

## **Repetitions, References and Reflections: Woodman's *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi***

Alison Dunhill

This paper provides an analysis of Francesca Woodman's untitled photographic Book, referred to here as *Dettati e Temi* (Dictations and Themes).

The paper forms Chapter 5 of my thesis "*Almost A Square: The Photographic Books of Francesca Woodman and Their Relationship to Surrealism*", University of Essex, 2012.<sup>1</sup> 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 includes what is to date the only full descriptive and interpretative analysis of all six of the photographic Books that Woodman made in her lifetime.

*Alison Dunhill has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this paper.*

---

*Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*, referred to simply as *Untitled* by the Woodman Estate, is the longest Book Woodman constructed.<sup>2</sup> We find in this Book, true to

---

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

<sup>2</sup> *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* ('Notebook of Dictation and Themes') is the title given to this Book by the curators of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni exhibition of Woodman's work in Rome in 2000: Bonito Oliva, *Francesca Woodman* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni catalogue), 2000, 198 and 202. They have used the title of the original schoolbook directly. I shall adopt it as it is more useful to my project than the *Untitled* used by the Woodman Estate. Woodman responds deeply to the title throughout and makes use of its last word as a springboard for her own themes. I shall hereafter abbreviate the title to *Dettati e Temi*.

its title, an intensified example of the often subtle embroidery of interlinking themes threaded with self-reference that occurs throughout the work of the artist.

It contains thirty three photographic images made and applied by her, all of which, for the first time, are in transparency form. The Book measures eight inches by five and five eighths of an inch when closed, the width measurement increasing to eleven inches and nine sixteenth of an inch when open in a double page spread. The use of transparencies links it in date and form to *Quaderno Raffaello*; that is to her late career period of 1979-1980, in the period when she was living in New York, with many visits to Rhode Island. She spent the summer of 1979 in Stanwood, Washington and by the end of 1979 she was back in New York.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1980 she worked as Artist in Residence at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire developing the blueprints techniques (*Zig Zag* as discussed in Chapter 9 for example) that she had been experimenting with at the beginning of the year when ideas for her *Temple Project* were germinating.

Some themes addressed in *Dettati e Temi* were developed or conceived as projects made at MacDowell, denoting that the Book was made at some time in 1980,

---

<sup>3</sup> Having moved to New York at the beginning of 1979, coincident with her BFA qualification, she spent the summer of 1979 in Stanwood, Washington, after which she returned to a different New York studio. During the New York periods Woodman worked too on making fashion photographs, inspired by Deborah Turbeville's work (Turbeville's photographic output cannot, however, be confined to the category of fashion; it often far surpasses it.) In the November of the previous year (1978) she had held the solo BFA Degree show entitled *Swan Song* (in homage to Proust) at the Rhode Island School of Art and Design's Woods Gerry Gallery. Five of the eleven stunning extra large photographs (120cms x 90cms approx.) from *Swan Song*, beautifully digitally reconstructed, were exhibited in July 2007 at the Victoria Miro Gallery, London. A fuller description of this series is given in Chapter 9.

probably soon before, soon after or even during the residency. The period and place in which an image was made does not, however, importantly, preclude the use of images made in other time spheres and settings. This aspect will be addressed in Chapter 9.

This Book should therefore be viewed against the backdrop of certain key projects being developed by Woodman in this important period. *Swan Song* was realised and completed by the autumn of 1979, when the series formed her BFA Degree exhibition at the Woods Gerry Gallery at Rhode Island School of Art and Design in Providence. The *Temple Project* was an extraordinarily ambitious and inventive visual dialogue between Greek classicism and what was emerging as the end of modernism, realised in blueprint format. Finally, *Tree Piece* made during her New Hampshire summer, which developed the experimental colour, method and size of the *Temple Project*, while researching solutions to mimetic transferences between human and natural form. Ongoing too at this time, but of less importance to my current project, was her interest in developing a career as a fashion photographer.

The number of added photographic images in *Dettati e Temi* exceeds that of Woodman's second largest Book, *Angels, Calendars*, by seven. The base script of the Book is approximately twice as large as that of *Angels, Calendars*, due partly to the wider gaps between the printed lines of the original book. It is written by the original student in a particularly ornate and beautiful measured hand, providing a format of considerable aesthetic quality. Although the colour of the ink used is primarily deep sepia, some variations cause it to have pink and purple patches. These subtle and beautiful colour variations are in effect the stripping

back of the ink to its chemical base and could be a result of the natural ageing process or could have been manipulated by Woodman by adding water or bleach to the script. However, the absence of blurring and smudging makes this possibility unlikely.

The front (fig 100) and back outside hard covers of the Book are each decorated with an identical undifferentiated mottling in a deep purple over a pale pink/buff. The Book's size merits a spine and this, now in a decrepit form, is dark pink.

Woodman responds immediately to the aesthetic of the covers' mottling by inserting her first pair of images (fig 101). These are a sequential pair attached to a double page spread which is devoid of both script and printed font from the original era. We know the exact date of the era by the script on the next page:

*1908*

*agosto (August)*

With a strongly appropriate twinning, in the genre of circumstantial magic, one female figure is featured in each image, each wearing a vintage dress of a different mottled pattern in a human extension of the covers' patterns. This is the start of a series of variants to the control of the cover aesthetic explored in the first five-pair sequence, of which this is the first image pair. The dresses worn by the women are vintage objects, from perhaps the 1940s, only three decades past the era of her template.

The left-hand image of this first double page spread sustains a blur across it caused by a movement in her right arm and a resulting increased mottling from a shake of the folds of the dress. She references the covers' all over *field*, undifferentiated and horizonless, no climax, no *Golden Section* quality (think Jackson Pollock in the late 1950s), by choosing a background wall of what looks like pebble dash to continue the camouflage of circumstance. This maintains both the texture and the aesthetic of the control motif. In this image, importantly too, she holds a roll of paper, the archetypal scroll, in a symbolisation perhaps of the goddesses Athena and Kalliope, both of whom are depicted holding a scroll, to mark the moment of this Book's beginning.<sup>4</sup>

Since this is one of the latest three photographic Books and possibly even the last that Woodman made, the scroll, the goddesses' emblem of poetry, arts and science, the artist's three deep concerns, can be read as a symbol representing her whole image and word project, addressed in her five found object based Books but deeply signified in this one.

In the right-hand image of this pair Woodman stands straight on to the camera again and the mottled design of the dress she wears (this time a light on dark rather than a dark on light fabric), is extended in her and its reflections in the mirror. The mirror is at the lower left of the image (in reality behind her) and also reflects one arm clasped behind her.

---

<sup>4</sup> Athena is the Goddess of Arts and Sciences and Kalliope the Goddess of Poetry so Woodman might have thought about either or both of them.

I have tried to trace a sequence in the order and method Woodman chose for presenting her images in *Dettati e Temi*, thinking that it might be a mathematically balanced order which remained independent of any ideas in the original text. As soon as I exchanged numbers, which I first used, for simpler marks, stick verticals, a symmetrical format became clear. The aim was to detect her method of using pairs of images followed by single images and the resulting discovery shows her arrangement has the rhythm of a poem:

11 11 11 11 11	5 image pairs
1	1 single image
11 11 11	3 image pairs
1 1 1	3 single images
11 11	2 image pairs
1	1 single image
11 11	2 image pairs
1 1	2 single images
11	1 image pair

She therefore adheres to a mathematical sequence of her own invention.

The second image pair (fig 102), which she has added to her found object base is the second of the five pairs forming the Book's first sequence. It continues the artist's exploration of visual resemblance kick-started by the patterns of the front

and rear covers.<sup>5</sup> I shall refer to this sequence from now on as the *mottling* sequence. This is the first pair to be stuck onto a base page with script, although the left image is fixed to a page with blank *exercise* lines only. Both images are placed on the page more haphazardly here than in the first pair.

The left image is a shot of Woodman from above. She wears a Persian lamb pill box hat. Its tight *bobbly* surface is another visual equivalence to the cover's mottling. The contours of her profiled face are bleached out through over-exposure. This makes her anonymous, but her hair is tied behind, her back is straight and she reads an open book with a mottled inside cover. This book is the object of this project. She looks prim: this is an acting-out of the identity of the Italian student from the past at the same time as it is literally an over-looking at the enacted self; the Italian student who writes in the beautiful script, the artist's anonymous predecessor from seventy years ago. A mysterious object is pinned to the wall just above Woodman. It is possibly a death-mask or an African mask; a symbol of haunting and brings to mind the thought from Breton's musings in *Nadja's* beginning *Whom do I haunt?* The bottom edge or jaw-line of the mask loops into a photographic convergence with Woodman's hat rim.

The right-hand image of this second pair is stuck over an original title page of script over wide-lined exercise paper. This is dated the ninth of August 1908 and entitled *Dettati*. An image that is difficult to read, it is a blurred accumulation of shadow and object shot in a very dark tone with a void background. The diffusion of both shadow and object into formlessness is a disturbing rendition of the left-

---

<sup>5</sup> The *mottling* pattern of the covers was probably achieved by the oil and water resist technique, popular in the early twentieth century, known as *marbling*.

hand image. Here the mask, the image's only definable object, is brought closer to the camera and 'leans' towards the foreground in a grim high-lit grin. It has acquired a kind of neck form which connects it, in a formal way, to the displaced rectangle composite. This composite consists of the table surface and the extension of it in the soft-edged shadow, pierced centrally by another mottled surface, the sharp right-angle of the book. A *jackanory* jumping light intercepts the rectangle's mass in the low centre of the image and what could be the silhouette profile of a torch-head, or a even perhaps a small megaphone, protrudes in a dark form on the right.<sup>6</sup> The *jackanory*'s light breaks up the solid forms to expose the first fragment of underlying script. The blurred part-negation of the script adds mystery to an image already full of it.

The third image pair of the *mottling* sequence (fig 103), initially appears to be closely linked to the first pair (fig 101), certainly in the big things like girls and mottled dresses. Woodman has recruited a friend to join her in an enactment that looks fun. In the left-hand image most of the girls' faces are visible. Although this is unusual, perhaps even more so is the fact that Woodman has a smile on her face, perhaps to encourage her friend who seems shy and nervous. Each of them wears a differently patterned mottled dress. Woodman leans from the waist with a dancer's suppleness into the centre of the image, raising a stretched arm high, taut and out of the frame. Although the angle of her pose is almost the same angle as the lines of antique writing, her dramatically lifted arm causes rivulets of folds in the dress fabric which contravene the lines' angle. With her other arm she reaches down to a wide ribbon that is suspended between them. Her friend's pose has no

---

<sup>6</sup> Or Jack O'Lantern, a mysterious phosphorescence, sometimes caused (if we must be logical) by a displaced reflection in glass.

waist-twist. She stands straight, her arms in an opposite position to Woodman's. Her left arm (as seen) in the image centre, reaches down to the ribbon's short diagonal, which hangs straight at her side in deep shadow. The friend's other arm is raised straight up. Because of the darker tone of the friend's dress the underlying copperplate script hardly registers there. Rhythmic horizontal lines of writing (and what a perfect, fluid and embellished script it is) flow like rivulets under Woodman's light toned dressed figure. Some blurring from movement occurs, especially in the low dress folds.

The short and wide dark diagonal behind the two figures is Woodman's playful intervention to the horizontal script lines' harmony. In the image too, we see a use of the mottling on the dresses to answer the energy of the writing lines. Both this image and its opposite have strong links to Woodman's *Temple Project* in which she investigates a contemporary rendering of Greek temple caryatids using the theme of paired females (fig 104).

In the right-hand image (fig 103) the enactment becomes a dance with ribbons in which both girls lean towards the book's centre with both their paired arms stretched at an extreme angle. The ribbons emphasise the lines of script. The friend's face disappears in dark tone at an opposite angle to Woodman's, which is raised at a contrasted angle to her arms in a triumphant and classical heroism. The dark ribbon strands are gently twisted to form various thicknesses (as if after the motion of dancing around a maypole) except for the highest strand which stretches in full tension below Woodman's upturned chin and over the whole face of her friend. Importantly, the pair of young women here lean at an opposite angle

to the rhythm of the page's script-lines' givens; forming a visual arrest in intervention.

Testimony to the interchange of future and past in her work and the methods of trial and reflection Woodman uses as she picks images from her store, that active archive, is her re-use of an earlier image in the right-hand image of the next, fourth, pair (fig 105) in the *mottling* sequence. Peggy Phelan describes the process here:

*When Woodman initially began keeping her diary, she thought of it as a place to respond to her photographic work – that is, she first thought of her diary as a forum for observations and reflections on her completed work. Soon, however, the diary functioned as a rehearsal space, a book for first drafts for her compositions...<sup>7</sup>*

It might also be helpful at this point to consider Barthes's reflection on the *Text*.

*The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination.<sup>8</sup>*

Perhaps the key word here is *passage* with its simultaneous implications of movement and of a link between two areas or composites. Woodman's work defies stasis by its continual movement as she explores different sequences, new printings and tries different contexts through different passages for her images in never ending quiet explosions.

---

<sup>7</sup> Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography', 2002, 991.

<sup>8</sup> Barthes, 'From Work to Text', 1977, 159.

The right-hand image of this pair is now very well-known. Made in Rome between 1977 and 1978, it was probably printed in 1978 in the US. Certainly it is used in Woodman's *Angels, Calendars Book*, in it as a reversed and darker toned positive print (fig 59) surrounded by a white border and with the annotation *december* and developed, possibly simultaneously, as a separate fine autonomous print for circulation (fig 106).<sup>9</sup> Here, in a mysterious transparency made (or re-used) about two years later, a treble diffusion of the dress's pattern is developed in the area of peeled paint marks on the bottom right wall, which seem to follow the horizontal march of the copperplate under-script and in the way the words dissemble the dress's pattern both in and outside its area. Magnificently exemplifying the surrealist *magique circonstancielle*, the artist's headless figure displays her torso and breasts in an abandonment that is also somehow quiet.<sup>10</sup> Some over-exposure encourages the merging of her figure with the wall behind it, while Woodman's naked torso is a tablet encrypted by the anonymous script. Her favoured themes of dereliction and wall layers are also encapsulated here; in the image's lower half two layers of the wall's surface are exposed and their visibility is repeated, as a visual pun, in the two layers, naked and clothed, of Woodman's exposure.

A development or pre-cursor of this image depicts a fully naked and dirt-smeared figure, this time with most of the face visible and placed centrally, against the same derelict wall and shot in a much lighter exposure (fig 107).<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 108. The three printings of this image are discussed further in Chapter 9.

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller description of this element of the surrealist marvellous, please see Chapter 1.

<sup>11</sup> Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 113.

The image used in this Book (fig 105) necessarily forges links with its left-hand partner which depicts the rear view of a seated Woodman wearing the same mottled dress as her friend wears in the third image pair (fig 103), the one with light mottling on a dark background. Her woollen mid-toned cardigan has a lighter dot-form pattern in which the dots or blobs are larger and more separate on the cloth than those of the dress patterns. These cardigan dots are of the same size and distance apart as the organic forms (sea sponges?) arranged on a light table surface which Woodman peruses. Playing with ideas of light on dark and dark on light, these natural objects have been separated in their arrangement between the light surface and the dark-toned mottling of what must surely be the Book *Dettati e Temi*, itself. Therefore present within the image is the first response to the pattern of the Book's cover in the skirt fabric (and how close a resemblance this is when we see them side by side), its visual spreading or de-limiting in the cardigan's pattern and its freeing, in an expanded interpretation, in the organic forms, which are a three dimensional extension of what is ultimately an audacious but satisfying concatenation of references.

The image's visual answer and response sequence is altered by Woodman's many-braceletted and elegant arm. The repeated arm rings of the bracelets in the angles of cardigan folds below her elbow accentuate the focal point of this section: the gentle curves between wrist and fingers and thumb and fingers are intersected by the sharp angle of the table corner which is depicted in the lightest tone of the image. On this table corner are both the dark-toned Book and the organic soft-edged objects.

If we accept Brunella Antomarini's lucid hypothesis (from which I quote below) about Woodman's working methods, we may then realise just how balanced in Woodman are the roles of artist and mathematician, creator and technician.

*Movement towards light, and from light to object, can be observed and captured by the eye of the camera only if it is guided by the vision of a form. Not until the form has been determined, rather than accidentally invented, is the photograph taken and movement turned into form*<sup>12</sup>

Antomarini also maintains that...*one is drawn to them (the images) not by their decadence, but, on the contrary, by their austerity, which nips any personal and psychological small talk in the bud.*<sup>13</sup>

The next image pair (fig 108) is the last in the sequence directly addressing the theme of *mottling* and its resemblances, although more references to it occur through the Book. On the left Woodman is seen bending over and stretching out her arm towards a section of peeling wall under a dado rail. The wall section has large black marks on its surface which I cannot distinguish, other than to relate them in formal attributes to the smaller black marks of the fish in the opposite image. Her figure is blurred photographically into an apparent movement, one device Woodman often uses to defy the photographic arrest in one frame. The mottled pattern of her dress moves out from itself in almost electric currents of outward direction and the dress's opacity lets us read the primary copperplate clearly, here in an even more ornate script than before.

---

<sup>12</sup>Brunella Antomarini, 'Francesca Woodman', *Parkett*, 15, 1988, 98-107, 106, (translated from the German by Catherine Schelbert). Antomarini is writing still in the first critical wave after the first major one person exhibition of Woodman's work, at the Wellesley College Museum Exhibition in 1986, held just over five years after her death.

<sup>13</sup> Antomarini, 'Francesca Woodman', 1988, 107.

The right-hand image of the pair, with Woodman wearing her dress of a different (light on dark) mottled pattern, depicts her standing in some water in which a shoal of tiny fish, probably sticklebacks, swim. Shot from high up so that her legs are foreshortened - and it is only her legs and the unevenly hemmed lower part of the dress that are included - the natural darting angles of the swimming fish construct another visual dispersal of the dress's material and the Book's cover pattern. Simultaneously a dynamic scattering of the visual rhythms of the base script occurs in a subtle displacement of the lines' regularity that does not, however, lose its aspect of mimicry. Somehow the fish dart out of line, in line. Simple and audaciously original, this composition arrests and disturbs.

The next image, a single one on the right of the original's double page spread (fig 109), is printed in such a dark tone that it obliterates, in all but one tiny central area, both the script beneath it and the clear recognition of its components.<sup>14</sup> It is a composition of negative form, in parallel to the second image from the mottling sequence (fig 101, right). The image shows a large form on the right, decipherable, I think, as the rear of Woodman's head and top shoulder. Is she extending a hand to the figure she faces? The figure, visible only through side lighting, holds his hands in a position of very careful holding; a *cradling* of some very special object which seems to be of a fluffy or clustered consistency. Is this object either a bunch of something organic or perhaps a densely curled wig? All the body language of the figure, here a cap-wearing and coated male, affirms the special quality of the substance or object brought. Three very bright small areas

---

<sup>14</sup> This aspect of Woodman's work is further discussed by Antomarini, 'Francesca Woodman', 1988, 107: *Mirrors, fruit, clothes and rooms are united in mutual delimitation so that the objective and the formal substance of the pictures assimilates all that is subjective and dynamic: every element receives light through the act that it is not the other one that it touches. ...one element makes the other possible and we know we can see things only in that light.*

are picked out on the visiting figure: the cravat, the lips and the shoulder, alongside a kind of rhythmic nest of high-lit hands and a just-visible football.<sup>15</sup> This accentuation of selected forms enables us to read the image in geometric formal terms, in the *mutual delimitation* of which Antomarini speaks, simultaneously to, but separately from, any narrative message, in the terms of which a ritual of gift exchange might be about to occur. The unusual stillness of Woodman's nearly absent presence suggests the calm expectancy of an important interchange. A narrative moment is at once superbly caught.

In both a dismantling and a retrieving of the mottling theme of the first sequence of five image pairs, the first pair of a new sequence of three pairs (fig 110), introduces, in the left image of the pair, an arch trope of fetishism and heterosexual male fantasy, silk stockings. Hung in a straight row on the wall, behind a defiant and mottle-pattern-dressed Woodman, are six of them. Woodman, in opening her dress to the side, (with a looping and gathering of it which forms an irregular kind of 'zig-zagging' at the front), both presents herself as a sexual object and simultaneously deflates this position. The revealed area of her flesh includes no body part that is conventionally erotic and I would suggest that she is equally interested in the visual construction of a kind of geometric form. The imagined male viewer is only allowed a glimpse of the side of her rib-cage. Her defiant pose, her hands clasped behind her back, affirms the courageous negation of the genre in which she has participated.

---

<sup>15</sup> Is this the *ball of hope* from the penultimate image (fig 136), annotated *in hoping* from *Quaderno Raffaello*?

The right-hand image is a mysterious twin, a trace configuration of the left-hand image that acts to negate the object-hood of the other in a similar manner to the process set up before in figs 102 and 109. Printed in reverse yet resisting being a full negative, all components of this transparency are printed in a tone dark enough to make differentiation difficult. The source composition has been slightly re-arranged and its components slightly enlarged. In a playing between positive and negative spaces Woodman has pushed the objects into a semi-obliteration of themselves, into a realm where their identities are outflanked by their form in space. Two stockings from the left's five in what looks like a reverse image of the two on the left of the former transparency, remain just distinguishable. The small, lighter triangle emerging between the stocking tops is picked out in the only highlight of a sombre and close-toned image, on the bottom left. In a near repetition of a pattern sequence which reveals the artist's outstanding technical mastery, the irregular, soft, 'zig-zagged' edge of the front of the last image's dress is re-created here more regularly. Each curve of the rounded, scalloped edge is pierced at its centre by a line of perfect, here faint, underlying copperplate, which intervenes too in the here darker-toned area of bare flesh. Woodman, typically, obliterates her head and face. And read visually, this action constructs a strong, broad diagonal that is edged at both sides with areas of mottled fabric, in a theatrical (visual) *aside* to a first theme explored in the Book. Below the image Woodman has scrawled a few pencil loops through the larger copperplate, in a negation of the script's meaning and also as a 'hands-on' reminder of her identity, in a Book where she writes no annotations. From the original script I can read the phrase *Dice l'aigilla* on the bottom line.<sup>16, 17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> These loops echo those painted wall-scrawls of her *Splater Paint* series reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 110-111 and dated there as

Both images of the following image pair, the second in the Book's second sequence (fig 111), depart somewhat from themes suggested in previous images but continue to maintain a rapport with them.

Suggested in the left of the first sequence image pair (fig 105) in the photographing of a delicately arranged display on a table surface were some difficult-to-identify organic forms all about the same size. Clearly making a gentle extension of the Book covers' and the dresses' mottling, these are possibly identifiable, as I argued previously, as sea sponges or even truffles. Now in fig 111 these similar soft and undulated-edged objects are grouped closely together in the left-hand image of this pair. Here they overlap the light-toned rectangle of their support. A strong beam of sunlight pierces the image square from the lower right in a diagonal which scatters its light in triangles over the image, becoming an explosion of the abstract. The soft-edged organic forms (could they be pieces of shorn sheep fleece?) are caught and repeated in a clever resemblance which extends their form outside their supporting surface onto what could well be Woodman's recumbent form under some pieces of fur. It is just possible to decipher her head and a section of her arm in the top left of the image. If so, the perspective from which the image is shot renders the figure's parts, seen in fragments through light, the same size as the organic forms. Some links, particularly in texture and composition, can be made between this image and Brassai's photograph of the Quai aux Fleurs, *Still numb from the night*, printed in

---

1977-1978.

<sup>17</sup> 'The eagle says'.

*L'Amour fou*.<sup>18</sup> In Woodman's particularly skilled image, organic form and substance have been distilled into the abstraction of geometry through light.

The right-hand image of this pair is closely related to the 'Fish Skeleton' (New York, 1979) pair, but differs from it in that Woodman is wearing the thick black coat which she wears in some earlier images, such as the series of her standing next to and tearing a large roll of paper (Providence, 1976-1977), whereas she wears two dresses in the 'Fish Skeleton' series.<sup>19, 20</sup>

I read the opening phrase of the copperplate script above the image as *Della anima* (of the soul). A possible response to this informs her choice of image.<sup>21</sup> If the soul is physically invisible (or non-existent to a materialist) then Woodman's pervasive interest in the revealing of interior layered areas, often focusing on the symbol of a wall that is derelict, is here using the fish skeleton she holds as a symbol of the soul. Reinforced by the exactitude of that circumstantial magic the plaster and lathe wall structure offers to the fish bones - and what a marvellous twinning it is - this image has a co-existent narrative component. Breton, when describing convulsive beauty in *L'Amour fou*, says ...*I have wanted to see some very special object constructed in response to some poetic fantasy*. He continues *This trouvaille...is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it*.<sup>22</sup> Her drawing out of the visual resemblance between the two forms does not rest in the

---

<sup>18</sup> Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 128 and 129, the images are dated there as 1979 and placed as made in New York. *Fish Skeleton* is my title for them.

<sup>20</sup> Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition catalogue), 1998, 77. This image was also used as the Wellesley College Museum/Hunter College exhibition catalogue cover (Gabhart and Krauss, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> 'Of the soul'.

<sup>22</sup> Breton, *Mad Love*, 1987, 13.

visual sphere, as although disparate, the forms share a logic of structure which, in organic life (fish), and good condition (wall), remain unseen.

Woodman's pose and clothes denote a furtive atmosphere. The inclusion of her face's features is rare. Here she has covered her mouth with her raised coat collar to imply that she has just eaten, a bit guiltily, the whole fish. This image does not relate strongly to the left-hand image in either narrative content or formal quality but both independent images are visually linked by the changing ink colours of the original script wrapping around, hardly visible under, the images.<sup>23</sup>

In the left-hand image of the third pair of the second sequence (fig 112) is a recurrence of the double woman theme first introduced in the Book in the third pair of its first sequence (fig 103). Naked in this image, the two women are standing in almost identical poses to those in the former image. In both the images the woman on our right leans to the left, towards the other woman, who stretches directly upwards. Some manipulation to the negative perhaps, adds a shadow behind the ribcage and hip of the left figure where none is visible on the right figure. This emphasises the diamond shape created between them. With paint or dark-toned paper strips, Woodman has created a vibrant sequence of more diamond forms and triangles on the wall behind.

The twinned dynamism of the double female form intersected by the triangle-formed 'zig-zags' is formally calmed by the lines of original script which importantly, and for the first time in this Book, interrupt its visual regularity. For

---

<sup>23</sup> As these are positive rather than negative transparencies.

these lines are written in a different (original) hand, that is upright and smaller, giving a new energy. Their new given corresponds, in visual terms, to the positions of the females' torsos. The lines contrast with and exaggerate the finely formed rhomboid-diamond Woodman has so finely realised between the figures. Two more lengthened triangles occur in the base centre of the image, one between the leg forms of the right-hand figure and another, matching the first as perfectly as a human body-becoming-geometry can, in between the right and left legs of the women.

Simultaneously making a positive from a negative and drawing out the abstract from the representational, Woodman holds the two in an equal balance. This image again relates strongly to the *Temple Project* which the artist was concurrently developing (in 1980), particularly in the denotation of female strength used to support an above weight, as in her simulation of the *caryatids* of the Temple of Artemis (fig 104).

The upright, stretched-up tension of the pose in the right-hand image of this pair (fig 112) reflects both poses of the earlier pair (fig 103). Again, only the neck, torso and hands are depicted and the ankles and feet are out of shot. Here Woodman wears a long velvet robe, giving the image strong resonances to an autonomous image, *I could no longer play I could not play by instinct* (fig 113) in which she holds the same knife and *bleeds* a strip of photo-booth self-portraits.

A vintage black lace and voile shawl emanates to the right in this right-hand Book image in a wing form while some fluffy organic substance (sheep fleece or truffle

again?) just beside her right hand serves to soften the sharp edge of the black robe and to mimic the soft-edged curves of the wing. This substance throws an expressive shadow onto the wall behind while a version of the same form painted directly onto the transparency, sits solidly to the side of her left hand. Both hands are formed into knuckles and a particularly interesting formal arrangement occurs around this left hand from the paint blob, the lower dress edge and the low sleeve. Under and over the whole image runs the regular and beautiful copperplate, forming waves of red, pink, then sepia and purple and running only over those carefully selected forms light enough to render the script visible: the neck and bared chest, the clenched hands and the knife.

Above the next image (fig 114 on the right), an individual image which is the first of three such, I can decipher the original script passage title *Tutto in Forma!*<sup>24</sup> And on the opposite page at the base is, for a second occurrence of an exact date, exciting to witness surely both for the artist and for us, in its precise documentation *3 guigno 1908*. The image maintains a visual independence from many other images in the Book while at the same time containing two important thematic links to them. Revealing her disarming ability to make visual links which cut through otherwise impermeable categories of object, Woodman places a paper scroll (that same rolled and ribboned scroll we see her holding in the very first image of the Book, fig 101, left)) in an immediately parallel position to a turn-of-the-century iron lamp post.<sup>25</sup> The lamp post has a horizontally set decorative band which makes the visual equivalent of the scroll's ribbon in another fine example of circumstantial magic. Behind this Woodman hides her head as she clings to the

---

<sup>24</sup> 'Everything is in the Form!'

<sup>25</sup> In fig 100 the blurring of the image makes the ribbon hard to detect.

post, just supported by another ring of metal under her feet. The background to this image is of a very dark tone which gives maximum impact to the lit figure of Woodman and the scroll she holds vertically. The second, subtle link to the Book's previous themes is found in the rolled small area of mottled dress she wears under another light vintage dress, once again nodding to the first *mottling* sequence as well as addressing the layering theme. A link in the chain of signifiers exists through too to *Quaderno Raffaello* in the visual aside from the fluting of the lamp post to the fluting on the dustbin in that short, contemporaneous Book's image.<sup>26</sup>

On the next double page is another individual image (fig 115, right-hand page) the second of three such. In the original script opposite, an even more specific time and date is given, in the beautiful embellished forward-slanting writing of the unknown student of the twentieth century's start *16 maggio, (May) 1908, sabato mattina* (Saturday morning) and under this *11 giorni* ('eleven days'). These examples of dates are working backwards: August, June, May.

On the opposite page too is a heading, *Tema* (theme) and written on the line beneath it is the phrase *Ogni sera ha la sua offire (?)* (Every evening we have her offerings). Woodman has in this case inflected her image with a poetic tangent pulled from the script. On a chosen wider rectangle than that of the previous image she emphasises the essential horizontality in this image in strong contrast to the former's focus on the vertical.<sup>27</sup> Here we have a high modernist beauty

---

<sup>26</sup> See fig 132.

<sup>27</sup> Two much-discussed and well known gallery prints are named *Horizontale* and *Verticale*, by Woodman. They are reproduced in Chandès, *Francesca Woodman* (Fondation Cartier exhibition

transfused with the influence of a surrealist classic by Brassai, *Untitled* from 1933.<sup>28</sup> Both images from each of the two eras are outstanding.

In Woodman's image the nude form is photographed closely and in a deep shadow that self-obliterates. It becomes a stone or the contours of the sea meeting the land. Nothing is between us and the majesty of bone-curved flesh. Here there is nothing of identity to grasp nor is there anything that denotes human fallibility. This is a monolith, a surrealist spasm, a human being what a human cannot be: a horizon with the textural purity of a sand dune after high winds. The *offerings*, if such they are, in a response to the original's subtitle, are a votive trio of dried rose heads and petals, looking like tiny dolls. They reflect the dried plants Woodman hung behind her friend's profile portrait in *Portraits Friends Equasions* (see fig 77).<sup>29</sup> The arrest of this image is the refinement and reduction of the spinal column, through deep shadow, to a pointing vertebral spear or arrow. This arrow points up to the votive offerings. And its gentle angle merges with the curlicues of script now written onto the reclined body.

The third of this group of three single images (fig 116, right-hand page) is the first of what I shall call the 'master theme' sequence, that theme itself constructed of four images, two of which are repetitions of the other two. As it projects its meaning out beyond the Book's consecutive order, I will outline my reading of the theme before starting an analysis of its individual images.

---

catalogue), 1998, 88 and 86. This clearly demonstrates the intrinsic thematic evolution of Woodman's practice.

<sup>28</sup> Brassai, *Untitled*, as reproduced in Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 94, Fig 85.

<sup>29</sup> The image here discussed from *Dettati e Temi* also brings resonances of Cahun's images of organic matter as in her *Untitled* from 1936 (Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 108, Fig 99) or her *I Would Give My Life* (Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou*, 1985, 109, Fig 100).

It is a presentation of her Books project from within the photographic medium, specifically of this photographic Book, to her audience. The images encapsulating this ambitious theme are flagged non-consecutively through the second half of the so-named *Dettati e Temi*. By this method they are imbued with mystery and seek to find each other. Extraordinarily rich in symbolism, they refuse to be read easily as a sequence, but rather project their signs delicately, intermittently and subliminally.

Each of the four images in the sequence is placed as a single image on the right-hand side of the double page.

The first and the third repeated images (figs 116 and 127) are three-quarter length clothed 'bust' self-portraits, over which the figure's (probably Woodman's) pale, slender arms are held over the open pages of a large blank-paged book. The first and the third images each have a slightly different cropping so that the first includes a little more space to the left of Woodman's cropped head and the form below the hips is obscured by a light-toned surface.

In the second and fourth images (figs 122 and 128) of the 'master theme' sequence the white table has displayed on its surface wooden writing appurtenances from the century before, in a symbolisation of the century with which her Books' project is intertwined. In these two images a greater part of the standing figure is shown; here it extends from the shoulders to the knees. The figure has been photographed from an increased distance. In the same manner the

second image is a repeat of the fourth, but printed out with a little more definition than the former. One and three, two and four: odd and even numbers in a clear mathematical pattern, images of the Book and the table top respond to each other in an alternating rhythm and the repeated images respond to each other over the interlude of the intervening images.

In these four images a high degree of self-reflexivity occurs. The first and third images, in repetition, show a tranquil and serene figure in a short-sleeved *mottle*-patterned vintage dress, holding both her arms out over the flat white pages of a large open book that must be *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi* in the contemporary version of Kalliope's scroll. The woman's left hand, over-exposed to the point of near-invisibility, holds a photographic print next to the left page (as seen) of the book. The open book presented in the image is of a 'foolscap' size, codex format with a conventional centre binding. On the pages viewed, exercise lines are filled with script.

After reading the images in the clear printing in Townsend's monograph, where he ties it to Woodman's MacDowell Colony period, later in time than when I had written the first analysis, I conclude that this book is, without doubt, the Book itself, *Dettati e Temi*. In an enactment of an immaculate circular symbolism, Woodman has included a photograph of the Book in which she cumulatively places photographs and addresses *themes* in the construction of what is perhaps the superlative *photographic book*.

All four images creating this ‘master theme’ are printed in the Book in a very pale faded-out tone on their transparencies. This gives a haunting ‘almost there’ quality to them which is gently counteractive to their significance; a gesture of deferral typical of Woodman.

This is the first instance in the whole group of six Books of the direct repetition of an image inside one Book. Two repetitions of one image occur, constituting the sequence of four. The sequence is threaded into the weft of the image texture with considerable subtlety, their threading is almost cryptic; difficult and delightful to discover in equal measure; as cryptic perhaps as the photographic images, the iconic metaphors and the words of poetry in prose evoking the mysterious chain in *Nadja*, such as the sunflower, the Mazda light-bulb and the fountain’s jet. The sequence in *Dettati e Temi* opens out in the Book’s pages like a Japanese paper flower in water.

In between the ‘master theme’s two repeated images of the female figure with an open book, are nine other images of *Dettati e Temi*. In between the two repetitions of the female figure with a table, are five other images. The location of the repetitions occurs alternately in the Book and the reader has to work to unhook the sequence from the text embedded in the inevitable linearity of the Book’s codex format; the format Woodman wants to disrupt.

The ‘master theme’ contains reflections of themes already photographically objectified in the Book’s first half including mottling, scrolls, ribbons and paired (doubled) women. Each of these themes is explored too in her wider practice.

Other themes explored in Woodman's wider practice have already been suggested in the Book. These include her focus on the magnification of glass, on sliding categories between, for example, organic matter, human form and script; the re-representation of the female as a subverted focus of (male) desire and the conjuring of surprising altered perspectives and equivalents to geometry in architecture, human form and artefact. One theme new to this Book is Woodman's investigation of open field composition.

This whole repeated image sequence addresses the theme of an objectivisation of the photographic dialectic, veiled in a moment of quiet contemplation. Its discourse centres on and extends and summarises her Books project. It conducts its examination here concentrically, in a motion which emanates from and returns to its centre. Emblematic too of Woodman's essential practice, that image centre is manifold and mutable like water's currents, as manifold and as mutable as the series' rhythmic format, her pervasive device.

At this point Woodman is producing a quietly magnificent climax of her project, a project that has always operated, as Benjamin Buchloh states ... *through the dialectics of the photographic*.<sup>30</sup> Buchloh further equates her project with an *anti-aesthetic* [which] *confronted its spectators with a critique of the representational process in the very act of constructing a representation*.<sup>31</sup> In what he also describes as the *counter-articulation* intrinsic to her work he lines it up with such key practitioners of the twentieth and twenty first centuries as Marcel Duchamp, Eva Hesse and Cy Twombly, all of whose work, he considers to be *defined by a*

---

<sup>30</sup> Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 47.

*chasm inside the painterly or sculptural [or photographic] sign itself ...*<sup>32</sup> His analysis is largely astute.

The second and fourth images, in repetition (figs 122 and 128) of the master theme depict a demurely standing figure, holding a rectangular object by its two top corners. This is a book with a light torn fragment of paper on its cover.

On a white table surface in front of the artist is a display of objects chosen to simulate and to haptically portray the character of the Italian student from three-quarters of a century before. These are an ink pot, a pen tray and an encased blotter, the kind the 'ghost' student would have used. On the left corner of the table too is a blurred trope from Woodman's 'real' contemporary practice, a pair of photographic negatives, that essential symbol of her project. Woodman blurs them to invert or negate history (another boundary to dissolve), in what is at least a clouding (and merging) of past with present. The pair of photographs is the blurred object in the image.

After writing these descriptions, based on very hard-to-decipher images, some points have been clarified or altered by Townsend's publishing of an autonomous and clear printing of the two images (fig 117). I observe that the figure with the book holds a speckled quail's egg in her outstretched hand and that a pane of glass held upright on her lap creates a nervous concertina form over the whole front of her dress. By this magnification its flowery pattern is rearranged into another wave back to the *mottling* of the Book's first theme. The egg is used in its

---

<sup>32</sup> Buchloh, 'Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph', 2004, 47.

capacity as an ancient symbol of fertility and creativity, its speckled surface making another wave to the *mottling* theme. It is also possible to identify what I had previously read as a pair of negatives laid on the table as a pair of positives with Victorian scalloped edges. I can read too that these vintage prints are made into a substitution for her (hidden) other hand.

It should be remembered that within the context of the *Dettati e Temi*, however, Woodman had certainly wanted its images to be unclear and mysterious.

Returning to a consecutive analysis of the images in the Book after the artificially grouped ‘master theme’ quartet, is the first image pair of another sequence of three pairs (fig 118). The transparency on the left is pulled from Woodman’s earliest period of practice (1972) when she was just thirteen years old. The *Dettati e Temi* image (in its 1972 printing it was titled *Self Portrait at Thirteen*) hones down to a section the earlier one (fig 119). The early image is an astounding achievement for a thirteen year old and as Buchloh argues creates a template for Woodman’s future and ongoing ambitious and sophisticated project:

*That this process of photographic effacement, or rather, the effacement of photographically produced identity, was a programmatic project for Woodman is corroborated by one of her very first, if not the first photograph. In what must be one of the most astonishing images ever produced by a child prodigy of photography, her Self Portrait at Thirteen, Woodman takes one of the classic tropes of self reflection in modernist photography, to capture the self by remote control.*<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Buchloh, ‘Francesca Woodman: Performing the Photograph’, 2004, 45.

The two images of this pair in *Dettati e Temi* both use light to construct and deconstruct form. They are interrelated primarily through the strong connecting diagonals of shadow and light across both the images. It is these dramatic diagonals which construct the point of arrest. And they are opposed in angle to the angles provided by the harmonies of the pervasive original script, so that here the combination of contrasting angles forms a spread of almost-seen triangles.

In the left image Woodman gives us a stark and mysterious version of the earlier photograph by eliminating a substantial amount of interior architectural detail; the detail that could squeeze a little individual narrative from the setting. She has cropped out the bench arm rest and the white chair and the white moulded door of the 1972 composition. The effects of the bright light originally behind her are retained from geometric necessity and the diffused light, triangulating in perspective on either side of her dark torch beam, is eradicated. Her paring down of all *setting* information, that comfortable handle, in this image, makes it sinister. But the other image of the pair contains a disturbance factor equal to this.

Why does the shadow thrown by the cup have such a hard outline and why is it so elongated at the side? The implication is that the object of reflection, or real object, in the cup, is what the torch-beam lights. Woodman is thereby constructing a new narrative, in this staggered focus, running directly through the two images. What floats in the cup, whether real object, reflection of another object outside the frame, or born of photographic manipulation, is the lightest area. When read anthropomorphically, the perfect ovoid form gains at least its nose and mouth features from the gentle invasion of the purple-brown copperplate script. If the

image is turned ninety degrees round, the (sugar-lump size) small, oval, hairless head visible has the elongated forehead I associate with Claude Cahun's distinctive photographic self imagery (which it is very unlikely, though not impossible, Woodman would have known) as in this example (fig 120).

The next pair of photographs, the second in the sequence (fig 121), shows an advanced manipulation of real form redistributed in the abstract realm. This achievement is substantiated with the technical aid of blurring and over-exposure. Content for a while to read this pair as purely abstract, curiosity spurred me on to investigate with which artefacts, whether organic, domestic or industrial, Woodman had conjured these extraordinary images. But I can claim no privileged knowledge and having obtained little insight it occurred to me that an analysis should perhaps not always forage for information in domains of the physical real. An important surrealist quest (and Woodman's too) is to visualise the oneiric. This might be achieved through the surrealist method of placing real objects in juxtaposition, to 'make strange' or by placing the oneiric within the 'real' in a bid to create the circumstances in which a convulsion of the marvellous could occur.

Looking at first to me like a low, spread-out, non-perspectival, aerial composition, perhaps an investigation of texture, the left image of the pair slowly materialised as Woodman standing, wearing a bikini bottom, juddering her right arm in blurred movement and absolutely covered in roses and lichen.<sup>34</sup> Or is it a *devorée* jacket patterned with the same?

---

<sup>34</sup> For example as in the Duchamp/Man Ray collaboration *Dust Breeding* or in an Elizabeth Blackadder spread-out objects-from-above composition or of course a Jackson Pollock painting from the 1950s.

The right-hand image can be similarly read as another ‘open field’ composition but is perhaps even more cryptic than its left counterpart. After looking at it for an extended period and wondering whether the central angled limb in the foreground was an arm (if so in what position?) or a leg (but where was the calf muscle?), I spotted Woodman’s face, small and over-exposed, asleep or in a dream (perhaps referencing Robert Desnos’s *sommeils* recorded in *Nadja*), her features bleached out, in the top right corner of the image. In this self-image, she is more absent than on the occasions when she omits her face by cropping at the neck. I have now ascertained a logical structure to the limb in that it is only half a limb (an arm) and an area which is half of her back. And the awkwardly-sized, bumpy kind of *bracelet*, which did not have true ‘bracelet’ characteristics, emerges slowly as her self-clasping hand. The ‘upper’ arm area emerges too as a section of back and shoulder. These are biological forms reduced to formlessness. Woodman has used the ‘real’ to serve the unreal. She holds them in an excruciating and precarious balance.

In between fig 121 and the next image pair is one of the previously discussed ‘master theme’ quartet of images (fig 122) which are scattered through this second half of the Book.

The following pair of images (fig 123) which is the third and last pair of the current sequence, is placed over some original text on the theme of Easter. The pair is printed in high exposure so that the two transparencies yield maximum visibility to the original script, the *unterschriften* which has variations of ink

colour here from pink through sepia to orange.<sup>35</sup> On the left page a change of script can be observed, beginning (possibly) with the words *Parle del luna!* (Speak of the moon). The script continues with four lines in the same altered, upright script. Woodman has cleverly made the energy of this change to the base aesthetic coincide with the focus of the drama between the two people she portrays in her image: a halved pomegranate.

This is an electrifyingly beautiful double portrait which is at the same time an interlude choreographed with a precise geometry. Both people photographed share the same facial features which gives this image pair a modernist purity. The energy extends inward diagonals through the downward-angled man's face, which looks intently at the upheld fruit and, as it were, across the page to the woman, who holds her outstretched hand upright, her thumb pointing at her own serious and composed profile. Her face looks out from the frame. The double image enacts the old Adam and Eve story with a pomegranate (in Spanish 'apple of God') instead of an apple. The portraits are of two self-aware contemporary individuals in an undoubtedly close union, with no external sign of Paradise. Whether or not these two images were primarily thought of as a pair (and I would suggest that they were), a superb harmonic energy runs through them.

A comparable but opposing diagonal energy runs between the final two (paired) images of *Dettati e Temi* (fig 129), still to be discussed.

---

<sup>35</sup> It is no coincidence that these graduated hues are of a very similar colour range to that used by Woodman in her blueprint projects of the last quarter of that year (1980).

Two double pages of unmediated original script follow the previous image pair (fig 123). These act as an interlude between the movements of an intensely orchestrated visual performance. The pages include, immediately next, a multi-toned double spread, on the right of which is written, with what could be imagined as a sigh of relief, in the different, upright Italian hand *Fine* (End). Ink smudges and a general relaxation of cursive regularity on the part of the original student/s occurs too. As the following double page, entitled *Poesia*, continues the script, it is clear that Woodman has deviated from the original sequence of pages and has probably combined two schoolbooks.

An image pair (fig 124), follows the pages of unmediated script. On the left-hand page is a transparency of Woodman dressed in a black dress standing in profile with her arms raised, in an action which obliterates her own head and reconstructs her figure as a simplified vertical in a resemblance to the fox fur hanging on her left that is central to the composition. It is hung vertically straight to the white wall so that its form is clear, in a manner parallel to Woodman's form. Somehow this image and that following are more about the fox animal than the fox fur.

Rising from the dark floor boards is the circle of a round-framed vintage photograph. The indistinct part-rectangle of another wall-hung picture is visible in the top right of the image. Woodman has placed the image deliberately askew so that its floor line, delineating the dark floor area, is in harmony with the regular march of linear script which is accented in this image over its large area of light wall.

On the right-hand page a deliberately difficult-to-read transparency, which acts as a negative photographic space, depicts a nude Woodman standing on tiptoe with her arms raised up slightly to the left. One fox fur again hangs from a line next to her face and straight down the centre of her body. In hanging the larger fox fur on a line that is angled out from her corner position, Woodman has made this fur, itself doubled over at the top so that the fox's nose turns downwards, the singular foreground focus of the image. It dominates her figure. This image has particular links to an extra large image sequence, entitled *Swan Song*, exhibited as her Rhode Island School of Art and Design degree show at the Woods Gerry Gallery. This series has also been developed as a set of superb independent exhibition prints (as for example figs 125 and 126). These image connections are discussed more fully in Chapter 9.

Three double pages of black ink script, again unmediated by Woodman, follow, after which the repetition of a single image from the 'master theme' quartet is placed (fig 127). This in turn is followed by the repetition of another image from the same quartet (fig 128). These images have been discussed previously.

Immediately after this is placed the last pair of images on a double page spread in the Book (fig 129). Here are two images in close harmony with each other which at once encompass and magnify the self-reflexivity of the 'master theme'. The pair is a further imaginary enactment of the first project of the original Italian student in the *Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi*. Made in the same double portrait form as the pomegranate image (fig 123), here are two images of the same female figure. The image pair, as is the case with several others in this Book, has surely

been taken especially for this purpose. In two unusual shots the viewer is taken into the concentrated calm of the figure reading, as it were over her shoulder. The left-hand image is subtly different from that on the right; in it the view is closer, more neck is revealed. The right-hand image shows an arm and gloved hand clearly holding the book over a table surface. The light source is opposite in both images, this being particularly apparent on the open pages of the book.

The image pair shows a contemplative Woodman reading a small book. Perhaps she imagines her future audience. Looking chaste in an innocent and old-fashioned, summer dress, with her hair tightly scraped up, she completes the vintage ambience by wearing an antique pearl choker. This offers a contrast in texture to the folds of the puffed dress sleeve.

Deliberately over-exposed, to give them a faded antique quality perhaps, as with so many of the Book's images, these transparencies demonstrate the delicacy of the photographer's mark in its chemical process. These two closely twinned images seem to emanate from an invisible point that is the apex of a triangle (the position of the imagined viewer perhaps) so perfect is the contrast of the forty-five degree outward position of her seated, repeated figure in the pair. This is the reverse angle, in the female heads' outward gaze to the inward gaze of the man and woman in the double portrait with the pomegranate (fig 124). The double joined rectangles that are the books she holds, strongly oppose (left) and continue (right) the angles of the script lines both in their hard edges and in the diagonal rhythm their forms construct. It is possible to decipher the word *Dettati* running close to Woodman's ear. She has picked a word to emphasise the template of

cursive regularity which has been the aesthetic foundation for this Book,  
notwithstanding its highly appropriate semantic value to this project. Its  
dialectical and dialogical symmetry is hereby complete and yet it remains an  
open-ended text.