

I used to have a fantasy where I would imagine a smooth, swirling, even-textured disk which would swell gradually, transforming itself into a giant, fibrous mass. I had a certain amount of control over this incarnation and could cause it to mutate back and forth between its polar extremes. To me this daydream, this constant gentle swing between the scatological and the serene, represents that double bind we refer to as the nature of eroticism. In a similar way Bataille thought of the foot as both a symbol of man's baseness, as well as, by virtue of it representing the transition from the bestial, of his loftiness, his mind.<sup>1</sup>

This duality is best expressed in the relation of the downward slanting frieze of faces opposite the giant, larva-like toes, suggesting the possibility of a meeting. Each however embodies an aspect of the other: the toes have a smooth luminescent quality, and the faces, enlarged from postage-stamp size are unusually gritty. The faces are haunting and transgressive in the way of something exhumed, or systematically and singlemindedly revealed, made to function in a way never intended by their originators. But because of their elevated placement they have an element of surprise and the ability to shock; their vulnerability and pathos is countered by a positioning which dominates the space and allows them, albeit symbolically, a reciprocal gaze.

In my work, the seamless, 'straight' photograph and the crudely constructed renegade are placed side by side in a meeting of the exalted and the abject. If there is a working through of the idea of perversion it is primarily in the will to infect meaning through a forced juxtaposition of disparate and incompatible images. It is also through the idea of mimi-

cry, and the resulting surprise or shock which follows from that duplicity. Several of my images work this way: a hand becomes a foot, a clump of mud a mouth or an anus, flesh merges with stone - these are the most obvious examples, but more generally, there is a dissolving of boundaries, matter and meaning shift and slide, refuse to be contained but insist on crossing over.

Salon-hung and bracketed by toes and faces is a constellation of titled sequences. Individually they have a rebus-like quality, however, read as a totality, and there is a clear invitation to the eye to travel, to cross over, they are singularly unfixated, echoing and invoking one another in a circularity of residual meaning. The titles, while they serve to inflect the work with a certain logic, in their brevity and equivocalness invite a multiplicity of readings, resulting in an economy of meaning which relies as much on absence as presence.

### Titled Sequences: A Listing

*Petite Mort* (little death),<sup>2</sup> *Grand Mal* and *Petit Mal* (big/little seizure) are oblique and humorous invocations of the Surrealist concept of "convulsive beauty" (the emphasis being on the first half of the epithet) - they allude metaphorically and symbolically to notions of eroticism and death. In *Petite Mort* an insect is shown lodged in a shoe, the reference to ejaculation or jouissance is not contained within the frame, thereby causing the meaning to spread, to be taken up elsewhere, in *Grand Mal* and *Petit Mal* for instance, which are images of excess, consumption and expenditure. While *The Gulf* refers to an instance of dissolution where the gap is the discontinuity of human existence, one which is voided

through death or bridged by sexual intimacy, *Drive* is 'petite mort' absurdly literalized, a phallic/vaginal coffin, it is both drives at once.

Other works - *Choose Me*, *Hopechest*, *Bust* and *Burned* suggest narratives of a suspended desire not yet rested on an object choice. In these images amatory anxiety is reinforced by a fractured, distanced treatment of the body, done in the genre of the evidence photograph. In *Closure*, the suggestion is of the photograph as reminder of loss and finitude. In this sequence, Victorian tintypes, little evocations of the "that has been", are juxtaposed with a hard black purse (reminiscent of Dora's reticule), its shiny surface mirroring that which the likenesses imply.<sup>3</sup> *Petite Mort* begins as a title and a euphemism but finds an echo and a twist as it re-emerges in other pieces in an effort to figure through representation the idea of expiration. This idea infuses all the work in the way that Barthes suggests, that a photograph is always a corpse, but one whose meaning has been sublimated such that it can be stared at, and whose only reflection is the inevitability of our own vanishing point.<sup>4</sup>

If the process of fetishization is one where the banal object becomes invested with meaning, then my own photographs, large-scale blowups of miniscule trinkets, would effect a similar transformation. Rendering these images in catalogue form has in a sense completed the cycle, returning the images and objects to a scale closer to their beginnings as not-yet-found. As photographs they have gone from being enormous to miniature, growing and shrinking in a way reminiscent of the erotic-polymorphous incarnation which could collapse and swell at will.

I have often thought that the space mapped out by photographs in books is that of the imaginary - I am thinking of certain kinds of personal and biographical images which have the power to arrest and fascinate. If as private images they are about remembrance and forgetting, brought into the public sphere they come to function as receptacles of a projected desire, windows on a world both tangible and remote. It is this quality of the photograph which I am interested in, its ability to invite and absorb a look, to evoke a memory and inscribe a loss.

Moyra Davey



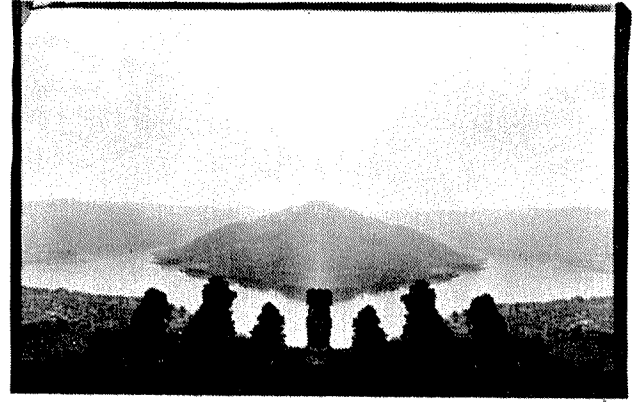
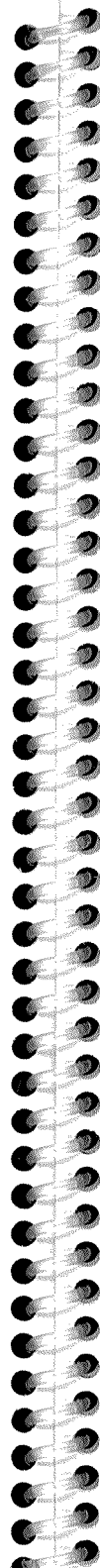
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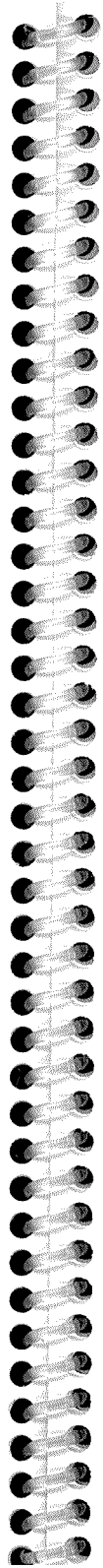
1. Dawn Ades has pointed this out in her essay: "Photography And The Surrealist Text" published in *L'Amour Fou - Photography And Surrealism*, Rosalyn Krauss, Jane Livingston, Abbeyville Press, N.Y. 1985.

2. In French a term for orgasm

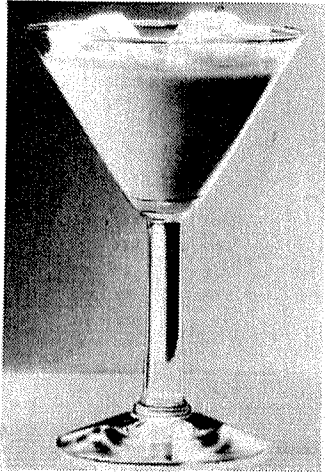
3. This process of fetishization has been described by Christian Metz in his article: "Photography As Fetish", *October* 34, Fall 1985.

4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981 (p.79)

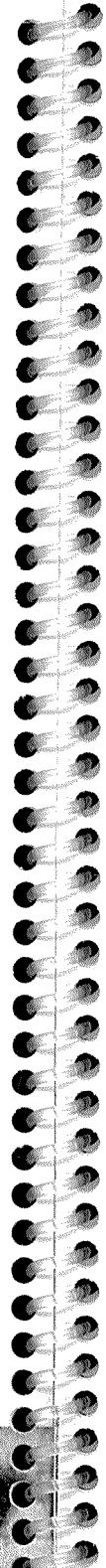
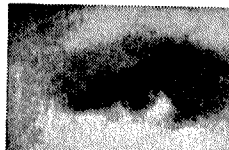






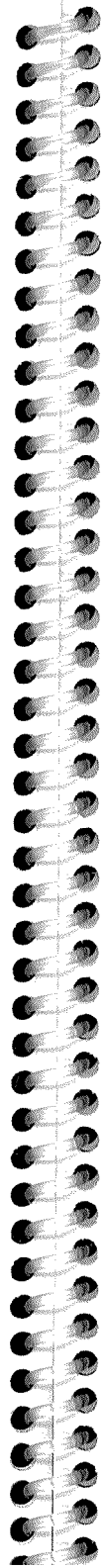


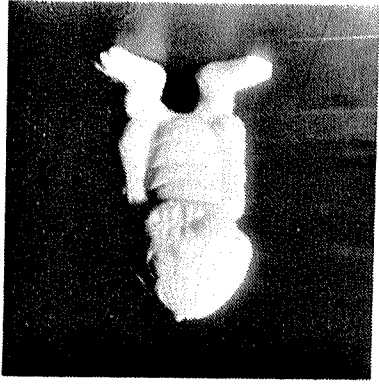
GRAND MAL



Petit Mal



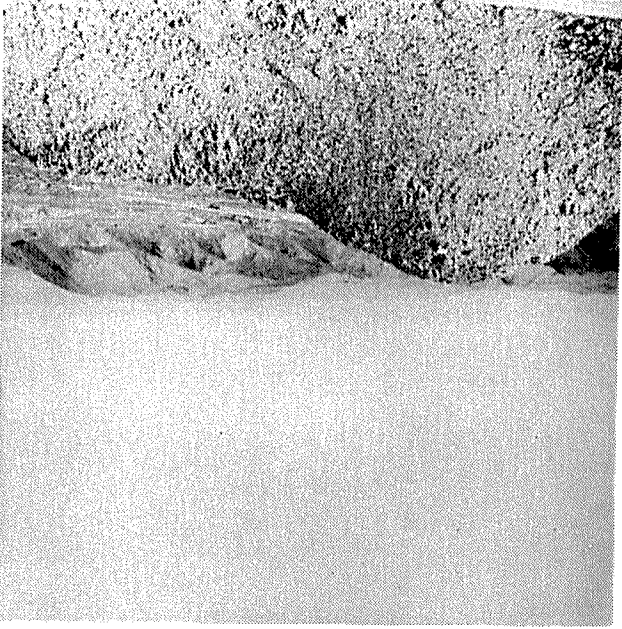




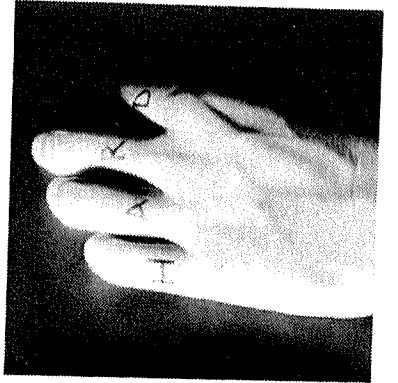
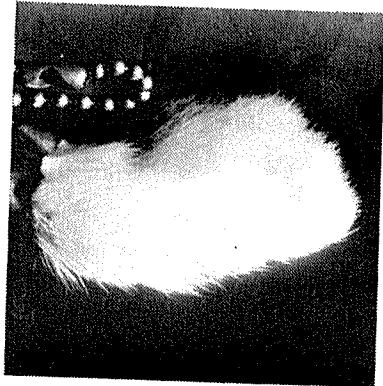
MAW

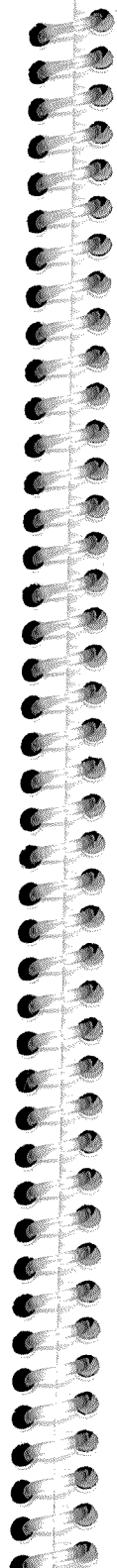


BURNED



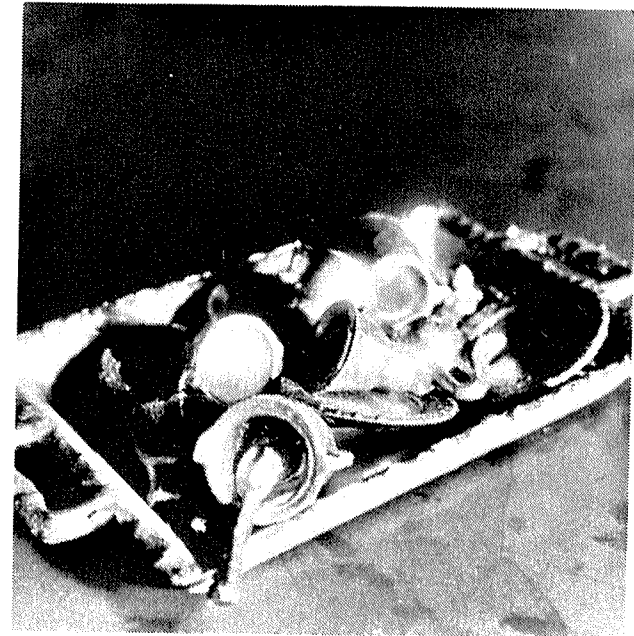
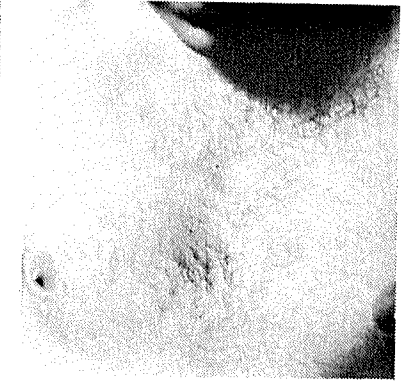
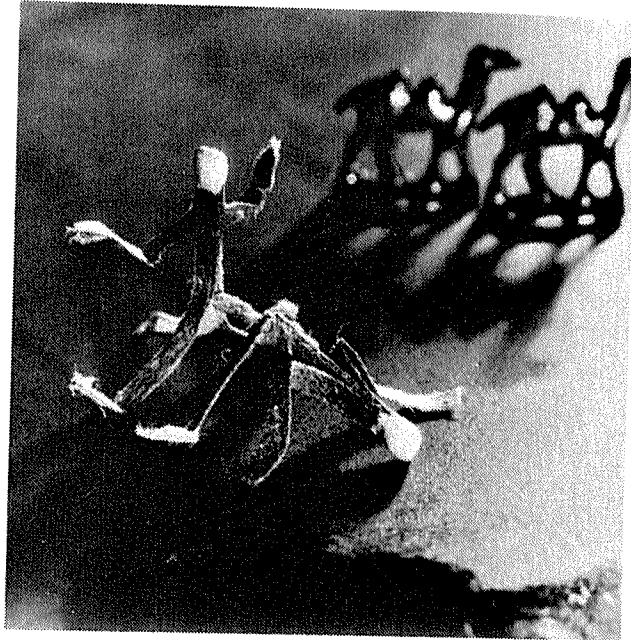
Bust



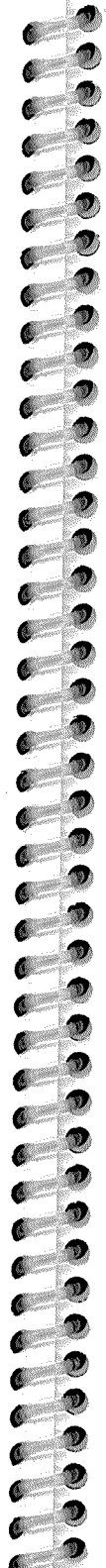


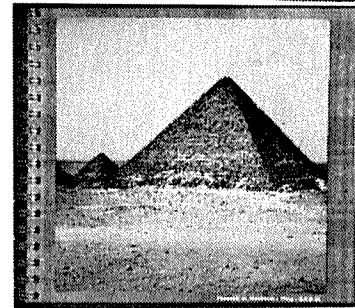
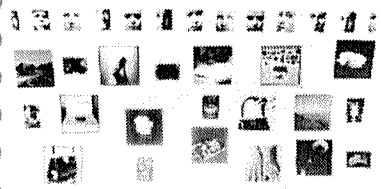
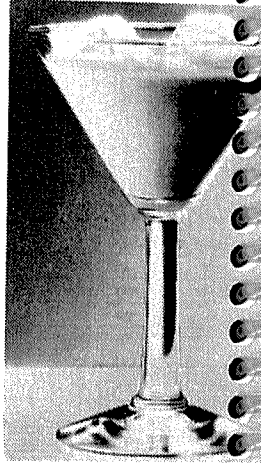
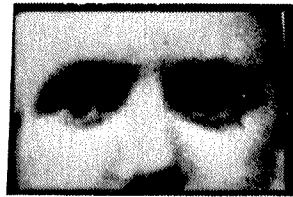
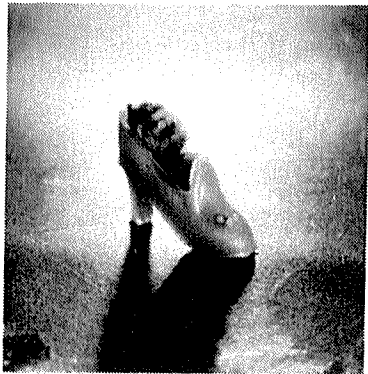
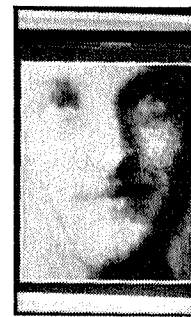
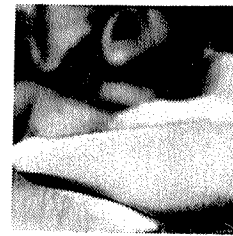
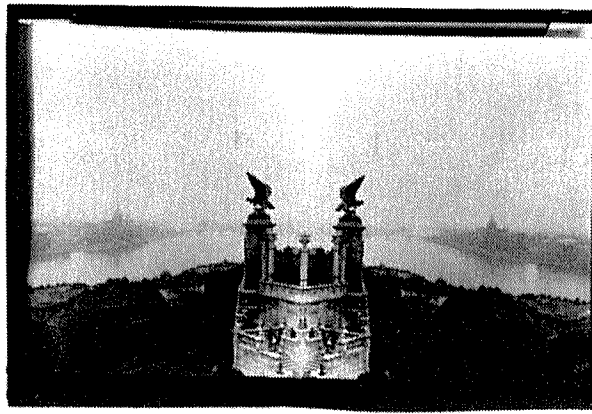
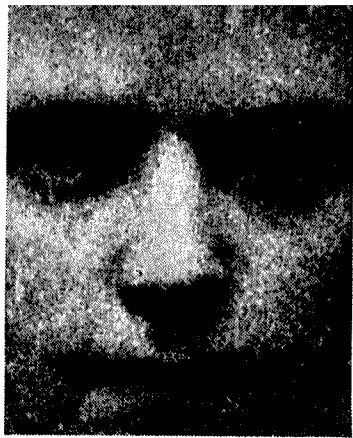


THE GULF

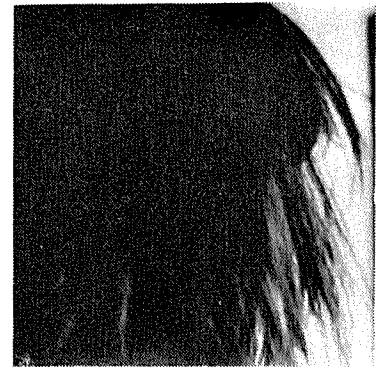


Hopechest

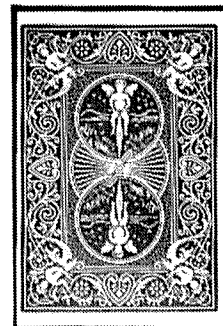
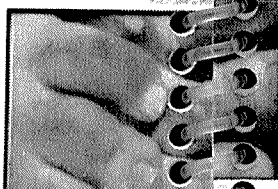
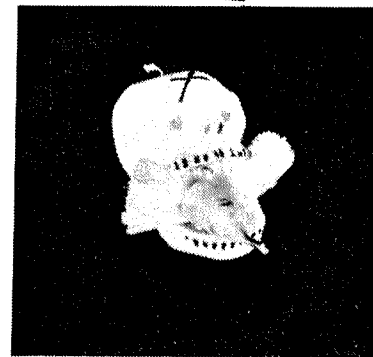


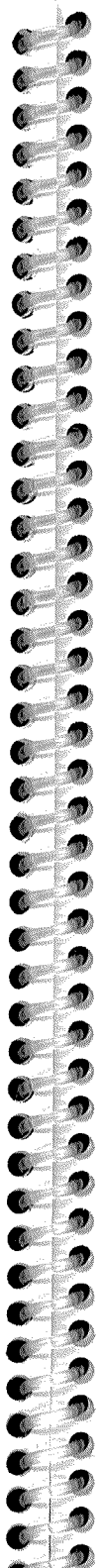


transcend \tranz-'end\ vb 1 a: to rise above or go beyond the limits of; EXCEED



trans-gress \tranz-'grees\ vb 1: to go beyond limits set or prescribed by; VIOLATE

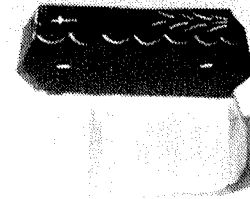
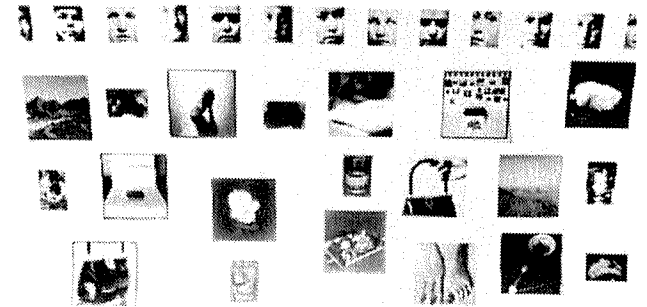
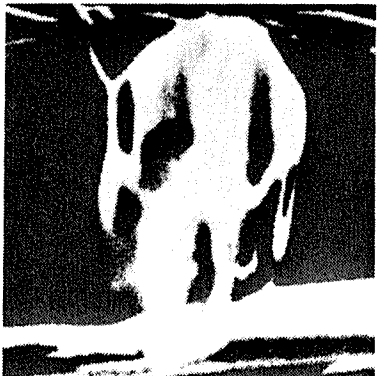
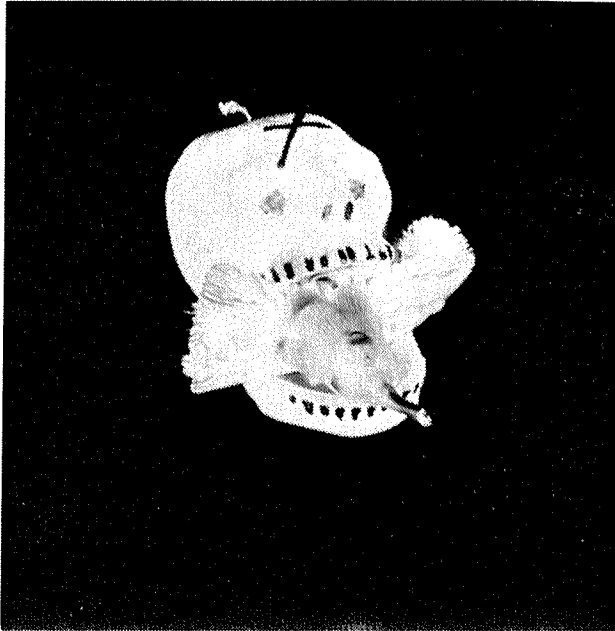




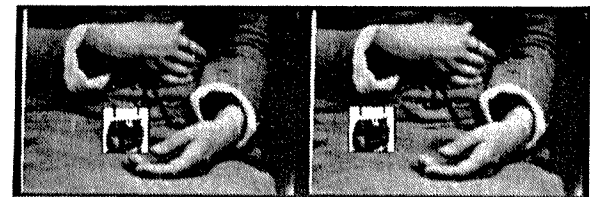


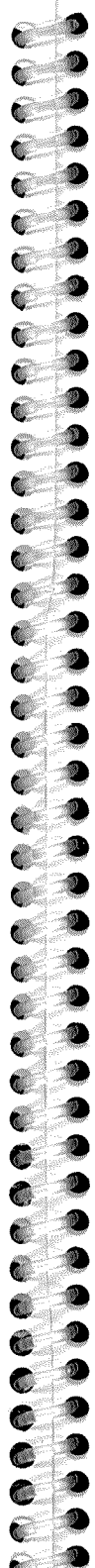


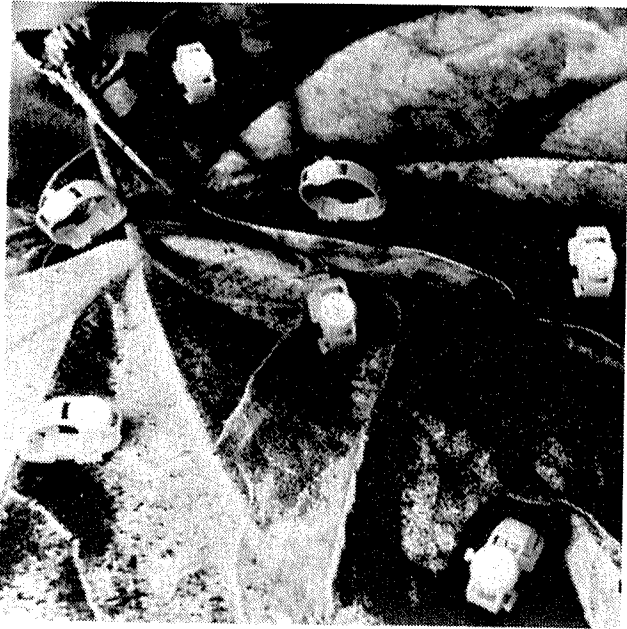
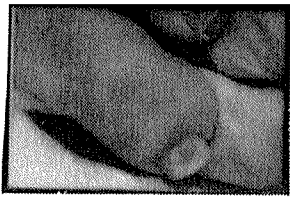
Coup-de-grâce



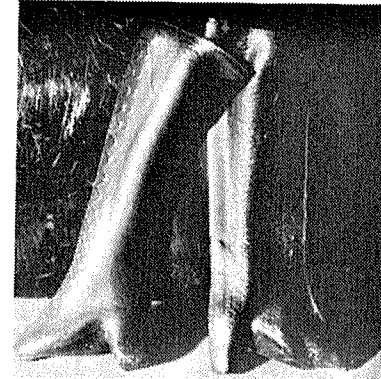
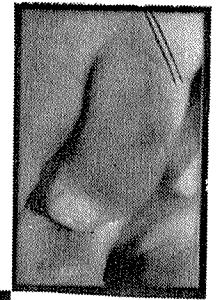
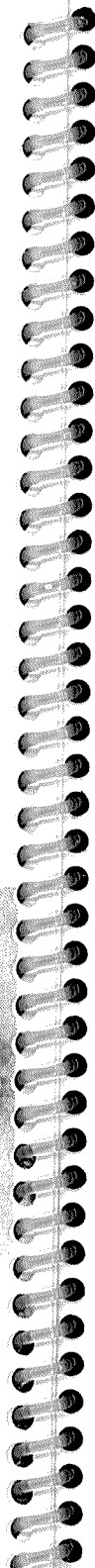
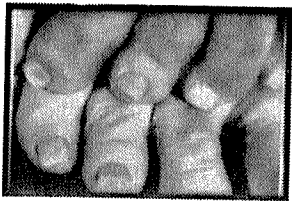
CLOSURE



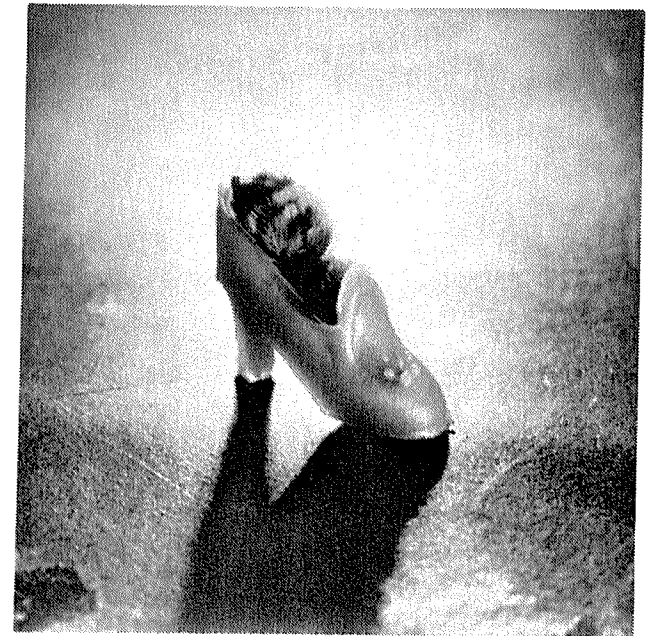


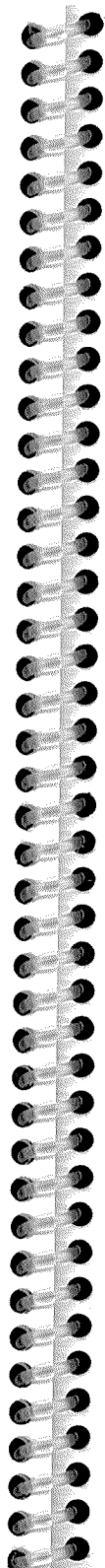


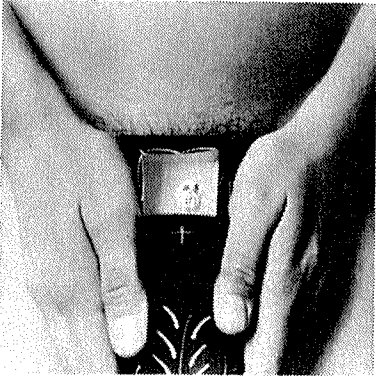
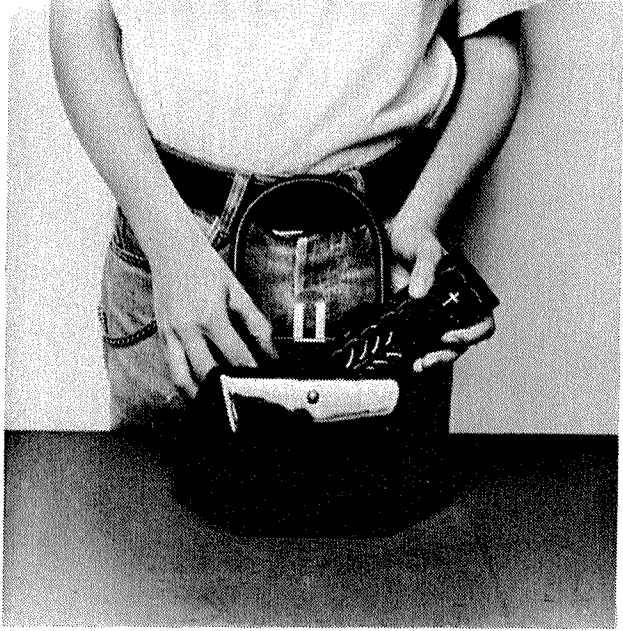
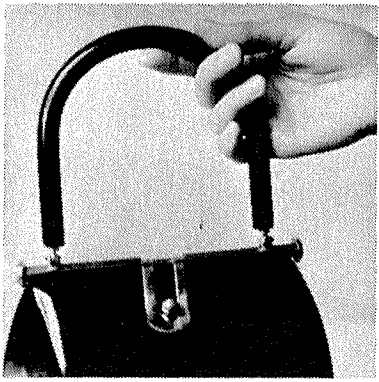
CHOOSE ME



PETITE MORT







Drive

