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薔薇刑

BA * RA * KEI



ORDEAL BY ROSES

Photographs of Yukio Mishima
by Eikoh Hosoe

Preface by Yukio Mishima
The Photographer's Note by Eikoh Hosoe
Afterword by Mark Holborn

APERTURE

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PREFACE BY YUKIO MISHIMA

One day, without warning, Eikoh Hosoe appeared before me and transported me, bodily, to a strange world. Even before this, I had seen works produced by the camera that were akin to magic, but Hosoe's work is not so much simple magic as a kind of mechanical sorcery; it is the use of this civilized precision instrument for purposes utterly opposed to civilization. The world to which I was abducted under the spell of his lens was abnormal, warped, sarcastic, grotesque, savage, and promiscuous . . . yet there was a clear undercurrent of lyricism murmuring gently through its unseen conduits.

It was, in a sense, the reverse of the world we live in, where our worship of social appearances and our concern for public morality and hygiene create foul, filthy sewers winding beneath the surface. Unlike ours, the world to which I was escorted was a weird, repellent city—naked, comic, wretched, cruel, and overdecorative into the bargain—yet in its underground channels there flowed, inexhaustibly, a pellucid stream of unsullied feeling.

Yes, it was a strange city to which I was taken . . .
a city not to be found on the map of any land, a city of awesome silences, where Death and Eros frolicked wantonly in broad daylight on the squares . . .

We stayed in that city from the autumn of 1961 until the summer of 1962. This is the record of our stay, as told by Hosoe's camera.

Before that camera, as I soon realized, my own spirit, the workings of my mind, had become totally redundant. It was an exhilarating experience, a state of affairs I had long dreamed of. Hosoe merely explored via the medium of his camera—much as the novelist uses words and the composer

sounds—the various combinations in which the objects to be photographed could be placed, and the light and shadow which made those combinations possible. For him, in short, the objects correspond to words and sounds. The objects are stripped of their various meanings, which are flung into a meaningless arrangement where their meaningless reflection of each other eventually restores a certain order to the light and shadow. It is only by such means that the elements with which he composes can acquire an abstract quality similar to that of words and sounds.

A first requirement for this process, of course, is that the objects photographed should have some meaning of which they can be stripped. This is why it was necessary that the human model should be a novelist of sorts, and that the background should consist of Renaissance paintings and Spanish baroque furniture. These were not, thus, a way of effecting satire or parody, but of achieving the photographer's unique type of abstraction. The use, for example, of Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* has a quite different significance from Dali's paranoiac parody of "L'Angelus." If the photographer is to create works that will stand for his spirit in the same way as artists in other genres, he must first—having no ready-made, abstract components such as words and sounds—supply other means to abstraction instead.

First of all, thus, the externals of the objects to be photographed must be precisely defined and a state of affairs established where, for instance, the model's eye can be, quite simply, an eye and his back a back. Before Hosoe's camera, I was trained until it meant exactly the same to me whether I stared into the lens or turned my back on it completely. If the flesh of my back and the retina of my eye were both treated simply as externals, what sense could there be to looking?

Yet I was not the only one who was placed in a position where he did not rely on his own eyes. It was the same for Hosoe, too, as the photographer. Quite obviously, as he peered into the viewfinder, he was waiting for some metamorphosis to overtake the objects he saw there. From beginning to end, his operations were aimed at preparing a state of affairs where his own eyes might be successfully betrayed, where a successful reversion to the kind of primary images already seen in his subconscious world would be achieved. Thus the objects to be photographed were decided on, placed—sometimes, literally, bound fast—and, together with the photographer himself, consecrated to the uncertain metamorphosis which would surely occur as a result of the ritual situation so assiduously arranged. For myself, I was in an objective world where staring and closed eyes, rejection and affirmation, were reduced to precisely the same significance.

It seems to me that before the photograph can exist as art it must, by its very nature, choose whether it is to be a record or a testimony. Whatever special lenses are used, and however the subject is thereby distorted, the camera only knows how to relate things directly. However abstract the composition, therefore, the individual meaning of the objects related inevitably remains as a kind of indispersible precipitate. The photographer's whole job is to filter this off by one of two methods. It is a choice between record and testimony.

The masterpieces of press photography belong to the former class. The images which the photographer has filtered from reality, whether particular events or the anguish of human reactions to them, already bear a stamp of authenticity which the photographer is powerless to alter by one jot or tittle; the meaning of the objects itself, by a process of purification, becomes the theme of the work. The photograph that chooses to record takes, as it were, the absolute authenticity of the object photographed as

its form and the purification of the meaning as its theme. On the other hand, when the photograph chooses to testify, the meaning of the objects related by the camera loses some parts in the process of being filtered off, while other parts are distorted and fitted into a new environment so as to serve as formal elements for the work; as for the theme of the work, it lies solely in the expression of the photographer's subjective judgment. His testimony is everything:

This is true . . .

This is a photograph, so it is as you see: there are no lies and no deceptions.

Hosoe's art is, supremely, that of the "testimony," the definition of which just given can be fitted to actual examples in his work.

In the way he treats a single rose, for example. . . . This particular flower embodies the general concept of the thing called "rose" which most men harbor in their brains, along with various special meanings implicit in the place of origin, the species, the form, and the color. The lens of the camera relates, not just the rose, but **its meanings as well**. These meanings, in fact,—and not the image—are the only thing that can be twisted and toyed with in the process of filtering out the testimony. In a documentary photograph, the meaning would itself be the theme of the work, but here the meanings of the rose are transformed and worked into the composition as his formal elements. It is here that it can become, for the first time, a rose in the form of a palace building, a rose like an elephant, a womb-rose, a phallic rose. . . . And yet the elephant and the womb remain, not the theme of the work, but mere formal elements. The theme consists solely of Hosoe's testimony:

This is the true rose . . .

This is a photograph, so it is as you see: there are no lies and no deceptions.

One can detect here, elevated to an incomparably higher level, the same pathetic emotional appeal that lurks in every fake spiritualist photograph, every pornographic photograph; one suspects, indeed, that the strange, disturbing emotional appeal of the photographic art consists solely in that same, repeated refrain: this is a true ghost . . . this is a photograph, so it is as you see: there are no lies, no deceptions.

This plea, this testimony, I feel, constitute the whole of Hosoe's personal message. It is, surely, only via this same consistent refrain that any self-revelation is possible to the photographer at all?

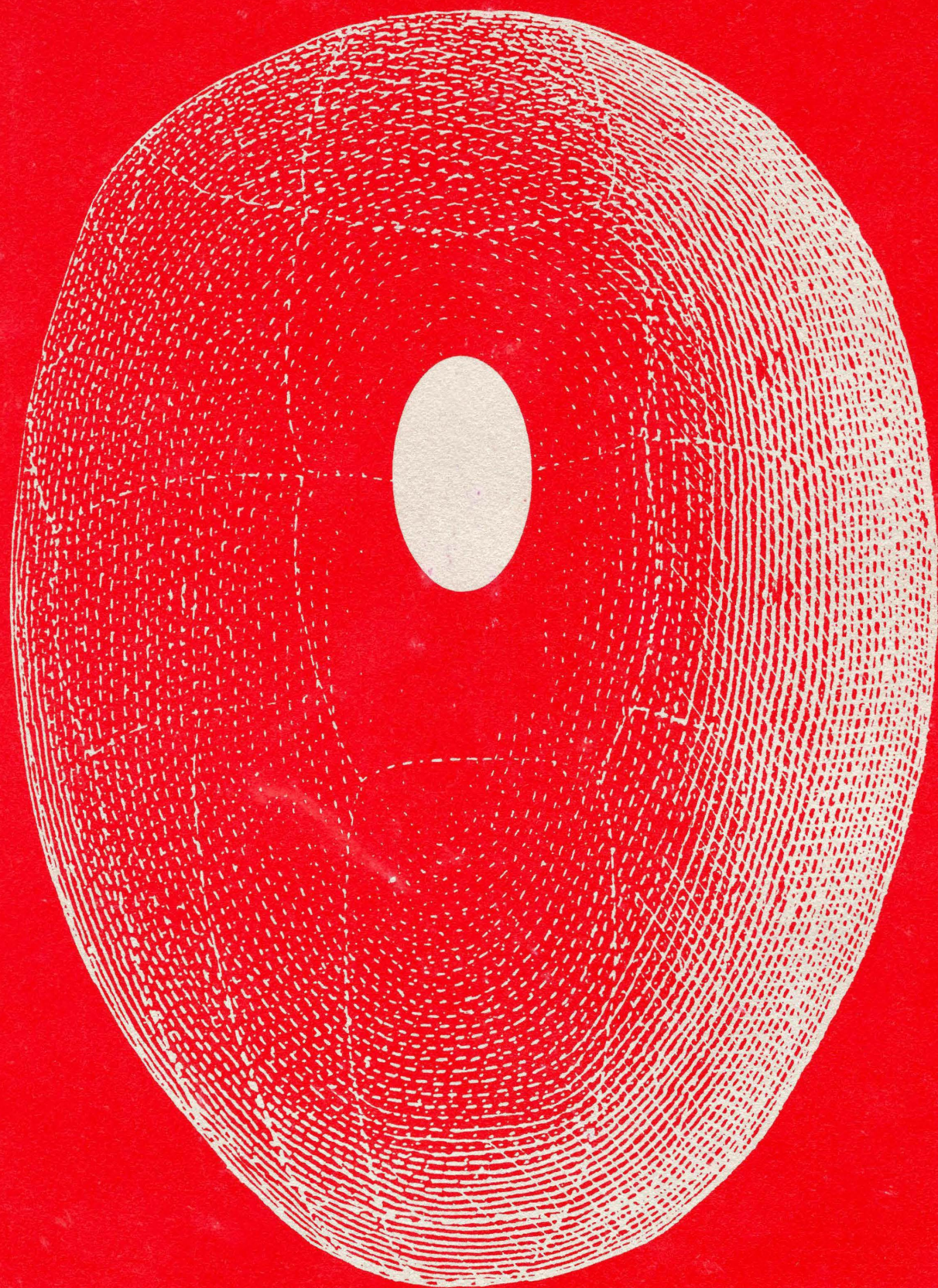
It follows that these works are vibrant with a frail yet intense tremolo of emotion—the emotion of the testimony that cannot partake of the slightest objective credibility. Why do you not believe, when this is a photograph? Why do you not believe, when this is something that actually occurred before my eyes? Little did the photographers of old, with their box-like contraptions covered with red-lined material, dream that the photograph—that product of the machine civilization, that all-mighty monarch of realism, more realistic than the most realistic of painters—would be used for such an ironic testimony! The loneliness of these works stems from this, from the repetition of the same testimony, each time in different keys; it is here, I would assert without hesitation, that the poetry of the photograph lies. The photographer has gazed clearly, with his own eyes, on unheard-of metamorphoses, and has testified to them. These things did, in fact, happen: as the doubtless unnecessary account of the works I append will show.

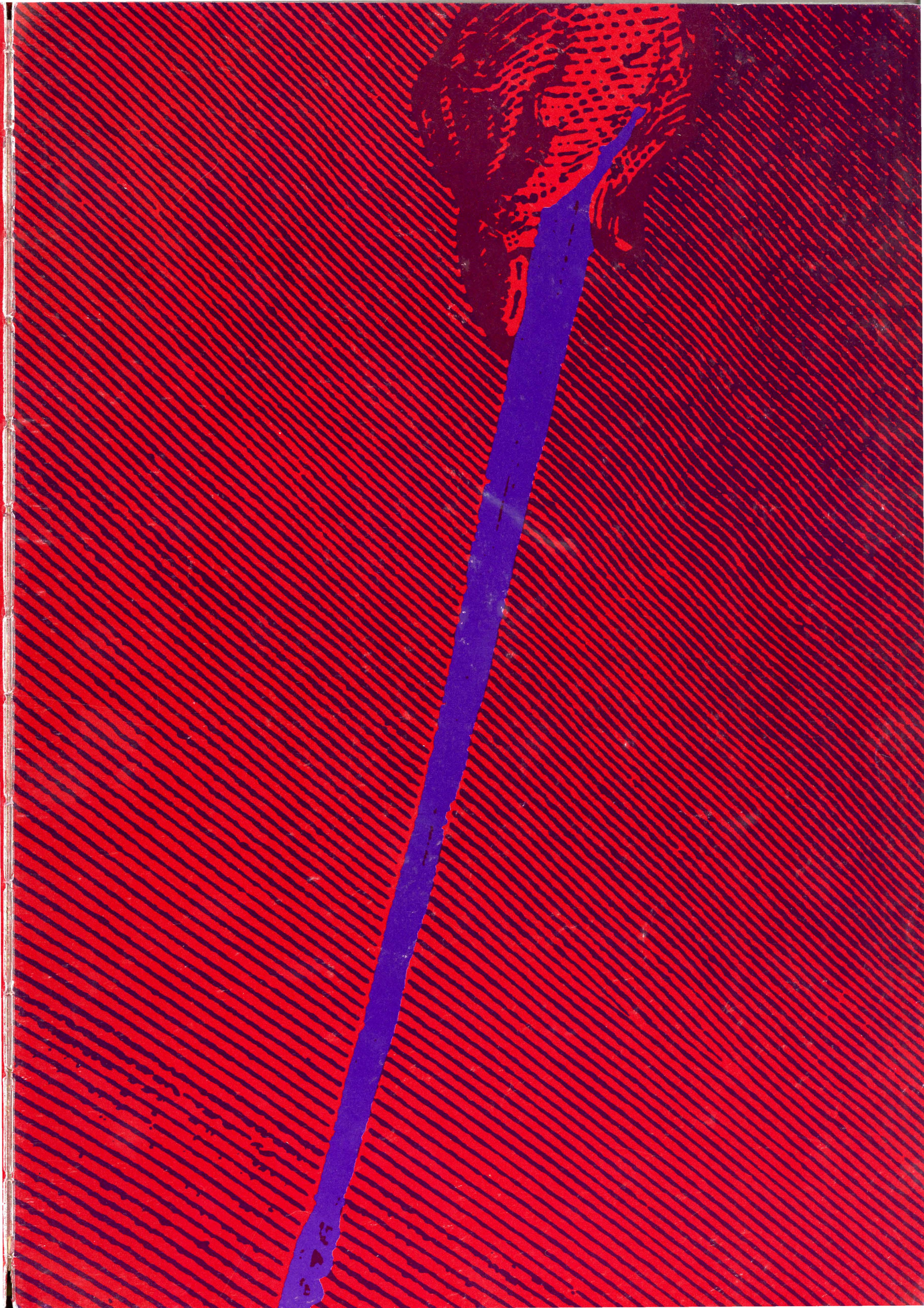
The collection begins with a *Prelude, Part I*, which presents, to begin with, a number of variations on a constant theme. *Part 2*, *The Citizen's Daily Round*, tells of the madnesses of the solid, worthy, average citizen. Yet who can laugh at his madnesses? As Mauriac so admirably put it,

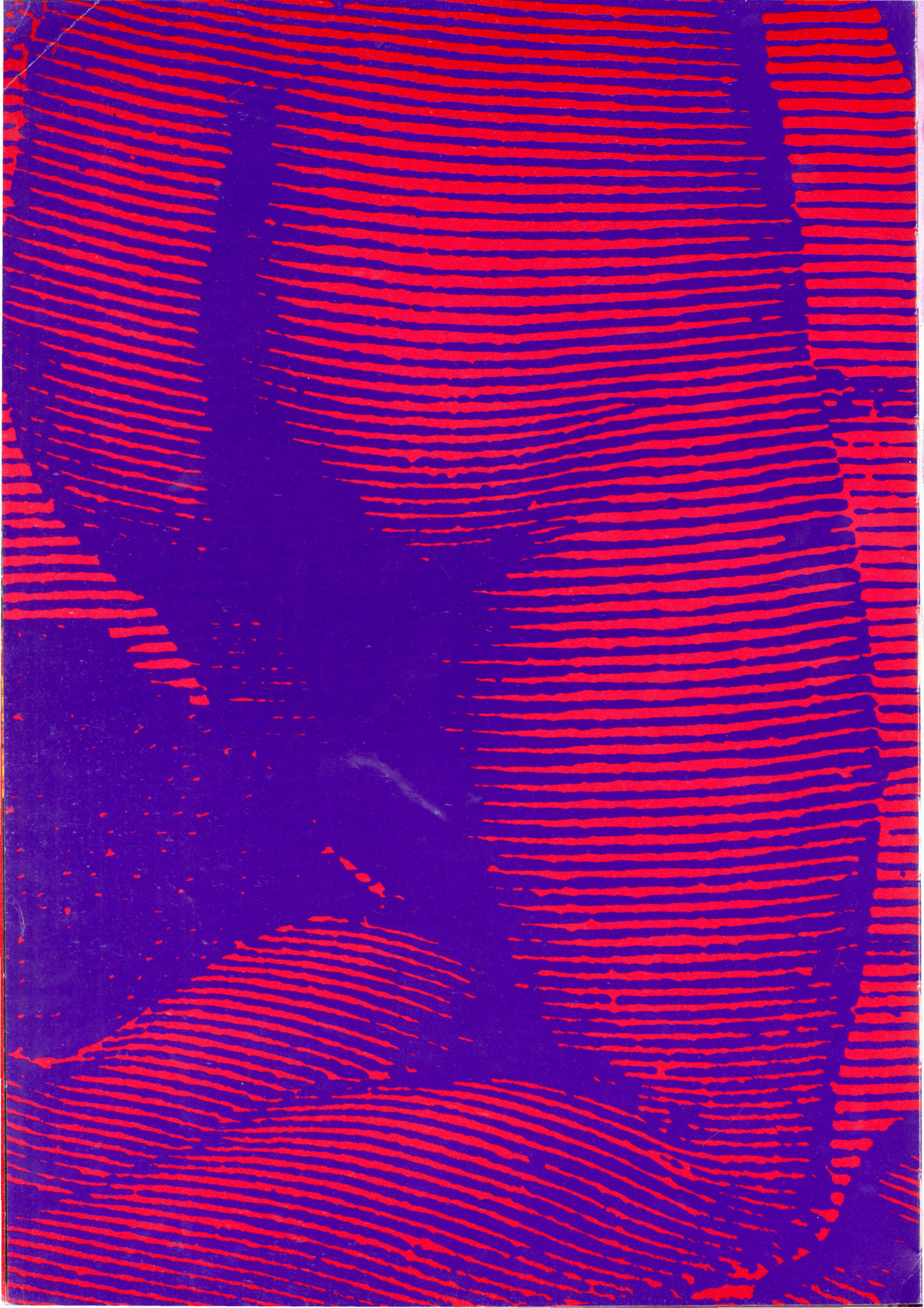
"men are all mad when they are alone." They put collars round their naked necks, with roses for ties, and stand gazing vacantly into space, or they lie on zodiacs of marble mosaic, their bodies wrapped in rubber hoses. It is a ritual that every solid citizen performs without fail, unknown to others, on one day out of the seven, for a few seconds out of the twenty-four hours. Without a single exception . . .

In *Part 3, The Laughing Clock or the Idle Witness*, the model is required to change completely and become a scoffer and a witness. He acquires the right to stand on a child's chair holding a large wall clock and a tennis ball, and to mock at the whole of human life. For the eternity marked by the stopped clock, he becomes a creature that merely watches; tortured alternately by his own shrill laughter that rings among the rafters and a nagging, indeterminate pain, he is forced to assist at human pleasures and suffering in their most naked forms. Yet he merely laughs scornfully, watches, and does nothing. His retribution will come in due course, but before that he is turned loose in a strange, wanton world, which we see in *Part 4, Divers Desecrations*. Plunging into the midst of ancient artistic styles, sacred and sensual alike, he kicks them about, he is born from them as a child from the womb, and he is buried in them as a corpse, till eventually these blasphemous sports create in him the illusion that his body has become transparent. He feels that he is the wind. He feels that he can come and go at will through every artistic style, transcending time and space, free to shift from one existence to another, from one life to another, released from all civic responsibilities. Yet beyond this joyous dalliance lies *Part 5, The Retribution of the Rose* and the protracted torment of his execution. Now the symbol of the rose with its cruel thorns emerges to the fore, and he is confronted with torture and extinction infinitely delayed. So the collection draws to its close, with death, and ascension to a dark sun.

第1章 = PRELUDE

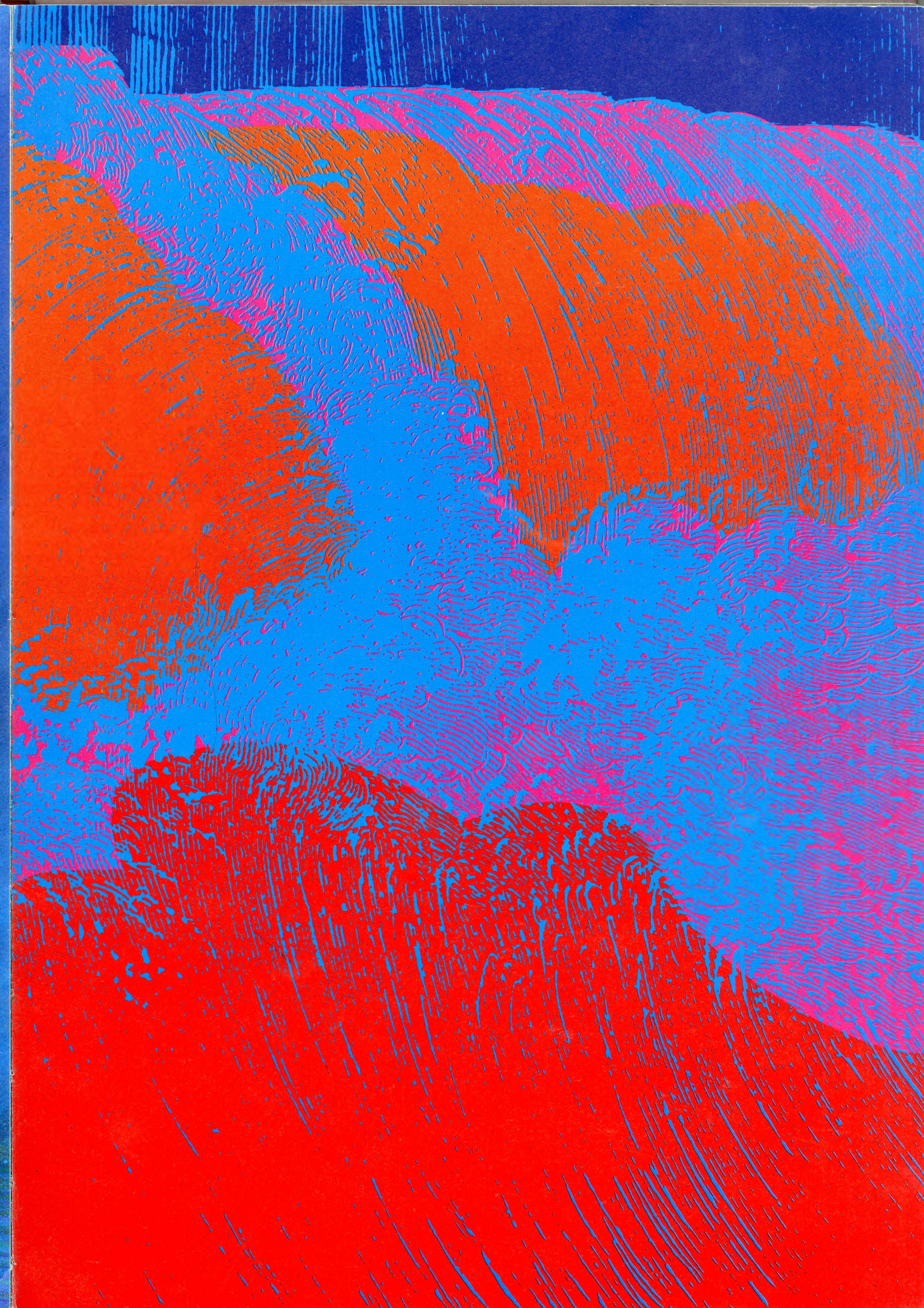












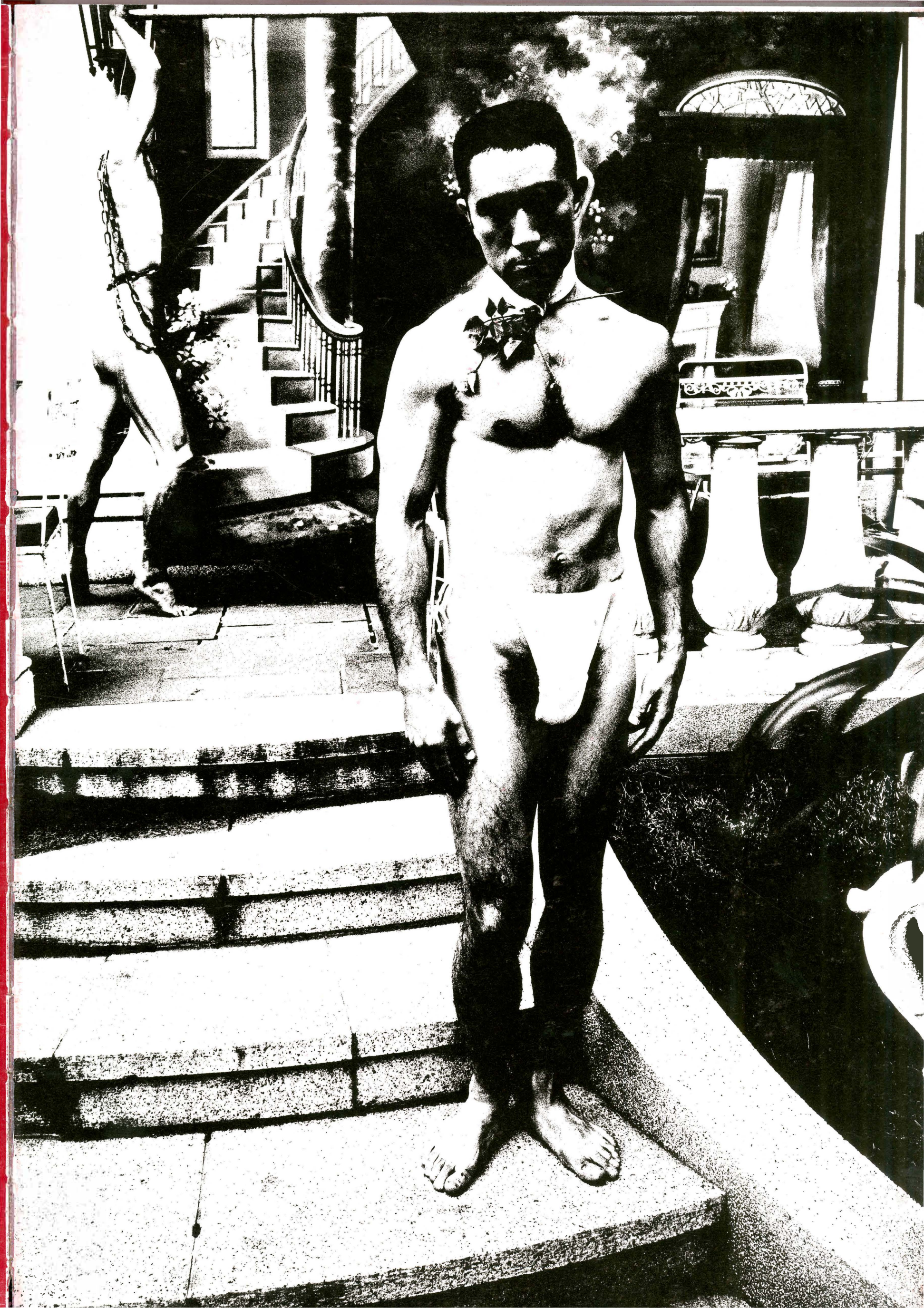
第2章 = THE CITIZEN'S DAILY ROUND

The divinity seen within this eye is the Self.

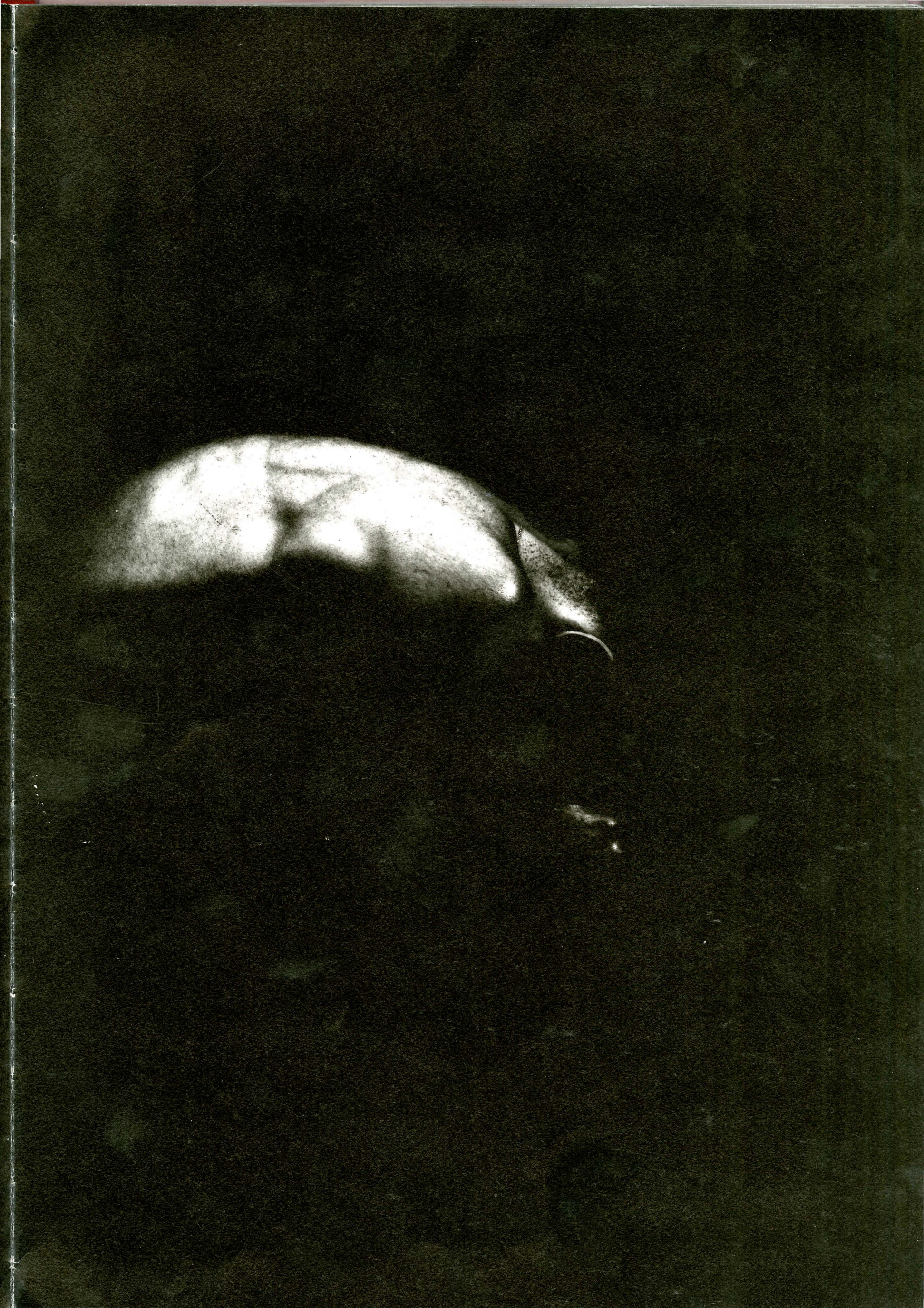
UPANISHADS

He who is upright and unbending yet mild and persevering, who shuns the cruel and does no harm to living creatures: if he shall live thus always, then through the restraint of his senses and through alms he shall attain the blessing of heaven.

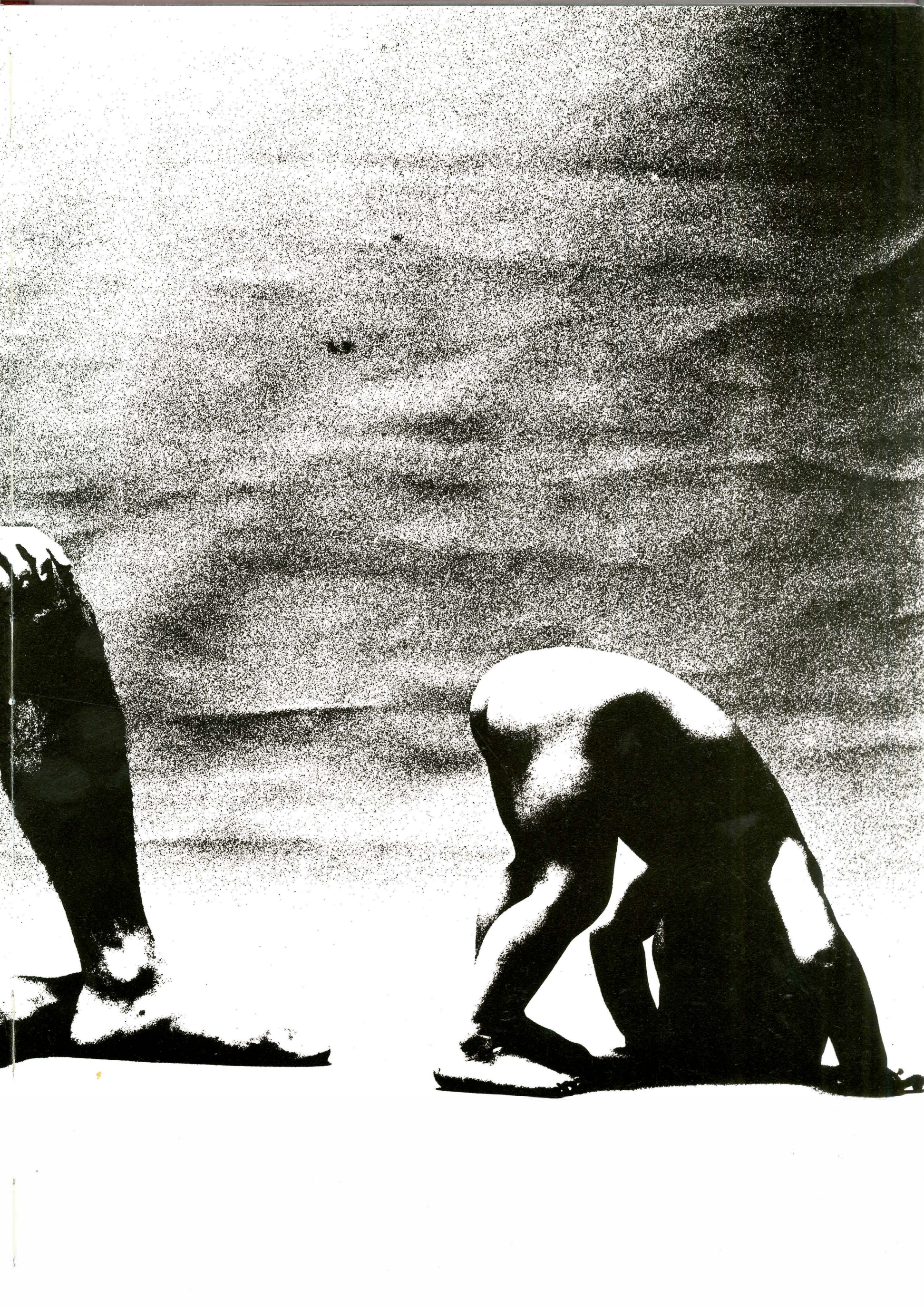
CODE OF MANU







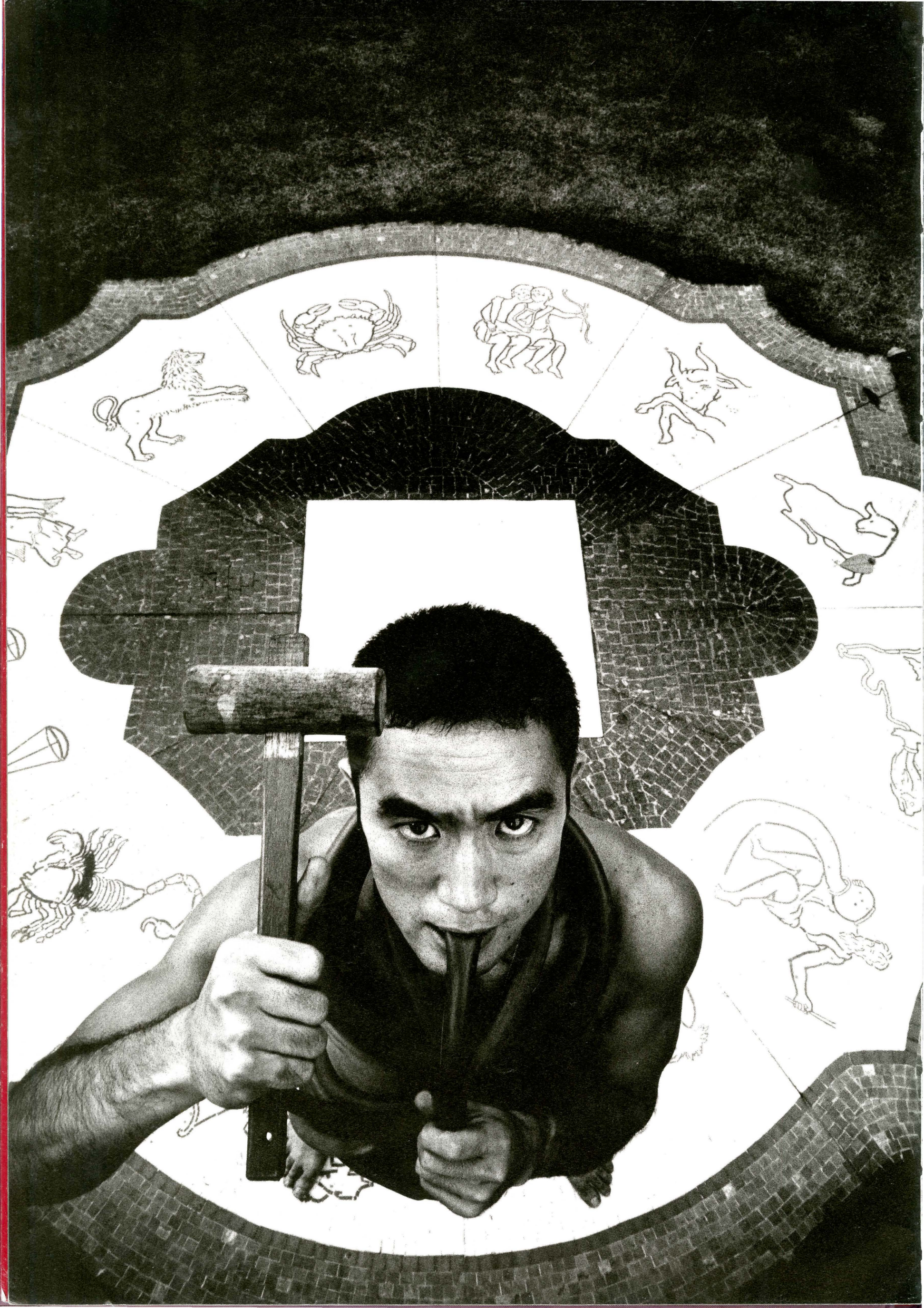


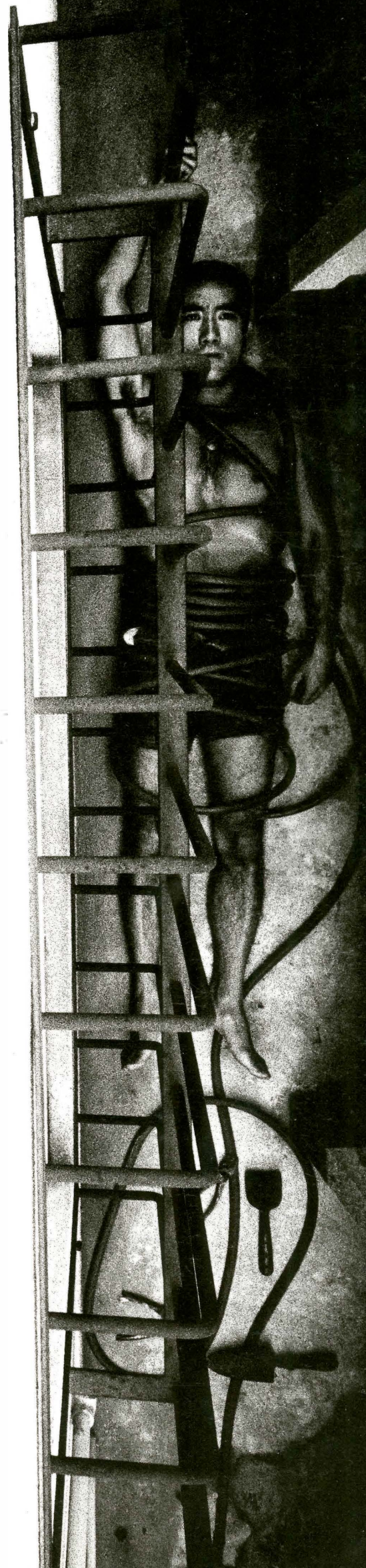


Let there be no dancing. Let there be no singing.
Let there be no playing of instruments,
nor clapping of hands, nor gnashing of teeth.
Let there be no strange cries of excitement.

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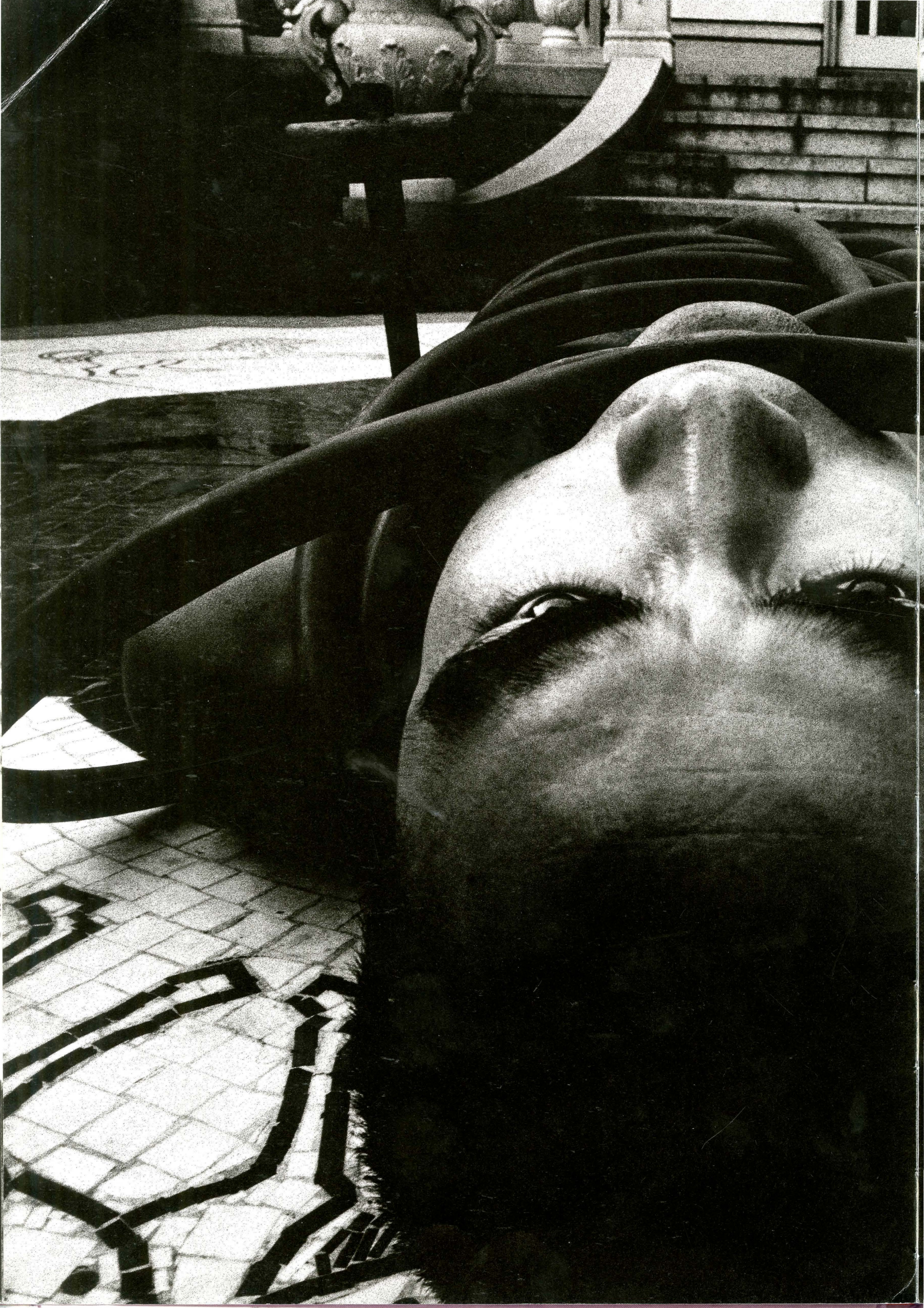














The mouth of a woman is always pure.
So too is the bird as it plucks the fruit.
The calf is pure when the mother cow's milk flows,
and the hound that has caught the deer is pure.

CODE OF MANU

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Brahma has two forms:
the phenomenon and the noumenon
Again, the mortal and the immortal
Again, the fixed and the fluid
Again
The actual and the hypothetical

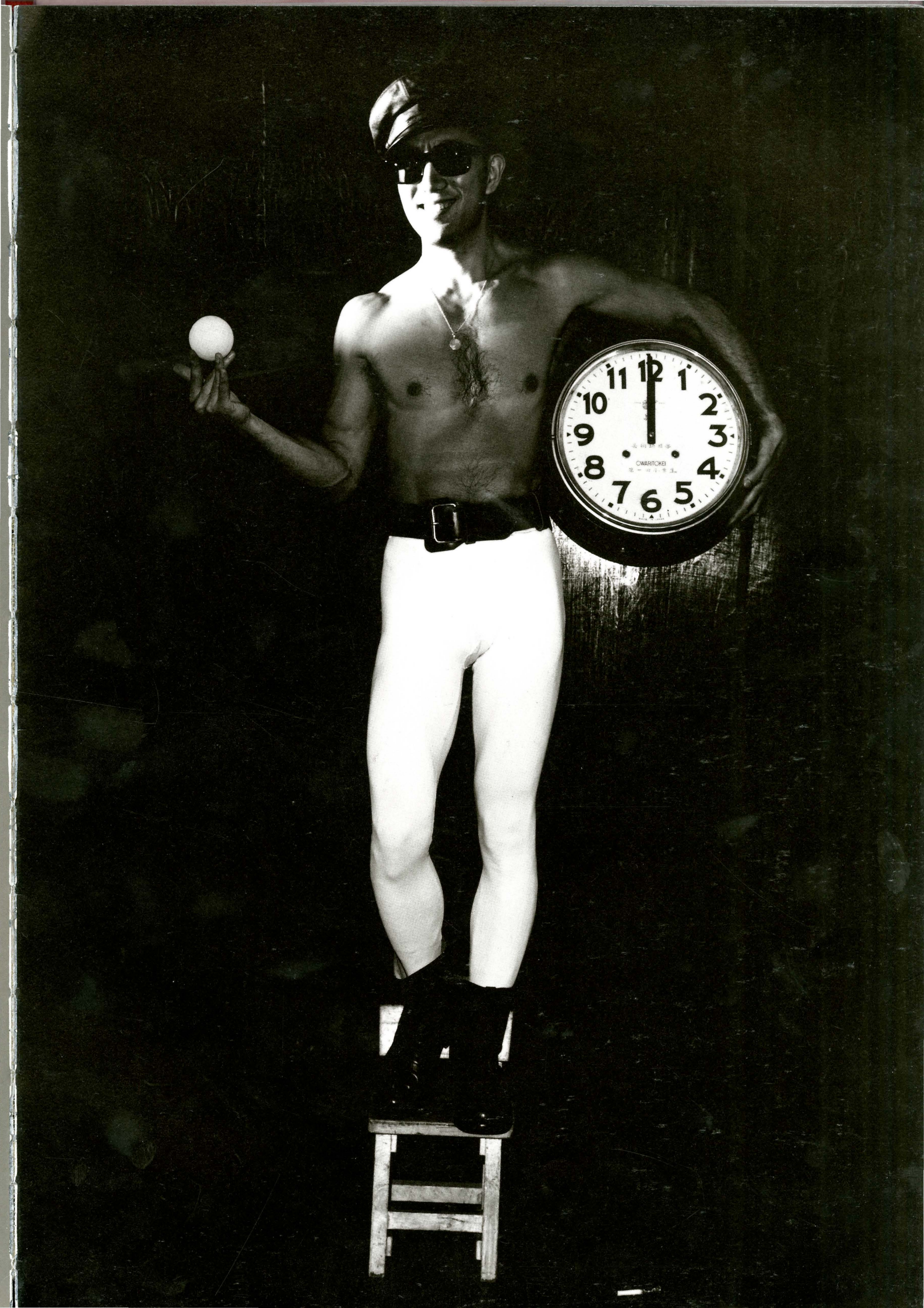
UPANISHADS

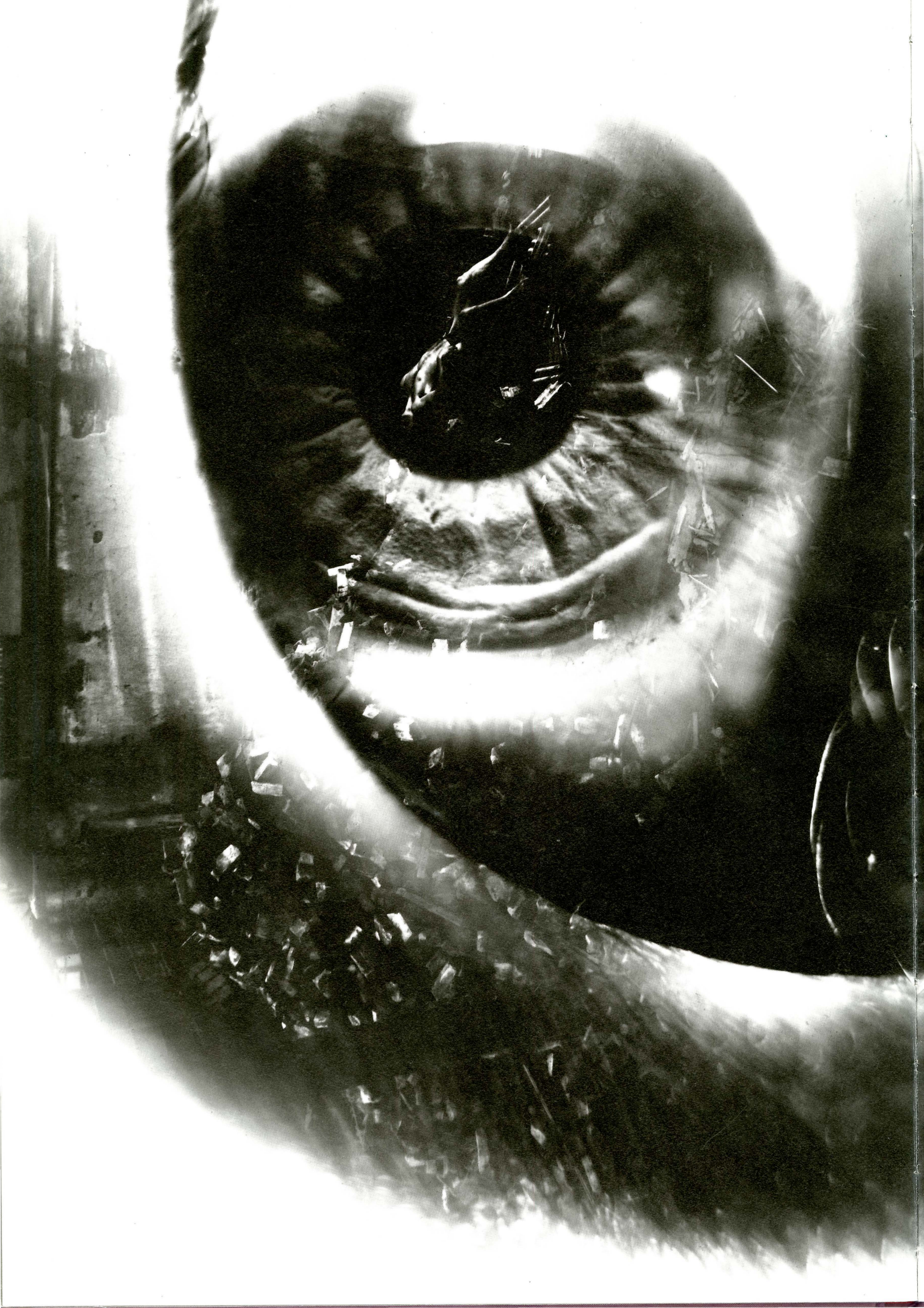
第3章

THE LAUGHING CLOCK AND THE IDLE WITNESS

Of old, I bestowed life on Adam,
but he forgot, and ate the forbidden fruit.
I saw no faith in him.

KORAN

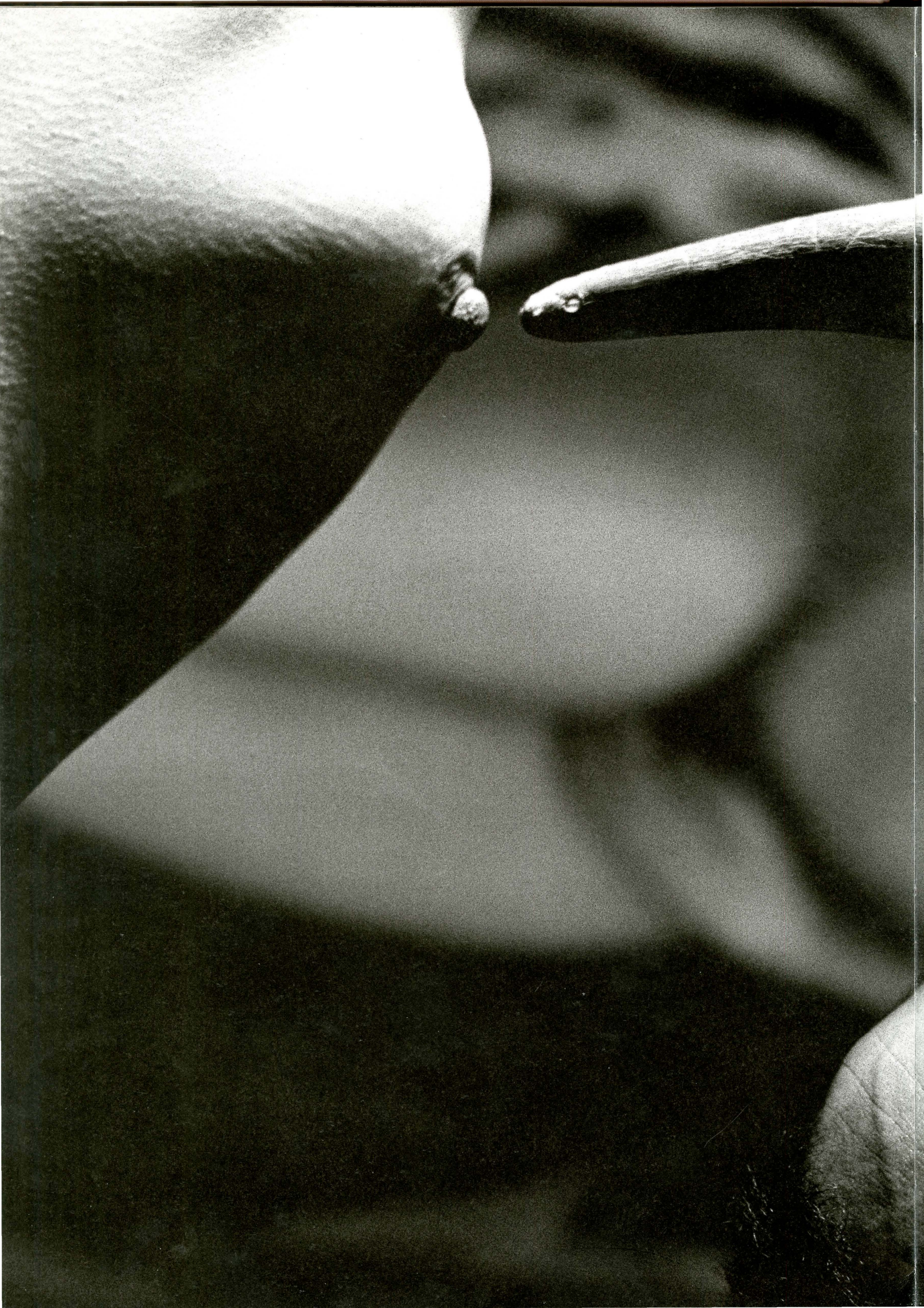
















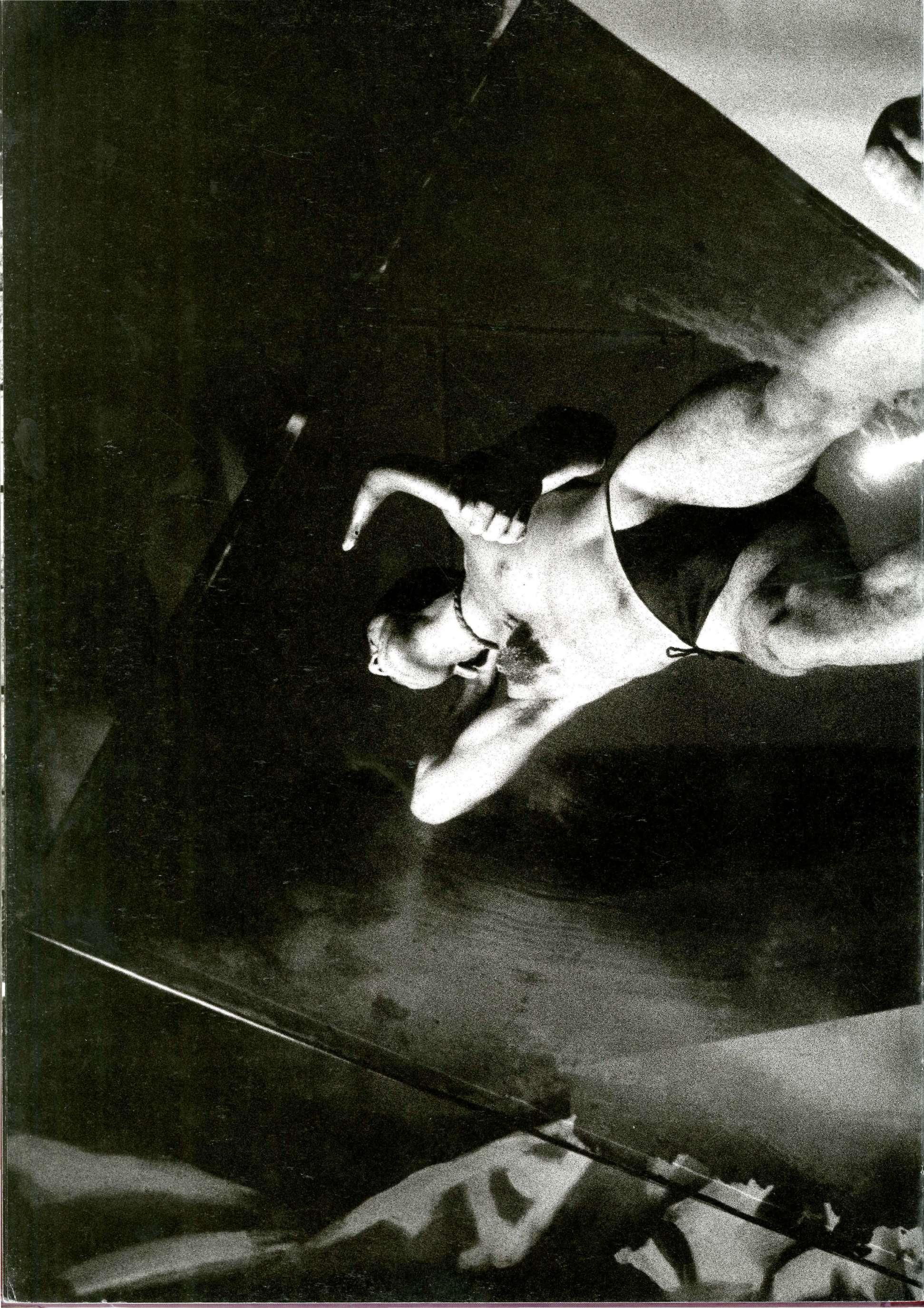
















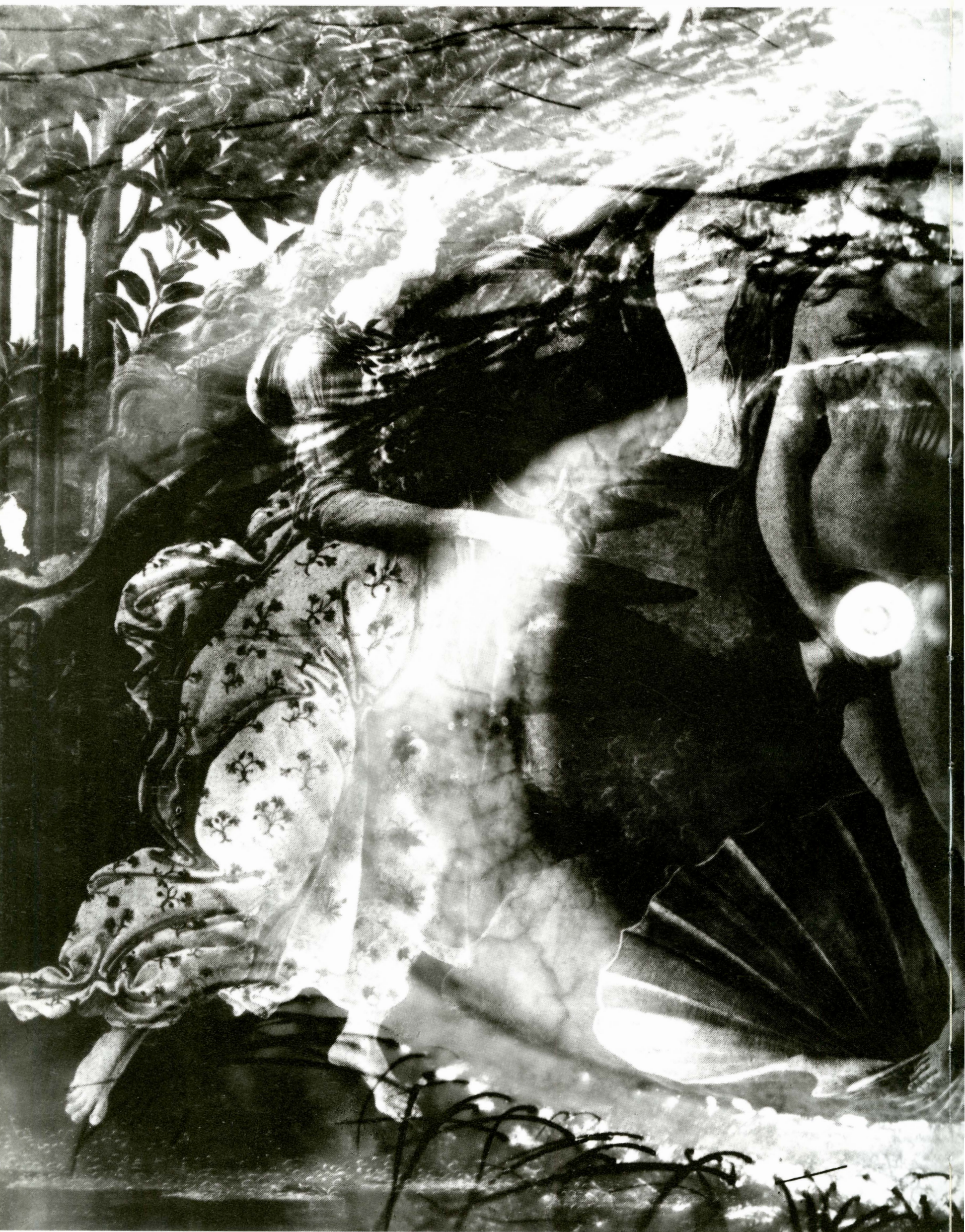


**Ey Parvuttee! Parvuttee veyshyah-sey
sumvhaushun punyeh hey, paupéh nushow hey!**

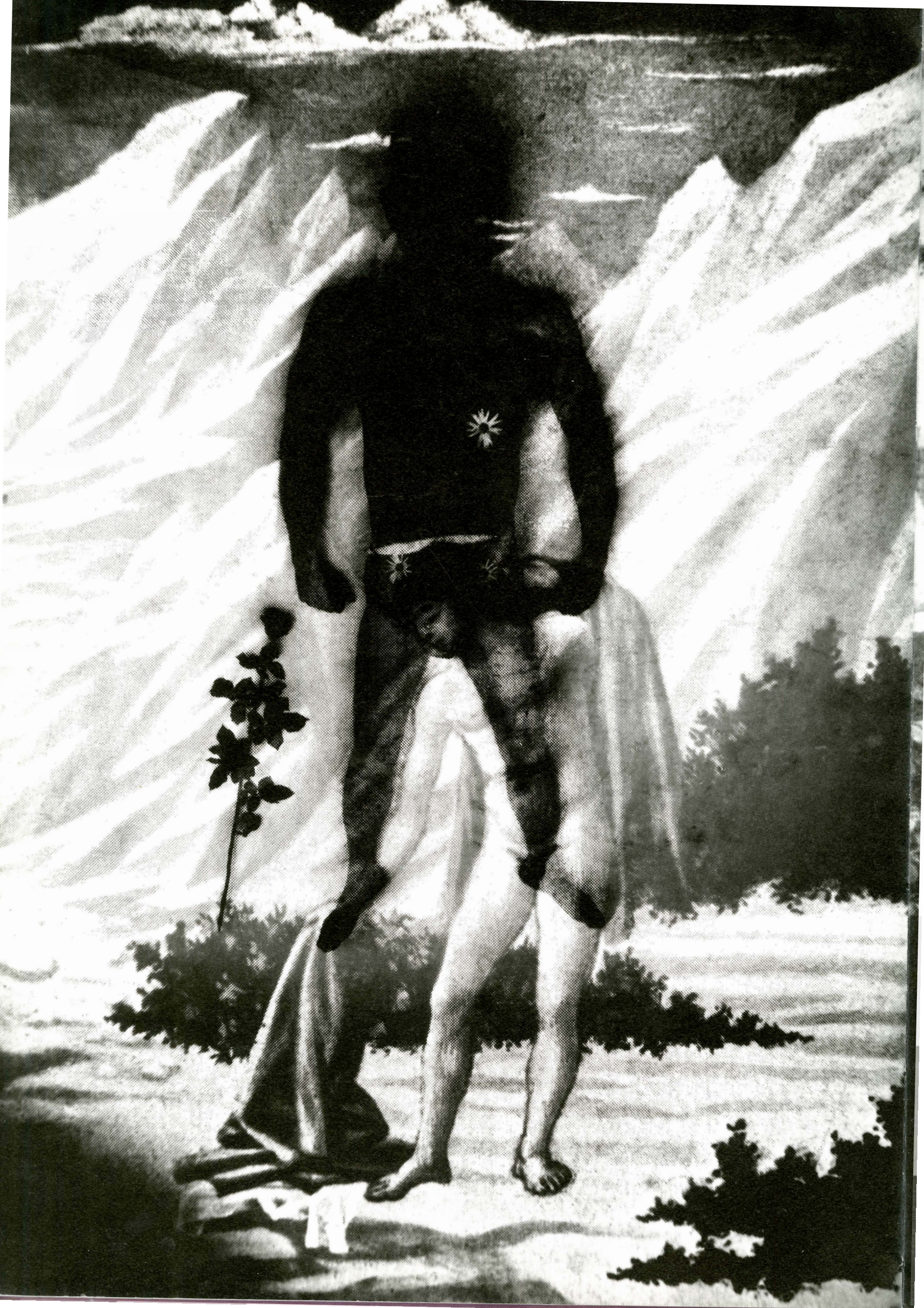
**O Thou of Mountainous Breasts!
To have carnal intercourse with the goddess Parvuttee
is a virtue which destroys all sin.**

ALLEN EDWARDS: *JEWEL IN THE LOTUS*

第4章 = DIVERS DESECRATIONS

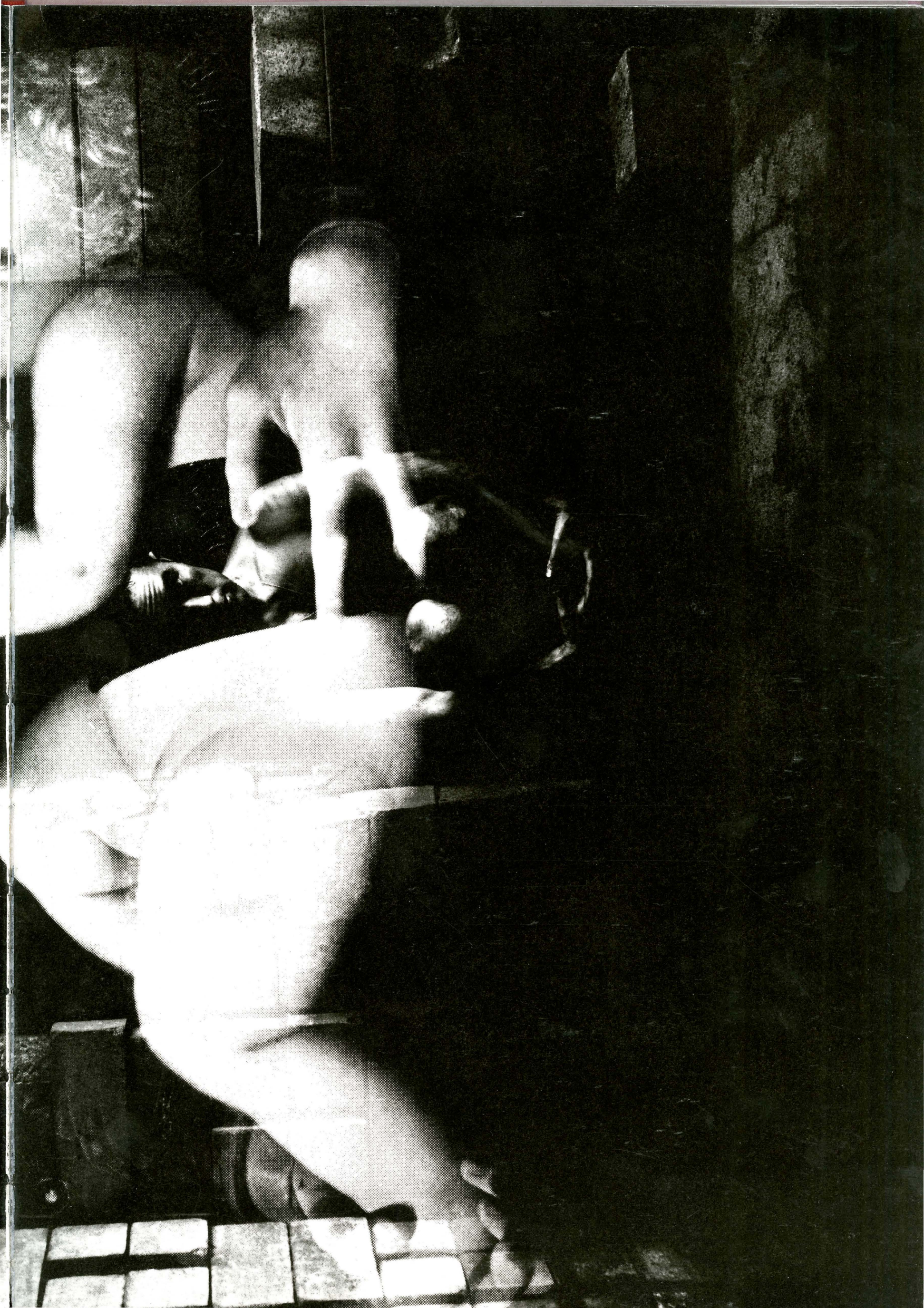






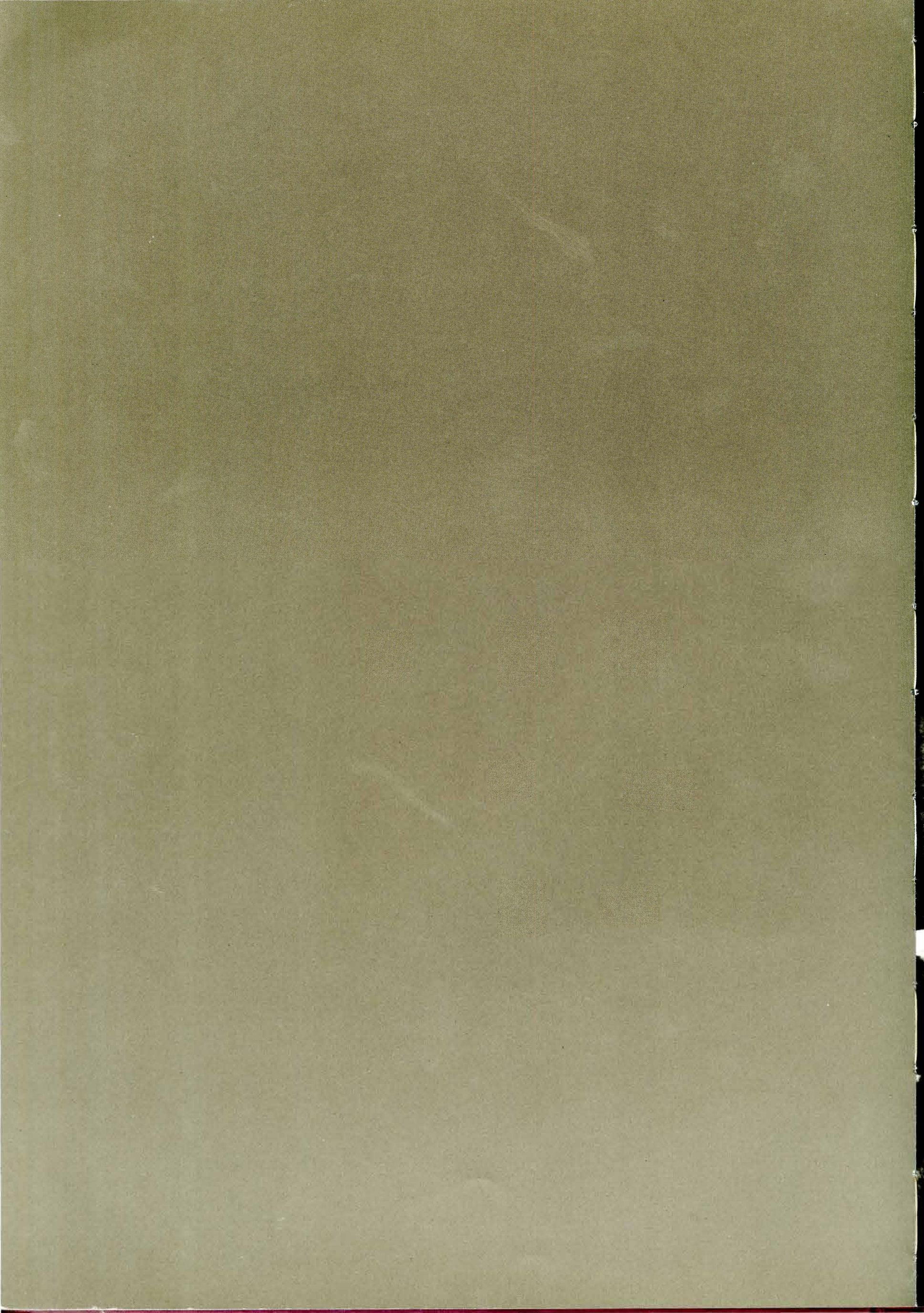


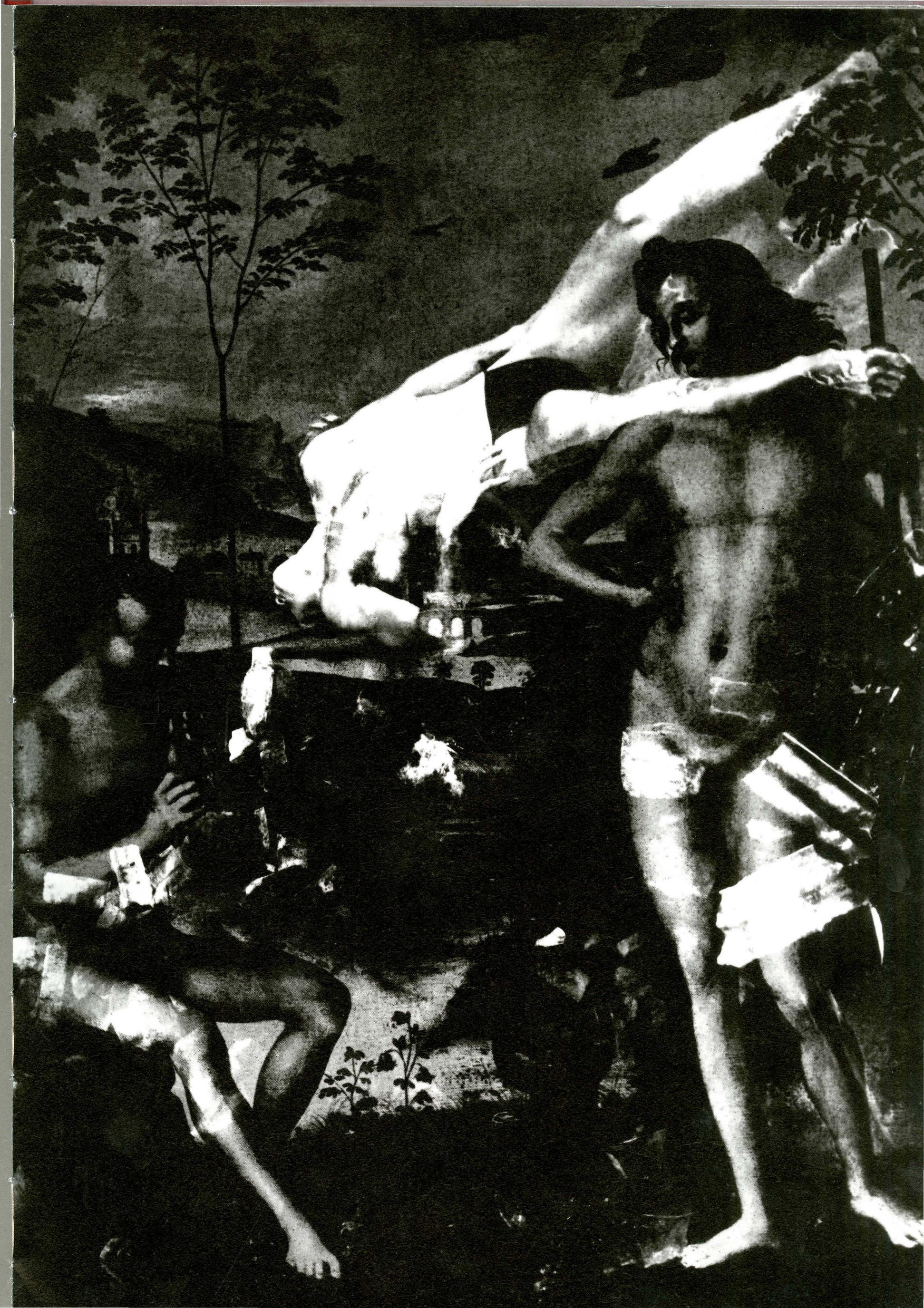


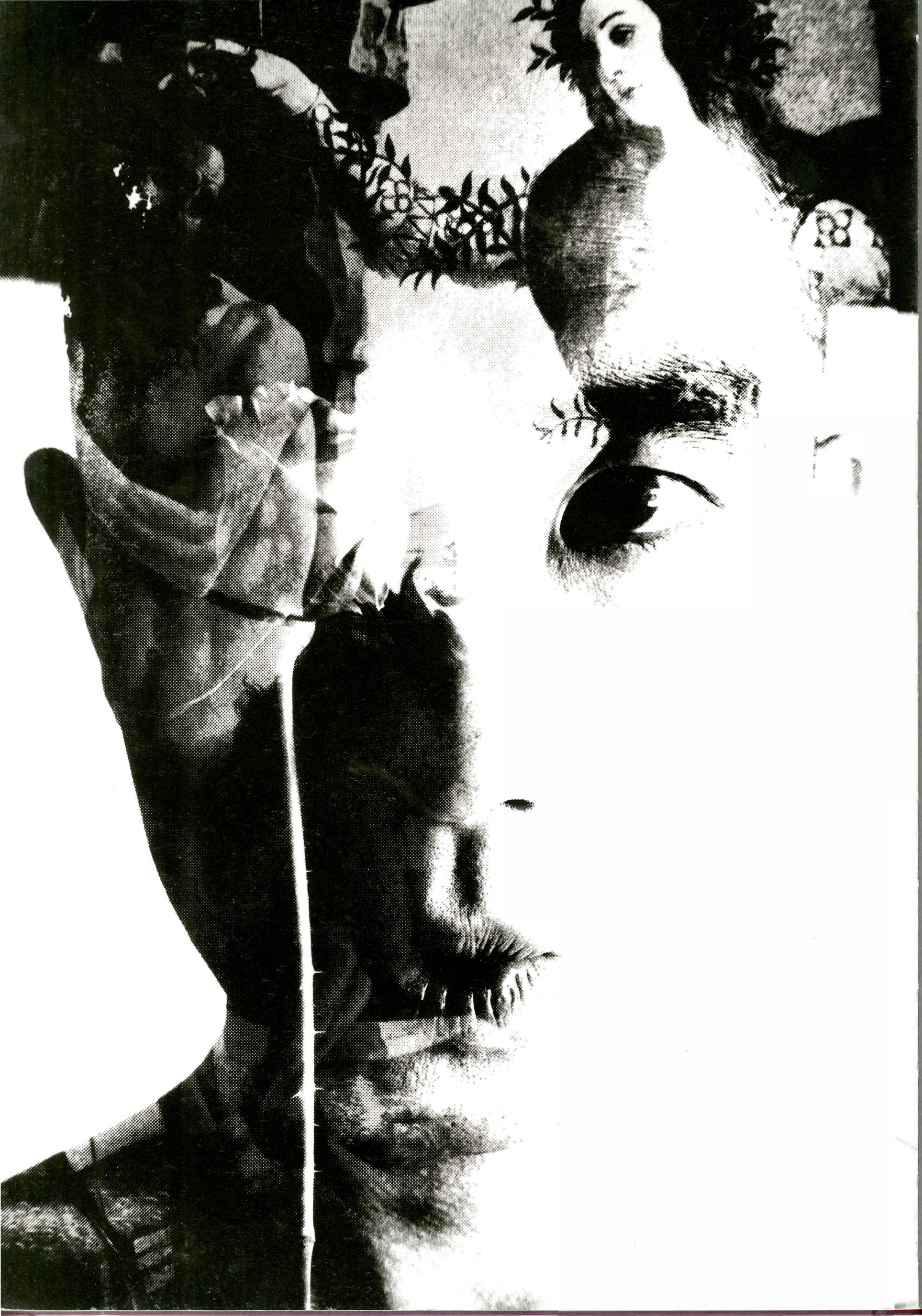












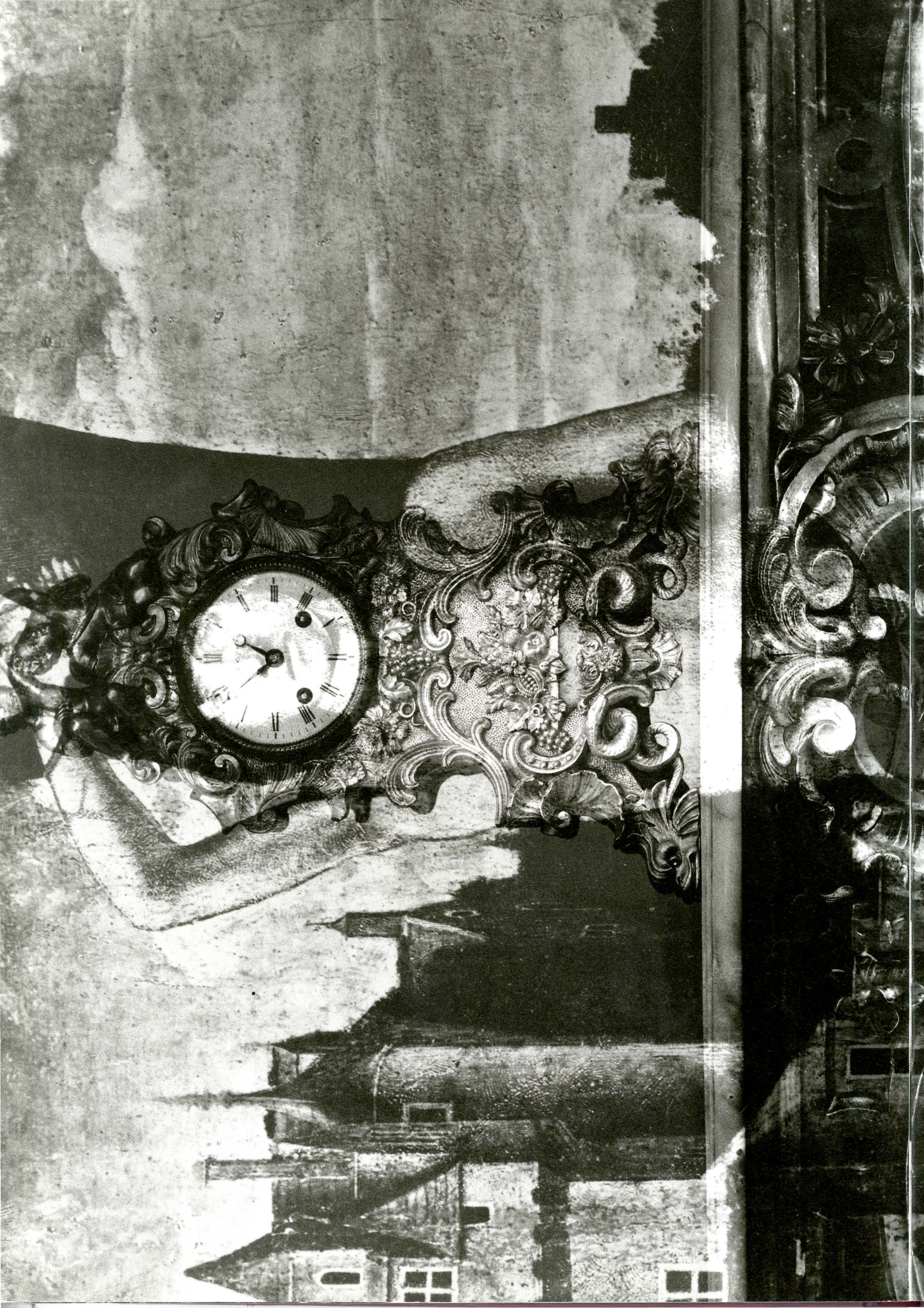


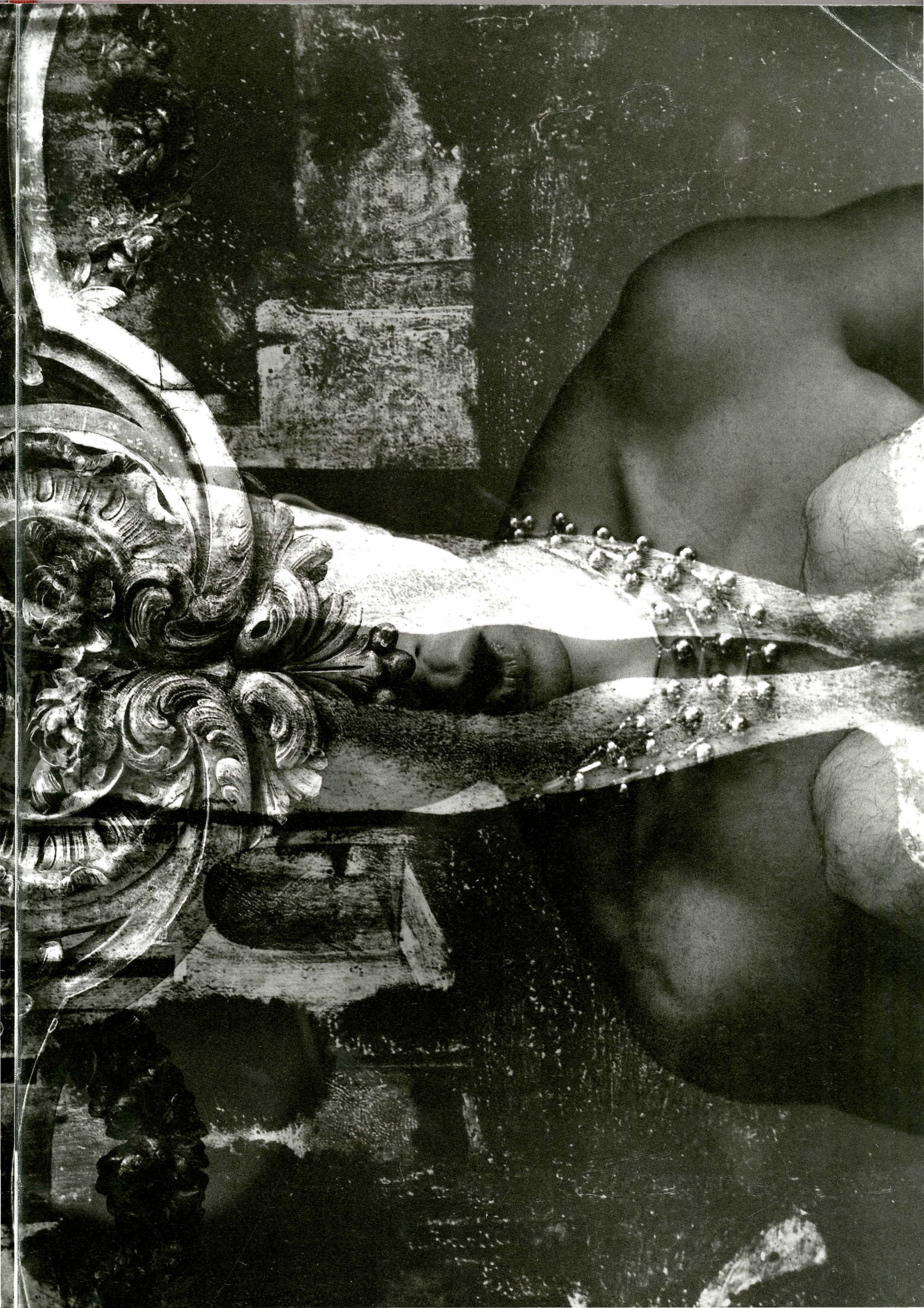
















**Sudanese sheykhs by strict custom would
tender their semen, carefully preserved in rosewater,
as evidence of fealty and manly power.**

ALLEN EDWARDS; *JEWEL IN THE LOTUS*

第5章 = RETRIBUTION OF THE ROSE







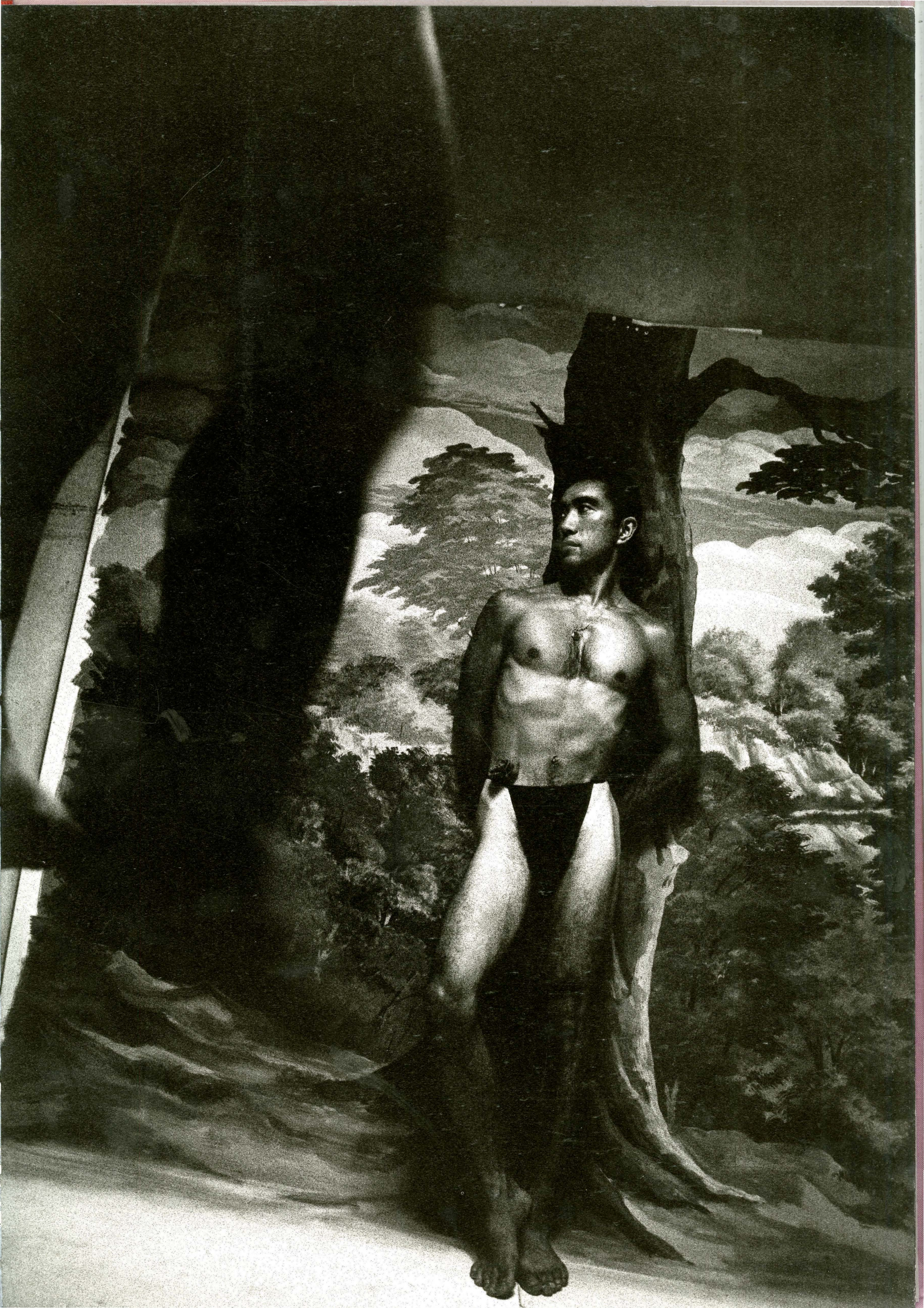


Truly, man is like the mighty tree,
lord of the forest.

His hair is its abundant foliage,
his skin enfolds him as the bark,
the blood runs from his skin as the
resin springs from the bark.

And the blood that flows from the slain man
is as the sap of the tree that is felled.

UPANISHADS

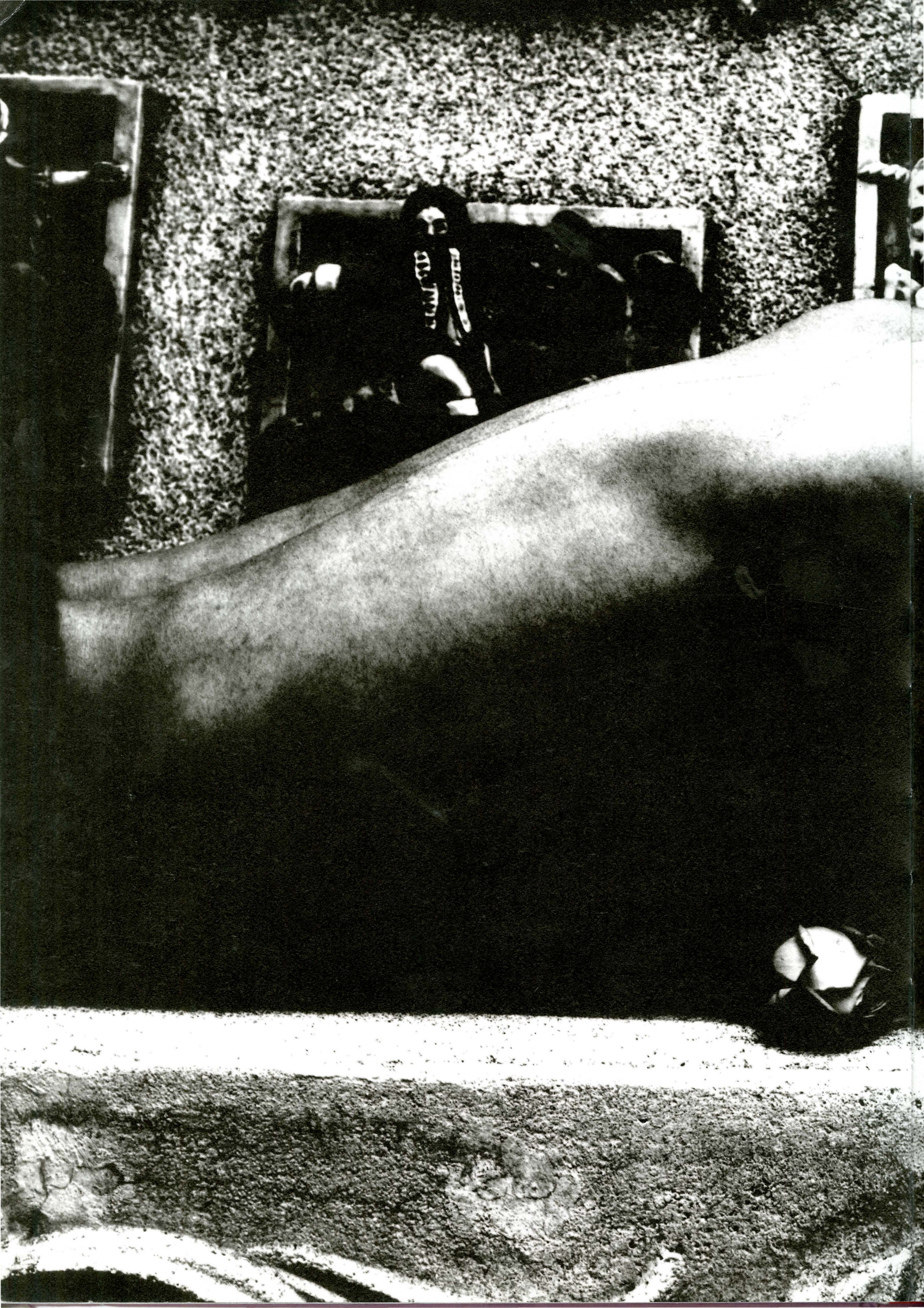










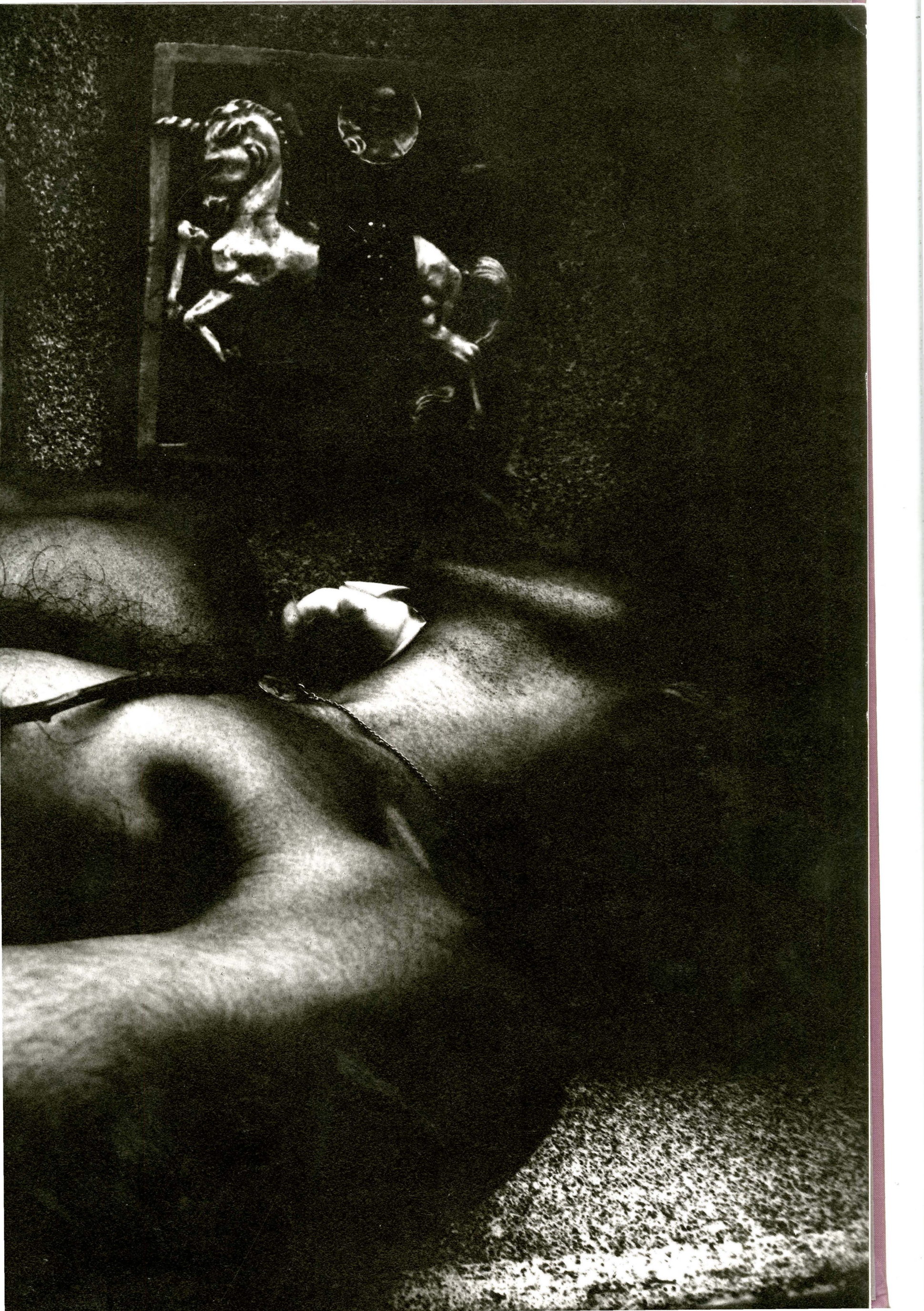
















And the light that shines above the
heavenly vault, the support of all creation,
the support of the universe, in the supreme and
highest realms, is none other than the
light that dwells in the human body. Its actual
manifestation is the warmth that is felt when
the flesh is touched.

UPANISHADS

* ject matter" of my photographs, *he wanted to become a dancer himself.*

I was still in my twenties at the time, so I was young and naive. I was unable to distinguish between an international literary figure and a dancer. Mishima's father happened to be watering the garden, so I grabbed the hose, and I wrapped Mishima in it. Later the garden, which was a peaceful family place, became a kind of nude theater in which Hijikata also participated. Mishima's wife, Yoko, and his children had to leave the house when I subsequently came to work with Mishima. I only discovered this later, but I still feel guilty towards his family. It was Mishima's policy that this work and his family were quite separate.

However, the first session began in front of Mishima's wife and his father. I completely wrapped his body in the hose and kept him standing in the center of the zodiac where he was planning to erect a statue of Apollo. I asked him to look up and concentrate on the camera which I was holding on a ladder above. When I had arranged the composition and was ready to shoot, Mishima said, "I have a special ability. I can keep my eyes open for minutes." It was true. He didn't blink until I had exposed two roles of film. I asked him to lie on the zodiac and I photographed him from a low angle on the ground. Then I asked him to walk slowly, with the hose still wrapped around him, and to lie down in the narrow space between the wall of his home and his neighbor's house. I continued shooting for about an hour.

"I have never been photographed like this," he said. "Why did you do it this way?"

"This is the destruction of a myth," I replied.

"You should wrap a hose around Sato," he laughed, referring to Haruo Sato, who was then considered a literary giant in Japan.

After I left Mishima, I thought perhaps I had gone too far. A week later I gave the editor prints of ten photographs. I told Daido Moriyama, who was then my assistant, that I was afraid that Mishima would become annoyed with me. After a further two days I received a call from Mr. Kawashima saying that Mishima was very pleased with the photographs and that he thanked me very much. Kodansha asked if I would also design the book, even though I had no experience. I immediately accepted and the book of Mishima's essays was published by Kodansha under the title *The Attack of Beauty* on 15 November 1961. It was my first book design.

I continued to be excited by the photographs of that day and I made up my mind to ask Mishima to be my model. I thought he would accept. He did so without hesitation over the telephone and I made an appointment for a new session. When I arrived for the second visit I remember that his wife and family were out. He showed me a number of reproductions of Italian Renaissance paintings, including work by Botticelli and Raphael. I remember in particular that he showed me Bernard Berenson's book on the Renaissance and several paintings of Saint Sebastian including a Raphael after which he said, "Isn't it beautiful, Mr. Hosoe?" I thought the painting was marvelous but at the time I didn't know why the body of a man dripping blood, where his breast had been pierced by an arrow, should be beautiful.

* My intentions in photographing Mishima were gradually

* becoming clearer. I thought I would use whatever Mishima loved or owned to form a document on the writer. However the interpretation and expression would be my own. After the first shooting I had referred to an iconoclastic act but I was in fact suggesting a creative process through destruction. I wanted to create a new image of Yukio Mishima through my photography.

After the second or third session I asked Hijikata to co-operate with me. Hijikata lent me his dance studio and together with his lover, Akiko Motofuji, they became models with Mishima. I created a special painted background based on Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* with the upper half of the Venus removed. It was of course quite out of fashion in portrait studios to use a painted backdrop, so my special order for the studio caused great excitement for a scenery painter. I believed that the soul of a man was residual in his property, and that his spirit was especially evident in the art and the possessions that surrounded him. I thought that Mishima's Venus would be born by merging his flesh with the half-painted *Sleeping Venus*. I also needed a woman who had the image of the holy virgin. I discovered that image in Kyoko Enami, a young movie actress known to both Mishima and myself.

Some of the photographs from *Barakei* were first exhibited in January 1962 in the group show *Non* which was held at the Matsuya Department Store in Tokyo. The exhibition, organized by the young critic Tatsuo Fukushima, contained work by several photographers including Hisae Imai, Yasuhiro Ishimoto, Kikuji Kawada, Ikko Narahara, Akira Sato and Shomei Tomatsu. The series was only half-finished at the time and I had no major intentions to exhibit or publish the work. It was only as a result of Fukushima's encouragement that I agreed to show any of the work. The rough title that I was considering was *Yukio Mishima and Himself*. I thought my title was too dull, so when the exhibition was about to take place I asked Mishima to provide a title. The next day he sent me a letter with eight possibilities: *Excuse of Suffering, A Man and A Rose, A Fugue of Nightmare, A Variation of Ordeals, Death and Loquacity, Barakei, A Fugue of Death and Laughter* and *Yukio Mishima and Himself*.

The word *Barakei* immediately impressed me. Each of the word's Chinese characters or *kanji* was beautiful in form and sound, and moreover the title fully expressed the content. *Bara* means *rose* and *kei* means *punishment*. Translated literally, the title would be *The Punishment of a Rose*. When the work was first published as a book in 1963, I decided after consulting Mishima, that the English title would be *Killed by Roses*.

I wanted to explore a theme of life and death through Mishima's body and flesh, but the idea was never concrete at the start. However, as Mishima wrote in his preface, the most significant element of the theme was established in the final section of the book. In fact the early sections were photographed as the shooting sessions were coming to an end and my concept had already been clearly established. This whole process of shooting and making the concept explicit had lasted from the fall of 1961 until the spring of 1962. When the project was crystalized I realized I needed an infant to symbolize birth. I really wanted to photograph Mishima's young son, but knew he would never allow this. However, he did permit me to bring an anonymous child into his house to use as a model.

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* Despite the fact that *Barakei* was a document of life and death, I had a taboo about actually mentioning the word *death* in regard to the theme of the book until the fall of 1970. At the end of the summer of 1970 we had changed the sequence and the layout of the work for publication of a second edition. Mishima chose the titles for each section and called the final chapter *Death*, then asked for my approval. I accepted the suggestion at once, having known all along that the essence of the last section was morbid. Shortly after this decision, on 25 November 1970, he committed suicide by *seppuku* at Ichigaya Heights.

Recalling that day now, I have no doubt he was exercising an absolute will. The publication of *Barakei* in a new edition is my requiem to Yukio Mishima, who revealed his gorgeous flesh and supremely powerful body at the age of thirty-eight. Here is the perfect body of Mishima, who never admitted the decay of the flesh.

* * * *

THE PUBLISHING HISTORY

The first edition of *Barakei* or *Killed by Roses* was published by Shueisha in Tokyo in 1963. The book design and the graphics for the first chapter, *Prelude*, were by Kohei Sugiura. This original edition is the edition from which any future editions will be derived.

The second edition was published by Shueisha on 30 January 1971 as an international edition. The book was totally re-designed by Tadanori Yokoo in consultation with Mishima and myself. I wanted to renew the book, add further elements, but maintain the central theme. The conspicuous change was the design of the book in a Western fashion, so that the pages were turned from the left and the text was horizontal. Mishima had always insisted that his writing be published in any Japanese publication in the traditional vertical fashion. However in this edition he compromised. With his own brush he produced calligraphy for the title, the credits and the headings, which were then placed above Japanese type which was set horizontally. At first this looked strange to the ordinary Japanese reader, but after a while we realized this produced a wonderful and original solution. Mishima also insisted that the first English title, *Killed by Roses* was not close enough to the original Japanese title *Barakei*. *Killed by Roses* was dead from that moment and *Ordeal by Roses* was born.

The publication of the second edition was planned for November 1970, but there were some delays over printing since I had instructed the printers, Nissha Co. in Kyoto, to repeat some proofs and change ink colors. Yokoo had also suffered an accident and was in hospital, unable to work. Yokoo later told me that Mishima visited him in hospital, not only to provide support but to encourage him to finish the lay-out work despite his serious condition. It was unusual for Mishima to act in such an impolite manner. Later, in view of subsequent events, I could understand Mishima's anxiety that the book might be delayed until after November. Mishima did know how the final book would look because a dummy copy and proofs were displayed in October in the exhibition *Yukio Mishima*, which was held at the Tobu Department Store in Ikebukuro in Tokyo. Several of the photographs were

* blown up and used in the exhibition in a section titled by Mishima as *River of the Flesh*, beside which he wrote, "I will never admit the decay of the flesh." I wondered what he meant, since everybody, however much they dream of perpetual youth, has to accept the aging process sooner or later. Even if it was a literary effect, the statement was too emphatic. I never told Mishima of my impression.

The news of his suicide crossed the world immediately. It was a terrible shock, whether I understood his motives or not. It was a complete surprise to realize that the publication was timed to coincide with his death. I suggested to Shueisha that they should postpone the publication. I wanted to avoid publishing on a wave of sensationalism. Despite the fact that after the extraordinary events of his death, the book would have sold very well, the chief executives of Shueisha accepted my suggestion, while most of the Japanese press went almost crazy, selling the Mishima story daily. I would like to express my sincere admiration for Shueisha for making that decision in the circumstances.

I subsequently received countless letters, telephone calls and cables from newspapers, magazines, television stations and even radio stations, both in Japan and abroad, asking for my photographs of Mishima. I declined all their offers. The main reason was that the photographs from *Barakei* had no direct relationship to his suicide. If the photographs had been published carelessly or sensationally by a journalist who was skilled in the relationship between image and text, then no-one would be able to control the result. The honor of Mishima and also the integrity of photography had to be protected.

I eventually received a call from Mishima's widow, asking me to revive the publication of *Barakei*. Although she had been sympathetic to my desire to postpone the book, she said that her husband had been greatly looking forward to it, so I decided to proceed. The sensationalism receded, the printing and the binding were revived, and the second edition finally appeared the following January.

This publication of the new edition of *Barakei* comes as the result of many requests from all over the world. There were many young people who knew of the title but had never had the chance to see either of the previous editions, which are very rarely found even in Japan. I only have one copy of each myself.

Kiyoshi Awazu designed the new edition with a new generation of readers in mind. It was a difficult challenge because of the existence of the previous two books. He succeeded in bringing *Barakei* back to life, especially by the use of the bold colors, such as the combination of the imperial purple and the blood red.

I have decided to refer to this new edition by its Japanese title. This will avoid confusion if it appears in several languages. *Barakei* is pronounced 'bara-kay' in English. *Ordeal by Roses* will remain as the sub-title.

In this edition I have returned to the structure, the sequence and the chapter titles of the first edition. The book returns to its origins. It is my great wish that *Barakei* will receive new blood and other reincarnations to be inherited by future generations in further editions.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have been concerned with the publication of this new *Barakei* for their great support and cooperation.

* * * *

* AFTERWORD BY MARK HOLBORN *

Barakei provides a glimpse of the interior world of a great modern Japanese writer whose death by ritual suicide in 1970 was the culmination of both a personal and political conflict. The year was a turning point in the transformation of modern Japan. The Osaka Expo marked Japan's new economic confidence, and the Revision of the Security Treaty with the United States was eventually accepted. In a final speech, Mishima accused the nation of being "drunk with prosperity." Mishima's death was greeted with some disdain in Japan as a sensational act. However, the subsequent publication of his final cycle of novels, *The Sea of Fertility*, which had been conceived eight years earlier, revealed that his death was a carefully considered act, a gesture of historical implication in perfect accord with the morbid and erotic aesthetic that pervades his writing. *Barakei* is the most explicit visual evidence of this aesthetic. Constructed from the baroque interior of his own home, *Barakei* is a private world that reaches Death at its conclusion. The props that surrounded the writer were the antithesis of the pure Japanese sensibility of understatement and restraint. The excesses of his private environment are a measure of the turmoil of a brilliant man torn between East and West and profoundly disturbed by the mercantile course of his native culture.

Mishima came to represent much more than a literary figure. In the West he fulfilled popular notions of the warrior creed. In Japan his postures embarrassed a society intent on an acceptable role in the international community. His respect for the Emperor touched a core of nationalism that had not been witnessed since 1945. His complexity is reflected in the contradictions of his society, which constantly reasserted its past while probing the future. Mishima placed himself astride the tension between past and future, East and West, and decided that a course of action, rather than the practice of literature, was the only resolution.

Mishima has attracted more attention in the West for the manner of his death than for the quality of his writing. In a tribute, Yasunari Kawabata, the Nobel Prize winner and Mishima's former teacher, said that only once in five hundred years would a writer of Mishima's stature emerge. Yet Mishima's books are still sold on the sensationalism of his physique, with headband and sword. He has been packaged as a fierce writer in the guise of an anachronistic warrior. The truth that surfaces is that Mishima was a complex and contradictory figure, reclaiming a traditional ethic in a transformed society.

Mishima habitually wrote during the night, probably every night. Through remarkable discipline he was able to live more than one life. Literature was a solitary nocturnal practice; the day and sunlight, in particular, offered the opportunity to become a "man of the body." He cultivated both language and his flesh fervently, constantly aware of the abstraction of words and the tangible, external frame of his body. The more he described a decisive course of action like the suicide in his story *Patriotism* or the assassination in his novel *Runaway Horses*, the more inadequate seemed the descriptive power of art, and the greater the gulf between art and action. Through theater the conflict could be resolved. Mishima's *Modern Nō Plays* serve as a bridge between a traditional literary convention and Mishima's innovative power. He believed that theater, even with its theoretical structure and false blood, could be more profound than real life.

* The staging of his final exhibition in a Tokyo department

store, his debate with the radical left students at Tokyo University in 1969, and his role as a movie actor are all theatrical gestures. The uniform of his *Tate no Kai, Shield Society*, the youthful brotherhood of "beauty's kamikaze squad," suited an aesthetic rather than a strategic subversion. The young men were not recruited to Mishima's private army, as the society was popularly described, but to a stage production. They were ferocious, fanatical and delicate in accord with an erotic sensibility. In retrospect so many of these gestures can now be seen as rehearsals for a final, irreversible act. In his own film, *Yukoku*, based on *Patriotism*, he enacted a suicide he had already described. He performed it on a set derived from a Nō stage before a scroll bearing the calligraphic character for Sincerity. A suicide on a stage can become a moving and disturbing spectacle. The suicide in the center of contemporary Tokyo with an alerted press at hand, momentarily halted the nation and stunned the world. The convention of theater enabled him to prepare and execute his death. It is as theater that he offered himself as the "subject matter" for Hosoe's camera. *Barakei* should be viewed as a performance under Hosoe's direction. The stage is the territory of Mishima's imagination.

Barakei is remarkable because Hosoe has enabled Mishima to drop the mask of successful writer. Only within the conventions of a performance would Mishima display himself. Contrary to the belief that this work is narcissistic, it is the act of a shy man challenging himself with the most severe task, to make public the morbid and erotic world he inhabited. *Barakei* describes a world that eludes language. The final paragraph of *Runaway Horses* describes the sunrise over a cliff as the hero, facing the sea, plunges a blade into his body. *Barakei* begins where that paragraph ends.

By submitting himself as "subject matter," Mishima made an unusual abdication. He took on a masochistic role, entrusting himself to Hosoe's almost sadistic authority. Hosoe has constructed the world of *Barakei* as an interior map composed of landmarks—fragments of history and art. The ghost of Saint Sebastian, who obsessed Mishima ever since he was aroused by Guido Reni's painting, hovers amongst the baroque props, the clocks and the mosaic zodiac of his home. Mishima lies wrapped on the zodiac, ensnared in his contradictions. He sits in samurai loincloth at a marble-topped Spanish table, or lies on an extravagant stone seat, his muscles glowing, a rose at his head and his Levis at his waist. Hosoe has uncovered Mishima's creative epicenter, a point on a fault line between East and West, a most dangerous yet vital place.

Mishima is said to have delivered his final lines for *The Sea of Fertility* cycle on the day of his death. The cycle is explicit, urgent, and includes a masterpiece, *Spring Snow*. In those last months he worked furiously to realize a monumental edition of *Barakei*. This is its successor. Hosoe penetrated the outer masks to expose the final view—the savage eyes and the lyrical rose. He has granted us access to the imagination of an extraordinary subject, an achievement seldom attempted through photography. The contrived and layered forms of the photographs are in perfect correspondence to the layers of the subconscious he has crossed.

This private theater serves us well if it draws us back to *The Sea of Fertility*, his testament. His language should be read again before judgments are passed on the terrifying conclusion of this course of action, when the line between theater and reality was crossed and the blood that spilled was real.

*

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