

**‘ALMOST A SQUARE’: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC
BOOKS OF FRANCESCA WOODMAN AND
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO SURREALISM**

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Abstract

My research investigates the work of the American 1970s artist/photographer Francesca Woodman in a framework of surrealist ideas materialised, though not exclusively, in photography.

Although surrealism is often interpreted as an historical movement, my understanding of it is as a way of life which continues as a practice, implying openness to the confluence between external reality and the unconscious. This is as relevant today as to the interwar decades when surrealist theories were evolved. In particular the Bretonian concept of *convulsive beauty* provides one way into my investigation of Woodman's work. I draw on some of the experimental techniques and poetic effects of this concept, focusing on innovations in the relating of image to text in Breton's 1928 work *Nadja*.

I argue that her five Books on found object templates are the optimum site for this specific investigation and within them pertinently, though not exclusively, the annotated images. This premise does not remove the potential of her wider corpus images to be placed in this framework and that of the extended surrealist sphere.

I provide an unprecedented and original close analysis of Woodman's six photographic Books. In these Books, only one of which has to date been published, Woodman superimposes 'found' text and diagrams with her own photographic images and scripted annotations. These result in objects which are

subtle, challenging and complex. Through them and her corpus of prints run themes, references and resonances like geological strata. In my argument her Books exemplify the Barthesian concept of *text*. Their components are multiple; they are trans-historical and trans-linguistic objects which elude straightforward classification and defy closure.

Selected comparisons of Woodman's work from both the Books and her wider corpus are made with first wave surrealist photographs. The relationship between Books images and the wider body of her work are also examined.



Frontispiece: Francesca Woodman's Photographic Books

VOLUME I: INTRODUCTION and CHAPTERS 1-3

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Interest in Woodman's work is as a wave gathering momentum. The importance of her work is being increasingly recognised internationally. On a recent visit to Rome I visited the Palazzo delle Esposizioni to ruminate on the Woodman exhibition held there in 2000, the catalogue of which has so inspired me. In the café I found, by chance, an announcement, promoted with a Woodman image, of the mixed exhibition *Donna: Avanguardia Femminista negli Anni '70*. On reaching Rome's National Gallery of Modern Art I found its pillared front swathed with flagged banners of Woodman's blown-up *Self Portrait talking to vince*. A similar experience had presented itself in Manchester at the end of 2009 when a greatly enlarged image from Woodman's *Angels* adorned Manchester Art Gallery's imposing entrances to advertise (and include on their information sheet) their excellent *Angels of Anarchy* exhibition.

Her curatorial appropriation within the folds of surrealism is augmented too by the inclusion of eleven of her images, hung on a separate wall, in Jane Alison's *Surreal House* exhibition at the Barbican in 2010. The videos Woodman made at Rhode Island School of Art and Design alongside photographs originally given by her to an Italian friend were displayed in Tate Modern's *Memory and Dream* section for a year (2007-2008) and exhibited in the Murcia retrospective of spring 2009. The film by C Scott Willis, *The Woodmans*, was awarded the 'best documentary' prize in New York at this year's (2010) Tribeca film festival. Recently opened in Victoria Miro's London Gallery is the gallery's third one

person Woodman exhibition, drawn from the retrospective in Murcia in 2009, which toured to Siena in 2009 and to Milan in 2010. In response to a thirty year period having passed since the artist's death in 1981, next year, 2011, an important exhibition will be held in the US, first at the San Francisco MOMA (opening in November 2011) and then travelling to the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum in New York (opening in 2012).

I would like to thank my daughter Amy Lankester-Owen for her perspicacious editorial comments; my son Barnaby Lankester-Owen for his unstinting encouragement and his Italian translations; my daughter-in-law Isabel de Meiroz Dias for her advice about thesis mechanics; and Christina Dunhill, my sister, for always valuing the project.

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INTRODUCTION

My research investigates a placing of the work of the American 1970s artist/photographer Francesca Woodman in a framework of surrealist ideas and their materialisation in photography.

I argue in this thesis, sustained by my parallel and comparative investigations of Breton's *Nadja* and Woodman's *Books*, that it is in the five *found object* books that Woodman comes closest to her demonstration of her deep comprehension of the activating position of images to words in *Nadja*, thereby contributing to the extension of first wave surrealist ethic into her own era.

Methodology

A close descriptive and interpretative analysis of Woodman's *Books* as objects will form the core of my research.

I shall view each of Woodman's six *Books* as a separate entity and as an autonomous work.

My methodological approach to the six chapters of the thesis which analyse Woodman's *Books* (Chapters 2-7) is as straightforward and logical as possible. As these *Books* are objects of complexity I decided that my approach would need to be systematic and rigorous in order to prepare the ground for an ongoing thematic

appraisal. In consequence I have allotted a separate chapter to a description and an analysis of each one, with an interpretative framing in surrealism and where appropriate other historic or theoretical contextualisation.

Disregarding the disparity in their respective lengths I have addressed the Books predominantly in date order, after my selective prioritisation of those made from a found object. The absence of a found object base and the absence of a dialogue between image and word (either in printed or in written form) as well as *Portrait of a Reputation's* confined, settled history, are the reasons why this first Book defies my chosen chronology. *Portrait of a Reputation* is in consequence the last Book to be addressed in the analysis, in Chapter 7. I analyse each image in each Book following Woodman's chosen order. This constitutes the central Chapters, 2-7. My Chapter 1 will provide a comparative analysis between some photographs in André Breton's *Nadja* with some images from Woodman's Books. I place this analysis first as my knowledge of the importance of *Nadja* to Woodman and an investigation of the extent and depth of it is a primary driver of my research. I analyse her images in relation to selected first wave surrealist photographs in Chapter 8. Although I begin to address thematic links between images within individual Books, between one Book and another and from the Books out to Woodman's wider corpus in my analysis of the Books as they occur, I extend this focus in Chapter 9.

The Books function as independent artworks that are equal to the body of individual or series prints or *blueprints* now in circulation.

Research beginnings

In the period immediately before writing my MA dissertation, in the spring of the year 2000, chance presented me with the inspiration and consequent affirmation of my dissertation topic choice of Francesca Woodman. This was the discovery of a catalogue of an exhibition of her work in Rome's *Palazzo delle Esposizioni* between February and March of that year.^{1,2} My discovery would lead to a strong desire to continue a more specialised work on Woodman's Books than the MA dissertation would allow, although it was during that research that I first connected her perceived allegiance to surrealism and to *Nadja* in particular as being exemplified in her Books. The volume was laid out on a display table in *Libreria Feltrinelli* in Bologna, pre-empting any need for shelf searching. I immediately bought it, after only a cursory look at the delights it contained for me. Within its pages I first saw reproductions of Woodman's marvellous photographic Books.³ In double page spreads, each on a single page of the monograph, examples were printed from each of her five found object-based artist's Books.

My first response to the reproductions was to them as aesthetic objects, within the context of another aesthetic object of the well-produced catalogue. Their astounding beauty was in no way hindered, was indeed enhanced, by their represented complexity. Each page of the catalogue, in an eleven inch by nine and

¹ Achille Bonito Oliva, curator, *Francesca Woodman: Providence, Roma, New York* (exhibition catalogue, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, 2000), Rome, Castelvecechi Arte, 2000. I subsequently refer to this volume as the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue.

² Although at this stage a wider appraisal of Woodman's work was relevant, I resolved soon after to activate further specialised research on her Books.

³ In fairness, the Fondation Cartier Woodman exhibition monographic catalogue, published two years earlier in 1998, had reproduced two double pages from *some disordered interior Geometries* (Woodman's capitalisation), placing them imaginatively before and after a section reproducing her *diazotypes*.

a half inch format, is of a satin-finished paper, in white. On this white page is printed one pale sepia double page spread in what is probably a first generation photographic reproduction of the page in the original Book. We know it to be part of a *book* as the shadows and edge-tears of the other, unrevealed, pages are grouped on the left (200, 203) and on the right (199, 202). After the wealth of black and white-toned, hard-edged prints of the artist's autonomous photographs reproduced formerly, the pale sepia base hue of these pages, in contrast to the white page base, moves into another level of fascination. Three of the reproduced pages show Woodman's annotations to her images; two of these, *winter landscape* and *almost a square*, are written in her own contemporary script (the latter one over erasing fluid) and the third, written in a strong vertical opposition to the found object's underlying horizontal copperplate script, *anxiously waiting*, is written in her spoof version of that underlying late nineteenth century script, over the original script.

Some examples of these pages and my response to them follow:

Transparencies over a sepia copper-plate scripted page (202, 203); an image figure's hand negated from form into the page's formlessness; modern italic script mimicking down-hanging folds of satin; subtly changing ink tones, sepia and pink and pale ochre; student script abruptly misaligned, a change-of-script alteration across the harmonic of a double human form: *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi; Quaderno Raffaello*.

A page of diagrams and formulae, tabulated and logical, opposite Woodman's audaciously emotional and eccentric comment on the quadrilateral; a one-legged figure trying to be a triangle standing before a fray-edged, bumpy, quilted kind of *square: some disordered interior Geometries* (201).⁴

Research Adventure

The roads of practical access to the original Books, at the point of starting my research at Essex University, proved to be insurmountably rock-strewn; finally blocked to the point of closure. The excitement of any tactile communion with them as objects was to remain beyond my reach for the duration of my project, as the archivist, Katarina Jerinic (who was later most helpful) at the Woodman Estate in New York, denied me access. She informed me of a compact disc she had recently prepared of Francesca's complete body of work, and that a copy of it had been donated to the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Consolation prize though this seemed, I went in hot pursuit of it and this compact disc was the source for my early research.

After this experience I was toughened to withstand setbacks and having for a period of six months sent emails and letters to the Estate, all with a negative outcome, I decided to put this behind me and start to re-direct my energy on researching the albeit compromised source material I had on hand for the research. I began compiling my own collection of the six Books, through photocopies of what were, luckily, high quality 'jpeg' images. The huge disappointment of access denial was in part counteracted by good fortune during my research trip to New

⁴ Woodman's capitalisation was often eccentric.

York, in the spring of 2006, when I was able to study, to hold and to turn the pages of the published copy of *some disordered interior Geometries* kept in the Special Collections of the New York Public Library. There I encountered kindness, respect and informed and inspired encouragement from the excellent archivist, Margaret Glover.

Early in 2006 I arranged a meeting with Chris Townsend whose monograph on Woodman was due to be published by Phaidon later that year.⁵ When he realised that access to the Archive had been denied me, he very generously volunteered to contact Woodman's parents and executors on my behalf and a month or so later, after their permission had been granted, my own copy of the compact disc of Woodman's entire oeuvre arrived by post.

Woodman and Surrealism

Three aspects of Woodman's work afford clear evidence of surrealism:

1. Images. Many of her images reveal sure knowledge of antecedent photographic surrealist images, particularly those from the first wave, interwar European period.
2. Found Objects. Her choice of found objects to form the templates of her photographic Books indicates an understanding of surrealism's involvement with the chance encounter (with an object or a person) as well as revealing a shared response to the potency of the vintage, out of date or exiled object. Woodman

⁵ Chris Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, London, Phaidon, 2006. This book was of enormous help to me in this project.

activates the objects into a second different history by her intervention. Five of her six Books use this surrealist trope as their base.

3. Books. Woven into her Books project is the thread of her fascination with and knowledge of Breton's work *Nadja*, with which she desires to make a parallel project. Her engagement is most strongly with Breton's experiments in the interface between word and image in that work of 1928.

I will develop the argument, through my research and my close analysis of Woodman's work that the artist's statement in regard to *Nadja* is borne out in her work. In it I will demonstrate how the artist's deep knowledge of surrealism pervades her practice and provides the armature from which she is able to enact her enquiry into Breton's experiment which I argue is most intensively realised in her Books.

These connections will be investigated throughout the thesis but particularly in Chapters 1 and 8. In Chapter 8 too I will discuss the availability of surrealist material to Woodman through literature and exhibitions.

Woodman's Statement on *Nadja*

In the following statement, recorded by the photographic historian Roberta Valtorta during an interview with Woodman in the offices of *Progresso Fotografico* in Milan in 1979, Woodman expresses her desire to activate a project of energy between her images and their appended words that could in some mysterious or tangential way be parallel in effect, though achieved in a different

balance, to the relationship achieved between words and images in Breton's *Nadja*. The interview was conducted in Italian.

*Vorrei che le parole avessero con le mie immagini lo stesso rapporto che le fotografie hanno con il testo in "Nadja" di André Breton. Egli coglie tutte le illusioni e i dettagli enigmatici di alcune istantanee abbastanza ordinarie e ne elabora delle storie. Io vorrei che le mie fotografie potessero ricondensare l'esperienza in piccole immagini complete nelle quali tutto il mistero della paura o comunque ciò che rimane latente agli occhi dell'osservatore uscisse, come se derivasse dalla sua propria esperienza.*⁶

[I would like words to have the same relationship with my images as the photographs have with the text in *Nadja* by André Breton.⁷ He can see all the illusions and enigmatic details of some ordinary snapshots and generates narrative from them. I would like my photographs to be able to re-condense this experience in small, complete images in which all the mystery of fear and whatever remained latent in the eyes of the observer, could come out, as if it emanated from their own experience.]

Analysis of Statement

In the first sentence of her statement, Woodman neatly inverts her own and Breton's positions. She is lucid about the important point of those words' enacting function on the photographs. From her strongly self-affirmed position of photographer, she emphasises the mechanism of the *some ordinary snapshots* in *Nadja* to draw out drama from the word-text-narrative by providing the *evidence* (photography's old tool), in one empty setting or another, of the drama enacted between the protagonists. The emptiness of Jacques-André Boiffard's images in

⁶ Roberta Valtorta, 'Francesca Woodman', *Progresso Fotografico* (Milan), 86: 10, October 1979, 46-50. My initial translation into English from the Italian in which Woodman and Valtorta spoke was subsequently improved by Barnaby Lankester-Owen and finalised having incorporated an English translation kindly provided me by Valtorta herself. I here quote Valtorta's description of the timing of her interview with Woodman, from my communication with her in February 2010: *I met Francesca in Milan, at [the] Progresso Fotografico office, a few months before the issue came out. So, as the issue came out in October, it might have been in May, or June, or July 1979. More or less.*

⁷ I speculate that Woodman would have read *Nadja*, in translation by Richard Howard, in the Grove Press, New York edition of 1960. By 1978 this edition had been reprinted twelve times. I do not surmise that the artist was sufficiently fluent in the French language, as she was in Italian, to have read it in the original.

Nadja, the quality some have called *bland*, both intensifies the narrative drama present in the body text by the absence of that same quality in the photographs and offers an opportunity to the reader for imaginative participation.

What Woodman desires is that her images could contain and emit their own drama, either independently or with the addition of words. Words would sometimes function in her work as a *tabula scriptura*, as in the background of anonymous copperplate original script, its meaning in arrest, as in the example of the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book. At other times the image would jump out in visual intensity from the base text, a nugget of whose meaning she might choose to pull out and re-phrase in her words; or a base text's phrase could be clenched by her into a short phrase that could be cryptic, reflective or humorous, but always punctures the skin of the photographic medium. This parallels the manner in which Boiffard's images puncture the skin of the unwinding document of *Nadja* in Breton's operation of generating narrative from the images through the caption text and its return to the main text.

As a photographer highly skilled in the manipulated image and very much aware of early surrealist manipulation of it, Woodman's description of Boiffard's photographs might at first seem less than flattering; but we might also consider her secondary talent as a poet (which I assert in my analyses of individual annotations in subsequent chapters) and her natural appreciation of literary works, as we assess the balance and perspicacity of her assessment.

Omitting the *words* at this stage of her statement, her vision is to replicate the word/image ratio and dynamic in *Nadja*, in her desire to *re-condense the experience* in the making of *small complete images*. Her primary accentuation of *words* at the outset of her statement reveals the essential part she requires them to play in the equation she intends. This equation refers to her whole practice, but is of paramount significance in her photographic Books.

Her omission of the word *words* in the last sentence of her statement, leading to an implication of a suggested autonomy of the image function, belies an inherent ambiguity. Either Woodman did not think it necessary to mention words a second time, because of her primary prioritisation of them, or, naturally from her position as a photographer, she wanted to emphasise and describe with zeal the making of her images. To argue here that her statement can be entirely and exactly supported in my enquiries in the thesis would be fallacious; rather her statement should be seen as a generative springboard and an essential armature for my enquiries.

Her statement at no time suggests a desire for a methodical application of her aspiration to reconstruct the generative impact of words on photographic image and of photographic image on words in *Nadja*, however. Woodman makes use of annotations only when she deems them appropriate, that is when she judges them able to activate or *generate* narrative from or onto a certain image. She adds annotations to selected images in three of her six Books and to selected independent images.⁸ Given that Breton's and Woodman's primary positions are

⁸ These Books are *Angels*, *Calendars*, *Quaderno Raffaello* and *some disordered interior Geometries*.

reversed, we might logically make the deduction that Woodman's words would form the parallel function to the images in *Nadja* of *some ordinary snapshots*, as she describes them. But in practice, her added words, which are usually her own lines and phrases of sometime poetry, inflect meaning/s away from and/or back to, her images' evocation of *whatever remained latent in the eyes of the observer*. If in some instances the images are judged by her to perform their full function independently, to be *small and complete* in themselves, then she does not add words.

I will provide evidence, through my investigations in this thesis that it is in her photographic Books that she best realises this aim in turning both image and text into spaces for inflection. My focus will extend beyond the close analysis I make of Woodman's six photographic Books to include my insights into how the images in them have been developed or repeated by the artist, in both sequences and individual prints, in her wider corpus. Her frequent use of sequence and serialisation can at times challenge or even obliterate the linear separation of a past, a present and a future. I will make some comparisons too between selected first wave surrealist photographic images and Woodman's dynamic responses to them.

Titling of the Books

Her Books are *Portrait of a Reputation*, made in circa 1975-6; *Angels, Calendars*, circa 1978; *Portraits Friends Equasions*, circa 1978; *Quaderno Raffaello*, circa

1979-1980; *some disordered interior Geometries*, 1980; and *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, 1980.⁹

A brief explanation is appropriate here to justify the titles I have chosen to use while I list the variations between the titles used by the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue (PE), Townsend (CT), and the author (AD) in the footnote, below.¹⁰

I have based my system of titling on Woodman's own hand-written titles when these are in evidence (and without amending her sometimes idiosyncratic spelling and capitalisation), as they are on the covers of three Books: *some disordered interior Geometries*; *Portraits Friends Equasions*; and *Portrait of a Reputation*. In the other cases, I have followed the first description of the whole group of found object-base Books that I have found: the section of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue (PE), *Quaderni fotografici*, which reproduces a page each from all five of them, after a short paragraph of description.¹¹ Each double-page image spread in PE is titled underneath it in the language, Italian or English, which Woodman has used. The *Angels, Calendars* Book, named *Angels, Calendar* by Townsend, gathers its title organically. Woodman's hand-written *angels* on the right-hand page of the inside cover, at the beginning, is developed into the *calendars* theme

⁹ It will be noted that four of the six titles are written in English and two in Italian. Woodman's idiosyncrasies of letter case are intentional. The incorrect spelling of the English *Equasions* is probably a result of her fluent, mutually interchangeable use of both Italian and English; in fact it is impossible to distinguish whether Woodman has written *equasioni* or *equasions*. As a crossover of languages occurs in both cases I have chosen to adopt the misspelt English word in my system. I have based my dating of the Books by and large on Townsend's own (Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 51).

¹⁰ *Portrait of a Reputation*, used by all three sources; *Angels, Calendars notebook* (PE); *Angels, Calendar Notebook* (CT); *Angels, Calendars* (AD); *Portrait Friends Equasions* (PE); *Equasioni* (CT); *Portraits Friends Equasions* (AD); *Quaderno Raffaello* (PE); *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* (CT); *Quaderno Raffaello* (AD); *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* (PE); *Untitled* (CT); *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* (AD); *Some disordered interior Geometries* (PE); *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* (CT); *some disordered interior Geometries* (AD).

¹¹ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 197-203.

by the insertion of her hand-written annotation *calendars inside this door*, as the new theme begins. More problematical to title are the two late Books which use transparencies. Having started my research using the title *Untitled*, like the Woodman Estate, for the longer of these two Books, I subsequently reverted to PE's *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, which is a direct reference to the original book's subject title, as it seems to me that Woodman significantly bounces her project off its title. I differ here from Townsend, who uses *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* as his title for the shorter Book which I call *Quaderno Raffaello*, following PE, and the Estate calls *Quaderno*.¹²

Essential Terms; their Clarification and Relevance to Woodman's Work.

The term *photographic book* exists as a generic term in the sphere of art criticism and practice implying that object which encloses a more systematic representation of the photographic images in it than that of a collection or an exhibition of photographs. Text may or may not be present in the photographic book. Although Breton's *Nadja* ticks certain boxes here, it is decidedly not operating within art criticism's sphere and hence cannot be categorised as such an object. Woodman's Books are *photographic books*. When the term is shortened to *photobook*, the indication is that the object in question becomes more fashionable and even more avant-garde, as in the case of Ed Ruscha's *photobooks*, in their deliberate contravention of the twentieth century photography-as-art tradition and their reappraisal of the status of the *artist's book*, as described here:

Bypassing traditions of singularity, fine printing and expressive layout in his deadpan inventories of everyday buildings and structures, Ruscha presented

¹² Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 51.

*particular challenges (and opportunities) to those working in the context of fine-art photography.*¹³

The term *artist's book* immediately denotes the choice of the artist to contain their work in a space which is more intimate than the space of a walled exhibition. The *artist's book* can function as a multiple, or as a singular, unique object. First used as an exhibition title in Philadelphia in 1973, the term *artist's book* has come to signify a transition beyond the development of the *livre d'artiste*, which, despite the synonymy of the terms across the languages, had generally been a more publisher-lead venture. Jean Khalifa's essay has enriched my knowledge of this development, particularly in his encapsulation of the 1970s (Woodman's working decade) as the *rich creative years* of its pinnacle. If conceived as a multiple the aim of publishing as distribution is not a prerequisite of its definition.

In spite of Woodman's willing participation in the publication of her Book, *some disordered interior Geometries*, and its consequent status as a multiple, her five unpublished Books exist currently as unique singular objects. We do not know whether or not the artist wanted to have the other five Books published. The *artist's book* can be an object over which the artist keeps a higher degree of control over the decisions in all stages of its making and distribution than occurs in a collaborative venture between a gallerist and an artist or a publisher and an artist.

¹³ Douglas Stockdale, review of Margit Rowell, *Ed Ruscha - Photographer* (Göttingen, Steidl, 2006), 5 April 2010. Online at *The PhotoBook*, <http://thephotobook.wordpress.com/2010/04/05/ed-ruscha-photographer>, accessed 22/04/2010.

A possibility implied by the term *artist's book* too is the ideal of an intimate and responsive participation in the product by the audience, leading to a haptic and tactile, fingers-with-the-page, relationship.¹⁴ *Made up of a 'set of surfaces' its skin-like pages' metaphors are of containment, of concealment and exposure.*¹⁵ This participation would involve the choice of the pages' order, the time spent on each page and a choice over whether to return to it.

Inevitably, however, this ideal is unattainable in many instances as the *artist's book* has become an archive item to be handled only with gloved hands in an overseen appointment. It might lie horizontally, encased in glass, halted at one selected page; withdrawn in display from the participatory rhythm of a codex-plus-reader format.

Woodman's Books bleed into both the categories *photographic book* and *artist's book*. They reach out from their identity as found objects to emit a poetic force from the cross-weavings of their original sources in parallel, diagonal, intersecting and horizontal activations in these objects; these texts. Sometimes the Books' cross-weavings deliberately disrupt, alarm, or surprise. They are singular objects with multiple constituents.

She enacts a manifold deconstruction of the book's and the art object's subject hierarchy in her simultaneous appropriation of found text, the photographic book and the *artist's book*.

¹⁴ I talk about a codex format. A discussion of the many permutations in re-thinking this format by artists in the 20th and 21st centuries is not appropriate here.

¹⁵ Harriet Riches, 'A Disappearing Act: Francesca Woodman's *Portrait of a Reputation*', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27: 1, 2004, 109. Riches here cites Susan Stewart, *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, 37.

Found Object

The *found object*, in the surrealist reading first evolved by Breton in *Nadja* and further developed by him in *l'Amour fou*, is the talismanic transference of unconscious fantasy into a materialisation that can be, at its most perfect, imbued with satisfaction for the participant. To some extent, the activity of the verb 'to find' can be an impetus shared by the participant and the object, so that the object could be able, in a manner of speaking, to find that participant who is ready for the fulfilment of its intercessionary role. It is in the city that *found objects* are most likely to be found. Search is never involved in the finding of the object, which may have been previously desired, anticipated or hoped for. It may enter the experience of the participant in an unexpected manner, by serendipitous chance: *the found object is essentially singular or irreplaceable, and both lost and found.*¹⁶ As a catalytic emblem of reciprocity between the rich source of the external world and the complexity of dreamed and imagined states, the *found object* is sometimes picked up and held, sometimes observed in situ and sometimes made into an artwork.

Woodman's *found objects* emit nostalgia; her own nostalgia, perhaps, for the childhood primary education she received in Italy and a wider nostalgia for another epoch, from and for which, although excluded in time, she yearns. The used school books forming the templates of her photographic Books and *found* during the student year she spent in Rome, were a very special nest of trophies. Their *givens* of printed diagrams and text and drawn and written inscriptions by

¹⁶ Margaret Iversen, 'Readymade, found object, photograph', *Art Journal*, 63: 2, Summer 2004, 48.

the first student, would excite and propel Woodman's imagination into the complex intersections and interventions she would make. *Found* in her favourite Roman bookshop, *Maldoror*, which was owned by some of her favourite Italian friends, these objects exude an immediate aesthetic delight.

Barthes as a Bridge to Woodman

Woodman's aptitude in her practice to move across boundaries between word and image confirms my choice of selected theories of Barthes as an instructive template from which to read both her Books and Breton's *Nadja*.

Notably Barthes's concept of *Text* is situated close to the etymological meaning of *text* meaning woven fabric. It evolves to simultaneously include not only both image and word but a multitude of disparate sources, even sound and clothes, in a *heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives*.¹⁷

Barthes's *Text* is non-hierarchical. Its structure accords equal agency to all its component elements. The threads of the component elements can be as individually diverse as its whole can sustain.

This diversity is exemplified by Woodman's found object Books and by *Nadja*. In both works the diversity can encompass deliberate contradictions in the surrealist mould.¹⁸

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image Music Text: Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath*, London, Fontana Press, 1977, 159. Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd revised edition, 1973, reprinted 1990. 2273: *texere*: weave; *textus*: tissue, style of literary work.

¹⁸ I address the constituent components of *Nadja* in more detail in Chapter 1, *Photography Intervenes*.

Necessarily open-ended, multivalent and plural in source, substance and signification, Barthes's *Text* is a structure which strongly depends for its development on the interaction with it by a reader.

Appropriate too is Barthes's idea of the *Text*'s position as being outside the confines of history and criticism. Its existence extends beyond those category boundaries. The *Text*'s innate ability to self-contradict enables it to project a ludic nature. This ludic aspect can be self-transformative and can result in a *Text* which can inflate and deflate itself and keep its own signifiers, its *weave of signifiers*, mutable.¹⁹

Susan Sontag responds here to Barthes's ideas in her own rich description:

*He speaks of the quiver, thrill or shudder of meaning, of meanings that themselves vibrate, gather, loosen, disperse, quicken, shine, fold, mutate, delay, slide, separate, that exert pressure, crack, rupture, fissure, are pulverised.*²⁰

Barthes's premise that...*the Text is that space where no language [nor, for my purpose, medium] has a hold over any other, [the space] where languages circulate ...* is helpful in understanding the organic, generative and propulsive effects between and amongst the components of Woodman's Books. In these she enacts a process that is an interplay of self-reflexive responses threaded and studded with manifold cultural references.²¹

¹⁹ Barthes, 'From Work to Text', 1977, 159.

²⁰ Susan Sontag, 'Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes', in Susan Sontag, ed., *A Roland Barthes Reader*, London, Vintage, 2000, xiii.

²¹ Barthes, 'From Work to Text', 1977, 164.

Woodman's found object templates include words written by an anonymous author whose first context undergoes a quadruple displacement and retrieval by history, geography, language and theme as a result of her intervention.

A Survey of the Critical Literature on Woodman

In the thirty or so years of critical study extant on Woodman's work, only a little attention has been paid to the group of aforementioned photographic Books which she made in the period of approximately 1975-1980.²²

The exception to this and in fact the only three in-depth readings of individual Books so far, are the analyses by Giuseppe Casetti in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue in 2000, and by Chris Townsend in 1999, of Woodman's only published Book to date, *some disordered interior Geometries*; and Harriet Riches's discussion of *Portrait of a Reputation* in 2004. *Some disordered interior Geometries* has been addressed, though not fully analysed, by several critics, including Peggy Phelan in 2003 and Martha Gever in 1981 (the year of its publication). Chris Townsend, in 2006, extends of his very good analysis of it from 1999 and includes brief descriptions of all the other Books including his take on their chronology. He also reproduces the whole of *some disordered interior Geometries* in a fine double page printing.²³ But up to this point in time, only scant attention has been given by critics to the other four Books; none to their

²² I calculate this thirty year period of critical study to start from the publication of Roberta Valtorta's paper 'Francesca Woodman' in *Progresso Fotografico* in 1979 to the (clearly ever moving) present. The scholarly appraisals of both Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, writing in the catalogue of the first posthumous one person show of the artist's work at Wellesley College Museum, Massachusetts, and Hunter College Art Gallery, New York and on tour in the US in 1986, helped to kick-start the current considerable international interest in Woodman.

²³ For the convenience and clarity of this printing in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 238-239, I am grateful to Townsend.

constitution as a group, with likenesses and dissimilarities as objects; and heretofore no systematic or comprehensive analysis of their contained images and base texts. These Books are *Angels, Calendars; Portraits Friends Equasions; Quaderno Raffaello*; and *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*.

The significance of Woodman's annotations has not been recognised by all publishers.

Only comparatively recently, in the Roman Palazzo delle Esposizioni Exhibition catalogue of 2000, in Townsend's 2006 monograph and in the 2009 Murcia exhibition catalogue, have the reproduced hand-written annotations been systematically included in tandem with the images.²⁴

The volume of discursive literature to date on Woodman's main corpus is extensive and consists mainly of journal articles and independently authored essays within exhibition catalogues. The exception to this is the extensive analysis in a mono-authorial framework by Chris Townsend, in 2006: a monographic volume which also prints a considerable number of previously unpublished images. The catalogue of the first posthumous exhibition of Woodman's work, in 1986 in the US, at Wellesley College in Massachusetts drew immediate serious academic interest to her work by its inclusion of essays by the eminent scholars Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. The catalogue of the second solo exhibition, held in Zürich in 1992, contains essays by Harm Lux and Kathryn Hixson. Six years later, in 1998, the first monograph/catalogue was published on

²⁴ Isabel Tejada, ed., *Francesca Woodman: Retrospectiva/Retrospective* (exhibition catalogue, Espacio AV, Murcia, 2009), Murcia (Spain), Espacio AV, 2009.

the occasion of the comprehensive solo exhibition in Paris which contained essays by Philippe Sollers, David Levi-Strauss and Elizabeth Janus, as well as a contribution from the artist's friend and companion, Sloan Rankin.²⁵ Levi-Strauss's surrealist reading of Woodman was the most stimulating and instructive for me. This Fondation Cartier catalogue also reproduced two double page-spreads from *some disordered interior Geometries*, the first reproduction of these after the images in contemporaneous reviews of the book's publication by Martha Gever and Faye Hirsch. This 1998 exhibition and catalogue created a consolidation of Euro-American interest in Woodman. After Paris the exhibition toured in Europe extensively and was certainly still on tour (in Dublin in 2001) after the next major exhibition of Woodman's work opened in Italy in 2000.

The catalogue of this exhibition, held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, has been a particularly inspiring source to me during this research. Out of the collection of essays therein Giuseppe Casetti's analysis of *some disordered interior Geometries* has provided a foundational source from which to project my own analysis of this published work, in my Chapter 4.

The catalogue to accompany the solo retrospective exhibition in Murcia, Spain in 2009 is the third to constitute a monograph on Woodman and, like Townsend's monograph, includes printings of hitherto unpublished images. I have found Mieke Bal's Proustian framing in her analysis of Woodman's videos particularly stimulating.

²⁵ Hervé Chandès, curator, *Francesca Woodman* (exhibition catalogue and monograph, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, 1998), Paris, Fondation Cartier/Zurich, Scalo, 1998. I subsequently refer to this volume as the Fondation Cartier catalogue.

Once I had emphatically decided that my road into and out from Woodman would be that of surrealism (and arguing in my MA dissertation in 2000 that she was a surrealist), I was extremely interested to read in Ann Gabhart's essay in the first American catalogue that Woodman had been deeply influenced by Breton's *Nadja*.²⁶ Pursuing this thread, I encountered, in the first published article written on Woodman's work, the aforementioned artist's statement recorded in an interview with the artist in Milan by Roberta Valtorta. Reading this article for the first time was an exciting experience. My recent discussion with Valtorta and my consideration of her fresh, very slightly altered translation from my original (see footnote 6, page 8), has been helpful in my understanding of this vital motivator of my research. Harboured within it was the key to the potential unravelling of some very specific and extremely exciting links from Woodman's Books to an extraordinarily innovative and influential first wave surrealist work. Jean Arrouye's essay on the photographs in *Nadja* has illuminated my argument on this subject.

Before this however, I had considered Solomon-Godeau's tentative suggestion, within the framework of her feminist reading in 1986, that Woodman could be placed within surrealism. Her refutation of her own argument because of her conjecture regarding the inaccessibility of surrealist photographic images (*[T]he great majority of [Surrealist photographs] were until recently unpublished...*) during Woodman's working period made me more determined to explore the

²⁶ Ann Gabhart and Rosalind Krauss, curators, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work* (exhibition catalogue, Wellesley College Museum, Massachusetts, and Hunter College Art Gallery, New York, 1986), Wellesley (Mass.), Wellesley College Museum/New York, Hunter College Art Gallery, 1986, 55 and 58 note 1.

unanswered quest of both this premise and those links.²⁷ These are investigated in my Chapter 8, *Connections, Intersections and Coincidences*. Before 2000, when my project began to evolve, David Levi-Strauss had also argued for a surrealist placing of Woodman. In Whitney Chadwick's *Mirror Images*, also from 1998, Susan Rubin-Suleiman's essay had given a reading of Woodman's work as surrealist, forging direct visual comparisons between the artist and surrealist figures such as René Magritte and Hans Bellmer.²⁸

Reflecting Solomon-Godeau's conjecture about the inaccessibility of surrealist images in the 1970s, Suleiman remained for me too tentative about Woodman's outstanding and comprehensive knowledge of these seminal figures and I therefore found her comparisons good as springboards but ultimately limited. Her title hypothesis is pertinent however; *Dialogue and Double Allegiance: Some Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde* captures the ironic sense of humour with which Woodman encases her responses to the surrealist images selected by Suleiman and the *dialogue* Woodman confidently maintains is testament to the artist's high self esteem.

Helaine Posner's contribution to the same publication, *Mirror Images*, though superficially more considered than Suleiman's piece, does not advance beyond a replication of Solomon-Godeau's underlying hypothesis. The feminist foundation of Posner's reading has not been sufficiently developed to encompass the fourteen year span that has passed between Solomon-Godeau's reading and her own. Her

²⁷ Gabhart and Krauss, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work* (Wellesley College Museum exhibition catalogue), 1986, 36 note 4.

²⁸ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Dialogue and Double Allegiance: Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde', in Whitney Chadwick, ed., *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1998, 128-154.

summary of Woodman's series *House* reveals for me more about the writer's presuppositions than the artist's intentions:

*Woodman also appears to be at risk of disappearing into the supposed sanctuary of the home, her fragile identity finally engulfed by a threatening world.*²⁹

Rosalind Krauss's key 1986 essay very usefully cast light on one of Woodman's essential practice methods. Her sourcing and confining of the deemed 'problem sets' method to art school practice is somewhat restricted by its lack of mention of the historic background of conceptualism and minimalism's fascination with the rubric and its variations. I find her assessment of Woodman as immature, a little too dismissive of the work and person capable of such sophistication.

In 1996, Margaret Sundell, in Catherine de Zegher's *Inside the Visible*, constructed a compelling Lacanian analysis of Woodman's self-imaging and her confrontation of vulnerability. I have found the empathetic depth of her enquiry thought-provoking and inspiring.

Peggy Phelan's paper of 2002, published in the *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, has strongly influenced my thought processes throughout the formation of the thesis. Her bold and disturbing hypothesis that Woodman's work can be read as the performative rehearsal for her imagined death, as both its primal memory and its anticipation, has reached a place in my unconscious which I am unwilling to admit, in particular as I have urgently desired not to include any romanticising of her suicide nor any ensuing heroizing of the artist. But her hypothesis is subtle

²⁹ Helaine Posner, 'The Self and the World: Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman', in Chadwick, ed., *Mirror Images*, 1998, 156-171.

and complex and her grasp of Woodman's refined imaging of co-existent simultaneous time spans is unparalleled. With regard to my specific project of the Books, Phelan's investigation has been of inestimable value to me in trying to assess Woodman's use of past images to confront the future in the present.

Phelan's analysis has been alluded to only in a cursory manner by critics, for example during the lively round table discussion in 2003 by Margaret Sundell, George Baker, an *October* editor, and the three artists Nancy Davenport, Ann Daly and Laura Larson. Providing a clear summary of past framing and calling for potential new framing, this discussion takes the participant, Sundell's, Lacanian placing of Woodman in 1996 (originally written in 1993) as the main point of progression after Solomon-Godeau's now-considered canonical 1986 reading. The group argues for a development of Solomon-Godeau's placing of Woodman within the feminist canon, as existent at her time of writing, to be extended to include her 1970s peer artists, as well as into the post-minimalist sphere of which she worked at the cusp. The discussion ends, admirably, with an important question: *What are the things about her work that are important to rearticulate now?*³⁰

Two good points generated in this discussion are expanded in Townsend's monograph of 2006. The first is the idea of Woodman being *a photographer's photographer*, including a link made between her work and Gordon Matta-Clark's.

³⁰ Margaret Sundell et al., 'Francesca Woodman Reconsidered: A Conversation with George Baker, Ann Daly, Nancy Davenport, Laura Larson and Margaret Sundell', *Art Journal*, 62: 2, Summer 2003, 67.

A year after the discussion between the above five participants was published, an analysis of Woodman's work by another *October* affiliated scholar, Benjamin Buchloh, was written for the catalogue of a show at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York in 2004. Using Philippe Sollers's reading of Woodman as a foundation, Buchloh posits an interesting analogy between a Woodman image and the process of photography and makes one unusual link from the artist through to the work of Cy Twombly, which I find lyrical and satisfying.

It is possible that Woodman met Twombly during her year in Rome as his studio was not far from hers. Twombly's process of visceral transposition of words in his paintings contains links to Woodman's process of interrupting script flow with an image, as she does in the two Books *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* and *Quaderno Raffaello*. In Twombly's own recorded words, *(He) understood scripture, text, quotations and words themselves both as forms, or as allusions to visual forms, and as emotional symbolic images ...*³¹

Harriet Riches published a very good critical analysis of Woodman's unpublished Book *Portrait of a Reputation*, in 2004, in which her description of the analogy between its paper pages and the texture of skin, *the haptic appeal of the artist's book*, has informed my chapter.³² Her analysis is both profound and multi-layered.

³¹ Richard Shiff, 'Charm', in Nicholas Serota, ed., *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons*, London, Tate Publishing, 2008, 26. Shiff himself quotes from a conversation between Twombly and Heiner Bastian.

³² Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 110.

I shall return to arguments of the above critics and scholars in my forthcoming chapters, in particular to Phelan and Sundell in Chapter 2, to Casetti in Chapter 4, to Riches in Chapter 7 and to Townsend in Chapters 2-7.

Chris Townsend's monograph has already become a valuable resource in the discursive field around Woodman. For my project, its reproduction of two Books, *some disordered interior Geometries* and *Portrait of a Reputation*, in their entirety has been of inestimable help. His publication of extracts from the artist's journals, edited by her father George Woodman, has been of incalculable value to me. These extracts have not only provided an insight into how Woodman wrote and thought, which particular impacts on my study of her annotations to images, but have provided a playful framework for my own discussion of *Portrait of a Reputation*.

Townsend's publication of four images from the brilliant *Swan Song* series in his monograph probably helped the Murcia exhibition's curators decide on their imaginative reconstruction of the original display at Woodman's Rhode Island School of Art and Design Degree show.

But the wave of interest in these magnificent works has only gathered momentum since Victoria Miro unearthed the rolled works from storage and restored them so carefully into a superb digitalised version, in over a year's work for a new consumption. Six images were beautifully exhibited at her London Gallery six months after the publication of Townsend's book (in the summer of 2006).

Townsend's dating of the Books has to remain somewhat speculative, as it does for the Woodman Estate and all critics, but I have found his system informative and though I differ from him on some points I largely agree with his dating and will use it as my model.

The three chapters in Townsend's book which have particularly invigorated, informed or challenged my project are *Woodman and Surrealism*, *Feminist Photography* and *A Post-Minimal Photography*. Strong on post-minimalism, excellent on her critique of photography from inside the medium and determined to extract Woodman from the bracket of feminisms, his case for a surrealist placing is marred by his sidestepping of the issue of the first wave's impact on her and indeed her comprehensive knowledge of the era's art. On this last point I strongly disagree with Townsend when he says *Woodman's encounter with Surrealism was often tangential and intermittent*.³³ His suggestion that *she had only limited formal instruction in the movement's history* seriously reduces a knowledge so extensive it was activated as a kind of vocabulary and denies her father George's claim, quoted elsewhere in my thesis, that *Francesca had a high appreciation of Dada and Surrealism by the time she was eleven years old*.^{34, 35} Townsend mainly equates surrealism with its *aesthetic legacy within mass culture* and seems to pin the key figures of contemporary surrealism's influence to Duane Michals and Deborah Turbeville.³⁶ While I acknowledge these two figures as having had a substantial influence on Woodman, I shy clear of describing them as surrealist, even 'surrealist'. This is not because I want to *presume some point of*

³³ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 28.

³⁴ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 28.

³⁵ Gaby Wood, 'The Lady Vanishes' (preview of Woodman exhibition at the Photographers' Gallery, London, 1999), *Observer Magazine* (London), 25 July 1999, 20-23.

³⁶ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 28.

purity for Surrealism beyond mass culture..., or that I dismiss the importance of the artist's contemporaneous influences, but that the backbone to my argument is Woodman's knowledge of surrealism's first wave manifestations; a knowledge that is as profound as it is accessible to her.³⁷

Townsend's chapter *Feminist Photography* straightaway belies some restriction in its choice of title, which it seems to me is at once too narrow a classification and somewhat too portentous a category. The author's examples of Turbeville and Sherman presuppose some neglect of feminism in favour of their status as photographers. Townsend also briefly places Woodman in relation to Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta and Judith Miller. These links are only alluded to, not explored in depth. His trove of artists and photographers with some links to Woodman is however impressive and useful as a resource. But his somewhat cursory investigation of feminist ideology reveals a lack in the underpinning of his arguments in the previous chapter which aim to unleash Woodman from inclusion in this particular canon.

A Post-Minimal Photography is the chapter in Townsend's monograph which I have found the most useful. His analysis of *some disordered interior Geometries* is rigorous and perceptive. It is above all the passages in Townsend's book which describe Woodman's critique of photography from inside the medium which have the most originality and depth. I am convinced and inspired by his contention which is comprehensively examined in the chapter. Her use of seriality, the transference and negation of meaning between signs through repetition and

³⁷ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 69, extract from note 4 to his chapter *Woodman and Surrealism*.

contra-position are proof, Townsend argues, of the framing of her work in the post-minimalist field. The examples he gives to substantiate his claim are amongst the most complex and the most compelling of her oeuvre: *Swan Song* from 1978; *Tree Piece*, *Temple Project* and *some disordered interior Geometries*, all from 1980 the last full year of her practice.

A critical study that I have found useful in my investigation of the development of the artist's book is Jean Khalifa's *The Dialogue between Painting and Poetry*. From its strongly Euro-centric position it is the essay in it by Yves Peyré, which addresses the transition between the long twentieth century's Franco-European development of the *livre d'artiste* and the emergence in the late 1950s, predominantly in the US, of the artist's book form. This form vigorously advances, in a temporary closure of the *livre d'artiste* form (where a poet and an artist might work together) a *versatility in the use of materials*, a *built-in complexity* and *intertextuality as well as multimedia experimentation*.³⁸ The book's superb image reproduction has however vitalised my knowledge of the subject's history and is a potent reminder of the inspiring exhibition I saw in the New York Public Library in 2006.³⁹

Another key critical work that has informed my discussion is Liz Kotz's *Words to Be Looked At*, which, in spite of its wider field of enquiry (though narrower time span), has both pinpointed and made more fluid my understanding of the foundations of minimalism which underpin Woodman's practice.

³⁸ Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D Hubert, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books*, New York, Granary Books, 1999, 7.

³⁹ This exhibition, *The Dialogue between Painting and Poetry 1874-1999, Artists' books from the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris*, was originally shown at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 24 April-24 June 2001.

For its clarification of surrealist interpretations of the book, I am indebted both to Renée Riese Hubert's marvellous *Surrealism and the Book* and her later co-written *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books*, which investigates the growing multi-dimensionality in the field before and after Woodman's time.

My short week of research in the Special Books Collection at Edinburgh's Dean Gallery, under the direction of Ann Simpson, was extremely stimulating. I found the wealth of new information I gained there extremely painful to excise from my thesis. Clearly a separate piece of research covering the influence of Duchamp's *Green Box* on Woodman, for example, has to wait its turn.

I discuss the subject of the artist's book in relation to Woodman's *some disordered interior Geometries* in Chapter 4.

Chapter Order

My thesis chapter order has evolved into a form in which the historical and philosophical sections will, I hope, provide a sustaining and objectivising shell around its kernel of Books' analysis. Because of its key position in my argument I have placed first, as Chapter 1, *Photography Intervenes*, my analysis of links between the operative functions of word and image in Breton's *Nadja* and Woodman's Books, thereby entering the thesis through a door with vital and very specific hinge-pins. The door's jamb must be Woodman's all-important statement regarding *Nadja*, explored earlier in this Introduction. Chapter 8, *Connections, Intersections and Coincidences*, will provide a wide plateau in which I will

demonstrate Woodman's conversance with surrealism. My final chapter, Chapter 9, will look at the occurrence of serialisation and sequencing in her images between the Books and her wider corpus. I will try to place Woodman in frameworks contemporary to her practice such as feminism and post-minimalism.

The kernel of the thesis is in Chapters 2-7; in these I make a close analysis of the individual Books. Where possible these chapters are ordered in the chronological sequence of the making of Woodman's Books, in tandem with the dating suggested by the Roman Palazzo delle Esposizioni monograph and by Townsend, with both of which I largely agree.⁴⁰ Each of these chapters will provide a consecutive analysis of each image in each Book and where appropriate each image sequence and my interpretations of it in regard to influences and sources I perceive.

I hope that this thesis will elucidate an element of Woodman's practice which has heretofore been under-emphasised by most scholars and that it will augment the increasing field of literature on Francesca Woodman's work.

More and more brilliant, Woodman's Book images disarm, are complex, formed in filmic sequences, in which each image is close, but just different from another like the moon's phases. Or an image might stand in glorious autonomy. These are multi-layered and multi-referential images; but this aspect never dilutes their autonomous beauty.

⁴⁰ Please see page 2 for the two instances when I have over-ridden this chronological system.

My fervent hope is that my enthusiasm for these objects, remaining as strong after these years of research, could be transmitted to a future and wider audience this research might find.

CHAPTER ONE

Photography Intervenes in Breton's *Nadja* and Woodman's Books

*The image is a pure creation of the mind.
It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of
two more or less distant realities.
The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is
distant and true, the stronger the image will be - the greater its emotional
power and poetic reality...¹*

*In the realm of literature, only the marvellous is capable of fecundating works
which belong to an inferior category such as the novel...²*

In this chapter I shall explore the innovatory balance of text and photographic image in André Breton's *Nadja* and its counterpart in Woodman's Books, in the impact her annotative text has on the photographic image.

In the 1920s the surrealists began to develop techniques experimenting with time, place and object to develop new spheres of poetry and fantasy and within its own legacy of the intrinsic and unassailable imaging of reality, photography became an especially potent tool. In 1925 Breton had declared that *The photographic print...is permeated with an emotive value that makes it a supremely precious article of exchange.*³ An important development in the use of photographic image

¹ Pierre Reverdy (*Nord-Sud*, March 1918) quoted by Breton in his first *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924, in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (originally published as *Manifestes du Surréalisme*, Paris, Pauvert, 1962), trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1972, 20.

² Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 1972, 14.

³ André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (originally published as *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Paris, N.R.F., 1928), trans. Simon Watson Taylor, London, Macdonald, 1972, 32. He continues:

in relation to text occurred between the publications of *Nadja* and of *L'Amour fou* (1937) most potently within the fertile ground of the surrealist journals of the 1920s to the 1930s.

Interest in surrealist photography and painting had been generated and augmented by William Rubin's show *Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage* at MOMA New York in 1968, which Woodman could well have visited, despite being only ten years old, followed by Dawn Ades's Hayward Gallery show in London in 1971, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* which Woodman might also have seen.⁴ Certainly it fits with her father's claim that she had *a high appreciation of Dada and Surrealism by the time she was eleven years old*.⁵ By the time of Woodman's late career in New York she had also formed a close friendship with the surrealist collector Timothy Baum, whose collection of surrealist material was being formed in the early part of Woodman's early career, the early 1970s. Arguably the two important exhibitions in New York and London had been held in response to a renewed interest in the subject in response to Albert Skira's re-printing of *Minotaure* through the decade of the 1960s and its consequence of the wider dissemination of surrealist photographic images in art journals.

Written at the end of the period of Euro-American re-appropriation of surrealism, Jean Arrouye's early 1980s analysis of some of these surrealist photographs in a book context has informed my perception of an intermediary balance between

...and when will all the books that are worth anything stop being illustrated with drawings and appear only with photographs?

⁴ Please see Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 35-37, for a more detailed investigation of this subject.

⁵ George Woodman is quoted by Wood, 'The Lady Vanishes', 1999, 20-23.

word and photographic image therein.⁶ Arrouye's contribution is a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the photographs and their function in *Nadja*.

He argues that images are fully integrated with the text and that they fulfil the visual part of the anti-literary imperative core to Breton's project, (as reiterated by Breton in his preface of the 1963 revised edition).⁷ Arrouye first defines four categories of photograph in *Nadja*: places, portraits, documents and curious objects and art objects. He then divides the images into those which he considers signs in a successive series (his categories of places, portraits and documents fit here) and those he considers to be singular, such as the photographs of art and curious objects, which he fuse into one category. This category includes Nadja's own drawings. Collectively, Arrouye suggests, the images of the book constitute the *tissu d'inraisemblables adorable* (thread of adorable improbabilities) Breton believes exists and which he must follow and record.

Arrouye also argues that the appearance of each image acts as a stop to the preamble of the text and that in combination the images construct a shared rhetoric in which each works to complete the other(s) with no possibility of either or any becoming redundant. At times the eloquence of Arrouye's ideas, encapsulated in such phrases as *poétique iconique* and *le lisible au visible* have been difficult to render in the English language, but overall his best premises have helped my understanding of this subject.

⁶ Jean Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', *Méluine*, 4, 1982, 123-151.

⁷ Breton, his *Avant-dire* to *Nadja* (his revised 1963 edition), Paris, Gallimard/Folio Plus, 1964, reprinted 1998, 8: *...des deux principaux impératives "anti-littéraires" auxquels cet ouvrage obéit...* ('...the two principal "anti-literary" imperatives to which this work adheres...'). The other imperative to which the author refers is the tone of medical observation.

In considering Arrouye's contentions it is possible to see how Breton succeeds in simultaneously overturning and disrupting both the literary and photographic conventions of his time.⁸

Later readings from the late 20th and early 21st century, by Renée Riese Hubert and Ian Walker have contributed to my investigation of the impact of Jacques-André Boiffard's photographs on Breton's text.

Although a self-declared seminal influence on Woodman's practice, *Nadja* clearly has a fundamentally opposite starting point from that of Woodman in that Breton's prime position is as a writer and Woodman's as a photographer. Both however enjoy shifting the perspectives of image and text and rearranging the impact of their respective functions. Importantly, both artists desire and demand a contribution from their audience to complete the work.

This demand for the contribution of the audience is in tandem with Barthes's thinking in *Death of the Author* which eradicates the ego and directorial control of the author. It is developed by him in *From Work to Text* to that point at which the *Text* cannot exist as such without the reader or audience's participation.

By democratising the 'evidence' which he seizes from the rolling everyday of his tripartite tale, Breton manages to absolve himself from a steering position most of

⁸ On photography in particular, Arrouye remarks on this point: *Par la Breton semble se rallier à la conception la plus habituelle de la photographie, considérée comme le constat fidèle d'un avoir-été la auquel on accorde une valeur de témoignage objectif.* ('In this way Breton seems to rally against the most often held idea that photography, constant faithful of the 'that has been there' is accorded the value of objective evidence). Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 124.

the time and refuses any neat episodic and reader-satisfying closures. Because the evidence of his situations can be raw, awkward and embarrassing the audience is drawn into the emotional net and he requires our participation to tidy up the mess.

Woodman presents work in her Books in a disrupted format which invites a restlessness of enquiry. She demands our own troubled orderings of a deliberately complex and enigmatic system. Her complex juxtapositions are oiled by poetry and made brilliant by astonishing images.

The network of intersections between the group of Woodman Books and *Nadja* is intriguing, complex and intricate, which makes it difficult to grasp and even more difficult to hold. Often defying logic, both author and artist leave trails and clues across the wild terrain of the unconscious and sometimes these emerge as live connectors to a more conscious state. Perhaps the clues can be anchored too in the impetus and stimulus of the everyday, *this very poetry of the everyday*, even the everyday of three-quarters of a century ago.⁹ The trails are strewn on the ex-historical plain of memory and appropriation that is the *Text*. I shall investigate these subtle and tangential connections and trace the oblique and obtuse angles of Woodman's and Breton's respective imaginations.

Both Breton and Woodman, to a lesser or greater extent, use irony, emotional encounter and narrative fabric alongside poetry and humour in their works.

Breton's compulsion to document in order to prove the 'truth' of his narrative,

⁹ Mary Ann Caws, Introduction to André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* (originally published as *Les Vases communicants*, Paris, Gallimard, 1955), trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T Harris, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, xxi.

albeit often with an ironic detachment, is his own independent project. The process gives rise to a multi-layered structure for *Nadja* which is not shared in the same way by Woodman's Books; her project is differently multi-dimensional in its important interaction with its found object base, which opens a discourse between subject, language and time.

I shall look at what it was that stimulated Woodman to draw inspiration from Breton's revolutionary work, and her expression of this inspiration in her statement, which I have quoted in full and analysed in my Introduction.¹⁰ I shall look too at which aspects of *Nadja* were pertinent to her own project and at which aspects of it moved her. The inspiration of *Nadja* runs like an electric current through her Books practice. It is clearly an inspiration running its current in one direction only, from the early work to the later work. Despite this one way street I have chosen to place the works alongside each other as equals in my appraisal, for so I judge the talents of both the makers to be. Applied by Woodman in inventive ways, *Nadja*'s inspiration enacts its power on her pervasively, although direct reference is always absent.

As its influence is felt to maximum potency in the three photographic Books in which Woodman both uses a found object base and to whose images she adds annotations, I shall confine my direct comparisons of resonances in Breton's situating of image in text in *Nadja* to Woodman's situating of text in image, to

¹⁰ Introduction to this thesis, 7-11. The key statement made by the artist in spoken word is recorded by Roberta Valtorta. I have quoted it in full in my Introduction, 8.

these three Books: *Angels, Calendars* (of which only the second part, *Calendars* is annotated), *Quaderno Raffaello* and *some disordered interior Geometries*.¹¹

My analysis will carry an awareness of the fundamental difference of the positions occupied by Woodman and Breton and the consequent need for caution in forging direct comparisons. Both are poets. *For Breton is always outside in these texts, watching ... when everyone is already outside, carrying out the poetic operation in full daylight*.¹² Breton worked as a visual artist, making *poème-objets* throughout the 1930s. That overlap, the intersection and interchangeability of talents, is important. Woodman writes her annotations which always contain or are poetry, in response to her photographs as well as to the aesthetic and/or the subject of the found object base onto which they are applied. An example of a poem by Woodman written as a separate work is published in the catalogue of the *Incommunicado* exhibition.¹³

Second, Woodman has chosen her found object bases; they constitute an area of the work over which her control is limited to the first selection and her intervention. They constitute an *unterschriften* which can be read as an automatic text, an underlying, already-there, text.¹⁴ Breton's control over his images resides

¹¹ At this stage I use this fact only as a basis for differentiation and not descriptively.

¹² Caws, Introduction to Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, 1990, xxiii.

¹³ *i am apprehensive. it is like when i played the piano. first i learned to read music and then at one point i no longer needed to translate the notes: they went directly to my hands. After a while i stopped playing and when i started again i found i could not play: i could not play by instinct and i had forgotten how to read music.* Margot Heller, curator, *Incommunicado* (catalogue of National Touring Exhibition, 2003-2004), London, Hayward Gallery, 2003, 100.

¹⁴ *Unterschriften* can be translated as writing underneath.

in his commissioning of mainly Boiffard as an external photographer.¹⁵ The comparative analysis sections of this chapter should therefore be received in the surrealist mode of paradox and juxtaposition.

Breton lifts the captions he places under the photographs from his written text. Both he and Woodman use their captions for emphasis and inflection, towards and away from the image and towards and away from the words. Movement is thereby initiated between readings of word and image, as neither would perform independently in the manner in which they perform when placed together. Hubert stresses...*that the visual and the verbal never completely lose their autonomy in surrealist books; indeed, their complete fusion would subvert surrealist aims.*¹⁶

Nadja took form as a book some eight years after Breton's early experimental writing sessions with Soupault had been published as *Les Champs magnétiques*. An important tenet of these live writing sessions had been neither to omit nor edit, nor, I understand, re-read, any of the words emerging from the trance-like state consciously induced by Soupault and Breton¹⁷ *Nadja's* essence is just as experimental and as radical and these early works in particular must be assessed as testimony of an essentially revolutionary movement .

¹⁵ Boiffard is certainly formally credited with all of the Paris scenes in *Nadja* except the 'Nouvelle France' image. I owe this information to Ian Walker's endnote to his chapter 'Nadja: A Voluntary Banality?' in Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and documentary photography in interwar Paris*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, 65 note 30.

¹⁶ Renée Riese Hubert, Introduction to *Surrealism and the Book*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, 23.

¹⁷ These sessions, which took place in Paris in 1919, are gathered together and published as *Les Champs Magnétiques*, Au Sans Pareil, Paris, 1920.

Five years before the creation of *Les Champs magnétiques*, in 1919, Gertrude Stein would experiment with an downgrading of syntax and denial of linear, hierarchical progression in writing, to make a different and possibly equally radical ‘anti-literary work’, *Tender Buttons*, in 1914. She had begun experimenting with *automatic writing* in the late 1890s, partly in the form of seven manuscript notebooks, while studying neurophysiology at Harvard alongside the philosopher William James. A practitioner of *poetic science*, Stein sought to *destroy associational emotion* in order to achieve *exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality*.¹⁸ The conjunction between poetry and science must have inspired Woodman, whose application of its conjunction and disjunction can be most keenly observed in her Book *some disordered internal Geometries*.

In considering an extract from Stein’s 1914 work alongside an extract from Breton and Soupault’s work of 1919, I would like to pinpoint some similarities in the projects. A difference between the works is the retention of syntax in Breton’s collaborations with Soupault; the more to reveal wild juxtapositions perhaps and its near-abandonment by Stein.

Both authors deliberately contravene logic for their own reasons in their dismantling of the linguistic status quo:

¹⁸ Stein is quoted by Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science*, 2003 Palo Alto (Calif.), Stanford University Press, 2003, 399. Online at http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=l51WKk05X-UC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=Gertrude+Stein+1890s+writing&ots=OOzlm_tPF-&sig=IV86h3UP1JzCrUFRvKjvO1pCAE#v=onepage&q&f=false, accessed 13/11/2010.

Eclipses

*The colour of the fabulous salvations darkened until the slightest death rattle: calm of the relative sighs. Despite the smell of milk and coagulated blood, the circus of leaps is full of melancholy seconds.*¹⁹

A Box

*Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle.*²⁰

Stein's near non-syntactical approach would be a strong influence in the century that followed, particularly in the example of her line, both logical and illogical, *a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose*, which would be quoted directly, or in slightly altered form, by twentieth century writers such as Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, Brett Easton Ellis and Jeanette Winterson.²¹

Stein's influence on Woodman's entire writing practice (poetry, image annotations and journal writing), was so strong and Woodman's awareness of Stein's presence so acute, that Woodman would refer to her own journal writing as *Steinwriting*. This influence can be observed in the following example from Woodman's journal. We must keep in mind Woodman's youth (seventeen years) in the period when she wrote this, at the start of her degree course at Rhode Island School of Art and Design, from September of 1975:

I would have waited six months and then read books, letters, slept in blankets and have been my own archaeologist for this lost bit of civilisation - this attic ghost.

¹⁹ André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *The Magnetic Fields* (originally published as *Les Champs magnétiques*, Paris, Au Sans Pareil, 1920), trans. Antony Melville with an Introduction by David Gascoyne, London, Atlas Press, 1985, 39.

²⁰ Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons: objects, food, rooms*, New York, Claire Marie, 1914. Online at <http://www.bartleby.com/140/1.html>, accessed 31/05/2010.

²¹ Stein, from *Sacred Emily*, poem published in the collection *Geography and Plays*, written in 1913, Boston, Four Seas Company, 1922, 178. Online at <http://www.bartleby.com/140/1.html>, accessed 31/05/2010.

*People don't turn heads much up or down. I like to watch cats who move their whole heads to see and try to do so too.*²²

Nadja's form is constructed from distinct sections of writing: narrative, diary and medical observation, combined in parallel and intersecting threads. Its whole of disparate and open-ended parts embodies the Barthesian concept of *Text*. Roger Cardinal summarises *Nadja's* form here:

*It seems to me that Nadja is best envisaged as a many-layered structure, a set of superimposed, semi-transparent patterns which, in combination, constitute the dense and polyvalent whole. ... as a dossier on surreality, a treatise on chance and desire, a meditation on personal identity, an enquiry into paranormal experience, a narrative of a love affair, an oblique manifesto about a certain way of living, an anti-novel, and an exercise in the stylistics of Enigma.*²³

Nadja, first published in 1928, documents events which took place in 1926.²⁴

Woodman's found object bases, which are used school books, date from between 1890 and 1910. Woodman thereby intercedes with a fantasy history which not only pre-dates the making of *Nadja*, but could coincidentally twin Breton's birth date of 1896. Circa 1900, 1928 and the period when Woodman worked on her Books, 1975-1981: a twenty five year gap between the original use of the Roman found objects and *Nadja's* first publication in Paris (though Woodman would probably have read Richard Howard's first translation of *Nadja* into English in

²² George Woodman ed., 'Journal extracts', in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 242 (unnumbered page).

²³ Roger Cardinal, *Breton: Nadja: Critical Guides to French Texts*, London, Grant and Cutler, 1986, 11-12.

²⁴ All references to *Nadja*, unless otherwise specified, are to Richard Howard's translation (originally published New York, Grove Press, 1960) of Breton's 1928 edition (André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris, Gallimard, 1928) in the Penguin edition: André Breton, *Nadja*, with Introduction by Mark Polizzotti, Harmondsworth (UK), Penguin, 1999. 1928 was the same year as the publication of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, which also used photographs within its text. Woolf's language, verging out of the descriptive into the abstract, and her use of images, was equally, but very differently, experimental.

1960) and a fifty year gap between the appearance of that Librairie Gallimard book and Woodman's Book practice in America.²⁵

The continuous swinging motion between the spheres of operation from word to image and from image to word in Breton's work is echoed tangentially in Woodman's Books. Breton's captions are taken directly from his main text. They inflect the image and then return through and from the image to the main text. Woodman's annotations sometimes inflect the base text and sometimes her photograph.

The motion in Breton's work is played reciprocally by caption text onto image. His achievement in maintaining an equal interaction of the visual and the textual is a zenith of experimentation. We can look at the text and we can read the photographs. Our understanding of events from the main text is expanded, contracted, deflected and even negated by the visual information given in the photographic image and that photograph's caption. The caption can also unsettle our reception of a photograph. Most importantly, despite his writer's role in *Nadja*, Breton does not prioritise image over word or word over image, but maintains their interdependence. The difficulty of this task, both in cultural and creative terms, permeates the book with a sense of unease which is also its triumph. In so doing he constructs a document which successfully records the untidy everyday.

²⁵ Decidedly in her work, the decade of the 1970s was a point of transition between high modernism and emergent post-modernism in Euro-America.

Woodman, though primarily a photographer, uses her own poetic text when she captions an image, either in pursuit of a theme or independently and therefore, in contrast to Breton, exerts a full control over her interventions. Woodman's control is only surrendered within the space of her found object's givens.

Woodman's response to *Nadja* constitutes a strong, formative armature in her work. Woodman was intrigued by the inter-related functions of text and image in *Nadja* and in her statement, quoted earlier, she professes a desire to construct a similar dynamic in her own work, *She wanted to be able to establish a similar relationship between words and her images as those achieved in Breton's book, Nadja.*²⁶

I will try and demonstrate that the poetry between image and text is found in a different place in *Nadja*, to the place where it is found in Woodman's Books. Does this poetry occur in the space of disjunction between word and image, in either or both case/s? In order to investigate my contention, I shall compare an image and its text from *Nadja*, with an image and its text from Woodman's Book *Angels, Calendars*.

Calendars, the second section of Woodman's Book, is separated from the first, *Angels*, section by a double page of found text. I shall look at the second image applied by Woodman to *Calendars* (fig 1).²⁷ For the comparison I shall take the

²⁶ As stated by Ann Gabhart in her essay 'Francesca Woodman 1958-1981' for the Wellesley College Museum exhibition catalogue in 1986: Gabhart and Krauss, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, 1986, 55. The statement is quoted in full in the Introduction.

²⁷ For a full analysis of the image discussed, please see Chapter 2.

image of the *white irregular half-cylinder* object (fig 2) created, like the photograph of Saint-Ouen flea market opposite it, by Boiffard.²⁸

I have made this pairing for comparison, as a result of some immediately discernible visual attributes shared by the two images. At once noticeable, for instance, are the several (Woodman) and one (*Nadja*) white form/s on a dark toned background. The forms in both photographs are constructed of paper.

Woodman's forms, the simple paper squares, are spread in a repetition of separateness. The object of *Nadja*'s image contains repetitions of a simple linear triangle, spread on the object's surface of what seems to be folded and curved paper.²⁹ The image in *Nadja* emits mystery and exactitude simultaneously. Its exactitude and its precision, as in the words *natorum linea*, are intrinsic to its function and comprehensible only to the relevant specialist, a geographer or a statistician perhaps. Here its logic is brilliantly deferred. Referring to this object, Renée Riese Hubert declares: *Here mystery and desire arise from the photograph itself and hardly require(s) the corroboration of the text.*³⁰

²⁸ The accreditation to Boiffard is verified by Julia Kelly in her list of objects in *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects: Paris, c.1925-35*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007, x (list of illustrations). Online at http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=WURXHmZQDRsC&pg=PR3&dq=julia+kelly+manchester&hl=en&ei=vR9DTJOqM9SRjAf9svgW&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=julia%20kelly%20manchester&f=false, accessed 29/05/2010.

²⁹ Or, according to Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*, 2007, in her image list, constructed of plaster. She describes it thus: *Cylindrical object (population curve) plaster, 34.5 x 17.9*. It is No 15 on her list.

³⁰ Chapter 8, 'Displacement of Narrative', in Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 1988, 264.

Breton is happy for the object's codes to elude him and indeed relishes this. This is a prime surrealist object, found by chance, utterly incongruous and completely estranged from its first-use usefulness. Woodman's image contains mystery too. A poetry arcs between the accuracy of the ten spread squares of her image and the vagueness of the word *several* of her short annotation *several cloudy days*. Hand marked in charcoal to further simulate, with humour, a *cloud*-likeness, Woodman has in this way differentiated a few of the floor-strewn rectangles from their white neighbours. In so doing, she has added another practice dimension (drawing) to her photographic image, which links it in turn to the double handwriting of her annotation. The annotation, in both its vivid green trace and in its full phrase in sepia ink beneath it, exists in the liminal area between the completed chemical process of the photograph and the written backdrop of the French poetry in sepia copperplate by the original nineteenth century 'ghost' student. The black legs in the top centre of her image add a quality of moving time and human intervention to this interpretation of the stasis induced by days without light.

Breton's image caption is a phrase lifted (as always) from his text and unusually, on two counts in this case, the caption is both abbreviated from a longer paragraph and is a focused description of the object. His caption *Even perverse, like that kind of irregular white half-cylinder...* (SEE PAGE 52) has been extracted from a long musing on Breton's part on the nature of his visits to flea markets and the categories of object he finds there. He offers the discussed *half-cylinder* as an example of one category, the *perverse*.³¹ The object's perversity intrigues him.

³¹ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 52. The other categories are: *old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible*. The inherent perversity of this object resides perhaps in its separation from that first context in which its usefulness had been its paramount value.

Therefore, in the converse of his customary practice, Breton uses text to amplify an image which alone is compelling and extraordinary.

I shall now forge a comparison between the sole image representation of Nadja (if such it can be called) printed only in the 1963 revised edition (108), captioned *Ses yeux de fougère* (fig 3) and Woodman's last image from *some disordered interior Geometries*, captioned *almost a square* (fig 4).³²

Anticipated by and retrospectively connected to the first Woodman image of *some disordered interior Geometries* (fig 5), the last image of the Book (fig 4) repeats the first image's intense focus on two areas, the dress's V neck and Woodman's hands and wrists, in relation to a glass square they hold. By this means a strong sequence is established. Distinguished from the first Book image by the presence of a lighter tone which surrounds and differentiates her figure from the background (in the first image her neck and hands emerge from a dark mass in which her figure's outline is indistinguishable), a second, most important, difference between the two images lies in the work done by the pane of transparent glass. The function of the glass in the first image is as the visual and corporeal construction of an equivocal response to the original's printed section heading *Tabella della abbreviazioni usate nel presente quaderno* (table of abbreviations used in the present notebook), in its making of Woodman's own corporeal abbreviation: the highlighting of the fingertips and the clothing details

³² 'Her fern-like eyes'. Breton extracted the 'Plate' numbers under the images in the revised edition of *Nadja* (Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998), leaving only the captions and the less formal page number text references.

around the front of the neck.³³ The function of the glass pane in the second image is both to highlight and magnify the double junction of wrist and arm, making a new and mysterious form. This form acts crucially as another equivocal response to the top sub-heading of the original page *Superficie e volume dei tre corpi tondi* (surfaces and volumes of three round forms). Three round forms, the two wrist heels and the reflected fingers area above, are all enclosed within the glass's rectangle.

The repetition of forms is the salient aspect in the link I want to make between this Woodman image and Man Ray's collaged photograph from the author-revised edition of *Nadja*. Placed opposite page 109, its caption *Ses yeux de fougère* (her fern-like eyes) intensifies the poetic description in its isolation from the more elaborate text paragraph.³⁴ More poetry is poured in by the image as, in his collage-composite, Man Ray has trans-located the poetry from Breton's rhapsodic allusion to Nadja's eyes, *J'ai vu ses yeux de fougère s'ouvrir le matin...*, and sealed it within.³⁵ This image is far from a conventional portrait and yet better contains the essence of her magnetic allure for Breton, expressed here in Arrouye's description *Nadja, créature de rêve éveillé, est ainsi rendue obsessionnellement présente dans son absence même ...* (Nadja, creature of the waking dream, is therefore rendered obsessively present in her very absence).³⁶

³³ Woodman has tonally obliterated all the rest of her seated figure apart from these two accentuated areas, her *abbreviations*. Having very recently seen a very good quality framed print at Victoria Miro's Woodman Exhibition, I have now observed her face to be reflected in the glass pane.

³⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 108.

³⁵ 'I have seen her fern-like eyes *open* in the morning...' (my translation from Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 112; I think Howard's translation of *fern-coloured* misses the marvellous surrealist juxtaposition).

³⁶ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 137.

A nervous but subtle repetition of the selected facial segment, where eyebrows and eyelids feature as much as pupils, aligned with gently different light exposures, creates a movement through the Man Ray image in which the directness of the repeated gaze is seductive, sad and compelling.

Breton's choice of metaphor is at once a delicate surrealism, the semiotic movement between eye and fern being no less extraordinary for its gentleness. Nadja's eyes are for him her chief allurements zone. And the manner in which they open is to him as quietly fantastic as the tantalising visibility of the opening of the fern's tight curlicues of leaf.³⁷ Man Ray has cleverly made a close visual resemblance that is semantically distant: we can voluntarily read the central connections of Nadja's nose-bridge as the central fern stem which repeats a rhythmic pattern of mushroom-shaped and leaf/eyebrow arches.

Is it the effect of the passing of thirty six years which permits Breton to include one technically manipulated photograph in the three that he adds to his revised edition of *Nadja*. Breton has swum against the tide, in the majority of his selected images for *Nadja*, of the then prevailing highly experimental epoch in photography, as expressed by Ian Walker:

*As, all around, images were being tilted, reversed, cut up, collaged and juxtaposed, it required a very particular vision to allow an apparently direct, simple image just to sit there on the page, against the text.*³⁸

³⁷ Another possible association with the fern plant is an ability to observe a multiplicity of growth/opening stages simultaneously, across a growing clump, as if one had witnessed the complete unfurling of the leaf.

³⁸ Chapter 3, '*Nadja*: a "voluntary banality"?' in Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 2002, 63.

In *ses yeux de fougère*, Breton makes a retrospective departure from his preferred photographic genre, in encouraging Man Ray to make an innovative collaged work.

Woodman's image (fig 4) from *some disordered interior Geometries* contains a complex quartet of meanings. In the area magnified and blurred behind the glass square, the first meaning is in the response to the original's section heading, already mentioned, *Superficie e volume dei tre corpi tondi*. She has constructed and fixed the three round forms behind the square's sharp cornered definition.³⁹ In what must be a maximum contrast of form (and in its simultaneous meaning, in both languages, of body) between round and square (heightened by its hard edge and its lit interior), she presents two round forms made from the two wrist bases and an upper round form constructed of higher arm parts. The edges of these are diffused, softened and rounded, by blurring and by the gentle interruption from the fluttering trace of fingers.

A second poetic response is present in her visual transformation of the information, the given, of the opposite page's printed diagrams of pyramids and the accompanying word descriptions of their variations:

Piramide regolare a base quadrata /
Piramide triangolare regolare /
Piramide esagonale regolare /
*Piramide obliqua avente per base un pentagon regolare*⁴⁰

³⁹ 'Surface areas and volumes of three round forms'.

⁴⁰ 'Regular pyramid with square base / Regular triangular pyramid / Regular hexagonal pyramid / Oblique pyramid constructed on a regular pentagonal base'.

A triangle and a pyramid form are visually present in the spaces between the magnified body parts. A third meaning is present in the response between her annotation, *almost a square* and the nature of the complex composite of constructed geometric forms in the focused, magnified hand/wrist area. This area brilliantly maintains the geometry of its triangles, cones and rounds in its compression and distortion beneath the square glass pane at the same time as transposing the forms into a soft human counterpart. And a fourth meaning is found within the parallelogram of space edged by the simultaneous doubling of the co-existent Italian and English languages.

Another comparison sets Boiffard's fountain image (fig 6) (opposite p 86) from *Nadja* in relation to Woodman's chair and dragonfly image, the third from *Quaderno Raffaello* (fig 7). The combined effect of image and caption in both examples captures and extends a moment seized from the narrative.⁴¹ The caption Breton appends to the image *We are in front of a fountain, whose jet she seems to be watching*, directs his audience to the fuller description in the text as well as to the image's differently full evidence of a very peaceful scene.⁴² Woodman's caption *anxiously waiting* is stretched and exaggerated in the image.

Breton has selected the phrase from his text which is the most emphatically, even mundanely, descriptive of the image, thereby allowing the photograph both to contain more allure than the caption and to direct his readers straight back to the text, where a considerable embellishment nestles. Breton's assumed tone of

⁴¹ The word *caption* clearly has the same root (Latin *capere*) as capture and an earlier meaning, before the 17th century, had been exactly that: seizure or capture. Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd revised edition, 1973, reprinted 1990, 282.

⁴² Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 87.

detached observation, present of course in both caption and main text and evolved in *Nadja*, is here described by him, writing some ten years later:

*Surrealism has always suggested they [the facts and circumstances] be written like a medical report, with no incident omitted, no name altered, lest the arbitrary make its appearance. The revelation of the immediate, bewildering irrationality of certain events requires the most severe authentication of the human document conveying them.*⁴³

We know from the main text, here on the opposite page to the image, that Breton and Nadja have arrived at the Tuileries Gardens *towards midnight*. Breton's direct quotation of Nadja's speech includes a near repetition of his own descriptive phrase from the immediately preceding incident and page, *her eyes and mine*, becoming, in Nadja's words, *your thoughts and mine*, as she develops her symbolic use of the imaged fountain. Poetry therefore unfolds from the main text to the image, leaving the caption to work as evidence alone.

Arrouye's first example of his category of the 'symbolic' and 'demonstrative' function of the images in *Nadja* is that of the fountain image, about which he says:

*Outside of the liaison established between the text itself and the water jet of the Tuileries Gardens which Nadja appreciates as an "image found almost in the same form" ...*⁴⁴

⁴³ André Breton, *Mad Love* (originally published as *L'Amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937), trans. Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1987, 39.

⁴⁴ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 129: *En dehors de la liaison établie par le texte lui-même entre le jet d'eau du jardin des Tuileries (p.99) que Nadja apprécie par une "image qui se trouve presque sous la même forme ..."*

This is Nadja at her most naturally poetic: *Look where they all start from, how high they reach, and then how it's still prettier when they fall back.*⁴⁵

The episode at the Tuileries Gardens is recorded simultaneously in image and text. Read in a narrative sense, it is indicative of the romantic peak of their affair. But the romantic element is strengthened for the intellectual Breton by its embedment in philosophy. Nadja articulates the same thought as that expressed by Berkeley in his third *Dialogue of Hylas and Philonous*:

*You see, Hylas, the water of yonder fountain, how it is forced upwards, in a round column, to a certain height; at which it breaks and falls back ...*⁴⁶

Breton is reading a 1750 edition of this book at the time of his visit to the Tuileries Gardens with Nadja. It is illustrated by an engraving (*vignette*) of the fountain at whose edge the two thinkers stand, which Breton reproduces.⁴⁷ The coincidence is powerful and extraordinary for him. His Pygmalion relationship in regard to Nadja's intellectual development is subverted in his reception of her straightforward observation.

The effect of serenity is partly conjured by the surprise of an outdoor scene, the first and only occurrence of such in the earlier edition. As its description in the text includes a phrase of recorded speech, spoken by Nadja at the fountain, the episode exists in a shorter and more intense time frame than, for example, the

⁴⁵ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 86.

⁴⁶ George Berkeley, 'Hylas and Philonous: Third Dialogue', in *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues* (originally published in 1713), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, 208.

⁴⁷ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 88.

dinner at the Place Dauphine, where speech and anecdote are drawn through a longer period. Nadja has already beautifully symbolised the water jet into their thought.⁴⁸

Boiffard's image depicts a fountain propelling its jet upwards and downwards in a stone-edged lake in the formal Tuileries Gardens. The mutable and very white form of the water jet is echoed by the static mid-toned form of a statue at the rear of the lake. Dark shrubbery and trees which are in front of and behind the lake provide dramatic contrast to the white focus of the horseshoe-shaped spray in its centre. The lake's water is calm, providing another symbolisation.

Woodman's caption, hand-written as always (as opposed to Breton's print-form captions), here in a pseudo-copperplate, intercedes its base text script in an abrupt manner. It is in vertical opposition to the former's horizontal rhythm. Her caption is as equally direct as Breton's, in the sense that it takes the viewer straight into the core of the simulated narrative action, encapsulated in both the image and the chain of annotations. However, whereas we are taken to a particular place in the shared flânerie of Breton and Nadja and into a moment which demonstrates Nadja's inspiration and their still mutual enrapture, Woodman, in her caption *anxiously waiting*, allows her viewer to be tantalisingly close to her emotional centre, heightened as it is in an intensity of expectation, in her choice of a pared down interior mis-en-scène.⁴⁹ In Woodman's case too, her caption is, uniquely in

⁴⁸ See page 53 for the full quotation.

⁴⁹ Certain locations, when she takes outside shots, are traceable (for example Palazzo Cenci in Rome in her *Self Deceit* series) but the majority of the images in her Books focus on an interior space, whether domestic or architectural.

Quaderno Raffaello of her found object Books, one link in a tight narrative chain constructed of six consecutive annotations to six of its seven constituent images.⁵⁰

Woodman uses what can be construed as an interpretation of the *still life* genre in her image, in contrast to Boiffard in *Nadja*, who uses what again could be widely interpreted as the *landscape* genre. Both images use the material of their different genres to portray symbolically the thoughts and emotions of the chosen urgent moment. Breton's image contains the double symbolisation of the fountain for the couple's thoughts, as suggested by Nadja, and the fountain and its surrounding gardens for the moment of harmony they share. The second, less literal part of Breton's caption *whose jet she seems to be watching* adds another element of objectivity, which soon develops into a descriptive justification of his observation, encompassed in Nadja's recorded words.

The only photograph in the early edition of *Nadja* of a green space, in the formality of Paris's Tuileries Gardens, enhances the inspiration shared by the two protagonists in this episode.⁵¹ Unique amongst *Nadja*'s assemblage of images in the early edition, this image has both space and perspective in a natural, though formal, environment and its impact is strengthened by its contrast to the book's other images, collectively, of Paris streets, portraits, statues, objects and documents. These other images are for the most part taken at close hand, filling the image rectangle, with no, or only incidental, perspective.

⁵⁰ A comparably tight narrative chain is present in the early Book *Portrait of a Reputation*.

⁵¹ The 1964 revised edition has the image of a green space (with the famous Avignon Bridge in the distance) as the setting for the key sign of a new dawn, *Les Aubes*.

Woodman draws a potent symbolisation from the group of objects she photographs in an interior setting just as strongly as Breton did.

Her image caption *anxiously waiting* in *Quaderno Raffaello* is preceded by her caption *you can. I am*, and followed by the caption *your reply*. The whole caption sequence thus reads:

call me as soon as you can. I am anxiously waiting your reply
call collect 901-274-4184 In hoping,

The logic of the sequence is only disrupted (à la Stein) by Woodman's defiance of capitalisation and syntax. The glistening, shimmering satin of the draped dress in the image equates to *anxiety* in a brilliant transposition of mental state to object. The satin fabric is almost an *explosante fixe* arrest of movement, in contrast to the photographed fountain water's rise and fall which is a continuum of movement chosen to symbolise the lovers' thoughts. Woodman allows the regular linear rhythm of the first text to provide, in its new context, a backdrop of words to her image through her choice of a photographic transparency. The lines of copperplate script are particularly clear over a light-toned rectangle on the chair's left which extends out beyond the image border further to the left onto an extra area of transparency. It is onto this extra transparency area that the artist's annotation is written; Woodman's script intersects that of the original student. The figure's hand in the image clasps the chair back, adding to the atmosphere of nervous anticipation. This female hand is all we see of the figure. Under, behind and to the right of the chair is an area of very dark tone, in contrast to which the country kitchen chair (especially its back support bars and legs), the ripples of

satin cloth and the elegant fingers (which repeat the angle and form of the support bars) are all lit from the left in bright tone and clear delineation. Too anxious to sit down, the human void of the chair invites a new presence and/or the arrival of the desired reply. For Woodman the dragonfly image (representing ‘truth’ for the artist, probably in response to the adult-perpetrated myth about the dragonfly sewing up the lips of a lying child) on the cover of the book placed on the chair’s seat, perhaps implies she has the courage to face any outcome of the narrative episode.

The narrative chain in *Quaderno Raffaello*, of which this caption is a part, is broken by the autonomy and the *arrest* of the image, the *arrest* which punctures the word sequences. Closely resonating with each other, the images here evolve into a tight chain, cemented by the words of the annotations.⁵² They stretch the narrative encapsulated in them into a poetry found in between the contrasted currencies of word and image.

In a movement between the medium of words and the medium of image well within the scope of both creators, a different basis exists for the following comparison.

Nadja: *I am the thought on the bath in the room without mirrors.*⁵³ This haunting phrase, allegedly spoken directly by Nadja as one of her answers to Breton’s pervasive question *Who Am I?* has, I contend, inspired Woodman to make two images in a poetic response to Nadja’s phrase, in photography’s medium. Having

⁵² A full discussion of the images of *Quaderno Raffaello* is given in Chapter 6.

⁵³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 101

used the mirror as a trope in many important image series, for example in *Self Deceit*, *Charlie the Model* and *some disordered interior Geometries*, this project would have been an absorbing challenge to Woodman.⁵⁴ The two images I propose constitute Woodman's response to Nadja's at once both concrete and whimsical phrase are *New York 1980* (fig 8) and *Study for Temple Project*, New York, 1980 (fig 9).

The first image shows a female figure sunk stone-still in a Victorian lion's foot bath, her figure hidden from view by the enamelled curves of the bath's structure. Only a small part of her profiled face can be seen, one eye and the top of her nose. Somehow, perhaps because of the fixed, straight-ahead stare, we know she is deep in mesmerised, water-calmed thought. A visual flourish is contained in the spread of her long hair splayed over and moulded by the metal bath's edge. Philippe Sollers's reading of the bath in this image is as a coffin, while Benjamin Buchloh draws out the bath as a metaphor for the development process of photography, what he calls '*photography's chemical dimension*'.^{55, 56} While both these readings are interesting and perfectly valid, we might reflect too on the classical reference Woodman has made to David's painting of Marat murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday.

⁵⁴ Woodman's *Self Deceit* and *Charlie the Model* series are reproduced in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 156-157 and 116-117.

⁵⁵ Philippe Sollers, 'The Sorceress', in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 10.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph, Staging the Subject', in *Francesca Woodman, photographs, 1975-1980* (exhibition catalogue), New York, Marion Goodman Gallery, 2004, 46.

The second image (fig 9), also made in New York in 1980, supplies a stark interior interspersed with a high-lit spiralled form. Suffused with a rhythmic drama not unlike the swirled hair over the bath edge in fig 8, this cloth simultaneously conceals and reveals the *modern* perspex bath rail, defying our expectations of a towel or two, in a repeat of the flaked paint textures and motifs above it. It is both the *thought* made concrete and in its absurd (nylon petticoat) ‘curlings’, constructs an acute resemblance to ancient Greek decorative motifs. This was after all a study for Woodman’s ambitious late-career *Temple project* in which she brilliantly transforms mundane objects into a replication of the sublime cultural episode of Ancient Greece.

I will now put forward an explanation of some connections that I have observed between the drawings of Nadja (or Léona-Camille-Ghislaine D), as published in Breton’s book and some drawings by Woodman, reproduced in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue.

Breton published ten drawings altogether by his protagonist in *Nadja*. As Renée Riese Hubert points out, [t]he drawings originate in the domain of the imaginary without direct reference to everyday reality.⁵⁷ Briony Fer states that *Unlike Boiffard’s photographs, these drawings are described by Breton*. She also contends that *For Breton, these were ‘automatic’ drawings that revealed the workings of the feminine unconscious*.⁵⁸ The two drawings by Woodman which are published as separate works (figs 10 and 11) are ascribed to her period in

⁵⁷ Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 1988, 266.

⁵⁸ Briony Fer, ‘Breton’s Nadja’, in Briony Fer et al., *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars*, New Haven (Conn.), Yale University Press, 1993, 185.

Rome between 1977 and 1978.⁵⁹ Other drawings by Woodman, which will be alluded to later, are detectable both within unitary photographs and as constitutive parts of a series, for example in her *Teacup project* from 1980 or as background to four nude studies (charcoal drawings of chairs) *Self Portrait, Hard Edge and Breast, Face and Flesh*, all made in Providence in spring 1976.⁶⁰

Woodman's advanced visual training meant she had been taught to draw and even though at this stage in her career photography undoubtedly predominates as her medium, it is clear that she never entirely relinquished the joy of the immediately tactile, *hands-on* nature of drawing. This is evidenced by her inclusion of a drawing in one image from *some disordered interior Geometries* with the annotation *I made this...* (Woodman refers to a blank white board on a white wall) *...then I traded it for this drawing;* and in her practice of working directly (painting) on her own negatives and in the process of *dodging and burning* them.⁶¹

Nadja had not drawn before she met Breton; she was clearly encouraged to develop the activity by his fascination with this expression of her free imagination.⁶² Aware that I am skating on slightly thin ice, I contend that *Nadja's* influence on Woodman was strong enough for the latter to have made a conscious choice to adopt both the drawing style (in what for Woodman would have been a *faux naïf* style) and genre of motifs present in Nadja's drawings. For the purposes

⁵⁹ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 138-139.

⁶⁰ These drawings are reproduced on pages 48, 49, 51 and 52 of Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000.

⁶¹ For a fuller explanation of this technique please see the opening section from my analysis of *some disordered interior Geometries* in Chapter 4.

⁶² Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 130: *Before we met, she had never drawn at all.*

of this comparison I shall look at Nadja's drawings (figs 12 and 13), *A symbolic portrait of the two of us* and the two reproduced in one plate *Who is she?* and *The Devil's Salute*.⁶³ These three drawings are executed in strong pencil or black ink.

The first drawing (fig 12), has its subject described by Breton:

*The drawing, dated November 18th, 1926, consists of a symbolic portrait of the two of us: the siren, which is how she saw herself always from behind and from this angle, holds a scroll in her hand, the monster with gleaming eyes has the front of its body caught in a kind of eagle-head vase, filled with feathers representing ideas.*⁶⁴

Nadja's drawing makes up in imagination what it lacks in technique and style.

That Breton sees himself as a *monster* reveals his awareness that he will come to harm her, whereas the drawing indicates his power in her symbolisation of him as a lion head inside an eagle/jug composite. But the power holds no negative aspect: it is rather her self-denigrating homage to his intellectual ability and his leadership qualities. It is interesting to note that Nadja depicts herself as an Undine/Melusine creature she perhaps sees as just entering Breton's intellectual world since she holds the scroll. In a naturally balanced composition, Nadja's eagle-head/jug handle Breton symbolisation is positioned so that it leads our eye out to the left and the mermaid/Melusine figure is looking out to the back and right.

In Woodman's drawing (fig 11), a large bird flies in from the left, a swan perhaps, or a flamingo, its open beak and stretched neck echoing those of Nadja's Breton-eagle. Her bird brings a basket of young rabbits as an offering, entering a quiet domestic tea-time. Unnoticed by the central dark-clad female figure, the response

⁶³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 118 and 123.

⁶⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 121.

to the bird's presence is solely from the young girl at the left base of the drawing, who, in a thin wave of speech-bubble says *sono contenta che hama amici* (I am happy that I have friends).

Nadja adds words to the much reproduced drawing (fig 13, top) of herself clothed in a high-necked cloak, with her hair sticking up and out in Medusa fronds (like a sun) and covered by a giant question mark, next to which is her extension to Breton's enquiry into his identity *Qui suis-je?*, with the words *Qui est elle?* The small drawing reproduced beneath it (fig 13, bottom) shows less consciousness of its own drawing method. Annotated in Nadja's handwriting *Le salut du diable*, a rather friendly-looking devil emerges from a curlicued seventeenth century dandy's heeled boot. And from the top of this heel flames emerge.

Of Woodman's two drawings referred to earlier, fig 10, made in pencil and fig 11, made in lithographic crayon or compressed charcoal, contrast strongly with each other. It is fig 11 which most clearly substantiates my argument. Woodman is here working in a purposefully naïve manner to imbue the drawing with the blundering lyricism present in the fresh examples made by the untutored Nadja. Woodman's other drawing (fig 10), of a female nude languishing on a Regency sofa next to a cow with neatly folded legs (cow's and human's) to fit, demonstrates a more sophisticated drawing technique. It depicts a studied scene in a measured style implying a command of both concept and its realisation. The three-dimensionality of both the woman and the cow is beyond question. A clear surrealist juxtaposition is made humorous by the female wearing a hat and the careful arrangement of spotted cushions under both the woman and the cow, her intimate

companion. The two teacups and saucers on a side table indicate an ‘after tea’ moment.⁶⁵

It is possible that Woodman identified with the character of Nadja. In Simone de Beauvoir’s finally sardonic reading of Breton’s work, she equates the female heroine to Gérard de Nerval’s characters Sylvie and Aurélie, the phantom-like presences who *open the doors of the supernatural world*. She describes Nadja as:

*... the most remarkable of these [Breton’s] sorceresses ... she predicts the future, she gives utterance to words and images that her friend has in mind at the same instant; [as exemplified in the fountain episode] ... ‘I am the wandering soul’, she says; she guides her life ‘in a peculiar manner, which relies upon pure intuition only and never ceases to partake of the marvellous’.*⁶⁶

But most pertinent for Woodman is Nadja’s psychic ability, her refusal of logic, her easy navigation from unconscious to conscious states through her openness, her *disponibilité*, her imaginative and inspirational observations and in consequence, the high price, perhaps, of a personal psychic vulnerability.⁶⁷ All these attributes of character can equally be applied to Woodman. Philippe Sollers names her *The Sorceress* in his inspired essay on her work, from which I quote:

She emerges from obscurity, crosses through the mirror and materialises for a moment in a world twisted with anxiety. She treats herself like an apparition. In

⁶⁵ Teacups can be symbolic of bourgeois cosiness in Woodman’s work, but also developed into an incisive post-minimalist work *Teacup project* (reproduced in Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 184-187) made while Woodman was artist-in-residence at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in 1980.

⁶⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (originally published as *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949), trans. and ed. H M Parshley, London, Vintage, 1997, 262. De Beauvoir also compares Nadja and Breton with Beatrice and Dante (261).

⁶⁷ Another aspect of Nadja’s character and role is described here by Roger Cardinal: *...Nadja is a creature of pride and resource whose allegiance to personal impulse as against orthodox behaviour make of her a prototype of the new woman which, one may surmise, Surrealism was beginning to discover or invoke*. Cardinal, *Breton: Nadja*, 1986, 59.

*this space that we others accept as reality, she shines more brightly than we, surrounded by mere cameo figures and shadows (...). She has decided to disturb this sleep walk that is life.*⁶⁸

However, the Woodman's ability in the spheres of logic (and mathematics) must not be overlooked and I propose in this respect that she probably identified as much with Breton as with Nadja. During the liaison between him and Nadja an immediate access to his unconscious was opened by her for Breton. This was an exit from the male domain of domination by logic, much desired by the surrealists. Clearly she is an object of desire and fantasy for Breton, who wants to fall in love with her. As Briony Fer suggests *She is the object of his desire but she also articulates the workings of his fantasy.*⁶⁹ Fer's phrase is paramount to understanding the transference of thought between Breton and Nadja, the fusion of the intuitive with the intellectual that gave their short liaison the magic of the marvellous.

The failure of their affair and its chronicled disintegration necessitates a forced courage on Breton's part, as he will not depart from his anti-literature, *pris sur le vif* techniques and therefore must include all, even awkward, constituents of *a true story*, even to the point of admitting his own confusion and vulnerability.⁷⁰ After all is considered, as Dawn Ades has said, "*Nadja*" is about loss and "*L'Amour fou*" about desire and fulfilment.⁷¹ Simone de Beauvoir summarises the character and role of Nadja here:

⁶⁸ Sollers, 'The Sorceress', 1998, 9-13.

⁶⁹ Fer et al., *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism*, 1993, 186.

⁷⁰ Dawn Ades, 'Photography and the Surrealist Text', in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, New York, Abbeville Press/Washington DC, Corcoran Gallery, 1985, 161.

⁷¹ Dawn Ades, personal communication, January 2005.

*This unique woman, at once carnal and artificial, natural and human, casts the same spell as the equivocal objects dear to the surrealists: she is the spoon-shoe, the table-wolf, the marble sugar.... She is all things.*⁷²

In Woodman's case, however, in a corpus of work that superbly subverts and reclaims woman as muse for man, from man, the artist forms a superb conjunction, in her imaging of herself, between possessor and possessed, seeker and sought and as object of, and controller and initiator of, fantasy.

What Mark Polizzotti describes as the *frailty and wonder of Nadja's grasp on life...* is arguably equally applicable to Woodman.⁷³ The strong counter-argument would be that Woodman is her own muse and as the constant artist/poet/creator, she maintains a strong hold on the steering of her life, while at the same time exposing herself continually to what Sundell describes as *the psychic vulnerability of allowing oneself to be constituted as an image.*⁷⁴

Certainly Woodman identifies with Nadja's increasing psychological imbalance, that price she paid for her openness to experience perhaps. This reaches a climax in the period of Nadja's rejection by Breton. In a tragic coincidence *Nadja* is published in Paris in the same month and year as the protagonist's incarceration. We might think of the brilliant and simultaneously fragile title that Woodman chose for her important late Book, *some disordered interior Geometries*.

Woodman is the director of her own emblematised fantasies as she projects both

⁷² de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1997, 264.

⁷³ Mark Polizzotti, Introduction to Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, xxi.

⁷⁴ Margaret Sundell, 'Vanishing Points: the Photography of Francesca Woodman', in M. Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1996, 439.

serial and auratic images of herself, in *the production of a never-ending chain of images*, onto her own and our consciousness.⁷⁵ It is her choice to address her psychological fragility in her project.

I would venture that Breton professed the need for a deliberate simplicity in his instructions to Boiffard to photograph the exact scene described in the text, completely devoid of action, in the example of *l'hôtel des Grands Hommes* (fig 14).⁷⁶ The image has the added caption, lifted from the text on page 23, of *Je prendrai pour point de départ l'hôtel des Grands Hommes*. This deliberate simplicity disguises, as Ian Walker here maintains, a high level of sophistication:

*To make and utilise photographs as insolently “dumb” as those in Nadja in fact required the highest degree of sophistication - and also a degree of nerve, given the way the medium was at that point in time being positioned on the cutting edge of modern experimentation.*⁷⁷

Also, as Arrouye suggests, an alternate cross-function occurs between the text and the photograph,

*In the same way that the text fills certain images with an anchoring function as to their significance, the images in turn fill this anchoring function for the narrative in attesting to the reality of the episodes described.*⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Sundell, 'Vanishing Points', 1996, 439.

⁷⁶ Breton, *Nadja*, 1998, 21. Boiffard's Paris photographs must owe some allegiance to Eugène Atget's Paris scenes, which had been discovered by Man Ray two years before Boiffard's commission.

⁷⁷ Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 2002, 63.

⁷⁸ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 134: *De même que le texte remplit pour certaines images une fonction d'ancrage de la signification, les images, en retour, remplissent une fonction d'ancrage du récit en attestant de la réalité de ses épisodes.*

The blandness and banality present in the caption genre arrowed to its exact page reference, alluded to by Walter Benjamin as having the quality of *old chambermaids' books*, was in common practice in *illustrations* in nineteenth century novels, through to boys' adventure stories of around the same time as *Nadja*. It is deceptive when inflected meanings are considered.⁷⁹ Breton's innovation is to use the photograph in the same manner. In his choice of a photograph he deliberately denies the possible whimsicality of an illustration, which is, after all, the illustrator's personal interpretation of a selected scene in a traditional novel; and Boiffard has been instructed to exploit the documentary aspect of the photograph to contribute to the attainment of the desired genre of objective medical observation. Throughout, the photographs document places, people and objects as they occur in the written text; they are the 'proof' of events happening in the text. A more experimental and impassioned use of photography occurs in Breton's later book, *L'Amour fou* (1937), in part as a natural consequence of his fulfilled loving relationship with Jaqueline Lamba.⁸⁰ Ades pinpoints this development here:

There are signs, then, in the "dumb" photographs, which may be read if they are taken in conjunction with the text. And yet they can never be fully "interpreted". The photographs convey only parts of the cryptogram in which Nadja's life was hidden. ... [F]or there was, finally, no illumination through love. Such illumination would come later for Breton, as he described it in "La Nuit du tournesol", illustrated through Brassai's photographs of an illuminated night city. Nadja tells, rather, of "quest and failure".⁸¹

⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', *New Left Review*, 1: 108, March-April 1978, 231: *In such passages in Breton, photography intervenes in a strange way. It makes the streets ... of the city into illustrations of a trashy novel, draws off the banal obviousness of this ancient architecture to inject it with the most pristine intensity toward the events described, to which, as in old chambermaids' books, word-for-word quotations with page numbers refer.*

⁸⁰ André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937.

⁸¹ Ades, 'Photography and the Surrealist Text', 1985, 165. Brassai's Paris night photographs were published in *Minotaure* in 1935 and in Breton's *L'Amour fou* in 1937.

The image of the horse-drawn cart, empty of its passengers, but with the driver ready, is used as a symbol for the imminent departure that is the beginning of the *Nadja* adventure. The hotel with its significant name, *des Grands Hommes*, offers the double clue of introducing the passage and the work in homage to his literary forbears and of denying an allegiance to the *patrimoine* symbolised by the illustrious, immured in the Panthéon opposite (just out of the photograph's frame) from which the hotel takes its name. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (one hero of Breton's) is present, I suspect here without irony, in the photographed statue.

The caption placed under the Place Dauphine scene, the subject of the next comparison, is of a different descriptive genre from the caption discussed previously, *Je prendrai pour point de départ l'hôtel des Grands Hommes*. In this case the text gives us the geographical information and the words under the photograph place us dramatically inside the events that are taking place there *Nous nous faisons servir dehors par le marchand de vins*.⁸² It is one effect of the empty scene photographed, which many critics have dubbed 'bland', combined with the use of the present (or active-continuous) tense, that the audience can become imaginative participants, an identification with the book's protagonists is thereby encouraged. We are outside the restaurant in the now peaceful triangle-shaped end of the Île de la Cité that is the Place Dauphine. Breton uses the device of banality, even repetition, in the factual rendering of a scene in *Nadja* to maximise the dramatic involvement of his audience.

⁸² Breton, *Nadja*, 1998, 82: 'We have our dinner served outside by the wine cellar'.

Woodman makes selective use of an image/text combination and might coax meanings and references out of her photograph with a reflexive text. Looking at two images as a pair (figs 15, 16), the first has the added caption *Then at one point I did not need to translate the notes; they went directly to my hands.*

The second develops the phrase into:

*when I started again
I could no longer play
I could no longer play by instinct*

The two phrases can be interpreted as either independent of each other or interconnected.

Made in 1976 in Providence, in her mid-career, the first image shows a crouching Woodman, mostly obscured by large and jagged wallpaper strips, seemingly animated into independent life (fig 15). These strips link her in a kind of *magique circonstancielle* camouflage to an ageing cracked distemper wall surface. Surfaces and layers of walls are an important ongoing formal theme in her work. Above the torn strips her bent arms emerge with her two emphatically star-shaped hands: piano-playing hands. This text exists too as a separately structured, longer poem.⁸³ The second image (fig 16) made the following year, also in Providence, continues the annotated poem into the image in a menacing photograph of the artist holding a moving knife pointed downward, its shuddering effect achieved by a blurring technique.

⁸³ See note 13. I quote the poem in full in Chapter 7.

Black paint and a strip of self-portrait photo-booth miniatures drip like blood down her torso. We think of self-harm. A cut strip of a floral design, which visually mimics the photo booth strip and a paper doily, stuck up on the right of the image on a perpendicular wooden surface, subverts the menace into the flippant and humorous. The whole caption/poem is written in Woodman's own script in black pen under both images, which are printed superbly in Townsend's monograph.⁸⁴

The poem refers to a period of time when the learned and practised activity of piano playing is ceased and then resumed.⁸⁵ The effect this has on the artist's mental state is transposed into the visual. The use of her handwriting on the caption of the second image is important. Woodman has here washed over the first phrase *when I started again*, with a black ink, leaving the words just legible. A blurring of the ink over the word *play*, occurring in the second phrase, is not arbitrary; it emphasises poignancy in the phrase's meaning and also simulates in visual terms the vibrating repeated and intersecting phrases typical of a Scarlatti piece.

Woodman's Books' practice is a process in the formation of a living document, a record of ideas and of emotions, not usually a recording of events after they have

⁸⁴ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 113 and 141.

⁸⁵ Woodman is quoted by David Levi Strauss as recording, 'in a notebook entry', '*What happened is that I played the piano for a long time. The pieces I played most were themes on variations, Scarlatti, etc. This occurs in my imagery.*' David Levi Strauss, 'After You, Dearest Photography: Reflections on the Work of Francesca Woodman', in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 16.

happened. It addresses the same urgent intention Breton demonstrates in his *pris sur le vif*, throw everything in, structuring of *Nadja*.⁸⁶

Despite his desired anti-literary status for it, Breton's book *Nadja* was conceived and realised as a work for publication. Revolutionary in its time, it has quietly exploded in the ensuing decades after its inception. In essence both complex and cryptic, *Nadja*'s multi-layered structure and temporal fluidity give it a substance which is a critique of the literary work. It supports more unravelling.

Woodman's Books *Quaderno Raffaello* and *Angels, Calendars*, from which I focus on the *Calendars* section, were an essential component of her working practice and were, I speculate, neither conceived for nor specially targeted at publication.⁸⁷ Aspects of Breton's *Nadja* were a self-proclaimed energising source for Woodman most appositely realised in the five Books which use a found object base. It is the innovative relationship between text and image present in *Nadja* that engages Woodman in her own project.

Breton's *Nadja* is constructed from disparate elements signified by a variety of writing styles and tense changes, the jolting or missed connections of which are bound by the book form in which they are placed. Opening with a section of rumination and reflection on his identity, his literary influences and his future and

⁸⁶ Breton, in his *Avant-dire* to *Nadja*, revised edition, 1964, 8. A conventional translation into English of the phrase *pris sur le vif* would be 'taken from life', necessitating the use of the adverb 'from'. This would immediately imply a removal away and a stage further on from life as lived, a cleaning of the process into literature or art. It was exactly such a process that Breton passionately wanted to counteract.

⁸⁷ That is not to say the artist did not welcome the publication of her book *some disordered interior Geometries* in 1981.

past love interests, an ensuing section delivers a prolonged analysis of a theatre performance. All sections of *Nadja* are interlaced with anecdotal evidence of the daily activities of the surrealist group and the importance of the diaristic, *pris sur le vif* aspect is paramount. *Nadja* simultaneously masquerades as a crime story, along the lines of the *livres populaires* comic books of Paris, such as *Fantomas*, which were popular at the time.⁸⁸ *Nadja* is a documentation of the daily life of the surrealists and as a live love story, described in a ten day diary form. *Nadja* stands as a cryptic puzzle and continues to be as tempting, frustrating, fascinating and insoluble as life.

The self-referentiality of Woodman's working process encompasses her continuing use and re-use of her own images so that the past is re-activated in (and by) the present and the future, in a natural testimony both to quotidian elements of her life and to formal correspondences between images. *Calendars*, is the Book section in which a diaristic aspect is most evolved. Her annotations may however soar into the abstract through the image's ambience, even when the annotation is allegedly grounded in an observation on a particular day and time. An example, fig 17, of this is the hand-written annotation *calendars inside this door*, which is placed beneath a white-bordered image showing two closed doors, in front of which is a plaster figure of Aphrodite. One interpretation of the image could be that Woodman reflects on the separation of the present and future from the depicted classical past. That past is close, just a small hallway away from the enticement of the present and the future, both are held intact, separate and

⁸⁸ For sale at 65 centimes at a time, each copy of *Fantomas* promised to contain one complete story. The subtitles of the *Fantomas* would have inspired Breton as, for example: *La Main Coupée*, *Le Bouquet Tragique*, *Les Amours d'un Prince*.

unrevealed, behind the unopened door. The following annotation *several cloudy days*, fig 1, is translated into a contradiction and contra-vision in her image of precisely ten (in opposition to the vague word *several*) white paper squares. These squares provide an extreme contradiction in image form to the vaporous soft-edged malleability connoted by the word cloud. And they are laid on the floor, that very opposite of sky.

A contemporary work which has strong affinities with both *Nadja* and Woodman's *Books* is Sophie Calle's *Douleur Exquise*. I shall look at it in comparison with Woodman's *Quaderno Raffaello* and *Calendars* as well as Breton's *Nadja* in the hope of further illuminating the relationship between the two key works of this project by viewing three works alongside each other. She moulds a fiction out of language, time and photographic image used often as a found object. Calle's project *Douleur Exquise*, conceived as an installation for exhibition and later published as a book, uses verbal annotation to inflect her sequential photographs so that image and text co-opt equal power.⁸⁹ These operate, as in Woodman's *Books* and Breton's *Nadja*, separately and in tandem, always maintaining the tension of equals. For my current purpose I shall look at the book form of *Douleur Exquise*.

Calle's work, structured in a triptych narrative form within the book, is embedded in the temporal, here in a numerically precise daily count that is in some ways directly opposed to Woodman's elliptical observations on *days*. *Avant la douleur* consists of a 92 day diary countdown section to the source events of the pain, then

⁸⁹ Sophie Calle, *Douleur exquise*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2003; and in translation, *Exquisite Pain*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2004.

a 5-day break section when the pain is experienced full-on followed by a 94 day reverse countdown section, *Après la douleur*, beginning, fig 18, *Il y a 5 jours l'homme que j'aime m'a quittée*.⁹⁰ Each of the days in *Avant la douleur* is stamped in a red printing over the image representing each day with a minus sign as in, fig 19, *Douleur J-92*, photographed with friends in the buffet of the Gare du Nord before the start of her journey. Calle sometimes uses an image (nearly always her own photograph) with a piece of text opposite, sometimes a double image spread and sometimes, more rarely, a double spread of text. Both the text and the image may be found, anecdotal or evidential. An example of some found text is in her image, fig 20, of a steel door on which is painted in large white letters the word *Jetée*, serving as a symbolic premonition of her approaching emotional crisis; Calle uses the found text here in a very similar way to Breton's use of found text in the place sign he encounters near the end of *Nadja*, fig 21, *Les Aubes*, as a pointer towards his new life of perfect love with Suzanne Musard.⁹¹

Closely aligned to Breton's combination of found with evidential text in *Nadja* is a kind of 'here is the proof, therefore it must be true'/'we have-been-there' message. We might compare the photograph, fig 22, that he uses to substantiate his reference in the text to the *Théâtre Moderne* (a sheet of headed notepaper, subtitled *Comédies, Revues, Operettes* with *Théâtre Moderne* listed amongst other theatres on the left) with Calle's evidence of her journey to Japan, from Paris, via Moscow, including her photographed train ticket (fig 23), with couchette reservation and, importantly, the dates of her departure, 26th October 1984, and

⁹⁰ The numbers in the reverse countdown section are in a large red font.

⁹¹ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 154. Breton's inability to sever his own emotional and intellectual connection with this work further intensifies its echoing of his own life.

her arrival, 4th November 1984, evidence that her journey was *real*.⁹² Where Breton's captions to Boiffard's photographs in *Nadja* are lifted as direct quotes from the text and re-direct the reader back to it, sometimes two or three pages away, the descriptive power and emotional resonance of Calle's book are constructed equally from image and text operating sometimes simultaneously and sometimes alternately.

Woodman's *we have-been-there*, her found text, is the template of the whole book-work in both *Calendars* and *Quaderno Raffaello*. It creates a historical already-used document template, a testament to another era onto which she punctures and stamps her late nineteenth century interventions. This found object is given a *real* second history by the interaction, since it has in a sense moved forwards through three-quarters of a century to its re-activation in Woodman's present.

The intervention is reciprocal. In the first added photograph of *Quaderno Raffaello*, fig 24, for example, the linear, forward-diagonal flow of copperplate script adds a visual layer both as a continuous rhythmic structure and as a base colour variant, here a purple-pink ink on a light sepia page. In a contra-flow to the linear regularity Woodman sets her caption at a right-angle to the found text and down the left side of her image, in a deliberate contravention of the position in which a caption is conventionally placed, thus predisposing her audience to not only alter its reading angle but to reassess the caption's function. Five images of a sequence of seven have an annotation written by hand in this same position. The

⁹² Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 39 and 37.

sixth image, fig 25, has an annotation written horizontally (conventionally) beneath Woodman's image and this time beneath the found text too.

The tight narrative interjections of staccato captions to each image of the series in Woodman's *Quaderno Raffaello* Book share common ground with the live diary episodic centre of Breton's *Nadja* and with the unfolding tripartite narrative structure of Calle's *Douleur Exquise*.⁹³

Calle's *Douleur Exquise* corrodes the boundary between her audience and her personal life, the latter of which is the material foundation for her practice. In her recording and editing of part of her own life, her trip to Japan and her rejection by her lover, she simultaneously charges the experience of her pain and defuses it by presenting it to her audience and shocking that audience into sharing the emotive charge and its defusing. Calle enacts a catharsis for herself and the audience she captures and captivates. She does this sequentially, in a chain of photographic images which are documentary, intimate, humorous and emotionally symbolic. Sparks and blocks of text intercede, amplify or contradict the images. Her links to Breton's *Nadja* are evident.

In drawing a comparison between the following three examples of writing, it must be pointed out that the connections between the first two are immediately apparent, as they both share a genre of unfolding action recorded in the present tense. Woodman's piece differs from Breton's and Calle's in creating a less immediately diaristic ambience. She issues a request for action as she reveals her

⁹³ The third part of *Douleur Exquise*, 'Après la Douleur', consists of a collection of other people's accounts, in story form, of their painful experiences.

own emotional state. Calle's technique is to block out the high emotional anticipation she is experiencing in an acute recording of detail. Breton subverts his presentation of an ordinary dinner by throwing in the detail about the plates which disrupts this event's harmony. He provides no further explanation in the caption. All three examples use the accuracy of numerical information, a date, a room number, a telephone number, to lure the audience into a staged participation. The examples are in the order of *Nadja*, *Douleur Exquise*, *Quaderno Raffaello*:

*October 10. - We are having dinner on the Quai Malaquais, in the Restaurant Delaborde ... eleven plates are broken.*⁹⁴ and

[75 Days to unhappiness]: *Mon amour, Shanghai. Dans la chambre 4215, il y a deux lits, deux fauteuils, deux tasses, deux tables, deux chaises. Tout est peint en rose. La fenêtre donne sur un mur.*⁹⁵ and

*Call me as soon as you can. I am anxiously awaiting
your reply call collect 901-274-4184 in hoping*
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In discussing some links between these works it has become clear that all three works are excellent embodiments of the Barthesian concept of text.⁹⁷

Slippery to categorise and to hold onto; moulded from juxtaposed and antipathetic sources and woven from the jagged threads of incompatible media, Woodman's Books, Breton's *Nadja* and Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain* are all works which refuse to close. They all remain open to the interaction of chance and the

⁹⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 98.

⁹⁵ Calle, *Douleur exquisite*, 2003, 48: *My love, Shanghai. In room 4215 there are two beds, two cups, two tables, two chairs. Everything is painted pink and the window faces a wall.*

⁹⁶ *Quaderno Raffaello*, captions to the first six images; the seventh image is without a caption.

⁹⁷ This concept is expounded by Barthes in 'From Work to Text', 1977, 155-164. For a fuller discussion of this please refer to my Introduction.

malleable, shifting operations of an historical audience whose responses cannot help but move weave in new threads to their textual fabric in changing appropriations.

All the works I look at in this chapter share an ability to disseminate ideas which send increasing resonances across the decades; all share a ludic component and none is bound to a confinement in its nascent historic period. All three works remain open to contemporaneous appropriation and re-appropriation, in Barthes's sense of the *Text, how it is unmade, how it explodes, disseminates - by what coded paths it goes off.*⁹⁸

For Breton it is essential that he leaves the door not only open, but never lets us forget it is open by its banging. He also vows to alter nothing, taken from life, in his document.⁹⁹ This strongly contravenes the conventional descriptive role of a novel that *is only made up of those elements selected by the author and hierarchised in textual linearity.*¹⁰⁰ Woodman's project is premised on constant making (her door is never silent either), reflecting on what she has made, and selected re-making, creating a succession of signs in a continual loop of inter-impacting meanings, which, in a similar manner to *Nadja*, finally has the open-ended impetus required by Barthes, along with audience participation, to make a text.

⁹⁸ Barthes, 'The Struggle with the Angel', in *Image Music Text*, 1977, 127.

⁹⁹ Addressing Suzanne Muzard in the final section: '*que je le voulais "battant comme une porte..."*' (Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 157), rather confusingly translated by Richard Howard as 'ajar, like a door' (Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 156).

¹⁰⁰ Philippe Hamon, 'Qu'est ce qu'une description?', *Poétique*, 12, 1972, quoted by Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 127.

Arrouye asserts early in his argument, that all *Nadja*'s photographs play either a demonstrative or a symbolic role. This role, he suggests, is both inflected from and back onto the text, is autonomous and sends waves from one image to one other, all other, or several other images. The images in *Nadja* thus form a chain of signifiers, as they emphatically do too in Woodman's work, perhaps most of all in her late Book *Quaderno dei Detatti e dei Temi*. 'Waves' resonate from autonomous images in her main corpus and her conscious series projects to her Books and between her Books' images, many of which exist in series, back out again to works of her main corpus. I investigate these chains of signifiers further in Chapter 9.

I find that an extremely good way to understand the democratised juxtapositioning of image in *Nadja* is to flip through it at speed, as with a comic book: a drawing of Nadja's appealing in its naïveté and earnestness of spirit, cast next to a reproduction of one of Braque's analytical cubist works; the stunning street symbol of the Mazda billboard next to the image of the dour psychiatrist Professor Claude.¹⁰¹

The image (fig 26) of the woman re-fastening her stocking to her suspender, seen by Breton in the Musée Grévin and photographed by Pablo Voita, is of a waxwork in the museum's collection. It can be read as a third allegorical portrait of Nadja, in combination with the Mazda light bulb hoarding (fig 27) and the *fern-like* eyes images (fig 3).¹⁰² This image was added to Breton's revised edition of the book after almost forty years had passed. It introduces a current of the erotic to

¹⁰¹ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 134 and 137.

¹⁰² Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 150.

counteract both the romantic, inspirational quality presented by *fern-like eyes* and the dramatic, light-explosive aspect presented by *l'affiche lumineuse de "Mazda"*. In combination too with the small selection of Nadja's drawings that Breton chose to publish in his book, a suitably elliptical and trace-like portrait begins to emerge of the elusive heroine, she of *I am the thought on the bath in the room without mirrors* perhaps.¹⁰³ Revealing Breton's disillusionment with Nadja and his and their common story, this image possibly also alludes to her suggested habit of *street walking*.

Breton claims in his text that this 'statue' is the sole one in the museum to possess eyes: his reaction to her is as to an alluring and tantalising bait, her eyes being, of course, a symbol of her almost revealed sex:

*... l'adorable leurre qu'est, au musée Grévin, cette femme feignant de se dérober dans l'ombre pour attacher sa jarretelle et qui, dans sa pose immuable, est la seule statue que je sache à avoir des yeux: ceux mêmes de la provocation.*¹⁰⁴

Audaciously un-museum-like, the woman's pose is both immodest and intimate. In Renée Riese Hubert's reading, in this image *[t]he poet completely subverted the code of the museum ... [and] (A)n intimate gesture subversively displaces a public pose.*¹⁰⁵ In some aspects it could be construed as a sign of the happier

¹⁰³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 152: 'The adorable bait which is, at the Musée Grévin, this woman pretending to undress in the shadows to fasten her garter and who, in her immovable pose, is the only statue which I know to have eyes: and they those of provocation.'

¹⁰⁵ Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 1988, 268. She prefaces the lines with this description of the museum: *The Musée Grévin, in 1928 a wax museum housing the likenesses of great men, primarily those loyal to the Republic and its institutions, held great appeal for the surrealists.*

seduction which was to come; or at least Breton's openness to the possibility of a seduction, in a prediction of his forthcoming love affair with Suzanne Muzard.

I believe that Woodman reveals her knowledge of the Musée Grévin image in a photograph in her late Book *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* (fig 28, left). Where Breton's 'eye' of the female sex is tantalisingly only partially revealed, Woodman's female figure's sex is clearly though subtly shown in the black triangle of bikini pants. This figure is cropped at about the same upper point in both images, just above the bust, but whereas Voita's image is cropped just below the knees, Woodman's is cut at the top of the thighs. The bold dog-tooth pattern of the 'statue's' dress in the image from *Nadja*, such an important visual aspect within it, is reconstructed, albeit with differences, in Woodman's image by the dispersal of a large black floral motif over more of the image than just the figure. This implies that the woman might have been photographed behind a diaphanous, embroidered cloth. This floral motif sometimes becomes less distinct, more 'blobby' and at the figure's central abdomen area, at its left between the torso and the arm and in the area at the top of one thigh, the flowing underwriting of the original manuscript is allowed to show clearly, at times merging into a 'blob' of word and motif. The focus of the gloved 'hands', performing the action of attaching the stocking to its suspender in Voita's image, is addressed in Woodman's image by an overall 'sexiness' befitting the era in which her image was made. This is occluded by the overall blurring of her image. In consequence what is on offer is simultaneously clawed back, retrieved and finally, like the three images in *Nadja* which are constitutive of its heroine's presence and simultaneous absence: elusive.

The stunning visualisation of Nadja/Mazda in the Mazda light bulb advert image (captioned *The luminous Mazda sign on the boulevards*) contains the twinning poetry of the Russian names (Nadja meaning hope and Mazda meaning wisdom).^{106,107} It also encapsulates Nadja's electrifying nature in one image, an advert which will be seen again (and again) on hoardings on the boulevards of Paris.

It is in the transverse connotations of these three remarkable images that we might construct Nadja's mysterious, elusive, nature; her nature and her being still eluding Breton in these final stages of his text, *Qui est la vraie Nadja (?) (...) je veux dire de la créature toujours inspirée et inspirante*, perhaps somewhere between terror and hope, courage and vulnerability.¹⁰⁸ And yet this elusiveness, captured in episodic fragments so well by the bemused and captivated Breton, still fascinates readers after almost a century.

The last photographic image of the revised edition, captioned *Une vaste plaque indicatrice bleu ciel* (fig 21; the last image in the earlier edition is a portrait of Breton), encompasses all categories and genres present in the body of photographs in *Nadja*. Taken by Valentine Hugo, added in the clarity of reflection thirty five years can bring, this is the image which perfectly fuses symbol with sign; here

¹⁰⁶ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 134.

¹⁰⁷ ...through the phonetic coincidence, *Nadja-Mazda, the poetic mystery of mental association...*: G J Mallinson, 'Surrealism, Literature of Advertising and the Advertising of Literature in France 1910 -1930', *French Studies*, 41: 3, 1987, 334-335. Online at <http://fs.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/XLI/3/334.pdf>, accessed 09/11/2009.

¹⁰⁸ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 113. Indeed Breton's need is that her nature be such that it can inspire him into the sphere of an excess of poetic vision, that only a soon-to-be unhinged mind could enter.

word becomes image.¹⁰⁹ A French country village sign, *Les Aubes*, swells with implied meaning: new beginnings, adventure and the crystallising of the beyond in a blue-skied present. The creative point present in this coinciding of image and text mirrors, in an ingenious manner, the climax of Breton's personal quest, about to be fulfilled in the excitement and serenity of a reciprocal love relationship. Every sign in the chain, whether visual or verbal, plays its allegorical role and the whole chain constitutes Breton's *paysage mentale*.¹¹⁰ The coinciding of text and image at this point in the work is formidable. Described memorably by Arrouye (and sounding better in French) as *le texte s'y abolit en pure surface iconique* it is the only instance of the text eliminating itself within the purity of the image (icon) and it is the 'climax' of Breton's project as well as the harbinger of *l'Amour fou*.¹¹¹ It is, in another of Arrouye's inspiring phrases *cette entente entre expérience narrée et symbolisation imagée, entre constat textual et poétique iconique*.¹¹²

When considering the field of image making, in what Arrouye calls the 'iconic rhetoric', he differentiates between the image in its 'closure' (the entity and autonomy of its operating sphere; Benjamin's *auratic*) and the image in the series format.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Some other examples in *Nadja* of the word presented as an image are: Sphinx Hotel, Wood for Charcoal, Mazda light bulb, Humanity bookshop and Hôtel des Grands Hommes.

¹¹⁰ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 155.

¹¹¹ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 143: the text dissolves itself in the pure surface of the iconic.

¹¹² Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 138: that accord between experience and symbolisation through image, between textual report and the poetic iconic.

¹¹³ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 148: *la rhétorique purement iconique de l'image en elle-même, considérée dans sa clôture, et de l'image en série, constitutive de la séquence...* ('the rhetoric of the image, which is purely iconic in itself, considered in its closure, and the image in series form, constitutive of the sequence...').

This more open series format is one of Woodman's most successful and essential modes of practice. Krauss has analysed this method of working of Woodman's and sees it as an extension of a practice encouraged at her art school, Rhode Island School of Art and Design, when students would be given a 'problem' to investigate.¹¹⁴ I would go further: I see it as a system Woodman extends, develops, thoroughly personalises and makes into a sophisticated armature for the production of images throughout her working life. In the wider field of 1970s minimalism and conceptualism, it adheres to the popular method of the score and its variation as propagated by John Cage. In fact this method of production is so crucial to her practice to that it is hardly possible to find any image in her body of work which excludes references to other images of hers.¹¹⁵ She builds chains of signs that intersect each other and reflect on each other in and from all directions and time spheres of her practice.

In exactly the manner Arrouye advocates, in his reading of the photographic images in *Nadja as le fonctionnement de l'ensemble des images*, so must Woodman's entire practice, including her Books' practice be viewed.¹¹⁶ However, the caveat must be added that Woodman's output was arrested by her death, not by the imposition of an authorial or artistic decision. In this way she is a post-modern artist.¹¹⁷ By this I mean that, in spite of her work often being appropriated as such, she is unbound by late modernism's impetus to make original and auratic work. She enjoyed free access to a multiple source store, ample, varied,

¹¹⁴ Rosalind Krauss, 'Problem Sets', in Gabhart and Krauss, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, 1986, 41-51.

¹¹⁵ Please see Chapter 9 for a deeper investigation of this.

¹¹⁶ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 149.

¹¹⁷ Even this conjecture remains open to discussion however, as Peggy Phelan contends in the argument she puts forward which I address in Chapter 2.

specialised and munificent, into which she dipped and from which she soared, like an eagle with a nest on a high peak. Her sources emanate from her own practice, in a continual and sustained critique of her completed and mutable images.

Woodman's practice was fertilised by her deep knowledge and understanding of surrealist thinking, pertinently Breton's theory of convulsive beauty and its expression in literature and the visual arts. Examples of this knowledge, particularly of first wave photographic surrealist images, as evidenced in her images, will be given in Chapter 8.

As I see it, surrealism is essentially a radical and ever-moving and ongoing change to the thinking process of individuals *that was [is] never still or monolithic*, and primarily affected and affects the way people live and how they receive their experiences.¹¹⁸ Defying the entrapment of logic, it was and is a continuing revolution of the mind and a potential revelation, hopefully a *permanent revelation* which makes mutable or even eradicates the boundaries of history, geography and identity. Surrealism encourages access to *that other plane of existence where stones fall upwards and the sun shines by night*.¹¹⁹

Optimum surrealist function occurs when the channels between the conscious and unconscious mind are clear of detritus, whether floating or low-growing. These channels, referred to brilliantly by Breton as *Les Vases communicants* (Communicating Vessels) in the title of his 1955 work, enable both an immediate

¹¹⁸ Dawn Ades, Preface to David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (originally published London, Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), London, Enitharmon Press, 2000, 10.

¹¹⁹ Gascoyne, Introduction to *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, 2000, 23.

access that is a double and reciprocal contact or a more reflective, analytical after-process. Openness to chance and *disponibilité* is a prerequisite. One must be continually in a state of being ready, though not expectant, for the chance encounter and the finding of the found object (which never includes a search) to occur.

The Bretonian theory (and practice) of *convulsive beauty*, first alluded to by him at the end of *Nadja* and evolved in *L'Amour fou* (1937), is a tripartite operation of visual coincidences. Woodman's knowledge of the theory and her application of it are clearly traceable in her practice. Prompted by 'signs' from the conscious, physical world thrown out in an abrupt clenching at both ends, into the unconscious, these signs act to arrest the individual in a dramatic or humorous, perhaps visually repetitious or visually punning manner.

The three desired conditions which Breton develops as necessary for the attainment of 'convulsive beauty' or the surrealist marvellous, are 'veiled erotic', 'circumstantial magic' and 'fixed exploding'. All three conditions are frequently and evocatively evidenced in Woodman's work, showing her command of surrealism's tenets and tools. The component 'circumstantial magic' has been developed by her to a refined level.

Early in *L'Amour fou* Breton declares excitedly that *Convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-exploding, magic-circumstantial, or it will not be.*¹²⁰ He does not imply that all three components must be there at once however. The category

¹²⁰ Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 19.

‘circumstantial-magic’ involves visual repetitions which juxtapose or at least move between spheres of objective difference. ‘Fixed-exploding’, at once containing in its name a physical impossibility, is the creation (arguably best attainable through photographic means), of an image or event where two extreme states in opposition dangerously collide. The erotic in Woodman’s work is usually played out openly, in unveiled form, so the category ‘veiled erotic’ is less traceable in her work. This category implies the unexpected erotic, that passion deferred in response to an object; evident only when unanticipated. Probably the category most reliant on the existing state of conscious or unconscious mind of the beholder, it is also that which is the most difficult to objectivise satisfactorily.

Woodman thoroughly understands how visual resemblances can be anamorphic or biomorphic and excels at creating a category- jumping result from her acute sense of the visual freed from the semantics of definition. She makes a visual resemblance, for example, between tiny fish and vintage script. The fish go into lines and the script begins to swim in this instance in *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, described in Chapter 5.

The expression of the revolutionary and constantly moving spirit of surrealism courses through and manifests itself perhaps most potently amidst the excitement and extreme concentration of first wave practitioners. These were the poets and artists of the second and third decades in Paris where the concepts of surrealism were first evolved and tested through an intense process of experimentation, the realisations of which bloomed sometimes as projects of visual art and literature, hybrid never-before-seen flowers, fervently propagated.

Particularly in the first decade, boundaries were purposefully eroded between such distinct activities as poetry, painting, fiction and photography. Photography nevertheless, as discussed, enjoyed an enhanced status in this era. At the same time such disparate sources as science, astrology, medicine, anthropology and popular and crime fiction were willingly incorporated into the journals and mono-authorial projects where they were all democratised. This led to the desired result of dissolution of separate discipline or form, or at least a fragmentation of its whole. When the decade ended, marked perhaps by the London International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936, *the move was inexorably towards the dominance of the visual aspects of Surrealism as perceived by the public and to exhibitions as a primary mode of expression.*¹²¹

It is from this background, when image and text were equal, that *Nadja* emerges. Emblematic and talismanic, outrageously ambitious yet utterly, and tenderly, unresolved, it stands as a work highly representative of the turmoil and excitement of the formative period of surrealism, for my purpose I tie this to the decade between the publications of *Nadja* and *l'Amour fou* (1928-1937).

Its effect on Francesca Woodman is testimony both to the longevity of *Nadja*'s continuing power to astonish and arrest its readers and to the success of Breton's fervent desire to leave its door open and banging, a door through which the young artist would enter courageously and consciously in her own time of the century.

¹²¹ Ades, Preface to Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, 2000, 9.

CHAPTER TWO

Dialogue with Disappearance, Dialogue with Days

Section 1. Dialogue with Disappearance: *Angels*

The *Angels, Calendars Book*, in common with another four of Woodman's six Books, makes use of a found object base. In this case it is an Italian student's book entitled *Poesie*. Mostly written in French, it would probably have served as a vehicle both for the rote-learning and the writing out of the sonic rhythms of poetry, as well as for the practice of what was the first foreign language taught in Italy at the turn of the century. I imagine the group to have been secondary school students. A prerequisite for these students would have been the execution of work in a neat, regular and flowing cursive, in the copperplate style in use at that time. A notable feature of the style was its diagonal forward slant. Woodman's intervention, both in image and in annotation, makes responses to the copperplate script both as a continual aesthetic *unterschriften* and to selected poetic phrases as well as to the occasional poem and stanza title.¹ As an occasional poet herself, Woodman would have responded positively to the subject matter of this Book.

¹ It has however been difficult to be precise about direct responses made by the artist to the original script, as this script has rarely been clear or large enough, in reproduction, to decipher with confidence.

The *Angels* part of the *Angels, Calendars* Book contains a total of thirteen added Woodman images.² No images have annotations. Its second part, *Calendars*, which will be discussed in the second section of this chapter, also contains thirteen images and several of them have annotations by Woodman. The whole Book therefore contains a total of twenty six added images, divided into two numerically equal parts by the artist.

First conceived and executed as a theme in Providence in early 1977, the *Angels* theme, constituting half of this Book, was developed in Rome where Woodman worked on a Rhode Island School of Art and Design European Exchange scheme from May 1977 to August 1978.

The measurements of the Book when closed are eight and three quarter inches by six and thirteen sixteenths inches. When open, its width measures thirteen and five eighths inches. With one exception (the last image is rectangular), all of the twelve images in the *Angels* section of the *Angels, Calendars* Book are black and white positive prints in a square format. Most added images are surrounded by a white border. This varies slightly in width. The pages of the original early twentieth century schoolbook are hand-written dictated stanzas of poetry in a pale sand/sepia hue. Woodman's white borders and the white tones within her images, as her base tone, therefore make a strong contrast to this original base colour. The variation of her tones through to black makes a harsher range to contrast with the base work's vintage subtlety. The script of the past writer has occasional slight

² This combined title has emerged through the discursive practice. Woodman titles both sections of her notebook separately, the first in her hand scripted lower case *angels* and the second in a photograph annotation: *calendars inside this door*.

variations of tone and pen nib width. Woodman's intervention is limited, in the *Angels* section, to a part-obliteration, with white paint or masking fluid, of the text surrounding her added images, which acts as an eradication of script deemed by her irrelevant, or as the provider of extra un-scripted space around (and hence an emphasis of) the image.

As Woodman understood French, both a bi-lingual sequence of responses and an organic cross-flow between word and image, that is word-text as script, acting as an aesthetic template and word as script acting as annotation, is both possible and realised.

The outside hard cover of the Book (fig 29) is a deep maroon-brown, its battered edges a testimony to its century of existence. A torn-edged, black-bordered label is centrally placed one third from its top. On it is the hand-written title *Poesie*, in a large and perfectly measured italicised copperplate on a faint printed line. The student's name (that disturbed identity) is written on the base right of the label in a less careful script, about eight times smaller. It is indecipherable. This old label is bordered with a double line, which cuts the four corners of its own rectangle.

The first double page spread in the original document (fig 30) is made into a second generation title page by Woodman. She has over-painted a rectangle of about the size and position of the photographs to come: on the upper part of the right-hand page. Woodman lets the copperplate script bleed through this rectangle, onto which she writes her own sub-title *angels* in pen, at about six times the size of the original script. The left page is a jumble of notes between several original students in a relaxed mood, possibly after an examination. On this page

the copperplate script has relaxed into many transformations and increased in size in a dramatic contrast to the severe regularity of the following pages. Amongst these entries I can decipher the name *Donato Jacobi*, an encouragement to *boire souvent un petit cognac* and on the bottom left side a small torn piece of paper with the words *po [sic] moi un livre*.³

My interpretation of Woodman's approach to this historic textual template will primarily be as a visual background for the application of her images. She seizes and emphasises with white gouache only the occasional line of text in *Angels*. This is when it might by chance relate or respond to, or emphasise, a theme or narrative moment of her late twentieth century project.

The *Angels* theme is an exploration of a sliding between two levels of existence with particular focus on the liminal. Woodman is the actor in a performance which intensely challenges photography's *given* of stillness. Theories on photography expounded by Barthes in his last work *Camera Lucida* can be threaded weft-like through the tissue of *Angels*. I will suggest that the series realises some of these theories in a near-contemporaneous practice.

*In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph ... represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death*⁴

³ '... often drink a small cognac ... for me a book'.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (originally published as *La Chambre claire*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1980), trans. Richard Howard, London, Vintage, 1993, 13-14.

In the concluding chapters of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes locates his enquiry into *the anthropological place of Death*, continuing:

*For Death must be somewhere in society; if it is no longer in religion, it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. Life/Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print.*⁵

Barthes's presupposition that photographer and subject have different identities confirms the extra intensity and the extra vulnerability of the dual position

Woodman supports. This position offers her at one time both a greater autonomy and an increased psychic exposure. Margaret Sundell here expresses this aspect of

Woodman's practice:

*The fragility of self-recognition necessitates an endless re-staging of the subject's autonomy. The tension and strength of Woodman's work lies in her ability to return again and again to this precise point of instability, to simultaneously create and explode the fragile membrane that protects one's identity from being absorbed by its surroundings.*⁶

Perhaps the most perfect encapsulation of the Barthesian idea of the pressing of the camera's shutter replicating, in its click, a *micro-version of death*, is omnipresent in this series. Peggy Phelan develops this link, referring to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to the extent of claiming that the performance Woodman constructs as a narrative can be read as both a rehearsal and as the dramatic pre-enactment of her own death:

⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1993, 92.

⁶ Sundell, 'Vanishing Points', 1996, 43-438.

Woodman's photographic games can be seen in this light as well, except that rather than throwing a spool away from her gaze and reeling it back in as [Freud's grandson] Ernst does, she plays fort/da with her own image. Rather than seeking to rehearse for an anticipated loss of another, Woodman's artistic practice might be understood as a way to rehearse her own death.⁷

The position Phelan occupies is extreme. While considering and remembering it throughout my analyses of Woodman's Books and realising its particular pertinence to *Angels*, I will defer from agreeing with the position she takes while keeping alive the premise and boundaries of her valuable argument through the scope of this research.

For Woodman as for Benjamin [but I presume this is a misprint for Barthes], the distinction between the initial pose and the final print was difficult to discern. She might have thought of it as a recursive algorithm, one whose structure made her uncannily alert to the force of death within life, the lure and achievement of stillness within her ongoing creative work.⁸

Although here not confining her argument to the series being discussed, certainly the *angel's* repeated disappearances and reappearances and half-appearances go far beyond the conjuring trick skills of photographic techniques which the artist surely has at her command. I think too, in contrast to Phelan's conjecture, that Woodman was intensely (almost mathematically) aware of the photographic result of her pose. In consideration too of Benjamin Buchloh's emergent hypothesis that:

Woodman's preoccupation seems first of all to be the critique of a compulsive equation between physiognomy and the self, and of the photographic functions that seem to corroborate this false equation.⁹

⁷ Peggy Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography: Death and the Image One More Time', *Signs: Journal of Women In Culture and Society*, 27: 4, 2002, 987.

⁸ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 999.

⁹ Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 45.

Buchloh uses Woodman's *From Space* series as his prime example, but I think the argument is equally well exemplified by the *Angels* series and Book.

The first added image, on page nine of the original (fig 31) depicts the artist standing in the mid-foreground of a corner of a large studio that was probably a neglected area of Rhode Island School of Art and Design's Roman headquarters at Palazzo Cenci. Her pose is solid and balanced, symmetrical except for a slight tilt of the head, her feet are in Mary Jane pumps and firmly on the ground, her torso is naked and her hands are clasped in the centre of a white flared skirt; her hair is tied back. The one clue to her pending angel status is visible in the wing made out of paper or tricked out of light. Large and detached from her in visual space, it seems to point to her, perhaps beckoning her away from the pragmatism of material life. This wing and Woodman's white skirt are the two main areas of light in the photograph. She is at this stage an unwilling angel. The 'ordinariness' of this pose is of course a deliberate ruse and increases the drama to follow by contrast. Notably it is only in this frame of the sequence that we see the artist's feet placed solidly on the ground.

In the image on page thirteen of the original (fig 32), the camera frames the whole space of the studio with a double natural light source coming from two Georgian paned windows at its rear. Woodman's figure, also at the rear of the studio, is caught in an elegant jump, lit from behind and from the right. This is an altogether joyous image; superbly constructed compositionally, with natural light used for

the evocation of a transformation/visitation (even annunciation?) experience.¹⁰

Woodman, half-clad in white Victorian pantaloons, seems to be arriving and about to leave in the same moment. Passing through. All at speed.

Little detail of the setting can be detected here, unlike in the first image, but the near-invisibility of her legs in this image, probably achieved by her wearing black tights, emphasises the desired illusion of flying. The two hung wings we know to be white are half-toned in silhouette over the bright windows and diagonally placed above either side of her moving figure which is framed by the centre wall's dark rectangle. These wings are an essential component of the image. A very bright light from the windows diffuses the top window-panes and forms an arch of light between Woodman and the wings. She still wears the white skirt and her arms are flung out straight to her sides; her left leg is positioned straight out, in a forty five degree ballet pose.

This photograph is about how light (here and in most of the *Angels* images, of that wonderful Roman quality) can create and diffuse material form. Woodman has portrayed the illusion of her becoming a non-human self. And she enters this space with arms outstretched in euphoria. Are her wings made of paper, white sheet or canvas?¹¹ How are they fixed to the ceiling rafters? There is no trace of

¹⁰ Rossella Caruso testifies to the fact that Woodman never used artificial light: *Francesca non usava mai illuminazione artificiali e, pur privilegiando ambientazioni al chiuso, si serviva solo della luce natural, apprezzando le ben note qualita di quella di Roma.* ('Francesca never used artificial light and, taking advantage of the atmosphere inside, she used only natural light, putting to good use the remarkable qualities of the light of Rome'. Trans. Barnaby Lankester-Owen). Rossella Caruso, 'Francesca a Roma' ('Francesca in Rome'), in Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 28.

¹¹ We learn from the testimony of Woodman's close friend Sloan Rankin, that together they...*smuggled angel wings props past the first floor offices of the empty spaghetti factory in San Lorenzo.* Sloan Rankin, 'Peach Mumble – Ideas Cooking', in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 35.

wire or wood support and yet they hold their form, flowing, yet static, perfectly. Woodman's hair makes another 'wing' over one shoulder. The strength of daylight from the main window is stunning. This is an exuberant image.

In the next image (fig 33), on page fifteen of the original, Woodman is self-photographed in an identical position in the studio to that of the last image. This is the third in a tight narrative sequence of five images. Here her figure is caught blurred in a mid-action flight or jump and was probably shot with the self-timer cable within seconds of the last image (the camera probably left on the tripod to run during the performance). Jumping higher than in the former image, only the artist's black clad legs are clearly visible, against the bright window light; the rest of her form is diffused. This image has the energy of a buzzing bee; a diffusion of form through movement caught in stasis, and is a perfect example of Breton's *fixed-explosive* concept, in particular referencing Man Ray's *Dancer* photograph used by Breton to demonstrate the *fixed explosive* idea in *L'Amour fou*.¹²

On page seventeen of the original is the fourth of the five-part image sequence (fig 34). Here Woodman's figure, back in focus, has moved forward in the frame to the front and centre of the studio. Caught in a jubilant run, her arms brilliantly intersect the wings: they become part of her body. This is the closest we come to a preview of her transformation. Her top torso is in dramatic silhouette, her arms are raised at forty-five degrees to her upright body's vertical. In this fine visual symmetry they form a wing-holding 'V', that is also probably a reference to a crucifix. She knows how to look ethereal for sure, her black leg-wear lets us

¹² Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 84.

forget her earthbound legs and her technical expertise removes them as connectors to the floor.

After this climax of her spellbinding performance, the emptiness of the last image of the sequence (fig 35), on page nineteen of the original, is frightening. Here an eerily empty and enlarged studio space shows only the 'noeme', the what-has-been, of the departed angel. The floating tips of the wings, which are exiting upwards, reveal a new black formlessness in a dark arching area; a formlessness which hangs formidably in the direct centre of the square image, leaving shadows where none were before. And a black stage screen, realised surely in the print's development process, is being lowered over a third of the photographic square: in front of the performance arena and onto the uneven studio floor. The screen acts as a fictional device which is both the closure of the sequence and the end of the (theatrical) performance.

A change of compositional form occurs in fig 36, on page twenty one of the original, serving to shift the emphasis of the continuing *angel* theme. The seven consecutive images, of which this is the first, can be read as a separate series. Particularly in the case of the first four, the figure (and rarely, one is that of a male friend) is fore-grounded. The interior space is contracted, in direct contrast to that of the previous series. Encouraged by the artist to emit a symbolism particular to each image (in another departure from the repeated space of the former five images), the interior space is individuated in each of this series apart from in the last two. In this manner each image contains a separate drama, and is developed in distinct climaxes until the narrative twinning of the sequence's last pair of images.

The first image of this second series, fig 8, can take our breath away by its disturbance factor. We see a naked Woodman in contorted part-form suspended in a terrifying arc from high up in the picture frame. Her silent open mouth forms a high-pitched scream and the arm that would defend her-self is ‘mutilated’, through photographic processing skill, into a grotesque club-hand. Her arched torso has on it one big stripe of black paint – no, blood, that is splayed in vivid loops and sprays on a back wall that is claustrophobically close to her.¹³ Is she trying to wrench herself from a vice of entrapment, frozen in a fear of flying? Or is this angel attempting a revisit to a world in an experience that is extremely painful to enact? Is this human morphing into a creature?

The following image (fig 37), on page twenty three of the base book, follows with a much-needed serenity. Woodman has applied a light, transparent paint in a block over the whole original poem/text on this page. At first reading this is an image constructed in the high modernist manner of beauty of composition, from a fusion of the equals of form and content.¹⁴ The spinal arch contorted into terror in the previous image (fig 36) is here softened into a gentle tension. A fine contrast occurs between the spine’s rhythmic line and the hard wall’s corner, of which the deep-toned rectangle on the left acts as half of the visual frame around the figure’s upright. This frame’s right half, in an even deeper tone, darkens into the depths of the room, providing a little space and a little mystery. Some paint marks on

¹³ The wall marks clearly link it to the *Splater* (sic) *Paint* series; for these images see the Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 110-111, where the here-discussed image is printed by Woodman in reverse, to equally strong effect.

¹⁴ What T J Demos describes as *Modernism’s obsession with pure presence*. He continues: *In the mid-twentieth century, abstract painting and sculpture were pledged to the intensity of optical immediacy* T J Demos, ‘A Matter of Time’, *Tate Etc.*, 9, Spring 2007, 100.

Woodman's back link us to the previous image and can be read as a thread of narrative. An over-exposed area to the front of the form dissolves it into a partial disappearance as the angel hovers in the liminal sphere.

The following image (fig 38), on page twenty five of the original book, is a disturbing one, with strong links to the first image of the sequence (fig 36). This angel is once again in extreme distress. Only her top arched torso is visible, her mouth is an open screaming "O". The prop of the umbrella, counter-angled to the long shafts of sunlight, is a clear phallic symbol which could also be read as a symbol of protection in the everyday sphere. The full perspective of the floorboards makes the figure appear to be bursting out of the frame. Or perhaps dying; when read as fiction, this angel/human has been speared down to earth; a symmetrical body compacted into an inhuman mass. She/it is anguished in capture: pinned like a butterfly to a panel, or painfully immobilised like an upturned tortoise: those human limbs-perhaps-becoming-wings rendered awkward and ineffective. Has the angel landed wingless in this room, this alien habitat? Here is the disturbance factor: she is the grounded angel, transgressing the natural order.

The gallery-print version of this image (fig 39) must have been printed by Woodman first. It includes more details than the Book's version, from which two small sections have been cut, one from the top and one from the bottom. The cut section at the top makes it more difficult to identify the studio objects at its far

perspective, recognisable as a small display case and a film reel, or clock, in the uncut version (fig 39). The black circle formed by Woodman's mouth in the (cut) Book version makes of her scream a silent and unworldly thing. In fig 39 however (uncut), the inclusion of her teeth gives that scream a human ground, a human voice. In the (cut) version printed in the Townsend monograph, the annotation/title *on being An Angel* (sic) is included, hand-written by the artist in pencil.¹⁵

The Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue reproduces a related image (fig 40) placed at an angle, mounted across a rectangle of white paper and under-scripted in Woodman's bold hand *on being An Angel #1* (sic).¹⁶ The Fondation Cartier catalogue reproduction of the same image, however, like the catalogue of the 1992 Shedhalle, Zurich exhibition, places its square image squarely on to the page, with no annotation and with no visible border.¹⁷ The dark area below the suspended figure is printed in such a dark tone that, unlike in fig 39, no floor board lines can be deciphered, apart from in the top right-hand corner where some incoming light reveals the acorn form and another shadow.

Through these two images (figs 39 and 40) Woodman remembers Rogi André's photograph *Seeming to swim...* which Breton used to accompany his poem 'La

¹⁵ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 125.

¹⁶ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 84.

¹⁷ Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 82; Harm Lux and Friedrich Meschede, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work* (exhibition catalogue, Shedhalle, Zurich and other venues, 1992–93, with essays by Harm Lux and Kathryn Hixson), Zurich, Shedhalle, 1992, 77.

Nuit du Tournesol' in *L'Amour fou* in 1937.¹⁸ Rogi André's swimmer has an innocently benign manner however, in contrast to Woodman's *angel*. This link is further discussed in Chapter 8.

Another first wave surrealist photograph with which Woodman here makes a dialogue is the Brassäi image *Untitled* from 1933, published that year in *Minotaure* and later printed in *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism*.¹⁹ It is if Woodman had photographed herself in the same pose as Brassäi's model from a position behind her upturned elbows (which support her raised torso), focusing on the thrown back head.

The next Book image (fig 41) on page twenty seven, relates to fig 37. This image is that unusual occasion when the artist photographs a male model (angels are after all, androgynous). The diffusion of the standing, photographically cropped nude form, through light exposure, in fig 37 is here exaggerated into the conjuring of ether, achieved through the manipulation of a super-imposed negative. We can see such a technique used, for example, by Maurice Tabard, in his *Untitled* of 1930.²⁰ The young man's pose in Woodman's image is a study of the horizontal. His arms are raised in an out-of-shot symmetry suggesting the beginnings of wings. This image strongly references the inter-war surrealist image by Man Ray

¹⁸ Image and poem first published in *Minotaure* in 1935 and in Breton's *L'Amour fou* in 1937. André's image (see fig 148) is that of an underwater dancer/swimmer:

*Les uns comme cette femme ont l'air de nager
Et dans l'amour il entre un peu de leur substance
Elle les interiorise
(Some of them seemed to swim like that woman
And in love there enters a bit of their substance
She interiorises them)*

Breton, *L'Amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937, 64.

¹⁹ Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 56.

²⁰ Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 29.

from 1933.²¹ Man Ray's image is also of a male nude torso with raised arms in a folded position. They transmute into the bull's horns and his nipples transmute into the bull's eyes. The horizontality in Woodman's photograph is gently fragmented by a whimsical angle into the suggestion of a spirit form departing through the window.

The following image (fig 42), on page 29 of the original book, is the source shot of one of Woodman's most singularly arresting images. Here the photographed trace is heavily gouged out of a hard yet crumbled earth/floor in a desolate interior, as opposed to the ethereal ectoplasmic trace of the previous image. And this trace takes up a full two thirds of the composition's square. We can read it as the heavy fall of the angel and its subsequent wrenching from an earth it/s/he loves. Formally exact, only the imprint of the legs, not the rest of the body, is shown, implying the physical (that is dirty and painful) connection of the limbs to (and into) the ground. The real legs almost hang, but the toes just touch the earth before leaving: they form one visual triangle, whilst the trace of them, their hewn shape, forms another. Together they form a diamond. The consequent reversal of the shape, in positive and negative, feeds us an intense drama. This image cannot be discussed without a short investigation of an existent connection to images from Ana Mendieta's poignant *Siluetas* series.²² Mendieta's series was not only made in the same temporal framework (1976-1978) as Woodman's *Angels*, *Calendars Book*, but shares with it a deep psychological as well as a strong visual resonance.

²¹ Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 16-17.

²² De Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible*, 1996, 164-170.

Mendieta, born exactly ten years before Woodman in 1948, was exiled from Cuba in 1961 in her early adolescence and this series constitutes an enactment of her mourning for her country. In *Siluetas*, executed between 1973 and 1980 on land in Iowa and Mexico, a re-enactment of her birth is symbolised as an emergence from the earth, the symbol of mother and country, which is simultaneously a vision of and arguably a desire for, her own death. Our knowledge of the series is entirely built on the photographic documentation of what was an intensely private performance. The performance ritualised her pain and its desired catharsis and was not conceived for any public participation, at least not at the time of its making. The moulds (womb cradles or shallow graves), mounds, sprays and fires she makes are at once a commemoration and an extinction of *herself*, in that self's body-form and in this manner they form a parallel to Woodman's project. The works of *Siluetas* expel from that body-form an identity (from culture) and nourish it, yet eject it from its own memory and return it to the quiet neutrality of the natural environment. As works of art, these events exist as photographs which are not quite documents, but in essence rather souvenirs.²³

So the works made as performance about loss are themselves 'lost', washed, blown or covered by nature's gentle and violent continual movements. They exist now only in the photographic trace that is the art work. This captures the emotion of the first act which made an ephemeral mark on a land oblivious to the human condition.

²³ As expressed by Miwon Kwon: *While a document is predicated on the belief of an authentic moment of origin, the souvenir is based on a recognition of its loss.* Miwon Kwon, 'Bloody Valentines: Afterimages by Ana Mendieta', in de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible*, 1996, 170.

Ultimately, the performative aspect is as endemic to Woodman's *Angels* as it is to Mendieta's *Siluetas*. Both series address the theme of absence. Where the performance of pain is intrinsic and unrelenting in *Siluetas*, Woodman's *angels* carry a redemptive jubilation and buoyancy.²⁴

An intensity and variety of emotion is confronted and explored through the location of it in her chosen personification. In photographing this self in wide ranging settings and an intriguing array of poses and antics, she creates a range of selves that are both emblematic and explicit and that evolve into a performance. Because Woodman's work and its performance are compressed into photographic form, is it more or less of a trace than the photographic recording, the *afterimage* of what has been enacted, in Mendieta's work?

Woodman's fascination with, and identification through, the angel figure is due to its leverage in a material and extra-material world. In sequences of disappearance and reappearance which resonate strongly with Mendieta's investigation, Woodman explores the negation and re-establishment of her own self. The image in the *Angels, Calendars Book* which has the deepest resonances with Mendieta's *Siluetas* images, as in, for example, fig 43 from the Mexico series (1973-1977) and fig 44 from the Iowa series (1976-1978), is the tenth image of the *Angels Book*, (fig 42). I am aware that these two Mendieta images are in colour but I have

²⁴ Philippe Sollers describes her position thus, in his essay 'The Sorceress', 1998, 10-11: *There is no ostentation or megalomania, no religiosity, no display of mimed pain or suffering. Her role is not to intimidate us by crying that there is nothing more than madness, passion, death and horror – that would be vulgar. ... She remains constantly dynamic and buoyant. She periodically conceals herself, doesn't take her ordeal seriously, even if (what a terrible image this is) she can represent herself with open mouth, emitting a stream of what look like bubbles.* Sollers refers here to the image *Self portrait - talking to vince*, Providence, 1975-8, reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 50.

worked from published black-and-white reproductions which I deem more appropriate for the purposes of this comparison.²⁵

Most poignant and most terrifying in Woodman's image (fig 42), is not the upward lifting of her naked figure, viewed here as legs only, but the trace the legs leave in the pebbled mud. A diametric reverse of her loosely hanging, spread legs only, (perhaps chosen as the body part in contact with the ground), is gouged out in the ground itself. The narrative enacted is of the embedment of her legs, and their subsequent gouging out; as both temporal stages, the before and after, are simultaneously realised in one image. A severance from the material world is enacted. It has strong repercussions with Mendieta's severance.

Woodman's pervasive interest in texture contrast and the revealing of the structural layers of architectural boundaries, (walls, floors, ceilings), is visible here in the strong contrast of flesh and stone. The rough stone under-layer of a stratified interior ground acts here and in much of her work as both as a sharp aesthetic and a rich allegory. The narrative aspect is poignantly reinforced by the visibility of some earth/floor dirt on Woodman's right foot. It is notable that no human artefacts are present in the interior which, having the double aspects of floor and earth, is itself liminal. Her angel is in mid-disappearance, bravely alone; shaking off the world's beautiful and dreadful pull; either returning to, or newly entering, the angel sphere.

The image on page thirty one of the original book (fig 45) incorporates for the first time in the *Angels* section two figures, one of which is probably the artist and

²⁵ Posner, 'The Self and the World', 1998, 165; Kwon, 'Bloody Valentines', 1996, 170.

the other that of a friend. Woodman is clearly playing with narrative threads already woven into this series of seven images: the materiality of existence and a visualisation of a dramatic disappearance into another, non-material, sphere. The incompatibility of the two enacted worlds is crystallised superbly in the juxtaposition between one naked figure and one fully clothed figure occupying the same interior.

This interior is a keenly described domestic space. The clothed friend sits demurely in a high-backed Shaker chair, clasping her hands in her lap and gazing out of frame with an intently vacant look. This figure, dressed conventionally apart from her bare feet, reinforces the extraordinary nature of Woodman's continuing narrative drama. She is depicted as oblivious to Woodman's performed exit. The angel's form is blurred in movement and part-obscured through deep shadow. The softening of the angel's curved form, enacting its disintegration in the now, is heightened by its contrast to the hard architraving verticals, in an example of a theme consciously pursued by the artist throughout her project.²⁶ It makes a natural frame for Woodman's centrally placed figure.

The next image (fig 46), on page thirty three of the original book, is directly connected to its predecessor in narrative. This image enacts the simultaneous but separate experiences of the angel and her now absent friend. The only trace of the erstwhile friend is a white cloth (in the brightest toned area of all) on the chair's seat not visible before. Read as narrative and in assuming a more 'normal' day

²⁶ *Me and Francis Bacon and all those Baroques are all concerned with making something soft wiggle and snake around a hard architectural outline.* Woodman's words, quoted by Peter Davison, 'Girl, Seeming to Disappear', *Atlantic Monthly*, 285: 5, May 2000, 110.

was hers, we might wonder whether the friend has left the room to water a plant or answer the telephone. But now the angel swings, caught in a diagonal motion. A vivid suggestion of movement in a *still* image is created again by blurring and a consequent ‘doubling’ of one leg. Her extrovert behaviour, in its conjured narrative crescendo, is brilliantly juxtaposed with the friend’s ordinary day. Woodman has shot this image from a slightly higher angle than she did the previous one, possibly so that the proof of her hanging support, the top of the door-frame, is visible, but also to show the figure rising. And she has photographed her own body both times (in figs 45 and 46), so that deep shadow eliminates her head and at least three-quarters of her torso. She has transformed herself into a creature: a liminal being about to exit. For this is the shuddering finale of the *Angels* series: a re-enactment of the climaxes of the earlier images.

The angels of Woodman’s *Angels, Calendars Book* are both an investigation of a physical space in terms of traditional elements like perspective, light and architecture and an investigation of temporal and ephemeral space. She self-photographs the angel in fast shot images, which amount to an almost filmic sequence. Her angel, a configuration of a fictional protagonist and a visual template, disappears and reappears, transcends and is degraded, brought in and out of the space rectangle and backward and forward in the frame. Narrative works in this series as a chain with potentially interchangeable links, as images rear into autonomy and buck back into sequence. Narrative is, here and in the other Books (with the exception of *Portrait of a Reputation* and *Quaderno Raffaello*), not necessarily either linear or mono-climactic. In spite of the innate fluency of the highly successful sequence, each image, both since and before the series’

inception, can be and has often been printed individually and is autonomous, with that beauty of composition celebrated high modernism.

Section 2. Dialogue with Days: *Calendars*

The *Calendars* section of the Book opens out from the tight focus of the first section's theme, *Angels*, into a broader sphere. Month names and occasional comments about the weather in Woodman's annotations perform the function of reigning in the new multiplicity of themes and encasing them in a quotidian diaristic reality which is a thousand miles from their imaginative scope. But the manner of tying an image to the exact day she is living in is exciting and successfully ignites the cross-temporal nature of the Books. At times these months and seasons, those markers of imposed time, intertwine in harmony with or in discord to the poems of the base text.

In Woodman's case the diaristic can be contained in one image (linking, dancing signifiers) or realised in a pair or a series of images. The temporal sphere is more often addressed by the artist in a diagonal zig-zag sequence: forward and backward or lateral but not straight. For my purpose *diaristic* is a term equally applicable to word or image structures.

We know, from Townsend's section *Journal Extracts*, edited by George Woodman, that Woodman practised *diary writing*; and assuming the American word 'journal' to have the same meaning as the English word 'diary', we know

too that the diaries were written in what she called ‘steinwriting’ on *ledgers* which were carried with her at all times.²⁷ I would submit that her photography practice contained many shared elements with her ‘journal’ practice, that of reflection and the recording and working out of visual projects. By this method she kept pace with her own ideas and plans. In her continuing and mutually responsive practices of daily image making and daily journal writing she proves herself equally capable of planning and reflecting in the domain of words as in the domain of images. She is also able to use images in a manner established by the diary’s convention of words.

She could activate the thinking through of her ongoing projects as well verbally as she could visually and she participated in the two spheres with a flexibility of access to both which is rare among artists and writers.

Woodman’s annotations in *Calendars* are written in a deeper hue of sepia ink than that of the written text of the original and the pen nib she uses is much broader than that in which the first text is written. The artist’s choice of sepia ink and her use of an old-fashioned nibbed pen create an element of unity in at least a nostalgic nod to the history of her matrix. Her script though is plump and unashamedly *modern*, in scale about six times larger than the harmonious *unterschriften*. The resulting rhythms between scriptive ink tones and image tones in both sections has much subtlety and the relation between the 1890s text and the overlaid 1970s images and text evolves through the whole Book as a response that is primarily visual. Occasionally however, Woodman will harness a poetic phrase from the original stanzas either to inflect her image or for her image to inflect.

²⁷ George Woodman, ed., ‘Journal extracts’, in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 241-248.

All images in the *Calendars* section are stuck, with the opaque corner photograph mounts, in common contemporary use, onto the right-hand page of the double page spread. They are mostly square, but sometimes rectangular in format and all, with the exception of the last image, have a white border of a varying width around them.

A natural division between *Angels* and *Calendars* occurs in this Book when the first *Calendars* image (fig 47) captioned in Woodman's bold, late twentieth century script *calendars inside this door*, eases us out of the intensity and drama of the *Angels* theme. A new interior is introduced, the domestic details of which are reassuring. The interiors to come will contrast strongly to the anonymity of the interiors in the *Angels* section.

Here we see the corner of a tiled-floored, light-walled room which is probably, from its tiles and door proportions, Italian. Against one wall stands a nineteenth century chiffonière made in dark mahogany and on its surface is a model of Aphrodite, her dark shadow reflected in the chiffonière's mirror. Poetry is present in the domestic and this Aphrodite can be read as a clever and beautiful transmutation of the angel into a domestic sphere. It is a forecast too of Woodman's germinating interest in figures and architecture of the classical era, which she was to develop as the *Temple Project* in her late career. The weight of the Aphrodite's sculpted base, a firm rectangle on the flat polished surface, quietly establishes some much needed stillness after the whirlwind entrances and exits of the angel. Maximum formal contrast occurs between the small figure's half-draped form and the hard repeated rectangles of two doors on the corner wall. The

door on the right is three quarters off-frame. Just visible over the right door is Woodman's arm. Its dark curve visually repeats the ornate front curves of the cabinet.

And in the narrative sphere what could entice us more than the anticipation of a closed door about to open? The artist's operation in the fictional must rest at the occasional and the humorous, however. But true to the spirit of 1970s post-minimalism and conceptualism, the next image (fig 48) represents *cloudy days* in the abstract. An arrangement of ten square pieces of paper, each equidistant, on a pavement of Italian chip mosaic, splits the rectangle of the image in a vertical diagonal, as the real surface is shot from a high point.²⁸ This diagonal serves to accentuate the border between two floor surfaces (perhaps of kitchen and dining areas) and two levels. Woodman's bent black-clad legs, appearing with her feet as a double *S* shape, break the hard-edged rectangle's domination and rise up from the flat plane above the image edge. Her legs cross the border, as do four of the paper squares.

The hand-written caption unwinds the precision of the displayed equidistant ten paper squares, in its *several cloudy days*. Above this phrase in sepia ink is the trace of another version in a bright emerald crayon. Its large words refuse to fit into the photograph's white border, which its trace penetrates. The vagueness of the title's *several* is stretched into the abrupt exactness of the number *ten* in this impossible, acute and humorous symbolisation. We are immediately brought into

²⁸ The semantic space between the visual and the textual field in interpretation, from the poetics of the cloud form imagined in *several cloudy days*, to its photographic realisation in the material form of paper squares, implies a surrealist movement which simultaneously contains a post-minimalist prosaic.

Woodman's daily life.²⁹ Other examples of the direct time focusing caption of this image in the Book are *november, yet another leaden sky* and *winter landscape*.

The word *calendars* indicates what can be either a dream-like interpretation of time or a precise pinning of a moment.

The exemplification of daily life present in Woodman's *Calendars* section is a chain of ideas which may be broken or repeated, reflective, surprising or anticipatory; as untidy and as organic as Breton's revolutionary *pris sur le vif* technique in *Nadja*, which caused his composite *text* and anti-novel to live outside its pages. Woodman's understanding of this procedure and its embodiment in her practice is part of the experiment of all her Books, most significantly and finely evoked in *Calendars*.

The sequence of her practice is complex; the Book images not only precede a development into potential framed gallery prints or the experimentally finite form of the late blueprints, but are subsequent to them, thrown from a developed form back into the experimental. Harriet Riches talks here specifically about Woodman's *Portrait of a Reputation* but what she describes can be applied equally well to *Angels, Calendars*:

*Breaking open the frame of the still photograph, Woodman creates a web of connections not only between the shots within the series of the book, but to other seemingly self-contained photographs elsewhere. Woodman's practice of explicit self-reference not only upsets a serial logic, but also loosens the book format's enveloping structure.*³⁰

²⁹ I have made a comparison between this photograph and that of the white irregular half cylinder object in *Nadja* in Chapter 1.

³⁰ Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 109.

The importance of journal-keeping to Woodman is implied here by her close friend Sloan Rankin. It is noteworthy that the artist equates life with photography.

Rankin quotes Woodman:

*...this journal used to be a consequence of my life – of the photographs. Actually now it is the primary force. Photographs are simply illustrations to relieve, That [sic] is OK, we like a picture book.*³¹

Her practice of continuously writing journal entries, both after and before taking photographs, is a separate but essentially linked practice to that of her photographic Book-making, which contains strong journalistic or diaristic currents.³² The movement backwards and forwards through time, which combines an assessment of existing photographs with a planning of new ones, occurs in her writing practice as much as in her photography. Overall, Woodman's practice of writing, in either journals or as image annotations combines with her image-making practice in a diaristic venture. Writing and photography are interdependent though different aspects of the same process.

Peggy Phelan argues, affirming that in this aspect of Woodman's work the artist moves decisively in her Book practice from a position of reflection on already-made images to a position of forward image planning.³³ Woodman's reflections

³¹ Sloan Rankin, 'Francesca Woodman: Photographs' (essay to accompany exhibition at Herbert F Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2003), Ithaca (N.Y.), Herbert F Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2003, 5, *with my* [Rankin's] *interpretive punctuation*.

³² Rankin, *Francesca Woodman: Photographs*, 2003, 5: *The journal was a previously used ledger [found object again] with headings such as "Dulee W. Flint Motor Sales" written in careful flowing cursive [as in students' script]. In great contrast, interspersed throughout, is the hurried vertical scratch of Francesca's thoughts and ideas. There is vague punctuation and yet considerable attention to train of thought. The journal always lay open in the studio or our apartment near an ink pot and, for an elegant aesthetic continuity, Francesca kept most entries in ink by way of nib and reservoir, just as the previous owner had.*

³³ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 991.

on her images are often made through the making of other images. It seems that Woodman manages both positions simultaneously, in a sustained, if difficult, confluence. For my purpose I take Phelan's use of *diary* to mean photographic Book. Phelan limits her pertinent argument by confining this process to the *either/or*:

*The movement from thinking of her diary as a place to reflect on completed work to thinking of it as a place to plan future compositions is a psychically complex one. It is to move from the present as a place to contemplate the past to the present as a way to shape the future.*³⁴

Phelan alleges too that *some diary entries are like scores for performances that were composed but not developed and the diary functioned as a rehearsal space, a book for first drafts for her compositions.*³⁵

Clearly it would have been impossible for any artist, particularly one dying young, to develop all *scores* to the level of *performance*. And in the spirit of post-minimalism, Woodman's natural element, whatever level the performance reached, it was just another interpretation of the score. However, as my knowledge of Woodman's six Books grows, I am increasingly astonished at the quantity of images in her oeuvre which have been developed from the Book format into the framed auratic soliloquy of the single print and back again to the Book search-grid she loved.³⁶

³⁴ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 991. I interpret her use of the word *diary*, as I believe she meant it, as *photographic book*.

³⁵ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 991.

³⁶ This idea of a return to the sphere of experimentation from conventionally deemed *developed* spheres will be looked at in Chapter 9.

The third image in the *Calendars* section of the *Angels, Calendars* Book (fig 49) shows a slightly blurred figure in black, pigeon-toed and photographed minus the head. In a compressed visual echo, the same ten paper squares of *several cloudy days* (fig 48) are here arranged on a rough paved surface. There is darkening by charcoal of two or three paper squares, suggesting, as in the former image, the smudging of the days by cloud. The flat surfaces of the paper squares here occupy less than a third of the image square. The wall rising at a right-angle behind the figure has a substantial broken area of plaster gouged by dereliction from its surface. This gouged area of wall is shaped like a cloud, for this image, without a caption, surely extends the *several cloudy days* theme. It is reproduced as an independent print, in a lighter tone and with some cropping and in reverse register, by Townsend.³⁷

The next image (fig 50) continuing the *several cloudy days* theme, shows Woodman's top half. Her head is turned off camera but we still see part of her neck, in a taut sideways stretch and an area of her hair. She wears a pale woollen sweater. Dramatic emphasis is focused on her hand, which leads us towards her vanished head. The hand's open spread of fingers lies relaxed over her chest. Strong chiaroscuro from the natural light source of a window in the corner of the room (domestic and well-decorated this time in contrast to fig 49) carves out the contours of a panelled shutter as the immediate background to her figure. The shutter's hard edges make a strong contrast to the curves of the soft human form. The next part-rectangle, at right angles to the shutter, has its own contrast in the curves of the wrought iron of this outer balcony. The light from a cloudy day is present only as close as this to a window.

³⁷ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 158.

The following image (fig 51) shows a poorly lit room corner with a door architraving emphasised off-centre, its open door space a deep dark void in which a just discernible, mostly dark, figure stands in back view. The unintelligibility of form is probably intentional, as Woodman refines the forms into an abstract sequence. A link to the former image (fig 50) is made as a lit hand, graceful and outspread, pierces the dark void. A finger points at the remaining two thirds of this composition in which stands a shiny topped round Shaker chair, the same one on which her friend was seated in the last images from the *Angels* section of the Book. From the hand falls what may be a shroud or an imposed blurred light area. Two small horizontal curves of bright light, one at the top left and the other in the lower left, impact on the diagonal rhythm of this image.

Woodman's use of the hand (and sometimes the glove) as a symbol, demonstrates her flowing appropriation of one of surrealism's most widely used and evocative tropes. Two photographs by Lee Miller from 1930 and 1931 are an example of a direct visual precursor.³⁸

The next image (fig 52) has the caption *a winter landscape*, hand-written by Woodman using her sepia ink. I am for once able to decipher a small piece of this original script. The poem title on the bottom left of the facing page, clearly in direct tandem with the project, is *Nuit d'Octobre*. Of the two short original script lines which she has left visible above the image, I am able to decipher the lower line, (I think) too, as *le lait, bon a boire*.³⁹

³⁸ See Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 222-223 for Miller's images.

³⁹ *Milk, good to drink*.

Within this thoughtfully constructed image, these phrases from the original script are a springboard for the artist's adventurous mind. In this image, made entirely from interior objects, Woodman spoofs a more conventional winter landscape in the zig-zagging motif of the white lace dress clutched by her fingers. The zig-zags of a snow-capped mountain range, as well as icicles, are here succinctly referenced. More ice is simulated by the mirror laid on the floor on which she has propped two white cards at forty five degree angles, but each with a differently angled reflection. This mirror reflects light only in the small area of its lower right-hand corner and the background is mostly very dark in tone, enhancing the dramatic placing of white and light objects. How clear the thick straight lines are which delineate the surface between the real object and its reflection under the cards. Woodman's feet and ankles are in the shot, one foot curved as if from cold: think shiver, think frostbite. Again the human curves strongly contrast with the white cards' hard edges, a theme present in a large quantity of her work in and outside the Books. To the top left of the composition is a dragonfly *seeming to fly*.⁴⁰

The next image (fig 53) stuck by Woodman onto page 49 of the original student book, is captioned *winter landscape*. The near repetition of the caption to the former image (fig 52) *a winter landscape* is a subtle word shift leading us to suppose that this image and the next (fig 54) form in the variations of their pair the definitive rendering of *winter landscape*: no argument.

⁴⁰ Often included by Woodman as a trope; for her the dragonfly was an emblem of truth.

If film can be thought of as a series of moving pictures Woodman goes some way here in making movement occur through these two ‘still images.’⁴¹ They are glued into a sequence by the aid of Woodman’s annotation. The caption is written in exactly the same 1970s hand script that is an upward hand over the original’s diagonally slanted copperplate.

In the first image of this pair (fig 53) Woodman has marked three words from the original poetic stanzas with a small cross at the top, *Et quand mort*. They are written in a uniform copperplate, immediately above her image. Is she imagining death, her own death? This is a central tenet of Peggy Phelan’s argument, explored in the first section of this chapter.⁴² Certainly it is beyond dispute that contemplation of death is a pervasive theme of Woodman’s work. *Et quand mort*, and when dead: this pair of images consequently relates back to themes explored in the *Angels* series of this Book, here through the specificity of day and season, the chosen springboard of *Calendars*.

Here, in figs 53 and 54, the same floor section (Italian chip mosaic tiles) of the same space is twice caught on camera film. We are given no indication as to the scale of the space as no upward plane is shown. It is probably an interior, if the season, winter, is not just imagined, but ‘real’. The base structure of a Bentwood rocking chair, present in both photographs, has a rectangular section of moulded plaster propped against it in both images. This is the darker, positive structure of the white negative plastic mould. In the first image, fig 53, the light plastic mould,

⁴¹ The thrust of the argument behind the curating of *La Mouvement des Images* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in the autumn of 2006.

⁴² Phelan, ‘Francesca Woodman’s Photography’, 2002, 979-1004.

white, undulating in peaks and rectangular, is linked to its product by the mould's corner leaning onto it. The mould is the before-trace of the real product as the footprint is the after-trace of someone walking in snow. Seeming to leak from the mould, some scattered white powder (flour, plaster?) denotes the real substance from which the transmutation into the real and solid occurs. Woodman, photographed naked three quarters in frame, cross-legged on the centre left of it, is captured spreading this powder, but only just captured, only just there, for despite the absence of blurring a sense of her speedy entry is strong. The scattered powder does not only describe its own process but symbolises a scattering of self. It is invisible in the second image of the pair, fig 54, where Woodman holds down a corner of the plastic mould to cause it to register visually as a triangle under which she lies. Its absence eliminates the trace of the other, the transmutation; which is the description of the liminal.

In these two powerful images connections exist to her gallery print series *Self Deceit* (in the crouching pose of the artist with a talismanic prop which in that case is a mirror) and to the video she made while at Rhode Island School of Art and Design in which she is filmed lying in white powder and leaving a trace image of her body on a wooden floor.⁴³

The next image (fig 55) depicts a female figure from centre to mid-calf, clothed entirely in a loose long black garment. Dramatically, one arm only, shot from mid

⁴³ The most relevant image from *Self Deceit* is reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 105. The relevant 'stills' from the video are reproduced in the catalogue of Woodman's One Person Show in Siena: Marco Pierini, ed., *Francesca Woodman* (exhibition catalogue, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 2009-2010), Milan, Silvana Editoriale, 2009, 102.

forearm down, is visible. This arm curves into its hand which in turn curves around the round edge of a very shiny steel bowl, held upright the better to show its contents. Two dark loops of long hair make this a baroque curving in a minimalist composition. Although looking through a magnifying glass reveals this to have the surface texture of a fish, or tripe, its front bulge and position conjure a mammalian embryo. We know Woodman loved to haunt the Fish Market in Rome, in which city she made the images for at least a good part of this Book.⁴⁴ She has probably made this extraordinary and unsettling image from quite ordinary source material through the alchemy of her resourceful intelligence.⁴⁵ This image makes reference to an interwar surrealist photograph by Wols and is developed in the artist's wider corpus in a photograph made in New York in 1979, *Untitled* (fig 56).^{46, 47}

The dead fish or still-born embryo is a symbol for the death of light and nature in winter. The upper central position of the bowl and its contents could imply the centrality of a reliance on inner resources in the winter season. But a powerful

⁴⁴ *In Rome we carried bags of live eels across town from piazza Vittoria*: Woodman's friend Sloan Rankin reminisces in her essay Rankin, 'Peach Mumble', 1998.

⁴⁵ A much clearer print from the same negative is reproduced in Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 132. Here developed with the added script in Italian: *Forse qualche volta Andreno tutti (?) alla mia casa a mangiare pere come gusto*. (*Perhaps Andreno will come some time to my house to eat some pear with gusto*). I have, with the help of another's scrutiny and a key word in this script, deduced that the bowl might possibly contain a large, somewhat deformed, pear and its reflection. This visual play brings to mind the skill of Brassai's *Involuntary Sculptures* of 1933.

⁴⁶ Wols, *Serpillière dans un sceau*, ca 1938, reproduced in Marion Diez, ed., *La Subversion des images: Surréalisme, Photographie, Film* (exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2009-2010), Paris, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009, 262. Wols's image of a featured metal bowl with handles contains small snakes, whereas Woodman's contains a larger organic mass, probably a piece of tripe. Her bowl, in smaller register as it is held by the figure (Wols's is on its own), resembles that of the Wols image acutely, particularly in the play of light around the rim and on the inside contents.

⁴⁷ Woodman's own referenced image, reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 130, features both hands of a similarly black-robed figure with a complex organic object on the left.

disturbance is at work in this image, if so read, of a human girl carrying an inhuman being so tenderly.

Present in the next image (fig 57) are two female figures. An organic round form makes an echo to the (confined) round form of the steel bowl in the last image (fig 55), but here it is also its geometric opposite in its open-ended leaf structure which ‘explodes’ from its centre in front of the lower abdomen of the left standing woman, from the same position as that in which the bowl was held. This woman’s identifying head is, typically, cropped out of the shot. The large succulent leaves of the plant protrude in equal, energetic lengths. Whereas the steel bowl form of the last image acted as a symbol for death and confinement, the plant is alive and thriving, symbolising, perhaps, the advent of spring. This is a finely organised composition. Woodman’s figure with its bent leg and two inwardly pointing hands shows her face (its inclusion in itself unusual) in profile, with her gaze directed at the fecund plant and just cut off a little at the top, from the frame. A piece of material, perhaps a man’s tie, caught in patterned sunlight, hangs between the two figures. One hand, a shoulder and one of Woodman’s legs are also lit by sun. Her clearly etched profile meets one of the light-edged leaves in a fine visual concision. With some caution I would venture to extract a note of optimism from this image.

Avril is the title of the poem in the original French text which wraps round the next image (fig 58), captioned by the artist, with a good surrealist absurdity combined with a mathematical precision (these months are exactly six months apart), *november*. Another glimpse of optimism in spring’s coming, perhaps?

Woodman has obliterated the centre lines of poetry purposefully, with erasing fluid, to make a tabula rasa on which to place her image as well as to emphasis her cursive *november* and the original word *Avril*. She has not done this since opening out the page space for her own title of *angels* at the Book's beginning. Her caption-writing arena is for once clear of the century-old underwriting.

This image is different from those preceding it of the *Calendars* section in its chosen geographical space. Precise architectural detail such as this has not been in evidence since the first image of the *Calendars* series (fig 47). It is probably shot in Palazzo Cenci, in some more derelict areas of which several *Angels* images were also probably photographed. A gallery print version with a differently posed figure exists.⁴⁸ This huge sun-hit paved corridor or cloister shows a naked Woodman trying to remove herself from a solid oak Renaissance bench. Or is she trying to take it with her? Her right foot seems to drag on the ground and almost to make or trace the low diagonals of sunlight. Her face is turned away from the viewer, her head is in shadow. On one level this is a great study of dramatic light. At least the light is returning after all those leaden skies. It is also a study of stasis and movement with some address of convulsive beauty's *explosante-fixe* element. Woodman again develops the high contrast between the solid wooden form and her own human warmth and softness in a dramatic action in clear photographic focus. She connects her own form to the bench's form quite simply through the surge of light.

⁴⁸ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 167.

December is Woodman's title for her next image (fig 59), now extremely well-known in its gallery print version. Therefore the months of November and December have each been encapsulated in a separate image. Spring's flash in the plant and sunshine image of fig 57 is over. This image is part of an important and well-known pair; the other of which depicts Woodman against the same wall, naked.⁴⁹ The wall is divided horizontally into two sections which Woodman matches in her half-clothed two-sectioned figure. The Book image is reproduced as a gallery print in the Fondation Cartier catalogue, in reverse and in a lighter tone.⁵⁰ Woodman stands against a derelict wall. Three quarters of the wall had once been painted and this section is therefore of a much darker tone than the upper quarter area of the wall. This paint is now flaking off, revealing the original wall, the plaster of which is gouged and indented. The torso of her half-clad figure is smeared with dirt. Her vintage dress is rolled down to the waist and replicates the speckled dereliction of the wall. This is an anamorphic resemblance within the *circumstantial magic* genre of Breton's *convulsive beauty* theory, so well understood by Woodman. The dress's lower folds are deliberately blurred: to complete the camouflage and not, in this case, to create movement. She references such first wave surrealist photographic epics as Man Ray's 1923 image *The Return to Reason* where the female figure (Lee Miller) in three-quarter view is overlaid with sunlight patterns and his *Untitled* from 1931. In the later image Miller holds her arm back from her torso in a similar way to how Woodman holds hers.

⁴⁹ The other image of this pair is reproduced in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 154.

⁵⁰ Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 108. For a more sustained comparison of different printings of the image pair, please see Chapter 9.

The next image (fig 60), again now much reproduced and celebrated as an autonomous print, is of the artist wearing dark garments and crouching in an unlit corner of an Italian interior. Audaciously fore-grounded is a tortoise made by this method to appear nearly twice the size of her. The monumentalised domestic pet is imbued with the foreboding of a prehistoric monster on the rampage. Woodman backs into her corner as if threatened, scared, by the animal. Lit from the rear, the markings on the tortoise's shell make a coned-rectangular (trapezoid) symmetry with the floor's deep perspective of square chequered tiles. Woodman hides her face from the predator with a round white plate; its circle draws light cleverly to her corner and contrasts with the squares and trapezoids.

Shot from a lower angle here than a similar image reproduced on the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue's cover, the dramatic tension constructed in this image surpasses that of the catalogue's cover image, in which Woodman, half standing and a little more upright, looks elegant and the tortoise merely inquisitive, not threatening.⁵¹ The light thrown onto the tortoise belies the Book image's annotation, hand-scripted below the image *yet another leaden sky*, but perhaps the atmosphere of oppression and fear is another simulation of the claustrophobia induced by winter's leaden skies.

Mysterious, precisely composed and with much attention to depth of field, the next *Calendars* image (fig 61) is a very different photograph of another room's corner, from that photographed in fig 60. This depicted corner is claustrophobically full and dark when compared with the light and open space of

⁵¹ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, front and back covers.

the previous image. Yet if claustrophobic, it is serenely so, in this elegantly conceived and realised composition, which is the last image of the *Angels, Calendars Book*.

What looks like a Victorian mahogany round pedestal table curves its sumptuous solid surface through the top right part of this final image, this *Swan Song*. The curve of the table-top (perhaps the chiffonière from the first *Calendars* image) is interrupted by the bright white border of a photograph of a man with a swan, its hard white edge intersecting the fine curve of the table, just overlapping its shiny edge.⁵² Below the table's thick surface is an area of such deep dark tone that it is only possible to imagine what is there. But emphatically interrupting this dark area is a solitary white kid glove, resonancing the famous bronze glove photographed and described in *Nadja*.⁵³

To the left of the table's top, which is in crisp focus, is a deliberately out-of-focus form which must surely be that of Woodman, in a visual reduction of her human form to two slanted ovoid forms close against the table's top. In this reduction of form she is about to disappear: to become de-materialised, about to sing. The placing of this image at the end of the Book is significant. Phelan's courageous conjecture that Woodman's chain of images could constitute a rehearsal for her

⁵² This postcard photograph was probably found by Woodman in the *Libreria Maldoror* in Rome. An image of a swan and human profile was included as a series of small images grouped as a frieze, displayed above the skirting board, in her BFA degree show at Rhode Island School of Art and Design entitled *Swan Song*. Above the frieze were hung the giant series. Other instances and images on this theme are explored in Chapter 9.

⁵³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 56-57: ...on the very spot where I had so hoped she would not leave the blue glove, a bronze one she happened to possess....

death becomes acutely relevant in its light, nourished of course by the Proustian reference of the photograph photographed.⁵⁴

Woodman has captioned the image underneath with her hand-written *swan song*. She had used *Swan Song* previously as the title for her graduation show at the Woods Gerry Gallery at the Rhode Island School of Art and Design in 1978, coincident with the time this Book was made. This brilliant series of photographs, each measuring three feet by four feet, in newly digitised restoration, was exhibited in London in 2007.⁵⁵

A compelling and beautiful legend in circulation since the time of Aristotle, the white mute swan, *Cygnus Olus*, is allegedly song-less and silent throughout its life, until the moment just before its death. It is expressed here, in Tennyson's words:

*The wild swan's death-hymn took the soul
Of that waste place with joy
Hidden in sorrow: at first to the ear
The warble was low, and full and clear;
...
Sometimes afar, and sometimes anear;
But anon her awful jubilant voice,
With a music strange and manifold,
Flow'd forth on a carol free and bold;*⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 1002: *Woodman's use of photography as a way to rehearse her death allows us to consider her art as an apprenticeship in dying, rather than the thing that somehow outlasts or conquers death*. On a human level, enormous difficulties can arise from Phelan's position. Taken as a key to understanding many sequences and series in Woodman's oeuvre, however, Phelan's position can, at times, be alarmingly insightful.

⁵⁵ Victoria Miro Gallery, 19 June-28 July 2007. The *Swan Song* series is discussed in Chapter 9.

⁵⁶ 'The Dying Swan' in Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, 15.

This legend has become deeply and romantically embedded in western culture, epitomised as an exceptional creative act before death. The quality of the act is realised by its crystallisation in the pain and poignancy of a material end and its inevitable re-assessment of that life's achievements.

It is no surprise that the dying swan myth holds a fascination for Woodman as it encapsulates her career's rigorous interest in the liminal and that symbolisation of transgression and transmutation that is captured in her recurrent imaging of overlapping borders and revealed inner layers. In this second section of the Book she is compelled to record these months of her life, sometimes by name; they are a part of her process of drawing on the everyday and its objects to fertilise her practice.

CHAPTER THREE

Algebra Answered: Woodman's *Portraits Friends Equasions*

The original texts chosen by Woodman to be the templates for the two Books *Portraits Friends Equasions* and *some disordered interior Geometries* are from separate disciplines: algebra in the Book under current discussion and geometry in the next to be discussed Book. It is important to elucidate certain details in the givens of their pages. The original text of the Book *Portraits Friends Equasions* contains the given of plain ruled lines on pages filled out with the student's hand-written notes and hand-written equations, which are both single and grouped. The template of *some disordered interior Geometries* contains the givens of pervasively printed diagrams and printed formulae (it is in essence a reference book) with no marks in the hand of the original student.¹

Portraits Friends Equasions differs in its template from the formerly discussed *Angels, Calendars* by the fact that its original script varies between the student's hand-written lines of workings out, including lines of separate or clumped equations and hand-drawn diagrams, whereas the script's given in the *Angels,*

¹ Typically, these printed diagrams descend in the left-hand column of a page divided into a five (vertical) by four (horizontal) grid. The three remaining horizontal squares of the grid print various occurrent or suggested examples, giving printed equations and the degrees of specific angles as instructions. These constitute a system of *problems to solve*, the answers to which are in the form of pencil shaded areas delineating a new and specific form, for example a one dimensional square on the side of a three dimensional rectangle. The student probably worked through the examples in a separate work book.

Calendars template is in the continuous form of hand-written poetic stanza or full poem, naturally punctuated by stanza length and poem title.

Portraits, Friends Equasions measures eight and seven sixteenth of an inch by six and three sixteenths of an inch when closed; the width measurement when open is twelve and five sixteenth inches.

The Book contains twenty two of Woodman's positive images. All of them are square in format, several have no border and of the rest, the width of the white border varies. Although *undated* it is possible to harness several photographs in *Portraits Friends Equasions* to Woodman's Roman period of Spring 1977 to Summer 1978 and some to her period of return to Rhode Island, from the autumn of 1978. I shall consequently date the Book as from 1978.

Throughout *Portraits Friends Equasions* few scriptive annotations are present and within it we see only two examples of Woodman's writing, on the front cover of the book and on the first double page spread, where she repeats her title on the right-hand page, in pencil, using small case letters for the words *friends* and *equasions*. The cover is an even more decorative version of that of *some disordered interior Geometries*, described in Chapter 4, an example of fin de siècle baroque typographic virtuosity (fig 62). Woodman's title is written in ink at the top (all three words are capitalised) and outside the bold double border-as-scroll of the publisher's details:

RAFFAELLE STANI
 OGGETTI di BELLE ARTI
 NAPOLI Via Roma 432 NAPOLI

This border is pierced with trompe l'oeil quills and pens, intersected at a corner by a globe and books and at another by symbolic sailing boats of knowledge. Acting as a standard lined-page exercise book it leaves a space for the student's name and the subject studied: *Quaderno dell...* and in this case it is *...Meccanica Superiore*.² Helpfully, the student has here written the precise date of their period of study: 1894-1895.

Woodman's cover script is of approximately the same size and angle and of the same sepia colour ink, as that of the late nineteenth century scholar. By this means it is well integrated, almost camouflaged, within the original. Her title sits just above the first student's signature (which is indecipherable). The first student's lessons inside are neatly executed, but the title-script on the cover *Appunti di Meccanica Superiore*, and the sub-clause *Lezioni dettate dal Prof. F. Scanieri* [?], are written in a different script. The exercise book had sold at the cost of 4 denari.³

The first double page spread of the Book reveals a large torn section on the left side of what is probably the first written page of the combination of notes and complex equations that will continue throughout the Book. On the right-hand page four photo mounts are still stuck on, showing how Woodman changed her mind

² 'Exercise Book ... Higher Mechanics'. Mimosa and pansy flowers and a *trompe l'oeil* scroll are also illustrated here.

³ 'Points of Higher Mechanics. Lessons dictated by Professor F.Scanieri' [?]

about putting an image here. Instead she has re-written her own title, this time in faint lead pencil, in the gaps and pauses of the base text. Here her writing is about twice the size of that of the original student and she has not attempted to mimic the regular slant of its copperplate. The two central staples are black with age and the paper edges are nipped, folded and torn for the same reason. Woodman's photo mounts too have become a sepia colour after another twenty five years.

The next double page spread has four photo mounts on the left and three on the right page, where images might have been.

The third double page spread (fig 63) has a Woodman image placed on each side. Every photographic image in this Book is square in format. These first two have had their white border cut; as also have the following nine images, so that there is a total of eleven images; exactly half the whole image count of twenty two, without white borders and eleven images subsequently with white borders round them. This sort of precise mathematical pattern is typical of Woodman. Only four images are shot in exteriors. It is no coincidence that these four exterior shots (figs 69, 70, 71 and 72) are collectively the centre of the Book.

The left-hand image of fig 63 is placed in an upper central position on the page. In a response to the engineering student leaving an extra-wide blank left-hand margin, Woodman has placed her image slightly to the right of the page.⁴ This might change on later pages, always in a visual thought process on the artist's

⁴ The wide margin is left throughout, except on the few occasions when algebraic equations run over both pages.

part. Here Woodman's figure, unusually in *normal* attire of cardigan, skirt and knee-high boots, is photographed moving towards a dark corner of a semi-derelict interior in an investigative manner. Or possibly and impossibly, but fictionally, she is about to penetrate this dark border corner. Shot so that her head is extinguished in deep shadow, the sharp delineations of floor, wall and its plain cornicing are a materialisation of algebraic formulae, to the extent that the double line created by the cornicing mimics the double line above and below the complex equations on this page. Her photograph both answers and obliterates the engineering student's stage of formulaic reasoning: *Donde*.⁵

Woodman's figure's distinctive pose reflects an elongated *S* from the first text, visible above and central to the image. And possibly her whole pose is a human response to the visual quality of the algebraic sign for square root $\sqrt{\quad}$.

Continuing the fictional thread, I posit that a clear linear development is present in the first set of six images and that these are distinct from the following twelve in their dramatic content. These following twelve thus form another sequence.

The right-hand image of fig 63 is of Woodman in another corner of another stark and empty interior, looking very much like the interior of the first five *Angels* images. She is dressed in the ethereal white attire of the *angel* and is experiencing an emotional moment of pain or gasping serenity.⁶ In a re-visiting of themes present in the *Angels* series, she has penetrated the wall, that symbol of the liminal, to enter another sphere and to possibly experience a transformation. The

⁵ *Where from? For which reason?*

⁶ Perhaps this image was deemed surplus to *Angels* and is being tried out in a new context here.

strongly diffused light from the large paned window rectangle, which is shot at a precarious angle to continue the angle of some of the equations and exaggerate the angle of others on the base-page, cancels the light in the room's interior. It half-lights the artist's figure on one side and centrally. The effect of this is to obscure her legs and one arm; in effect to sever her connection to the material world. Her upturned head, with its opened mouth, reinforces a sense of the difficulty of the transition.

When viewed as a pair, the visual connection through the images is obtained through a continuance of the forty five degree angle realised on the left through the wall base line and on the right through the lower definition of the window pane. This also reflects the overall thrust of the forward rhythm of the original written text, but at the same time dramatically counteracts its linear rhythm.

The same window rectangle, shot from slightly further away than in fig 63 (left), appears in the next pair of images (fig 64), higher in the frame than in the previous image and swirling out at its base in a light effluence which becomes a raggedly abstract *informe*. In both images, an area of light cuts out a surprisingly geometric portion of the human form, seen in silhouette against the light and in rendering it abstract, makes it almost invisible. We have seen this photographic virtuosity before in the *Angels, Calendars* series. Something is surely owed to the technical achievements of her immediate predecessors Ralph Meatyard and Duane Michals.⁷ Michals here explains his blurring technique:

⁷ In particular Meatyard's *Ghost* image and Michals's series *The Human Condition*, in which a man disappears through light dissolution by an underground train. Cecilia Casorati differentiates between Woodman's and Michals's use of light dissolution as form disappearance in her claim that ... *le sue anime luminose e trasparenti sono sempre animate da una vision ironica*, Francesca

*To make a blur, I stop down the lens as far as possible and use a slow shutter speed. A second is just long enough to get a nice blur. Then I run the person through the gesture at varying speeds. I tell them to think about doing it in slow motion. You can't control a blur. If people move too fast, they blur too much.*⁸

Woodman's technical virtuosity remains awesome.

The right-hand image of fig 64, though increasing the area occupied by the swirl of the effluent *informe*, simultaneously reclaims some recognisable Woodman form. An intensity that is a forbidding quality can be noted in this part-figure, seen again in back silhouette in front of the window. Its stasis, in contrast to the generous swirling movement of the light effluence which partly obscures it, speaks of a concentrated energy, a kind of distilled panic: an animal trapped in a cage; a wasp in a jar. Fictionally, she is trying to open the huge, headily angled window. She wants to be through the border it has become.

This marvellous pair of images refers closely to the first *Angel* series in the *Angels, Calendars* Book. Strong links exist too between these images (and the next, fig 65) and Woodman's series *Self Deceit*.⁹ Another very similar image exists too as a gallery print. In this image Woodman stretches out her arm to touch the wall, that obstruction to her imagined escape.¹⁰

Woodman agisce la sparizione con leggerezza ma senza ironia. ('Michals's luminous and transparent souls are always animated by an ironic vision [whereas] Francesca Woodman plays with disappearance with levity but without irony'.) Cecilia Casorati, 'Francesca Woodman e la fotografia dell'immaginario' ('Francesca Woodman and the Photography of the Imaginary'), in Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 23-24.

⁸ Duane Michals, 'Camera As Darkroom', in Eleanor Lewis, ed., *Darkroom*, New York, Lustrum Press, 1977, 136.

⁹ Examples from this well-known series of six images are reproduced in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 156-157.

¹⁰ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 108.

Read aesthetically, this pair of images angles its dominant lines (constructed in them by window panes and wall planes) in harmony to the predominant angle thrust of the base pages' script. The area of light effluence acts as a necessary soft-edged curve to the tyranny of the straight lines (as does Woodman's form to a lesser extent but more so in the right page image). In the case of the script, the function of refreshment is performed jointly by the repeated loops of letters below the line, the $\sqrt{\quad}$ (square root) sign and the curves of the parenthesis symbols. All of these provide a rhythmic extension to the division and emphasis brought by the hand-drawn equation lines.

Excitingly, the next double page spread (fig 65) of the original ignores the central stapled page division, as the engineering student extends a complex set of equations over this centre and onto the wide vertical margins of the opposite page. S/he has outlined these extensions in rectangles of ink. Between them, possibly by a visually felicitous chance, s/he has drawn a diagram, bigger than anything precedent, of lines emanating from a central point to illustrate their different directions and angles. The central point is marked *O*. Woodman's choice of place for her image reflects her resolve to respond directly to this diagram, as she has left its page untouched.

In this image, stuck on opposite the diagram, she has placed her own figure at the opposite equivalent central point, *O*, of emanation of the diagram's lines, as if a square is imagined around the diagram. This zero mark is the diagram's point of highest energy. Her response to the drawn diagram opposite is subtle and

complex. Instead of using the wall, floor and the lines of the window panes to directly simulate the angle lines in the diagram, as she often does, we are encouraged here to imagine these as traces through the given grid, formed particularly by the window panes. But extraordinarily too, the figure itself repeats in one movement each separate angle of diagram. It must of course be realised in reverse.

In the previous chapter I touched on Woodman's interest in depicting a maximum contrast between the softness and curves of human flesh with the hard lines and cold material of architecture. Here she resolves to coax the human form into the representation of a mathematical formula. She proves that this ambitious project, clearly in some ways impossible, can be achieved with precision and exactitude. She will pursue it further in *some disordered interior Geometries* which I discuss in the next chapter.

Continuing the fiction of the previous image pair, in fig 65 the rectangle of the paned window occupies at least a third of her image's square. In this photograph, no light diffusion of individual panes occurs, as it does in the preceding pair and no area of blurred effluence is present. Woodman's form is here clearly defined by its high-lighted upper contours in the light, constructing a rhythmic curved line. The rest of her form, in part-silhouette, merges into the dark tones of the image's lower half. The contrast between her body, caught in un-blurred movement and the unbroken hard edges of the room around her, is a significant example of her interest in these contrasts. I will repeat Woodman's own words on this subject, although already quoted in Chapter 2's note 26, as they are apposite:

Me and Francis Bacon and all those Baroques are all concerned with making something soft wiggle and snake around a hard architectural outline.

The single image in fig 66, on the right-hand page, is another response to a visually interesting original diagram, left complete again by Woodman. This time the lines emanating from point zero progress into two curved forms constructed from a base of exactly the same measured angles as the former. Jubilantly, Woodman here makes a human parallel by arching herself back, supported by arched arms, against a wall. Read as a reverse equivalent to the smaller constructed closed curve of the mechanics diagram on the opposite page, the treble parallel angles of the stone steps at the lower right of Woodman's image exactly repeat, (when combined with her body's arch over these steps to the wall), the angle line at the base point of the curved form. She has perfectly analysed this form, with its pointed base and wider, outward curving top, here in her imaginative combining of architecture, mathematics and the figure.

The image on the right side of the next double page spread (fig 67) is stuck on at a slight angle to the central margin, as the page is a little out of alignment with the page opposite. In spite of this, both upper and lower edges of her photograph are placed exactly in line both with the line of equations at the top and with the line of text at its base. Woodman's response to a busy but calm double page of equations and text is an image of a relaxed encounter in a slightly dilapidated palazzo or museum between her and a friend. As this is the first image which depicts another figure, we can assume that this is the introduction of a new theme, that of friends.

The first section of six images encompassed the theme of equations and the last image group addresses the theme of portraits.

But these themes can overlap and interlace. It is hereby apparent that Woodman has deliberately inverted her title's order, *PFE, Portraits Friends Equasions*, to its mirror image *EFP, Equasions Friends Portraits*.

At first sight this image (fig 67) appears to be taken in the same corner of a palazzo as in fig 5 as there are some very similar stone steps at the bottom right of the image. The same architectural elements: the steps, the wall and floor plane-meeting place as well as the same light source from high up on the right, occur here. The wall behind the figure/s in both images is visually punctured by a stone rectangular (commemorative?) tablet. Sloan Rankin testifies, giving some clarification that these images were made in front of:

*...a painted trompe l'oeil tomb in the church in Ravenna (Chiesa di San Francesco or Basilica di S. Appolinare Nuovo, I can't remember which), both bombed in the war, which explains the cement restoration in the lower half of the picture.*¹¹

More detail of the stone tablet is given here than in fig 66; its likeness to a commemorative plaque means the chiesa is probably a mausoleum.

In fig 67 too and throughout the Book, but particularly in the *Equasions* section, the floor/wall/plane dividing lines can be read as an acute simulation of the horizontal equation division line in the original text, to which Woodman would

¹¹ Rankin, 'Peach Mumble', 1998, 36.

surely have strongly responded as a reminder of her own interest in boundaries and layers as symbols of the liminal, from a different field. Here a double dividing line is extended in the original text into the square root symbol.

In this case, Woodman sites herself and her friend as two elements of the top faction of the equation, the base faction of which is made from the steps rising in a staircase or perhaps from the base to a plinth. The angled edges of the steps make a gentle counterpoise to the wall/floor line angle, exactly repeated in the friend's linear blocked shadow. A strong side light, from the low sun of early morning or late afternoon, causes a part elimination of both figures, but particularly Woodman's, whose tense pose contrasts to the relaxed pose of the friend (Sloan). Rankin gives hard evidence that this was the case: *The picture was taken in less than a minute. Why? Because that was all the time she had to slip out of and back into her clothes, as I once again tripped the shutter.*¹²

The *punctum* remains for me in that part of the image where the undulating edge of the form which jaggedly repeats the stair angle at the base of the image crosses behind the stone wall plinth to make another shuddering equation division line. That line which divides the original masonry from the restored part imparts the area with an appropriation of itself.

My understanding of Barthes's idea of *punctum* is that in an image which one is not guided by the artist to notice, it is unaccented and not 'presented' for consumption. The *punctum* causes an unexpected reaction that is neither desired

¹² Rankin, 'Peach Mumble', 1998, 36.

nor needed, but that is strong and persistent in leaving its trace of memory. It seizes the unconscious:

*The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: "Technique", "Reality", "Reportage", "Art", etc.: to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness.*¹³

The image on the next double page spread (fig 68) continues the narrative and visual elements of its two predecessors (figs 66 and 67) to form a link within the current theme of the Book, *friends*. In combination with a gallery print from her wider corpus, these images form a quartet.¹⁴ Like the previous two images in this Book, fig 68 is stuck onto the centre left of the right-hand side of a double-page spread. This time it half-obscures the equation lines above and below it. A very slight change of camera angle moves the stone plaque to the centre of the image. The anonymity of the surface rectangle from fig 67 is replaced here by decorative embellishment: a central urn and a base motif of classical column decoration. The area of the image which waved its juddering diagonal through its composition appears here in fig 68 as a *newly plastered* area. In fig 67, due to the slightly different position, a suggestion of a space retreating in perspective filled a narrow vertical rectangle to the right of the (plain) masonry border's blur. In fig 68 Woodman repeats the form that is visible on the right side of the central stone plaque, in what could be a painted *trompe l'oeil* version of it, on the left of the

¹³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1980, 55.

¹⁴ Described as *Ravenna, Fall 1977*, this is reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 102. The strongly blurred figure shows Woodman in the process of disrobing and was clearly shot by Rankin. Happily it solves some architectural mysteries. As the figure is shot here standing to the right of the two steps, the extent of the *trompe l'oeil* work can be observed as occurring extensively both to either side of the carved stone mausoleum tablet and in an area directly beneath it where the original plaster layer has been restored.

plaque and behind the rear view of the solitary standing figure. This image is reproduced as an autonomous image in a very similar gallery print.¹⁵

So far seven images have focused on the diagonal; the shift of focus from it to the horizontal and vertical is first made in figs 68 and 69 which are transition images. Her interest in the horizontal/vertical axis is of course explored in the very well-known *Horizontale* and *Verticale* images made in Providence in 1977.¹⁶

In fig 69 Woodman makes a departure from the previous eight images by setting it outside. Placed again on the right page of the double page spread, this time it is slightly to the right of the centre in accord with the original text and its wide left margin. A freely drawn almost quirky diagram occupies a focal position on the opposite page. This has subtle and precise differences to the diagram opposite the image in fig 66. The diagram's lines, emanating from a central point again marked as *O*, are of the same length and have exactly the same angles measured between them by the Italian student of Higher Mechanics. But the joining form on its left arcs at a different point and the curved triangle in the fig 66 diagram is absent here. Evidence of some page tearing can be seen in the centre of the pages.

Woodman is clearly interested in making a direct connection with both the text of the base page and aspects of the diagram: she has made some marks under her image which form a rectangle to emphasise what I can just decipher as *tre segmenti che rappresentano dimensioni dell'ellip...es*.¹⁷

¹⁵ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 96.

¹⁶ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 132-133.

¹⁷ I cannot decipher the last word of this phrase, but propose that it is 'ellipses'. The phrase can therefore very tentatively be translated as 'Three segments which represent the dimensions of the ellipses'.

She has photographed herself in a side bend in a less dramatic arch than that performed in fig 66, in a gentle answer to the constellation of numbered lines and in particular their joining form, the inner curve of which her postural curve reflects in opposition. The front of what looks like a twentieth century American house makes a background of black and white rectangles against which the artist's upper figure is placed. The house wall emerges from that mottled unpainted house-base area which in turn emerges from a dark formlessness occupying at least a third of the composition. Above this the light-toned, flat-textured, plaster of the house wall creates the wide base of an *L* shape. The house window forms two different sized dark rectangles cut through with a light upright division; a perfect contrast device for the figure's bend. Horizontal division, texture, contrast of human and architecture: portrait, equations, no friend. Only Woodman's form creates a curved diagonal against the horizontals and verticals of the house's structure.

In the same way that the image in fig 69 can be analysed in terms of texture and form, this is also evidenced in the next composition (fig 70) which contains horizontal bands resembling the strata of rock. These two images stand apart from the first eight images in the book which incorporate diagonally angled compositions of various degrees, all focusing mainly on the *equasions* theme. The two images also begin the *Friends* section of the Book.¹⁸ Significantly Woodman

¹⁸ I am suggesting these section divisions, between *Portraits*, *Friends* and *Equasions*, in the awareness that Woodman probably did not intend any such division between categories. Several overlaps occur and I am sure were intended by the artist, particularly between portrait and self portrait and between friend and portrait. Her inflection of the original text or/and her incorporation of it is signified largely by her confinement of its most densely diagrammed part to the sheer poetry of her first, *Equasions* section. But the student's drawn diagrams and rows of written equations continue to delight Woodman in other parts of her Book, as seen, for example in Images Nine and Eleven, (figs 9, 11), which I have loosely tied into the *Friends* section.

changes her address from the diagonal to the horizontal and the vertical.¹⁹

Woodman's visuals continue to bounce against those of the found object base, in which its predominant horizontal linearity is arrested both by the minutiae and energy of the intensive equation sections and by the 'beauty' of the diagrams in this complex cross-dimensional work.

The image in fig 70, shot outside like its predecessor, depicts a standing Woodman in the right foreground, her head turned sharply to the right, away from and out of, the picture frame. Behind her and next to her are trees. Their trunks make a vertical parallel to her legs and a visual and verbal pun to her body's *trunk*.²⁰ The base area of the square format image is of a dark tone of dense foliage, against which some light thin branches and Woodman's hands make a light toned interruption. Above this strip of dark is a horizontal strip of bright sunlight and a plastic white wall. Through this strip the dark verticals of the trees' trunks pierce, mottling out into their branch form in a sometimes condensed, sometimes light-broken area of dispersed diagonal angles. And across the composition, both emphasising its horizontality and simulating a repetitive chain of equations, is an added *other*. In pragmatic terms possibly a piece of plastic display fencing, this artefact goes behind Woodman's figure and in front (though here it is broken) of one tree on the left. The addition of the fencing condenses the elements of form and texture in the image as well as providing another symbol of the liminal by its small border.

¹⁹ In a text that contains many algebraic formulae, horizontal fraction division lines are common.

²⁰ Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2005, 51.

In a return to a composition made of dynamic diagonals and verticals, the image in fig 71 contains an intricate selection of responses to a double page spread which must have held much fascination for Woodman. For the first time in the book, a rectangle is clearly drawn by the Italian student. Inside it are neat columned letters and codes. Woodman has placed her image below this rectangle. She obscures some text as a result, but leaves a circled, centripetal diagram visible at her image's base. This diagram, as in the previous examples in figs 66 and 69, is answered by Woodman playfully and skilfully. Visually interesting too, is the area of tiny equations and their square roots compressed to fit on the right side of the diagram. They contain a kind of nervous energy born from their having been written at speed and from having their size contracted. On the facing page the top third is, unusually, blank and a third of the page down it is possible to read: $w = o4(2) = 0 = 1$

This is followed by a series of complex columned equations mixed with some analytical text.

Woodman's image bounces off the angled upright lines of the central point of the base text diagram, in its photographed tree form. This tree is in the foreground and left centre of the image. If Leonardo planned to construct a cathedral inspired by the symmetry and elegance of branch and trunk forms of an avenue of trees, the occurrence of an intrinsic geometry in the growth patterns of branches from their central trunk is here understood perfectly by Woodman too. The widest branch of her tree leans to the right and two branches grow up, one straight up and one, to compensate, a little to the left. Another branch curves to the left; in that perfect

balance of growth a dancer knows when holding an arabesque. The tree in the image is supported by a whiter trunk that is dead wood and forms a slightly different vertical from the live trunk. Moving away from the horizontality of the last pair of images, we have here a street corner in a quiet American town, photographed in a deep perspective down a pavement by a windowed house wall. The perspective's vanishing point is marked by the rear wheel of a propped-up bicycle. The bicycle wheel's reflection of the "spokes" in the base work's diagram is subtle in its distance.

On the front pavement, a few feet behind the tree, the blurred figure of a man in a flat cloth cap is photographed caught in the act of raising his cap, perhaps in a greeting to Francesca. The pavement on which he stands is shot in a diagonal which slopes down. This diagonal is pierced at the front by the tree and behind both by the man's upright stance as well as by the straight vertical of the corner street building, which provides a light tone in contrast to the dark tone of the man.

The following image in fig 72 is directly related to the previous image in that the same corner of the street with the same man standing on it, is photographed. Woodman has moved her camera position to the left. This movement of the camera has the effect of the tree now occupying the immediate centre of the image. The perspective view is now shortened at one window on the receding street. Woodman has joined the man (and friend) and leans towards him at exactly the same angle as the flow of the original pages' copperplate script, which in this case is an even balance of text and equations. Her figure is divided from his figure by the tree, in a sideways, upright equation. The man's figure is now in focus.

Most of the angles in the previous image's diagram have been simulated or suggested through the pair of images.

Both these images reveal Woodman's knowledge of certain images from Hans Bellmer's second series of *La Poupée* (The Doll). I discuss these connections in Chapter 8.

In this pair of images I am reminded of Woodman's splendid *Tree Project* made in 1980 at the MacDowell Colony and the sure influence on her of Giuseppe Penoni's *Alpi maritime* and his *Ripitere il Bosco*.²¹ Her project offers a post-minimalist reading of the tree which is witty, searching and poignant by turns. Woodman hangs giant scale blueprints of table legs, the manufactured counterparts of trunks, amongst trees of a real wood. In a linked series she wears silver birch bark as amulets on her arms in a successful and humorous camouflage of her figure in the silver birch wood. Penoni carves a turned table leg from a section of a large tree branch, leaving a section 'natural'.

In fig 72 we find portraits, friends and equations all contained in one image. As it is bordered in white, unlike its partner (fig 71), it is slightly bigger. It is the first image of the Book to have a substantial white border and as such marks the first image of the second half (this is the middle image of the total number of twenty

²¹ Woodman's considerable exposure to the *Arte Povera* movement, both directly through artists she met and ideas being discussed during her period in Rome, is beyond doubt. Her interest in and connection to the movement is alluded to by Elizabeth Janus in her essay 'Un séjour romain', in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 29. Eight works from Penoni's *Ripitere il Bosco*, an ongoing 'forest' project, were exhibited in Amsterdam in 1980. His *Alpi maritime* was an ongoing project in woods near Turin. Woodman's *Tree Project* was realised in woods near the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire. Both artists realised their installation projects largely through photographic record.

two). All subsequent images of the Book are bordered in white. A formulated and purposeful mathematical precision is present in Woodman's implemented change.

Following a double page spread without an attached photograph, the image in fig 73 relates strongly to Woodman's well known gallery print series *Three Kinds of Melon in Three Kinds of Light*, made in Providence in 1976-1977.²² In her address of a favourite male subject and trope of first wave surrealist photography, the female breast, Woodman simultaneously feeds the male erotic imagination and subverts the quest by presenting an effrontery so blatant it becomes bizarre. In the Book image the friend stands, with her head cropped in the shot and her breasts bared brazenly. Woodman's shot is of a full top torso so that the breasts are accented. Behind her on the wall is a large cube, drawn in charcoal. Over the cube's top left corner hang a pair of false breasts. They are not in line with their displayed real counterpart, but slightly above, in line with the posed woman's shoulders. Some humour is present here: the real outranks the simulacrum. Or is an equation possible between two different kinds? No direct interplay is detectable in this instance between the image and the diagram drawn on its base page.

The following double page spread (fig 74) contains two images. This is the third occurrence of a double image spread since the beginning of the Book when there were two consecutive double spreads. Nine single images separate the second and third occurrences and seven single images follow. These are the second and third

²² Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 53.

images of a quartet which uses female nudity to address all three themes of the Book light-heartedly: friends, portraits and equations.

Both images on the double spread have narrow white borders, like fig 73. Both continue an investigative and playful approach to female nudity which here specifically challenges the capacity of the body to become a formula or a symbol for an equation. The intrinsic playfulness of these images might induce the term *adolescent* if they lacked the subtlety they contain. No direct inflection of the original pages' written equations and formula analysis is made here by Woodman.

The image on the left shows a friend standing centrally in what looks like Woodman's studio. She is naked but unaffectedly so. Continuing the 'breast' theme of the previous image, here she holds an ill-fitting brassiere clumsily over her breasts, seeming to be rather startled by their existence. Perhaps intentionally all women could be reminded of their own adolescence by the awkward self-involved intent of the young woman. Behind her, on the floor, we can see the mirror/s which will be a focused trope of the next two images.

A base text line of equations extends, unusually, over the centre page to the opposite page. The original student has reined in the formulae with a linear part-box, as before, which serves to link the pair of images. Woodman responds to the box by including her version of it made by the part-rectangle of a mirror.

The image on the right uses the dark framed mirrors arranged one over the other on the floor to symbolise the dividing equation lines preponderant in this page

spread. A friend of Woodman's is seated cross-legged on the floor looking directly at her own reflection in the mirror. Her figure constructs the two elements of the equation with a body and self that is divided by the *water specified* of the mirror.²³ The combination of her real and reflected forms constructs what is the central element of this composition. Can the so different front and back views really equal each other? And can the reflection ever be equal to the imagined, non-reflected self? Woodman is caught in the shot standing behind, observing, as a neutral presence. This image has a diagonal rhythm after the mainly horizontal structure of the last two. A third figure is just detectable through an arm and hand in the bottom left of the composition.

The last of this mini-series of four, the image in fig 75, attempts to construct a corporeal *is equal to* or simultaneous equation, or perhaps, in simpler mathematical terms, the sum of two parts in an addition. Woodman leans back onto her taller friend, whose body, in darker tone, hers mostly obscures. The two become one form with two clear heads. The mirror behind them, propped on the floor, holds a reflection of only one limb, but gives some light and distance to the shot. Some objects hung on the studio wall behind them create a visual rendering of another line of equations. This image is dominated by the verticals of the two figures becoming one, their vertical repeated in the upright of a door's architraving and a garment hung in a thin vertical above and in line with the right edge of the mirror. The base page has, especially in its lower right, increasingly complex lines of equations.

²³ Woodman's own description of a mirror in *some disordered interior Geometries*, as written by her under Images Six and Seven of that Book, is: ... *This mirror is a sort of rectangle although they say mirrors are just water specified.*

The next image, fig 76, is the first of a series of six striking portraits which, though prioritising that genre, again encapsulate all three themes of Woodman's project title. These are portraits of three friends, two of whom are identifiable. The first three portraits are of Sabina Mirri, an Italian artist.²⁴ The fifth portrait is of another Italian woman, Mirella Bordoni.²⁵ The sequence of this series, which includes examples of the double portrait, the profile portrait and Woodman's special genre, the headless portrait, ends with a disturbance of the classic 'portrait bust' into a narrative fantasy when a hand appears round a door frame.

In the first image of the mini-series, Sabina Mirri is seated in elegant, relaxed serenity, minus her head, neck, shoulders and feet. Her legs are crossed and twisted into what Woodman teases our imagination to believe is a perfect equation. Her hands and wrists are differing fractions put into a new equation; one hand is cradled up in a blur which contains the other's down-facing cradle; in contrapposto the two hands are therefore simultaneously equal and opposite to each other. Woodman has created another equation by allowing only one side of Sabina's black waistcoat to be visible opposite a white scarf which unites, by crossing over its border, the top bloused part of the figure to the lower form. The deep tones of the base image area almost eradicate the support structure of the chair on the right side so that its seat forms a white floating triangle which is photographed as an exact continuation of the floor skirting line. For such an equation to emerge from one figure is a surprising and clever accomplishment. A

²⁴ I owe this precise identification to Harriet Riches who recorded George Woodman's identification of Mirri in Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 102.

²⁵ She is identified by the editors of Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue in a caption under a gallery print version of this image: Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 131.

strong contrast is present in this image between the hard edges of the section of room and the soft and elegantly dressed form of the young woman. This is accentuated in the folds of her clothes (a chic drapery), the curves of her intertwined legs and the delicacy of her fingers which are caught in stasis during their movement, in juxtaposition to the gracefully still figure. Her fingers here express the essence of personality which would usually be found in the face. And the movement of the fingers denies the control of the static framing of the image and disrupts its control over and its fixing in time. The movement of the hands is the point of emotional arrest in the portrait.

The classic profile portrait in fig 77 shares some attributes of its pose with the late nineteenth century genre of criminal or psychiatric records. But this is Woodman's friend Sabina Mirri again. And behind her a row of dried vegetables is hung. It traverses the serious with the absurd in a clever visual homage to the equations' rhythms and patterns, abundant in the surrounding pages' field, in a response that is a joyful transgression of the equations' conceptual framework. Woodman responds to the period hair style of her friend by making the image in this genre. This image is an embodiment of the three themes of the book; holding them, *portrait, friend, equations* in a balance of emphases which is in itself another equation.

In fig 78 Woodman puts on the self-timer and runs to join her friend. This does not preclude the formation of a highly controlled and well-composed image. Woodman's presence in the image is at once mysterious, as conjured from the combined effect of the half-face and deep-toned lower form merging with the

surrounding space, and relaxed; she holds the back of her Sabina Mirri's chair in an affectionate gesture. In spite of Sabina's position, seated straight-backed, on the right side of the image, Woodman has used two devices to make her appear central. One is the position of the central dried vegetable (the row of five slopes down in this image due to a fresh camera angle). The form of this points exactly to the centre of Sabina's head. This increases the impact of the vertical down through it, as well as replicating dark toned areas of her figure. The second device is the development of a downward line from this central vegetable to Sabina's hands, which are pressed together between her evenly placed knees. In this position her hands form the apex of a triangle of which her light-toned arms are the sides. Woodman's own figure joins the two figures, making an equation symbolically with her stretched arm across to the chair.

Two double page spreads with no photographic intervention by Woodman follow.

The next added image (fig 79) introduces a new female friend, shot in traditional portrait 'bust' genre. The woman is dressed in a contemporary summer V-necked T-shirt (this *normal* attire unusual for Woodman and her associates) and a purposefully incongruous vintage (1940s) hat. She is shot in the direct centre of the image, symmetrical and even in her gaze at the viewer. The visible corner of her surroundings, a room, offers no possibility of drama. She is lit from a window just visible to the left. Her outstretched hand which she holds to her neck gives one diversion from an apparently ordinary portrait. The other is the hat. Absurd in combination with the T-shirt, set at a rakish angle, its face-covering transparent veil reveals the woman's strong features and its ambience, in spite of its absurdity,

is that of dignity. On the right of the woman, extending from behind her chair, a rococo shadow curves. This photograph is roughly cut, in an imperfect rectangle. It seems to have been hastily adhered to its page, which consists mainly of regular lines of copperplate script. On its opposite page are the equation lines:

$$A^2p^2 + B^2q^2 + C^2r^2 = D^2h^2$$

A 7 B 7 C

A C 8 C C

The image in fig 80 was probably made in Rome, as stated in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue, and is a portrait of Mirella Bordini.²⁶ It contains and emits the stunning modernist beauty that Woodman's images seldom avoid and yet often transgress and subvert. Here, unusually for Woodman, only the blurring of the woman's face attempts that disturbance and somehow the beauty of the composition and its subject are thereby intensified. As its date is probably 1978, Duane Michals, whose influence on the artist was strong, would have already made, five years previously, his now famous triple photographic portrait of Andy Warhol (fig 81), which in turn answers Francis Bacon's triptych portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne, made seven years before. The subtlety of the blurring in Woodman's portrait leads neither to a distortion nor to an obliteration of Bordini's fine features, but enlivens her. The gentle blurring of her face has the effect of a movement that helps the viewer to imagine her existence outside the frame.

²⁶ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 131.

The image is placed opposite a page divided into even and balanced full script block followed by a half-page of the nervous staccatos of massed equations. The print has been cut and placed more carefully here than formerly. Bordonni is elegantly seated, in a poised and yet naturally relaxed pose. Her hands, shot white against the area of darkest tone (her jacket), are a hub of expressive energy. Woodman, like Rembrandt, understands their significance in portraiture. One cradles the other, in an echo of the first portrait of Sabina Mirri (fig 76), but here in two upward cradles of which three fingers of the top hand are shot in an upward curve here at a *contrapposto* angle to the tilted head. The loops of folds in her skirt echo and enlarge the delicate curves of the fingers. Only a small black triangle behind her right shoulder betrays the real chair supporting her. A small section of floor reads as a black stretched triangle, which is countered by the small upward triangle of cloth on the right side. Woodman's image, unusually, is placed here over some semi-blank printed lines next to a hand-written section on the original page.

The last image of the Book (in fig 82) and of this short sequence of *portraits*, depicts the same vintage-hatted friend as in fig 79. She is photographed seated in the same chair in a similar position in the same room as in that image, but from a little further away, so that she appears smaller. She has been moved back and to the right of the room, so that enough of the door can be revealed behind her to enable the secretive and curious figure of Woodman to (just) appear in the shadowy oblong of the 'ajar' door's gap. The continuity of setting, pose and costume through the image pair leans towards the recurrence of an implied narrative, in a reflection of such sequences in the *Angels* section of the *Angels*,

Calendars Book. But in spite of the occasional narrative flash in this Book, theme rather than narrative dominates *Portraits Friends Equations*.

The friend's gaze this time is to the right of the camera. Both her hands are out of the frame so that a better emphasis can be given to Woodman's hand, almost a claw on the door edge. The hand either heralds her slightly creepy entrance or delays her exit in this ripely Gothic image. The rococo shaped shadow which does not belong to any visible object (seen before in fig 79) is here exaggerated.

Cut with uneven white borders, the photograph is laid over a section of original script that is mostly elegant word-text. Above the image are three lines of equations and the page opposite consists of roughly half equation and half text.

Three double-spread pages of complex equations and analytical hand-written text follow this last Woodman image. There is no direct intervention by her on these original pages; rather they create an interlude of silence after the images' music.

**‘ALMOST A SQUARE’: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC BOOKS OF
FRANCESCA WOODMAN AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO
SURREALISM**

Alison G Dunhill

VOLUME II: CHAPTERS 4-9, CONCLUSION and BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER FOUR

Dialogues with Diagrams: Francesca Woodman's Book, *some disordered interior Geometries*¹

Woodman's Book *some disordered interior Geometries* was published in Philadelphia in 1981 and offered for sale at nine dollars by Synapse Press.²

This published edition of *some disordered interior Geometries* measures six inches and a quarter in width, with a height measurement of exactly nine inches.³ Its soft card front cover (fig 85) is a pale purple in facsimile, with the title of the original found object *Esercizi Graduati di Geometria* (Graduated Exercises in Geometry) in large Art Nouveau-Baroque decorative print.⁴ *Some disordered interior Geometries* is described by Giuseppe Casetti, one dedicatee of Woodman's Book and the joint owner of the Roman *Libreria Maldoror* in which the turn-of-the-century school books were found by Francesca, as:

*... fifteen photos that Francesca had applied onto two pamphlets, joined by her ... entitled Exercises of Geometry, the first Triangles and Equilaterals and the second Surface Areas and Volumes of Solids.*⁵

¹ A version of this chapter has been published in *re•bus*, 2, Autumn/Winter 2008.

² I owe the knowledge of this fact to the review of *some disordered interior Geometries* by Martha Gever in her essay 'Artists' Books: Alternative Space or Precious Object?', *AfterImage*, 9: 10, May 1982, 6-8.

³ Francesca Woodman, *some disordered interior Geometries*, produced with the help of Daniel Tucker, Philadelphia, Synapse Press, 1981. OCLC No.11308833.

⁴ My analysis is based on the scrutiny of one copy of this alternative press edition in the Special Collection of the New York Public Library.

⁵ Giuseppe Casetti, 'La Nuvola Mediocre' (The Intermediate Cloud), in Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 17. I am indebted throughout this document to Casetti's reading of *some disordered interior Geometries*. Casetti's nickname for

Throughout the Book, Woodman confronts issues of memory and identity through the tight narrative framework of her studio interior, herself and personal and family objects. On an aesthetic level the superimposed images work simultaneously and audaciously to construct a series of responses to the geometric forms illustrated and described in the source work by re-creating or referencing them through the imaging of her body, as well as by using the spaces between furniture and wall and floor divisions in the selected interiors.

Her response is to the givens of printed diagram, printed text and printed formulae. In her interventions she adds a specially made or chosen photographic image, often annotating it in her own handwriting or making a written aside to the page's instructions, as well as sometimes re-drawing a diagrammatic form for emphasis or delight.

Within the Book format of *some disordered interior Geometries*, Woodman deals with an inter-play of a text in two languages. This is manifest in the original book in Italian, in both printed text form as in the printed instructions to the original student; in the printed labelling of geometric diagrams and in the printing of tables of numerical formulae. Woodman's own authorial annotations are in English and vary between a mock early twentieth century joined copperplate, in her dedication inside the cover and in her first annotated page, under her second image, for example and those in her natural late twentieth century hand script. Interventions

Francesca was *La Nuvola* probably in reference to Raoul Ubac's photograph from 1939, entitled *La Nebuleuse*, in English rendered *Woman/Cloud*, which is reproduced in Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 71.

by the original Italian geometry student are rare: a hand-written name on the cover of two pamphlets and a light pencil marking with a diagonal cross on selected diagrams. Woodman's annotations act as a bridge between the demonstration of formulae of geometry in the early twentieth century text and her late twentieth century image intervention, surely only possible in quite this way (a female photographer photographing her own body) after the European sexual revolutions.

The annotations are arcs of absent poetry disguised as descriptions of geometry exercises. The poetry can be deliberately absent in the words themselves but present somewhere in that space between the artist's annotations, her images and the printed instructions and formulae for that long-ago student, as in, for example, *L'area d'un parallelogrammo é uguale al prodotto della base per l'altezza* (the area of a parallelogram equals the sum of the base times the height). This is the printed text from page six of the original pamphlet, above both Woodman's image and her written annotation *These things arrived from my grandmother's they ...* On the opposite page (seven) of the original pamphlet, the printed text reads *Il quadrato considerate qual rombo ha per superficie il semiprodotto d'una diagonal per se stessa* (the surface area of a square when considered as a rhombus is half the sum of the diagonal multiplied by itself), above Woodman's image and her written annotation *... make me think about where I fit in the odd geometry of time.*

At this point it is relevant to provide a definition of geometry as:

*The science which investigates the properties and relations of magnitudes in space, as lines, surfaces, and solids. (At first regarded as a practical art, and mainly associated with Architecture.)*⁶

Woodman's stuck-on images concisely stretch the old geometric meanings into an impossible possibility of human interpretation. Her walls and cloths and mirrors and primarily her body make an astonishing and ambitious simulation of geometric forms throughout the Book. This simulation works too as a disruption. Townsend points out that the process within which she works, photography, is another seat of geometry:

*If photographic reproduction depends on the temporally regulated action of lights on salts of silver and other metals, photographic vision is articulated through a geometry of lenses, an ordering and exactness of numbers. Both proceed from discourses that imagine the world as both fully understandable and regulable. Undermining this is Woodman's theme in ... Some Disordered Interior Geometries.*⁷

The emotional resonance of the images gains maximum potency for having been squeezed out of one sphere of the formal, the tight grid of the graded exercises in geometry's discipline, into the visual formal. Woodman's quest both intervenes in the staged exercises of the base work and operates alongside it in a separate process of enquiry. The courage and complexity of Woodman's self-imposed challenge is clear if we think about the size of the cultural and academic space between the disciplines of geometry and visual art. Woodman meets the challenge with energy. And throughout, the project's seriousness is interlaced with a surrealist play. The success, albeit an awkward success, of the *some disordered*

⁶ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd revised edition, 1973, reprinted 1990, 845.

⁷ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 51.

interior Geometries project is in its coalescence of diverging dimensions and disciplines and in their several intricate reverberations.

George Woodman, Francesca's father, has testified to the extent of his daughter's planning of an image in both a conceptual and a technical sense. Woodman's understanding of logic and mathematics was comprehensive. I would speculate that without that knowledge the subtlety and precision in photographing her own body, seen as form, and its interaction with the surrounding space could not have been mastered to the sophisticated degree she achieves specifically in *some disordered interior Geometries*.⁸ As expressed here by Townsend, Woodman's project has been continuously involved in seeing *that photography is the materialisation of discourses of precision in which the body ... must announce itself as messy, awkward and disruptive*.⁹ But where Townsend views her purpose in this Book as primarily one of disruption to the framework of geometry, both in the Book and the medium of photography, the argument will be developed in this chapter that her project clothes the element of disruption in a parallel mathematics to that of the original, in her fine sequences, overlaps of theme and repetitions.

Body seen as form: a fine word-play here exists in the Italian language since *corpo* simultaneously means form and body. The word has an immense flexibility in Italian (a language in which Woodman was fluent) running through the sciences and law and can mean earthly *corpo materiale* or beyond matter *corpo celestiale* through to *corpus delicti* (famously used in graphic experiments by the

⁸ Russell Joslin, 'Francesca Woodman', *Fotophile*, 27, Spring 1998, 42, quoting George Woodman: *I think sometimes there has been an insufficient appreciation of the formal focus of Francesca's work. ... she would have certain themes that would be developed throughout a series of works, which are quite elaborate on a formal level.*

⁹ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 52.

Paris surrealists in the 1920s) meaning material evidence or delectable body.

There is no doubt that Woodman responds in depth to these variations in meaning and sometimes, as for example in figs 6 and 8, she engages directly with the template's language of geometry as exemplified in such phrases as *L'estensione d'un corpo e la porzione di spazio occupata da questo corpo* (The extension of a body/form is that portion of space occupied by the body) and *Nell'estensione dei corpi considerate tre dimensioni: lunghezza, larghezza e altezza* (In the extension of bodies/forms there are three dimensions: length, width and height).

The Book confronts and indeed relishes that diachronic and trans-lingual context addressed in all but one of Woodman's Books (arguably all five which use the found object can be placed at immediately before, during and after her period in Rome in 1977-1978) and in the case of *some disordered interior Geometries*, focuses in depth on an enquiry into an inter-textuality of geometric and human form.¹⁰

Clearly her extensive technical knowledge, especially of the chemical development process of her medium, informs both the results and challenges of her practice.¹¹ Woodman's mathematical understanding of form and its mirrored reflection in space through geometry sustains a developed awareness of how these forms and part-forms can be translated into the visual. Her aim in *some disordered*

¹⁰ The exception to this is *Portrait of a Reputation* (undated; Townsend dates it 1976-77: Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 51). This information is from the *Woodman Images* CD, 2006, by Rossella Caruso (translated by Debra Werblud): *Woodman probably conceived of the idea of a diachronic correspondence between two different linguistic codes while in Rome....*

¹¹ George Woodman relates how the master printer of Kertesz's work, Igor Bahkt, whom Betty Woodman and he employed to print from Francesca's negatives for the Fondation Cartier exhibition (Paris, 1998) was baffled for hours by how she achieved the archive prints he used as reference: *The amount of dodging and burning and holding back and manipulation of the image is very considerable*. Joslin 'Francesca Woodman', 1998, 42.

interior Geometries is to construct varying geometric forms from her self-photographed body, both clothed and nude and in its relationship with interior architectures. Martha Gever observes, in writing a contemporaneous review of *some disordered interior Geometries*:

*The section headings do not describe only problems in calculating areas and volumes of geometric figures; they also can be read as posing problems of picturing the enigmatic spaces of introspective perception and unconscious reality.*¹²

She alludes, of course, to Woodman's Book title and its primary assumption that the body's form can represent the mind's state. I think, however, that any psychological and diaristic elements arising in the photographic images through content and sequence are ongoing concerns and secondary to the revelation of the formal through these elements in the Book. Woodman confronts an exposure of vulnerability throughout her work and possibly even desires a creation in her images of the undifferentiated state of self theorised by Lacan in his (pre) Mirror phase concept.¹³ Although she does not abandon these enquiries in this Book, I would suggest that her overriding enquiry is to construct a parallel formulation of the axioms of geometry within it through her portrait and body, quotidian objects and architectural interiors.

George Woodman believes many critics of Francesca's work have underplayed or misunderstood the rigour and exactitude of the investigations she makes into the

¹² Gever, 'Artists' Books', 1982, 7.

¹³ For an in depth analysis of both Woodman's confrontation of her vulnerability and her work in relation to Lacan's concept, please see Margaret Sundell's excellent essay 'Vanishing Points' in de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible*, 1996, 435-439. For examples of the visualisation of the pre-mirror phase undifferentiated state, see Woodman's *Self Deceit* series in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 156-157.

formal aesthetic field.¹⁴ I hope to be able to redress this balance and would argue that a formal aesthetic is the ground for every image she makes.

But how disordered are her interior geometries? Could it not be argued that some of the disorder present is just the natural consequence of the unnatural conjunction she makes between the testing of Euclid's axioms and an analysis of human form that is as cryptic and ingenious a quest as it is intimate and self-searching?

A poet acquaintance of the family, Peter Davison, who received a copy of *some disordered interior Geometries* in 1981, described it as *a very peculiar little book indeed*, also reacting to the contents thus:

*There was a strangely ironic distance between the soft intimacy of the bodies in the photographs and the angularity of the geometric rules that covered the pages ...*¹⁵

In *some disordered interior Geometries* Woodman uses tropes; a chair, a mirror, gloves, a stool, a shell, a pane of glass and a selection of vintage clothes in sections of a repeated interior (her studio) in a constant process of re-selection and re-ordering. Their repetition works to disturb, not to reassure. She changes depth of field, angle, reflection, light source and magnification to 'make strange' our perception.¹⁶ Specifically in this Book, mirrored and transparent glass is used to construct new and

¹⁴ Joslin, 'Francesca Woodman', 1998, 42.

¹⁵ Davison, 'Girl, Seeming to Disappear', 2000, 108-111.

¹⁶ A different *take* on Ellen Dissanayake's concept of 'making special'. Ellen Dissanayake, 'Sociobiology and the Arts: Problems and Prospects', in Jan Baptist Bedeaux and Brett Cooke, *Sociobiology and the Arts*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1999.

surprising geometric forms from part/s of her own body, in particular in the first and the last image of the Book.

It is highly probable that Woodman would have been familiar with Robert Smithson's *Nine Mirror Displacements*, particularly feasible since his account of making the works in the Yucatan was published in the Autumn of 1969 in *Artforum* (a copy of which was probably available in her art school's library) and *The Writings of Robert Smithson* had been published just one year before Woodman made the currently discussed Book.¹⁷ Smithson's declarative statement that *Light is separable from color and form* of his *Map of Glass* built in New Jersey in 1969 has many resonances in Woodman's work. Woodman's contention, wrapped inside what is at first reading a 'musing' in her longest annotation, to the image pair on pages 6 and 7 of the Italian pamphlet (fig 91) in which she dresses in her grandmother's 'things' is apposite, *This mirror is a sort of rectangle although they say mirrors are just water specified*¹⁸. In this double image sequence Woodman answers the geometry book's axiom *l'area d'un parallelogrammo e uguale a prodotto della base per l'altezza* by placing a mirror flat on a floor photographed at a steep angle, in the manner that Smithson placed his mirrors flat on the landscape in his *Mirror Displacements* (fig 83).¹⁹ Woodman's mirrors, part-covered with cloths and garments, reflect the interior environment as Smithson's reflected the exterior. Woodman's mirrors also form parallelograms partitioned by the cloths into rhomboid and triangle forms. Like

¹⁷ Robert Smithson, 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan', *Artforum*, 8: 1, September 1969, 28-33, reprinted in Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*, New York, New York University Press, 1979. Revised and expanded edition Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, 119-133. Woodman attended Rhode Island School of Art and Design between 1975 and 1978.

¹⁸ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 238-239.

¹⁹ Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 1996, 121-125.

Smithson's mirrors, Woodman's are placed where water always is in the natural environment because of gravity, low and horizontal; *water specified*.

Another influence on her explorations of glass and mirrors is Marcel Duchamp, whose passion for the tricks glass could play in rendering three dimensions two, probably infected Woodman. We encounter her investigation into the flattening capacities of glass specifically in her *Charlie the Model* series of eleven images, made in Providence, between 1976 and 1977.²⁰ In this series glass serves as a metaphor for the flattening capacities from three dimensional form into two dimensions in both a drawing and the photographic image. As Krauss observed in her analysis of the series *Everything that one photographs is in fact "flattened to fit" paper, and thus under, within, permeating, every paper support, there is a body*. Krauss argues too, that in using her body as a site to inscribe, Woodman allows the subjectivisation of objective enquiry and that she uses this approach to counter the emphasis on objectivity in the 'problem sets' directive she first encountered at Rhode Island School of Art and Design, which Krauss suggests is Woodman's *modus operandi*.²¹ Townsend develops this idea and cites it as an indicator of Woodman's ongoing defiance of the temporal and spatial confinements of the photographic medium.²² I would add that she defies the confinement of the two dimensional sphere in photography altogether.

²⁰ See in particular #11 of the series. #s 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 of the series are reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 64-68.

²¹ Krauss, 'Problem Sets', 1986, 47. The essay was published in the catalogue of the first major exhibition of Woodman's work.

²² Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 53, and his chapter 'A Post-Minimal Photography', 45-54.

Duchamp's imaginative identification of glass as an agent of both time and philosophy, embodied in his concept of *delay in glass* was a testimony to the forcefulness with which photography had entered the field by the beginning of the twentieth century's second decade. As postulated by Dawn Ades, Duchamp arguably conceived his *Large Glass* project as a *giant photographic plate*.²³ Woodman's project in *some disordered interior Geometries* sustains an intriguing empathy with Duchamp's *Ready made malheureux* of 1919 (fig 84) which, in Arturo Schwarz's description *combined allusions to geometry, psycho-physical states, and natural physical forces*. In this work Duchamp too acquired a geometry book which he sent to his sister Suzanne, asking of her that she create the *readymade* according to his instructions.²⁴ Clearly he wanted to remove his participation though not entirely his control when he asked her *to hang a geometry book from the balcony of her apartment so that the wind would tear through its pages*.²⁵ The photograph Suzanne returned as documentation showed the book's pages rain-washed into blankness and wind-crumpled. In a much later print, made in 1940 and included in his *Box in a Valise*, Duchamp added text and diagrams to give the book back an identity absent in the image mediated by his sister.²⁶

Some disordered interior Geometries is perhaps the most cryptic and stratified of Woodman's six photographic Books. Its rich concourse however holds many satisfactions for an analytical appraisal. The descriptive paragraph on the Book

²³ Dawn Ades, 'Camera Creation', in Jennifer Mundy, ed., *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia* (exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, London, 2008), London, Tate Publishing, 2008, 92. Ades is quoting Jean Clair.

²⁴ Arturo Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade and of its Editions', in Mundy, ed., *Duchamp Man Ray Picabia*, 2008, 128-129.

²⁵ Schwarz, 'The Philosophy of the Readymade', 2008, 129.

²⁶ The geometry absent in the geometry book is present however in the surrounding structure of the balcony.

written to accompany the double page reproduction of it in Chris Townsend's monograph on Woodman is written with concision and a lyricism that merits a full quotation:

*Some Disordered Interior Geometries is the most complex book, a three-way game that plays the text and illustrations for an introduction to Euclid against Woodman's own text and diagrams, as well as the geometry of her formal compositions. This tripartite balancing act has the magical dexterity of a fugue.*²⁷

Printed geometric forms such as cylinders, rhomboids and cones surround the title on the front cover (fig 85) and in case they are not sufficiently decorative, cherubim, garlands, a scholar at a desk, flying birds and a Greek urn containing a set square form more decoration, in a panel down the page's left-hand margin. Unopened, it struck me that this Book is very similar in size, colour, format and decorative genre to the London-based *International Surrealist Exhibition* catalogue. The 1936 catalogue, printed by The Women's Printing Society, measures six inches by nine and a quarter inches and has a pale orange-pink soft card cover on which a composite nude male figure by Max Ernst, an engraving, has been reproduced. It is possible that Woodman saw this catalogue at the New York MoMA show, curated by William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* in 1968.

Some disordered interior Geometries also has printed on its front cover two explanatory subtitles *Metodo Corso Secondo Geometria* (Second Course in Geometry Method) and *Corso Primo* (First Course) and records its place of publication as Rome. It is above the second of these that Woodman has written, in

²⁷ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 239.

her natural, slightly untidy hand, her second generation title, in a distinctive combination of lower and upper case *some disordered interior Geometries*. And under *Corso Primo* she has stuck on a white paper rectangle with torn edges, here repeating her written title, this time in her best upper-case 1900s-in-1970s copperplate. On the rectangle she has written *by Francesca* in the same script. The original student's name *Mario Malatesta (?)* is written on the top left.²⁸ Perhaps her decision to capitalise only the original word shows a reticence about her own project or this may be self conscious, even contrived. A defiance of letter case rules was fashionable in the 1970s, as, for example, in the poems of e e cummings. Several typographical versions occur in the critical field when transcribing her title's case discrepancies. I imagine their inconsistency is favoured by Woodman in order to achieve a maximum awkwardness, a highly ordered *disorder*. George Woodman describes the influence of Gertrude Stein's near non-syntactical writing experiments of the early twentieth century on Woodman:

*By the time she was in her eighteenth year, she acknowledged Gertrude Stein as the model for (journal) entries that, taken out of context, might seem bizarre in diction, logic and orthography. These affectations of style she referred to as her Steinwriting.*²⁹

The quality of reproduction achieved by Synapse Press in their photo-lithographic printing of *some disordered interior Geometries* was not high.³⁰ Precious and rare

²⁸ This is in very faint reproduction and therefore difficult to decipher.

²⁹ George Woodman ed., 'Seething with ideas' in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 240. I am grateful to George Woodman for definitively rooting her word play and disjointed syntax in Stein and for agreeing to the reproduction of the *Journal Extracts*.

³⁰ Gever, 'Artists' Books', 1982, 6: *In its one-and-a-half year history ... the founders and directors of Synapse, have produced seven books in collaboration with a number of artists. All these books were published in small, but not miniscule editions; all are priced considerably lower than coffee-table art books but considerably higher than comic*

edition that it increasingly (and ironically) has become in the twenty five years or so since it was made notwithstanding, I was struck by its textural distance (a reverse of intimacy) and mass reproduction feel. On handling it, a light and delicate object, in the library's cradle of foam rubber cloth-covered triangles, the full experience of texture contrast between page, photograph and hand-writing were absent.

It is noted by Rossella Caruso that the early twentieth century student books Francesca acquired and (as I have previously argued) *found*, had been given to her by the owners of the Libreria Maldoror (a double find this: the owners, who became influential and stimulating friends, and the books).³¹ For Woodman this was a very different endeavour from the display of her prints on a gallery or studio wall, which allowed a simultaneous viewing. Her choice of format of a small, thin, soft-covered volume brings an intimacy and an image separation to the viewing process. Already an original piece of ephemera that had survived the century before the artist began her appropriation, Synapse's print run of perhaps three hundred copies both freezes the original object's deterioration through time and imbues it with a second period in which it has the potential to again become a piece of ephemera.³² Synapse's method of reproduction results in a considerable reduction of the definition of the original's texture, which is visible in the original scanned to compact disk. Several ironies emerge here. Did Woodman have the intention in publishing the Book of making it available to a

books; and, to a varying degree, ... the books share a feature which is primarily conceptual – a concern with visual-verbal reciprocity...

³¹ Information from *Woodman Images* CD.

³² An edition of between 200 and 500 was suggested to me by the archivist of the New York Public Library in 2006.

wider audience, in a kind of mini mass-production or commercialised form, or did she want the publication to construct its identity as a specialist artist's book?

I would speculate that both aims are relevant to her intention. According to Gever in her summary of the development of the artist's book as a genre, a split, or more accurately, a development point between these two aims for artists' practice had occurred at around this time.³³ It was in 1973 that the term *artist's book* had first been used, suggesting a heyday for the form, in a catalogue of a so-named exhibition.³⁴ Harriet Riches stipulates that *the conceptual possibilities of the photographic book format had by this point long been recognised*, citing Walker Evans's *American Photographs* from 1938 as a prototype of the photographic sequence format.³⁵ Yves Peyré, though prioritising painting over photography in his analysis of the development of the *livre d'artiste* both into and alongside the *artist's book* in the twentieth century, describes the 1970s as *rich, creative years when* (his term) *the book of dialogue appears to reach its climax*.³⁶ This recorded split was articulated in part as a response to Ed Ruscha's mid-1960s interview with John Coplans soon after the publication of his now iconic *Various Small Fires* book, in which Gever quotes Ruscha as desiring a wide distribution of this work:

Above all, the photographs I use are not "arty" in any sense of the word. I think photography is dead as a fine art ... One of the purposes of my book

³³ Gever, 'Artists' Books', 1982, 6-8.

³⁴ In the catalogue of an exhibition held at Moore College of Art in Philadelphia in 1973 was the first use of the term, according to Stefan Klima, *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature*, New York, Granary Books, 1998. Online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artists_books, accessed 15/10/2008.

³⁵ Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 109.

³⁶ Yves Peyré, 'A Glimpse of the Future', in Jean Khalfa, ed., *The Dialogue between Painting and Poetry: Livres d'Artistes 1874-1999*, Cambridge (UK), Black Apollo Press, 2001, 163.

*(Various Small Fires) has to do with making a mass-produced object. The final product has a very commercial, professional feel to it.*³⁷

It must be remembered that Ruscha had a printing/typography background which had influenced his knowledge of the distribution field. Ruscha's first book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* shares a *verbal/visual reciprocity* with Woodman's *some disordered interior Geometries*, though an important difference between them is Woodman's use of found and given text and diagram in addition to her own hand-written annotations.³⁸

Ruscha makes and controls his own text completely and it is directly aimed at printing in a way that Woodman's project is not. The difficulty in achieving a balance between the visual and the verbal, in these two cases the photograph and the text, ensures a certain tension is present in the enquiry of each.

Woodman's verbal and visual dialogue intersects the Book's primary context by following and leading, sometimes erasing, sometimes emphasising the symbols and usually obliterating the spaces for the original student's answers in her self-imposed quest for some different visual answers.³⁹ These work in tangent and in tandem to the original ones. The answers, which can be more questions; these solutions to problems set, *problems to resolve*, emerge coherently through her

³⁷ Ed Ruscha interviewed by John Coplans, quoted by Gever, 'Artists' Books', 1982, 6.

³⁸ Gever's term.

³⁹ As it is the working process of both the artist and the scientist both to create or choose the problem and to find its solution.

photographic inventions, the investigation of the chosen site that is the construction and deconstruction of her own form: her *body* and *corpus*.⁴⁰

In *some disordered interior Geometries* the printed text font is small and grey coloured, small that is, in comparison to Woodman's hand-scripted annotations which are often between four and six times as large.⁴¹ All diagrams are printed in the same grey tone as the text and quite often have a printed shaded surface to simulate solidity. Once (opposite the first annotation *almost a square*) the artist has filled a given diagram with colour, carefully applied and chosen to answer and repeat the puce and buff harmony of the two pamphlets' pages. Twice, she has underscored the template text. Firstly she underscores the capitalised printed title *Definizione Preliminari* (Preliminary Definitions) on the page of her second photographic image (fig 88), in a pink crayon blocking which both separates and combines the Italian phrase and her English translation of it. The translation is written in a small italicised black script underneath. The second instance is a kind of highlight of lemon yellow crayon underscoring of the original sub-title *Problemi da risolvere* (Problems to solve) and of its specification *superficie dei triangoli e dei quadrilateri* (surface areas of triangles and quadrilaterals), under which is her translation, written in her own contemporary script. The size of the printed diagrams varies but these visual embodiments of the theories are giants to the pygmies of verbal text font. Woodman's written words are middlemen in size between printed font and printed diagram.

⁴⁰ Krauss, 'Problem Sets', 1986, 41-51. In this critical text Krauss argues that this student initiated working method is Woodman's favoured approach into her practice. I agree but hesitate over Krauss's implication of Woodman's immaturity in adopting it.

⁴¹ The local page colour is a slight variation, being more grey than puce, to that recorded in the first generation copy of the original that I have viewed on the *Woodman Images* CD. The photo/litho method of printing used by Synapse Press in 1981 has slightly deadened the original colour, as far as I can tell.

In the pre-publication *some disordered interior Geometries* original, Woodman has underscored the title word on the front cover, *Geometria*, several times with a deep purple pencil (fig 85). The Book has a small hand-written circled *c* (copyright mark) next to her name, in her own writing, on the base of the back inside cover (fig 99), whereas the Synapse edition has expanded copyright details together with a small paragraph of Woodman's acknowledgements on the original pamphlet's page 3.⁴² This page is now the first inside page *recto* or frontispiece of the new work (fig 86). It is pale buff ochre in colour as are all those following, with some variations of fading, inside the Book. Woodman has twinned her dedication, in her best copperplate writing, with the dedication of the original pamphlet, which is *for Paolo Missigoi, Cristiano Casetti and Sabina Mirri of the Maldoror Bookshop, Rome.*⁴³ This twinning is achieved by placing her dedication in exactly the same position on the page opposite to that of the original's inscription *Al venerato F Dr. Michele, omaggio di rispettoso affetto dell'Autore.*

Over the page, the original pamphlet's page 4 (verso) has as its title *Tabella delle abbreviazioni usate nel presente quaderno* (Table of abbreviations used in this exercise book). Woodman has covered most of this table by sticking her square photograph over it. This is her first applied photographic image (fig 87). She leaves visible above her image eight abbreviations, one example of which is *min. per minore* (min. for minor). We may take special note of the small decorative

⁴² Francesca Woodman, *some disordered interior Geometries*, 1981 (Synapse Press edition), 3. Details are given of two grants she was awarded, one from the 'Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Council on the Arts' and one from 'The National Endowment for the Arts', 'And with the help of Daniel Tucker' (Editor at Synapse); 'The drawing in the last chapter is by Jim Johnson'. She has written her name after the copyright sign. All of this acknowledgement section is hand-written in 1970s script by Woodman.

⁴³ *Cristiano* was Woodman's nickname for Giuseppe Casetti.

pause marks of the original pages, one at the base of her image and one under the opposite page's title *Definizione Preliminari*, left showing by Woodman. She conjures a formal twinning between them and the neck decoration she wears in the image. Her own abbreviations are surely the hands and neck, an accentuation used historically in portraiture, as in the fine example in Rembrandt's painting *Portrait of Margaretha de Geer* from 1661.

Woodman's photographic image is a direct foreground self-portrait shot, from the waist up. Though aping the self-portrait genre, she has exactly chosen the area to accentuate for the focus of an enquiry into the formal, conceptual and psychological. Wearing a black dress, she is sitting surrounded by a black background from which her form both emerges and by which it is submerged. A natural emphasis is the area of her dress's shiny neck pattern in its high tonal contrast to the dominant black. It is an embroidered and beaded motif of paisley design in white and forms the lower apex of one gentle triangle at its downward point. Superimposed, probably during the development process, is a thin glowing tube (this effect possibly obtained by 'jello') which intersects formally with the neck pattern in its double convex/concave loop, its concave part echoing the same triangle's apex. The neck area links in its high tone, to the high-lit fingers of the glass-flattened hands, the next area of focus.

White and dramatic, they are placed on her lap in perfect symmetry, each hand identically opposite the other, her fingers meeting to form the apex of another, natural, triangle. But Woodman has cleverly shot the finger-joining area behind a square pane of glass which highlights and magnifies three fingers of the hand on

the viewer's left and two of that on the right. A small light square, the right-angles of which are disrupted by her fingers is formed from these triangle sections of the hands and a new non-symmetric square is created by the geometric intersections.

Facing this image, on the right-hand page, the original text has a page heading *Definizioni Preliminari*, subtitled *Poliedri* (polyhedrons). Examples of regular polyhedrons are printed from drawn diagrams in a line at the bottom of the page. Woodman's correspondence with this geometry is coaxed from her own body with technical mastery and an eloquent imagination. Her figure sits with dignity amongst the busy spread of symbols and diagrams on and around this 'page stage'.⁴⁴

Whereas the first image's base-text page was sub-headed *Tabella delle abbreviazioni* (Table of abbreviations), Woodman continues her investigation of these same *Definizione Preliminari* on the next double page spread (fig 88). She sticks on her photograph opposite a page of printed diagrams which are examples of prisms and pyramids. She underlines this Italian section title with a pink crayon close in colour to the base book's covers. She then translates the printed title into English in an untidy and large version of her own 1970s 'antique' script. She has part-scored through this phrase in black ink, placing it in between the visible and the invisible in its partial ineligibility. At this stage we clearly realise her hesitations, heading to that interior disorder. This is in direct contrast to her intellectual command over the display of interior states in this Book, which is why its title *some disordered interior Geometries* is at once intentionally ironic and daringly self-exposing.

⁴⁴ Martha Gever's phrase: Gever, 'Artists' Books', 1982, 7.

She had first written her own descriptive title *I: a sort of round* at the page's top, under both the printed given's title and her annotative handwritten title, but then changed her mind and part-erased it in a high-toned white erasing fluid, in another gesture of deliberate confusion.

In this image Woodman covers her face with her hand so that her nose and eyes are invisible. In her mouth is a round object, a bubble made either from gum or jello.⁴⁵ The opposite page, with its heading *Prisma e Piramide* (Prisms and Pyramids), lists the occurrent variations of these forms, which are most pertinently triangular, quadrangular and pentagonal, and provides explanatory diagrams with shaded areas to create a three dimensionality. This section is followed by a new section with the heading *I tre corpi tondi* (the three round forms), followed by a description of the three principle examples of round forms: cylinders, cones and spheres. Her image visually demonstrates a cylinder form in her arm and a sphere in the exaggerated 'O' of her mouth: Woodman as Cyclops.⁴⁶ Above her image appears the base text's title *Definizioni Preliminari* (with Woodman's emphatic underlining). These are the definitions with which Woodman desires to connect:

1. *La Geometria e la scienza dell'estensione*
2. *L'estensione d'un corpo e la porzione di spazio occupata da questo corpo*
3. *Nell'estensione dei corpi considerate tre dimensione: lunghezza, larghezza et altezza, ditto second casi anche spessore o profondita*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Strong links exist between this image and *Self-portrait talking to Vince* (Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 2006, 140), made at Rhode Island School of Art and Design between 1975 and 1978.

⁴⁶ The Greek means *round eye* as well as one eye, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd revised edition, 1973, reprinted 1990, 480.

⁴⁷ '1. Geometry is the science of extension. 2. The extension of a body (form) is that portion of space occupied by the body. 3. In the extension of bodies there are three

Underneath her image she has written a response to the sequence *I. a sort of round*. Underneath two linear diagrams at the bottom of the page and her image she has written *sung in the form of a canon*, her script four times smaller than in that of the previous phrase. A pun on the other use of *round* in English, as *canon*, as Townsend has observed, and written perhaps too, in a response to the lyricism in the rhythms of the Italian language.⁴⁸

Below the next image (fig 89, left), the original text's sub-heading *Triangoli* appears left intact as a title for her image. This shows a crouching Woodman in a clinging V-necked dress with a white object in her mouth and her head turned side on so that the object becomes a tiny triangle. Her right hand is outstretched against a crumbling wall, forming four more triangles in between her fingers and thumb. The V-neck of her dress forms another triangle. There are a few more triangles in the shoulder folds of her dress and the inner angles of her bent arms contain two more. A large white high-lit object on the floor looks like an oval made out of plaster with two flat kid gloves (in a resonance of the last image of *Angels, Calendars*) laid on top. This object is reminiscent of one of Brancusi's sleeping heads.

Three printed triangles appear beneath the image, diagrams from the given of the original text. Woodman has drawn a circle round the left-hand triangle which demonstrates a *triangolo rettangolo* (rectangular triangle), the one, perhaps, with

dimensions: length, width and height, secondly we shall also consider thickness or depth'.

⁴⁸ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 52.

which she wishes to make the most concourse. Some of the triangles become trapezoids on the opposite page (fig 89, right) of the original geometry book.

The right-hand image of this double page spread shows Woodman's two outstretched arms, one as a horizontal and one as an *angolo ottuso* (obtuse angle) both coming from the left and across to the centre of the image. Closely linked with two given diagrams to the immediate left of the thin white image border, her arms appear to emerge from and to extend their printed forms. She holds two white, neatly folded gloves (as before, but here out of focus) which together make a trapezoid structure in an echo of the original book's underlying diagrams *trapezio ordinario*, *trapezio rettangolo* and *trapezio isosceles* (ordinary, rectangular and isosceles trapezoids).

This image is in dark tone overall in order to almost-spotlight the high-lit gloves. A tiny oval rim is visible at the bottom right. The leather finger containers fall down over and obscure Woodman's hand in another instance of the simulacrum outflanking the real.

The following double page spread (fig 90) is headed *Avvertimenti intorno ai problemi de risolvere* (possible pitfalls in problem-solving). In this superb composition, the same white, leather-topped stool as in the previous (left-hand) image in fig 89 is photographed to the left of the centre. In it Woodman's outstretched arm, coming again from the left, holds one of the same pair of white gloves; its label hangs over her outstretched thumb. This time the potent trope's (the glove's) form subtly and precisely rests over Woodman's hand so that the

representation through the real and its substitute coincide. Her live fingers make a perfect right-angle to their leather container. Just the tiniest shining chrome curve from the base rim of the stool is visible to bottom right, again. On the original page just one diagram of a small rhomboid is shown; the angle at which the glove is held perfectly re-creates it in reverse.

On the facing page there is no added image from Woodman. But she has emphasised with yellow crayon the original heading *Problemi da risolvere* and its subtitle *Superficie dei triangoli e dei quadrilateri*. She translates these, in her own contemporary script, in black ink, as *problems to resolve: the surface areas of triangles and parrallelograms* (sic). This will be the manner in which her quest is extended.

Underneath the next pair of the now much reproduced images (fig 91) Woodman muses, in her faux-copperplate hand-writing, that *they say a mirror is just water specified*. Her thoughts on this saying are developed in visual language as part of this double image sequence. She photographs herself standing on, in the right-hand image and kneeling by, in the left-hand image, the horizontal surface of a mirror. At the bottom of both pages Woodman intervenes in the base text diagrams. She changes a diagram of a horizontal diamond on the left page, marked *rhomboid*, into a rectangle, drawing this fresh right-angle with smudgy orange and pink coloured pencils. On the left page she similarly draws a new right-angle by picking out two sides of a triangle in pink and orange. On the left image base she has over-painted with white her own written words *these things arrived from my grandmother's*. The left image shows the closed trunk in which

these things had been packed, a solid parallelogram next to that of the reflective oblong mirror. The two parallelograms, in parallel positions to each other, both replicate in objects the top left original diagram of the same form, its base marked *A* and *D*, its height by *B* and *C*. At the top of the page above the left image the theorem *L'area d'un parallelogrammo é uguale al prodotto della base per l'altezza* is printed in small font.⁴⁹ She has removed them with erasing fluid from their first position, synchronised with three lines of formulae and has placed them, re-thought, under the original page's formulae box, adding the word *they*. This makes a more fluid run onto the opposite, right, page where she continues the annotation, written once more on the page's bottom border *make me think about where I fit in this odd geometry of time. This mirror is a sort of rectangle although they say mirrors are just water specified.*

The first phrase *these things arrived* intimately includes the audience almost cosily in the daily events of her life in such optimistic vein that we are surprised at the next clause's reflection; poignant, philosophical and absurdly mathematical...*make me think about where I fit in this odd geometry of time.*

Woodman's understanding of exactly which part of her will be revealed in the mirror's reflection, and also which objects and part-objects, shows an awesome mastery of composition, concept and technique. In a piercingly precise geometry she photographs these part-forms, using light to delineate and subsume the abstraction evolving from the human, the textile and the artefact. She reveals just what she needs for that image, and nothing else.

⁴⁹ 'The area of a parallelogram is equal to the sum of the base multiplied by the height'.

In the left-hand image of this pair Woodman kneels in the right foreground of her photographic rectangle. Shot with her head and her knees cut out of the image, she wears only a vintage lace camisole and holds a white handkerchief which covers the hand of her raised and bent arm on our left. With her other hand she covers her sex, remaining elegant. The corner of the grandmother's trunk is just visible and out of it spills a vintage lace garment. A black framed rectangular mirror has been laid flat and purposely positioned with one edge parallel to the floorboard line and its other edge in line with the skirting board, that plane change border which separates horizontal from vertical. The mirror's surface reflects only a very small section of the gathered and ruched garment hanging to the right of the chair. This is faint in tone and sits below the real non-reflected dark triangle of material which blanks one corner of the mirror, negating its reflection. The remaining reflective area of mirror forms into the shape of two joined triangles in a zig-zag. The photograph addresses the theme of verticals and horizontals in heights and bases, in parallel with an intimate narrative content.

In the right- hand page image the same room corner is photographed from a lower angle than its predecessor, a consequence of which is to flatten the (identical) mirror which has here become the rectangular rhomboid that it represents, with its three clues of right-angle corners revealed. At the top of the original page, printed in small font is *Il quadrato considerate qual rombo ha per superficie il semiprodotto d'una diagonale per se stessa.*⁵⁰

⁵⁰ 'The square when considered as a rhombus has the surface area of half the total of a diagonal of itself'.

Some of the objects remain in the same positions as in the image on the left: the cushion cover obscuring the mirror section, the same white garment screwed up over its left top corner, a white fur over the cushion cover and a painted white chair in the top left corner of the image. We can no longer see the trunk.

Importantly Woodman has changed her foreground position. Here she recedes, standing on the mirror with only her legs and her hands on them visible. Her reflection is created skilfully as part of her legs and (in the lower right corner) a small part of her same camisole garment and one arm part. The reflecting area of the mirror repeats that of its partner image in its zig-zag form but the right-hand apex of one, now non-reflective, triangle is extended by a lace cloth which makes a new crumpled geometric form over the mirror. It also preserves the artist's modesty in her reflection in it. A cat passes, looking back at the scene. Over the lower mirror's edge Woodman has placed a piece of heavy velvet fabric with an embroidered or painted skeleton motif on it: her *memento mori*. The trunk containing her *grandmother's things* has presumably been received after her grandmother's death.

These two images, operating as a pair, contain the most narrative content in the Book in parallel with their serious and impossible re-constitution of geometry through human form and domestic paraphernalia.

In the pair of images over the next double page spread (fig 92), Woodman departs from the specifics of the given text, here dealing with the right-angled isosceles triangle *nel triangolo rettangolo isocelo*, by returning her here preferred, forms *another rectangle and a circle and*

a parrallegram (sic), as annotations. As the original page has diagrams of triangles and one trapezoid only, she draws her own significant part-circle, extended by hand from a curve on the white board within the image to outside its perimeters.

The left image has Woodman's hand written annotation *another rectangle* at its page base, on a background of what appears to be her over-painting with correction fluid of an earlier, then re-thought annotation. This over-painting is, as in fig 91, in white cloud-like blobs. Woodman's photograph shows a window sill on which a variety of objects sit. A centrally placed conch shell is 'viewed' through a square blank glass transparency constituting *another rectangle* held in her hand. This shell becomes a triangle in magnification. At least eight other rectangles appear naturally or are visually constructed in this composition; her title is therefore probably a humorous under-statement.

The window above its sill is composed of rectangular panes. A balcony constructed from a metal grid structure is visible outside. The window panes are splattered with white blobs of pigeon dirt, (linking visually to the over-painting blobs) or, in Casetti's reading, snow.⁵¹ The inside sill too is splattered with black blobs. In his lyrical description *water outside and inside the room*, Casetti also refers to the shell as a water symbol. Woodman links a visible part of a shaded triangle from the base text, just outside the border of her photo on the left, to the curve of an upturned vase (a cylinder). A strong black triangle is formed beneath the sill which is shot in a diagonal.

⁵¹ Casetti, 'La Nuvola Mediocre', 2000, 19.

At the bottom of the right-hand image Woodman has written *a circle and a parrallegram* [sic]. A segment of a circle is superimposed on the parallelogram at the top right of her photograph. She has extended the curve in black ink right out of the image, above and below its borders, out through the formulae in their boxes and through the words that block the slightly shakily drawn curves. Part of the circle's centre is constructed by the division between the very dark toned area of floor and where it diffuses, on the lower right image section, into a blurred black and white parallel-lined section. She also extends the straight line at the base of the bright, white, angled rectangle from the board that occupies the left third of the composition. This creates the parallelogram behind which Woodman's crouching huddled figure is seen in rear view, blocking the reflection of the mirror with her body. A reference to the *Self Deceit* series made in Rome in 1978 is embedded here.⁵² Another parallelogram is constructed by the sill line of the left image which forms an exact parallel with the base line of the white rectangle in the right image.

In a trick of proportion across the double image spread, Woodman's crouched figure registers as smaller than the conch shell opposite it. Woodman brings the tension between curve and straight to its maximum pitch by accenting with light the added parallelograms of the floorboard lines at the bottom left of the image square.

⁵² The *Self Deceit* series consists of seven mirror-themed (and 'mirror phase': Woodman certainly makes reference to Lacan's concept) images made in Rome between May and August 1978 in the cellar of a Renaissance palace. See Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 105-107 for the images and Sundell, 'Vanishing Points', 1996, 437 on Lacan's 'mirror phase'.

Possibly one of the most inventive single images in this Book (fig 93, left) is Woodman's first interpretation of the base work's section on the triangle and the rectangle *Esercizi di ricapitolazione sopra i triangoli e i quadrilateri*, which investigates these forms' identifiable components such as ways of measurement and ratios of sides and the ability of their components to slide between categories.⁵³

On the original document's page eleven the sequence of exercises, illustrated by four clear diagrams in a downward line, demonstrates the recapitulation of a triangle into a rectangle and back again.⁵⁴ Woodman has clearly responded to the beauty of these diagrams and has filled in the top one *Quadrati concentrici* (concentric squares), with a pink crayon for the outer square and an orange crayon for the inner.

This image, the first of two with her hand-written annotation *almost a square* under the photo, depicts the artist in front of a large white quilt pinned to the wall in and out of tension; pinned tightly in a skewed straight edge at its top, left hanging at both sides and with a large triangular loop at its centre down to its base⁵⁵ Woodman stands on one leg before this *almost...square*. She is trying to become, has almost re-capitulated into and will become a triangle, to pierce the square behind. An impossible, absurd task this, in which she 'almost' succeeds. She adds a wooden pole where the other leg should have been (two human legs would detract from the construction of the triangle) and the pole's straight edge

⁵³ 'Exercises in recapitulation between triangles and quadrilaterals.'

⁵⁴ A discrepancy will occur between page numbers and the placing of photographic images as Woodman used the portions of three different geometry pamphlets for her project. See Casetti, 'La Nuvola Mediocre', 2000, 17.

⁵⁵ The phrase appears again under the last image of the Book (fig 98).

enhances the form made by the thick primed canvas 'triangle' garment she wears. She covers her face with her hands in a symmetry that makes another triangle between her forearms and her hands. The apex of it is in between her joined fingertips: *almost a triangle*.

Linked in tone and texture, these two *almost* forms visually transform the base text's first enquiry into a surrealist absurdity *almost a square* and *almost a triangle*. Her interpretation is a transmutation into the human through a serious parallel enquiry containing a comic and self-mocking edge, a simultaneous surrealism. The base page investigates how a triangle can evolve into a rhombus. Woodman's image draws poetry from this evolution.

In the following double page spread (fig 94) Woodman has made a composition in her image from fresh artefacts: a wooden chair and a large white-painted plywood rectangle that is probably a drawing board. On the large expanse of white wall are the remains of sellotape lengths and other marks and cracks on a wall. These represent delicate and subtle examples of geometric angles, particularly the thin hair-line crack running between the board's edge and the image base which represents the diagonal. The annotation *I made this*, presumably she refers to the image itself, runs over into the following image's annotation *then I traded it for this drawing* in an almost (very unusual) cosy narrative nugget.

The image of Woodman's intervention is of a bigger size than that of earlier images in *some disordered interior Geometries*. This image flattens back into two dimensions the two dimensional illusion of three dimensions of the base page

opposite in a mediation that is complicit with its own page in its address of the triangle, rectangle and diagonal forms (*rettangole, triangolo, diagonale*), but counteractive to that opposite. Left intact by Woodman, with its printed title *Problemi da risolvere* (problems to solve) and its subtitle *Superficie e volume dei poliedri* (surface areas and volumes of polyhedrons), it has on it perspectival diagrams of a square and of an oblong, the print-shaded parts of which demonstrate the relation of their surface areas to all their dimensions.

The following double image spread (fig 95) consists of two shots from different positions of the same wall and objects as in the last image. In the left-hand image the chair has been moved so that its back curves over the right lower corner of the rectangle/board. Pinned to the board a section of a drawing showing a strong diagonal form is now visible. Woodman's hand-written annotation *then I traded it for this drawing* is in black ink on little blobs of white correction fluid which carefully do not obscure numbered examples of the under-text. One very faint original rhomboid diagram protrudes from under the right-hand image, under which is printed *Oblique Parallelepipedo a base rettangolare* (oblique parallelograms with rectangular bases).

If we consider 'oblique's meaning of *declining from the vertical or horizontal* we can find in this image good demonstrations of oblique forms in the reflected tripod legs, the two diagonals visible in the drawing and a soft-edged version of the triangle of effluence oozing from the leg of the chair.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd revised edition, 1973, reprinted 1990, 1427.

I speculate that Woodman traded her photographic image (in fig 94) for the charcoal or ink drawing of two parallel diagonal forms across a rectangle, sections of which are shown in this current pair of images at the top left.

The inclusion of the dark wooden floor, an even darker mirror-frame and a wall pot of dark, untidy vegetation in the right-hand image dramatically alters the light and stark studio ambience of the previous two images (fig 94 and fig 95, left). Woodman has moved back to take this shot and her own reflection at the tripod, those oblique forms that interrupt the mirror's rectangle, is unexpectedly and evocatively caught in the now fully reflective mirror on the right.

In the next image (fig 96, left) we see a seated figure wearing an all-white, lace-cuffed outfit (from Woodman's grandmother's case?). It resembles a male figure in a lace and cotton night gown with a shell attached and clearly accented hands in another image made in the same period (fig 97) and therefore I will read the figure in fig 96 (left) as that of a male friend.⁵⁷ The man's figure is cut off at mid upper torso and he is photographed holding his stomach in what might be a symbolisation of the word *interior* from the Book's title. In a depiction of two close but (for the first time in the Book) non-symmetrical hands, this key aspect addresses *disorder* too, extended in the visual metaphor of emptying or dissembling suggested by the liquid oozing from the perimeters of his figure.

The top half of the image-square contains the man in what is a white camouflage against a white wall. His bottom-half is shot in a strong white contrast to the rectangle corner made by the dark floor area. His photographed form crosses the

⁵⁷ Townsend, 2006, 203.

wall/floor division. This purposeful use of white links his figure with the chair leg and with the wall through the *Nu-Brite* – in what is a much-used device by Woodman to eliminate the boundaries between object and form (and by implication, category too). The only visible chair leg is very white and spills out, in a photographic flattening of two planes (vertical and horizontal) a spluttered triangle of *Nu-Brite* (its can is visible on the mid-right).

The original text here consists of formulaic investigations of surface areas in relation to their perimeters so a neat and witty visual transmutation has been made.

In the right-hand image of fig 96 a surface area fantasy is formed from a rearrangement of the detritus of the studio floor. Beautifully shot from above, the baroque curlicues of the iron table leg imply a diversion from the previous theme. A featured ‘rhomboid’ corner is here constructed from the dark floor. It forms the background for a display of objects: a beaded Victorian belt piece, the traded drawing (here appearing small), some perspex pieces, an electrical floor socket and white powder and particles.

The final image of the Book (fig 98, right) should be viewed in relation to the first photographic image (fig 87), with which it forms a direct visual sequence.

Whereas the first Book image responded to *poliedri regolari* (regular polyhedrons), above the last Book image we read the original text’s page-heading *Superficie e volume dei tre corpi tondi* (surface areas and volumes of three round forms). Woodman has also left visible the words *La superficie laterale del cilindro circolare retto e uguale all’altezza moltiplicata per la...* (The lateral

surface of the correct circular cylinder is equal to its height multiplied by the...).

Her elimination by her image's placing of the second part of the axiom is intentional: the intervention of her image will supply the answer. Ambitiously therefore, her image will address the specificity of three round forms and the method of dimension search for the cylinder alongside the construction of her pyramid forms in response to the diagrams opposite.

An enquiry is enacted by Woodman between the two dimensional form of, for example, the diagram, its transmutation into three dimensions in her vital and ingenious compositions and its return to two dimensions in the image confinement against which she rebels.

Woodman has here shot herself in the same pose as in the previous image. She is wearing the same dress and she crops her head and legs in the same manner and at the same place. She has photographed herself from the same frontal angle too. The same shiny decorative collar motif, of sequins or marcasite, again creates the important triangle at the neck. Her placing of the two images at the start and at the end bequeaths circularity to her image chain, which disrupts the finite object-hood of the codex book. This triangle points down to the pyramid version of itself she has constructed with such inspiration in the area of her joining wrists.

But in this image the hands are held more closely together and the wrists that touch each other are magnified to about one and a half times their size by that same clear square of glass seen in the first Book image; here the glass is held almost vertically. The magnified area is printed by Woodman in negative and

blurred to make it extraordinary, in a possible reference to the vagina. We think of an x-ray of the two cylinders of her wrists, joined to make a new form that is uncanny, *unheimlich*, disturbing. Woodman has written *almost a square* in her 'neat' semi-copperplate script on the top left of the page. This is a repetition of her caption for the image of herself as triangle in front of an *almost square* (fig 93) and seems a simplified problem in comparison to the base text's problem on this page. It provides the solution to the separate inflexive enquiry she is making, however. Spaces are left at the bottom of the page for the Italian student's precise answers to the problems set, for example: *lateral surface area=* , *total surface area=* , *volume of cylinder=* . These are all precisely and poignantly addressed in the complex strategies of the image. Again she introduces the impossible maxim *almost a square* in her annotation. If her audience can make the imaginative leap and the poetic juxtaposition, that rearrangement of thought that surrealism requires, then this image answers all of the set problems.

Although her photographed *square* containing the marvellously deep dimensions of the composite wrist and hand area is here given emphasis by her annotation, those more complex problems of the base text are addressed visually in a cryptic layering of meanings waiting to be revealed. For example her seated position in this photograph can be read as alluding to her height being equal to the base measurement of her body/form: *corpo* in Italian (which double meaning she relishes throughout the Book). Two more contrasted *bodies* than the cylinder's *corpo*, left just visible through stabbed marks of erasing fluid at the underneath border of this image, and Woodman's body, the omnipresent vector of her life's work, would be hard to find.

Woodman's choice of a geometry student book works as a device parallel in rigour to her own artist's practice both in form and content. It is just such contrasts, surrealist word-plays and anamorphic resemblances which both delight Woodman (here she displays her mastery of the veiled erotic component of Breton's convulsive beauty concept) and inform the complex nature of her enquiry. It is a natural, if demanding choice for an artist able to plan and execute her project through a Euclidean sphere of logical precision, which acts as a tight grid from which to emanate into the domain of the conceptual and perceptual: with the volatility of a high-flying imagination. The emotional sphere too can become its most potent in the context of a strictly graded learning system, the axiomatic development into logically derived theorems that is Euclid's Geometry. Parallel investigations and tangential leaps; adverse conclusions: a play between the verbal and the diagrammatic text as a visual backdrop and the text as a container of meanings that is an inspiration to diversion.

The value in *some disordered interior Geometries* is in the meaning and rhythm of Woodman's dialogue with the original: poetic and humorous, analytical and reflexive. The diagrams and symbols used in the first context to illustrate theories of geometry evolve their givens through Woodman's intervention into a second context as primary visuals. These are hard-edged diagrams moulded by logic to necessarily lack human presence and essence: they are the static codifying of an ancient system of understanding, monographic symbols in use by engineering students probably in Rome, almost a century earlier.⁵⁸ Woodman's last quarter of

⁵⁸ Euclid was active two thousand three hundred years ago.

the twentieth century project complexly intervenes in the base template they provide. Her Books are containers of found text, diagram, explanation and proof, a compression of their era into pieces of ephemera. In common with all found objects, they are dispossessed, separated from a first owner and from a first function by time and death. Woodman's intervention resurrects their purpose.

CHAPTER FIVE

Repetitions, References and Reflections: Woodman's *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*

Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi, referred to simply as *Untitled* by the Woodman Estate, is the longest Book Woodman constructed.¹ We find in this Book, true to its title, an intensified example of the often subtle embroidery of interlinking themes threaded with self-reference that occurs throughout the work of the artist.

It contains thirty three photographic images made and applied by her, all of which, for the first time, are in transparency form. The Book measures eight inches by five and five eighths of an inch when closed, the width measurement increasing to eleven inches and nine sixteenth of an inch when open in a double page spread. The use of transparencies links it in date and form to *Quaderno Raffaello*; that is to her late career period of 1979-1980, in the period when she was living in New York, with many visits to Rhode Island. She spent the summer of 1979 in Stanwood, Washington and by the end of 1979 she was back in New York.²

¹ *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* ('Notebook of Dictation and Themes') is the title given to this Book by the curators of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni exhibition of Woodman's work in Rome in 2000: Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 198 and 202. They have used the title of the original schoolbook directly. I shall adopt it as it is more useful to my project than the *Untitled* used by the Woodman Estate. Woodman responds deeply to the title throughout and makes use of its last word as a springboard for her own themes. I shall hereafter abbreviate the title to *Dettati e Temi*.

² Having moved to New York at the beginning of 1979, coincident with her BFA qualification, she spent the summer of 1979 in Stanwood, Washington, after which she returned to a different New York studio. During the New York periods Woodman worked too on making fashion photographs,

In the summer of 1980 she worked as Artist in Residence at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire developing the blueprints techniques (*Zig Zag* as discussed in Chapter 9 for example) that she had been experimenting with at the beginning of the year when ideas for her *Temple Project* were germinating.

Some themes addressed in *Dettati e Temi* were developed or conceived as projects made at MacDowell, denoting that the Book was made at some time in 1980, probably soon before, soon after or even during the residency. The period and place in which an image was made does not, however, importantly, preclude the use of images made in other time spheres and settings. This aspect will be addressed in Chapter 9.

This Book should therefore be viewed against the backdrop of certain key projects being developed by Woodman in this important period. *Swan Song* was realised and completed by the autumn of 1979, when the series formed her BFA Degree exhibition at the Woods Gerry Gallery at Rhode Island School of Art and Design in Providence. The *Temple Project* was an extraordinarily ambitious and inventive visual dialogue between Greek classicism and what was emerging as the end of modernism, realised in blueprint format. Finally, *Tree Piece* made during her New Hampshire summer, which developed the experimental colour, method and size of

inspired by Deborah Turbeville's work (Turbeville's photographic output cannot, however, be confined to the category of fashion; it often far surpasses it.) In the November of the previous year (1978) she had held the solo BFA Degree show entitled *Swan Song* (in homage to Proust) at the Rhode Island School of Art and Design's Woods Gerry Gallery. Five of the eleven stunning extra large photographs (120cms x 90cms approx.) from *Swan Song*, beautifully digitally reconstructed, were exhibited in July 2007 at the Victoria Miro Gallery, London. A fuller description of this series is given in Chapter 9.

the *Temple Project*, while researching solutions to mimetic transferences between human and natural form. Ongoing too at this time, but of less importance to my current project, was her interest in developing a career as a fashion photographer.

The number of added photographic images in *Dettati e Temi* exceeds that of Woodman's second largest Book, *Angels, Calendars*, by seven. The base script of the Book is approximately twice as large as that of *Angels, Calendars*, due partly to the wider gaps between the printed lines of the original book. It is written by the original student in a particularly ornate and beautiful measured hand, providing a format of considerable aesthetic quality. Although the colour of the ink used is primarily deep sepia, some variations cause it to have pink and purple patches. These subtle and beautiful colour variations are in effect the stripping back of the ink to its chemical base and could be a result of the natural ageing process or could have been manipulated by Woodman by adding water or bleach to the script. However, the absence of blurring and smudging makes this possibility unlikely.

The front (fig 100) and back outside hard covers of the Book are each decorated with an identical undifferentiated mottling in a deep purple over a pale pink/buff. The Book's size merits a spine and this, now in a decrepit form, is dark pink.

Woodman responds immediately to the aesthetic of the covers' mottling by inserting her first pair of images (fig 101). These are a sequential pair attached to a double page spread which is devoid of both script and printed font from the original era. We know the exact date of the era by the script on the next page:

1908

agosto (August)

With a strongly appropriate twinning, in the genre of circumstantial magic, one female figure is featured in each image, each wearing a vintage dress of a different mottled pattern in a human extension of the covers' patterns. This is the start of a series of variants to the control of the cover aesthetic explored in the first five-pair sequence, of which this is the first image pair. The dresses worn by the women are vintage objects, from perhaps the 1940s, only three decades past the era of her template.

The left-hand image of this first double page spread sustains a blur across it caused by a movement in her right arm and a resulting increased mottling from a shake of the folds of the dress. She references the covers' all over *field*, undifferentiated and horizonless, no climax, no *Golden Section* quality (think Jackson Pollock in the late 1950s), by choosing a background wall of what looks like pebble dash to continue the camouflage of circumstance. This maintains both the texture and the aesthetic of the control motif. In this image, importantly too, she holds a roll of paper, the archetypal scroll, in a symbolisation perhaps of the goddesses Athena and Kalliope, both of whom are depicted holding a scroll, to mark the moment of this Book's beginning.³

Since this is one of the latest three photographic Books and possibly even the last that Woodman made, the scroll, the goddesses' emblem of poetry, arts and

³ Athena is the Goddess of Arts and Sciences and Kalliope the Goddess of Poetry so Woodman might have thought about either or both of them.

science, the artist's three deep concerns, can be read as an symbol representing her whole image and word project, addressed in her five found object based Books but deeply signified in this one.

In the right-hand image of this pair Woodman stands straight on to the camera again and the mottled design of the dress she wears (this time a light on dark rather than a dark on light fabric), is extended in her and its reflections in the mirror. The mirror is at the lower left of the image (in reality behind her) and also reflects one arm clasped behind her.

I have tried to trace a sequence in the order and method Woodman chose for presenting her images in *Dettati e Temi*, thinking that it might be a mathematically balanced order which remained independent of any ideas in the original text. As soon as I exchanged numbers, which I first used, for simpler marks, stick verticals, a symmetrical format became clear. The aim was to detect her method of using pairs of images followed by single images and the resulting discovery shows her arrangement has the rhythm of a poem:

11 11 11 11 11	5 image pairs
1	1 single image
11 11 11	3 image pairs
1 1 1	3 single images
11 11	2 image pairs
1	1 single image

11	11	2 image pairs
1	1	2 single images
11		1 image pair

She therefore adheres to a mathematical sequence of her own invention.

The second image pair (fig 102), which she has added to her found object base is the second of the five pairs forming the Book's first sequence. It continues the artist's exploration of visual resemblance kick-started by the patterns of the front and rear covers.⁴ I shall refer to this sequence from now on as the *mottling* sequence. This is the first pair to be stuck onto a base page with script, although the left image is fixed to a page with blank *exercise* lines only. Both images are placed on the page more haphazardly here than in the first pair.

The left image is a shot of Woodman from above. She wears a Persian lamb pill box hat. Its tight *bobbly* surface is another visual equivalence to the cover's mottling. The contours of her profiled face are bleached out through over-exposure. This makes her anonymous, but her hair is tied behind, her back is straight and she reads an open book with a mottled inside cover. This book is the object of this project. She looks prim: this is an acting-out of the identity of the Italian student from the past at the same time as it is literally an over-looking at the enacted self; the Italian student who writes in the beautiful script, the artist's anonymous predecessor from seventy years ago. A mysterious object is pinned to the wall just above Woodman. It is possibly a death-mask or an African mask; a

⁴ The *mottling* pattern of the covers was probably achieved by the oil and water resist technique, popular in the early twentieth century, known as *marbling*.

symbol of haunting and brings to mind the thought from Breton's musings in *Nadja's* beginning *Whom do I haunt?* The bottom edge or jaw-line of the mask loops into a photographic convergence with Woodman's hat rim.

The right-hand image of this second pair is stuck over an original title page of script over wide-lined exercise paper. This is dated the ninth of August 1908 and entitled *Dettati*. An image that is difficult to read, it is a blurred accumulation of shadow and object shot in a very dark tone with a void background. The diffusion of both shadow and object into formlessness is a disturbing rendition of the left-hand image. Here the mask, the image's only definable object, is brought closer to the camera and 'leans' towards the foreground in a grim high-lit grin. It has acquired a kind of neck form which connects it, in a formal way, to the displaced rectangle composite. This composite consists of the table surface and the extension of it in the soft-edged shadow, pierced centrally by another mottled surface, the sharp right-angle of the book. A *jackanory* jumping light intercepts the rectangle's mass in the low centre of the image and what could be the silhouette profile of a torch-head, or a even perhaps a small megaphone, protrudes in a dark form on the right.⁵ The *jackanory's* light breaks up the solid forms to expose the first fragment of underlying script. The blurred part-negation of the script adds mystery to an image already full of it.

The third image pair of the *mottling* sequence (fig 103), initially appears to be closely linked to the first pair (fig 101), certainly in the big things like girls and mottled dresses. Woodman has recruited a friend to join her in an enactment that

⁵ Or Jack O'Lantern, a mysterious phosphorescence, sometimes caused (if we must be logical) by a displaced reflection in glass.

looks fun. In the left-hand image most of the girls' faces are visible. Although this is unusual, perhaps even more so is the fact that Woodman has a smile on her face, perhaps to encourage her friend who seems shy and nervous. Each of them wears a differently patterned mottled dress. Woodman leans from the waist with a dancer's suppleness into the centre of the image, raising a stretched arm high, taut and out of the frame. Although the angle of her pose is almost the same angle as the lines of antique writing, her dramatically lifted arm causes rivulets of folds in the dress fabric which contravene the lines' angle. With her other arm she reaches down to a wide ribbon that is suspended between them. Her friend's pose has no waist-twist. She stands straight, her arms in an opposite position to Woodman's. Her left arm (as seen) in the image centre, reaches down to the ribbon's short diagonal, which hangs straight at her side in deep shadow. The friend's other arm is raised straight up. Because of the darker tone of the friend's dress the underlying copperplate script hardly registers there. Rhythmic horizontal lines of writing (and what a perfect, fluid and embellished script it is) flow like rivulets under Woodman's light toned dressed figure. Some blurring from movement occurs, especially in the low dress folds.

The short and wide dark diagonal behind the two figures is Woodman's playful intervention to the horizontal script lines' harmony. In the image too, we see a use of the mottling on the dresses to answer the energy of the writing lines. Both this image and its opposite have strong links to Woodman's *Temple Project* in which she investigates a contemporary rendering of Greek temple caryatids using the theme of paired females (fig 104).

In the right-hand image (fig 103) the enactment becomes a dance with ribbons in which both girls lean towards the book's centre with both their paired arms stretched at an extreme angle. The ribbons emphasise the lines of script. The friend's face disappears in dark tone at an opposite angle to Woodman's, which is raised at a contrasted angle to her arms in a triumphant and classical heroism. The dark ribbon strands are gently twisted to form various thicknesses (as if after the motion of dancing around a maypole) except for the highest strand which stretches in full tension below Woodman's upturned chin and over the whole face of her friend. Importantly, the pair of young women here lean at an opposite angle to the rhythm of the page's script-lines' givens; forming a visual arrest in intervention.

Testimony to the interchange of future and past in her work and the methods of trial and reflection Woodman uses as she picks images from her store, that active archive, is her re-use of an earlier image in the right-hand image of the next, fourth, pair (fig 105) in the *mottling* sequence. Peggy Phelan describes the process here:

When Woodman initially began keeping her diary, she thought of it as a place to respond to her photographic work – that is, she first thought of her diary as a forum for observations and reflections on her completed work. Soon, however, the diary functioned as a rehearsal space, a book for first drafts for her compositions...⁶

It might also be helpful at this point to consider Barthes's reflection on the *Text*.

⁶ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 991.

*The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination.*⁷

Perhaps the key word here is *passage* with its simultaneous implications of movement and of a link between two areas or composites. Woodman's work defies stasis by its continual movement as she explores different sequences, new printings and tries different contexts through different passages for her images in never ending quiet explosions.

The right-hand image of this pair is now very well-known. Made in Rome between 1977 and 1978, it was probably printed in 1978 in the US. Certainly it is used in Woodman's *Angels, Calendars Book*, in it as a reversed and darker toned positive print (fig 59) surrounded by a white border and with the annotation *december* and developed, possibly simultaneously, as a separate fine autonomous print for circulation (fig 106).⁸ Here, in a mysterious transparency made (or re-used) about two years later, a treble diffusion of the dress's pattern is developed in the area of peeled paint marks on the bottom right wall, which seem to follow the horizontal march of the copperplate under-script and in the way the words dissemble the dress's pattern both in and outside its area. Magnificently exemplifying the surrealist *magique circonstantielle*, the artist's headless figure displays her torso and breasts in an abandonment that is also somehow quiet.⁹ Some over-exposure encourages the merging of her figure with the wall behind it, while Woodman's naked torso is a tablet encrypted by the anonymous script. Her

⁷ Barthes, 'From Work to Text', 1977, 159.

⁸ Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 108. The three printings of this image are discussed further in Chapter 9.

⁹ For a fuller description of this element of the surrealist marvellous, please see Chapter 1.

favoured themes of dereliction and wall layers are also encapsulated here; in the image's lower half two layers of the wall's surface are exposed and their visibility is repeated, as a visual pun, in the two layers, naked and clothed, of Woodman's exposure.

A development or pre-cursor of this image depicts a fully naked and dirt-smeared figure, this time with most of the face visible and placed centrally, against the same derelict wall and shot in a much lighter exposure (fig 107).¹⁰

The image used in this Book (fig 105) necessarily forges links with its left-hand partner which depicts the rear view of a seated Woodman wearing the same mottled dress as her friend wears in the third image pair (fig 103), the one with light mottling on a dark background. Her woollen mid-toned cardigan has a lighter dot-form pattern in which the dots or blobs are larger and more separate on the cloth than those of the dress patterns. These cardigan dots are of the same size and distance apart as the organic forms (sea sponges?) arranged on a light table surface which Woodman peruses. Playing with ideas of light on dark and dark on light, these natural objects have been separated in their arrangement between the light surface and the dark-toned mottling of what must surely be the Book *Dettati e Temi*, itself. Therefore present within the image is the first response to the pattern of the Book's cover in the skirt fabric (and how close a resemblance this is when we see them side by side), its visual spreading or de-limiting in the cardigan's pattern and its freeing, in an expanded interpretation, in the organic

¹⁰ Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 113.

forms, which are a three dimensional extension of what is ultimately an audacious but satisfying concatenation of references.

The image's visual answer and response sequence is altered by Woodman's many-braceleted and elegant arm. The repeated arm rings of the bracelets in the angles of cardigan folds below her elbow accentuate the focal point of this section: the gentle curves between wrist and fingers and thumb and fingers are intersected by the sharp angle of the table corner which is depicted in the lightest tone of the image. On this table corner are both the dark-toned Book and the organic soft-edged objects.

If we accept Brunella Antomarini's lucid hypothesis (from which I quote below) about Woodman's working methods, we may then realise just how balanced in Woodman are the roles of artist and mathematician, creator and technician.

*Movement towards light, and from light to object, can be observed and captured by the eye of the camera only if it is guided by the vision of a form. Not until the form has been determined, rather than accidentally invented, is the photograph taken and movement turned into form*¹¹

Antomarini also maintains that...*one is drawn to them (the images) not by their decadence, but, on the contrary, by their austerity, which nips any personal and psychological small talk in the bud.*¹²

¹¹Brunella Antomarini, 'Francesca Woodman', *Parkett*, 15, 1988, 98-107, 106, (translated from the German by Catherine Schelbert). Antomarini is writing still in the first critical wave after the first major one person exhibition of Woodman's work, at the Wellesley College Museum Exhibition in 1986, held just over five years after her death.

¹² Antomarini, 'Francesca Woodman', 1988, 107.

The next image pair (fig 108) is the last in the sequence directly addressing the theme of *mottling* and its resemblances, although more references to it occur through the Book. On the left Woodman is seen bending over and stretching out her arm towards a section of peeling wall under a dado rail. The wall section has large black marks on its surface which I cannot distinguish, other than to relate them in formal attributes to the smaller black marks of the fish in the opposite image. Her figure is blurred photographically into an apparent movement, one device Woodman often uses to defy the photographic arrest in one frame. The mottled pattern of her dress moves out from itself in almost electric currents of outward direction and the dress's opacity lets us read the primary copperplate clearly, here in an even more ornate script than before.

The right-hand image of the pair, with Woodman wearing her dress of a different (light on dark) mottled pattern, depicts her standing in some water in which a shoal of tiny fish, probably sticklebacks, swim. Shot from high up so that her legs are foreshortened - and it is only her legs and the unevenly hemmed lower part of the dress that are included - the natural darting angles of the swimming fish construct another visual dispersal of the dress's material and the Book's cover pattern. Simultaneously a dynamic scattering of the visual rhythms of the base script occurs in a subtle displacement of the lines' regularity that does not, however, lose its aspect of mimicry. Somehow the fish dart out of line, in line. Simple and audaciously original, this composition arrests and disturbs.

The next image, a single one on the right of the original's double page spread (fig 109), is printed in such a dark tone that it obliterates, in all but one tiny central

area, both the script beneath it and the clear recognition of its components.¹³ It is a composition of negative form, in parallel to the second image from the mottling sequence (fig 101, right). The image shows a large form on the right, decipherable, I think, as the rear of Woodman's head and top shoulder. Is she extending a hand to the figure she faces? The figure, visible only through side lighting, holds his hands in a position of very careful holding; a *cradling* of some very special object which seems to be of a fluffy or clustered consistency. Is this object either a bunch of something organic or perhaps a densely curled wig? All the body language of the figure, here a cap-wearing and coated male, affirms the special quality of the substance or object brought. Three very bright small areas are picked out on the visiting figure: the cravat, the lips and the shoulder, alongside a kind of rhythmic nest of high-lit hands and a just-visible football.¹⁴ This accentuation of selected forms enables us to read the image in geometric formal terms, in the *mutual delimitation* of which Antomarini speaks, simultaneously to, but separately from, any narrative message, in the terms of which a ritual of gift exchange might be about to occur. The unusual stillness of Woodman's nearly absent presence suggests the calm expectancy of an important interchange. A narrative moment is at once superbly caught.

In both a dismantling and a retrieving of the mottling theme of the first sequence of five image pairs, the first pair of a new sequence of three pairs (fig 110), introduces, in the left image of the pair, an arch trope of fetishism and

¹³ This aspect of Woodman's work is further discussed by Antomarini, 'Francesca Woodman', 1988, 107: *Mirrors, fruit, clothes and rooms are united in mutual delimitation so that the objective and the formal substance of the pictures assimilates all that is subjective and dynamic: every element receives light through the act that it is not the other one that it touches. ...one element makes the other possible and we know we can see things only in that light.*

¹⁴ Is this the *ball of hope* from the penultimate image (fig 136), annotated in *hoping* from *Quaderno Raffaello*?

heterosexual male fantasy, silk stockings. Hung in a straight row on the wall, behind a defiant and mottle-pattern-dressed Woodman, are six of them.

Woodman, in opening her dress to the side, (with a looping and gathering of it which forms an irregular kind of 'zig-zagging' at the front), both presents herself as a sexual object and simultaneously deflates this position. The revealed area of her flesh includes no body part that is conventionally erotic and I would suggest that she is equally interested in the visual construction of a kind of geometric form. The imagined male viewer is only allowed a glimpse of the side of her ribcage. Her defiant pose, her hands clasped behind her back, affirms the courageous negation of the genre in which she has participated.

The right-hand image is a mysterious twin, a trace configuration of the left-hand image that acts to negate the object-hood of the other in a similar manner to the process set up before in figs 102 and 109. Printed in reverse yet resisting being a full negative, all components of this transparency are printed in a tone dark enough to make differentiation difficult. The source composition has been slightly re-arranged and its components slightly enlarged. In a playing between positive and negative spaces Woodman has pushed the objects into a semi-obliteration of themselves, into a realm where their identities are outflanked by their form in space. Two stockings from the left's five in what looks like a reverse image of the two on the left of the former transparency, remain just distinguishable. The small, lighter triangle emerging between the stocking tops is picked out in the only highlight of a sombre and close-toned image, on the bottom left. In a near repetition of a pattern sequence which reveals the artist's outstanding technical mastery, the irregular, soft, 'zig-zagged' edge of the front of the last image's dress

is re-created here more regularly. Each curve of the rounded, scalloped edge is pierced at its centre by a line of perfect, here faint, underlying copperplate, which intervenes too in the here darker-toned area of bare flesh. Woodman, typically, obliterates her head and face. And read visually, this action constructs a strong, broad diagonal that is edged at both sides with areas of mottled fabric, in a theatrical (visual) *aside* to a first theme explored in the Book. Below the image Woodman has scrawled a few pencil loops through the larger copperplate, in a negation of the script's meaning and also as a 'hands-on' reminder of her identity, in a Book where she writes no annotations. From the original script I can read the phrase *Dice l'aigilla* on the bottom line.^{15, 16}

Both images of the following image pair, the second in the Book's second sequence (fig 111), depart somewhat from themes suggested in previous images but continue to maintain a rapport with them.

Suggested in the left of the first sequence image pair (fig 105) in the photographing of a delicately arranged display on a table surface were some difficult-to-identify organic forms all about the same size. Clearly making a gentle extension of the Book covers' and the dresses' mottling, these are possibly identifiable, as I argued previously, as sea sponges or even truffles. Now in fig 111 these similar soft and undulated-edged objects are grouped closely together in the left-hand image of this pair. Here they overlap the light-toned rectangle of their support. A strong beam of sunlight pierces the image square from the lower

¹⁵ These loops echo those painted wall-scrawls of her *Splater Paint* series reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 110-111 and dated there as 1977-1978.

¹⁶ 'The eagle says'.

right in a diagonal which scatters its light in triangles over the image, becoming an explosion of the abstract. The soft-edged organic forms (could they be pieces of shorn sheep fleece?) are caught and repeated in a clever resemblance which extends their form outside their supporting surface onto what could well be Woodman's recumbent form under some pieces of fur. It is just possible to decipher her head and a section of her arm in the top left of the image. If so, the perspective from which the image is shot renders the figure's parts, seen in fragments through light, the same size as the organic forms. Some links, particularly in texture and composition, can be made between this image and Brassai's photograph of the Quai aux Fleurs, *Still numb from the night*, printed in *L'Amour fou*.¹⁷ In Woodman's particularly skilled image, organic form and substance have been distilled into the abstraction of geometry through light.

The right-hand image of this pair is closely related to the 'Fish Skeleton' (New York, 1979) pair, but differs from it in that Woodman is wearing the thick black coat which she wears in some earlier images, such as the series of her standing next to and tearing a large roll of paper (Providence, 1976-1977), whereas she wears two dresses in the 'Fish Skeleton' series.^{18, 19}

I read the opening phrase of the copperplate script above the image as *Della anima* (of the soul). A possible response to this informs her choice of image.²⁰ If the soul is physically invisible (or non-existent to a materialist) then Woodman's

¹⁷ Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 52.

¹⁸ Reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 128 and 129, the images are dated there as 1979 and placed as made in New York. *Fish Skeleton* is my title for them.

¹⁹ Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 77. This image was also used as the Wellesley College Museum/Hunter College exhibition catalogue cover (Gabhart and Krauss, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, 1986).

²⁰ 'Of the soul'.

pervasive interest in the revealing of interior layered areas, often focusing on the symbol of a wall that is derelict, is here using the fish skeleton she holds as a symbol of the soul. Reinforced by the exactitude of that circumstantial magic the plaster and lathe wall structure offers to the fish bones - and what a marvellous twinning it is - this image has a co-existent narrative component. Breton, when describing convulsive beauty in *L'Amour fou*, says ...*I have wanted to see some very special object constructed in response to some poetic fantasy*. He continues *This trouvaille...is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it*.²¹ Her drawing out of the visual resemblance between the two forms does not rest in the visual sphere, as although disparate, the forms share a logic of structure which, in organic life (fish), and good condition (wall), remain unseen.

Woodman's pose and clothes denote a furtive atmosphere. The inclusion of her face's features is rare. Here she has covered her mouth with her raised coat collar to imply that she has just eaten, a bit guiltily, the whole fish. This image does not relate strongly to the left-hand image in either narrative content or formal quality but both independent images are visually linked by the changing ink colours of the original script wrapping around, hardly visible under, the images.²²

In the left-hand image of the third pair of the second sequence (fig 112) is a recurrence of the double woman theme first introduced in the Book in the third pair of its first sequence (fig 103). Naked in this image, the two women are standing in almost identical poses to those in the former image. In both the images the woman on our right leans to the left, towards the other woman, who stretches

²¹ Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 13.

²² As these are positive rather than negative transparencies.

directly upwards. Some manipulation to the negative perhaps, adds a shadow behind the ribcage and hip of the left figure where none is visible on the right figure. This emphasises the diamond shape created between them. With paint or dark-toned paper strips, Woodman has created a vibrant sequence of more diamond forms and triangles on the wall behind.

The twinned dynamism of the double female form intersected by the triangle-formed 'zig-zags' is formally calmed by the lines of original script which importantly, and for the first time in this Book, interrupt its visual regularity. For these lines are written in a different (original) hand, that is upright and smaller, giving a new energy. Their new given corresponds, in visual terms, to the positions of the females' torsos. The lines contrast with and exaggerate the finely formed rhomboid-diamond Woodman has so finely realised between the figures. Two more lengthened triangles occur in the base centre of the image, one between the leg forms of the right-hand figure and another, matching the first as perfectly as a human body-becoming-geometry can, in between the right and left legs of the women.

Simultaneously making a positive from a negative and drawing out the abstract from the representational, Woodman holds the two in an equal balance. This image again relates strongly to the *Temple Project* which the artist was concurrently developing (in 1980), particularly in the denotation of female strength used to support an above weight, as in her simulation of the *caryatids* of the Temple of Artemis (fig 104).

The upright, stretched-up tension of the pose in the right-hand image of this pair (fig 112) reflects both poses of the earlier pair (fig 103). Again, only the neck, torso and hands are depicted and the ankles and feet are out of shot. Here Woodman wears a long velvet robe, giving the image strong resonances to an autonomous image, *I could no longer play I could not play by instinct* (fig 113) in which she holds the same knife and *bleeds* a strip of photo- booth self-portraits.

A vintage black lace and voile shawl emanates to the right in this right-hand Book image in a wing form while some fluffy organic substance (sheep fleece or truffle again?) just beside her right hand serves to soften the sharp edge of the black robe and to mimic the soft-edged curves of the wing. This substance throws an expressive shadow onto the wall behind while a version of the same form painted directly onto the transparency, sits solidly to the side of her left hand. Both hands are formed into knuckles and a particularly interesting formal arrangement occurs around this left hand from the paint blob, the lower dress edge and the low sleeve. Under and over the whole image runs the regular and beautiful copperplate, forming waves of red, pink, then sepia and purple and running only over those carefully selected forms light enough to render the script visible: the neck and bared chest, the clenched hands and the knife.

Above the next image (fig 114 on the right), an individual image which is the first of three such, I can decipher the original script passage title *Tutto in Forma!*²³ And on the opposite page at the base is, for a second occurrence of an exact date, exciting to witness surely both for the artist and for us, in its precise

²³ 'Everything is in the Form!'

documentation 3 *guigno* 1908. The image maintains a visual independence from many other images in the Book while at the same time containing two important thematic links to them. Revealing her disarming ability to make visual links which cut through otherwise impermeable categories of object, Woodman places a paper scroll (that same rolled and ribboned scroll we see her holding in the very first image of the Book, fig 101, left)) in an immediately parallel position to a turn-of-the-century iron lamp post.²⁴ The lamp post has a horizontally set decorative band which makes the visual equivalent of the scroll's ribbon in another fine example of circumstantial magic. Behind this Woodman hides her head as she clings to the post, just supported by another ring of metal under her feet. The background to this image is of a very dark tone which gives maximum impact to the lit figure of Woodman and the scroll she holds vertically. The second, subtle link to the Book's previous themes is found in the rolled small area of mottled dress she wears under another light vintage dress, once again nodding to the first *mottling* sequence as well as addressing the layering theme. A link in the chain of signifiers exists through too to *Quaderno Raffaello* in the visual aside from the fluting of the lamp post to the fluting on the dustbin in that short, contemporaneous Book's image.²⁵

On the next double page is another individual image (fig 115, right-hand page) the second of three such. In the original script opposite, an even more specific time and date is given, in the beautiful embellished forward-slanting writing of the unknown student of the twentieth century's start *16 maggio, (May) 1908, sabato*

²⁴ In fig 101 the blurring of the image makes the ribbon hard to detect.

²⁵ See fig 132.

mattina (Saturday morning) and under this *11 giorni* ('eleven days'). These examples of dates are working backwards: August, June, May.

On the opposite page too is a heading, *Tema* (theme) and written on the line beneath it is the phrase *Ogni sera ha la sua offrire (?)* (Every evening we have her offerings). Woodman has in this case inflected her image with a poetic tangent pulled from the script. On a chosen wider rectangle than that of the previous image she emphasises the essential horizontality in this image in strong contrast to the former's focus on the vertical.²⁶ Here we have a high modernist beauty transfused with the influence of a surrealist classic by Brassai, *Untitled* from 1933.²⁷ Both images from each of the two eras are outstanding.

In Woodman's image the nude form is photographed closely and in a deep shadow that self-obliterates. It becomes a stone or the contours of the sea meeting the land. Nothing is between us and the majesty of bone-curved flesh. Here there is nothing of identity to grasp nor is there anything that denotes human fallibility. This is a monolith, a surrealist spasm, a human being what a human cannot be: a horizon with the textural purity of a sand dune after high winds. The *offerings*, if such they are, in a response to the original's subtitle, are a votive trio of dried rose heads and petals, looking like tiny dolls. They reflect the dried plants Woodman hung behind her friend's profile portrait in *Portraits Friends Equasions* (see fig

²⁶ Two much-discussed and well known gallery prints are named *Horizontale* and *Verticale*, by Woodman. They are reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 88 and 86. This clearly demonstrates the intrinsic thematic evolution of Woodman's practice.

²⁷ Brassai, *Untitled*, as reproduced in Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 94, Fig 85.

77).²⁸ The arrest of this image is the refinement and reduction of the spinal column, through deep shadow, to a pointing vertebral spear or arrow. This arrow points up to the votive offerings. And its gentle angle merges with the curlicues of script now written onto the reclined body.

The third of this group of three single images (fig 116, right-hand page) is the first of what I shall call the ‘master theme’ sequence, that theme itself constructed of four images, two of which are repetitions of the other two. As it projects its meaning out beyond the Book’s consecutive order, I will outline my reading of the theme before starting an analysis of its individual images.

It is a presentation of her Books project from within the photographic medium, specifically of this photographic Book, to her audience. The images encapsulating this ambitious theme are flagged non-consecutively through the second half of the so-named *Dettati e Temi*. By this method they are imbued with mystery and seek to find each other. Extraordinarily rich in symbolism, they refuse to be read easily as a sequence, but rather project their signs delicately, intermittently and subliminally.

Each of the four images in the sequence is placed as a single image on the right-hand side of the double page.

The first and the third repeated images (figs 116 and 127) are three-quarter length clothed ‘bust’ self-portraits, over which the figure’s (probably Woodman’s) pale,

²⁸ The image here discussed from *Dettati e Temi* also brings resonances of Cahun’s images of organic matter as in her *Untitled* from 1936 (Krauss and Livingston, *L’Amour fou*, 1985, 108, Fig 99) or her *I Would Give My Life* (Krauss and Livingston, *L’Amour fou*, 1985, 109, Fig 100).

slender arms are held over the open pages of a large blank-paged book. The first and the third images each have a slightly different cropping so that the first includes a little more space to the left of Woodman's cropped head and the form below the hips is obscured by a light-toned surface.

In the second and fourth images (figs 122 and 128) of the 'master theme' sequence the white table has displayed on its surface wooden writing appurtenances from the century before, in a symbolisation of the century with which her Books' project is intertwined. In these two images a greater part of the standing figure is shown; here it extends from the shoulders to the knees. The figure has been photographed from an increased distance. In the same manner the second image is a repeat of the fourth, but printed out with a little more definition than the former. One and three, two and four: odd and even numbers in a clear mathematical pattern, images of the Book and the table top respond to each other in an alternating rhythm and the repeated images respond to each other over the interlude of the intervening images.

In these four images a high degree of self-reflexivity occurs. The first and third images, in repetition, show a tranquil and serene figure in a short-sleeved *mottle*-patterned vintage dress, holding both her arms out over the flat white pages of a large open book that must be *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* in the contemporary version of Kalliope's scroll. The woman's left hand, over-exposed to the point of near-invisibility, holds a photographic print next to the left page (as seen) of the book. The open book presented in the image is of a 'foolscap' size,

codex format with a conventional centre binding. On the pages viewed, exercise lines are filled with script.

After reading the images in the clear printing in Townsend's monograph, where he ties it to Woodman's MacDowell Colony period, later in time than when I had written the first analysis, I conclude that this book is, without doubt, the Book itself, *Dettati e Temi*. In an enactment of an immaculate circular symbolism, Woodman has included a photograph of the Book in which she cumulatively places photographs and addresses *themes* in the construction of what is perhaps the superlative *photographic book*.

All four images creating this 'master theme' are printed in the Book in a very pale faded-out tone on their transparencies. This gives a haunting 'almost there' quality to them which is gently counteractive to their significance; a gesture of deferral typical of Woodman.

This is the first instance in the whole group of six Books of the direct repetition of an image inside one Book. Two repetitions of one image occur, constituting the sequence of four. The sequence is threaded into the weft of the image texture with considerable subtlety, their threading is almost cryptic; difficult and delightful to discover in equal measure; as cryptic perhaps as the photographic images, the iconic metaphors and the words of poetry in prose evoking the mysterious chain in *Nadja*, such as the sunflower, the Mazda light-bulb and the fountain's jet. The sequence in *Dettati e Temi* opens out in the Book's pages like a Japanese paper flower in water.

In between the 'master theme's two repeated images of the female figure with an open book, are nine other images of *Dettati e Temi*. In between the two repetitions of the female figure with a table, are five other images. The location of the repetitions occurs alternately in the Book and the reader has to work to unhook the sequence from the text embedded in the inevitable linearity of the Book's codex format; the format Woodman wants to disrupt.

The 'master theme' contains reflections of themes already photographically objectified in the Book's first half including mottling, scrolls, ribbons and paired (doubled) women. Each of these themes is explored too in her wider practice. Other themes explored in Woodman's wider practice have already been suggested in the Book. These include her focus on the magnification of glass, on sliding categories between, for example, organic matter, human form and script; the re-representation of the female as a subverted focus of (male) desire and the conjuring of surprising altered perspectives and equivalents to geometry in architecture, human form and artefact. One theme new to this Book is Woodman's investigation of open field composition.

This whole repeated image sequence addresses the theme of an objectivisation of the photographic dialectic, veiled in a moment of quiet contemplation. Its discourse centres on and extends and summarises her Books project. It conducts its examination here concentrically, in a motion which emanates from and returns to its centre. Emblematic too of Woodman's essential practice, that image centre

is manifold and mutable like water's currents, as manifold and as mutable as the series' rhythmic format, her pervasive device.

At this point Woodman is producing a quietly magnificent climax of her project, a project that has always operated, as Benjamin Buchloh states ... *through the dialectics of the photographic*.²⁹ Buchloh further equates her project with an *anti-aesthetic* [which] *confronted its spectators with a critique of the representational process in the very act of constructing a representation*.³⁰ In what he also describes as the *counter-articulation* intrinsic to her work he lines it up with such key practitioners of the twentieth and twenty first centuries as Marcel Duchamp, Eva Hesse and Cy Twombly, all of whose work, he considers to be *defined by a chasm inside the painterly or sculptural [or photographic] sign itself* ...³¹ His analysis is largely astute.

The second and fourth images, in repetition (figs 122 and 128) of the master theme depict a demurely standing figure, holding a rectangular object by its two top corners. This is a book with a light torn fragment of paper on its cover.

On a white table surface in front of the artist is a display of objects chosen to simulate and to haptically portray the character of the Italian student from three-quarters of a century before. These are an ink pot, a pen tray and an encased blotter, the kind the 'ghost' student would have used. On the left corner of the table too is a blurred trope from Woodman's 'real' contemporary practice, a pair of photographic negatives, that essential symbol of her project. Woodman blurs

²⁹ Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 46.

³⁰ Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 47.

³¹ Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 47.

them to invert or negate history (another boundary to dissolve), in what is at least a clouding (and merging) of past with present. The pair of photographs is the blurred object in the image.

After writing these descriptions, based on very hard-to-decipher images, some points have been clarified or altered by Townsend's publishing of an autonomous and clear printing of the two images (fig 117). I observe that the figure with the book holds a speckled quail's egg in her outstretched hand and that a pane of glass held upright on her lap creates a nervous concertina form over the whole front of her dress. By this magnification its flowery pattern is rearranged into another wave back to the *mottling* of the Book's first theme. The egg is used in its capacity as an ancient symbol of fertility and creativity, its speckled surface making another wave to the *mottling* theme. It is also possible to identify what I had previously read as a pair of negatives laid on the table as a pair of positives with Victorian scalloped edges. I can read too that these vintage prints are made into a substitution for her (hidden) other hand.

It should be remembered that within the context of the *Dettati e Temi*, however, Woodman had certainly wanted its images to be unclear and mysterious.

Returning to a consecutive analysis of the images in the Book after the artificially grouped 'master theme' quartet, is the first image pair of another sequence of three pairs (fig 118). The transparency on the left is pulled from Woodman's earliest period of practice (1972) when she was just thirteen years old. The *Dettati e Temi* image (in its 1972 printing it was titled *Self Portrait at Thirteen*) hones

down to a section the earlier one (fig 119). The early image is an astounding achievement for a thirteen year old and as Buchloh argues creates a template for Woodman's future and ongoing ambitious and sophisticated project:

That this process of photographic effacement, or rather, the effacement of photographically produced identity, was a programmatic project for Woodman is corroborated by one of her very first, if not the first photograph. In what must be one of the most astonishing images ever produced by a child prodigy of photography, her Self Portrait at Thirteen, Woodman takes one of the classic tropes of self reflection in modernist photography, to capture the self by remote control.³²

The two images of this pair in *Dettati e Temi* both use light to construct and deconstruct form. They are interrelated primarily through the strong connecting diagonals of shadow and light across both the images. It is these dramatic diagonals which construct the point of arrest. And they are opposed in angle to the angles provided by the harmonies of the pervasive original script, so that here the combination of contrasting angles forms a spread of almost-seen triangles.

In the left image Woodman gives us a stark and mysterious version of the earlier photograph by eliminating a substantial amount of interior architectural detail; the detail that could squeeze a little individual narrative from the setting. She has cropped out the bench arm rest and the white chair and the white moulded door of the 1972 composition. The effects of the bright light originally behind her are retained from geometric necessity and the diffused light, triangulating in perspective on either side of her dark torch beam, is eradicated. Her paring down

³² Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 45.

of all *setting* information, that comfortable handle, in this image, makes it sinister. But the other image of the pair contains a disturbance factor equal to this.

Why does the shadow thrown by the cup have such a hard outline and why is it so elongated at the side? The implication is that the object of reflection, or real object, in the cup, is what the torch-beam lights. Woodman is thereby constructing a new narrative, in this staggered focus, running directly through the two images. What floats in the cup, whether real object, reflection of another object outside the frame, or born of photographic manipulation, is the lightest area. When read anthropomorphically, the perfect ovoid form gains at least its nose and mouth features from the gentle invasion of the purple-brown copperplate script. If the image is turned ninety degrees round, the (sugar-lump size) small, oval, hairless head visible has the elongated forehead I associate with Claude Cahun's distinctive photographic self imagery (which it is very unlikely, though not impossible, Woodman would have known) as in this example (fig 120).

The next pair of photographs, the second in the sequence (fig 121), shows an advanced manipulation of real form redistributed in the abstract realm. This achievement is substantiated with the technical aid of blurring and over-exposure. Content for a while to read this pair as purely abstract, curiosity spurred me on to investigate with which artefacts, whether organic, domestic or industrial, Woodman had conjured these extraordinary images. But I can claim no privileged knowledge and having obtained little insight it occurred to me that an analysis should perhaps not always forage for information in domains of the physical real. An important surrealist quest (and Woodman's too) is to visualise the oneiric.

This might be achieved through the surrealist method of placing real objects in juxtaposition, to ‘make strange’ or by placing the oneiric within the ‘real’ in a bid to create the circumstances in which a convulsion of the marvellous could occur.

Looking at first to me like a low, spread-out, non-perspectival, aerial composition, perhaps an investigation of texture, the left image of the pair slowly materialised as Woodman standing, wearing a bikini bottom, juddering her right arm in blurred movement and absolutely covered in roses and lichen.³³ Or is it a *devorée* jacket patterned with the same?

The right-hand image can be similarly read as another ‘open field’ composition but is perhaps even more cryptic than its left counterpart. After looking at it for an extended period and wondering whether the central angled limb in the foreground was an arm (if so in what position?) or a leg (but where was the calf muscle?), I spotted Woodman’s face, small and over-exposed, asleep or in a dream (perhaps referencing Robert Desnos’s *sommeils* recorded in *Nadja*), her features bleached out, in the top right corner of the image. In this self-image, she is more absent than on the occasions when she omits her face by cropping at the neck. I have now ascertained a logical structure to the limb in that it is only half a limb (an arm) and an area which is half of her back. And the awkwardly-sized, bumpy kind of *bracelet*, which did not have true ‘bracelet’ characteristics, emerges slowly as her self-clasping hand. The ‘upper’ arm area emerges too as a section of back and shoulder. These are biological forms reduced to formlessness. Woodman has used

³³ For example as in the Duchamp/Man Ray collaboration *Dust Breeding* or in an Elizabeth Blackadder spread-out objects-from-above composition or of course a Jackson Pollock painting from the 1950s.

the 'real' to serve the unreal. She holds them in an excruciating and precarious balance.

In between fig 121 and the next image pair is one of the previously discussed 'master theme' quartet of images (fig 122) which are scattered through this second half of the Book.

The following pair of images (fig 123) which is the third and last pair of the current sequence, is placed over some original text on the theme of Easter. The pair is printed in high exposure so that the two transparencies yield maximum visibility to the original script, the *unterschriften* which has variations of ink colour here from pink through sepia to orange.³⁴ On the left page a change of script can be observed, beginning (possibly) with the words *Parle del luna!* (Speak of the moon). The script continues with four lines in the same altered, upright script. Woodman has cleverly made the energy of this change to the base aesthetic coincide with the focus of the drama between the two people she portrays in her image: a halved pomegranate.

This is an electrifyingly beautiful double portrait which is at the same time an interlude choreographed with a precise geometry. Both people photographed share the same facial features which gives this image pair a modernist purity. The energy extends inward diagonals through the downward-angled man's face, which looks intently at the upheld fruit and, as it were, across the page to the woman, who holds her outstretched hand upright, her thumb pointing at her own serious

³⁴ It is no coincidence that these graduated hues are of a very similar colour range to that used by Woodman in her blueprint projects of the last quarter of that year (1980).

and composed profile. Her face looks out from the frame. The double image enacts the old Adam and Eve story with a pomegranate (in Spanish ‘apple of God’) instead of an apple. The portraits are of two self-aware contemporary individuals in an undoubtedly close union, with no external sign of Paradise. Whether or not these two images were primarily thought of as a pair (and I would suggest that they were), a superb harmonic energy runs through them.

A comparable but opposing diagonal energy runs between the final two (paired) images of *Dettati e Temi* (fig 129), still to be discussed.

Two double pages of unmediated original script follow the previous image pair (fig 123). These act as an interlude between the movements of an intensely orchestrated visual performance. The pages include, immediately next, a multi-toned double spread, on the right of which is written, with what could be imagined as a sigh of relief, in the different, upright Italian hand *Fine* (End). Ink smudges and a general relaxation of cursive regularity on the part of the original student/s occurs too. As the following double page, entitled *Poesia*, continues the script, it is clear that Woodman has deviated from the original sequence of pages and has probably combined two schoolbooks.

An image pair (fig 124), follows the pages of unmediated script. On the left-hand page is a transparency of Woodman dressed in a black dress standing in profile with her arms raised, in an action which obliterates her own head and reconstructs her figure as a simplified vertical in a resemblance to the fox fur hanging on her left that is central to the composition. It is hung vertically straight to the white

wall so that its form is clear, in a manner parallel to Woodman's form. Somehow this image and that following are more about the fox animal than the fox fur.

Rising from the dark floor boards is the circle of a round-framed vintage photograph. The indistinct part-rectangle of another wall-hung picture is visible in the top right of the image. Woodman has placed the image deliberately askew so that its floor line, delineating the dark floor area, is in harmony with the regular march of linear script which is accented in this image over its large area of light wall.

On the right-hand page a deliberately difficult-to-read transparency, which acts as a negative photographic space, depicts a nude Woodman standing on tiptoe with her arms raised up slightly to the left. One fox fur again hangs from a line next to her face and straight down the centre of her body. In hanging the larger fox fur on a line that is angled out from her corner position, Woodman has made this fur, itself doubled over at the top so that the fox's nose turns downwards, the singular foreground focus of the image. It dominates her figure. This image has particular links to an extra large image sequence, entitled *Swan Song*, exhibited as her Rhode Island School of Art and Design degree show at the Woods Gerry Gallery. This series has also been developed as a set of superb independent exhibition prints (as for example figs 125 and 126). These image connections are discussed more fully in Chapter 9.

Three double pages of black ink script, again unmediated by Woodman, follow, after which the repetition of a single image from the 'master theme' quartet is

placed (fig 127). This in turn is followed by the repetition of another image from the same quartet (fig 128). These images have been discussed previously.

Immediately after this is placed the last pair of images on a double page spread in the Book (fig 129). Here are two images in close harmony with each other which at once encompass and magnify the self-reflexivity of the 'master theme'. The pair is a further imaginary enactment of the first project of the original Italian student in the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*. Made in the same double portrait form as the pomegranate image (fig 123), here are two images of the same female figure. The image pair, as is the case with several others in this Book, has surely been taken especially for this purpose. In two unusual shots the viewer is taken into the concentrated calm of the figure reading, as it were over her shoulder. The left-hand image is subtly different from that on the right; in it the view is closer, more neck is revealed. The right-hand image shows an arm and gloved hand clearly holding the book over a table surface. The light source is opposite in both images, this being particularly apparent on the open pages of the book.

The image pair shows a contemplative Woodman reading a small book. Perhaps she imagines her future audience. Looking chaste in an innocent and old-fashioned, summer dress, with her hair tightly scraped up, she completes the vintage ambience by wearing an antique pearl choker. This offers a contrast in texture to the folds of the puffed dress sleeve.

Deliberately over-exposed, to give them a faded antique quality perhaps, as with so many of the Book's images, these transparencies demonstrate the delicacy of

the photographer's mark in its chemical process. These two closely twinned images seem to emanate from an invisible point that is the apex of a triangle (the position of the imagined viewer perhaps) so perfect is the contrast of the forty-five degree outward position of her seated, repeated figure in the pair. This is the reverse angle, in the female heads' outward gaze to the inward gaze of the man and woman in the double portrait with the pomegranate (fig 124). The double joined rectangles that are the books she holds, strongly oppose (left) and continue (right) the angles of the script lines both in their hard edges and in the diagonal rhythm their forms construct. It is possible to decipher the word *Dettati* running close to Woodman's ear. She has picked a word to emphasise the template of cursive regularity which has been the aesthetic foundation for this Book, notwithstanding its highly appropriate semantic value to this project. Its dialectical and dialogical symmetry is hereby complete and yet it remains an open-ended text.

CHAPTER SIX

Quaderno Raffaello: Anticipation and Delight

Succinct in presentation and finite both in its form and its message, this short Book, *Quaderno Raffaello*, is, in the intervention made by Woodman to its found object base, both an urgent missive to a lover and a playful sexual summons. Measuring eight and three sixteenths inches by five and fifteen sixteenths inches when closed, it opens to a double page width of eleven inches and five sixteenths. Described as *Quaderno Raffaello* in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue, I would speculate that this Book is of a later date than both *Angels, Calendars*, from around 1977 to 1978 and *Portraits Friends Equasions* made in around 1978 to 1979, but slightly earlier than or concurrent with the published *some disordered interior Geometries*, which dates from 1980.¹ Thus, like *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, it can be placed in the 1979-1980 period, when Woodman had been back in the United States a full year and living in New York City. This dating system, however, does not necessarily harness the Book's images tightly to an alleged period.

Quaderno Raffaello is one of two Books in which Woodman uses transparencies and semi-transparencies taped onto and over the original text rather than positive, full opacity prints.² This method allows the original copperplate script in its

¹ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 203.

² The other is *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, discussed in Chapter 5.

rhythmically blocked written paragraphs of magenta ink, in this instance on a European squared base page, to be mysteriously visible through the image stuck on to the page. Each photographic image is attached with one piece of sellotape down the length of its left side.

Containing seven applied Woodman images, the original book's pink front cover (fig 130), is adorned with peacock feathers and edelweiss flowers, over and under a scrolled illustration of a smoking factory in an industrial complex. *Quaderno* is printed in a large copperplate script, under which the small adverb *di* (of or from, belonging to), is printed before an empty line for the student's name. In this space Woodman has written her name, using a mock copperplate, to play with the idea of being in tandem with the period of her chosen base work. An energetic erasure of the former student's name by Woodman is visible underneath. The then popular baroque illustrative ambiance of the front cover details an alternative printer to the earlier Book *Portraits Friends Equasions* (*Raffaele Stani* of Naples) and to *some disordered interior Geometries* (whose printers were based in Rome).³ The printer in the present case is *Cartieri Franco Rossi*, of Perale. The Book's name alludes both to *Raffaele Stani*, the Naples printers of the *Portraits Friends Equasions*, template and to an Italian boyfriend of Francesca's.

Quaderno Raffaello's front cover illustrations have the breadth to incorporate most academic subjects at school level; whereas the back cover, with its neatly presented geometric forms (fig 139) differs from the front's as it has a specialised format. This has a regularly displayed selection of geometric forms inside a

³ Woodman would certainly have noticed and probably encouraged the coincidence between the named subject of this Book, *Raffaello* (her boyfriend) and the printer's name, *Raffaele*, of *Portraits Friends Equasions*. Typically, she leaves the coincidence to float unanchored.

decorative border printed on it. These include rhomboids, a cylinder, a triangular pyramid, and an octagon. Woodman has stapled pages in between the two covers. The codes and symbols of another discipline subvert the analysis of theological text in the original book's content. Woodman will subvert it anew in her subject matter.

All the interior pages appear to have been flattened and re-arranged from a codex format into a single foolscap folio page which shows the two 'open' pages side by side.⁴ Evidence of staple holes along the top edges of the pages indicates Woodman's method of making the selected pages into a book. By her action of stapling the pages together along their top edge, she has trapped the codex format into obsolescence. This action is made more curious by the consequent continuous flow of original script with no gap between the pages. In this method at times the original script's sense is retained and at times it is fractured. The archivist has removed Woodman's staples for the ease and clarity of photographic record and the prioritisation of an upright position for both the original script and Woodman's image would seem inevitable.

A dynamic narrative composite is contained within the seven image chain in the pages of *Quaderno Raffaello*. It shares a direct focus on a mono-narrative and its foolscap format with the much earlier *Portrait of a Reputation* (of ca 1975). Every added transparency is positioned similarly on the page; at just above half way up over the script area, so that two-thirds of the template's script is visible under the image and one-third above. Each transparency is placed and stuck on a right-hand

⁴ Foolscap folio, a standard paper size in European use since the fifteenth century up to the introduction of A0-A6 as European standard in the late 1970s, measured 17 inches by 13 1/2 inches.

page. The first double page of the Book has a blank bright pink end-paper area on the left side opposite the image. This is repeated in reverse on the final page so that the bright pink area occurs on the final page in place of an image, to the right of a script page. This attention to rhythmic symmetry so typical of Woodman creates a tight form in which to hold the dynamic narrative.

On each of the transparencies, except for the last, Woodman has written a concise annotation, creating a continuous fiction which avoids the staccato, sometimes abstract interjections in the other two annotated Books, *Portraits Friends Equasions* and *Angels, Calendars*, both of which are multi-themed. Each image in *Quaderno Raffaello* has been methodically cut to leave a larger area of clear film on its left side. It is here that Woodman delights in writing her caption. She writes it in a faux-copperplate in grey/black ink, only surrendering the vintage guise in the very last image caption to the penultimate image, when her script returns consciously to 1980s mode. Woodman writes her annotation on this transparent margin of acetate, in a clear, short, vertically-placed line that is at an exact right-angle and in contra-flow to the base-text block of purple/magenta script. Her script, in a size twice that of the original, positions her textual intervention therefore, simultaneously both in harmony and in opposition to the work from a century earlier. And in these exact vertical script interjections, cutting through the original's horizontal lines, Woodman's annotations make a cruciform.

The whole collection of annotations forms a narrative of short/cut and interlinked phrases. They hold an intense meaning independently but the word chain is superbly expanded by the images which at once separate and fuse them. Each

on while she preens herself. She adjusts her clothing, brushes off some dust or perhaps looks in a hand mirror. Her legs are crossed over each other in a carefree, flippant position. Unwanted garments are dropped on the floor beside her, in strong tonal contrast, of course, to a dark, rug-patterned floor. A long mirror is propped at an angle in the left corner of the room. In its props of mirror and table and of a female figure in the process of dressing, this image is a more straightforward and lighter version of the image pair in *some disordered interior Geometries* (there with a chair, not a table).⁵ It is divided into three sections and reflects a corner of a left central white wooden table and a white crumpled piece of clothing on the floor. Woodman has conjured an image in which she is happily occupied, not without irony, with the fripperies of adornment; in expectation of her lover. She is mesmerised by daily dreams and in a state of relaxed self-absorption. This image captures an afternoon light. The diaristic element is immediate and made urgent by the annotation *call me as soon as* which pulls the audience directly into a moment which they share. We want more; we want the phrase to be completed straightaway and we cannot wait to turn the page.

On the next page (fig 132) the phrase is extended into another annotated section where it is still readable as a separate, emphatic, statement fragment and as a nugget of poetry *you can. I am*. Woodman might be borrowing a full stop from the underlying text, teasingly, so that the phrase *I am* can be interpreted both as an end, *I am* and as a beginning *I am (In my beginning is my end)*.⁶ Remembering that the American word for a rubbish bin is trash *can*, the image which visualises

⁵ Please refer to Chapter 4.

⁶ T S Eliot, *Four Quartets* (originally published 1944), London, Faber & Faber, 1986, 21, 27. The first line of the second Quartet, *East Coker*, is repeated as the first line of the second stanza and inverted, *in my end is my beginning*, as the final line of the quartet: a circularity that fuses well with Woodman's often mathematical sense of construction.

the phrase, in depicting a bin, could be construed as a literal clue as well as a desired surrealist crossover pun between a word and an image. In a converse manner, Breton similarly puns through image into word, in the superb conflation of image and word in the last pastoral and symbolic image of the revised edition of *Nadja: LES AUBES* (fig 21).

Here the printing of the background is in so dark a tone that it is hard to distinguish the hint of form/s on the right of the bin. Is the form (human figure?) leaning against the bin, falling out of it or hiding behind it? There is too the implied reference to Samuel Beckett.⁷ I guess that it is probably a seated Woodman-wraith dressed in a reflective material like satin, only the folds of which are visible; a Woodman in typical half-obliteration. The vertical folds of her garment and the sheen of its fabric reflect the texture and fluted structure of the galvanised metal *can* in an example of Bretonian *circumstantial magic*.⁸ This image has resonances to an image in the *Dettati e Temi* Book, in which Woodman is seen clinging to the vintage iron lamp post she has climbed.⁹

The third Woodman image in the present Book, fig 133, shows the same garment as seen before (fig 132) but here it is draped over the back of a wooden country chair. It is creased and shiny, as of satin, again. Woodman's hand over the chair's back holds it in place as its folds hang down to the floor on the left of the chair. Supplying the subject of the previous annotation's *I am*, with immediacy, this handwritten caption reads *anxiously waiting*. Her tentative visibility in the image

⁷ In Beckett's play *Endgame*, written in 1958, the character Nell lives in a dustbin.

⁸ This is one component of his theory of *Convulsive Beauty*, fully expounded in Breton's *L'Amour fou*.

⁹ See fig 114.

(her hand and one foot only) and the shimmering quality of the empty dress, which might or might not be worn, become emblematic of her apprehensive and nervous state, the state of not knowing, expecting and yet not yet being able to give full rein to the expectation.

On the chair's seat is placed a favourite truth symbol of Woodman's: the dragonfly, visible at an angle on a light block. The chair, white painted or of a light natural wood, is photographed exactly central in the composition. Its form is lit from the left along with the draped dress it supports and the artist's hand. The remaining area to the right of the chair, across three quarters of the image square horizontally and one third of it vertically, is shot in very dark tone. Through this area the fingers of Woodman's hand just appear, holding the chair's top, making a good formal visual repetition of the linear chair-back uprights. The result of this is that the *L*-shape formed disintegrates the plane of floor and wall and makes a surface too opaque for the original script to penetrate. The rectangle of transparent light tone on the top left of the image permits the copperplate underwriting to be seen in the regular rhythms that are its beauty.

And at a point made visible by her use of a darker toned ink, Woodman has underscored one phrase of the under-script, which I can decipher as *la tua signora*, 'your woman'. In this gesture she appropriates a piece of the original poetry for her own narrative-poem and simultaneously intervenes in the aesthetic sanctuary of the horizontal antique cursive by transgressing it with her twentieth century vertical mark; her script.

If *waiting* is interpreted visually by the near-vacuum of the empty chair in this image and the word *anxiously* is (very imaginatively) once more interpreted by the shimmering satin of the draped dress, we can move into an interpretation of the next image's (fig 134) annotation *your reply* as denoting both the fullness of certainty and a readiness for the emotional exposure and discomfort that truth might bring.¹⁰

Here Woodman stands looking deliberately sumptuous in the satin evening dress, now full after its empty flopping over the chair in the previous image. The flouncing of her jutting hip, in this self-consciously *sexy* pose, causes the satin material to open out its folds towards the chair's corner. This corner is still draped with another piece of *anxious* un-ironed, un-ready, vintage satin, perhaps as a reminder of Plan B. Its high-lit folds direct the eye to the dragonfly. These folds make a triangular form which extends and continues the angles of folds of the worn dress (these too form a triangular structure) and incorporates the double diagonal of Woodman's arms. The dragonfly picture is here developed in importance and held emphatically towards the audience in Woodman's open hand over the chair back. She will know the truth, the answer, the *reply* and she is ready, expectant and glamorous, for the desired erotic encounter, that seduction, imagined in the fullness of this image.

The central position in this Book held by the image in fig 134 would have been considered important by Woodman with her high awareness of mathematical structure. This image can be seen as the apex of a triangle, with its two bases

¹⁰Although necessary here for the analysis, the concept of a direct visual interpretation of a word, though sometimes occurrent in the photographic Books, substantially limits the subtle confluence between the two spheres that is mastered by Woodman.

formed by the three images which precede and follow it. Nevertheless not a slave to mathematics, Woodman makes a dramatic deviation from her evolved pattern, constituting an arrest, by leaving the Book's final image un-annotated.

The next image (fig 135) returns from the fantasy conjured by its predecessor to give the would-be lover the wherewithal to make a meeting possible: the exactitude of an American telephone number, *901-274-4184*. In its precision the given number transforms the audience's position from that of an interested spectator into that of an urgent and intimate participant.

This is achieved by a lightning flash element of surprise, its impact in offering a sudden shared intimacy comparable to that of Boiffard's photograph in *Nadja* of the shady canopied restaurant in Place Dauphine. In that photograph we see the starch-cloths on the tables ready for dinner, enhanced by the caption *We have our dinner served outside by the wine seller*.¹¹ Even when consideration is given to the fact that Breton's image primarily inflects his main text (from which it is directly lifted) and Woodman's caption primarily inflects her image, both examples share the effect of an abrupt pulling of the audience into an intimate narrative moment.

Woodman's caption begins with the admonishment to *call* and reverse the charges of the call. For the first time in this Book the annotation *call collect 901-274-418* spills out above its transparent image border into the primary copperplate.

¹¹ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 82.

In an important departure from the compositional situations of the three preceding images, this image depicts a large interior space with a dramatic perspective marked by three big windows. The natural light they afford glides and shines onto a mainly uncluttered wooden floor in compressed diagonals. It is the half-light of dawn or dusk when the sun is low in the sky; it half-lights the figure and the few objects in the stark interior. No sign of the satins and other props of the last four images are here; this interior is decidedly a non-domestic space, a studio. The figure, probably Woodman, stands close to a battered cardboard box or leather trunk and next to the vertical form of a cylinder, perhaps a large roll of photographic paper. The strong dark tone on the left of the figure here confuses rather than dissolves its form. It appears to be Woodman or her model, performing, an 'ordinary' self; dressed in an outfit remarkable for being *ordinary*: a light cardigan with a dark straight skirt. Her head appears bowed and the one arm visible is folded behind her back.

She is about to travel or move house. An oblong ball that is doubled by its shadow on a shiny floor (to Woodman's left), here works as a symbol of hope or anticipation. The ball recurs in the next, penultimate image (fig 136). At the far back corner of the space is an empty, dark chair, which is a very different empty chair from the white version of the preceding two photographs, but again it symbolises expectancy.

Read as narrative, our protagonist is ready, her trunk and photograph roll at her side, her habitat has changed; she seems to be waiting for the arrival of a train, her lover, a change, in a summons from the telephone call.

Possibly shot in the far corner of the space used in fig 135, the next image (fig 136) depicts a doll-like Woodman, seated in the same white country chair as that used in figs 133 and 134. She appears doll-like partly because her body leans out from the chair's stability as if controlled by wood and rivets rather than musculature. And she is dressed in a long, patterned skirt with a tucked-in old fashioned blouse, resembling a 1930s country American from an Andrew Wyeth painting or a Walker Evans photograph. Her figure is unsteady and appears to be very close to toppling off the chair. Even her bare toes are curled away from the low chair bar on which they rest. This precarious position, the lean sideways, is dangerous; visually symbolic of the danger she is in, in exposing herself to hope, as her annotation *in hoping* encapsulates. She holds her stomach, the seat of emotion, with one hand. She is right in the back corner of a large room falling, at the image base, into deep shadow. The area of shadow expands in a giddy perspective towards a foreground that is more like a bleak 'distance' than an interior, in which the only marked point is a white, near perfect, orb: the now-round ball. Near us, it is out of reach for her cowering, frightened, figure. Again, when projected as a symbol of hope, it can roll in any direction. It is photographed here saturated with light, in strong contrast to the deep shadow in which it was shot in the previous image (fig 135).

In this image Woodman again photographs herself with her head off-camera. It is for us to imagine, in the thread of the narrative, whether she has received the desired telephone call or not. Is she in a newly intensified state of nervous anticipation? The annotation, for the first time in the Book, significantly, is

written in her natural 1970s handwriting. It is also placed, importantly and again for the first time in the Book, under the image and under the original script's end. Her caption is inflected with a kind of zany optimism by this change: she has added two pairs of watching eyes in a double dotting above each word. A larger dot is also apparent on the ball, in a happy manoeuvring of the under-script in which she has also brightened an area of pink ink.

The final image of the Book (fig 137) is un-annotated. It is both the climax and the consequence of the six annotated images that precede it. We, the audience, have our dénouement. Woodman's/the protagonist's expectations are realised in a narrative sense in a simultaneous parody. Here, strikingly, without annotation, (for the first time in the Book), the image shows a half-naked Woodman in the role of an extrovert seductress, displaying her ankle-booted legs and bottom, in a performance staged for a seated spectator/lover. We can see very little of this *lover*, just a little of the head is visible above the back, in a black rectangle, of a traditional armchair. But surely the head's top is furry, that of a bear, not that of a human. The absence of an annotation implies a relaxation of control as well as a strong inflection of the image. The narrative is being propelled from the distillation of the art form back into the arena of a real, surreal life.

Thus retaining a subtlety up to the end, Woodman reminds us with the device of humour that the reality of her personal life will only be revealed when a creative necessity pushes it through crevices in her project for us to glimpse.

The final double page spread of the Book (fig 138) has no image attached to it and the original script page on the right has been torn out and pieces of it re-stuck onto the opposite page. These fragments disrupt the script's linear flow, in one instance at a right angle like that of the annotations on previous pages. They partially obliterate small areas of script and make jagged what is everywhere else in the Book a straight edge. A strong vivid pink, the card of the cover's inside is exposed, repeating the inside front cover's motif (fig 131). Bright endpapers amongst the interior pages' pale buff norm. The torn and re-stuck residue of the last script page constitutes a purposeful fragmentation that is an aesthetic change of gear. Its torn triangles overlap the bright blank the pink page offers as the Book's end and the narrative's continuance.

As in all six Books considered in this project, narrative readings, amongst so many other possible readings, are in this instance most intensively fulfilled at the same time as being deliberately unresolved or disrupted, remaining cryptic and open-ended for their audience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Flight from Touch: Woodman's *Portrait of a Reputation*

Consisting of five square, positive, photographic images, each printed with a substantial surround of white and each placed centrally on a plain horizontal, non-codex white page, this is the only one of Woodman photographic Books which does not use a found object old school book base, thus aligning it to a career period which pre-dates Woodman's discovery of these school books in Rome. I am in agreement with Chris Townsend's dating of *Portrait of a Reputation* as *perhaps the earliest, its prints suggesting that the series was made in 1976-7....*¹

This work is not therefore central to my project and seems initially to lack the complex layering of meanings present in the other five Books. *Portrait of a Reputation* is a hand-made Book which had not been published until its full page spread in Townsend's monograph in 2006. Its pages measure seven inches by eleven inches. In common with two other Books, *Dettati e Temi* and *Portraits Friends Equasions*, it contains no authorial annotations.

Its white foolscap sheets of thick cartridge paper are tied together at the top left with red raffia. As the pages are turned, therefore, each has a short horizontal dart of red in its corner. The strands of raffia loop and curl over the cover page (fig 140), which is plain like the others. Onto this page, Woodman has hand written

¹ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 51.

the title of the Book *Portrait of a Reputation* about a third down from the top, in a conventional capitalisation.

Each positive print sits in a wide sea of white page. The page base is of a very similar dimension to that of the double page spread of the other five Books. It measures 7 inches by 11 inches. Here therefore we have an immediate square image on a rectangular format. The wide white border of each print is of the same tone of white as that of the base page which means it just about disappears to the eye.

What Townsend describes neatly as *a powerful allegory of the experience of being touched* is a compact series containing an abrasive violence within its tenets of self composure and self erasure.² Harriet Riches is right to draw attention in her analysis of the Book, to Woodman being its exclusive model, thereby giving it a unique status amongst the six Books.³ It consists of five images, out of which four are of Woodman. Its uniqueness is attained too through its unsettling content. Some other examples exist in a series form, as within the first-named section of her Book *Angels, Calendars* for example, in which Woodman portrays only herself as subject and model.

For the purpose of this analysis I shall intersperse some quotations from Woodman's journals, written in what she called *Steinwriting*, from periods both

² Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 236

³ Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 95.

earlier and concurrent with *Portrait of a Reputation*.⁴ These journals were described by her father George as written on *Old copy books, half-filled ledgers and school folios ruled to perfect the student's penmanship...*⁵ Clearly her interest in this particular genre of found object had preceded her use of them as templates for her photographic Books. Francesca's close friend Sloan Rankin also refers to the artist's practice of journal writing:

*Francesca kept a journal. The journal was a previously used ledger with headings such as "Dulee W. Flint Motor Sales" written in careful flowing cursive. In great contrast, interspersed throughout, is the hurried vertical scratch of Francesca's thoughts and ideas. There is vague punctuation and yet considerable attention to train of thought. The journal always lay open in the studio or our apartment near an ink pot and, for an elegant aesthetic continuity, Francesca kept most entries in ink by way of nib and reservoir, just as the previous owner had.*⁶

George Woodman talks about Gertrude Stein's influence on his daughter's journal writing in his introduction to the *Journal Extracts*, as quoted on p 156. Here he describes the word and image connections of the process:

*Frequently there are brief descriptions of photographs she planned to make, often with summary diagrams. Nearly all of these ideas became embodied in the photographs, which followed them closely.*⁷

As Woodman was just fifteen in 1973 we can forgive the affectation present in this extract from her journal:

⁴ George Woodman, ed., 'Seething with ideas', 2006, 240: *These affectations of style she referred to as her Steinwriting. While remembering that no direct connection exists between the Book under discussion and the selected quotations, my hope is that words and images will invigorate each other.*

⁵ George Woodman, ed., 'Seething with ideas', 2006, 240.

⁶ Rankin, 'Francesca Woodman: Photographs', 2003, 5.

⁷ George Woodman, ed., 'Seething with ideas', 2006, 240.

To catch up present shoelaces Cesca is about to go home which is tremendously exciting after a just-breath summer only I think bearable and treasured because I believe that it is the last of this sort

Oct 25

*Maybe I like Thursdays the way I used to hate baths.*⁸

Comparisons, especially in the dissolution of syntax and the creative distribution and re-scattering of subject matter, can be made between these morsels from Woodman's journals and some extracts from Stein's *Tender Buttons* from 1914:

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing.

*The change of color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared. Sugar is not a vegetable.*⁹

Stein's project in *Tender Buttons* has affinities with the experimental writing techniques evolved by André Breton and Philippe Soupault in 1919, drawn together as *The Magnetic Fields*, as discussed in Chapter 1. These affinities exist in result and not in intention. A serviceable definition of Stein's project is given in

Wikipedia:

*...word clusters chosen for their prosody, juxtaposed for the purpose of subverting commonplace dictionary meanings which Stein believed had largely lost their expressive force and ability to communicate.*¹⁰

⁸ George Woodman, ed., 'Journal extracts', 2006, 241.

⁹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 1914. Online at <http://www.bartleby.com/140/1.html>, accessed 31/05/2010.

¹⁰ Online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tender_buttons:_objects,_food,_rooms, accessed 31/03/2008.

The first image of *Portrait of a Reputation* (fig 141) depicts Woodman shot in centre frame standing square on to the camera with one long gloved arm raised diagonally over her chest. Dressed in an assortment of vintage garb, in demure, *Mary Jane* character, she seems to confront her embarrassment for an audience to scrutinise.

*Here is Francesca dressed nicely and smug, hands folded. And then here are her hands.*¹¹

Her rarely photographed face is flushed (perhaps with rouge), a little puffy and emitting a look of resignation. So why does this pose bring a soldier in line for a uniform and arms inspection to mind, when her outfit, a crochet cardigan over a plain vintage dress, is such an antithesis of that? Her arm with an un-gloved hand, held straight down her side in some way resonates a rifle held steady at a soldier's side during an inspection. The tops of two more gloves, spare tropes, are taped to the studio wall in line with her un-gloved hand of flesh (in half shot). It is notable that the hand we view fully and clearly is the gloved one.

The popular surrealist trope and Freudian fetish of the glove had been explored in a series of etchings made just before Freud's work was known, by Max Klinger.

The series had been exhibited in New York in 1974 and could very well have been seen by and have influenced Woodman.¹² Riches has explored this

¹¹ George Woodman, ed., 'Journal extracts', 2006, 245. This excerpt from Notebook #6 is undated but I would place it at 1975-1976, or later possibly contemporary therefore with the Book.

¹² Max Klinger, *Ein Handschuh* ('A Glove'), a series of ten etchings first published in 1881. The whole series had been exhibited at New York's Carus Gallery in 1974 and had directly influenced Woodman's contemporary Duane Michals to make his own narrative sequence (*The Pleasures of the Glove*) in a photographic response to Klinger's cycle (Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 102).

possibility lucidly in her illuminating paper ‘A Disappearing Act: Francesca Woodman’s *Portrait of a Reputation*’.

She strongly argues too that Woodman demonstrates her knowledge of Man Ray’s *Veiled Erotic* series of Meret Oppenheim in the studio of Louis Marcoussis throughout this Book. Riches suggests that Woodman extends the allegory constructed by Man Ray between the female figure (particularly that figure’s hand) and the paper surface before the appearance on it of the printed image. This intriguing analysis adds fuel to my argument about the depth of the artist’s knowledge of surrealist practice.

She extends her discussion of Woodman’s use of the glove into the only analysis I have found to date of a superb Roman Café series of photographs by Woodman, which Riches views as another full response to Klinger’s etchings *Ein Handschuh* (from 1881, and reprinted in 1977).^{13, 14}

*Photography is too connected with life. I take pictures of reality as filtered through my mind. All these are too instinguish [sic] connected.*¹⁵

In the second image of this short Book (fig 142) Woodman photographs herself with a naked torso. Operating as ‘shock’ after the first image’s quality of the demure, the folds of her rolled down skirt reveal her navel symbolising a third

¹³ See Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 98-103. This is a different sequence (or at least differently ordered) from that reproduced in Riches, ‘A Disappearing Act’, 2004, 103-106.

¹⁴ Riches, ‘A Disappearing Act’, 2004, 102. Klinger’s etching series had also influenced Breton and other surrealists, of course, as well as Gérard de Nerval’s earlier (1850) story *La Main enchantée*.

¹⁵ George Woodman, ed., ‘Journal extracts’, 2006, 243. Excerpt from Notebook # III, August-December.

smaller eye than the ‘eyes’ of her nipples (or mouth, in reference to her *Flesh*, which in turn references Magritte’s painting from 1934, *The Rape*).^{16, 17} Between her breasts is held the same gloved arm and hand as that of fig 1, but this time the hand is stretched a little more tautly. Her other arm, bent behind her back, is printed in a deep tone.

An erasure of her neck and lower face constructs a fissure of identity which pushes her torso into a stark separation. Almost-erased through deep tone her hair and face merge to become one soft-edged blob: an *informe*. In a technical judder which bifurcates physical form in a formulation of Barthes’s *that has been* with a possible ‘that will be’, two thirds of Woodman’s face is reinstated in a clear image hovering above the print’s edge. Read (over-romantically perhaps) as a sun rising above a horizon, it has resonances too of Lewis Carroll’s Cheshire cat: beyond the frame, in the liminal sphere, that mysterious *other*.^{18, 19} Here, this after-image is a meaningful manipulation of the printing process and could contain the symbolic consequence of a psychic split between spirit and physical body.

The power of the glove as a trope and Woodman’s conversance with its potency and its sex appeal, in its multi-finger-sheathing, *vaginal connotations of the glove’s interior* and its present-object reminder of an absence that is the fetish, is well documented and analysed by many surrealist and post-Freudian scholars.²⁰

The pervasive impact of the glove in *Nadja*, famously photographed as a

¹⁶ See Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 52.

¹⁷ For an in-depth analysis of these and other connections, see Suleiman, ‘Dialogue and Double Allegiance’, 1998, 128-154.

¹⁸ As in *Space*; see Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 72, for example.

¹⁹ As in the *Angel* series, see Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 101, for example.

²⁰ Riches, ‘A Disappearing Act’, 2004, 101.

fossilised fetish in bronze and as a wistful trace and dynamic emblem of desire, in a recorded *real* episode in the text, would naturally have ricocheted to Woodman.^{21, 22}

*I'm sitting in a chair sewing
the camera sees me sewing then looks up at my face I look up talk
about women mediocrity myself whatever very sweetly camera out
to full frame then back to my sewing I raise my hands which I
have carefully sewed together with black thread.*²³

The third image of the Book (fig 143), shows Woodman in an apparent gesture of surrender, perhaps before a dramatised weapon-wielding stranger, the symbolisation of a male sexual predator, perhaps, or of the affront of an external influence that interferes with her controlled existence. Her face is in clear focus here and in its direct confrontation of the camera it contrasts strongly to the doubling of the face in the previous image (fig 142), yet repeats the direct gaze of fig 141. Here the black-gloved arm that was held in a diagonal across her chest in the first two images is transferred into its indexical trace. A deliberately clumsy outline of it has been painted onto her torso. This creates a sense of speed of action, a sequence reminiscent of the *polyphoto* sheet pages common in the 1950s. And of a flick book, the pages of which, when turned fast, create apparent movement from the still and closely developed images.

²¹ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 57.

²² Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 55-56: *I don't know what there can have been, at that moment, so terribly, so marvellously decisive for me in the thought of that glove leaving that hand forever.*

²³ George Woodman, ed., 'Journal extracts', 2006, 245. Excerpt from Notebook #6 (undated).

Two first wave surrealist precursors shared Woodman's involvement with identity slippage and self imaging, Hans Bellmer and Claude Cahun:

*All dreams return again to the only remaining instinct, to escape from the outline of the self.*²⁴

*Where shall I put the silvering? On this side or the other; in front of or behind the pane? In front. I imprison myself. I blind myself. What does it matter to me, Passer-by, to offer you a mirror in which you recognise yourself, even if it's a deforming mirror and signed by me... .*²⁵

Woodman cringes and shrinks in the fourth image of the Book (fig 144). In a repeat of the three-quarter figure of fig 141, here she is completely nude and yet her nudity is sabotaged by the untidy marks of the fictive absent intruder. In perfect control of this visualisation of a desire-become-nightmare, she is the actor of all roles. The fusion of her subjective and objective positions is, in this Book's sequence, highly uncomfortable. Present in this image is a symbolisation of her own desire and the dichotomy between her desire-to-be-desired and her antipathy to it, which is here and throughout her practice, simultaneously displayed and withheld.

The untidy marks in black paint or ink link this series to Woodman's *Splater Paint* series, made in Rome in 1978 and as Riches argues, to Man Ray's *Veiled Erotic* series. Woodman conceivably identifies with Oppenheim's dual role as actor and model in the series and interacts herself, with Oppenheim, in a

²⁴ Hans Bellmer, quoted by Hal Foster, 'Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman As Fetish, As Shattered Object, As Phallus', in Jennifer Mundy, ed., *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, London, 2001-2002), London, Tate Publishing, 2001, 208.

²⁵ Claude Cahun, quoted by Dawn Ades, 'Surrealism, Male-Female', in Mundy, ed., *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, 2001, 188.

symbolisation of the print making process which conflates the female figure with paper.^{26, 27} So Woodman's knowledge of the *Veiled Erotic* series here becomes a palpable thread. She makes the top black mark, a black hand-claw, both cover and obliterate her left breast and 'seize' it. Extraordinarily, the typography of this mark exactly echoes the mark Oppenheim would have made forty years earlier had Oppenheim's inked arm and hand been printed out into an image. The lower ink/paint mark obscuring her pubis collapses the identity of a hand. The deep tone of both marks accentuates the artist's shrinking pose by bringing the marks closer to our eye. Woodman shrinks, is coy, timid, embarrassed; yet finally reconciled.

*I think when I get home I should take pictures of objects: purse, hand, etc "clues to a lost woman", also objects with flesh. Touch up highlights on objects or flesh with vaseline...*²⁸

These two marks re-form in the last image of the Book (fig 145), as two small, fainter hand prints, traces which recede in space. The artist's physical presence is annihilated in disappearance. Only the prints of touch remain. Her hand prints emanate innocence after the torment of experience which preceded this image and we cannot, perhaps, look at them after *Sensation* in 1997, without remembering Marcus Harvey's portrait of Myra Hindley, made from children's hand prints.²⁹ And Woodman's hand-prints make a delicate and poignant end to a gripping tale. At this point Woodman has retired offstage, vanished into another sphere. The

²⁶ Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, 97-99.

²⁷ As David Lomas posits in 'The Omnipotence of Desire: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Hysteria', in Mundy, ed., *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, 2001, 224, *Oppenheim was to argue in later life that each human being had both male and female elements, and ... [believed] that gender was a potentially fluid, unstable category.* – an identity slippage to which Woodman would have responded.

²⁸ George Woodman, ed., 'Journal extracts', 2006, 241. Excerpt from Notebook # 1 (1973).

²⁹ This was an exhibition at London's Royal Academy curated by Norman Rosenthal. The Hindley portrait caused a reaction strong enough for public physical assault and it eventually had to be withdrawn from display in the exhibition.

intensity of this emotional enactment is too much for her. The four images in which her rouged face is (very unusually) visible, create an alarming honesty and provide an openness to her own and her audience's scrutiny (and mock disapproval) which necessitate in this series the final and habitual *Disappearing Act*.³⁰

Embedded in *Portrait of a Reputation* is the combination of a visual exposure of an extreme vulnerability coupled with a powerful and subtle control of that exposure throughout technical prowess and wide knowledge. In *Portrait of a Reputation* the expression of vulnerability is raw and poignant. I justify quoting Woodman's *Poem about 14 hands high* here in full, as it provides a vital key to understanding this complex artist.³¹

Poem about 14 hands high

*I am apprehensive. It is like when i
played the piano. first I learned to
read music and then at one point i
no longer needed to translate the notes:
they went directly to my hands. After a
while I stopped playing and when i
started again I found I could not
play: I could not play by
instinct and I had forgotten how
to read music.*

³⁰ Riches, 'A Disappearing Act', 2004, her title phrase.

³¹ Heller, *Incommunicado*, 2003, 100.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Connections, Intersections and Coincidences: Woodman's Voyages in the Wide Surrealist Sea

In this chapter I will investigate visual links between Woodman's Book images and selected photographic images from the body of first and second wave surrealism in Europe and the US. I will reiterate my premise argued in Chapter 1, that Woodman was both conversant with and responsive to the field of high experimentation, occurring particularly in Paris, in surrealist interwar photographic practice. I will provide evidence of her continuing response, through *intersections and coincidences* to this period of the movement's history; that efflorescence of visual ideas made possible by the interchange of talent.

While in no way subjugating her own ideas and talents to those of these predecessors, her images are flagged out in small or large, always profound and considered, visual references born of knowledge that is both deep and wide, in a tribute to the earlier era.¹ This tribute constitutes the construction of a trans-historical dialogue pervading her work.

I would first like to investigate what I believe to be an extremely strong visual connection between the photograph by Man Ray chosen by Breton to demonstrate, in *L'Amour fou*, the *explosante-fixe* component of his convulsive

¹ This apposite phrase is borrowed from Dawn Ades in 'Orbits of the Savage Moon' in Chadwick, ed., *Mirror Images*, 1998, 107.

beauty theory (fig 146); and an image made by Woodman in Providence between the years 1975 and 1976 (fig 147).

Man Ray's image, made in 1934, is a fine encapsulation of this element of convulsive beauty. The compression of powerful and vigorous motion caught in a blur by the camera produces a force of opposition between movement and its arrest. This opposition is held in strong contrapuntal axis in the visualisation of internal combustion through the arrested motion of the dancer. Probably dancing *flamenco*, she moves in a strong floor-stamping contraction which propels her central spinal energy downwards. Simultaneously the motion is opposed by the lifting of her arms in a controlled gesture that is born of the Spanish spirit of *duende*, that dark side of ecstasy. Here a deliberate and highly effective blurring is evolved particularly through an abstract display of the shimmering concertina folds of the dancer's gown. The blurring varies in its intensity in accord with the dance enacted. The dance is both its cause and its effect. It displays the spread and speed of her movement in different registrations of clear focus and blurring. Her head, held at forty five degrees from her body, blurs her hair into a state of *unheimlich* 'fur'. In its containment near the centre of the image rectangle, Man Ray emphasises the *explosante-fixe* quality of the dancer's intrinsically combustible and uncontainable character in an impossible stasis of locked movement, that explosion of opposites. The photograph's strong light source from the right exaggerates the crisp and complex structure of her garments' folds on that side. This creates a separate wildly moving abstract form.

In what will be read as a response to Man Ray's image, Woodman's photographed figure is arched back in an opposite movement. Her figure is in a movement of expansion that is equally dramatic to his dancer's contraction and in contrast to Man Ray's, refuses the confinement of the rectangle by spilling out swathes and folds of dress material in one giant splaying action around and above the female figure and beyond the rectangle. The woman has her head thrown back out of sight as if a tornado had forced the action, in a reverse replication of Man Ray's dancer, whose downward movement eliminates all trace of face and neck. Neither of the two images contains any facial identification. Woodman has responded to the highlight which gracefully traces Man Ray's dancer's dress hemline by highlighting the small and only edge of patterned material inside her image border, half way down its right side. Her interest in material and its patterning and texture is an innate theme in her work, particularly pursued in her Book *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, discussed in Chapter 5.

Here Woodman makes the choice to hold in clear focus most of the large area of quilted (eiderdown) fabric on the right side of her image. The folds of the eiderdown spill out in swathes of tension from the figure in an extension of her boundary. But she blurs the main dressed figure while holding onto a clearer focus of her *flesh* area of shoulders, neck and arm. By this means she accentuates the thrust of the woman's dramatic movement backward out of the frame. Similarly, the eiderdown's square quilting provides a gentle static in contrast to the figure's arched movement in the tension of combustion: in explosion, as well as to its own tightly pulled substance in vast wing-like folds. A passing reference must be made too, in the probability that Woodman would have seen it, to the photograph of

Hélène Vanel performing the *Unconsummated Act* at the International Surrealist Exhibition held in Paris in 1938.²

Woodman's response and tribute to another key first wave surrealist photograph, the Rogi André image of an underwater swimmer (fig 148) reproduced in Breton's *L'Amour fou* as *Seeming to swim*, takes form in a trio of images. For this comparison I shall consider her image. Again the figure position is reversed.³ Her courage to recreate the essential qualities of such a seminal image reveals her ingenuity and determination combined with her extraordinary imagination. Within this image connection, a ninety degree re-positioning occurs, instead of the one hundred and eighty degree angle-change occurring in the Man Ray and the Woodman images just discussed.

André's image depicts the full figure of a nude female swimmer in near profile. The image is preceded (four pages earlier), by a section of Breton's seminal poem *La Nuit de Tournesol*:

*Some of them seem to swim like that woman
And in love there enters a bit of their substance
She interiorizes them*⁴

The swimmer's arms are outstretched in tension behind her and the double-point made by her legs, in their upward angle, recedes slightly away from the front

² Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 2005, 53.

³ This image was first published in 1935 in *Minotaure* and then in 1937 in Breton's *L'Amour fou*. It is clearly inspired by the love heroine of *L'Amour fou*, Jacqueline Lamba. An earlier image made by Brassai and published in *Minotaure* in 1933 (reproduced in Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 56) must also have influenced Woodman's compositions. This is of a nude female, her upper half-torso high-lit and raised, her head similarly arched back out of shot.

⁴ Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 55-56.

plane. The elegant muscular tension of the legs' action suggests the movement of a trained dancer. André accentuates the area of her figure's upper torso, head, shoulders and breasts by high-lighting it. She thereby creates the ambience of a majestic ship's figure-head.

Woodman responds to the accentuation of this part of André's image by containing only the, here re-angled, area of the figure in her image *On Being an Angel #1* (fig 40) in a masterful re-capitulation of a first wave classic not dissimilar to the clever approach in her strong response to Man Ray's *Veiled Erotic* series of the print/woman allegory acted by Meret Oppenheim, as described by Riches. She deliberately deepens the tone of the part of her image which could include some pictorial evidence of the remaining torso.

The Woodman image I discuss here is both powerful, wonderfully majestic and unsettling. We are convinced of her *Angel's* position above eye level, close up and like André's, figurehead-like, centrally balanced and dominating the square of her composition, until we notice the unmistakable recognition marks of a floor: the dividing lines between the boards. She has used the ingenious device of inversion to suspend our disbelief. And a small organic form, perhaps an acorn or quince, opposes gravity beside her, magnetically attached to the ceiling/floor and so twinning her angelic antics through understatement. The use of an extreme light/dark contrast pushes the drama of the image to its furthest point.⁵

⁵ André's image, in Breton's analysis, "Seemed to swim" ... "seemed to dance," said of a woman walking, may even have the meaning here of "seems to dance under the water ..." (Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 63). The poem, *Sunflower* ('La Nuit de Tournesol'), is a key surrealist text, which Woodman is sure to have known, especially fine lines like *Despair was swirling its great lovely calla lilies in the sky* (Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 55).

Woodman's statuesque pose is a compacted contraction of a figure; her face is unusually visible. It maintains a serene expression with the mouth closed.

A linked image, the second proposed as made in response to André's image (fig 39) is one in which she makes her primary investigation of the *angels* theme.

Made in Providence in spring 1977, shortly before the period when the *Angels, Calendars Book* was taking form in Rome, this image is given the same title, *On Being an Angel* (but without a number). It repeats the other's body section and turned-angle technique in an expanded allusion to André's *Seeming to swim*.

It differs strongly in ambience from both *On Being an Angel #1* and André's image. The angel here is at menacing and in distress; *in extremis*. Seemingly she is forced floor-wards and into one position. Notable on the same wooden floor, in a continuance of an 'optional' narrative thread, if so read, are the same props of an umbrella and this time a record player in the middle distance. Shot so that her arched body is invisible apart from her part-torso and part-face, the contraction of visible form is almost inhuman as it condenses into a distortion of pain, as if the form left invisible has been violently severed. The mouth is wide open in a dark and silently screaming hole lined at the bottom by three high-lit creature teeth. Her wrist has become *unheimlich* in its backward, handless arch in another reflection perhaps of Vanel's 1938 performance.⁶ This is a brilliant and disturbing image, in which Woodman addresses surrealism's Bataillean underbelly.

⁶ See page 262 and footnote 2.

An intimate resonance exists too between a further decade-crossing trio of images. Two were made three years apart in the extended first wave period, *Self Portrait* by Claude Cahun in 1932 (fig 149) and an image from *La Poupée* by Hans Bellmer made in 1935 (fig 150).⁷ The image by Woodman (fig 151) made forty odd years later in Providence in her 1975-1978 mid-period, responds to each and both of the surrealist images. It is necessary however in this retrospective analysis and especially in making a close comparison between Cahun's image and Woodman's, that the possibility of Woodman having seen Cahun's image is very unlikely as Cahun's images were not disseminated until the 1980s. That Bellmer would have seen the image made by Cahun is probable.

Closely attuned both in subject matter and setting, all three images allude to the female form and a surreal displacement of it in a domestic interior that might be supposed *real* but with some irony. At once cunningly camouflaged and *bien placée*, all three figures lie, or in the case of Bellmer's signified female, is supported, along a shelf of a domestic storage unit. Chosen in all three cases to connote enclosure and display, but acting primarily in a surrealist juxtaposition with the figure of woman, this unit is a kitchen dresser in Woodman's and Bellmer's photographs and a mahogany wardrobe unit in Cahun's. Woodman's photograph relates strongly to Cahun's in the pose of the figure and strongly answers to Bellmer's image in its cutting of the figure (although the dislocated

⁷ As Bellmer made his first *Doll* in 1934, according to Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge (Mass.), October Books/MIT Press, 1993, 116, and Cahun had her photographs published, although very few, in surrealist journals in the early and mid-1930s, (Rosalind Krauss dates it as *circa* 1932 in *Bachelors*, Cambridge (Mass.), October Books/MIT Press, 1999, 40-41), it is probable that Cahun's image directly influenced Bellmer.

limbs of Bellmer's *Doll* will never be a cohesive anatomic form).⁸ Woodman's resonances are thereby skilfully triangular.

Woodman has shot her simple dresser in an abandoned living space, resonant of her *House* and *Space* series. The theme of enclosure and display has been addressed by her before, acutely in *Space 2*, where her images depict the artist inside a large glass-topped museum display unit.⁹ Her shot here has skewed the straight horizontals of the skirting board and the surface base, giving an ambience of giddiness in the interior, against which her semi-nude form, amongst the empty and conventionally functionless shelves, acts as a flourish: Gothic overtones as well as plain 1970s *sexy*. In either a clever technical feat or by taking advantage of chance dilapidation, Woodman includes only the lower half of her semi-clad form in her photograph. Her upper torso disappears behind what is, in reality and as a symbol, a broken support between the cupboard and the wall into which it is built.

Bellmer's image contains a more solid-looking dresser, complete with some stacked dishes and a cupboard door open, creating a homely and bourgeois nuance. He has placed his double-legged *Doll* in a quadrupled leg arch and dressed her four feet in white bobby socks and black patent shoes. The stark atrocity of its double-absence form flinches and flares against the domestic calm of the dish stacks on lace-edged shelves.

⁸ As Cahun's images were not disseminated until the 1980s but Bellmer's already were in the 1970s, Woodman's direct source can probably only have been Bellmer. This fact strengthens my argument however that Bellmer was influenced by Cahun in the image discussed here. Periods of Cahun's practice coincided with Bellmer's and it is therefore likely that they would have known each other's work.

⁹ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 118-119.

Cahun's image is the earliest of the three to have been made. It is a self portrait with Cahun dressed as an exaggerated version of her child-self. She wears bright white ankle socks, Bermuda shorts and a dotted summer top. In the blonde shiny curls of her wig is an over-large bow. Feigning sleep, she rests languidly on one folded arm; the other hangs over the polished wood of the drawers. The child-Cahun fits snugly into the lowest shelf of the high cupboard unit above the drawers. Both the unit's doors are flung open to reveal her self-display. This is her day of 'airing', perhaps. Lucy Lippard refers to this image here:

*Although she concentrated on the face, it is almost invisible in one of her most powerful images, where she is curled upon the shelf of a dresser like a small girl hiding from punishment or prying eyes while simultaneously hoping to be discovered.*¹⁰

Two images in particular (figs 152 and 153) out of the eighteen photographs in Hans Bellmer's *Les Jeux de la poupée*, the maquette for which was made and photographed through eleven years between 1938 and 1949 contain a strong thread with a pair of images by Woodman from her Book *Portraits Friends Equasions* (see Chapter 3, figs 71 and 72). Interestingly, before working on *Les Jeux de la poupée*, Bellmer had published his *Doll* photographs in book form, *Die Puppe* in 1934 and *La Poupée* in 1936.¹¹

Thirteen of Bellmer's images are interior shots with props such as stairs, a bed, a chair back and even a bamboo fly-swat. But it is two from the five images of the

¹⁰ Lucy Lippard, 'Scattering Selves', in Shelley Rice, ed., *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1999, 38.

¹¹ The first book was published in Karlsruhe (Th. Eckstein) and the second book in Paris (GLM): Diez, *La Subversion des images*, 2009, 116.

thirteen which Bellmer photographed in the exterior setting of a wood, which Woodman references in her two Book images.

Woodman is concerned primarily with making organic and human equivalents to the givens, in this case equations and diagrams, of her base text in the two images from *Portraits Friends Equations*. In the first she recreates the diagram of the base-page fastidiously in tree or human form but distorts the balance of the diagram's angles by a few degrees. The tree itself functions as a representation of six lines of extension in the circle form. The man in the image is half present only as the motion of an arm raised in greeting removes the focus of his form. By the second image, when Woodman has joined him, his form is re-established through clear focus. Here the tree constructs a vertical division line in a rendering of a two people equation. In Woodman's two images the male figure has none of the menacing attributes of Bellmer's, whose man stands hidden behind the tree, a voyeur, watching the *Doll's* secret performance. Her man seems reassuringly ordinary and surely a 'friend'.

Mahon describes the *Doll* from Bellmer's second series, made earlier, here:

*Bellmer's second doll, with her ball joints and multiple limbs, allowed for greater physical, and by extension greater erotic, manipulation. Her four-legged, headless, naked form, staged in nature, presents the spectator with a disturbing image of illicit desire.*¹²

¹² Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 2005, 51. She is describing the series *La Poupée*, made three years before *Les Jeux de la poupée*.

Disturbing indeed and the effect of the images in Bellmer's series can be strongly subliminal, probably intensely so for a woman; their subliminal hold occurring some time after, even years after, the first reaction of disturbance.

Woodman also shows in these two images her familiarity with the tree Bellmer constructs in another of this series (fig 154), in which the standing *Doll* co-forms the trunk of the tree with its own trunk that is splayed into two branches at its top. Woodman's tree both splays into two at its top at the same angle and has a trunk constructed with the addition of a lighter wood support.

It is not relevant here to delve deeply into the topic of the dissemination of surrealist photographic imagery during Woodman's formative period in the late 1960s until the start of the 1980s. Suffice it to say that her acute knowledge of the subject is evidenced in her work, in its abundance of references and tributes, in deep acknowledgement or multiple asides. The artist could have seen the work in facsimiles of *Minotaure* which had first been published by Albert Skira between 1933 and 1939 and re-published by them between the early 1970s and 1981. In response to Skira's re-publishing of *Minotaure*, many reproductions appeared in journals such as *Artforum* and *Art International*, throughout the 1970s. These would have been available in the libraries of both Rhode Island School of Art and Design and the University of Denver, where her father taught in the Fine Art faculty and were therefore accessible to Woodman, as attested to by Townsend.¹³

¹³ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 35.

Seen in the context of her period of practice, it is evident that Woodman was acutely conversant with first wave surrealist photography. She drew on it as a source from which to fecundate her practice. She created a unique and formidable body of work which although containing profuse and profound references to key surrealist works, remains equal to them at all times.

CHAPTER NINE

Woodman and Woodman: Chains of Signifiers

*The stairway branches off indefinitely
It leads to a haystack door it broadens suddenly onto a public square
It is made of swans' backs with one wing outstretched as a railing*¹

This chapter will offer an analysis of the relationship of images in Woodman's Books to those of her images developed as independent or serial prints in silver gelatine/nitrate or in the more experimental blueprint format. These are now, and especially since 1986, being exhibited in galleries worldwide. The Woodman archive in New York consists of approximately 800 images from which to date only around 140 have been made publicly accessible in catalogue, monograph or exhibition. The artist printed all her own images and kept most careful control over these processes. It is because of this that her so-named *vintage* prints, the ones printed by her in her lifetime have become rare and extremely sought after. Each new edition of prints when permitted released by the Woodman Estate is usually limited to 40 which will include one vintage print.²

¹ André Breton, extract from *Facteur Cheval* ('Cheval the Mailman') in *Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares/Jeunes cerisiers garantis contre les lièvres*, bilingual edition, trans. Edouard Roditi, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press/Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1969, 23 (unnumbered page).

² This information was gained from a personal communication with Anna Mustonen at the Victoria Miro Gallery on 8th December 2010.

Reconsidering Peggy Phelan's argument regarding the function of the Books within Woodman's working practice and particularly in the relation of the images to their own past, present and future, I will try to assess their position within the artist's wider practice.³

In the process of tracing the connections between the images in Woodman's Books and those she pulled out for development as gallery prints or those images contained in series form or those made in the experimental blueprint form, perhaps also in series, I hope to enrich my understanding of the relationship between her different methods and their purpose in her whole field of practice. Experimentalism is core to it. This implies no existent hierarchy amongst images.

Making, reflecting, cropping, repeating, re-printing and re-thinking through re-making are key to the working process of a photographer who gave supreme value to the print development stage of that process.

The variables and variations within Woodman's practice construct an open-ended, activated and activating form. In the relation of themes explored in her Books both to the rest of her corpus and to the other Books, a *weave of signifiers* is constructed. This constitutes an example of the Barthesian text.⁴

If, in Arrouye's assessment of text and image relations, the *series* contains *complémentarité, concurrence ... and successivité*, we can apply these useful

³ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 987, 991.

⁴ Barthes, 'From Work to Text', 1977, 159.

terms for image to image relations in Woodman's work, for the moment excluding her practice of adding caption text.⁵

Of her six photographic Books two of them, *Portrait of a Reputation* and *Quaderno Raffaello*, contain no exact image replication in the main corpus of her work. Although this section will look at similarities between images when these are strong, with variations occurring at the printing stage, it will mainly focus on that intrinsic element of Woodman's practice, the development of themes, in whichever way these may occur. These themes are often crystallised in the series format, leading possibly to the contention that the form of the autonomous print, so attractive and accessible to the public and the curator, might be counteractive to or atypical of her essential practice.

I will here prioritise occurrences of repetitions of the same image or a slightly altered version of it. This alteration could be from cropping, re-angling or the choice of a different print tone. Movement of an image from the Book form to the wider corpus is just as likely to occur in reverse. I will observe the relative temporal positions of images and the impact on them of contextual placing. The movements occur within a frame of self reference complexly immured in her practice. Woodman's use and re-use of her images, so that they are already-made and nearly-made and re-made, is expressed here by Phelan:

*Each print copies the moment that is both behind her and still waiting to be (re)developed as the series forces new interpretations of past images as additional ones are added.*⁶

⁵ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 149. I have omitted Arrouye's category of *redondance*.

⁶ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 987.

In spite of some confusion between Phelan referring to the photographic Books as *diaries*, when in fact Woodman kept separate written *Journals* in which she both wrote and drew plans for her images, for my purpose both practices operate within the term *diary*.⁷ Extracts from these journals were not after all published until four years after Phelan wrote about Woodman. I discuss this further in Chapter 2.

*Soon, however, the diary functioned as a rehearsal space, a book for first drafts for her compositions Some diary entries are like scores for performances that were composed but never developed. The movement from thinking of her diary as a place to reflect on completed work to thinking of it as a place to plan future compositions is a psychically complex one. It is to move from the present as a place to contemplate the past to the present as a way to shape the future.*⁸

I propose that a continuum of movement between present and past and future is embedded in Woodman's operation; and furthermore that a defiance of the temporal exists in her work.

Within the six photographic Books I have traced no external development of images, nor any direct repetition of them in the innate self-containment of both *Portrait of a Reputation* and *Quaderno Raffaello*. The images in these two short Books function as tightly linked chains only connected to images within that particular Book. In these cases, the Books address a personal narrative that is more than usually self-exposing and perhaps because of that Woodman's interest in the aesthetic of image development is held to be less important.⁹

⁷ Please see George Woodman, ed., 'Seething with ideas' and 'Journal Extracts' in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 240-248, for more extracts from Woodman's journals.

⁸ Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 991.

⁹ However, a tight development of the images in their own series certainly occurs in *Portrait of a Reputation*.

In the remaining four Books, the highest incidence of image repetition within the Book or outside it in the wider corpus occurs in those Books which already address a complex and pervasive layering of themes. Repetition of images or their internal sequence inside a Book is always based on reflection and is usually non-linear.

The so-named *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* has eight images out of a total of thirty three which have either been developed from pre-made images or are developed into autonomous prints in the wider corpus. *Angels, Calendars* has ten images out of a total of twenty four which are developed from or into autonomous prints. *Portraits Friends Equations* has a total of seven images out of its total of nineteen which either pre-exist or are developed as independent images. *Some disordered interior Geometries*, containing perhaps the most brilliant sequence of responses to its already complex *found object* base, contains three image developments in the wider corpus out of its total of sixteen. This is the lowest number traced in proportion to its total number out of the four Books in question, perhaps explicable as this Book contains such a close thematic relationship of its images inside it.

It is important to remember that Woodman herself would probably only rarely have thought in terms of prints made specifically for exhibiting on a gallery wall or for insertion into any particular Book. All her work was fundamentally experimental and process-based, though never in itself unresolved. Of two important exhibitions in which she participated in her lifetime, one consisted of her ambitious, unfinished *Temple Project* in the format of giant-scale (between 1

and 3 metres) blueprints shown at New York's Alternative Museum's *Beyond Photography* exhibition in 1980. The other was her Rhode Island School of Art and Design Degree show in 1978, *Swan Song*, which contained off-rectangle table-top-sized prints (measuring about 3 feet by 4 feet each) complemented by wainscot-high tiny (two or three inches by 10 or 20 feet wide) horizontal contact strips.¹⁰ Townsend reflects on her *Swan Song* exhibition:

*By now, however, Woodman was also using the space as an active part of the work – this was, effectively, installation rather than exhibition.*¹¹

Importantly all the works shown in the two exhibitions were of a nature that challenged both the conventions of the rectangle and that of the gallery wall.

Her first Italian solo show, held most aptly at her favourite Roman haunt *Libreria Maldoror* in March 1978, was, to judge by the invitation cards, experimental too. These postcards each have a unique Woodman print stuck onto their back.¹² I have seen none of the images printed on the three postcards in the same composition and printing in any published catalogue on Woodman. One, for example (fig 155), connects strongly to the *Angels* series but is neither present in the *Angels*, *Calendars Book* nor yet in currency as an independent print. Here she has torn the print's edge and stripped off its shiny surface at the top to reveal the

¹⁰ With extraordinary ingenuity, Woodman had cut a large hole in the ceiling above the setting she used to photograph herself, naked and with various tropes, probably with a shutter-release cable. This knowledge was gained from my conversation with Victoria Miro in summer 2006, who told me about her exciting discovery of these prints, by this time very torn, stored in her parents' New York apartment in huge rolls. Miro organised a comprehensive digitised restoration of the prints for exhibition at her Islington gallery in July 2007. I thank her for giving me the experience of seeing these magnificent works in their full scale and splendidly hung.

¹¹ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 49.

¹² Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 206.

white paper under-layer that, perfectly and speedily, constructs another pair of angel's wings, outside the image rectangle, wings that are scattered with spasms of light.

Woodman's methods of trial and reflection equalise her images so that they may be lifted from any point in time during her nine-year period of practice. They form a chain of available sources from which she selects and rearranges in a process based on narrative, theme or aesthetic value, to use in whichever format she deems most apposite.

I will try to get closer to an understanding of the process described by looking at the remarkable and well-known image used in both the Books *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* (fig 105, right-hand image) and *Angels, Calendars* (fig 59). In the latter Book it occurs with the annotation *December* underneath. The image has also been widely exhibited as a gallery and monographic print (fig 106). As the timing coincides, the *Angels, Calendars* Book comprised of an image series first conceived in Providence, developed and augmented in Rome and probably developed further in the US on her return. This image could have been used as just such a *rehearsal space* for a development of the autonomous image later or pulled out and trialled consecutively. Woodman must have wanted to further experiment with the print by placing it into the new context, the *afterwards* of *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, where the image in transparency both negates and sustains the under-script. But in that case which print was the rehearsal, which the enquiry and which the result? Probably all three prints explore and contain the

three parts of the process and the undulating time span it releases. Woodman's sense of time was decidedly circular, not linear.

In the print used in *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* we see the image in a soft exposure and in a reverse printing registration to the one in the earlier *Angels, Calendars* Book. Both the printings in the two Books are in a dark tone though this tone is deeper in the *Angels, Calendars* image. Both the compositions achieved are equally striking. The image printed for autonomous publication is of a better quality than those in the Books. In position it corresponds to the print in *Angels, Calendars*. But it has a greater tonal contrast and consequent clarity of detail; in it the marvellous textures of the space's dilapidation are fully brought out, where in both Books' prints its textures play a subservient role to other visual matters. In the autonomous print Woodman's mud-smeared torso enacts its synaesthesia on the interior as she becomes a creature from the wall.

The visual links between the fabric's pattern on Woodman's dress, here rolled down to the waist, and the mottling from the covers' aesthetic are now expressed and extended by the surface textures of the peeling and gouged plaster and paint wall in a superb circumstantial magic camouflage.

This extension of patterning is rendered, in the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* image, both more random and wilder by the contrasting regularity of the scripts' lines in their continual delicate horizontal crossing: rendered faint as they cross the transparency at the blurred area in the low skirt folds. Woodman has stuck on her image so that the buttons on her skirt coincide exactly with the position of the

script lines, giving the image a different emphasis from that of the gallery print. Another difference is in the underplaying of the gouged marks on the rear upper wall. These become nearly invisible under the script lines which dominate this area in the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* image. In it the lines pass across the wall and onto the torso in a musical alignment of two distinct physical masses.

Another image pair used by Woodman in *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* resonates strongly with images in her wider corpus. In this image pair she uses the trope of a fox fur. I will place my focus on the right-hand image of the Book's pair (fig 124). A fuller description of these Book images can be found in Chapter 5. A difficult image to read in its version in the Book, due to the very faint tone of its printing, its wider corpus counterpart (fig 126) is a clearer image and a subtly different independent print, as the transparency in *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* is slightly cropped. I will therefore read the image components primarily from the independent print, which was made in New York in 1979.

The image shows a naked Woodman standing tightly against a room corner on tiptoe, with her arms stretched upwards, in a similar pose to that in her double portraits of two women with maypole ribbons in *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*. Her torso is slightly slanted but one fox fur hangs from a thin line in front of her, in a contrasting clean vertical, down the exact centre of her body, from just above her lowered eyes to just above her knees. Another fox fur, no, two other combined fox furs, are strung as one vertical in front of the other fur. Woodman has created another practically invisible perspective from the line on which they hang. As this object is nearer our vision we can see details such as its furry top, in line with

Woodman's hair. A sharp part-rectangle of sunlight cuts into the floor's rectangle and a glittering pattern of diffused sunlight is spread over the wall and door at the back, in a diagonal angle towards the figure.

In the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* transparency the reversal of composition, the consequences of the cropping, and a printing so faint that many tonal variations disappear, give the image a very different quality from that of the independent print. The sun and shade diagonals of that print become, in the Book image, dark soft-edged pointers to the corner figure who is faded out to near-obliteration behind a fox fur and a floor and door corner area where much definition has been lost. But the foreground fox fur, here appearing near the physical centre of the composition, gains a central significance, as it is both the darkest and the most clearly defined object in the Book image. Rather than reading this as her being subsumed by that old trope of fetishism, the fur, I think Woodman desires the power of the creature, in its dead-object form of adornment and fetishism, to be paramount.

The next image I want to discuss (fig 156) was, according to Townsend, also made in the same year, 1979, in Washington or while Woodman was artist-in-residence at the MacDowell in 1980.¹³ Without wanting to delve too deeply into precise dating, I have to say that it relates most strongly for me to the image with the fox fur prop which is part of the formidable *Swan Song* series (fig 125), made in Providence in 1978 for her Degree show at Rhode Island School of Art and

¹³ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 215. Knowing too that Townsend worked closely with the Woodman Estate over dating and placing matters for his 2006 book, I treat his suppositions with respect. However, the archive catalogues the image as from her New York period.

Design that year. It is in part a tribute to her unswerving self-confidence that she uses and re-uses images from all years of her practice with such conviction.

Woodman wears the fox fur triumphantly in this striking and majestic independent image (fig 156). Its fur has a rough-edged, ruffled quality that forms a visual *double entendre* with a feather boa. No interior details or tropic accoutrements are present. Her naked torso, placed very close to centrally, has one arm holding the fur straight down her right side and the other held up so straight it looks as if it is being pulled from above. The three verticals of arm and fur and torso are superbly counteracted by an apparently last-minute twist of her head in an extreme *contrapposto* revealing a profile concentrated in blurred movement. The angle down, at which her turned head is directed, is echoed by the half-diamond form of her bent arm. As she has done on many occasions, Woodman here presents the fur as the unchallenged object of fetish, including herself as sexual object, for the full view of her audience. We have gone beyond the *male gaze* phenomenon and the vehement waves of feminist reaction to it. In this image, as in so many others, Woodman avoids a presentation as *desirable woman*. She retracts the position as she simultaneously reclaims it, succeeding in making an image that is full-bloodedly beautiful within the soon-to-be-past genre of late-modernism.

In the *Swan Song* series image (the series referred to by Townsend as *sculptural* photography) from 1978, Woodman wears two fox furs round her neck.¹⁴ In this image, measuring of 3 by 4 feet, we can distinguish two small fox heads and a fox

¹⁴ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 49.

leg, placed in a way which resembles the central torso placing of the image just discussed.¹⁵ Here the dramatic loop upwards, as one fur misses her neck and blocks the chin-base of her thrown-back head, sees the object lead a movement accentuated by the gentle downward angle of Woodman's left arm (as seen). Another white fur piece loops beneath the artist's figure. This reflects and increases the light toned area of Woodman's body as both forms intersect the dark-toned floorboards in a diagonal that is in counterpart to the dramatic overlay of a large piece of torn white paper, on the top left of the image. In all the twelve *Swan Song* images, seven of which she exhibited in 1978, a large strip of white paper divides the giant rectangle. It acts as a motif of extreme tonal contrast to the dark-toned floor and as a lightest tone backdrop for the sequence of tones created by the props. It is particularly extended, as in this case, by her use of large untidily torn sections of the same white paper. These are readable in a narrative sense (of course as they were too in the *Angels* section of the *Angels, Calendars Book*) as wings.¹⁶ In this image Woodman's interest in textile design is again in evidence, demonstrated by her careful folding of a quilt to show both its mottled side and geometric diamond pattern patchwork at the top of the image.

Most poignantly throughout the *Swan Song* series the image or object of a small bird occurs. If the large bird of the title is addressed it is conceivably present in Woodman's own form. In a conceptualist mode, addressing the sign and its multiplicity of signifiers, Woodman uses various small bird corpses, displayed feathers and vintage bird prints, even transfers and stencils as well as negative

¹⁵ The series was restored in 2006 by London's Victoria Miro Gallery, which used the digital C-printing method to re-photograph the series to include all accumulated tears and creases in the originals which had been stored rolled up.

¹⁶ This series was constructed at most a year after the *Angels* series and the *Angels, Calendars Book* were started.

space, abstract, ‘wings’, in the range of her investigation. In the *Swan Song* image under discussion, she cleverly forms the lines of a small flying bird from a combination of the negative space in between the calf of her left leg, the top straight edge of the large paper strip and a torn corner point of the irregular paper segment. On the left of Woodman’s figure, just beneath the bird form, is an area of black cable. This is probably her shutter-release cable. It also provides a visual connecting device in most images of the series. But it may also (and if so very movingly) evoke electrocution (the song title *High Flying Electric Bird* comes to mind), her empathy for the killed bird and a visual enactment of just such a dramatic death as Peggy Phelan argues Woodman had performed in her almost contemporaneous *Angel* series.¹⁷

The technical prowess she sustains in the *Swan Song* series, as for example in her acute understanding of exactly how tonal areas will intersect, overlap and cancel each other and in the construction of such complex tableaux, pushing boundaries in their original display, even including the suspension of the figure, is breathtaking. Townsend describes the original display of the series at the Woods Gerry Gallery within the Rhode Island School of Art and Design.

*Woodman took the photograph away from its format as a flat print upon the wall and deliberately introduced a third dimension, whilst exaggerating scale. The grouping of large prints within a room at the Woods Gerry Gallery used familiar ideas of rhythm and patterning, both within the individual work and in the play of forms between them. ... The large prints were placed in the corners of the room, so that their rotation on to each other, the hinging of representational space that was an effect solicited by the images, was simultaneously a rotation of one wall onto another, a hinging of haptic surfaces that defined a space.*¹⁸

¹⁷ Please see Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of Phelan’s hypothesis.

¹⁸ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 49.

This same technical prowess, coupled here with an outstanding mastery of category-jumping visual resemblance, is apparent again in two large-scale blueprint works of the year 1980. In that year she worked on the unfinished masterpiece the *Temple project* (exhibited in May of that year in New York), a fine example of which is fig 157; the courageous conceptual *Treepiece* (fig 158 is an example); and her Book *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*.

The superb analysis of the texture and patterns of dress materials made within *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* is one of the Book's themes that has been and is continued and advanced in works drawn out or repositioned as independent or serial images. For example, we might cite the composite image of fig 159 (*Untitled*) and the sepia blueprint *Dress* (fig 160), both of which were made in 1980 during her summer residency at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, in the same period as *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*.

The two large-scale blueprint works I want first to look at are *Bridges and Tiaras* (fig 161), a work measuring 93 x 431 cm (around 3 feet by 14 feet), printed on sepia-coloured paper and *Zig Zag* (fig 162), measuring 19.5 x 133 cm (around 7 ½ inches by 5 feet), also printed on sepia paper.¹⁹ I see these works on the one hand as extensions of themes present and explored in the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book and on the other hand as autonomous, highly experimental works concerned with the poetry of objects and suffused with metaphors of mutual delimitation between the organic, the artefact, human form and the architectural.

¹⁹ Regrettably the large size of these two images and those in figs 163 and 164 compromises the quality of my reproductions.

The term blueprint, originally and still an architectural term, does not imply confinement of the process to the colour blue, as clarified by George Woodman, writing in Italian for publication in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue:

*Il termine blueprint è forse usato impropriamente. In realtà le carte sono disponibili in una vasta gamma cromatica che va dal blu-ghiaccio al viola intenso. Ci sono anche carte color seppia, nelle variazioni del marrone-arancio e del miele-chiaro. Francesca ha impiegato tutte le colorazioni.*²⁰

Bridges and Tiaras and *Zig Zag* are both works which use the technique initiated by Woodman in 1980, whereby she applied existing positive photographic images onto clear, light-sensitive architects' paper and then printed the image composite through a cyanographic machine used for printing large scale architects' drawings.²¹ The rolls of cyanographic paper measured 1 metre by 25 metres.

Bridges and Tiaras seems to combine one real photograph, in the left image, with what I read as two photographs of prints or drawings (in the centre and on the right). The massive scale of this work, at 3 feet by 14 feet it is as wide as the whole wall of an average room, can only emphasise its outrageous category bursting. It is a delicate and acutely accurate visual linking of semantically distant artefacts. Though not exemplifying any of Breton's three components of the

²⁰ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 189: 'The term *blueprint* is perhaps used incorrectly. In reality the card (architect's paper) was available in a large chromatic range which varied from ice-blue to intense violet. A sepia coloured card was also available, which varied from orange-brown to light honey. Francesca used all the colours.'

²¹ From Wikipedia: *The blueprint process is essentially the cyanotype process developed by the British astronomer John Herschel in 1842. The photosensitive compound, a solution of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide, is coated onto paper. Areas of the compound exposed to strong light are converted to insoluble blue ferric ferrocyanide, or Prussian blue. The soluble chemicals are washed off with water leaving a light-stable print.* Online at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blueprint>, accessed 24/6/2010.

marvellous directly, it is a pure surrealist work, convulsively beautiful. Woodman has observed the kinship of the extremely close visual elements which form the disparate scales of structures and their design. This is the kinship of strangers so monstrously separate, as of monuments and head decoration, that no existing category or social function could contain them both; tiny and precious jewels for a princess shrunk to fit next to a vast engineering structure over miles of river unified within the scale change Woodman enacts through the *photographic real*.

Zig Zag is about one quarter the size of *Bridges and Tiaras*. It measures 19 cms by 133 cms (approximately 7 ½ inches by almost 5 foot) and therefore proportionately it has a far narrower depth in proportion to its width than *Bridges and Tiaras*. It is printed on a blue architect's paper. Again in this work Woodman subsumes the materialisation of objects in her focus on their formal connections. These connections are of a less dramatic nature here than they were in *Bridges and Tiaras* but they are a no less remarkable collection. Her fascination with the patterns of textiles, as evidenced in particular in *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* and throughout her corpus, continues here in inventive interceptions in the wearing, draping, rolling and spreading of mottled, flowery, leafy and dog-toothed-check cloth. The ribbon motif from the same Book is used again, or before, here too, laid in relaxed loops in the motif of the first section.

The zig-zag is created from the space between splayed human feet, two wide, high straight-legged jumps (Woodman and her friends were dancers), the stark black V-neck of a sweater, a family photograph between two reflective cone forms, a bent arm 'triangle', two bent arms behind a head which conceals their hands, a

bent knee with half an arm, an arm and the stalk of a flower. In each separate image the motif of the zig-zag is caught and then continues its rhythm of differences which gel energetically into a formally galvanised whole.

She continued this theme in the appendiary series *Schizzo per Zig Zag* (fig 163) and another *Zig Zag* (fig 164). This *Zig Zag* is printed on a blue architect's paper and is a similar very large size and proportion as its named counterpart and to *Bridges and Tiaras*. In the image a juxtaposition of an image of a woman in a Victorian triangle-ruffed shoulder dress with an image of three shadows of houses in zig-zag-rhythm falling on another building, is particularly ingenious and successful.

The art world's reception of Woodman's work, mostly posthumously, often takes it back to a point of 'high' modernism because of the stunning beauty of many of her images seen in *auratic* isolation. In spite of the embedded 'series' or what Rosalind Krauss calls *problem sets*, modus operandi of her practice many curators have understandably prioritised her independent images. This is of course encouraged by the practical strictures of the (white cube) gallery wall during exhibition and of the fitting of the image to the white page- rectangles of the monographic catalogue.

As the democracy of her images within the restless and probing field of enquiry she enacts becomes increasingly acknowledged by her audiences, their dissemination and reception will change. Her Books constitute a fecund area of research which not only fertilises her whole practice but expands beyond the

purely visual into the inter-disciplinary. In what I contend is her last Book, *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, it is a powerful address of the photographic dialectic through the silence of images within the photographic medium.

As unique objects of precision and unity, Woodman's Books should be valued in the critical field as equal to her well-known corpus of unitary prints.

CONCLUSION

In the rising wave of posthumous critical attention that Woodman's work has received in the last twenty five or so years, her Books have not received the amount of interest they merit. No systematic appraisal and analysis had been made of them until the present work. To provide such an appraisal has been the motivating force of my project and the analysis of these marvellous objects therefore forms its core. Rather than entering the analysis of the Books from a pre-designated theoretical standpoint, I have allowed any such standpoint, outside of the framework of surrealism, to emerge from the primary description of the object.

Surrealism as a framework for Woodman has been the second motivator of the project. Apposite for my purpose has been first wave surrealist work of the interwar period from the decade or so between the publications of Breton's *Nadja* in 1928 and of his *l'Amour fou* in 1937. The reasons my choice of this period are twofold. First it is heralded by *Nadja*, a work that has been central to my project for reasons outlined below. Second this is surrealism's era of fantastic

photographic experimentation. Woodman enacts a deep and profuse dialogue with the images produced in the era, with which she is highly conversant.

I first read of Woodman's desire to line up her project alongside *Nadja* in regard to the *relationship between words and her images* in Ann Gabhart's essay in the Wellesley College catalogue of 1986. This subject intrigued me and I began an investigation of it in my MA dissertation (2000). At that stage I had not read the extended statement Woodman made in a live interview in Milan with Roberta Valtorta. The statement, which had been conducted and was recorded in Italian, became a very exciting stepping stone for my research. A thorough comparative analysis of aspects of *Nadja* (selected photographic images with their captions) with selected annotated images of Woodman's lay ahead. My subsequent enquiry has been a complex and enriching procedure. The relationship between Woodman's Books and the first wave work is subtle, at times tangential, but nevertheless, as I have demonstrated, strong and tangible. The proof of Woodman's accomplishment is embedded in the findings of this thesis, in the internal evidence from Woodman's work.

As the research developed and my knowledge of Woodman's Books, her wider corpus and first wave surrealist photography increased, the more connections were detected between her images and those of the first wave surrealist field.

The investigation of direct and indirect references to this source in Woodman's work is another element of proof of the extent of the artist's familiarity with the experimental images of surrealism's emergent era.

Woodman's own knowledge of and enthusiasm for the surrealist field is not restricted to her surrealist photographic images. Her conversance with Breton's concept of the marvellous is considerable. It is encased in her displayed command of all of the concept's three components; veiled erotic, fixed exploding and circumstantial magic. Perhaps the most continuous visual application of the marvellous in her images is in its circumstantial magic genre, where the exemplification of biomorphic resemblance, category crossing and visual punning is outstanding.

My early contention that most of Woodman's annotated images lie within the Books has had to be re-considered a little during the progress of the research in response to topical curatorial decisions about the cropping and cutting of her photographs for gallery display which now usually, happily, include her annotations. Their consolidation within the containment of the series in the Books affords a more concise scrutiny however. Perhaps those images with annotations in Woodman's wider corpus could justifiably also have been compared with *Nadja*. However the interior corpus provided by the Books with their word/diagram templates as well as occurrent annotations by Woodman, was a superior format for the analysis.

There are three reasons for choosing the Books for this comparative function. First, as I have demonstrated, the Books constitute a composite Barthesian *Text*. In them the annotated images punctuate a sea of original handwriting, formulae or diagrams. This creates a fresh dynamic in addition to that already in operation

between her annotations and image. Second, the Books' format is ideal for Woodman's multiple choreographies of images, in serialisations, repetitions and openings and closures of sequences in a temporal shifting. Third, within their format Woodman could try out and reflect on a procession of planned and experimental images. The Books therefore provide that *supremely precious article of exchange* that Breton had argued for the status of photography.¹

I argue that *Nadja* exemplifies Barthes's *Text* too. Barthes's concept has particularly invigorated this comparative analysis part of my research. The complex and cryptic nature of *Nadja* placed next to the equivalent complexity of the Books is both tethered and given release by according them this appropriation.

Developments and repetitions occur between images placed within an individual Book, in another Book or in the extended corpus. These have been addressed as they occur. A fuller exploration of the subject of Woodman's self-referencing evolves into a separate enquiry in the last chapter of the thesis. A further separate enquiry contains a specific investigation of the artist's conversance with the rich surrealist image field. The challenge here, in dealing with the material untethered from my main argument's tenets, was to discipline it without a consequent restriction in its flow.

Entry into this rich and inspiring surrealist field has led to more ideas for comparisons than were possible to pin down in the project. These ideas are germinating: Woodman's visual responses to Raoul Ubac's *La Nebuleuse* and to

¹ Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 1972, 32; see Chapter 1, 34-35, note 3.

Man Ray's *Moving Sculpture* are just two examples from a myriad of enticing future photographic connections to explore. The visual links between the page colours and mixed typographies of early surrealist journals and their precedents in

Dada with Woodman's Books is another area of possible exploration too.

I very much hope that this project will stimulate further research activity on Woodman's Books. My hope too is that, with the co-operation of the Estate, a Book or group of Books might be published in the near future.

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**'ALMOST A SQUARE': THE PHOTOGRAPHIC BOOKS OF
FRANCESCA WOODMAN AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO
SURREALISM**

Alison G Dunhill

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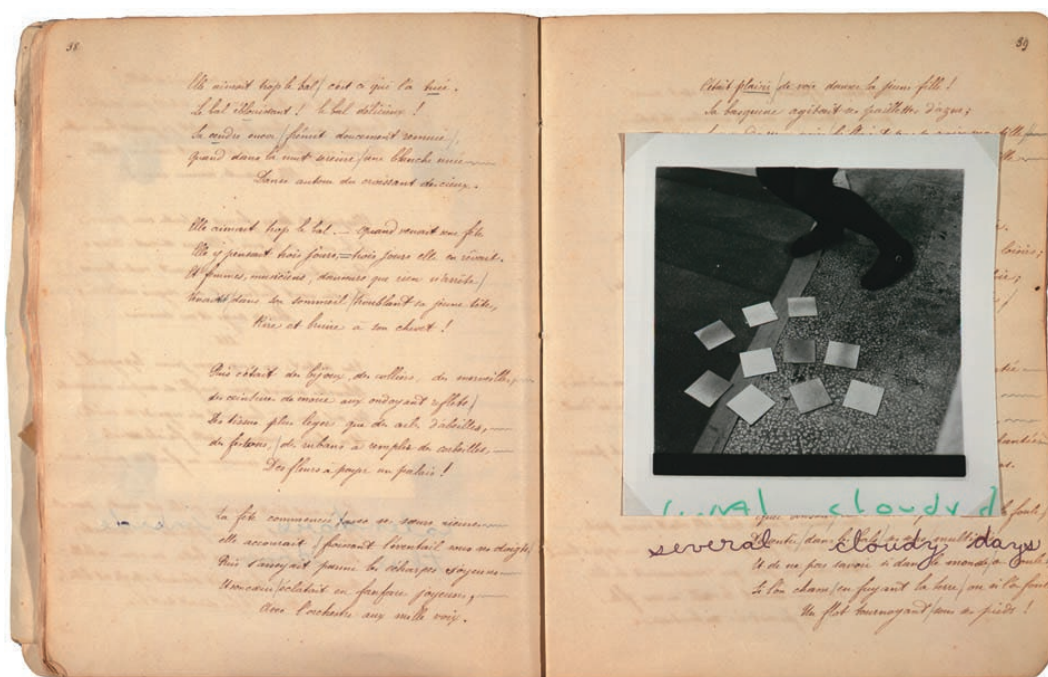


Fig 1: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels*, *Calendars Book*, ca 1978

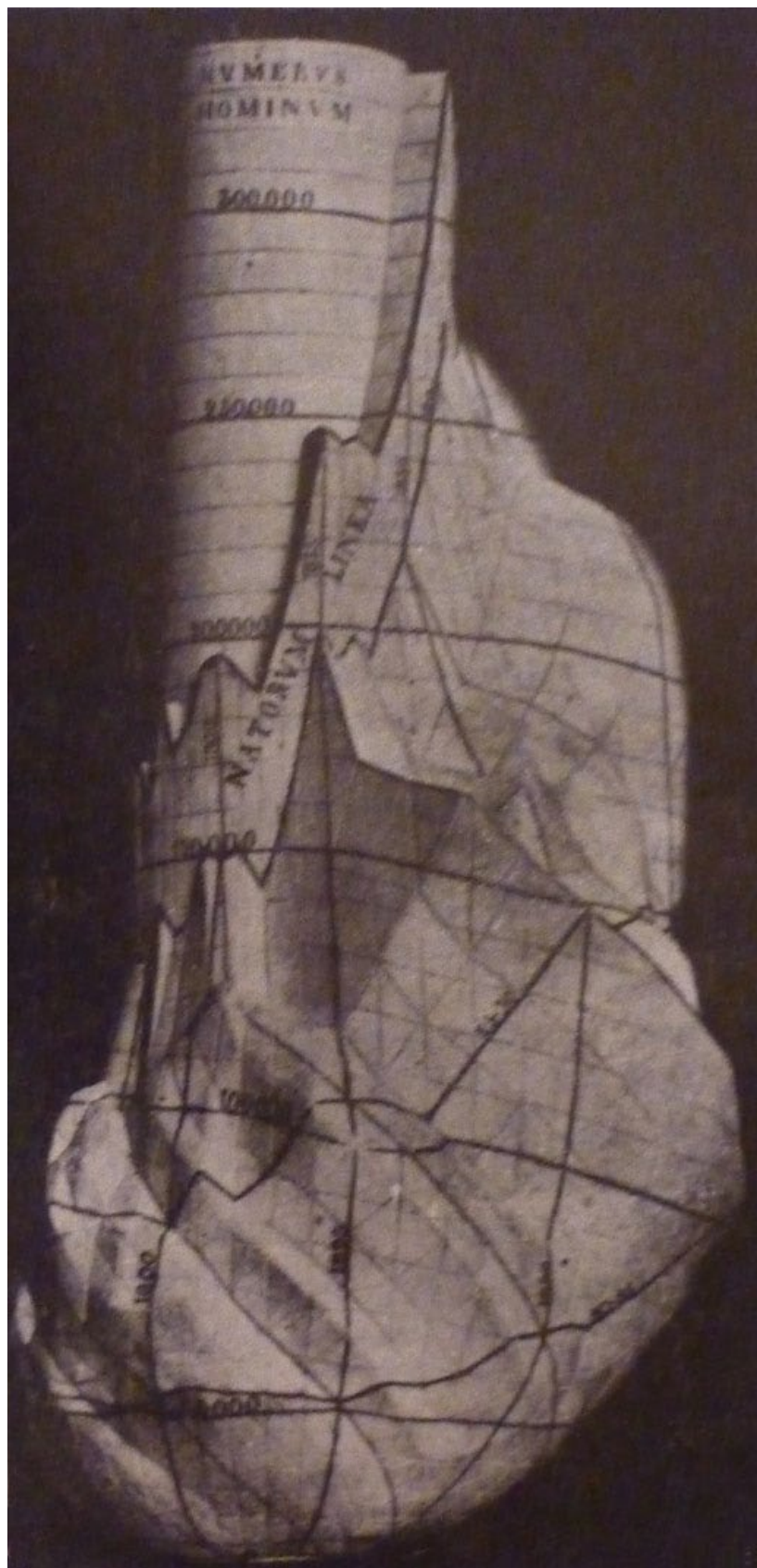


Fig 2: Jacques-André Boiffard, *Pervers enfin...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928

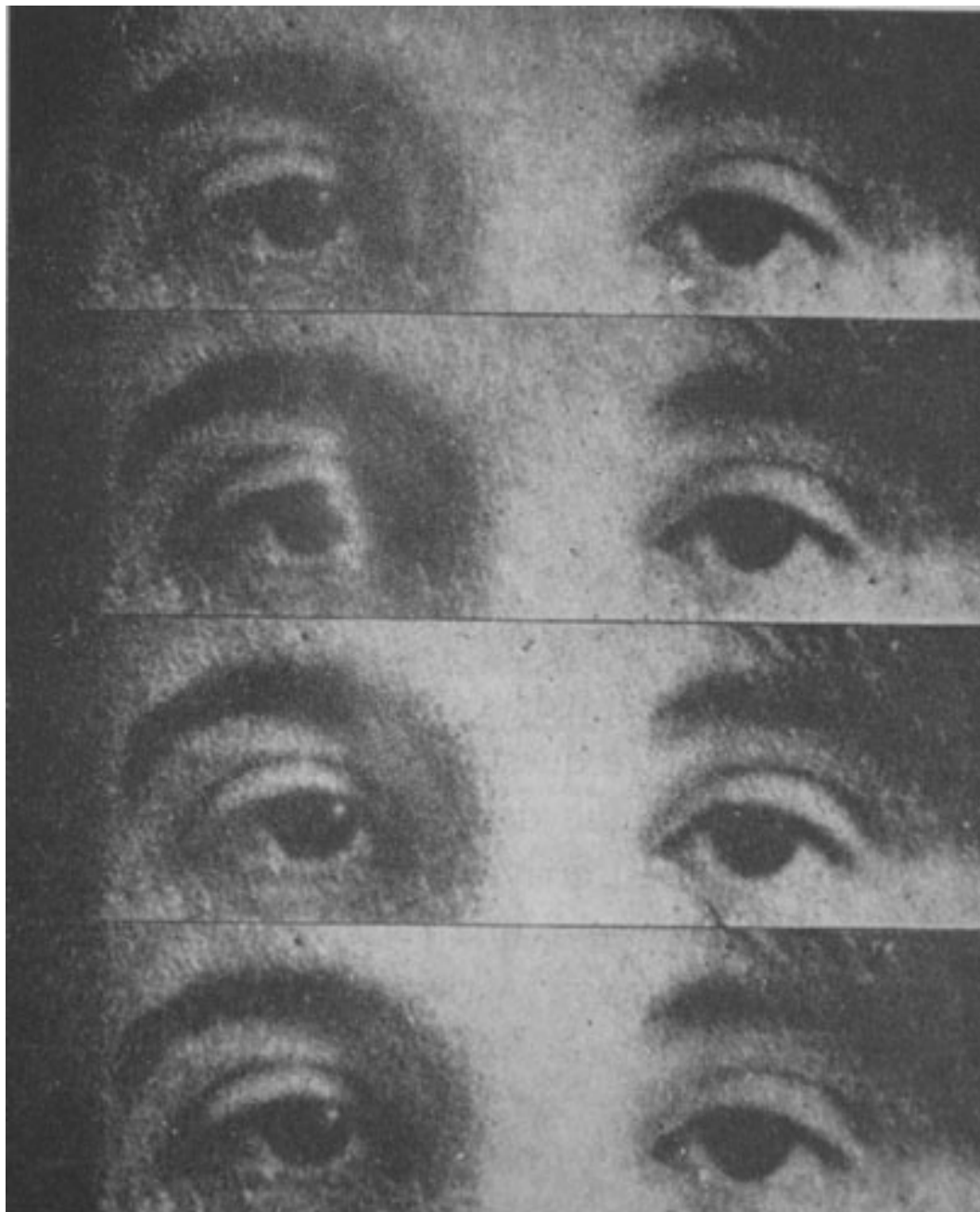


Fig 3: Man Ray, *Ses yeux de fougère...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1963

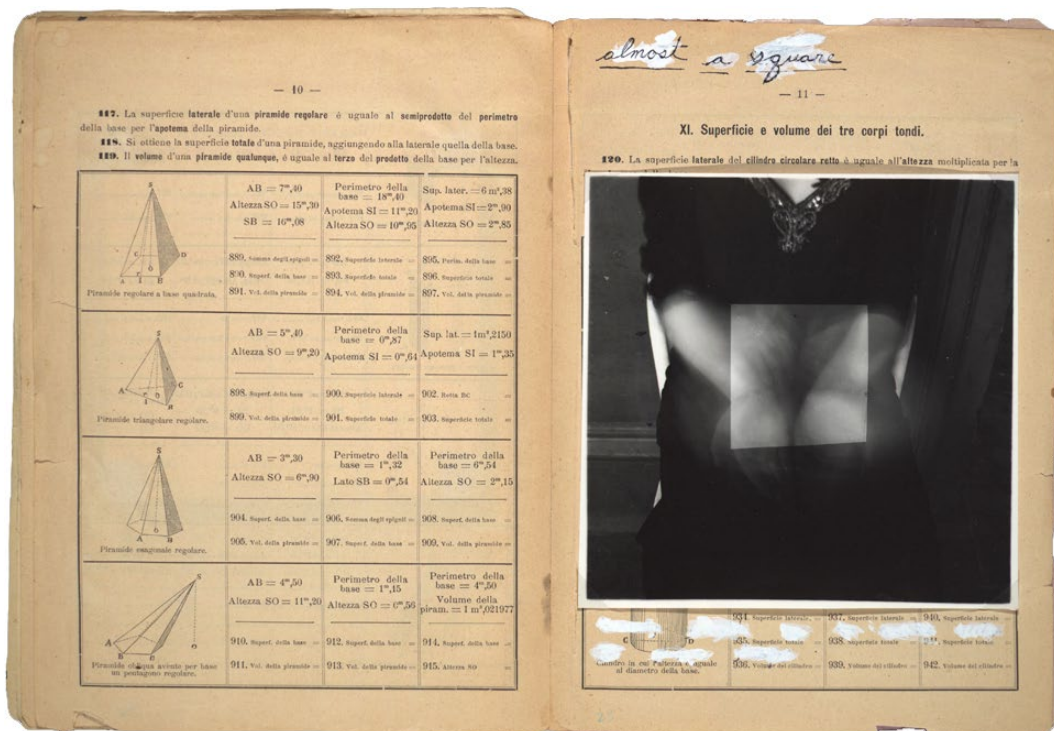


Fig 4: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

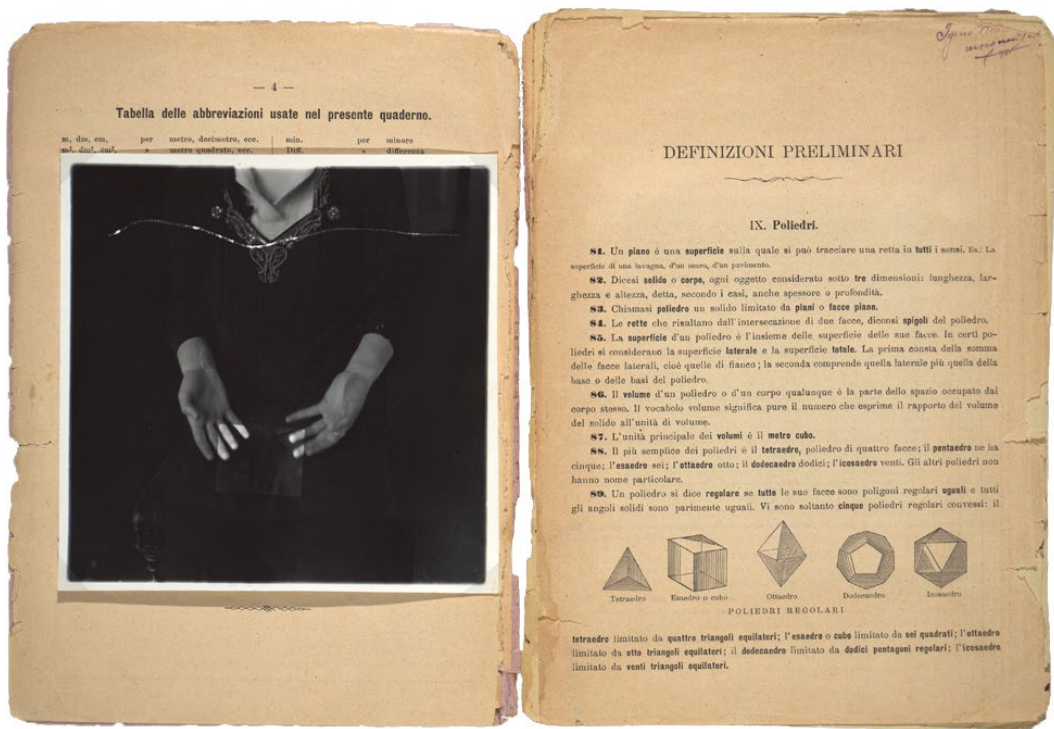


Fig 5: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980



Fig 6: Jacques-André Boiffard, *Devant nous fuse un jet d'eau...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928

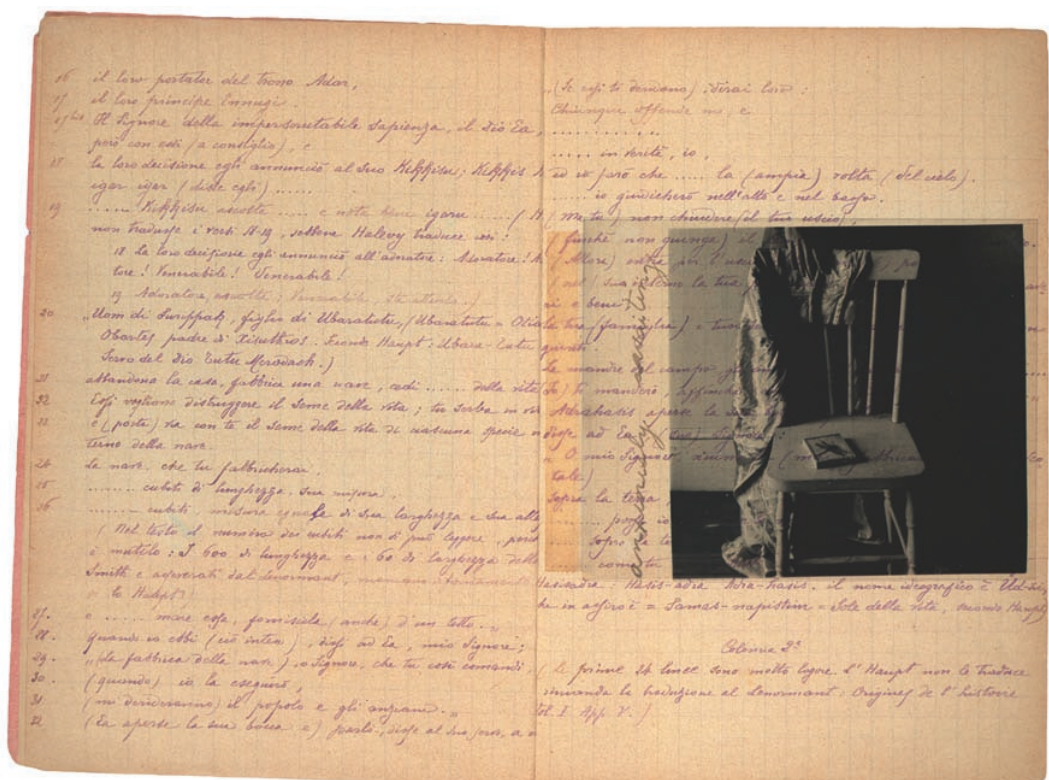


Fig 7: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80



Fig 8: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, New York, 1980



Fig 9: Francesca Woodman, *Study for Temple Project*, silver gelatin print, New York, 1980



Fig 10: Francesca Woodman, pencil drawing, Rome, 1977-1978



Fig 11: Francesca Woodman, pastel drawing, Rome, 1977-1978



Fig 12: *Un portrait symbolique d'elle et de moi...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928

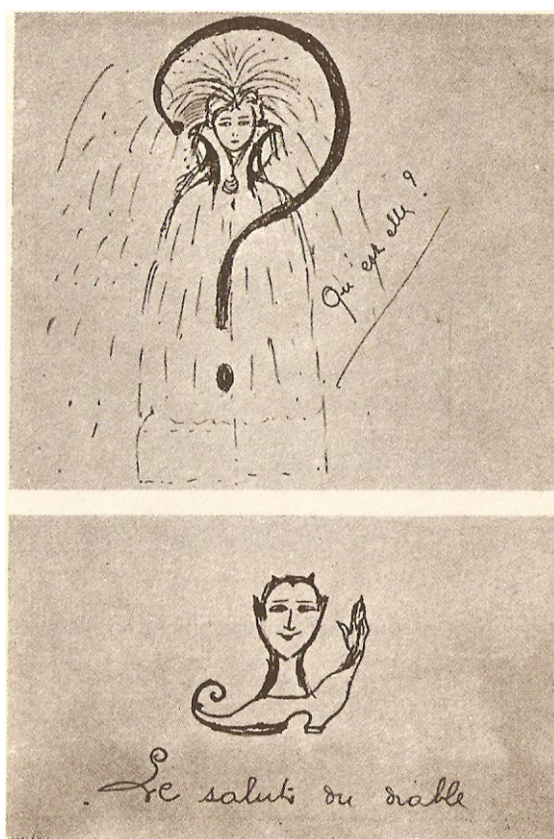


Fig 13: *Dessins de Nadja...* and *De manière à pouvoir varier l'inclinaison de la tête...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928



Fig 14: Jacques-André Boiffard, *Je prendrai pour point de départ l'hôtel des Grands Hommes...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928



Fig 15: Francesca Woodman, silver gelatin print, Providence, ca 1976



Fig 16: Francesca Woodman, silver gelatin print, Providence, ca 1977

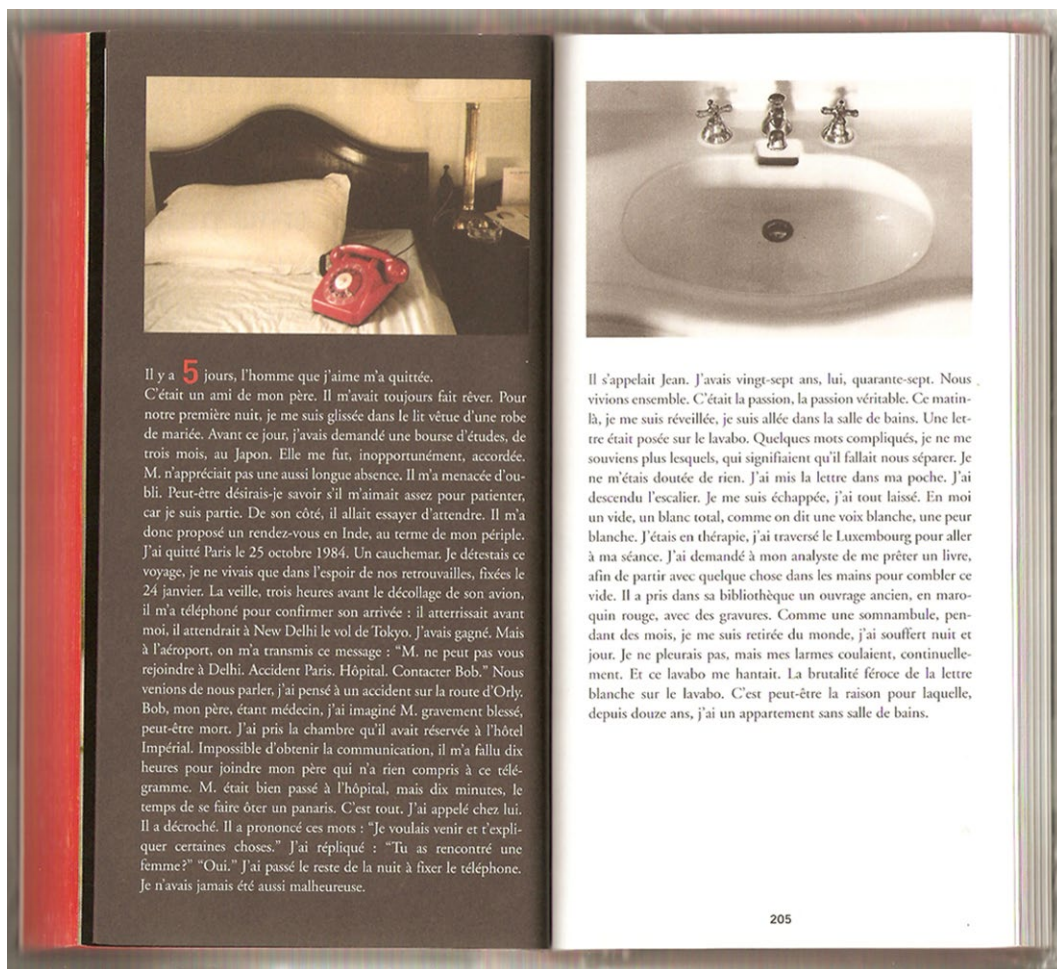


Fig 18: Sophie Calle, from *Douleur Exquise*, 2003, 204-205

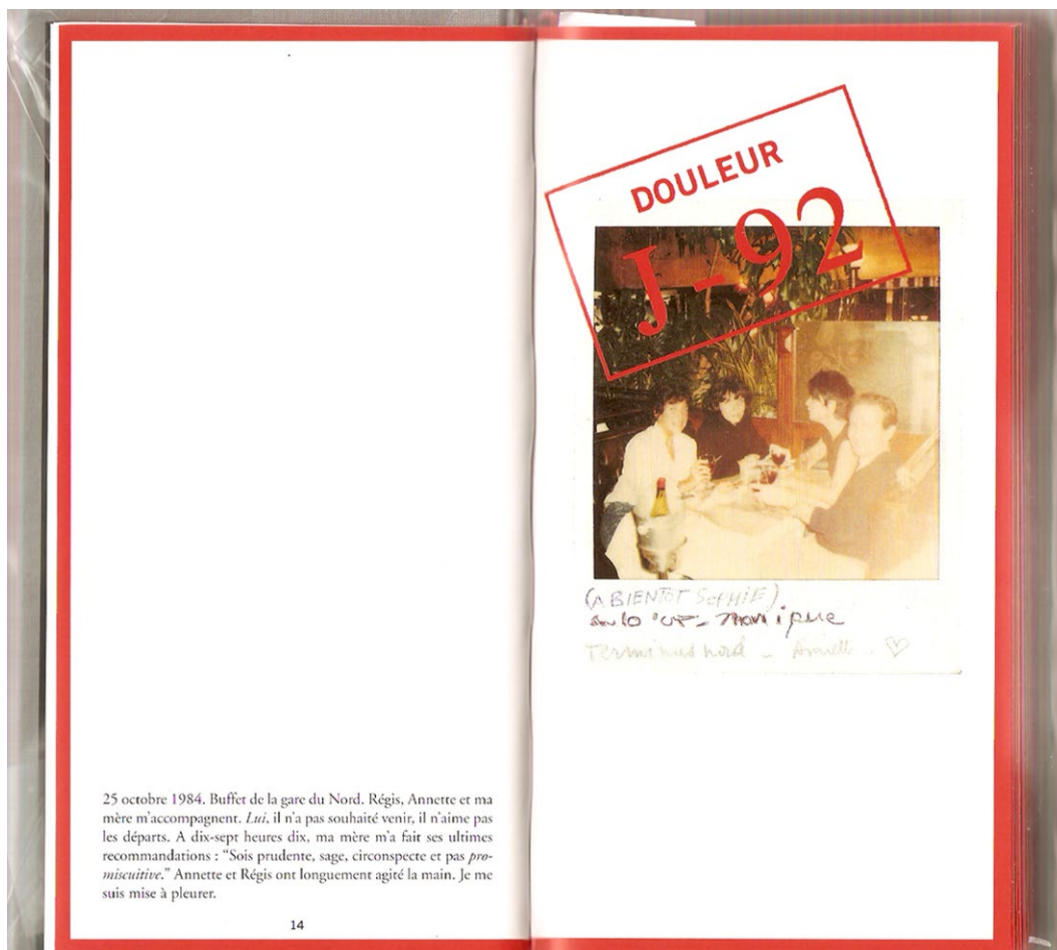


Fig 19: Sophie Calle, from *Douleur Exquise*, 2003, 14-15



Fig 20: Sophie Calle, from *Douleur Exquise*, 2003, 104-105

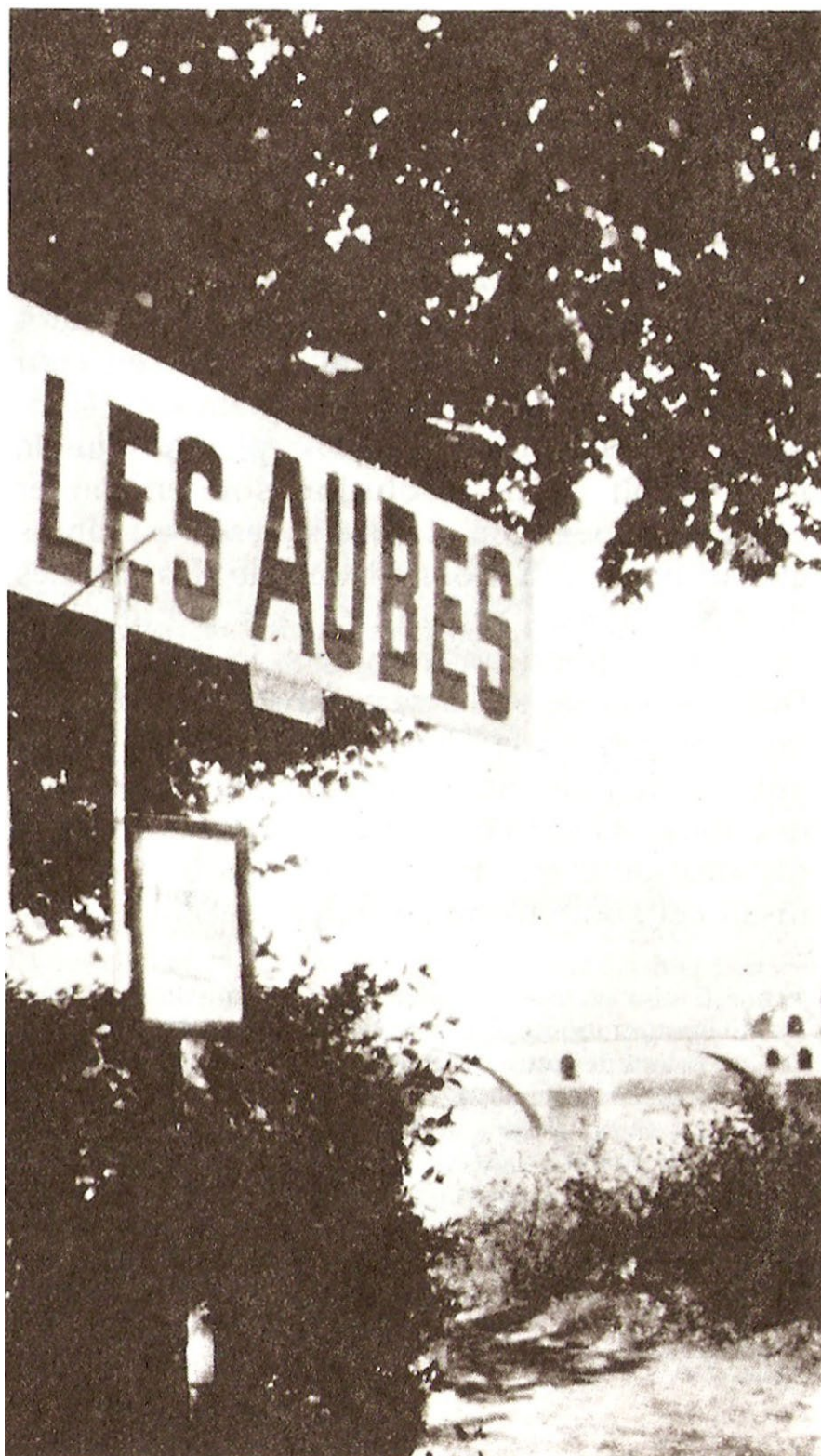


Fig 21: Valentine Hugo, *Une vaste plaque indicatrice bleu ciel...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1963

L. MAZEAU
COMÉDIES, REVUES, OPÉRETTES
DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE

Tours de Chants, Comique Typique

ACTUELLEMENT
Tournee Barct
libre le 6 janvier 1927

124 Rue Paris XIX
à Châtenay

M^r Martin - 19 Octobre 1927

Monsieur

Excusez-moi si je réponds
un peu tardivement à votre lettre
du 14 Octobre mais étant actuellement
en tournée Barct elle n'est venue
me rejoindre qu'à Grenoble le 6.

D'autre part les renseignements
que je pourrais vous fournir sur le
Théâtre Moderne dont je suis avoir
quelque photos de moi de Paris, chez
moi ne concordent pas avec la triste
fin de cet établissement car j'en
faisais partie en 1916 sous direction.

RÉFÉRENCES
(PARIS)

OLYMPIA
CHATELET
SCALA
DEJAZET
CLUNY
TH. MONCEY
TH. NOUVEAU
TH. MODERNE
TH. ALEXANDRETTE
TH. LYRIQUE DU 16^e

LA FOURMIE
VARIÉTÉS-PARIISIENNES
FOLIES-PARIISIENNES
SUCCÈS-PALACE
CASINO de PONT - Charenton
Etc., Etc.

Fig 22: À propos du Théâtre Moderne..., from Breton, Nadja, 1928

On m'avait accordé une bourse d'études d'une durée de trois mois, à New York. Seulement, je suis paresseuse. Par avance je me sentais coupable. J'avais des habitudes nonchalantes dans cette ville. Je redoutais ma désinvolture. Comment être certaine de vivre une expérience singulière, tirer profit de ce voyage ? J'ai préféré me rendre là où précisément j'avais le moins envie d'aller. Non par masochisme. Mais pour que ce périple influence de façon plus tangible ma vie. J'ai choisi le Japon. Une fois cette destination acceptée, j'ai regretté : c'est long, trois mois. Afin d'écourter mon séjour sur place, j'ai opté pour un voyage lent. En train. Paris-Moscou, puis le Transsibérien qui parcourt la Russie et le Transmandchourien, la Mongolie, avant de faire halte à Pékin. Des trains locaux pour la traversée de la Chine avec escales à Shanghai et Canton. Ensuite Hong-Kong. Et finalement, l'avion pour Tokyo. Il resterait deux mois à passer au Japon, mais je gagnais trois semaines.

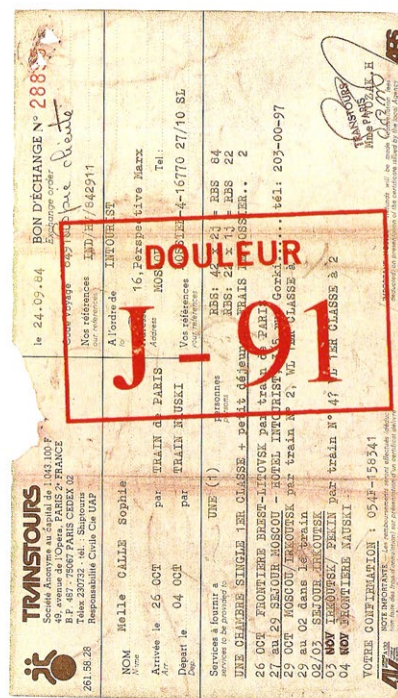


Fig 23: Sophie Calle, from *Douleur Exquise*, 2003, 16-17

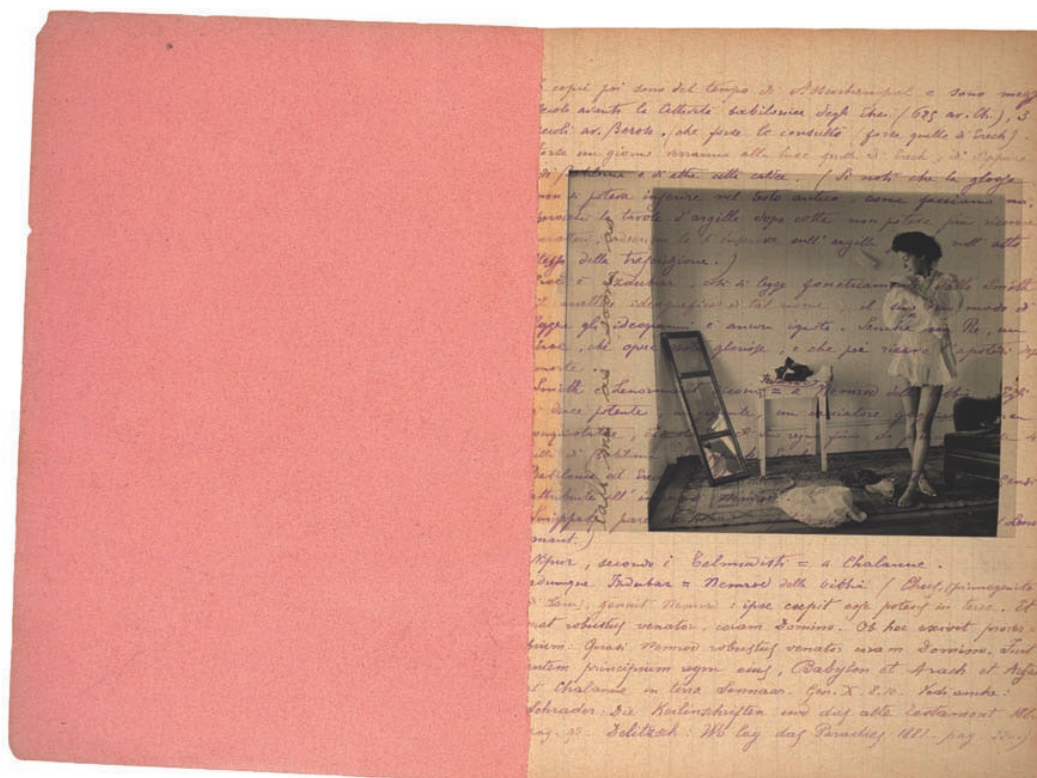


Fig 24: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

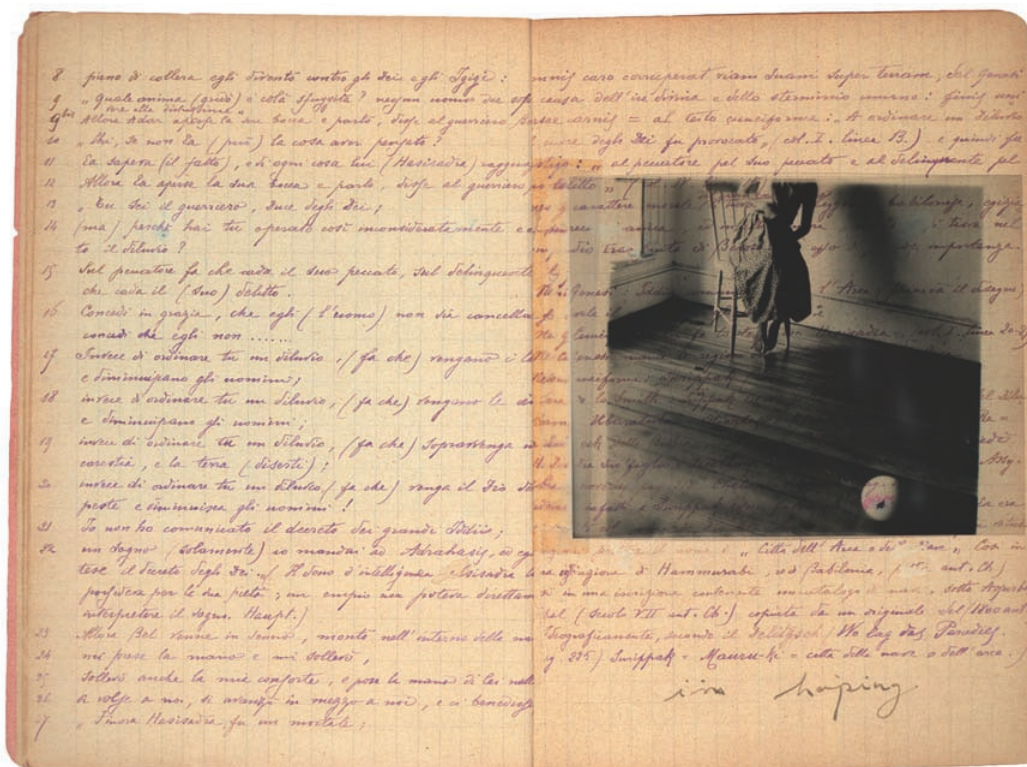


Fig 25: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80



Fig 26: Pablo Voita, *Au musée Grévin...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928

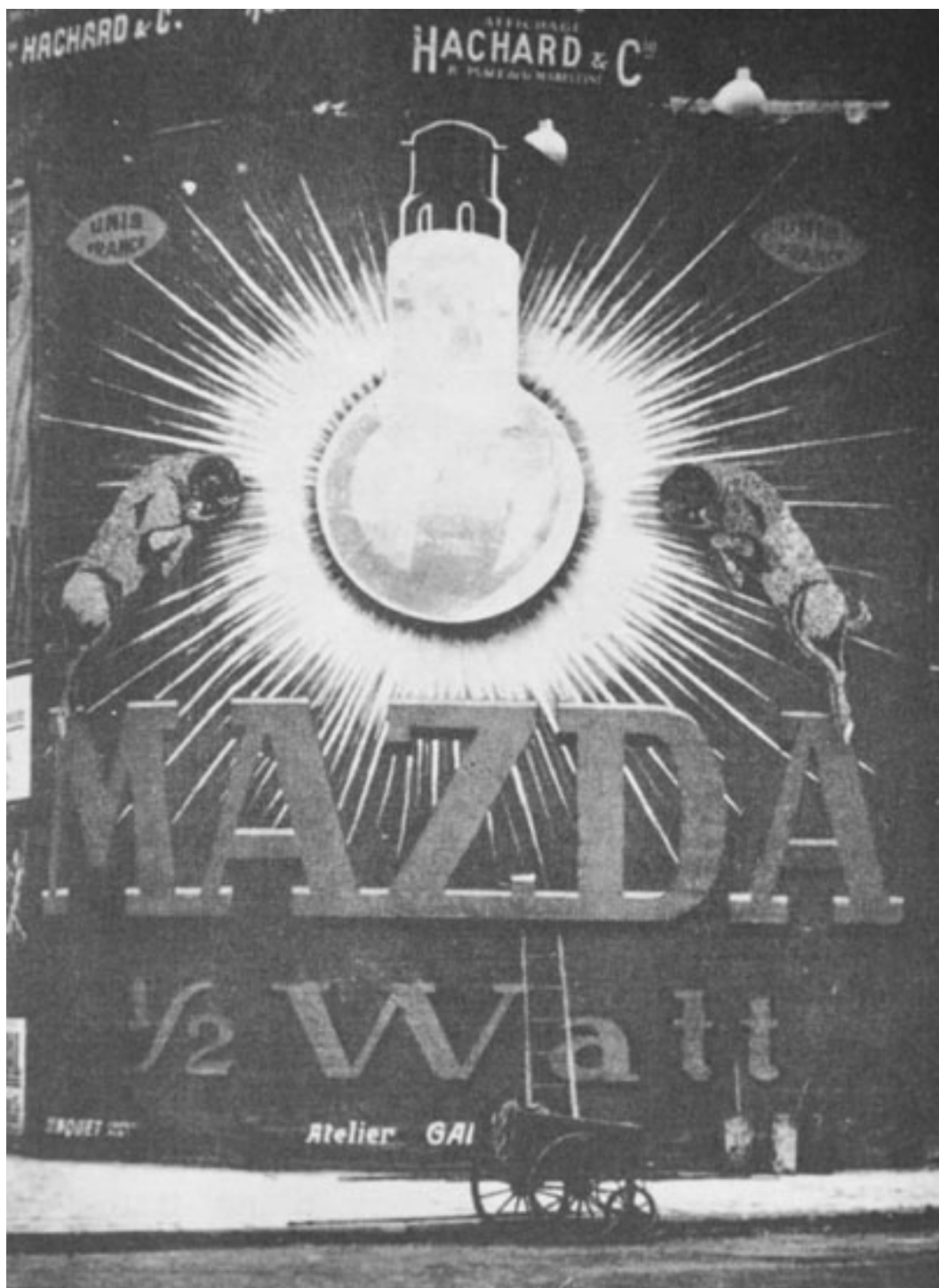


Fig 27: Jacques-André Boiffard, *L'affiche lumineuse de «Mazda» sur les grands boulevards...*, from Breton, *Nadja*, 1928

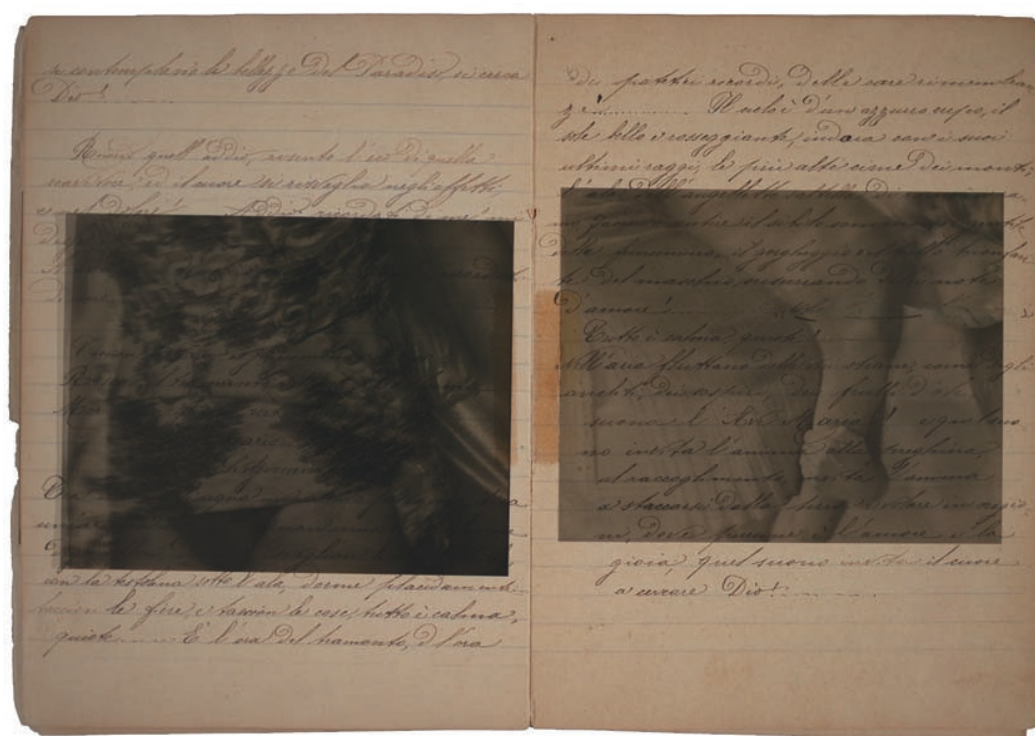


Fig 28: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi Book*, 1980



Fig 29: Francesca Woodman, front cover of *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

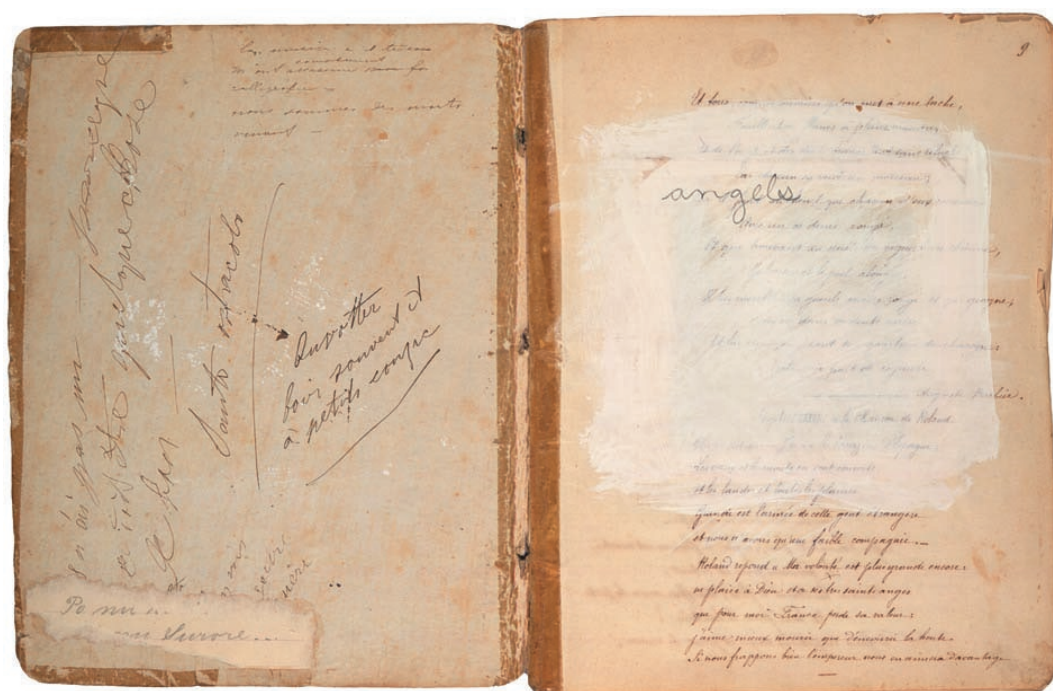


Fig 30: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels*, *Calendars Book*, ca 1978

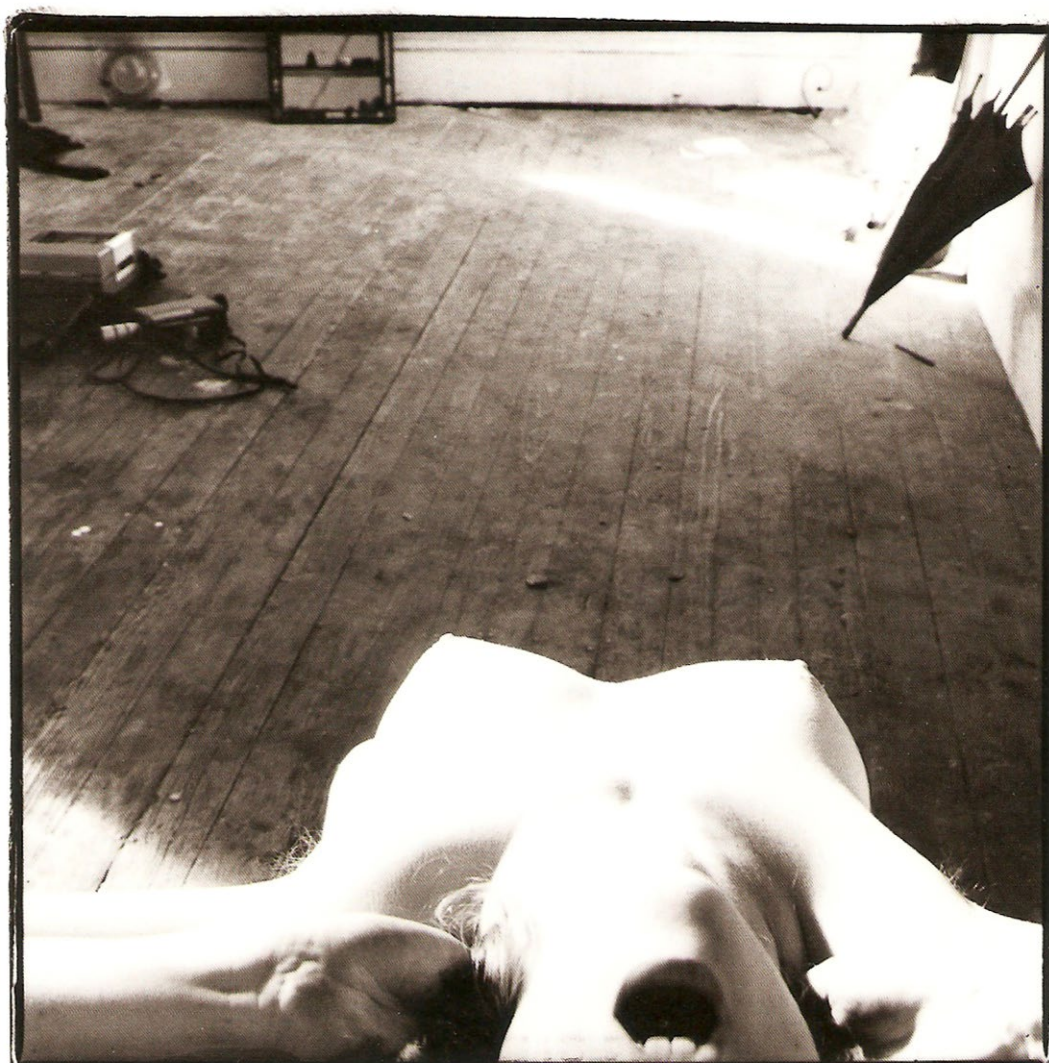


Fig 39: Francesca Woodman, *On Being an Angel*, silver gelatin print, Providence, 1977



Fig 40: Francesca Woodman, *On Being an Angel #1*, silver gelatin print, Providence, 1977

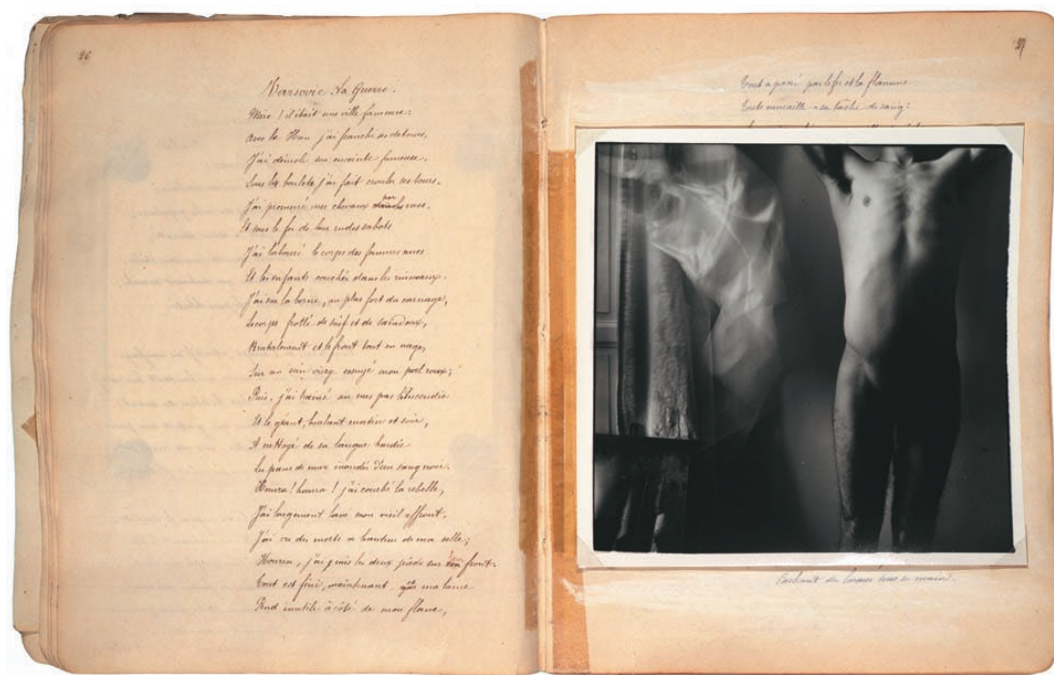
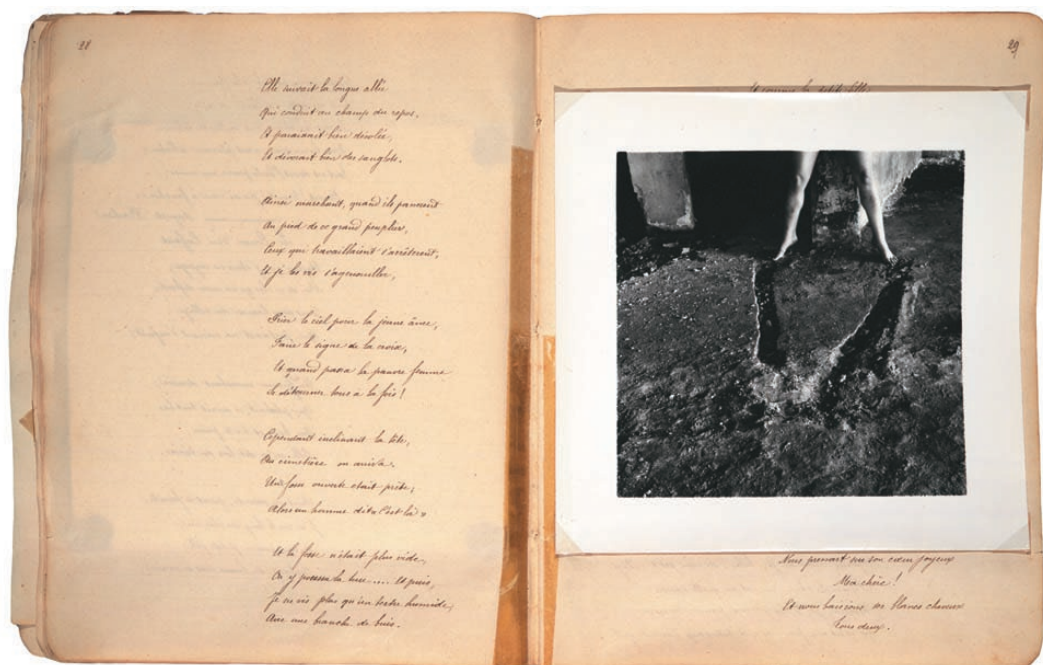
Fig 41: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978Fig 42: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978



Fig 43: Ana Mendieta, from *Siluetas* series, colour photograph, El Yagul, Mexico, 1973



Fig 44: Ana Mendieta, from *Silveta Works in Iowa*, colour photograph, 1976-78

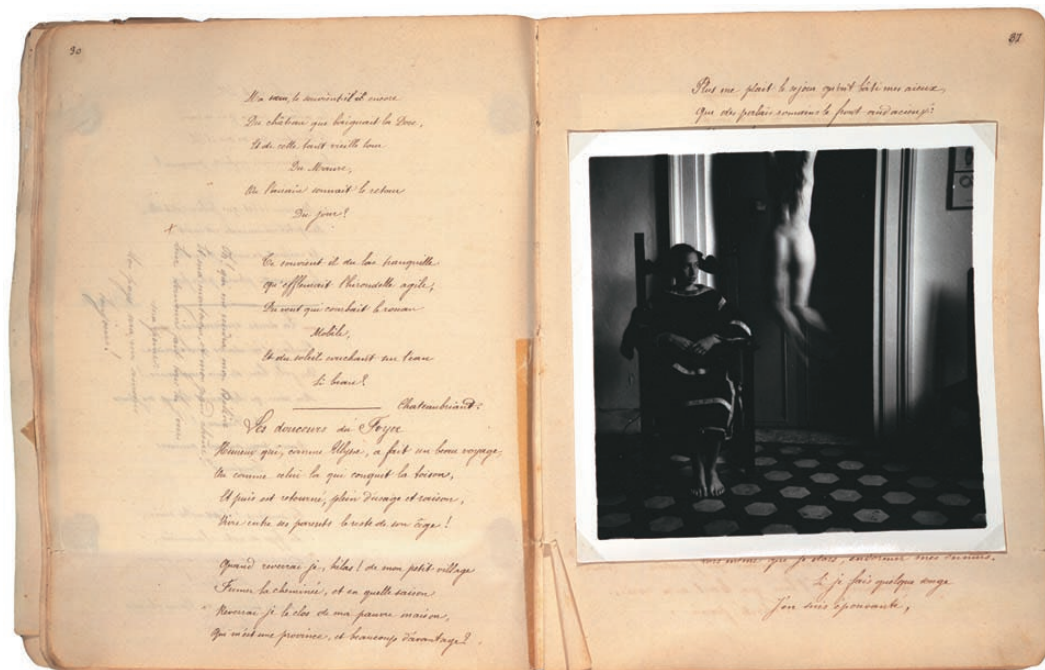


Fig 45: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, Book, ca 1978

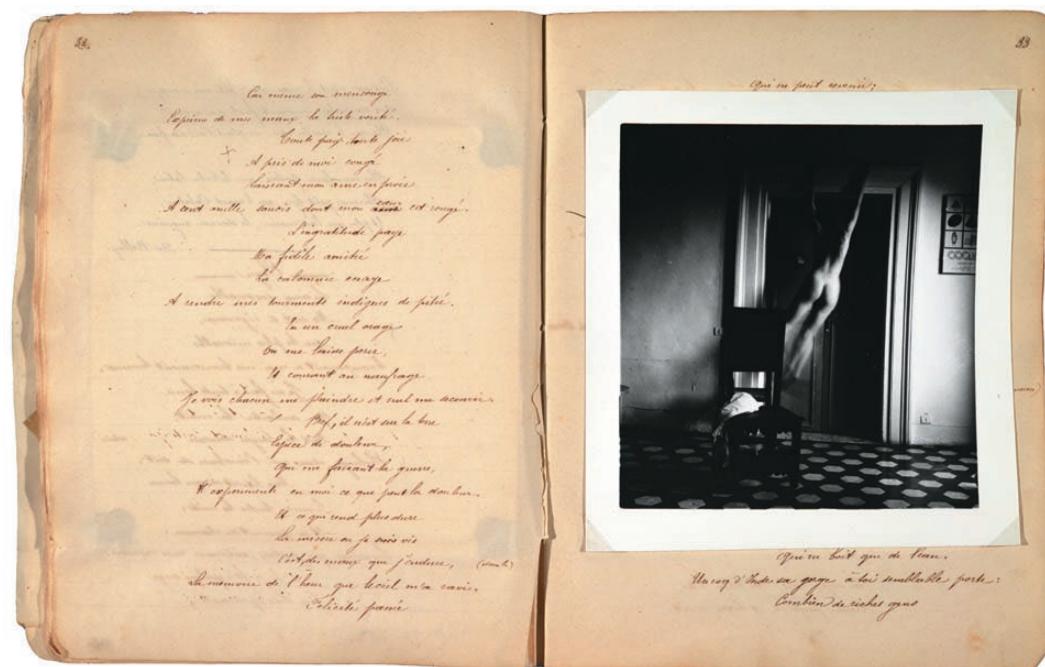


Fig 46: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

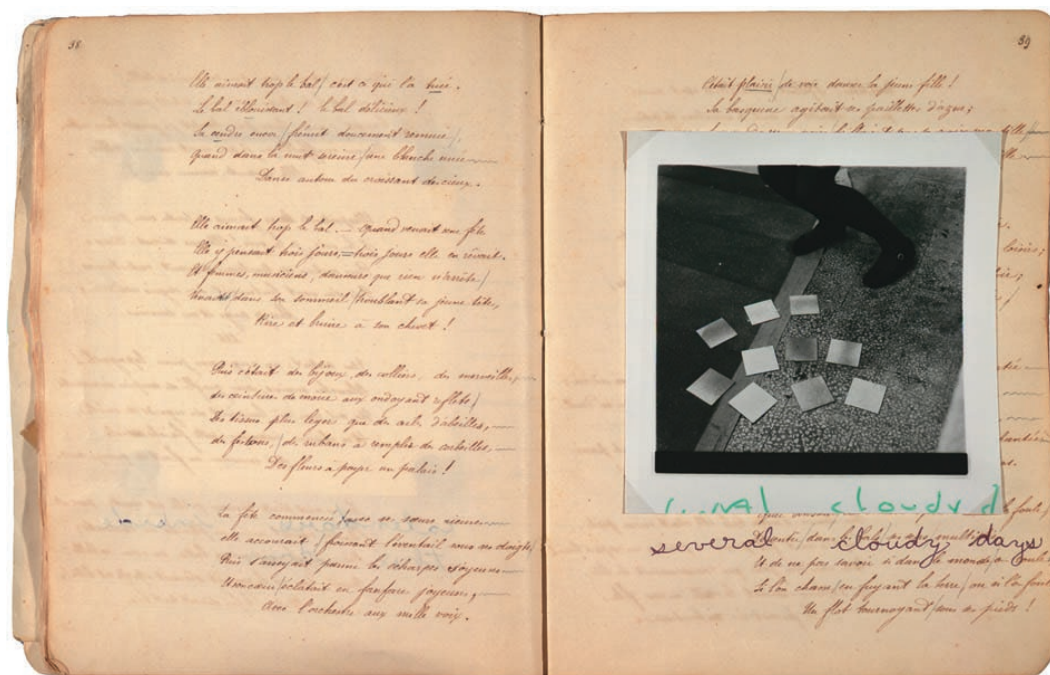


Fig 48: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

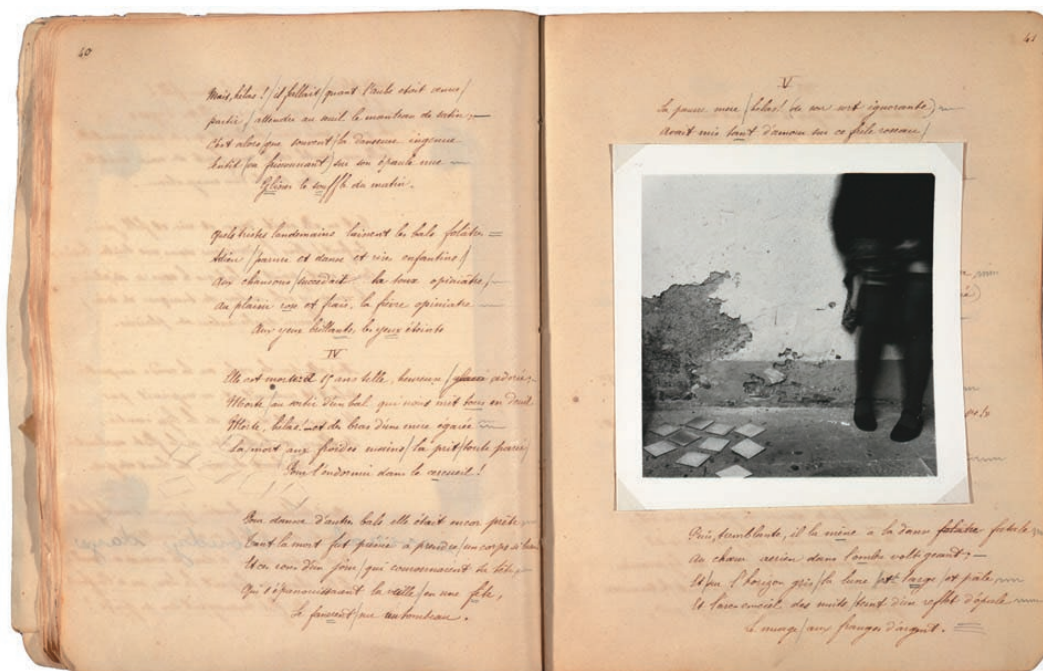


Fig 49: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

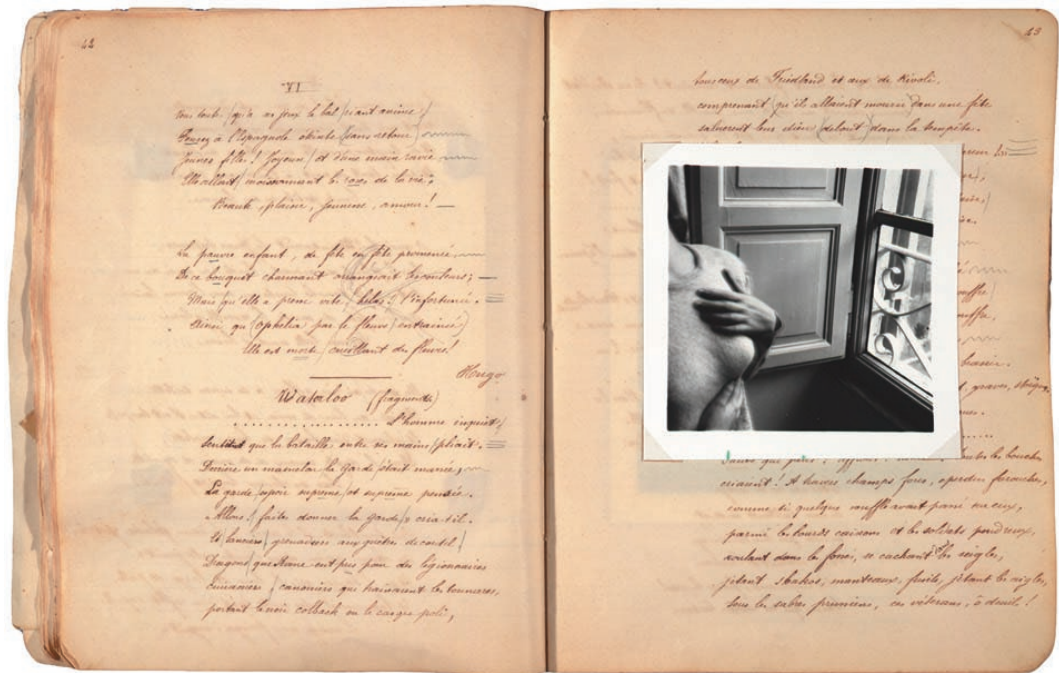


Fig 50: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

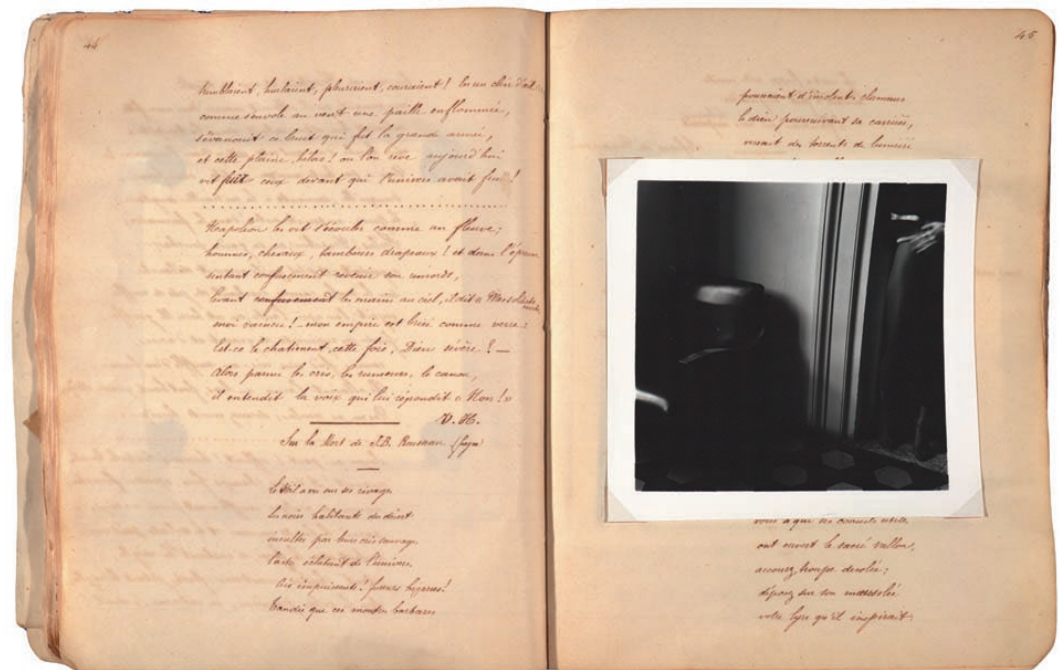


Fig 51: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

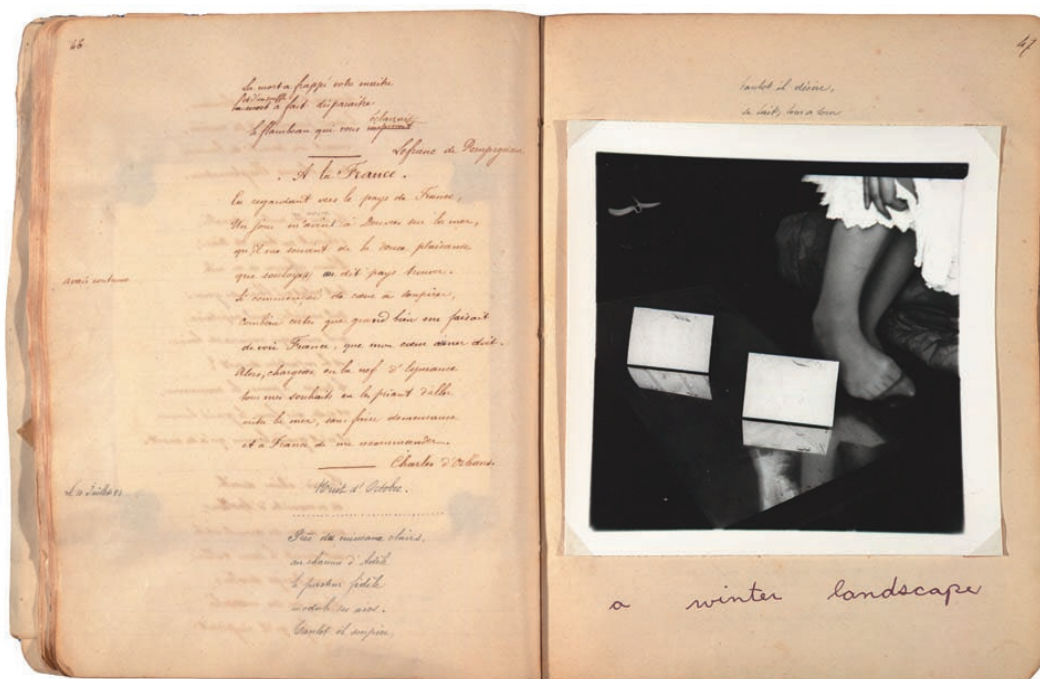


Fig 52: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978

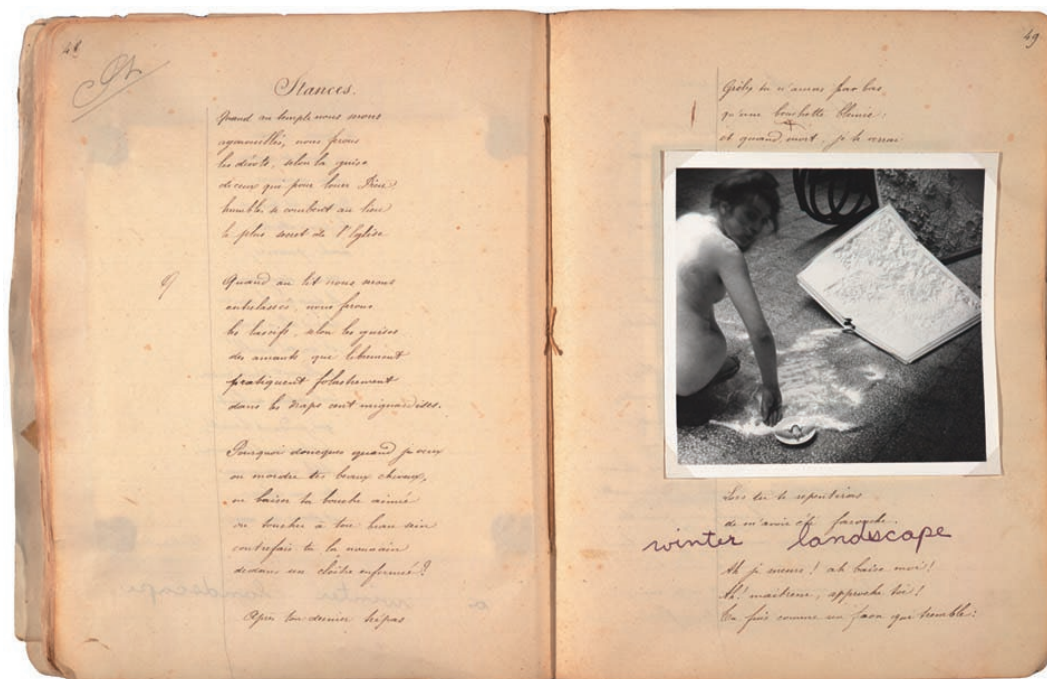


Fig 53: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978



Fig 56: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, New York, 1979

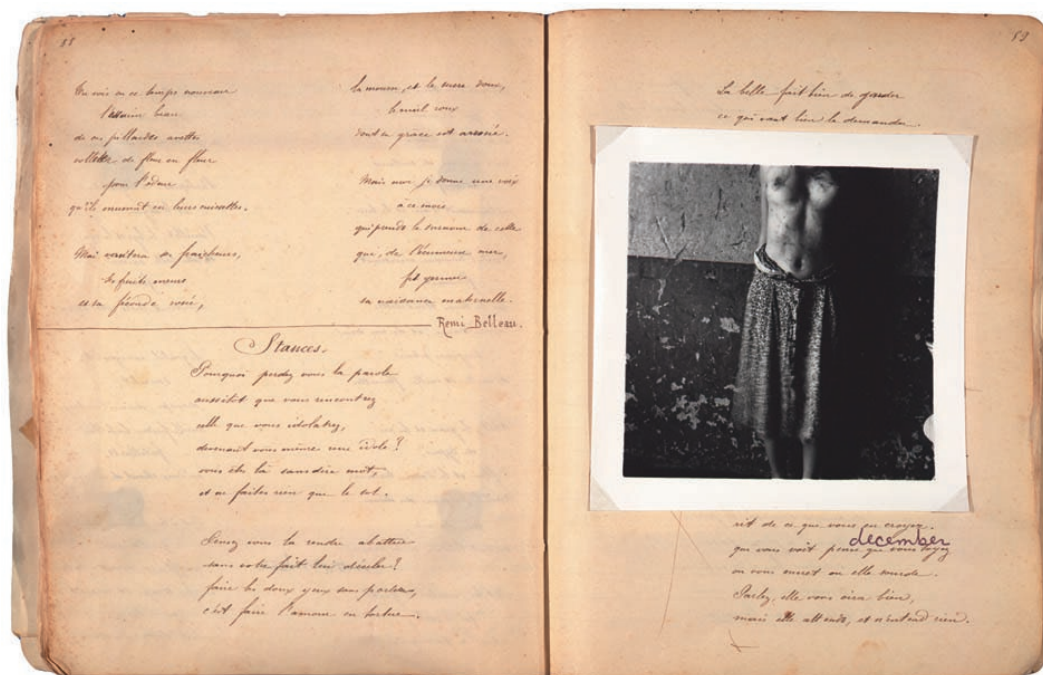
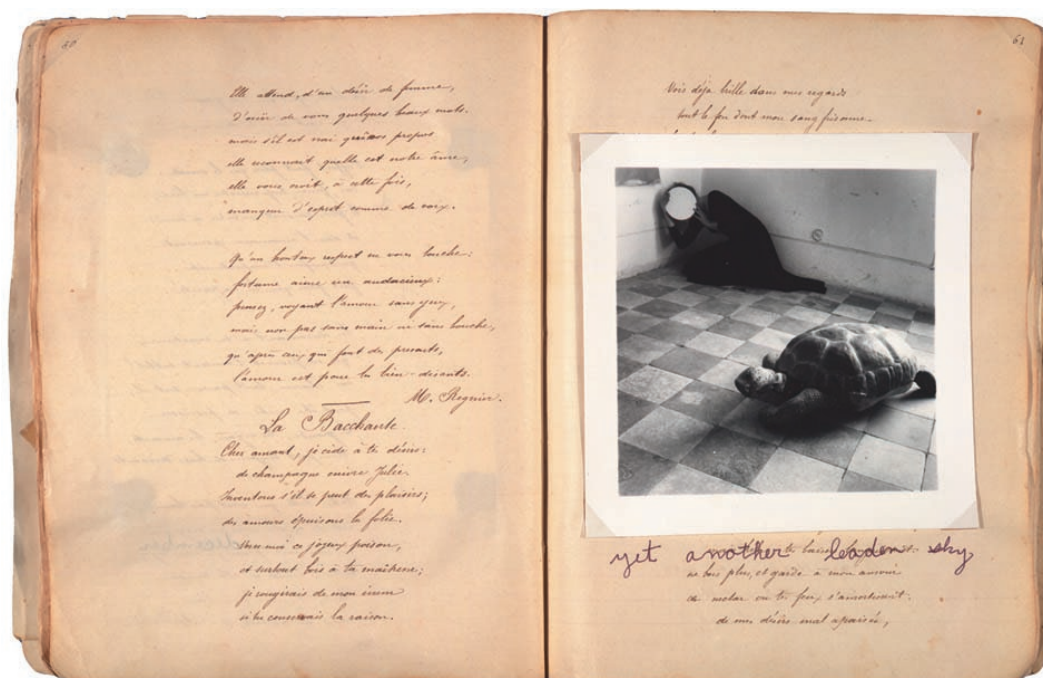
Fig 59: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978Fig 60: Francesca Woodman, from *Angels, Calendars Book*, ca 1978



Fig 62: Francesca Woodman, front cover, *Portraits Friends Equasions Book*, ca 1978

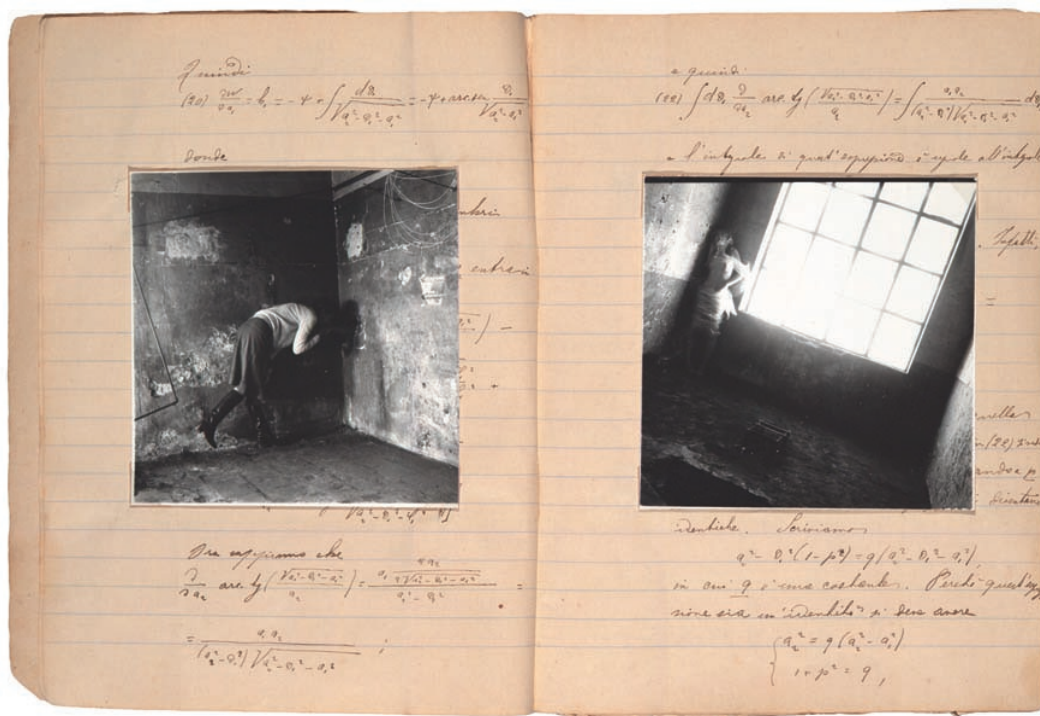


Fig 63: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equasions* Book, ca 1978

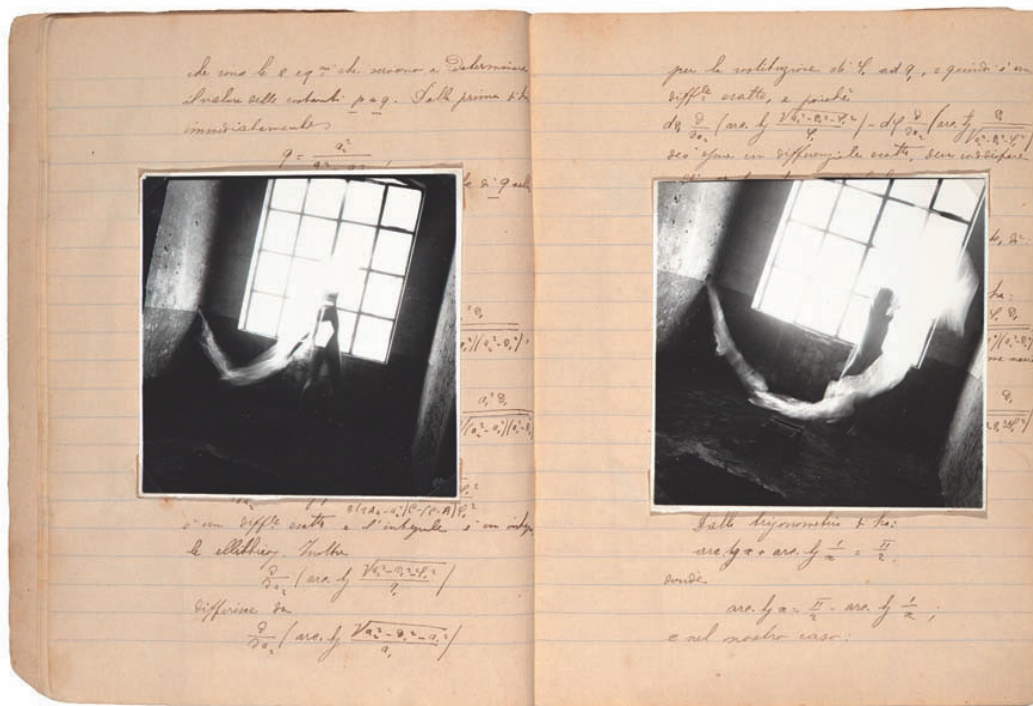


Fig 64: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equasions* Book, ca 1978

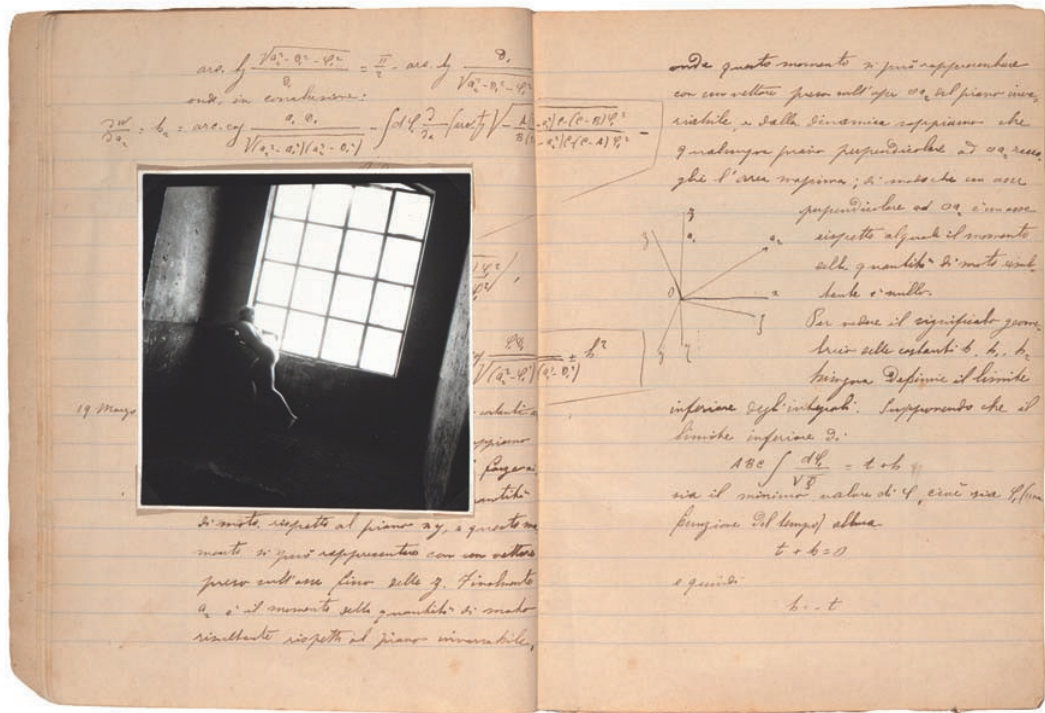


Fig 65: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

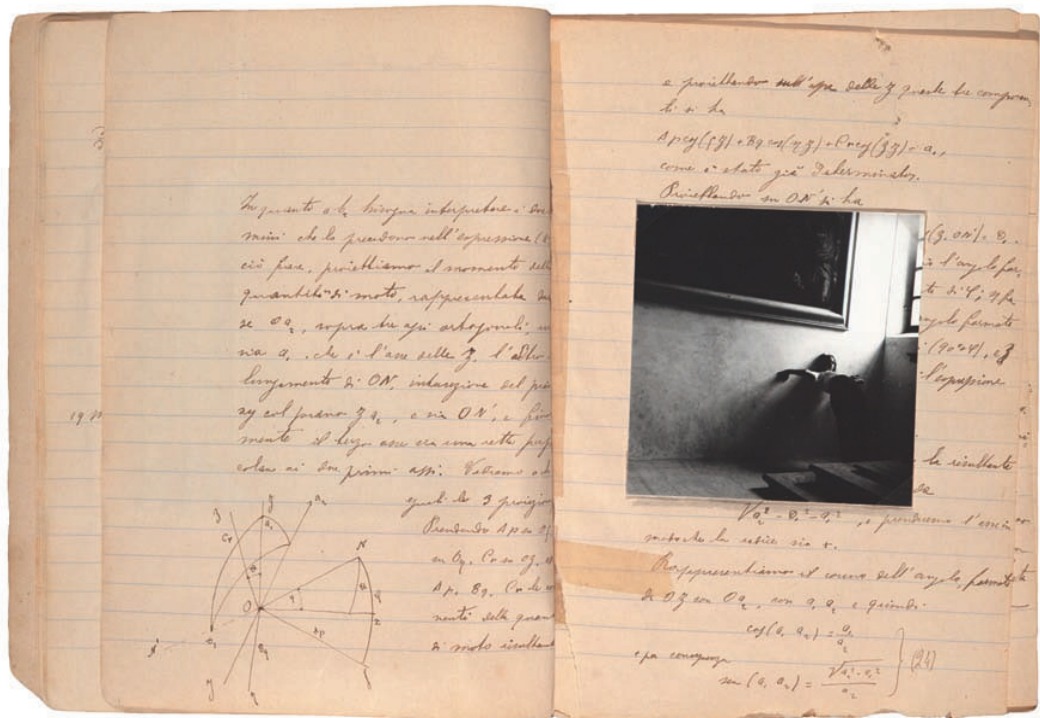


Fig 66: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

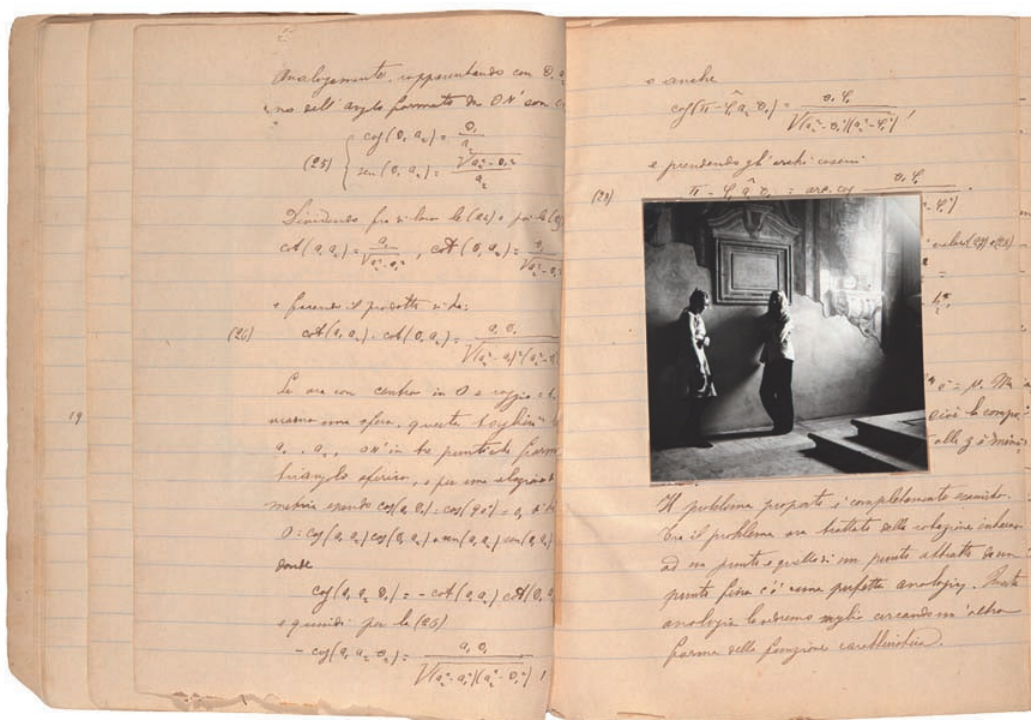


Fig 67: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

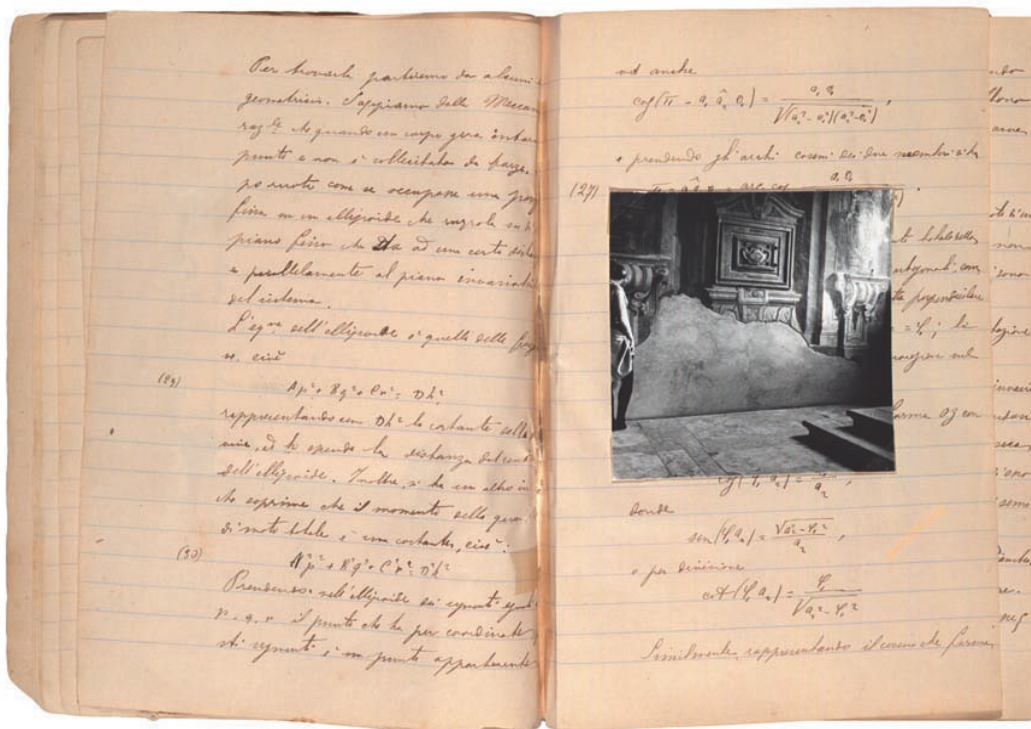


Fig 68: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

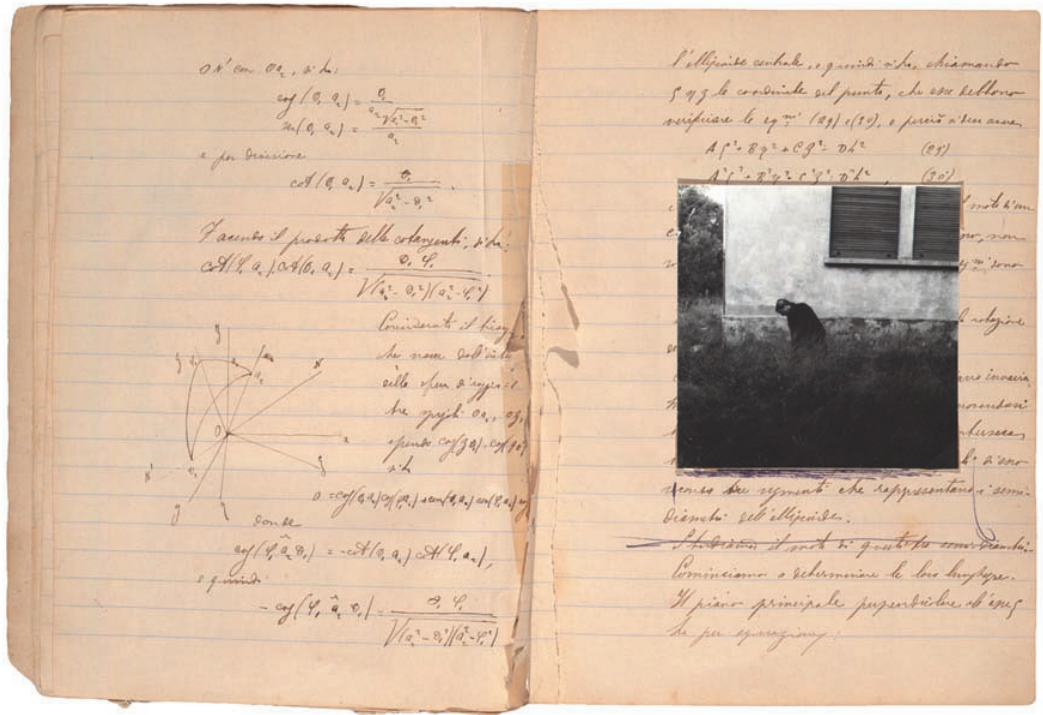


Fig 69: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

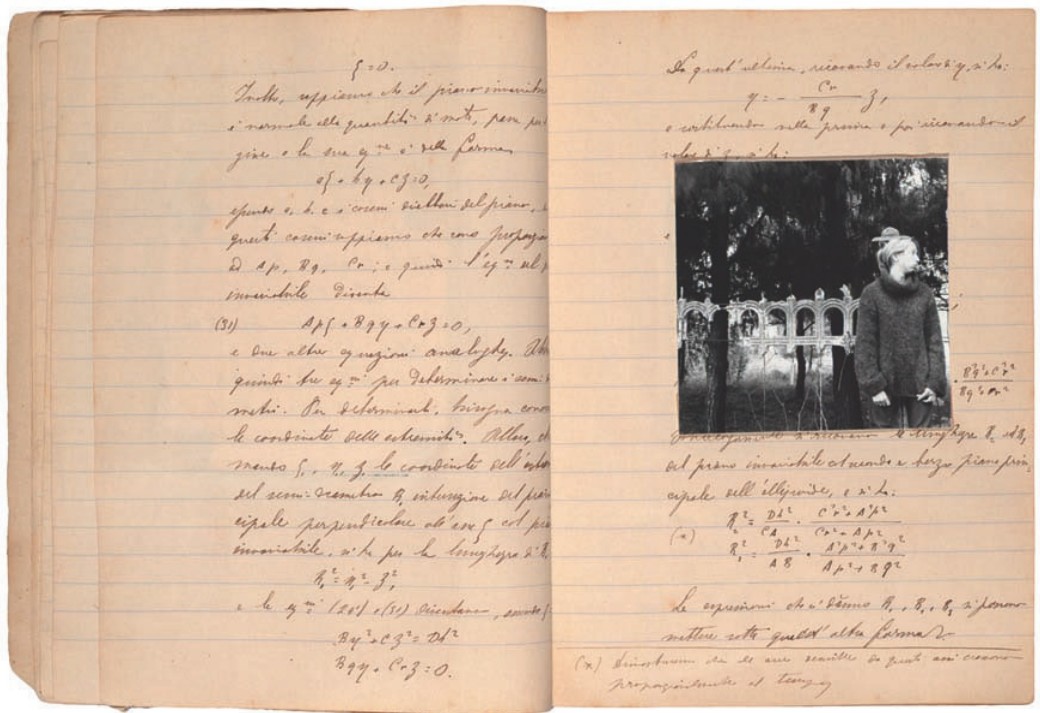


Fig 70: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

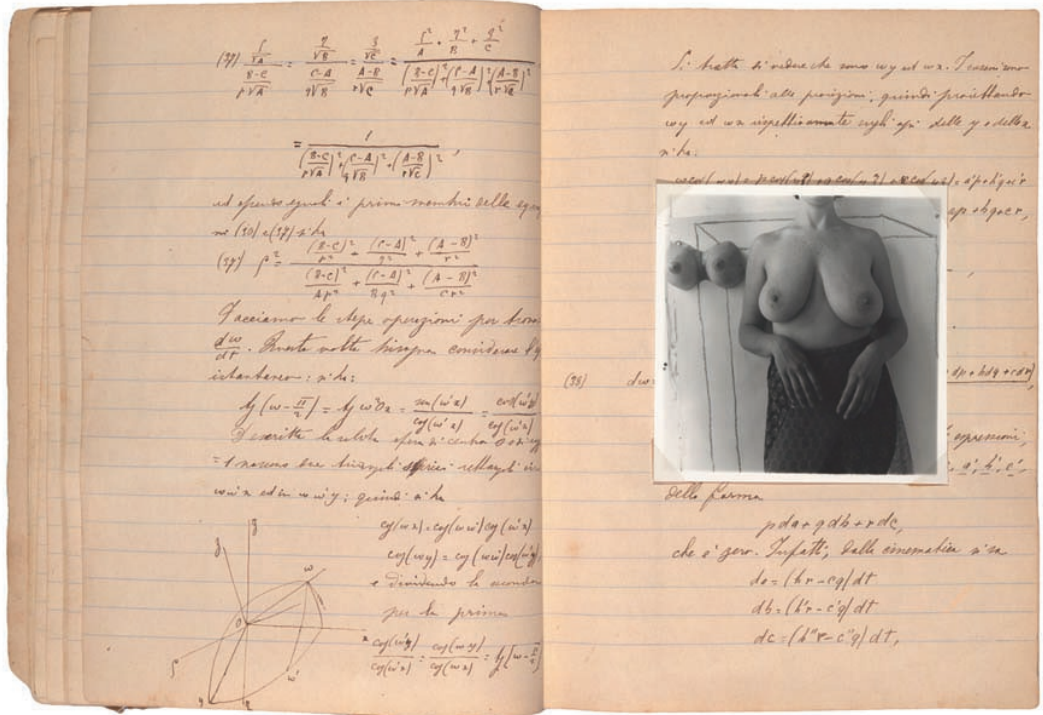


Fig 73: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

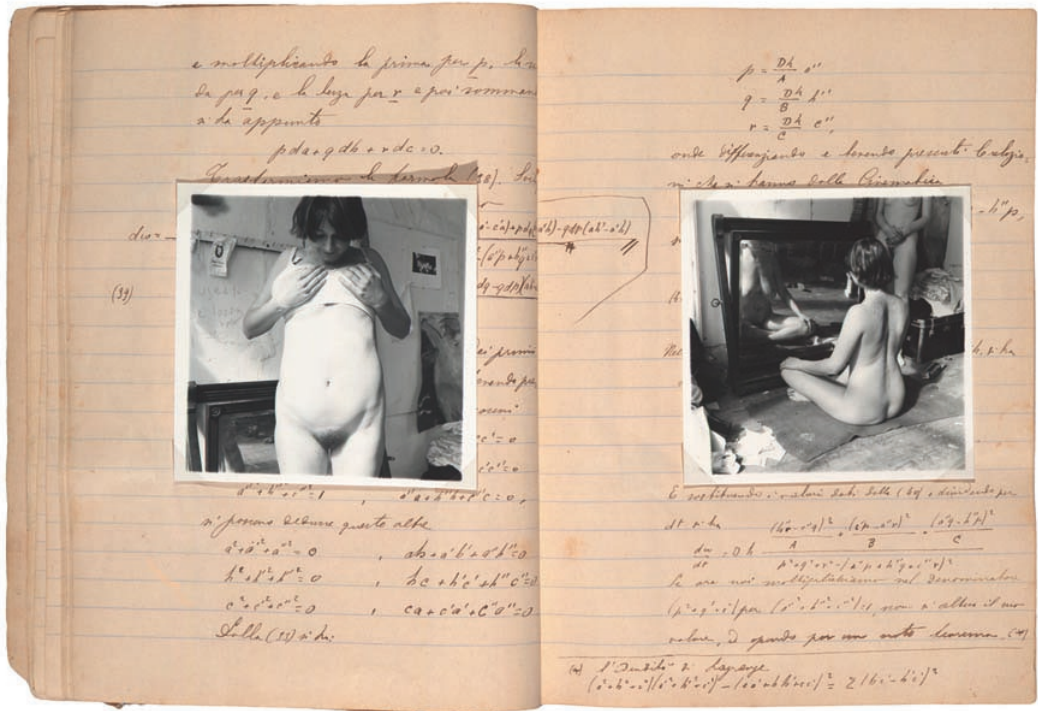


Fig 74: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

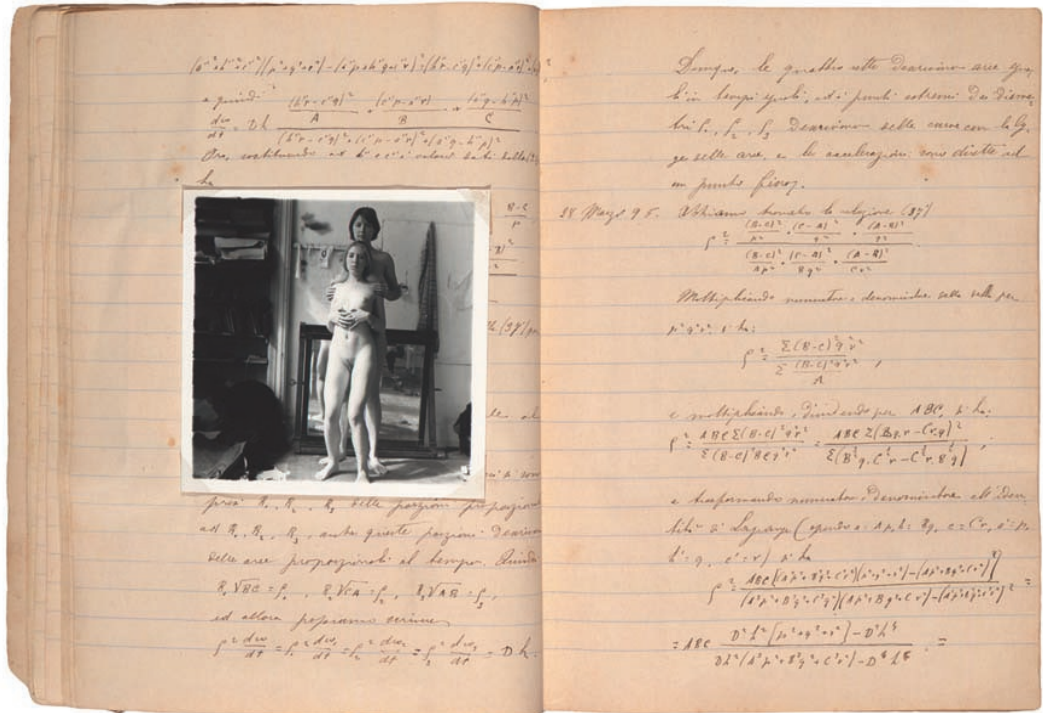


Fig 75: Francesca Woodman, from Portraits Friends Equations Book, ca 1978

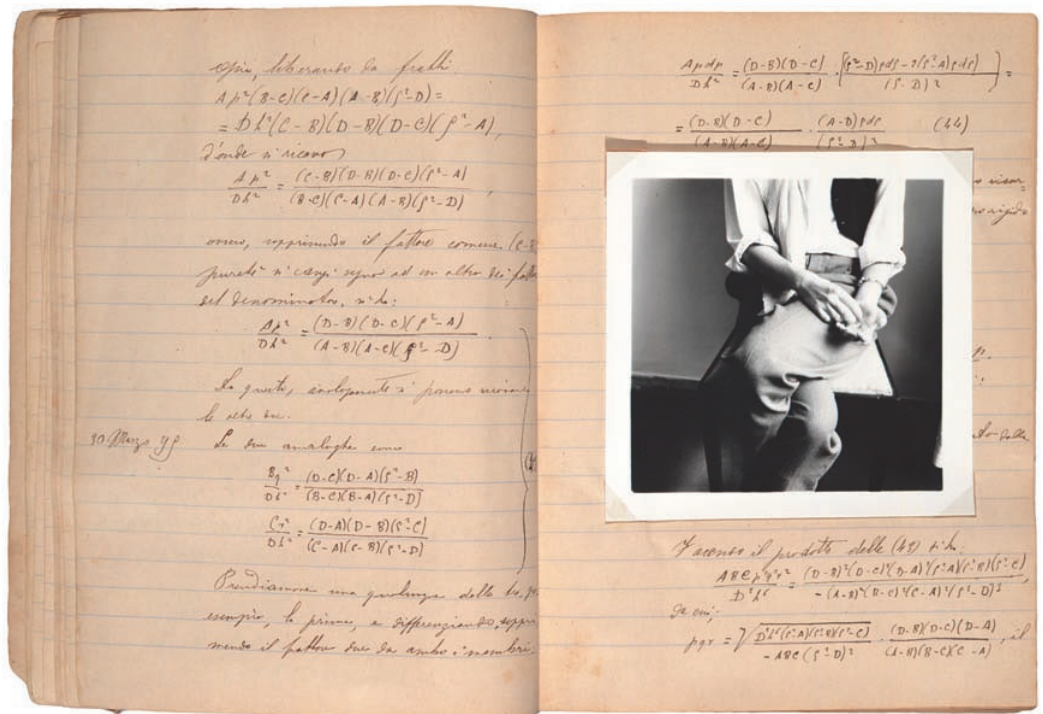


Fig 76: Francesca Woodman, from Portraits Friends Equations Book, ca 1978

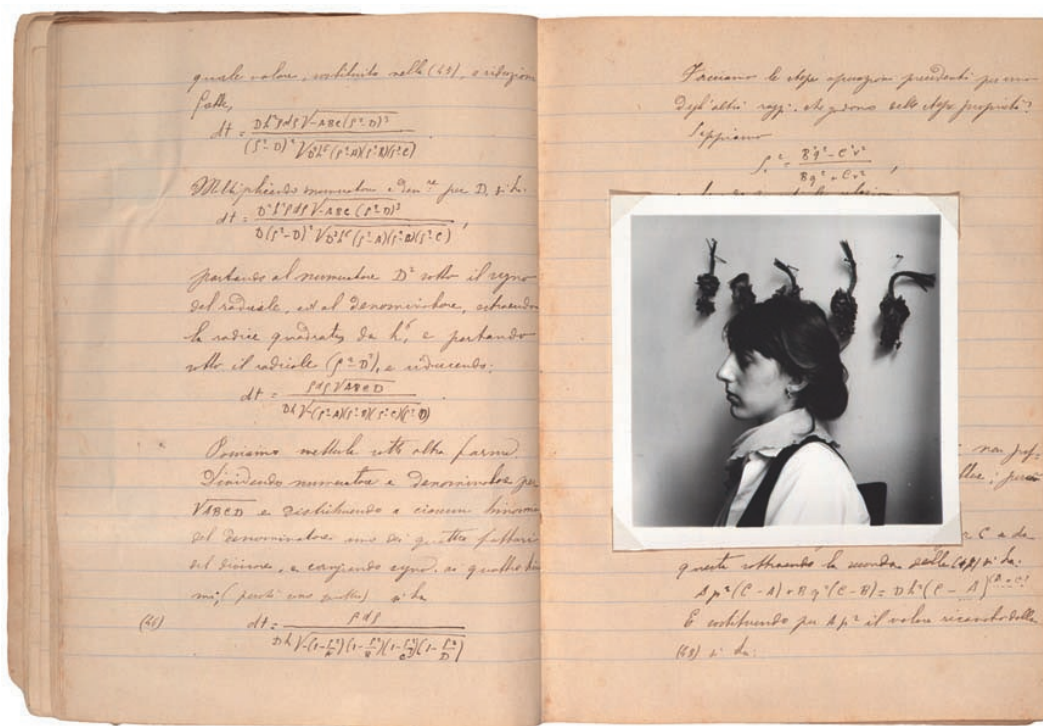


Fig 77: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

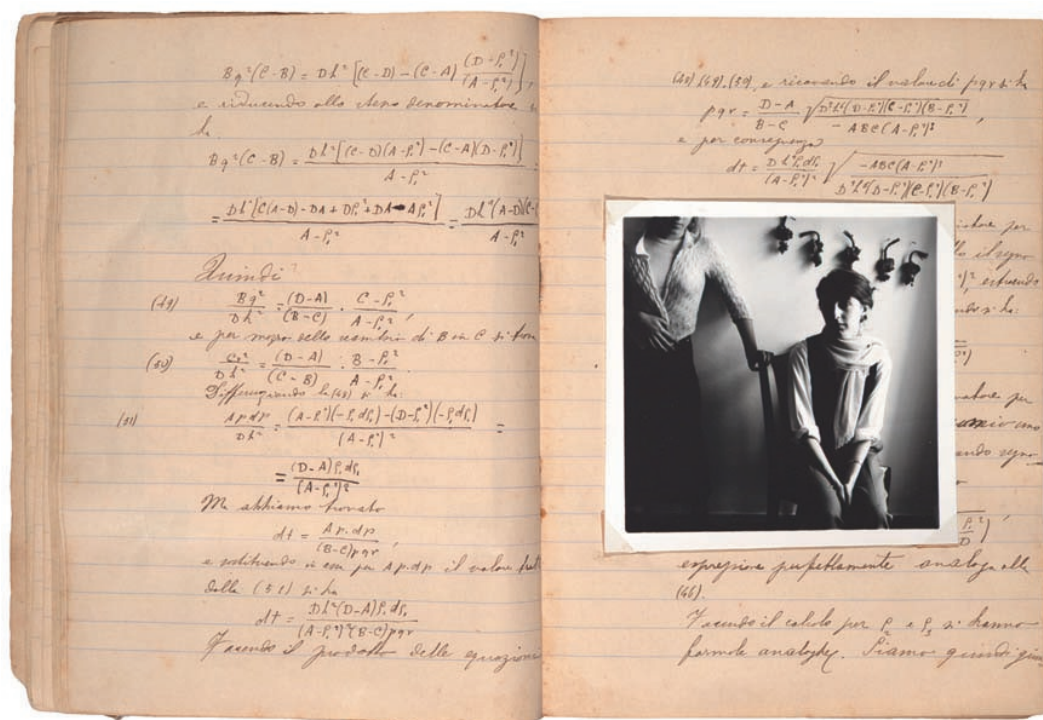


Fig 78: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

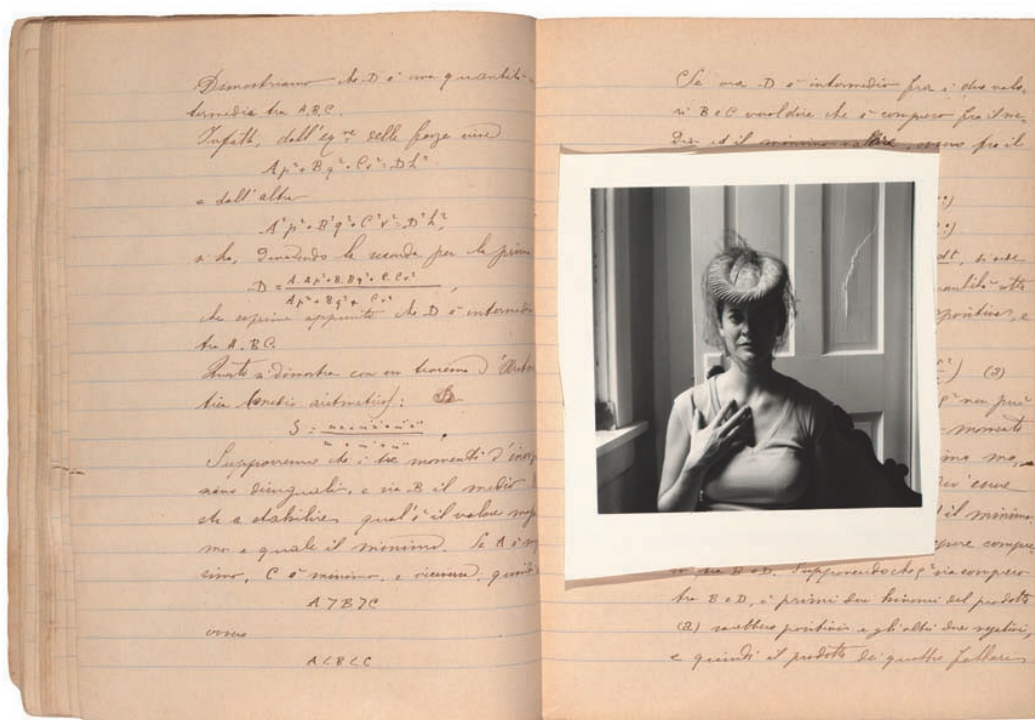


Fig 79: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

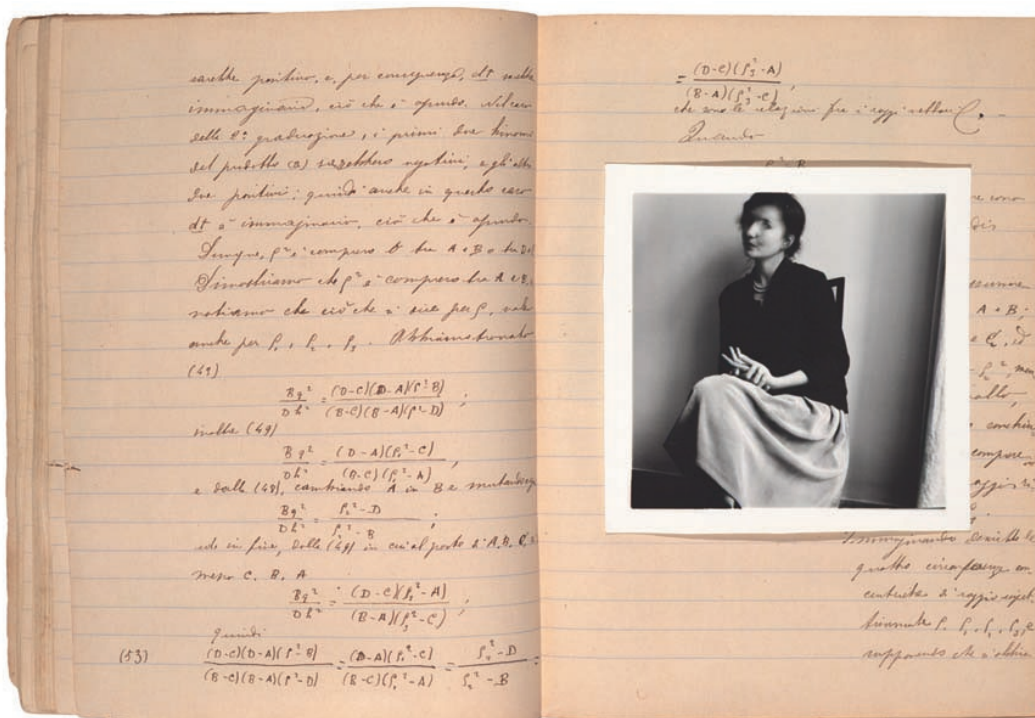


Fig 80: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equations* Book, ca 1978

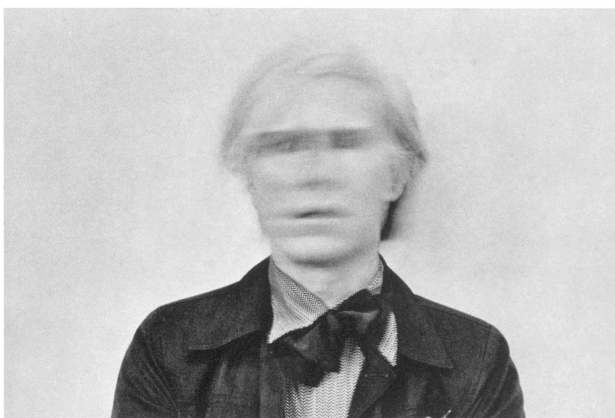
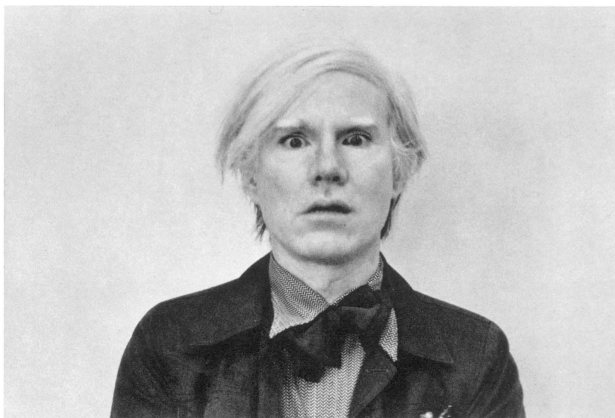


Fig 81: Duane Michals, *Andy Warhol*, black and white photographs, 1973

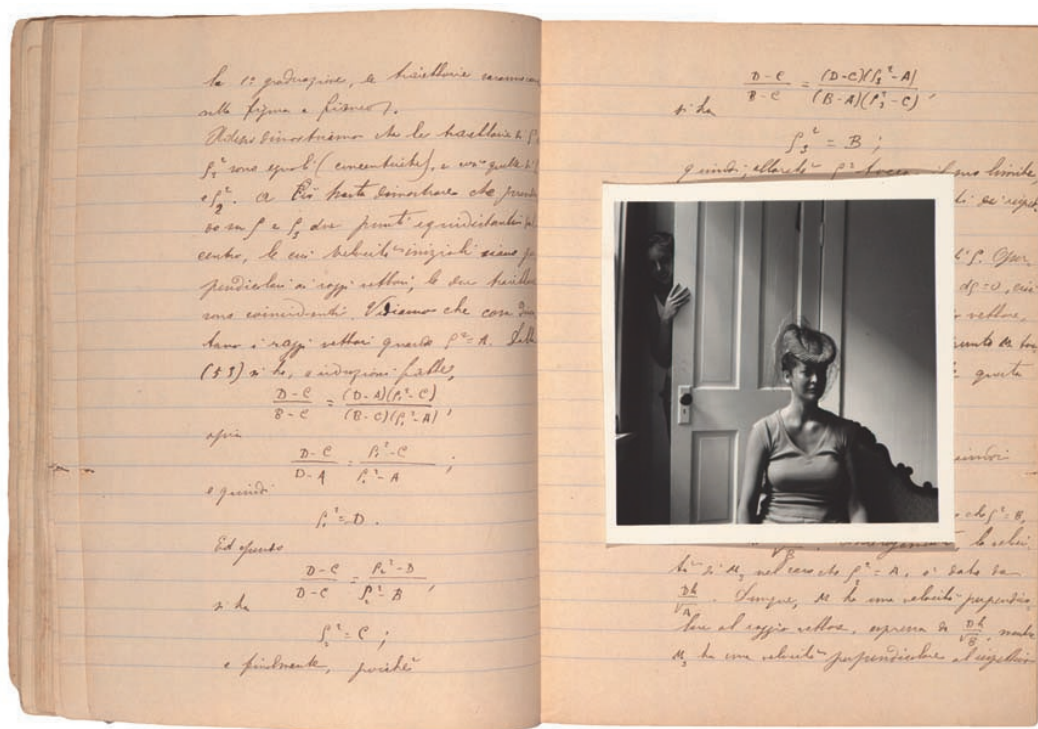


Fig 82: Francesca Woodman, from *Portraits Friends Equasions* Book, ca 1978



Fig 83: Robert Smithson, *Seventh Mirror Displacement*, Yucatan, 1969



Fig 84: Marcel Duchamp, *Ready made malheureux*, 1919, printed 1940 (in *From or By Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy*, Series E, 1962)

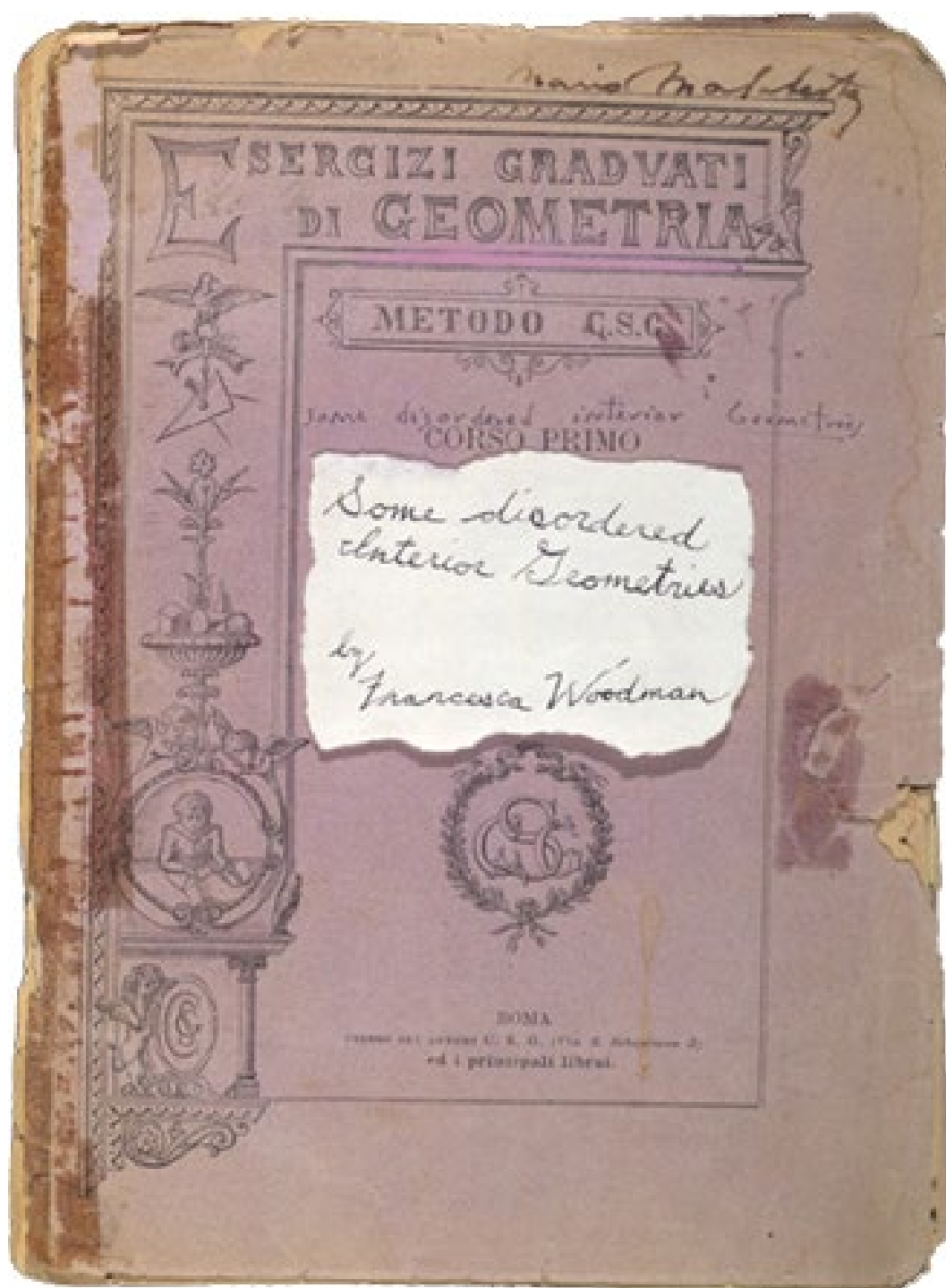


Fig 85: Francesca Woodman, front cover, *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

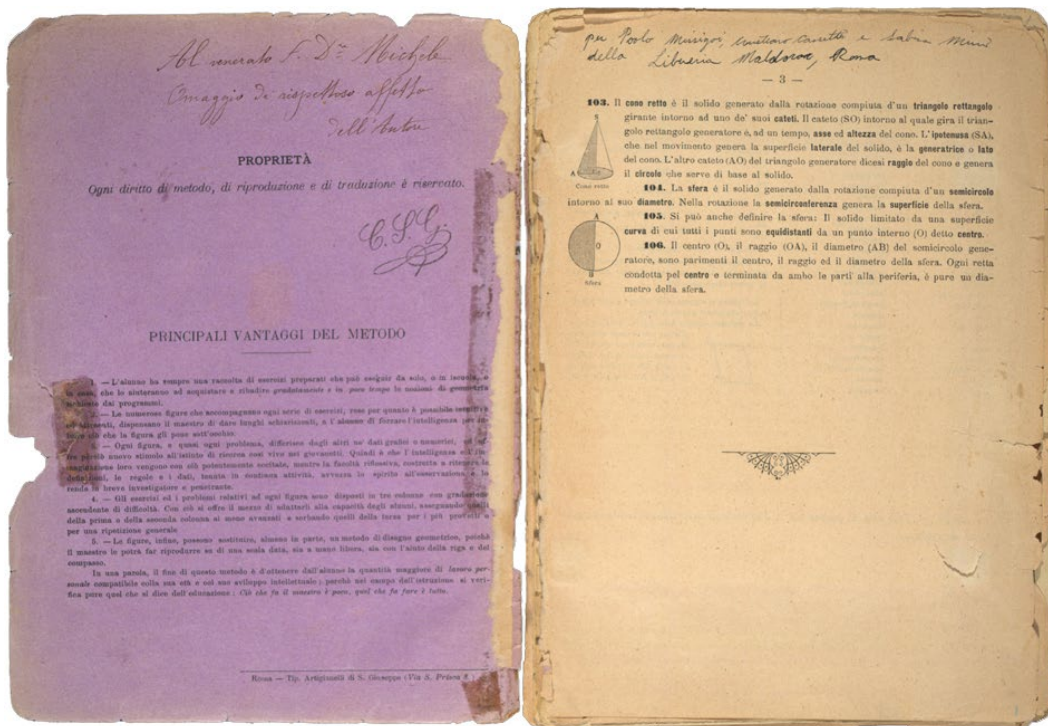


Fig 86: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

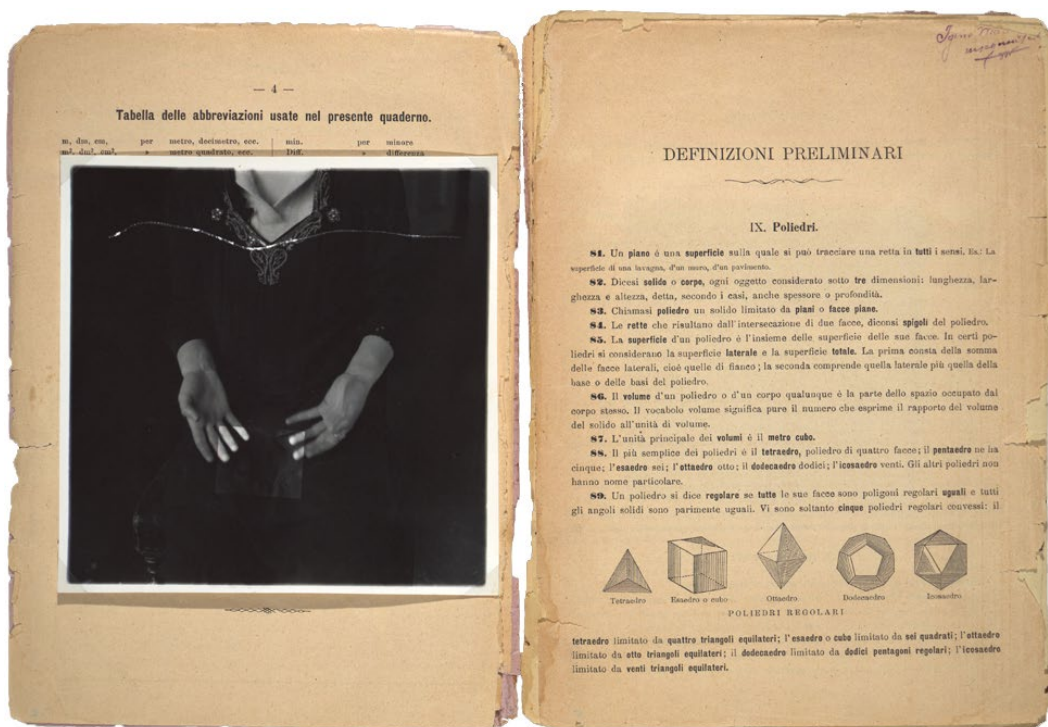


Fig 87: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

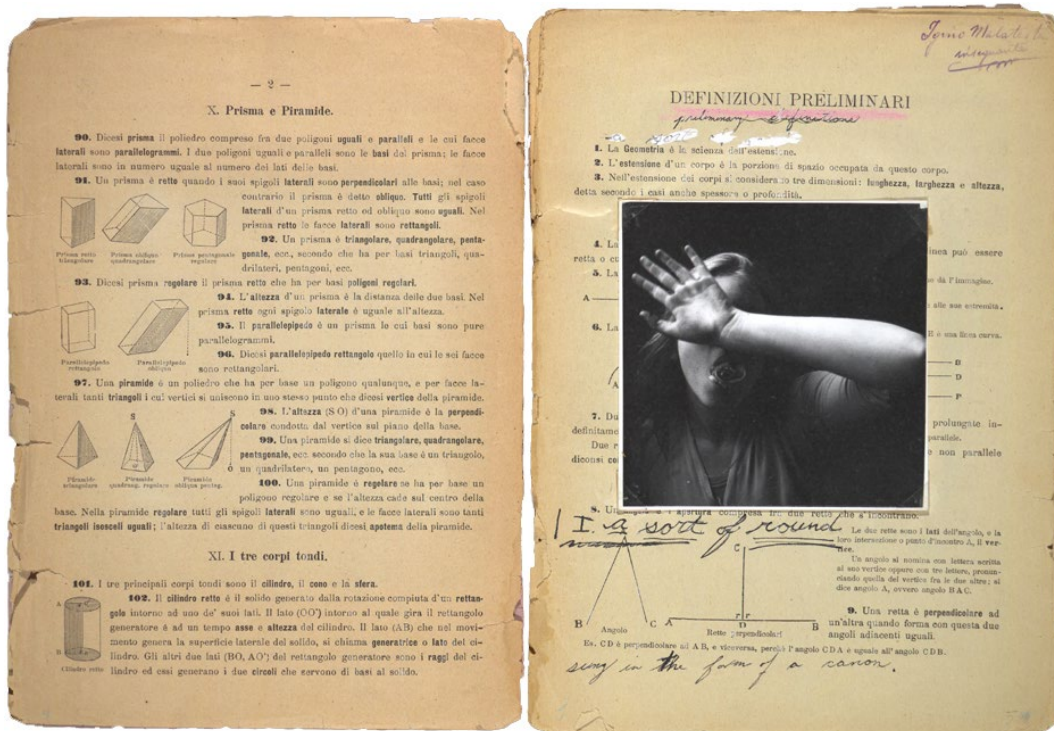


Fig 88: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

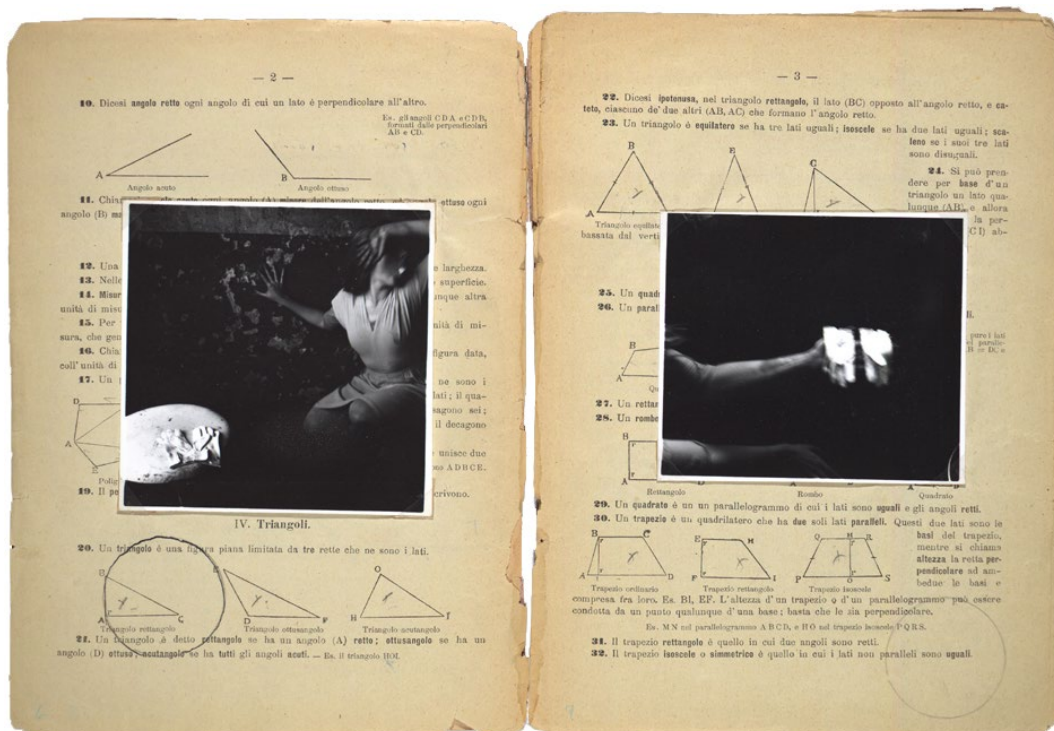


Fig 89: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

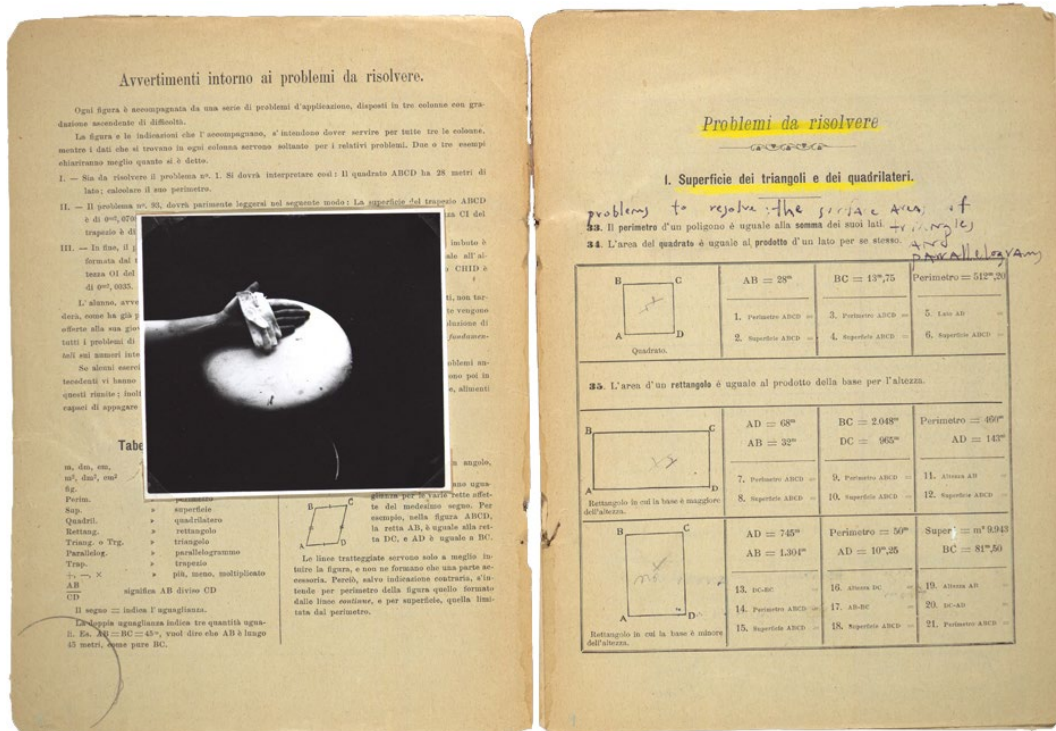


Fig 90: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

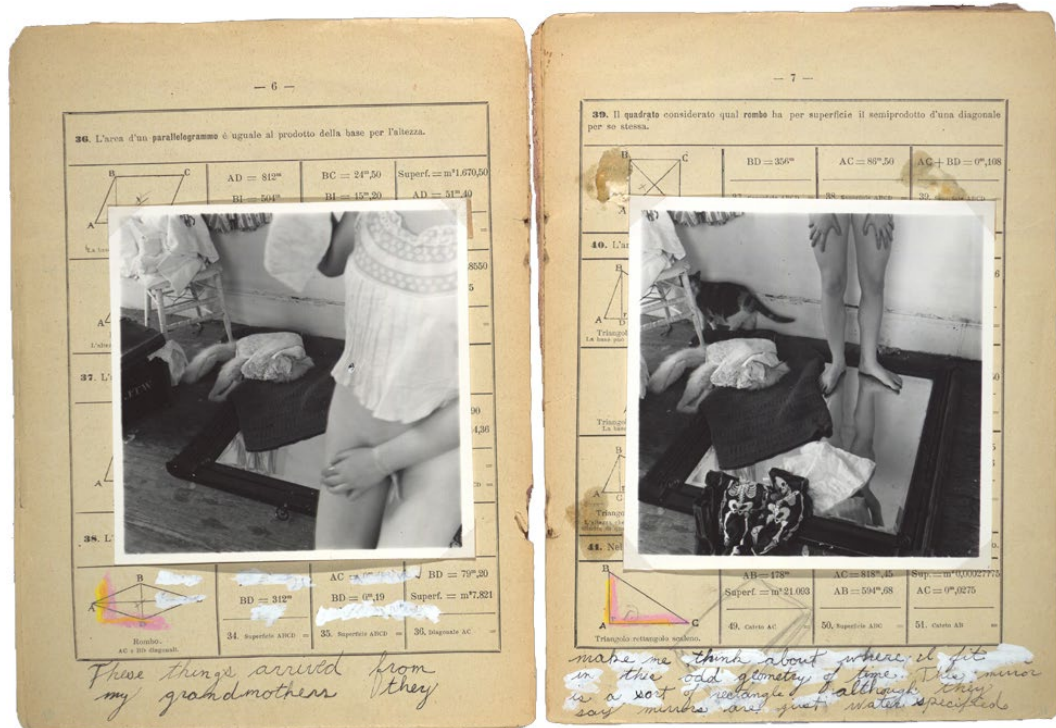


Fig 91: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

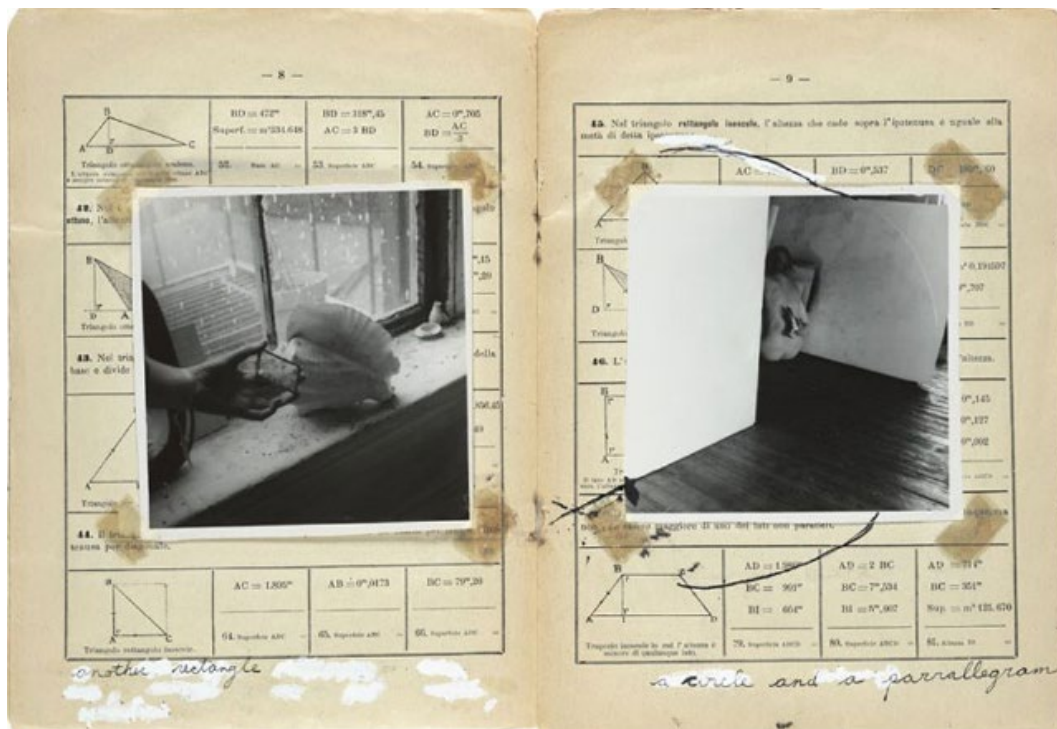


Fig 92: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

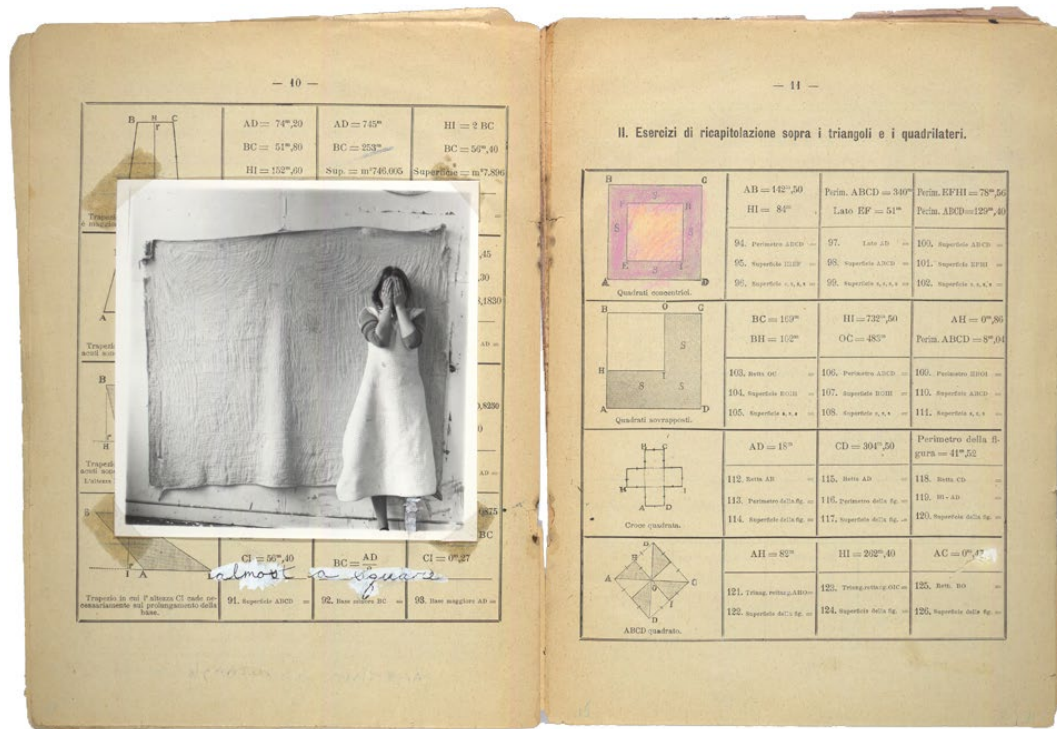


Fig 93: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

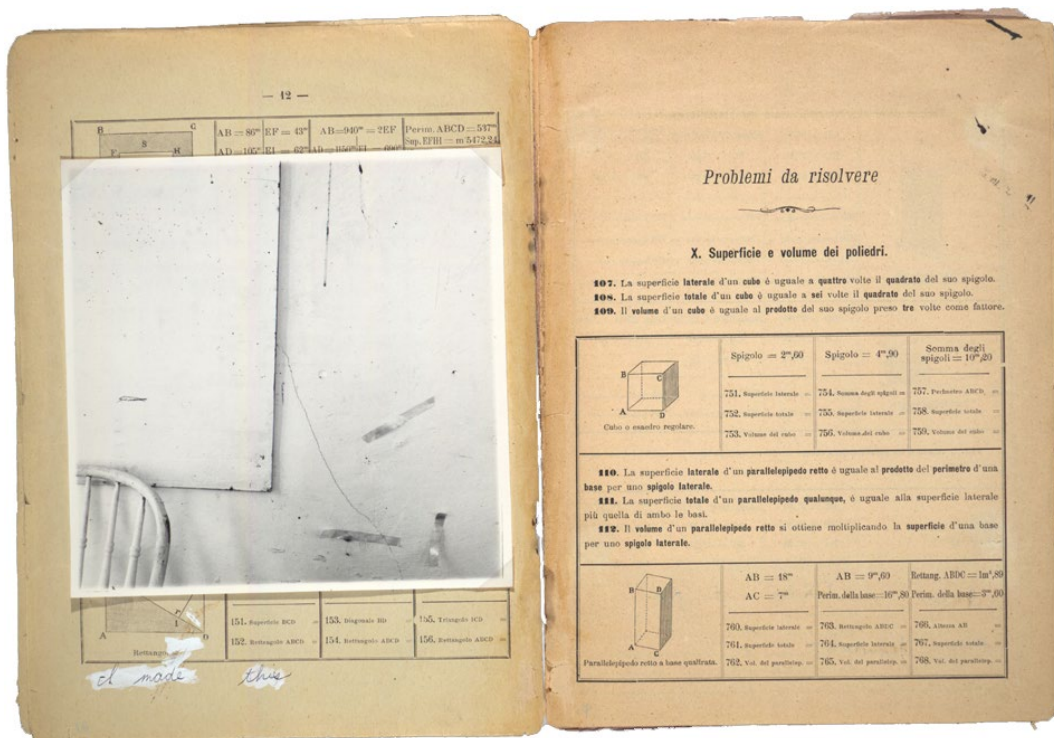


Fig 94: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

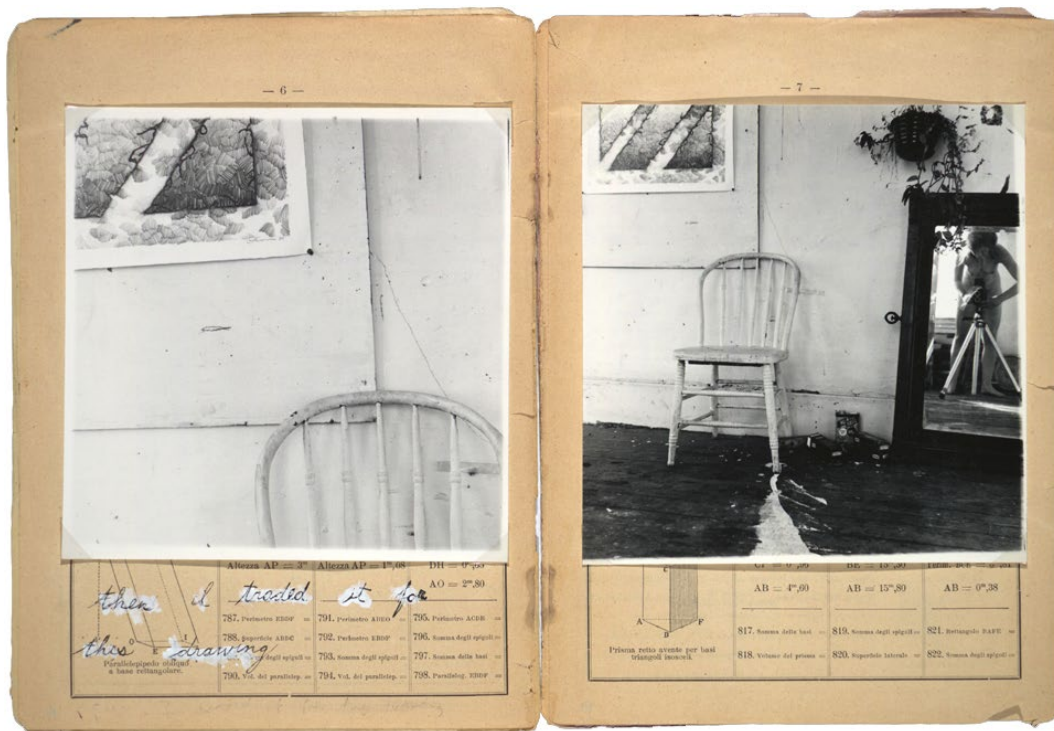


Fig 95: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980



Fig 96: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980



Fig 97: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, New York, 1979-80

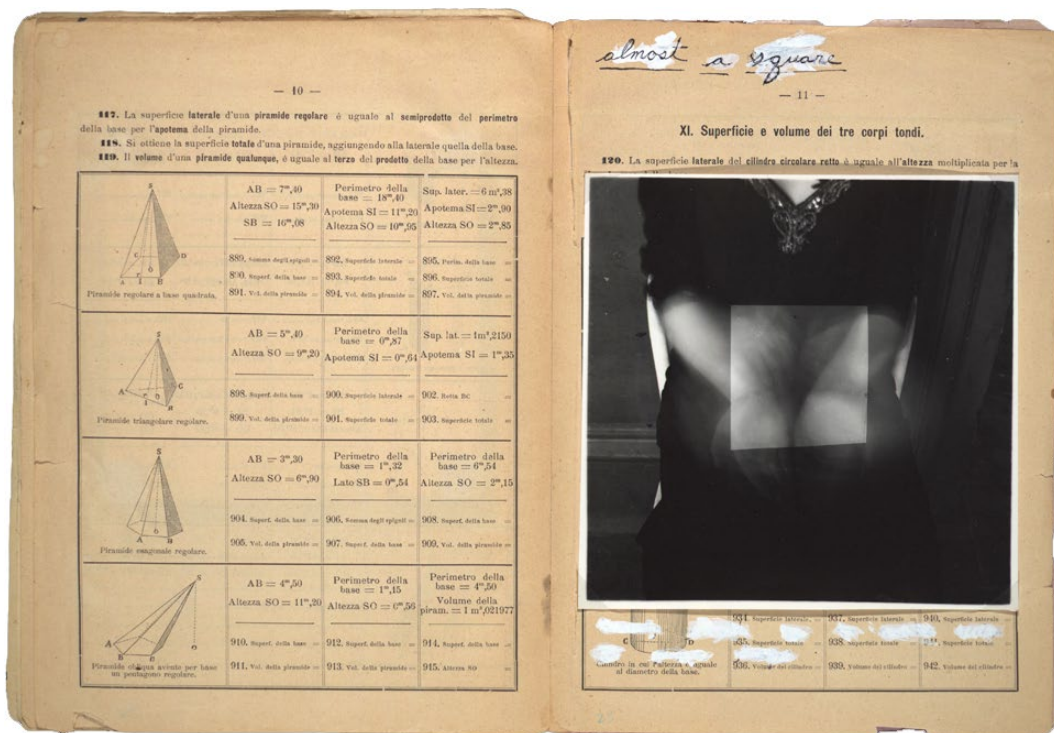


Fig 98: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980

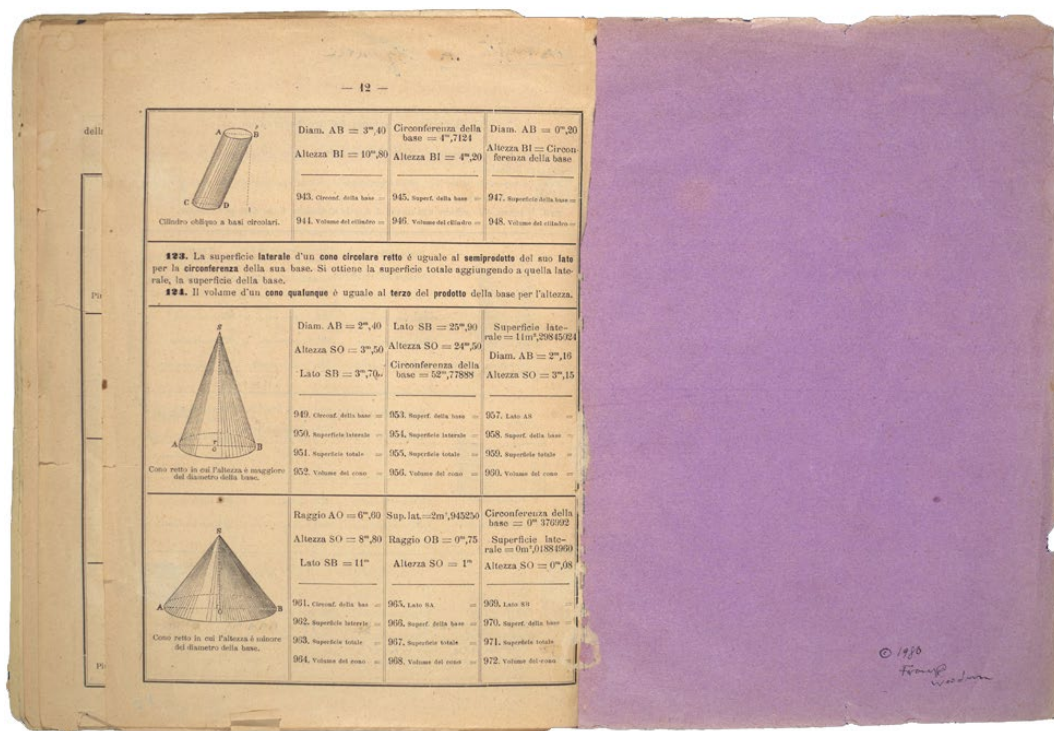


Fig 99: Francesca Woodman, from *some disordered interior Geometries* Book, 1980



Fig 100: Francesca Woodman, front cover, *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 101: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 102: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 103: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 104: Francesca Woodman, *Study for Temple Project*, silver gelatin print, New York, 1980



Fig 105: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 106: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, Rome, 1977-1978



Fig 107: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, Rome, 1977-1978



Fig 108: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980

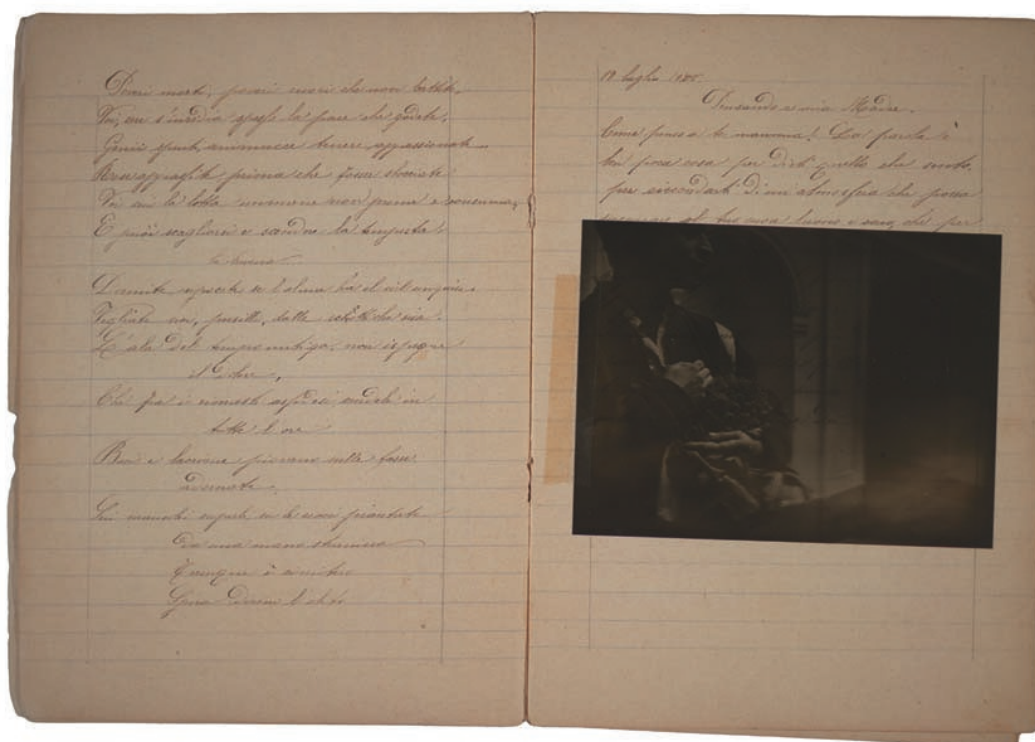


Fig 109: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980

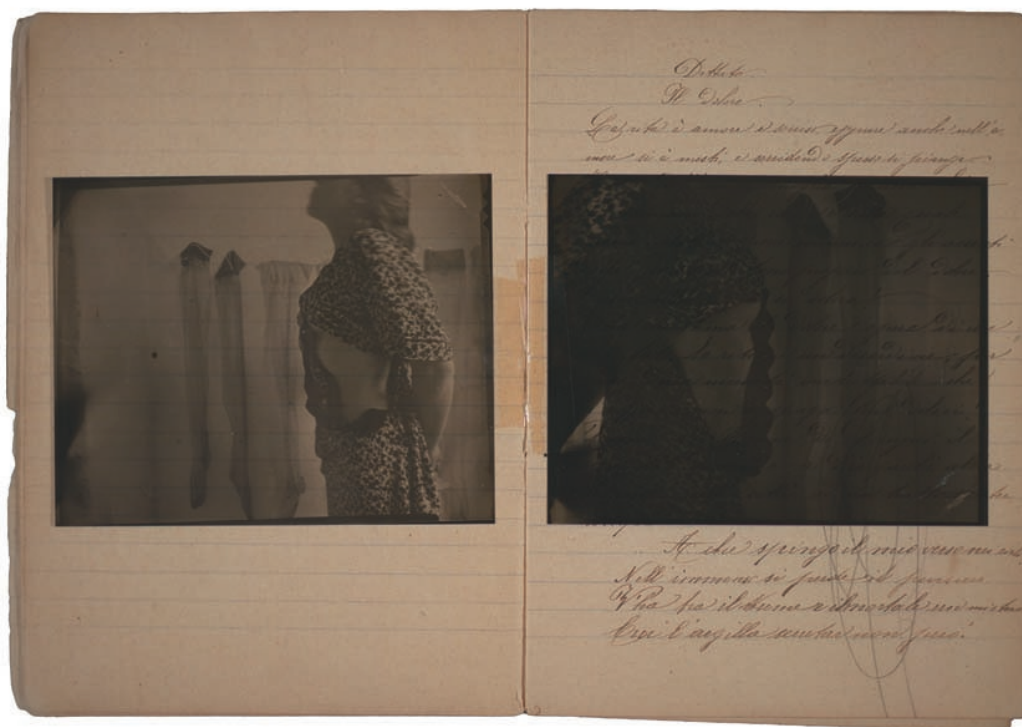


Fig 110: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 111: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 112: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 113: Francesca Woodman, silver gelatin print, Providence, ca 1977

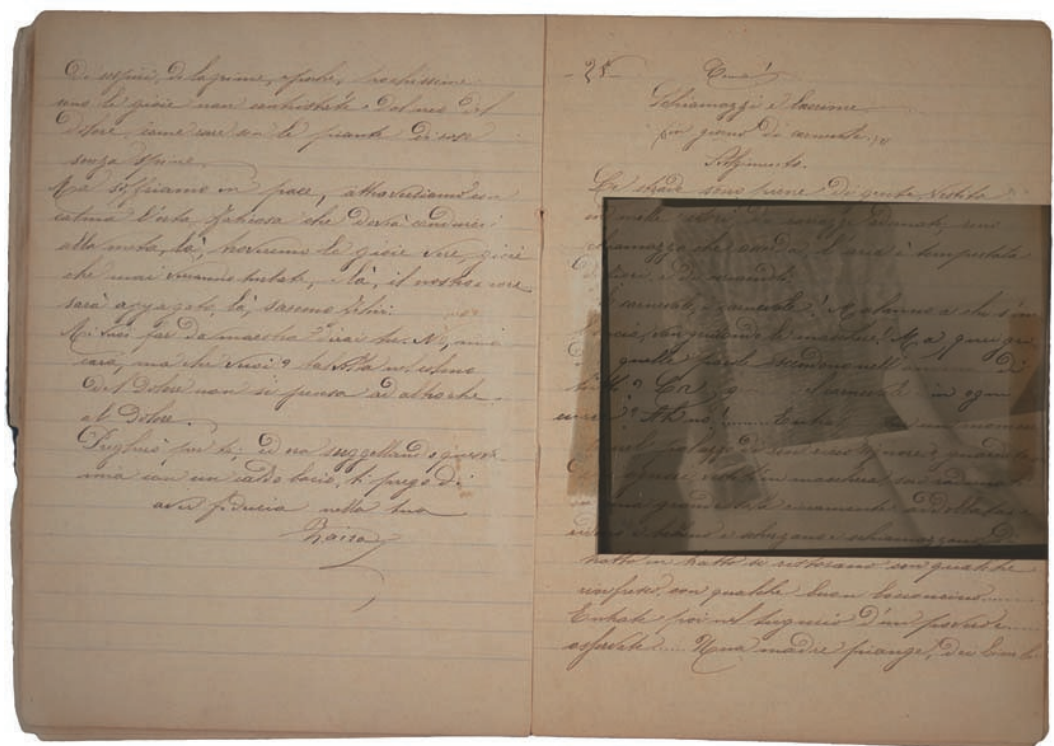


Fig 116: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980

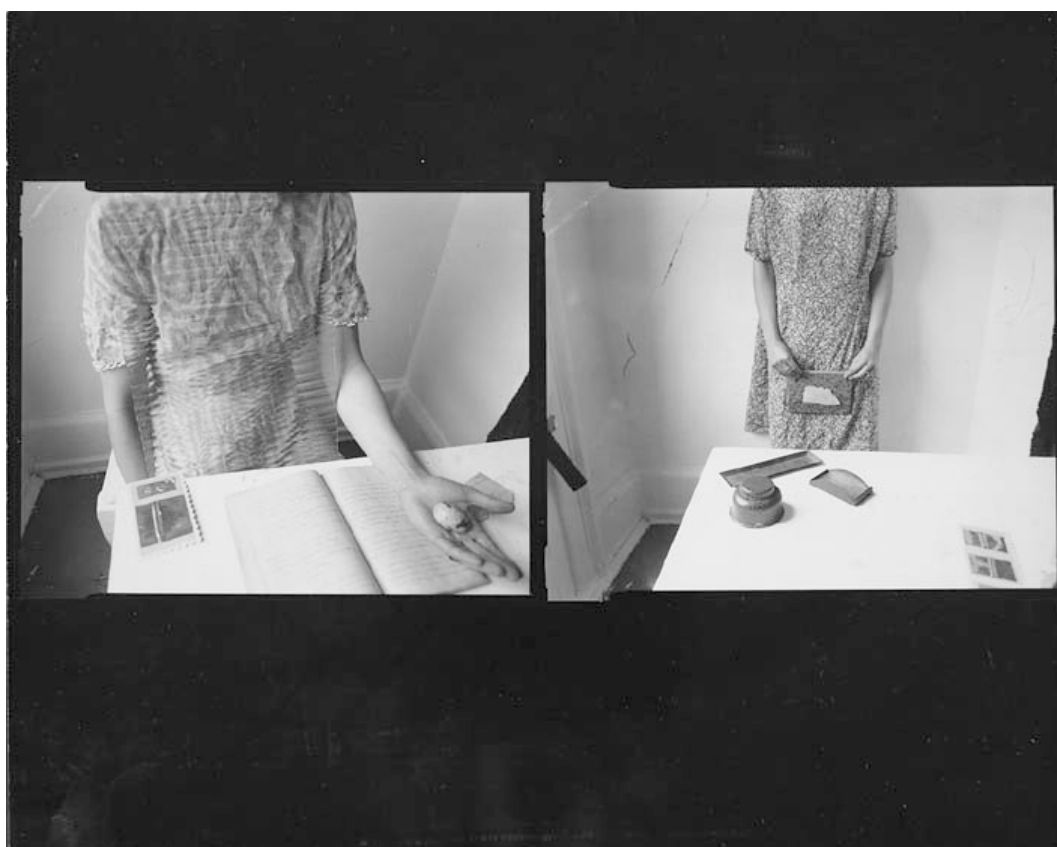


Fig 117: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, MacDowell Colony, 1980

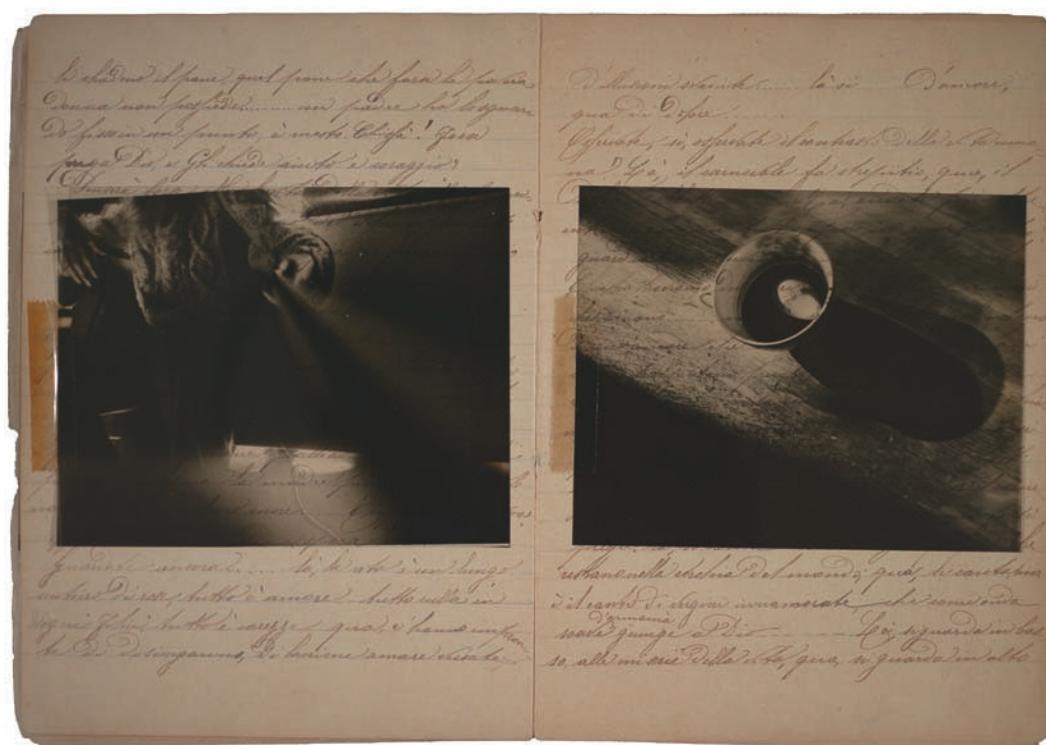


Fig 118: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 119: Francesca Woodman, *Self Portrait at Thirteen*, silver gelatin print, Boulder, 1972



Fig 120: Claude Cahun, *What Do You Want From Me?*, silver gelatin print, 1928

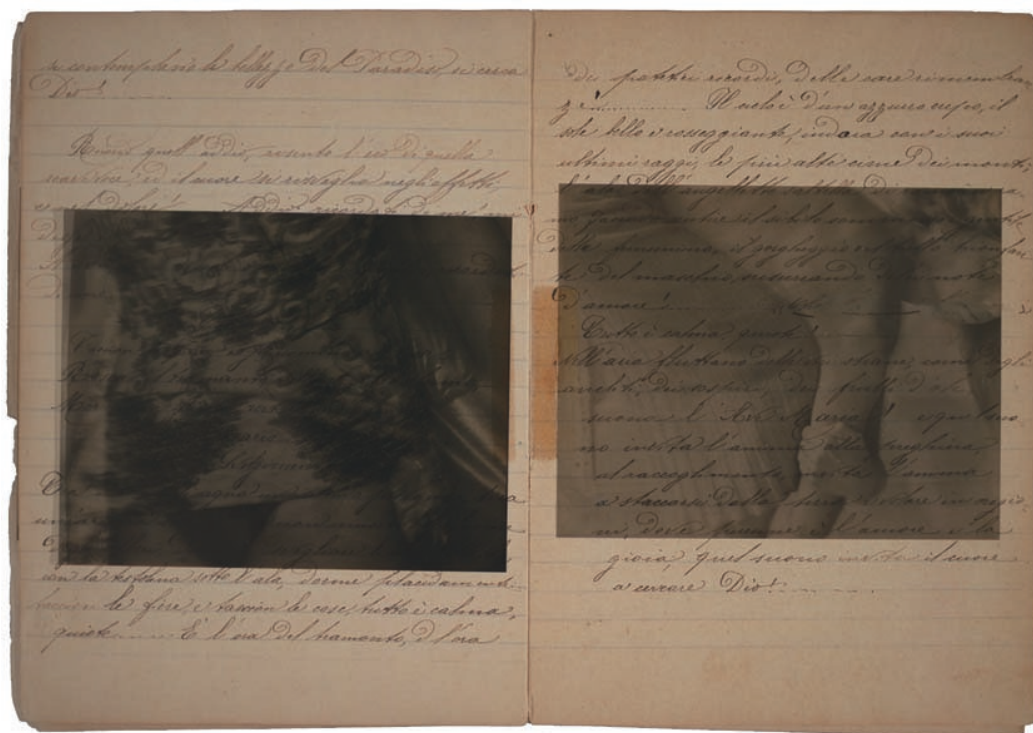


Fig 121: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980

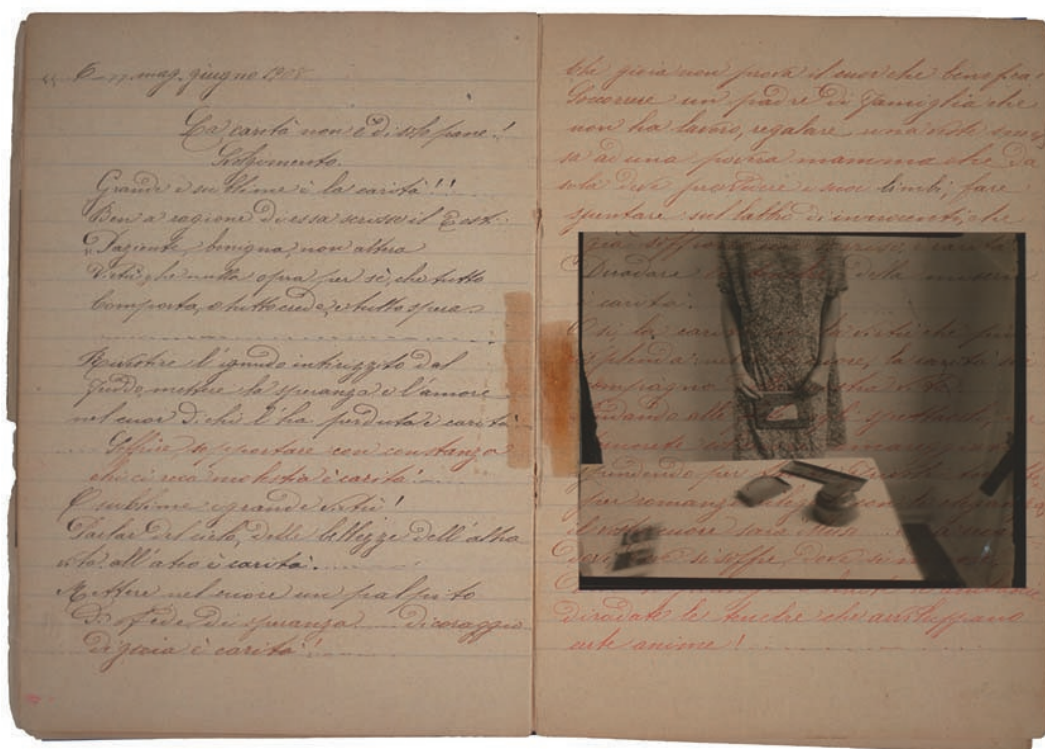


Fig 122: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* Book, 1980



Fig 125: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, Providence, 1978



Fig 126: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, New York, 1979

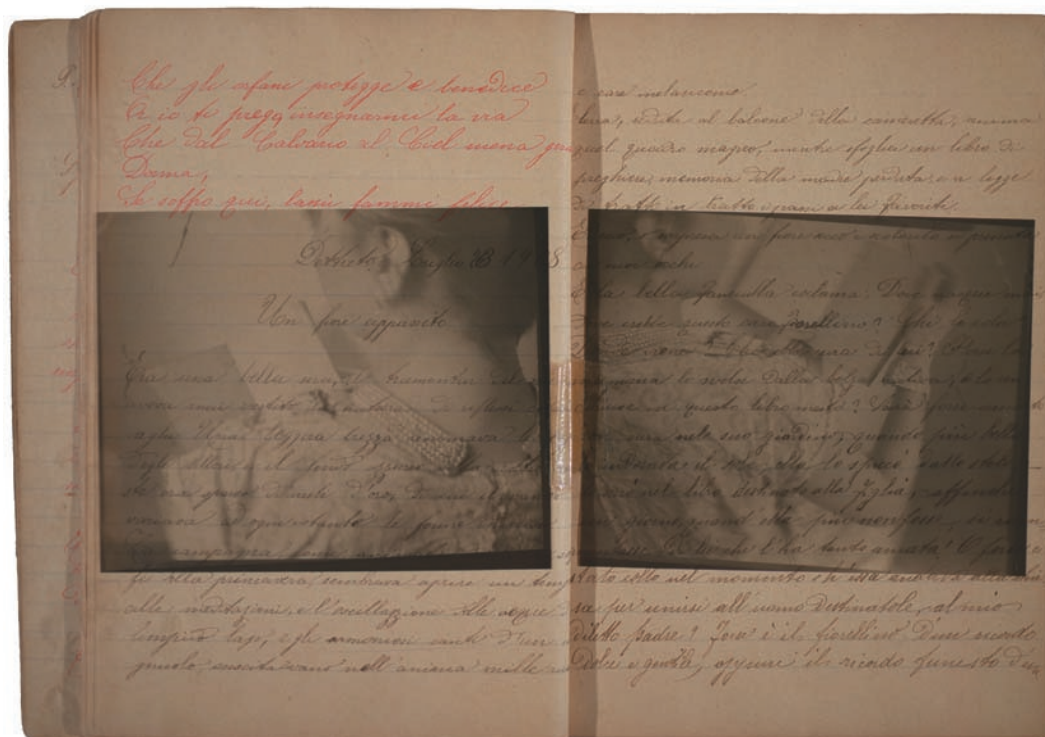


Fig 129: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi Book*, 1980



Fig 130: Francesca Woodman, front cover, *Quaderno Raffaello* Book, 1979-80

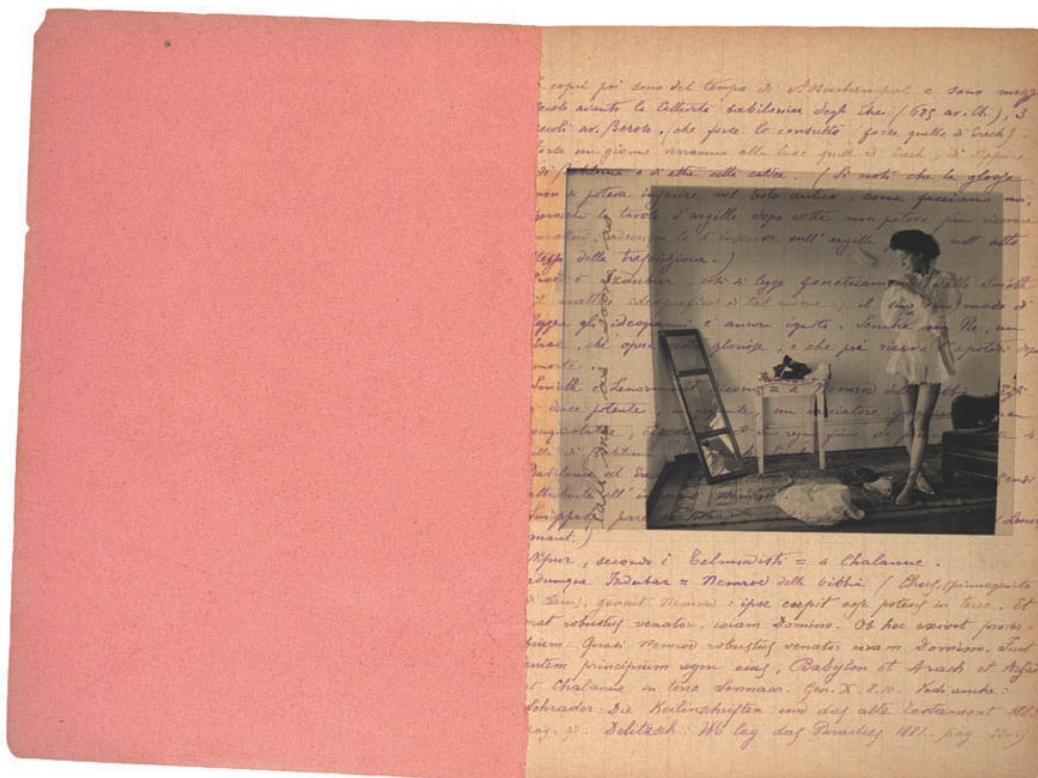


Fig 131: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

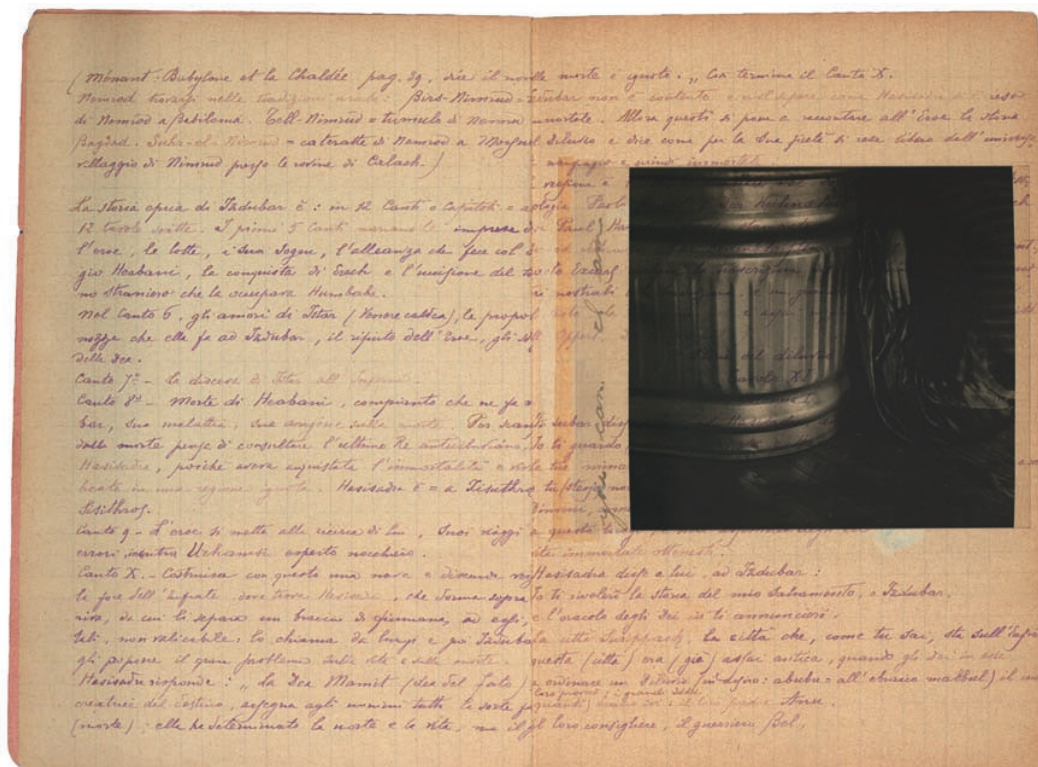


Fig 132: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

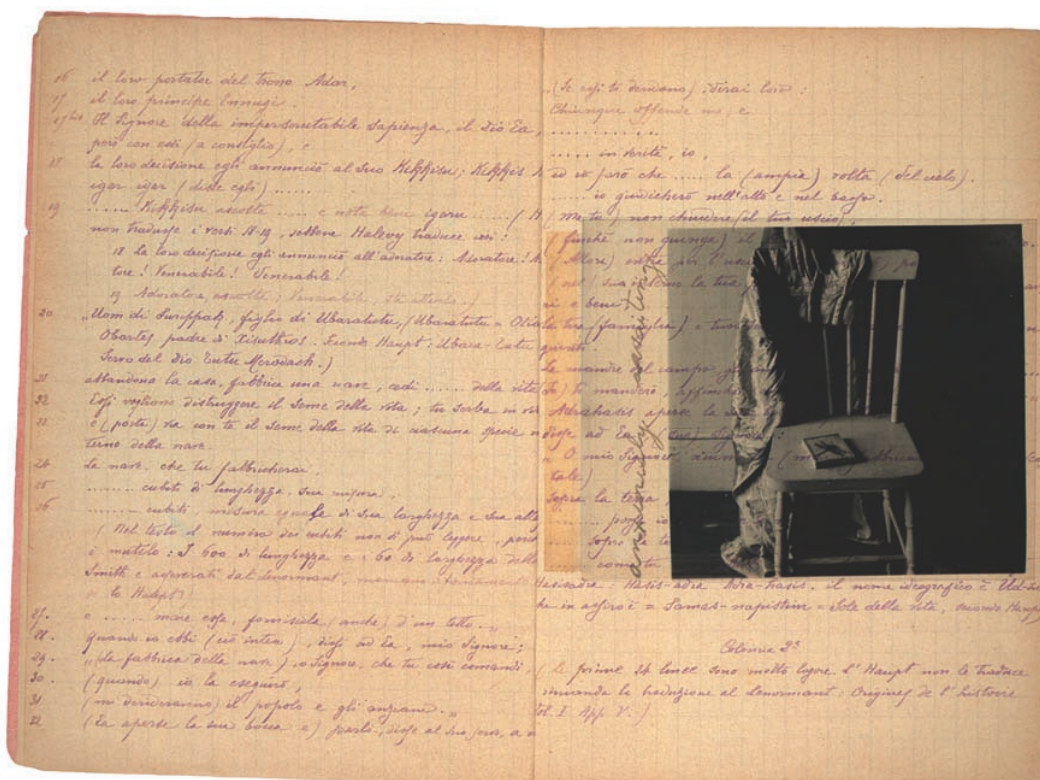


Fig 133: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

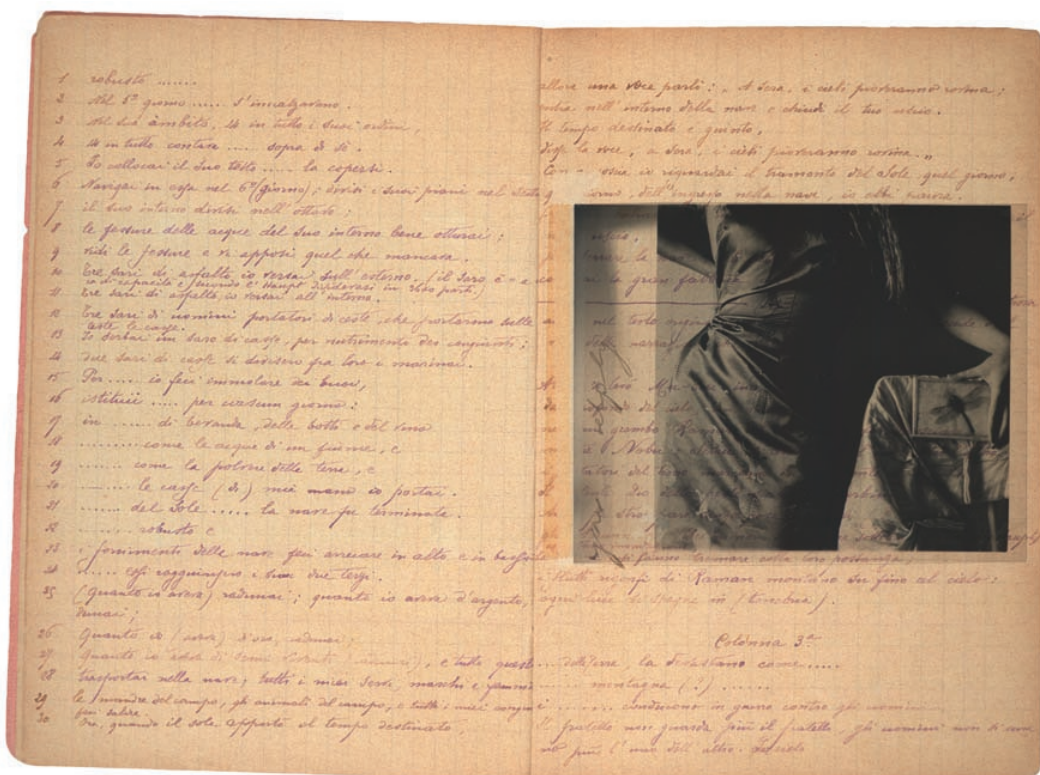


Fig 134: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

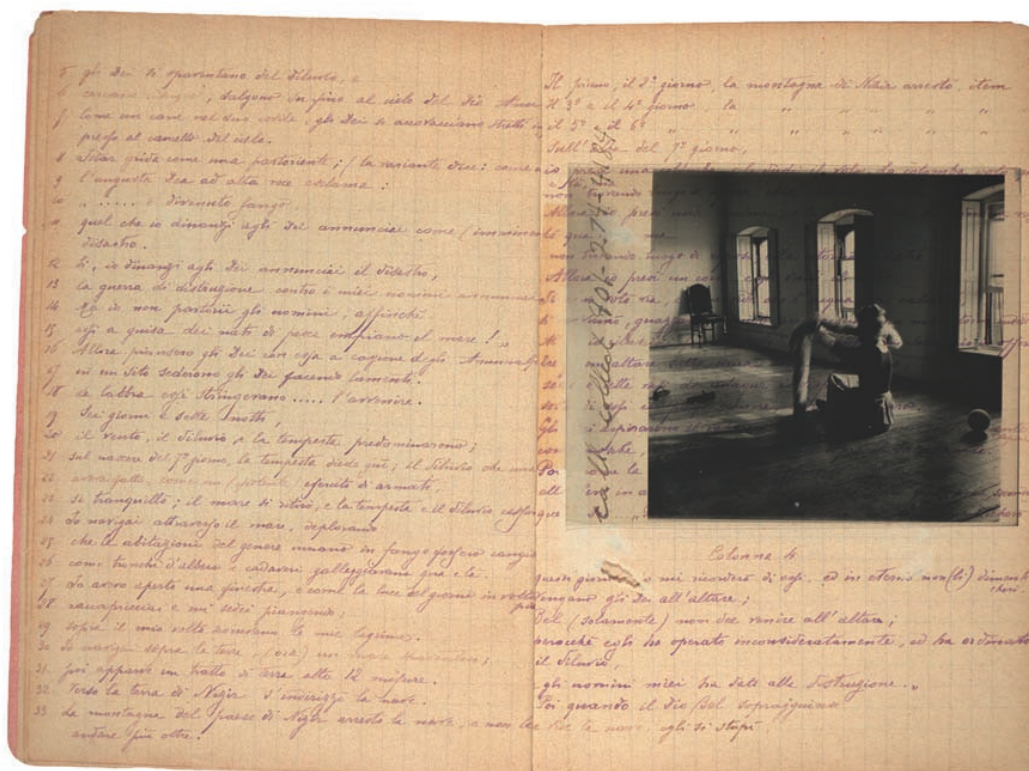


Fig 135: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

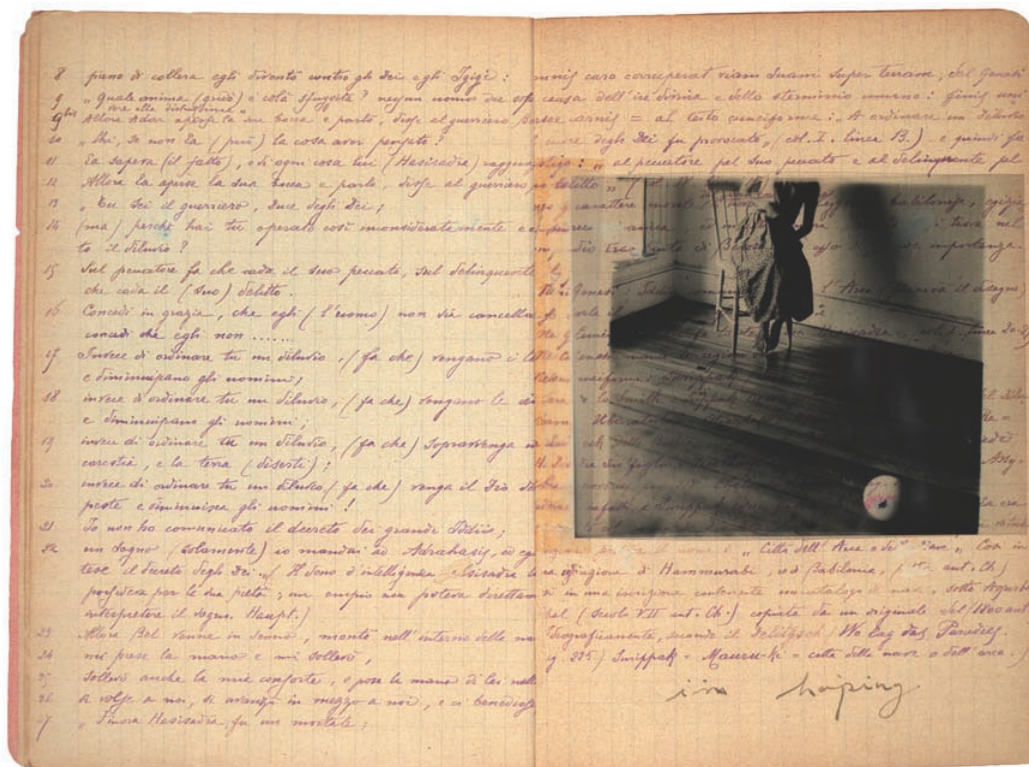


Fig 136: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

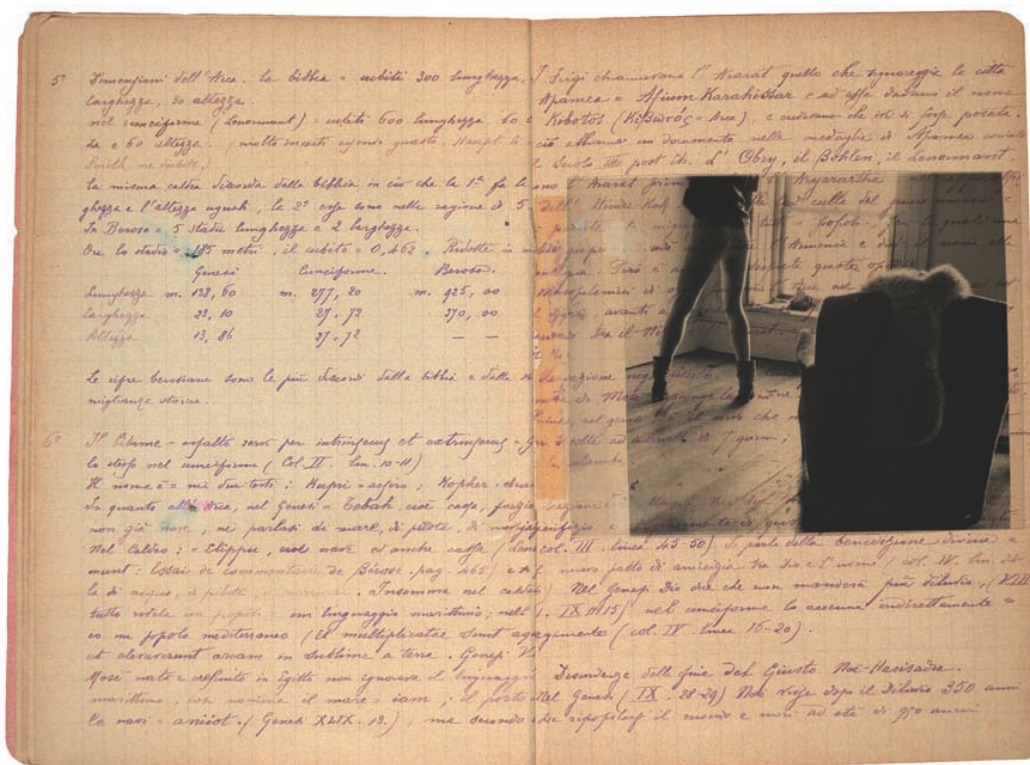


Fig 137: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

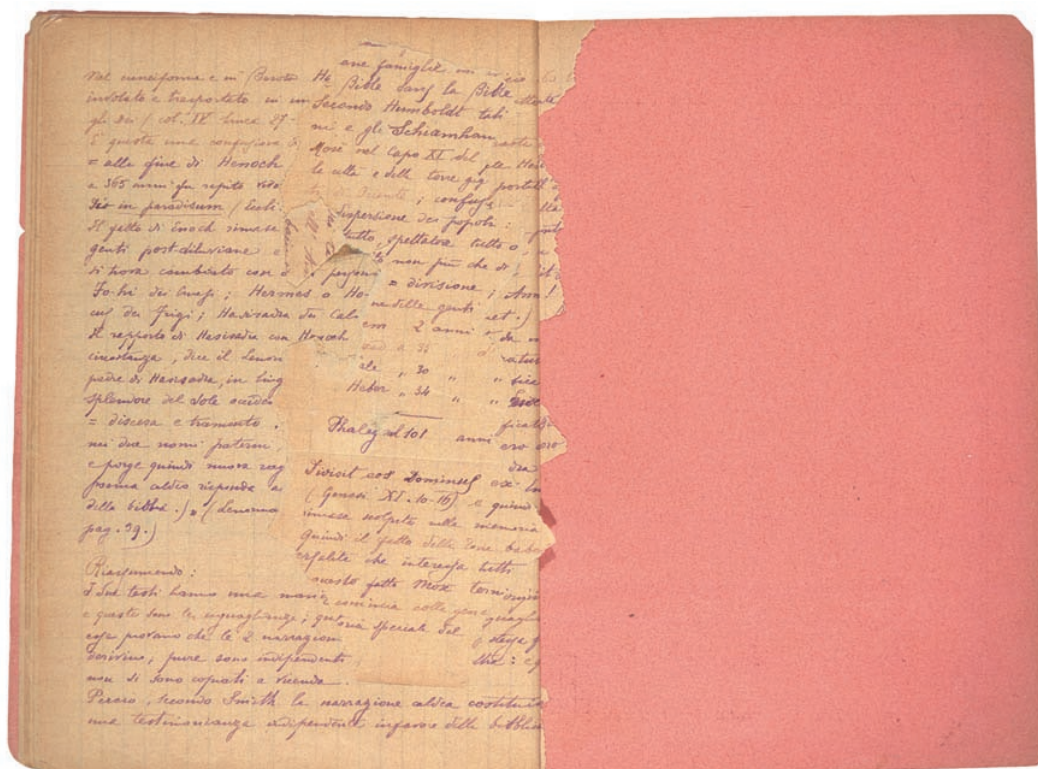


Fig 138: Francesca Woodman, from *Quaderno Raffaello Book*, 1979-80

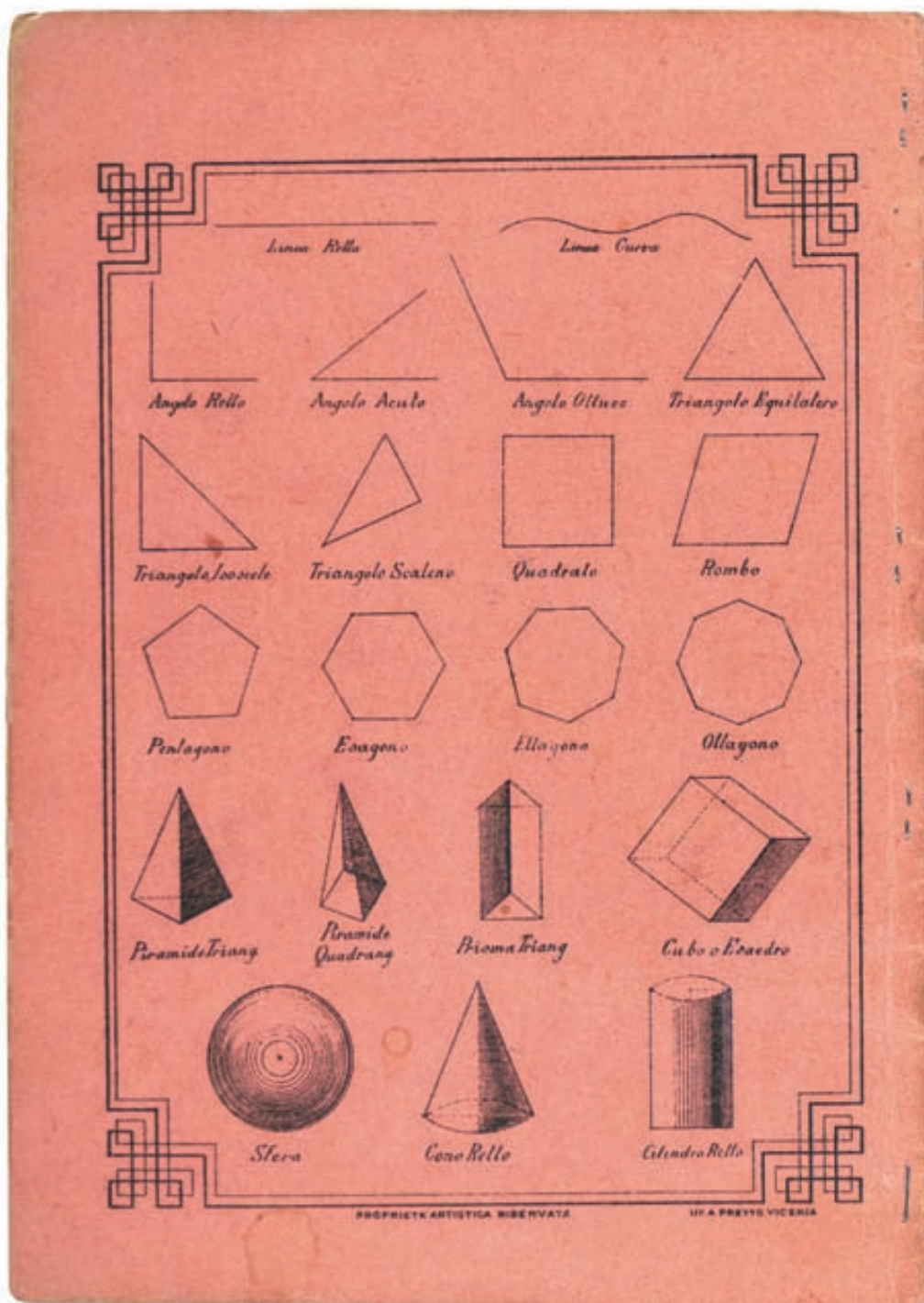


Fig 139: Francesca Woodman, back cover, *Quaderno Raffaello* Book, 1979-80



Fig 140: Francesca Woodman, front cover, *Portrait of a Reputation* Book, 1975-76



Fig 141: Francesca Woodman, from *Portrait of a Reputation* Book, 1975-76



Fig 142: Francesca Woodman, from *Portrait of a Reputation Book*, 1975-76



Fig 143: Francesca Woodman, from *Portrait of a Reputation Book*, 1975-76



Fig 144: Francesca Woodman, from *Portrait of a Reputation Book*, 1975-76



Fig 145: Francesca Woodman, from *Portrait of a Reputation Book*, 1975-76



Fig 146: Man Ray, *Explosante fixe*, silver gelatin print, 1934



Fig 147: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, Providence, 1975-76



Fig 148: Rogi André, *Seeming to swim...*, from Breton, *L'Amour fou*, 1937



Fig 149: Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, black and white photograph, 1932



Fig 150: Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée*, black and white photograph, 1935



Fig 151: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, Providence, 1975-78



Fig 152: Hans Bellmer, *Les Jeux de la poupée*, coloured silver gelatin print, 1938-1949



Fig 153: Hans Bellmer, *Les Jeux de la poupée*, coloured silver gelatin print, 1938-1949



Fig 154: Hans Bellmer, *Les Jeux de la poupée*, coloured silver gelatin print, 1938-1949

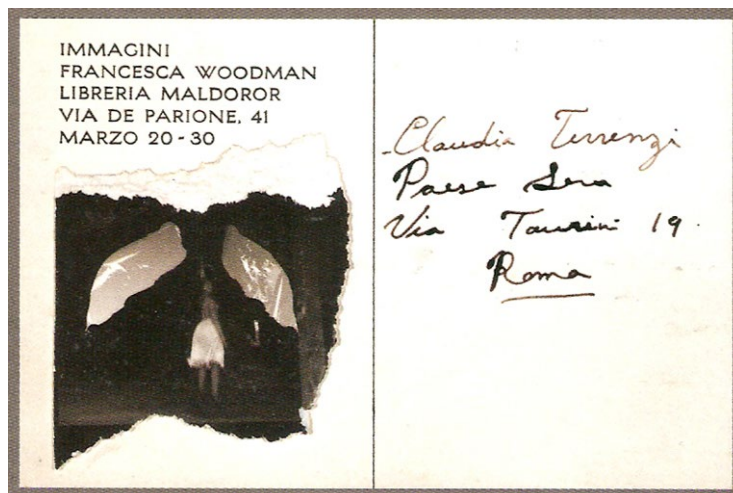


Fig 155: Francesca Woodman, invitation postcard to her first exhibition, Rome, 1978



Fig 156: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, MacDowell Colony?, 1980?,



Fig 157: Francesca Woodman, *Study for Temple Project*, blueprint, New York, 1980



Fig 158: Francesca Woodman, *Treepiece*, blueprints installation, 1980



Fig 159: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, MacDowell Colony, 1980

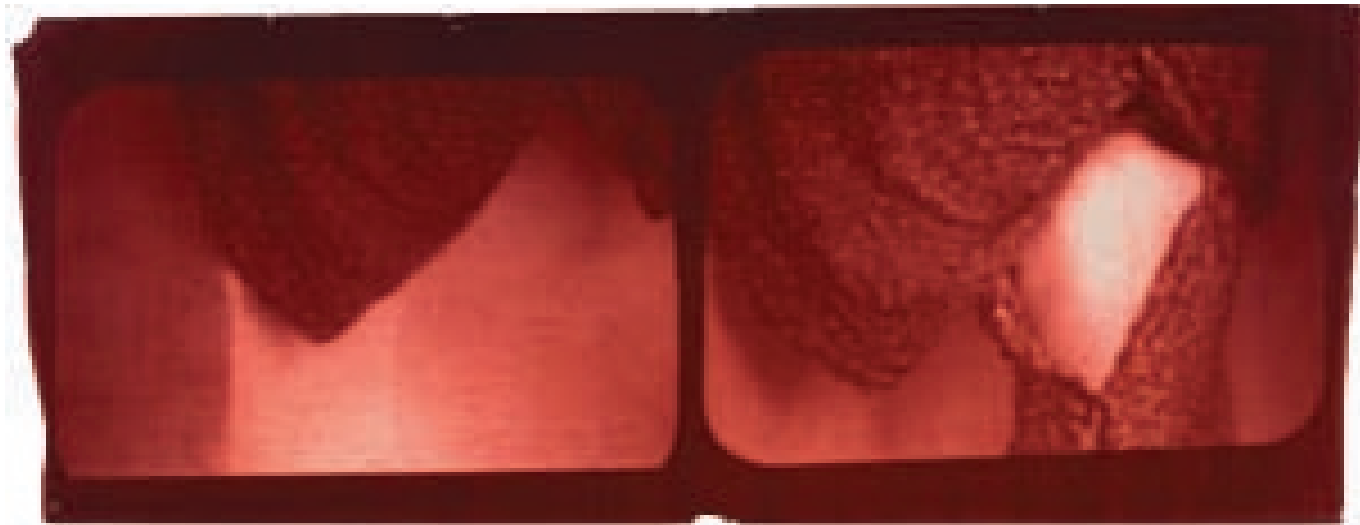


Fig 160: Francesca Woodman, *Dress*, blueprint, MacDowell Colony?, 1980



Fig 161: Francesca Woodman, *Bridges and Tiaras*, blueprint, New York?, 1980

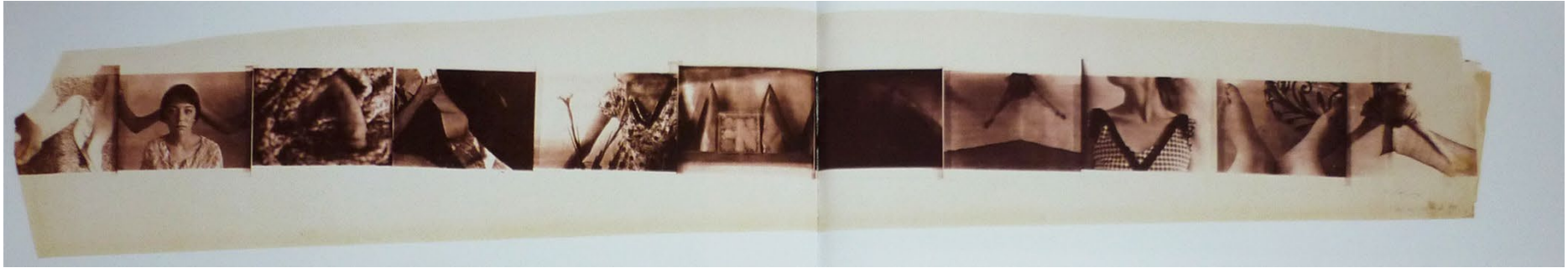


Fig 162: Francesca Woodman, *Zig-Zag*, blueprint, New York, 1980



Fig 163: Francesca Woodman, *Schizzo per Zig-Zag*, blueprint, New York, 1980

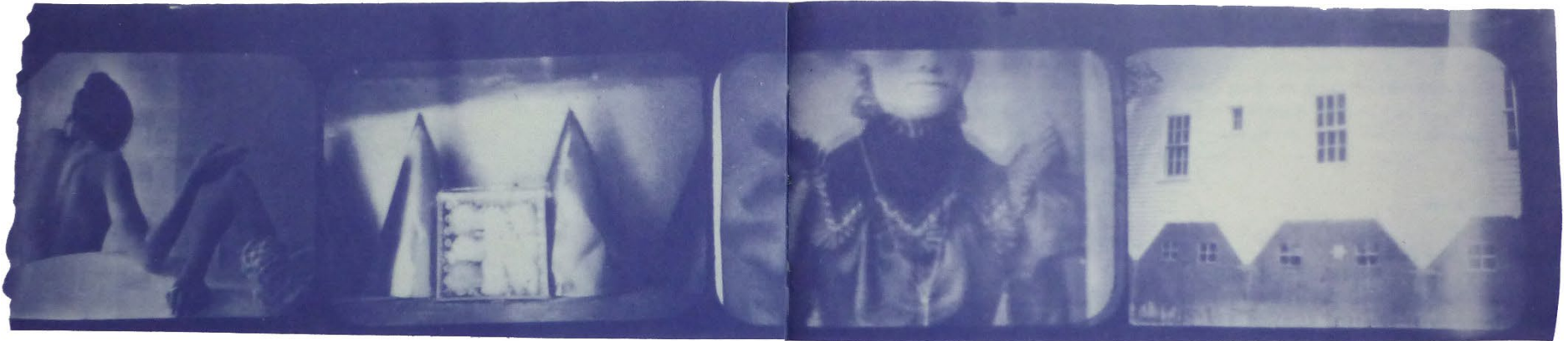


Fig 164: Francesca Woodman, *Zig-Zag*, blueprint, New York?, 1980

