The solitary notations

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THE SOLITARY NOTATIONS

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS

FROM

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

BY

HSIU-LI KUO BFA MFA

FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

2004
NOTE

Please see print copy for Figures 1-141
CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a degree to any other university of institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

Hsiu-Li Kuo
March, 2004
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Diana Wood-Conroy and Ms. Jacky Redgate for their wonderful guidance and inspiration in the process of theses writing and art making.

I would like to express my gratitude to my family members who have always been very supportive and encouraging.
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ABSTRACT


The Solitary Notations explores the concept of unveiling what has been concealed. Examining what is hidden underneath the visible in both a cultural and metaphorical sense is investigated in both theoretical and creative research. This study includes Surrealist art that explored the unconscious realm of human personality. It also selects work of women artists influenced by Surrealism, such as Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo and Claude Cahun. The background to the representation of the female body in a dominantly male culture is researched through historical analysis, revealing woman’s unique psychic state and knowledge. The anatomists such as Andreas Vesalius, Bernhard Siegfried Albinus, and William Hunter explored human bodies to know the intricate structures underneath skin. Death-related photography from the mid nineteenth century to the twentieth century revealed the unfathomable nature of human existence in documentary images that extended scientific and psychological approaches to the body.

My creative work has a focus on the imagery that evokes the message of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis. Ruminating about such imagery and creative process is an attempt to express artistically how human self-affirmation can be achieved, and how I can gain an identity of the solitude of self through my imaginative photography, tableaux and assemblage.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates both imagery of the timeless fluctuation of the human psyche (Surrealist art), and imagery revealing the mortal condition of human corporeality (medical and death-related images). The study of interdisciplinary historical aspects of Surrealism (Rubin: 1968, Alexandrian: 1970, Bigsby: 1972), women’s art (Orenstein: 1973, Chadwick: 1985), anatomical illustration (Roberts: 1992, Cazort: 1996), and death-related photography (Sante: 1992, Burns: 1990, 1998, O’Connor: 1999) is an attempt to attain a coherent sense of being human in the natural world. The visual representation of both human psyche and human corporeality is analyzed in this thesis. Though produced in different social/historical contexts, such representations have great capacity to elicit profound contemplation of existential issues. They are, as well, potent images that evoke the message of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis. The concept of unveiling that which has been concealed or examining that which is hidden beneath the visible in both a cultural and metaphorical sense are inscribed in these productions of imagery.

The fundamental thought that underpins my art practice results from a process of synthesizing these theoretical insights. The study comes to the significant realization that there are threads actually connecting human beings in their solitary journeys. Thinking about these ubiquitous threads through my creative process is an attempt to express how a human’s self-affirmation can be achieved. The outcome of this artistic research is a group of my own images of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis that is shown in the final Doctor of Creative Arts Exhibition The Solitary Notations in 2003. This thesis is a written documentation that analyzes and interprets both theoretical elements and my studio work and shows the tenacious threads that connect them.

The cultural disjunction that I experienced while living in a foreign country, Australia, makes me aware of the significance of a multicultural perspective.
Although the issue of multicultural perspective is only stated in a subtle manner in the discussion of this thesis, it is important to point out that my Chinese cultural heritage will inevitably affect how I synthesize research material and my artwork. Like many Taiwanese artists influenced by western art, integrating western ideas and my cultural background into a personal vision is an essential part of the creative process.

Chapter One establishes a necessary background for further discussion. Though Surrealism’s aspirations and creative principles are complicated, it is necessary to have a brief introduction to Surrealist thinking as a foundation to explain certain themes in this thesis, particularly the emphasis in Surrealism on profound thought, imagination, intuition and liberation of human mind (Rubin: 1968, Alexandrian: 1970, Bigsby: 1972). Secondly, the relationship between the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and the core aesthetics of Surrealism will be demonstrated (Spector: 1972, Dresden 1985). The paramount framework established in Chapter One is to gain an understanding of how femininity was deduced into an element or an object to satisfy and complement male Surrealists’ development. Hence, selected images of woman by male surrealists, such as Jacques-André Boiffard, Man Ray, Max Ernst, Dalí, Hans Bellmer and Paul Delvaux, will be discussed in order to show how woman had been represented to suit a masculine theorizing about women and to express creativity involving the idea of eroticism (Spector: 1972, Belton: 1995). Finally, the kind of conflict and contradiction which women artists with Surrealist influence had to confront while pursuing their self-identity and professional maturity within a male-dominant Surrealist circle will be examined (Orenstein:1973, Chadwick 1985). Both the aesthetic ground of Surrealism and issues of feminine subjectivity inform my art practice.

Chapter Two analyzes visual works by women artists influenced by Surrealism. It is significant that these women artists produced a great quantity of self-representational and self-referential works under the great mass of imagery of
the eroticized and objectified female body created by male Surrealists as well as by artists throughout art history. Focusing on works that evoke messages of decay, solitude and metamorphosis is to elucidate a reclamation of feminine subjectivity and self-affirmation through creativity. The chosen images will be divided into eight subgroups – the unspeakable, exterior and interior, the past, passage, intermediary, cyclical drama, plurality and the looking glass, which function as a way to analyze their works. This discussion includes seven women artists: Frida Kahlo (Herrera: 1983, Helland: 1993, Lomas: 1993), Kay Sage (Suther: 1997), Remedios Varo (Kaplan: 1994), Dorothea Tanning (Bailly: 1995), Léonor Fini (Fini: 1994), Claude Cahun (Kline: 1998, Lichtenstein: 1992), and Francesca Woodman (Solomon-Godeau: 1986, Sundell: 1996). Some elements and themes of their art correspond to my artwork, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three examines two subjects, anatomical illustration (Roberts: 1992, Cazort: 1996) and death-related photography (Sante: 1992, Burns: 1990, 1998, O’Connor: 1999). There is a connection between these images and previously discussed Surrealist art. All of these works present the concept of unveiling what has been concealed. Anatomical illustration will be discussed first. It focuses on three subjects: the living anatomies, the motif of mortality, and the beginning of life, in order to expound how anatomical images, which were drawn originally from cadavers, were constructed aesthetically within the larger societies in which they work. The discussion of death-related photography, which will be presented next, will focus on three categories of photographs: medical photography, forensic photography, family postmortem photography, as an attempt to explain how human bodies are represented as object/subject in death-related photography. The study of both subjects helps me to develop a deep understanding of representation of “object as subject”, and transformation of life/death for creating my own image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis.

Chapter Four contextualizes research concerns with the final Doctor of Creative Arts
Exhibition *The Solitary Notations*. My studio works attempt to express the theme of decay and regeneration. None of these works present complete yielding to death or sole preference of life so that they are full of possibilities. In this chapter, the fundamental thoughts that directly reflect my creative process will be highlighted first in order to explain both form and content of my practical works. It will focus on four areas: notes on the unconscious, feminine subjectivity, medical metaphor within photography, and the found object and still life. Secondly, the descriptions of studio work will be divided into eleven groups: the remnant from the darkness, tools of the past, the old album, signs, the untold, white room, wandering box, double, dwelling, a strange mixture, and notes.

The contribution of this thesis is a deep investigation of interdisciplinary aspects of imagery produced in different social/historical contexts, Surrealism, women’s art, anatomical illustration, and death-related photography. With a focus on the image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis, the strange threads connecting human beings during their life journeys come to light to provide profound inspiration for the creation of art. My artwork, in the context of this thesis, is an outcome of synthesizing the investigation of western subjects and my own aesthetics from a Chinese perspective. This kind of interdisciplinary research as a theoretical foundation for creative production is valuable because it draws on distinctive subjects and finds significant correlations to offer a new impact upon both artist’s and viewer’s perception visually and conceptually. Through an inspiring process of pondering over the theoretical materials from different disciplines, a new comprehension of existential issues, and new visual language are achieved.
CHAPTER ONE

Aspects of Surrealism

Chapter One provides the necessary background in aspects of Surrealist art for the further analysis and discussion that follows in the next three chapters. Surrealism was about a revolutionary state of mind in the way that the Surrealists perceive the world. For the Surrealist key artists, there was always a “superior reality” waiting to be uncovered. One important aspect of twentieth century Surrealism was an attempt to reflect deep psychological insights that showed ultimate concerns about existence through creativity. Even though Surrealism does not directly link to my Chinese cultural background, these elements of Surrealism influenced the way I worked with objects and photographic representations.

The ideology of Surrealism emerging in Europe post 1914 has impacted profoundly upon the international art movements that followed it. In Taiwan, although strictly speaking there is no artist whose practice is directly derived from the original ideology of Surrealism, some Taiwanese artists such as Li, Zhong-Sheng (1912-1984), Chen, Ting-Shi (b. 1916), Chuang, Shi-Ho (b. 1923) have been influenced by it or attempted to create works in the style of Surrealism (Tsen 200-216). They inevitably personalize the ideas of Surrealism by imposing their own cultural heritage on their work. Like many other Taiwanese artists influenced by Surrealism, both Surrealism and Chinese cultural background have played essential roles and influenced how I have established a personal view about art making. It is important to indicate that my artwork in the context of this thesis is a result of synthesizing the investigation of western subjects and my own aesthetics from a Chinese perspective.

Because the Surrealist artists’ aspirations and creative principles were complicated, it is necessary to have a brief introduction to their ideas first as a foundation to make
clear certain themes in this thesis such as my interests in imaginative photographic tableaux, the power of found objects, values of intuition, expression of the intractable human psyche, and human condition. This chapter also investigates how the relationship between Surrealism and the Freudian theory of love and sex influenced the male Surrealist’s conception of “woman”. Selected images of “woman” will be discussed in order to gain an understanding of how “woman” had been represented to suit male theorizing about “woman”, creativity, and eroticism. Finally, the role of women participants in the Surrealist movement and the kind of conflicts and contradictions that they had to confront while pursuing their self-identity and professional maturity within a male-dominated Surrealist circle will be examined.

**Surrealism**

The great majority of the founders of Surrealism had been involved in the Dada movement since 1920. Dada was commonly known as a literary and artistic movement founded after World War I between 1915 and 1922. Dada was born in an atmosphere of disillusion and despair caused by the brutality of war. The Dadaists were in revolt against nineteenth-century “bourgeois rationalism” that was responsible for the tragedy of massive killing. The radical response of both Dadaists and Surrealists to the senseless murder in the war and the dark side of human nature correspond to my concern about human condition. This is manifested in my constant interest in developing a new comprehension of the vulnerabilities of human beings and a new way of reverence for everything that surrounds me through both theoretical and creative research.

From the beginning, the Dadaists frustrated art critics and historians by refusing to clearly analyze their activities. The Dadaists repeatedly affirmed that Dada was a state of mind rather than a movement. They believed that to interpret Dada was to weaken its vital essence. Nevertheless, they continued publishing contradictory
statements of their beliefs while declaring that Dada was indefinable. These statements, fragmentation of words and manifestoes basically conveyed their dislike of “bourgeois” values and predilection for contradiction (Bigsby 5). As Tristan Tzara said, “I’m against systems, the most acceptable system is on principle to have none” (qtd. in Bigsby 6). Dadaists can be said to have formed an alliance against the past and rationality and they “resorted to the arbitrary, to change, the unconscious and the primitive, where man is at the behest of nature and gives up pretending to be its master” (Short 7). Dada was about a state of mind rather than a movement and its primary goal was searching for individual freedom from a devastated world that was full of political, moral and aesthetic crises.

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) was born in Blainville, France. He said, “Dada is the nonconformist spirit which has existed in every century, every period since man is man” (qtd. in Bigsby 11). He abandoned painting almost entirely to produce the ‘ready-made’, a significant anti-art gesture to destroy the orthodoxy of the so-called; masterpiece. The significance of art was revealed in the act of making it, and this act should be able to critically challenge the existing value system. Duchamp’s ready-made in 1910s was intended to abandon aesthetic interests; moreover, it radically questioned the nature of art. The ultimate aim of the Dadaist was to discover a new radical way that would free individuals from the restrictive response of logic and reason. Dada was spontaneous, contradictory and paradoxical; revolting against traditional social and artistic values.

Like their obstinate Dadaist antecedents, the Surrealists were not a group of European artists who practiced a single style of art but rather a collective of those who experimented in many ways to liberate the mind. The Surrealists were also dedicated to revising the definition of reality. They were devoted to expanding their awareness against middle class values and constantly searched for a higher reality. Various disagreements between André Breton (1896-1966) and Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) were soon to cause the proto-Surrealists to break with Dada in 1922
The Dada period was an important stage in the development of Surrealism. During the years of involvement with Dada, they constantly experimented with various techniques, established mature concepts to resolve theoretical and artistic problems and proposed a way to depart from the restrictive conventions of traditional values. Breton called the years of 1919 to 1925 “the intuitive period” of Surrealism (Short 53). The culmination of the experiments came in 1924 with his publication of the first *Manifeste du Surréalisme* which proclaimed the right of humans to search for new freedom through the unconscious activities of the mind.

Unlike the majority of the Dadaists, who took a more ironic approach, the Surrealists tried to be much more than merely rebellious against orthodox views. They were concerned with awakening society to alternatives to a conventional and rational world. They did not only want to be a literary movement or a certain style of art practice. What they really wanted was to question cultural practices, the quality of human life, and to provide a method of nourishing the human mind with more concrete principles. Whereas the Dadaists mostly disassociated themselves from social and political activity, the Surrealists with their revolutionary impulses and urges to establish a better world also showed their enthusiasm for the political arena; they were greatly inspired by the political ideology of Marxism (Bigsby 43).

Breton and others looked to earlier writers for nurturing revolutionary thoughts, and in particular felt a link with the romantics and the symbolists: Nerval, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Hegel (Bigsby 56). The Surrealists also appreciated child art, art of the mentally ill and that of the primitives and gained inspiration from them because of their spontaneity and intuition (Short 83, Wach 186). The Surrealists’ theoretical background of exploring the unconscious realm of the human personality led to a new aesthetic experience and a new kind of human liberation that owed much to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. Freud developed knowledge of the unconscious, consisting of
unfulfilled instinctual desires and guilt-laden wishes that are forbidden by a rational and conscious mind (Wright 9-12). Even though it is barred from the consciousness, the unconscious is dynamic and can be symbolically revealed through the interpretation of dreams, verbal slips, jokes, etc. The interest of the Surrealists in psychoanalysis was not so much about its therapeutic application, but about its potential to liberate the mind through unleashing the repressed unconscious. In sum, the Surrealists identified the active elements of artistic inspiration from different sources and included these new approaches in their manifestoes.

André Breton stated in the first *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924, “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a sort of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak” (14). “Psychic Automatism”, as Breton expounded, was “the actual functioning of thought…in the absence of any control exercised by reason…”(26) which was the Surrealists’ essential concept to allow free speech to be exempt from the restrictions of rationality and logic. To achieve this goal, the Surrealists employed various means, such as automatic writing; trance narration; interpretation of dreams; automatic drawing; collage; poems; paintings; photography, and “exquisite corpses” that present dream-like images or the fragmentation of reality, to demonstrate a reliance on the irrational.

The Surrealists appropriated the term “automatism” from physiology and psychiatry to develop spontaneous writing. During the process of automatic writing, any preconceived thoughts must be excluded, and images simply allowed to flow. In other words, everything was written down as quickly as possible without conscious control and without revision. The use of automatic writing implied that moral, religious, reason and aesthetic restrictions were to be scorned in order to achieve an absolute passive and receptive state in the making of works (Dresden 118). The sources of information that were gained from the process might reveal personal aspects or the operation of mental elements. All of which provided inspiration for
It is commonly known that the early Surrealists concepts did not include the possibilities of visual art, and was biased toward writing, as the majority of the group were poets, including Breton, Philippe Soupault, Robert Desnos, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret and Louis Aragon (Cardinal 99). By December 1924, the situation had changed, as is evident from the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, which included Morise’s pioneering essay and visual images. *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* (Surrealism and painting) of 1928 by Breton was an essay showing his general agreement that visual works could be a kind of the Surrealist explorations. Between 1924 and 1929, the Surrealists’ visual images emerged, which showed their experiments with the two Freudian concepts – “automatism and the dream images” (Rubin 64). To achieve the production of images originating from the unconscious, they developed various techniques, such as automatic drawing, “exquisite corpse”, frottage, decalcomania and fumage.

The “exquisite corpse” was a method to record words or visual images intuitively as elements for the final product that was based on “Consequences”. The spontaneous record gained from the process of “exquisite corpse” was a result of logical exemption. There was correlation between this game and Freudian concepts of slips of the tongue, mistakes, neologisms and parapraxes (Wach 181). The frottage was a technique to obtain accidental imageries through the rubbing process – rubbing pieces of paper with black lead against textured surface, such as floorboards, sackcloth, leaves, and brush marks on painting surface. The formed pattern could be used as a final product or could be reworked into other dream-like images. With frottage, the artist was, as Ernst said, “a mere spectator at the birth of his work” (qtd. in Wach 181).

Wolfgang Paalem began to use fumage for his painting in 1935. The fumage technique is to work from the smoky traces left on a surface by the flame of a candle.
Oscar Dominguez experimented with a method called decalcomania that was an inkblot method, which meant applying paint to a piece of paper or any smooth surface, pressing another sheet on the top of it and then peeling it off. It would render patterns suggesting imaginative flowers, animals and various dream images. The techniques that they employed were all intended to obtain unpredictable effects that would free them from the bond of logical thinking and go beyond conventional painting skills.

The illusionary effect resulting from the incongruous juxtaposition of two-dimensional images and three-dimensional objects was used to dissociate with reality so that logical thinking would be seen to be irrelevant. The method of either collage or assemblage employed by the Surrealists became distinctive Surrealist ways to explore the insights of the human psyche. By dislocating images, objects, ideas, and words from their original context, the Surrealists abandoned conventional expectations to alienate the familiar from our senses. The Surrealists used the principle of displacement not only in their pictorial form, but also in the form of journals, books and other printed materials that presented absurd qualities in which they eloquently advocated their revolutionary view about the world.

They also incorporated photographs into their collages or used them independently. The various methods of manipulation employed by the Surrealists, such as photomontage, collage, solarization, sabattier effect, rayographs, double, infomé, negative, and distorted proportion, could transform an experience of reality into a particular visual representation that extends beyond documentation and creates paradox, tension and hallucination between the real and the imagination. For the Surrealists, the photographic image is not merely a substitute for the natural world. As Rosalind Krauss commented, “In cutting into the body of the world, stopping it, framing it, spacing it, photography reveals that world as written. Surrealist vision and photographic vision cohere around these principles” (40).
The fundamental goal of the Surrealists was to remove the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious, dream and reality, and to alter our perception of the world. Surrealism is not simply the dream imagery, the irrational thought or the rebellious content. Like Dada, it was never a common style. It was about a state of mind, and a revolutionary way of perceiving the world rather than the form and content of literary and artistic work. Unlike Dada, it did not simply propose a destructive attitude toward reality, but provided a new vision of life to unite all areas of human experiences. The Surrealists broke aesthetic ground, challenged traditional definitions of art, and generated heated debate about conventional values. Their thoughts and actions have had a profound impact on the art discourses that followed the movement.

**Sigmund Freud and Surrealism**

The name “Surrealism” was first used by Apollinaire in 1917, in the sense of ‘lyrical fantasy’, without any psychological implications. In 1922, André Breton wrote, “Up to a certain point, one knows what my friends and I mean by Surrealism. This word, which is not our invention and which we could have abandoned to the most vague critical vocabulary, is used by us in a precise sense. By it, we mean to designate a certain psychic automatism that corresponds rather closely to the state of dreaming, a state that is today extremely difficult to delimit” (qtd. in Rubin 63-64). In the autumn of 1924, Breton proclaimed the monumentally formal definition of Surrealism in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*. Ever since, the word *Surréalisme* has taken on a brand new and experimental meaning.

Surrealism, noun. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern…Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain
forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the
disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic
mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal
problems of life (Breton 26).

As an assistant at the neuro-psychiatric center of Saint-Dizier in 1916, André Breton
was already interested in methods of revitalizing the study of psychology on the
basis of data provided by psychiatry. During World War I, most of the writing by
Freud was not available in the French language. Breton used the available
psychoanalytic knowledge to record and interpret the thoughts and dreams of his
patients. He wrote, “I could spend a whole lifetime eliciting the confidences of the
mad. They are people of the most scrupulous honesty, and their innocence is
matched only by my own” (qtd. in Cardinal 95). His early training in the field of
medicine would have a crucial impact on his ideology in the formalization of
Surrealism.

According to the definition of Surrealism, the Surrealists emphasized the
imagination, profound thought and the search for liberation, and they looked back at
the dream-explorers, the romantics (Spector 151). However, Breton found the
mysteriousness of the romantics in the search for the “marvelous” problematical and
modified their sentimentalism to develop a more defined and psychologically
informed principle (Spector 151). “Psychic automatism”, the creative theory of the
Surrealists, was officially proclaimed in the Manifesto of 1924 that supposedly owed
a debt to Dr. Pierre Janet’s L’Automatisme psychologique (Psychic Automatism) in
1903, or Dr. Théodore Flournoy’s Des Indes à la planète Mars (From the Indies to
the planet Mars) in 1900, a classic case study of the medium Hélène Smith
(Cardinal 96). The reason Breton chose Freudian theory as an intellectual debt in
1924, when Freud was still not much publicized in France and ignored the above
mentioned works of Janet or Flournoy was unclear. It was when Breton was exposed
to a theory of sex and love that Freud’s theories became more important to him
Later, the accessibility of French translations of Freud’s writings led surrealists to study his texts closely. In their early stages, poetry and psychoanalytic theory were the two inspirations for André Breton and other Surrealists when they tried to formulate conclusions from their experiences with automatic writing and hypnotic trance speaking. Their searching, bearing psychological insight, was simultaneously a quest of the alternative notions of “reality”. The Surrealists were among the first in France to admire the liberating spirit of Freud’s theories, yet as mentioned above, the Surrealists utilized Freud’s theory for their sources of imagery and poetic value from the unconscious rather than as a means to cure neurosis.

Even though it is evident that it is possible to see Freudian traces in the Surrealists’ theory and practice, a question may be raised about the degree to which the Surrealists used Freudian psychoanalysis to achieve their goals. There is no doubt that the Surrealists did not execute Freudian theory in practical terms; they absorbed aspects of Freudian thought to suit their own purpose. The Surrealists and Freud had similar ideas at the beginning, but their initial motivation and final aims were totally different; “the aim of the Surrealists was art, and for Freud, it was science” (Dresdem 121). Surrealists viewed the dream as having the power of imagination and used sources of The Interpretation of Dreams by Freud to unify “life and death, the real and the imaginary…” while Freud wanted to know and analyze systematically the dreams of his patients during the therapeutic procedure so as to help the patients to return to an orderly life (117). Because it aimed at utterly precluding preconceived thinking, the practice of automatic writing used by the Surrealists had a similarity to Freud’s free association. However, Freud stated that the patient was encouraged to speak freely, but only on the topics being discussed. The Surrealists viewed such a restriction as being repressive and opposite in aim to

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their search for the utterly free spirit (121). The Surrealists considered hallucination
and hysteria to be essential forces of creativity; that is to say, the Surrealists
purposefully disregarded that hallucination and hysteria are medical conditions, but
used them as methods to elaborate their artistic practice (Wach 182). As for the
relation of the conscious to the instinctive, the Surrealists considered the id as a
liberator, whereas Freud hoped the id could be overcome and absorbed by the ego
(Spector 152). In sum, the Surrealists have taken aspects of Freudian theory and
interpreted them to suit their own notions. Though misunderstanding Freudian
therapeutic intention, as J. Spector commented, the Surrealists exploited the
Freudian ideas of the unconscious and sex into a monumental achievement of human
thought not foreseen by Sigmund Freud (149).

Between the late 1920s and the 1930s, the Surrealists made significant attempts to
make use of psychoanalysis in their creative works. Many of the principles of
Surrealism – automatism, biomorphism, found objects and games, had already been
experimented with by Dada, but were later systematized by Surrealists who
employed Freudian ideas (Rubin 63). Not all of the Surrealists’ applications of their
art were attributed to Freud only, some being apparently Dadaist and Futurist
inspiration of anti-art and some biomorphic forms apparently linked to Cubism. The
Surrealists were very much aware of Freudian fundamental ideas of psychoanalysis,
dream narration, hypnotism, free association, dream symbolism, sublimation,
condensation and displacement. The effect of these ideas upon their imageries was
significantly demonstrated. The work of the Surrealists in painting, sculpture,
photography, film and literature is an attempt to reflect profound psychological
insights, and to artistically probe the constant fluctuation of the unconscious.

The Freudian focus on sexuality was essential for the Surrealists as it directly
pointed to the instinctual, and the unrestrained. Through releasing the sexual urges
from the repressed unconscious, the Surrealists believed that one could go beyond
rational control. The sexual drive could be vast resource of creativity. They sought
revolution both in art and in their personal lives. They too were committed to “Love” as a means of liberation and a path to a creative magical world. The Surrealist searching for a communal love was expressed poetically “in notions of ‘mad love,’ ‘convulsive beauty,’ and the fusion of lovers in sexual ecstasy” (Spector 155). In the second Manifesto of Surrealism Breton stated, “The problem of woman is the most wonderful and disturbing problem there is in the world. And this is so precisely to the extent that the faith a noncorrupted man must be able to place, not only in the Revolution, but also in love, brings us back to it…Yes, I believe, I have always believed, that to give up love, whether or not it be done under some ideological pretext, is one of the few unatonable crimes than a man possessed of some degree of intelligence can commit in the course of his life” (180). Love, according to Freudian theory, expressed the messages of desire and possession, as Freud wrote, “Loving in itself, insofar as it is longing and deprivation, lowers self-regard, whereas being loved, having one’s love returned and possessing the loved object raises it once more” (qtd. in Belton 33). It is not surprising that André Breton had said that “…the solitude is vast, we don’t often run into one another. And anyway, isn’t what matters that we be the masters of ourselves, the masters of women, and of love too?” (17). They were searching for an ideal woman with whom they could share love and sexual ecstasy.

There were various sexual imageries derived directly from Freudian symbolism. The phallic bones and noses of Réne Magritte, Yves Tanguy and Salvador Dalí, the sexuality of the birds of Max Ernst, the obsession with naked woman of Paul Delvaux, the infantile sexuality of Dalí and Balthus and the fetishistic dolls of Bellmer were all implicitly inspired by Freudian ideas (Spector 155). Objects with long and upstanding shapes could symbolize a phallus; such as a harp, knife, fish, banana and tree; objects with an enclosing hollow space could be a vagina – cave, box, cup and hole. The appropriation of Freudian sexual symbols became very literal.
Freud’s brilliant analysis of Wilhelm Jensen’s novel titled *Gradiva* evoked the Surrealists’ imagination powerfully. Gradiva is the central figure in a story by the nineteenth-century German writer, Wilhelm Jensen. The story was about a German archaeologist Horbert Hanold, who so devoted himself to his profession that he became obsessed by an ancient relief. Breton and other Surrealists were fascinated by this mythical female figure Gradiva.² Strongly inspired by the mythical image of Gradiva, various imageries on the theme of Gradiva were painted by the Surrealist painters at that time; André Masson painted one of his major Surrealist paintings *Metamorphosis of Gradiva* (Fig. 1), Salvador Dalí turned out numerous drawings of Gradiva (Fig. 2) and the expression of the idea of Gradiva also frequently recurred in the writings of Breton, Euard and others. Gradiva became the fusion of contradictions of the conscious and the unconscious, life and death, mind and body, and “a means of symbolically demonstrating the dynamism of repressed erotic desire and as a myth of metamorphosis” (Chadwick 1985, 51). When Breton opened a Surrealist Gallery in Paris in 1937, he gave the name Gradiva to the Gallery. Above the Gallery glass door, her name was spelled out above the names of five women who were associated with Surrealism in some way during that decade.

The Surrealists’ exploration of the relation between sexuality, creativity and the unconscious owed a debt to Freudian theory. The strong emphasis upon sexuality in their works contributed to their exclusively masculine view of Woman. The concept that the female governed creation prevails in male Surrealists’ thinking and echoes Freud’s theory on woman’s place in the world. Freudian theory asserted that woman is closer to the unconscious than men because they have not completely entered the symbolic order. The Oedipus complex and phallic organization of subjectivity of Freudian theory stated that female sexuality is passive, thus woman’s subjectivity is

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submitted to models and images defined by and for men. In addition to Freudian influence, the Surrealists’ poetic sources owned much to Romanticism and Symbolism; from the late-nineteenth-century Symbolists the male Surrealists inherited a polarized view of Woman, in which she had both “the creative and the subversive powers of love and instinct” (Chadwick 1985, 16).

The Surrealists’ commitment to the liberation of sexual experimentation offered an opportunity to re-evaluate conventional concepts and representations of sexuality, especially for the women artists who were associated with the Surrealist circle. However, in practice, femininity was often defined in relation to dependence on masculinity. The Surrealists viewed woman as ‘other’ to man. Whereas male Surrealists for the purpose of fulfilling their desires and fantasies often used female images as icons, most of the women Surrealist artists created works of self-representation or self-reference as an effort to artistically express the theme that were close to female experiences and to gain their own self-definition.

**The Female Image in Male Surrealists’ Art**

Freud regarded sexuality as the essential role in human life and this is reflected in the Surrealists’ fascination with eroticism. It was natural that the Surrealists soon came to realize that eroticism was the most liberating expression of human subjectivity and developed eroticism as an obsessive subject in their art. Sexuality, its relationship to instinct and spontaneity became potent strategies for the Surrealists to directly challenge traditional values. In addition to Freud’s theory, the memory of the sexual liberation embraced by Donatien-Alphonse-Francois, Lord of the Chateau la Coste, Rimbaud, and Marquis de Sade, Guillaume Apollinaire had all inspired the Surrealists since the beginning (Chadwick 1985, 107). Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) spent twenty-seven years of his life in different prisons for his lewd language that was unacceptable to French society and for his abusive behavior to women. Sade embraced absolute freedom without fear and insisted on his total
authority over his own destiny and saw society as confronting and intolerant. This made him a forerunner of the Surrealists’ sexual revolution. Breton claimed in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924, “Sade is Surrealist in sadism” (26). The writing of Guillaume Apollinaire also helped to shape the Surrealist ideology initially. Apollinaire actually wrote two pornographic novels and edited a series of pornographic texts with selections from Sade in 1909. The nature of eroticism, which is both subversive and violent, was manifested in the art of Surrealism.

The Surrealist journals, *La Révolution surréaliste, Documents, Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, and *Minotaure* published in Paris in the 1920s and the 1930s manifested their strong interests in eroticism, sexual transgression, sadism and ant clericalism as a result of their constant search for the liberation of the human mind (Gott 126). In terms of the visual representation of Woman, there were uneasy images in their publications. *Documents* were published from 1929 to 1930, edited by Georges Bataille. The photographic illustration of *Woman in a Leather Mask* in ser. 2, No.8 of 1930 by Jacques-André Boiffard (Fig. 3), showing a woman in a leather facemask with chain-like belt around her neck had an implicit sadomasochistic look. The fetishized woman was mute, helplessly mortified, and seemed almost suffocated beneath the mask. She was an offering to satisfy male’s voyeurism. The second issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* published Man Ray’s photographs *Homage à D.A.F. de Sade* (Fig. 4), which placed a female head inside a bell jar like a serving dish and in *Monument à D.A.F. de Sade* (Fig. 5), was a close-up of a woman’s buttocks. Man Ray’s use of dismembered female body parts was a perfect avocation for the sodomy and blasphemy themes which are an integral part of Sade’s writings, such as the infamous *120 Days in Sodom* (Gott 139).

As mentioned above, the Surrealist’s masculine view toward women made it

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difficult for women artists to fully share the ideology. Whereas male Surrealists often used female images for fulfilling their desires and fantasies, female images in most of the women artists’ works showed an effort to gain their own self-definition. Woman was often idolized as muse, child-woman, virgin, angel, and celestial creature or as erotic sexual forces to aid man’s creative life (Chadwick 1985, 13). Woman was also equated with the praying mantis. The Surrealists were interested in the praying mantis primarily because the female mantis was renowned for devouring their mates after or during mating. Some of the Surrealists even kept mantises in their homes for inspiration. It expressed the nineteenth-century’s popular idea of the *femme fatale*, “the archetypal, one-dimensional Eve who was responsible for man’s fall from grace” (Belton 53). The praying mantis became an important iconographic metaphor for the Surrealists to interpret the repressed erotic desire and to express possible demonic quality in the unconscious mind (Pressly 615). The mantis’ mating imagery recurred in the works of Dalí, André Masson, and Max Ernst (Fig. 6).4

Visual works of Dalí, Masson, de Chrico, Bellmer, Ernst, Delvaux, Magritte and others manifested the Surrealists’ commitment to erotic desire. The theme of impotence, voyeurism, onanism, coprophilia, castration and putrefaction was reflected in Dalí’s dream imagery, which was significantly influenced by the writings of Freud (Rubin 113). Dalí’s relationship with Gala Eluard, soon to be Gala Dalí, and the union between them were to have a great influence on his art, because she was his source of masculine inspiration and his focus of erotic desire. She encouraged Dalí to write and put his notes in order for him. He worshipped her and even said, “Every good painter who aspires to the creation of genuine masterpieces should first of all marry my wife” (qtd. in Alexandrian 97). In 1929, Dalí included Gala’s image into his painting titled *The Great Masturbator* (Fig. 7) as a heroine. This painting depicts a monstrous creature. Gala’s head, arising from the upper right part of the creature, kisses a male genital. As Dawn Ades has interpreted in her

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monograph, this was a work which presented a “psychodrama of frustration and mingled fear and desire in the presence of the loved one” (1982, 76).

In 1936, Hans Bellmer visited Paris and met the Surrealists. His constructed “dolls”, clothed dummies and a type of mannequin played a central role in the great Surrealist exhibition of 1938. Bellmer’s work was known earlier from photographs titled Poupée that had appeared in the December 1934 issue of Minotaure (Fig. 8). One of the inspirations of the Poupées series was the operatic version of the E. T. A. Hoffmann tale The Sandman that Freud discussed in detail in The Uncanny (Foster 101). The photographs showed Woman by means of a doll in fragmentary or lifeless form, as if brutally torn apart. These dolls were made of wood, metal, plaster pieces and papier-mâché. The systematized ball joints allowed the body to be manipulated, dismembered and reassembled in various strange combinations and photographed in different positions to express erotic subject. The dismounted wigs, misplaced eyes and disfigured body parts recalled fetishism and expressions of sadism-masochism in the Freudian sense.

This eroticism permeated Bellmer’s drawings and paintings as well. In his drawings and paintings, human sexual anatomy was portrayed in detail. One of Bellmer’s illustrations for Sade in 1946, manifested unrestrained erotic desire. In the drawing, a distorted woman’s form lay on the floor with her four legs split wide apart awkwardly, a giant erect male organ mounted on the wall, and confused multiple vantage points of space all hinted that the repressed and disruptive sexual desire was ready to explode. There is no doubt that the works of Bellmer discussed here presented unrestrained perversity.

The Belgian painter, Paul Delvaux, was associated with Surrealism during the 1930s. With the example of de Chirico and Magritte in mind, Paul Delvaux developed his own painting style of a more detailed descriptive manner. The Surrealists sought to probe repressed desire and to unleash the disruptive energies of the libido. Like
other male Surrealists, Delvaux also expressed the repressed desires and fantasies of the male in relation to the female through his paintings. The subjects of the primal, the Oedipal, the castration complex and the neurotic obsession with naked woman were consistently presented in Delvaux’s work (Scott 14). In the late 1930s, oddly mixed subjects, such as fully suited males, naked women, skeletons, and trains, appeared in his works. The idealized naked woman was the visual center of his painting world. Woman often appeared in a sexual context in a both passive and melancholic state. The eroticism of the gaze was presented in the paintings of *The Visit* of 1939 (Fig. 9). The beautiful naked woman waits for a youth coming into the room, holding her breasts with her both hands in an apparent sexual welcome. Viewers are always invited to indulge their own voyeurism of the pretentiously constructed female body in front of Delvaux’s paintings.

To discuss selected images of women in the male Surrealists’ art is not to negate the Surrealists’ endeavor to praise women artists’ position in the movement. However, in order to read these images critically and to realize how the male conception of women was played out in their art, it must be remembered that Surrealism emerged from a traditional patriarchal society. It is essential for women to be able to read the intention of the male representations of Woman and insist on proclaiming their own views. In her essay “Ladies Shot and Painted”, Mary Ann Caws had suggested, “Rather than yielding our minds up with our modeled and remodeled bodies, we must give our readings of our representations, and our opinions as to which deserve anger and which, celebration. We must, in short, read freely and choose how we are to read our representing. Good and true reading is a gift, one we must hope to develop, and one on whose exchange we must work” (1992, 393). This view makes clear why the subject matter of the art produced by the Surrealist’s women artists was primarily dominated by the theme of “woman as subject”, rather as “object”.

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Women Artists in the Surrealist Movement

Surrealism’s relationship with women was complex and hard to fully comprehend. Influenced by Romanticism, Symbolism and Freudian theory, they recognized that poetic sources rested on Eros and it was woman who had both the instinctive and the subversive powers to make the magical creative world possible as discussed above. They had ambivalent attitudes toward women. The Surrealists encouraged women associated with the movement to develop creativity and to liberate themselves from social repression. Meanwhile, they conceived of woman as man’s inspiration to unleash the repressed unconscious, and as man’s source to create dream imagery that conflicted with the women artists’ need to search for their own subjectivity.5 Woman existed in many roles in the movement; “as virgin, child and celestial creature, on the one hand; as sorceress, erotic object and femme fatale, on the other” (Chadwick 1985, 13). From the male Surrealist point of view, the roles they played were to inspire masculine creativity, to evoke a “convulsive beauty” and to fulfill the search for the ultimate truth – the surreality (13). Woman as a creative muse for the male Surrealists can be readily understood through a composite illustration published in Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution in 1930. Photographs of sixteen male Surrealists with their eyes closed were arranged in a rectangle around a painting of a naked woman by Magritte titled I Cannot See the Woman Hidden in the Forest of 1929 (Fig. 10). They ponder over their inner and outer reality by thinking of their female muses.

Surrealism was devoted to the principal liberation struggles of the human mind; at the same time, it also showed interest in promoting the possibilities for woman to be freed from conventional roles. Women participated in the Surrealist movement from 1924 and actively joined exhibitions from 1929. Their involvement was through

established personal relationships as travel companions, or through a network of friends. They came to the Surrealism group either searching for self-definition or artistic identity. Leonora Carrington, Léonor Fini, Valentine Hugo, Dora Maar, Lee Miller, Jacqueline Lamba, Valentine Penrose, Alice Rahon, Remedios Varo, Eileen Agar, Frida Kahlo, Kay Sage, and Meret Oppenheim had personal or social contact with a Surrealist group, which as a result, drew them to Surrealism (Chadwick 1985, 8). Along with the Surrealist expansion into the international arena, it attracted artists from other countries, such as Dorothea Tanning from America, Ithell Colquhoun, Emmy Bridgwater, Edith Rimmington, and Grace Pailthorpe from England and Rita Kernn-Larsen from Denmark (9). Most of these women associated or involved with Surrealism, were in revolt against the conventional women’s roles assigned to them at some time during their lives. These women artists had the courage to renounce traditional values, attempt to search for their own ideal life, and to follow difficult paths to achieve artistic maturity at a time when the art world was almost exclusively male-dominated and when few role models existed for them (9). To a certain degree, the liberating spirit of Surrealism did offer an inspiration to ignite women artists’ self-awareness and to allow them to speak for themselves.

Gala Eluard, who became the first inspiring muse for Surrealists, was a strong-minded, beautiful, intelligent woman with a free sexual attitude that made her perfectly suited to the Surrealists’ concept of woman (Chadwick 1985, 25). The poet, Paul Eluard, wrote about Gala in L’Amoureuse, “She has the shape of my hands, she has the color of my eyes, she is engulfed in my shadow…”; he kept a photograph of her nude body in his briefcase (25). As discussed above, Dalí obtained tremendous inspirations from Gala; this was manifested by his paintings of her. She existed as a source of inspiration for Surrealists for almost a decade. One can easily find that female roles were mainly defined in reference to those of the perspective of young male Surrealists.

The first of the femmes-enfant was Marie-Berthe Aurentche whom Max Ernst
married in 1927 and who inspired his collage novel, *Dream of a Little Girl Who Wanted to Enter a Convent* (Chadwick 1985, 33). The *femme-enfant*, or woman-child, a young and naive creature possesses a direct connection with intuitive knowledge because of her spontaneity and lack sophistication. This woman-child can function as an inspiration for a man, leading him away from a restrained reality. This image appeared under the title *L'Ecriture Automatique* in 1927. The illustration presented a young woman dressed in the costume of a schoolgirl with an odd mixture of sexual awareness and child-like innocence in her expression. It is obvious that the definition of *femmes-enfant* discouraged woman to grow into maturity (33). Maturity would diminish the unique powers that a *femmes-enfant* possessed. During the 1930s, the Surrealists continued to embrace the young and naive woman in poems and paintings.

As Whitney Chadwick has argued in *Women and the Surrealist Movement*, the Surrealist movement allowed women the opportunity to revolt against traditional roles by which they felt deeply repressed and were now able to explore their creativity and subjectivity. On the other hand, the male Surrealists restricted women to their roles as muse or *femme-enfant*. This made it difficult and complex for woman artists to search for their creative autonomy and subjectivity. Most of the women were drawn into Surrealism when they were young, and produced their most mature works after leaving the group. Some of them, such as Léonor Fini and Frida Kahlo, distanced themselves from the Surrealism circle, or even refused the label of Surrealist in order to work freely and independently. Their responses to the male Surrealists’ view of women were different. Meret Oppenheim explained, “the ‘male dominance’ of the Surrealist founders merely reflected the inherited attitudes toward women of the late nineteenth century, and the Surrealists treated female artist and writers fairly and without prejudice” (qtd. in Chadwick 1985, 12). Ithell Colquhoun commented that “Breton’s vision of the ‘free and adored woman’ didn’t always prove a practical help for women, especially painters” (qtd. in Chadwick 1985, 66). The question of how much the women artists gained by their relationship to the
movement and how much support Surrealism could have offered these women artists is not easy to answer.

To investigate how these women Surrealists explored their creative instinct with assiduousness while the male Surrealists’ attitude toward woman was ambivalent is to show aspects of Surrealism from another perspective. The kind of art works that these women artists produced were closer to their own experiences and significantly subverted the male Surrealists’ polarized view of woman. By creating self-representational or self-referential works, these woman artists were eventually able to retain self-definition and to develop a mature artistic style.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the Surrealist’s emphasis on the profound thought, imagination, intuition and liberation of human mind was manifested in their art through different creative strategies, and how femininity was deduced into an element or an object to satisfy and complement male Surrealists’ development. One aspect of Surrealism is an attempt to reflect profound psychological insights. With the discoveries of Sigmund Freud, “the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much further, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities” (Breton 10). The Surrealist artistic exploration of the constant fluctuation of the human psyche inspired my creativity when I started my art practice. The creative process is a journey to reconcile opposites, dream and reality, art and life, in order to go beyond conventional senses.

Along with my increasing awareness of feminine subjectivity, my research focus consequently moves toward investigation of women artists influenced by the Surrealism. The theoretical background in regard to both the aesthetic ground of Surrealism and issues of feminine subjectivity inform my art practice. The following chapter will analyze the complex strategies that the Surrealist women artists
employed to assert their own subjectivity through their creativity. The criteria for choosing the visual works of specific women artists for the following discussion are based on the correspondence between their artistic searching and my current creative concern. It will focus on the themes of decay, metamorphosis and solitude in their works.
CHAPTER TWO

Reclaiming Feminine Subjectivity Through Creativity

Chapter Two analyzes visual works by selected Surrealist women artists and demonstrates how they came to be interested in themes such as natural transformation, journeys of searching for self-affirmation, and existential issues in their creation of art. These themes correspond to the themes in my studio work, which will be discussed later in Chapter Four. The self-representations and self-references by these women artists is considered as a response to a background in which Surrealism was actually constrained by the patriarchal male-oriented view of life as discussed in Chapter One. The focus on works that evoke messages of decay, solitude and metamorphosis in the following discussion is an attempt to explain the significance of women artists’ self-representations or self-references as a vital entity in visual art – whether figuratively or symbolically, and to examine how women artists reclaim their self-affirmation through these images. Firstly, the significance of women’s self-representation will be considered. Secondly, the chosen images that illustrate this will be divided into eight subgroups – the unspeakable, exterior and interior, the past, the passage, intermediary, cyclical drama, plurality and the looking glass, all of which function as a means of analyzing their works in terms of themes, metaphors and meanings. Without wanting to overly emphasize their biographies, a few selected biographical facts will be given that seem significant for understanding the works of these women artists. Finally, a summary will be given.

Woman’s Self-representation

The woman artist, working with self-representation is in a very privileged position to subvert the conventional notion that the woman’s body denotes the site of the male’s interests. As mentioned in Chapter One, many works of the women artists
associated with the Surrealist movement tended to explore women’s creative power and wisdom or to emphasize women’s subjectivity. Consciously controlling the process of making self images would allow great scope for every possible meaning created for her own sake. The context of work can be a revelation, confession, autobiography, propaganda or self-definition. The self-representation can go beyond the naturalistic likeness and can permit great possibilities of unique visual language for women artists to present perceptions of themselves and their surroundings. It is a profound change from simply a depiction of her appearance to a more complex expression of her thoughts. Significantly, many women artists influenced by Surrealism explore possibilities of alternative identities through the images of decay, solitude and metamorphoses. The act of creating self-representational or self-referential works that evoke message of decay, solitude and metamorphosis may be seen as an affirmation of the knowledge and the capability of women artists.

Analysis

The Unspeakable

The Surrealists were attracted to Frida Kahlo (Mexico 1907-1954) primarily for two reasons: firstly, she fitted the Surrealist ideal of woman (Chadwick 90) and secondly, Frida Kahlo’s paintings satisfied the Surrealist endeavor to explore all human experiences, including the unconscious and dream world. However, she declared that she was not one of the Surrealists and said that she never painted dreams but that she painted her own reality. She asserted that her personal world was the main subject of her art because she had strong consciousness of her body and psychic condition. Susan Gubar remarked that because of women’s conventionally assigned position as objects rather than subjects throughout art history, women artists may “experience their own bodies as the only available medium for their art…and cultural forms of creativity are often experienced as a painful wounding” (qtd. in Lomas 17). This thought would be highly applicable to the medical imagery by
Kahlo. The four paintings of Kahlo to be discussed are extraordinary examples of representing the artist’s body, disregarding social convention in a subject which was taboo in the most frank manner.

Anatomical illustration of the female reproductive body parts flourished in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The most influential obstetrical atlas was *Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravidi* published in 1774 by William Hunter. In a preface to this remarkable atlas, Hunter advocated that realism was the preferable style of anatomical illustration to carry unmediated truth. In his essay, *Body languages: Kahlo and medical imagery*, David Lomas make clear how Hunter’s obstetric atlas marked the durable genre and presented the prominent features of its empiricist vision. He then argued, “the putatively male anatomic gaze takes the female body as a privileged object to be unveiled, opened and penetrated” (6). When this view is considered, the medical imagery of Frida Kahlo becomes significant in its representation of private experience. Her medical imagery does not represent what was actually seen, and is not concerned with offering science a “universal language” as William Hunter did; instead, it subverts the passive role of the female as viewed and substantially embodies the meaning of ostensible medical illustrations with her real life experiences. “Whereas the realist epistemology of Hunter seeks to elide any distinction between signifier and signified in the name of objective truth, Kahlo reopens a space between them and forces the beholder to acknowledge gender and power relations inscribed in visual representations” (7).

*My Birth* (Fig. 11) was painted shortly after the death of her mother in 1932 and was commonly considered as a reaction to her mother’s death and her fears of the ultimate separation. In the painting, Matilde Kahlo lies on the bed wrapped in sheet. Frida depicts her mother’s bent knees and legs spread apart in the act of childbirth from a frontal position. Between the two spread legs, the child’s head is appearing just out of the vaginal canal in a bath of blood. The child who bears Frida’s facial features looks lifeless. Above the bed is an image of the Virgin of Sorrows; it is as if
she witnesses the torment of giving birth. The painting is disturbing due to its frankness. It dramatically questions the differences between what is public and what is private or should remain so.

Her attitude toward maternity is largely affected by her emotional relationship with Diego Rivera, a famous Mexican mural artist and by her extreme physical pain brought on by a serious injury. She identified this injury as the cause of her inability to bear children. She was perfectly aware that pregnancy could bring her health problems and, moreover, Diego did not want a child with her. In *Henry Ford Hospital* of 1932 (Fig. 12), Kahlo depicts herself lying naked on a hospital bed in a bath of blood. The strings like red veins that she holds against her belly tie six objects, such as pelvis, fetus and the dead flower that symbolize the painful experience of miscarriage she has experienced. The hospital scene is displaced into a barren land with Detroit industrial factories in the background. The cold machinery as its environment increases the feelings of helpless isolation. In the culture to which Kahlo belonged, miscarriage was shameful; “the stark proximity of birth and death in miscarriage adds up to nothing, and so there is nothing to say – it is virtually unrepresentable” (Lomas 11). Kahlo articulates the conventionally unspeakable in a unique visual language. The patriarchal transcription of what should remain concealed is subverted. The act of painting is like the redemption of something she lost. As she said, “My painting carries within it the message of pain…painting completed by life. I lost three children…Paintings substituted for all this. I believe that work is the best thing” (qtd. in Herrera 149).

It is commonly known that a tramcar accident caused serious injuries when Kahlo was eighteen years old. This accident left her with back pain, partially crippled and unable to bear a child. Susan Sontag wrote in *Illness as Metaphor*, “Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for
a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place” (qtd. in B. Smith 37). Kahlo had held the citizenship of “that other place” since the devastating accident. In The Broken Column of 1944 (Fig. 13), the burdensome corset substitutes the broken column for her injured spine. Though her two exposed breasts carry a sexual energy, they do not intend to arouse the viewers sexually. The self-portrait is situated in a desolate landscape that mirrors Kahlo’s isolation. She conveys poignantly the despair of being a permanent citizen of illness.

Tree of Hope, Stand Fast (Fig. 14) was painted in 1946. It uses the strategy of double images. Frida lies on a gurney, revealing her apparent scars from surgery; the second Frida wears a Tehuana dress and sits on a chair, holding a plaster corset. Sun and moon, light and dark, life and death all manifest the opposite forces that Kahlo experienced. These form background to Tree of Hope, Stand Fast. This painting refers to her operation in New York in 1946. Both paintings (Fig. 13, 14) present the increasing anxiety in her life which was accompanied by physical pain. In a diary entry, she wrote, “I am disintegration” (qtd. in Grimberg 102). Even so, the repeated depiction of pain seems to function as a courageous act of integrating broken selves.

Frida’s psychological pain, physical disability and her tempestuous relationship with her philandering husband, Diego Rivera, established her as a dramatic female figure. Writing about Kahlo’s art often has taken the approach of biography. Biography is essentially a realist genre that assumes the images themselves, which are regarded as reflections of the author’s thoughts and life. Sometimes, the over emphasis on Kahlo’s love affairs or dramatic accidents, while viewing her paintings, resulted in the neglect of other aspects in which Kahlo is engaged. Kahlo’s paintings were not merely about “painting away” her struggle but also about her commitment to Mexico and the Mexican people (Helland 405). It is apparent that Kahlo emphasized her loyalty to the South America Indian culture of her mother rather than to the European heritage of her father. The repeated use of Aztec symbols and Tehuana dress in her paintings, such as My Dress Hangs There of 1933, Two Fridas of 1939,
The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Me, Diego, and Mr. Xólotl of 1949, is a way to demonstrate her passion for her chosen culture. Kahlo’s life struggle is not only for the integration of broken selves, but also for the search for an independent cultural identity.

**Exterior and Interior**

Like Kahlo, Kay Sage (America 1898-1963) also manifests a truly female voice within her image of woman but in a very different manner. Kay Sage’s paintings are always situated in unspecified spaces or wastelands that evoke a sense of solitude, isolation and melancholy. These carefully constructed exterior landscapes are actually a revelation of the mysterious inner state of the artist. The fundamental distinction between interior and exterior is blurred by the unseen forces prevailing in her painting that mirrors the Surrealists’ constant endeavor to transform interior and exterior reality into “an absolute reality, or surreality”.

Kay Sage was born in 1898 in Albany, New York, the second daughter of a wealthy and conservative family. Her parents were separated when she was two years old. From that time, Kay’s mother began to make extended voyages abroad, always taking her and her sister. These trips, taken during Kay Sage’s early years, had an impact on her life. When Kay was nine years old, her mother took her to Egypt for three months. They visited the Sphinx, the pyramids, Aswan, the Colossus of Memnon, the Temple of Philae and other ancient monuments. The geography of the desert, the strong light and shadows crossing over the geometric pyramids and temples, the specific colors of the land and the Nile, according to Stephen Miller’s observation, was evoked in the architectural structure in her painting titled *Interim* of 1949 (Fig. 17) (127). This painting will be discussed later. In 1908, Kay Sage and her sister went to San Francisco with their mother and they arrived just after the great San Francisco earthquake. The haunting experience of witnessing the devastated scenes left by natural forces became the basis of her anxiety. In her
unpublished memoir, *China Eggs* (1955), she wrote of her experience in San Francisco, “There was never a day or night without an earthquake. The pictures would hang out from the walls and the doors would open and shut. I was in mortal terror all the time” (qtd. in Miller 127).

Sage married an Italian prince in 1925 and lived in Rome and Rapallo. Years later, she found the life of an Italian princess did not suit her free spirit. She abandoned her secure and comfortable life and went to Paris to further pursue her artistic profession. Between 1934 and 1937 she worked on a series of abstract paintings that had important consequences for her later Surrealist work. The emphasis on structural geometry and unspecified constructive scenes distinguish Sage’s mature Surrealist work from other Surrealists. In the autumn of 1938, Sage exhibited six paintings at the annual exhibition of the Salon des Surindépendants at the Porte de Versailles in Paris. The Surrealist visitors, André Breton and Yves Tanguy, and the Greek poet, Nicolas Calas, were attracted to the atmosphere of unsettling tension and imaginatively depicted geometrical shapes by Kay Sage. Breton felt that because of their strength, these works must be painted by a man (Miller 123). Sage quickly became acquainted with the Surrealists and later married Yves Tanguy.

The characteristics of Giorgio de Chirico’s paintings, long shadows, dramatic perspectives, silent spaces, ancient architecture, figures in the evening light and strong contrasts of light and dark would be found in many of Sage’s paintings. In the early 1940s, under Yves Tanguy’s influence, she began to experiment with biomorphism. Sage absorbed different aspects of Surrealist art and eventually developed a personal visual language for her paintings. After the mid-1940s, she focused on the various forms of scaffolding, latticework and drapery that inhabited the desolated landscape of her paintings. The emphasis on structural geometry, constructed space deprived of any human trace, the contrast of light and shadows, and calm cool colors in Sage’s work highlighted her unique artistic approach that differed from other Surrealists’ paintings.
One of Sage’s identifiable visual elements is her use of drapery. The phantasmal human presence created by drapery conveying uncertainties continued in her paintings during the 1940s. Sage’s first solo exhibition was held at the Julien Levy Gallery, 1947, after settling in Town Farm, Connecticut, with Yves Tanguy. Paintings in the exhibition, such as *I Saw Three Cities* of 1944 (Fig. 15) and *Too Soon for Thunder* of 1943 (Fig. 16) were typical examples of her use of drapery to shape the upright figure. The drapery motif is like a visual form that is reminiscent of the persona of the woman artist. In her painting *I Saw Three Cities* (1944), a solitary figure wrapped in a soft and folding shroud overlooks the “three cities” and ominous sky. The figure is meditating upon what she confronts, probably the unpredictable forces hidden underneath the cityscape or on the long lost alienated self. The gesture is somber in mood and there is a solemn silence as the ritual is carried out. The shrouded figure in *Too Soon for Thunder* is different from the one in *I Saw Three Cities* for its painted half covered vein-like body texture. The figure, standing alone in front of geometrical pyramid-like structures, is immersed in a process of metamorphosing into an unknown dissected creature. The strong light does not brighten the scene; instead, it increases the overall mysterious atmosphere.

In the late 1940s, her drapery became more metaphorical and fragmental. By combining the fragments of drapery with visual forms of scaffolding and latticework, she created a new epoch in her creative career. Around 1930, Kay Sage experienced an unusual psychic event. According to Stephen R. Miller, this psychic experience probably had a significant influence on her later Surrealist imagery (130). While sleeping in bed at the Palazzo Rospigliosi, she was awakened by the noise of a fire crackling and people’s shouting. She ran to the window to see what happened and checked where the noises came from. At that time, the façade of the Palazzo del Quirinale on the opposite side of the square was covered with wooden scaffolding for repairs. She thought that the scaffolding might have caught fire. However, when she pulled open the shutters to check, there was only silence and nothing had
happened. She assumed that she must have been dreaming. No sooner had she gone back to bed, than she was awoken by the same noise again. Later, a priest told Sage that she had encountered supernatural forces. Besides this unusual psychic dream, another possible visual source may have been the rebuilding of the Town Farm that went on around Sage for almost a year in 1946. As Tanguy describes it, they “lived among plasterers, painters, carpenters etc. and colds” (qtd. in Suther 121).

Sage’s imageries are paradoxical. The carefully arranged drapery, latticework and scaffolding suggests simultaneously both construction and disintegration. However, there is no final structure to be completed within a promised time, nor is there a deadline for dismantlement of the structure. The fragmentation of drapery symbolizes a human presence; yet it is disembodied. In the painting *Interim* of 1949 (Fig. 17), a vaguely suggestive figure is composed of wooden beams, ladders, frames, and scraps of soft fabric. The ominous lighting from the left side creates dramatic shadows that increase the enigmatic quality of the statue. In the far background, the desolate terrain is vaguely discernable through the mist. The paradoxical characteristics of her pain ting create disquiet tension and unseen supernatural power. In his article *In the Interim: The Constructivist Surrealism of Kay Sage*, Stephen Miller considered *Interim* of 1949 as a significant departure of Sage’s painting. While this painting still retains the geometric emphasis of her earlier work, it has a new “unspecified, yet authoritative, constructive subject” that makes Sage’s paintings unique within Surrealism” (126).

In *Tomorrow Is Never* (Fig. 18), which was painted in 1955, four architectural structures rise up from the mist and clouds. They vary in distance and sharpness. A concentrated gaze at these uninhabitable structures makes them seem to turn into the confined space. What is restrained inside the space are metaphorical souls that are suggested by softly pleated and moving cloth. These souls have no expression, do not struggle, or attempt to leave. It is as if they feel more secure inside the fragile yet protective scaffolding. Sage’s painting reflects the Surrealist characteristics of
undoing boundaries, which lead viewers into a surreal world, beyond imaginable
time and space. Although she often created the atmosphere of isolation, melancholy
and detachment in her paintings, she actually reclaimed a sense of her own existence
through the creative process. As Gloria F. Orenstain commented, Kay Sage indeed
“illuminates the theme of woman’s desolation in a world devoid of images of
woman as creator” and “her images immediately speak to us of the experience of the
woman artist and her intuition of the existence and subsequent annihilation of the
powerful female principle from all forms of contemporary civilization” (1982, 53).

The Past

Most of the women associated or involved with Surrealism were in revolt against the
conventional women’s roles assigned to them by society. Some of them, for example,
Remedios Varo and Kay Sage discussed above, had changed their life style several
times as a result of their struggle for an independent life. The weight of their past
memories were sometimes too heavy to look back on.

Remedios Varo (1908-1963) was born in 1908 in Cataluna, Spain and came to Paris
to escape the Spanish Civil War. After encountering the Surrealists in Paris in the
early 1930s, Varo underwent a significant change in both artistic approach and life
style. The Surrealists’ effort to question the conventional values, liberate the human
mind, and advocate sexual freedom all had an impact upon Varo. In 1941, she fled
from Vichy France to Mexico with her second husband, the Surrealist poet Benjamin
Péret (1899-1959). During their early days in Mexico, she earned her living by using
her technical skills as a commercial artist for almost ten years before she could
devote herself full time to her exquisite painting style. After separating from
Benjamin Péret, Varo remarried and stayed permanently in Mexico (Hubert 1994,
Kaplan 1994).

Varo used the Surrealist technique of fumage and decalcomania to create smoky
swirls and spongy imaginative patterns. Unlike other Surrealists, she never allowed automatism to dominate her creative process. Later on, she gave up the unpredictable effects inherent in these techniques, only using decalcomania to achieve hallucinatory texture effects if necessary. Many of Varo’s creative sources from art history were direct. In Unexpected Journeys, Janet A. Kaplan discussed Varo’s artistic influence in detail, especially the influence of Hieronymous Bosch, El Greco, Goya, and Giorgio de Chirico, for examples, the hybrid machine-animals and fantastic vessels from Hieronymous Bosch, the bat-winged figure from Goya, the strangely attenuated gothic proportions of her figures from El Greco, and the psychological power of architecture from Giorgio de Chirico (190-208). Nevertheless, Varo gradually developed a unique visual language for her paintings.

Varo’s paintings constantly show a gender-specific spiritual journey from a woman’s perspective. She does this by depicting woman as voyager, inventor, explorer, scientist, composer, artist and alchemist who journeys to search for an explanation of mysterious phenomenon or an answer to self-identity. Varo demonstrates that a woman with intense awareness of her own subjectivity, is capable of profound personal or universal investigation. The journey as metaphor is important for both Bosch and Varo. However, for Bosch, “the journey is a metaphor for the randomness of life, with passengers adrift on a ship they cannot control”, yet for Varo, “the journey represents both physical exile, with its psychic dislocation, and spiritual quest” (Kaplan 195).

Because of her urgent need for independence, Varo was in revolt against the conventional woman’s role assigned by society. Her wild, wandering youth had been her unresolved psychological burden. Although she had left her home in Spain more than fifteen years before, Varo still tried to solve the complex issues of her independence and was haunted by her own disapproval of her life decisions (Kaplan 149). In Visit to the Past of 1957 (Fig. 19), Varo depicted a self-portrait character setting out on a solitary journey back to Paris. When she walks into a furnished
room for rent in Paris, she finds that the room is haunted by her own ghostly presence, peering out from the tabletop or the walls. The abandoned room setting surrounded by decayed walls evokes the feeling of solitude. It is apparently a lonely trip and the weight of the past cannot ever be relieved. In 1958, she did travel to Biarritz on the French-Spanish border to meet her mother, and then she went to Paris to visit Benjamin Péret. Her journey must have been as disturbing as this painting suggests. An undated pencil drawing *Fear* (Fig. 20) also depicts the enormous pressure coming from the past. A young woman, propelled by a wheeled vehicle, tries to flee away from a long and dark tunnel. The ghostly figures behind the walls, symbolizing unpleasant memories, threaten her as she passes.

After more than fifteen years together, Yves Tanguy’s verbal abuse of Kay Sage became worse. They both drank heavily. He shouted, she kept quiet and retreated. Even so, she kept on painting on the other side of a wall from Tanguy (Suther 131). Although their relationship was strained at the end, when Tanguy died from a cerebral hemorrhage in early 1955, Sage felt an extreme emotional sense of loss which lasted until her death in 1963. *The Passage* of 1956 (Fig. 21) has been commonly interpreted as Sage’s response to Tanguy’s death. In the painting, Sage presented only the young woman’s back. The seated woman gazes out at a landscape immersed in a desolate mood and ruminates what the past has meant to her. The painting retains the theme of solitary and psychic emptiness. What is special about *The Passage* is that the phantasmal figure suggested by the shrouds or softly pleated cloth in her paintings is now replaced by a concrete female figure. This is a literal rather than a metaphorical representation of woman’s internal psychic state. Sage never admitted that this was a self-portrait, though the painting has been considered to contain a confessional note. Sage’s eyesight deteriorated due to double cataracts after 1956 and her anxiety increased. In her private notebooks, she began to contemplate death in solitude. Her final desperate struggle stated in a poem from *Demain Monsieur Silber* (1957):
I built a tower on despair
Nothing to hear or see there
And no answer when, black on black,
I shout and shout, in my ivory tower.

(qtd. in Hubert 196)

The Passage

By using the door as a symbolic passage in her painting, Dorothea Tanning presents a constant searching for transformation, while Kay Sage’s painting The Passage, discussed above, shows a static and melancholic psychic state. Large numbers of Tanning’s works between 1940s and 1950s presented figures, animals, plants and unidentified creatures inhabiting strange interior spaces and engaged in enigmatic activities. The space, which they occupy, seems charged with mysterious transformations or urgent desires. The five paintings of Tanning to be discussed are in this category of work. In an interview, Tanning said, “As a child, I was always drawing...But I was drawing otherworldly things right from the beginning. Actually, they weren’t all that strange. They were fairy-tale drawings, monsters and little creatures flying around – that sort of thing” (qtd. in Gruen 180). Although she was closely associated with the Surrealists for many years, she never consciously emphasized sexual symbolism or totally relied on Freudian theory in her paintings as other Surrealists did. Tanning said, “My work is about leaving the door open to the imagination so that the viewer sees something else every time” (qtd. in Gruen 181). In her creative career, she always insists on aligning to the inner voice and attuning to fantasy. For Tanning, to keep an independent spirit was always vital.

Dorothea Tanning (b. 1910) came from the small town of Galesburg, Illinois, U.S.A. These small towns, located in the heartland of America, have been described as places where nothing significant ever happens. Near to her eighteenth birthday, she
rented a cabin on the shores of Lake Bracken in Illinois to escape from this conservative midwestern culture.

In an introduction to Tanning’s works, Jean C. Bailly indicated that the decision Tanning made to leave her small world was “linked to youth’s innermost thrust, a life allies itself with an imperative and inevitable force; when, as in this case, the imperative is to answer an inner voice, to ignore the word risk, to begin, alone and without hesitation” (14). Dorothea Tanning attended art classes in the Chicago Academy of Art in 1930. She decided to quit the training because her teacher insisted that his students drew and painted exactly as he did, which was in a Picassoesque style. She learned how to paint by looking at great works and studying art reproductions in books closely. A journey to Paris in the summer of 1939 was fruitless due to the outbreak of World War II. Returning to New York, Tanning was hired to do advertisements for Macy’s department store. Meanwhile, she began to paint in her spare time. Her first solo exhibition was held at the Julien Levy’s gallery, New York in 1944. The disquieting subject matter of her early paintings already revealed the Surrealist aesthetics. Among these early paintings, a self-portrait titled Birthday (1942) (Fig. 22) drew the attention of the French Surrealists in New York. Shortly after the show, she met Max Ernst, to whom she was married for almost thirty years.

In the Birthday, at least seven pairs of doors, open one upon another, leading the viewer’s eyes into the vanishing point consisting of infinite possibilities of the dream world. Before the first door is the artist with strong self-awareness who wears an elaborate theatrical costume. The violet silk, cascades of lace, green skirt, the bare breast and foot and the solemn facial expression help to form a sensual and surreal scenario. Though her breasts are exposed, there is little intention of provoking sexual desire. The dread winged beast with a pig-like snout is recognizable as an image of a lemur and “the lemur appears as a herald of the unconscious released through the dream; the frequency with which the image
appears in the paintings of women artists suggests its adoption as a kind of talisman for woman’s visionary powers” (Chadwick 1985, 92). This is a scene of theater, a stage where Tanning performs her drama of self-affirmation and visionary powers.

Tanning’s use of “door” is not only about division but also about expansion. The door is opened to point the way to a wonderland or to a terrifying unknown; the door is closed for secretive metamorphosis or for spiritual transcendence. As Breton explained in the Second Manifesto of Surrealism, the concept of “unbound contraries”: “Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point in the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradiction” (Breton 123). This manifested in Tanning’s painting. It seems that the unseen power transgresses within her painted spaces, undoing all the boundaries.

In the anxiety-prevailing image Children’s Games of 1942 (Fig. 23), two girls are playing with flames in the hallway. Another girl lies down in the foreground and only her legs and feet can be seen, appearing motionless. The two girls standing peel off the wallpaper. What is inside the wall is an impulsive force hiding there and devouring the long moving hair of one girl and transforming a human’s torso. At the end of the rapidly receding perspective is a space with an open door. The factory’s smoke rising to the sky outside the door echoes the unspeakable danger in the interior.

Another painting titled A Little Night Music of 1946 (Fig. 24) also depicts children caught in a highly charged drama. Tanning is adept at using the painted space, scale and perspective as means to provoke unusual impulse. A Little Night Music features Tanning’s unique visual form in her early work. The enormous writhing sunflower with a broken branch looks like a living beast. The sensually moving upward or drifting down long hair and disarrayed dresses of two young girls releases incredible energy. The scene is situated in an abandoned hotel corridor and stairway. Only one
of four doors is opened onto a blaze of light, yet there is no indication where the door might lead.

Paintings titled *Interior of 1953* (Fig. 25) and *Home Light of 1952* (Fig. 26) are visually alike. A naked little girl in *Interior*, standing inside the door, is poised against the unseen forces suggested by the rising skyward drapery on the other side of the door. The tensions on both sides of the central dividing door alerts the viewer as the little girl is caught between the real and the unreal, pain and joy, and life and death. Like Kay Sage, Tanning also used drapery or soft cloth as metaphorical objects, but presented them in different ways in terms of meaning and forms. Tanning’s draperies, either spreading over the image’s surface or moving upward to the edge of the image, were always charged with electrified power, whereas Sage’s drapery that shaped the human figure or indicated traces of the remains of humans was static and phantasmal.

In the *Home Light* (Fig. 26), the unidentified beast with a distorted human face clings to the door hinge. It is unclear if the hybrid creature intends to go out of the door or stay inside the confined space. It is wrapped in softly moving cloth and is immersed in its own metamorphosis like a metabolic insect. The ominous nocturnal light implies the possible futile result of transformation. The living beings in both paintings (Fig. 25, 26) are suspended on the threshold of major change. From Tanning’s point of view, the enigmatic and ecstatic passage of life was never easily grasped.

**Intermediary**

Tanning’s work *Interior of 1953* (Fig. 25) and *Home Light of 1952* (Fig. 26) presented the living being caught on the threshold of major change. A group of works that evoke messages from an intermediary, to be discussed next, also expressed similar themes. By depicting the self-referential character as a hybrid
creature engaging intricate activities, these women artists such as Romedios Varo, Frida Kahlo, Léonor Fini showed an impulsive desire to gain self-realization in either a tranquil or threatening manner.

As mentioned above, Romedios Varo was interested in the search for a special psychic journey and probing the possibilities of woman’s creative power (page 39). Her works revealed a strong sense of feminine subjectivity. Varo’s inspirations came from the tenth-century German mysticism, medieval alchemy, the reincarnation theories of G. I. Gurdjieff, the novels of Hermann Hesse, Tibetan Tantric, Zen Buddhism, as well as the ideas of astronomy, physics, engineering and psychoanalysis (Engel 66). It is not surprising that Varo was interested in engaging in a search for revelations, which would enable her to explain the unfathomable world.

The objects in Varo’s paintings *Mimesis* of 1960 (Fig. 27) can never maintain their autonomy for they show constant exchange and metamorphoses. A woman who is absorbed in magical experiences is seated in an armchair in a self-contained isolated room, surrounded by domestic furniture. Her face is strangely invaded by the fabric pattern of the chair and her arms and legs match those of the armchair. It is likely that as she moves toward metamorphosis, she may eventually change into a chair. Varo described this woman’s situation: “This woman is lost in her thoughts and has remained motionless for so long that she is turning into the armchair, her flesh has become just like that cloth on the chair and her hands and feet are already turned into wood, the furniture gets bored and the armchair bites the table, the chair in the background investigates what the drawer contains, and the cat, which went out to hunt, is frightened and astonished upon returning as he sees the transformation” (qtd. in Kaplan 159). It seems that Varo intended to show the possible distressed passivity of women in their domestic environment. This painting draws attention to the fact that sometimes a seemingly protective domestic environment provided by a man is like an invisible prison that can lead woman to give up her subjectivity. Women need
and deserve a habitation of their own in which to constantly grow.

*The Creation of the Birds* of 1958 painted by Varo depicts a solitary artist using alchemical apparatus as a device to create a new life (Fig. 28). The woman artist, a personification of an owl in feathery costume, draws birds at her drafting table with a brush attached to a violin necklace. The meticulously drawn bird, stimulated by the starlight filtered through a triangular lens, comes to life and flies off the drawing paper to the outside world. Pigment spurts from an egg-shaped alchemical device onto the palette. On the wall behind the artist, two laboratory vases exchange their contents, probably symbolizing the constant reconciling of opposites. Birds are often depicted in her intimate tableaux as “symbols of escape”, or as “Jungian symbols of transcendence” (Kaplan 1994, 163). Remedios Varo believed in magic and had an animistic faith that believed plants, animals, humans and the inanimate are interconnected and all possess a certain kind of power. In this painting, everything is interconnected to form a harmonious cycle and it is the woman artist who possesses the wisdom to make it happen.

When Kahlo’s self-representation is compared with Varo’s, Kahlo’s often leans towards being stark and moody, whereas Varo’s is mysterious but precisely drawn; Kahlo often directs the violence upon herself, while Varo keeps within the elements of calmness and anonymity. *The Wounded Deer* (Fig. 29) was painted by Frida Kahlo in 1946 before surgery to fuse four vertebrae with a metal rod and extract a piece of bone from her pelvis. Kahlo paints herself as a hybrid animal, with the body of a deer and her own head, surrounded by tree trunks. Nine arrows pierce her hybrid body. Here the metamorphosis does not offer Kahlo a new body but rather an ailing life. Tragic as the painting may be, the message of hope is also conveyed in her painting. The deer symbolizes rebirth because its antlers are periodically renewed; it also represents the soul searching for divine water in order to quench its thirst (Grimberg 101). Kahlo’s self-portrait may be looked on as pitiful, yet by thinking about it from a different angle, one can say that Kahlo always combats fears
by confronting it courageously in self-representation.

The myth of the hybrid sphinx appears in Léonor Fini’s (1918-1996) painting circa 1942. For Fini, the hybrid sphinx serves as a symbolic unification of death, regeneration and magic power. In the Freudian sense, myth, like dream or art, also implies certain psychological elements that demand further interpretation. In *The Myth of the Androgyne*, Robert Knott observed that under Freudian influence, it is not surprising that the Surrealists would transform the sphinx’s questions about human existence into a quest of love (53). In André Breton’s essay *Le Chateau etoile* of 1936, the sphinx was described as a guardian beast and before anyone enters the Surrealist world; they must answer a question of future love (53). The sphinx’s puzzle tests each Surrealist’s dedication to the liberating power of love. Meanwhile, the image of the sphinx also symbolizes the female principle: the provider and destroyer of humans. In Greek mythology, the sphinx signifies earth/mother/female/life/death associations of her Near Eastern origins, and it presides over the earth as it lies fallow and as drought covered the land (53). Fini’s interest in the sphinx is more about positioning woman in the natural world rather than about the liberating power of love as male Surrealists thought.

In Fini’s *Petit Sphinx Ermite* of 1948 (Fig. 30), a decaying building is the stage for the eerily ongoing process of metamorphoses: a hybrid creature with features of the sphinx and a woman kneel down in the doorway, the peeling walls indicates the building will be laid to ruin and the plants crawling over the walls seems to invade the whole place. In front of the door, a broken eggshell, a pelvic bone and an animal claw are laid on the ground. This image of decay is almost without sign of creation. To Fini, nature is about both destruction and renewal and is full of contradictory forces. Fini told Xavière Gauthier in an interview, “The painting instinct draws a whole world out of me and that world is me. It is always an ambivalent and contradictory place where I find myself, and that can be an astonishing experience at times” (qtd. in Colvile 175). Fini’s repeated depiction of the image of the sphinx
reflects her thoughts in which the woman, by transforming into the form of sphinx, owns the power to preside over nature in a constant process of life and death, regeneration and decomposition.

**Cyclical Drama**

The Surrealist’s belief that eroticism and death are coexistent also fascinated women artists. The natural cycle evoking eroticism was a Surrealists’ concern, yet for the Surrealist women artists, “the language of resolution and regeneration is one of nature and the cycles of the earth’s renewal, rather than one of erotic desire and fusion with the loved one” (Chadwick 1985, 136). The following section of discussion will focus on the theme of cyclical drama in their art.

Léonor Fini (1918-1996) was born in Buenos Aires of Spanish/Italian/Argentinian parents, but was raised in Trieste. Fini arrived in Paris from Italy in 1935 and exhibited her work with the Surrealists at their International Exposition in London in 1936. She is an artist who is extremely aware of her creative autonomy and the necessity of woman’s independence. Although she had a close relationship with the Surrealist group, she refused to submit to the collective goals defined by the male Surrealists. Julien Levy, a New York art dealer, organized her first New York solo exhibition in 1937. Since then, Fini was very active as a painter, illustrator and theatrical designer. Her life-long endeavors in searching for independence in both her art and her personal life echo what she had said in an interview: “I always imagined that I would have a life very different from the one imagined for me, but I understood from a very early time that I would have to revolt in order to make that life” (qtd. in Chadwick 1985, 86). Fini refused to depict women in a passive role. By placing the woman or herself in the center of her painting, she strongly asserts the equal position of female knowledge.

In *Women Artist and the Surrealist Movement*, Chadwick gives a detailed account of
Fini’s fascination with death since she was a teenager. Her curiosity about the meaning of life and death led her to frequently visit the morgue in Trieste and this experience greatly affected her view of nature. In the part of the building where the corpses were kept, “she began a daily, quasi-religious contemplation of the corpses, comparing these anonymous nude bodies, painted with tincture of iodine and tagged with identification numbers, to the dressed and adorned bodies that lay surrounded by floral tributes in the morgue’s public rooms” (Chadwick 1985, 95).

Death indeed often lurks in Fini’s works. Fini’s *L’amour Sans Condition* of 1958 (Fig. 31) and *L’amitie* of 1958 (Fig. 32) well manifest her interest in the theme of life and death. The skeleton in two of her paintings is not merely representations of death but show the integration of opposites, such as life and death, decomposition and regeneration. While the skeleton in *L’amour Sans Condition* is a little threatening, the one in *L’amitie* is tender, embracing the reclining androgynous figure with arms and soft drapery that indicates the unification of opposite forces.

The term “androgyney” is defined as the unification of opposites of male and female. Its meaning has been constantly interpreted and reinterpreted in different cultural contexts. For the Surrealists, it is not only a metaphor for the search for totality but also the basis for the definition of sublime love. Idealistically, in an androgynous unity, the man would recognize his feminine counterpart in woman and the woman would realize her masculine counterpart in man, so that they would experience totality in each other (Orenstein 1973, 15). However, this theory was not applied in this way; but as “woman is merely the subordinate supplement to man’s nature, rather than his equal and complementary counterpart…. even if it did grant her equal status, the concept of the androgynous union makes them totally dependent upon each other for self-realization” (15). Women artists such as Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo and Léonor Fini had depicted androgynous figures in their paintings. Their concept of the term androgyney was different to that of the male Surrealists.
In Fini’s painting, *The Guardian of the Phoenixes* of 1954 (Fig. 33), an androgynous figure is depicted bald but with apparent female features. She presides over a sacred ritual of rebirth, holding an egg with her right hand. The egg is the name of the alchemical vessel of transformation. It is also a female symbol and is used by Fini to express the idea that “woman is the universal vessel of creation, spiritual rebirth” (Orenstein 16). Accompanied with the symbol of the egg is the phoenix, which is thought to be reborn from its own ashes and also symbolizes spiritual rebirth. The image is mysterious, yet reveals predictable renewal of life.

In Remedios Varo’s work *Harmony* of 1956 (Fig. 34), an androgynous composer is depicted, trying to uncover the invisible element that unites all things to create harmonious music; this mirrors Varo’s faith in the interrelatedness of plant, animal, human and mechanical worlds. In this intimate space, floor tiles erupt with plants and bits of drapery; female muses emerge from the peeling walls to aid the artistic creation; birds as spiritual conveyors fly freely. The composer who bears Varo’s own features is seated at a table and manipulates musical notes presented as leaves, crystals, a turnip, flowers, seashells and scraps of paper with handwritten formulas on a musical staff and waits for the result to be a miraculous harmony. A strong sense of feminine vision pervades Varo’s works and this affects her choice of visual symbols. Like the woman artist in *The Creation of the Birds* (Fig. 28), the woman artist here also possesses wisdom to create artistic harmony for the natural world.

Kahlo shared the Surrealists’ belief that eroticism and death are coexistent. Another aspect that should be examined in order to understand Kahlo’s works in regard to the natural cycle is the iconography in Aztec culture with which Kahlo strongly identified through her life. Esther Pasztory wrote in *Aztec Art* that the Coatlicue sculpture “embodies the duality of Mexican consciousness….At the very center of the figure is a contrast of quintessential opposites: breasts seen behind a skull, the two images of life and death” and “death was chaos, evil, and darkness overcoming the forces of order, good, and light; yet it was also necessary, for without it life could
not continue” (qtd. in Helland 404, 407). The concept of undoing the boundary of life and death is deeply rooted in Kahlo’s culture, thus, the skeleton that appears in Kahlo’s paintings does not necessarily present death only; it also speaks about life. In *The Dream* of 1940 (Fig. 35), Kahlo reclines on a bed intertwined by roots and plants and a skeleton wired with explosives rests above her. The visual elements in this painting, the sleeping Kahlo, living leaves, threatening skeleton, floating bed and cloud-like background, manifest the coexistence of opposites, life/death, dream/reality. *Roots* of 1943 (Fig. 36), presents Kahlo reclining on the barren land. The flourishing green leaves are growing out from her chest. Contrary to the general concept that nature nourishes living beings, in this image, woman nourishes nature with her own body.

### Plurality

Western thought prizes unity, visibility and autonomous subjectivity, and perceives the female body as lacking and dependent (Grosz 105). Luce Irigaray proposes a female imaginary “two lips” that positively represent female sexuality in *This Sex Which Is Not One* in terms of multiplicity, fluidity and ambiguity as opposed to the monolithically unified phallus. Irigaray asserts, “Her sexuality, always at least double, is in fact plural” (qtd. in Grosz 116). Surrealist women artists, Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo, Léonora Fini, Claud Cahun, and Francesca Woodman had articulated a complex identity in their multiple images of self as opposed to the idea of a fixed, autonomous subjectivity. In Surrealism, the doubled image is a visual strategy of breaking with unitary meaning and of transmuting interior and exterior reality into “an absolute reality”. It also provides women artists with a device of “complicating otherness by reproducing it as sameness, by making the woman Other to herself and engaging her in a dialogue with the self that produces her life as narrative” (Chadwick 1998, 29).

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1 Coatlicue is a goddess in Aztec culture, mother of the Mexican patron deity, Huitzilopochtli. It represents an aspect of the earth/fertility. Coatlicue sculpture was made around 15th century.
A self-portrait *Two Fridas* of 1939 (Fig. 37) was painted by Frida Kahlo few months after her divorce and the worst moments of her emotional crisis. Kahlo uses the strategy of double images to express both conflict and integration. Two Fridas sit side by side on a bench with their hearts exposed, one wears European style dress and the other wears a Tehuana dress. They are united by holding hands and by one artery going through their hearts. Kahlo told a friend that the Frida dressed as a Tehuana is kept alive by the love she received from Rivera; the other Frida is dying for she is not loved by Rivera (Grimberg 98). This painting reveals complex opposite forces, hope and despair, living and dead, Rivera and herself, Mexican and European. In a painting *Tree of Hope, Stand Fast* of 1946 (Fig. 14) discussed above (page 33), she also uses a doubled image of self to show a similar struggle. Both paintings manifest clearly how Kahlo was torn between opposite forces in her life.

In *Encounter* of 1959 (Fig. 38), Varo depicts a woman, wrapped up in drapery, opening a box in anticipation of significant discoveries. However, she finds only an identical old self peering out. Her dismal expression implies that no matter how hard she tries, she will not discover any new meaning for her life and she is destined to be haunted by her past. Like Sage and Tanning, Varo often uses soft cloth or drapery for symbolic meaning. Clothes are not simply for practical functions but interact with other objects and characters in Varo’s paintings. Together with threads, strings, wrappings, and ribbons, Varo’s clothes are involved in “a constant process of doing and undoing contours, of reestablishing and effacing relations between different orders of things as well as both concealing and revealing a crucial enigma” (Hubert 259).

Fini used a different visual strategy to create a doubled image in *Le Bout Du Monde* of 1949 (Fig. 39) in which a woman immersed in a swamp, showing only the head and shoulder, resembles the artist. The skulls with eyeball popped out, dead plants floating the water and the ominous reddish sky are signs of desolation and decay.
The woman’s gaze seems calm and solemn while she confronts such an isolated environment. Her reflected double self from the swamp water is demonic, symbolically presenting an unknown dark nature of self. Unlike the doubled images by other women artists discussed in this section, Fini’s quest for self-knowledge is derived from her fascination with the natural cycle. Fini believes that life and death coexist. Hence, implicit in the woman’s serene look there is still a faint hope for regeneration in such a desolate swamp.

The Looking Glass

The theme of plurality showing women artists engaging themselves in a dialogue with self, discussed in the above section, is also implicit in Claude Cahun and Francesca Woodman’s photographs. Both Cahun and Woodman have very distinct self-portrait photographs that reverse the position of woman as the object of photographic gaze conventionally through the lens. Woman’s self-portrait through the photographic process enables woman to create a site for herself as a subject in front of the looking glass and to obtain an assertion of her own knowledge that are well manifested in the obsessive multiple self-images created by Cahun and Woodman. Although they were influenced more or less by the Surrealist aesthetics, the content of their work is definitely distinct from that of the male Surrealists. Whereas the previously discussed Surrealist photographs by Jacques-André Boiffard, Man Ray, and Hans Bellmer (Fig. 3, 4, 5, 8) in Chapter One, present the female body in a dehumanized manner (page 19-23), photographs by Cahun and Woodman explore complex self-definition and undercut the traditional feminine stereotypes.

Lucy Schwob (France 1894-1954) was born into a wealthy intellectual Jewish family in Nantes. She was a niece of the prominent Symbolist writer Marcel Schwod – an early influence. Sometime around 1918, she began to use the pseudonym “Claude Cahun”. From the early 1920s, Cahun lived with her stepsister and life-long lover, Suzanne Malherbe, in Paris. This lesbian couple became
prominent members in the intellectual and artistic circle of Paris in the years between the wars. Cahun published articles in a variety of journals, translated Havelock Ellis’s controversial theories on human sexuality, performed both male and female roles in avant-garde theater and was also active in politics (Monahan 126). In late 1932, while participating in the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Revelutionnaires - a fusion of an artists’ group and a communist trade union she met Breton (Lichtenstein 64). She also participated in the Contre-Attaque group, the antifascist political coalition organized by the Surrealists. Attracted by Surrealism’s experimental approach to art and the reclamation of the suppressed realms of human expression, Cahun produced a wide range of photographs, collages and writings that explored identity and gender issues through her own image and autobiography. In 1936, Cahun moved to the Isle of Jersey from Paris with Suzanne Malherbe, where she joined in resistance activities such as writing and distributing anti-Nazi leaflets during the Nazi occupation and where she was finally arrested and sentenced to death (64). The war’s approaching end saved her from execution. She remained on the island until her death in 1954.

Although Claude Cahun was devoted to engaging in artistic and political activities, little is known about her life and work. Her photographs of self-portraits in various guises from the 1920s and the 1930s are being rediscovered at a time when women artists, such as Cindy Sherman, Judy Dater, Jo Spencer, Hannah Wilke, and others are using photography as a potent medium to explore complex self-identity, to criticize female stereotypes, or to create a visual autobiography. Her Autoportraits presented an ongoing inquiry into her identity and challenged the traditional notion of an autonomous subjectivity. Cahun’s work engages current feminist concerns, as well as providing the opportunity to examine contemporary concerns about sexuality and identity. Katy Deepwell considered that Cahun prefigured the acceptance of the homosexual in society, postulating the postmodern “possibility of a plurality of gendered identities and identifications” and demonstrating that identity is not a fixed one (qtd. in Kline 79).
Cahun constructs various personas in her photographs, alternating between femininity and masculinity (Fig. 40-41). In her self-images, there is no room for the male’s gaze. She wears exaggerated facial makeup and various costumes to explore different identities, a rag doll, a little girl, a Japanese puppet or a vamp. In some self-portraits, Cahun is shown as bald in order to play various male types, a man in a suit, an oriental deity, or a sailor. There is no single image that can be regarded as the real Cahun; expressed another way, every image can be considered as one of Cahun’s mutable selves.

Cahun used mirrors to double her image in Autoportrait of 1928 (Fig. 42). The photograph presents the outward looking gaze of the artist’s face and head in a man’s jacket reflected in a mirror. Cahun’s gaze is serious and uneasy; yet does not reveal much of her inner self. Cahun’s androgynous figure, just like that in the paintings of Remedios Varo (Fig. 34) and Léonor Fini (Fig. 33) discussed in the section of Cyclical Drama (page 48-51), proposes an alternative sexual identity as opposed to the conventional objectification of women. In contrary to the male Surrealists, the concept of androgyny shown in the work of women artists does not invite a male’s desire and gaze. In another Autoportrait of 1928 (Fig. 43), Cahun is wearing a woman’s dress and a shiny necklace. The image captures Cahun’s assertive and defensive gaze. Cahun doubled herself metaphorically by using a mask hanging in the left upper corner that resembles one of the many of Cahun’s made-up faces. The tension between Cahun and the mask is a dialectic one. Cahun’s face without a mask does not mean that her face reveals her “original self”. Her face is itself a mask that both presents and conceals. Furthermore, the mask here represents a possible aspect of Cahun’s mutable selves. It is a never-ending game of mask, masking and unmasking.

In 1930, her book Aveus non avenues, an original book-length autobiographical publication, featured poems, aphorisms, recollected dreams and thoughts on the
identity and androgynous sexuality. To illustrate her book *Aveus non avenues*, she manipulated her images, playing with doubling, cropping, cutting and pasting, into ten photomontages. Each individual element of a photomontage obtains new meaning from deliberate juxtaposing. The photomontage’s visual effect to destruct or disturb the seemingly flawless reality within photographic image can be a potent medium for a woman artist to subvert the conventional viewing relation between male spectator and the photographed female body (Solomon-Godeau 11).

A photomontage by Cahun titled *I.O.U. - Self-Pride* of 1930 (Fig. 44) presents her various overlapping heads rising from a single neck, juxtaposed with the imagery of embryo and text. Cahun repeatedly used her self-image. The expressions of smiling, wondering, resenting and confounding were all pasted together to emphasize an idea of a destabilized “plural self”. One of the faces is rather astonished as one of her eyebrow is shaven and her gaze confronts viewer in an unfriendly manner. A text reads “Under this mask, another mask. I will never be finished with carrying all these faces.” The meaning of the imageries of embryo varying in size may be used to suggest the birth of a constantly changing self, as Cahun herself concluded at the end of *Aveus non avenues*, “Make myself another vocabulary, brighten the silver of the mirror, blink an eye, swindle myself by means of a fluke muscle; cheat with my skeleton, correct my mistakes, divide myself in order to conquer, multiply myself in order to assert myself; briefly, to play with ourselves can change nothing” (qtd. in Kline 74).

Unlike the assertive quality within Cladue Cahun’s self-representation, Francesca Woodman’s self-representation conveys a tension between bodily appearance and bodily disappearance. The daughter of artist parents, Francesca Woodman (1958-1981) spent most of her childhood in the university town of Boulder, Colorado, U.S.A. She started taking pictures at the age of thirteen and built up a cumulative portfolio of approximately five hundred black and white photographs in a brief period of time. Her photographs, which are almost exclusively
self-portraiture, often present her elusive psyche state and reveal her newly emerging awareness of being a woman and an artist. In 1975 Woodman was admitted to the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and spent a year studying in Rome, through RISD’s European exchange program. In November 1980, Woodman wrote to one of her friends: “I do have standards and my life at this point is like very old coffee cup sediment and I would rather die young leaving various accomplishments, i.e. some work, my friendship with you, some other artifacts intact, instead of pell-mell erasing all of these delicate things” (qtd. in Rankin 37). A year later she committed suicide, leaping from a window in her Manhattan apartment at the age of twenty-two.

Because of her short period of creative life, her artistic inspirations can only be suggested. She certainly knew contemporary photographers and was particularly interested in the serial photographs of Duane Michaels, the bizarre and violent images of nightlife of Weegee and Clearence John Laughlin’s Southern Surrealism in his book Ghosts Along the Mississippi. Other sources of Woodman’s work are from her readings of authors, such as Colette, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Rhys and Andre Breton. Abigail Solomon-Godeau wrote that “if Woodman’s photography recalls any other body of work, even superficially, it might be Surrealist photography”, yet she adds an explanation that “the great majority of the former were until recently unpublished and very little known and certain correspondences of similarities between Surrealist photographs and Woodman’s work are most likely fortuitous” (19). Rather than being in the full Surrealist tradition, it would be better to view her photographs as possibly bearing traces of Surrealism.

The content of Woodman’s multiple self-representation to be discussed here often fluctuates between revelation and concealment, self and environment. Viewers are caught up in the conflict between the artist affirming and denying herself. It is likely that no matter how hard she tries to presents herself in front of the lens as if she
knows something about herself, her self-knowledge is never fully attained. Matthew Teitelbaum, a critic, described Woodman’s work as one of great sensitivity, “it is as if, by making herself a subject to be looked at, she makes herself disappear. Indeed, many of her photographs convey a tension between bodily presence and bodily absence….She often reaches out of the picture frame, spins out of focus, hides behind an object, or twists her body away from the viewer” (qtd. in Sundell 437). Nevertheless, the power of her photographs is implicit in her ability to repeatedly return to her elusive psychic state and to constantly transform her vulnerable body into numerous phantasms. The photographic act is an affirmation of her own existence, even though her existence is only transitory.

In Providence of 1975-76 (Fig. 45), Woodman portrays herself curled like an embryo, lying down on the bottom shelf of a cabinet of stuffed animals and birds, which includes a raccoon, a fox and several birds. The birds and animals are dead but have been stuffed realistically; Woodman is alive but is portrayed as dead. This image seeks out and surpasses the boundary between life and death. An air of mystery and melancholy emanates from the image. The enclosure of the cabinet poses a question of why this young woman is placed in such a suffocating space. The suffocating space symbolically indicates that woman’s psychic state is a private domain and is not in accord with dominant patriarchal values.

The House #3 (Fig. 46), Space² (Fig. 47), Space Squared (Fig. 48) and Angel (Fig. 49) exemplify the scenario of bodily presence and bodily absence. These four photographs capture Woodman’s phantasmal appearance in overly long exposures. Her image seems to merge into the peeling walls, dilapidated floor and window frame of an abandoned dwelling. As mentioned above, Woodman’s work manifests the uneasy tension between opposites. The scene in these photographs is seductively beautiful because of its textured decaying wall, elegant window light, perfect composition and ghostly blurred human body. However, it also implies fears because her fragile presence seems to be absorbed in the nostalgic spaces, without trace.
Woodman’s preference for decayed domestic environment recalls Dorothea Tanning’s works between the 1940s and the 1950s in which strange domestic spaces with overflowing unseen forces were depicted (Fig. 23-26). Whereas Woodman’s photographs lean towards presenting a drama of metamorphoses, photographically and metaphorically blurring the boundary between her body and her derelict surroundings, Tanning’s paintings present figures, animals, plants and unidentified creatures engaging in enigmatic activities or suspended on the threshold of major change in strange interior spaces.

The phantasmal self-portrait and premature death of Francesca Woodman recalls Roland Barthes’s influential theorization of photography as an emblem of death and mortality. In his last book, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, Barthes related how he miraculously found the essence of his mother from a photograph of her as a child. His excitement soon turned into deep grief as Barthes realized that he confronted the being of his mother as a being-in-the-past reflected by the photograph that recorded her as a being who was going to die. Barthes said, “In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott’s psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe” (96).2 The melancholic effect of Woodman’s photographs is partly implicit in “that-has-been” and “it is without future.” (79, 90) Although transience and death are inscribed in every aspect of Woodman’s work, her photographs are more than memento mori. Daring to repeatedly return to the fragile sense of self in front of the looking glass seems to reaffirm her delicate presence.

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2 The clinical work by Donald W. Winnicott (1896-1971) has been influential in British Psycho-analytical society. Part of his notes on about 2000 child cases was published in 1971 titled Therapeutic Consultations in Child Psychiatry.
Summary

The series of images of decay, solitude and metamorphoses examined in this chapter represents only a small selection of the numerous works of self-representation or self-reference by women artists influenced by Surrealism. However, these works all proclaim that the subject matter of their art is primarily dominated by the theme of placing woman in the center. They are also about revealing woman’s unique psychic state that had always existed but had been made invisible through the process of suppression, as it was not in accord with the dominant male culture. Once this is understood, the meanings of the art works by the women Surrealists examined above can be placed in perspective. In fact, these images of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis are the images of the regeneration and reaffirmation of women artists’ lives, not a morbid comment on the fate of woman in a male world.

In addition to the significance of reclaiming feminine subjectivity, the concept of unveiling that which has been concealed and hidden is a primary strategy for my creative concerns. The idea of metamorphosis in both a cultural and metaphorical sense is inscribed in the art works by Frida Kahlo, Kay Sage, Remedios Varo, Dorothea Tanning, Léonor Fini, Claude Cahun and Francesca Woodman. Their art reflected highly imaginative and intuitive minds that inspired me profoundly and led me to create my image of decay, solitude and metamorphosis in a context of my own aesthetic experience. Some elements or themes of their art appear in my artwork. Cyclical drama is particularly expressed in The Old Album (Fig. 88-92). The transformation of life/death within photography is demonstrated in The Untold (Fig. 101-105) and White Room (Fig. 106-114). Anatomical illustration is used in A Strange Mixture (Fig. 130-135). A journey of archeology of self is manifested in Tools of the Past (Fig. 83-87) and Dwelling (Fig. 115-120).

The study of these women artists’ bodily (self) representation leads me to an investigation of realistically representing the human body through different systems
of representation in order to enhance the understanding of the unfathomable nature of existence. The next chapter will examine two subjects related to Surrealist concerns, anatomical illustration and death-related photography. Such systems of representation reflect a scientific curiosity to search for the connection between the visible surface and the invisible depth. Although these images were created in a different social/historical context from that of the Surrealists, they are also potent manifestation of the themes of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis. While Surrealist art is an expression of the fluctuation of the human psyche, the medical and death-related image is a visual presentation of the mortal condition of human corporeality. Through the lens of science and reason both modes of viewing the human condition have the capacity to enlarge on existential issues.
CHAPTER THREE

The Human Body as Object/Subject in Representation

Chapter Three examines two subjects, anatomical illustration and death-related photography; both of which have had a strong effect on my artwork. There is a thread among these images and the previously discussed Surrealist art. All of these works present the concept of unveiling that which are hidden and invite the viewer and artist to the contemplation of existential issues. Chapter Two demonstrated how Frida Kahlo gained inspiration from anatomical illustration to paint her own bodily experience, and how Francesca Woodman’s elusive self-portrait photographs mirrors Roland Barthes’s theorization of photography as an emblem of death and mortality. The fascinating works analyzed in Chapter Two lead to the further investigation of the image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis produced in other disciplines in this chapter.

Although anatomical illustration and death-related photography are two different fields of imagery, they have three things in common: Firstly, these images which will be discussed in this chapter are not made for fine art. Their original use was for medical instruction, legal evidence or memorial purposes. Secondly, they have an implicit association with the themes of human decay and mortality. Thirdly, they present an effort to unveil the concealed realm of human existence.

Anatomical illustration, which will be discussed first, is not an attempt to introduce anatomical illustrations in a chronological order, rather, after a necessary summary of its background, it will focus on three subjects: the living anatomy, the motif of mortality, and the beginning of life, in order to expound how these drawings were constructed aesthetically for the purpose of medical instruction. The discussion of death-related photography, which will be presented next, will focus on three categories of photographs: proof of human decay (medical photography), the enigma
of the archive (forensic photography), commemoration of loved ones (postmortem photography), as an attempt to explain how human bodies are represented as object/subject in death-related photography. Finally, a summary will be given.

Anatomical Illustration

Introduction

Anatomical investigation, one of the elaborate forms of engagement with human bodies, was initiated by physicians and surgeons from the ancient Mediterranean, Arabic societies and again, in Renaissance Europe. They reckoned that the better the intricate structures and functions of the human body were understood, the more effective medical treatment could be. The term *anatomia* or anatomy had a more restricted meaning in the past than it has now, as it then meant simply “dissection” (Kennedy 13). In most cases, graphic artists worked closely with the anatomists to execute the illustrations. The collaboration of the anatomist and artist was an attempt to comprehend the human body by the dissection of cadavers. The product of their collaboration is an organized document in which written material as well as visual graphics demonstrate the interior of the body that hitherto been hidden beneath the skin.¹

Human dissection was first practised in the ancient world in the third century B.C. when Greek scholarship was encouraged and a school of medicine that regarded anatomy as the study by dissection of the human body was founded in Alexandria. In contrast to the Greeks, the Romans did not approve of the dissection of human corpses. They thought that the dissection of monkeys would serve the understanding of the human body because the physical characteristics of monkeys were similar to

those of the human. From the eighth century, anatomical study was offered in the areas occupied by Arab conquerors, such as Asia Minor, North Africa, Persia and Spain (Cazort 13). By the period 1100 to 1350, the center of medical studies had gradually shifted to Europe as many universities had been established in Italy. The University of Bologna, for example, offered methodical instruction in anatomy in the fourteenth century (13). The Bolognese physician, Mondino de’ Luzzi, stated that he performed two dissections in 1315 (Kennedy 16). He wrote the first student’s manual of anatomical procedure, *Anatomia corporis humani*, a book that influenced the study of anatomy for more than two hundred years (Roberts 1992, 4).

The dissections were often carried out in churches, hospitals or even in outdoor settings until the construction of special anatomical theatres during the sixteenth century. The dramatic spectacles of dissection were both teaching as well as public events, and were sometimes held during Carnival when the weather was cold enough to retard putrefaction (Kennedy 16). Scenes of anatomical theatres were often depicted in engravings, showing the skeletons of humans and animals, a cadaver on the central dissecting table, surgical instruments, crowded audiences and the Latin text *Nosce te Ipsum* (Know Thyself), which established the religious context for anatomical study. For centuries, the effort of looking for the concealed secrets of the dead on the dissecting table was to help bring back the normal order and function of the living body. The transformation of the *corps mort* back in to the *corps vivant* is the ultimate purpose of the “Theatre of the Body” (Cazort 42).

Claudius Galen (c. AD129-c.199), a Greek physician, described human anatomy in a series of detailed works that formed the basis of anatomical knowledge in the Middle Ages and which had a profound influence on early modern medicine after they were translated into Latin in the sixteenth century. It is not clear if Galen ever witnessed a human dissection. Galen’s knowledge of human anatomy was substantially derived from that of animals, such as pigs or monkeys because the Romans did not permit the dissection of human corpses during that period. The
Mediaeval anatomical illustrations were Galenic-based. For Galen, the Creator predetermined all structures and functions of the human body. The diagrammatical figures were often shown in half-squatting, or frog-like postures (Fig. 50). A series of five anatomical schemata were commonly used to depict five major body systems – bones, nerves, arteries, muscles and veins. The figure of a gravida female, showing a fetus and internal organs inside the womb, was sometimes contained in the series of diagrams (Fig. 51). Strictly speaking, the frog-like figures only vaguely portrayed the internal structure of the human body and were hardly intended to achieve a naturalistic representation. Galen’s non-scientific texts of human anatomy were challenged by some sixteenth century anatomists, who came to realize that the new knowledge of anatomy could be acquired only by direct reference to actual human bodies, not to archaic manuscripts (Roberts 1992, 7).

During the Renaissance, there was a gradual change in the attitude of scholars towards the natural world and also in the basic approach to scientific research – an approach that was to have a great influence on the methodology of the new descriptive sciences and especially for the study of anatomy (Cazort 15). The scientific revolution in the study of anatomy was one part of the diverse interests in the natural science which developed in the Renaissance era. Renaissance scholars were strongly motivated to question and verify the earlier systems of organizing the knowledge of human anatomy. They believed that true information only could be obtained through direct empirical observation of the body, rather than from existing theory. This ideological change contributed to the secularization of anatomical study, and diminished the influence of “Creationist doctrine” in the making of anatomical illustration (15). Meanwhile, both anatomist and artist had developed the understanding that anatomy could be presented in an observational and naturalistic manner. The great originality of anatomical illustrations was achieved by three academic anatomists, Charles Estienne (c. 1505-64), Bartolomeo Eustachio (d. 1574) and Andreas Vesalius (1514-64). In particular, the work of Vesalius, Fabrica first published in Basel in 1543, was considered to be one of the most influential works
on later anatomical atlases. His achievement was comparable to Bernard Siegfried Albinus’s (1697-1770) *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani*, 1747. Although Vesalius repeatedly criticized his Galenic predecessors, it is apparent that he still copied some errors from Galen’s anatomical text (Roberts 1992, 135). Even so, his revolutionizing “hands-on” anatomical study replaced that of explicating old Galenic texts (135).

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the dissected corpses were those of hanged criminals, though hospitals also provided cadavers. A Florentine Statute of 1387 decreed that university anatomists could receive the bodies of two hanged persons from another town every year and added “In case God grants the Studium to grow, then let the Podestè see to the delivery of not two but three bodies of alien criminals each year; whatever their foul felonies be, let them be hanged (not burned as is wont with witches, nor beheaded) and delivered the same day, for corruption comes on apace” (Fusco qtd. in Cazort 28). Because of that, there was an implicit connection between dissection and punishment; the public dissection was considered as prolonged suffering and a dreadful punishment for criminals who had offended against society and God. They believed that the fragmented bodily remains after dissection hindered the path of a person to eternal life, an idea that persisted into the Age of Enlightenment (Roberts 1996, 84). *The Four Stages of Cruelty* was produced in 1751 by William Hogarth (1697-1764). It portrayed the anti-hero, Tom Nero, being dissected in an anatomical theatre after being hanged for his immoral behavior in life, in which the anatomist or surgeons seemed to play a part within the justice system (Fig 52). The judgment of state authority in the Age of Enlightenment replaced the earlier concept of Divine Judgment in the anatomical illustrations (Roberts 1996, 82).

Through such studies, the organization of written text and illustrations related to profound religious, moralistic or social-medical discourses about the body, which were naturally projected onto anatomical illustration and formed certain styles of
bodily representations. The illustrating of the human body is a selective process of observation and representation by both anatomists and artists. Some anatomical illustrations seemed to interweave several themes, justice, redemption, sex and death, in which the complex meanings and the scope of visual information should be interpreted in a broad sense. The following discussion is not an attempt to interpret anatomical illustrations in chronological order from the medical point of view but rather it focuses on three subjects, the living anatomies, the motif of mortality and the beginning of life, in order to expound how anatomical images, which were drawn originally from cadavers, were constructed both scientifically and aesthetically within the culture of the time. Implicit in these anatomical illustrations are the persistent questions about human decay and mortality, either the visible phenomenon that one can experience, or the invisible realm of which one only can gain a vague sense through imagination.

**Analysis**

**Living Anatomies**

Representing the flayed figures, and skeletons, standing upright in pastoral landscape settings as if they were still alive, was a visual strategy of anatomical illustration in the early sixteenth century. The “living anatomies” seemed to be capable of retaining significant gestures and emotional expressions for the dramatic story of human destiny. It has been suggested that there were several reasons for this particular kind of style: the widespread practice of outdoor open dissections held in cold weather, the creation of a sense of scale of the human figure within this perspective view, and the avoidance of the feelings of pain directly associated with dissection (Robert 1992, 255, Cazort 27). This convention was first seen in Berengario da Carpi’s (1460-1530) *Commentaria* of 1521 (Fig. 53), and was carried on into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, achieving a kind of perfect style in Bernhard Siegfried Albinus’s publication, *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis*
humani, published in Leiden in 1747 (Fig. 54).

The series of fourteen large plates of the muscles of man in Fabrica by Andreas Vesalius in 1543 depicted the cadaver standing on a high hill above an open landscape, a drama of life and death in solitude. Vesalius’ use of the word fabrica for his book’s title had functional implications. The word fabrica, commonly referring to cloth or material, can also symbolize the intricacies of the tissues and organs of the human anatomy (Robert 1992, 128). The plates showed progressively deeper dissections, first from the front, then from the back. The Second Muscle Figure is a rather relaxed one with most of the muscles still attached to the body. It seemed to be indulging in a rapturous “animated cadaver dance” (Fig. 55). As the dissection progressed deeper, the previously discussed muscle was removed or turned downward from the body to show further hidden layers of muscle (Fig. 56). The expression on the figure’s face became more severe, corresponding with his deeply stripped layers of muscle. The sequence of the muscle-man showed the human body looking more grotesque as the dissection progressed down to the deeper layers, and the increasingly growing deserted landscape behind the figure was a symbolic expression of the natural process of bodily decay. The artist of these stunning illustrations deserves the same recognition as Vesalius but no artist has been identified.

During the Renaissance, the artists and scholars explored the classical world with admiration and this attitude to the ancient world was carried on into the following century (Roberts 1992, 272). The anatomical illustrations by Odoardo Fialetti (1573-1638) from Adriaan Spieghel’s De humani corporis fabrica, 1627, had a quality of delicacy, as in the one showing a male figure in a graceful posture against a beautiful landscape, holding up an abdominal flap to display his superficial bodily structure (Fig. 57). His stripped skin was elegantly depicted like a piece of soft fabric. Fialetii’s plates were not as disturbing as the works of Vesalius, yet the feeling of absurdity prevailed.
Pietro Berrettini da Cortona (1596-1669), a distinctive artist and architect in the Baroque period, produced a series of anatomical drawings within this “living dead” convention in Rome around 1618. Many noble and heroic male figures in his drawings, imitating classical statues, were placed into classical architectural or landscape settings, often holding up framed mirrors that reflected detailed drawings of body parts. The figure in Fig. 58 is posed like a living person with highly charged emotions, seeming to say loudly to his spectators, “Come and look at the secrets inside my body.” These elaborate drawings, with an emphasis on the visceral and nervous system, which are on grayish paper, in brown ink and black chalk, washed with blue, sepia, and gray, highlighted with white paint, were published later in 1741 as the *Tabulae Anatomicae* (Roberts 1992, 272-276).

Albinus’s *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani*, 1747 had an enormous influence on subsequent anatomical atlases, an influence which has lasted till the present time. Unlike Vesalius’s anonymous artist, Albinus’s collaborative artist was clearly identified as Jan Wandelaar (1690-1759). Albinus stated frankly that he used the artist “like a tool”; yet it was Wandelaar’s skill and good taste that gave these drawings their distinctive vitality and that undeniably helped Albinus to win his great reputation (qtd. in Cazort 198). The task of Albinus as well as Wandelaar was to present the anatomy of perfectly proportioned human bodies with absolute accuracy and to surpass all previous attempts. Albinus deliberately chose an ideal subject to meet his needs and he finally obtained the cadaver of a “perfect-proportioned” young man in 1725 (198). Unlike the emotional and pathetic figures in the Vesalius’s plates, the muscle figure of Albinus was a confident and ideal young man, standing upright against the meticulously depicted background to convey scientific knowledge of what was hidden beneath the skin (Fig. 54). Albinus’s illustration was an extraordinary expression of the Enlightenment ideal of perfection (199). Looking at these aesthetically beautiful copper engravings, one may almost forget that these images were made as applied art – for medical
instruction, not for fine art.

The Motif of Mortality

Anatomy is inevitably associated with decay and death. The skeleton is the final outcome after stripping away layer after layer of bodily structure by dissections; the skeleton was naturally becoming the conventional motif of mortality. The skeleton in the anatomical illustration in the early sixteenth century had an iconological precedent, the *danse macabre*, the *Totentanz*, or “Dance of Death”, a popular image in the late Middle Ages in northern Europe, in which Death, personified as a partially decayed corpse or a skeleton, threatened the living person (Roberts, 1996, 79). A woodcut from *La grant danse macabre* of 1499 showed that Death took the life of a compositor, a pressman and a bookseller without pity (Fig. 59). The obsession with death, the decayed body in the grave, and the dreadful Last Judgment were deepened by the mortality caused by that great pestilence, the Black Death in the fourteenth century (79). These fearful images appeared in great numbers of drawings, paintings, sculptures, embroideries, stained glass and print, and the deeply rooted religious views of human mortality were succeeded by the factual anatomical illustrations.

The skeleton or skull of the anatomical illustration often conveys a kind of moralistic teaching. A woodcut by a Swiss printmaker, Georg Thomas, for the German physician and mathematician, Johannes Dryander’s (1500-1560) publication of 1537, showed a skull placed on a stone pedestal, with an hourglass beside it and clouds and a scroll in the background (Fig. 60). INEVITABILE FATUM (“Unavoidable Fate”) was inscribed on the stone pedestal. Here, the skull is not only a static motif of mortality but also an actively frightening icon that makes people reflect and wonder about their own ending. Another example was *The second skeletal figure* of Vesalius in *Fabrica*, 1543 (Fig. 61). In this image a skeleton, standing cross-legged in a melancholic manner, was deep in contemplation of a skull
placed on a plinth. A motto was inscribed on the front of the plinth – *Vivitur ingenio caetera mortis erunt*, which has been translated as “genius lives on, all else is mortal”; or “Man’s spirit lives; all else Death’s hand shall claim”; or “It is his genius that yet walks the earth; all else of him may go down into silence” (Roberts 1992, 146). One of Vesalius’s complicated motivations, through his dedication to the science of the human body was to unveil “the direct evidence in nature of the wondrous machinery of God’s supreme creation” (Kemp 14). According to the motto, the corporeal aspect of the wondrous machinery of God’s creation will pass away, yet Vesalius seemed to hope that he could achieve a kind of immortality through his prominence in the secular world.

During the seventeenth century in Holland, many researchers largely exploited techniques in anatomical preservation that allowed anatomists to observe the circulatory system and the composition of tissues. Fredrik Ruysch (1638-1731) received his medical doctorate from the University of Leiden in 1664 and during his sixty-year medical career devoted himself to the preservation of specimens against decay by perfecting the techniques of injection and embalming. The specimens that he prepared were kept in his “cabinet” of anatomical preparations – the so-called “cabinet of curiosities”. Some of these displays are elaborate tableaus. Fig. 62 was one of the engravings that illustrated such oddly constructed tableaus in Rhysch’s *Thesaurus anatomicus actavus* in 1709, in collaboration with the artist C. H. Huijberts. The fetal skeletons were arranged against a background of dried arteries and preserved anatomical specimens on a stone plinth. Two infant skeletons who seemed to mourn their premature death, wiped away their tears with tissue-like handkerchiefs. Rather than intending to be an accurate anatomical reference, this illustration presented an emotional drama. Ruysch’s displays carried double connotations: life is transient, but living beings are the perfect product of God’s creation (Cazort 202). He noted that this particular image reminded him of Psalm 139: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works” (202).
The Beginning of Life

The Female body was generally excluded from anatomical textbooks, though the female cadaver had been available for anatomical purposes since the thirteenth century. It has been suggested that the indifference of the early anatomists to the female body resulted from the common assumption of the ancients that the female body was an inferior version of the male’s. Aristotle thought that the nature of the female body is colder and weaker than that of the male’s (Schiebinger 48). Galen, who thought that female are cold and idle, while males are warm and active, viewed the female sex organs as analogous to the male’s but imperfect (48). These ideologies of sex differences remained influential until the seventeenth century. Vesalius together with early modern anatomists, Bidloo and Cowper, mainly focused on two major sex differences: reproductive organs and external bodily form (49). It seemed that besides these two differences between males and females, the structure of a female’s body could be deduced by reference to the drawings of skeletons, muscles and other body parts, which mostly were drawn from a male – the “universal” human body. In the eighteenth century, the anatomists’ serious study of the female body and sex differences was partly as a result of the newly emerged ideal of motherhood initiated by the interests in population growth (53). The illustration of an accurate female skeleton appeared in the Jean Joseph Sùe’s Traité d’ostéologie of 1759 in Paris (Fig. 63) (Cazort 33). A further influential obstetrical atlas was completed in the eighteenth century by William Smellie (1697-1763), Charles Nicholas Jenty and William Hunter (1718-1783).

The most influential obstetrical atlas was The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus by William Hunter in (1774). The extraordinary draftsmanship of the Netherlands artist, Jan van Rysmdyk, who also worked for the anatomists William Smellie and Charles Nicholas Jenty on their obstetric anatomy works, apparently contributed to Hunter’s success in his publication. Hunter’s plates showed different stages of dissection from prior to the skin opening to the empty womb. It is a progressive
revelation of the knowledge of “where we begin”.

William Hunter stated clearly in a preface to *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* that realism was the preferable style of anatomical illustration and confirmed that art endowed medicine with a realistic expression to persuade viewers that what they saw was an existing reality, which carried unmediated truth:

> The art of engraving supplies us, upon many occasions, with what has been the great desideratum of the lovers of science, a universal language. Nay, it conveys clearer ideas of most natural objects, than words can express; makes stronger impressions upon the mind; and to every person conversant with the subject, gives an immediate comprehension of what it represents (qtd. in Jordanova 393).

Hunter’s “universal language” was well utilized in a close-up illustration of a fetus, (plate XII), in which the fetus is depicted in meticulous detail, safely in its mother’s womb (Fig. 64). So realistically is it portrayed that the viewer has a natural impression that this is what the fetus should look like in the womb, without questioning what was represented and what has been erased. Moving backward to (plate VI), a fragment of a woman’s body was represented, showing a seemingly dislocated womb with amputated legs and most of the torso, in contrast to the wholeness of the fetus (Fig. 65). While viewers were gaining further knowledge about “where they began”, they were also witnessing a strange scenario of impossible birth and human decay. L. Jordanova commented that this illustration is “intimate yet impersonal, suggestive of humanity yet butchered, celebrating the act of generation, yet also conveying violated female sexuality” (390).

The discussion of Hunter’s universal language of the obstetrical atlas recalls the previously discussed Surrealist woman painter, Frida Kahlo, who gained inspiration from the obstetrical atlas, but subverted the male medical gaze by representing her
own experiences with utmost frankness, as shown in *My Birth* of 1932 (Fig. 11) and *Henry Ford Hospital* of 1932 (Fig. 12). Kahlo’s art was not restricted to the parameters of male experience; it was a significant act to embody woman’s subjectivity against Freud’s notion “anatomy is destiny”.

**Death-Related Photography**

**Introduction**

Since the 1970s, several publications of death-related photography collections and exhibitions of images of human decay and death have drawn extended discussions and formed a growing interest in images that had previous been hidden from the public’s eye. They include images for medical purposes, forensic photographs, postmortem photography, lynching images, prints of warfare, the morgue photography of Jeffrey Silverthorne and Rudolf Schafer, images of body parts preserved in museum formaldehyde by Akin & Ludwig, Joel-Peter Witkin’s tableaux photographs of dead bodies with living deviant persons, Olivia Parker’s mementos of death, and Rosamund Purcell’s photographs of stuffed animals and specimens (Proulx 30). Gewn Akin and Allan Ludwig, American photographers in the “post-mortem genre”, said, “We chose to render these subjects as photographs because of all visual media, none can record the world with as much fidelity. None is as painfully literal as the unmanipulated still photograph.” (qtd. in Proulx 34)

Although the belief in the photograph as a direct transcription of reality is problematic, it is this unrelenting belief that gives photography a reputation as an objective instrument of visual documentation. The static characteristic and evidential force of still photographs have a great capacity to allow the viewers to speculate about what they see in a compressed two-dimensional photographic surface. The persistent visual and psychological effect of a still photograph can have a profound impact.
Most of these subjects were once the highly exclusive fields of specific professions so that the trend of unveiling what had been hidden from the public gaze has been analyzed as resulting from an almost instinctive voyeuristic impulse. It is true that taboo subjects tend to induce voyeurism. However, the experience of looking at these uncanny photographs is an uncomfortable one. Taboo subjects may inspire a voyeuristic desire, but it is doubtful that many people really want to look at them in order to gain a kind of voyeuristic pleasure. For some viewers, the sensational pleasure that they can get from gazing at “the different bodies” does not exist. What is important for these particular viewers is that they come to an understanding of the unfathomable nature of human existence within a social and historical context through the act of looking. The spectacle of “the different bodies” compels people to contemplate such a profound existential issue.

With these thoughts in mind, this discussion will focus on three categories of photographs: proof of human decay (medical photography), enigma of the archive (forensic photography), commemoration of loved one (postmortem photography) as an attempt to expound how human bodies are represented as object/subject in the death-related photography. In a theoretical sense, all photographs transform their subjects into objects. Here, the term object/subject refers to the degree of embodiment of subjectivity, which is endowed to a person (or a thing) through the photographic representation. My critical interpretations of the selected photographs is not to devalue these photographs but to attain a coherent sense of being human in the natural world and furthermore, a sense of what the solitude of self is.

Analysis

Proof of Human Decay

The potential for photography as an effective scientific tool for the medical representation of the human body had been acknowledged not long after its
invention. William Hunter’s promotion of “utmost realism” in anatomical illustrations could be achieved easily through the photographic process. By 1859, photographs were becoming a popular instrument to document disease and medical events in France, America, England, and Germany (O’Connor 232). The authoritative knowledge of medicine defines normal and abnormal, and photography transfers the definition of pathology into a visual proof. The main concern of the medical photograph is to show the ontology of the disease undisguised in any way, so that the most common use of photography in medicine during the early period was for superficial features, such as skin disease, external wounds, and obvious deformities (234). In 1895, a German physicist, Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen, discovered X-ray, a shorter wavelength ray that can penetrate right through the flesh and capture an image on a negative. Photography became not only a means to document disease but also a significant diagnostic device. Although medical photographs have been largely produced and utilized, they have not been included in the standard histories of photography. The writings on medical photography more often appear in the history of medicine than in the history of photography, which implies that medical photography belongs to science rather than to art (232).

Having both the aesthetic element of conventional portraiture and the cold quality of clinical record, most nineteenth-century medical photographs have an oddly mixed characteristic. By using soft flat lighting and a plain backdrop, and by framing the patient in the center as conventional portraiture does, medical photography did not aim to either acknowledge the presence of the patient or to make the patient the primal focus, rather, it is to ensure the clear depiction of pathological details of the patient. Unlike a general portrait, which always shows the features of a person, medical photography intends to present a person’s imperfections. As O’Connor stated, “rendering intensely personal images impersonally, as types, they are meant not to capture individual character but to illustrate the laws of disease” (235).

2 For the discussion of this section, and my general understanding of medical photography, I am indebted to the articles of Erin O’Connor (1999) and Rachelle A. Dermer (1999).
are meant not to capture individual character but to illustrate the laws of disease”

Medical photographs almost always depersonalize the patient into visual signs of disease. The body or body parts are naturally categorized as specific pathological groups by the medical profession. A photograph, *Three Soldiers with Midthigh Amputations* of 1865 (Fig. 66), was taken by Dr. Bontecou (1824-1907) to show his surgical achievements during the Civil War (Burns 1998). Midthigh amputation was a difficult task; however, his patients seemed well recovered from the surgery. This photograph intentionally groups these three soldiers by their same deformity but, oddly enough, the real subject of this photograph is the missing part of their bodies. The flattened two-dimensional image is a reassertion of the absence of their body parts, not the presence of these three soldiers, which emphatically mirror back their tangible wounds and loss.

One of the functions of medical photography is to capture the look of a disease with clarity and show viewers “what the disease is” through the caption and “what the disease looks like” through the image with a rare authority. Thus, “name and diagnosis merge in the caption, as the photograph merges person and pathology” (O’Connor 234). Captions of medical images are not used to identify the individual who has been photographed but to identify the disease in a person. The caption of the medical image, *Urtica of 1886* (Fig. 67), is simply the disease itself – *Urtica*. *Urticaria*, or dermatographism is the clinical name of the “Skin writing”, which occurs when the skin is pressed in states of hypersensitivity (Burns 1998). The pressure causes a temporary swelling on the skin. This image depicts this unusual disease in a patient. At first glance, it is quite an artistic portrayal of a human arm; soft lighting, enigmatic written words on the arm, and hand-tinted pink colors make it look like a fine art photograph. Under closer observation, this arm, isolated by the medical framing, is hanging helplessly there to be observed and endowed with a medical meaning. The arm belongs to a living person, but to whom this hand belongs is not important in this photograph. Just like the brownish wall and the soft bedding fabric, the arm is reduced to the backdrop for the real subject – a disease
called *Urtica*. The most intriguing thing about this image is that the caption is not only printed outside the photographic frame but also appears on the patient’s arm. In order to document the unusual pathological phenomenon, the patient had the name of the disease *Urtica* written down his arm. The effort ensures that both the name and the look of the disease are presented and become self-explanatory through the photographic process. The writing on the arm is like the engraving on a tombstone, permanent and unforgettable.

The medical meaning of the photographed human body, indeed, is socially constructed and the application of the pathological definition of normal and abnormal bodies has to be within specific institutional practices. As John Tagg argued, “The photograph is not a magical ‘emanation’ but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes” (3). The power structure of medical photography is based on a medical subject and the authority of the medical institution within which the medical profession has openly been permitted to display the patients’ bodies as visual signs of illness (Dermer 245). It is very common for the facial expression of the medical object to be emotionless with a vacant stare. In some cases, their faces are covered with a piece of fabric to secure privacy. It is intriguing that the protection of a person’s privacy and the denial of a person’s subjectivity coexist in a medical photograph, forming a peculiar kind of representation of the human body.

The image, *Young Woman with Elephantiasis as a Result of Scarlet Fever of 1878* (Fig. 68), shows a woman who contracted a rare complication of scarlet fever at the age of eight, resulting in the grotesque appearance of her legs (Burns 1998). Her rigid frontal nudity displays her deformed legs and her face is covered to hide her identity. If there is Roland Barthes’s so-called “punctum”, certain details in a photograph that unexpectedly prick the emotions of the spectators, it is the woman’s
raised arms (26). This gesture indicated her strong self-consciousness about her deformed naked body in front of the camera’s gaze. Is she ashamed of her body? The very punctum reminds viewers of the fact that she is a suffering living being, not a dead specimen. This poignant truth is hidden underneath the phantasmal body.

Enigma of the Archive

The police’s application of photography is apparently underpinned by the assumption, that a photograph can be considered as a phenomenological guarantee, which police can treat as evidence, or faithful record. The police have used the instant representational power of photography in the service of identification, crime detection, and the provision of legal evidence in court proceedings. The photographs of crime victims, taken by the New York Police Department between 1914 and 1918, were displayed in Luc Sante’s disturbing book, Evidence, published in 1992. Sante discovered these almost-forgotten images from the police archives unexpectedly. To the contemporary eye, these remote pieces of evidence are like a series of undecoded enigmas. Sante explained that the reason why he presents these photographs is because of “their terrible eloquence and their nagging silence…their power is too strong to ignore; they demand confrontation as death demands it.” (xii)

Rather than struggling with emotional responses like Sante does, these police photographers were at the crime scene, carrying out a routine procedure. What they were concerned with was the “legal quality” of the photograph, its quality of objectivity and accuracy. “Photographs made for the purpose of crime detection or

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3 Roland Barthes uses the terms studium and punctum as a way to distinguish public knowledge and private experience in a photograph. The studium presents general interest in a photograph that we can learn to discern culturally, which is considered as “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment” (26). The second element, which will disturb the studium is punctum. A photograph’s punctum is some detail, which unexpectedly pricks the emotions of the spectator that cannot be recognized through intellectual analysis. The punctum “rises from the scene, shoots out like an arrow”, and it is like a “sting, speck, cut, little hole” which punctuates the studium (26-27).
for production in any court proceedings should not be retouched, treated or marked in any way. Exaggerated lighting effects must not be used, and deep shadows or burnt-out highlights could reduce the value, as evidence, of an otherwise good record picture” (qtd. in Tagg 96). A former Detective Chief Inspector of Birminham City Police wrote this in a manual of police photography (96). Unlikely as it seems, these so-called “standard” and “neutral” police photographs depict this tragic world from a particular point of view with specific instruments. The spatial ambiguity of a crime scene, the recession of a room, the contrast lighting effect and the dark border of the photograph are the results of the equipment available at that time.

The tendency to accept the camera lens optics as a surrogate for our own eyes makes the camera function like a transparent window, allowing the viewers to view the world without real contact or interaction. Even so, the photographs of the corpse, documenting what was once a living being, but now reduced to an inanimate object because of dark violence, still provokes undeniable fears in the viewer. These photographs of the dead elicit the viewers’ recognition of their own destiny; they are visual evidence of a human’s death and the inevitable decomposition of the body. Homicide photographs are full of regret, loss and wounds, in the same way as the medical photographs discussed above. Unlike the body in medical photography, however, which may be cured, the human body in this mysterious detective folder is significant because it represents a drama, violent death.

Seventeen crime victims were photographed from overhead, with the most inclusive wide-angle lens available used in the camera, which was set upon a tripod. Viewers are in the position of looking at miserable victims in unsettling detail from a strange perspective. The bright artificial light, created by the use of magnesium powder, froze the last interpretation of the human bodies. Some of the bodies, bathed in the luminous light and surrounded by the peripheral darkness, seem to be floating away from the malicious world (Fig. 69). Melancholy is inscribed in every aspect of these images because the truth is that these bodies are no longer capable of being
transferred to a better place. Some of the bodies seem to be stuck to the ground, undifferentiated from their environment (Fig. 70). They are reduced to inanimate objects like pots, garbage, baskets and clothing which surround them. The tripod legs, the feet of the investigators and the vertical lines of the furniture or building distantly converge toward the central realm of silence, forming an almost ritualistic burial ground for the dead. These collective photographs represent a peculiar kind of visual cemetery. “All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability”, said Susan Sontag (15). Here, the significance of the photographs of the dead is far beyond memento mori (remember thy death); these photographs are the prosaic reaffirmation of the relentless ending of life.

About two-thirds of the photographs in this collection have no captions due to careless storage and most of the pictures have been obliterated by general decay. The surviving captions, such as “Homicide body of John Rogers 88 W. 134th St. Christensen 10/21/15 883”, is a detailed one compared with “Homicide 2/14/18”. It is clear that a regular police file caption includes the following information: who the victim was, where this event happened, when it happened and a file number. Quite different from the anonymous nature of the caption of medical photographs, it is important that police photographs can provide detailed data for each case. The crime victims are always recognizable and have “names” and “addresses”, while in the medical photography the name of the disease is always a person’s surrogate identity. However, this final deliberate identification of victims is somewhat ironic, considering their non-existence in the world.

One image of a crime scene containing no body showed a hallway with blood on the floor (Fig 71). The rectangular milky stains in the middle of the photograph are merely the effect of acidity or moisture on the glass negative, which seem to form the center of an enigma and which perplex the viewers, visually and psychologically. Luc Sante tried to examine every detail in these pictures like a professional detective.
or coroner. He did almost reconstruct some events with the aid of news accounts. Besides that, the true happening in most of the images remains as a mystery and unsolved puzzle. It is this surreal and enigmatic quality of these images which raises profound questions about good and evil, and life and death. Evidence shows “a world described with a strange though pointed uncertainty of tone, unutterably material in detail yet spectral in effect – a world that is, in the end, apparently evil beyond measure” (Kozloff 79).

Commemoration of Loved Ones

Postmortem photography of loved ones was first made soon after the invention of the medium and was a common practice in America until the early twentieth century. It seems that postmortem photographs are still taken, but mainly by family members rather than by studios. These family memorial photographs were a normal part of a family’s picture collection and were often displayed in wall frames, kept in albums, worn as lockets, or carried as pocket mirrors. Postmortem photographs allowed the family not only the memorialization of an individual but also the preservation of the images of those who died prematurely, especially when infant mortality was very high. Sometimes, the family shared their feelings of grief with relatives and friends by sending these pictures with a letter stating specific details regarding the cause of death and significant characteristics about this special person. A great number of postmortem photographs remained largely unseen and the custom was gradually abandoned because of the change in the concept of death as a result of medical advances and social change.4

The photographic way of preserving the likeness of the loved family member who has died seemed to help people to mitigate the pain of their loss, which was essential to their mourning process. The problematic concept of photography as a direct and

natural transcription of reality was fully exploited in the postmortem genre. The bereaved families have a weird kind of tacit sense about photography - it is a magical way by which the appearance of the lost loved ones can be fixed before they are really "gone". Although photographs are more or less culturally bounded artifacts, to the family the evidential force of a photograph is not necessarily a result of complex social or historical outcomes, but rests mainly on an existential fact. Barthes asserts that photography’s referent is a necessary presence at a past moment in front of the lens, the superimposition of reality and of the past, which distinguishes it from other systems of representation (76). The postmortem photography had a precedent, the memorial oil painting, which is mainly used to commemorate the death mainly of the rich or famous; its referent does not necessary have a pre-existing presence. The “this-has-been”, the noeme of photography, guarantees that the referent of photography has really existed (77). The uniqueness of photograph’s referent makes people feel that they can have surrogate possession of their cherished love ones by having postmortem photographs. It is the affection of the bereaved family that gives the evidential force of photographs its power and significance.

The very early daguerreotypes showed only the likenesses of the deceased and their simple surroundings. The photographer focused on the portrayal of the upper half of the body and a close-up of the head in profile. Their mothers often held the dead children as standard postmortem poses of the time (Burns, 1990). Fig 72 of 1842 is an unusual image, portraying a father holding his dead daughter. Although the mother is not shown in this picture, her hand reaches out to support her daughter’s head. The parent’s protective hands formed the center of emotions in this photograph. They were trying to give their daughter their last affectionate support.

There had been certain stylistic development of postmortem genre since 1840s. “The last sleep” was a dominant convention in the nineteenth-century photographs due to the general sentiment toward death. “The last sleep“ was designed to imply that the
deceased was not dead, that is a denial of death (Ruby 63). “In the ideology of the late nineteenth century, death did not really occur. People did not die. They went to sleep. They rested from their labor” (Kenneth Ames qtd. in Ruby 63). Many of these photographs even treated the dead subjects as living beings and attempted to create peaceful illusions of people “asleep”. The well-dressed bodies rested on domestic furniture, draped with a blanket or a bedspread. Flowers, books, toys, or religious objects, such as a cross, were sometimes placed in their hands, as if they were still alive. The old man in Fig. 73 (1868) was holding a newspaper and appeared to have just fallen asleep (Burns 1990). Since the mid-1880s, the elaborate beautification of death often showed the deceased in a casket surrounded by flowers, wreaths and other mementos. Even in the casket photographs, the dead love ones is represented as “asleep”, not dead.

The deceased family member was often surrounded by loving care while dying and the hands and arms of the dead in the postmortem photographs are placed close to the top of the body, or with crossed hands, a rather peaceful gesture, whereas crime victims who died alone from unexpected violence are always shown with their arms flung out after an attack. Unlike the medical photography and crime scene shots in which human bodies are mostly reduced to objects, undifferentiated from the surroundings, the subjectivity of the deceased’s bodies in the postmortem photography are reaffirmed by love.

If the photographs of corpses elicit fears, “it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living images of a dead thing” (Barthes 79). In the case of the corpse in the crime scene photographs, the concept that a photograph has an equivalent pre-photographic existence does provoke horror. However, the corpse of a loved one in a photograph soothes the bereaved family. A postmortem picture (Fig. 74) presents a pair of sisters, nicely dressed and with their hair combed. The overhead shooting angle resembles the above discussed overhead crime scene shots. The difference between the two photographs is that the bodies of these two
sisters seemed to be capable of transgressing the boundaries of life and death, while the bodies of the crime victim lie helplessly there in a void.

The discussion of death-related photography recalls the self-representational photographs by Francesca Woodman whose work is discussed in Chapter Two (Fig. 45-49). Even though they are distinctively different photographic genres (the former is documentary and the later is artistic expression), both kinds of imagery have an implicit association with the themes of human decay and death. Medical, forensic and postmortem photograph reaffirm the imminent decay and death of human beings, whereas Francesca Woodman’s self-portrait photograph foretell her own death. There are rich medical metaphors in relation to the photography in Camera Lucida by Roland Barthes in 1981 – death, embalming, surgery, preservation, wound, and madness. This important implication will be discussed in details in Chapter Four.

**Summary**

Critically interpreting these images, which were produced in past centuries, is not so much a question of voyeuristic pleasure but about the attempt to achieve some insight into human mentality and to gain a cohesive sense of being human. The urge to be so close to the margin of decay and death through the act of looking at these images implies a search for an identity of the solitude of self: a self who has strength to confront the unfathomable world alone as well having the capacity to be an integral part of the world. Searching for a personal identity prevails over the Surrealist project, or in an extending sense it prevails over human existence. One intriguing finding of this study is that the producers of both the anatomical illustration and death-related photograph strive to portray the human body in an utmost realistic style; yet these imagery evoke an unreal ambience; they are like “dream images”.

The analysis of how women artists influenced by Surrealism reclaim their
subjectivity through the image of decay, solitude and metamorphosis discussed in Chapter Two, and the study of anatomical illustration and the human body as object/subject in death-related photography in Chapter Three have helped me to develop a deep insight into representation of “the object as subject”, and a new understanding of transformation of life/death for my studio works. This influence can be particularly seen in my artwork: *The Remnant from the Darkness* (Fig. 78-82), *Signs* (Fig. 93-100), *The Untold* (Fig. 101-105), and *White Room* (Fig. 106-114).

The belief that humans need to achieve a cohesive sense of being human and to gain an identity of solitude of self are the premises that underpin my theoretical and artistic search. In the next chapter, I will contextualize my research concerns with the final Doctor of Creative Arts Exhibition *The Solitary Notations* exhibited at the Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery at University of Wollongong in 2003.5

5 During the research, I found that the notion of the solitude of self by American Feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton in a farewell speech *The Solitude of Self* in 1892 is inspiring. For more details, please refer to Geoffrey G. Ward. *Not for Ourselves Alone – The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.189-197.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Solitary Notations

The final Doctor of Creative Arts exhibition, *The Solitary Notations*, is a result of a deeply felt desire to reflect an artistic search which was derived from an obsessive need to discover harmony, order, and meaning and an understanding of ubiquitous threads connecting human beings. Chapter Two demonstrated how women artists, influenced by Surrealism, made their particular female experience visible through their solitary artistic search within a male-dominated culture. Their obsessive impulse to discover harmony, order, meaning, and ultimately to gain an identity of solitude of self was fully manifested in their art. The image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis created by these women artists is in fact the image of regeneration and reaffirmation of women’s artists’ lives that provides insightful inspiration.

The study of interdisciplinary historical aspects of Surrealism, women’s art, anatomical illustration, and the death-related photography in this thesis comes to the conclusion that these subjects generally reflect three types of existential anxiety. Paul Tillich proposed three categories in his influential book *The Courage to Be* - anxiety of emptiness and loss of meaning, the anxiety of fate and death, and the anxiety of guilt and condemnation (41-54).¹ These threads of existential issues inevitably haunt human beings through their lives and connect human beings during their solitary journey in the unfathomable world.

As an artist, these essential existential issues are meant to be approached and

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¹ Paul Tillich divided existential anxiety into three types according to the direction in which the nonbeing threatens beings. Nonbeing which threatens one’s ontic self-affirmation is defined as the anxiety of fate and death. The cause of anxiety of emptiness and loss of meaning is when the nonbeing threatens one’s spiritual self-affirmation. When nonbeing threatens one’s moral self-affirmation, the anxiety of guilt and condemnation appears. These three types of existential anxiety are not mutually exclusive. They cannot be eliminated as they belong to existence itself (39-54).
explored with frankness. The final Doctor of Creative Arts Exhibition *The Solitary Notations*, therefore, is an artistic expression of how self-affirmation can possibly be achieved, and how an identity of the solitude of self can be gained by speculating on these threads connecting human beings. A feeling of reverence first appeared during my childhood, when I was old enough to join in the ritualistic worship of ancestors at the family altar. The Chinese death ritual of veneration for the dead expanded my sense of the importance of having a harmonious relationship with my surroundings, including unseen phenomena. During my research, a different level of awareness of the act of reverence emerges through pondering over the image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis and having a close relationship with nature. The act of reverence for everything that surrounds us indicates a new comprehension of the vulnerabilities of living beings and is one of the possible ways to solve the puzzle composed of these tangled threads. All these elements contribute to the new visual language developed in my studio work.

Chapter Four will contextualize my research concerns with the final Doctor of Creative Arts Exhibition *The Solitary Notations*. In the following discussion, an allusive way of describing the studio work is preferable in most instances. Firstly, the fundamental thoughts and understanding of the contexts of this lengthy research that directly reflect my creative process will be highlighted as a foundation for the discussion of both form and content in my studio works. Four areas will be emphasized: notes on the unconscious, feminine subjectivity, medical metaphor within photography, and the found object and still life. The detailed descriptions of the studio work, which will be presented next, is divided into nine groups in terms of the central theme of each series of work: *The Remnant from the Darkness*, *Tools of the Past*, *The Old Album*, *Signs*, *The Untold*, *White Room*, *Dwelling*, *Double*, *Wandering Box*, *A Strange Mixture*, and *Notes*. Finally, a summary will be given.
Thoughts

Notes on the Unconscious

…Photography is an imprint or transfer off the real; it is a photochemically processed trace causally connected to the thing in the world to which it refers in a manner parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints or the rings of water that cold glasses leave on tables. The photograph is thus generically distinct from painting or sculpture or drawing. On the family tree of images it is closer to palm prints, death masks, cast shadows, the Shroud of Turin, or the tracks of gulls on beaches.

(Rosalind Krauss 1985, 31)

The Surrealists’ theoretical background of exploring the unconscious led to a new aesthetic experience and a new kind of human liberation. At the beginning of the Surrealist revolution, André Breton was committed to automatic writing as a result of his dislike of visual images. The Surrealists’ interest in photography may seem at odds, given Breton’s thoughts on his distrust of visual images. However, this contradiction of the Surrealist aesthetics was resolved exactly by the close connection to reality of photographic images. In *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* of (1945), André Bazin pointed out that the Surrealists might understand that there is an essential relation between the object photographed and the image, but for the Surrealists “the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tends to disappear…Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image” (15). Bazin’s emphasis on photography’s connection to the natural world is actually used to explain the idea that photography is an hallucination. He explained the reason why the Surrealists used photography for their creative medium is “because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact” (16).
“The experience of reality as representation”, according to Rosalind Krauss, in fact constitutes the central aesthetic concepts of surrealism – the “Marvelous” and “Convulsive Beauty” (1985, 24). Through the various photographic manipulations employed by the Surrealists – spacing, doubling, cropping and framing – the photographic works by the Surrealists actually produced “the paradox of reality constituted as sign – or presence transformed into absence, into representation, into spacing, into writing” (Krauss 1985, 28, 40). The connection to the real of a photographic image provided vital materials for the Surrealists’ imaginations; yet they did not view the photographic image as simply a substitute of the natural world. Their photographic production went beyond reality, pointing to the intractable human psyche.

I have absorbed substantial aspects of the Surrealism; yet I clearly do not completely embrace the male Surrealists’ photographic practice, especially the aspect of the dehumanizing female body by Jacques-André Boiffard, Man Ray, and Hans Bellmer as discussed in Chapter One (page 19-23) (Fig. 3, 4, 5, 8). The interests and concept of my creative project leans toward that of the women artists with a surrealist influence as discussed in Chapter Two (page 53-59). For example, Claude Cahun’s ongoing inquiry into her identity through photographic self-representation challenges the traditional notion of an autonomous subjectivity in a western patriarchal society (Fig. 40-44). Woodman’s use of photograph for her multiple self-portrait elicits thoughts in the viewer on transformation of life/death within photography (Fig. 45-49). In the self-representation of Cahun and Woodman, there is no room for the male gaze.

Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin had made analogy and metaphor as qualities related to photography. Their thoughts reflected that the production and interpretation of the photograph involved complex psychological processes: memory, identity, perception, and desire. Sigmund Freud made a comparison between the
unconscious stage of the human psyche and photographic negatives “Let us assume that every mental process...exists to begin with in an unconscious stage or phase and that it is only from there that the process passes over into the conscious phase, just as a photographic picture begins as a negative and only becomes a picture after being formed into a positive. Not every negative, however, necessarily becomes a positive; nor is it necessary that every unconscious mental process should turn into a conscious one” Freud asserted in General Theory of the Neurosis (1917) (qtd. in Marsh, unpaged).

In 1931, Walter Benjamin first discussed the term “optical unconscious” in his Small History of Photography in which he drew the connection between photography and Freudian psychoanalysis. He observed that photography with its technical capabilities of capturing slow motion and enlargement, reveals the small details inhabited in the visual world, which is “meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams” (Benjamin 243). This idea led him to conclude that seeing with a camera is a way to learn about what he calls the optical unconscious. In the same way Freud uncovered the repressed instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis and interpretation of dreams (243). Benjamin’s thinking in regard to photography was deliberated within a commodity culture. He thought that the technical advance and reproductive characteristic of photography diminished the aura and uniqueness of its production; photography increasingly contributes to the formation of the human psyche.

Many possibilities can happen while a latent image is waiting to become a positive picture, the “optical-unconscious” waiting to be observed, a cast of shadow disappearing to exchange the light, or the tracks of gulls on beaches gradually immersed by tides. This explains my fascination for photography as an expressive medium. My creative interests with photography partially rests on how fragile is the idea that a photograph can sustain an immutable meaning of reality and how this fragility becomes the strength of photography in contemporary art discourse. My
approach to photography in this context of thesis as a kind of inherent self-representation in a metaphorical sense finds resonance with the work of Surrealist women artists.

**Feminine Subjectivity**

Women’s specificities, their corporeality and subjectivities, are not inherently resistant to representation or depiction. They may be unrepresentable in a culture in which the masculine can represent others only as versions of itself, where the masculine relies on the subordination of the feminine. But this is not logically or biologically fixed. It can be contested and changed. It can be redefined, reconceived, reinscribed in ways entirely different from those that mark it today.

(Elizabeth Grosz qtd. in Betterton 17)

The Surrealists’ reiteration of the relation between sexuality, creativity and the unconscious owed a debt to Freudian theory. The exclusively masculine view of woman’s role as inspiration in the creation of art prevailed in male Surrealists’ thinking as discussed in Chapter One (page 16-27). It seems that femininity was relegated into an element or an object to satisfy men’s needs and complement male artists’ development. It is significant that women artists with Surrealist influence produced a great quantity of self-representational and self-referential works under the mass of imagery of the eroticized and objectified female body created by the male Surrealists and by artists throughout art history. Their works reflect their desire to cross the boundaries of patriarchal representational system in order to regain their social and sexual identity. By the examination in depth of women artists’ work in Chapter Two, my awareness of feminine subjectivity is significantly increased and this kind awareness is certainly carried into my studio work.
According to Freudian theory, women are closer to the unconscious than men because they have not completely entered the symbolic order. The Oedipus complex and organization of subjectivity of Freudian theory stated that the female is passive, thus she is always represented in relation to her dependence on the male. The universal model of human subjectivity that Freud constitutes is based on a phallocentric bias. Phallocentrism is a term used to refer to “the ways in which patriarchal systems of representation always submit women to models and images defined by and for men” (Grosz 1989 xx). The Freudian theory of sexual difference mainly relied on the visibility of difference; sight is a major way of determining what is true and what is false (Moi 132). The male sex organ is external and the female’s is hidden, thus the inherent invisibility of female body is not in accord with the male norm (132). The female body is perceived as lacking, dependent, oriented towards the phallus (132). Feminist writers, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Catherine Clement and Luce Irigaray, have largely challenged this Freudian model of subjectivity. Their works have been influential in the development of aesthetics for the feminist artists since 1980s.

While employing psychoanalytic theory as a framework, the French feminist Luce Irigaray attempts to deconstruct the patriarchal phallogocentric ideology because it marks a women’s body as lacking and denies her access to her own pleasure.\(^2\) Her purpose is not to establish a theory of woman, but to devise a series of strategies by which phallogocentrism can be constantly put in question and a possible alternative for women can be demonstrated (Grosz 113). In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she proposes an image as a new emblem to positively represent female sexuality that subverts the dominant male conceptions of women’s essence by the metaphor of the “two lips” as opposed to the monolithically unified phallus. “So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed, she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further,

\(^2\) For my general understanding of the writings by Luce Irigaray, I am indebted greatly to the book by Elizabeth Grosz (1989) and Toril Moi (1985).
it is plural…” remarked Irigaray (qtd. in Grosz 116).

Irigaray’s image for woman emphasizes the fluidity, excessiveness, multiplicity, and ambiguity, of female sexuality; “it evokes a remainder or residue of jouissance left unrepresented in a phallic libidinal economy” (Grosz 115). Though Luce Irigaray is often criticized as an essentialist by critics, partially mistaking her use of language by seemingly advocating a return to the biological body as the bedrock for defining female sexuality. What is important is that her writings make it possible to propose an alternative representation for repressed female imagery that accords to women’s own needs. The sense of multiplicity in identity and plurality of individual position within a social/cultural context has been an important focus for many contemporary women artists, as it has been for my work as symbolically expressed in *Tools of the Past* (Fig. 83-87), *White Room* (Fig. 106-114), and *Dwelling* (Fig 115-120).

A secret women’s writing from Southern China, Nushu, also provided me with inspiration. In contrast to the scholarly writing of sexual difference by western feminists, Nushu was used by Chinese peasant women in Jiangyong County, in Hunan, China and was an exclusive writing system for repressed Chinese women in a male-dominated society (Fig. 75). Despite the many speculations as to the origin and development of the Nushu script, it had probably been adopted since the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 AD) until the 1980s (Gong 21-22). Nushu has been rediscovered and systematically researched by Chinese scholars since the 1980s. Nushu was predominately a phonetic syllabary. Generally speaking, each graph of Nushu could represent various homophones so that a singular graph alone did not have any meaning until the reader of Nushu script chanted each graph continually. In another word, they read each graph for sound rather than for meaning, thus the meaning of Nushu script only became understandable through vocalization (Gong 44-45).

It has been commonly known that the functions of Nushu were as a record of women’s ritual and festival performances, correspondence between sworn sisters,
documents of personal grievance, writings of historical event, and translation of folklore from Chinese script (Gong 27-33). A woman actually obtained status in the sworn sister’s group for her talent in Nushu, and through the practice of it, women shared their feelings in common hardship, and gained emotional support from each other. It would be inappropriate to consider Nushu as a “discourse of resistance…against gender oppression” from a western feminist view (Cathy Silber qtd. in McLaren 1). Nevertheless, the existence of Nushu is inspiring for reiterating what Luce Irigaray proposed eloquently: “women’s autonomy implies women’s right to speak, and listen, as women” (qtd. in Grosz 127). One of my color photographs Signs #4 (Fig. 96) is dedicated to these Chinese women, which will be discussed in detail later.

Medical Metaphor within Photography

Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. Life/Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print.

(Roland Barthes 92)

At the moment the shutter clicked, the light writing forms a clash of past and presence, appearance and disappearance inside the Camera Obscura. This strange clash recalls the viewer’s memories and desires. Roland Barthes’ Camera Lucida (1981) also bears psychoanalytic insight. His thoughts on the ontology of photography reflected his desire to search for the essence of his mother’s identity through her photographs. The Winter Garden Photograph depicts both what he felt was the essential person and also commemorates his mourning at her death. It also manifests how the concept of punctum works in a photograph. Barthes wrote that the
**Punctum** is a “sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s **punctum** is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). It symbolically implies that a meaningful photograph hurts the spectator. I have used this view to analyze one medical photograph *Young Woman with Elephantiasis* (Fig. 68) in Chapter Three (page 78). The **punctum** of the photograph, the raised arms of the woman showing her strong self-consciousness of her deformed body before the indifferent medical framing, does hurt and form a psychological wound in me.

Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* was rich in medical metaphors in relation to photography – surgery, preservation, wound, madness, and death (O’Conner 239). In the early history of photography, this analogy seems rather vivid. The low light-sensitive photographic plates require both restraining clamps to secure stillness of the subject during the long exposure and bright sunlight to lighten the subject. The photographic process which turns the subject into an object indeed “made one suffer as much as a surgical operation” (Barthes 13). To be photographed is like experiencing a series of medical procedures. The subject of the photograph is “fastened down”, “anesthetized”, and “embalmed” according to the photographer’s instruction (14, 57). Photography is the instant capture of the moment which never comes again. For Barthes, his photographic portrait is the record of both his experience of “a micro-version of death” and rehearsal of his death: the intention seeking in the photograph of himself is Death: “Death is the *eidos* of the Photograph” (15). That is why he calls the thing or person photographed *Spectrum*. The word *Spectrum* “adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (9). The *Spectrum*’s “it has indeed been” and “it is not there” make a photograph “a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination…a mad image, chafed by reality” (115).

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3 The terms **studium** and **punctum** used by Roland Barthes are explained in the footnote on page 79.
During my lengthy research, I realized that there has been a strong thread between why I am interested in medical images, death-related photographs, and my practice in photography. As a photographer, I practice medical procedure and death ritual all the time. The sound of the shutter clicked soothes my anxiety as if the more shutter is clicked, the more effective would be the treatment. This feeling is particularly intense when I act as both *Spectrum* and *Operator*, taking self-portraiture in solitude. Unlike Barthes’s questioning about his being object/subject in front of camera and confusions of the photographic double (14), being both *Spectrum* and *Operator* at the same time allow me to have power over my own multiple images. This thought is reaffirmed particularly through the process of making a series of black and white photographs *White Room* (Fig. 106-114).

Taking pictures originates in the human desire to preserve “vivid life” as photography immortalizes a certain moment for memory, yet paradoxically at the same time it foretells the imminent demise of the *Spectrum* (Barthes 92, 96). Hence, the process of taking self-representational photographs is like a process in which the photographer poses as an object to practice his or her own death a number of times. There is always a tenacious desire beneath my consciousness while photographing either still life or myself. This desire is to transform the *corps mort* back in to the *corps vivant*. This is also the ultimate purpose of the “Anatomical Theatre of the Body” as mentioned in Chapter Three (page 64). Beyond the concept of “photographs are *memento mori*”, I am also searching for “vivid life” through the photographic practice. The different levels of transformation of life/death within photography fascinate me tremendously. The ineffable interests in both death and life seem naturally to coexist in the photographic practice. Through this practice, I

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4 Barthes’s sense of photography and death implied that photographic self-portrait might be considered as rehearsals for the photographer’s own death. Peggy Phelan has used this view to analyze Francesca Woodman’s photography. For more information, please refer this article: “Francesca Woodman’s photography: death and the image one more time” *Signs*, 27.14 Summer (2002): 979-1005.
acquire knowledge of my own subjectivity. The above-mentioned insight about photography and death will be further examined in the later discussion of three series of studio work: The Old Album, The Untold, and White Room. (Fig. 88-92, 101-105, 106-114).

The Found Object and Still Life

…the materials of assemblage have a past or even a future apart from the culturally defined sphere of art. Previously extrinsic to art, these fragments become intrinsic to the particular work of assemblage. The assemblage “holds” the multiple, shifting associations of the original context, while at the same time recontextualizing it in a work of art. This art context allows for both a narrative and a formal repositioning of the found fragment or object.

(Ann Ayres 49)

In western art, a complex history of assemblage included “cubist formal investigations and reality/illusion queries, dada’s anti- and non-art gestures, surrealist objects trouvés and irrational juxtapositions, and constructivist-based sculpture that welded rather than carved or modeled” (Ayres 50). The Surrealist approach of assembling objects distinguished it from others because it sought psychological insight to gain from the objects. By removing objects from their normal contexts and juxtaposing incongruous elements, they intended to dissociate reality and explored the realm of the unconscious. They frequently visited the flea markets, looking for objects to discover the intrinsic worth of the found object.

Among the varieties of creative production of assemblage, Joseph Cornell’s shadow box of disparate objects and elements, transformed the objects into a kind of theatrical stage, particularly attracted my attention in the 1990s (Fig. 76). Joseph Cornell, an American artist, (1903-1972), never formally joined the Surrealist
movement. He had been drawn to and fascinated by the Surrealists’ poetic searching during the 1930s and 1940s; yet he did not agree with the idea that the concept of his work was totally founded on Surrealist psychological theories (Ades 1980, 19) As Dawn Ades commented, “In Cornell’s later constructions…What he comes to seek is not incongruity so much as a mysterious congruity, a thread of affinities, however intangible, rather than an illuminating spark struck from disparateness” (16). Cornell’s searching for “mysterious congruity” and “a thread of affinities” is parallel to my own practice. This correlation will be demonstrated in the discussion of my assemblage works Dwelling (Fig. 115-120). Treating the ordinary and ephemeral objects as if they have inherent dignity and fascinating character waiting to be revealed is an attempt to make the collective objects seem capable retaining significant gestures and emotional expressions for an enigmatic drama. For me, both the object and photograph possess a perpetual state of fluctuation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and the imagined and the real.

The collection of found objects is particularly important for constructing the imaginative tableau for my still life photographs. The mode of still life photography that I have practiced since 1992 was a conscious choice. The lyric comment on still life by Jules David Prown explains the depth of still life imagery that I attempt to pursue:

The appeal and power of still life, like chamber music, lie not only in its comprehensible scale, but in the fact that extraneous details are stripped away and what is left speaks to the responsive eye, simply and directly, of matters larger and small. Of what do still lifes speak? Of relationship – connections, reflections, support, power, balance; of cause and effect; of things that have happened and will happen; of taste, touch, and smell; of man and nature; of markets and appetites and genetics and diet; of time, mortality, and regeneration. If we are to understand what a still life signifies, we must attend closely (qtd. in Lowenthal 3).
At the beginning of 2002, I came across a still life painting by Juan Sánchez Cotán (Spain, 1561-1627), *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* of 1602 (Fig. 77). The eloquent subjectivity of these objects comes from the absolute “stillness”. Muteness and distance are ways to shun worldly dissension. There is a practical purpose in hanging up vegetables and fruits because this preserves them from decay. Despite this practical function, in this painting, the cabbage and quince, hanging on strings against a dark background, reclaim their own autonomy within a territory beyond the frame. Their motionlessness implies the removal of any human presence. Even the melon and cucumber stay in the position that they have chosen for themselves as if they had existed as they are forever. Cotán’s still life refused to comply with worldly scale of value “by plunging attention downwards, forcing the eye to discover in the trivial base of life intensities and subtleties which are normally ascribed to things of great worth” (Bryson 64). The quince, cabbage, melon and cucumber in Cotán’s painting are endowed with great worth within a new mode of seeing. Their eloquent subjectivity seems to reject “an idea of consumption”, and “their role as nourishment” (66).

I was drawn to contemplate and examine closely Cotán’s still life during a time of deep investigation into death-related photography. I was intrigued not for its perfect geometrical order, but for its metaphysical ability to bring relief to my overburdened senses at a time when I was deeply involved in looking at these death-related photographs. Whereas human issues have high priority in death-related photographs, the ordinary objects in the art of still life eloquently occupy the primal position of attention. I have an inkling of how to heal my psychological wound resulting from confronting these poignant photographs, an act of total acceptance.

Later, I recognized that the majority of my early still life photographs have objects which seemed to be abandoned in an esoteric and menacing atmosphere without exit. By contrast my latest still life photographs have more allusions to the issues of “the
object as subject”. On the basic level, this can be explained through the use of different lighting strategies in the studio. High contrast and darkness predominates in my early still life photographs, which reveals my strong impositions upon the object, while balanced light and shadow is used to illuminate the object in later works to create a visually comfortable space in which these objects are possibly becoming subjects. The study of the human body as object/subject in death-related photography in Chapter Three, a distinctively different genre from my approach to photography, brings me back to my core concern of art practice with insights that I lacked previously.

**Illuminations**

In the above section, I have stated the fundamental thoughts that directly reflect my creative process. The integration of creative thoughts, working methods, and medium is a complicated process; it is intuitive and intellectual, incidental and controlled. Although there are certain methods and views that I have developed for my art practice over years, the making of each new work gives me the opportunity to be renewed and innovative.

The cultural disjunction that I experience while living in a foreign country makes me strongly aware of the significance of a multicultural perspective. Even though this issue is only stated in a subtle manner in the discussion of this thesis, it is important to point out here that my Chinese cultural heritage will always inevitably affect how I synthesize research material and my artwork. The following section will document my creative process and central theme of each series of work.

**The Remnant from the Darkness**

One group of black and white photographs titled *The Remnant from the Darkness #1, 2, 3, 4 and 5* (Fig. 78-82) is not included in my final exhibition; yet it is very
important for being transitional in my creative process. On a sunny winter day in 2002, I found chicken heads and skin in a bucket at a chicken shop in Taipei, Taiwan, my hometown. They would be discarded later. Chicken, one of the common offering objects during the ritual in Chinese culture, always carries a sacred aura in my memory. The intensive “interaction” with these originally animate body parts during the photographic process lasted for a month. Through decorating, stitching, and positioning them, the feeling for these objects changed from fear to respect. I felt deeply privileged to be so close to these objects.

There is a bizarre mixture of cruelty, sacredness and dignity overflowing within these photographs. At the end, the most astonishing thing was the noble look of the chicken head. I realize what I really like to do with these chicken heads is to let “the object be the subject” as mentioned above. I, as an operator behind the camera, though controlling the picture frame, the presence of “I” actually am excluded from the frame of still life. What is left is that the object (subject) directly speaks to the viewers; a true voice seems metaphorically to be coming from the object (subject) itself to elicit the viewer’s contemplation.

One photograph *The Remnant from the Darkness #1* (Fig. 78) depicts a chicken head placed in a dish with soft cotton cloth. The shape of its comb resembles that of soft cloth which symbolically indicates non-differentiation between the subject and the surroundings. The total ease of the chicken head is like the absolute stillness of Cotán’s quince, cabbage, melon and cucumber (Fig. 77), rejecting the idea of consumption. In another photograph, *The Remnant from the Darkness #2* (Fig. 79), the heads of a rooster and a hen are clipped on to a linen string side by side, hanging against dark a background. Their intimacy ironically betokens inevitable restraint and pain. The chicken heads in this series of photographs seem to retain their authority as performers, present a narrative of conflicts between longing for intimate relationship and desire to be one’s self.
Tools of the Past

Uncovering objects, which were originally hidden in dusty shelves and rusty cabinets in the junkyard, and finding objects that are brought by tides from elsewhere on the sandy beach became my routine ritual while making the work. Most of the objects are obliterated by the general decay. To position the object in the studio requires countless observations and touching of the object. Touch is not merely a simple bodily gesture to hold or move the object, but an essential way to “know” the object besides seeing visually. Being able to touch the thing photographed is like a kind of rite, a rite with which I feel that I am connected with others at the intersection of darkness and light. I always sat in dim light or in total darkness with collected objects in silence for hours or for days without taking any photographs. The period of silence is required to gain a new vision that is beyond what I already know.

My particular predilection of the rusty object at this period is resonant with personal meaning. Rust, a signifier of constant state of deterioration, loss and change, becomes a central metaphor for my images of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis. The rusty tool in the series of photographs Tools of the Past #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 is significant for both its original function and its hidden history that was revealed in an abstract form composed of rust, stain, dirt, scratch and inscription. The other visual elements in these photographs, such as a drawing of a female skeleton measured by a wooden ruler (Fig. 83), the Roman numerals “I” inscribed on the tool (Fig. 84), a screaming figure in an interior space immersed in enigmatic nocturnal light (Fig. 85), wrinkled diary pages displaced on the dusty shelf (Fig. 86), a collaged map uncovered from a rusty box (Fig. 87), metaphorically constitute a personal psychic history that is parallel to the history of these long forgotten tools. This series of archeology of self Tools of the Past contain memories in the passing of time that can never have a fixed meaning. Its meaning, just as the repressed but dynamic nature of the unconscious, will be always in the process of interpretation.
**The Old Album**

Life is the companion of death; death is the beginning of life. Who understands their workings? Man’s life is a coming together of breath. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death. And if life and death are companions to each other, then what is there for us to be anxious about?

(Chuang Tze qtd. in Kramer 85)

Fascinated by the phenomenon of the natural cycle, Frida Kahlo, Léonor Fini, and Remedios Varo created works to express the theme in which they strongly asserted the privilege of female wisdom as discussed in Chapter Two. Like these women artists, a similar theme recurs in my studio works. Chuang Tze (399-295 BCE), was a Taoist in ancient China, whose philosophy of non-distinction between life and death providing a harmonious image of natural transformation has grounded my thinking since youth. Because humans can never experience death directly, “non-distinction between life and death” is both a thought to resolve the fear, and a way to be transcendent while confronting existential issues. The five black and white photographs in the series *The Old Album* (Fig. 88-92) are not visual presentations to directly express Chuang Tze’s philosophy; rather, they are showing an effort to understand it through worldly life experiences.

In the work *The Old Album* #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Fig. 88-92), the old album is a symbolic site for positioning the human in the natural world. The opened archaic album page signifies an uncovering narrative of metamorphosis. Feather, bone, fly, fish tail, broken shell, and anatomical images replace the human’s portrait in this old album. If a photograph foretells the death of the referent, the disappearance of the portrait that was originally kept in the old album reiterates the “death” of the referent. This obliterated yellowish album is like an active witness to both human loss and
natural decay. By rendering these objects in black and white and creating seemingly changeable light and shadow, these photographs present a drama of ongoing process of decay in a non-threatening manner. The tenderness indicates a new way of comprehending the vulnerability of living beings. Along with human ephemeral life, nature goes on its own continuous cyclical transformation. The constant “wounds” resulting from the life cycle seem to be possibly healed by the process of decay and renewal itself.

**Signs**

The solitary presence of a naked fish bone standing against a dilapidated wall ponders the absence of its stripped flesh (Fig. 93). The dark shadow of hair swings the viewer’s attention into an unknown space in which a long buried memory is revived (Fig. 94). The scroll of paper is rolled up not to conceal what is printed on it, but to reveal it, showing a diagram of human viscera (Fig. 95). The partially revealed Nushu script (secret Chinese woman’s writing) symbolizes its finally proud presence in history (Fig. 96). A symbolic surgical knife cuts the visible surface, exposing the blood red “I” that emerges from the layers of reddish-brown rust (Fig. 97). The stained fabric in a rusty box is waiting to be stitched by “a thread of affinities” (Fig. 98) A fish head emerges from sand with a message in its mouth to be decoded (Fig. 99). A foot descending a ladder leads to an unknown place (Fig. 100). All of these eight color photographs titled *Signs #1-8* reflect the desire to search for the connection between the visible surface and an invisible realm. Like psychoanalysis, such a realm uncovers the repressed instinctual unconscious or anatomy engages with the intricate structures of human body.

The image of nushu titled *Signs #4* (Fig. 96) will be particularly described in detail. To these oppressed women the page of elegantly written Nushu was very significant in their lives. In Jiangyong, people commonly believed that there is “another world” specifically for the deceased. The woman’s last wish was that her family would help
to burn all of her personally owned Nushu script during her funeral (Gong 33). In the Chinese death ritual, the burning (the fire) is a metaphorical medium to transmit the worldly belongings to the “another world” for the deceased. In this way, the woman still could find comfort from reading these scripts while apart from her dear friends. The last wish and offering by these women still carry the characteristics of caring and sharing within this gender-specific nushu culture. The image of partially burnt Nushu script in the photograph is poised against turning into ashes and the photograph’s “stillness” seems to embalm its existence. The act of burning numerous pages of Nushu required while photographing this image in the studio was a kind of performance of an offering ceremony. The smoke, the smell, and the fragile paper ashes all over the table formed a private altar in which the silent dialogue between the tangible and the intangible was carried on.

The Untold

The orderly composition, somewhat deliberately, adopted for these color photographs The Untold #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Fig. 101-105) is in fact a camouflage of a chaotic psychic state. These images are like final solutions to the struggle of paradoxical longing for both life and death. As mentioned above, there is always a tenacious desire beneath my consciousness while photographing that is to transform the corps mort back in to the corps vivant, as the anatomist does. This kind of desire also appears while making still life photographs. Beneath the calmness of these images, there is a great effort to reconcile the opposites.

In a poem by Sylvia Plath, Tulip, vivid imagery of longing for death was created. It is clear that the subject in the poem is attracted by the threatening aspects of life. She wrote:

…

Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.

The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me
Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins,
And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow
Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,
And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.
The vivid tulips eat my oxygen.

…

(Sylvia Plath qtd. in Hughes 33)

Unlike the imagery created in Plath’s poem, the images of *The Untold* reiterate the active resistance to the horror resulting from the preference of escaping the solitary self forever through self-destruction. As Paul Tillich suggested, “Anxiety turns us toward courage because the other alternative is despair. Courage resists despair by taking anxiety into itself” (66). By imaging and creating such a metaphorical psychic order in visual forms, a kind of unity and transcendence seems to be possibly acquired, although even it is transient.

The process of creating “the object as subject” is somewhat like the process of uncovering the unconscious. After all, the attempt to exclude the self from the picture frame in the making of still life is more or less like “the return of the repressed”. Sometimes these objects may possibly become symbolic fluctuating elements of the unconscious waiting to come to light and proclaim their position as an essential part of the artist’s subjectivity. In one of my imaginings, these forlorn broken shells, lobster’s tails, chicken claws, withered flower, and seed pod eventually will start breathing, and whispering to each other in the middle of night; their voices become louder and louder…

**White Room**

In one dream, bright white walls surrounded a small empty room, where several deformed bodies of living creatures were lying on the floor. The fragments of
the body seemed to take care of each other in a metaphorical manner because there were no doctors and nurses. The atmosphere of the white room was cold, yet oddly intimate, which gave a surreal ambience. Even though the touching interaction among these solitary deformed bodies did not last for long in the dream, it offered a mystical energy for the continuation of my studio work.

(from Hsiu-Li Kuo’s diary 11 August, 2002)

The clinical white room in the dream is like well-protected consciousness, barring all guilt-laden wishes from it. The solitary deformed bodies on the floor represent the bottom level of the unconscious. This dream is perhaps the result of my intense study of medical imagery in 2002. In a sense, it may present a long buried wish to be able to reconcile alien elements within the psyche. The motivation for creating a series of black and while photographs *White Room #1-9* (Fig. 106-114) is ascribed to the mystical energy of this dream.

The constant state of fluctuation between revelation and concealment, self and environment recalls the self-portrait photographs by Francesca Woodman discussed in Chapter Three (page 56-59). In order to be seen as a subject, I travel to what I barely remember or intend to forget, returning back with numerous phantasms. There is an unusual mystical exchange between the silent environment, and the being in my photographs *White Room* (Fig. 106-114). They are about the revelation of being connected, of urgent desire to be connected, and of futile searching for connection. Both the freestanding wall and joined walls symbolize forms of an open book. The human body either blurs the boundaries of pages, or is caught up on the threshold of major change in between pages. In these photographs, the moving

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figure has profound interaction with the static objects, anatomical poster, stained cloth, white board with arrow mark, bed with a white sheet, birdcage with the door opened, etc.

In comparison to the large still life photographs, figurative photographs are relatively small, and presented in small wooden boxes. My perception is certainly influenced by both the aesthetics of still life and the philosophy of Taoism. The aesthetics of still life in which the worldly view of what is valued as a subject for primal attention is reversed, and the philosophy of Chinese Taoism in which no one thing in the whole universe can be said to be superior to another and all social values are relative. Another reason for choosing small wooden boxes to present self-images is that these images are about revealing a private domain so that an intimate space is preferable.

In one photograph titled *White Room #9* (Fig. 114), a blurred figure poses like a bird flying, which corresponds to the cage with gate open. This is a purposefully literal image. The most important visual element in this photograph is neither the figure nor the cage, but is the borderline between two walls that is a symbolic line between conscious and the unconscious. The figure, hanging on the line, seems to have enough strength to break the line and fly off. Beyond the concept of “photographs are *memento mori*”, searching for “vivid life” through the photographic practice is implicit in these images.

**Dwelling**

The work of assemblage *Dwelling #1-6* (Fig. 115-120) is parallel to the previously mentioned assemblage work of Joseph Cornell (Fig. 76). The searching for “mysterious congruity” and “a thread of affinities” is also the essential process for creating my assemblage. While the old album in black and white photographs *The Old Album* (Fig. 88-92) is a trace, a visual proof, of a constructed/dismantled tableau,
the obliterated yellowish album is presented as object in the work of *Dwelling*, which is like an inhabitable site for other lost and found objects: bird’s wing, hair, rusty object, seed pod, wood stick, anatomical image, etc. There are six assemblages that present six spaces, #1 The Bedroom, #2 The Dressing Room, #3 Conservatory, #4 The Loft, #5 The Study, and #6 The Bathroom.

Both the rusted object and the old album are signifiers of a constant state of deterioration, loss and change. A purposefully juxtaposed rusted object, fragile obliterated album, and shining brass screws is not only to show the uneasy contrast between materials - old and new, hard and soft, but also to indicate contradictory psychic elements that compose these metaphorical dwellings. These ruin-like spaces are full of fragmentation of memory and they are created as personal habitations for transformation and growth. The new brass screws and wires function as metaphors of a new awareness of the value of old structures and memories.

These assemblage works may be considered as a response to Remedios Varo’s painting *Mimesis* of 1960 (Fig. 27) in which Varo intended to show the possible desperate passivity of a woman in the domestic environment. The creative process of *Dwelling* certainly offers a way to understand why woman deserves a habitation in which they can constantly grow. One of the assemblages titled *Dwelling #6 – The Bathroom* (Fig. 120) presents a small corner in the bathroom. A memory from daily routine, picking up loose hair in the bathtub in the mist after a hot bath, was the impulse in the making of this assemblage. This gesture has been repeated thousands of time over the years, which is so natural that it becomes an automatic motion. The lines of waxed background composed of cheesecloth and star maps echoes the lines of hair, which metaphorically express the ubiquitous threads connecting human beings. The hair in the bathtub is like a necessary remnant from a sacred bath. It signifies the day to day bodily and perhaps also a spiritual renewal in a vaguely discernable way.
Double

Though three color photographs titled *Double #1, 2, and 3* (Fig. 121-123) are intended as poetic or witty, melancholy is inscribed in them. Roots with plants cut off correspond to random words without sentences (Fig. 121). Two bird legs are tied by a red thread. The resulting shape resembles that of flower buds (Fig. 122). An antique ruler obstructs the intimate dialogue between two sea horses (Fig. 123). They are full of regrets and mysteries; yet, are presented in a seductively beautiful way. The attempt to make these images beautiful and elegant is to redeem the past in a positive manner. These regrets and mysteries seem to have existed forever just like unchangeable long shadows from the still lives in these images. Both proclaim their existence without hesitation.

It was a tedious job to position small buds and grass to accompany the bird legs, sea horses and roots. Their fragmentation and delicacy demanded a protective mind. The freezing of time and space within the film’s frame and the chemically fixed final print seem like potent ways to resist certain decay. My still life photograph, though composed of inanimate or dead objects is by the process of photography given a new life. Later, I realized that I have lost the bird legs while moving to a new accommodation. I seem to have the same kind tacit sense about photography, as do the bereaved families for their loved one. This sense is that photography is a magical way to fix the appearance of lost loved ones. It may be an odd comparison; yet that was my true feeling while looking the image of the bird legs. “This is only image of it”, I said to myself with regret.

Wandering Box

I find the different levels of transformation of life/death fascinating, and this is reflected in my works accordingly. Sometimes, I feel that I am like a weaver, using
Weft as life, and warp as death to weave into a metaphysical fabric. Weaving and photography are dissimilar; yet there is a common ground that I found intriguing. My weaving experience years ago helped me to develop a deep sense about the timelessness and meditative qualities of the thread. Weaving is a process, which transforms every single thread into something ‘alive’. It connotes the coexistence of life/death too. Although I no longer practice weaving, thread, rope and fiber material recur in my photographs, and mixed medium work.

During my creative process, I am always wondering if there is danger that I missed something essential because of overly concentrating while constructing and photographing imaginative tableaux. After long intensive photographic sessions, I would like to simply look at the pure beauty of the found object. I use wandering in the wilderness to renew my energy. Two triptych titled *Wandering Box #1 and #2* (Fig. 124-126, and 127-129) are efforts to express wandering experiences by “weaving” the found object, and dream fragment together. I made maple wood boxes to display *Wandering Box #1 and #2* to emphasize the pure beauty of these found objects. Wooden boxes for my new works here is not so much related to the preservation of specimens in a cold scientific sense but reflects a protective instinct. These boxes have double connotations; they are both wandering and wondering boxes.

*Wandering Box #1* (Fig. 124-126) is composed of three boxes in which a fish bone, a bird’s nest, and an animal bone are “places” to wander. I found these unique bones on a remote walk along the beach. Being alone there was a privilege but frightening. When I look at these bones, the vivid memory of wandering and wondering at that specific moment always comes back to me. Whereas natural found objects are used in *Wandering Box #1*, man-made rusty found objects are used in *Wandering Box #2* (Fig. 127-129). The shapes of rusty found objects intentionally correspond to that of natural objects.
Using narrow piece of burnt paper with pencil writing of dream fragment and arrow marks to weave or bind the found object is as if I am wandering through them. The numerous arrow marks indicate a never-ending wandering. The object of a wandering search may exist amongst or in between arrow marks. Whether the expected destination will appear eventually or not does not mean much in the works of *Wandering Box*. The process of repeatedly writing dreams and arrow marks on fragile paper and burning paper edges with a wood burner is like a peaceful chant.

**A Strange Mixture**

After being preoccupied by the amazing map of the human body for almost a year through my research into anatomical illustration, I came into the possession of nine pieces of life size anatomical posters in January 2003 like a magic coincidence. They were aged and covered with dirt. These life size posters formed walls surrounding the studio space. I would pick any labeling number and follow the indicated line on the poster to locate the intricate structure and organ of human body. It is a game of connection; connect body part with the indicated line, line with the number, number with the name of the structure and organ, and diagram with my body. The concept of a series of color photograph *A Strange Mixture #1-6* (Fig. 130-135) is developed through this simple game.

In the history of anatomical illustration, it was a visual strategy to present dead bodies standing upright in a landscape as if they were living beings as discussed in Chapter Three (page 67-69). They were shown as flayed or skeletons. These bodies looked extremely odd as the dissection progressed deeper and the human body became more grotesque, with great visual impact (Fig. 56). Implicit in anatomical illustrations are the persistent questions about human decay and mortality. In addition to this obvious theme, this series of photographs is an attempt to create visual language to indicate what is not fully comprehended. Juxtaposing the assertive anatomical diagram with laboratory glassware with bacteria growing inside,
or with constant deteriorating rusty object is to construct an image in which a strange mixture of impasse, doubt and renewal finds its proper way to exist.

In one photograph of this series *A Strange Mixture #6* (Fig. 135), an anatomical diagram shows a side view of a face. Though the anatomically portrayed face is “transparent”; yet it is full of mystery and secrecy. On the left side of the image is a laboratory test tube, which is tied up with red thread against a rusty object. The laboratory glassware has fascinated me since fourteen years ago when I was a student worker in a science laboratory, helping to take care of the growing of plant cells, and it recurs in my studio work as an important visual language. The substances in the glassware seem to have the potential for inducing change, reconciling the opposites, and unleashing desires repressed in the unconscious. It is intriguing to think that while the interconnecting web of a human body showing in the anatomical poster seems highly assertive in its scientific meaning, the actual functioning of the human body and psyche is much more complicated than being an immutable truth.

**Notes**

If the above-mentioned series of works are like essays, three diptyches of black and white photographs *Moving Hand #1 and #2* (Fig. 136-137), *Hair and Arrow Mark #1 and #2* (Fig. 138-139), and *Camouflage #1 and #2* (Fig. 140-141) are like notes. The reason why they are important in the whole creative process is because they are visual evidence of my creative thought at a specific moment of time, showing a glimpse of how some of my other works are extended and multiplied. In *Moving Hand #1 and #2*, the object and human presence have equal weight, showing an effort to make connection with both still life and blurring human presence. Later, the subject of a blurring figure is fully explored in black and white photographs *White Room* (Fig. 106-114). Hair and arrow marks in *Hair and Arrow Mark #1 and #2* can be seen in works *Signs #2* (Fig. 94), *Dwelling #6* (Fig. 120) and *Wandering Box #1*
and #2 (Fig. 124-129). Bird wings and chicken claws in *Camouflage #1 and #2* are initial thoughts for a series of color photographs titled *The Untold* (Fig. 101-105). The significance of the whole creative process seems to be understood fully by looking back to these visual notes.

**Summary**

Wandering on a path to the mountaintop seems like a never-ending solitary journey. The air has no temperature. The tree has no leaves. There is neither cloud nor sunlight. Stillness and silence indicate that the place is void of humans. Suddenly, thousands of magnificent colorful feathers cover up the whole ground as if an invisible magician is performing a trick. The falling feathers on the earth connotes residue from the process of both renewal and death; it is a sign of unification of the opposites. While encountering the “magnificent colorful feathers”, the matter of what you “know”, or what you “have” becomes trivial because you are already an intrinsic part of the limitless whole…

(from Hsiu-Li Kuo’s journal undated)

The oceanic feeling, the experience of a new unity within as experienced in the dream mentioned above or from a rewarding creative process, that transcends reason is always transient. It is a precious feast provided for a mind that clearly knows its own incompleteness. 6 Wandering along paths and going for a solitary walk that usually has no set destination in the dream, indicates both a search and a series of significant changes. Humans in reality repeatedly go through similar journeys, and

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6 Anthony Storr commented in his insightful book, *Solitude – A Return to the Self*, “…man’s adaptation to the world is the result, paradoxically, of not being perfectly adjusted to the environment, of not being in a state of psychological equilibrium. The ecstatic sense of wholeness is bound to be transient because it has no part in the pattern of ‘adaptation through maladaptation’ which is characteristic of our species. Boeotian bliss is not conducive to invention: the hunger of imagination, the desire and pursuit of the whole, take origin from the realization that something is missing, from awareness of incompleteness” (197).
are always in a perpetual process of pursuing psychological equilibrium, and of negotiating a socially constructed identity of the solitude of self. These thoughts are well manifested in my image of decay, solitude and metamorphosis.

In this chapter, I have highlighted the fundamental thoughts that underpin my art practice, and explained the creative process and central themes of my studio works. It is clear that my art works attempt to speak about the total acceptance of decay and regeneration. Before reaching the total acceptance of decay and regeneration, there is perpetual struggling for it. None of these works present complete yielding to death or sole preference of life so that they are full of possibilities. During my whole creative process, many repetitions with one aspect of change indicate being a step closer to the “truth”. “Truth” in this context of my works is that the spirit is amongst or in between the imaginative spaces created. I believe that it is always necessary to go one step further in the pursuit a new state of the creative mind.
CONCLUSION

The concept of unveiling what has been concealed or hidden in both a cultural and metaphorical sense is consistent through my theoretical and practical research. The study begins by investigating Surrealists who explored the unconscious realm of human personality. The Surrealist women artists’ works revealed woman’s unique psychic state that had always been invisible in a male dominated culture. Their emphasis on the body leads into an examination of the early anatomists who elaborately engaged with human bodies in order to know the intricate structures underneath the skin. The last section of my writing is an analysis of death-related photography, formerly hidden from the public knowledge, an area that revealed the unfathomable nature of human existence.

There are three essential common threads connecting these interdisciplinary subjects investigated in this thesis. Firstly, they are all potent visual representation of the themes of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis. Secondly, they reflect three types of existential anxiety that Paul Tillich proposed in *The Courage to Be* – anxiety of emptiness and loss of meaning, the anxiety of fate and death, and the anxiety of guilt and condemnation (41-54). Thirdly, they indicate great concern of the issues of representation of “object as subject”. The fundamental thoughts that underpin my art practice are the results of a complicated process of synthesizing these theoretical insights.

The ultimate purpose of this lengthy research is an attempt to provide possible paths through creating my own image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis to express artistically how human self-affirmation can possibly be achieved in relation to solitude. The interest in researching imagery that has the capacity to elicit profound rumination on existential issues takes origin from the belief that there is always a tenacious desire beneath human consciousness to gain a coherent sense of being human in the natural world. With this premise, I started both my theoretical and
artistic research. The value of this theoretical and artistic research lies in an aesthetic experience derived from the combined study of different historical and artistic aspects. The inspiring journey of closely investigating distinctive disciplines and finding significant correlation among them offer a path to develop a new visual vocabulary.

In Chapter One, I established a framework in regard to principles of Surrealism as a foundation to elucidate my creative interests. Surrealism emerged in the western world as a response to the disillusion of human existence resulting from a devastating war and a deep crisis of western culture. Their emphasis on the profound thought, imagination, intuition and liberation of human mind inspired my creative awareness when I started my art education. The Surrealist aspirations and creative principles are personalized in my studio work. Their artistic strategy to dislocate images, objects, ideas, and words from their original context in order to disrupt conventional expectations and to alienate the familiar from ordinary senses is used to construct my photographic tableaux. My aim is to rethink reality and to explore the insights of human psyche.

As stressed in Chapter Four, my photographic practice is not so much aligned with that of male Surrealists. The idea that photography is an hallucination underpins my photographic practice. André Bazin explained the reason why the Surrealists used photography for the explosion of their creativity is “because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact” (16). Roland Barthes also considered that photograph is “a new form of hallucination” because of the mad quality of the Spectrum’s “it has indeed been” and “it is not there” (115). This thinking facilitates my tireless interplay between capturing and distorting reality while composing collections of found objects into imaginative tableaux for image making. The process of creating a construction or a theatrical setting for image making in the photography studio, and the eventually dismantlement of construction and theatrical setting adds another layer to the meaning of the idea that photography
is like an hallucination.

Along with my increasing awareness of feminine subjectivity, my interest in the parameters of Surrealism became the focus on the kind of art created by women artists with a Surrealist influence. Their works directly explored the theme of inner and outer reality that was close to female experiences. The awareness of feminine subjectivity affects my choice of visual symbols and colors. Rust, a signifier of constant states of deterioration, loss and change is a central metaphor of my image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis. The red color that relates to specific female experience is used as metaphor of bleeding, violence, passion, or betokens irresistible human decay and mortality after worldly experiences. Rust and red are particularly used in the artwork *Tools of the Past, Signs*, and *A Strange Mixture*.

Frida Kahlo gained inspiration from anatomical illustration to depict her own body as a painful wounding to articulate the conventionally unspeakable subject in the most frank manner. Francesca Woodman’s elusive multiple self-portraiture represents a self-image fluctuating between appearance and disappearance that mirrors Roland Barthes’s thoughts of the relationship between photography and death. Their fascinating works naturally led to an interdisciplinary analysis of anatomical illustration and death-related photography in Chapter Three.

The essential link between anatomical illustration and my creative work is the idea of transformation of the *corps mort* back in to the *corps vivant* that is the ultimate purpose of the anatomical theatre of the human body. In the anatomical theatre of the body, the anatomists’ urge to know the intricate structures and functions of the human body through dissection is by analyzing death to enhance an understanding of life. In Chapter Four, I have explained the different levels of transformation of life/death within photography in regard to my art practice. Beyond the concept of “photographs are memento mori”, I am also searching for “vivid life” through photographic practice in a metaphorical manner. This thought particularly underpins my creative
The Remnant from the Darkness, The Untold, and White Room as discussed in Chapter Four.

Both anatomical images and death-related photographs portray human body in the most realistic style; yet create the most unutterable “dream images”. The living anatomies (see Fig. 54-58) and medical photographs (see Fig. 66-68) are extraordinary exemplary of “dream images” that elicit my serious pondering over the insight of life/death at a new level. I become persistent in the idea of transformation of the corps mort back in to the corps vivant and abandon solely melancholic view of life/death. My work does not directly portray death, but is about a realization of its implication. Beneath the calmness of my still life, assemblage, and figurative image, there is great effort to reconcile the opposites. My work endeavors to bring together the intensity of the Surrealist dream and the reality of the photograph in a creative process.

In Chapter Four, I have stated the awareness of the act of reverence, reverence for the thing, people, self, and surrounding nature that contributes to the new visual language developed in the studio work. This comes from my new comprehension of the vulnerabilities of visible things by pondering over the image of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis created within interdisciplinary areas, and my increasingly close relation with nature while living nearby the sandy beach. The intriguing finding is that the feeling of reverence does not need a complicated theoretical background; in a deepest sense, it belongs to the intuitive innermost being that knows its incompleteness. When human beings are humble enough, their surroundings will be enlarged to a size that is in harmony with their existence. These elements are naturally manifested in my creative works in the way that I present still life images in a relatively larger size than that of figurative images. The aesthetics of still life in which the worldly view of what is valued as subject for primal attention is reversed certainly influenced my perception. Privileging humble objects, and rejecting an idea that humans have first priority is a way to reveal a new knowledge hidden beneath the
mundane world.

The cultural disjunction that I experienced while I was away from my hometown, Taipei, Taiwan to a strangely beautiful country, Australia, increased the desire of searching for a connection. This urgent desire significantly links to the special characteristic of the medium that I use to explore for my creative project, photography and assemblage. Both photography and assemblage pose a perpetual state of fluctuation between familiar and unfamiliar, and imagination and the real. With these media, my endeavor is to find affinity between objects, meanings, and opposites. This kind of strange sense also appears while living in a foreign country alone. When alienation occupies daily life, there is always the danger that the ego may nearly disappear in the effort of trying to distinguish the difference between the familiar and unfamiliar, and between the imagination and the real. The accumulation of creative energy partially results from this psychological struggle.

The desire to search for the connections mentioned above does not necessarily mean searching for connection within a social/cultural web, but seeking the metaphysical connection between the surroundings and utmost being. My images of decay, solitude, and metamorphosis are about a particular way of interaction with surroundings, a way developed from the long dialogue with a natural rhythm that comes out from the great silence. My studio works in this context of thesis attempt to speak about the total acceptance of decay and regeneration in a realm which has no reference or restriction. In my studio spiders spin webs in rusty boxes, bacteria grow from the fluid in laboratory glassware, flowers are withered, rust peels off from the deteriorated metal surface and sunlight changes its pathway shining through window. I realize that there are always new elements, notations from the complexities of the physical and cultural worlds that provide inspiration for expressing the theme of decay and regeneration. Between the vast space in nature and my small private studio, I found a path to create my images of decay and metamorphosis with a coherent sense of being human in the natural world. The solitude of self provides the possibility of
transformation and identity through imaginative photography, tableaux and assemblage.
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Fig. 70  Anonymous.  *Body Bessie Weils [sis] alias Dumont found in kitchen 5 Monroe St 4-2-17, undersized file #159 [last digit illegible] Charles E. Carsbrer*. black and white photograph. Sante, Luc.  *Evidence*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux,
1992, plate 30, no page number.

**Fig. 71** Anonymous. No caption. black and white photograph. Sante, Luc. Evidence. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992, plate 16, no page number.

**Fig. 72** Anonymous. *Father with Daughter; Mother's Hand Reaches Out to Hold Head*. 1842, Daguerreotype, 9.5 x 10.8 cm. Burns, Stanley. *Sleeping Beauty—Memorial Photography in America*. Altadena: Twelvetrees Press, 1990, plate 13, no page number.


**Fig. 75** Nusu script from Gong, Zhebing. “Introduction to a unique script in southern Hunan—women’s script.” *Nushu*. Ed. Cheng, Tse-Huei. Taipei: 1990. no page number.


**Fig. 78** Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Remnant from the Darkness #1*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

**Fig. 79** Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Remnant from the Darkness #2*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

**Fig. 80** Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Remnant from the Darkness #3*. 2002, Gelatin silver
photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 81  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Remnant from the Darkness #4*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 82  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Remnant from the Darkness #5*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 83  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #1*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 84  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #2*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 85  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #3*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 86  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #4*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 87  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #5*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 88  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #1*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 89  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #2*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 90  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #3*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 91  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #4*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 92  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #5*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 93  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #1*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 94  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #2*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.
Fig. 95  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #3*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.

Fig. 96  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #4*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.

Fig. 97  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #5*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.

Fig. 98  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #6*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.

Fig. 99  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #7*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.

Fig. 100  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #8*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

Fig. 101  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #1*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 102  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #2*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 103  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #3*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 104  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #4*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 105  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #5*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 106  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #1*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.

Fig. 107  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #2*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.

Fig. 108  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #3*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 18.3 X 13 cm.

Fig. 109  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #4*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.

Fig. 110  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #5*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 18.3 X 13 cm.

Fig. 111  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #6*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.

Fig. 112  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #7*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 18.3 X 13 cm.

Fig. 113  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #8*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.

Fig. 114  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #9*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.
Fig. 115  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #1 – The Bedroom*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 116  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #2 – The Dressing Room*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 117  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #3 – The Conservatory*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 118  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #4 - The Loft*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 119  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #5 – The Study*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 120  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #6 – The Bathroom*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 121  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Double #1*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 122  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Double #2*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 123  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Double #3*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 124  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #1a*. 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm.

Fig. 125  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #1b*. 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm.

Fig. 126  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #1c*. 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm.

Fig. 127  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #2a*. 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm.

Fig. 128  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #2b*. 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm.

Fig. 129  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #2c*. 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm.

Fig. 130  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #1*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 131  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #2*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 132  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #3*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 133  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #4*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 134  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #5*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 135  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #6*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 136  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Moving Hand #1*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19 cm.

Fig. 137  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Moving Hand #2*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19 cm.

Fig. 138  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Hair and Arrow Mark #1*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19 cm.

Fig. 139  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Hair and Arrow Mark #2*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19 cm.

Fig. 140  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Camouflage #1*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19 cm.

Fig. 141  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Camouflage #2*. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19 cm.
Fig. 75a Booklet of Nusu script (Chinese women’s secret writing).

Fig. 75b Closeup of Nusu script.
Fig. 76 Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Medici Prince)*. 1942-52, Construction.

Fig. 77 Juan Sánchez Catán, *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*. 1602, Oil on canvas.
Fig. 78 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. The Remnant from the Darkness #1, 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.
Fig. 79 Kuo, Hsiu-Li *The Remnant from the Darkness #2.* 2002. Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 80 Kuo, Hsiu-Li *The Remnant from the Darkness #3.* 2002. Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.
Fig. 81 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. The Remnant from the Darkness #4. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 82 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. The Remnant from the Darkness #5. 2002, Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.
Fig. 83  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #1*. 2002. Type C photograph, 50.8 X 63.5 cm.
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Fig. 85 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past #3*. 2002, Type C photograph. 50.8 X 63.5 cm.
Fig. 86  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Tools of the Past* #4. 2002. Type C photograph. 50.8 X 63.5 cm.

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48.7 X 39 cm.
Fig. 89 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #2*. 2002. Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

Fig. 90 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Oh! Album #5*. 2002. Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.
Fig. 91  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Old Album #4*. 2002.
Gelatin silver photograph, 48.7 X 39 cm.

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Fig. 98 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #6*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.
Fig. 99  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #7*. 2002, Type C photograph, 63.5 X 50.8 cm.

Fig. 100  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Signs #8*. 2002, Type C photograph, 50.8 cm X 63.5 cm.
Fig. 101  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #1*, 2003, Type C photograph.
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Fig. 102  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #2*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 x 53.5 cm.

Fig. 103  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *The Untold #3*. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 x 53.5 cm.
Fig. 104  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. The Untold #4. 2003. Type C photograph. 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 105  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. The Untold #5. 2003. Type C photograph. 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 106  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. White Room #1, 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.

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Fig. 108 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. White Room #3. 2003. Gelatin silver photograph. 18.3 X 13 cm.

Fig. 109 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. White Room #4. 2003. Gelatin silver photograph. 13 X 18.3 cm.
Fig. 110 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. White Room #5, 2003. Gelatin silver photograph, 18.3 X 13 cm.

Fig. 111 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. White Room #6. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.
Fig. 112 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #7*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph. 18.3 X 13 cm.

Fig. 113 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #8*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph. 13 X 18.3 cm.
Fig. 114 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *White Room #9*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 13 X 18.3 cm.
Fig. 115 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #2 – The Bedroom*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 116 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #2 – The Dressing Room*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.
Fig. 117 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #3 - The Conservatory*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.

Fig. 118 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #4 - The Loft*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.
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Fig. 120 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Dwelling #6 – The Bathroom*. 2003, Mixed media, 20.5 X 30.5 cm.
Fig. 121  Kuo, Hsiu Li. *Double #1*, 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 122  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Double #2*. 2003, Type C photograph. 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 123  Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Double #3*. 2003, Type C photograph. 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 124-126 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #1a-1c.*
2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm each.
Fig. 127-129 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Wandering Box #2a-c.* 2003, Mixed media, 34 X 29 cm each.
Fig. 130 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. A Strange Mixture #1. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 131 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. A Strange Mixture #2. 2003, Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 132 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #3*. 2003. Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 133 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #4*. 2003. Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 134 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #5*. 2003,
Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.

Fig. 135 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *A Strange Mixture #6*. 2003,
Type C photograph, 65.75 X 53.5 cm.
Fig. 136 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Moving Hand #1*. 2003.
Gelatin silver photograph. 24 X 19.3 cm.

Fig. 137 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Moving Hand #2*. 2003.
Gelatin silver photograph. 24 X 19.3 cm.
Fig. 138 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Hair & Arrow Mark #1*. Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19.3 cm.

Fig. 139 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Hair & Arrow Mark #2*. 2003, Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19.3 cm.
Fig. 140 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Camouflage #1*. 2003,
Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19.3 cm.

Fig. 141 Kuo, Hsiu-Li. *Camouflage #2*. 2003,
Gelatin silver photograph, 24 X 19.3 cm.