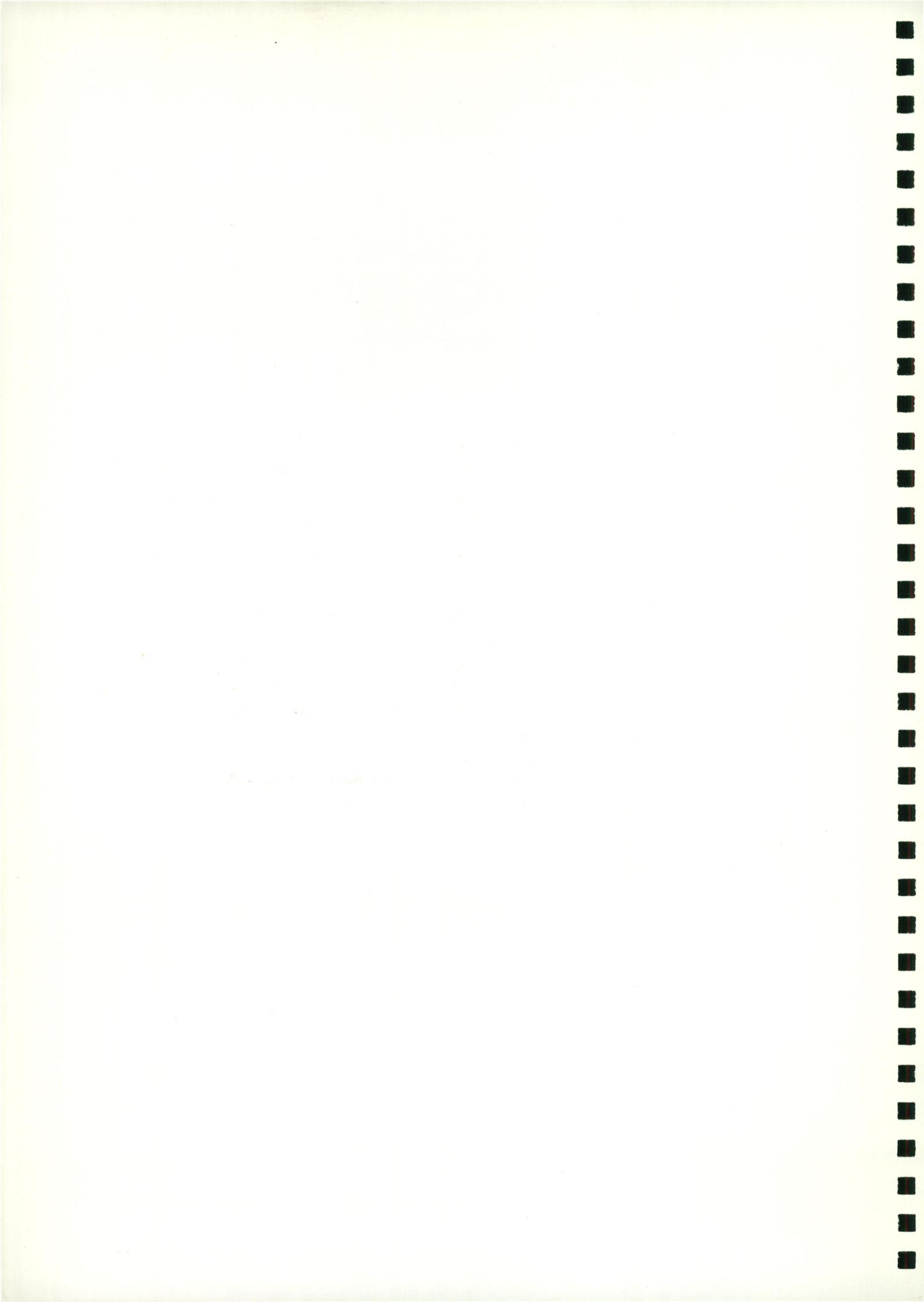




Fig. 17



developed a particular film style, a new language if you will. (McAlpine, 1997, p.6)

This film language is drawing many different film genres. Some of it looks like it is from the seventies and some of it could easily be said to look like it is from the forties. As Lurhmann says: "part of it looks like *Rebel Without a Cause*, part of it looks like a *Bushy Berkly*¹ musical see **Fig.18** and another part of it looks like a Clint Eastwood *Dirty Harry* picture". Such well known cinematic references offer us with meanings and connotations which are easily comprehended. Clashes between the families are represented in the form of news reports about streetgang violence the kind we've seen on television. Verona Beach is a place where guns have replaced swords see **Fig.19**, the Montagues have their name tattooed onto the backs of their heads. Yet amongst all this modern mayhem, we are led to understand that family honour, marriage and religion are still held in high esteem see **Fig.20**. We see the character of Father Laurence, played by actor Pete Postlethwait (a former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company), with his vocation signified by a large tattoo of a celtic cross displayed on his back see **Fig.21**. The Montague's bulletproof vests are highly ornate, adorned with colourful religious icons see **Fig.22**. All these symbols intertwine with the words and structure of the film. To quote the costume designer of the film:

Shakespeare's language, for most people is a little daunting at first. In most movies what people say conveys the facts, but in this it will take the audience some time to get into listening to the language and relaxing into the rhythm of it. What I tried to do with the costumes was help smooth the way. The first information they may get is through what they see. The language will reinforce what they see, and sooner or later, the audience will hopefully want to be able to tell which came first. At one point during the story, and for everyone it'll be a different place, the language and the visual information will become interchangeable. (Barrett, 1997, p.10)

ref? Fredric Jamesone has argued that this is typical of the 'dehistoricising effects' of post-modern culture, but one could argue that what he calls dehistoricising can make older forms of telling a story understandable in a modern context. I think this is the basis to the concept of adapting a Shakespearean play to film. I am more likely to go with the argument put forward by Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley in their book *Screening the Novel*: "The fact is and should be admitted that filmmakers, T.V. classical serial makers and all the rest of them, have their own goals and imperatives, and that the cry of being true to the text is not defensible, and need not be defended. We enjoy Verdi's *Macbetto*, *Luisa Miller*, *Don Carlo*, *Othello* and *Falstaff* as Italian operas and do not judge them as 'versions' of original works by Schiller and Shakespeare." (Bloom, 1990, p.xix)

¹Bushy Berkly musicals were highly choreographed, lush extravaganzas performed in America in the 1930

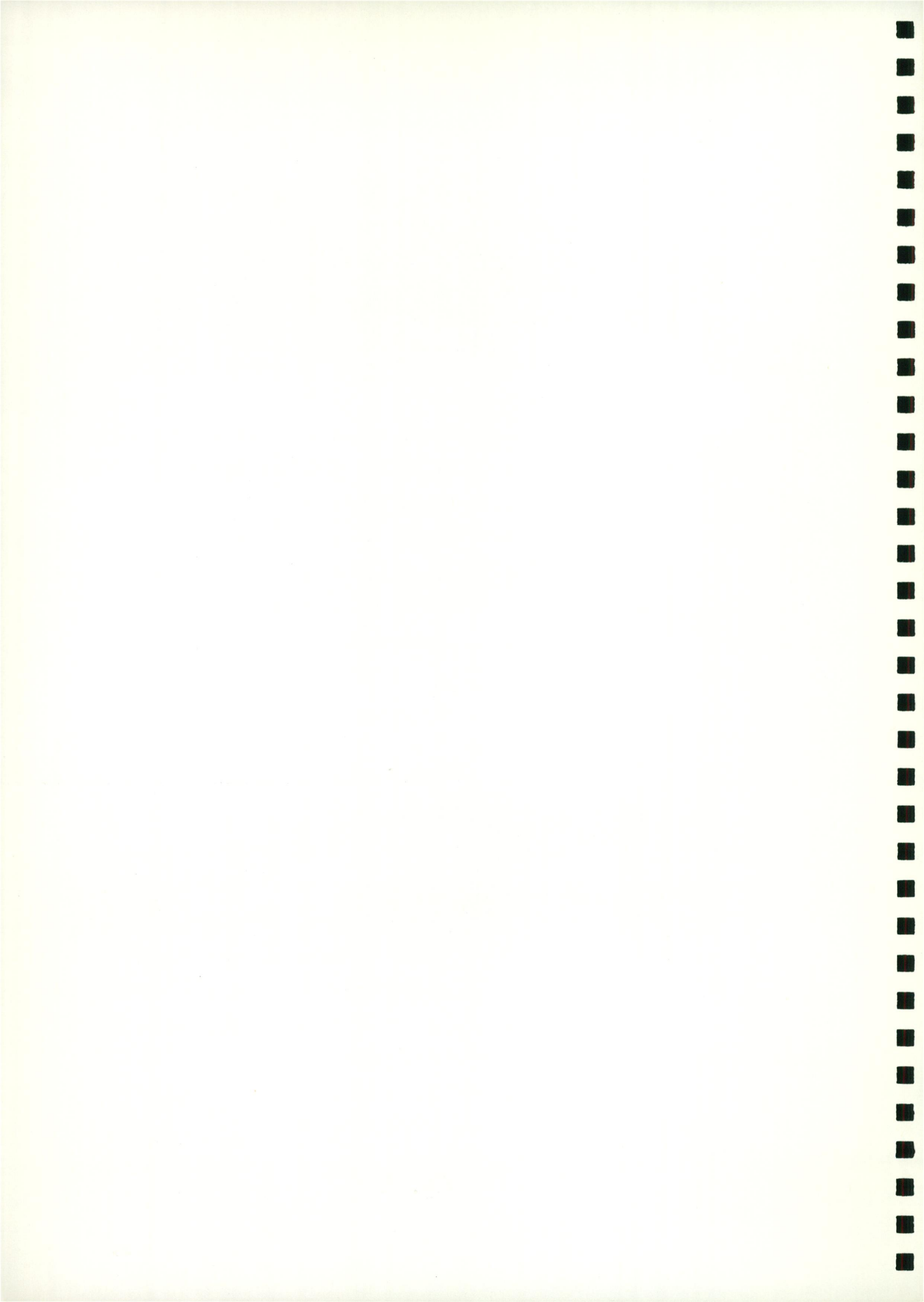




Fig. 18

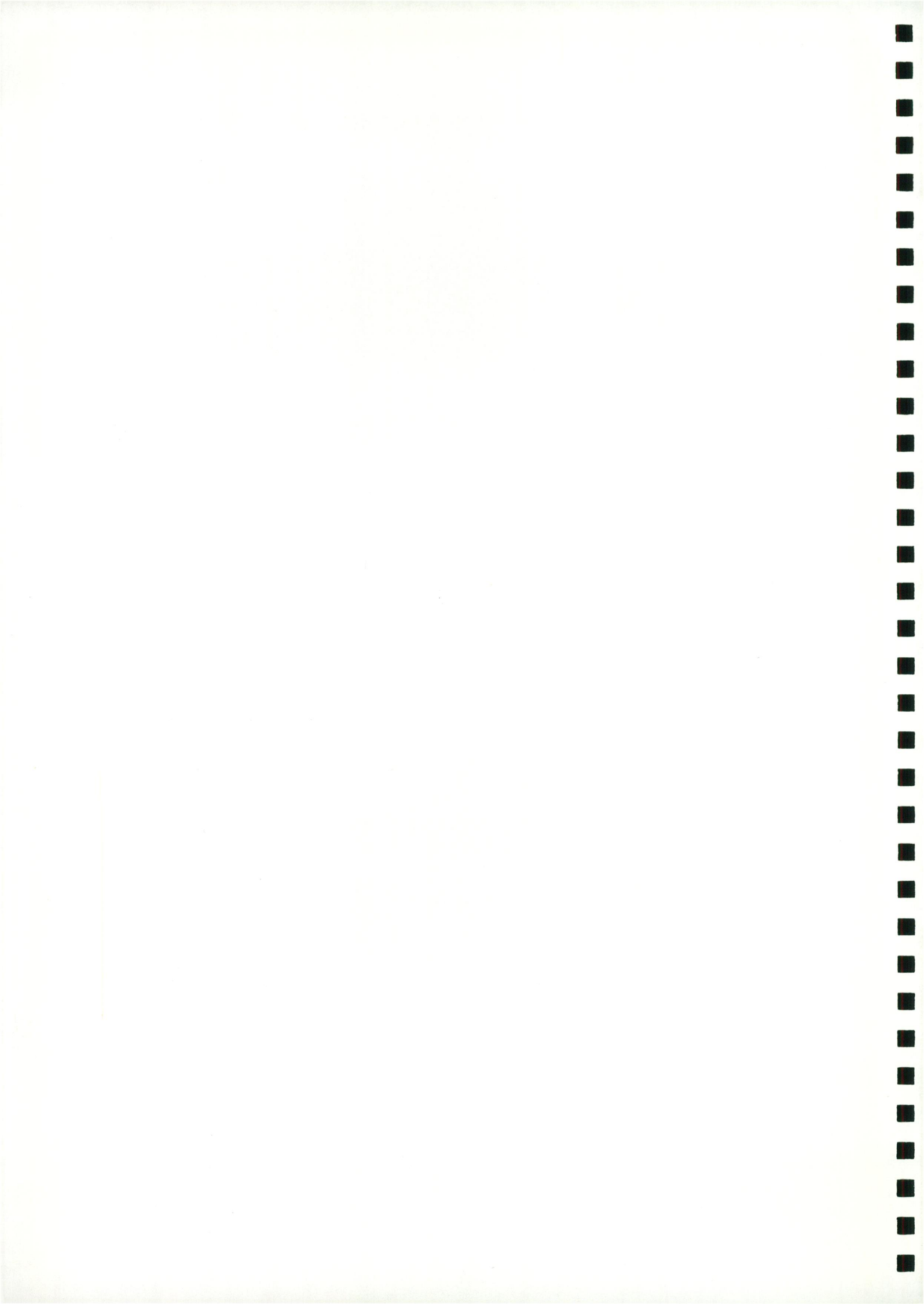




Fig. 19



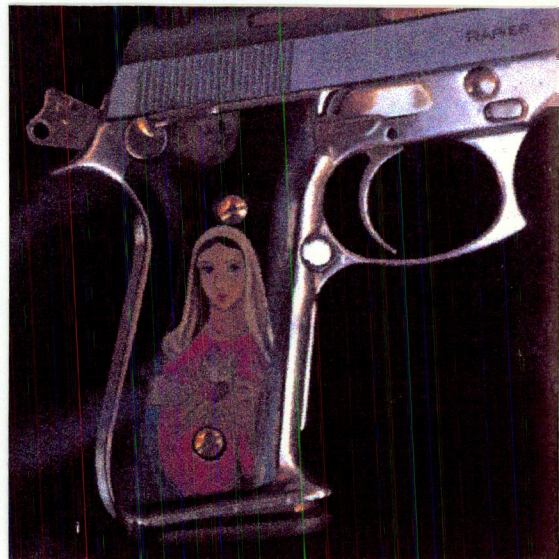
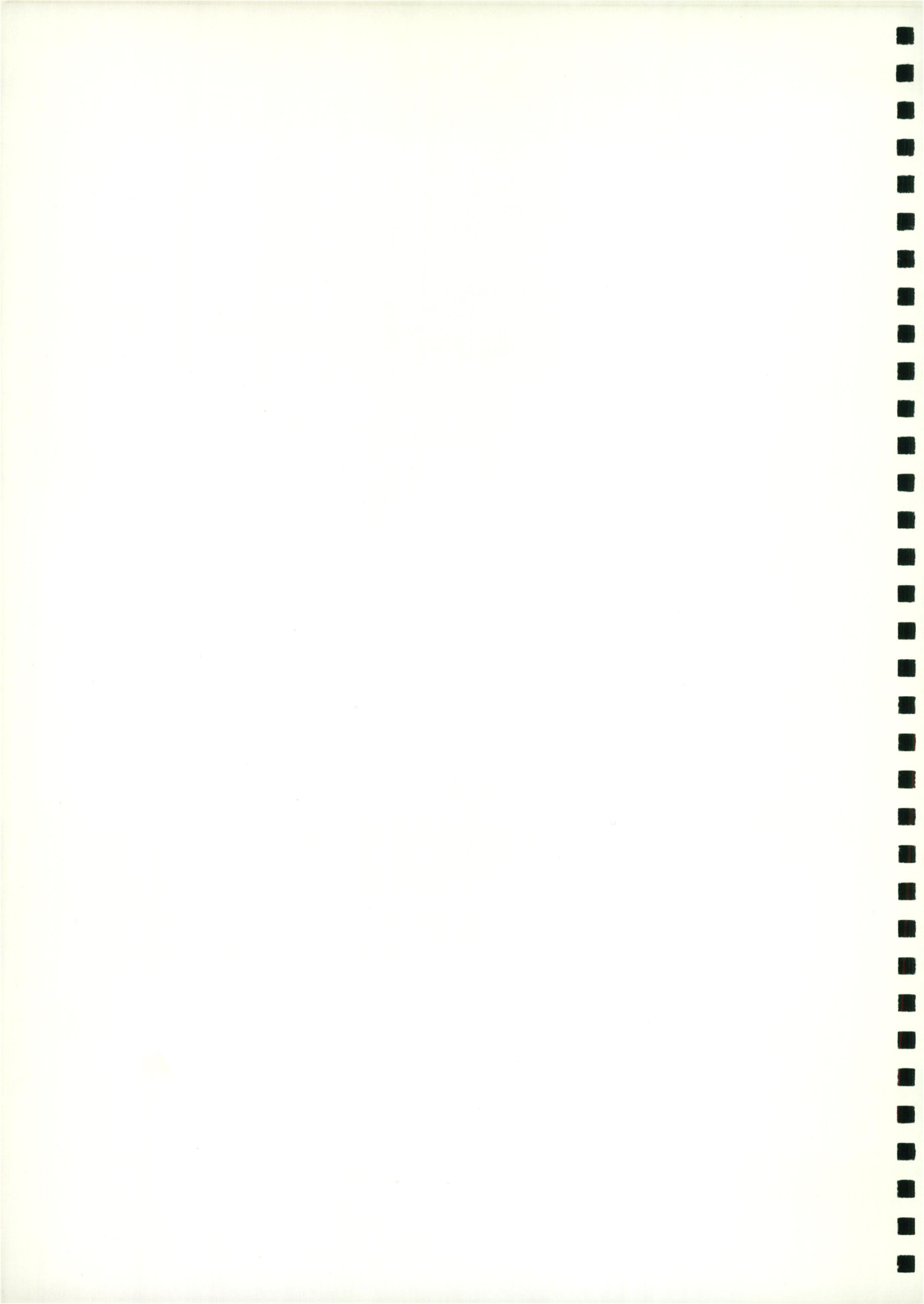


Fig. 20



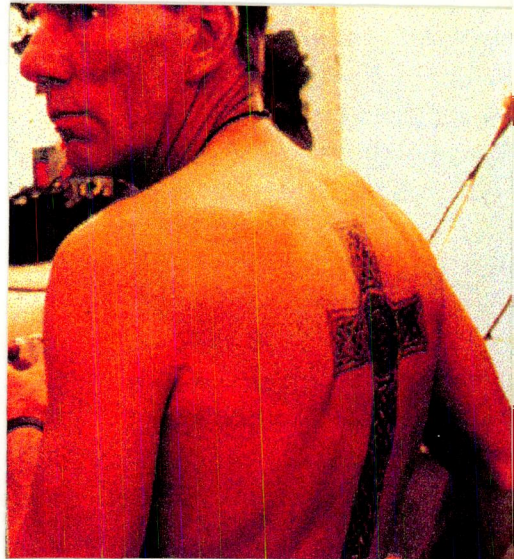
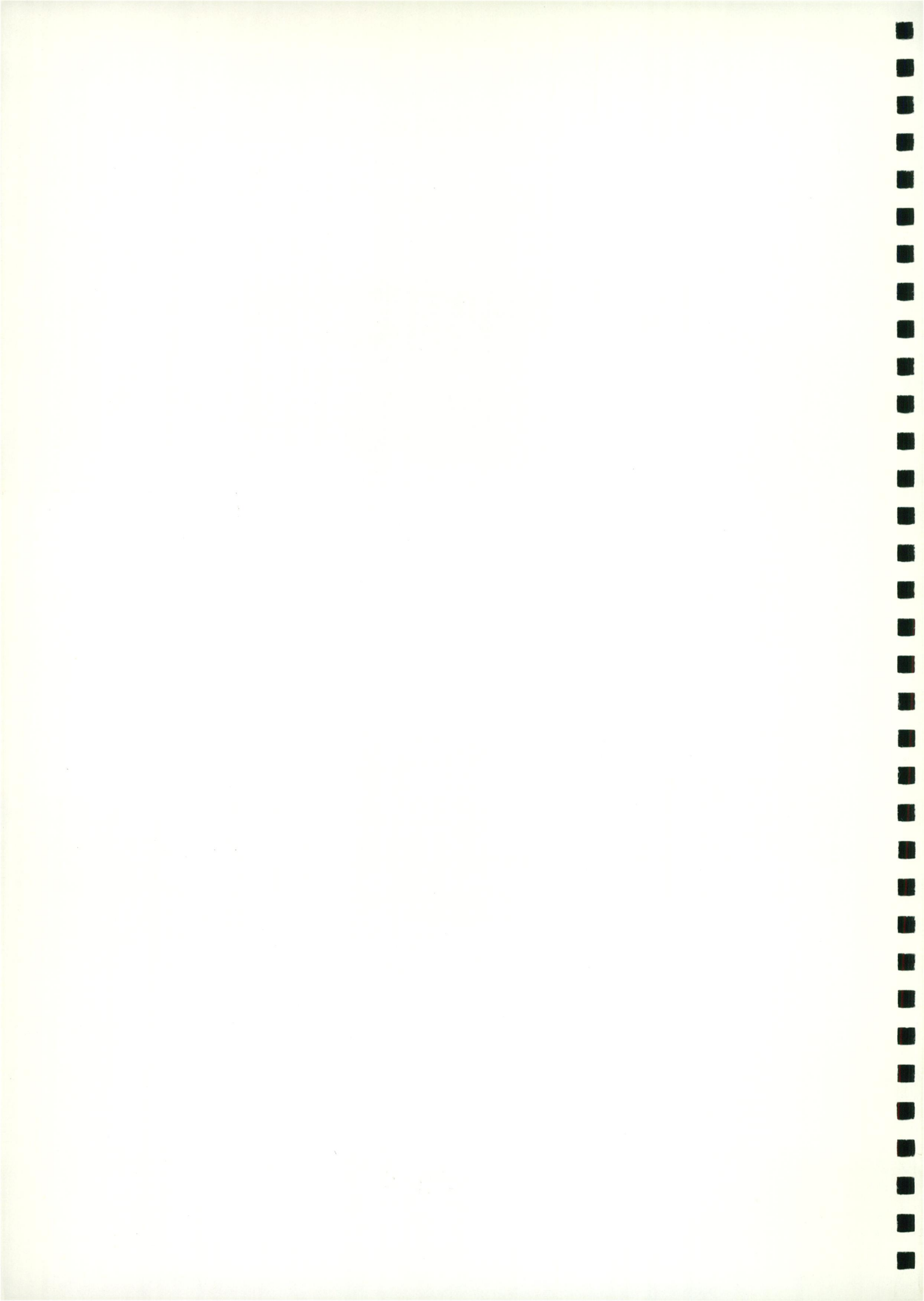


Fig. 21



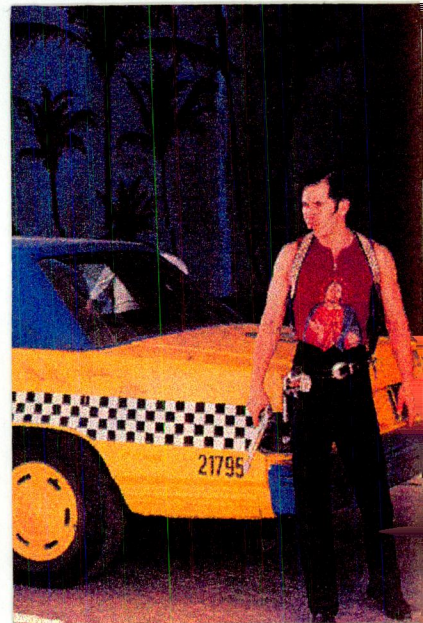
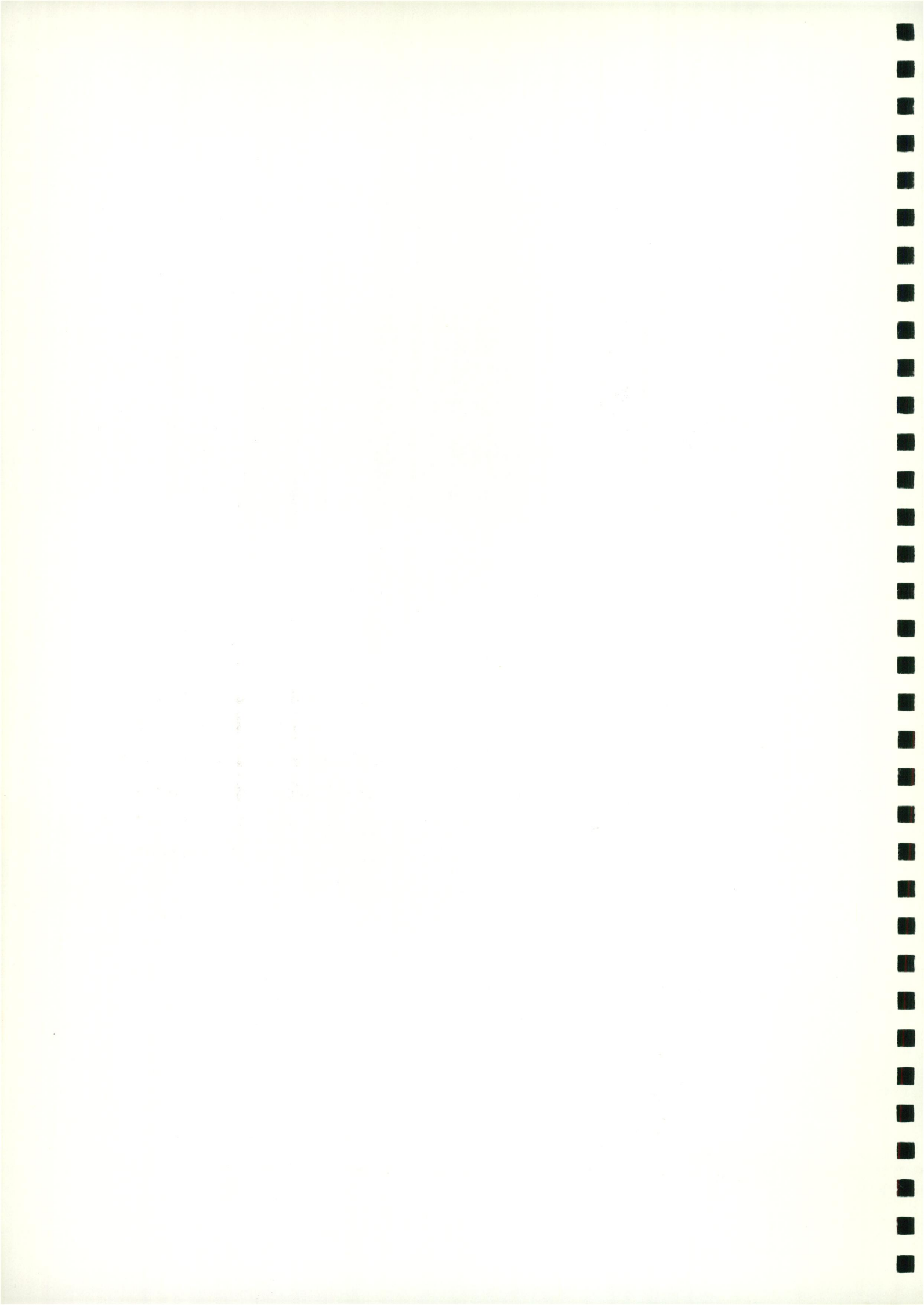
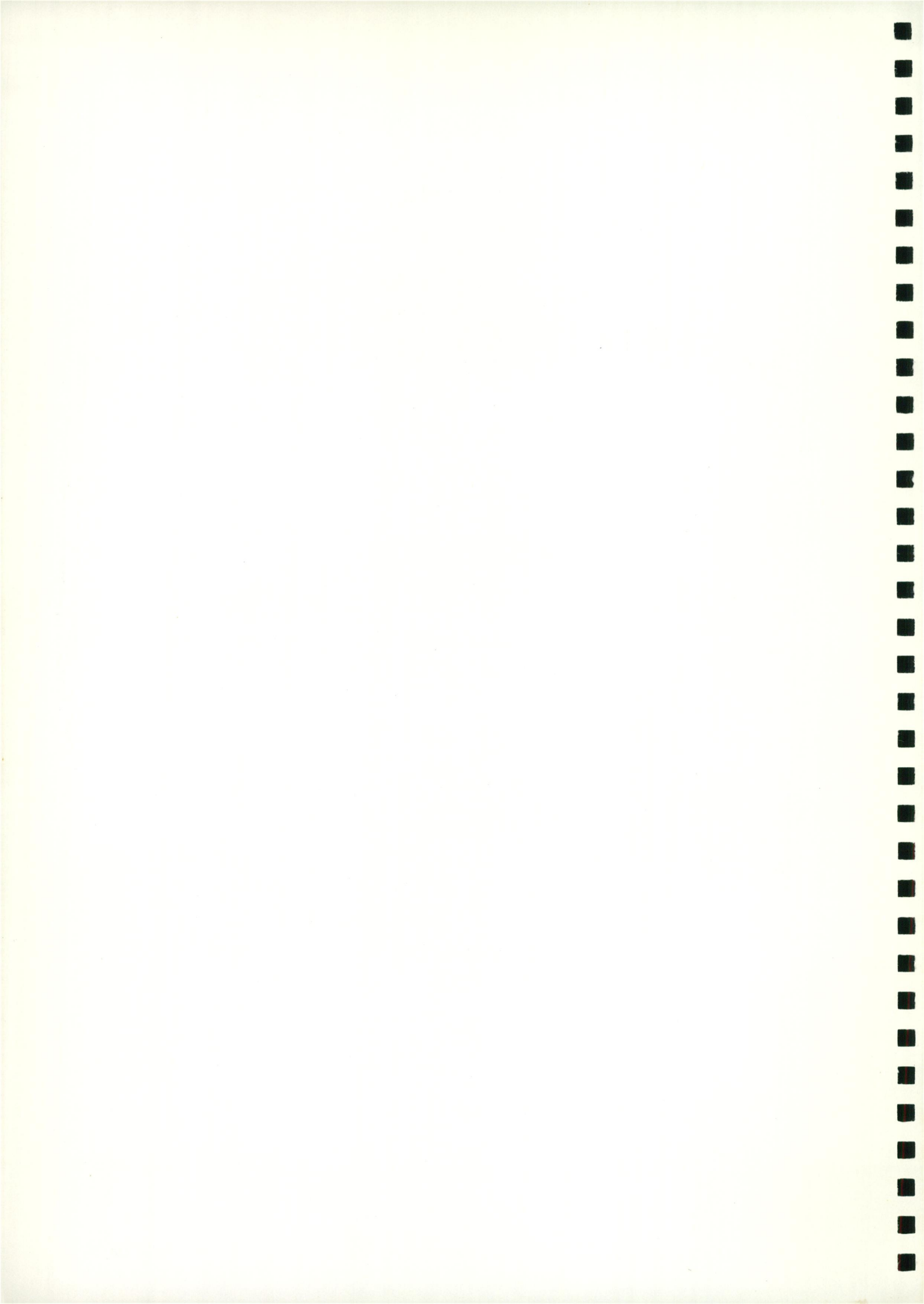


Fig. 22



Conclusion

During the course of this thesis I have looked at a number of films adapted from Shakespearean plays. Preconcieved notions of Shakespeare say he is all about words, whan he is much more of a dramatist, and drama is perfect for the medium of film, as film is about visuals primarily, and less about pure words. This is why so many older ways of adapting Shakespeare to film have failed in the past. It was more about filming theatre, than adapting theatre to a filmic mode. All these case studies I have chosen share a common approach to adaption. To approach a literary source with a new, fresh and essentially filmic perspective. A film that merely copies its literary or theatrical basis is inherently weakened. It has attempted to copy rather than create. Only when the theatrical signifier becomes a new filmic attribute to a cinematic structure can a movie based on Shakespeare succeed. We have seen how film must be prepared to work as a film rather than be a medium to record theatre. It has been shown how Jarman has tackled this in his own personal way. How Greenaway has approached adaption on a very inellectual and acedemic level. He almost drowned out the original text and tried to turn the medium of film into almost a book form, which I feel does not work, and how Luhrmann has achieved what I feel to be the most successful adaption

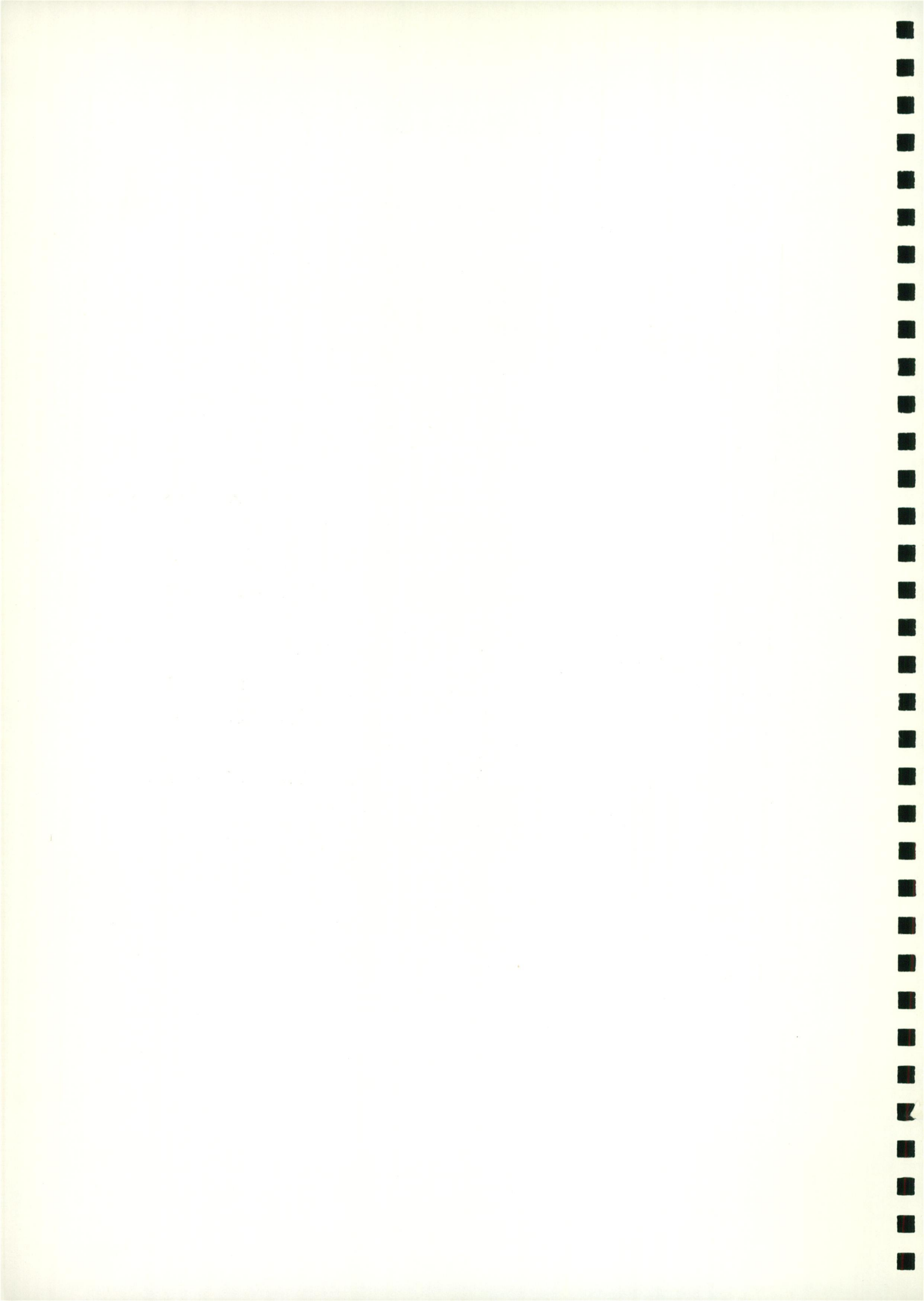


of a Shakespearean play. It has drawn from a myriad of filmic traditions, and used them to full effect in getting across the bones of the Shakespearean source in a new and exiting way. It has transformed word to image into a very modern and understandable form. It is a film process that can stand apart from its literary model and illuminate both arenas of film and theatre.



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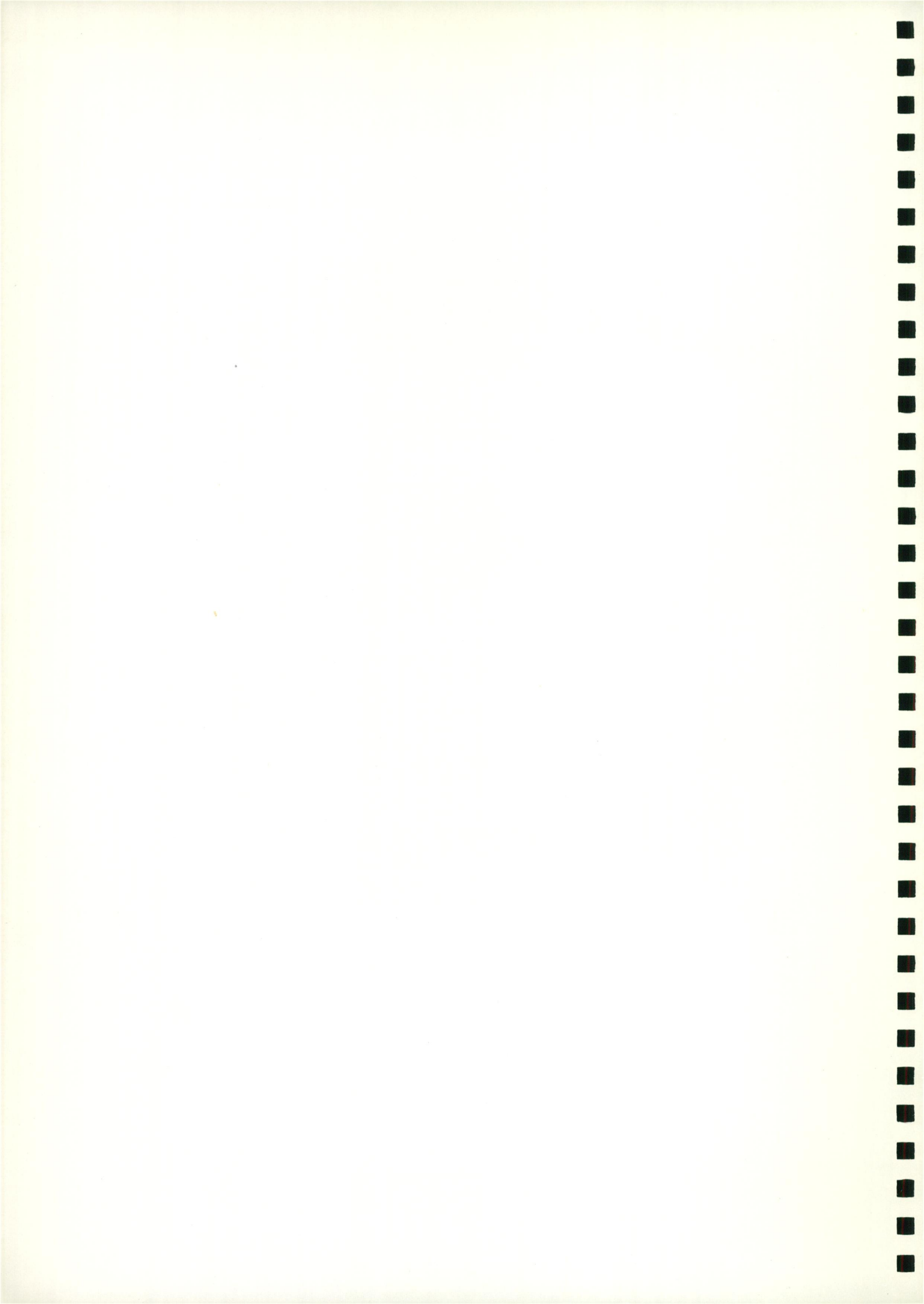
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