Sensual Sites, Dust and Displacement: The Photographic Spaces of Francesca Woodman

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Abstract

This thesis examines Francesca Woodman's self-representational photography to explore the complex relationship between the body and place. In particular, her staging of abandoned locations highlights the difficulty of making space on the margins of society and holds wider implications for the fields of gender and photographic history.

Woodman's death by suicide at the age of 22 has led to a predominantly psycho-biographical approach to her work. But I challenge this reading and its linear teleology by re-situating the artist within the socio-economic context of America in the 1970s and early 1980s, emphasising how Woodman's images converse with other contemporaries, particularly performance, body, and land artists.

The argument is structured around notions of interior, exterior and liminal spaces, focussing on the haptic places, that is, the places she took her photographs which evoke the sense of touch, Woodman encountered throughout her career; namely Boulder, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island and New York City. The introduction addresses the shortcomings of existing literature, whose artistic biography and 'prodigal' status accentuate her apparent displacement.

Chapter One analyses the motif of the house within the context of the women's movement and the *Womanhouse* project. Focussing on her use of domestic tropes, I question what it means for Woodman to be 'at home in dust'. The second chapter concentrates on Woodman and Gordon Matta-Clark's depiction of distorted liminal spaces, whose material traces challenge Gaston Bachelard's notion of 'intimate dwelling space' by accounting for lived experiences, gender and disorder. The final section explores the trope of woman-as-nature through Woodman's depiction of the natural landscape. Her hybridisation with the external world attempts to create an alternative space for women's creative expression among growing concerns for the environment and the Land Art Movement.

If scholars wish to gain increasingly nuanced perceptions of Woodman's photographs and challenge psychoanalysed notions of her identity, it is essential to question the overarching problem of placement in her oeuvre.

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Declaration

Sections from my previous published book chapter, “Whispers of escapades out on the ‘D’ train” The Entangled Visions of Cindy Sherman, in *The Past in Visual Culture: Essays on Memory, Nostalgia and the Media*, ed. by Jilly Boyce Kay, Cat Mahoney and Caitlin Shaw (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2017), pp. 203–219, feature in the Introduction and are referenced appropriately.

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Introduction
Who is Francesca Woodman?

Figure 1 Francesca Woodman, *Self-portrait at thirteen*, Boulder, Colorado, 1972, 8 x 9.9 in. (20.3 x 25.2 cm). Gelatin silver print on barite paper.

At the age of thirteen, Francesca Woodman (1958-1981) was given a camera by her father. The first image she took was entitled *Self-portrait at thirteen* (1972) at Boulder, Colorado which shows the artist sitting to the left of the frame (Figure 1). It is rare to see the artist fully clothed and so well-defined, as Woodman is now renowned for capturing blurred images of her predominantly nude form. She wears a cable-knit jumper and dark, loose-fitting trousers. Aside from her clothing, another compelling element in this image is how Woodman shields her face from the camera. It is unclear which way she turns her head due to the long locks of hair obscuring her features. The deliberate concealment of Woodman's face creates an air of uncertainty. How can viewers be sure that this is the artist if they cannot see her facial features?

Masking the face also obstructs the viewer's gaze, creating a sense of distance between the subject and the spectator.

Moreover, by covering her face with her hair, Woodman subverts the traditional function of a self-portrait. Where is the viewer to look if they cannot see the sitter's face? This aversion to showing her face is a prominent theme throughout Woodman's work and contributes to the uncanny atmosphere of many of her images. But the lack of identifying features also raises issues relating to notions of 'clarity' and 'artistic authenticity'. As I argued in a previous article, the issue of locating identity in self-portraiture resides partly in 'viewership expectation' in contrast to 'actuality'. Viewers receive more questions than answers when looking at Woodman's images.

> Spectators want to know more but end up knowing less … and that is unsettling because not only does it suggest that there is no singular or unitary 'truth' to be taken from an image, but it destabilizes the notion of 'reality' itself and what spectators expect from it.[1]

The status of this image is also significant. Woodman printed her own photographs and often scrawled captions in the margins of the frames, like *Self-portrait at thirteen*, which later became the photograph's title once exhibited or analysed by scholars. Images with no annotation are referred to as *Untitled*. For the sake of clarity, I have differentiated untitled photographs by summarising the content in parentheses. But the afterlives of photographs are complicated, especially when we consider who selects the images for exhibition following the artist's death. Similarly, to think that the artist is somehow knowable through her photographs is a mistake. The image spectators encounter is not Francesca Woodman, but a single representation of the artist taken in a specific time and place.

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[1] Vanessa Longden, '"Whispers of escapades out on the 'D' train" The Entangled Visions of Cindy Sherman', in *The Past in Visual Culture: Essays on Memory, Nostalgia and the Media*, ed. by Jilly Boyce Kay, Cat Mahoney and Caitlin Shaw (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2017), pp. 203–219 (p. 207).

If Woodman's identity is ambiguous, then what else can the viewer gain from an image like *Self-portrait at thirteen*? Looking closer, spectators notice Woodman's right arm bends at the elbow and drapes over the curved armrest. Her fingers and right sleeve are bathed in light. Meanwhile, a dark shadow, which is possibly the shutter cord, extends from her other hand towards the camera, creating a blurred effect in the foreground of the image. Light and shade culminate to create an air of mystery and self-dramatisation around the artist. The wisps of grey and black in the foreground echo the shafts of light which fall on the sitter from the top-left of the frame.

Similarly, this out-of-focus, smoke-like, effect contrasts with the solidity of her setting, as well as the texture of her cable-knit jumper, emphasising the depth and structured composition of the photograph. The artist's location is a vital component of creating photographic depth. The image can be divided up into geometric segments through the layering of furniture and fixtures, or the cropping of the camera. The glossy wood of the seat runs horizontally across the image, echoing the shaft of light beneath the seat and the floor. A white wooden square, possibly a wooden panel or a canvas, cuts the top segment of the image into three; more geometric shapes—circles within squares—recalls the composition of the square photograph and the borders of the frame. In Woodman's image, space is squared, cut and divided by carefully arranged matter.

Scholars and critics have written a considerable amount on Woodman since her death at the age of 22. Despite Woodman's complex photographs, many commentators continue to speculate on the intent of her images, with the knowledge of the artist's depression and suicide overshadowing her work. But as Claire Raymond correctly notes, 'Woodman's cult status as a prodigy, literally an otherworldly phenomenon, and the dramatic, self-imposed truncation of her career by suicide haunt most critical readings of her work'.[2] Woodman's penchant for

[2] Claire Raymond, *Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 8.

black-and-white photography, vintage clothing, decrepit locations, and for visually blurring her form—alluding to the notion of disappearance—enhances these notions of 'haunting' and 'otherworldliness'. However, Betty Woodman maintains her daughter's 'life wasn't a series of miseries … It's a basic fallacy that her death is what she was all about, and people read that into the photographs. They psychoanalyse them'.[3] As I will show, psychoanalytical approaches of Woodman's work, particularly through the writings of Peggy Phelan and Elisabeth Lopes, romanticise the artist's juvenile status and contribute to her isolated and prodigal position. The desire to understand the artist's creative intention, or to decipher photographic meaning, will always be a topic of concern. Any attempt to know Woodman through her images is a futile line of enquiry which contributes to the artist's mythologisation and over-speculates her photographs.

Identity-oriented approaches towards Woodman's work is inadequate for several interrelated reasons. First, the notion of identity is difficult to define and its relation to Woodman's artistic biography is equally unclear. Various social, cultural and political factors influence identity but, as I noted previously, it is also intrinsically linked to notions of representation. If identity is a fleeting and everchanging entity, as poststructuralists argue, then attempting to define the artist through her images suggests she is somehow knowable and unchanging.

Second, there is a misunderstanding that Woodman's photographs were diaristic snapshots and that her motives were visually transparent. When faced with Woodman's images, Elizabeth Gumport writes: 'Living is "erasing"; dying a way of ensuring that what was will continue to be, of fixing certain things in place'.[4] Woodman, Gumport continues, reverses

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[3] Betty Woodman quoted in Rachel Cooke, 'Searching for the real Francesca Woodman', in *The Guardian*, 31 August 2014, n.p. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/aug/31/searching-for-the-real-francesca-woodman> [date accessed: 13 April 2019].

[4] Elizabeth Gumport, 'The long Exposure of Francesca Woodman', *The New York Review of Books*, 24 January 2011, n.p. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/01/24/long-exposure-francesca-woodman/> [date accessed: 14 April 2019].

the traditional arrangement of life and death by leaving a series of photographs behind. Instead of disappearing, the artist leaves photographic traces of her existence. But Gumport's reading raises concerns over the fatalistic and intentional documentation of Woodman's passing. Equating Woodman's blurred images as precursors to her death is not only an unpleasant argument, but it is also largely speculative. Furthermore, readers may misinterpret such readings, thinking they offer a 'true' depiction of the subject.

Third, the dominant tropes which define the artist are superficial and generalised. In addition to being defined as a 'ghost' who 'haunts' the spectator, Woodman is labelled as a 'schoolgirl' and a 'temptress' throughout academic accounts.[5] These descriptions draw on Woodman's biography but render the artist as a series of reductive stereotypes. By offering so many photographs of herself, Woodman's work undermines any attempt to fix her image according to the spectator's desires. Displaying her nude body through various fleeting gestures suggests that 'identities are temporarily "occupied" and are never fully "owned"'.[6] The problem, Judith Butler argues, is 'the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions'.[7] In other words, conventional ideas of representation trap interpretations of Woodman and her work. While I agree with Harriet Riches, who argues the artist plays with the theme of identity and subjectivity, this is just one facet of her photography.[8] Focussing solely on identity-orientated approaches, scholars risk isolating Woodman within a truncated

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5 James Catchpole writes how Woodman's images 'tempt' the viewer; meanwhile, Townsend emphasises Woodman's 'schoolgirl' status in his monograph. See, Chris Townsend, *Francesca Woodman*, ed. by Chris Townsend and George Woodman (London; New York, Phiadon Press, 2007), p. 6;
James Catchpole, 'Am I in the picture? Am I getting in or out of it? I could be a ghost, an animal or a dead body, not just this girl standing on the corner . . .', *Fluid Radio*, <http://www.fluid-radio.co.uk/2013/05/in-memory-of-francesca-woodman/> [date accessed: 26 August 2016].

6 Longden, 2017, p. 208.

7 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990); and, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge Classics, 2011), p. 4.

8 Harriet K. Riches, *Skin, Surface, and Subjectivity: The Self-Representational Photography of Francesca Woodman* (University College London, 2004), p. 34 (unpublished doctoral thesis).

biographical narrative that does little to develop alternative readings of her photographs and overlooks other compelling themes, such as place, materiality and feeling.

Discussing the wider discursive field surrounding Woodman's work, Claire Raymond notes how, 'we see in different critical responses the use of Woodman as a figure for each decade's dominant trope'.[9] Initially, Raymond notes, Woodman was interpreted as a feminist figure by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, reflecting cultural feminism of the 1980s. Phelan placed the artist in line with 1990s trauma theory. Finally, Chris Townsend reads Woodman as a 'schoolgirl', a twenty-first-century *femme-enfant*, who was not aware of her talent. Readers should not misunderstand Raymond's comment. It is not that these critical 'tropes' are attached to specific 'decades', but that scholars have employed Woodman's work as vehicles for prominent academic trends, as well as convenient methods to categorise the artist. The artist's initial trope for photographing herself is a common, yet implicit, factor in the critical responses Raymond outlined above. As seen in Figure 1, Woodman's tendency to capture herself lends itself to identity-orientated readings. However, photographing herself almost exclusively accentuates her reputation as an 'isolated' artist. Woodman does not appear to fit easily within photographic space, or even into any established critical discourse. She flits to the borders of the frame, covers herself in wallpaper, crouches beneath furniture and darts across deteriorating interiors. It is this notion of 'not fitting in' which interests me the most and which other critical accounts overlook. The issue of placement and fitting in—both within physical locations, between the borders of the photograph and within the photographic canon—is just as problematic for Woodman now as it was when she began her photographic career in 1972.

Turning critical attention to the places she photographed enables scholars to move away from psycho-biographical notions of identity, gain an increasingly nuanced understanding of Woodman's work in conjunction with her contemporaries, and produce new alternative

[9] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 11.

readings around the body, place and gender. Additionally, the spaces Woodman photographed must be accounted for as they offer the viewer 'the flexibility to capture *all* the multiple dimensions of subjectivity, while also providing the means of theorising subjective mutability'.[10] Kirby continues, 'we plot ourselves a destination, and inevitably find ourselves caught up in following the very outline we thought delimited ourselves'.[11] But Woodman does not appear to be limited by space or the trajectories she maps. While the boundaries between Woodman's body and the places she occupies do not always seem to accommodate one another, they nevertheless shift as the artist wrestles against and merges with her surroundings. As Robyn Longhurst succinctly puts it,

> bodies and spaces construct each other in complex and nuanced ways. It is impossible to talk about bodies without talking about space, and vice versa. Bodies are performed, resisted, disciplined and oppressed not simply in but through space.[12]

The unwelcoming nature of her messy interiors, distorted spaces, and entangled natural environments enhance Woodman's 'dislocated' status. But the artist's depiction of space also challenges onlookers' expectations of what it means, and how it feels, to be embodied within a particular time and place.

Taking a broadly chronological approach, I argue there are three further interlinking factors which contribute to Woodman's 'displaced' status in critical discourse: the first is an overreliance on the artist's originary narrative, which underpins critical discourse of her work and binds Woodman's photography to a linear teleology centred around issues of suicide, loss and trauma. The second is the myth of the young 'artistic genius' and her subsequent canonicity

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[10] Kathleen M. Kirby, *Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity* (New York: Guilford Publications, 1996), p. 154. My emphasis.
[11] Kirby, p. 154.
[12] Robyn Longhurst, 'The Body' in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. by David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil Washbourne (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 91-96 (p. 93).

which simultaneously establishes Woodman as a figure worthy of study and isolates the artist through her eminent and romanticised status. Significantly, integrating Woodman into a pre-existing artistic discourse not only attempts to understand and define her, but it is also a method of power and control. Third, it is essential to consider the wider discursive field surrounding Woodman's work, which I categorise into three subsections: the first being psychoanalytical interpretations of Woodman's photography, which typified 1990s trauma theory. The second part considers notions of performativity influenced by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), which dominated the discourse on Woodman in the early 2000s. Finally, I outline Woodman's reception following the onset of the digital age, which resulted in a broader public engagement with her photography, produced less homogenised critical approaches and emphasised the sense of transience in Woodman's work.

When considering Woodman's oeuvre and the problem of placement, I suggest the artist's act of photographing is a method of 'working through' her surroundings—both physically and in an attempt to understand her habitats—which transforms her supposed confining environments into flexible sites of visual exploration. I should note that I am not attempting to 'fix' Woodman in a particular discursive space or emancipate the artist in any way. Instead, I am more concerned with presenting an alternative dialogue between the artist and unexpected spaces and structures, which, in turn, challenges the melancholy psycho-biographical analysis that overshadows her work.

Woodman's Artistic Biography and Initial Critical Responses

Before turning to the broader thematic discourse surrounding Woodman's photography, it is necessary to outline scholars' originary narrative of the artist and the initial critical response to her work. The American photographer was born in April 1958 to George (1932-2017) and Betty Woodman (1930-2018), who were well-known artists in their own right. Betty was a

high-profile ceramicist and teacher. George formally trained as a painter, and later turned to photography after his daughter's death. Francesca and her elder brother, Charlie (1955-), were raised in Denver, Colorado, and often spent their summers in Florence, Italy. The children learnt about art history through visits to museums and galleries. Woodman spent her last year at college in Rome as part of an honours programme which was aided by her fluency in Italian and family connections with local artists and academics. A highly inquisitive student, she skipped a year of high school to attend Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence (1975-1979) where she majored in Photography at Pilgrim Mills Studios. After graduating, Woodman moved to New York City with her friend, Betsy Berne, to establish her artistic career. She photographed, primarily, in her apartment and made a living as a secretary, a photographer's assistant and a nude model.[13] In January 1981, after a series of failed grant proposals and bouts of depression, Woodman committed suicide by jumping from her apartment window on the Lower East Side of New York City. She left behind over 800 works, made between 1972 and 1980, in addition to her first art pamphlet *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* (SDIG), which was published earlier that same month by Synapse Press. Copies of the publication were handed out at the artist's funeral.[14] This narrative implicitly informs readings of her photographs, particularly within exhibition contexts. For instance, the Tate's 2014 ARTISTS ROOMS exhibition drew extra unnecessary attention to Woodman's death and encouraged young people to think of Woodman as an 'enigma'.[15] The supporting learning resource states the '"Die Young" effect … draws fascination, especially when the perpetrator is well known and talented'.[16] In this context, Woodman's death becomes a culminating force and a predetermined endpoint. By stating, 'her images capture a life cut short which makes

[13] Gabriele Schor, *Francesca Woodman: Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, ed. by Gabriele Schor, Elisabeth Bronfen (Vienna; New York: D.A.P., 2014), p. 7.
[14] Francesca Woodman, *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* (Synapse Press, 1981), n.p.
[15] *Finding Francesca: A guide to supporting young people to explore ARTIST ROOMS, Francesca Woodman*, ARTIST ROOMS on tour with the ArtFund (Tate and National Galleries of Scotland, 2014), pp. 1-69 (p. 8).
[16] *Finding Francesca*, p. 8.

them poignant today', viewers are conditioned to see the artist's work in a particular, and limited, way. So, Woodman is bound to her 'haunted' biography and, as a result, is separated from her extensive creative network and the places she resided.

In contrast to her short career, Woodman has steadily accumulated critical attention since her death. The first significant public exposure to Woodman's work came posthumously with the 1986 exhibition organised by Wellesley College Museum and the Hunter College Art Gallery. Ann Gabhart, the director of Wellesley Art Museum, produced the show with the co-founder of *October* (1976), the American art critic and theorist Rosalind E. Krauss, after "discovering" Woodman's work at her parents' house. The exhibition's accompanying catalogue, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, featured texts by Krauss and the feminist art and photography critic Solomon-Godeau. Their respective essays centred on Woodman's biography and situated her collection within the feminist and poststructural discourses of the 1980s. At this time, the combination of feminism and poststructuralism significantly shifted how women thought about their representation and how they contributed to knowledge production both inside and outside the academy. As Chris Weedon notes, women theorists who adopted poststructural approaches were influenced, in part, by the politics of the Women's Liberation Movement. Feminist theorists 'placed subjectivity, signifying practices … and sexuality on the theoretical agenda', as well as focus 'on the political implications of many of the theories which have formed current poststructuralist perspectives.'[17] In other words, by addressing the relationship between 'language, subjectivity, social organisation and power', poststructuralism enabled feminists to think about their identities and societal roles beyond the predetermined patriarchal confines imposed upon them.[18]

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[17] Chris Weedon (1987), *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), p. 12.
[18] Weedon, p. 12.

As the art catalogues were not widely distributed (with a print run of about 100), Krauss and Solomon-Godeau reprinted their essays in other publications. Krauss's *Bachelors* (1999) is a proactive account of the achievements of nine major women artists, including Dora Maar (1907-1997), Louise Lawler (1947-) and Woodman. This valuable critical resource provided feminist scholarship with new approaches to art history by challenging the unitary and mastery of masculine aesthetics. Centring around the question, "What evaluative criteria can be applied to women's art?" Krauss explores the intersection between painters, sculptors and photographers and their concerns with the trends of postwar visual culture: namely, questions of commodity, the status of the subject and issues of its representation and abstraction.[19] It is important to note that these critics were, and continue to be, highly respected within artistic and academic spheres. Both have established esteemed academic careers and have curated major art exhibitions, among them Krauss exhibited the work of Joan Miró (1893-1983) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1970-73) and Richard Serra (1938-) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), while Solomon-Godeau curated *Sexual Difference: Both Sides of the Camera* in 1992.

So, the reputations of Krauss and Solomon-Godeau influenced Woodman's initial recognition and set her photography apart from the onset. But, as Phelan notes, it was Solomon-Godeau's essay "Just Like A Woman", in her seminal publication *Photography at the Dock* (1991), which introduced Woodman to a national audience.[20] Solomon-Godeau convincingly examines the politics of photographic criticism, practice and history. The work takes a revisionist approach to photography's history and critiqued modernism, in addition to the institutions that promoted it. The art historian placed Woodman within feminist discourse, reading her self-portraits as strategic appropriations and subversions of feminine stereotypes,

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[19] Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 161-177.
[20] Peggy Phelan, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography: Death and the Image One More Time', *Signs*, 27:4 (2002), pp. 979-1004 (p. 984).

thus challenging the sexual-politics photography often endorses. Solomon-Godeau's interpretation critiques the linguistic and historical constructions of femininity. Woodman's work 'indicates no privileged space for the female spectator'.[21] Instead, the artist

> relentlessly offers up the archetypal allusions, mythologies, emblems, and symbols adhering to the feminine, and infuses them—charges them—with dread, with disease … Nowhere is this clearer than in the numerous series that enact tableaux of entrapment, engulfment, or absorption of the woman in those spaces—both literal and metaphorical—to which she is conventionally relegated.[22]

According to Solomon-Godeau, Woodman's feminist aesthetic exposes the historical ideologies that define and marginalise women. Despite Woodman's alienation 'from language, from culture, from image, from body, the woman artist nonetheless manages to speak' through her act of photographing.[23] While Woodman's photographs are encapsulated within feminist critical discourse, they also re-establish the framework which categorises her, acting as a closed circuit. This encapsulation is evident through Solomon-Godeau's consideration of place and the notion of the female spectator. How can scholars consider different concepts of place if Woodman merely works within the patriarchal spaces that conventionally relegate women? Furthermore, Woodman's visual articulation is dependent on someone viewing her work. If Woodman does not accommodate the female spectator, as Solomon-Godeau argues, then the question remains: Can Woodman's work speak if those who share her experiences are not accounted for?

In response, George Baker argues Solomon-Godeau 'goes so far in bringing Woodman's work into the context of the eighties – into which it obviously doesn't really fit', so Woodman's work is caught in a double bind.[24] Baker does not elaborate on how Woodman's

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[21] Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1986), "Just Like a Woman", in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 252.
[22] Solomon-Godeau, "Just Like a Woman", p. 252.
[23] Solomon-Godeau, "Just Like a Woman", p. 255.
[24] George Baker, 'Francesca Woodman Reconsidered: A Conversation with Margaret Sundell, Ann Daly, Nancy Davenport, Laura Larson, and Margaret Sundell', *Art Journal*, 62: 2 (2003), pp. 53-67 (p.55).

work does not fit into the context of the 1980s. It is unclear if he is referring to the socio-political context, the cultural discourse or Woodman's visual aesthetic, or all three. His comment also displays a misunderstanding of Solomon-Godeau's intentions. She critiques the institutionalised aesthetics which define photographic theory, offering a counter-history instead. Solomon-Godeau wants the viewer to think differently about the politics of images, not that Woodman was politically aligned with 1980s feminism, per se. Ultimately, the authoritative positions of Krauss and Solomon-Godeau meant they were able to influence Woodman's reception as an artist. This is particularly true in Solomon-Godeau's case, whose essay, published seven years after Woodman's death, constructs the artist's canonicity from the critic's privileged position. Critical advocacy has a long and established history, and readers must be aware of the effects such influence has on creating so-called artistic status. To be clear, the narratives which surround and define Woodman's work were not created in a vacuum. They have their own social, political and cultural motivations; and in the case of Solomon-Godeau and Krauss, these publications not only increased Woodman's profile within academic and artistic circles, but also crucially set the precedent for future critical enquiry. I wish to build on what Krauss and Solomon-Godeau began by considering how the critical discourse around Woodman has come to shape the reception of her work, and how insights from feminism can reshape dialogues with space.

Woodman's 'Artistic Success' and the Complexities of Canonicity

So far, I have identified how an over-reliance on Woodman's originary narrative, as well as the artist's suicide, underpins and taints her photographs. There is a fascination with Woodman's blurred images that capture her flailing limbs and her 'haunted' aesthetic. Aside from her visual style, Woodman's evident talent for creating consistently engaging images makes the reality of her depression and death even more poignant. The loss of the artist is

equated with the transience of her photographic medium, marking her as a unique and unusual case from the outset. Meanwhile, her posthumous discovery, the authoritative position of art historians and Woodman's visual 'feminine codes' in the writings about her photos which are a product of poststructural feminist discourse, set the pattern of scholarly inquiry around the artist. But reiterating the question of Woodman's identity and speculating her subsequent creative output had she lived, is a futile task. In this section, I focus on the problems of labelling Woodman an 'artistic genius' and the difficulties of fitting her work within a pre-existing art historical canon. The two subjects reinforce one another, which serves to alienate the artist further from the context in which she worked. 'Artistic genius', I argue, reinforces what Corey Keller and Jennifer Blessing call Woodman's 'cult-like' status.[25] The artist's eminence, particularly at such a young age, contributes to a notion of success that others can aspire to but never achieve. In other words, Woodman becomes a benchmark of 'artistic success'. In this sense, Woodman's 'genius' is a mythic construct which sets her apart; meanwhile, her subsequent assimilation into other artistic movements attempts to understand and categorise the artist in a predetermined canon, making her a subject worthy of scholarly study.

Scholarship after "Just Like A Woman" suggests Woodman's future as an artist was written from an early age, a notion which implies her situation was somehow different, or more unusual, than that of her contemporaries. Woodman's 'prodigal' status alienates her from those around her. As Krauss emphasises in her article 'Francesca Woodman: Problem Sets' (1999), Woodman created the majority of her photographs while she was a student at RISD. For Krauss, photographic titles such as *Space²* (1975-1978) or *On Being an Angel* (1977) were produced in fulfilment of school assignments. In addition to accusing Krauss of being formalistic, Solomon-Godeau criticises her for ignoring issues of gender and sexual difference

[25] Corey Keller, *Francesca Woodman*, ed. by Corey Keller and Jennifer Blessing (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2013), back cover.

in Woodman's work. Nor does Krauss discuss the relation of Woodman's oeuvre to that of other women artists, or the impact of feminist practices and politics which were prevalent in 1970s artistic and political culture. Commenting on *Space²*, Krauss states the image 'was undoubtedly made in fulfilment of a studio assignment', which may 'have been devised as a reply to something like "Define a particular space by emphasizing its character, its geometries, for example"'.[26] While the photograph *On Being an Angel* was 'no doubt' a response to being asked to photograph a non-existent being, Woodman 'thought, perhaps, of Coubert's realist remark, "I'll paint an angel when I see one!" … As she makes *On Being an Angel*, she might have said, "I'll see an angel when I'll be one!"'[27] Can viewers be certain that Woodman's image was a response to an artistic brief? Furthermore, should scholars consider Woodman's work solely within an educational context at the expense of discounting her broader experiences and influences?

Other scholars, such as Phelan, Raymond and Solomon-Godeau share this concern, suggesting the notion of classroom assignments risks reducing Woodman's work to an artistic apprenticeship, which is 'an especially sharp irony given that Krauss's decision to write a commentary at all lends Woodman's work impressive cultural capital'.[28] Krauss argues Woodman employed her body as a formal tool when acting out the problem-sets, which allowed her to '[internalise] the problem, [subjectivize] it, [and render] it as personal as possible'.[29] The activation of Woodman's body attempts to assert ownership over her artwork; the phrase 'as personal as possible' suggests Woodman's images were only hers up to a point, but never belonged to her in their entirety. My point is that if viewers merely acknowledge that Woodman's photography was a response to institutional instruction, how can her work ever transcend such a narrow discursive framework?

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[26] Krauss, p. 162.
[27] Krauss, p. 162.
[28] Phelan, 'Death and the Image One More Time', p. 988.
[29] Krauss, p. 177.

Increased public perception of Woodman came in 2007 when the first major monograph on her work was released. Townsend established a respected relationship with the artist's family, which enabled him to reproduce 250 of Woodman's pictures, many of which have never been exhibited or published before. Townsend's extensive and detailed text situates Woodman within a lineage of post-war avant-garde artists who aimed to challenge the limits of the photographic medium. He also substantially studies the influences on Woodman's photographs, including gothic literature, surrealism and post-minimalist art, positioning Woodman as one of America's most notable artists since 1970, 'with an influence lasting well beyond her own time'.[30] This myriad of influences is vital when considering the richness of Woodman's photographs, and an aspect I wish to explore further in the artist's depictions of complex spaces.

The artist, Townsend argues, is as 'concerned with the processes of presentation as [she] is with the representation of things or of Woodman herself; as concerned to probe and unsettle the limits of the medium in which she chose to work as she was to make images with it'.[31] By shifting from the message of Woodman's work to the medium, Townsend makes a decisive shift away from the likes of Solomon-Godeau. With the knowledge of Woodman's depression, suicide and her 'struggle' to gain artistic recognition, it is all too easy to interpret the artist's photographs as the visual remnants of a 'troubled psyche'.[32] Townsend openly criticises such feminist and psycho-biographical approaches stating that they are 'in part the discursive construction of successive generations of critics who have interpreted her photographs through their own theoretical concerns rather than ''read'' them either formally or contextually'.[33] Such theories have played a part in Woodman's psycho-biography, where her images are interpreted as visual symptoms of her mental state. Townsend is not wrong, an

[30] Townsend, back cover.
[31] Townsend, p. 11.
[32] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 2.
[33] Townsend, pp. 38-39.

overreliance on psycho-biographical methodologies may heighten Woodman's disposition as a 'mentally tortured' artist, it also separates her from the society in which she lived, worked and drew influence.

In spite of Townsend's criticism, he continues to extend Krauss's notion by rendering Woodman an eternal student, insisting that 'we must never let go of the fact' of Woodman's schoolgirl identity, which meant that she 'never fully understood herself as a fully realized artist'.[34] However, by suggesting Woodman was unaware of her artistic capabilities and never reached her full potential, Townsend positions Woodman as a victim of her ignorance and shortcomings. By emphasising her student status, Woodman is placed on a pedestal as one who was unwitting in her capacity and perhaps fortunate enough to create influential images. Moreover, the artist's supposed naivety towards her craft makes her cult status even more impressive. It renders her as an adolescent figure born with a 'natural gift' but one which was too perplexing for her to master entirely. Townsend disregards Woodman's formal artistic training and ignores her awareness of her capabilities. As Raymond rightly notes, Woodman openly acknowledged her role as 'femme-enfant in a highly self-conscious, allusive, *lifelong* self-portrait project', which is paralleled by her knowledge of the gallery as an institutional space.[35] Raymond's comment suggests Woodman was not only aware of her abilities but also knew *how* she wanted to present herself as an artist and subject. Moreover, the reference to Woodman's *lifelong* photographic project contests the transience of Woodman's life and career, while challenging Townsend's understanding of 'artistic success'.

By suggesting Woodman was artistically inexperienced, Townsend also implies Woodman lacked the institutional knowledge needed to become a successful artist. As Berne remarked: growing up in a creative environment surrounded by artists, Woodman was all 'too

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[34] Townsend, p. 6.
[35] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 8. The second emphasis is my own.

aware' of the art scene; she knew how to 'play the game' of the gallery.[36] The ramification of Woodman's age and her supposed ingenuity is just as complex as the interpretations of her suicide, with both focusing on Woodman's biography and her subsequent reception, as opposed to the context of her own time.[37] If we are to accept that 'artistic success'—however, 'success' may be assessed or measured—is a linear progression equated with a movement towards artistic 'maturity', then Townsend's interpretation may hinder the development of any further understanding of the artist, which he so fervently desires. In other words, a linear model of the ideal artistic biography is not only restrictive, but also predetermines Woodman to fall short.

Following Townsend's attempt to assimilate Woodman's work to the post-war avant-garde, critics have looked to Woodman's historical influences in an attempt to create visual parallels and a form of artistic lineage where Woodman's work becomes increasingly comprehensible. For instance, Gabhart relocates Woodman to a preceding era where visual similarities with the Victorian Countess Lady Clementina Hawarden are apparent.[38] In attempting to carve an aesthetic space for Woodman's work as a paradigm of historical revivalism, Gabhart overlooks the issue of placement itself in her account and the problem of transplanting a figure into an unfamiliar era. In addition, Woodman's status as a canonical artist is emphasised by the works of Katherine Conley, who argues in *Surrealist Ghostliness* (2013) that the photographs are part of a long tradition of surrealist practices,[39] and Eva Rus, who similarly interprets Woodman as a feminist Surrealist.[40] Meanwhile, Jui-Ch'i Liu argues Woodman's work reflects a longing to return to the maternal womb through the domestic sphere of the house, akin to Dorothea Tanning's (1910-2012) *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943).[41] Woodman was familiar with

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[36] Betsy Berne, 'To Tell the Truth', in *Francesca Woodman: Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, ed. by Gabriele Schor, Elisabeth Bronfen (Vienna; New York: D.A.P., 2014), pp. 89-93 (p. 89; p. 93).
[37] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 8.
[38] Ann Gabhart, *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work* (Wellesley: Wellesley College Museum and Hunter College Art Gallery, 1986).
[39] Katherine Conely, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).
[40] Eva Rus, 'Surrealism and Self Representation in the Photography of Francesca Woodman,' *49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies*, 15 (2005), pp. 1-12.
[41] Liu, pp. 26-31.

Surrealism's history and shares some common visual motifs with the movement, such as using gloves and umbrellas as props, but whether she personally identified as a Surrealist or share the group's ethos is unclear. To clarify, I am not suggesting scholars discount Surrealism's influence on Woodman's work. I examine the Surrealists' use of dolls and parlour games in conjunction with Woodman's practice in Chapter One. But it is important to note that her surrealist influences are not passive replications of previous artistic movements or simply acts of mimicry. As an artist who is often considered naïve or juvenile, I frame Woodman's notion of 'child's play' as a serious act. One that is *just as* relevant as the predominantly male Surrealist movement which came before her.

While visual parallels are fruitful and create possibilities for a wider dialogue, it is important to note that placing Woodman alongside other established artistic figures serves to reinforce her canonical status by attempting to 'locate' her by artistic style, making her work increasingly comprehensible. I am not saying historical comparisons are not valuable, far from it: I discuss Woodman work alongside that of Claude Cahun (1894-1954) in Chapter One, and the artist's penchant for intertextuality in Chapter Three. My point is that instead of merely assimilating herself to a pre-existing lineage, Woodman may in fact challenge and complicate the very nature of the traditional art historical canon through the visual references art historians so fervently uphold.

Thirty years after her death, Keller and Blessing re-examine the maturation and reception of Woodman's work through feminist theory, Conceptualist practice, and performance art. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to emphasise Woodman's extraordinary creativity and youthfulness.[42] As Keller and Blessing note in their 2013 monograph, 'Artists who arrive fully formed at a young age always dazzle, and Francesca Woodman was one of

[42] Woodman was introduced to photography when her father gave her a camera for her thirteenth birthday.

the most gifted and dazzling artist prodigies in recent history'.[43] The authors' make a bold claim to 'natural talent': asserting that 'fully formed' artists 'always dazzle' raises questions surrounding the rarity of female artistic prodigies in the traditional and often masculine confines of the canon. As Fiona Carson notes, the myth of 'artistic genius' as God-given essence has a long history with 'its origins in Pliny, reiterated by Vasari about Giotto and Michelangelo, and embodied in modern times by Picasso and Vincent Van Gogh, to whom Woodman's mental state has been compared.[44] In other words, the notion of 'artistic genius' originated as a male myth about the elite status of masculine creativity. By contrast, until the end of the nineteenth century, women were denied access to the intensive training which male artists received from an early age. It raises the question: can and should the same frame measure Woodman's work as that of male artists who worked in very different mediums and at very different times?

If the notion of 'artistic success' did not correlate with Woodman's schoolgirl status in Townsend's publication, then notions of 'artistic virtuosity' are similarly problematic in Keller's statement. Considering Woodman as an artistic prodigy raises questions as to how such exceptional talent should be measured and defined. But what is more concerning is that Woodman's sudden appearance as a 'fully formed' artist continues to feed the myth of artistic genius by reversing the gender polarity. Aside from the illusion of the 'genius artist', other mythic interpretations of Woodman's images are apparent. For instance, Adele Tutter presents the artist as the 'lady of the woods', likening Woodman to the Greek heroines, Daphne and

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[43] Keller, *Francesca Woodman*, back cover.

[44] Fiona Carson, 'Feminist debate and fine art practices', in *Feminist Visual Culture*, ed. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p. 26.
In an interview with the art critic Alastair Sooke, George Woodman comments that 'Francesca's work suffers a little bit what Van Gogh's work suffered from,' […] 'The picture of this crazy man who cut off his ear isn't very helpful to understanding Van Gogh's paintings. Similarly, there are people whose attraction to Francesca's work is bound up with their sense of her tragic story and without the tragic story they might not be so interested in the work. But I don't think that, as a way of 'reading' her work, this is particularly productive.' See, Alastair Sooke, 'Francesca Woodman: eerie visions from a life cut short', *The Telegraph*, 16 November 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8130041/Francesca-Woodman-eerie-visions-from-a-life-cut-short.html> [date accessed: 15 May 2017].

Leda.[45] Comparing Woodman to such vulnerable and fictitious figures underscores the fact that there is a cultural discomfort surrounding the artist's age, gender and representation. Woodman remains a young, vulnerable, yet gifted artist, and her status as an 'otherworldly phenomenon' prevails.[46] Furthermore, Keller and Blessing's miraculous conception of Woodman as a fully formed artist implies that she is akin to the mythologised figures of Aphrodite, who was born from the sea, or Athena, who sprang fully formed from her father's head. These extraordinary comparisons emphasise Woodman's supposed haunted disappearance by accentuating her mythic status and displace her from her own time.

Furthermore, mythologising the artist casts her as an unattainable figment, as Linda Nochlin observed in her article 'Why There Have Been No Great Women Artists' (1971): labelling Woodman a prodigy or a genius suggests she is an 'atemporal' figure whose 'mysterious power [is] somehow embedded in the person of the Great Artist'.[47] Instead, Nochlin argues that women artists were not considered great due to the lack of opportunity and patronage. Similarly, in their publication *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (1981), Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock conclude that women artists 'are mentioned in order to be categorized, set apart and marginalized' within the masculine discourses of art history.[48] Despite this deliberate marginalisation, scholars such as Blessing and Keller continue to stress Woodman's innate virtuosity, an aspect of which George Woodman was equally sceptical as I am. In conversation, he responded:

> I guess I'm suspicious of natural talent … I think for Francesca photography came along at a moment when it fit in perfectly for what she wanted to do. But if

[45] Adele Tutter, 'Metamorphosis and the Aesthetics of Loss: ii. Lady of the woods—The transformative lens of Francesca Woodman', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 92:6 (2011), pp. 1517-1539.
[46] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 8.
[47] Linda Nochlin (1971), 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Westview Press, 1989), p. 153.
[48] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981), *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), pp. 169-170.

> photography hadn't come along, she would have gone on being an artist, that's for sure.[49]

Calling Woodman 'naturally talented' risks turning her into a hollow icon by presenting her as a solitary artistic prodigy. Consequently, the name 'Francesca Woodman' becomes a mere emblem of success to measure and quantify the creative abilities of those who surpass her. Certainly, her posthumous reception placed Woodman in a troublesome position, along with other figures such as Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, both of whom achieved cult status after death. Her placement alongside such figures implies that there is a distinctively 'feminine' style which binds these women together. However, as Nochlin states, no subtle essence of femininity would link such works. Placing Woodman within an alternative canon of women artists would not suffice either, as inverting the pre-existing white, Western and predominantly male system continues to restrict women artists to a model that is defined by gender binaries and notions of difference.

Furthermore, comparing Woodman solely to other women artists risks discounting a plethora of alternative dialogues among her contemporaries. As Nochlin says, 'In every instance, women artists and writers would seem to be closer to other artists and writers of their period and outlook than they are to each other.'[50] However, I suggest scholars should think of Woodman and her contemporaries as constellations: that is, a collection of entities connected visually and thematically through time, and within intersecting spatial spheres. Comparing Woodman's work with artists who navigated similar places enables scholars to forge new connections between seemingly disparate figures; contextualising Woodman's work in the time it was created allows audiences to move away from an over-reliance on psycho-

[49] Vanessa Longden, Conversation with George Woodman, Durham University, 5 September 2016 (Skype call).
[50] Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', p. 149.

biographical interpretations of her work while challenging Woodman's status as an isolated artistic genius.

Woodman's photographic practice does not comply with the conventional traditions of art history. For instance, by using her body as a formal artistic tool, Woodman recasts the artist's role as model, muse and nude combined. Traditionally, Nochlin explains, 'the nude model was essential to the production of any work with pretentions to grandeur, and to the very essence of History Painting, [and was] then generally accepted as the highest category of art.'[51] Meanwhile, women's representation in Western art history is conventionally associated with the more passive roles of 'model' and 'inspirational muse' for the benefit of the artist.[52] By assimilating four artistic functions into one body (artist, model, muse and object), and one body of work, Woodman challenges traditional art historical conventions, reflects on the marginal status of women in creative culture and highlights the multifaceted aspect of women's identities and their representation.

> Woodman photographs herself, or young women who double as herself, not to fasten identity but to trouble and complicate identity, an important twist on the self-portrait, but one that nonetheless allows her work still to be classified within that genre.[53]

Raymond correctly notes how Woodman skews the traditional self-portrait. Indeed, Woodman's photographs are often referred to as 'self-portraits' or 'self-representational images' in an almost interchangeable fashion. Ultimately, the person in front of the camera is both Woodman-the-artist and Woodman-the-subject, but the viewer will never gain a full understanding of 'who Woodman was'. While Raymond identifies two significant aspects of

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51 Linda Nochlin (1971), 'The Question of the Nude', in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Westview Press, 1989), p. 158.

52 It should be noted that over the past forty years feminist art history has developed into a significant discipline which addresses issues of gender and representation in art history. But as the female art historian Eunice Lipton reflects, in the 1960s "reading historical events into the style of works of art was forbidden in art history … Abstraction was sacred." See, Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), pp. 5–11.

53 Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 9.

Woodman's work—that the artist complicates identity and confuses traditional art historical genres—I argue that the issue of placement is crucial when considering the nature of these two elements and is of central concern in Woodman's work. The artist's body, her perceived identity and the places she chose to inhabit are inextricably linked. Throughout her oeuvre, Woodman displays how body and place constantly intersect and shape one another. They adapt to and perform alongside each other and in response to wider cultural concerns. The issue of place and the broader scope of Woodman's work is overlooked due to her isolated appearance within her images. As Krauss acknowledges, the artist's locations 'are not really the objects of vision. They are not what is examined. They are what is used as surrogate surfaces, the elements that flatten someone "to fit paper"'.[54] Place is merely a backdrop, a passive stage where the artist can form and enact her identity. By focusing on what is visually apparent—namely the artist's body—the scholarly gaze is bound within the parameters of the photographic frame and to an andro-centric viewpoint which emphasises the body's significance over its environment. Place is never the centre of attention but always constituted by a body, or in Woodman's case, by the sense of loss her physical absence leaves behind.

The Wider Discursive Field: Psychoanalysis, Performativity and the Digital Age

Previously, I argued that Francesca Woodman's portrayal as a schoolgirl and a creative prodigy causes significant tensions when attempting to locate the artist's work within broader art historical movements. Just as Woodman does not fit into a traditional canon or a unitary discursive theme, the method of measuring her 'success' as an artist is similarly limited. Before I argue why the notion of 'placement' is a significant topic of study in Woodman's work, I will outline three contemporary themes—psychoanalytical interpretations, performativity and the

[54] Krauss, p. 172.

digital age—which continue to shape and challenge critical understandings of the artist's work, the fixation on her identity and the narrative of loss and disappearance which dominated critical discourse.

Psychoanalytical Interpretations:

Due to Woodman's penchant for black-and-white photography, her blurred aesthetic, and the characteristic concealment of her face, many critics and scholars draw speculative conclusions about the artist's work, and what motivated her to create her images. In her article, 'Francesca Woodman's Journey into the Gothic Wonderland' (2013), Lopes emphasises Woodman's 'haunted mind' and 'the shadows and ghosts that tormented [the artist's] imagination'.[55] The knowledge of Woodman's biography and suicide only adds to the artist's romanticised and 'haunted' status. Coupled with largely speculative psychoanalytical approaches, Woodman's status as an 'isolated' and 'alienated' artist has taken hold of a wider cultural consciousness, particularly portrayed through contemporary exhibitions.[56]

I am not saying psychoanalytical theory lacks value when considering alternative interpretations of Woodman's work. There is a wealth of work on psychoanalysis and the visual—Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' (1946) and Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), being prime examples. Psychoanalytical methodologies became increasingly popular within academic circles in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly among feminist theorists. Implementing the theories of Sigmund Freud and the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, many feminist theorists sought to understand how gendered subjectivities developed. Psychoanalysis offered 'a framework from within which femininity and masculinity [could] be

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55 Elisabeth Lopes, 'Francesca Woodman's Journey into the Gothic Wonderland', in *Women and the Arts: Dialogues in Female Creativity*, ed. by Diana V. Almeida (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 71-84 (p. 71).

56 *Finding Francesca*, p. 8.

understood as a theory of consciousness, language and meaning'.[57] I employ psychoanalytical terminology throughout my thesis, such as the 'uncanny' and occasionally 'haunting', to stress the strange familiarity of Woodman's work. But I wish to resist the notion that the photographs are *literal* signs of a tormented mentality, as 'psycho-biography' implies. Instead, by using psychoanalysis as a tool of critical theory, scholars can view Woodman's photographs as depicting the unconscious of a culture that includes anxiety, uncertainty, as well as curiosity and wonder.

Writing on psychoanalysis, trauma, and testimony, Suzette Henke argues in *Shattered Subjects* (1998) that women often used writing in order to heal the wounds of psychological trauma. She refers to Shoshana Felman's argument that 'a surrogate transferential process' takes place, where the author imagines a sympathetic audience to validate their testimony.[58] While Freud suggested it takes two to witness the unconscious, for Felman, the act of writing replaced the other witness and transformed the unconscious into a conscious testimony. Henke refers to this as the act of 'scriptotherapy', which enables women to write out trauma as well as write through traumatic experiences as a process of therapeutic re-enactment. As Henke writes, 'authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing,'[59] yet this desired outcome cannot be ensured.[60]

Unlike Henke, I am sceptical that narrative recovery in any textual form ensures healing. Henke's belief that 'the process of writing out or writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment,' to 'heal the wounds of psychological trauma' implies that woman is a fragmented (shattered) figure and needs to be 'fixed'—in both senses of the word: mended and anchored—to a prior state.[61] While autobiography offers a system of control

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[57] Weedon, p. 42.
[58] Suzette. A., Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1998), xxi.
[59] Henke, xxi.
[60] Longden, 2017, p. 208.
[61] Henke, fourth cover.

it is rooted in the phallocentric notion of self-unity and wholeness; this 'prior state' resides within the parameters of Lacan's Mirror Stage, that which is formative to the construction of 'the self' (otherwise known as 'je' or the I). Lacan argues that the human subject is always divided from the outset. The child's recognition of itself in the mirror is but a series of *méconnaissances* (misrecognitions) of a unified ego. The image of the I is empty and is only established by an imposed language, a language which Luce Irigaray argues serves only the male subject. Women have no alternative language with which to articulate themselves and are therefore un-representable. This subjectivity is formed and reformed continuously through thought and speech, but 'in order to function as an effective being in the world, one must necessarily cling to this Lacanian *mensonge vitale* ('vital lie') as an enabling myth of coherent identity, despite its status as a fictional construct'.[62]

The 'vital lie', Henke argues, places the woman writer at the center of her own story, recast as the protagonist, where her art becomes a form of therapy. Yet psychoanalytic approaches appear incompatible with 'autobiographic reflexivity'. As Rose notes, 'autobiographical reflexivity implies a full understanding of the [subject's] self', which is impossible to achieve.[63] Furthermore, I question the validity of Henke's 'scriptotherapy'. If the myth of a coherent identity is constituted in a language she did not choose, how would her self-articulation be any more fulfilling than that of a mythic, fragmented, or ventriloquized subject who adopted a male discourse? Moreover, due to Henke's emphasis on *language*, can psychoanalysis be a valuable interpretive tool in the study of visual culture and Woodman's photography?[64]

Autobiographical reflexivity is also problematic in the analysis of visual culture, particularly as it 'may over-emphasise the writer at the expense of the critical agency of their

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[62] Henke, xvi.
[63] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 4th edn. (London: SAGE, 2016), p. 180.
[64] Longden, 2017, pp. 208-209.

audiences', who also bring their own insights to the images they encounter.[65] Returning to the notion that Woodman's images depicted her troubled mental state, scholars like Phelan attempt to challenge the discourse around the artist's suicide. In her article, 'Francesca Woodman's Photography: Death and the Image One More Time' (2002), Phelan combines Woodman's work with Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production' ([1935] 1969), and Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1981), arguing photography might be the most appropriate medium to respond to the temporality of mourning. The scholar interprets the artist's physical movement and visual blurring as deliberate disappearances, questioning: 'Are we certain that [Woodman's] suicide is a tragedy? What might we gain if we considered it, however tentatively, as a kind of an achievement, even … as a kind of gift?'.[66] Despite the supposed caution, Phelan's question casts Woodman's photographs as visual preparations, or 'rehearsal spaces', for the artist's eventual demise. Accentuating her point further, Phelan argues that 'Woodman's use of photography as a way to rehearse her death allows us to consider her art an apprenticeship in dying'.[67] Phelan attempts to combine theory and practice by equating Woodman's disappearance within the photographs to her death. This approach is concerning as it presupposes Woodman's suicide as an inevitable outcome.

Phelan's interpretation implies Woodman was an informed technical artist and an actor in her passing, she employs the Kraussian notion of 'problem solving' to legitimise her reading, despite criticising Krauss for her restrictive scope. Phelan asserts 'Woodman found in her art a type of theatre for the oscillating tension between the desire to live and the desire to die' where

> it was *an accomplishment to solve the equation* the way she did: she leapt … Woodman invites us to see her suicide, like her art, as a *gift*. Perhaps not the one

[65] Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, p. 181.
[66] Phelan, 'Death and the Image One More Time', p. 984.
[67] Phelan, 'Death and the Image One More Time', p. 1002.

> we might have wished for, but the one *she gave us when she did not have anything to give*.[68]

Phelan's bold reading acts as a starting point to question perspectives of trauma in Woodman's work and the wider stigma surrounding suicide, but her images are still bound to the artist's psycho-biography, as steps in her creative journey.

Furthermore, the assertion that Woodman 'solved the equation' and gifted viewers with the answer does not rest easily, perhaps because Woodman owed viewers nothing in the first place. While the artist's mental health could inform her images, it should not be the sole factor which shapes and defines her photography or critical reception. Problems ultimately arise when critics speculate about Woodman's artistic intention. Namely, her work is presumed to be an autonomous creation, and all external influences—her environment, culture and economic climate—are disregarded. As I have mentioned in a previous publication, considering Woodman's psycho-biography alone, 'often prioritises a static or definitive understanding over a fluid account of development, experimentation, and re-interpretation'.[69] The work of Woodman continually questions the viewer each time they return to her images. But if scholars merely employ the artist's demise as a lens through which to interpret her work, the content of Woodman's images is continually eclipsed, and critical responses are predetermined. Where do scholars go from there? There is no room for alternative critical enquiry within the confines of the artist's biography alone.

Attempting to move away from the artist's biography, Carol Armstrong questions how to understand Woodman's artistic legacy and her subsequent place in the canon in her article, 'Francesca Woodman: A Ghost in the House of the "Woman Artist"' in *Women Artists at the Millennium* (2006). The publication contributes to and explores the legacies of feminism and

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[68] Phelan, 'Death and the Image One More Time', p. 999; 1002. My emphasis.
[69] Longden, 2017, p. 215.

critical theory in the work of women artists more than thirty years after Nochlin wrote her formative article, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?'. Since then, Armstrong argues, the 'woman artist' has not only 'been assimilated into the canon of "greatness"' but has developed the parameters of artmaking itself.[70] Akin to Townsend, Armstrong emphasises Woodman's 'marginality' and 'minorness' when considering ideas of greatness.[71] However, she suggests these elements are beneficial eccentricities which set Woodman apart from a traditional feminine lineage. Armstrong heightens Woodman's status as a disruptive feminine force by focusing on the *House* series (1975-1978), arguing the artist's presence within the uncanny domestic setting transforms the traditional familial and conjugal space to one of disorder and subversion. In the house, Woodman assumes the role of the 'female ghost rather than the housewife'.[72] The house of the woman artist remains a 'haunted' site, but not in the traditional sense. Armstrong interprets Woodman as a figure of interruptive difference as opposed to an inevitable victim of suicide. By focussing on the role of the house, and building on Armstrong's observations, I argue scholars can expand her line of enquiry to consider the roles domesticity and dust play in Woodman's interiors, which reasserts the artist's presence within a haptic space, as opposed to conforming to a narrative of disappearance.

Notions of Performativity:

Similar to psychoanalytic approaches to Woodman's work, notions of the artist's representation and photographic performances are equally complex. Readers observe Woodman's critical transition from a feminist figure of the 1980s, to the haunting archetype of Phelan's psychoanalytic trauma theory following the 1990s, and the more recent focus on

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[70] Armstrong, back cover.
[71] Armstrong, p. 348.
[72] Armstrong, p. 350.

performance theory in the early 2000s, as influenced by the release of six short videos[73] from Woodman's estate in 2001 and the work of gender theorist Butler.[74] The theme of performance and the instability of Woodman's visual identity emerged as a topic of critical enquiry following Butler's question of what it meant to 'trouble' normative gender identities. By radically critiquing the categories of identity, the theorist argued a new shape of feminist politics could emerge once identity no longer constrained its parameters.[75] With identity no longer being a unitary and predictable category, critics suggest that Woodman's photographs display 'the impossibility of engaging a stable identity of the self'.[76]

This difficult negotiation of identity is shown through various themes: first, Woodman photographs her (mainly nude) self in an almost repetitious fashion. These snapshots display the fragmentary nature of constructing an identity, which is continuously assembled. Second, the photographs capture the ephemeral nature of identity through their visual blurring and use of typically 'feminine' props (such as Woodman's use of flowers, knee socks and garter belts). But the transient nature of identity is also displayed through the sheer amount of images Woodman produced. Third, the artist's exposure—both physically and to the gaze of the camera—emphasises the fragility of the body and raises the question of how the artist is perceived. Meanwhile, the nature of photography as a developmental medium lends itself to a theory of identity that is constantly becoming.

Phelan considers Woodman's performativity differently. As Jane Blocker notes, Phelan 'privileges performative disappearance and accepts notions of blindness'.[77] Phelan employs performativity as a lens through which to imagine the unseen Other outside of identity

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[73] For more information on the relationship between Woodman's still and moving images, see: Jennifer Blessing, 'The Geometry of Time: Some Notes on Francesca Woodman's Video', in *Francesca Woodman* ed. by Corey Keller (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2011), pp. 197-203.
[74] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* (London: Routledge, 1990); and, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011).
[75] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, ix.
[76] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 12.
[77] Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity, Exile* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 25.

categories, or on the margins of legibility, at the very least.[78] The issue is that the minority figure, in this case, Woodman, remains isolated at the centre of dual dichotomies: she is both inside and outside; visible and invisible. Subjects like Woodman can never entirely escape such categorisation as the boundary between visibility and invisibility is continually redrawn. But equating Woodman's performativity with the repetitious visualisation of her body does not employ performativity to its fullest potential. The artist's performances are apparent even when her body is not clearly visible. Viewers perceive this through her movements, gestures and traces as she leaps in front of the camera, or through her careful staging of props, such as furniture, mirrors, and doors. Her attention to *where* she performs her photographs and *how* she rearranges space is not only intentional, but it underpins the identity she performs.

If Woodman's identity is unstable as well as repeatedly coded and performed, as Butler's notion of performativity argues, then so are the places where these photographic acts occur. I consider Woodman's work as performative pieces in the broadest sense. I am in agreement with Blocker who states that 'the performative describes a special class of actions that are derived from and may be plotted within a grid of power relationships.'[79] In Woodman's case, her photographs connects the artist, her environment, the camera and the viewer in an inextricable relationship, which is all-encompassing. She creates 'a series of geometrically self-contained spaces that are simultaneously strange and familiar'.[80] For instance, readers see this in Chapter One through Woodman's use of domestic objects when emphasising the curious monotony and materiality of the everyday. These performances of everyday life can expand and even transcend the psycho-biographical categories that underlie interpretations of Woodman's work. Her performative identity, like that of her contemporaries Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019), Cindy Sherman (1954-), Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) and Ana

[78] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.
[79] Blocker, p. 24.
[80] Longden, 2017, p. 214.

Mendieta (1948-1985), is not stable or unified—and therefore limited solely to categories of 'identity' or 'gender'—but is a fluctuating, metamorphosing and unstable entity. Such performance liberates 'identity' from a static construct to a dematerialised configuration that is repeatedly staged and re-presented. For Butler, who draws heavily on Derridian theory, performance is a repetition of (dis)empowered acts.[81] But there is no escape from these semiotically coded gestures. Instead, Butler would have us think of identity not as something which we possess (and which is therefore unchanging), but as something that we repeatedly do. So, to label Woodman as a feminist, a girl or a student attempts to fix her identity, making the artist both visible and legible in normative discourse.

By thinking of Woodman's work as a series of performative pieces and everyday gestures, the viewer can look past the question of who Woodman was and instead question where these performances occurred. Scholars can consider the events beyond the scope of Woodman's photographic frame and juxtapose the artist with other sculptors, performers and earth artists who renegotiated body boundaries and their environments during the 1970s and early 1980s. Woodman's refusal to be tied down—both visually and within critical discourse—is perhaps the most interesting aspect of her work, of where she chooses to position herself. Considering Woodman's work as photographic performances through a variety of spatial lenses takes her images out of their previous critical confines and complicates the physical location of identity and its supposed stability. As Doreen Massey argues in in her publication *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), 'gender has been deeply influential in the production of 'the geographical''.[82] But this is deeper than a dualistic relationship between body and space, it is a field in constant fluctuation and re-development. When recounting Woodman's performative identity and her movement between various props and fixtures, the symbolics of space must

[81] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 16.
[82] Doreen Massey (1994), *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 177.

also be considered.[83] Alternative critical discourses are opened up once scholars discard the notion of identity.

Woodman in 'The Digital Age':

The critical conversation surrounding Woodman and her visual metamorphoses are inextricably linked and have become more prominent with the onset of the digital age. Her discursive shifting not only highlights each decade's dominant trope and the academic affinity of scholars, as Raymond suggests, but also reveals the extent to which Woodman's images reach a wider audience and compel them to look. While academic and artistic circles initially elevated the name 'Francesca Woodman' as a commendable figure of critical analysis, it is worth noting how her audience has altered to include a popular, younger generation influenced by the replication of images on the internet. In 2010, C. Scott Willis's documentary *The Woodmans* introduced the artist to a general audience and offered an alternative perspective on Woodman's artistic career through the experiences of her family and friends, albeit through the lens of the artist's suicide and the family's shared sorrow. But with the onset of the digital age, Woodman became a figure of the 21st century. Her images are reproduced in their thousands and shared on social media platforms such as Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest. Her work has also featured in a wide range of magazines and journals, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Nation of Artforum*, *Observer Magazine*, *Another Magazine*, *W Magazine* and *Vogue*, all of which exposed her to a wider audience and helped to close the distance between scholarly and public spheres. Woodman's inclusion in *W Magazine* and *Vogue* came at the release of the artist's fashion photography in 2015 and its supporting exhibition, 'Francesca Woodman: I'm trying my hand at fashion photography', at the Marian Goodman Gallery (March 2015), which has since opened a new line of critical enquiry surrounding the materiality

[83] Longden, 2017, p. 213.

of Woodman's images and her strategic use of fabric, repetition and pattern.[84] My point is that if it was difficult to define who Woodman was, then locating the artist becomes increasingly complicated in contemporary times. While digital technology allows a broader engagement with Woodman's images, it also adds to their sense of transience.

Nevertheless, this discursive shift, from the virtual to the material, is significant. The change implies that there is a nuanced desire to become reacquainted with the body within a place that is equally material. As Helaine Posner notes, traditionally, critics read Woodman's body as emerging from her surroundings, which is proof of the artist's transformation into 'burgeoning womanhood', or as retreating into it.[85] Aside from debating the artist's (gendered) visibility, focusing on Woodman's body emphasises her lived experiences and the physical places she inhabited. Teresa de Lauretis describes women's experience as a process through which all social beings are subjectively constructed and expressed. 'Experience' is not used in the individualistic sense of 'something belonging to one and exclusively her own even though others might have 'similar' experiences'.[86] Instead, de Lauretis argues that subjectivity is an ongoing process of development, and 'not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world'.[87] Woodman expresses this 'alternative vocabulary' by 'taking up the camera'.[88] Returning to questions of placement and shared visual experiences allows critics to reframe the artist in a methodology which does not rely exclusively on psycho-

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[84] Woodman's work is also being reassessed by a younger generation of scholars: see the works of Kelly Long, 'Thresholds of Being: Phenomenology and the Art of Francesca Woodman' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Rochester, 2013); Cassandra Blair, 'Bodies in Space: Spatial Practice and Spatial Representations in the Work of Francesca Woodman and Gordon Matta-Clark', (unpublished master's thesis, University of Washington, 2015); Jemma Craig, 'Refashioning materiality: a study of affect and embodied perception in Francesca Woodman's fashion photography', (unpublished master's thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2016). It is necessary to acknowledge these works as they approach Woodman's photography with a fresh curiosity, and I am hopeful that Long, Blair, Craig and others will continue the critical conversation surrounding Woodman in the future.

[85] Helaine Posner, 'The Self and the World: Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman', in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 156-171 (p. 169).

[86] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 159.

[87] de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, p. 159.

[88] Longden, 2017, p. 205.

biography but reconnects Woodman's photography to her material surroundings. I question whether it is possible to consider Woodman's work within a more accommodating framework. Instead of focussing on psychoanalytic approaches which emphasise Woodman's mental illness, visual disappearances and supposed regression, situating the artist in a positive and constructive light highlights her curiosity. Woodman's photographs display a desire to explore, connect with and to recreate her surroundings as tactile sites.

'Unfashionable' Aesthetics

Aside from a fixation on Woodman's psycho-biography, trends in academic discourse and issues around artistic canonicity, Woodman's distinctive aesthetic captivates onlookers but crucially sets her apart from the period in which she lived and worked. While her work became increasingly fashionable in contemporary times, I suggest Woodman's dislocation during the 1970s and early 1980s can be attributed to her distinctive aesthetics and the time in which her work emerged. I also pose the question; how can scholars and critics locate an elusive artist within an unstable landscape without reinforcing the parameters which isolated her?

Upon viewing Woodman's work, Gabhart commented: 'One gets the sense' that the artist was 'born in the wrong period' and would have been 'more at home in the Victorian age'.[89] Gabhart's comment referred to Woodman's aesthetic, not that the artist *felt* like a Victorian. However, her remark raises significant issues around the artist's placement and the 'fashionability' of her work. By the late 1970s, the camera became a comprehensive tool for documenting the changing physical and cultural landscape. American culture also experienced many changes during this period, a key example being the emergence of postmodern artforms. Postmodernism reacted against the traditional conventions and idealistic values of modernism,

[89] Gabhart, p. 54.

instead favouring scepticism, irony, and the contradictory, in an attempt to challenge societal conventions and 'offering multiple perspectives on everyday life'.[90]

American historian and photography critic, Vicki Goldberg spoke of postmodernism's influence on photographic practice:

> Photography, once hailed as the great conveyor [of] truth and reality, was now said to have replaced reality itself … There were said to be no more authors, no true creators, no single dominant ethos, only pastiches of the past … The separation of culture into high and low was now regarded as just another instance of one class asserting its authority over another.[91]

Woodman's work did not appear to fit amongst her contemporaries within an emerging postmodern style. Nevertheless, Woodman did adopt similar visual motifs as her contemporaries, even if it is unclear whether she shared their ethos.[92] As I will show, her artwork shares spatial concerns with artists such as Judy Chicago (1939-), Miriam Schapiro (1923-2015) and members of the *Womanhouse* group, the urban installation artist Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) and numerous other conceptual, performance and earth artists.

Woodman's photography developed at a point of significant aesthetic and cultural change. In the autumn of 1977, the 'Pictures' exhibition, featuring the work of Troy Brauntuch (1954-), Sherrie Levine (1947-), Jack Goldstein (1945-2003), Robert Longo (1953) and Philip Smith (dates unknown), opened at Artists Space in New York City. Douglas Crimp, an eminent art critic and one of Krauss's ex-students, curated the show. He discerned that these young artists focused on a new engagement with the media of mass culture, and their critique of everyday life appropriated commercial practice.[93] In 1980, Crimp published his supportive

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90 Longden, 2017, p. 203.
91 Vicki Goldberg, *American Photography: A Century of Images*, ed. by Vicki Goldberg and Robert Silberman (San Francisco, California: Chronical Books, 1999), p. 204. Also see, Longden, 2017, p. 203.
92 An example being shared domestic motifs which I will explore in Chapter One and notions of intertextuality in Chapter Three. Woodman often imitated those she admired which George Woodman also noted. He told me, 'that's how you learn to do things, by imitating them'. Longden, Conversation with George Woodman, 2016.
93 Townsend, p. 63.

essay 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism' which also included Sherman's allegorical *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980). Sherman's work, along with that of Levine and Prince, undermined photography's claim to originality by destabilising the notion of 'reality' and challenging what spectators expect to receive from an image.[94] In the work of the Pictures generation, Crimp writes, 'originality cannot be located, it is always deferred; even the self which might have generated an original is shown itself to be a copy … Their images are purloined, confiscated, appropriated.'[95]

Woodman's work appears almost old-fashioned in contrast to the assertiveness of the Pictures generation. These postmodern works were often gaudy, large in size and overtly political.[96] By comparison, Woodman's photographs are unassuming, delicate and retains the artist's lingering presence at the margins of the frame, which gives the impression of the image serving diaristic purposes. The diminutive size of her photographs, cropped into roughly 8 x 10 inch rectangles, along with the artist's scrawled annotations along the edge of the white frame, created a sense of closeness with the viewer, which seemed to oppose postmodernism's sense of detachment. Additionally, Woodman's choice of black-and-white film, her adoption of vintage clothing in addition to her choice of gothic and decrepit environments, emphasise the 'old-fashioned' quality of her images, all of which set her apart from the fashionable postmodern style of her contemporaries. In contrast to the Pictures generation, Townsend maintains: 'Woodman's work looked not only unfashionable but [also appeared] irrelevant.'[97]

It is possible that the popularity and visibility of the Pictures generation 'blocked contemporary reception of Woodman's art' and now serves as 'a historical filter' through

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94 Longden, 2017, p. 207.
95 Douglas Crimp, 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', *October*, 15 (1980), pp. 91-101 (p. 206). <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/visualarts/Crimp-Photography-PoMo-October-1980.pdf> [date accessed: 28 May 2016].
96 See Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York: MetPublications, 2009).
97 Townsend, p. 64.

which to perceive and measure her work.[98] But Woodman's oeuvre does share similarities with the Pictures generation, namely through her appropriation of abandoned spaces. While artists like Sherman, Longo and Levine assumed everyday stereotypes and commercial representations in their artwork; Woodman's photographs can be read as a series of adopted or borrowed locations, as I suggest in Chapter One, which in turn challenge the traditional function of space. Another crucial element in Woodman's work which is overshadowed by the artist's disappearance, 'old-fashioned' style and notions of loss is her depiction of abundance. Woodman portrays plenitude in various ways: the first, and perhaps most obvious, is the repetitious use of the artist's (often nude) body in her photographic work. As I previously noted, the majority of scholarship surrounding Woodman focuses on her body, coupled with her psycho-biography. Second, Woodman produced a copious number of images, creating over 800 in her lifetime. This dedication to her craft, as well as the consistency of her production, contributes to her reputation as a 'gifted' artist, but also questions what a 'normal' rate of production is. Third, in addition to her commitment to photography, Woodman also achieved a consistent aesthetic style. Using key visual tropes, such as dirt, decay, patterns and textures, animals and domestic objects, she consciously created a style that drew inspiration from art history and classical literature, which heightened the sense that the artist was 'born in the wrong era'.[99] Lastly, Woodman's choice of photographic location emphasises the notion of excess as the artist portrays dilapidated architectures on the verge of disrepair, littered domestic spaces and overgrown natural environments with twisted roots and cracked earth. Without considering these complex photographic places, scholars cannot discuss the significance of Woodman's body or her 'unfashionable' aesthetic.

[98] Townsend, p. 64.
[99] Gabhart, p. 54.

Where is Francesca Woodman?

If Woodman was not at the centre of the cultural mainstream when she lived in New York, it raises the question: where was she? The issue of the artist's location moves away from an over-reliance on Woodman's supposed psycho-biography, but it is also a question of finding space. While Townsend notes how Woodman's photographs present an obsession with the problem of space, mainly through the camera's framing function, issues of space and place are central visual concerns in Woodman's photographs as well as themes of contention within the surrounding academic literature.[100]

The terms 'space' and 'place' have long histories and connote a variety of meanings to scholars across various disciplines and locations. As Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine note, for many geographers, place 'represents a distinctive … type of space that is defined by (and constructed in terms of) the lived experiences of people'.[101] If place is a bounded area that provides a locus of identity for those who reside there, space is thought of as 'a large self-contained gathering of people in a bounded locale (territory)'.[102] But, as Hubbard notes, the regional study of space became increasingly varied and flexible when, after the so-called 'spatial turn', problems of space and place became a key facet in disciplines such as sociology, literary studies, cultural studies, feminism and postcolonialism.[103]

In contrast to the notion of 'bound' space, cultural geographers think of space and place as being culturally produced and in constant development. As Massey noted, social relations and the places they occur are everywhere, and 'imbued with power and meaning and

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[100] Woodman's relationship with her surroundings was only acknowledged in 2014 with the publication of Gabriel Schor's monograph, *Francesca Woodman: Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, ed. by Gabriele Schor, Elisabeth Bronfen (Vienna; New York: D.A.P., 2014), which offers broader, pluralistic readings of Woodman's photographic work.

[101] Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, Gill Valentine, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 5.

[102] Hubbard, p. 5.

[103] Hubbard, p. 2.

symbolism'.[104] For Massey, the politics of representation converge with the power and resistance of the everyday. Places are complex; they are 'rational and contingent, experienced and understood differently by different people; they are multiple, contested, fluid, and uncertain'.[105] Expanding this line of enquiry to produce a more rigorous analysis of Woodman's work in conjunction with her contemporaries is essential, not only for her critical reception but in challenging how scholars think of the body and its relation to space while exposing the complex power relations of inserting an Other into a pre-existing space.

The question 'Where is Francesca Woodman?' initially seems short-sighted. The literal response that Woodman is deceased is unsatisfying and accepting this response halts the conversation around her photography and the issue of place. However, the question is also liberating as it suggests her work can surpass the 'territorial' disputes of each discursive trend. Woodman is not *solely* defined by 1980s feminism, the psychoanalytic readings following the 1990s, or by performativity in the early 2000s, but these interpretations do leave their mark. By asking 'Where?' and being unable to provide a definite answer, the question emphasises Woodman's physical movement as well as her movement in scholarly discourse. Considering the artist's placement allows critics to surpass the question of 'who', as well as the confines of the art historical canon, to pursue alternative readings of the artist's lifework. 'Where?' highlights the ambiguity and instability of Woodman's posthumous position, but it also demands a space for the artist and all of her visual incoherencies and multiplicities.

It is important to note that asking 'Where is Francesca Woodman?' places the artist in a network of power which is all-encompassing where Woodman as a historical individual is in opposition to her position as an "outsider". As Michel Foucault argued in *The History of Sexuality* (1978):

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[104] Massey, p, 3.
[105] Hubbard, *Key Thinkers*, p. 6.

> Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. … Power is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere.[106]

Try as we might, we can never get out of place or away from power. 'Location' and 'dislocation' are mutually sustaining and often indistinguishable sources of power: as Edward Casey notes, 'to be somewhere is to be in place and therefore to be subject to its power, to be part of its action, acting on its scene'.[107] The desire to locate Woodman assumes that her placement within a pre-existing framework translates to an increase of power; however, Casey's comment also emphasises the reciprocal pull between place and its inhabitant. It highlights how Woodman's gestures, no matter how small, are part of a more extensive system of actions and reactions.

I am aware of the problems of writing such an account, namely that choosing Woodman as a topic of study privileges her as a key creative figure worthy of taking up space—which simultaneously marginalises other artists working during this period—and that attempting to place Woodman in the context of her own time constructs a particular narrative. Blocker summarises the complexities of locating another:

> The question, ['Where?'] is a metaphor for the very task of writing this study or any other historically driven analysis. ['Where is Francesca Woodman?'] also means, Where can history locate her? — when locate means both "accidentally to find" and "intentionally position."[108]

Any attempt to understand Woodman is an attempt to locate her in a place that is recognisable, which is also a space constituted by ourselves.[109] Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge

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106 Michel Foucault (1978), *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 93.
107 Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 23.
108 Blocker, p. 4.
109 Blocker shares this outlook when she approached Ana Mendieta's work. See p. 134.

how Woodman engages with the problem of finding and creating spaces of self-representation to generate new interpretations of her work and open alternative intellectual dialogues.

My thesis considers Woodman amongst her artistic intertextuality and contemporaries in the 1970s and early 1980s, with a particular focus on New York City due to the scale of its economic problems and urban deterioration, in addition to its popularity as a creative centre among artists. It was in New York that Woodman created some of her most compelling work concerning the problems of placement, and where her career culminated. Nonetheless, I have deliberately chosen not to present Woodman's photographs chronologically or grouped by location in order to avoid a linear teleology. By presenting Woodman's images across time and from various locations—namely Boulder, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; New Hampshire; New York City; and occasionally Rome and Antella in Italy—viewers can comprehend not only the consistency of Woodman's aesthetic but also her overall penchant for place.

My methodology brings feminist politics, the phenomenology of space and the materiality of photography into conversation by comparing Woodman's work with several post-war American artists. I chose to compare Woodman to artists like Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Gordon Matta-Clark and Agnes Denes due to the visual similarities in their work. Artistic comparison is valuable as it opens new avenues of interpretation and prompts viewers to consider various themes that connect seemingly disparate artists. I explicitly draw inspiration from the content of Woodman's photographs. By closely engaging with the images on their own terms, we are able to shift away from the artist's biography. I also employ a variety of other sources, including diary entries and personal interviews, in an attempt to open an alternative line of enquiry and produce new original readings of Woodman's photography concerning the body, place and gender.

Through a spatial lens, critics can group Woodman's photographs into three spatial themes: Chapter One is set against the context of the women's movement and focuses on the messiness of Woodman's interior spaces through the motif of the house and its domestic trappings. In addition to comparing Woodman's interiors with Chicago's and Schapiro's *Womanhouse* project (1972), I employ theories of the everyday and of dust as a disruptive force to challenge the idea that Woodman's house is a site of repression and entrapment, and to open new interdisciplinary dialogues around her interiors as playful sensory environments.

Expanding on Woodman's everyday messy environments, Chapter Two explores haptic liminal spaces through her depiction of squalid, abandoned (sub)urban environments. By juxtaposing Woodman's abandoned house in Providence, Rhode Island (1975-1978), and other images of deteriorated spaces, with Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (1974), scholars can challenge traditional notions of dwelling, as seen through Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological intimate dwelling space. While Bachelard's theory romanticises the house as a site of reverie for the (male) dreamer, Woodman and Matta-Clark highlight the areas this theory does not accommodate, namely gender and material experience. Scholars can interpret the over-staging of Woodman's environment as an attempt to inhabit a space which has lost its original function: a gesture which references the homelessness, crime and building abandonment that was rife after the economic downturn following America's fiscal crisis (1970s).

Finally, Chapter Three focuses on exterior space through Woodman's photographic depictions of her natural environment in Boulder, Colorado; Andover, Massachusetts; and the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire. Set against the context of emerging American environmentalism and the Land Art movement, I argue Woodman's work challenges traditional depictions of woman-as-nature, as exemplified by Don Gayton's theory of 'primal landscapes'. By carefully unpacking the mythic readings which influenced her reception, I

suggest Woodman's work displays contemporary environmental concerns and explores the body's transformative potential with its surroundings through her posthuman hybridity with flora and fauna, where body-spatial boundaries are thoroughly disturbed and redrawn.

Notions of space and place, which I use interchangeably, are not merely gestural practices or backdrops for the artist's performances. Considering Woodman's photography under the rubric of spatial discourse offers a more holistic and flexible understanding of the artist's work, that includes the disorder and displacement in Woodman's images. Aside from representing concerns around women's representation and the difficulty of forming a stable identity, Woodman's photographs are intrinsically concerned with spatial manipulation and the materiality of her surroundings. Photographic space is altered by using mirrors as props, or by blurring and camouflaging her body with decorative and natural objects, such as wallpaper, furniture and tree bark. For instance, as I show in Chapter Two, Woodman expands and collapses space almost repetitiously, by distorting and dissecting her surroundings with architectural elements and unusual photographic perspectives.

Similarly, imagined locations emerge out of recycled domestic objects, as seen in *Blueprints for a Temple* (1980) (Figure 59). Through its collaged effect, the image shows that Woodman is in a reciprocal relationship with her surroundings, or as Edward Casey succinctly puts it, 'just as every place is encultured, so every culture is implaced'.[110] As commentaries on place and the power it has to shape and entangle its inhabitants, the areas Woodman photographed were carefully selected and staged. The abandoned house, her dusty studio or the natural surroundings of New Hampshire all root the artist in a particular time. By bringing her work into conjunction with that of artists like Chicago, Schapiro, Matta-Clark and others, critics can forge original interpretations of seemingly disparate artists, who shared visual motifs, spatial concerns and artistic contexts. The convergence of dust and debris within the

[110] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. 31.

borders of the photographic frame reminds viewers that the spaces where art intersects life are often indiscernible. If Woodman does not fit easily into any established discourse, it is perhaps because life itself is rarely methodical or well-organised.

New York: A Series of Crises

Before I consider Woodman's use of dust and themes of domesticity in Chapter One, it is necessary to contextualise when and where she lived and worked to gain a broader understanding of the external factors that influenced her photographs. I chose to focus specifically on New York City and its surrounding suburban areas as Woodman's artistic career came to a pinnacle here. In my opinion, she created some of her most compelling images in the city, particularly when considering themes of place and space. While I chose to analyse a few photographs taken in Rome, Italy, due to their shared themes of domesticity or the artist's manipulation of space; I do not focus on the country specifically for the sake of consistency. Woodman's photographs of Rome could be a study in themselves, and there is unfortunately not enough room to explore them here.

In many ways, scholars can read Woodman's work as a response to the series of economic, social and environmental crises New York experienced during the 1970s. The city and much of the Western world was experiencing deep fiscal crisis and economic stagnation, high rates of unemployment coincided with high inflation. As Kim Phillips-Fein notes, the city's breakdown was the result of various factors:

> the dismantling of the urban manufacturing economy, the flights of companies to the poorer parts of the world [where manufacturing costs and wages were cheaper and local governments were more compliant], and the construction of highways which made suburban life more appealing.[111]

111 Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), p. 314.

These factors had a significant impact on the movement of social networks and communities, such as the poor, ethnic minorities, the middle class, and young artists like Woodman. She also worked during a period of intense artistic experimentation, civil and racial tensions and intensive political activism where spatial politics saturated people's everyday environment. For instance, territorial disputes emerged between students and the National Guard at Kent State University (1970) as did the violence at Stonewall in 1969; by the mid-1970s, liberal feminists attempted to distance themselves from more radical elements of the Women's Liberation Movement by rebranding the movement as the Women's Movement, and there was continual disagreement between the people and its government. As Blocker notes, conceptual art, earthworks, body art, performance, video, installation and sculptural works attempted to redefine the spaces in which people viewed art while integrating the audience into artistic production.[112] My point is, that creative expression at this time was diverse and intrinsically linked to its turbulent surroundings.

Through Woodman's photographs, I have highlighted three key socio-economic themes which her work responds to: the monotony of suburbia, problems of vagrancy and anxieties surrounding environmental decline. Kenneth T. Jackson identifies five essential features of suburbanisation in his publication, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (1985): first, suburban houses were architecturally uniform; second, their population density was low; third, suburban housing often occurred in peripheral locations. Fourth, new houses were readily available due to mass production techniques, government financing, low interest rates and high wages. Lastly, suburbia maintained an exclusive image of economic and racial homogeneity, exasperated by zoning laws and the ostracisation of low-

[112] Blocker, p. 5.

income minority groups to nearby slums on the outskirts of the city.[113] While the lure of standardised and functional suburban lifestyle tempted many white middle-class families to leave the city, New York City's increased urban degradation, congestion and crime rates also encouraged many Americans to relocate to the suburbs. In images like Figures 5 and 12, Woodman disrupts the predictability of the suburban home by littering the abandoned site with dust and debris. The artist presents everyday life and domestic surroundings as both monotonous and strange acts.

Aside from depicting the everyday, Woodman displays the difficulty of assimilating oneself to a particular location through visual references to vagrancy. In addition to the financial downturn, vagrancy was fuelled by a range of inextricable factors. As Joel Blau notes, these included: cutbacks to social welfare, reductions to affordable housing in the 1970s—partially influenced by landlords' successful undermining of the rent-control system—and the proliferation of low-wage jobs.[114] The poor also 'struggled against the impact of crime, drugs, and unemployment',[115] scholars broadly agree that a significant factor in producing homelessness was the deinstitutionalisation of people with mental health conditions.[116] Not that Woodman was ever homeless, but her images of deteriorating interiors and make-shift shelters (Figure 29) display the tensions surrounding normative dwelling spaces, while emphasising New York's substandard housing and declining economic infrastructure.

In addition to concerns surrounding vagrancy and inadequate housing, anxieties around pollution and the environment were also apparent in America during the 1970s and early 1980s. Rachel Carson's publication, *Silent Spring* (1962), heightened public concerns about air and

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113 Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 241.
114 Blau, p. 10; and, Thomas J. Main, *Homelessness in New York City: Policy Making from Koch to de Blasio* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), p. 65.
115 Blau, p. 11.
116 Thomas J. Main, *Homelessness in New York City: Policy Making from Koch to de Blasio* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), p. 63.

water pollution, in addition to the sinister aspects of technological progress. Chemicals and synthetics, Carson argued, poisoned not only the environment but also infected America's wildlife and humanity. A series of manmade disasters—such as oil-rig fires—and cuts to municipal services enhanced public apprehensions about pollution and the environment. Sanitation workers went on strike in 1975, leaving refuse piling up in the streets; two years later, amid a heatwave, New York experienced a blackout which shut down the city and sparked looting, arson and civil unrest. While concerns over the environment saw significant social, legislative and administrative developments through the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (1971), unease around the environment can also be read in Woodman's images of Boulder, Colorado (1976) and at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire (1980). These grainy and often desolate landscapes appear apocalyptic as tree roots often ensnare the artist or she is exposed, lying on cracked earth. Woodman's natural surroundings are visually compelling and parallel her abandoned interiors as contested and petrified sites.

Throughout her oeuvre, Woodman displays a body in tension with its surroundings and her photography, along with the work of her contemporaries, is a significant component in constructing a space to draw upon and critique the surrounding economic, social and environmental crises of her time. The places Woodman situates herself may be dirty, neglected and overgrown, but they are also carefully considered. Moreover, her photographs suggest that the materiality of place—whether they are interior, exterior or liminal spaces—was worthy of artistic exploration as well as a key facet of identity formation.

Chapter One
Dust, Deterioration and the Everyday

Introduction

Set against the backdrop of social feminist movements, this chapter will reconsider Francesca Woodman's domestic interior spaces in conjunction with the *Womanhouse* project (1972) and theories of the everyday. Originally, Solomon-Godeau's influential article portrayed Woodman's *House* as a violent and repressive space that physically consumed the young female artist. Her struggle against the surrounding architecture was interpreted by scholars as a revolt against the traditional domestic setting which confines women to the private sphere. But when considered in the same realm as the work of Chicago or Schapiro, Woodman's interior spaces can be viewed as 'meeting places', as collaborative creative spaces where the everyday routines of setting the table, eating and dusting become small subversive acts of (dis)placement.[1]

Armstrong was the first to note the artist's decrepit surroundings in her publication 'Francesca Woodman: A Ghost in the House of the Woman Artist' (2006), stating Woodman's images 'of very old houses (inhabited by very young bodies)' are indicative of an identity on the threshold 'between childhood and adulthood'.[2] Yet it was Meghan Thurston who explored this further when she wrote that the artist appears 'at home in dust' in her provocative article ''At Home in Dust': Francesca Woodman's *House Series*, Revisited' (2010).[3] Dust has negative connotations of disorderliness and impurity, of carelessness and of being unkempt,

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1 My reference to 'meeting places' differs from Meaghan Thurston, who employed Bernard Tschumi's theory to describe Woodman's ability to 'move across architectural boundaries'. See, Meaghan Thurston, '''At Home in Dust': Francesca Woodman's *House Series*, Revisited', *FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts* 11, (2010), pp. 1-13. <http://www.forumjournal.org/article/view/658/942> [date accessed: 30 May 2016].

2 Armstrong, p. 348; p. 413.

3 Thurston, p. 1.

which marks out Woodman's domestic space as a site of subversion. 'Dusty', as Michael Marder notes, 'can also mean "old-fashioned" or "outdated"' which again lends itself to the narrative of displacement that surrounds the artist. Yet, dust is also a marker of elapsed time and of deteriorated matter. The remnants of threads, hair and skin, dust is redistributed as one tries to eliminate them. Dust is a material trace.[4]

I will further the conversation between Solomon-Godeau, Armstrong and Thurston by emphasising dust's significant role as a disruptive force while offering an increasingly nuanced interpretation of Woodman's work. The accumulation of dust not only disturbs the cleanliness of the house, but it also raises questions about the materiality of being. Importantly, the artist added dust to her surroundings, scattering floorboards with debris, re-pasting the walls with wallpaper while peeling other sections away. Woodman, it seems, does not merely disappear into the volatile space of the house but also leaves extensive traces of her physical existence. To think that our dwelling spaces can be dust-free, if only for a short amount of time, is to suggest we can also purge the body. Woodman's apparent comfort with dust and debris in turn draws attention to her being, not her 'preoccupation with death and disappearance within the visible field'.[5] She does not choose to anonymise herself by cleaning her surroundings and erasing traces of dirt; instead, she reasserts her visibility through filth and draws attention to other senses beside the visual, such as touch and embodied experience. But before exploring this in more depth, I will consider the prior scholarship surrounding Woodman's engagement with place, and why her work warrants a broader theoretical approach.

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4 Michael Marder, *Dust* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 8.
5 Phelan, 'Death and the Image One More Time', pp. 990-991.

Considering 'the Everyday' in Woodman's Work

Previous critical analyses of Woodman's photographic locations centred solely on women's confinement to the home. While Woodman was never explicitly affiliated with the politics of the second-wave feminist movement in America, Solomon-Godeau suggests that her work displays 'proto-feminist intent' through the artist's juxtaposition of dilapidated locations with her young, female body. For Solomon-Godeau, the photographs respond to patriarchal representations of the female body and its place within the domestic sphere. The abandoned house confines its inhabitant through domestic objects. Referring to an untitled photograph, Woodman is 'swallowed by the fireplace', Solomon-Godeau wrote. The artist 'presents herself as a living sacrifice to the domain'.[6] Woodman's apparent 'self-sacrifice' implies that the artist is both victim and martyr, which heightens her romanticised prodigal status further and suggests all women felt equally repressed in the home. Since Solomon-Godeau's publication, the motif of the house has undergone numerous transformations in artistic depictions, metamorphosing from the ideal domestic refuge, to a site of entrapment and haunting and, more recently, to a space of playful disorder.[7] Not only is the house an oppressive space, but it also encapsulates the sublime. I do not refer to the sublime in the traditional romantic sense. Instead, Woodman's decaying interiors is akin to the sublime's effect in Gothic literature. Akin to the Gothic sublime, there is a sense of confusion and delight among the mess and dirt in Woodman's photographs. Viewers see the artist wrestle against her surroundings, but she also leaps and dances across space. Woodman's decrepit interiors stress the limits of the body, but they also display a sense of fascination and wonder. An alternative response to Woodman's work is essential to display the interplay between the photograph, theory and the sensory; and additionally, to convey the messiness, complexity and elusiveness of the house and daily life.

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[6] Solomon-Godeau, p. 252. (See Figure 5).

[7] The motif of the house as a site of entrapment was prominent in nineteenth-century fiction, particularly in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892).

In contrast to Solomon-Godeau, Thurston convincingly argues that the *House* series reflects Woodman's photographic attempt to inhabit deteriorated sites, not only as a gendered construct, but also as a figure engaged in an 'adaptive process with her environment'.[8] To further Thurston's reading, and to achieve a more nuanced perspective of the artist, I argue that scholars must consider Woodman's photographs in relation to theories of the everyday. Due to their complexity, both theories of the everyday and Woodman's images warrant an interdisciplinary approach. While the quotidian emphasises the routine monotony of life, it is also associated with the overlooked, the unnoticed and the alienated. The everyday can also be 'accidentally miraculous' due to its serendipitous nature.[9] Woodman's work shares these traits: as a figure who is often presented as a 'mere schoolgirl' or a 'prodigal artist', Woodman is overlooked, alienated and recalled into our cultural consciousness. Akin to dust, Woodman existed 'below the threshold of the noticed' in the time she worked.[10] Through her photography, she appears to be 'everywhere and nowhere at the same time', which is emphasised through her visual motif of blurring.[11] Woodman, I argue, drags everything into view. Messiness and the haptic come into focus through her act of photographing, displaying a wider concern with the monotony and wonder of her everyday environment.[12]

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8 Thurston, p. 4.
9 Geoff Dyer quoted in Stephen Johnstone (ed.), *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2008), p. 9.
10 Johnstone, p. 13.
11 Johnstone, p. 13.
12 Notions of 'wonder' and the 'accidentally miraculous' are common in writings on surrealism, especially in André Breton's *Nadja* (1928), which Woodman read and took inspiration from.

Figure 2 Douglas D. Prince, *Francesca Woodman in her Studio*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976-1979. 9 x 9 in. (22.89 x 22.89 cm). Black-and-white photograph printed on 11 x 14 in. (27.94 x 35.56 cm) on Canson Platine Fiber Rag paper.

Woodman's attraction to dusty locations correlates with the notion that she is a figure who is out of place. Appearing 'at home in dust', one gets the impression that she is transient, like the debris which often surrounds her.[13] But Woodman's dilapidated environment emphasises more than her youthfulness or even her body. I suggest that the juxtaposition of aged buildings and the artist's body accentuates her everyday sensory environment, which is indivisible from the body. Woodman's concern with the haptic is evident in a photograph taken by Douglas Prince between 1976 and 1979. *Francesca Woodman in her Studio* (Figure 2) displays the corner of an apartment with high ceilings and large square-paned windows. Pale patterned fabrics cover the far wall and the light casts geometric patterns upon it, causing a superimposed layer of shapes. A large rectangular wooden mirror is propped against the wall;

[13] Thurston, p. 1.

polka-dot bunting decorates its length. Two plush winged armchairs, possibly upholstered in velvet, add a sense of opulence to the room. They also make the space feel strangely dated yet simultaneously timeless: one gets the sense that this furniture does not quite fit into its surroundings. Perhaps the furniture was already in the apartment when Woodman moved in, having belonged to a previous tenant, or maybe it was bought at a flea market.[14] A pile of clothes is heaped onto one chair, the arm of a jumper dangles over its side and what looks like a coat covers the back of the armchair. Woodman sits in the other chair which occupies the corner of the studio; her shoulders are hunched as her hands grip onto the arms of the chair. Woodman's legs are slightly spread, the skirt of her patterned dress creases in the gap and she fixes our gaze. Where should the viewer look? It is rare to make eye contact with the artist and there is something disconcerting in the permanence of *her* gaze. The eye contact, the design of the chair and the sitter's posture with the addition of knee-length leather boots allude to a sense of masculinity and mastery over her domain. Woodman's imitation of male dominance complicates the function of the space: it is a hybrid space where (masculine) art and (feminine) domesticity are blurred. Her surroundings are ambiguous; Woodman is unapologetic in her messiness and the disturbance of her domestic space.

The closer the viewer looks, the more they see: judging by the small plastic alarm clock, the image was taken in the afternoon around half-past two; there are papers strewn on a make-shift table to the artist's left, a stack of books on the windowsill, a vase with a single flower, trailing houseplants to the right of the frame, a bedside lamp set on the floor in front of what appears to be a radio. One of the windowpanes is boarded up with a wooden panel, suggesting that the apartment's physical disrepair merges with its bohemian aesthetic. Focusing on dirt, dust and decay at the periphery of this photographic site holds wider implications, as 'filth

[14] A practice Woodman and her friends were keen on. See, Berne, Betsy, 'To Tell the Truth', *Francesca Woodman's Photographs 1975-1980*. Exh. cat. Marian Goodman Gallery (New York, 2004), pp. 3-6.

represents a cultural location at which the human body, social hierarchy, psychological subjectivity, and material objects converge'.[15] Not only that, reflections on dirt call into question the materiality of being. The ambiguity of the space extends to Woodman herself: her crumpled dress, the top layered beneath it, the sleeves bunched at the elbows, all echo the pile of clothing on the adjacent armchair. Woodman merges with her surrounding disorder. This messiness, as Phil Dunham notes, makes it impossible to draw 'a line … between the human and nonhuman worlds'.[16] Are her surroundings an extension of the artist's creative process, or does she become part of her messy environment? By drawing attention to the tactility of her surroundings, Woodman's 'environmental portrait' suggests that the conjunction of art and living is not always a neat process; dirt does not equate to a material erasure of life but in fact adds to the everyday environment; and that the blurring between the human, nonhuman and the architectural cannot be separated from where you are or what you do. Woodman's depiction of dirt not only disrupts the order of being, but also draws the viewer's attention to a body that touches and feels within a place that is equally material.

If Woodman expresses what it feels like to inhabit chaotic and untidy spaces, the lines between dirt and purity are not discernible either.[17] Filth and dirt are relative to the pre-existing social order, being both 'dangerously polluting and bounteously providing'.[18] Filth is in the eye of the beholder, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas notes: 'There is no such thing as absolute dirt … Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.'[19] Dirt's ambiguous nature was highlighted by

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[15] William A. Cohen, Ryan Johnson, *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2005), viii.

[16] Phil Dunham, 'Dust' in Stephan Harrison, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2004), p. 100.

[17] Filth was a volatile element of contemporary culture which held multiple meanings: filth was associated with physical deterioration and social scandal, but waste and refuse reinforced the city's image as a 'gritty' cultural centre that attracted young creatives to its centre.

[18] Cohen, Johnson, xvii.

[19] Mary Douglas (1966) *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

Douglas's comparative study, *Purity and Danger* (1966), which laid the foundations for a theory of filth and decay. Douglas worked with a structural definition of dirt as 'matter out of place', that nothing is inherently dirty, but our idea of dirt is comprised of two entities: our care for hygiene and a respect for conventions.[20] So, matter appears to be in the wrong location when it violates our conventional sense of order. When combined, these notions of purity, impurity and their apparent 'correct placement' create the illusory experience of stable and controllable surroundings. Ultimately, this search for transparency resists change by attempting to force lived experience into neat, unambiguous categories, much like the scholarship surrounding Woodman, which categorises the artist within 'each decade's dominant trope' in a bid to understand her.[21]

Just as Woodman's images compel viewers, they are captivated by what John Roberts terms 'the lure of the ordinary' – the 'normally unnoticed, trivial, and repetitive actions' and routines which comprise daily life.[22] Behind their enchanting eeriness and fragility, Woodman's photographs supposedly depict the 'low (or Lower East Side) social status of its unpaid, young girlfriend models and ratty East Village bathrooms (before gentrification)', which Raymond believes creates 'an uncanny architectural space'.[23] While Woodman's blurred aesthetic, penchant for monochrome printing techniques and decrepit photographic settings lend themselves to this evocation of the uncanny, Raymond's equation of Woodman's uncanniness to the 'low social status' of Lower East Side artists is slightly exaggerated: the Lower East Side was an artistic hotbed during the 1970s. Nevertheless, Woodman is simultaneously in and out of place throughout her images, visible yet invisible among the chaos of her studio space and abandoned locations further afield. She depicts a very specific and

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[20] Douglas, p. 8.
[21] Raymond, *Kantian Sublime*, p. 11.
[22] John Roberts quoted in Johnstone, p. 12.
[23] Claire Raymond, *Francesca Woodman's Dark Gaze: The Diazotypes and Other Late Works* (London, Routledge, 2016), p. 36.

unusual appearance of everyday life, one of comfort amidst seemingly uninhabitable locations. This not only disrupts traditional depictions of domestic cleanliness and wellbeing, but also raises larger questions over why the everyday matters, and how its multifaceted nature can be presented and transformed through Woodman's photography. Woodman's affinity for dust is a powerful subversive tool which simultaneously challenges the traditional order of the home while visualising the artist's presence in the world. In other words, ignoring the material conditions where Woodman worked limits scholarly understanding of her, and the specific visual tropes shared by a network of artists who strove to examine the complexity of the everyday.

Just as the accumulation of dust and debris in Woodman's work shows us that 'fitting in' is not always easy, Woodman and her contemporaries highlight how 'the relationship between art and life is never straightforward or transparent'.[24] This can be seen through Woodman's depictions of interior space and their conjunction with the *Womanhouse* project, created by Chicago, Schapiro and their group of students.[25]

A Brief Note on 'Women Artists'

So far, I have argued that a material approach to Woodman's work is necessary to create an increasingly nuanced view of the artist, the places she chose to work and the broader visual motifs she adopted. But before I turn my attention to her images, it is worth noting that while women like Chicago, Schapiro and many others gained prominence through their influential work and activism, setting a precedent for contemporary artists like Woodman, not all 'women artists' shared the same ideologies. While I employ the term 'women artists' it is necessary to

[24] Nikos Papastergiadis (1998), ''Everything That Surrounds': Art, Politics and Theories of the Everyday', in Stephen Johnstone (ed.) *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art*, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2008), pp. 68-75, (p. 68).

[25] My reading of *Womanhouse* is based on the photographs of the installation, rather than physical inhabitation of the space.

outline its limitations for the sake of transparency. Classifying a subsection of the art world as 'female' may lead to the assumption that there is an essential difference between art made by men and art made by women, which suggests women's art has particular 'feminine' qualities. Focusing on difference limits how scholars perceive and define art made by women and men alike, which is why I include a various artists and theorists in my interdisciplinary study.

Furthermore, as Imogen Racz notes, to presume all women produce the same work risks reducing their individual experiences, social backgrounds and collective cultures.[26] Many scholars have persuasively disputed this premise, including Pollock, Nochlin and Marsha Meskimmon.[27] Many artworks created by women shared visual tropes, such as domesticity, the home, the body and female sexuality, which were used as sources of power and expression to challenge their marginalisation. However, these themes also led Woodman to be branded 'narcissistic' and 'immature' by male art curators, who suggested her work was superficial due to the artist's youth, self-absorption and biological difference.[28] Also, the tropes Woodman employed, such as the nude female form, the domestic setting, and notions of confinement, led scholars like Solomon-Godeau to use Woodman's work as a vehicle for poststructural feminist motivations. While feminist readings of Woodman's work have become the norm, scholars should not assume that Woodman was consciously working with the same rubric or considered herself a 'feminist' due to the content of her work, as many women, who also classed themselves as artists, employed patterns and themes which centred around domesticity and the body.[29] Ultimately, Woodman did not need to self-identify as a feminist for her work to be productive for a feminist investigation of space and representation.

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[26] Imogen Racz, *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), p. 56.
[27] See: Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Linda Nochlin, 'Memoirs of an ad hoc art historian', in Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), pp. 6-33; Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).
[28] Baker, pp. 52-67.
[29] According to friend and roommate, Betsy Berne, Woodman did not class herself as a feminist artist although she was aware of the discourse. See, Berne, 'To Tell the Truth', 2014, p. 91.

The problem of space is also intrinsic in women's struggle for artistic representation and recognition. Women artists began to challenge the negative connotations associated with the home and domestic artforms in the late 1960s. Previously, women—predominantly middle-class and working-class housewives—adopted handcrafted practices within the private sphere and outside the realm of 'high' art. This gendering of public and private space was also prevalent in institutional structures. Racz notes how artists like Chicago, Schapiro and their students used feminist art to create a collective voice. In the early 1970s,

> there were no pre-existing frameworks of subject matter, techniques or histories to work within to counter the dominant understanding of what constituted art that had been ratified by the powerful forces of institutions, critics and historians.[30]

Racz's comment foregrounds the institutional practice of gender difference. With no previously established space for representation and creative exploration, many women struggled to pursue their art professionally. While Racz maintains these women 'reclaimed a hidden history of female artists, developed patterns and themes of making that were relevant to their needs and histories, and paved the way for future developments', caution must be taken not to over sensationalise feminist narratives, as 'paved the way' implies. In reality, organisations like the Women's Liberation Movement, the National Organisation for Women (NOW) and artistic collectives like the *Womanhouse* group melded, fragmented and faced internal factionalism.

Instead of disputing what makes women artists the same or different from their contemporaries, scholars need to question what these shared visual themes and spaces tell us about Woodman's work that viewers cannot find elsewhere. Through her photographs, Woodman emphasises the messiness of the everyday; these locations are static yet retain a sense of transience. Woodman demonstrates how taking up space is a fleeting action, but to see its significance requires a shift in the viewer's perception.

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[30] Racz, p. 56.

The House as a Borrowed Location

I am concerned with the problem of placement in Woodman's work, particularly the way she portrays the difficulty of 'fitting in' to her physical locations. In order to formulate new readings of Woodman's work and her material surroundings, critics like Solomon-Godeau need a different way of thinking about the role of the house that is not merely a backdrop for the artist to perform her creative identity. While the sites of Woodman's interiors are separated by time and physical location—whether in Boulder, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; Rome; Antella, Italy; or New York—they are continually recalled through Woodman's act of photography and the wider dissemination of the image. I position Woodman's photographs as a series of 'borrowed locations', due to her momentary occupation of physical sites and her visual thematisation of transience. Her images not only emphasise the effect the physical environment has upon the body, but also highlight the importance of acknowledging the material in photography and its remarkable influence on the everyday.

While Woodman's abandoned interiors raise questions of cleanliness and the process of establishing a sense of place within a turbulent environment, the motif of the house has undergone many physical and symbolic transformations. Engagement with the home has been a major theme in post-war art as an increase in radical political activism during the 1960s and 1970s helped alter the way domestic space was thought about in everyday life. Martha Rosler was one of the first female artists who addressed issues of fragmentation, societal instability and women's confinement to the home through her photomontages, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-1972), which drew attention to gender stereotypes within the home. American suburban housewives appeared to have everything—a comfortable home, healthy family, education and white goods which saved time and labour—yet Betty Friedan and other

feminist scholars argued that these women felt trapped and isolated by an idealised depiction of domestic femininity. According to Friedan, the housewife was left asking, 'Is this all?'[31]

Figure 3 Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, *Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, Feminist Art Program at CalArts, 1972. Size unknown. Digital pint. The Getty Research Institute, 89-B23677.

If idealised depictions of domesticity confined women to monotonous routines, as well as limited social roles and aspirations, as Friedan argued, then *Womanhouse* depicted the domestic sphere as a site of disorder and experimentation, enabling women artists to subvert the traditional societal expectations that defined them and their homes. The problem of 'fitting in' to the home is displayed through the artists' framing of domestic space. The above image appears on the original *Womanhouse* exhibition catalogue, designed by Sheila Levrant de

[31] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 15.

Bretteville (1940-) (Figure 3). Chicago and Schapiro sit at the top of a flight of concrete steps. They appear to be engaged in deep conversation which implies a shared perception. They also seem to be unaware of the camera, which emphasises both the intensity of the conversation, but also the comfort the pair feel at the Mariposa mansion. Vegetation grows on either side of the entrance way, emphasising the central framing of the image and the artists' visual and metaphoric elevated status. The women are doubly framed, by the rectangular doorway behind them, and again by the outline of house. Seemingly, the photograph of a house within a house is an all-encompassing image of dwelling and creative collaboration, adding to the narrative that the *Womanhouse* project emerged out of a collective vision.

But on closer inspection, the photograph alludes to more. The outline is a stereotypical portrayal of a house, one which a child might draw – a square topped with a triangular roof. While the framing of the image draws on elements of childishness and playfulness, which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter, the outline of the house also skews the viewer's perception of interiority and exteriority, as the women are simultaneously positioned inside and outside. Are they confined, or can they come and go as they please? Chicago and Schapiro's ambiguous placement disrupts the traditional order of dwelling, of a women's place being in the home. But the outline of the house creates the illusion of transparency which Niko Papastergiadis argues cannot exist between art and everyday life.[32] In this sense, the black outline functions as a type of greenhouse, evoking similarly complex connotations as its sister-structure, the home. While the greenhouse is associated with preservation, sustainability and self-sufficiency—an ethos which *Womanhouse* sought to represent—the greenhouse is also a site where nature is transplanted, contained and displayed.[33] Just as viewers can see through the windows of the greenhouse, there is a sense that Chicago and Schapiro do not know they

[32] Papastergiadis, p. 68.
[33] Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 171.

are being observed. While the collective experience of *Womanhouse* was a place for creativity to thrive, it was nevertheless a regulated environment due to its pre-existing structure and methods of construction. Although de Bretteville's design acts as a symbol of the *Womanhouse* project and the ideals it stood for, her aesthetic motif nevertheless encapsulates the difficulties surrounding a sense of place.

Tensions in the work of Woodman and *Womanhouse* are multifaceted. The difficulty of 'fitting in' is displayed through a number of shared visual motifs, such as disorder, domesticity and the figure of the doll. These motifs are predicated on the artists' choice of location: the repurposed house. That both Woodman and the *Womanhouse* group created their most renowned work in borrowed locations is particularly noteworthy, especially when considering discourses of the everyday. Like the majority of Woodman's photographs which portrayed fragile, derelict interiors, *Womanhouse* was a temporary installation set within a dilapidated 75-year-old mansion located at 533 N. Mariposa Street, a rundown section of Hollywood.[34] After being encouraged by the art historian Paula Harper to apply their ideas to the wider world, students in the California Institute of the Arts Feminist Art Program visited the Halls of Records and found the home owner to be Amanda Psalter. Chicago, Schapiro, Faith Wilding and other artists described their intentions to the Psalter family to explore the history of gender difference and traditional domestic roles in the home. The Mariposa mansion was granted to the group for a three-month period through a special lease agreement, after which the house would be demolished.

By contrast, Woodman decided to use the abandoned house in Providence, Rhode Island, after exploring the area in which she lived and studied. According to Raymond, it is likely that Woodman was aware of the Feminist Art Program (FAP) at Fresno State College

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[34] *Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, ed. by Judy Chicago; Miriam Schapiro (California Institute of the Arts; Through the Flower, 1972) (digital reprint). See also, Vicki Hodgetts, 'The Kitchen at Mariposa', found in Miriam Schapiro's Papers (Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University, 1972) (unpublished essay), p. 3.

(now California State University), the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and the *Womanhouse* project due to its prominent exhibition in 1972, and through her education at RISD.[35] Indeed, Raymond believes the influence of '*Womanhouse* is fateful in Woodman's photographs' not only as a feminist precursor but also as a site of contention.[36] She continues: 'Like the creators of *Womanhouse*, Woodman seeks an abandoned house in which to create her work. But if *Womanhouse* is a kind of public protest art, Woodman takes a turn to the interior in her housework.'[37] Does 'fateful' mean *Womanhouse* influenced Woodman's depiction of space? Or is the reference more ominous, that *Womanhouse* leaves a lingering trace within Woodman's photographic oeuvre? Perhaps Chicago's and Schapiro's work can have dual effects. However, differentiating the artists' sites by their public and private functions is too simplistic and neat. Both Woodman's house and *Womanhouse* served dual functions as buildings and art objects, suggesting houses can change and transcend their pre-existing boundaries. Aside from epitomising feminist ideals, the house was also a site of physical and social tension, an aspect which is often overlooked. When coupled with Woodman's work, *Womanhouse* can be seen as a series of difficult, yet playful, spaces which challenge the viewer's understanding of shared visual motifs and their influence on the everyday as a sensory realm. The home is 'no longer a dwelling but the untold story of life being lived', and it is both messy and miraculous.[38]

In addition to categorising these sites as 'abandoned' or 'decaying', I also wish to emphasise Woodman's house and the *Womanhouse* project as 'borrowed spaces', as the latter allows for artistic exploration of the site of abandonment. In his publication, *The Practice of*

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[35] The original FAP was developed by Chicago at Fresno State College in 1970. After Chicago left for CalArts in 1971, the class was continued by Rita Yokoi from 1971-1973 and then by Joyce Aiken from 1973-1992. See, Jennie Klein, '"Teaching to Transgress": Rita Yokoi and the Fresno Feminist Art Program' *Entering the Picture: Judy Chicago, The Fresno Feminist Art Program, and the Collective Visions of Women Artists*, ed. by Jill Fields (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 132-144.
[36] Claire Raymond, *Women Photographers and the Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 109.
[37] Raymond, *Women Photographers and the Feminist Aesthetics*, p. 109.
[38] John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart Brief as Photos* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 64.

Everyday Life (1980), spatial theorist Michel de Certeau defined 'borrowed space' as transient moments. According to de Certeau, our ability to place ourselves in the present and to create meaning from our experiences is akin to leasing an apartment.[39] In the works of Woodman and *Womanhouse*, 'borrowed space' is displayed literally through the artists' physical insertion into abandoned and neglected spaces. As a result, Woodman and the *Womanhouse* project show the transience of everyday life as they manipulate domestic space.

Similarly, Woodman's interiors and *Womanhouse* show how 'living does not easily organize itself into a continuous narrative', while the practice of living is not predetermined by a particular architectural space.[40] This is evident through the composition of *Womanhouse*. The piece comprised 25 mixed-media environments and six performances, in which each room embodied a separate art piece, serving as a type of snapshot, offering a glimpse into a hidden domestic life. Meanwhile, throughout Woodman's photography, the sense of a linear narrative is disrupted by her difficulty of physically fitting into her adopted locations. Shared visual cues also disrupt the linearity of time, Woodman's props and poses often reference other art historical works and effectively recall a previous era, as I show in Chapter Three.

In the following sections, I argue that the Providence house and the Mariposa mansion are furnished with symbols of domesticity, dust and disorder, in an attempt to leave a trace, a 'fingerprint of … social identity', to show how the everyday can encapsulate contention, as well as banality and wonder.[41] Instead of reproducing a linear narrative which does not reflect how Woodman lived and worked, considering her photographic locations as borrowed spaces allows for wider critical interpretation and everyday transformation.

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[39] Michel de Certeau, (1980) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 3rd edn. (Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), xxi.
[40] James Clifford, George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkley, Los Angeles: University California Press, 1986), p. 106.
[41] Papastergiadis, p. 72.

Negotiating Space: Woodman's Interiors and the *Womanhouse* project

So far, I have argued for a more flexible approach to Woodman's work by considering her photographs as depictions of complex everyday spaces that encapsulate the banality and wonder of her messy environments. In this section I suggest that the problem of 'fitting in' raises issues around the body and its interchange with the material environment. This interchange, I believe, can be seen through Woodman's movement, her framing of photographic spaces and her bodily tension as she holds specific poses for the camera. The problem of 'fitting in' is not only applicable to Woodman's aesthetic or the scholarly discourse around her work. Issues of representation and finding a dwelling place were also evident through social and civil unrest. This unease was particularly prominent through the imposition of vagrancy laws and substandard housing, as I argue in Chapter Two.

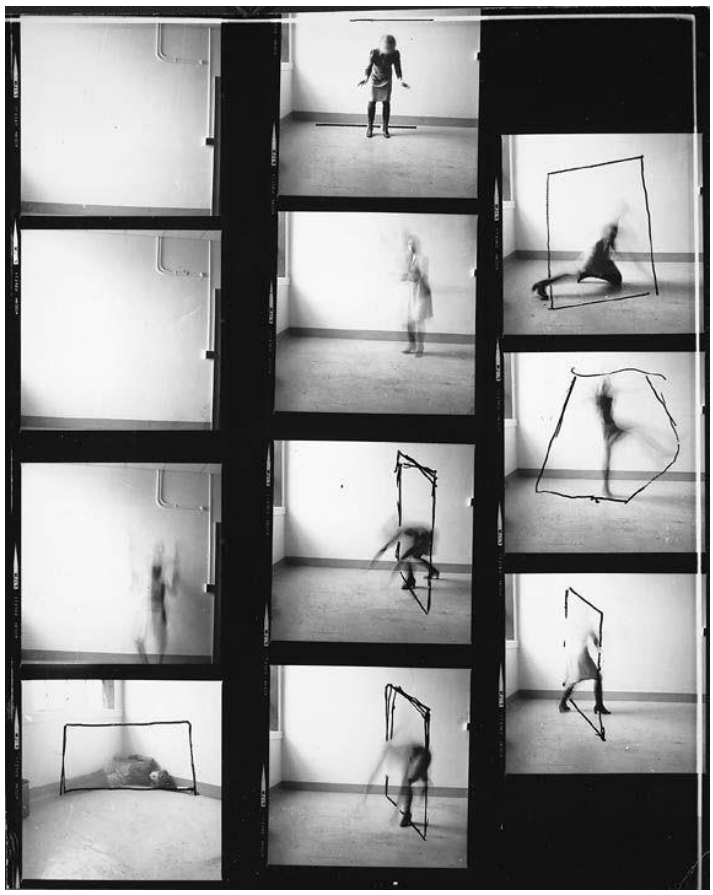

Figure 4 Francesca Woodman, *Study for Space²*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1978. Size unknown. Contact sheet.

Woodman's use of framing in *Study for Space²* is comparable to the front cover of *Womanhouse* (Figure 3). The contact sheet displays eleven square photographs in three linear strips. The first pair of images in the top left of the frame displays a whitewashed interior wall. A dark skirting board runs along the bottom of the frame, while a light switch and electrical wires interconnect in the top-right-hand corner of the image. Unlike *Womanhouse*, Woodman captures a seemingly uninhabited space. But in the photographs that follow, her figure seems to appear in front of the camera. The artist fits her body into corners; she lunges, crouches and waves her limbs sporadically. Her gesticulations form a type of visual language where she playfully distributes her body across space, transforming these sites into spaces of mischief. Akin to *Womanhouse*, Woodman also uses geometric outlines to frame the blurred body. These hand-drawn lines are common methods of cropping the photographic image before its final edit. But these shapes are imprecise: they are messy and sketchy and they are unable to contain the artist's body in its entirety. Limbs protrude beyond inked frames; and Woodman pushes the boundary of spaces by constructing thresholds which she ultimately breaches. If viewer's first impression of the *Womanhouse* catalogue displays artists 'fixed' in discourse, then Woodman displays the body's sporadic interaction as it attempts to navigate and occupy a given space. It is not that the artist is on the verge of disappearing from her surroundings, but that she is engaged in an 'intricate play of revealing and concealing' herself through the wider environment, as her materialisation into the empty shots suggests.[42] Like the act of dusting, Woodman displays the constant redistribution of matter through props and her bodily movements, where her blurred form recalls both a sweeping motion and a scattering of matter across photographic space. While Woodman equates herself with dust through her visual blurring and grainy photographic appearance, she also employs the motif of dust as a tool for her self-expression. Dust emphasises the materiality of her surroundings as well as 'the

[42] Marder, p. 97.

impossibility of things disappearing, of going away, or being gone', including herself.[43] Dust, like Woodman, is a persistent force throughout her photographs, demonstrating the artist's reluctance to disappear.

Woodman's interiors display a dynamic interplay between buildings and their inhabitants. 'I am interested in the way people relate to space', the artist wrote in her journal. 'The best way to do this is to depict their interactions to the boundaries of these spaces … people becoming or emerging from [their] environment.'[44] For the artist, the spaces where she performed her photographs are not static but change through constant interaction and performance. Traces of everyday movements are depicted through Woodman's sensuous absorption into her surroundings, in addition to a fascination with the abject. The artist's interaction with domestic fixtures is a prime example of this interchange with the everyday environment.

[43] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 164.
[44] Francesca Woodman, 'Excerpts from Notebook #6 (undated)' in Townsend, p. 244.

Figure 5 Francesca Woodman, *House #4*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. 5.7 x 5.7 in. (14.6 x 14.6 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Returning to Figure 5, viewers find the artist crouching behind a disconnected mantelpiece which is propped against the chimney breast. Like the majority of Woodman's settings, the room is in disrepair: floral paper peels from the wall—like Figures 18 and 21, this is another example of the exterior world encroaching on the interior—and the floorboards are scattered with fragmented debris. The mantel, which appears to be made of stone, or possibly wood, is also scarred and pock marked. Its roughness contrasts with Woodman's bare legs which span the width of the mantle leg. While this detail has led some scholars to emphasise Woodman's youthfulness and vulnerability, the opposite is also evident. This attention to texture and touch within the photograph emphasises the squalid conditions of the artist's location. Similarly, the artist's flailing of her upper body could imply domestic confinement and oppression, but it may also be interpreted as Woodman's attempt to be both in and out of

place. Instead of being 'subsumed' by the fireplace, Woodman negotiates the mantle's framing effect.[45] Turning towards the dark rectangle of the chimney breast, we see how Woodman's right leg, partially covered and clothed with pump shoe, is the only part of her body to be framed by the interior fixture.

Within Woodman's photographs, viewers get a sense of what Julia Kristeva termed the 'abject': the artist 'does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules'; by evading the viewer's gaze and experimenting with spatial boundaries, she instead represents an entity which is 'in-between … ambiguous, [and] composite'.[46] Within the photograph, Woodman is simultaneously framed by and extracted from the mantelpiece. Being in and out of place, she shows the viewer how the body is inextricable from its equally complicated location. On the surface, Woodman's visual blurring and the messiness of her surroundings imply these domestic settings are no longer habitable. Yet her presence and the emphasis on disrepair challenge the very notion of hospitable environments. Similarly, if the everyday is banal and repetitious, as Stephen Johnstone suggests, then Woodman's interior spaces are unpredictable, curious and volatile by contrast. Her everyday locations, like the *Womanhouse* project, are deeply 'personal, eccentric, peculiar, quirky, idiosyncratic, [and] queer'.[47] Woodman's work complicates the convergence between art and life, body and building, the everyday and the extraordinary.

Further tensions are apparent in Woodman's work, not only between the body and building, but between the image and the spectator. While Woodman's images could be interpreted as 'a love letter to the ephemeral and to memory', which valorise 'all things that

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[45] Woodman and Sloan Rankin also negotiated the physical mantel piece by *carrying* the hearth into the abandoned house (Raymond, Kantian Sublime, p. 27). This act not only displays the collaboration between friends but also the physical strength they share. Woodman and her friend are no wallflowers; they masterfully construct the *appearance* of entrapment and bodily tension.

[46] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia Press, 1982), p. 4.

[47] Allan Ruppersberg (1985), 'Fifty Helpful Hints on the Artist and the Everyday', quoted in Johnstone, pp. 54-56 (p. 54).

are destined to disappear', I want to resist over-romanticising her photographs.[48] Yet this is difficult due to the limitations of how photographs are discussed—an aspect which will be covered in more detail later in this chapter—and Woodman's notable ethereal aesthetic. Her images evoke a sentimental response through their monochromatic nature, the young waif-like subjects and the haunting locations in which they are set. While the photographs lend themselves to narratives of loss and deterioration, their staging was nevertheless a conscious decision. Woodman's images, like the duality of the everyday being both banal and unusual, are inextricably pragmatic and performative. Various readings and tensions emerge through Woodman's staging of an untitled image taken in 1977-1978 (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Rome, Italy, 1977-1978. 5.8 x 6 in. (14.8 x 15.2 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

[48] Allan McCollum, 'Allan Ruppersberg: What One Loves about Life are the Things that Fade', in *Allan Ruppersberg* (Limousin: Fonds regional d'art contemporain de Limousin, 2001), p. 18.

A doorway leads into a room with black-and-white hexagonal tiles and high ceilings. In the centre of the room stands a high-back antique chair made from glossy dark wood and decorated with ornate carvings; a white cloth, or an item of clothing, has been tossed across its seat. A woman hangs in the doorway; she wears a light-coloured, loose-fitting shirt; the sleeves are bunched at the elbows. The light which falls across her body emphasises the creases in the fabric, the pale smoothness of the wall, her hovering legs which are blindingly white. Her face is turned away, partly hidden in the crook of her shoulder and the shadow which culminates in the folds of the cloth. Anna-Karin Palm notes that 'many possible interpretations unlock one another' in Woodman's pictures; they are 'superimposed and layered'.[49] An initial interpretation of this image falls in line with Solomon-Godeau's theory of the oppressive home. With her arms outstretched and her body set against the cross of interlocking door panels, Woodman assumes the position of the crucified Christ – a woman sacrificed to the domestic sphere.

More questions arise the longer viewers focus on Woodman's body and her surroundings. Framed by the doorway, she is literally in-between two spheres. Viewers are left questioning whether she is entering the space or leaving it. Is she hanging or floating in space? Woodman's work, like her body, is always on the threshold of becoming something else. On closer inspection, the traces of everyday life begin to reveal themselves: a geometric image hangs to the left of the artist, the edge of a circular table encroaches into the frame, paper peels away from the skirting board and the cable of an electrical wire curls from its socket along the floor. A post-it note on the door marks the place Woodman needed to pose, and the chair is positioned so she could reach the top of the doorframe. Despite these visual clues which hint at Woodman's creative process, viewers still notice how 'the light feels like morning, the white

[49] Anna-Karin Palm, *Francesca Woodman: On Being an Angel*, ed. by Anna Tellgren (London, Walther König, 2015), p. 22.

cloth on the chair is perhaps a robe, dropped in passing'.[50] Set amongst these everyday details, the shirt Woodman wears no longer alludes to biblical robes; it may have belonged to a man – a piece of clothing you throw on as you get out of bed. This image displays life in everyday motion, where the acts of living and artistic creation converge almost seamlessly. Woodman is not sacrificed to the house: she collaborates with the built environment and displays the physical strength which is required to do so. The architecture transforms into a climbing frame as her fingers grip the edge of the wood, her arms are taut and strong as they bear her weight, her legs are rigid. This is not a victimised body, nor does the image depict the softness of the feminine form. Frozen in time, her pose emphasises lightness and heaviness, muscles and tension. Woodman's photographs of extraordinary everyday spaces are so compelling because they make spectators look, notice and reflect, but crucially recall senses of touch and feeling, to which I will now turn.

Feeling Photography: Domestic Spaces Made Strange

In this section I will emphasise the importance of tactility in Woodman's photographs when displaying the multifaceted nature of her everyday spaces. I will juxtapose Woodman's domestic motifs—dinner plates, food and cutlery—with *The Kitchen* and *The Dining Room* of *Womanhouse* to show how ordinary spaces can become distorted and strangely sensual through the artists' mischievous humour. As Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu argue in *Feeling Photography* (2014), late-twentieth-century photography criticism largely disavowed feeling as an appropriate discourse, enabling a materialist analysis of photography to form. Feelings, Brown and Phu write, 'seemed to cloud the critic's thoughts, making him vulnerable to the

[50] Palm, p. 23.

ideologies of the (art) market'.[51] To acknowledge feeling in photography was problematic and hindered the critical task of analysing or 'thinking' photography in relation to wider society.

Critics like Victor Burgin, John Tagg and Allan Sekula, who worked with materialist theoretical approaches, focussed on the photograph's production of meaning as opposed to what the image evokes. In his publication *Thinking Photography* (1982), Burgin argues photography theorists and art historians for relying on 'personal thoughts and feelings' to explain photographic meaning.[52] Burgin's argument is similar to that of W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, who employ the term 'Affective Fallacy' to challenge the practical and theoretical problems of impressionistic approaches, which suggests the reader's emotional response to a poem indicated its ultimate value. The Affective Fallacy, the authors write,

> is a confusion between a poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*) … It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome of either Fallacy, the Intentional or the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear.[53]

Wimsatt and Beardsley believed criticism ought to be objective as intense feelings were easy to refute. Critical judgement 'will not talk of tears, prickles or other physiological symptoms, of feeling angry, joyful, hot, cold, or intense, or of vaguer states of emotional disturbance,' instead, ideal criticism will offer 'shades of distinction and relation between objects of emotion.'[54]

Tagg is equally suspicious of feelings, considering the 'real effects' of photography more significant than the role of affect in the production of meaning. The critic sought to distance structural photo criticism from Roland Barthes's reintroduction of feeling in the

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[51] Elspeth H. Brown, Thy Phu, *Feeling Photography* (Durham; London: Duke University Press Books, 2014), p. 2.
[52] Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 3.
[53] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, 'The Affective Fallacy', *The Sewanee Review*, 57:1 (1949), pp. 31-55 (p. 31) <http://www.jstor.org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/stable/27537883> [date accessed: 23 April 2019].
[54] Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, p. 48.

English translation of *Camera Lucida* (1981). Tagg argues the photograph is not magical or alchemical but derived from specific historical contexts and particular purposes, 'material product of a material apparatus', with understandable and quantifiable histories and functions.[55] However, Barthes use of emotive language, like the word 'touch', throughout his account is significant. It emphasises his implicit understanding of feeling in photography, outlines the complexities between the image, the viewer and their emotions, and communicates this relationship in nuanced ways.[56]

Despite Barthes's emphasis on emotion and feeling, the task of 'thinking' photographs produced a 'straight' photo criticism in the 1970s and 1980s. While writers such as Burgin and others were shrewd in separating thinking from feeling, they also reinforced the division between putatively masculine intellectualism and the affective feminine, which 'effectively marginalised photography's shadow subjects, most notably, women, racialised minorities, and queer sexualities'.[57] Since the 'thinking' approach marginalised so many diverse perspectives, it is perhaps not surprising that an alternative approach to photography and its relation to feeling emerged.

Critic Susan Sontag wrote eloquently about feelings, particularly melancholia, in *On Photography* (1977) and later in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). While emotion pervaded Sontag's accounts, she was also wary of feeling's overdetermining effects on meaning and its ability to prevent ethical action. 'Compassion', Sontag writes, 'is a useless emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated'.[58] For Sontag, the viewer's feelings are valid and should urge them to take political action, as opposed to being overwhelmed by what they encounter. Other scholars agree, Ariella Azoulay and Sharon Sliwinski are

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[55] Tagg, p. 3.
[56] Brown and Phu, p. 1.
[57] Brown and Phu, p. 3.
[58] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 101.

concerned with 'establishing an ethics of spectatorship' and emphasising the photograph's power to bind 'spectators into an ethical community', a notion which I will return later.[59]

Ultimately, the relationship between 'thinking' and 'feeling' photography is increasingly complex. Interestingly, Woodman photographs an in-between space where the gap between thinking and feeling, bodies and spaces, art and life are continuously negotiated. Accounting for the senses of touch, feeling and embodied experience in these images is a necessary way of theorising the materiality of everyday life, and emphasises the attention paid to the visual and the textual when interpreting photography. Woodman's photographs account for the unexplainable: they expose the difficulties of working within preconceived boundaries, such as 'clean' and 'dirty' or, as readers shall see in Chapter Three, restrictive notions of 'women' as 'nature'. Woodman's images are also deeply emotive. Photographs evoke reactions; it is this implicit sense of movement in photography—'to be moved by'—which is so fascinating, as it implies the spectator is simultaneously immersed in and changed by their encounter with the image.[60]

As Barthes reminds readers, the photograph retains emotional significance long after the subject is gone. The *punctum*, Barthes notes, is a 'wound' that 'pricks' and arouses desire in the spectator, but this feeling is also a tenderness or ache which remains long after the initial visual encounter.[61] In the case of Woodman's photography, the artist's lingering presence, ephemeral movements and deteriorating locations create a poignant atmosphere, enhanced further by the artist's use of black-and-white photography. This emotive quality becomes increasingly noteworthy with the knowledge of the artist's depression and suicide. But

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[59] See, Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008) and Sharon Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[60] In her publication, *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990), Diane Ackerman highlights how 'Language is steeped in metaphors of touch. We call our emotions feelings, and we care most deeply when something "touches" us' (Ackerman, 1990, p. 70). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also reminds us that the dual meaning of feeling as both 'tactile and emotional' represents 'a particular intimacy [which] seems to subsist between textures and emotions' (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003, p. 17).
[61] Roland Barthes (1979), *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), p. 10.

Woodman's work is not disturbing in the traditional sense. Often, her photographs are playful and surprising. There is a sense of experimentation which underpins her work and a sense of wonder in everyday locations and objects. Woodman may photograph herself almost obsessively, but she is equally enamoured of her surroundings. To consider Woodman's oeuvre from the perspective of the everyday is to recognise the ordinariness of her photography and how bodies, feelings and their surroundings make these photographic spaces extraordinary. Woodman challenges viewers' understanding of photographic space by emphasising the haptic, as well as her stance, gait and the sense of the body holding itself within a particular environment. Consequently, she successfully presents 'the everyday as a sensory realm'.[62]

While Woodman combined photography, the material and the sensual to produce complex sites of self-expression, the visualisation of dust and play hold wider implications for how viewers perceive the everyday. Although spectators could certainly interpret Woodman's images as haunted sites and images of loss, playfulness and the sensory coalesce in Woodman's photography, which is rarely acknowledged. This is significant, because the conjunction of play and dust demonstrates a physical reordering of space and a disruption to everyday routines. In other words, photographs like Woodman's can offer insightful routes into her everyday experiences and creative process. As viewers, we are reconnected with the photograph at a deeper sensory level; and the functions of play and dust are transformed from 'useless' to 'generative' entities. Many of her images display a childlike innocence: friends playing in treehouses, girls leaping through the air or impishly opening the front of their dresses to the camera. In contrast to the deterioration Woodman usually photographed, these light-hearted images offer a form of sensory relief from the seriousness of everyday life.

A photograph which displays Woodman's wry humour is *Three kinds of melon in four kinds of light* (1975-1977).

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[62] Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 26.

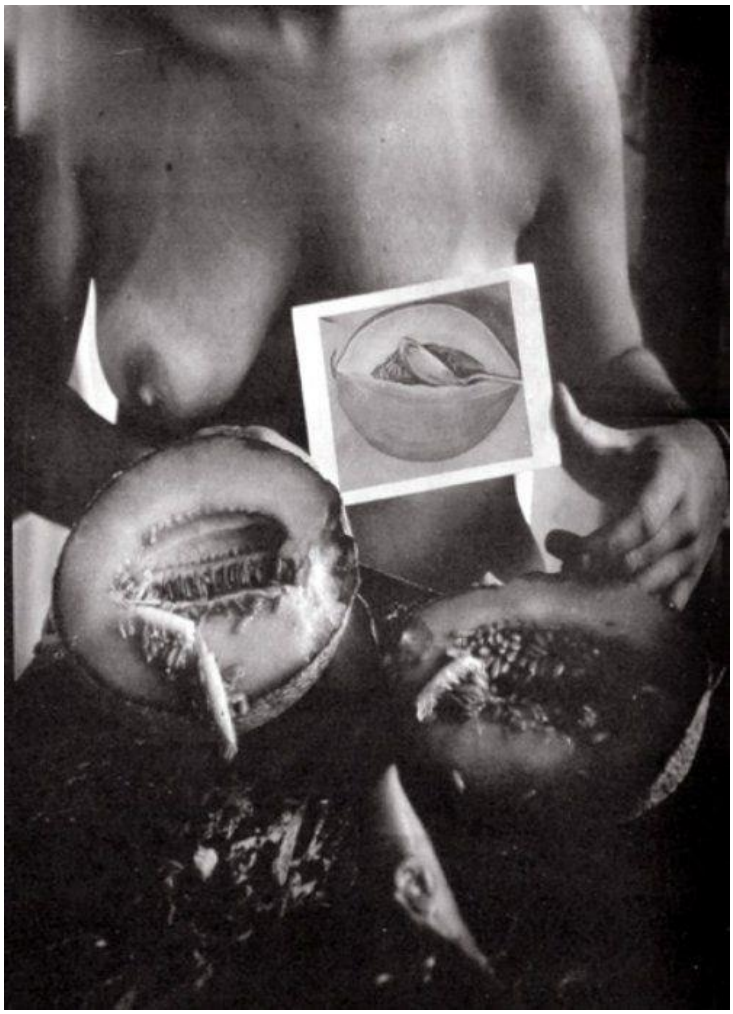

Figure 7 Francesca Woodman, *Three kinds of melon in four kinds of light*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1977. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper. Sheet size: 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm).

Instead of being composed in Woodman's signature square style, the image is cropped as a portrait, but the artist's face cannot be seen, if it is Woodman at all (Figure 7). Viewers see part of her torso and stomach, angular arms, curled fingers, the highlight of a collar bone, her right breast. A melon, split almost in half, is placed on the table in front of the artist. The pale flesh of the fruit echoes the smoothness of the woman's skin. The pulp and seeds are exposed and spill out onto the table-top and into shadow. A postcard covers the sitter's left breast, depicting another image of a melon, this time quartered. Held tentatively between her thumb and the hand, which is out of sight behind the actual fruit, the aesthetic arrangement of the still-life portrait satirically equates women's breasts with melons. This change of composition is

significant, as it suggests Woodman's playfulness is founded in a deeper specialised knowledge that preceded her own artistic practice. In other words, Woodman adopts a common comedic trope in this image, the literalisation of metaphor. The metaphoric form 'melons' for 'breasts' is taken literally, thereby exposing the woman-as-nature equation at the heart of the image. But this act of exposure is not merely comic: there is also the decay of the fruit which connects the image to the *memento mori*. The image becomes an emblem of inevitable death—which is similar to Woodman's depictions of taxidermy in Chapter Three—combined with the comedic and the sensual.

Moreover, by recreating the traditional still life, where the flesh of the body and fruit converge, Woodman mocks art history as a 'serious' and elitist discipline and plays with the boundaries between art and the everyday. Is this image also a comment on the objectification of women's bodies and the domestic roles they adopt within the home? Possibly, especially if we consider that the sitter is headless, and therefore unidentifiable, subject.[63] This sense of objectification and satirical playfulness is heightened when comparing *Three kinds of melons in four kinds of light* with the kitchen of *Womanhouse*, where eggs similarly transform into breasts (Figure 8a and 8b).

[63] Violence towards the muse is particularly prominent in the Parisian Surrealist movement. See, for instance, Man Ray's fashion photography and Max Ernst's *The Hundred Headless Women (La Femme 100 têtes)*, 1929. Woodman's images have been paralleled with Surrealist tropes and found objects, such as umbrellas, gloves and flowers; meanwhile, the dream-like quality of her images and her spectral haunting of the image has been likened to Breton's *Nadja*.

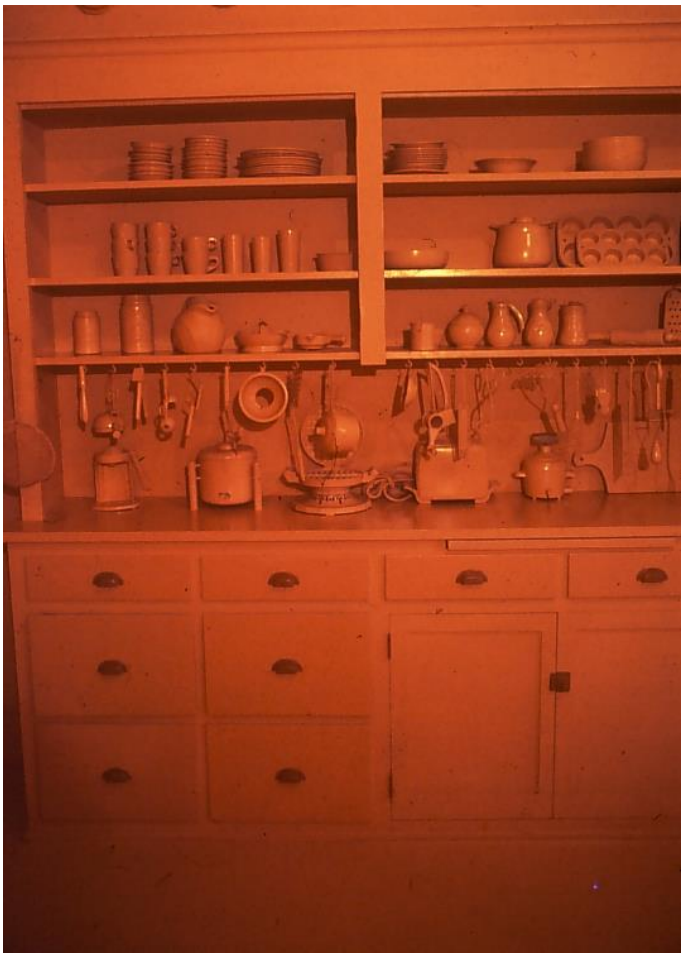

Figure 8a Robin Weltsch, *The Kitchen*, *Womanhouse*, Los Angeles, California, 1972. Sizes unknown. Colour photograph and black-and-white photograph. (Above & above left).

Figure 8b Vicki Hodgettes; Wanda Westcoast, *Eggs to Breasts* and *Curtains*, *Womanhouse*, Los Angeles, California, 1972. Size unknown. Colour photograph. (Below left).

Upon entering *Womanhouse*, visitors noticed the room's lurid colour. Robin Weltsch (dates unknown) painted every inch of the kitchen a bright, 'Pepto Bismol' pink. The walls were covered in plastic breasts which transformed into fried eggs as they ascended into the room. Akin to Woodman's equation of melons with breasts, the eggs function as a similar analogy of objectification. 'How do you like your eggs?', a female spectator asked her husband, only half-jokingly. The idea that women's bodies are for the consumption of the male gaze underlies the artists' premise. Transformed into the breasts, the eggs become overtly sexualised and pornographic. Notions of consent are also raised as visitors touched the walls and squeezed the fake breasts. But eggs also have connotations of fertility and breasts of childrearing, suggesting that a woman's role in the home is to cook and raise children. The kitchen visually symbolises women's bodies as a highly contested and political space. But the kitchen, like *Three kinds of melons*, is much more than the representation of women's objectification in everyday society: it is also a space of alienation, routine and humour.[64]

If viewers attempt to look beyond the eggs and breasts to the room itself, they find the photograph of the kitchen is composed of an abundance of smaller details which display the complexities of everyday life. In one image, a free-standing gas cooker and refrigerator can be seen, tableware occupies an open cupboard drawer, pans and colanders hang on the walls. There is a breadbin. Crockery and baking trays are stacked on shelves above the worksurfaces, there are eight coffee cups on the middle-left shelf and a cheese grater can be seen to the right-hand-side of the photographic frame, on the bottom shelf, next to the rolling pin. Viewers see more hooks, nineteen of which are visible, with dangling utensils. A chopping board, toaster and a waffle maker line the counter-top, along with a number of other indistinct objects. Spectators get the sense that the kitchen is a place of routine, where everything has a correct

[64] This is not to dismiss women's objectification, but I think critics need to look beyond the initial shock of the kitchen to its deeper implications.

place: a regimented inventory of cookware. In another photograph entitled *Curtains* (1972) (Figure 8b), a small rectangular mirror is hung vertically in the centre of the frame, flanked by two large square windows. Their ripped concertina curtains let shafts of light into the room. The fabric is covered in blue spots, echoing the eggs, breasts and lightbulbs. The worktop spans the length of the wall, with four drawers and four cupboards underneath. At the centre is a sink, two taps and a square shaded recess where one might place a bin. Aside from the wire draining board to the right of the sink, the room has an almost uncanny symmetry, much like the parallel placement of artificial eggs, sliced melon and breasts. This strange space emphasises art as an alienating practice, as Lefevre suggests. The kitchen's gaudy colouring and its abundance of unexpected objects disorientate viewers from their everyday reality. In other words, the kitchen becomes a jarring, uncanny space, which spectators recognise but cannot fully occupy. Furthermore, the combination of art with the everyday transforms the house, as well as the domestic practices of preparing and cooking food, into a spectacle of dark humour.

Notions of uncanniness and of 'being in the correct place' extend to the figure of the housewife, whose absence from the domestic setting is heightened by the hyper-gendering of the kitchen. French theorist Luce Irigaray suggests the 'homeliness' of the house is predicated on a specific notion of the maternal feminine subject who is both 'placed' and 'sheltered' within the home. This site turns the subject into an 'internal exile', alienated within her own home.[65] While this dual status of being internally exiled is feasible, the *Womanhouse* group, like Woodman, does not conform to traditional notions of feminine domesticity and so avoids being confined to the home. The traditional interior is disrupted and transformed through the artists' use of elaborate props, general uncleanliness and playfulness. *Womanhouse* is more akin to a funhouse at an amusement park or fairground. The false eggs and breasts look like items one

[65] Luce Irigaray (1993), *An Ethics of Sexual* Difference, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 65.

might purchase at a joke shop. The bright pink covering is akin to the garish primary colours and neon signs which mark the funhouse as a site of entertainment and alarm. Looking at the various incongruous spaces of the *Womanhouse* project, one might also imagine other elements, such as trick mirrors, shifting floors and people in costume ready to jump out at unsuspecting visitors. Predicated on the pre-existing structure of the house, *Womanhouse* not only challenges everyday perspectives surrounding women and the home, but *also* becomes 'a carnivalesque fantasyland of painting, sculpture and installation'.[66] The Mariposa mansion was a mischievous site which simultaneously unsettled and amused visitors, emphasising the disturbing banality and playfulness in everyday life.

But even without these unusual details and shocking paintwork, the kitchen would appear strange due to its dated décor. The refrigerator and cooker are in the style of the 1950s. The built-in wooden counters and cupboards with shell-shaped handles—the type you find on museum cabinets and display cases—look tired and worn. There is a sense that the kitchen is trying to be something it is not: with its organised shelves and spotless appearance, the room aspires to be a show home, a space for aspirations and dreams. It does not look as though any cooking or preparation has taken place in this particular space. However, while the combination of old furnishings and new technologies alludes to growing consumer culture and advertisements aimed at housewives, there is an excessive amount of stuff in this kitchen which is literally and metaphorically all for appearance. Under the garish pink paint, false foodstuffs and prosthetic breasts, the kitchen is a rather banal depiction of domesticity, as much as it is political, unnerving and humorous.

At the centre of *The Kitchen* and *Three kinds of melons* are ideas of representation and deception. *Three kinds of melons in four kinds of light* could also be a reference to René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928-1929). Magritte's painting displayed the image of

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[66] Perry, p. 145.

a pipe along with the caption '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*' ('This is not a pipe'). Similarly, the viewer is reminded that 'this is not a melon' (or with *The Kitchen*, 'this is not an egg/breast'). Woodman's breast, the fruit and the postcard all offer representations that connote melons. But this does not account for the sensuous in Woodman's photograph. There are other details which emphasise the tactility of her everyday environment: the fruit is not cut cleanly, suggesting that whoever attempted to prepare the melon struggled; did the seeds spill out of the fruit's interior, or were they scooped? What about the sweetness and stickiness of the process? Performing this image would have been a messy task, akin to the artist littering her spaces with dust and debris, only this time it would have been sticky, tactile and sensuous. There is a sense of childish wonder which underpins the photograph, along with the notion that the artistic process is chaotic but fruitful. Another element which must be mentioned in relation to the everyday is the tan line of a bikini top, which marks the subject's skin. The lightened skin along with the inclusion of the fruit suggest that it was summer and warm enough to bathe. The postcard itself alludes to the practice of holidaying, of play and relaxation and of writing to loved ones. Seen through the lens of the everyday, this image not only calls female objectification or traditional representations of the muse in art history into question, but also becomes a site of playful exchange between the artist and the viewer.

Aside from *Three kinds of melons in four kinds of light*, spectators find that motifs of food and domesticity are recurring elements throughout Woodman's photographs, emphasising her concern with making the everyday strange. Similar visual motifs, of table settings (Figure 11) and cuisine (Figure 7), were used in *The Dining Room* of *Womanhouse* (1972) (Figure 9).

Figure 9 Beth Bachenheimer, Sherry Brody, Karen LeCoq, Robin Mitchell, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Wilding, *The Dining Room, Womanhouse*, Los Angeles, California, 1972. Size unknown. Colour photograph.

The room was a traditional depiction of luxury, with deep mauve walls and contrasting floor-length yellow curtains which cast a golden glow over the lavish scene. A chandelier hung in the centre of the room, realistic fruit and flower moulding ran around the edge of the ceiling and a mural of fruit and flowers was painted in the style of a nineteenth-century still life by Anna Peale on the far wall. The room was designed to be a feast for the eyes. Upon entering the room, visitors saw it 'had an aura of heaping and generous romance'; it was 'outrageously elegant and beautiful; a classic room of traditional proportions where life was presented as it hopefully might be'.[67] A large oval dining room table covered in a lemon-yellow cloth occupied the middle of the room. The elaborate scene of

[67] *Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, 1972, n.p.

entertainment and aspiration was heightened by the abundance of bread dough sculptures. The women created:

> a turkey, a ham, an irresistible pecan pie, a vinyl salad bowl collapsing and enfolding its pale green organdie lettuce leaves into a state of engulfment. The vinyl glasses and wine bottle on the table were all leaning on each other, in sensuous contact as though drunk on their own crystalline beauty.[68]

Inspiration was also taken from the 'super rich color photographs from cook books', the visual depictions of food of which made 'one's stomach yearn' and fuelled the fantasy of an elegant domestic life. The feast represented the aspirations of the housewife beyond everyday domestication, of keeping up appearances, which were both desired and imposed by societal expectations. In fact, the image of the feast presented a hyper-real depiction of everyday life. The colour of the food was gaudy with a sickly high sheen which was paralleled by the glossy floorboards; meanwhile, the vinyl glasses and wine bottles appeared warped and fragile. These symbols of domesticity are difficult to digest, being both physically inedible and visually unappealing; their falsity and lack of other sensuous stimuli, such as realistic texture, taste or ability to decay, creates an uncanny and disturbing effect on the viewer. This sense of discomfort is heightened by the dining room's lack of guests: the artists did not include any chairs. It begs the question, who is the feast really for? This photograph suggests that the everyday is complex, both familiar and strange, and increasingly difficult to decipher.

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[68] *Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, 1972, n.p.

Figure 10 Stephan Birgidi, *Woman with Large Plate*, Rome, Italy, 1978. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

In comparison to the lavish spectacle of *The Dining Room*, Woodman's visualisation of table settings and utensils appears meagre, but equally peculiar. In Figure 10, the artist stands with her back to a pale wall, her hair swept back and tied to keep it off her face. She stares directly into the camera and half of her body is cast in shadow. Akin to Prince's 'environmental portrait' (Figure 2), viewers come face-to-face with the artist; yet, the viewer's eyes are drawn to the empty dinner plate which Woodman clutches in front of her torso. The circumference of the plate is decorated with two dark parallel lines, punctuated by an abstract flower pattern. On the surface, this is an image of a girl holding a plate. But the photograph evokes other connotations, especially when considering it in conjunction with multifaceted theories of the everyday. Akin to Allan Ruppersberg's 'Hints on the Art of the Everyday' (1985), Woodman's

photographs concern 'the reality of impressions and the impression of reality'.[69] So, what else could an empty plate signify? One possibility is that the combination of the plate, the artist's nakedness and her challenging gaze signify a disturbance to the traditional gendered domestic order. By refusing to do household chores—such as cooking and setting the table—and offering the viewer an empty plate instead, Woodman does not comply with the traditional role of the housewife and challenges the everyday routines of family life. However, the artist's nakedness holds further implications. The image may also allude to the patriarchal idea that a woman's body is for consumption, due to the empty plate in addition to Woodman's exposure. However, the artist's gaze is challenging, and the plate, in turn, obstructs the spectator's gaze. Woodman does not offer herself freely to the audience.

Aside from gendered domestic readings, another compelling interpretation arises when scholars consider Woodman's in-between status. Woodman is often on the threshold of disappearing or appearing in her photographs and viewers see a similar transference between the artist's body and the object she holds. The tone of the plate is almost indistinguishable from the body or the backdrop. The plate bores a hole through Woodman's chest, creating an illusory heterotopic space.[70] This imagined space in Woodman's chest is disturbing as the circular 'gap' portrays the body as incomplete and 'other' to its surroundings. Woodman is exposed, both through her nakedness and through the tone of the plate, but this gap is physically inaccessible to the viewer. By creating a gap where transformation can occur, Woodman makes space for illusion, which emphasises the body in its actual surroundings and plays with the viewer's perception. Furthermore, this process of extending and warping urban spaces becomes increasingly evident when Woodman's work is compared with Matta-Clark's building cuts in

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[69] Ruppersberg, p. 54.
[70] See, Michel Foucault (1967), *Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias and the City*, trans. from *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* no. 5 (London: Routledge, 1984).

Chapter Two. But my point is that everyday unassuming objects (like a plate) can alter viewers' perception, if they are open to the possibility.

Other factors also alter the viewer's interpretation of the image: despite holding the dinner plate up to her torso, Woodman is visibly naked, and spectators glimpse her lower abdomen and bare shoulders. The plate comes between the body and the camera; when combined with Woodman's determined stare, the plate is transformed into a breastplate, a protective shield which deflects the viewer's gaze. Staring into the lens and beyond the photographic frame, Woodman seems to challenge the spectator. Try to look if you can. Crucially, Woodman not only holds the plate up to herself, she holds it up to the viewer, like a mirror. Her hands curl around the rim in opposite directions; it is almost in an act of cradling. But the viewer cannot see their reflection. If Beate Söntgen is correct when she suggests Woodman 'shows us what we do not see'—an idea advocated by second-wave feminists who believed patriarchal structures could be changed if they were brought to public consciousness—then the artist withholds the spectator's image in order for them to consider the bigger picture, even if what they see is both banal and disconcerting.[71]

Woodman's depiction of everyday spaces displays how it is possible to evoke numerous interpretations from a single image of seemingly prosaic environments. Johnstone questioned whether 'we bring the everyday into view in order to change it', and that is exactly what Woodman's photographs realise.[72] Woodman actively alters how viewers experience her everyday reality by playing with spatial perspective and employing unassuming domestic objects as transformative props. In one image from her series, *On Being an Angel* (1977), she uses cutlery and paper as malleable visual motifs (Figure 11).

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[71] Beate, Söntgen, '"I show you what you do not see." Francesca Woodman's Force', *Francesca Woodman: Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, ed. by Gabriele Schor, Elisabeth Bronfen (Vienna; New York: D.A.P., 2014), pp. 63-72 (p. 63).
[72] Johnstone, p. 14.

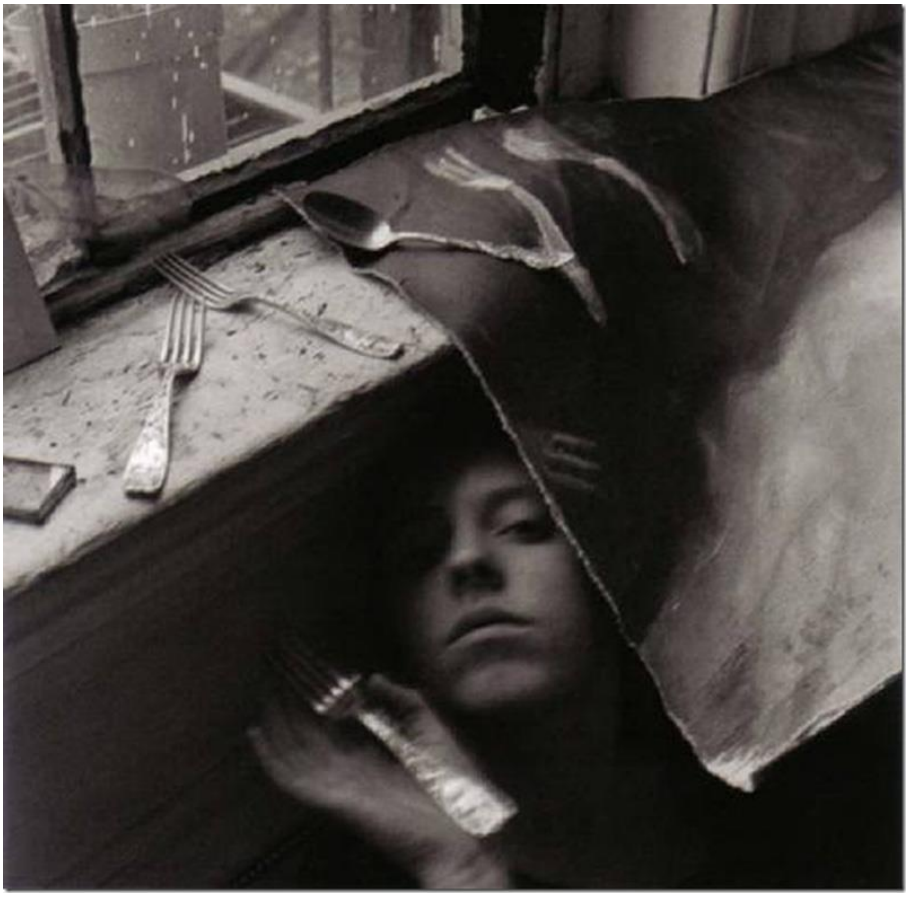

Figure 11 Francesca Woodman, *It Must Be Time for Lunch Now*, Rome, Italy, 1977. 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Spectators see the blackened edges of a windowpane intersecting with an equally grubby windowsill. The droplets of water on the glass suggest it has been raining. A sheet of paper shaded in charcoal and white chalk extends beyond the right-hand side of the frame and interrupts the diagonal line of the windowsill. Woodman's use of light and dark in this image creates a sense of expanding space – the paleness of the windowsill echoes the lighter strip of paper which runs adjacent; the charcoal section, which is almost a triangular shape, connects the geometric darkness to the bottom of the frame. It looks as if the interior of the building has been cut away from itself, flipped and repasted into the photographic frame. This clever trick of symmetry gives the illusion of unfolding space. But Woodman plays with the spectator's

perception in other ways. Two metal forks have been placed at angles on the windowsill and a tablespoon rests on the corner of the paper, perhaps to secure it in place. The windowsill becomes a makeshift table, but the settings are all wrong, confusing our understanding of what a domestic space should be. Imaginary cutlery extends beyond the windowsill to the paper, where forks and spoons are drawn in white. The additional tableware has two effects: first, the chalk cutlery is drawn into reality, and the drawings become objects, blurring the line between image and reality. Second, the sketches are devoid of elaborate decoration. Woodman's images are understated and almost primitive in style, being more akin to a makeshift child's tea party than a show of welcoming domesticity, entertainment and indulgence like the overly organised dinner table in *Womanhouse*. Woodman's depiction of the everyday is imaginative and mischievous. She crouches in the dark space between the wall and the paper; her face is surrounded by shadow and her hand extends towards the camera; she offers the viewer a fork. By looking at this image, the viewer is implicated in a curious game of make-believe.

Child's Play: Messing Up the House

In this section I argue that themes of playfulness underpin Woodman's everyday environments, sparking the viewer's curiosity and implicating them in the artist's world of make-believe. I use the word 'make-believe' in a specific way: Woodman constructs her reality where art and life become indistinguishable from each other. This was evident in Prince's depiction of her messy studio space, but it can also be seen through Woodman's wider depiction of child's play. The notion of child's play is a common visual trait throughout Woodman's photographic work, most evident by the artist's choice of girlish vintage clothing and her photographic practice of 'hide-and-seek' with the camera. The role of playfulness and wonder in Woodman's art is a relatively new line of scholarly inquiry, prompting scholars such as Riches to describe

Woodman's work as 'conjuring an impishly disruptive presence'.[73] But it is important to note that Woodman's acts of photographic playfulness are not 'childish' in a dismissive sense. Nor do her movements solely evidence a state of regression, or a desire to return to the maternal womb and a state of non-being, as Liu argues.[74] Woodman's whimsical playfulness carefully constructs and makes sense of the world. An important but overlooked aspect in Woodman's work is how the scale of her photographs lends itself to notions of playfulness. The artist cropped and sliced her photographs into small squares, which I argue renders their content diminutive. By focusing on the scale of Woodman's photographic rooms, viewers find that each image acts as a cross-section of an open dollhouse, with each image containing miniature furniture and decorations: chairs, doors, mirrors and mantlepieces all come to resemble the props of child's play.

[73] Harriet K. Riches, 'Skin, Surface and Subjectivity: The Self-Representational Photography of Francesca Woodman' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2004), pp. 1-223 (p. 56).
[74] Liu, p. 26.

Figure 12 Francesca Woodman, *House #3*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. 6.25 x 6.25 in. (15.9 x 15.9 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

This spatial distortion is evident in the interior of Figure 12. The interior walls are bare, mottled grey and white from age, the wooden window frames peel and split, fragments of debris scatter the wooden floorboards to the right-hand side of the frame and the exposed brickwork of the fireplace can be glimpsed to the left of the image. A blurred figure crouches at the bottom of the window. Her clothes, which are the same tone as her surroundings, become almost indistinguishable from the building itself. Her face is mostly in shadow, but viewers can just about make out the artist's profile, as well as her leg kicked out towards the camera, and she wears a Chinese slippers (otherwise known as 'Mary Janes'). But the figure is not the most compelling aspect of the image. Her surroundings appear more defined and solid than the artist who is almost camouflaged by her surroundings. Dirt and debris assume a prominent role in

House #3; highlighted by pools of light, the messiness of Woodman's everyday environment comes into focus.

Note the tactility of her environment: scuffed and chipped plaster, sharp geometric edges, cracked walls, layers of dust and grit. This environment is visually and physically challenging, as well as being difficult to define. But the eye is also drawn to the lightness of the external world away from the shadowy structure of the house and the intense portrayal of declining domesticity to the growth beyond. The rectangular window to the top-right of the photograph is devoid of glass. Bathed in light, the gap frames the natural world, bringing the outside into sharp focus. Concentrating on this visual element, the trees beyond the decrepit interior are transformed into a framed landscape, a decorative object hanging behind the crouching artist, embellishing the interior of the house. Instead of depicting a ghostly presence or a tortured mindset, this photograph emphasises how scale is a provocative and transformative tool when considering spaces of self-expression in art and everyday life. Just as Charles Baudelaire believed the 'scaled-down' size of the dollhouse was what made it seductive, Woodman's playful images share this characteristic.[75] Viewers have to encroach on the photograph's space, faces inches away from the glass, peering at the contents of the frame to take in every detail. Just like *It Must Be Time for Lunch Now* (1977) (Figure 11), where Woodman seems to cut and superimpose interior space onto itself, viewers can imagine the artist's photographs opening up along architectural lines, the insides flipped outwards like an optical illusion, a compelling space unfolds and is displayed almost voyeuristically, akin to the structure of the dollhouse or the gutted interior of the abandoned residence.

On the surface, the dollhouse is an aspirational space where childhood is projected, formed and organised. But for social historians, the object epitomises varied relationships, class and racial backgrounds, as well as social aspirations which are defined, constrained and shaped

[75] Charles Baudelaire quoted in Perry, p. 76.

by familial and communal living.[76] But Woodman's dollhouse-esque images portray a different type of domestic aspiration to the upper-middle-class desires conveyed by the traditional dollhouse. 'How often', Gill Perry asks, 'is the tower block flat on an urban housing estate (rather than the multi-roomed middle-class home of mock-Tudor or neo-Gothic design) reconstructed as a desirable toy for the discerning young shopper?'[77] Similarly, few people would give a child a deteriorated dollhouse to play with, unless, perhaps, they were poor. Through the dual lenses of playfulness and the everyday, Woodman's depictions of photographic 'rooms' can be seen to emphasise urban deterioration, economic struggle and the problem of being in-between, that is, being on the border of society and of representation, issues which are actively evaded in the structure of the child's dollhouse. By considering Woodman's photographs as dollhouse-esque snapshots, the artist emphasises how many children grow up in unkempt homes, and questions how such disadvantaged sites shape childhood aspirations. As these spaces are empty, not cramped and overused, they are full of possibilities.

Conceiving Woodman's photographic interiors as rooms from a dollhouse puts the artist in a precarious position. She occupies a liminal space between adulthood and childishness, employing the domestic site as a messy play area, which in turn disturbs our expectation of the house being a comfortable retreat. The seven women who collaborated on *The Dining Room* similarly recalled how they inhabited an in-between space between adulthood and childishness. In the Mariposa mansion, they were 'behaving as adults and pretending like little girls that this giant dollhouse room was real'.[78] This comment emphasises the blurred boundary between the real and the imaginary, of 'grown' women pretending to be 'little' girls. Similar to the scaled-down dollhouse, which 'require[s] levels of careful (adult)

[76] Perry, p. 76.
[77] Perry, p. 77.
[78] *Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, 1972, n.p.

upkeep' and supervision so the child's dream could manifest itself, *Womanhouse* also required an erudite level of play-acting which saw artists assume not only the role of adult and child, but also that of artist and the traditionally male construction worker.[79] If both Woodman and women from the *Womanhouse* project used the trope of the dollhouse to skew space and blur discursive boundaries, then we must also ask what sort of role the doll plays within such ambiguous structures? By adopting the role of the doll, artists like Woodman, Robin Schiff (dates unknown) and Sandy Orgel (dates unknown), who were also involved in the creation of *Womanhouse*, display the difficulty of taking up space, how bodies and spaces interact and the materiality these elements evoke.

Francesca Woodman's Doll Parts

If Woodman's diminutive photographs can be likened to the child's unconventional rearrangement of dollhouse rooms, then she can be reimagined as a doll-like figure. The use of doll-like human effigies is not new in art, especially when exploring the politics of gender and representation in contemporary culture. As Grace Banks notes, ownership of the female image in art history is centuries old. Women's bodies have featured in primarily submissive positions, as property—that man 'had' a wife or an eligible daughter—the object of sexual desire, the victim and the muse, to name a few.[80] Some women artists navigate within male-defined tropes in order to unsettle them – see Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), for instance, in which the artist adopted various feminine stereotypes to critique women's superficial and overly sexualised representations; or her *Sex Pictures*, taken between 1978-1992, where dolls were positioned in explicit positions. While Sherman stated that her use of prosthetic body parts arose out of 'a sense of boredom' from using herself in her work, she nevertheless

[79] Perry, p. 77.
[80] Grace Banks, *Play With Me: Dolls, Women and Art* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2017), p. 10.

employed the doll as a substitute to negotiate her own place beyond the photographic frame.[81] While dolls in contemporary art have been employed as political tools of self-expression, Woodman's doll-like portrayal emphasises the materiality of the body and its surroundings, and the sense of transformative playfulness ordinary surroundings can evoke.

Traditionally, a child's doll may be used as a form of escapism, an interaction which allows the player to reimagine an alternative existence. But Deborah Varat notes that before dollhouses were considered children's toys, they were 'typically the province of upper-class women who dedicated untold hours and great sums of money to creating alternate domestic spaces in miniature'.[82] But, according to Varat, the dollhouse represented more than a record of wealth or English domestic life: it divulged clues about a period of liberalised social values and domestic aspirations during the eighteenth-century. While dolls traditionally depicted and reinforced the roles women assumed within the home and wider society, informing scholars primarily of elite male views, Susan Broomhall notes how dollhouses accentuated 'an important female-oriented vision of the idealised early modern household' for elite Dutch women who created and collected dollhouses in the same period.[83] In this sense, the doll is not simply a passive figure, but a communicative tool.

Dolls reflect how the female form is objectified and emphasise ethical and political debates around representation of the self. While many women artists have used dolls as playful, subversive tools to emphasise their domestic confinement and personal experiences, the doll-as-feminine-representation has become increasingly diverse over time. While their representation is often idealised, dolls assume increasingly diverse features which reflect contemporary society. Likewise, dolls are constructed from various materials, such as wood,

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81 Therese Lichtenstein, 'Cindy Sherman Interview', *Journal of Contemporary Art*, 5:2 (1992), pp. 78-88.
82 Deborah Varat, 'Family Life Writ Small: Eighteenth-century English Dollhouses', *Journal of Family History,* Vol. 42:2 (2017), pp. 147-161 (p. 147).
83 Susan Broomhall, 'Imagined Domesticities in Early Modern Dutch Dollhouses', *Paregon*, 24:2 (2007), pp. 47-67 (p. 47).

paper, plastic, ceramic, and silicone. This not only displays the convergence of a material body with everyday surroundings, but also shows how technology and production have altered, ranging from the realistic to the futuristic. Rag dolls, mannequins, sculptures of female forms, blow-up dolls and cyborgs differ due to numerous factors. The first is context: where dolls are crafted and subsequently displayed affects their reception. Also, the purpose of the doll and their intended audience have a similar effect. The material composition of the object, as outlined above, also influences human interaction, and the doll's overall reception, which changes across cultures and over time.

Dolls also evoke specific social values through their representation, their adoption of 'adult performances' and via additions to the doll's social world through accessories. A key example is Donovan Bess's discussion of Mattel's design of Barbie. Bess notes how the doll originally portrays a young woman 'mad about dressing' who, in 1965, had thirty-eight outfits for 'social occasions'.[84] Barbie's initial representation as a young, fashion-conscious girl makes her appealing for a young female audience but also stipulates how girls, in particular, should present themselves to society. The social and cultural roles dolls adopt and perform are also significant. Despite ideas of New Traditionalism, which rejected 'the idea that women can have both a career and a family', Barbie later entered various progressive careers in the 1980s—from Doctor, to Astronaut, she also ran as a Presidential candidate in 1992—displaying her transformation from teenager and a housewife to a woman with numerous options.[85] The inclusion of non-fashion items made the doll's social world more realistic and offered an opportunity to construct an increasingly complex play situation. As they play, children's

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[84] Donovan Bess, 'Barbie and Her Friends', *Ramparts Magazine*, April 1965, pp. 24-30 (p. 27).

[85] Hannah Tulinski, 'Barbie as a Cultural Compass: Embodiment, Representation, and Resistance Surrounding the World's Most Iconized Doll', *Sociology Student Scholarship*, 1 (2017), p. 23. <http://crossworks.holycross.edu/soc_student_scholarship/1> [date accessed: 22 April 2019].

fantasies are ‘directed by a corporation’ which ‘removes the children from little girlhood and transports them into what they regard as a teen-age Utopia’.[86] Bess argues companies like the Mattel Corporation teaches children to adopt a system of morals and values shaped by the organisation’s ethos. Ultimately, the factors which influence how dolls evoke social values are complex and historically rooted.

In addition to depicting particular social values and histories, dolls also recall past artistic movements and practices. Returning to the *Womanhouse* project, the group’s decision to use mannequins in their art assumes another level of significance.[87] The collections of dolls at the Mariposa mansion echo the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in 1938 at the Galérie des Beaux-Arts. The collaborative event showed 229 works by 60 exhibitors from 40 countries. Artists such as Breton (1896-1966), Paul Éluard (1895-1952), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) and Max Ernst (1891-1976) staged their exhibition in three sections displaying paintings, readymade objects, unusually painted rooms and redesigned mannequins.[88] Dalí’s *Taxi Pluvieux* (otherwise known as *Mannequin Rotting in a Taxi-Cab*, 1938) welcomed visitors in the forecourt. Ivy covered the old vehicle; a male chauffer with a shark head sat at the wheel and a worn female dummy dressed in an evening gown sat on the back seat between heads of lettuce and chicory. Live snails crawl across her body. Next to the female mannequin was another surrealist signature and domestic object, the sewing machine. Dalí’s installation encapsulated the Surrealists’ ethos: the irrational juxtaposition of objects and images sought to create new visual connections and release the potential creativity of the unconscious mind. But the artwork also drew on common tropes of femininity, nature and death, emphasising women’s passivity and their ability to be

[86] Bess, p. 26.
[87] Readers should note that I use the terms ‘mannequin’ and ‘doll’ interchangeably since the doll-as-art and doll-as-plaything are almost indistinguishable within this context.
[88] Derek Sayer, ‘Doll Parts, or, the Subject Reconfigured from the Point of View of the Mannequin’, European Association for the Study of Science and Technology (EASST) conference Public Proofs: Science, Technology, Democracy (Paris, 25-28 August 2004), pp. 1-47 (p. 11) (unpublished lecture).

manipulated, which continued throughout the show. André Masson's (1896-1987) mannequin also attracted attention because he managed to squeeze its head into a bird cage. The doll's mouth was gagged with a velvet ribbon, which resembled a surgical mask, and had a pansy placed over its mouth. The mannequin peered out of the open cage door through long lashes, unable to speak or free herself.

For the Surrealists, the mannequin epitomised the muse as a blank slate on which to project male desire.[89] Many dolls were the subject of violence, as limbs were amputated, twisted or added to the body, forcibly distorting the female figure for the artists' creative vision. Hans Bellmer (1902-1975) was the most notorious practitioner in this regard. His piece, *La Poupée* (1937-1938), was inspired by Jacques Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann* (first performed 1881), where the hero falls in love with a life-sized mechanical doll. Bellmer constructed his dolls around central ball joints which enabled the artist to manoeuvre them into unrealistic positions and add extra limbs. The sculpture was disconcerting due to its resemblance of young girl and was often pictured wearing white ankle socks and black patent shoes. Bellmer often photographed the doll in compromised positions, tying the figure up to emphasise the breasts, genitals and 'folds' of skin. The doll embodied numerous fetishistic, voyeuristic and subversive qualities, but above all, represented the notion of masochism and corrupted innocence, which Hal Foster argues is also self-destructive. 'In this way,' Foster writes, 'the dolls may go inside sadistic mastery to the point where the subject confronts its greatest fear: its own fragmentation and disintegration.'[90]

While the doll may address the fragility of the human condition while appropriating and subverting the child's plaything, its gendered subjugation cannot be ignored. Dolls like

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89 All the mannequins at the exposition were photographed by Raoul Ubac, Man Ray, and others, and are illustrated in Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

90 Hal Foster, 'Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus', in Jennifer Mundy (ed.), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Modern, 2001), pp. 203-22 (p. 208).

Bellmer's, and the ones displayed at the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, showed the desire to sexualise the body through its manipulation, veiling and exposure. Moreover, these installations depicted the aftereffects of trauma and abuse. Unlike the Surrealists, the *Womanhouse* artists were not overtly violent towards their mannequins; instead, they positioned the dolls as subjects in their own right. Many of the dolls, such as Kathy Huberland's (dates unknown) doll, *Bridal Staircase* (1972), or Shawnee Wollenman's (dates unknown) life-sized ballerina doll, were frozen in states of action. While this stasis emphasises women's confinement to the home—the bride cannot escape her domestic trappings while the ballerina cannot be played with by the child due to its size—it also suggests the female form must be idealised, passive and silent, due to its stasis. Moreover, reclaiming the Surrealist iconography of the mannequin through the staging of *Womanhouse* is a powerful political and creative gesture.

This motivation becomes increasingly evident when critics consider the way women artists such as Orgel and Schiff, who were part of the *Womanhouse* collective, have used the motif of the doll in their installations.[91] Although Orgel's and Schiff's depiction of dolls are of their time, being influenced by second-wave feminism and activism, they also transcend this moment. Aside from art historical influences, this is in part due to the recognisable role of the doll-as-plaything and its depiction of female representation, and secondly due to *Womanhouse's* portrayal as a paradigm of feminist art history by the likes of Chicago. But the mannequins were also functional objects, being mass-produced and easily accessible. While their standardised design represented women's objectification through creative industries, such as mainstream fashion, they also emphasised women's anxieties surrounding their

[91] I could have drawn on other works in this section, such as Schapiro and Sherry Brody's *Dollhouse* (1972), whose 'rooms within rooms' were filled with miniature domestic objects and figurines. The latter items explored the often conflicting identities Schapiro felt she adopted as both a wife and an artist (Schapiro, 1972), or Laurie Simmon's photographs of *Walking House* (1989), which displayed a two-story suburban house teetering atop a pair of female mannequin legs, evoking the stereotypes and nostalgia of 1950s middle-class America. See, The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights since 1980* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), p. 97.

representation, the societal expectations placed upon them and the anonymity that came with performing monotonous domestic routines. Instead of using the mannequin as the artistic expression of male desire, these were women's bodies curated *by* women.

Womanhouse not only presented life-size dolls engaged in various activities, but viewers also encountered them in seemingly normal, if unexpected, places. As I will show, Woodman's environments are similarly 'ordinary' to the likes of Schiff's *Nightmare Bathroom* (1972) and Orgel's *Linen Closet* (1972), but her depiction of doll-like figures differs. Unlike Orgel and Schiff, who use alien and external materials to create their dolls, Woodman chooses to transform *her* body into a doll-like figurine. In contrast to Schiff and Orgel's sculptural portrayals of the female form, Woodman offers a dynamic representation of the human figure which bends, strains and feels, displaying the tension between the body and the everyday environment through her photography. Considering Woodman's photographic form as a series of 'doll parts' not only emphasises playfulness within her work but also questions how an objectified body can become human. By positioning herself as a doll-like figure, Woodman does not strip herself of her humanity through her self-presentation. Instead, she draws attention to the corporeal and the mundane, but equally fascinating reality of what it means to exist and become in a particular space.

Quotidian Washrooms

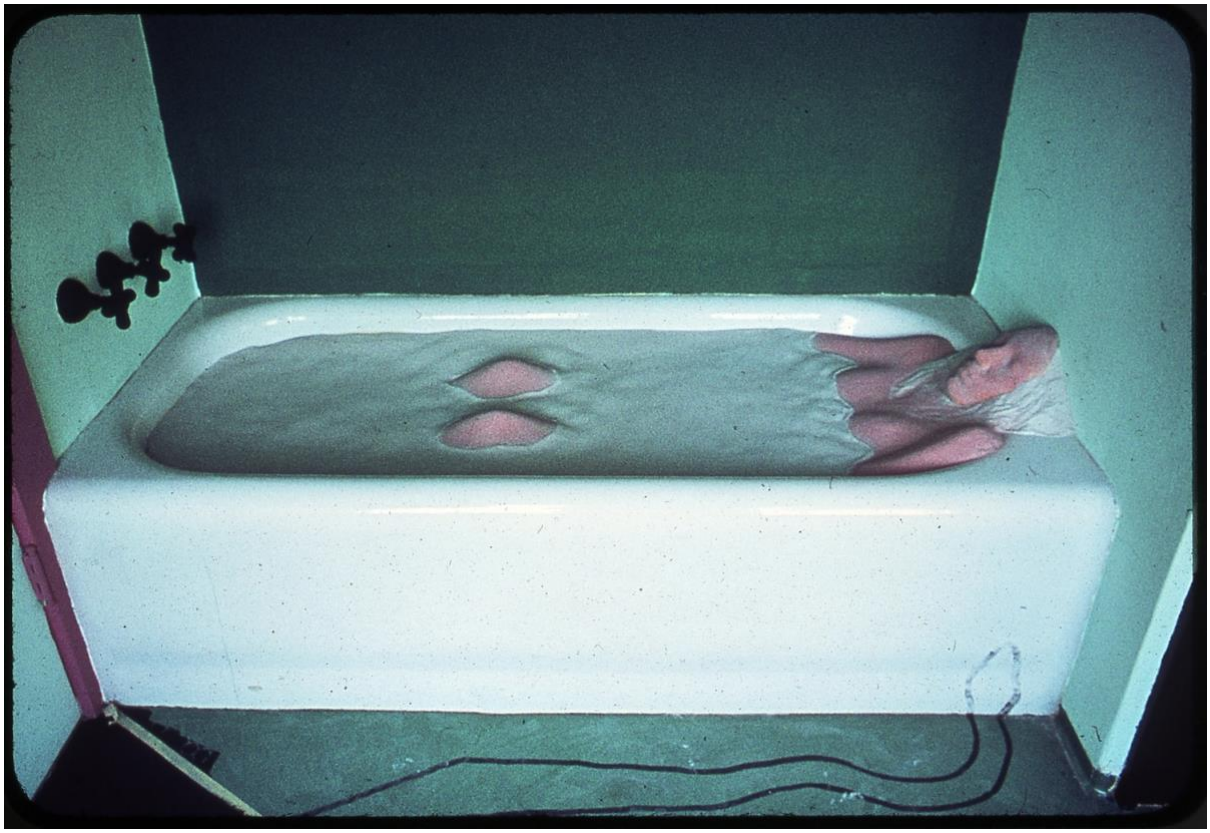

Figure 13 Robin Schiff, *Nightmare Bathroom, Womanhouse,* Los Angeles, California, 1972. Size unknown. Colour photograph.

Schiff's *Nightmare Bathroom* (1972) (Figure 13) and Woodman's untitled washroom (1979-1980) (Figure 14) are multifaceted images. Both raise questions of what it means to exist in domestic settings, but through different material methods. Schiff constructed her installation in the bathroom of the Mariposa mansion, incorporating the pre-existing structure of the house within her sculpture. Unlike the rich opulence of the dining room or the garish kitchen, Schiff's bathroom is cold and muted by contrast. The walls were painted in tones of blue, green, grey and white, creating a sense of detachment. The cast-iron bath is recessed into the alcove, giving the impression that the bather is hidden out of sight. The visitor has to peer around the wall in order to see that the bath is occupied. The figure of a woman reclines in the bath, but she does not look comfortable. Viewers see that her shoulders are hunched, the water barely covers her chest and her knees bend and protrude above the surface. Her eyes are closed. This figure looks

uncomfortable. Schiff commented that *Nightmare Bathroom* considers the notion of vulnerability 'as one ritually confronts their own nakedness'.[92] Schiff's concerns are primarily gendered: the artist wished to convey 'the fear of being intruded upon' by the gaze of unwelcome visitors.

This sense of unease is emphasised by the image of a snake on the floor, outlined in the same dark tone as the bath taps. Making its way up the side of the tub towards the figure's head, the serpent represents the fear that anyone could encroach upon this once private room and upon the woman's body. Furthermore, the outline of the serpent, like water, assumes a fluid function. It is both visible and invisible, suggesting the serpent has the ability to move beyond solid boundaries. Due to its elusive form, of being both present and absent, the serpent is displayed as a constant threat to the figure in the bathtub. It is not clear if the woman realises the snake is there or not. In this sense, the serpent's ambiguous form displays a lack of restriction around the female body and her right to privacy whilst also emphasising the woman's nakedness and vulnerability. The biblical connotations of the serpent and the woman cannot be ignored either. The serpent emphasises the figure's weakness—through the shifting of her material form and the social anxieties of being exposed—but the snake is also a threat. Its presence alerts the spectator's attention as well as their temptation to look at the woman in the bath but crucially stresses their inability to intervene in the ominous situation. It appears that woman's shame from Eve's original sin lingers, even in contemporary times.

Schiff's female figure is not a woman, but a doll-like figure constructed from sand and paint. She is an 'everywoman' symbol who represents women's collective concerns. Her lack of realism is emphasised by her 'skin', which is too pink. Its texture is not smooth, moist or wrinkled from prolonged bathing either, but rough to the touch. The doll's tension is depicted through her pose and the abrasiveness of her material configuration. She is an artificial form,

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92 Robin Schiff, *Nightmare Bathroom*, *Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, 1972, n.p.

petrified through construction and by the artist's projected apprehension of 'being sucked down the drain with the water'.[93] The latter concern is a psychological fear stemming back to the artist's childhood, which becomes increasingly significant when viewers consider the unconventional role of the doll in this piece. The doll cannot be 'played with' in a traditional sense, but she can be touched, which evokes the sense of vulnerability further. Her fragility is also conveyed through the materiality of the art piece, which is made entirely from loose sand, moulded and packed by the artist and her assistants. The sculpture slowly disintegrated as increasing numbers of visitors gave themselves permission to reach out and touch the doll-like figure.

Touch, then, is an imperative part of this installation. It not only emphasises the lack of boundaries between the doll's body and the viewer, but it also highlights the artwork's interactivity and the paradoxical nature of the sand sculpture. The material holds its form but simultaneously erodes and shifts when combined with water or other objects. Akin to Woodman's affinity with dust, sand can be manipulated, stirred and unsettled. So, the nightmarishness of Schiff's bathroom surpasses psychological anxieties; it also physically manifests itself in the doll's body and the structure of the building. Aside from the artist's psychosomatic motivations, the materiality of the body and its surroundings becomes an intrinsic part of Schiff's installation. An equally foreign material depicts woman's alienation from herself. Sand is an unlikely substance to encounter within the domestic bathroom, more often being associated with the natural world. Schiff's choice of sand not only emphasises the artist's mental and physical unease, but it also acts as a stand-in for the human model where anxieties can be projected and faced. Moreover, Schiff's installation emphasises the importance of considering everyday corporeal practices, such as the routine of bathing, and how such acts help form and refashion women's sense of self, which I will explore next.

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[93] Schiff, n.p.

While the disintegration of sand emphasises a lack of boundaries between private and public spheres, as well as the physical 'wearing away' of the subject, the disintegration of sand also accentuates the passing of time, losing pieces of oneself, exfoliating away the remnants of the day, the grime and the dirt, through the process of ritual cleansing. Sand is a powerful motif as it is able to 'take a shape and retain its vulnerability at the same time'.[94] Sand can be moved to reveal something, but it can also be moulded and redistributed, emphasising women's malleability and the habitual process of making and remaking oneself. This routine practice of grooming as an act of self-creation is not only 'nightmarish' to Schiff due to societal expectations to look a certain way and the pressure of being seen, but this act of making and remaking is also a powerful gesture of resistance. Schiff's notion of building the self is increasingly poignant considering the doll is apparently 'anchored' within its surroundings. The combination of natural and artificial materials—sand, cast-iron, paint—contribute to this false sense of stability through the materials' unnatural composition. These materials also emphasise a fusion of artistic techniques similar to that of the women land artists in Chapter Three, but it also displays how the body cannot be divorced from its environment. The head of Schiff's doll is sliced vertically, disappearing into the wall behind her; meanwhile, her white hair blends with the pale lip of the bath. The doll's hybridity with the bathroom disrupts the habitual nature of bathing as it seems the body cannot get away from the everyday places where it commonly resides.

[94] Schiff, n.p.

Figure 14 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, New York, 1978-1980. 4.3 x 5.9 in. (10.9 x 14.9 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

How might Schiff's work have been interpreted if she decided to use a human subject as opposed to a doll-like effigy? How would audiences have reacted if she covered herself in sand and sat in the bathtub? Would they have lingered in the bathroom, or even touched her body in the way they did the doll? While it is impossible to answer these questions, they do help emphasise the intricate conjunctions of the body, place and feeling. The viewer sees similar visual motifs when comparing Woodman's untitled washroom (Figure 14) with Schiff's *Nightmare Bathroom*. The photograph shows the artist lying in a claw-foot bathtub, but we cannot tell if any water is present. Unlike Schiff's doll, only the top of Woodman's head is visible above the curved lip of the bath, her dry hair cascading over the edge of the tub which is highlighted by the light from the right of the frame. Her eyes are fixed in front of her, a glimpse of her thigh is visible to the left of the frame, but we do not know whether she is

clothed or not. In that moment of stillness, waiting for the camera timer to go off, the viewer is left wondering what the artist is thinking.

There does not seem to be the same sense of unease as there was in Schiff's bathroom, partly due to the absence of body and the tension it might hold. Moreover, the use of light and shadow accentuates the quotidian state of Woodman's washroom. While Woodman's bathroom is not pristine – dark mould can be seen on the base of the waterpipe and grey watermarks spread from the join between the wallpaper on the back wall – her washroom appears light and airy in comparison to Schiff's. The interior is well-lit, as is the inside of the bath which almost furls around the artist's body like a cocoon. Shadows pool in the lower right-hand corner of the room, under the base of the tub, in the centre square floor tiles and in the lowlights of Woodman's hair. A sense of stillness culminates in these shadows. Is it that Woodman does not want to be seen, like Schiff's sand sculpture, or is this photograph a secluded space away from the complexities of modern life?

Although Woodman's photograph is shot in monochrome, it does not appear 'nightmarish' or oppressive in the same way that Schiff's bathroom does. This image displays a snapshot of her New York bathroom with its classical motifs, geometric floor tiles and exposed waterpipes. Woodman described her restroom as a type of sanctuary, a 'modern-day counterpart' to the temples of ancient Greece. Their classical elements, she observed, were 'often found in the most squalid and chaotic apartments of the city'.[95] Just as the biblical connotations of Schiff's serpent connects woman's shame of her naked body from the past to the present, Woodman's comparison of the bathroom to the temples of ancient Greece suggests that the same sense of historical weight can be achieved through modern motifs. For instance, Woodman's signature square framing is emphasised by the geometric floor tiles, elements she

[95] Francesca Woodman quoted in Corey Keller, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman', *Francesca Woodman*, ed. by Corey Keller. Exh. cat. (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2011), pp. 169-185 (p. 181).

also used to create *Blueprints for a Temple* (1980) (Figure 59). These recurring visual motifs emphasise the makeshift nature of Woodman's work, as domestic fragments are combined to create a visual whole, emphasising how everyday objects can be transformed into newly conceived milieus. By highlighting the bathroom as a contemplative space, infused with the faint visual traces of a distant nostalgic past, Woodman reclaims her surrounding dilapidation as elements of her intriguing visual aesthetic. Furthermore, re-imagining the squalor of her everyday environment subverted the chaos of her urban surroundings, as outlined in the introduction. Woodman transforms her interior into a self-reflective space through the mundane performance of bathing.

Unlike Schiff's doll-like figure, which appeared to be ensconced in its domestic surroundings, Woodman's adoption of this similar pose can be read in a variety of ways. Has the artist's body 'worn away', disappearing down the plughole, as Schiff once feared? Is she hiding from the viewer, either to dodge their gaze or in a playful game of hide-and-seek? Or could it be that Schiff's figurine has taken on a life of her own, facilitated by her comparison with Woodman's photograph, where everyday acts of washing and bathing become transformative, almost miraculous, acts? Perhaps the image encapsulates all these readings. And while the latter interpretation offers the objectified doll-like figure the potential to become human, it also raises other concerns over the order of being and women's 'place' in art and society. Certainly, Schiff's sand sculpture has an uncanniness which Woodman's image does not possess. But that is not the point. Woodman is not trying to emulate Schiff through her photograph but attempts to open a dialogue. By drawing attention to her material surroundings (and the lack of a body), Woodman emphasises how similar visual motifs—such as a doll or a bathtub—can come to represent something 'other' depending on their sensory environment. For instance, by reconceiving domestic fragments as classical elements of ancient Greece, Woodman collapses the distance between past and present; by doing so, the bathroom

transforms from a fearful place to one of self-worship. Moreover, she makes the viewer question what it means to exist and become in a particular space.

Linen Closets and Store Cupboards

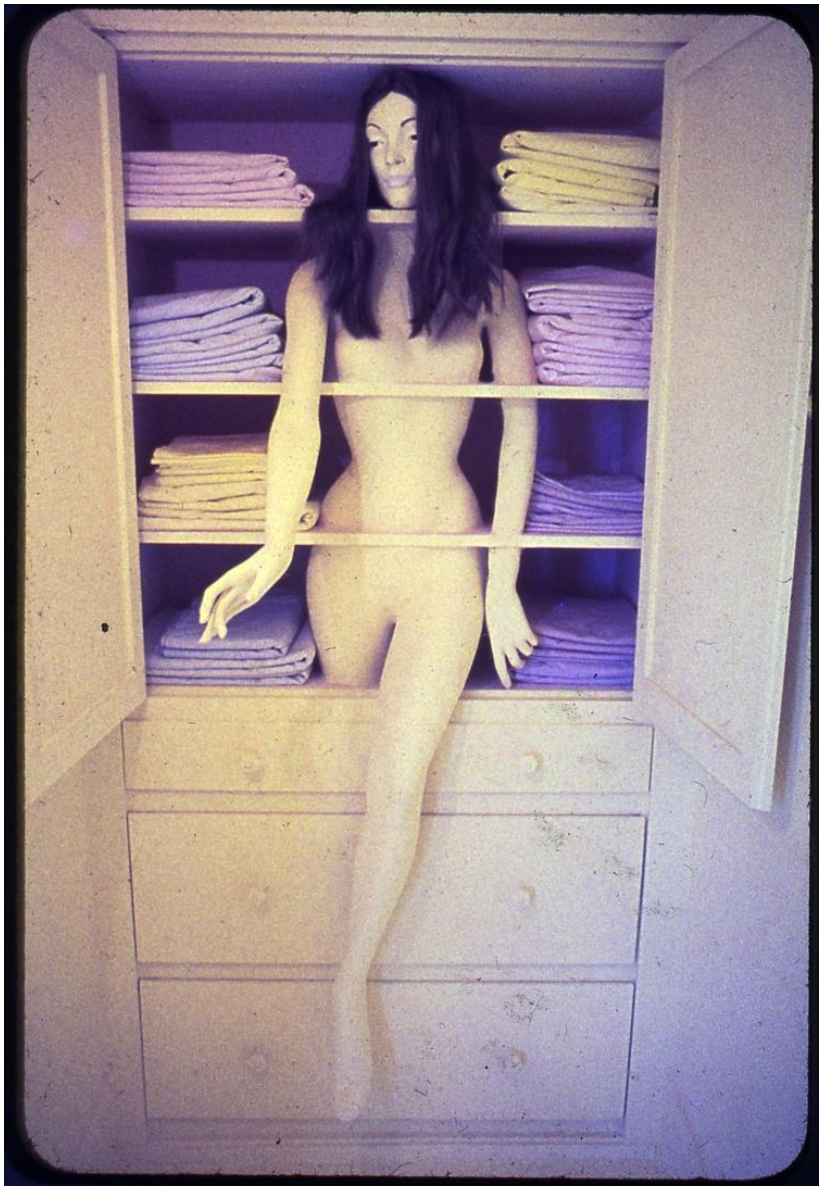

Figure 15 Sandy Orgel, *Linen Closet, Womanhouse*, Los Angeles, California, 1972. Size unknown. Colour photograph.

Wandering through *Womanhouse*, viewers came across the figure of a woman in an unlikely place. Orgel incorporated her mannequin in a linen closet (Figure 15). The cupboard was comprised of three long rectangular drawers with round wooden handles

and four equally spaced shelves. Two wooden doors flanked either side of the shelves, cast wide open, revealing the interior of the cupboard to the viewer. However, the once unassuming and private space of the closet is transformed upon seeing its contents. Pushed to the side of the shelves are sets of folded sheets which appear to be dyed in pastel tones—lemons, sugar pink and lilac—which emphasise the gendered nature of domestic housework. In the centre of the cupboard, viewers see a collection of doll parts. The mannequin's head rests on the top shelf, looking slightly to the right beyond the photographic frame. The mannequin's shoulders, chest and the tops of her arms intersect the second shelf down, followed by her midriff, hips and forearms. The last shelf features the top of the mannequin's thighs and her left hand. Is this an ironic shrine to one of many unremarkable domestic rituals? Possibly. Viewers certainly seemed to think the installation represented the housewife's expected place within the home, her static form alluding to her confinement and depersonalisation. One female spectator commented, 'This is exactly where women have always been—in between the sheets and on the shelf.'[96] The remark, in addition to the mannequin's naked form, emphasises the housewife's role as an object of her husband's sexual and domestic desire; meanwhile, being 'on the shelf' refers to an unmarried woman at a later point in life, implying she is a second-class subject, relegated to the margins of society and put away out of sight.

But another reading arises when critics consider *Womanhouse's* subversion of Surrealism. While segmenting the body could be seen as an act of violence, this division of the mannequin also recalls the *exquisite corpse*. The latter was originally a parlour game. A concertinaed sheet of paper was passed around the group of participants, who in turn drew body parts on each fold in order to create a new form. The Surrealists saw

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[96] Sandy Orgel, *'Linen Closet', Womanhouse* exhibition catalog, 1972, n.p.

this as an act of creative free-association and incorporated domestic objects, animals and buildings into the game, creating uncanny hybridised entities. Orgel's *Linen Closet* can be seen as a play on this practice, with each shelf representing a fold in the paper. Additionally, is it any coincidence that the word 'parlour' also refers to a 'store', similar to the place where Orgel stores her linen? Moreover, the mannequin's pale form and equally light encasement imply the doll and the cupboard are part of the same structure, similar to the interconnected lines on a sheet of paper. Equally, it is not clear whether the doll's limbs fuse with or emerge from the cupboard. Akin to the *exquisite corpse*, Orgel's mannequin is a hybrid form composed of human parts, domestic furnishings and the built environment, suggesting that the places where we reside shape our existence.

Despite the traditional associations with confinement, the installation also offers elements of hope. Looking more closely at the doll-like figure, other details emerge: the left leg is poised, the ankle flexed as if about to step out of the cupboard, freeing the model from her domestic confines; the right arm extends out towards the passing visitors, her fingers are slightly curled but appear relaxed. Is she reaching out to the viewer or beckoning them closer? Observe her face, the slight smirk, the dark painted eyebrows and the addition of a long black wig which hangs over the edge of the shelf and the mannequin's shoulders. These additional elements—the wig and brows—contribute to a sense of realism, and the possibility that the doll might take on a life of its own, returning the viewer to the sense of the uncanny.[97]

[97] Sigmund Freud uses an example of dolls taking on a life of their own in his 1919 essay, 'The Uncanny', by drawing on E. T. A. Hoffmann's story *The Sandman* (*Der Sandmann,* 1816), which features the lifelike doll, Ophelia. See, Freud, (1919) 'The 'Uncanny'', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. XVII, trans. from the German. Edited by James Strachey, in collab. with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey, Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press, 1955).

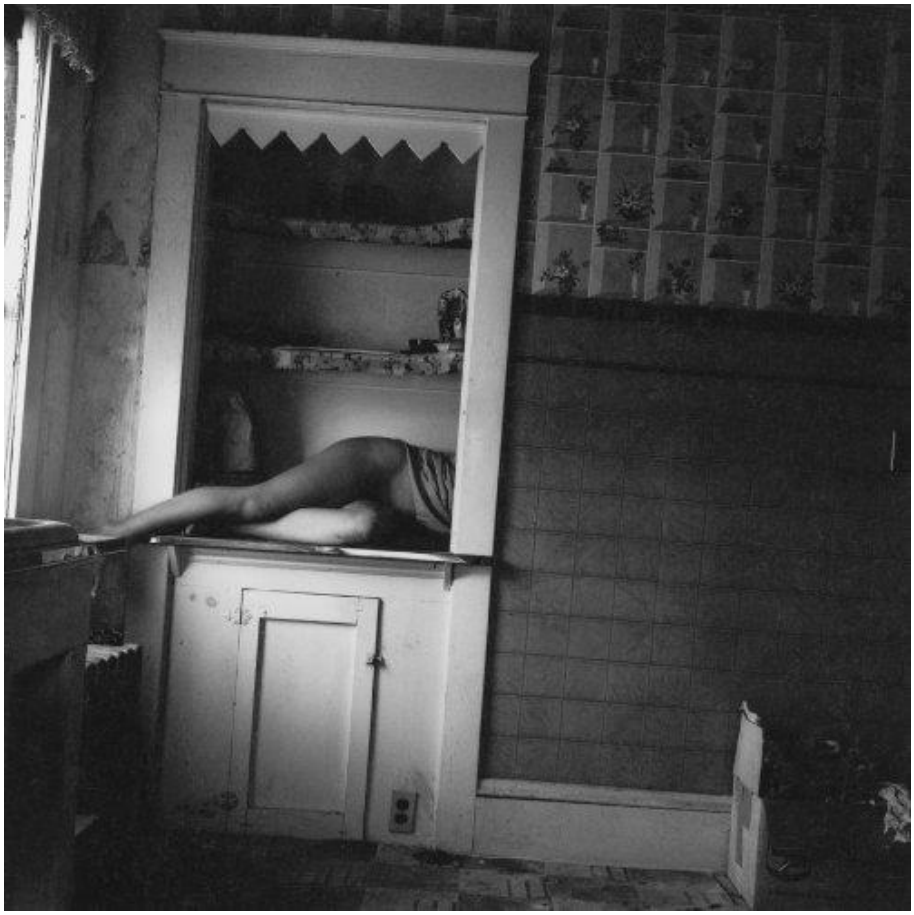

Figure 16 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1978. 5.2 x 5.2 in. (13.3 x 13.2 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Between 1975 and 1978, Woodman created a similar image to Orgel, but instead of using a linen closet, the artist situated herself in what appears to be a kitchen pantry or store cupboard (Figure 16). This image is visually complex: spectators see dark geometric kitchen tiles to the right of the frame; heavy white wooden skirting boards intersect the frame of the cupboard and the wallpaper appears dated due to the repetitive floral print. Woodman's choice of medium emphasises the setting's unclean status. Her use of black-and-white film emphasises the scuffed paintwork and the peeling wallpaper, making her environment appear dirtier and aged, and the square floor tiles look worn and discoloured. The room is dimly lit from the left, accentuating the dingy atmosphere of the room. Unlike Orgel's installation, which is bright and clean,

Woodman's interior is not neat or familial in the traditional sense. One gets the impression that the inhabitant is on the verge of moving into, or leaving, the house due to its disrepair: an aspect emphasised by the inclusion of cardboard boxes stacked to the right-hand-side of the frame.

Paying attention to the store cupboard itself, viewers note the heaviness of its surround, the small rectangular wooden door in the lower section of the furniture. The lower half of a woman's half-naked body sprawls out of the store cupboard above a thin shelf. Her left leg is bent at the knee and tucked beneath her, while the other is outstretched to the left of the frame. Her lower leg is highlighted by the shaft of light, her right hip is bare, an item of clothing, possibly a shirt wrinkles over her stomach and shadows form in the creases of the fabric. It is an unexpected sight, seeing the lower half of a woman so overtly on display, yet seemingly comfortable in her surroundings.

In light of Orgel's *Linen Closet* and the Surrealist's practice of disfiguring dolls, the most obvious interpretation of this image is perhaps that of domestic confinement. As the artist lies within the mouth of the cupboard, the triangular pelmet above takes on anthropomorphic features. The white wooden border looks like a row of teeth, about to consume the artist's body. Akin to Solomon-Godeau's reading of Figure 5, where Woodman is 'swallowed by the fireplace', the artist's domestic surroundings appear to devour her.[98] But this house's anthropomorphic qualities are heightened and become something much darker when we consider the objectification of Woodman's body parts: her top leg, lolling from the interior of the nook, appears heavy and almost divorced from the rest of her body. Comparable to joints of meat, Woodman's legs emphasise the fleshiness of the body and the predicament of taking up space. The image emphasises how Woodman's body, her domestic routines and the places she enacts are inextricably

[98] See note 6.

linked, especially as it seems the artist must relinquish her humanity for the house to assume lifelike qualities, such as teeth and the ability to eat. In doing so, the artist not only becomes doll-like and a figure of consumption—that is, to be played with and eaten by the house—but she transforms into a carcass, much like the depictions of petrified nature in Chapter Three.

Figure 17 Claude Cahun, *Self-portrait (in cupboard)*, 1932. 4.38 x 3.38 in. (11.11 x 8.57 cm). Black-and-white photograph, Jersey Heritage collection. Courtesy: the artist and Jersey Heritage.

On first glance, Woodman's store cupboard evokes negative connotations of entrapment, objectification and mutilation, similar to Orgel's *Linen Closet*. But there is

something enchanting about this image which is difficult to place. The photograph shares visual parallels and the same sense of curiousness as Claude Cahun's (1894-1954) *Self-portrait (in cupboard)* (1932). Figure 17 depicts an ornate wooden cabinet set against a backdrop of busy floral wallpaper. The cabinet doors are opened wide, stacks of white boxes, a selection of bottles, and packets line the top two shelves and a child-like Cahun appears to be asleep on the bottom shelf. The artist lies on her side with an arm curled under her head. With her left knee bent beneath her, Cahun's pose is similar to Woodman's. But instead of a leg protruding from the furniture, as if she has vaulted inside the cabinet, Cahun's right arm dangles from the sheltered interior. There is a sense that the viewer has encroached on a private moment. How long has she been asleep? Cahun appears almost angelic with her peaceful expression; meanwhile, the ribbon in her hair and the white ankle socks enhance her child-like persona.

Viewers also perceive the artists' light-hearted playfulness, as they attempt to fit their bodies into unexpected places or *pretend* to be asleep. Who is to say Woodman is a victim of the house when she, like Cahun, may be jesting with her audience? While Cahun's staging displays a woman portraying a child, Woodman's body-shape, by comparison, suggests she is not a juvenile. Yet the artist's age is similarly ambiguous to Cahun's due to her fragmented form and lack of clothing. My point is that a similar visual tone can be achieved despite the traditional markers of identity being obscured. By focusing on how bodies fit into unexpected places, Woodman not only plays with the conventional function of the house. She also teases the viewer by playing with their sense of perception, the idea of where the body 'belongs' and partakes in a wider dialogue with artists like Cahun, Orgel, Schiff and others, enabling her work to traverse decades and geographical distance.

This play with perception is also achieved through the framing of the image, which is skewed to the right. Everything in the frame leans slightly, creating a sense

that the house is sinking or that the fixtures defy gravity. It is only a slight distortion of space, but it is enough to put the viewer on edge. I am reminded of the funhouse mentioned earlier in the chapter, but this time the house has trapdoors and hidden mirrors. Similar to Orgel's fragmented mannequin, the artist's body is severed in two by the edge of the cupboard, assuming the position of the magician's assistant who has been cut in half for the spectator's entertainment. Where is her torso, her arms and face? The audience is left asking how this photographic trick was performed. But there is a sense of playful defiance in this reading: Woodman does not attempt to conceal herself or diminish herself to fit the recess. If anything, she defies the house's structure by pushing against its pre-existing boundaries. The artist hints at how the trick is performed by offering a glimpse of her body, but nothing more.

Concluding Thoughts

To conclude, this chapter has considered Woodman's interior spaces within a wider, and increasingly flexible, theoretical approach. Contemplating how Woodman 'fits' into her physical and photographic environments raises a number of issues around notions of the everyday, the role of materiality in photography and the body's place in supposed ordinary environments. Artists such as Woodman, Orgel, Schiff and others show how bodies and familiar environments, like the home, can be challenged and transformed, not only through shared visual motifs, such as dust, dolls and domesticity, but through the corporeal as well. Woodman draws attention to bodies and places that are equally material. How might it have felt for a body to move in this particular space? Above all, Woodman was concerned with how bodies and places interact and play together, in a reciprocal process which transformed seemingly mundane domestic interiors into curious spaces. By considering her photographs in the realm of the everyday, I have

argued that traditional markers of domesticity, like store cupboards, table settings and linen closets, can become captivating spaces of playful wonder. But only if viewers are willing to look.

Next, I turn my attention to the wider suburban landscape amidst demographic change, urban degeneration and building abandonment during the 1970s. By continuing the theme of tangible human experience in Woodman's work, in conjunction with that of Matta-Clark's fractured buildings and cityscapes, I argue that visual motifs of gaps and voids not only display the actual difficulty of re-inhabiting deteriorated spaces, but also disrupt conventional spatial order, creating sites of visual tension, suspense and distortion. Moreover, by employing Woodman's and Matta-Clark's photographs as vehicles, scholars are able to disrupt traditional theories of dwelling by confronting Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology with the two aspects he omits: everyday living conditions within a society characterised by inequalities of power and resource; and gender, which enables critics to construct a wider theory of space that combines the notion of intimacy with disorder and displacement.

Chapter Two
Voids, Vagrancy and Disorder

Introduction

Francesca Woodman's photographs of interior spaces portray the curious banality of the everyday. Her use of shared visual tropes, such as domestic paraphernalia, dolls and dust, disrupts and transforms the house from a motif of familial entrapment to one of playful wonder and messiness. Moreover, considering how the artist assimilates with or wrestles against her surroundings prompts the question of how bodies and the material realm reciprocally interact. The haptic is increasingly significant when thinking about the artist's problematisation of place, and scholars find that bodily-spatial tensions underpin Woodman's photographs beyond the domestic sphere. Consequently, scholars cannot discount her wider socio-economic context when considering the influential roles disorder and displacement assume within her images of the suburban landscape.

This chapter will bring the material and historical aspects of Woodman's and Matta-Clark's photographs into dialogue. At first, their work appears unrelated; however, on closer inspection, critics find that their photographs of abandoned homes converse through aesthetic symmetries, through the severing of space and physical deterioration, and shared contextual landscapes. I argue that these works offer detailed depictions of tangible human experience, emphasising various aspects of housing policy and demographic change, from suburban relocation to urban degeneration and building abandonment where Woodman lived and worked. Between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, half a million jobs disappeared from New York City.[1] As factories continued to close and the city's degradation increased, 800,000 people relocated to the suburbs in the 1970s, enticed by government tax incentives that

[1] Phillips-Fein, p. 21.

favoured home ownership and by real estate speculators who exploited racial fears in areas like the South Bronx and the neighbourhood of Bushwick in Brooklyn.[2] But white flight and suburbanisation inadvertently contributed to the rise of inner-city degradation and made social and economic divisions increasingly apparent. Through their depiction of squalor and degeneration, Woodman's and Matta-Clark's visual responses blur the boundary between the city and suburban neighbourhoods. These volatile surroundings directly contrast idyllic depictions of suburban life and the house as a united site of refuge.

The house as a site of dreaming and reverie was a central theme to Bachelard's notion of 'intimate dwelling space', yet it was only accessible to the *male* subject. By default, Bachelard's poetics of space are exclusively male, in both their formulation and communication. In his introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, Richard Kearney states the publication 'adopts a humanist approach' that liberates the reader from the confines of a gendered language.[3] However, by suggesting the author's vernacular is a tool capable of transcending both image and text, Kearney merely evades the topic of gender, instead of attempting to make space for those who are unrepresented.[4] By closely analysing Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (1974) and Woodman's fragmented interior spaces, I argue that we can critique a well-established theory of space by confronting Bachelard's phenomenology with the two aspects he omits: everyday living conditions within a society characterised by inequalities of power and resources; and gender, which enables us to construct a wider theory of space that includes disorder and displacement. While his theory could be reinforced by Woodman's ephemeral and dream-like photographs, Bachelard's phenomenology of domesticity is a bit

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[2] Fires, destruction, and crime were rife in these areas, and real estate investors encouraged white homeowners to sell their houses cheap because black people were moving into the neighbourhood. The houses were then resold to black and Latino buyers at inflated prices. Bushwick's population declined from 200,000 to 134,000 as the original white population left the area, moving farther out into Brooklyn or the Long Island suburbs. See, Phillips-Fein, p. 229.

[3] Richard Kearney, 'Preface' in Gaston Bachelard, (1958) *The Poetics of Space* (London: Penguin, 2014), xiii.

[4] Kearney, xiii.

'cosy'. I want to use Woodman's and Matta-Clark's images to stake out the limitations of Bachelard's theory to include a politics of feeling and materiality. I argue Woodman's and Matta-Clark's tangible visual engagement with suburban environments not only reflect the wider social history of New York-area housing during the 1970s and early 1980s, but their blurred aesthetics, physical absences and material interactions also display the difficulty of fitting the body into deteriorated suburban places. However, by emphasising a sense of visual and atmospheric uncertainty, Woodman's and Matta-Clark's photographs go further than document their surroundings. Their work plays with notions of presence and absence, immateriality and the haptic, as well as marking the house as an uncanny transformative site. Before I explore how Woodman and Matta-Clark subvert the built structure of the suburban home and its traditional connotations, I first account for common theories of dwelling which underpinned American society when artists like Matta-Clark and Woodman worked.

Traditional Theories of Dwelling

As I have discussed so far, the environments in which artists like Woodman and Matta-Clark lived were unpredictable, and directly influenced their artwork. Economic instability led to increased crime rates, vagrancy and urban decay; many on the outskirts of mainstream society were also made visible through the city's deteriorating infrastructure. Accounting for the messiness of everyday life and the breakdown of habitable space is intrinsic to Woodman's work and her negotiation of space.[5] Perry asserts that the combination of notions of the home and domesticity is a product of the modern age 'in which developments in technology, capitalist economics, industrial labour, and post-Enlightenment ideas of individualism and the family, have contributed to a notion of a private space, infused with intimate traces of family

[5] For debates on belonging, see, K.H. Alder and Carrie Hamilton, *Homes and Homecomings: Gendered Histories of Domesticity and Return* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 2-5.

life'.[6] One frequently quoted text on the idea of the intimate home is Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space,* first published in French as *La Poétique de l'Espace* in 1958. Bachelard combines phenomenological and psychoanalytical methods to analyse the house and home as a metaphorical site of possibilities and daydreaming. For the theorist, the domestic space is a quintessential phenomenological object; it is the place where personal experience reaches its epitome, where memories, dreams and human consciousness thrive. Bachelard explores cellars and attics; nests and shells; nooks and corners; drawers, chests and wardrobes, all of which are filled with emotion and reverie.

I focus on Bachelard's theory of space, in part due to its archetypal portrayal of place. Additionally, many architects training in America during the post-war period, including Matta-Clark, studied *The Poetics of Space* in a bid to challenge Modernism's style and philosophy.[7] According to Bachelard, 'the poetic image is so new that correlations between past and present can no longer be usefully considered'.[8] Consequently, his study on the development of subjective consciousness discounts the notion of change through time. 'Memories are motionless', Bachelard asserts, 'and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are'.[9] Daydreams and layers of history accumulate within the home, which also transfer to the dweller. Within this space of constant re-imaginings, the subject cannot develop, only exist; meanwhile, the notion of a dwelling place becomes a static, unchanging ideal.

By comparison, Woodman's portrayal of the house offers viewers a different image of dwelling. If the house is comprised of a collection of images that creates the illusion of stability, then Woodman achieves similar through her use of the photographic medium. The image itself produces the illusion of a fixed moment, yet Woodman's emphasis on bodily movements and

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6 Perry, p. 11.
7 For instance, Michael Benedikt notes that *The Poetics of Space* was required reading at the Yale School of Architecture in the mid-1970s. See, Michael Benedikt, 'On Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* Now, in Introduction to "Nests," "Shells," and "Intimate Immensity," *CENTER 17: Space + Psyche* (2012), p. 2.
8 Bachelard, p. 14.
9 Bachelard, p. 31.

decaying structures highlights the instability of bodies and the built environment. Moreover, her notion of embodiment is more flexible than Bachelard's. For the theorist, the house 'is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams', and an abstract archetype.[10] In the case of Woodman, the house embodies mess, disorder and the corporeal. Moving around abandoned sites is a haptic experience; and while Bachelard notes how 'the house image moves in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them', Woodman's visual interplay between bodies and buildings alludes to a physical integration.[11] While the merging of human and architectural forms is a reciprocal movement in Woodman's photographs, it can also be strenuous, if not always welcomed.

If Woodman's depiction of bodies and the spaces they inhabit appears unstable, it is in part due to the artistic milieu in which they were created. During the turbulence of the 1970s, artists sought to challenge the role of the authorial artist, traditional relationships with the natural world and the notion of the ephemeral by experimenting with new shapes, materials and techniques.[12] In his publication, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982), Marshall Berman categorised the modernity of the 1960s as 'a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier', in order to achieve 'a radically new departure, a point that could be a true present'.[13] This notion of modernity stemmed from the Nietzschean idea that one had to break away from the past in order to create something new. However, the economic downturn and decreased technologisation of the 1970s meant modernists 'were forced to find themselves by remembering' and attempting to 'recover past modes of life'.[14] One central theme of modernism which Matta-Clark and Woodman shared is the symbol of the house, which became an increasingly personal and private space. For Matta-Clark, his building cuts

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10 Bachelard, p. 37.
11 Bachelard, p. 21.
12 Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).
13 Paul De Man quoted in Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London; New York: Verso, 1982), p. 331.
14 Berman, p. 332.

and dismantling of space drew on the gestural mark-making of Abstract Expressionism and Cubism. Works such as *Splitting* (1974) brought 'old homes, visions and values' into contrast with the disorder of his everyday surroundings. Matta-Clark's work critiques formalism; he excavates the owners' past life from the house by severing the building down the middle, rejecting the notion that art ought to be separate from life and deconstructing determinant ideas about time, space and place. His ruinous structures appear to emerge from the decade's maelstrom; like his contemporary, Robert Smithson, who was obsessed with 'man-made ruins: slag heaps, junk yards, abandoned strip mines, exhausted quarries, [and] polluted pools and streams', Matta-Clark was interested in hidden areas within the urban infrastructure, gaps, voids and fissures, decaying abandoned sites on the margins of society.[15] But, crucially, Matta-Clark's manipulation of the built environment creates new structures from surrounding societal disintegration, which viewers also encounter in Woodman's work.[16]

By distorting her body and the photographic space it inhabited, Woodman exposes the subjective effects that artists like Matta-Clark, Serra and Michael Snow (1928-) also explored during this time. Discussing Minimalism in Woodman's work, Baker states:

> [Woodman's] reading of Minimalism's engagement with space flips it into an excessive, desperate mode rather than a euphoria of bodily experience. That one can know oneself, that one is constituted in a constant, mobile transformation of one's own sensory experience of space and interaction with objects: this is the utopian project of phenomenology and Minimalism … Now this is precisely what someone like Gordon Matta-Clark began to challenge by flipping such spatial explorations into experiences of excess and loss: vertigo, nausea and disorientation.[17]

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[15] Berman, p. 340.

[16] Woodman adopts another prominent theme in the modernism of the 1970s: the ecological idea of recycling. By using a collection of found domestic objects and fragments of debris in her photographs, Woodman finds 'new meanings and potentialities in old things and forms of life'.[16] This is perhaps most evident in her late work, *Blueprints for a Temple* (1980) (Figure 58), where the artist constructs a life-size sanctuary from collaged images. But the notion of recycling is also apparent in her depictions of nature. By transforming herself into a 'foreign object' in the landscape, Woodman assumes the practices of women earth artists, which I explore in the following chapter.

[17] Baker, p. 65.

Townsend is correct when he notes that these artists 'situated themselves in the same cultural sphere as the ideas and art they challenged'.[18] But due to the complexity of 1970s modernism and the economic and political unrest from which it arose, I question why Woodman's work cannot encompass both the 'euphoria of bodily experience' and 'an excessive desperate' rearrangement of space, as she and Matta-Clark created new visual compositions by dismantling and rearranging their surroundings. If the work of Woodman and Matta-Clark are modernist because they 'make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom', it ought to be noted that neither artist appears perturbed by their surroundings.[19] What is implicit in Woodman's work is more obvious in Matta-Clark's images: their visualisations of chaos and anxiety surrounding the broken home enables scholars to employ the artists' photographs as vehicles to challenge and disrupt Bachelard's well-established theory of space while accounting for the materiality of real life, and gender.

Although Bachelard criticised the uniform buildings of Paris, the unity of *his* house was similar to suburbia's optimistic ideals – as a microcosmic structure that ensconced man and safeguarded his dreams: 'A house', he wrote, 'allows the poet to inhabit the universe, to put it differently, the universe comes to inhabit his house'.[20] The exterior world saturates the house, evoking fragments of everyday life through sights, sounds and memories, which the poet encountered during his day. For Bachelard, the house is a site of rumination, where the inhabitant is always looking back at past events or inwards, towards his home, and consequently himself.[21] While Bachelard's theory of space promoted a romanticised notion of dilapidation which American suburban homes did not, the hope of escaping the degenerated city was fuelled by a similar notion of nostalgia. Just as the (French bourgeois) house was

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[18] Townsend, p. 65.
[19] Berman, p. 345.
[20] Bachelard, p. 72.
[21] The gendered use of 'man', 'his' and 'himself 'in this paragraph is deliberate, as this is how Bachelard wrote his text. To be clear, I am not emulating Bachelard. I use the male gendered pronoun to emphasise the fact that Bachelard's attention to space was dependent on the *male* subject alone.

steeped in melancholic longing to return to childhood origins, the American suburban home and its standardised design meant houses were packaged and sold the same, much like a child's dollhouse.

Post-war suburbs, like Levittown and others, initially attracted a range of 'young professionals and lower-middle-class blue-collar workers'.[22] As Kenneth T. Jackson notes, young growing families sought the aspirations of the previous generation: they longed for 'good schools, private space, and personal safety', and the post-war single-family tract house offered a retreat away from hectic city life, with the addition of pre-purchased white goods.[23] While the suburban house was initially designed around the employed husband and the stay-at-home housewife, Jackson notes how suburbia's demographic altered after 1968 due to 'the rise in divorce rates, the decline of average household size (2.75 in 1980), and the movement of women into the permanent labor force'.[24] These factors altered the shape of the traditional family and reduced the appeal of the suburbs, which were largely self-contained enclaves away from the metropolitan centre and its services.

The dream of returning to the childhood home, Bachelard argues, is '*man's* earliest memory' as 'the house we are born in is physically inscribed in us'.[25] If this is so, where can women like Woodman find a sense of place if the theorist's ideal caters only for the male subject? While ephemera may turn a space into a place by infusing the interior with meaning, the problem is how this significance is constructed through a language that does not accommodate women's self-expression.[26] The problem is not that male authors like Bachelard, Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe write about idealistic rooms and shelters which can accommodate male creativity, but that their accounts are presumed to be objective truth, which

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[22] Jackson, p. 243.
[23] Jackson, p. 244.
[24] Jackson, pp. 300-301.
[25] Bachelard, p. 36. My emphasis.
[26] See, Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

silences women's personal and collective narratives, not to mention their physical movements. It is not that Woodman's or Matta-Clark's work discount the fantastical, but rather that they use it for very different means, which can be see through Woodman's use of domestic furnishings to warp physical space in *House #3* (1976) (Figure 18) and Matta-Clark's interior shot of *Splitting* (1974) (Figure 19).

Broken Homes: *House #3* and *Splitting*

So far, I have suggested how disparities in America's economic and social fabric emphasise the conceptual gap between modernist architectural design and popular theories of dwelling. Matta-Clark's and Woodman's photographs of broken homes can be employed as vehicles which expose the hollowness of the suburban ideals and transform them into uncanny spaces of possibility. In the following sections I will closely analyse five sets of images: Woodman's *House #3* (1976) and *Space²* (1976) with Matta-Clark's interior and exterior shots of *Splitting* (1974); *Untitled (Mirror)* (1975-1976) and *Bronx Floor: Threshole* (1973); *Day's End* (1975) and *Untitled (Jumping)* (1977-1978); finally, I juxtapose Matta-Clark's *Subway Train* (1974) with Woodman's *Small Sketch for a piece about Bridges and Tiaras* (1980). These images transport the viewer from the playful domestic spaces outlined in Chapter One to the external world through the gaps and fissures of deteriorating structures. Furthermore, the photographs emphasise that creating a sense of place is a complicated process, and crucially highlight how notions of intimate dwelling encapsulate disorder and displacement.

Figure 18 Francesca Woodman, *House #3*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. 6.25 x 6.25 in. (15.9 x 15.9 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

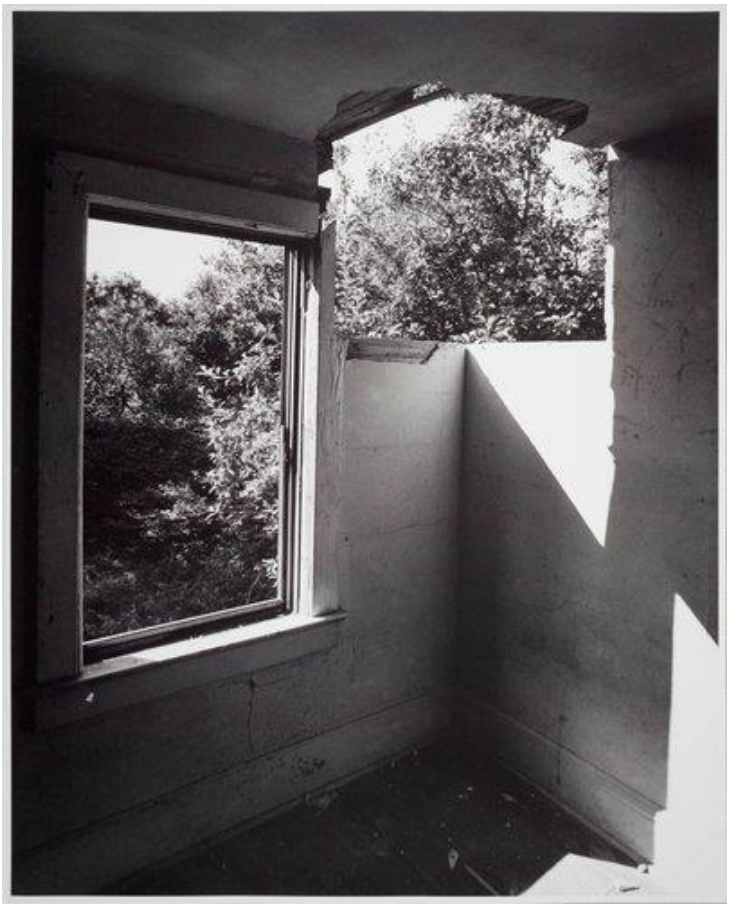

Figure 19 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting: Four Corners*, Englewood, New Jersey, 1974. Size unknown. Gelatin silver print.

Ultimately, abandoned houses like Woodman's *House #3* (Figure 18) and Matta-Clark's images of *Splitting* (Figures 19, 20, 22a and 22b) suggest the suburban home is complex and disorderly. While Matta-Clark was concerned with critiquing vast social inequalities surrounding the production of space by modern architects and their regulation of the human body, Woodman displays the difficulties that arise when buildings can no longer accommodate their inhabitants. However, when viewers first confront images of Woodman's interiors, like *House #3* (Figure 18), and Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (Figure 20), the photographs, at first, appear unrelated. Returning to *House #3*, where the windowless gap is transformed into a framed landscape, unexpectedly decorating the blighted wall of the abandoned property, Woodman's transformation of the void through her careful framing and diminutive composition can be likened to the unusual gaps and fissures in Matta-Clark's *Splitting*. Figure 19 was shot from the interior of the building; to the left of the image viewers see a rectangular window, devoid of glass, much like Woodman's in Figure 18. Trees and vegetation are framed by the window frame, rough foliage contrasts the smoothness of concrete walls. But *Splitting*'s interior contains an unusual architectural feature: a geometric gap is cut from the corner of the house, to the upper right of the window. This gap, which extends across the intersection of two walls and the ceiling, appears as an extension of the window. Akin to a skylight, the void enables the viewer to see beyond the borders of the house to the world beyond. Aside from extending the spectator's sight, the gap also replicates the practice of collage. Has the house's interior been cut away, or, like with *Space²* (Figure 21), has the natural world been layered onto the interior, akin to floral wallpaper? The void of the window, which is simultaneously a gap, echoes the geometric patterns of light and shadow cast onto the interior of the building, confusing the conventional spatial order of the house.

While it could be argued that their work is nihilistic due to their black-and-white aesthetic and portrayal of destitute surroundings, they also challenged this reductive

perspective through their portrayal of space. Even though Matta-Clark's and Woodman's photographs emerged out of a turbulent environment, there is an unexpected beauty in their images where sharp architectural edges are softened by pools of light and mid-tones. The division between urban degradation and regeneration is not clear-cut, as traditional markers of deterioration are transformed into captivating spatial elements. This sense of ambiguity is seen in Figure 20. The photograph documents *Splitting* from the outside, 332 Humphrey Street was a suburban wood-clad house located in the predominantly African-American neighbourhood of Englewood.[27] The house appears in disrepair, some of the façade has come away from the lower right-hand corner of the structure, the paintwork flakes and the windows are dirty. But the most telling sign of the building's deterioration is perhaps the split which runs down its centre and widens towards the crown of the structure. The right side of the house seems to buckle under its own weight and slip from its stone foundations. The unusual sight of a house divided into equal halves, seeming to represent 'the broken traces of life inside the home' and the wider declining neighbourhood, distracts the viewer from the upper corners of the house which have also been cubed and removed from the structure.[28] The holes are easily overlooked as they echo the dark voids of unlit windows; yet their doubling, reflected by the mirror-like split, heightens the uncanny symmetry of the fractured house. Space pools in unexpected areas of the house's façade. Akin to vortexes, the corner gaps of the Humphrey Street house are non-conventional entry points which draw viewers into the structure. The artist may create a

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[27] While Matta-Clark's work emphasised substandard social conditions and a housing industry 'that profligates suburban and urban boxes as a context for [ensuring] a passive, isolated consumer', another key factor is the consideration of race. (Gordon, Matta-Clark, interviewed by Donald Wall in 1976, 'Gordon Matta-Clark's building Dissections', in *Gordon Matta-Clark: Works and Collected Writings*, ed. by Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006), p. 57). As Pamela M. Lee notes, the private suburban home acts 'as a spatio-temporal retreat from a public sphere now regarded as debased by class, ethnic and racial influences.' (Pamela M. Lee, *An Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2000), p. 23). Matta-Clark's dissection of *Splitting* disrupts the supposed stability of suburbia and opens the discussion around social segregation. In contrast, Woodman's apparent omission of race raises questions over white normativity. While I do not pursue race any further in this chapter, this is not to say the topic is trivial. The question of race permeates New York's socio-economic context, as well as its cultural realm during this period. The issue of race in Matta-Clark's and Woodman's work deserves further consideration and thorough exploration.

[28] Perry, p. 13.

temporary monument to a broken society, but he also makes space in a structure that is vulnerable to external elements.

Figure 20 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, Englewood, New Jersey, 1974. 16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm). Film still of a Super 8 black-and-white and colour film, silent, transferred to 16mm film; 10:50 min.

In reality, the house's outward modification required careful foresight. In order to create *Splitting*, and to make space, Matta-Clark first moved the family's furniture and possessions to the basement before making two vertical parallel cuts with a circular saw through the structure, from its gaggle to its latch and from roof to basement. Then, by bevelling the foundations, the rear half of the house was tilted back on jacks, causing the double cut to open into a split. The split, and later cutting away of the upper corners of the house, meant that the fissured interior was permeated by the exterior world 'in a fundamentally different way to the liminal zones of

windows and doors'.[29] But the structure's deterioration was not the only marker of time passing. Sunlight seeped through the gap and rotated throughout the house, transforming the broken structure into a type of decaying sundial. Matta-Clark's performance is twofold: first, the light traces the linearity of time through the building cut; second, the building's gradual deterioration emphasises the house's materiality as it physically passed into disrepair and dust. For the artist, the afterlives of old abandoned buildings were ruinous (non)uments—a play on the word 'monuments'—which stood against urban redevelopment and defiantly blighted the American landscape. Matta-Clark's suppression of past lives complicates Bachelard's desire for the house to encapsulate multifaceted stories and layers of history.

By severing the structure of the house, 332 Humphrey Street is no longer a stable 'discursive arena [where] inside and outside spaces hold specific social and cultural associations'.[30] While doors and windows signify thresholds that separate Bachelard's intimate space from the external world, Matta-Clark's V-shaped cut subverts this traditional public-private divide. These boundaries were further confused when Matta-Clark displayed the upper four corners of the house in The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (*SFMoMA*, 1974). Much like Smithson's Non-sites, or the process-based installation works of Serra and Robert Morris (1931-2018), Matta-Clark transplanted segments of the suburban home from one context to another, prompting viewers to think beyond the gallery space to Englewood's redevelopment, and of the family homes which no longer stood there. By physically relocating the house from its geographical context, Matta-Clark reminds spectators that humans are not the only ones to be displaced.

In contrast to Matta-Clark, who severs the shell of the house, Woodman's *House* series, set in Providence, New Jersey, demarcates deterioration inside the domestic space. The wooden

[29] Racz, p. 115.
[30] Perry, p. 25.

floorboards are scattered with debris; meanwhile, the walls are cracked and pockmarked. Unlike Matta-Clark, who rarely features inside the photographic frame, viewers see Woodman crouched beneath an open window, which frames the exterior world beyond. Using a long exposure, Woodman's form blurs and becomes almost indistinguishable from her environment. Through her visual shifting the artist appears to synchronise with her surroundings, unlike the image of *Splitting* (Figure 20), which is in a constant state of suspense as the two halves of the house strain against themselves. The physical tension of Matta-Clark's performance manifests differently in Woodman's images. As seen previously with Figure 5, where the artist folds herself behind the mantlepiece, or with Figure 6, where she suspends herself from the doorjamb, Woodman's tension appears as choreographed movements with her architectural surroundings. Similarly, she carefully chooses the abandoned Providence house, 'where no housework has been done for years, and increases its disarray'.[31] The artist adds to the existing deterioration and uncomfortable atmosphere by introducing scavenged objects into the home, such as mirrors, flora and fauna; 'she peels back wallpaper, and adds rubbish to her surroundings'.[32] Her attempted re-inhabitation of the house unsettles the original sense of spatial abandonment. While Matta-Clark warps physical structures to create a sense of distortion and detachment in images like *Bronx Floor: Threshole* (1973) and *Conical Intersect* (1975), Woodman's images achieve similar visual interruptions through the careful staging of excess, but often overlooked, materials inside the home.

To reiterate, I argue that Woodman and Matta-Clark transform so-called stable structural boundaries into ambiguous spatial sites through the visual motifs of gaps and voids, and through their vigilant reorganisation of interior space. Their shared act of transplanting fragments to and from their respective locations obscures the uniformity of the house as a

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[31] Raymond, *Women Photographers and the Feminist Aesthetics*, p. 107.
[32] Sloan Rankin, 'Peach Mumble – Ideas Cooking', *Francesca Woodman*, ed. by Hervé Chandès Exh. cat. (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain; Zurich: Scalo, 1998), pp. 33–37 (pp. 34-35).

dwelling space whilst physically and metaphorically deconstructing suburbia as an intimate motif.[33] Matta-Clark transfigures the suburban environment into a site of spectacle by physically uprooting the house. Drawing attention to the broken, fractured and damaged homes emphasised the ruptures of everyday life, in addition to the falsity of suburban ideals. The Humphrey Street house not only appears aloof in comparison to Bachelard's intimate vision, but its deconstruction also crucially removes human agency from the structure. The house is doubly displaced through its physical disturbance and lack of occupancy. In the midst of economic uncertainty, the *Splitting* becomes a ghostly monument for a flawed ideal.

It should be noted that my reference to 'ghostly' monuments does not denote nightmares or ghosts in a traditional sense. Matta-Clark's *Splitting* or Woodman's *House* series are not psycho-biographical readings of the artists' premature deaths. Rather, the building-cuts and spatial distortions open a space to analyse societal expectations, in addition to well-established theories of space, which remain rooted in the tangible experiences of their environments. If by dividing the house, Matta-Clark literally and metaphorically opened up an unconventional space in which to critique society, then it could be argued that Woodman's work fills this conceptual gap. That is, she would not look out of place in any of Matta-Clark's photographs, as she darts across broken floorboards or manoeuvres between shafts of light. This aesthetic correlation implies there was a wider concern for creating a haptic space by those who were marginalised and overlooked, and this gesture was facilitated by the act of photographing.

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[33] However, Matta-Clark's performances do not entirely escape the myths he wished to expose. While the artist attempted to reject the private sphere, he nevertheless displayed his work in the mainstream gallery space. As a result, Matta-Clark's work 'remains linked to the modernist ethos of the singular, heroic, transgressive male, whose independence drives him from the home' (Poggi, 1996, p. 239). The difference is that while Matta-Clark is able to stray away from the home, he is also free to return. Woodman, on the other hand, has no space to call her own. Just as Matta-Clark splits the house against the grain in a physical and allegorical sense, Woodman visually re-inscribes the abandoned house and subsequent dwelling spaces in an attempt to put down roots, thus challenging Bachelard's theory of space and the great male writers he endorses.

While the camera was an important documentary tool for Woodman and Matta-Clark, it was also a significant instrument when structuring and slicing space. While buildings like *Splitting* twist and disorientate the viewer through their creation of negative space, complicating the notion of interior-exterior dualism, by contrast, Woodman's photographs layer visual and historical cues to unsettle notions of linear time and distance. In *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (1996), Beatriz Colomina argues architecture only becomes modern through its engagement with mass media. While conventional criticism portrays architecture and mass media in opposition to one another, Colomina sees representations of architecture, such as photographs, films, writing and advertising, as systems of communication that defines and drives contemporary culture. Colomina believes that the blurring of inside and outside already existed in the modernist architecture of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, which was facilitated by the camera. While photography and film are often viewed 'as "transparent" media, deriving from the classical system of representation, there is an epistemological break between photography and perspective. … The camera—particularly the movie camera—implies that there is no center'.[34] The notion of de-centring is also applicable for Matta-Clark's images: the camera both focuses and disrupts the gaze on the severed house which stands as a critique against the modernist ideals of architects like Le Corbusier, but also contests the notion of a universalist perspective.[35] Similarly, Woodman's act of superimposing and extending spatial plains through visual illusions and collages, as seen in *Blueprints for a Temple* (1980) (Figure 59), creates a microcosm which complicates the boundary between the home and the artist's studio.

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34 Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 133.

35 See James Attlee, Towards Anarchitecture: Gordon Matta-Clark and Le Corbusier', *Tate Papers*, no.7 (2007), n.p. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier> [date accessed: 31 August 2016].

Ultimately, Matta-Clark interrupts the notion of an idealised stable dwelling space by physically dividing the house, while Woodman gives the impression of detachment by using her body and other objects to disrupt the interior. These buildings are no longer at the centre of the domestic sphere partly due to their physical undercutting (in the case of *Splitting*), and the house becomes a metaphor for a fractured society. Akin to Matta-Clark's architectural warpings, Woodman's photographs of interior spaces emphasise how the house is simultaneously a site of dreams and reality, but the boundary between the two realms is thoroughly disturbed. As I show in the next section, this sense of unease is depicted through the artists' visual sites, in addition to their bodies, emphasising the difficulty of establishing a sense of place.

Sites of Tension: *Space²* and *View of Splitting*

Creating space for movement and self-expression is more than a discursive act for artists like Woodman and Matta-Clark. Their depictions of disturbed spaces are rooted in the material realm. While the act of photographing blurs the boundary between art and architecture, it also emphasises the physical distinction between bodies and their environments which are contextually and haptically ingrained, as we have seen previously with *Francesca Woodman in her Studio* (Figure 2) and *Three kinds of melon* (Figure 7). Similarly, Woodman's subsequent documentation of abandoned and ruinous locations highlights the physical difficulty of re-inhabiting a place once its initial function deteriorates. This bodily tension is evident in *Space²*, taken in Providence in 1976 (Figure 21).

Figure 21 Francesca Woodman, *Space²*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. 6.6 x 6.6 in. (16.7 x 16.7 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Figure 22a Gordon Matta-Clark, *View of Splitting*, Englewood, New Jersey, 1974. Size unknown. Gelatin silver prints. (Left).

Figure 22b Gordon Matta-Clark working on *Splitting*, Englewood, New Jersey, 1974. Size unknown. Gelatin silver prints. (Right).

A girl stands with her back to a pockmarked wall (Figure 21). Plaster chips and wallpaper peels. Architectural fragments litter the floor around her feet. She could be emerging from the structure, peeling away layers of paper to reveal herself, statue made human. Or similar to *then at one point i did not need to translate the notes; they went directly to my hands*[36] (1976) (Figure 54), the printed floral pattern may subsume her form, transforming the artist into a hybridised woman-as-nature figure, as I will explore in Chapter Three. But what else can be observed? Pale skin, almost the same tone as the wall behind her; the crook of an elbow echoing the bottom corner of the windowsill; the shadow of her ribcage; a bellybutton that alludes to the dark spots of concrete in the top left-hand corner of the frame. Her curled fingers grip the edge of the paper; how long has she held this pose? Being an art object is a strenuous task. It requires an enormous amount of focus for the model to hold their body, which in that moment is not their body, in a particular position. Extremities turn cold due to their inactivity, muscles and tendons ache and twitch, the subject introspects their interior. Models are looked at but not entirely seen. The body, particularly in the case of the female model, is broken down into shapes, lines and shadow. She is not sexualised, not yet at least. In this moment, as artist, model and object combined, Woodman has more power over how she wishes to be seen. But not over what she feels.[37]

Matta-Clark's *Splitting* is similarly fragmented and strained (Figures 22a and 22b). Viewing the structure from the inside, viewers note a dark line about one or two inches in width which runs the length of the floor until it intersects with the wooden skirting board, where it

[36] The lack of capitalisation is deliberate, as that is how the artist titled the image.

[37] As Woodman's friend and collaborator, Sloan Rankin, noted: 'you wouldn't believe how many times I had to roll around in a material like flour or sawdust for Francesca, or do something bodily—to experience it, feel it, stand in a room in January that is not heated, stand there nude for hours waiting for the right light.' Rankin's comment emphasises tactility and feeling in Woodman's work, suggesting the limit of bodily experience, and how performative spaces were of paramount concern for the artist. Moreover, her comment highlights how vision is elevated over other bodily senses when spectators look at photography. See, Sloan Rankin in George Baker, 'Francesca Woodman Reconsidered: A Conversation with Margaret Sundell, Ann Daly, Nancy Davenport, Laura Larson, and Margaret Sundell', *Art Journal*, 62:2 (2003), pp. 53-67 (p. 63).

begins to widen. A power cable trails to the left of the gap and runs up the staircase. Akin to the strips of wallpaper which divide Woodman's body, the interior of the house is cut in two which gives a surreal impression of photo-collage. Viewing the image, it is easy to forget that this severed structure existed. But where Woodman's body fills the gap in her image, Matta-Clark's building cut lets the light in. In a rare glimpse, spectators see the artist in the process of cutting the gap with an electric power saw. The camera is positioned so the viewer stands below Matta-Clark; looking over his right shoulder, our eyes are drawn upwards towards the partially constructed split. Between the gap, which I presume is the ceiling due to the camera angle, but could also be a floor or wall, viewers see the thin slice of a women's face. An eye, nose and lips are perfectly framed between the gap; her eyes are downcast as she concentrates on cutting the structure from above.

Both Matta-Clark and the unnamed female take part in the equal act of cutting the structure (which also creates an equals-sign), visually demonstrating the collaborative effort the project required. But there is also the deeper sense that the gap acts as an opening and a meeting place between the pair, much like Woodman's bodily emergence between the strips of wallpaper. By dividing the house, the boundary between the artist and the woman is breached, and the building cut, which once represented a negative violent act, becomes a space of possibility.[38] The architectural cut and Woodman's body share other compelling parallels: aside from the unknown female, as the house sinks on its foundations and strains under its own weight, I am reminded of Woodman's bodily experience. Her body and the building exude stillness and tension as each attempt to uphold their distinct positions. By juxtaposing the work of Woodman and Matta-Clark, viewers find that bodies and buildings are not so dissimilar;

38 Although Matta-Clark's voids and gaps create a space for new interpretive freedom to engage, neighbours and visitors associated the artist's performance with violence; and another accused him of 'out-and-out rape' (Interview with Gordon Matta-Clark, 1977, p. 10; also quoted in Lee, 2000, p. 21).

creating space is a physically demanding process, and the resulting images capture moments of suspense, as shown in the following photographs.

Spatial Distortions: *Untitled (Mirror)* and *Bronx Floor: Threshole*

Just as the stability of bodies and architectures are disrupted through their physical conjunction, Woodman and Matta-Clark also extend space through photographic distortions. In an untitled image by Woodman set in Providence, a wooden framed mirror has been placed on the floor (Figure 23).

Figure 23 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Mirror)*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1976. 4.29 x 4.29 in (10.9 x 10.9 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Figure 24 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Bronx Floor: Threshole*, New York, 1973. 11 x 13.88 in. (27.9 x 35.2 cm), Gelatin silver print. The Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Its dark ornate frame contrasts the floorboards and the white backdrop. A knitted blanket or jumper covers the far corner of the mirror, and to its right crouches the blurred figure of a woman. She kneels on the reflective glass, only her legs and their reflections, appear material as the rest of her figure shifts the spectator's focus. Viewers can almost make out traces of her hair; her hand reaches towards her right shoulder; the left one is planted on the glass in front of her, covering the reflection of her sex. But we can still see through her. Her bodily movement gives the impression of double exposure, where two disparate images are layered over one another, superimposed to create a new visual experience. This act of aesthetic layering further adds to the sense of intertextuality in Woodman's work (an aspect I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three). Moreover, her projection adds to the visual depth of the image. The mirror contains the subject but simultaneously disrupts the notion of replication through its framing effect. She is both here, inside the photographic frame, and elsewhere. Looking into the mirror, I see a patterned skirt, and what seems to be a blank canvas, which hangs on the wall behind

the artist but almost entirely outside of the picture. The audience's perception of what is tangible is skewed as reflections appear more material than Woodman, and as the combination of the camera and mirror extend viewers' sight beyond physical borders. There is a profound sense of depth and suspense in this image, both visually and physically, as spectators feel they could easily fall through the mirror into the liminal space below.

This sense of vertigo and spatial distortion in Woodman's image is heightened when it is juxtaposed with Matta-Clark's *Bronx Floor: Threshole*, which was taken two years previously (Figure 24). Looking through the square cut into the floor, the viewer is drawn through the cavities of the house into the room below. The geometric gap frames the petrified wall and window below. But when paired with Woodman's mirror, the gap serves a different function: it offers both the illusion of reflection and exposes what was once hidden beneath a solid surface. Just as spectators can see through Woodman's once solid form, the woodwork, window frame and beams subvert the audience's traditional sense of perception as they peer into the apartment below. In Matta-Clark's image, ceilings transmute into floors and floors become ceilings, suggesting how turbulent environments can transform into something increasingly fluid and abstract. As Cassandra Blair comments, there is an 'unsettling symmetry' to Matta-Clark's work; moreover, there is a sense that space extends beyond the confines of both the photographic frame and the building itself.[39] Playing on the word 'threshold', *Bronx Floor: Threshole* stands for a space on the verge. It is both a point of entrance and exit, an in-between and incomplete space which Foucault would define as 'heterotopic'.[40] Woodman's eerie presence heightens the lack of a photographic subject in *Bronx Floor: Threshole*, but also hints at the possibility that Matta-Clark has already

[39] Blair, p. 86.
[40] Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, pp. 1-9.

transcended the gap into another spatial expanse. In conjunction with Woodman's image, these spaces are conceptually elaborate through their spatial distortion and deliberate arrangement.

Similar to Woodman's depiction of vagrancy, which I will elaborate on later in this chapter, the notion of a 'disturbed place' evokes numerous connotations. It can mean disconcerting, agitating, interrupted, shifted and tampered. Woodman's photography is all of these things. Indeed, as Woodman appears to wrestle with her surroundings, she underscores the fact that finding a dwelling space is challenging, especially if the family home is no longer available. Woodman's presence in the abandoned Providence house and other decrepit interiors may indicate wider socio-economic issues during the 1970s, yet her presence crucially subverts prohibited locations, akin to the movement of squatters and the displaced, or like Woodman's 'ancient wayfarers' who sought a place to rest.[41] By re-inhabiting unconventional locations, the artist not only displays a propensity for place but also demonstrates an affinity towards those on the margins, subjects who 'wriggle and snake'[42] around solid surfaces.[43]

The amalgamation of splintering wood, debris, the blurred bodies, and the eerie atmosphere conveyed through Woodman's and Matta-Clark's use of black-and-white film indicates disturbing and uncanny visuals. However, these elements may also be perceived as symbols of play, or 'mischievous hauntings', as Woodman often evades the viewer's gaze by hiding behind upholstery or making dens from dismantled fixtures; meanwhile, Matta-Clark

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41 Woodman quoted in Keller, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman', p. 181.

42 Woodman quoted in Conely, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, p. 151.

43 When constructing Temple, Woodman said she was inspired by the mosaic tiles she found in her tenement bathroom and likened the space and its clarity to the temples of ancient Greece. She wished to create 'a Temple of classical proportion made out of classically inspired fragments of its modern-day counterpart, the bathroom. Bathrooms with classical inspiration', she continued, "are often found in the most squalid and chaotic apartments of the city … they offer a note of calm and peacefulness like their temple counterparts offered to wayfarers in ancient Greece.' Woodman quoted in Keller, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman', p. 181. The idea that the most 'profane' sites can offer tranquillity is not a new one, Matta-Clark also explored the transformative effects of abandoned spaces when he constructed *Day's End* (1975) from Pier 52 on the banks of the Hudson River. The structure stood as a landmark to America's industrial epoch and had since been occupied by gay cruisers. Although I am not able to explore this further here, both sites possessed transformative potential through the reclamation of the city's waste materials.

uses his building cuts as physical and conceptual climbing-frames.[44] But in these photographs, the artists' notion of play assumes a darker significance. Suspending himself from pullies and steel girders, Matta-Clark treats his construction sites as architectural playgrounds. Meanwhile Woodman gradually disappears behind surfaces, emerges from cabinets and camouflages in her surroundings. She appears to be engaged in an uncanny game of hide-and-seek where the viewer is constantly evaded (see Figure 21, for example). Through their spatial distortions, bodily tensions and tactile materiality, artists like Woodman and Matta-Clark suggest creating space may be a difficult task but it can also be a powerful transformative act.

Suspenseful Moments: *Day's End* and *Untitled (Jumping)*

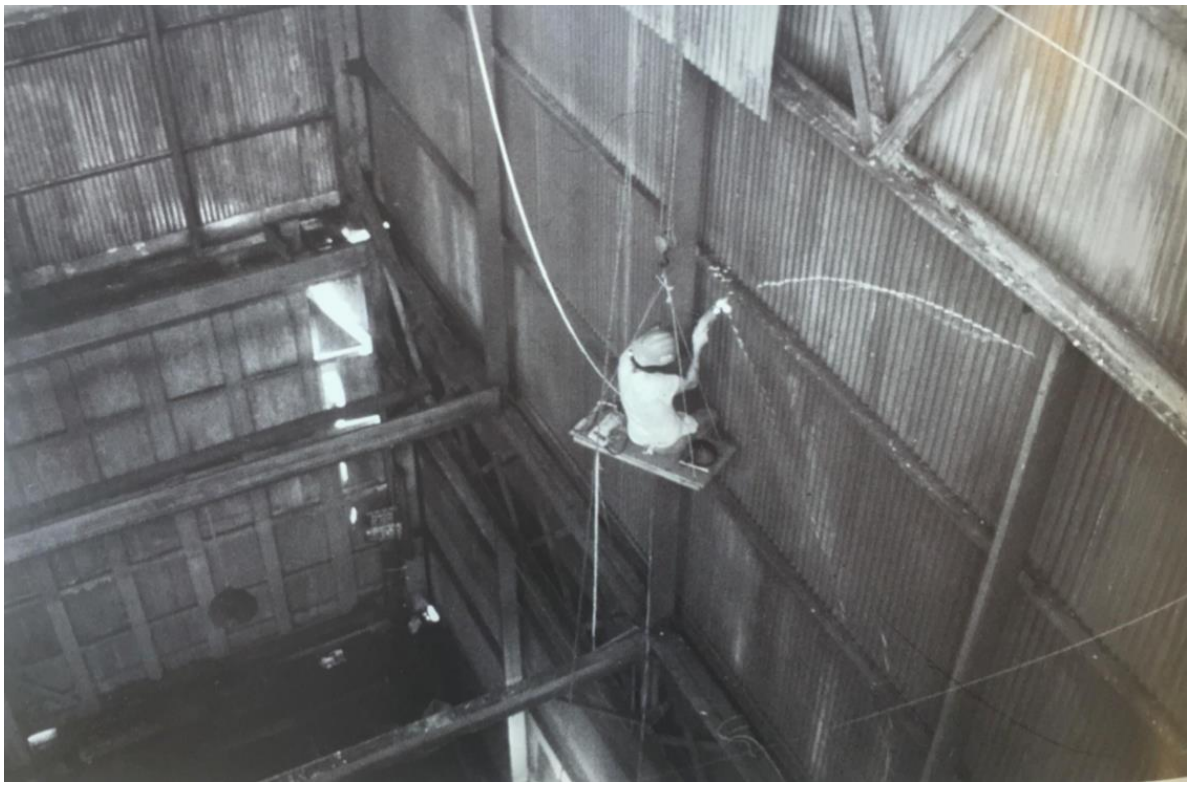

Figure 25 Gordon Matta-Clark, Cutting *Day's End* (Pier 52), Hudson River, New York, 1975. Size unknown. Gelatin silver print.

[44] Perry, p. 147.

Aside from depicting harsh everyday realities, which I will explore through Woodman's visualisation of vagrancy and the wider urban environment, Woodman and Matta-Clark disturb conventional notions of dwelling and spatial order through their strategic use of gaps and voids, bodily tension and distortion. Their photographic sites depict moments of suspense as the artists attempt to create a space for self-expression. These performances are evident in Matta-Clark's *Day's End* (1975) (Figure 25) and an untitled image by Woodman, taken in Rome between 1977-1978 (Figure 26). Viewers see the gendered body at work in one of Matta-Clark's photographs where he is seen cutting *Day's End*. Figure 25 shows the artist wearing a hardhat; he sits suspended on a narrow platform as he makes an incision into the corrugated metal wall of the abandoned pier located on the Hudson River. Elisabeth Sussman writes that: 'His overcoming of the environment, his assault on the structure, his sensation of being chained to the ceiling and burned by the acetylene torches, all were [a] ''macho'' … part of the masculine dynamic'.[45] By equating the strenuous construction process with the artist's gender, Sussman upholds the traditional notion that man dominates his surroundings, but she also draws attention to the materiality of the artist's environment and his physical embodiment. When viewing *Day's End*, the spectator is reminded of the artist's corporeal experience. Viewers can imagine the ritual grating, sawing and tearing of the structure; of lifting and pulling the pier away from itself; the rhythmic severing of metal teeth and sore callouses on the artist's hands. Moreover, by sketching a line on the interior wall of the pier, Matta-Clark emphasises how the supposed division between art and life is not clear-cut. The image occupies an ambiguous space, somewhere between urban construction and performance art. Through his habitual interaction with the architectural structure, Matta-Clark not only complicates spatial order, but also challenges the pre-conceived roles of the artist, architect and construction worker. By

[45] Elisabeth Sussman, *Gordon Matta-Clark: 'You Are the Measure'*, Whitney Museum, (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 29.

accounting for the material environment and getting his hands dirty, Matta-Clark displaces the architect's elite status, just as Woodman confused the boundaries between artist, model and object.

Figure 26 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Jumping)*, Rome, Italy, 1977-1978. 4.4 x 4.4 in. (11.1 x 11.1 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

If *Day's End* confused bodily-spatial interactions through Matta-Clark's engagement with the built environment, the untitled image of Woodman in Rome draws viewers' attention to her corporeal experience in a different way. Figure 26 shows a blemished concrete wall which is mostly a mid-grey tone. A lighter horizontal strip runs along the top of the frame, giving a sense of height to the image; meanwhile, the point at which the wall meets the floor is almost indistinguishable. This photograph displays an interesting spatial arrangement: by dividing the square image into three unequal parts in descending tones (light-mid-dark), the photograph becomes a collection of rectangles, referencing traditional photographic framing

techniques. This composition creates a sense of depth, which is heightened by the white rectangular outline that is slightly off-centre on the wall. Unlike Matta-Clark's curved line in *Day's End*, viewers are unsure whether Woodman drew this geometric shape. The rectangular outline serves two purposes: it firstly acts as a frame, drawing the viewers' gaze into the image and beyond the artist to her rough surroundings; and secondly, it denotes an entry point, much like the gaps and windows in *Splitting* (Figure 19), the mirror in Figure 23 and the structural matrix of *Small Sketch for a piece about Bridges and Tiaras* (1980) (Figure 27). While the incomplete outline signifies a potential liminal space, it also emphasises Woodman's fleeting bodily gesture. To the right of the white outline, spectators witness the artist in a state of suspense. Has she just entered the space or is she about to leave? Clothed in a dark dress which echoes the shadowy pockmarks of the wall, the artist's knees tuck beneath her in mid-jump. Her hair appears to float above the tonal line; meanwhile, her arms blur with a dynamic motion, rendering her skin and facial features indistinguishable from the lighter tones of her surroundings. But on closer inspection, viewers are unsure whether Woodman is jumping, falling or levitating. This gestural ambiguity emphasises the materiality and concreteness of her surroundings by evoking a sense of lightness, and perhaps even a childish playfulness. Furthermore, Woodman's sprightly gesture directly contrasts Matta-Clark's careful 'masculine dynamic' in *Day's End*, evoking a sense of gracefulness which juxtaposes her crumbling surroundings. Significantly, these photographs may depict moments of suspense and gestural expressions, but they also emphasise the importance of the built environment in creating a visually compelling image.

Mutable Constructions: Subway Trains, Bridges and Tiaras

By accounting for everyday living conditions, the haptic and the gendered body, Matta-Clark's and Woodman's work inadvertently questions *who* can take up a particular space at any given time. But issues of gender and the capacity to transform architectural space into liberatory sites are not limited to bodies or interior spaces. Woodman's and Matta-Clark's architectural playgrounds display a convergence of interior and exterior space, which in turn create ambiguous places of possibility and transformation. A rare and richly complex image entitled *Small Sketch for a Piece about Bridges and Tiaras* (1980) displays Woodman's concern with the 'mysterious' and 'harsh images of outdoor city life' which surrounded the artist and inspired her photography (Figure 27).[46]

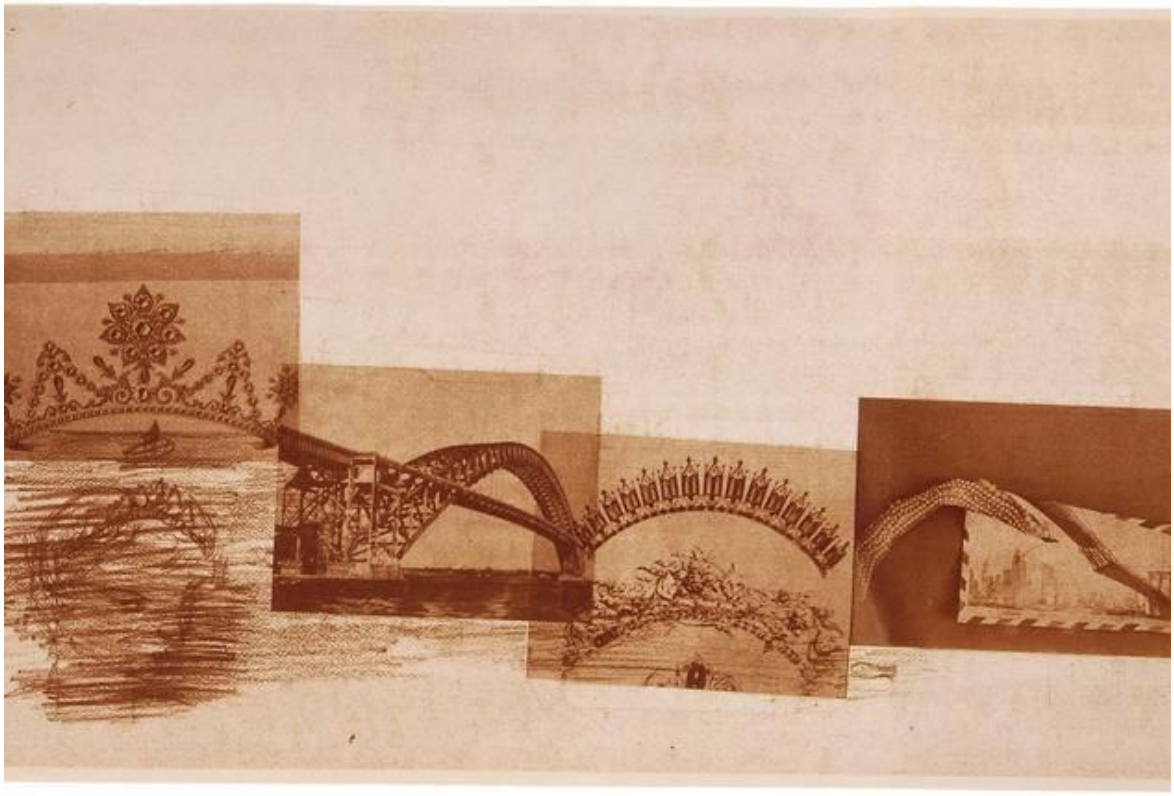

Figure 27 Francesca Woodman, *Small Sketch for a Piece about Bridges and Tiaras*, New York, 1980. 15 x 30 1/2 in. (38.1 x 77.47 cm). Diazotype.

[46] Francesca Woodman, letter to a friend, 1980, *Zigzag*, Victoria Miro exhibition, London, 9 September – 4 October 2014.

The photograph displays four sketches which are presented horizontally across the frame (Figure 27). At the bottom left of the image, viewers can just about make out the drawing of a woman's head in profile. Her features are dainty, her hair is short, or perhaps pinned up. Atop her head rests a tiara. But the image has been scribbled over, suggesting that the artist created it in haste, that this was the first draft of an idea, but her thought process changed. It is rare to see Woodman's work in progress. So why did she not erase the image, or start again on a new sheet of paper? Drawing a woman adorned with ornate jewellery acts as a marker of status, but it is also a normative image that denotes gender. So, shading out the woman may be seen as a decisive act. Woodman leaves a trace of her initial idea which acts as a point of departure. Did she come to the realisation that a gendered figure was not needed to convey her message? This perhaps also explains Woodman's decision not to include herself in the image. The lack of a figure also displays an important shift in Woodman's perspective and an increasingly nuanced approach to her work. Woodman moves away from the body and its convergence with space and instead focuses on material objects which connote gender disparities through their construction and presentation: for instance, the feminine ornamentation of the tiara contrasts the heavy masculine design of the bridge, despite their similar curved configurations.

The use of sepia is also a significant change from her usual black-and-white aesthetic, indicating a move away from photography to experimenting with drawing and architectural blueprints. This technical drawing is also supported by Woodman's subject matter. Aside from the defaced sketch, the collection of four sepia images depict seemingly disparate objects. Tiaras and bridges are juxtaposed in succession, but on closer inspection, I find these architectural and decorative studies have a lot more in common. Woodman's depiction of Hell Gate Bridge, as pictured in the top left image, arches away from the viewer. If the tiara is an opulent feminine symbol that emphasises a woman's beauty by framing her features, then the

bridge is a symbol of masculine engineering associated with the physical exertion and strength of the male body, which is seen in the work of Matta-Clark, who plays with the image of the construction worker through the physical splitting of buildings. Woodman emphasises the artificiality of gender binaries by contrasting these seemingly disparate objects; just as the tiara turns the woman into a spectacle, the bridge similarly crowns and monumentalises the city.

Figure 28 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Untitled (Anarchitecture)*, 1974. 16 x 22 in. (40.6 x 55.9 cm). Black-and-white photograph mounted on board.

Matta-Clark was no stranger to the harsh realities of the city and often used its raw materials in his work. This can be seen in an untitled image included in his *Anarchitecture* exhibition (1974). In Figure 28, viewers see the carriage of a wrecked train balancing precariously across a void. Some of the windows are broken, the surrounding metalwork is dinted and scratched, overhead wires trail and dangle. The bridge falls away from beneath the carriage into the water below. As Jon C. Teaford noted, in 1945: ‘railroads still provided a major share of long-distance intercity transport, and soldiers and sailors coming back from the

war generally returned via rail'.[47] However, the mass production of automobiles, along with the construction of new highways, meant that the rail network became less of a necessity after the war. As Phillips-Fein notes, the federal highway policy subsidised suburban development and connected the suburbs to the metropolis, allowing the majority of white middle-class workers to live further away from the urban centre and commute to work.[48] Combined with the national recession, the decline of public services such as the police and fire departments and the increase of crime and muggings, this meant that the subway system became increasingly unsafe. Within this context, Matta-Clark's photograph documents the decline of the public transport system and the life experiences of New Yorkers as the city appeared on the verge of bankruptcy and social collapse.

Aside from documenting everyday realities, the image of the train also encapsulates Matta-Clark's philosophy 'that a rigid adherence to certain ideas of form will restrict an object or a building's usefulness'.[49] Just as tiaras and bridges metamorphose in Woodman's sketch, Matta-Clark's abandoned train carriage assumes the function of a bridge by punctuating the landscape, thus suggesting something new can be created from disordered surroundings. The idea of 'bridging' is also extended through the composition of *Small Sketch for a Piece about Bridges and Tiaras*, where Woodman plays with structural and spatial components of the bridge and the tiara. I deliberately use the word 'play' as there is a humorous undertone to these interlinked images, which George Woodman note in his supporting text for the 2014 Victoria Miro exhibition: 'Francesca creates visual puns, jokes and poetry in this series'.[50] Overlapping the images of bridges and tiaras at the corners, these drawings deliberately intersect one another to create a collaged effect. Much like Woodman's portrayal of birch trees at the MacDowell

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[47] Teaford, p. 9.
[48] Phillips-Fein, p. 22.
[49] Attlee, para. 5.
[50] George Woodman, *Zigzag*, Supporting literature at the Victoria Miro exhibition, London, 9 September – 4 October 2014.

Colony, or her subsequent creation of a temple façade in her New York apartment (both 1980), this layering technique creates a sense of spatial and thematic continuation across the page. The top-left tiara connects to the end of the bridge, which adjoins the third central diadem. The fourth image is difficult to make out. It appears a beaded headband overlaps a postal slip, judging by the striped border of the page. A bridge—possibly the Brooklyn Bridge—bisects the top-right-hand corner of the page, and a hazy cityscape is framed in the distance. The assembly of headpieces and overpasses forms a bridge of images across the page. This clever presentation reinforces the notion that bridges, and tiaras, are mutable objects and their gendered subtexts are just as flexible.

A number of visual correlations are apparent between Woodman's and Matta-Clark's depictions of urban space and decorative objects. While the bridge (and the train) interconnect two separate locations, the structures also acts as openings through the gaps in their portrayal. Space is framed as the viewer passes beneath the bridge or peers through its structural matrix, which resembles the framing effect of the window or the building-cut. The in-between space of the bridge is crisscrossed by trussed arches, lattices and wire rope suspenders. Similarly, the tiara's woven embellishment heightens Woodman's continuing concern for formalist assemblies and the interchangeability of objects. Meanwhile, the train's original function is ambiguous due to its deterioration; the hollow shell of the carriage is devoid of all commuters or cargo. The abandoned train hyphenates the landscape, emphasising how disused objects can become part of a new visual language through photographic practice. These objects, trains, bridges and tiaras are unconventional and (un)expected methods of construction which open portholes of spectatorship. Looking at the city's infrastructure, Woodman and Matta-Clark not only show viewers how the everyday environment is a mutable construct, but also that new connections can be fostered between inanimate objects and architectures, between the viewer and the photograph; and, as I will show in the following chapter, new forms of hybridity

connects ‘us’ to ‘them’, whether they are human, animal or material configurations. While the mutation of architectural sites facilitates new critical interpretations around Woodman’s work and their potential as liberatory sites, viewers cannot overlook the ‘harsh’ realities that Woodman’s photographs denote, such as images of vagrancy, or their broader socio-economic context.

Francesca Woodman and Images of Vagrancy

While Woodman and Matta-Clark transformed architectural motifs through their images, structures like bridges and subway trains also carried the marks of social unrest through graffiti and vandalism. If Matta-Clark criticised the suburban dream and the quality of mass-produced housing by fracturing the family home, then Woodman’s attempt to assimilate with her surroundings displays a desperate endeavour to reclaim lost space. Within this context of degradation and radical urban regeneration, Woodman’s images assume this darker significance: unlike Matta-Clark’s vanished inhabitants, her grainy presence reframes the artist as a wayward squatter, displaced and isolated amongst her deteriorating surroundings. By entering and occupying the abandoned house, Woodman’s blurred presence suggests the city’s housing problems had long-term effects on society, while her restlessness throughout her series of photographs implies that the right to inhabit space and to establish oneself was only accessible for a select privileged group, namely the white middle class. Yet, as Joel Blau correctly states, homelessness has not always been the same. In the United Sates, vagrancy spread after periods of economic difficulties during the 1920s and the Depression that followed, and again at the beginning of the 1980s. As Risa Goluboff notes, histories of vagrancy law, much like histories written on the 1960s, have generally been disjointed and partial.[51] This is,

[51] Risa Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 334.

in part, due to the ambiguity of vagrancy laws and their constitutional revision over time. By criminalising nonconformity, dissent and disorder, many people were made vagrant simply for being who they were; meanwhile, regulating the body became a social problem.

With this context in mind, I argue Woodman's photographs can be viewed in a different light. While Matta-Clark splits the house against the grain in a physical and allegorical sense, Woodman conversely embellishes her abandoned interiors with superfluous material waste. Aside from accumulating the detritus of the city, she also occupies the Providence house on her own terms, for her own expression. In other words, like the photograph, she *takes place.* Woodman effectively uses her body and repurposes domestic objects to create both a sense of place and a unique visual language. Unlike previous readings of the artist's work, I want to resist the idea that Woodman or her mental state haunts the Providence house, or any of her images. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the *House* series emphasised the normalcy of dust and debris through its sheer quantity, both within the images themselves and as a thematic thread throughout her collection.[52] But set against the grime of the city and issue of vagrancy, Woodman's images can be used as a vehicle to question the notion of representation when there is no permanent residence, and raise the possibility that being displaced can be a significant position of power.

Through Woodman's blurred restlessness, the squalor of the house and her distortion of interior space, the artist visually represents the difficulty of finding a sense of place. While Woodman and Matta-Clark occupied similar derelict interiors, they also chose photographic locations that were convenient to access and used negative expanses of space as formalist

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[52] Aside from the abandoned Providence house, Woodman also features in other deserted structures, such as abandoned factories and bombed-out churches. While I did not have the space to explore these places in my thesis, other scholars have begun to explore these areas in more depth. See the works of Claire Raymond, *Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2010), for compelling analyses of factories; and Isabella Pedicini, *Francesca Woodman: The Roman Years: between flesh and film* (Rome: Contrasto, 2012), for a thorough background on Woodman's time in Rome and detailed interviews with her friends, Giuseppe Casetti and Giuseppe Gallo.

tools.[53] But as far as I can tell from her images, Woodman's house remains structurally intact. Unlike Matta-Clark, she does not cut through the building with construction tools; instead, she skews spatial perspectives by inserting furniture, or herself, into unexpected locations. As seen in Figure 29, a door is taken off its hinges and propped precariously against a wall. The pale walls are mottled with dark spots, resembling general wear-and-tear, of creeping damp and mildew or perhaps even bullet holes. The black ceiling, which matches the window frame and skirting board, adds to the sense of oppression and confinement as their harsh geometry divides the room. Wedged between the floor and door is a woman, possibly curled in the foetal position. Viewers cannot see her upper body as it is shielded by the door. This odd position, of being stuck between two types of wood, and of herself being a Wood-man, further emphasises the difficulty of finding a sense of place.[54] Moreover, her bodily obstruction is akin to the magician's assistant who is placed in a box and sawn in half. But Woodman's 'magic' resides in her ability to alter perspectives through her photography. Seeing only her legs which curl and kick, Woodman could be anyone. But the viewer is left with a number of questions: is Woodman trying to wriggle into the space, or free herself from it? Where was the door hung before the image was taken (if it was hung at all)? Did the artist move it herself, or did she require assistance? How long has she been there, and is she not cold? Deciphering her photographs is like deciphering a magic trick, and like all captivating illusions, spectators would prefer them to remain a mystery.

[53] I use the term 'negative expanse' to describe the 'unoccupied' areas in Woodman's photographs, i.e. the spaces which are not taken up by the artist's body or props. These areas occur due to a decentralised camera-angle—Woodman and her props rarely fill the frame—and the conscious positioning of her body and props. The word 'negative' should not be associated with adverse connotations but with the technical photographic terminology which draws attention to the space around the subject (otherwise known as the 'positive space').

[54] Francesca Woodman often played with language. My play on the artist's surname and the materials she surrounds herself with is a deliberate reference to this playfulness. The reference 'Wood-man' also emphasises the inextricable nature of Woodman's body with her environment.

Figure 29 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Figure and Door)*, location unknown, 1975-80. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper. 5.52 x 5.52 in. (14 x 14 cm). ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland.

Similar to the exterior shot of *Splitting*, the door appears to defy gravity in an almost Constructivist fashion.[55] By punctuating the interior, the angle of the door disorientates the viewer and skews our perception. The normal spatial order is subverted, and the viewer is left wondering where this door could possibly lead. Aside from acting as a threshold to a heterotopic dimension, the door also acts as a type of ramshackle shelter by constructing a corner for the body to hide. But it is only partly successful. For Bachelard, the concept of the corner provided intimacy: 'an imaginary room rises … around our bodies, which think they are well hidden when we take refuge in a corner'.[56] Yet Woodman's image presents the stark

[55] Johannes Binotto referred to the work of Alexander Rodchenko in 'Outside In: Francesca Woodman's Rooms of Her Own' in *Works from the Sammlung Verbund*. Gabriele Schor and Elisabeth Bronfen (eds.) (Vienna; New York: D.A.P., 2014), pp. 51-62 (p. 52).
[56] Bachelard, p. 156.

reality of inhabiting a house that is no longer a home, and one which is on the verge of collapse. Ultimately, there may be intimacy in disorder and displacement. Woodman's images display a different type of poetry to Bachelard's. His dreamer is 'happy to be sad, content to be alone, waiting' to live and to die in dusty sentimental little corners.[57] Meanwhile, her images display the corporeal problem of accommodating *her* body, a specifically gendered and material body, and others like it at a specific time and place. This is depicted through the anonymity of deteriorated interiors, their lack of comfortable habitable space and Woodman's cowering figure (Figure 18). But this complex issue is also communicated through her interaction with other subjects in images like *Blueprints for a Temple* (1980) (Figure 59) and *About being my model* (1976) (Figure 30).

Much like Matta-Clark's constructions sites, Woodman's work was not created in isolation, which suggests that carving out a space for representation required help. Woodman often worked with friends and classmates, including Sloan Rankin and Betsy Berne, as well as a man, known as 'Charlie the model', who posed for life drawings classes at RISD. Despite these collaborative images, where friends would not only pose but also help stage and take the photographs, the critical focus is often excessively placed on Woodman's form. This notion of collaboration is evident in Figure 30, where three nude female models stand against a whitewashed wall. Viewers presume the artist stands to the right of the frame, due to her signature knee socks and pump shoes. However, the women cover their faces with headshots of the artist which renders the figures anonymous through their replication of the artist. Aside from depicting the loss of the models' identities, this image evokes multiple readings. These serious headshots are distracting; they deflect the viewers' gaze as the traditional markers of visual identity—the facial features—are thoroughly confused. Furthermore, due to their stance, the models appear to be in a type of line-up. While Woodman's anonymity is enhanced through

[57] Bachelard, p. 159.

the shielding of her face, it is also heightened by her whiteness. Standing against the pale interior, Woodman engages in a strategic act of (in)visibility where the body comes in and out of focus. This is supported by the fourth image of the artist's face which is taped to the wall. Devoid of a body, the image suggests the artist's identity is inextricable from her surroundings. If Woodman was concerned with 'finding herself' within the landscape, as her father suggested, then she found a sense of place by becoming part of her habitat.[58] To reiterate, while finding a sense of place may be difficult, Woodman displays intimate assimilation with her collaborators and her environment. While her selective anonymity evokes broader issues of displacement, vagrancy and representation, as seen in Figure 32, her depictions of photographic interiors, significantly, evoke empathy.

Figure 30 Francesca Woodman, *About being my model*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1978. 5.3 x 5.3 in. (13.5 x 13.5 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

[58] Longden, Conversation with George Woodman, 2016.

Despite primarily being the subject of her photographs, Woodman often evades the viewers' gaze through her blurred restlessness, by obscuring her face, through her whiteness and almost camouflaging herself among the excess materials which surround her. This suggests that while the artist appears 'at home in dust', she may also be easily overlooked. Traversing between (in)visibility, her bodily ambiguity emphasises how issues of vagrancy and pauperism were common occurrences and did not discriminate against other classifications, such as gender and race. Those on the threshold of society and at the edge of society's gaze faced 'not just an economic division but a cultural barrier between rich and poor, young and old'.[59] Woodman's ambiguous form which flits at the borders of the photographic frame reinstates Sharon Zukin's point with the addition of 'gender'. As a woman and as an artist, Woodman negotiates cultural barriers as an entity who is both seen and unseen within contemporary society. Moreover, her selective invisibility suggests the cultural barrier which divided people was never fixed in the first place, and that selective visibility could be a position of significant power.

Even though Woodman performed her *House* series between 1975 and 1978, the reality was that someone in her position, a financially insecure artist with a limited social circle,[60] faced becoming homeless as a real possibility. Within this context, her occupation of abandoned interiors also recalls the experiences of other displaced groups, like squatters and activists, who illegally occupied boarded-up buildings in an attempt to find a dwelling space or the freedom to experiment in an alternative lifestyle. This is not to say Woodman was ever physically displaced, but her preoccupation with deteriorated spaces can be interpreted as acts

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[59] Sharon Zukin, *The Naked City*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 9.

[60] In reference to Woodman's 'limited social circle': In C. Scott Willis's documentary, *The Woodman's* (2010), Catherine Chermayeff referred to Woodman's 'rock star quality', emphasising how the artist could not relate to her own age group, particularly her classmates at RISD. *The Woodmans*, dir. C. Scott Willis, Kino Lorber Films, 2010 [DVD]. Also, Woodman's father discussed with me how his daughter adopted various jobs to pay her rent, thus suggesting the artist was not necessarily financially stable.

of wider societal recognition and empathy, akin to the documentary images of Diane Arbus (1923-1971), who also likened herself to existing between two social realms.[61] It should be noted that I am not saying Woodman's or Arbus's photographs were depictions of social activism. With New York's social and economic context in mind, images like Figure 29 and Figure 32 prompt viewers to think *beyond* the artist and her interior spaces, suggesting issues of placement was not solely limited to Woodman or the domestic sphere. Living in New York City during the 1970s, Woodman would have been aware of the socio-political issues that surrounded her, even if she did not actively engage with them. My point is that, as an alternative reading which could be expanded on in later research, Woodman's depictions of homelessness may prompt an empathic reaction in the viewer depending on the theoretical framing of the photograph.

Woodman enhances this sense of dislocation through her visual detachment. While *Splitting* estranged viewers through its stark insight into an abandoned interior which reflected a deteriorating outlook on suburban residency, Matta-Clark's artist friends were still encouraged to tour the precarious structure.[62] By contrast, viewers do not feel welcome in Woodman's house. A sense of defensiveness surrounds her images, and the dilapidated setting is only one factor which contributes to this eerie atmosphere. Her use of monochrome film, insipid light and dense shadows adds to the feeling of unease; as does the staging of her figure

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61 The documentary photographer Arbus captured scenes of New York's squalor and its various inhabitants. Her images, shot in black and white, often encroached on her subject's personal space, framing their faces and exposing their flaws. Viewers come into contact with screaming children, bored housewives, prostitutes, nudists, transvestites and more. Despite asking their permission to be photographed, Arbus has been criticised for exploiting her subjects and depicting them in 'a bad light'. Yet the camera allowed Arbus to enter these private spheres, which she would never have had access to previously due to her privileged upbringing. 'My favorite thing is to go where I've never been,' the artist commented. 'I really believe there are things that nobody would see if I didn't photograph them.' Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: Revelations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003). An alternative view to Arbus's apparent insensitive actions is that the artist used her camera to create a connection with her subjects, as a mode of identification, to bridge the gap between different social realms.

62 Sculptor Alice Aycock noted her experience climbing *Splitting's* severed stairway: '[A]s you'd go further up, you'd have to keep crossing the crack. It kept widening as you made your way up … by the time you got to the top the crack was one or two feet wide. You really had to jump it. You sensed the abyss in a kinaesthetic and psychological way.' Alice Aycock quoted in Gloria, Moure, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Works and Collected Writings*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006), p. 82.

as she cowers in corners and gazes suspiciously at the camera. Spectators may not be welcome in Woodman's photographic locations, but by viewing her images the audience is also implicated as they infringe another's personal space.

Figure 31 Gordon Matta-Clark, Graffiti in progress on the *Graffiti Truck*, South Bronx, New York City, 1973. Dimensions of truck fragment: 34.96 x 36.42 x 29.06 in. (88.8 x 92.5 x 73.8 cm). Sculpture, Graffiti. Dome MIT Libraries. Accession number: 112605.

Finding habitable spaces within the city may have been a difficult task, but the act of taking and modifying space were examples of political, economic and social gestures. Repurposing abandoned buildings is also an example of individuals' attempts to transform their surroundings into areas of resistance and expression, where others could participate or 'witness the effects'.[63] Building modification was not limited to artists like Woodman and Matta-Clark; for members of the squatter movement, graffiti was employed as a vehicle of communal

63 Emily Pugh, 'Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space: Gordon Matta-Clark's Made in America and Keith Haring's Berlin Wall Mural', *Space and Culture*, Vol. 18, Issue 4, 2015, pp. 421-435 (p. 421).

participation. Works such as Matta-Clark's *Graffiti Truck* (1973) (Figure 31) and scrawling on exterior walls of abandoned buildings activated residents' surroundings as an alternative mode of subversive expression.[64] Spraying graffiti on buildings became active forms of resistance through their visual communication. These shifting signifiers and textual layering may have challenged the city's official infrastructure, but they also visually reconfigured the urban landscape, as the once static amalgamation of tenement buildings and office blocks were rearranged by the inhabitant's hand. Altering the physical appearance of buildings created new relationships with the surrounding cityscape. Additionally, abandoned buildings were not only decorated with graffiti but were often adorned with collages, hand-painted banners, found-objects and other waste materials, which recalls Woodman's collection of flora, fauna and other eclectic ephemera. If Matta-Clark's sense of place and community was formed through destruction, for Woodman it was created through the act of re-making a space to exist among excess material waste, wherein she felt emotionally invested.[65]

One of Woodman's photographs, taken in 1976, is particularly compelling given the context of increased crime rates, building abandonment and tenement fires. The photograph shows Woodman sitting on a chair in the corner of an abandoned interior. Unlike the previous interior, this shot is light and airy. The walls are painted white and light enters the room through an open window behind the artist. Woodman sits on a white wooden chair; she is nude except for a necklace and a pair of 'Mary-Jane'-style shoes. Her hair is pulled back; a single lock falls by the side of her face as she looks directly at the camera. Her hands rest in her lap. We see her in full clarity: she is over-exposed in both senses of the word. While viewers are accustomed to seeing Woodman's form, it is rare to see her in her totality. Nevertheless, our attention is drawn to the left of the composition where the floor is lightest. There is a dark silhouette or

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64 Pugh, p. 425.

65 In conversation, George Woodman remarked how his daughter attempted to "find herself" in the landscapes she inhabited and photographed.

impression of what appears to be a female body laying diagonally to Woodman's right, with its head at her feet. The severed shadow is only partial, missing its left leg, forearms and hands. A video documents the artist's process of creating the silhouette: Woodman can be seen scattering flour on the floorboards before lying back into the area to create the dark impression. The resulting image was taken with a long exposure which heightens the glowing white areas exposed to natural light; meanwhile, the shadows darken (Figure 32).

Figure 32 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Silhouette)*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper. 5.6 x 5.7 in. (14.3 x 14.4 cm). ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland.

Few interpretations of this image exist. Often, Woodman's Chinese slippers are perceived as feminine symbols, which transform the artist into the *femme enfant*.[66] Yet, this

[66] The idea that woman is childlike and closer to nature and can therefore connect more easily with her subconscious.

idealised construct of girlishness is challenged by the decaying interior, a site traditionally associated with female domesticity.[67] Alternatively, Emilie Reed suggests the photograph can be associated with 'supernatural imagery', which 'corresponds to the artist's interest in the surrealist movement' where the dark impression on the floor 'creates the illusion of a body sinking through a surface, or perhaps floating through light'.[68] This Surrealist reading is thought-provoking and also plausible, as Woodman tried similar photographic techniques to Lee Miller (1907-1977) and Man Ray (1890-1976) who experimented with double-exposure photography. Also, the connection to ectoplasmic photography[69] yokes Woodman to the Victorian era and the haunted spectacle. Expanding this theme, Elisabeth Bronfen likens the bodily imprint to a 'shadowy doppelgänger' from a Gothic tale, where the colour contrast between light skin and dark silhouette symbolises the play between presence and absence. Meanwhile, the studio itself becomes 'the stage for a subjective drama as well as for the transformation of her body into a canvas on which she can leave signs of herself'.[70]

Bronfen's notion of bodily signs is particularly interesting and one which I will expand on shortly. However, when coupled with Matta-Clark's photographs, like *Splitting* (Figure 20) or *Bronx Floor: Threshole* (Figure 24), I suggest this image has less to do with supernatural imagery or Surrealism and instead recalls Woodman's everyday environment. Here, the artist's abandoned location and improvised living space not only reflect the deteriorating social landscape, but also assume substantial economic and political weight. Woodman's decaying interiors are more than passive performative stages: they are junctures

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[67] Armstrong, pp. 347-370.
[68] Emilie Reed, 'Francesca Woodman, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976, *Tate*, (2013), n.p. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/woodman-providence-rhode-island-1976-ar00352> [date accessed: 23 September 2017].
[69] Mulmer discovered the technique by accident, after he saw a second figure in his self-portrait, which was a result of double exposure. Paranormal ectoplasm was coined by Charles Richet to denote the spiritual energy communicated by physical mediums when in a trance-like state. This energy was visualized as a white ethereal substance that appeared to ooze from the orifices of the medium's body. Considered by many to be a hoax, apparitions were often fashioned from gauzes, cheesecloth, chiffon and other natural substances.
[70] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Francesca Woodman: Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, ed. by Gabriele Schor, Elisabeth Bronfen (Vienna; New York: D.A.P., 2014), p. 13; p. 14.

where art meets life, and spaces which artists and civilians shared. I am reminded of Blau's point about normative societal boundaries, and how the modern construction of homelessness has been defined in opposition to this ethic. Normative places of residence rely on the assumption 'that citizens retreat daily to home and family after they have succeeded in the pursuit of private gain. Indeed, the world outside the home is considered fit only for private gain; otherwise, it is a frightening place full of crime, drugs, and merciless competition'.[71] Woodman's sporadic habitation of decaying interior spaces, that are neither solely 'internal' or 'external', emphasises Blau's argument further. By distorting and playing with photographic space, Woodman highlights how the dichotomy between internal and external, public and private, 'safe' and 'dangerous' spaces is not only false, but also attempts to construct how and where the body is seen, whilst regulating its movement. Within this milieu of neglected properties, rent control, crime and structural fires, Woodman reimagines the dark imprint of the body as a burn. Faceless and unidentifiable, the human scar on scorched floorboards comes to represent myriad nameless individuals who suffered at the hands of private investors and city officials, but she leaves a trace of her existence nonetheless.[72]

Aside from being an indicator of the socio-economic landscape, the burn-like mark, or bodily sign, as Bronfen puts it, is also an extension of the artist and represents the point where the body meets and amalgamates with the building. The scorched silhouette can also be interpreted as a method of graffiti where the dark impression becomes a textual inscription or marker that transfers the materiality of the body onto the blank canvas of the abandoned

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[71] Blau, p. 7.

[72] In addition to discriminating against ethnic minorities, namely black and Puerto Rican tenants who occupied their buildings, many landlords provided substandard housing, charged maximum rents and returned minimal repairs. Meanwhile, other property owners set fire to their estates to avoid maintenance protocols or to claim their insurance. For more information, see, John M. Clapp, 'The Formation of Housing Policy in New York City, 1960-1970' *Policy Sciences*, 7:1 (1976), pp. 77-91. This saw the rise of 'hotel families' who had been 'burned out of or otherwise lost their housing and were put up in hotels at the city's expense'. Main, *Homelessness in New York City*, p. 2.

interior.[73] In contrast to Matta-Clark's erasure from his images, the trace Woodman leaves is a gradual disappearance. Her mark may also be interpreted as a stain which colours the house. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* describes staining as an act that 'involves pollution, disgrace and discolouration', but as Perry points out, staining also contains an element of transformation: 'A discolouration produced by absorption of or contact with foreign matter; usually one that penetrates below the surface and is not easily removable'.[74] The bodily trace Woodman leaves is simultaneously easy to eradicate due to the diffusion of flour, but also difficult to erase due to the permanence of the photograph. This dual presence—of being and not being—hints at the convergence of history and domesticity that underlies the structure of the house, which I explored in more depth in Chapter One. Moreover, the 'absorption of foreign matter' suggests Woodman's presence in the house is both alien and unwelcomed. She is the 'other' that invades and disrupts the domestic sphere, altering the traditional order of things and emphasising the power in her dislocated status.

Concluding Thoughts

Regardless of their differences, Woodman's and Matta-Clark's photographs converse: when juxtaposed, either artist could easily inhabit the other's work and cultural context. Considering Woodman's photographs among her contemporaries, and in the midst of an unstable urban environment, her images transform from biographical snapshots and supernatural hauntings to social commentaries on issues such as the representation of vagrancy in the city where she

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[73] Additionally, Woodman's images of bodily shadows and imprints may also be compared to the photographic works of Ana Mendieta, as Katharine Conely has eloquently argued in her article 'A Swimmer Between Two Worlds: Francesca Woodman's Maps of Interior Space', *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, 2:2 (2008), pp. 227-252. Despite this valuable comparison of visuals, I chose not to compare Woodman and Mendieta due to their similar markers of representation. Both were young female artists who used their bodies as tools of self-expression. Similarly, both were overlooked by the contemporary art market or were overshadowed by their significant other. Similarly, both women died young, and their eminence has increased ever since. Comparing the biographical details of women artists who were discriminated against due to their gender, age or race can quickly become a narrative of exclusion, missed opportunity and victimhood. While these are all valid and important issues to raise, they have been covered extensively by other scholars, and I do not wish to tread old ground.

[74] Perry, p. 160.

lived and worked. Woodman's and Matta-Clark's discarded and modified sites are no longer emblems of the ideal archetype; their abandonment and deterioration mean they no longer shelter, protect or 'grant the dweller relief', as Bachelard would have us believe.[75] Through their fragmented representations, these buildings act as vehicles to critique contemporary society.

By considering dwelling in conjunction with gender and historical experience, scholars can consider how they construct and perpetuate spatial discourse, but also how Woodman's and Matta-Clark's artwork reciprocally shaped and challenged their socio-economic environment. For instance, by complicating the traditional domestic space, Matta-Clark exposes social anxieties surrounding redevelopment and the hollowness of the suburban dream. By contrast, Woodman fills the house to excess with memorabilia and debris. As a result, we may interpret Woodman's messy staging as an attempt to inhabit a space which has lost its original function, which references vagrants, crime and building abandonment that was rife after the economic downturn. This materiality is crucial: by situating herself in abandoned and decaying locations, Woodman's images not only display a more comprehensive awareness of her social surroundings but also develop a type of photographic empathy.

Moreover, the artist's presence emphasises the difficulties women encountered as they attempted to inhabit ideological spaces that did not include them. In other words, Woodman's uncomfortable presence disrupts the discursive status quo of gender and place by forcing viewers to question the broader significance of her location. However, Woodman's evasiveness of the camera is also a deliberate act which draws the spectator into the image. This notion of photographic intimacy places Woodman in a significant position of power; moreover, her images implicate viewers in a particular version of history which goes against the grain of popular narratives and nostalgic re-imaginings of suburban New York in the 1970s.

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[75] Bachelard, p. 28.

Chapter Three
Among Woods and Water

Introduction

The last chapter juxtaposed the material and historical contexts of Francesca Woodman's photography with the work of Matta-Clark. I argued that their depiction of poverty and (sub)urban deterioration offers viewers tangible representations of human experience and demographic change during a volatile social and economic period in American history, which was characterised by inequalities of power and resources. In turn, this raised significant questions over notions of ideal dwelling space and the blind spots of Bachelardian phenomenology, particularly the difficulties of establishing a sense of place if the subject is physically displaced or unrepresented due to gender. Essentially, Woodman's images emphasise the notion that intimate dwelling space embraces disorder. The inclusion of dirt and excess may subvert conventional notions of domestic space, but these elements also highlight the more significant problem of placement in Woodman's work, and her resistance against physical and discursive confines.

Issues surrounding place is not an isolated incident but a profoundly ingrained socio-cultural response to *where* women should be seen and *how* they should act. The spaces where Woodman constructs and navigates her self-representation are highly gendered and political. The artist's landscapes—whether she resides in the dusty domestic sphere, is paralleled with a deteriorating suburban landscape, or is immersed in the natural environment—implicates her in a specific cultural context that scholars cannot overlook. Moreover, critics cannot theorise Woodman's body without considering the places she is located; nor should Woodman's embodiment or the materiality of her photographic surroundings be ignored. Accounting for this materiality offers viewers a nuanced understanding of Woodman's work.

Visual and material chaos is a common motif in Woodman's work, and this chapter will consider her depiction of the natural environment through photographs taken in Boulder, Colorado, at the beginning of her artistic career; Andover, Massachusetts; and the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire, in the latter years of her life. While Woodman was based in New York City during a period of social and economic volatility, these other photographs suggest that cities 'do not eradicate nature, nor do their residents lose contact with the environment or fail to develop a sense of ethics of place'.[1] These depictions of entangled and blighted landscapes mark a visual and spatial shift in her photographic work, from focusing on domestic interior spaces to equally chaotic representations of her external surroundings. By turning her attention to the natural environment, I suggest Woodman calls into question dominant tropes that equate women with nature, such as their supposed mythic feminine qualities. She also raises essential questions about the way people interact with the landscape, with the organisms that inhabit such spaces and mankind's inability to contain nature within physical and categorical borders.

I pose the following questions: how are Woodman's images of the environment still caught within a framework dictated by (masculine) geographic ideologies? These traditional heteronormative principles, as I will show, are deeply ingrained in the way scholars think about place and how they position themselves within broader society. So, how do Woodman's images disrupt the parameters of this spatial discourse? If Woodman's photographs merely challenge the archetype of the feminine within the same patriarchal power structure, as Solomon-Godeau suggests, then where do critics go from there? Where is the alternative space outside of the woman-nature/male-culture dichotomy for artists like Woodman (and women in general) to express themselves? As Teresa de Lauretis argues, scholars must think 'beyond the categories

[1] Sarah T. Phillips, 'Environmental History' *American History Now* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), pp. 285-313 (p. 304).

of sexual difference: … the subject of feminism must be positioned in relation to social relations other than gender'.[2] By considering Woodman's images in the context of emerging environmentalism, as well as the Land Art movement during the 1970s, I argue her images offer a more flexible method to thinking about the way women approached their surroundings and worked in the landscape. This is not to imply that Woodman's work only speaks of women's collective experience, but historically, women's interaction with the environment was an important facet of second-wave feminism, political activism and personal expression.

Woodman's portrayal of the landscape leads the viewer on a particular trajectory: historically rooted depictions of women and nature inform previous readings of the artist's work, which I explore in 'Woodman's Depiction of Nature'. In the following sections, 'Intertextual Landscapes' and 'The Land Art Movement: Blurring Gender Distinctions through the Landscape', I argue that viewers are also able to see Woodman's work through contemporary lenses which reformulate and challenge her historical and cultural landscapes. In the final section, I move beyond the contemporary into the realm of the posthuman. 'Animal Parts: Woodman's Posthuman Hybridisation' allows scholars to consider the artist's photographs as liberatory spaces, where bodily boundaries can be disturbed and redrawn. But first, I consider the traditional depictions of nature that have shaped conventional Western understandings of the landscape, and the romanticised yet reductive figure of woman-as-nature that influenced readings of Woodman's work.

Women's Equation with Nature

Depictions of woman-as-nature have a long, complicated history and are studied in various disciplines aside from art history, such as the history of science, anthropology, geography and postcolonial studies. According to Carolyn Merchant, female symbolism became increasingly

[2] Teresa de Lauretis quoted in Rose (1993), *Feminism & Geography*, p. 138.

significant as the old organic order of feminine nature gave way to the 'new sciences' in the early modern period. 'The image of both women and nature was two-sided,' she states.[3] The Mother Earth image offered nurture and fertility, but she also brought natural disasters, such as famines and plagues. The image of disorderly women and chaotic nature reflected societal anxieties around change and disorder: both had to be controlled.

Writing on the universal devaluation of women, Sherry B. Ortner (1974) notes that, aside from biological determinism, which attempts to equate women's gender with her social role as a maternal caretaker, other factors, such as women's 'feminine psyche', also devalue her status, as well as her 'tasks, roles, [and] products'.[4] Women, Ortner argues, are socialised to have a limited and more conservative set of attitudes than their male counterparts, which in turn limits both her social context and her movement within the cultural realm. While differences in women's 'economy, ecology, history, political and social structure, values, and world view' may explain variables in their secondary status, 'they could not explain the universal itself'.[5] This is because the distinction between nature and culture is a cultural product, with culture defined as transcendence through rational thought and technology, while women's equation with nature is an expected means of existence.[6]

Similarly, in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), a study of women in the seventeenth century, Merchant argues that the combination of an increasingly mechanistic worldview and the emergence of Cartesian rationality portrayed both the organic and the (feminine) body inferior to its male cultural counterpart. If depictions of women and the landscape are feminised and mythologised, this is in part due to the fact that

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3 Carolyn Merchant (1980), *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 127.
4 Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?' in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 68-87 (p. 69).
5 Ortner, p. 83.
6 Ortner, p. 84.

women 'have been and continue to be marginalized as producers of geographical knowledge'.[7] Consequently, traditional landscape studies and the field of geography were dominated by 'male responses and the landscapes created and occupied by men'.[8]

The debates around women's bodies, of where they ought to be placed and how they should be represented, links to deeply ingrained patriarchal ideologies which seek to control the landscape and all that resides there. For instance, humanistic geography continues to present women and nature as pure, undiscovered and untouched, awaiting the exploration of the male pioneer figure. A prime example of this viewpoint is Don Gayton's theory of 'primal landscapes', which suggests natural surroundings leave a psychological imprint on the male inhabitant. Both women and nature, he asserts, 'are vessels for our conception of beauty'. He continues: 'the wild graces and symmetries that originally defined beauty for us were first seen in women and then, in the next breath, transferred to natural landscapes'.[9] Gayton is only attracted to uninhabited lands on which he plots his unstable subjectivity, while the environment remains a passive stage on which to act. By identifying himself as a 'rootless traveller' who explores the landscape to define himself, Gayton reinforces his position as a dominant cultural subject. As Gillian Rose states, 'place is represented as Woman, in order that humanists can define their own masculine rationality'.[10]

While attitudes like Gayton's shape and reinforce dominant masculinities and influence how women and the landscape are perceived and represented, as is the case with Woodman's environmental photographs, Gayton's desire to regulate the landscape represents wider male

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[7] Gillian Rose (1993), *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 2.

[8] Janice Monk, 'Approaches to the Study of Women and Landscape', *Environmental Review: ER*, 8:1, Special Issue: Women and Environmental History, (1984), pp. 23-33 (p. 29).

[9] Don Gayton, *Landscapes of the Interior: Re-explorations of Nature and the Human Spirit* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1996), pp. 75-76.
But Gayton takes a lot for granted, specifically that all men are masculine, heterosexual, and will have a shared universal experience of the landscape. The author fails to realise that 'not all men become masculine in the same way,' neither geography or the landscape will attract all men, 'and those it does attract will react in different ways to the discipline' and their external surroundings. See Rose, *Feminism & Geography*, p. 10.

[10] Rose (1993), *Feminism & Geography*, p. 56.

anxieties surrounding identity formation, which is similar to the apprehensions surrounding Woodman's posthuman hybridisation covered later in this chapter. What Gayton fails to realise, and what I think Woodman was acutely aware of, is that 'imprinting' with the landscape works both ways and is a deeply embedded haptic experience for all genders.

As Edward Casey notes, 'If the body is imprinted in the world, this is because it presses itself into the surface of the world's body, into its very flesh.'[11] While I am uneasy about likening the world to mortal flesh, as it upholds the traditional pastoralisation of nature, it is apparent that Woodman's form leaves a visual trace on the land, and the environment lingers on her through her act of photographing. Woodman's images challenge patriarchal theories like Gayton's through her complex visualisation of the landscape. Through this fluidity with her surroundings, she surpasses the confines of passive femininity to emphasise an affinity with nature that is visceral and profound. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, attitudes such as Gayton's construct a form of geographical knowledge that was considered 'normative'. This heteronormative masculine geography not only influences the way scholars perceive women and the landscape but also how they interact with and shape these entities. Moreover, these ideals underpin traditional interpretations of Woodman's environmental photographs.

Woodman's Depictions of Nature

Conventional readings of Woodman's environmental photographs tend to focus on nature as an oppressive site due to the artist's apparent confinement to her surroundings. In her invaluable article, "Just Like A Woman" (1986), Solomon-Godeau argues that Woodman pushed the confines of a single still image, and the notion of a stable, unified self, by visually rewriting traditional archetypal representations of the feminine. Solomon-Godeau believes that

[11] Edward S. Casey, *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 103.

the conceptual collapse of woman into nature is 'bracketed, stalled, even short-circuited through [Woodman's] subtle suggestion of the nightmare facet of metamorphosis'.[12] If the artist merely makes the natural environment a visible site of patriarchal oppression, where is the alternative space for her self-expression, and what will she become after her metamorphosis is complete? Furthermore, it is difficult to see how Woodman's hybridisation with the environment highlights the problems of equating women with nature. By emphasising the limits of the landscape instead of employing it as a tool for change, Woodman is caught within a cycle of entrapment. If Woodman's images momentarily disrupt or postpone the conflation of women and nature, as Solomon-Godeau suggests by her use of the word 'stalled', then presumably the status quo will resume. Consequently, women and their (self)identification with nature are continually devalued in Western culture, which forestalls Solomon-Godeau's desire for women's liberation. By employing posthumanism as a theoretical tool, I will expand Solomon-Godeau's original enquiry to explore how Woodman uses the landscape to transcend her human form, and the confines of the women-as-nature stereotype, thus furthering feminist theories around gender and identity.

Continuing on the theme of metamorphosis, Tutter interprets the images Woodman took at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire, as visual reinterpretations of the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (completed 8 A.D.), which she argues represent the loss of adolescence and the child's transition into adulthood. Alternatively, Woodman's photographs not only depict a girl on the threshold of adulthood but portray instants where she momentarily casts off her human form altogether. While the mythic is a powerful transformative device, it implicitly reinforces the idea that the figure of woman is mysterious, unruly and unknowable. Furthermore, Woodman's entanglement with the landscape suggests she is closer to nature than her (visually absent) male counterpart. But as

[12] Solomon-Godeau, p. 239.

Merchant rightly reminds us, 'individuals form concepts about nature through their relationships to it that draw on the ideals and norms of society into which they are born, socialised, and educated'.[13] So, the contention around women's bodies is inextricably linked to deeply ingrained social ideologies and the places they reside. That being said, I want to converse with Tutter's notion of entrapment and further debates around the transformative potential of Woodman's images. Since Women constantly renegotiate their bodies and reformulate their identities with the places in which they are born and the areas in which they choose to reside, a reassessment of Woodman's work is necessary.

Just as concepts of women and nature are historically rooted social constructions, it is clear that the writings of Solomon-Godeau and Tutter are embedded within the cultural context of their times and have come to drive interpretations of Woodman's photographs. While Woodman was developing her images, contemporary critical methodologies, such as poststructuralist feminism and gender theory challenged preconceived notions of what constituted a 'masculine' or 'feminine' identity. Poststructuralism and the undoing of categorical boundaries around the self and social relations enabled feminists and gender theorists to create a discursive space where identity could be formed and reformed as a flexible entity.[14] While poststructuralism allowed scholars to explore how Woodman exposes identity as a social construction, it also limits interpretations of her images. Due to its focus on deconstructing linguistic binaries, poststructural readings of Woodman's work tend to *uncover* the artist's apparent concerns around issues of identity, gender and power, but do not always *develop* analyses of her work. Moreover, an emphasis on semiotics devalues the material in Woodman's work. As visuals, Woodman's photographs surpass definition; their transience encapsulates moments, pauses and gaps which language cannot sufficiently articulate.

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[13] Merchant, xvi.
[14] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Considering Woodman's ephemerality and her use of visual echoes prompts viewers to think of elsewhere; whether that is a physical location or a cultural representation, her work moves the spectator beyond themselves. This notion of movement allows an increasingly complex analysis of Woodman's work to develop, one which not only accounts for Woodman's limitless identity but also recalls the importance of place in this formation.

Woodman creates these moments of recognition through her careful use of pose, props and setting. By combining these elements, she transfers intertextuality to the visual field through carefully arranged references to art and literature. In doing so, language is no longer the prime signifying practice, but a visual semiotics takes its place. Perhaps Woodman appears 'displaced' due to her use of intertextuality. Through this technique, it is possible to simultaneously recognise her photographs and see them as something other, strange or alien to herself. I will explore this notion in the next section by drawing on classical, pastoral and biblical motifs in Woodman's work. This intertextuality not only creates a visually rich image which displays the artist's education, but also reformulates the landscape, highlighting the stark contrast between idyllic landscapes and her cultural context, which was subject to deterioration and pollution.

Intertextual Landscapes

The mythical and environmental elements of Woodman's work are not clear-cut. In the following section, I will fully explore the implications of Woodman's intertextual landscapes, before considering her work in the recent context of emerging environmentalism and the Land Art movement, the latter of which was active throughout the 1960s to the late 1970s. Concerns around the environment pre-existed the modern environmental movement, and its origins, as I mentioned in the introduction, were both varied and complex. But if environmental identities

and movements are difficult to define, how are spectators to visualise the toxic, which was often out of sight, through photography?

Figure 33 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Boulder, Colorado, 1976. 3.8 x 5.9 in. (9.7 x 14.9 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Woodman's depiction of the landscape assumes a bleaker significance amidst environmental concerns. In an image taken in Boulder, Colorado, in 1976 (Figure 33), viewers see Woodman nestled within the landscape. On first glance, the artist's conflation with her surroundings could place her in a subservient and passive position due to her central placement and the encroaching environment. Woodman's body bisects the land and water, lying horizontally at the edge of a riverbank under the base of a tree, where its tendril-like roots span and envelop her torso. Water partially covers her legs and the left side of her body, while her right arm bends above at the elbow creating a central focal point as she clutches on to the root system. The tree roots appear distinctly phallic, which is troubling in the sense that the root

physically constricts her movement, but it also depicts a certain image of female subjugation. Seemingly unaware of the camera, Woodman's gaze is cast down following the line of her legs, which become distorted and almost indistinguishable from the gnarled tree roots. Meanwhile, locks of the artist's hair flow downstream like vines, extending her form and the scope of the viewer's gaze.[15]

Figure 34 Sir John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-1852. Support: 30 x 44 in. (76.2 x 111.8 cm). Frame: 43.5 x 57.4 x 5.7 in. (110.5 x 145.8 x 14.5 cm). Oil on canvas. Tate. Accession number: N01506.

The floating female body alludes to John Everett Millais's (1829-1896) painting of Elizabeth Siddal as *Ophelia* (1851-1852) (Figure 34). Similarly, Deanne Williams suggests Woodman's 'self-portrait of herself in a bath, some years before her own suicide, might be understood to refer to Siddal, Millais, and Ophelia in a complex game of allusion in which art,

[15] I am aware that my own metaphor also conflates women and nature, but I use it in a purely descriptive sense. As I have stated earlier in this thesis, it is difficult to describe images, particularly representations of women, outside of this highly romanticised and often deprecating language.

real life, and performance become indistinguishable'.[16] Similar connections can also be made to Virginia Woolf, whose suicide by drowning positions her as a 'tortured' woman artist, akin to Woodman. This is further complicated knowing that Woodman avidly read Woolf's work, and even staged a portrait in her guise (Figures 35 and 36).

Figure 35 Francesca Woodman, *Sabina Mirri as Virginia Woolf*, from George Charles Beresford's 1902 photographic portrait of the writer, Rome, 1977. 3.63 x 3.63 in. (9.2 x 9.2 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper. (Left).

Figure 36 George Charles Beresford, *Virginia Woolf*, platinum print, July 1902. 6 x 4.25 in. (15,2 x 10.8 cm). Purchased, 1983, National Portrait Gallery Primary Collection, NPG P221. (Right).

Enactments of Ophelia, or even Woolf, not only blur literary and art-historical boundaries, but also encourage critics to interpret these images as intertextual markers of Woodman's education and cultural upbringing. As Armstrong points out, it is all too easy to suggest Woodman's work invites 'the mythology of the Ophelia syndrome', along with the clichés of female morbidity and madness that are re-enforced by the gravestones in the background.[17] Woodman's equation with the tragic literary protagonist appears rather

[16] Deanne Williams, *The Afterlife of Ophelia (Reproducing Shakespeare)*, Kaara L. Peterson (ed.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6.

[17] Eleanor Nairne, 'Review: Francesca Woodman', *Frieze Magazine*, 1 March 2011, n.p. <https://frieze.com/article/francesca-woodman> [date accessed: 1 February 2019].

superficial and narrow in scope, especially as it is unclear whether Woodman is in the process of getting in or out of the water. Unlike depictions of Ophelia, which show her succumbing to her surroundings, Woodman retains an element of agency due to the placement of her arm which levers her from the water. Her interaction with the landscape prompts viewers to question whether the roots ensnare her, or if the artist emerges from the tree itself. Unlike Tutter, I do not suggest this merging of the body and nature evidences mythic connotations, but instead displays a haptic process which blurs the boundary between the human and non-human.

Aside from displaying the artist's amalgamation with her surroundings, Figure 32 also emphasises notions of tactility and the environment. For instance, how might it have felt to be encircled by cold water, or to have rough bark and silt come into contact with bare skin? How long did Woodman pose among these elements to get the shot she envisaged? While we may never answer these questions, they are significant nonetheless, as they highlight photography as a material process. Consequently, her image is no longer an after-effect but an integral way of working in and through the landscape. Ultimately, the sense of touch in Woodman's images is central to her conception of making space. Her navigation through seemingly uninhabitable surroundings disrupts Gayton's notion of the primal landscape in two ways. While the latter employs the feminised landscape to map his subjectivity across the surface of the earth, Woodman's physical presence disrupts woman's lack of agency in Gayton's theory, while her entanglement with her surroundings suggests an innate reciprocal relationship with the environment. While his landscape beckons the rootless wanderer, Woodman's surroundings are not harmonious or inviting in a traditional sense. She appears as though she has always been there, cradled by roots and enveloped by water. The artist depicts a haptic, metamorphic process with her surroundings where she slips between distinct boundaries of 'human' and 'nature'. Woodman does more than simply re-stage fabled scenes; her images make viewers

question the relationship between bodies and their surroundings. Also, by drawing on the composition of other artists, her intertextual images question how bodies and the environment are perceived and restructured through time. By blending mythic, literary and historical elements together, Woodman prompts critics to think about what is beyond the categorical confines of 'women' and 'nature'. While Woodman's work cannot escape mythological symbolism, scholars can question the roles these tropes play in constructing future environmental discourses.

By highlighting the ambiguity of her placement, Woodman offers the viewer a multifaceted depiction of the landscape beyond the confines of a narrow patriarchal perspective. She assumes the paradoxical position of being simultaneously in and of nature; moreover, within the context of emerging environmental concerns, her hybridisation with the landscape assumes disturbing significance. How does the polluted environment influence spectators' perception of Woodman's immersion in the landscape? Spectators cannot see her left arm or breast beneath the surface of the water; her limbs seem to dematerialise into the depth. Her metamorphosis with the network of roots alludes to physical deformity. Within the context of emerging environmentalist concerns, Woodman's corporeal distortion renders the artist a victim of increased industrialisation. As Carson notes in *Silent Spring* (1962), many Americans were affected by 'potentially damaging toxic substances that infiltrated the air water, soil and accumulated silently in the human body', which resulted in various health issues.[18] But when viewed through an ecological lens, viewers are uncertain whether Woodman's photographs raise concerns about the landscape, or about the young woman who appears at its mercy. The artist's use of natural elements and artificial props in her photographs allude to a series of landscapes which succumb to increased technologisation, pollution and toxicity. Alternatively, through her amalgamation with the environment, Figure 33 presents

[18] Rachel Carson (1962), *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000), p. 263.

Woodman as a posthuman figure whose hybridisation transcends the traditional confines of woman-as-nature, which I will cover later.

Figure 37 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Boulder, Colorado, 1976. 7.3 x 7.3 in. (18.42 x 18.42 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

In another image, Woodman's nude figure reclines on grassland, her knees bend upwards towards the sky, while her left arm extends towards a coiled cable which snakes from the bottom right-hand corner of the frame (Figure 37).[19] With her right hand placed across her

[19] It is worth noting that the function of the nude in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries is very different. As opposed to the sensual, mythological and Biblical Baroque depictions in the seventeenth century, the female nude began to be depicted in playful settings by Rococo artists in the eighteenth century, as a celebration of female beauty. Following this, the nineteenth century marked the rise of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, with artists like Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) and Edgar Degas (1834-1917). Their approach differed, as their aesthetic was less sentimental and depicted settings of modern life, as opposed to fantasy and myth. The twentieth century saw a deliberate subversion of the classical idealisation of the female nude. For instance, Pablo Picasso drew unconventional subjects, such as prostitutes, in cubist and primitivist styles. Unlike the portrayal of intimate subjects that came before, these nudes appeared assertive and provocative. See, David Rodgers and Dimitris Plantzos, 'The Nude', *Grove Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), n.p. <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000062999> [date accessed: 20 February 2019].

stomach, Woodman gazes past the cable just off-centre of the camera. As viewers, we are positioned beyond the photographic frame, just out of reach, watching over the subject. This detachment, along with Woodman's passive reclining pose and the mottled lighting that smatters her body evokes elements of an idyllic landscape, mimicking the pastoral depiction of nature. Merchant explains how 'the pastoral tradition had its roots in its nostalgia for the Homeric Golden Age, the uncorrupted Garden of Eden, and escape from the ills of the city'.[20] This traditional mode of spectatorship was, in part, a reaction to Western culture's increased mechanisation, particularly at the turn of the 1600s.[21] Through landscape painting, such as Peter Paul Rubens's (1577-1640) *Venus and Adonis* (roughly mid-1630s), artists depicted women as synonymous with their environment, where they were benevolent, nurturing, passive yet sexualised and ultimately unthreatening to the male social order. This romanticised landscape was characterised by the dominant visual regime of heterosexual masculinism, in which John Berger states 'women appear' but 'men act', thus keeping women and nature in a subservient position for male desire.[22]

[20] Merchant, p. 8.
[21] Merchant, p. 2.
[22] John Berger (1972), *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008), p. 47.

Figure 38 Peter Paul Rubens, *Venus and Adonis*, probably mid-1630s. 77.75 x 95.63 in. (197.5 x 242.9 cm) with added strips. Painting, oil on canvas. The MET. Accession number: 37.162. The subject depicts Venus and Adonis from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D). Venus fell in love with the hunter, Adonis, after being accidentally pricked by Cupid's arrow. The painting displays the couples' departure, as Adonis ignores the goddess's warnings of danger. Adonis hunted a wild boar which subsequently killed him. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/37.162/> [date accessed: 24 February 2019].

The notion that Woodman presents herself for the (male) viewer is not new: as Ann Daly notes, Woodman's photographs have been considered exhibitionist and narcissistic.[23] However, to suggest the artist epitomises a Mother Nature figure due to her conflation with the environment would also be essentialist, especially as there is nothing maternal about Woodman. By expanding our scope to the perimeter of the frame, Woodman's photograph evokes other visual cues. For instance, the twisting cable which lies adjacent to the artist recalls biblical connotations of Eve and the serpent. But on closer inspection, the artist's depiction of Eden does not appear to thrive. Her signature black-and-white aesthetic emphasises the arid landscape: the earth is dry, and the grass is brittle. It suggests that temperatures are high and

[23] Ann Daly in Baker, p. 58.

there has been little rainfall. Lying within this drought-affected environment would be physically uncomfortable, which in turn directly contrasts idealised depictions of a mythic nature where the woman appears content and at home, in works such as Camille Corot's (1796-1875) *Diana and Actaeon (Diana Surprised in her Bath)* (1836) (Figure 39) or Alexandre Cabanel's (1823-1889) *The Birth of Venus* (1875) (Figure 40).

Figure 39 Camille Corot's *Diana and Actaeon (Diana Surprised in her Bath),* 1836. 61.63 x 44.38 in. (156.5 x 112.7 cm). Painting, oil on canvas. The MET. Accession number: 1975.1.162. The image depicts a scene, again, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and recounts the fate of Actaeon as he encounters the naked figure of the goddess Diana and her nymphs. Embarrassed and annoyed, Diana splashes the hunter, transforming him into a deer. Corot's painting displays a landscape which is incredibly detailed and remarkably naturalistic, despite its mythic subject matter. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1975.1.162/> [date accessed: 24 February 2019].

Figure 40 Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1875. 41.75 x 71.88 in. (106 x 182.6 cm). Painting, oil on canvas. The MET. Accession number: 94.24.1. Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* embodied the ideals of academic art, careful composition and refined brushwork, in addition to the alluring figure of the reclining mythological nude. The combination of these elements created a stir at the Salon of 1863, where the painting was displayed, being dubbed the 'Salon of Venuses' due to the number of muses on show. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/94.24.1/> [date accessed: 24 February 2019].

Furthermore, Woodman's inclusion of a seashell in the bottom left corner of the image is particularly compelling. Traditionally the shell is a marker of classical painting and mythology; within a Catholic context, the scallop shell symbolically referred to Mary and the immaculate conception, so Woodman's inclusion of this prop may be an ironic comment on Sandro Botticelli's (1445-1510) *The Birth of Venus* (1484-1486) (Figure 41).[24] Another Christian use of the shell refers to baptism, while shells left at gravesites are symbolic of a pilgrimage to a sacred place, resurrection and eternal life.[25] The latter representation assumes increased contemporary significance when the seashell is juxtaposed with the parched earth.

[24] Another image which has been likened *The Birth of Venus* is an *Untitled* photograph taken in Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. The image shows a female figure standing with her back to a wall, vellum paper has been tacked across her torso, so it covers her legs and pubis. She cradles a shell in the crook of her right elbow. The paper that covered her breasts and navel is torn and peeled away, as if the body is coming into existence and can no longer be contained. While the shell and Woodman's apparent emergence from the paper evokes representations of Venus, the image could also be likened to the birth of Athena. Instead of being born from her father's forehead, Woodman is fashioned from her physical surroundings.

[25] Jennifer Speake, *Dent Dictionary of Symbols in Christian Art* (London: J.M. Dent, 1994), pp. 125-129.

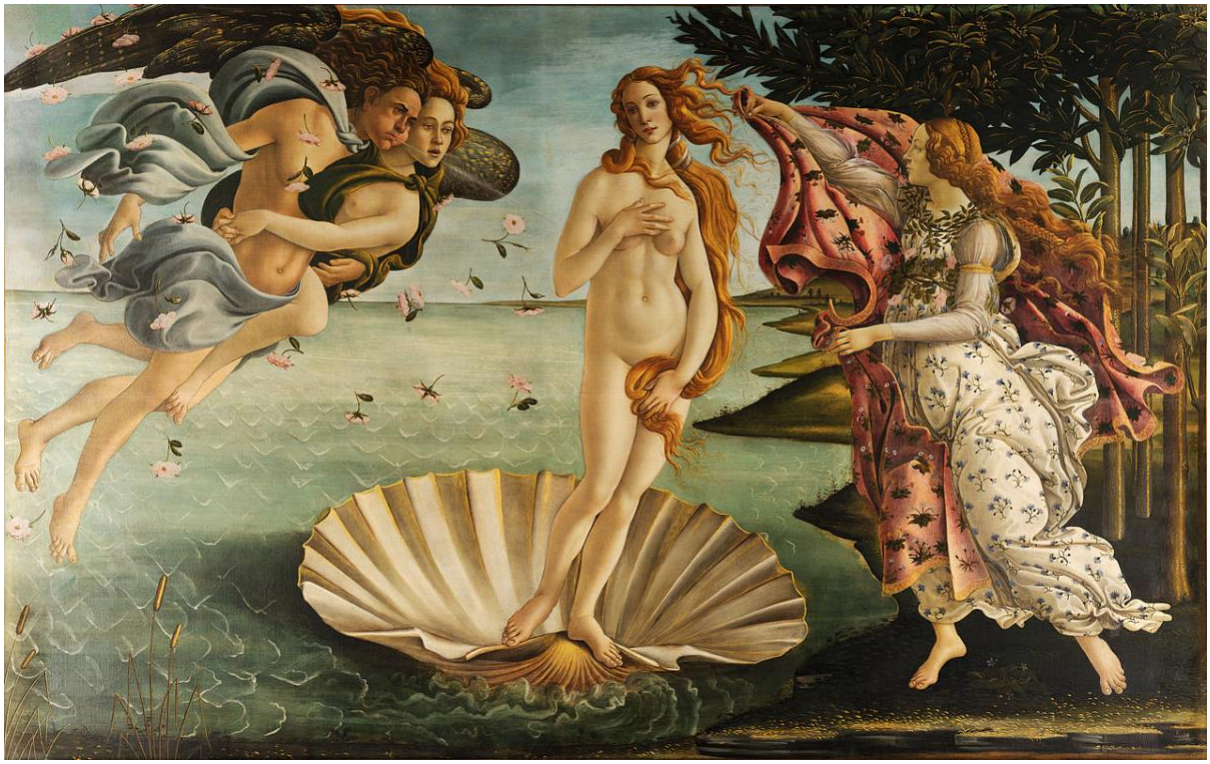

Figure 41 Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1486. 67.7 x 109.4 in. (172 x 277.9 cm). Painting, tempera on canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. *Inv. 1890 no. 878.* The painting displays the goddess of love and beauty arriving on land, on the island of Cyprus. She was born of the sea spray and blown by the winds, Zephyr, and possibly, Aura. Botticelli took inspiration from the classical statue of Venus, depicting his figure in a modest pose, she covers her nakedness with her long, blonde hair. The goddess stands on a scallop shell in the place of the pearl, which alludes to her purity. Meanwhile, the roses blown on the wind emphasise her idyllic surroundings the burgeoning of springtime. <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/birth-of-venus> [date accessed: 24 February 2019].

The inclusion of the shell in Woodman's photograph indicates that water may have occupied this space previously, before the onset of pollution, toxic waste and other environmental concerns (Figure 37). The image then assumes an increasingly sombre meaning when viewed through an ecological lens, where Woodman appears 'washed-up' or deposited by the receding tide. The inclusion of natural elements, such as shells and grass, alongside foreign materials like rubber cables, hints at a wider concern over humanity's place within an unstable and deteriorating contemporary environment. Technology is presented as the new snake in the Garden of Eden whilst simultaneously challenging the art historical canon by disrupting traditional depictions of nature.

Figure 42 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Laying Nude)*, Boulder, Colorado, 1972-1975. 5.5 x 5.8 in. (14 x 21.6 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Pastoral depictions of nature, which portrayed the landscape as a romantic, scenic backdrops, were often closely linked to the biblical. This notion of 'history painting' often depicted a moment in a narrative, drawn from classical history, mythological or religious themes. While its aesthetic style is grand and idealised, Peter Seddon notes how 'the landscape "backdrop" of history painting operates as a powerful metaphor, and its psychic geography reinforces both the particular human psychological reactions that may be depicted and the wider moral lessons that are constituted from them.'[26] The convergence of history and nature was brought together in post-Renaissance humanism and 'salvation history', contrasting the garden and the wilderness, the struggle between good and evil and the nature of human destiny.[27]

Viewers see another example of Woodman's depiction of a deteriorating biblical landscape in the image above (Figure 42). The photograph, taken in Boulder, Colorado,

[26] Peter Seddon, 'From Eschatology to Ecology: The Ends of History and Nature' in David Green and Peter Seddon, *History Painting Reassessed: The Representation of History in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 82-96, (p. 84).
[27] Seddon, p. 85.

between 1972 and 1975, depicts a vast scene of scarred and fractured earth, which appears almost infinite due to the uneven framing of the image and its elevated, yet ambiguous horizon line. Woodman's archetypal use of black, white and grey tones creates a sombre atmosphere; meanwhile, the nude female figure in the lower right corner of the frame, curled foetal-like with her back to the camera, adds to the eerie environment. The figure covers her chest as she clutches her shoulder, a gesture which connotes both modesty and self-preservation. The image evokes biblical connotations of Eve, ashamed and cast out from the Garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit. Yet her counterpart, Adam, is nowhere to be seen. Who was cast out first? Has Adam already descended; and if so, where has he gone?

Figure 43 Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, 1948. 32.3 x 47.6 in. (81.9 x 121.3 cm). Egg tempera on gessoed panel. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Accession number: 16.1949.

On closer inspection, the photograph evokes other aesthetic connections that add to the complexity of Woodman's imagery. The framing has a similar perspective to Andrew Wyeth's (1917-2009) magical realist painting, *Christina's World* (1948) (Figure 43). Set in the barren

landscape of coastal Maine, it depicts a female protagonist, wearing a pink dress, with her back to the viewer. Although she reclines in the scenery, she also appears alert, strangely frozen mid-crawl, with her gaze fixed on a rural farmhouse in the distance which punctuates the grey and overcast sky. Wyeth's subject was afflicted with polio, and the image is said to capture her determination to overcome her physical limitations and 'do justice to her extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless'.[28] The image is picturesque, yet mysterious. Like Woodman's photograph, viewers are left asking: who is this young woman? And why is she positioned alone in the landscape? By contrast, Woodman appears to have given up hope, with no focal point to affix her gaze or travel towards; her surroundings appear bleak in comparison to Christina's. The point is that Woodman could be anywhere and in any time. With no physical markers to indicate her surroundings or seasons to establish the time of year, the sense of dislocation and disorientation increases. This land is not habitable, nor is it stable. The plane appears eternal, and the network of fault lines that emanates around the subject heightens her vulnerability and adds to the sense of timelessness. The expanse of broken terrain also conjures notions of human-made disasters, pollution and contamination. While the cracked earth could indicate drought, it could also evoke the chemical fires that swept the New Jersey landscape in 1972. Through this environmental lens, the photograph becomes ambiguous as a documentary by-product of an ecological catastrophe entwined with the fictional depiction of a post-apocalyptic landscape.

[28] Andrew Wyeth, James C. O. Harris, 'Christina's world: The challenge to me was to do justice to her extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 66:5 (2009) p. 466. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2009.49> [date accessed: 8 January 2019].

Figure 44a Francesca Woodman, *Self-portrait, birch sleeves*, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire, 1980. 4.1 x 3.8 in. (10.4 x 9.6 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper. (Left).

Figure 44b Francesca Woodman, *Self-portrait, birch sleeves*, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire, 1980. 4.5 x 4.4 in. (11.4 x 11.3 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper. (Right).

Figure 45 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire, 1980. 11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

While art historians have previously compared Woodman with sprite-like and mythical figures, such as the mysterious Lady of the Woods or Daphne escaping the unwanted attention of Apollo, these readings romanticise the artist's depiction of nature even further. In other words, it is not enough to read Woodman's photographs as allegories of mythical creatures. Critics must question how these images react to her social and environmental milieus, and subsequently alter viewers' preconceived perspectives surrounding the natural environment. How might her photographs be interpreted by ecological preservationists, who spoke out against humanity's exploitation of nature? For instance, Woodman's depiction of birch trees in Figures 44a, 44b and 45 show the artist standing amongst the woods of New Hampshire. With her head bowed, the camera crops the artist's body out of the frame so that her arms, which are encircled by tree bark, are the primary focus. While Woodman's stance suggests her arms are transforming into trees, the dark negative space beyond the birches and limbs serves to draw the viewer's eye further into the centre of the image. The spectator's immersion in the photographic environment makes Woodman's transformation increasingly plausible.

In an accompanying photograph taken indoors, Woodman evokes trees through other bodily and material signifiers: note her ridged stance; the pattern of her dress, echoing the linear markings of birches; her braided hair, evoking lianas. Looking away from the camera, she holds her branch-like arms down in front of her where they meet at the wrists. As Woodman's arms become branches, the strips of bark around her wrists transmute between bangles and restraints, 'Birch-cuffs adorn her wrists like bracelets – or, as positioned, like shackles'.[29] In Tutter's reading, the symbols of feminine adornment confine women to traditional associations of beauty. If critics accept Woodman's visual motifs equating woman with a constraining natural environment, then she is put in a position where she is never active, never wondering and never

[29] Tutter, p. 1522.

wandering, much like Gayton's passive female landscape which serves as a stage for male desire.

The restrictive birch-cuffs mark the landscape as yet another conventional space where women are relegated in patriarchal culture. Woodman may 'relentlessly offer up the archetypal allusions, mythologies, emblems, and symbols adhering to the feminine', and infuse them 'with dread and dis-ease'.[30] Here, Solomon-Godeau suggests the artist forces viewers to see the patriarchal constructs that subjugate women by revealing these positions. While Woodman's work offers these visual cues, this reading continues to equate the feminine as a site of negativity where the unruly landscape actively takes over the body. To say these images are charged with 'dread and dis-ease' implies that there is no positive outcome to take away, unless the unsettlement of the viewer is regarded in this way.[31]

For Solomon-Godeau, it appears the figure of woman will forever be trapped in a passive position. However, I suggest that critics can envisage the natural environment as a garment that allows a more flexible interpretation of women's place and representation in nature. Woodman not only 'offers up' archetypal allusions but also actively confuses the boundary between the environment and the body. By willingly 'taking on' her environment, the artist effectively tries her surroundings on and wears them like a costume or garment which she can then choose to cast off at will. This links back to Gayton's theory of 'primal landscapes'. While in some images Woodman appears to be subsumed by nature, in others, she adopts a playful 'trying on' of nature in the matter of Gayton's masculine explorer.[32] Her playfulness is key: there is something rather self-conscious and provisional about her work,

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[30] Solomon-Godeau, p. 252.

[31] Victor Burgin puts this view forward in 'Looking at Photographs', *Thinking Photography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), Chapter 6.

[32] Despite his reverie of spatial and self-discovery, Gayton claims he has always experienced a sense of rootlessness, stating that 'whatever did imprint [on him] simply evaporated, due to mobility and forgetfulness'. Consequently, he 'always travelled a lot, trying on landscapes' (Gayton, p. 72). Gayton's notion of 'trying on landscapes' is an interesting phrase as it likens the landscape to a garment. Gayton's wording suggests that the feminine landscape can be worn or cast off at will. Donning his environment puts him in an ambiguous position where he is neither strictly 'male' or 'female', but somewhere in between. See Gayton, p. 72.

unlike Gayton's existential angst. By choosing to wear her surroundings, Woodman disrupts women's traditional place in nature and adopts an ambiguous space where gender binaries become increasingly unstable.

Blurring human and organic forms further emphasises Woodman's concern with an ecological posthumanism. In fact, as with many of her transformative images, the direction of Woodman's metamorphosis is not clear. The process of 'taking on' and shedding bark contributes to a sense of the natural evolutionary process and the passing of time. In other photographs, Woodman removes herself from the frame, showing only the trees; in a series of contact montages, the artist alternates these images 'like a storyboard, an urgent, videographic narrative of transformation'.[33] While the images could show the tension between Woodman's petrified encasement and her desire to escape, they also display a continuing hybridised process as Woodman becomes so finely attuned to her surroundings that the difference between limbs and trees becomes almost indistinct.

While previous scholars suggest Woodman metamorphoses into a tree, the alternative could also be the case: the environment may be taking on human form as a consequence of humankind's influence on the landscape. It is also worth noting that the shedding of bark is a sign of renewal and healing for birch trees, and not a sign of deterioration, as readings like that of Solomon-Godeau suggest. This knowledge alters conventional perspectives surrounding Woodman's environmental images; here they become spaces of opportunity as opposed to oppression. Moreover, another overlooked point is how birch trees were a common trope in American landscape photography, most notably in the works of Adams and his depiction of national parks (Figure 46). The environmentalist's love of nature was 'coloured and modulated by the great earth gesture' of the Yosemite Sierra.[34] The act of photographing was not only an

[33] Tutter, p. 1523.
[34] Ansel Adams, John Muir Adams, *Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada* (Boston; Mass., Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), xiv.

attempt to explore the environment but also an effort to capture and portray something bigger than himself. Adams's photographs displayed the magnitude of the American landscape as a psychological experience of natural beauty and a symbol of a 'veritable' wild America, much like the idealised woman-as-nature figure.

Figure 46 Ansel Adams, *Aspens, Dawn, Autumn,* Dolores River Canyon, Colorado, 1937. 9.25 x 12.6 in. (23.5 x 32 cm). Photograph, gelatin silver print, printed 1975.

Similar to Woodman's images of hybridised nature, fiction and reality become increasingly indistinct in Adams's photography as time passes. Adams was often criticised for his depiction of an idealised nature which contained no humans. Henri Cartier-Bresson commented that 'the world is falling to pieces and all Adams and [Edward] Weston [1886-1958] photograph is rocks and trees'.[35] Nevertheless, if Adams's photography altered

[35] Ansel Adams quoted in Ruth Teiser, Catherine Harroun, *Conversations with Ansel Adams: Oral History Transcript / 1972-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 498.

environmental perspectives by making viewers look beyond themselves through the sheer scale and clarity of the image, then Woodman does the opposite. Her photographs close the gap between the natural surroundings and the body, partly due to the image's diminutive size as well as her physical closeness to the landscape. In doing so, Woodman encourages viewers to look inwards, to question the impact humanity has on its surroundings and to reflect on the spaces where they thrive. Woodman effectively interlinks various organisms to display their co-existing nature and disrupt traditional restrictive depictions of the environment, as I will argue through the artist's posthuman hybridisation. But Woodman was not the only artist concerned with disrupting traditional definitions of women and nature. Women land artists also challenged viewers' interaction with their everyday environment.

The Land Art Movement: Blurring Gender Distinctions through the Landscape

In the last section, I emphasised various intertextual motifs in Woodman's landscapes, which challenge traditional depictions of women in the environment. But the images also question the role of the art historical canon in forming such representations, while drawing attention to the contemporary environmental concerns that affected Woodman. While Woodman tested the limits of photography by blurring her form at the photographic margins and contesting bodily boundaries by embedding herself within the natural environment, she was not the only artist incorporating foreign materials into the natural landscape. As Matilde Nardelli notes, the 1960s 'inaugurated a period of artistic upheaval and radical redefinition of the nature and role of art'.[36] Artistic practice moved away from Greenbergian modernism, focussing on a 'more processed-based' approach which emphasised the 'dematerialisation' of the art object.[37]

[36] Matilde Nardelli, 'End(ur)ing Photography', *Photographies*, 5:2 (2012), pp. 159-177, (p. 165) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2012.700527> [date accessed: 25 November 2016].
[37] Nardelli, p. 165.

Concerns around the body shifted as land artists explored how audiences interacted with the broader environment, not merely through perception, but by emphasising the importance of the audience participation as visitors were encouraged to circumnavigate uncertain artistic sites.

Akin to the figure of the woman marginalised by nature, the female sculptors who worked outdoors in the 1970s were largely overshadowed by the male artists Smithson (1938-1973), Dennis Oppenheim (1938-2011), Richard Long (1945-) and others, whose earthworks and excavations received increased critical attention in the late 1960s. While Land Art originated as a predominantly male movement, this next generation of earth artists brought 'alien' materials such as pre-made structures from glass, plastic, wood, metal and concrete to their sites. These foreign bodies were often implanted into vast expanses of space in an attempt to enhance the site while acting as a mark of physical endurance on the landscape. While Smithson and his group of land artists used the landscape as a canvas on which to map their artistic explorations, the works of Alice Aycock (1946-), Jackie Winsor (1941-), Mary Miss (1944-), Jody Pinto (1942-) and Nancy Holt (1938-2014) challenged these pre-existing physical and conceptual boundaries through their distinctively different style. Unlike the latter group, which often emphasised nihilistic viewpoints surrounding decay and entropy, women land artists held a more optimistic and progressive outlook on the role of the environment in art.

Figure 47 Agnes Denes, *Rice/Tree/Burial*, Sullivan County, New York, 1969-1979. Sculpture.

Figure 48 Agnes Denes, Wheatfield - A Confrontation, Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan, New York, 1982. Sculpture.

Figures 47 and 48 are two examples of the landscape being used to challenge environmental perspectives. Agnes Denes designed *Rice/Tree/Burial* (1968) (Figure 47) and *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982) (Figure 48) to be forms of transgressive agriculture, as the artist planted a wheat field on two acres of wrecked landfill near Wall Street and the World Trade Centre in lower Manhattan.[38] By contrast, Holt's collection of concrete *Sun Tunnels* (1976) was arranged to offer shelter from the Utah sun, but also enhanced the play of light on the remote landscape. The four tunnels, arranged in the shape of an 'X', aligned with the sunrise, sunset and with the summer or winter solstice (Figure 49). These concrete channels reacted differently to the light and cast bright spots into their dark interiors, like stars. In Holt's words, *Sun Tunnels* is 'an

[38] See Christine Filipone, *Science, Technology, and Utopias: Women Artists and Cold War America (Science and the Arts since 1750)* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 160-162.

inversion of the sky/ground relationship – bringing the sky down to the earth'.[39] Altering the viewer's perspective of how they perceive and interact with the landscape was a similar concern for both artists and environmentalists alike.

Figure 49 Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, Great Basin Desert, Utah, 1973–1976. 9 ft. 3 in. x 68 ft. 6 in. x 53 ft., diagonal length: 86 ft. Each tunnel: 18 ft. 1 in. x 9 ft. 3 in. diameter. Sculpture, concrete, steel, and earth. From the collection of Dia Art Foundation with support.

This merging of perspectives is also apparent in Woodman's photographs. The places where she appeared 'at home in dust', such as the abandoned house and derelict factories, would not look out of place in Smithson's construction sites and quarries.[40] Much like the work of women sculptors who followed, Woodman's images can be viewed as the visual aftereffects of Smithson's artistic sites. In an untitled photograph taken in New Hampshire, Woodman

[39] Holt quoted in J Janet Saad-Cook, Charles Ross, Nancy Holt, James Turrell, 'Touching the Sky: Artworks Using Natural Phenomena, Earth, Sky and Connections to Astronomy', *Leonardo*, 21:2 (1988), pp. 123-134 (p. 127).
[40] Thurston, p. 1.

plays with the perspective of the landscape, like Holt, by bringing the sky down to the water (Figure 50). By taping fern leaves to her arm, Woodman's limb becomes a mirror-like plane that reflects the treeline into the water. This interaction with nature plays with the spectator's perception who can see an artificially constructed landscape through the curtain of leaves, akin to Holt's *Sun Tunnels* which simultaneously guides the viewer's gaze through the concrete opening and punctuates the landscape.

Figure 50 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire, 1980. 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Similarly, Woodman's entropic woodland images and her repetitive tree-like form in Figure 45 assumes a generative quality like the work of Denes. The works of Woodman and her contemporaries are, in fact, gender-fluid through their construction, universal inclusion and ambiguity. Holt encouraged connections between viewers and the cosmos through solstice

alignments and offered shelter through these concrete forms, combining the ethereal with the material; meanwhile, Denes sowed wheat crops in an attempt to feed the world and later planted trees to sustain it, displaying nature's powerful lifecycle.[41]

As the works of Denes and Holt suggest, spatially and materially the works of many women land artists are not distinctly feminine, as the large-scale structures and architectural forms, rough industrial materials and the burdensome procedures of cutting into and shifting the earth were associated with masculine traits. When seen through this lens, the fluidity between the natural environment and implanted art forms is evident in Woodman's MacDowell series (Figures, 44a, 44b, 45 and 50). On the one hand, her depiction of trees implies growth, but on the other hand their photographic reproduction forms a maze from which the viewer cannot escape, creating a level of emotional detachment. Meanwhile, Woodman's organic transformation renders her a non-human and genderless form; her body becomes the alien material transplanted into the natural environment.

[41] Suzaan Boettger, 'Looking at, and Overlooking, Women Working in Land Art in the 1970s', *Women Eco Artists Dialogue* (2008), pp. 1-6 (p. 5) <https://directory.weadartists.org/women-land-artists-1970s> [date accessed: 6 September 2016]. See also, Suzaan Boettger, 'Excavating Land Art by Women in the 1970s', *Sculpture*, 27:9 (2008), pp. 38–45.

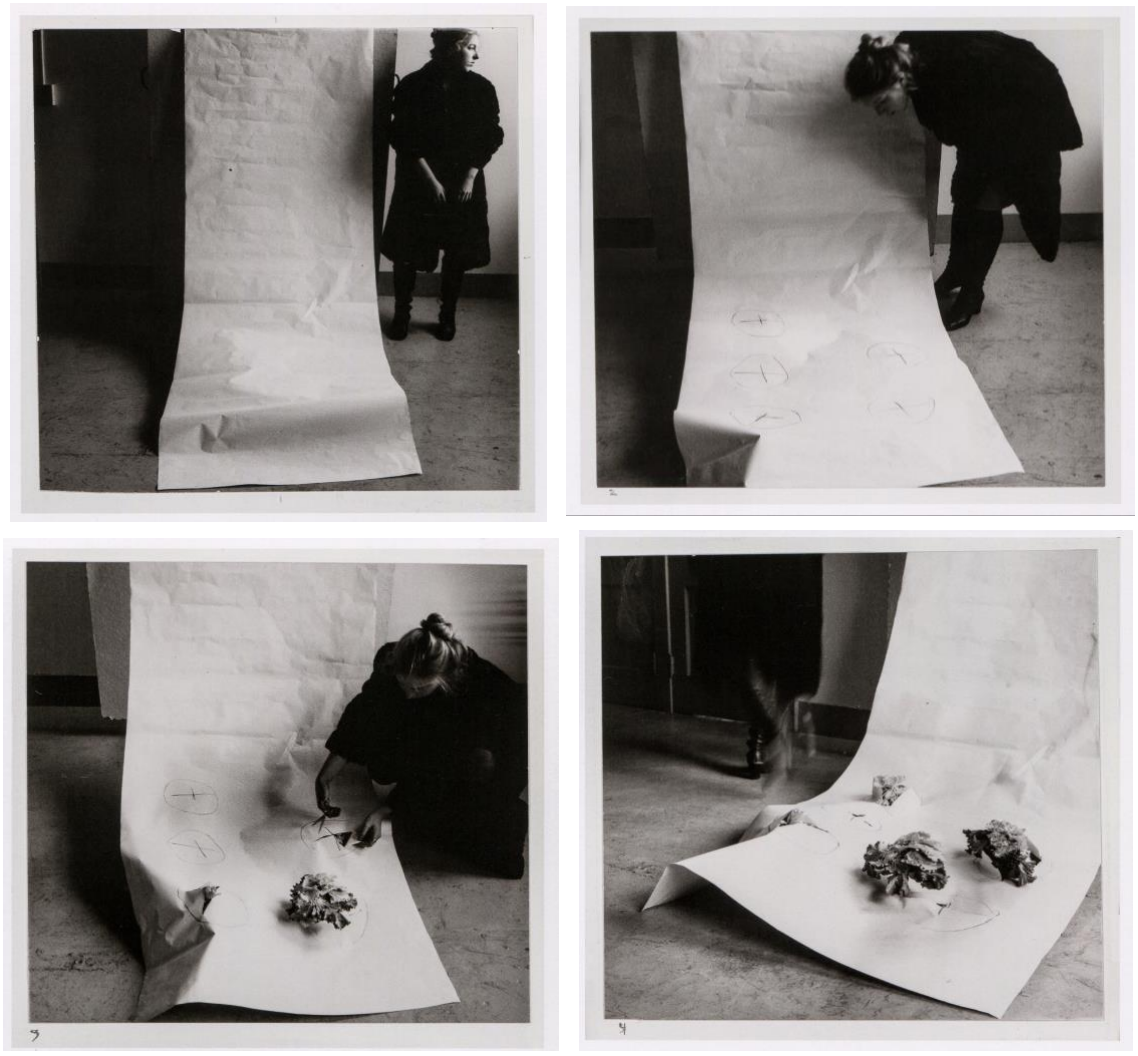

Figure 51 Francesca Woodman, *Spring in Providence #1-4*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper, L-R.

Woodman not only captures the body in transformation but effectively displays the fluidity between interior and exterior space through a series of compelling images (Figure 51). The four black-and-white photographs were taken in the artist's studio in Providence and were designed to be viewed in succession. Unlike her previous work, which rarely carried a narrative thread, Woodman's body is not the main focal point either and is notably absent from the final frame. Instead, a long scroll of paper hangs from the top of the frame, possibly tacked onto a wall, and furls towards the viewer. In the first three images, Woodman stands to the right of the frame, clothed in black, her shadowy form contrasting the brightness of the paper. The

paper recalls the discursive formation of subjectivity as a 'blank slate' on which identity can be plotted and inscribed. In the second photograph, Woodman can be seen marking the paper with X's within circles. As opposed to theorists such as Gayton, who map their desire onto the landscape, Woodman does the opposite. Instead of the paper marking traces of her subjectivity, she marks the ground like one would sow a seed, while her act of cutting the paper allows the outside to invade the interior. Vegetation appears to sprout from the concrete floor beneath the paper, a natural resource in itself, as paper is cultivated from trees before human labour transforms it into a communicative tool.[42] The method of transformation says more about humankind's domination over the environment than the mapping of subjectivity, and raises the question: how can nature thrive in unexpected urban milieus?

This apparent dislocation of nature corresponds with Smithson's *Non-Site* (1968). According to the artist, the indoor earthwork 'is a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site in N.J. [New Jersey]'.[43] *Non-Site* served to collapse the distinction between interior and exterior space by transplanting foreign materials, such as rocks and earth, to the clinical confines of the gallery space. Like a natural scientist, Smithson collected materials, transplanting rocks and debris from his homeland of New Jersey to the artificial and institutionalised gallery space in New York. Woodman similarly transports botanical specimens into the boxy, pure, white borders of the paper. Her vegetation is doubly framed by the edges of the paper and by the walls of the studio, just as Smithson's non-sites are confined to wooden and metal boxes and gallery walls. In addition to this framing effect, the simultaneous presence and absence of Woodman's flora and Smithson's New Jersey landscape not only decontextualise the environment from its actual surroundings but bring the external landscape squarely into focus. When viewing his work, Smithson makes the audience

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[42] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 158.

[43] Robert Smithson (1968), 'A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites', in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (California: University of California Press, 1979), p. 364.,

think of the small suburbs of New Jersey outside of the gallery setting, while Woodman's unexpected foliage evokes the natural world beyond her Providence studio. When viewers encounter Woodman's work, as with any photograph, they are physically entrenched in their context, yet transported to a different time and place through the image. In his publication, *Camera Lucida* (1981), Barthes discusses the sense of detachment familial photographs evoke in the context of bereavement. Looking upon a photograph of his late mother as a young child, the author felt the uneasiness of being torn between critical and expressive languages.[44] But the sense of dislocation in Woodman's work is different to Barthes. Her photographs are not merely images of loss and demise, but snapshots of elsewhere beyond the borders of the spectator's perception. Looking at photographs like Woodman's expands the viewer's visual field and their corporeal reality. It allows them to see the world through the photographer's eyes and contemplate their physical existence.[45] As Susan Sontag wrote, 'the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own'.[46]

Dislocation in Woodman's photographs generates space to develop other perspectives, which viewers also see in the previous images (Figure 51). By documenting the illusion of growth in four parts, Woodman cultivates a specific space that echoes the process of field rotation. Much like Denes's crop installations, Woodman emphasises the cyclical process of planting, growing, harvesting and renewal. Her process challenges Smithson's linear relocation of the natural world to the commercial gallery space, while simultaneously representing the notion that nature has little respect for urban boundaries. This breaching of boundaries is also evident through Woodman's interaction with animals, where her humanness becomes increasingly ambiguous, allowing viewers to consider the potential freedom in creating new complex forms of being through photography.

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[44] Roland Barthes (1979), *Camera Lucida*, p. 8.
[45] In this case, '…their physical existence' refers to both the photographer and the viewer.
[46] Susan Sontag (1973), *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), p. 57.

Animal Parts: Woodman's Posthuman Hybridisation

In addition to disturbing spatial boundaries and categorical borders, Woodman also re-envisions bodily boundaries through unusual framing techniques and the juxtaposition of disparate objects. While visual depictions of vegetation challenge woman's equation with nature, other species occupy ambiguous places in her work as well. Another common, albeit overlooked motif in Woodman's environmental photographs is the hybridisation of humans and animals. The posthumanist scholarship of Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles's has closely explored inter-species relationships.[47] According to Haraway, simians, cyborgs and women are 'odd boundary creatures', crafted from social reality and science fiction.[48] By questioning how technology reimagines the subject's 'natural' body and transforms the gendered binary that constricts identity, the difference between machine and organism is thoroughly blurred: 'body, mind and tool are on intimate terms'.[49]

Just as Haraway and Hayles recognise the importance of reframing embodiment within increasingly flexible parameters, Woodman employs the camera to extend and articulate her sensory experience. The artist is concerned with a different type of hybridity, one which is based on natural elements as opposed to technology. Her photographs suggest that the hybridity of humans and animals not only verge on the monstrous, but also display a type of intertwined empathy for the strange and the outcast. In Woodman's photographs, boundaries between humans and animals are constantly shifting, and new 'beings' are in constant (re)creation. The notion of 'becoming animal' has complex implications for those on either side of the supposed boundary.[50] In *Becoming Animal in Contemporary Visual Arts* (2005), Nato Thompson

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[47] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991); N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999).
[48] Haraway, p. 2.
[49] Haraway, p. 165.
[50] When Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write of 'becoming animal,' they destabilize the strict boundaries between humanity and the animal kingdom, displaying its arbitrariness. For Deleuze and Guattari, the individual

identifies animal-human hybridity as a 'conscious point of departure' where the space between animal and human existence diminishes. This shrinking of space, he suggests, acts as an opportunity for self-reflection on the nature of animal-human relationships. If the gap between these two entities barely exists, then what makes us human? Hybridity serves as a point of anxiety for Thompson: the amalgamation of the animal and the human threatens the unique status of the enlightened subject, as well as the traditional order of things. This shrinking of space is uncomfortable as it destabilises mankind's apparent superiority as a rational entity, in order to open the possibility of inter-speciesism.[51] Unlike Haraway, who sees the cyborg as a potentially liberatory figure, Thompson emphasises the sense of anxiety and predatory nature which underpins the hybrid, the cyborg and the monstrous.

Hybridity is so unsettling because it forces viewers to confront their unstable subjectivity. Being simultaneously both in and in between two categories, our understanding of what makes us human is compromised. These hybrid creatures disturb and contribute to the 'normal' order of things. As Thompson suggests: 'The once sacred and obvious distinction between humans and their feral counterparts shrinks, and, as it does, we are forced to imagine what it might be like to live without this division altogether'.[52] It is this imagining that Woodman's images make space for and encapsulate. Within her photographs, animals and nature surround and reach deep into the subject in both disturbing and captivating ways. Woodman's images are so compelling because the evolutionary scale is thoroughly disturbed. Through her cowering, twisting and amalgamation with her surroundings, it is hard to tell whether she regresses from her humanness or transcends it. Any indication of the posthuman in her work also points to the pre-human, emphasising the complex foresight Woodman

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is constantly shifting. The notion of 'becoming' allows for exchange between static conceptions, such as: human/nature, man/woman, I/we, human/animal (*A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, 1987, Chapter 10).

[51] Nato Thompson, Christopher Cox, *Becoming Animal in Contemporary Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), p. 7.

[52] Thompson, p. 8.

retained when considering the nature of what makes us human. I see Woodman's images as radical spaces which display a 'kind-ness'—both a physical likeness and an empathy to animal hybridity—which challenges the conventional fear-laden approach towards amalgamated entities. Scholars can consider new, complex forms of existence through these images, and in doing so, 'we might free nature in freeing ourselves'.[53]

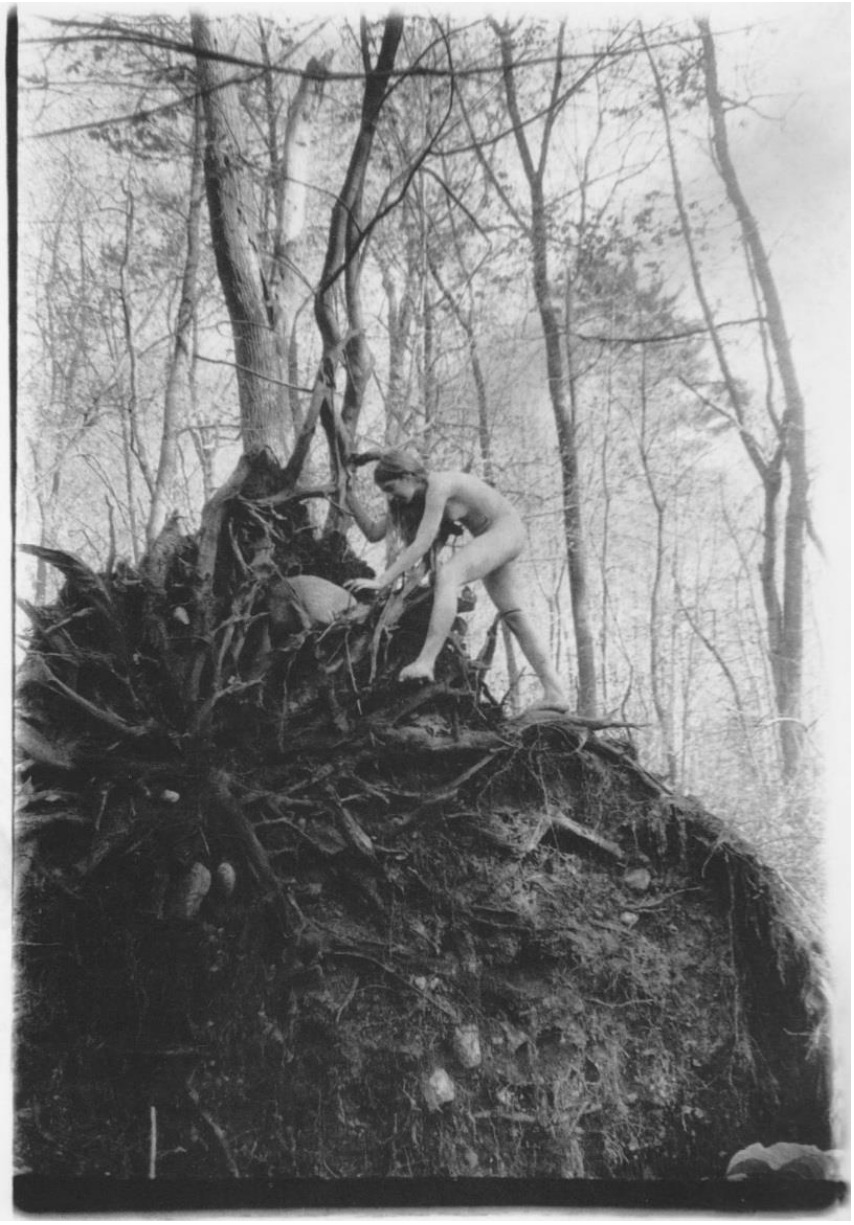

Figure 52 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Andover Massachusetts, 1972-1974. Size unknown. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

[53] Haraway, p. 8.

Woodman's hybridity with her surroundings is not always obvious. In a photograph taken in Andover, Massachusetts (1972-74) (Figure 52), the viewer sees Woodman clambering over a mound of tree roots, soil and bark. The artist is at the centre of the image; bent over with one arm outstretched, she holds on to a branch with the other. Her gait is broad, and her gaze is downcast as she appears to watch her step over the precarious terrain. Her navigation of the landscape does not look comfortable and may even suggest her environment is unfamiliar, which undercuts Gayton's assertion of the feminine primal landscape. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of this image is Woodman's exposure. I refer to exposure in two senses: first, through her nudity, which becomes an almost habitual act throughout her work. Her lack of clothing and material belongings implies that she is somehow freer and closer to nature as she does not require any artificial markers of identity. Seeing the artist clothed in a few of her images is surprising. Spectators are not used to seeing Woodman in a guise which places her squarely in the realm of the human. Second, the camera's perspective emphasises the artist's position. Woodman is elevated; we observe her from a distance where she occupies the central focal point of the viewer's gaze. There is something voyeuristic and even predatory about this image. Due to the framing, viewers are drawn to the middle of the photograph to the subject's breast, like hunters peering through the sight of a gun. The camera 'is a predatory weapon—one that's as automated as possible, ready to spring'.[54]

While I have stated that the artist is concerned with a different type of hybridity to Haraway and Hayles, it is worth noting that while the camera-gun analogy is not a new one, it does lend weight to posthuman readings of Woodman's work. As a documentary tool, the camera is a paradoxical machine. It 'shoots' its subject to preserve a decontextualised snapshot of the past. Walter Benjamin's theory of photography suggests the essence of the moment is

[54] Or in Susan Sontag's words: 'Like a car, the camera is sold as a predatory weapon—one that's as automated as possible, ready to spring', p. 14.

lost, that the 'aura' of the work of art 'withers in the age of mechanical reproduction'.[55] An alternative notion is that the camera extends the photographer's physical capabilities: that is, their sight and memory, blending human, subject and technology. As Dorothea Lange argues, the camera is 'an appendage of the body that shares your life with you'.[56] This sense of entanglement is also re-enforced through the backdrop of branches which heightens the notion of pursuing and trapping the animalistic subject. The tree branches are almost indistinguishable from one another. Abstracted, they crisscross to create an interwoven matrix which mirrors the root system below the subject's feet. When combined, the lens of the camera and the physical surroundings trap Woodman in the spectator's line of vision.

[55] Walter Benjamin (1935), 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Henry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 220.
[56] Dorothea Lange quoted in Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999,), vii.

Figure 53 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1978. 6.25 x 6.56 in. (15.9 x 16.7 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Woodman's allusion to hunting and her collection of fragmented animal parts, which I will explore in more detail next, suggest the fearful connotations associated with animal-human hybridity are difficult to shift. An example of this can be seen in Woodman's depiction of taxidermy (Figure 53). The image displays four segments of a wooden display case which echoes the squarely cropped framing of the photograph. White flecks mark the edges of the dark cabinet, suggesting that the piece of furniture is both aged and unpreserved. Three of the glass windows display various taxidermy animals: a flock of birds cluster amongst artificial wetland, twigs and feathers; a snarling fox prowls in the upper right-hand corner of the case, its gaze possibly fixed on an unseen prey beyond the border of the photographic frame. Similarly, the stuffed racoon snarls at the glass turned towards the latch: it appears to be trapped within the dark confines of the cabinet. But an unexpected object occupies the bottom-right of

the frame. The artist curls within the case, with the door slightly ajar, so her hair tumbles onto the wooden floorboards. By juxtaposing the female form with animal counterparts, Woodman draws attention to broader issues of gender, death and display within the natural environment.

As an object, the display case is a liminal space where predator and prey converge but never meet. It is an artificial place where time stands still, much like the museum cabinet. Captivated by their 'character' and the objects they housed, Woodman often frequented museums and galleries.[57] While it is easy to view Woodman's images through a pessimistic lens due to her suicide, there was also a lot of humour evident in her work. For instance, the artist befriended the guard of La Specola, Florence's Museum of Natural History, to photograph the displays after hours. Once inside, Woodman began to undress and pose amongst the exhibitions before the guard discovered her intentions and threw her out. Personal stories like these are not visible behind the surface of the photograph, but their retelling offers a nuanced glimpse of Woodman's humour, as opposed to her 'tragic' biography.

Yet by encasing herself among wild animals, she not only plays with the slippage between predator and prey but also draws attention to the dream-like state of taxidermy and its culture of display. As Patrick A. Morris notes, taxidermy has a long, complicated history where the practice ranged from a scientific method to a decorative art. Similarly, Arthur MacGregor explains how the role of the taxidermist clashed with patrons, who aspired for 'life-like' displays 'impervious to decay [and] were frequently disappointed' by primitive preservation techniques.[58] As a scientific practice, taxidermists 'mounted single specimens in profile on standard perches', which served the purpose of advancing natural knowledge by naturalists engaged in comparative work that characterised the 1800s.[59] But increasingly,

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[57] Longden, Conversation with George Woodman, 2016.
[58] Arthur MacGregor, 'A History of Taxidermy. Art, Science and Bad Taste', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 24:1, 2012, pp. 140–141 (p. 140) <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1093/jhc/fhr022> [date accessed: 15 March 2019].
[59] MacGregor, p. 141.

MacGregor continues, the demand for taxidermy displays was driven by purely domestic markets rather than scientific ones. This development saw collectors combine species from 'different seasons, habitats [and] continents', brought together for decorative purposes among equally artificial settings of everlasting foliage 'purchased from suppliers to the funeral trade'.[60]

Taxidermy is paradoxical in that animals have to be killed and removed from their natural habitats to be displayed within the artificial context of the cabinet, which is adorned with foliage, thus hinting to the outside world as an 'authentic' environment. Exhibiting nature in this way demonstrates man's power and dominance over his surroundings. By positioning Woodman in a case, the image implies that woman is removed from her 'natural' environment; separated from nature, she is a passive object for the enjoyment of others. However, the artist's self-insertion into the scene disrupts the traditional display of power. At this point, it is worth noting that the origin of the word monster is 'that which is to be displayed': an aspect which assumes greater significance when considering Woodman's posthuman hybridity. It suggests that the nature of spectatorship not only evokes social standing and mastery over the environment, but also is a way of re-enforcing a degree of normality in uncertain times. The zoo, the natural history museum and the art museum (animal, nature and culture) share a common ethnographic legacy of displacing and displaying the exotic 'other', which I think Woodman was acutely aware of when staging her photographs. Woodman's photographs, such as Figure 53, show us that 'being on display' is not reserved for animals alone.

Despite the uneven power dynamic, the snarling wildlife merely masquerades as a threat behind the glass, their stasis emphasising man's artificial dominance over the external environment. If nature is tamed and domesticated through this exhibition, Woodman critiques

[60] MacGregor, p. 141.

the ‘woman-as-nature’ stereotype by posing within an enclosed and objectifying space. Woodman challenges the male gaze by disrupting the primary masculine way of seeing by blurring multiple perspectives: she is a complex figure comprised of a woman, animal, artist and object. Just like her multifaceted identities, the artist cannot be neatly categorised or contained within the display case. Her head dangles from the cupboard and her hair cascades onto the floor. It is not clear whether she is alive or dead, getting into the case or out of it. Meanwhile, the reflection in the glass door prevents access to what lies within the bottom right cabinet. It is this ambiguity and visual disruption which interrupts the suppression of woman-as-nature and subverts the masculine culture of environmental display.

Aside from challenging woman’s conflation with nature, Raymond believes Woodman’s photographs display an attempt to renounce the predetermined gender implications assigned to her. She argues that the images explore ‘the embodiment of fate’, where the female body serves as a template for exploring wider ontological issues – which is not to be confused with ideas of biological determinism or ‘gender as fate’.[61] Here, the term ‘fate’ does not mean Woodman was passive in her art, but rather that her photographs ‘[predict and show] the limitations of poststructuralist feminist theory that postulates gender as a series of performative gestures … fate catches or marks the subject despite and even against her own choices and will’.[62] Woodman seeks to resist the uncontrollable mark of gender by employing her body as a formal tool. By positioning herself as an art object, Woodman can briefly escape her assumed feminine status.[63]

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61 Raymond, *Women Photographers and the Feminist Aesthetics*, p. 93.
62 Raymond, *Women Photographers and the Feminist Aesthetics*, p. 93.
63 But it is arguable to what effect. In casting off her human form and paralleling herself with wild animals, the artist adopts an unassuming, yet equal, societal status to make her point. While the image displays flexible inter-species relationships, it also suggests that woman must renounce her gender to assume another, traditionally inferior, form. While Woodman’s presence disrupts the conventional chain of being, I question whether it is enough to substitute one embodiment for an alternative animalistic incarnation, as such a gesture is one of exchange.

Figure 54 Francesca Woodman, *then at one point i did not need to translate the notes; they went directly to my hands*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976. 6 x 6 in. (15.2 x 15.2 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

In Figure 54, Woodman uses interior furnishings to alter her form and conceal her gender from the viewer. The photograph, *then at one point i did not need to translate the notes; they went directly to my hands*[64] (1976), is part of a series that includes: *And I had forgotten how to read music…* and *I stopped playing the piano* (1975-78). While the images allude to piano-playing, they also hint at a kind of transcription process, one which supports Woodman's desire to invent 'a language for people to see the everyday things that I also see … and show them something different … Simply the other side'.[65] What Woodman means by 'the other side' is unclear. On face value, the statement could refer to a spiritual realm reinforcing the notion of her ghostly presence. But, as I have stressed, Woodman's photographs emphasise her

[64] The lack of capitalisation is deliberate, as that is how the artist titled the image.
[65] An excerpt from Woodman's last diary entry, according to C. Scott Willis's 2010 documentary, *The Woodmans*.

everyday materiality. ‘Simply the other side’ could refer to her perspective and experiences as an artist and a woman, but it could equally allude to her wider environment and the people that reside there. Offering viewers access to her sight is intended as a benevolent act, as her photographs allow viewers to see the ordinary and unremarkable as curious spectacles.

With the camera positioned behind her, Woodman crouches on the floor with her hand pressed against a scratch-marked wall, her head bowed. The starkness of her surroundings is emphasised by the blank furl of paper which she uses to cover her back and buttocks. Despite its minimalist approach, this image prompts various interlinked readings beyond its musical title. The artist wears the paper like a garment; concealing her form from view, Woodman also effectively obscures her gender in addition to her human subjectivity. Here, the paper does not act as a blank slate on which to inscribe meaning; instead, it is in the process of erasing Woodman’s form altogether, transforming the artist into something else entirely. Does the addition of paper enable Woodman to merge with her architectural surroundings, an attempt to camouflage herself while confusing the distinction between human and urban construction? Or does it have a further purpose of challenging the viewer’s perception? The longer viewers look at the image, the more confusing it becomes. Not only is it difficult to tell where Woodman begins and her surroundings end, due to the photograph’s close framing, the wall on which the artist places her hands could also become the floor. Through this lens, the artist is transformed into a crustacean where the paper assumes the role of a shell. Woodman’s use of paper contrasts Haraway’s use of the material as a communicative tool. By employing paper as both body, shelter and animal part, Woodman emphasises the interchangeable materiality of her surroundings. Moreover, her use of blank paper indicates how the visual precedes and surpasses language, an aspect that is also supported by Woodman’s lack of photographic titles. This hybrid animality is heightened by the artist’s claw-like arms which jut out, suggesting she is about to scuttle away. The melding of the human and its home surroundings through the

motif of the shellfish is an interesting one, especially as Woodman appears to be in the process of shedding her paper exoskeleton, as the intersection of paper drifts apart to create a V-shaped gap which exposes her flesh. Much like her work which surpasses conventional critical methodologies, Woodman has outgrown her shell and blurs the boundary between animal and human subjects.

Figure 55a Francesca Woodman, Untitled (from *Swan Song* series), Providence, Rhode Island, 1978. 34.3 x 40.5 in. (87 x 102.9 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Figure 55b Francesca Woodman, *Untitled* (from *Swan Song* series), Providence, Rhode Island, 1978. 35. 2x 33 in. (89.5 x 83.8 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Woodman's hybridisation with nature can also be seen in an untitled image taken from the *Swan Song* series (1978), where she uses environmental elements to blur the distinction between species (Figure 55a and 55b). Woodman photographs herself from above, possibly through a hole in the ceiling to add to the uncanny vertigo of the picture, and she lays on what appears to be a horizontal white table. The platform dissects both the room and the image itself. Fur rugs and patterned fabrics decorated with Aztec and abstract prints cover the wooden floor, adding to the image's tactility. By viewing the artist from above, the spectator holds her in a state of constant suspense. In the first photograph, the artist stretches diagonally across the frame and holds a fox pelt along the length of her torso, from her face to her pubis. The combination of the human form with the animal skin transforms into something that is

simultaneously phallic yet gender ambiguous. In the second image, Woodman has shifted position. Her right leg stretches towards the bottom of the frame while her arm follows the line of the table. Once again, the artist's face is obscured, this time by a sheet of blank paper through which she inserts her arm. A bird's wing is placed just above the bend of Woodman's knee, and its curve echoes the intersection of the artist's arm and leg. Through this presentation, there is little distinction between these fragments. The animal's wing and the subject's disjointed limbs are almost interchangeable: a factor which is heightened when we think of the fragmented work of Man Ray, Miller or Bellmer. But instead of symbolising violence against the female form through the depiction of distorted and severed limbs, Woodman displays the body's transformative potential. Her inter-speciesism is enhanced by her artistic process: the artist creates herself a paper wing. She verges on the threshold of being something human, animal and other – an unknown entity. She is strange as well as physically and categorically out of place. Woodman's use of nature and animal parts defies definition.

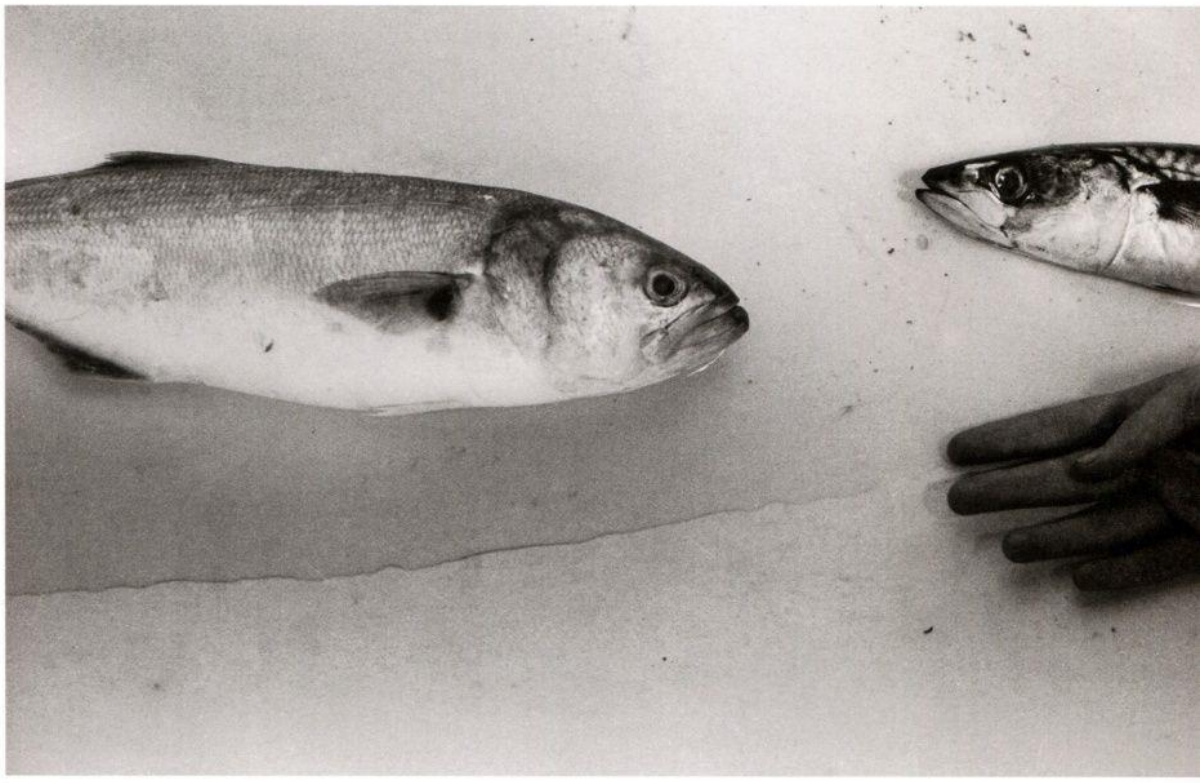

Figure 56 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, New York, 1979-1980. Size unknown. Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

This ambiguous inter-speciesism is similarly illustrated in Figure 56, where Woodman further blurs the boundary between human and animal by mimicking the pose of fish. It is not clear where Woodman acquired the animals: whether she bought them from a shop or fished for them. This lack of context adds to the image's sense of uncertainty. The fish, which are out of their typical environment, are positioned facing one another, so they appear to swim into the photographic frame. Spectators are met by their double gaze, which suggests that the fish are the main subjects of the image, not Woodman. But an alien object encroaches on their space: what viewers assume to be the artist's hand is cast in shadow and lurks in the bottom right-hand corner of the frame. Her thumb curls towards her palm and her fingers are slightly spread. It is a strange situation: one of these things is not like the other. But when juxtaposed with the fish, Woodman's hand appears almost fin-like as she attempts to mimic and assimilate with the other animals. By inserting her extremities into the image, Woodman blurs the linear evolutionary scale – viewers cannot tell if the hand will become animalistic if skin transforms to scales or vice versa. Nevertheless, it is a playful image, akin to casting shadow puppets on walls. Woodman's animal-human hybridity plays with the idea of dislocation, of being a 'fish out of water', but as viewers, we are uncertain which subject is unsuitable for its environment or situation.

Figure 57a Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, New York, 1979. 5.44 x 5.5 in. (14.7 x 14.8 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

Figure 57b Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, New York, 1979. 5.75 x 5.88 in. (14.7 x 14.8 cm). Black-and-white gelatin silver print on barite paper.

If the previous image showed the artist's ambiguous amalgamation with a different animal species, then the following photographs display Woodman's entangled interconnection with her surroundings through similar visual motifs (Figure 57a and 57b). The two images, taken in New York in 1979, depict Woodman standing to the left of the frame, leaning against a pockmarked wall. Viewers are drawn to the tactility of the images, the roughness of exposed brickwork, the depth of dark shadows against the smooth light skin of the artist's back and the sharp creases of her dress. How would it feel to reach out and run a finger down the skeleton spine? Or across the crumbling wall? This distance between the viewer and the hybridised subject beckons the spectator closer into the artist's personal space. In the second image, Woodman twists to the left, her fingers span out behind the row of fish bones as if she is about to strum them, or she has envisaged the viewer's prior thinking. Her downward-cast gaze bisects the point where her hand reaches out, emphasising her actions and the tactility of touch. Woodman's environment, which assimilates her, is raw and haptic through its intricate layering. The pattern which runs horizontally like tracks across the wall echoes the design on the artist's dress and the fanning bones of the fish skeleton, blurring the supposedly distinct boundaries between human, animal and architectural forms. But while Woodman layers comparable patterns to draw the viewer into the image, the photograph simultaneously emphasises the notion of exposure and vulnerability.

Not only is brickwork and flesh exposed, but the artist's superposition of a fish spine against her own implies that she makes visible the invisible. Akin to the paper crustacean which came before, Woodman's first image assumes the position of an X-ray; as viewers, we are shown a rare and unconventional glimpse of the artist's body. While Woodman draws attention to alternative parts of her body, she simultaneously attempts to conceal her face, which, I argue, is not the traditional marker of her visual identity. Through her artwork she surpasses conventional notions of recognition, becoming associated with her visual aesthetic—the

blurred movements; inky shadows; animal parts; and melancholy architectures—as opposed to her facial features. In fact, on the rare occasion viewers come face-to-face with the artist, it is an almost jarring experience. She appears too close, her gaze too fixed; she is too much like us. While these images emphasise exposure and vulnerability, they also highlight the interconnected experiences of humans, animals and their environment.

Meanwhile, the deteriorating urban environment contrasts the printed fern leaves which decorate Woodman's dress, bringing ideas of death and renewal into contrast. Much like her use of floral wallpaper to skew preconceived spatial and bodily divisions, Woodman challenges the notion of conventional dwelling spaces by bringing natural elements into an unexpected gritty interior. Ultimately, the addition of animal parts and natural components evokes the viewer's curiosity and skews the hyper-romanticisation of the female form in both traditional depictions of nature, and in art history in general. These images do not conform to conventional categorisations of bodily and spatial hierarchies; here, Woodman is neither animal nor human but ambiguously in-between. It seems that nature does not respect physical or categorical confines and neither does Woodman due to her hybridity with the natural landscape.

Concluding Thoughts

To summarise, Woodman's photographs disrupt traditional geographical ideologies that associate women with landscapes, relegating them to a passive position against which male desire and subjectivity emerge. In contrast to traditional male-oriented geographical readings, Woodman's photographs open ambiguous spaces of enquiry that enable the viewer to think differently about the environment and their place within it. The artist achieves this through various methods: by alluding to classical and biblical motifs and visual intertextualities drawn from the art historical canon; by emphasising contemporary environmental concerns such as increasing urban degradation and pollution; and finally, by choosing to freely merge with her

natural surroundings, trying on her environment for size. Nature does not merely subsume the figure of the woman. Rather, she actively takes on the environment like a garment, suggesting that the boundary between the female body and nature is not only flexible, but one of playful exchange. In doing so, Woodman transcends the traditional confines of woman-as-nature by creating ambiguous representations of post- and pre-humans.

So, it appears viewers have come full circle: Woodman's work addresses women's constrained gender stereotypes and her equation with a mythical landscape, but they also surpass this. She also draws on the experiences of artists and activists who sought to navigate and reconceptualise their social and political realms. Lastly, Woodman's photographs emphasise increasingly empathetic readings of her haptic surroundings and evoke uncanny re-imaginings of animal and human relations. But it would be misleading to think that Woodman's images somehow tell a linear narrative or provide viewers with a neat way of looking at her world. This simply is not the case. Her images are complex and messy, both poetic and confrontational, disturbing yet familiar. But what lies at the heart of her photographs is a 'kind-ness', something with which viewers can connect (that is softer and less violent or nihilistic than the *punctum*), but also see beyond.[66] What is so compelling is how Woodman's photographic empathy extends beyond the borders of her own cultural environment to encompass other species, and even our own. By merging with flora and fauna, Woodman presents the viewer with a series of hybridised creatures that contests traditionally monstrous

[66] In his publication, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Barthes described the *punctum* as something which 'wounds' or 'pricks' the viewer, but it is also a 'sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is also that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (See Barthes, 1981, p. 27). Furthermore, I am intrigued by Barthes's notion of bruising and photography. Bruising, similar to staining, acts as a physical indicator on the body, it is the trace where blood pools under the skin after impact or accident, it emphasises hurt and pain but also connotes 'blooming' and 'flourishing'. Bruises also fade and disappear, adding to the poignancy of Barthes's metaphor for photography. But beyond this is the idea of the haptic, of tracing the body to find these purple and blueish marks. If scholars think of Woodman's photographs as bruises—not in a violent sense but as in the transient trace they leave behind—then they not only focus on the elements which *move* viewers but also focus on the *impact* these images offer.

connotations by testing and extending our understanding of what makes us human, and maybe even welcomes such transformation.

Concluding Remarks
Touching Photographs

At the end of Berne's article, 'To Tell the Truth' (2004), there is a small rectangular photograph to the bottom left of the page, about 6 cm x 9 cm in size.[1] The image is shot in colour and features two female subjects. Francesca Woodman stands to the left of the frame, her head tilted slightly. She wears a cream dress with a dark polka-dot pattern, and her blonde hair is tied back from her face. She holds her hands in front of her body, and her legs are positioned slightly apart as if she braces herself against the camera's gaze. To the artist's left stands Berne, facing the camera front on, her dark hair frames her face and echoes the parallel lines of her black trousers. Sleeves rolled up on her yellow shirt, her arms hang by her side and she holds a cigarette in her left hand.

Figure 58 Francesca Woodman and Betsy Berne in front of *Temple Project*, New York, 1980. 2.4 x 3.5 in. (6 cm x 9 cm). Image reproduced as featured in Townsend (2006).

[1] Betsy Berne, 'To Tell the Truth' in *Francesca Woodman: Scattered in Space and Time*, ed. by Chris Townsend, George Woodman (London; New York: Phiadon, 2006), p. 148.

The two women regard the camera, perhaps ambivalently. Due to the framing of the image, it is not clear where the friends are situated, but they stand with their backs to a blue-toned image set against a light wall which suggests Woodman and Berne may be in the exhibition space of a gallery. This location is also alluded to by a series of smaller square photographs layered over the montage to the right of the frame. On close inspection, viewers can make out that the lower photograph is of Woodman in her bath (Figure 14). These images are perhaps the preliminary thought process behind the final image, entitled *Temple Project* (1980). But the inky sanctuary extends beyond the borders of the photographic frame, and it is unclear whether it is a temple that spectators actually perceive. This spatial uncertainty is enhanced as the snapshot is slightly blurry, which perhaps explains its small scale. Attempting to enlarge the picture further would distort its details. But this sense of distortion is also heightened by the sheer size of the artists' backdrop.

Where should the viewer begin to look? Decoding the image behind Berne and Woodman is difficult. Its edges are uneven, and spectators can make out column-like elements to the top of the frame; geometric patterns below that; dark creases which may be depictions of stone, fabric or possibly folds in the paper; and the bust of a woman above Berne's head. What these fragments signify would be indistinguishable without the title of the image. There is almost too much to see. It is as if the onlooker blinks in quick succession and glimpses an assortment of fleeting images. How can audiences be sure that these visuals are architectural signifiers; moreover, do these images serve to expand space, or crumple upon themselves in ruinous disarray? Only one thing is certain: the image implicates the viewer in a personal moment between two artists and a body of photographic work, which document a particular time and place.

Figure 59 Francesca Woodman, *Blueprint for a Temple*, New York, 1980, diazo collage, 173.2 x 111.2 in. (440 × 282.4 cm). Diazo printing process (irregular). Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), after treatment, 2012.

Woodman constructed the *Temple Project* (otherwise known as *Blueprints for a Temple*) in her New York apartment in 1980 and exhibited the piece that same year at the Alternative Museum in New York City (Figure 59). Some 30 years later after Woodman's death, one section of the *Temple Project* re-emerged as part of the 'Spies in the House of Art' exhibition (February 7-August 26, 2012) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). The rest of the collage is held at the Woodmans' estate, out of sight and hidden away from damaging ultraviolet light. While Woodman's work portrayed a sense of ephemerality through its small scale and blurred aesthetic, *Blueprints for a Temple* has a physical transience and an 'affective charge all of its own', in part due to its medium.[2] Diazotype prints are sensitive to light and often become illegible over time, decaying, fading and discolouring due to exposure. Curators at MoMA conserved the section of the temple and presented it in a Perspex box, away from direct light and the touch of visitors.

The diazo printing process is significant when considering the issue of place in Woodman's oeuvre. The practice is associated with large-scale architectural projects and blueprints. Woodman projected 35mm slides onto light-sensitive paper and after a lengthy projection time, during which Woodman stood in front of the paper for hours, the artist eventually joined 29 of the diazotype images together to create her temple. The collage spanned a height of almost fifteen feet. Unlike the diminutive size and geometric format of her previous images, which forced viewers to 'get up close' to her photographs, *Blueprints for a Temple* marked a decisive shift in the artist's traditional spatial configuration of the photograph. The collage occupied an entire wall of the gallery space; its monumental size, irregular edges and the abundance of photographic fragments which constructed the temple create a sense of awe, as opposed to the intimacy which characterised the majority of Woodman's photographic

[2] Patrizia Di Bello, 'Touching Photographs', *History of Photography*, 38:4 (2014), pp. 441-443 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2014.949113> [date accessed: 5 March 2019].

career. If viewers encroached on the artist's personal space to view the details of her photographic interiors, *Blueprints for a Temple* does the opposite by forcing spectators to stand back and observe at a distance, feeling small in its presence.

While Woodman portrays a different type of space to the ones previously encountered, the image stands somewhere between sculpture, architecture and photomontage. Nevertheless, *Blueprints for a Temple* contains the visual motifs and photographic practices of the *Womanhouse* project and Matta-Clark's sculptural dissections. Woodman's layering of images recalls the collaging of Matta-Clark's later work as he flattened his building cuts and cross-sections into one-dimensional photomontages. The temple also encapsulates Woodman's shifting domesticity. Akin to the *Womanhouse* project, Woodman employed a collection of domestic trappings, such as the black-and-white key-pattern floor tiles in her apartment bathroom, to create 'a Temple of classical proportion made out of classically inspired fragments of its modern-day counterpart, the bathroom. Bathrooms with classical inspiration', she observed, 'are often found in the most squalid and chaotic apartments of the city … They offer a note of calm and peacefulness like their temple counterparts offered to wayfarers in ancient Greece'.[3]

As a construction of classical Greek ornamentation and myth assembled from contemporary 'objects and icons from the spatiotemporal vastness of the exterior world', *Blueprints for a Temple* is more than a sum of its photographic parts.[4] Similar to Matta-Clark's *Bronx Floor: Threshole* (Figure 24), the temple appears to make and accumulate space in numerous ways: through the amalgamation of domestic objects, the subsequent layering and taping of photographs and, finally, through the interchangeability of bodies with their surroundings. However, Woodman's image not only creates a sense of space; as a site of

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[3] Woodman quoted in Keller, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman', p. 181.
[4] Kelly Long, 'Thresholds of Being: Phenomenology and the Art of Francesca Woodman', University of Rochester, 2013, pp. 1-23 (p. 5) (unpublished article).

renewal and possibility, the temple produces a collective experience that is both seen and, crucially, felt.

Viewing *Blueprints for a Temple* from afar, the collaged building appears deceptively unified, but the image is a façade, akin to the front of a dollhouse cabinet, or a masquerade-like layer to be put up and taken down at will. While *Temple Project* plays the part of a building within the studio or gallery space, it is impossible for viewers to enter the structure. As a site of worship where adoration cannot take place, *Blueprints for a Temple* acts as a visual oxymoron, and the audience is left questioning how the inside of the temple might appear. On closer scrutiny, one sees the architectural signifiers bearing their origins: the sloped cornice, which functions as the temple roof, is comprised of repetitive images of the floor tile Woodman found in the bathroom. Photographs of two clawed bathtub feet take the place of the frieze. Beneath stand five female figures: Woodman and her friends pose with their arms raised, draped in peplos gowns constructed from bedsheets.

While the caryatids assume various signification, such as highlighting the gendered role of the muse, the deliberate obstruction of the male gaze and the obscuration of identity by shielding their faces or the hybridisation between body and building, critics should not discount the caryatids' overall function. The statuesque figures appear to support a structure which is devoid of physical weight. Time and geographical location conflate at the junctures of the paper façade, where the past and present enmesh and collapse the binary between interiority and exteriority, in addition to real and imagined spaces. My point is that the temple accumulates cultural gravity despite Woodman's act of spatial and architectural abstraction. This sense of dislocation, of the temple being 'out of time', estranges the viewer as the artist creates and simultaneously restores the façade from disused objects. By alluding to the sacred structures of ancient Greece, Woodman creates a visual reference point that is culturally coded for a

collective audience, while retaining the sense of ephemerality through the temple's fragmented composition.

Blueprints for a Temple is captivating, partly due to its size and attention to detail, yet the sense of wonderment it creates for those who experience it directly is increasingly complex. The image, mounted on the wall of the gallery, is made and remade through reciprocal interactions with the spectator: that are both personal and social, real and imagined, but are nevertheless imperative to the mutability of space and the agency of the photograph. Viewers are drawn to Woodman's images, not only due to the artist's cult status, the consistency of her aesthetic or the minute scale of her work – the attraction is more nuanced than that. Woodman's photographs hint at *elsewhere*, whether it is through the artist's messy interiors and entangled depictions of nature, or that she appears *just* out of reach playfully hiding behind furniture and wallpaper, her images act as a form of escapism for the viewer. Ultimately, critics ought to question the relationship between the photograph and the spectator, and how they interact with one another. By experiencing her work in person, through print or digitally, audiences must want to take *something* away from Woodman's work. But what that *something* is, is unclear. In this sense, encountering Woodman's plan for a temple can be likened to a pilgrimage: *Blueprints for a Temple* encapsulates a sense of stillness and magnitude which does not exist in her other images. Moreover, the collage encourages reflection and contemplation: it is the only image that viewers can 'bask in'.

In her seminal 2012 publication, *Touching Photographs*, Margaret C. Olin argues 'we bask in an image to obtain what we need from it, much as we bask in the sun, or under a sunlamp, to obtain the benefits of light'.[5] What 'we' need from Woodman's images is unclear and will certainly be different for each spectator. But as Catherine Gander notes, 'basking can have damaging consequences', much like the risk of exposing the *Temple Project* to natural

[5] Margaret C. Olin, *Touching Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 197.

light.[6] Being 'over-exposed' to images lessens their visual impact; and so, scholars may ask: what are the implications of 'seeing too much' of Woodman, through her photographic replication, in addition to her nakedness? Was the artist's bodily obscurity a deliberate act to distance viewers and make them look away?

Furthermore, in order to bask, Olin argues the image must be generic: 'There has to be less to look at' for this 'therapeutic connection' between the image and the viewer to remain open, and for the shared experience of being touched by the photograph to be recognised as such.[7] 'Less to look at' does not necessarily denote photographic content; it also refers to the analysis of images. Depending on how spectators view *Blueprints for a Temple*, this influences what they take away from the image: the closer they are, the less audiences see the underlying detail and structure of the image. This dual perspective is akin to Woodman's hybridisation of the ancient with the contemporary; she presents two co-existing dimensions which cannot normally be perceived simultaneously. Perhaps critics ought to ask: how do images like *Blueprints for a Temple* extend the discussion of photography beyond the realm of the personal and the familial (through Woodman's depiction of the domestic); moreover, how do her images touch others—both metaphorically and physically—and create shared connections. If, in his influential essay on the 'pictorial turn', W. J. T. Mitchell asked, 'What do pictures want?' scholars might ask: 'what makes Francesca Woodman's photographs *matter*?'; and, 'what do they want us to do?'[8]

This thesis explored the complex relationship between body, place and its material evocations in Francesca Woodman's photography. An over-reliance on the artist's romanticised and psychoanalysed status following her suicide, often overshadows critical

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[6] Catherine Gander, 'Touching Photographs by Margaret Olin', *European Journal of American Culture*, 32:2 (2013), pp. 205-208 (p. 207).
[7] Olin, p. 197.
[8] William J. Thomas Mitchell, 'What Do Pictures Really Want?', *October*, 77 (1996), pp. 71–82 (p. 71). I deliberately play on the word 'matter', referring to the significance and material composition of Woodman's photographs.

interpretations of her images, rendering them the visual symptoms of a tortured state of mind. The problem of 'fitting in', I argued, implicitly underpins Woodman's work, and the scholarly discourse that surrounds her. Aside from an overreliance on the artist's originary narrative and the linear teleology of her success, this sense of dislocation is displayed visually, as Woodman wrestles and merges with her tactile surroundings. Moreover, the myth of her prodigal status and subsequent critical attempts to understand the artist's work risks displacing her further. For instance, attempts to assimilate Woodman's photographs to pre-existing art historical lineages serves dual purposes. While this method seeks to trace the artist's visual influences, it is also a method of canonisation which solidifies Woodman's status as a figure worthy of study. Meanwhile, popular trends in academic discourse, such as poststructural feminism of the 1980s and trauma theory during the 1990s, transform the artist into an allegorical figure for each dominant discursive trope.

In addition to scholarly fixations of Woodman's originary narrative, issues around canonicity and academic trends, Woodman's 'old-fashioned' aesthetic and photography's fledgling status as an institutional artistic medium also contribute to the artist's dislocation and perhaps hindered contemporary reception of her work. Similarly, when critics encounter her images, they rarely consider the period of artistic experimentation and socio-political uncertainty in which Woodman lived and worked. Overlooking Woodman's broader context beyond the photographic frame is a significant omission, particularly as bodies and their by-products, like photographs, are intrinsically shaped and dictated by their cultural and physical surroundings.

Akin to Townsend's approach, this thesis considered myriad ways to interpret Woodman's work, through spatial, feminist and material lenses. Focusing on Woodman's penchant for deteriorating places within her photographs enables scholars to expand the critical conversation around her work and offers the potential to create original and alternative visual

analyses that focus on the complexities of creating a space for self-representation, as opposed to the 'authenticity' of that representation. Set amidst the context of the women's movement, Chapter One considered Woodman's photographs as depictions of 'the everyday' and built on the works of Solomon-Godeau, Armstrong and Thurston, to develop new interpretations of Woodman's portrayal of the domestic sphere, taking insights from feminism and surrealism, to explore the complex relationship between placemaking, the material and feeling in photography. To briefly revisit Solomon-Godeau's argument where Woodman 'relentlessly' offers up archetypal allusions of the feminine, in addition to the conventional spaces to which she is relegated. I offer an alternative reading, which provides a space for the female spectator.

By viewing Woodman's images as spaces of wonder and transformation, her act of photographing becomes less of a 'chore', of ceaselessly displaying women's oppression to the audience, and more about playful experimentation through the routine habit of capturing her everyday life. In her images, Woodman repetitiously presents a female body that is strong and adaptable to its unconventional surroundings, as opposed to one that is disappearing or restricted by architectural boundaries. Additionally, Woodman disrupts the traditional notion of domestic confinement by occupying unexpected, decrepit spaces. This act of taking up space places agency with the artist and challenges the female viewer to question the notion of spatial normativity.

In addition to asking where women can (or cannot) see or locate themselves, the sense of playfulness and collaboration with friends, models and through posthumous comparison with her contemporaries is also significant. These elements suggest Woodman's photographs are prolific spaces. Whether it is through her bodily gestures, the dusting of her surroundings or their tactile materiality, Woodman displays the fluidity of creation, and the flexibility space has to offer.

An example of this posthumous comparison is the juxtaposition of Woodman's interior space with Chicago and Schapiro's *Womanhouse* project. I argued Woodman subverts the house as a traditional locus of domestic confinement through her accumulation of domestic paraphernalia, such as dinner plates and cutlery, in addition to her fondness of dust and debris. The messiness of Woodman's interiors reframes dust as a disruptive force that challenges the traditional cleanliness of the house and emphasises the artist's material trace within her surroundings, as opposed to her disappearance. But Woodman and the *Womanhouse* group 'mess up' the house in a different way: Woodman plays with perception in *It Must Be Time for Lunch Now* (Figure 11), while Welch's kitchen uses lurid colours and false body parts to create a sense of visual uncertainty (Figure 8a). Underpinning these domestic spaces is the notion of playfulness and the sensory, which viewers see through Woodman's, Orgel's and Schiff's depiction of doll-like figures. Akin to the motif of the house, the doll has undergone various transformations throughout history, and its status as an art object or a plaything is often indistinguishable. By employing the figure of the doll, these artists display the difficulty of taking up space, of transforming an objectified body to be perceived differently, in addition to the physical tension these figures are under as they attempt to fit into or react against their domestic surroundings.

Beyond Woodman's depictions of mundane yet captivating interiors, the difficulty of fitting in was felt on an extensive socio-economic level. Chapter Two explored the suburban landscape amidst demographic change, urban degeneration and building abandonment during the 1970s. Bringing Woodman's work into conjunction with Matta-Clark's building cuts and architectural distortions, through images such as *Splitting*, their shared visual motifs become increasingly apparent. Both artists employed abandoned houses in their photographic work; moreover, their use of gaps, voids and cuts, either by physically slicing the building or by framing and cropping the resulting image, disrupts conventional spatial order. In works such

as *Space²*, where Woodman positions her body behind torn strips of floral wallpaper (Figure 21), and Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (Figure 20) as the house strains away from itself, the artists create sites of visual tension and suspense, which viewers mainly encounter through the artists' physical interactions with their surroundings. During this time, volatility between body and place was felt on an extensive level by other displaced peoples—namely vagrants, ethnic minorities and the poor—who often adopted make-shift sites out of necessity, or as political statements. By employing Woodman's and Matta-Clark's images as vehicles and by focusing on tangible experience, scholars can disrupt traditional theories of dwelling, such as Bachelard's phenomenology, with the two aspects he omits: everyday living conditions within a society characterised by inequalities of power and resources; and gender. Akin to Woodman's house in Chapter One, her depiction of decrepit sites and harsh realities emphasises how notions of intimacy also encapsulate disorder, displacement and power.

In the final chapter, I closely analysed Woodman's photographs of the natural landscape amidst emerging environmental concerns and the Land Art movement in America in a bid to develop Solomon-Godeau's and Tutter's original readings of Woodman as the archetypal women-as-nature figure. Mythic interpretations dominate Woodman's depictions of Boulder, Colorado, Andover, Massachusetts, and the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire: this is, in part, due to the long and complex history that equated women with nature. Woodman not only calls this dominant trope into question, but also thoroughly exposes the artificiality of this dualism. Viewers encounter this disturbance through Woodman's evocation of classical, biblical and pastoral motifs in her work, as portrayed through the reclining female nude. I argued that Woodman employs such themes for two reasons: first, to challenge the art historical canon and its representations of women-as-nature; and second, to highlight contemporary environmental concerns. By curling herself upon arid earth, she draws attention to a landscape which is in decline but also serves as a warning to subsequent spectators (Figure 42). Within

her images, the natural environment and the flora and fauna which reside there infringe on the artist, and vice versa. But Woodman's surroundings are not oppressive: her entanglement with nature offers a sense of freedom as the evolutionary scale is thoroughly blurred. This liberation and increased interpretive flexibility are also heightened by my use of posthumanism as a theoretical tool through which to understand Woodman's work. Her assimilation with animals, be it encased taxidermy (Figure 53), gesticulations which evoke the movement of fish (Figure 56) or a furl of paper that evokes the shell of a crustacean (Figure 54), display the body's transformative potential through post- and pre-human imaginings. These photographs contort body-spatial boundaries and present a 'kind-ness' which reframes conventional approaches to hybridity and enables critics to consider a theory of photography that shifts precedence from the 'thinking' to empathy and touch.

Returning to the notion of touch opens a further line of enquiry around Woodman's work. As I mentioned in 'Feeling Photography' in Chapter One, the notion of feeling or 'tactile photography' is not entirely new, with theorists such as Barthes, Burgin and Sontag commenting on photography's physical materiality and its ability to touch others. As Patrizia Di Bello notes, 'photography has been crucial in mediating and constructing our very sense of being embodied'.[9] But unlike vision, touch has received less theorisation in histories of photography. Di Bello continues: In part, this is because, unlike sight, touch 'is not yet mechanically or digitally reproducible'.[10] The elevation of vision adds to this sense of disconnect. Similarly, photography's desire to be considered in the realm of fine art heightens this sense of detachment; meanwhile, the context of the gallery setting produces a certain type of decontextualisation for spectators.

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9 Patrizia Di Bello, 'Seductions and Flirtations', *Photographies*, 1:2 (2008), pp. 143-155 (p. 148) <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540760802285106 > [date accessed: 26 March 2019].
10 Di Bello, 'Touching Photographs', p. 441.

In Woodman's work, the tension between looking and touching is increasingly evident, depicted through her bodily gestures and her everyday volatile surroundings. Through Woodman's portrayals of the haptic, touch and vision are almost 'interchangeable in lived experience'.[11] Viewers see that her environments are dusty and that the spaces she attempts to fit herself are challenging, but the images also prompt the question: how must it have felt to inhabit such problematic places? But touch, or lack of it, as depicted through the distancing effect of the temple's Perspex box, is emphasised in other ways. For instance, Woodman's intermingling of everyday materiality with the visual in *Blueprints for a Temple* highlights the artist's medium and the work's tactile quality, but the temple also prompts an emotional reaction through the scale of the piece, and the transformation of its subject matter (from domestic fragments to monumental sign). Spectators are 'touched' and 'moved' by the collage, both emotionally and physically.

Prior to creating *Blueprints for a Temple*, Woodman practised this notion of 'touching' on a smaller scale by sending her photographs to friends and family as postcards, writing personal messages in the margins of the images.[12] This act exemplifies what Rachel Somerstein calls 'touching as proxy', where the photograph acts as a communicative device when the photographer is far away from loved ones, due to 'geography, social distance or death'.[13] While the *Temple Project*'s function differs from Woodman's other images, it surpasses the realm of the personal by creating collective bonds. Photographs, including Woodman's, bring people

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[11] Olin, p. 9.

[12] Giuseppe Casetti and Giuseppe Gallo were friends of Woodman, having met through Sabina Mirri while visiting Rome. Casetti commented on how Woodman was 'very generous' and often gave her photography away to friends. The artist even made her exhibition invitations, 'with little white cards that were glossy on the front and opaque on the back, exactly like a photograph. Next to each address, she affixed an original contact to each card … Francesca was basically sending her artwork in the mail!'
Gallo also notes how Woodman used to lend him letters, often mixing mediums, stating: 'I have some of her drawings—which were actually letters … She used to draw, and write, and also just play—she used to mix up words in her letters, but it made them even more poetic, she would tear off the part of the paper where she had drawn me.' For the full interviews, see, Isabella Pedicini, *Francesca Woodman: The Roman Years, Between Flesh and Film* (Rome: Contrasto, 2012), pp. 119-120; 125.

[13] Rachel Somerstein, 'Touching Photographs', *Visual Anthropology*, 26:5 (2013), pp. 460-462 (p. 460). <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2013.834238> [date accessed: 1 March 2019].

together and transform how they perceive their everyday realities. Woodman's temple creates a relational art between bodies, spaces, objects and, fundamentally, with spectators who have 'different viewpoints and interests that are always necessarily vested'.[14] If Woodman was a 'displaced' artist due to her visual isolation, youthful prodigal talent and through subsequent critical discourse, then how can her photography possibly act, acquire agency and appeal to a wider audience to keep 'in touch', not only with her work, but with their surroundings and one another? Olin concludes that 'touching really begins when the photograph has been put away, the newspaper recycled, and the book closed'.[15] These temporary acts of distancing—closing the book, putting away the photograph or leaving the gallery space—eclipse vision but also evoke nostalgia for the image left behind. Each subsequent encounter with Woodman's oeuvre reveals something different: its intimate small scale, smudged black-and-white aesthetic, the seemingly ordinary places she situates herself, as well as the tactile patterns of cracked concrete and unkempt surroundings. Her images draw spectators closer, but Woodman appears achingly out of reach hiding behind the domestic fixtures of the house, clambering over tree roots, or assimilating with broken architectural structures. These distant photographic spaces are at once ephemeral, captivating and, ultimately, touching.

[14] Di Bello, 'Touching Photographs', p. 442.
[15] Olin, p. 234.

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