

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

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This is the first chapter of my thesis “*Almost A Square*: The Photographic Books of Francesca Woodman and Their Relationship to Surrealism”, University of Essex, 2012.¹ This thesis investigates Francesca Woodman’s work within the framework of surrealist ideas materialised, though not exclusively, in photography.

I argue in this thesis, sustained by my parallel and comparative investigations of André Breton’s *Nadja* (1928, revised 1963) and Woodman’s Books, that it is in her five found object Books that Woodman comes closest to demonstrating 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.

The thesis continues with what is to date the only full descriptive and interpretative analysis of all six of the photographic Books that Woodman made in her lifetime.

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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...²

¹ See <http://serlib0.essex.ac.uk:80/record=b1805431~S5>

² 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 Surrealisme*, Paris, Pauvert, 1962), trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1972, 20.

In the realm of literature, only the marvellous is capable of fecundating works which belong to an inferior category such as the novel...³

In this chapter I shall explore the innovative 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.*⁴ An important development in the use of photographic image 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,

³ Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 1972, 14.

⁴ 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: ...and when will all the books that are worth anything stop being illustrated with drawings and appear only with photographs?

Dada and Surrealism Reviewed which Woodman might also have seen.⁵ 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.*⁶ 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 word and photographic image therein.⁷ 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).⁸ 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

⁵ Please see Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 35-37, for a more detailed investigation of this subject.

⁶ George Woodman is quoted by Wood, 'The Lady Vanishes', 1999, 20-23.

⁷ Jean Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', *Mélusine*, 4, 1982, 123-151.

⁸ Breton, his *Avant-dire* to *Nadja* (his revised 1963 edition), Paris, Gallimard/Folio Plus, 1964, reprinted 1998, 8: ...des deux principaux impératifs "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.

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'invraisemblables 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.

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.⁹

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.

⁹ 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.

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 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.¹⁰ 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, 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.¹¹ 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

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

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 these three Books: *Angels*, *Calendars* (of which only the second part, *Calendars* is annotated), *Quaderno Raffaello* and *some disordered interior Geometries*.¹²

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.*¹³ 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

¹² At this stage I use this fact only as a basis for differentiation and not descriptively.

¹³ Caws, Introduction to Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, 1990, xxiii.

poem by Woodman written as a separate work is published in the catalogue of the *Incommunicado* exhibition.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ Breton's control over his images resides in his commissioning of mainly Boiffard as an external photographer.¹⁶ 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.*¹⁷

¹⁴ *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.

¹⁵ *Unterschriften* can be translated as writing underneath.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Renée Riese Hubert, Introduction to *Surrealism and the Book*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, 23.

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 Breton.¹⁸ *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 .

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*.¹⁹ 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*.

¹⁸ These sessions, which took place in Paris in 1919, are gathered together and published as *Les Champs Magnétiques*, Au Sans Pareil, Paris, 1920.

¹⁹ 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=l5IWKk05X-UC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=Gertrude+Stein+1890s+writing&ots=O Ozlm_tPF-&sig=IV86h3UP1JzCrUFrVkJvO1pCAE#v=onepage&q&f=false, accessed 13/11/2010.

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:

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.²⁰*

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.²¹*

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

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

altered form, by twentieth century writers such as Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, Brett Easton Ellis and Jeanette Winterson.²²

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. 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.*²³

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:

²² 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.

²³ George Woodman ed., 'Journal extracts', in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 242 (unnumbered page).

*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 surrealism, 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.*²⁴

Nadja, first published in 1928, documents events which took place in 1926.²⁵ 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 1960) and a fifty year gap between the appearance of that Librairie Gallimard book and Woodman's Book practice in America.²⁶

²⁴ Roger Cardinal, *Breton: Nadja: Critical Guides to French Texts*, London, Grant and Cutler, 1986, 11-12.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Decidedly in her work, the decade of the 1970s was a point of transition between high modernism and emergent post-modernism in Euro-America.

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.

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.*²⁷

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).²⁸ For the comparison I shall take the image of the *white irregular half-cylinder* object (fig 2) created, like the photograph of Saint-Ouen flea market opposite it, by Boiffard.²⁹

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ For a full analysis of the image discussed, please see Chapter 2.

²⁹ 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.

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.³⁰ 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.*³¹

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

³⁰ 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.*

³¹ Chapter 8, 'Displacement of Narrative', in Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 1988, 264.

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*.³² The object’s perversity intrigues him. 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*

³² 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.

yeux de fougère (fig 3) and Woodman's last image from *some disordered interior Geometries*, captioned *almost a square* (fig 4).³³

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 around the front of the neck.³⁴ 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

³³ '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.

³⁴ 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.

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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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).³⁷

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.

³⁵ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 108.

³⁶ '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).

³⁷ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 137.

Nadja's eyes are for him her chief allurement 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.³⁸ 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.*³⁹

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.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ Chapter 3, 'Nadja: a "voluntary banality"?' in Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 2002, 63.

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.⁴⁰ 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 exagonale regolare /

*Piramide obliqua avente per base un pentagon regolare*⁴¹

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

⁴⁰ 'Surface areas and volumes of three round forms'.

⁴¹ 'Regular pyramid with square base / Regular triangular pyramid / Regular hexagonal pyramid / Oblique pyramid constructed on a regular pentagonal base'.

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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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 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:

⁴² 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.

⁴³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 87.

*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.*⁴⁴

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" ...*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ André Breton, *Mad Love* (originally published as *L'Amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937), trans. Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1987, 39.

⁴⁵ 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.*⁴⁶

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 ...*⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁶ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 86.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 88.

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 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.⁴⁹

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

⁴⁹ See page 53 for the full quotation.

centre, heightened as it is in an intensity of expectation, in her choice of a pared down interior mis-en-scène.⁵⁰ In Woodman's case too, her caption is, uniquely in *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.⁵¹

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.⁵² 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

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ A comparably tight narrative chain is present in the early Book *Portrait of a Reputation*.

⁵² 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*.

documents. These other images are for the most part taken at close hand, filling the image rectangle, with no, or only incidental, perspective.

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.⁵³ They stretch the narrative encapsulated in them into a poetry found in between the contrasted currencies of word and image.

⁵³ A full discussion of the images of *Quaderno Raffaello* is given in Chapter 6.

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.*⁵⁴ 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 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.⁵⁵ 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,

⁵⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 101

⁵⁵ Woodman's *Self Deceit* and *Charlie the Model* series are reproduced in Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 156-157 and 116-117.

what he calls ‘*photography’s chemical dimension*’.^{56, 57} 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.

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-Camile-Ghislaine D), as published in Breton’s book and some drawings by Woodman, reproduced in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue.

⁵⁶ Philippe Sollers, ‘The Sorceress’, in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 10.

⁵⁷ 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.

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.⁵⁸ 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.*⁵⁹ The two drawings by Woodman which are published as separate works (figs 10 and 11) are ascribed to her period in Rome between 1977 and 1978.⁶⁰ 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 1976.⁶¹

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

⁵⁸ Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 1988, 266.

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 138-139.

⁶¹ These drawings are reproduced on pages 48, 49, 51 and 52 of Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000.

(painting) on her own negatives and in the process of *dodging and burning* them.⁶²

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.⁶³ 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 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*.⁶⁴ 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.*⁶⁵

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

⁶² For a fuller explanation of this technique please see the opening section from my analysis of *some disordered interior Geometries* in Chapter 4.

⁶³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 130: *Before we met, she had never drawn at all.*

⁶⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 118 and 123.

⁶⁵ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 121.

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 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.⁶⁶

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

⁶⁶ 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.

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’.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸ 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 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.*⁶⁹

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

⁶⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (originally published as *Le Deuxième Sex*, 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).

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Sollers, ‘The Sorceress’, 1998, 9-13.

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.*⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ After all is considered, as Dawn Ades has said, “*Nadja*” is about loss and “*L'Amour Fou*” about desire and fulfilment.⁷² Simone de Beauvoir summarises the character and role of Nadja here:

*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.*⁷³

⁷⁰ Fer et al., *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism*, 1993, 186.

⁷¹ 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.

⁷² Dawn Ades, personal communication, January 2005.

⁷³ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1997, 264.

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.⁷⁴ 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.*⁷⁵

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 serial and auratic images of herself, in *the production of a never-ending chain of images*, onto her own and our consciousness.⁷⁶ It is her choice to address her psychological fragility in her project.

⁷⁴ Mark Polizzotti, Introduction to Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, xxi.

⁷⁵ Margaret Sundell, 'Vanishing Points: the Photography of Francesca Woodman', in M. Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1996, 439.

⁷⁶ Sundell, 'Vanishing Points', 1996, 439.

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).⁷⁷ 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.*⁷⁸

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.*⁷⁹

⁷⁷ 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.

⁷⁸ Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 2002, 63.

⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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 Jacqueline Lamba.⁸¹ 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

⁸⁰ 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.*

⁸¹ André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937.

tournesol", illustrated through Brassaï's photographs of an illuminated night city. Nadja tells, rather, of "quest and failure".⁸²

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 *patrimonie* 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.*⁸³ 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

⁸² Ades, 'Photography and the Surrealist Text', 1985, 165. Brassaï's Paris night photographs were published in *Minotaure* in 1935 and in Breton's *L'Amour fou* in 1937.

⁸³ Breton, *Nadja*, 1998, 82: 'We have our dinner served outside by the wine cellar'.

of banality, even repetition, in the factual rendering of a scene in *Nadja* to maximise the dramatic involvement of his audience.

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.⁸⁴

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.

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.⁸⁵

The poem refers to a period of time when the learned and practised activity of piano playing is ceased and then resumed.⁸⁶ 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

⁸⁴ See note 13. I quote the poem in full in Chapter 7.

⁸⁵ Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, 2006, 113 and 141.

⁸⁶ 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.

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 happened. It addresses the same urgent intention Breton demonstrates in his *pris sur le vif*, throw everything in, structuring of *Nadja*.⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁷ 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.

⁸⁸ That is not to say the artist did not welcome the publication of her book *some disordered interior Geometries* in 1981.

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 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.⁸⁹ *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,

⁸⁹ 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*.

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 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.⁹⁰ 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*.

⁹⁰ Sophie Calle, *Douleur exquise*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2003; and in translation, *Exquisite Pain*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2004.

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 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*.⁹¹ 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.⁹²

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

⁹¹ The numbers in the reverse countdown section are in a large red font.

⁹² 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.

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 her arrival, 4th November 1984, evidence that her journey was *real*.⁹³ 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

⁹³ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 39 and 37.

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 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*.⁹⁴

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

⁹⁴ 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.

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 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.*⁹⁵ 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.*⁹⁶ 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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⁹⁵ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 98.

⁹⁶ Calle, *Douleur exquise*, 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.*

⁹⁷ *Quaderno Raffaello*, captions to the first six images; the seventh image is without a caption.

In discussing some links between these works it has become clear that all three works are excellent embodiments of the Barthesian concept of text.⁹⁸

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 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.*⁹⁹

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.¹⁰⁰ This strongly contravenes the conventional descriptive role of a novel that *is only made up of those elements selected by the author and*

⁹⁸ 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.

⁹⁹ Barthes, 'The Struggle with the Angel', in *Image Music Text*, 1977, 127.

¹⁰⁰ 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).

*hierarchised in textual linearity.*¹⁰¹ 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 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.

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

¹⁰¹ Philippe Hamon, 'Qu'est ce qu'une description?', *Poétique*, 12, 1972, quoted by Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 127.

symbol of the Mazda billboard next to the image of the dour psychiatrist Professor Claude.¹⁰²

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).¹⁰³ 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 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.¹⁰⁴ 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:

¹⁰² Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 134 and 137.

¹⁰³ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 101.

*... 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.*¹⁰⁵

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.*¹⁰⁶ In some aspects it could be construed as a sign of the happier

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

¹⁰⁵ 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.'

¹⁰⁶ Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 1988, 268. She prefacing 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.*

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).^{107,108} 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

¹⁰⁷ Breton, *Nadja*, 1999, 134.

¹⁰⁸ ...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.

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.¹⁰⁹ 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 word becomes image.¹¹⁰ 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*.¹¹¹ 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*

¹⁰⁹ 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.

¹¹⁰ 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.

¹¹¹ Breton, *Nadja*, revised edition, 1998, 155.

*fou.*¹¹² It is, in another of Arrouye's inspiring phrases *cette entente entre expérience narrée et symbolisation imagée, entre constat textual et poétique iconique.*¹¹³

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.¹¹⁴

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.¹¹⁵ 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.¹¹⁶ She builds chains of

¹¹² Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 143: the text dissolves itself in the pure surface of the iconic.

¹¹³ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 138: that accord between experience and symbolisation through image, between textual report and the poetic iconic.

¹¹⁴ 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...').

¹¹⁵ Rosalind Krauss, 'Problem Sets', in Gabhart and Krauss, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, 1986, 41-51.

¹¹⁶ Please see Chapter 9 for a deeper investigation of this.

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.¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ 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, 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

¹¹⁷ Arrouye, 'La photographie dans "Nadja"', 1982, 149.

¹¹⁸ Even this conjecture remains open to discussion however, as Peggy Phelan contends in the argument she puts forward which I address in Chapter 2.

receive their experiences.¹¹⁹ 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.*¹²⁰

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 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.

¹¹⁹ Dawn Ades, Preface to David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (originally published London, Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), London, Enitharmon Press, 2000, 10.

¹²⁰ Gascoyne, Introduction to *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, 2000, 23.

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.*¹²¹ He does not imply that all three components must be there at once however. The category ‘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

¹²¹ Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 19.

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.*¹²²

¹²² Ades, Preface to Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, 2000, 9.

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.