

**Boxing Time:
Landscape, Feminism and The Archive in Selected Works
by Angela Grauerholz**

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of
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Abstract

Boxing Time: Landscape, Feminism and The Archive in Selected Works by Angela Grauerholz.

Lesley Brock

This thesis considers selected photographic projects created between 1985 and 1998 by Montreal artist Angela Grauerholz. The four main projects examined are *Secrets*, *a Gothic Tale*, *Églogue*, or *Filling the Landscape*, *Aporia*, and *Sententia I-LVII*.

Grauerholz's work includes images of the seemingly inconsequential and momentary: hazy images of people waiting in line, train tracks, a couple packing their car trunk, two men drinking in a bar, empty roads, an unused pool, a vinyl couch in a hall, gardens, windows, and so on. Through her work, Grauerholz confronts themes of memory, absence, framing, access. The photographs are presented in a variety of sizes from 8 x 12.5 cm to 244 x 161.5 cm, and in a variety of cabinets and boxes, in book format and in traditional frames, making generalizations difficult. In this thesis Grauerholz's *œuvre* is examined within a thematic construct dividing the paper into three main sections: Landscape, Feminism, and The Archive. The method used to approach the work is a consideration of the visual influences upon her work, examination of theories of photography, selected philosophical writings and feminist analysis.

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The past four years have been characterized by enormous change – there have been births and deaths, marriages and divorces, new cities, and new careers. The one thing that has remained constant during this time of upheaval has been my desire to finish this thesis. Without the perpetual help of the following people it would never have been written.

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“Every passion borders on the chaotic,
but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories.”
Walter Benjamin¹

All the arts are based on the presence of man,
only photography derives an advantage from his absence.”
André Bazin²

“Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays!”³ exclaims Vladamir in the first act of Samuel Beckett’s groundbreaking play *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett’s story of two marginal characters waiting on a country road for the mysterious Godot to arrive is not the subject of this thesis, but the existential themes which it confronts - absence, memory, boredom, framing, language, suicide, waiting, and hope for the future - definitely are.

This thesis will consider selected photographic projects created between 1985 and 1998 by Montreal artist Angela Grauerholz. The work will be examined within a thematic construct dividing the paper into three main sections: Landscape, Feminism, and The Archive. The methods used to approach the work will be a consideration of the visual influences upon her work, examination of theories of photography, selected philosophical writings and feminist analysis. In all three sections of this thesis I will rely heavily on the writings of Walter Benjamin, as well as texts dealing with the first fifty years of photographic history, in particular Geoffrey Batchen’s *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*. In the first section, Landscape, I will consider historical texts such as Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of*

Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 60.

² Andre Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” quoted in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993) 66.

³ Samuel Beckett, “Waiting for Godot,” *A Samuel Beckett Reader*, ed. Richard W. Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1974) 422.

the Sublime and the Beautiful, as well as modern views of landscape, Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*, for instance. In the second section, Feminism, I will consider the influence of turn-of-the-century fiction, notably Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. I have also concentrated on more contemporary feminist theory, including the writings of Griselda Pollock and Lynda Nead, amongst others. The main texts which I will use in the final section, The Archive, include: Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Douglas Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins*, and James Clifford's essay "On Collecting Art and Culture." In addition to these writings I will consider selected reviews and analyses of Angela Grauerholz's work published to accompany exhibitions of her work.

Born in Hamburg, Germany in 1952, Angela Grauerholz has lived and worked in Montreal since 1976. Prior to her arrival in Canada, she received a degree in graphic design from the Kunsthochschule Alsterdamm in Hamburg, as well as a degree in literature and linguistics from the University of Hamburg. She completed a Master of Fine Arts in Photography at Concordia University in 1980. Grauerholz has worked and taught as a graphic designer since the early 1980's. She is one of the founding members of ARTEXTE, a Montreal-based resource centre, the main agenda of which is the promotion and documentation of contemporary Canadian art. Recognized as a major Canadian artist, her photo-based work has been shown internationally in group exhibitions including Kassel's *Documenta IX* (1992), the 1995 *Carnegie International* in Pittsburgh and most recently at the Montreal 2002 *Biennale*. She has also had solo exhibitions at the M.I.T. List Visual Arts Centre (1993) in Cambridge, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (1995), The

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (1999) and Toronto's The Power Plant (winter 2000).

Angela Grauerholz's work, during the period that I will be considering, 1985-1998, includes images of the seemingly inconsequential and momentary: hazy images of people waiting in line, train tracks, a couple packing their car trunk, two men drinking in a bar, empty roads, an older woman walking into the distance, an unused pool, a vinyl couch in a hall, gardens, fragments of paintings, windows, and so on (fig. 1). Prior to 1985 her work consisted of large, hazy, close-up portraits of women artists that, although interesting, are perhaps not as layered in meaning as the works that I have chosen to discuss below. Grauerholz's most recent series, *Privation* (2002), consists of colour images of burned books, digitally printed on watercolour paper, that document the devastating effects of a fire at the artist's home in which her extensive library was destroyed. This new work has been created without the use of a camera or film and has clearly taken a turn in a direction that exceeds the scope of this paper. The four main projects considered within this thesis are: *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* (1993-1996), *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* (1995), *Sententia I-LXII* (1998) and *Aporia*, a bookwork from 1995. Each consists of multiple, even hundreds of photographs. The work is presented in a variety of sizes from 8 x 12.5 cm to 244 x 161.5 cm, and in a variety of cabinets and boxes, in book format and in traditional frames, making generalizations difficult.

Secrets, a Gothic Tale is the fictive narrative of a nineteenth-century woman photographer who becomes obsessed with recording the landscape around her. This permanent installation is housed in the library of the château at the Domaine de Kerguéhennec in Brittany, France. The viewer is permitted to sort through the work in

order to come to his or her own conclusion about the ultimate fate of the “photographer.” This project consists of landscape photographs of the Domaine. *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* will be considered in all three sections of this thesis.

Églogue or Filling the Landscape is a collection of two hundred and sixteen landscape photographs boxed in opaque, labelled cartons and housed in a clear Plexiglas cabinet. This collection of photographs presents itself as both private and public archive, visible and yet invisible. Any knowledge these images contain is strictly controlled by the museum at which they are exhibited, each museum revealing the contents of the boxes only at certain set viewing times during the course of each day. I will be considering this work in both the Landscape and Archive sections of this paper.

Sententia I-LXII is presented in a tall cherrywood cabinet with hanging racks that slide in and out, revealing photographs on both sides of the frame. The piece contains sixty-two photographs that are impossible to see at the same time, forcing the viewer to imprint the last photograph on his/her memory before viewing the next. *Sententia I-LXII* will be discussed primarily in the Archive section of this thesis.

Aporia, a bookwork published by Oakville Galleries in 1995, is the third and last instalment in a trilogy, the first two parts of which, *Secrets, A Gothic Tale* and *Églogue or Filling the Landscape*, I have already mentioned. Like the first two manifestations, this work can be read as a kind of archive, but one which the viewer is free to control as they flip frontward and back amongst the largely untitled photographs in the book. Many of these appear in both of the two earlier projects in the trilogy. *Aporia* will be considered in all three sections of this thesis.

Many critics have concentrated on the blurriness of the photographs that I shall be discussing or have made simplistic links with the family album, or turn-of-the-century Pictorialism, virtually ignoring their content or presentation. One writer describes Grauerholz as “Folle du Flou”⁴ and another, in reference to a collection of large, framed landscapes, states: “The heavy reliance on the mechanical process makes possible a debate as to whether or not this [work] smacks of visual gimmickery.”⁵ Some critics have successfully analysed one or two photographs chosen from the many, which, although effective in increasing the viewer’s understanding of selected works, leaves the whole unexamined. The extent of some of these works is clearly a stumbling block faced by most reviewers who simply do not have the time or the space to examine an entire work in depth or consider the work in relation to Grauerholz’s greater *œuvre*. Admittedly this thesis is also limited in space, but it is my goal to examine the four projects listed above both individually and collectively in order to gain a greater understanding and analysis of Grauerholz’s *œuvre* than has yet been achieved.

Before entering into the three main sections of this paper (Feminism, Landscape and The Archive) I would like to address some of the more regularly discussed issues in Grauerholz’s work – issues that are shared by all the works discussed in this thesis - as well as the theoretical underpinning which I will use to analyse the work.

Almost every article discussing the history of photography begins with a discussion of the “art or science” debate surrounding the mechanical nature of the medium. This subject has been discussed *ad nauseam* and I have no intention of reopening it here, but it is my belief that Grauerholz manipulates this original argument

⁴ This expression translates loosely as “Batty for Blur” or “Mad for Haze.” *Montreal Campus*, (22 February-7 March, 1995) 17.

⁵ Randy Saharuni, *C Magazine*, 15 (Fall 1987) 55.

in order to create tension and meaning in her work. None of the images in Grauerholz's *œuvre* has been digitally altered, or created using what are clearly props or lighting devices. In fact, she has used a style that *appears* to be entirely natural and spontaneous, a style that can best be described as "snap-shot" and thus fully understandable to all viewers owning even the most rudimentary of cameras. The subjects that she has chosen (a view from a window, interiors, buildings, average people) also seem to be familiar and comfortable, resulting in images that we may all have in our own personal photographic "archive." On first glance the works present themselves as documentary photographs in the loosest definition of the word – documents of a private person recording her most important moments, or people and places she has known. In this way they benefit from the mechanical nature of photography because they establish a link with "reality": the "that-has-been" of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, which insists on the necessity of the camera and the subject being in the same place at the same time in order for the image to exist. And yet the "reality" in Grauerholz's work is continually frustrated by both the presentation and the actual content of the photographs.

There are no sharp images in any of the works considered in this thesis. All of the photographs are either slightly out of focus or are almost unreadable because of either their framing or their blurriness. The artist accomplishes this at the moment that the photograph is taken - the detail is never recorded. The image is not printed out of focus in order to camouflage detail; the lack of detail is, instead, the result of long exposures or of movement by the subject or photographer. This works against our belief that an unclear photograph is a "bad" photograph – the blurry images are the ones left out of the album. The small size of 35mm film, which Grauerholz uses, is technically limited. By

enlarging the images beyond their acceptable technical limit, like the protagonist in the 1966 movie *Blow-Up* who attempts to solve a murder by enlarging an accidental record of the crime, the viewer is continually frustrated by being given less detail - not more. It is worth noting that the French word for blurriness is “trouble,” which can also mean turmoil, distress, agitation or confusion – feelings which can all be experienced in front of these works. In Grauerholz’s photographs the soft-focus acts as a distancing technique, which frustrates our voyeuristic need for detail. The available light is not supplemented by a flash; it is simply permitted to illuminate and hide what it may. In fact we are given very little information, a reality that becomes fully apparent after viewing all of the photographs that constitute each individual work. The mechanical nature of photography, which links it so neatly with science and reality, seems to be failing. Like a colour-field painting or thick impasto, the blurriness is self-referential, preventing the photograph from becoming wholly transparent. For critic Chantal Pontbriand the blur prevents these photographs from becoming a mechanical reproduction of the world by insisting on the hand holding the camera and the way humans view and interpret the world. Pontbriand writes: “Ce bougé fait sentir l’humanité derrière la photographie en tant que processus mécanisé du regard. Par contre, il fait aussi sentir la distance qui sépare la conscience humaine du monde.”⁶ The lack of detail also results in a lack of clear narrative – both in individual images and collectively within each project. The artist has carefully selected images that cannot be easily linked together to form a coherent whole, and individually the images give us less information the longer we look at them. A photograph that at first seemed familiar, such as one of an abandoned street with a parked car or one of people

⁶ Chantal Pontbriand, “Le Regard vertigineux de l’ange – photographies d’Angela Grauerholz,” *Parachute* 63, (July, Aug, Sept 1991): 5.

standing in line, reveals nothing as we realize that we are unable to place the street, that the licence plate is unreadable, that the ambiguous weather prevents us from placing the photograph within a specific season, that the faces are unclear, that we are unsure why the people are waiting, that the mullions on the windows could be bars, that we could be on any one of several continents, in any western country, at any time in the last fifty years. The blurriness seems to have compressed time and frustrated not only our viewing of the image but our own memories. Are we seeing/remembering this scene through the haze of sleep? Through tears? Through time? There are no “decisive moments” in Grauerholz’s work. The viewer is given no clues as to how long a scene has remained the same – or for how much longer it will do so.

The repeated use of the soft focus leads easily to the conclusion that memory is the only subject of Angela Grauerholz’s work, given that photographic blurriness has been used in advertising, in cinema, and on birthday cards in order to convey an easily packaged nostalgia. Several critics⁷ have fallen into this trap, mainly because on one level her work *is* about memory. But they have fallen short in not questioning whose memory they are viewing, how that sense of memory is constructed, or even how the use of photography itself permits the viewer to believe in that memory. This confusion has been compounded by the constant comparisons with both Pictorial photography and with the family album. I will not elaborate here on the former, as it is my intention to address photographic Pictorialism (a turn-of the century movement intended to ensure photography’s place amongst the fine arts) in detail in my analysis of landscape in Grauerholz’s work.

⁷ See for instance Marie-Michèle Cron, “Des photos qui déçoivent, des toiles qui éclaboussent” *Le Devoir* (samedi 18 et dimanche 19 février 1995): D8. and Luc Boulanger, “Double Objectif,” *Voir* (9-15 février, 1995): 46.

Comparisons with the family album are more complex as they do relate directly to how we remember, and construct, our own past. I have mentioned above that the lack of clarity in Grauerholz's photographs would exclude them from most family albums, which prize sharp, happy and easily identifiable photographs over those showing ambiguous or banal subjects. They are "failed" photographs in that they are not functional as historical family documents because they lack the details which would normally set recorded events apart from the everyday (the number of candles on a cake, the identities of people in front of a clearly delineated landmark, etc.). The monumental size of many of the works is also an indication that perhaps these are more than autobiographical snaps. And yet it would be wrong to totally disregard any link with the family album, mainly because - whether as a clearly organized book or loosely labelled shoebox - this is how many of us interact with photography on a daily basis: a reality which Grauerholz has not forgotten in her attempt to implicate the viewer in her images. That Grauerholz's works seem both highly personal and public, idiosyncratic and official, fragmented and narrative at the same time creates a paradox that some viewers may find frustrating as they search for the "meaning" of the work and are unable to find it. The usually well-ordered narrative of the family album (birthdays, weddings, and other important events) has been replaced with slices of everyday actions: packing the car, having a beer, reading a book: actions that took place when no one was watching - and yet someone has recorded them without our knowledge. Can we rely on photography to do the remembering for us or is human memory so subjective that despite details that it might record, the mechanical image will always reveal only what we want it to?

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes about receiving a photograph of himself that he could not remember having been taken. Barthes writes:

I inspected the tie, the sweater, to discover in what circumstances
I had worn them; to no avail. And yet, *because it was a photograph*
I could not deny that I had been *there* (even if I did not know *where*).
This distortion between certainty and oblivion gave me a kind of vertigo
[...]. I went to the photographer's show as to a police investigation,
to learn at last what I no longer knew about myself.⁸

Some critics have written about experiencing this vertigo in front of Grauerholz's work,⁹ mainly comparing it to a kind of sublime reaction to disorientation of time and place. For Barthes, it is indivisibly linked to the "what has been" of photography – its evidential force. It is this force that Grauerholz manipulates in order to construct meaning in her photographs. By creating a sense of time and place past – the indisputable "what has been" – she leads the viewer to their memories, not her own. Given the importance of time, place and memory in all of the works in this paper, I would like to consider for a moment what we actually mean by "memory" and how this functions in photography, especially in Grauerholz's work, which is a contemporary production and not a historical one.

It is no accident that references to Marcel Proust and his best-known work, *In Search of Lost Time*, come up repeatedly in reference to Angela Grauerholz's photography. "The idea of distance, the space between places that are never linked or between people who can never meet, can never become fully present to each other, is the

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 85.

⁹ See for instance Louise Déry who writes: "De cette lecture découle une syntaxe aussi prolifique qu'opportune, (...) du souvenir, du rêve, du vertige ou du sublime," Louise Déry, *Angela Grauerholz* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1998) 37.

basis of Marcel Proust's whole oeuvre."¹⁰ Indeed, this distance is always present in the works that I am considering. The moment at which we begin to see clearly, the image, reference or story seems to slip away and we are left with more questions than answers. For Proust, the memory of the past explodes into the present, shaping both our understanding of the present and of the future. This memory can be brought on by any number of stimuli: a smell, a taste, a place. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes' quest for his mother's true self takes him through photographs of her taken over her lifetime – and yet he is continually frustrated by his inability to grasp her memory through these images. In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin explains that "[a]ccording to Proust, it is a matter of chance whether an individual forms an image of himself, whether he can take hold of his experience."¹¹ And so, the comparison between Proust's and Grauerholz's work is an easy one to make - perhaps a bit too easy.

Proust's writing deals with the present sensation of a time past – a past that existed in a temporal space long before the moment of its recollection. *In Search of Lost Time* is a first-person narrative, an intimate retelling of the protagonist's life, full of detail and sentiment. Angela Grauerholz's "past," in comparison, is relatively present at the time of its initial exhibition. And yet the viewer reads the photographs not only as time past, but also as their own personal time past – not Grauerholz's. Art critic Johanne Lamoureux, in an article titled "Un Passé 'Composé': Grauerholz's Future Perfect," questions how we receive this work as old. For Lamoureux it is not simply the use of black and white photography, which she notes has come to represent a trendy stylishness, but that the "work of Angela Grauerholz presents itself as an appropriation of old

¹⁰ Bojana Pejic, "Art Ex Absentia" *ArtForum*, (April 1990): 147.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 158.

photographs, which it sometimes is, but most of the time it poses as such.”¹² Lamoureux writes: “The look of the past is used as a deliberate strategy of disguise, something infinitely more complicated than sheer nostalgia – that these photographs are about our future memories of the present.”¹³ While I fully agree with Lamoureux that Grauerholz evokes the past in order to question the present and future, I doubt the somewhat easy distinction between these three temporal categories. I propose that Angela Grauerholz’s photography is not in fact a *passé composé*, but an image of the *imparfait*. Lamoureux has used quotation marks around *composé* to indicate that she is referring more to an assembled or constructed past than to the grammatical tense which is defined by the completion of an activity in the past. For me a title such as “*Une photographie imparfait*” would have been more apt. Grauerholz’s work, like the imperfect tense and the French adjective “*imparfait*,” stretches from the past into the present and presumably into the future. The *imparfait* is repeated in the past, extends up until the present and is never completed. This expanded past is perhaps a better way to understand how memory functions in Grauerholz’s photographs, and how it affects our view of them as past, present and future simultaneously.

Writing early in the twentieth century, French philosopher Henri Bergson wanted to enlarge our concept of time, space and memory. For Bergson, the idea of time needed to be expanded to include different “times,” including material time and personal time, which we process differently. His best-known theory of time, however, is that of duration (*durée*). “Duration is time as experienced by consciousness, and perhaps Bergson’s most important insight is that we do not experience the world moment by moment but in a

¹² Johanne Lamoureux, “Un Passé “Composé”: Grauerholz’ Future Perfect,” *Angela Grauerholz October 11 to November 10, 1990*. Catalogue to an exhibition at the Mercer Union, no page.

¹³ Lamoureux, no page.

fashion essentially continuous, illustrated by the way we hear a melody, which cannot consist simply in hearing a succession of disjointed notes.”¹⁴ Most photography acts as a break in time; it captures the moment in a way that we never perceive as operating in real life. In contrast, Angela Grauerholz’s photographs, through their use of long exposure times and indistinct historical placement, seem to convey a sense of duration, of time’s passage. Bergson might as well have been theorizing about Grauerholz’s photography when he wrote the following:

Memory thus creates a new present perception... strengthening and enriching [it].... If after having gazed on any object, we turn our eyes abruptly away, we obtain an “after-image” of it. It is true we are dealing here with images photographed on the object itself, and with memories following immediately upon the perception of which they are but the echo. But behind these images which are identical with the object, there are others, stored in memory which only resemble it....¹⁵

Grauerholz’s work functions as this “after-image”: the image that echoes our initial perception and brings forth other images stored in memory. This can only occur once the object itself is absent, thus creating a new “present” - a present that is never exactly the same as the object itself. Grauerholz’s photographs have, therefore, captured not the past but our “after-image,” our present version, of that past. It is the emptiness, the presence of absence, in these photographs that opens them up, permitting viewers to fill in their own reality.

Absence can only exist in contrast to presence. This may seem obvious, but upon viewing a large body of work by Angela Grauerholz one is ultimately struck by how often we are viewing photographs of emptiness (empty rooms, empty gardens, empty

¹⁴ Alan Lacey, “Bergson, Henri-Louis” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 88.

¹⁵ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, quoted in Jonathan Crary, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory” *October: The Second Decade, 1986-1996*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997) 421.

furniture, empty stages) or waiting (waiting in line, waiting for a train). “The Latin etymology of the word – *abesse*, ‘being away,’ from *esse*, to be, and *ab*, away – already suggests a ‘there,’ a place, a world, a reality, from which one has gone missing. (The place must exist in order for one to be away from it.) Absence, then, is determined by distance, separateness, the breaking of space.”¹⁶ Waiting is a temporal absence because the subject of our desire is not present, except in the future. Photographs of absence are curious as they are contrary to our everyday understanding of photography as “full.” Like the blurry photographs discussed above, empty photographs are considered “bad” photographs (we are told as children learning photography not to waste film on photographs of “nothing,” as if we all had the same understanding of what was worth recording.) As a result there is often something unfamiliar in Grauerholz’s work that seems to work against our usual view of photography, but that is more like memory: full of holes and always changing. It is as if we remember the image but something is missing – it is the responsibility of the viewer to fill in the blanks. Critic Claire Gravel, in her article “L’extase photographique,” claims that this attempt to fill in Grauerholz’s photographs results in a kind of mania in which the viewer continually attempts to shape and reshape memories in order to fit the image, ultimately leaving one with a feeling of loss. Gravel writes: “Notre mémoire confesse son usure; nous devenons semblables à ces infirmes qui ressassent le même souvenir en le modifiant à l’infini. Apparaît quelque chose de très troublant, le sentiment d’une perte.”¹⁷ Chantal Pontbriand has also remarked on the unsettling nature of this emptiness, and its relationship with absence: “Certains lieux photographiés, qui figurent dans *Bar* (1986), *Hôtel* (1989), *Café* (1989), *Les*

¹⁶ Pejić, 146.

¹⁷ Claire Gravel, “L’extase photographique” *Vie des Arts*, 136: 45

Invalides (1989) ou *Allée* (1989) sont essentiellement identifiables comme des lieux de vulnérabilité, des lieux où la présence/absence de l'Autre se fait particulièrement sentir.”¹⁸

In Angela Grauerholz's photographs the absence of waiting is repeatedly evoked through travel. These photographs consist of images of people waiting for trains and planes, as well as views from windows, when the photographer is in transit. Images of travel, often framed through a window, echoing the camera's viewfinder, present us with voyagers, our surrogates in the photographs, in in-between states: the people may be leaving or arriving, beginning or ending their journey; they are in a group of other travellers but alone with their thoughts, boredom or anticipation. It is the responsibility of the viewer to create the narrative of their choice. Grauerholz's hazy, empty photographs permit the viewer to “travel” through their own memories. Planes, trains, statues and tombstones are all objects dedicated to absence – their presence stands in for a subject that is outside the frame in time and/or space.

For Grauerholz, memory is unstable and history, written in the present, can never faithfully reconstruct the past. Chantal Pontbriand writes that in these photographs “l'histoire y est vue beaucoup comme une fiction, manipulable.”¹⁹ Like photography, history is a fiction framed to meet the needs of its creator. Strangely, both photography and history function in our society as privileged carriers of meaning and truth. Photography's inescapable link with the “that-has-been” continues to promote its evidential force. That the viewer is the one who decodes this information, shaping it for his or her own use, is usually forgotten. Critic Paulette Gagnon writes: “Of any image of

¹⁸ Pontbriand, 9.

¹⁹ Pontbriand, 11.

reality, it offers only that which is already present in the memory, a sort of guide to what is lost and to the temporal experience of an eternal recurrence. Grauerholz exploits our ambiguous relation to reality.”²⁰ Photography, as memory’s aide, has come to stand in for remembered experience. We have all tried to remember an experience, only to be confronted with an absence of real memory, replacing a true recollection with the memory of the photograph of that experience (Do I really remember my great-grandmother or do I recall her image in photographs?). Roland Barthes explains: “Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory (whose grammatical expression would be the perfect tense, whereas the tense of the photograph is the aorist), but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory.”²¹ Angela Grauerholz’s images are fictions made to stand in for reality. They use photography to block and question history and truth, replacing it with an empty stage on which viewers can compose and alter their own memories.

As a result of the emphasis on memory, or perhaps even because of its beauty, Angela Grauerholz’s work has tended to be discussed without being clearly identified within the larger critical framework of postmodernism. Even more strangely, the influences that are repeatedly mentioned - German Romanticism, Pictorialism and Alfred Stieglitz - are icons of modernism. One notable exception to this is Marnie Fleming’s text “Putting the Past in Order,”²² published in a booklet which accompanies Grauerholz’s *Aporia* and that is itself structured along an archival system of classification. A possible explanation for this omission is that the scope of the work prevents some writers from

²⁰ Paulette Gagnon, “Angela Grauerholz” *Future Traditions in Canadian Art*, ed. Glen E. Cumming Inaugural Exhibition June 21 to August 28, 1994, Art Gallery North York Performing Arts Centre: 15.

²¹ Barthes, 91.

²² Marnie Fleming. “Putting the Past in Order” (Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995)

coming to a clear conclusion regarding Grauerholz's critical stance. For me a more likely explanation is that the subtlety of her postmodern message has gone largely unnoticed when compared with the works of contemporary artists such as Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine and Martha Rosler, whose main subject is essentially theory. One might ask not only what I mean by "postmodernism," but also why one should care about this potentially slippery term when discussing the works in this thesis. I strongly believe that Angela Grauerholz has used a number of postmodern approaches in her work in order to convey meaning, and that these include questions of authenticity, autobiography, audience and language, as well as originality and quotation. What has made this work more difficult to classify as postmodern is the modernist disguise in which it often presents itself.

The different ways in which Grauerholz uses these postmodern theories and methods will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, and while I have no intention in recounting the history of postmodernism,²³ I believe that it is worth defining the term as I will be using it in this paper. Contradictory and confusing definitions of postmodernism abound, mainly because it has been informed by various theories and methodologies, including Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. For the purpose of this thesis I have tried to restrict my use of the term postmodern to some of its most essential anti-modernist elements. Most postmodern photographic theory has concentrated on overthrowing modernism's use of photography as a tool for its own dominance. While modernism has sought photography's fundamental characteristics,

²³ Two excellent articles regarding the development and difficulties of postmodernism are: Terry Barrett, "Modernism and Postmodernism: An Overview with Art Examples," *Art Education: Context and Practice in a Postmodern Era*, ed. James Hutchens and Marianne Suggs (Reston: The National Art Education Association, 1997) 17-30 and Thomas Docherty, "Postmodernism: An Introduction," Thomas Docherty (ed.) *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 1-31.

mainly its scientific ability to record the “truth,” postmodernism has questioned this accuracy by concentrating on the power structure behind the production and reading of photography. In postmodern practice, the search for a universal meaning has been replaced with an ever-changing unfinished text in which multiple readings are possible. The creation of meaning has shifted from the all-powerful genius artist to the spectator, who can only ever read a text through his/her own reality. I have already considered the viewer’s role in the creation of meaning in Grauerholz’s work as well as the blurring of high and low art boundaries found in many of her images, both of which function as anti-modernist stances. While the use of a soft-focus aesthetic links the work to Pictorialism, it also prevents the photographs from becoming voyeuristic reproductions of reality capable of functioning as evidence of truth. Grauerholz’s subjective use of memory is contrary to the scientific, empirical thought espoused by modernism. The modernist respect for originality has been replaced with appropriation in postmodernist art practice. Unlike artist Sherrie Levine, whose best-known project is entirely made up of photographs of famous modernist artworks which she has re-photographed and signed as her own work, Angela Grauerholz’s *œuvre* consists largely of original images made to look like familiar found images. In addition to this use of pastiche, Grauerholz supplements her work with closely cropped photographs of paintings (*Painting* (1988), *Pieds III* (1989)) as well as the occasional stolen image, such as *Postcard* (1989), that as the name suggests, is simply a re-photographed postcard, in this case from an earlier era (fig.9). By mixing these different sources, Grauerholz involves her work in the postmodern shift from production to reproduction. Finally, the suggestion of

autobiography in the work opens up these photographs to an emotional and personal reading that would have been unheard of within the confines of modernism.

And yet the monumental size of many of the images invites easy comparisons with nineteenth-century studio painting, as does the repeated use of images that fit into the traditional fine art categories of the landscape, the still-life and the nude.

Additionally, the presentation often seems to work against a postmodern definition: the boxes and cabinets used to house *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* and *Sententia I-LXII* are truly one-of-a-kind, finely constructed pieces of furniture. The luxurious creamy paper on which *Aporia* is printed, as well as the very location of the works (within museums), and even in the case of *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, in a fantastic French château surrounded by forests and gardens, seem to place the work solidly within a high-art paradigm. These works present themselves as self-contained, both intellectually and physically. Museums move art away from the political; Grauerholz has used this assumption to her advantage by both disrupting the museum's linear narrative, as she did in Kassel at *Documenta IX* (1992), where she inserted her own photographs between the Neue Galerie's German Romantic paintings, and by degrading the museum's authority with works such as *Églogue or Filling the Landscape*, which appear to reinforce through the archive the museum's role as possessor and distributor of knowledge, but which ultimately "fail" at creating one clear and unquestionable truth. By playing with the viewer's own assumptions about the meaning of photography, as well as its placement within the museum or archive, Grauerholz layers her work with possible, even contradictory, meanings.

It has been argued that much postmodern photography is interesting from the point of view of theory, but often uninteresting as photography.²⁴ Because of a fear of reinforcing the very representations that they are trying to critique, many postmodern artists, such as Martha Rosler and Barbara Kruger, have moved away from representing the real - nature and the body - in favour of constructed studio images. The insistence on function in postmodern photography has resulted in photographic works that make a clear statement about the power structures behind photography but contribute little or nothing to the medium itself. For postmodern theorists such as John Tagg and Allan Sekula, photography itself is essentially inconsequential as its power is always external. I have trouble accepting this “all or nothing” view of photography’s relationship with postmodernism. In *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Geoffrey Batchen argues that “to assume that photography itself doesn’t matter, as postmodernism has traditionally done, is to fail to recognize that photography *cannot not matter*, just as the social can never not be present.”²⁵ Angela Grauerholz’s work *is* beautiful; it seduces the viewer with its soft, dreamy exterior and its elegant presentation, and then reveals a harder, more critical self literally veiled or hidden behind the blur or in a box, cabinet or book. In this work photography *cannot not matter*. It is photography that engages the viewer in his/her traditional search for the truth, only to be left frustrated when he/she realizes the impossibility of the quest. I cannot agree with Paulette Gagnon when she claims that in Grauerholz’s work “the subject of the picture is of little or no

²⁴ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Photography After Art Photography,” *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984) 75-85.

²⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997) 201.

importance.”²⁶ This reading of the work would limit Grauerholz’s *œuvre* to a modernist definition in which the frame and time are ultimately the only real subjects of photography. How then does one explain the elaborate construction of a fictive narrative in works like *Secrets*, *A Gothic Tale*, or the photographs *Nude* and *The Leap*: images of women, one heavy and one thin, leaping through the forest? The subject of this work is not theory *or* art, it is theory *as* art. Grauerholz’s photographs of nature and the body in nature confuse the clear divisions of culture or nature set up by both modernism and postmodernism. It is this complex relationship - this postmodern message in a modernist hat - which I will consider in detail in the next three sections of this thesis.

²⁶ Paulette Gagnon, *Angela Grauerholz*. trans. Susan Le Pan (Montréal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal) 51.

“Ruins suggest noble thoughts in me; that everything decays
and dies and passes away, only the world remains and time endures.
What an old world it is! [...] One never tires of looking.
Time stands still for he who marvels.”

Denis Diderot¹

“Ah, bear in mind this garden was enchanted!”

Edgar Allan Poe²

Angela Grauerholz is not a landscape photographer; and yet the vast majority of her photographs are of landscape. This apparent paradox is the result of intention rather than subject matter. Landscape photography as a distinct category of photographic production tends to align itself with a documentary tradition in which the image presents itself as a true record of what the artist has seen. This does not mean that these images are neutral; in fact much landscape photography has been produced in the service of those who wish to use the land for its resources, or by those who wish to preserve those same elements. But as useful records of a location or event, traditional landscape photography emphasizes the image's placement in both space and time. This is poignantly true in the directed fantasy images created to “sell” the landscape to tourists through brochures and postcards.

In contrast, in Grauerholz's photography the landscape serves less as a true record of what the artist saw than as a reflection of both the photographer's and viewer's own

¹ Denis Diderot, “Salon de 1767” quoted in Olivier Asselin, “The Sublime: The Limits of Vision and the Inflation of Commentary,” trans. Francine Dagenais, *Theory Rules: Art as Theory / Theory and Art*, ed. Jody Berland et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 254.

² Quoted in Benjamin Genocchio, “Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of ‘Other’ Spaces,” *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 35.

interpretations of a view. The titles, when present, give us little or no information about the location of the garden, pond, or path represented. These images are deliberately misleading as to their time of production. As proposed in the preceding chapter, it is the viewer's responsibility to imbue them with personal meaning or historical significance. Their factual aspect is undermined by their blurriness, moving them away from any resemblance to modernist documentary photography. Faced with Grauerholz's images one might ask if they represent traditional landscape photography gone astray or a physical manifestation of the emotional response that a viewer has to the landscape itself.

In this section of the thesis, I will begin by addressing the comparison between Grauerholz's photography and Pictorialism. I will consider the influence of German romantic art on Grauerholz's *œuvre* and then present an alternative reading of the work through the concept of the Sublime, which has come to have new meaning within a postmodern framework. Finally, it is my intention to introduce the figure of the *flâneur* in the context of the urban landscape.

Most casual museumgoers would agree that landscape is a neutral, happy, safe and timeless subject for art - much less upsetting than the current vogue for sheep in formaldehyde, or paintings of skinheads. We are taught that natural products are always better than unnatural ones, and that the wilderness should be left untouched by human hands. The word "park" can be used on its own or as a suffix to landscape, nature, and wilderness. But what do we really mean by these terms?

The word "landscape" entered English from the Dutch at the end of the sixteenth century: "*landschap*", like its Germanic root, *landschaft*, signified a unit of human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of

depiction.”³ Though its original meaning was land shaped by humans, landscape is now defined as “an extensive area of scenery as viewed from a single aspect, or a painting, drawing, photograph, etc., depicting natural scenery.”⁴ In addition, “nature” can be misleading because of its paradoxical meanings as both human fundamental qualities or essential character as well as “the whole system of the existence, forces, and events of all physical life that are not controlled by man, a wild primitive state untouched by man.”⁵ Historically, the word “wilderness” has been a negative word meaning a barren and uninhabitable area, a wasteland where humans were lost and confused. Kenneth Olwig, in his essay “Reinventing Common Nature,” explains that,

The etymologically primary meaning of the word “park”[...] is an enclosed preserve for beasts of the chase. A “wilderness” was, in contrast, the place where the beasts (*deoren* in Old English) ran wild (wild-deer-ness), and was related to “bewilderment” and going astray. The term “park” was later extended to mean a large ornamental piece of ground, usually comprising woodland and pasture, attached to or surrounding a country house or mansion, and used for recreation.⁶

It is also worth noting, in this context, that both the German root of the word “garden” and the English word “yard” mean enclosed area.⁷ The Garden of Eden was a park, not a wilderness. It may have been unspoiled but it was not free of human presence.

This argument is not a tangent into semantics; it is crucial to my argument that landscape be understood as “a unit of human occupation,” and not as untouched land. I believe that Grauerholz presents landscape views in which the human presence is

³ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Toronto: Vintage, 1996) 10.

⁴ *The New Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus*, ed. William T. McLeod (London: Collins, 1987) 562.

⁵ *The New Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus*, ed. William T. McLeod (London: Collins, 1987) 663.

⁶ Kenneth R. Olwig, “Reinventing Common Nature: Yosemite and Mount Rushmore – A Meandering Tale of a Double Nature,” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996) 382.

⁷ Olwig, 384.

constantly challenging the meaning of the natural. These are images of how we imagine the landscape, and how we imagine ourselves in it. While most landscape photographs contain their meaning inside their frame, these landscape photographs act as triggers to a memory of another time or place outside of the actual image. Humans have invented nature; Grauerholz's landscape photographs re-introduce this layer of culture through which we mediate and project our desires onto the land; a layer that some have interpreted as a modern version of turn-of-the-century Pictorialism.

I have briefly mentioned the comparisons with Pictorialism that these works evoke. As Beth Seaton writes: "Perhaps the most salient aspect of [her] work is its ephemeral quality; a blurred mark of indistinction which suggests a pictorialist style."⁸ It is, in fact, mainly that lack of sharp detail in Grauerholz's photographs that has led to this comparison. It is my belief that this oversimplification of both Pictorialism and Grauerholz's work has led to a misdirection in the analysis of the photographic projects that I am considering in this thesis.

Pictorialism was a turn-of the-century movement that sought to ensure photography's place amongst the fine arts. With the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888 photography became available to a wide range of people, effectively destroying any claim to artistic status that it might have held. Photography was now seen as a tradesman's occupation – not art. As a result, groups of photographers, the most important of which were the Linked Ring in Britain and the Photo-Secession in the United States, attempted to alter their photographic production to separate it from more commercial snapshots. Pictorialist photographers downplayed the mechanical nature of

⁸ Beth Seaton, "Mundane Re-Membrances," *Parachute* 56 (October, November, December 1989): 24.

photography by turning to allegorical subject matter, as well as artisanal printing processes not readily available to the general public. Photographers such as Holland Day, Gertrude Kasebier, Annie Brigman and Alice Boughton chose their subject matter from painting, concentrating on carefully posed female nudes, images of children, peasant life, animals, rural locations and mythical themes such as angels and the legend of King Arthur. The self-conscious referencing of classical painting was done reverently and without irony. The softer tonal range produced by the platinum and gum-bichromate process in printing was occasionally reinforced by the hand-working of both the negative and the print, the ultimate goal being the rarity of the fine print. The use of a soft-focus aesthetic became so prevalent that in 1902, in his review of the photographic exhibition of the Linked Ring and the Royal Photographic Society, published in *The Amateur Photographer*, George Bernard Shaw wrote: "I do not think that it can be denied that some of the Salon pictures are "fuzzygraphs." They raise the question, insoluble by the critic, whether the fuzz is the result of affection or defective sight. Do the artists need a little more common sense; or do they simply need spectacles?"⁹

Although there are critics who would claim that Grauerholz is also in need of spectacles, I have already elaborated on the much more significant motivations for her use of a soft-focus aesthetic in her work. I will not repeat myself here, except to reiterate that I feel that this work is defined by intention: where Pictorialism used the blur to distance itself from the mechanical nature of photography, Grauerholz uses the blur to distance the image from a precise reality and to remind the viewer that the photograph is mechanical, and not a transparent window on the world. The subject matter chosen by

⁹ George Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw on Photography*, ed. Bill Jay and Margaret Moore (Salt Lake: P. Smith Books, 1989) 90.

Grauerholz would have been entirely unacceptable to the pictorialist photographers, as her fragmented views lack coherence, clear narrative elements, and allegorical grandeur. The truth is that Grauerholz is a snapshot-taker – the very type of photographer the pictorialists despised. Grauerholz's work is about fleeting images, moments captured quickly, without the detail that classical composition and lengthy study would provide. Because of the printing processes used, most pictorial photographic prints were small, jewel-like images; Grauerholz's poster-sized photographs are often mechanically printed Cibachromes – colour prints made from a black and white negative. The rich sepia tone of these Cibachrome prints is reinforced by their smooth and perfect surface, undesirable to the pictorialist photographer. These reproducible, machine-made prints intentionally deny evidence of the artist's hand, while opening themselves up to the viewer/author who is free to read in them a personal meaning as well as a more structured one created by the artist. The complex presentation of Grauerholz's work as fictional autobiography, archive, or artist's book adds layers of meaning simply not present in Pictorialism. Whereas Pictorialism was about photography's place in the fine arts, Grauerholz's work uses photography as a medium through which she presents a larger meaning, one which has surpassed the "art or science" debate while continuing to acknowledge it. Continuing to reference Grauerholz's work in terms of Pictorialism does not serve either adequately. While I accept that the blurriness of the work has been the main reason for the comparison of the two, it is overly simplistic to assume that photography must cite photographic history. Admittedly, some critics have made links between Grauerholz's landscape work and both German Romantic art and the Sublime, but they have tended to do so without elaborating on or justifying these comparisons. Grauerholz's work merits

consideration within a larger art historical framework, and restricting it to photographic discourse is to limit both its meaning and its force.

German Romantic art has been an important influence on Grauerholz's photography in general, and her landscape photography in particular. Her use of lone figures with their backs to the viewer, a composition repeatedly used by Casper David Friedrich, has often been noted as referencing German Romanticism. I believe that in quoting Friedrich, Grauerholz is alluding to more than a stylistic heritage; she is also layering her work with the thematic values prized by Romantic artists. Early nineteenth-century Romantic art was self-consciously anti-classical; it emphasised sights that stimulated the imagination, the emotional and the spiritual. Romantic artists, such as Casper David Friedrich and Philipp Otto Runge, and writers, such as Friedrich Schlegel, believed themselves to be above all modern-witnesses to their own society, their work capable of capturing the "spirit of the age." For me, Grauerholz, by referencing the composition and subject matter of Romanticism, leads the modern viewer to the emotional and spiritual in her own work – and by extension also updates the meaning of German Romantic art of the past, making it relevant today. In a 1989 interview Grauerholz stated:

I worked upon a series of photographs where I recreated a type of Northern German romantic landscape [...]. I may not now be doing Northern German romantic landscapes, but I'm dealing with German romantic ideas. I don't know how far I've taken them out of what they were, or how far I've changed them but I do know that they are still there.¹⁰

In 1992, at Kassel's *Documenta IX*, Grauerholz inserted her own photographs into the Neue Galerie's exhibition of German Romantic painting, creating a dialogue between

¹⁰ Seaton, 25.

the old and the new works. There are, of course, no German Romantic photographers, as photography was not invented until 1839, by which time Romanticism had largely fallen out of favour. Despite this, Geoffrey Batchen in *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* claims that the romantic interest in nature was, in part, responsible for the idea of photography. Batchen believes that the concept of nature at the turn of the eighteenth century “became synonymous with the rapid expansion of time itself,”¹¹ and that it was this interest in harnessing both nature and time that ultimately led to the development of photography. Grauerholz’s photography, while modern in its subject matter, can be seen in an exhibition such as *Documenta IX* to fill in the void left between the idea of photography at the end of the eighteenth century and its actual invention fifty years later. *La Conductrice*, for instance (fig.2), elicits a strong emotional reaction in the viewer through its use of a Friedrich-like composition in which the viewer faces out of the front of a bus from behind the back of the bus driver. The blinding light coming in the front window, through which both the driver and the viewer look, is so bright that our vision is totally obscured and we can only imagine what might lie ahead as we drive into this “tunnel of light.” The spiritual and emotional ramifications of our desire to be absorbed by the landscape in Grauerholz’s work can only be described as Romantic. According to Simon Schama, in *Landscape and Memory*, Friedrich’s association of the spiritual and the natural “goes directly to the heart of one of our most powerful yearnings: the craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality.”¹² In both Friedrich and Grauerholz’s work we are forever separated from the view, leaving the viewer to imagine

¹¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997) 59.

¹² Schama, 15.

what their surrogate in these images is seeing and feeling. Ultimately in both artists' work it is what is happening outside of the frame - the power of nature, death and the infinite - that become the real protagonist in many of the photographs.

Beyond Pictorialism and German Romantic art, there are issues in Grauerholz's work that need further consideration. The landscape works that I will discuss below consist mainly of photographs found in three parts of an extended trilogy made up of *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* and *Aporia*. I will be introducing images from *Sententia I-LXII* mainly in my discussion of urban landscape. The physical presentation of all four of these projects is an integral part of their meaning and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. Most of the photographs that are published in the bookwork *Aporia* were originally presented in either *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, or *Églogue or Filling the Landscape*. Because the images in the first two parts of the trilogy are not easily accessible or reproducible, most of those that accompany this section of the thesis have been reproduced from *Aporia*.

Secrets, a Gothic Tale, as already noted, is a site-specific work created and housed at the Domaine de Kerguéhennec in Brittany. This permanent installation is found in the library of the park's château. Grauerholz describes the work as "a monument to a fictional woman photographer who lived in the castle sometime in the late 19th century, and who wandered the park – especially the area around the lake - obsessively taking pictures of the landscape. Her mental health slowly deteriorated and eventually she killed herself."¹³ The feminist implications of this work will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. It is worth noting, however, that it is unclear as to whether the landscape reflects the "photographer's" mental state, or if it is somehow responsible for her suicide.

¹³ Angela Grauerholz, *Aporia* (Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995) no page.

Is she literally consumed by the land or is it the act of photographing and framing the park around her that alters her perception to an such an extent that the garden becomes a wilderness – if only psychologically? The landscape photographs in this project are fragmented views of water: images that become more and more difficult to read as they move further away from classical landscape photography (fig.13).

Églogue or Filling the Landscape consists of two hundred and sixteen landscape photographs divided into twenty-seven opaque paper boxes, which are, in turn, held in a large, clear Plexiglas cabinet (fig.15). This work is presented in the form of an archive that is both private - being the production of a single artist - and public - displayed within the confines of the museum. The opaque boxes and clear cabinet, along with restricted viewing times controlled by the museum at which it is exhibited, create a tension between the visible and invisible. The cover of the first and the twenty-seventh box are labelled “ENTERING THE LANDSCAPE” and “LEAVING THE LANDSCAPE” respectively, implying a journey through a restricted space. The first box, “ENTERING THE LANDSCAPE,” might also connote a final voyage of death in which our own bodies are literally returned to the landscape and into the earth. Each of the remaining twenty-five boxes is labelled with a column of words that combine topographical and emotional classifications of the land. Box twenty, for instance, reads:

GROUNDS
TENDED
PRESERVED
ENCLOSED
SAFE
CAREFUL
GUARDED

Marnie Fleming, in *Putting the Past in Order*, has remarked that these words can be read as both a poem and a code to be broken.¹⁴ While many critics have mentioned that the name of the work, *Églogue*, means “to pick out,” or “to select,” few have mentioned the best-known eclogues: those written by Virgil between 42 and 39 B.C.E. (*Églogue* is the French translation of eclogue. To eliminate any confusion I have used the French spelling only when referring to Grauerholz’s work) Those critics who have mentioned Virgil quickly return to the archival significance of selecting and totally ignore the meaning of eclogue in terms of landscape.¹⁶

An eclogue, also known as a bucolic, is a pastoral poems in the form of a conversation. Virgil’s *Eclogues* consist of ten poems, the events of which are located in the idealized rural setting of Arcadia and told through classical mythology. “In the climactic fourth eclogue the return of the age of gold is heralded as a time of effortless rustic prosperity [...]. From this perfect pastoral state, all savage things have been banished.”¹⁷ Virgil’s Arcadia is located firmly within the garden walls; it is a mediated nature, a fertile land in which love, leisure and community reign. This paradise is destroyed when the land is ultimately divided and given to outsiders, sending the native shepherds into exile. “The home they leave [...] becomes a wilderness, the oak under which they sang struck by lightening, the land they cross dry, formless, and barren – roamed by wolves.”¹⁸ But Virgil’s rural utopia does not reflect the more ancient view of arcadian landscape. Simon Schama, in *Landscape and Memory*, explains that “the Arcadians themselves, [...], are never imagined by the Greeks as farmers. Hunters and

¹⁴ Marnie Fleming, “Putting the Past in Order”(Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995) 9.

¹⁶ Fleming, 12.

¹⁷ Schama, 528.

¹⁸ Olwig, 385.

gatherers, warriors and sensualists, they inhabit a landscape notorious for its brutal harshness, trapped between arid drought and merciless floods.”¹⁹ According to Schama, “there have always been two kinds of arcadia: shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic.”²⁰ This Arcadian duality, landscapes that are aggressive and passive, soft and hard, and sunny and stormy can be found in most of the photographs considered in this thesis.

Returning to Grauerholz’s work, *Églogue* can also be read as a pastoral poem in the form of a conversation: a conversation between the artist and the museum, between the museum and the viewer, between the viewer and his or her own memories, and even between the images themselves. What is more intriguing is the reference that the title *Églogue* evokes. For me, the tension between the golden age described in Virgil’s *Eclogues* and the dark, unsettling images in Grauerholz’s *Églogue* mirror the difference between the old and the new Arcadia. The wall, which literally distinguished Arcadia from the wilderness, has been breached in *Églogue*, and as viewers we repeatedly find ourselves outside looking in (fig.3). A land of bucolic pleasure often seems just beyond the viewer’s grasp in these photographs. Some of the images in *Églogue* do reflect a golden age of peaceful and beautiful parks, magnificent chateaux, placid lakes and clear paths through manicured forests, but their blurriness is unsettling. It evokes an instability, a sense that their perfection cannot last and that we may be cast out into the wilderness in the next photograph. The final destination of many of these peaceful paths is unclear as they stretch into the distance or bend around a corner to an ambiguous end. As in Virgil’s poems, the viewer enters the landscape housed in *Églogue*, passing through box

¹⁹ Schama, 527.

²⁰ Schama, 517.

after box in search of meaning and/or a clear narrative, only to finally leave the landscape for the wilderness of the museum and their own memories. Grauerholz's title is not random; the photographs in *Églogue* represent a landscape which is both "shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic." They represent a world both beautiful and sublime.

Angela Grauerholz's work has been repeatedly described as sublime, but two hundred years after becoming a meaningful artistic concept it is less clear what this term means, and how it is relevant today. Published in 1757, just prior to the rise of the Romantic movement, Edmund Burke's study *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was a way of viewing an excess of emotion as a new kind of subjectivity. For Burke, while it was possible to arrive at this excess through the Beautiful, it was much easier through the Sublime, which is a negative reaction of dread or self-preservation. The sublime experience is caused by a positive pain in which the boundaries between the world and the self are blurred, resulting in the strongest possible emotional response. The stimuli capable of bringing on a sublime reaction are closely linked to the study of landscape as understood by eighteenth-century thinkers. This new conception of nature promoted a less classical and formal landscape. The Sublime could be experienced through any of the following: light, darkness, sound, society, wild animals, the menace of pain or death, stars, lightening, ruins, chaos, storms, the sea, voids, infinity or eternity. Our desire to impose order on the world is frustrated by an excess of information that spills over the confines of how we negotiate reality. Art was seen as a privileged means of experiencing the Sublime because terrifying scenes could be represented while providing the viewer with the distance needed to experience

pleasurable pain over real terror. Olivier Asselin, in his article “The Sublime: The Limits of Vision and the Inflation of Commentary,” states: “[T]he sublime effect can also be achieved in painting by way of the composition, or merely by means of the spatial and temporal ‘découpe’ (framing) that it imposes on the subject, which sometimes seems in excess of its frame.”²¹ Asselin goes on to explain that the concepts of time and infinity are key to understanding the sublime experience:

The painting of ruins, though without ceasing to represent only a moment, present negatively (by representing its effects) a duration and an infinite duration – time in its totality which, in all its magnitude (it is infinite), and its power (it is inescapable and irreversible), remains unmasterable, imperceptible, and unknowable. [...] Hence the imagination in this instance attempts to imagine not only our future, but time in its entirety, to infinity.²²

Time is key to an understanding both of Burke’s Sublime and of a new postmodern Sublime, but it is also essential to the understanding of photography.

Jean-François Lyotard, in “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” points out that today the word “sublime” has lost most of its force and is synonymous with a word as commonplace as “great.”²³ How then are we to understand the use of sublime in terms of Grauerholz’s landscape photographs? Few critics, with the notable exception of Claire Gravel,²⁴ have fully explained their use of the term “sublime” in reference to this work. Louise Déry, for example, writes: “Suggérons ici que ce sont davantage les sujets qui sont ordinaires et que les images, défiant ce caractère banal, atteignent souvent le sublime.”²⁵ Echoing this statement, Chantal Pontbriand states: “Les photographies

²¹ Asselin, 252.

²² Asselin, 253.

²³ Jean-François Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 246.

²⁴ Claire Gravel, “Du lieu commun au sublime” *Le Cahier du Samedi, le Devoir*, 6 mai, 1989

²⁵ Louise Déry, *Angela Grauerholz* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1998) 37 Louise Déry, *Angela Grauerholz* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1998) 37.

d'Angela Grauerholz ont quelque chose du sublime et du banal à la fois. En ce sens, elles participent d'une sorte de romantisme postmoderne, désillusionné et vivant dans une même temps."²⁶ For Pontbriand, Grauerholz is a new kind of romantic. She is as passionate as the first romantics but maintains a critical distance from her subject matter. Similarly, Paulette Gagnon claims: "[S]he develops a visual narrative, communicated in paradoxical images which are at once commonplace, sublime and unexpected."²⁷ In terms of labelling the work as sublime, to describe these photographs as "unexpected" seems insufficient.

Instead I would argue that all three of the projects that I have mentioned in this chapter can be viewed within the definition of Edmund Burke's Sublime. The monumental size and scope of Grauerholz's work clearly sets it apart from much art photography. The quantity of photographs in *Églogue* is overwhelming; one "enters the landscape" without any real sense of when and how to exit. Marnie Fleming explains that the rigid structure and organization of *Églogue* is deceiving: "[M]entally primed by the text, we are brought face to face with the contents: ordered photographs of a disordered nature."²⁸ Twisted trees, tangled branches, dense shrubbery and agitated water seem at odds with the structure imposed by the archive and the museum in which the work is displayed (fig.4). Similarly, *Aporia* can be read both forwards and backwards, it has no page numbers, no titles and very little text to guide the reader. Picking up the book for the first time can be disorienting and confusing as one struggles to find a narrative or a clue as to how to read this collection of images. The traditional structure of the book has been overturned, leaving the reader unbalanced.

²⁶ Chantal Pontbriand, *Parachute* 63 (July, August, September 1991) 4.

²⁷ Paulette Gagnon, *Angela Grauerholz* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1995) 51.

²⁸ Fleming, 11.

Standing in front of mural-sized images the viewer cannot help but feel physically subsumed within the work. This sublime feeling of being pulled in is reinforced by the presence of figures in the foreground who face the landscapes, their backs towards us, as if they had themselves just been consumed by the image. *Églogue* and *Aporia* contain images of ruins and cemeteries, both of which reference death and the incomprehensible magnitude of time (fig.5). The need for self-preservation reaches its height in *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, with the ultimate suicide of the imagined protagonist. Faced with the mania that these landscape images reflect, viewers must question their own mental and physical safety as they follow along her visual path (fig.13).

Grauerholz's landscape photographs are often dark and threatening. In several images the horizon is eliminated, and as a result the viewer's sense of stability is diminished as one strains to make sense of an abstract image that seems to have no top or bottom. In an image such as *Sententia No 19*, a view from above of a wooden spiral staircase that winds down several floors, the viewer is made to feel a loss of balance and a sublime fear of self preservation as the photograph seems to be taken from a perilous vantage point, or as if one were actually falling. The sublime experience in Grauerholz's work is further heightened by a lack of containment: images spill out of the frame, paths reach out beyond our view, trees are too numerous, people travel away – beyond the boundaries that we have set for them (fig.6). I have already mentioned the feeling of vertigo that some viewers feel when faced with a photographic representation of their own memories. Claire Gravel, in "Du lieu commun au sublime," associates this feeling of being overwhelmed, even suffocated by the involuntary memories caused by Grauerholz's work to the seduction-repulsion of the Sublime. Gravel writes: "Ces espaces

profonds parlent du sublime (...) La séduction absolue des images n'est pas éloignée d'une certaine repulsion: on suffoque parfois devant ces lieux magiques qui font surgir nos souvenirs comme d'impénétrables apparitions."²⁹

Considering Grauerholz's work in reference to theories of the Sublime may seem irrelevant for the twenty-first century viewer, but the Sublime has taken on a new importance within postmodern theory. Jean- François Lyotard, who has written extensively on both Postmodernism and the Sublime, claims: "The sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern."³⁰ For Lyotard, whereas Modernism has privileged universal meaning, the Sublime is tied to our reaction in the "here and now." As a result, waiting and anticipation are to be viewed as negative feelings, which can result in a sublime experience. The instability of waiting can result in a sense of agitation, but "this agitation is only possible if something remains to be determined."³¹ Grauerholz's landscape photographs seem to capture the timelessness of nature, and yet the viewer begins to suspect that something is missing: benches are empty, paths seem unused, people turn away, and buildings seem lifeless. Perhaps we are too early, or too late. Emptiness is in itself capable of awakening a sublime experience, but there remains something unresolved in Grauerholz's photographs. Whereas most photography causes a temporal shock because of its ability to bring the past into the present, Grauerholz's images condense time through their subject matter and physical presentation. As a result they participate in the postmodern Sublime through their temporal instability. We are given little or no information about how long a scene has remained unchanged, or how long we will have to wait until it changes; as we wait we are

²⁹ Claire Gravel, "Du lieu commun au sublime" *Le Cahier du Samedi, le Devoir*, 6 mai, 1989.

³⁰ Lyotard, 247.

³¹ Lyotard, 245

incapable of placing these images in the “here and now.” Michel Foucault has postulated: “Maybe the most certain of all philosophical problems is the problem of the present time and of what we are in this very moment.”³² Photography once claimed mastery over time, but in Grauerholz’s work time seems to control the image. Time here is unknowable. Not only is the viewer denied a sense of the here and now, there never seems to have been a single present moment recorded. Lyotard explains that “[t]he avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation.”³³

Like the pre-photographic *flâneur*, Grauerholz’s viewer moves from place to place, seeing the everyday as a series of *tableaux*, in an attempt to imbue the banal with meaning, I would like to propose that the artist deliberately positions the viewer as a modern day “*flâneur*,” whose role it is to search for beauty and art. A product of the industrial revolution, the *flâneur*, or stroller, wanders the city in search of emotion in an environment that seems, at first glance, to offer only the banal. Walter Benjamin states: “The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as the citizen is in his four walls.”³⁴ But the *flâneur* is more than just a wanderer - he is a witness. Gillian Swanson, in “Drunk with the Glitter: Consuming Spaces and Sexual Geographies,” claims that:

The *flâneur*, as much as the train passenger, is constituted in terms of a modern sensibility whose moral and social character is endangered by the ‘shock’ of modern life, shock whose other side is evident in a fascination with the sensations offered by new forms of mobility and spatial horizon. This refiguration of

³² Michel Foucault, “Subject and Power” *Art After Modernism*, 424.

³³ Lyotard, 256.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin quoted in Victor Burgin, *In / Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 113.

perception is harnessed to the development of a panoramic gaze; a mobile gaze, collapsing the relations of space and time.³⁵

The concept of the *flâneur* as a personage developed with the invention of the arcade around 1820. The Parisian arcade, an interior street with a glass ceiling, was made possible with the technological development of iron rods to support large sheets of glass. These streets can be considered as liminal spaces – neither strictly indoors nor outdoors – that inhabit a world transparent and opaque at the same time. “The *flâneur* who turns the street into a living room commits an act of transgression which reverses an established distinction between public and private space.”³⁶

As the viewer strolls through Grauerholz’s photographs, they are repeatedly met with images of windows and doors – spaces that are both transparent and solid, and symbolizing containment and loss. “The ambiguous nature of the window casts the whole image in a profoundly melancholic dimension where absence becomes presence.”³⁷ In a work like *Hospital* (fig. 7) we see a large rectangular building covered in windows – and yet it appears entirely solid and impermeable, almost threatening. This cold urban landscape seems in harsh contrast to the nurturing that one imagines is needed in such a place. The viewer cannot see into the buildings and can only imagine those who look out, knowing that there are only two ways to leave a hospital: alive or dead. Windows and doors function in these photographs as frames within the photographic frame; they dissect and divide the images, reminding the viewer once again that the photograph always involves inclusion and exclusion. In *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination*, Penny Cousineau-Levine writes: “It would be impossible to

³⁵ Gillian Swanson, “Drunk with the Glitter: Consuming Spaces and Sexual Geographies” *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 82.

³⁶ Burgin, 145.

³⁷ Gagnon, 53.

overestimate the degree to which this window-like opening dominates Canadian photographic imagery.”³⁸ For Cousineau-Levine the window provides an opening into another reality, a threshold between two realms. If one accepts this interpretation than Grauerholz’s work must be seen as participating in this larger Canadian obsession, one that necessarily involves the viewer as they struggle to position themselves in an ambiguous space.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes likens photographic meaning to the view from a window. Barthes writes: “The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both: the windowpane and the landscape, and why not: Good and Evil, desire and its object.”³⁹ Grauerholz’s windows are often without a view and the object of our desire is, therefore, always beyond reach. Perhaps photography here has failed in its predatory function to “take” its subject. In *Sententia No. 1*, for instance, the photograph is framed internally by the window frame that appears as a solid bar on the right hand side of the image, and is divided again by a mullion, which cuts horizontally across the window, dividing the photograph in two (fig.8). It is the view through the window, however, that frustrates the modern *flâneur* in his quest for landscapes of artistic merit: it is nothing more than rows of windows, each divided and subdivided until the whole photograph forms a grid. The windows themselves reflect the light, preventing us as viewers from seeing through them and frustrating our voyeurism. We are inside and outside simultaneously. Unlike the protagonist in Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Rear Window*, who witnesses a murder from his

³⁸ Penny Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2003) 87.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 6.

window, Grauerholz's viewer sees little or nothing through her windows. It is unclear if time and space have collapsed in order to permit the viewer to fill in the blanks, or if we are simply waiting for Godot.

Grauerholz records images in which our everyday surroundings become a world of performance and illusion. Walter Benjamin, in "Naples", explains how "buildings are used as a popular stage. They are all divided into innumerable, simultaneously animated theatres. Balcony, courtyard, window, gateway, staircase, roof are at the same time stage and boxes."⁴⁰ Grauerholz's images seem to present - sometimes literally, sometimes allegorically - the space onto which the viewer may project the drama of their life.

Sententia No. 2 is a dark and gloomy image of an empty carnival space that connotes not only amusement but also masquerade. In works like *L'Opéra* and *Théâtre*, Grauerholz photographs empty stages and theatre seating. It is unclear if the drama is over or has yet to begin. These photographs are impossible to date and may have been taken anytime in the last century. Photography has not frozen time, but has instead collapsed it, permitting the viewer to wander through in search of meaning.

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) 165.

“I have always, beyond belief, hoped to meet, at night and in a woods,
a beautiful naked woman or rather, since such a wish once expressed
means nothing, I regret, beyond belief, not having met her.”

André Breton¹

“The goddess can be recognized by her step.”

Virgil²

Jacques Lacan, in “Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality,” writes: “Images and symbols *for* the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols *of* the woman... It is representation, the representation of feminine sexuality whether repressed or not, which conditions how it comes into play.”³ The works that I am addressing in this thesis have rarely been considered within a feminist context. Unlike the case with much postmodern feminist photography, Grauerholz’s feminist message does not control the work to the exclusion of other themes. Instead it winds its way through her production, revealing itself in ways that are subtle and meaningful. Many of Grauerholz’s photographs are of women; these are not portraits but images that speak to a broader feminine experience. They are representations of the woman, by a woman – a subject that many postmodern feminist artists have found problematic. Beyond these are works in which the body is entirely absent, and yet the representation of the feminine remains an important theme.

¹ Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces: Places and Memory in Visual Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 105.

² Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993) 157.

³ Jacques Lacan, “Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality,” *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. J. Mitchell and J. Rose (New York: Norton and Pantheon, 1982) 90. Quoted in Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1984) 71.

Prior to the works considered in this thesis, Grauerholz produced a series of large, blurry portraits of Canadian women artists. These photographs provided the viewer with the names of the women, while denying them the voyeuristic details that photography usually provides. Postmodern feminist artists have long struggled with how to produce images of women that do not reinforce the very stereotypes that they are questioning. This series was an attempt to create photographs of women that overcame the control of the “male gaze,” and this early project was reviewed in terms of its direct feminist meaning. I will not expand on these portraits in this thesis, but I feel that it is worth noting that they are indicative of the artist’s feminist sensibility. That Grauerholz moves away from a direct, openly political feminist message in favour of a more complex and diverse artistic production does not mean that feminism is not still a concern for the artist. I believe that the more subtle message is, yet again, a way in which Grauerholz presents a postmodern message in the guise of a modernist image. In the works that I will consider below, for instance, she has used several entirely different approaches to convey a feminist sensibility, including absence and presence, recontextualization, autobiography and appropriation. She has also represented the traditional category of the female nude, something that few postmodern feminist photographers have attempted to do. By layering the work with various open meanings, the risk is, of course, that the feminist message will be overlooked. In this chapter I will consider several individual photographs as well as *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*.

The representation of the feminine influences not only how the world views women, but also how women view themselves. The politics of this representation have

been a concern for women for well over a century. Rosemary Betterton, in *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, explains:

Between about 1890 and 1914, a reconfiguration occurred, both politically and artistically, in female embodiment. As women sought political representation, conflicts over the political and sexual body, the status of motherhood and the role of women as artists became the subject of intense debate.⁴

This period coincides with an explosion in photography. For the first time mass-produced images of women as celebrity, as suffragette, as homemaker, as artist, as seductress began to appear in the media, shaping how women viewed these roles. The suffragette, for instance, was repeatedly shown to be an unattractive, hysterical, mannish woman. Representations of the body are never neutral and remain central to feminist cultural practice. More recently postmodern artists have attempted to question not only the representation of women, but the very means of transmission, mainly photography and film. Postmodernism is concerned with our present understanding of representation, yet artists have found themselves bound to the same symbolic language that is used to oppress them. How can photography, a medium that is used to objectify and control women, be used to represent female experience and subjectivity? This issue is addressed by postmodern feminist artists like Cindy Sherman, Martha Rosler and Barbara Kruger, who “have tended to put to one side the issue of an authentic self-representation in order to expose the signifying codes by which the feminine is discursively produced and the psychic and cultural codes of investiture by which woman-as-sign is mobilized.”⁶

Kruger’s best-known work has been based on a recontextualization of vintage images. By

⁴ Rosemary Betterton, 3

⁶ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Representing Women: The Politics of Self-Representation,” *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*, ed. Diane Neumaier (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) 303.

adding new titles and phrases over the photographs in a bold black/white and red graphic style reminiscent of advertising, Kruger changes the meanings of the images. This is reinforced by the artist's mode of presentation, which involves printing her works on matchbooks, T-shirts and billboards. Kruger herself does not appear in the work. Cindy Sherman, on the other hand, has used masquerade extensively, posing herself in iconic female roles, such as victimized film star and Renaissance Madonna. Sherman's more recent works have centred on the fear of the body as abject object. These disturbing images present the body in pieces – disembodied from their owner. Grauerholz's images are less directed – the artist does not appear in her own photographs and she does not alter her found images in any representational way. Still, many of the overt feminist messages found in the postmodern artists considered above are present in Grauerholz's *œuvre*.

Two works from 1989, *Postcard* and *The Chinese Girls*, are both stolen images that question women's representation in mass media. Produced around the same time as the portrait series but removed from it, *The Chinese Girls* is a photograph of an article torn from the *Montreal Gazette* of October 15, 1988. Under the heading *The World*, the short news item is titled "Unhappy Peasant Girls Die in Group Suicide." The article is clearly photographed and easily readable; it tells the sad tale of 51 young women who had recently drowned themselves in the hope of coming back to a better life. The story goes on to recount how these women became dissatisfied with their lives after visiting the city and being made aware of the privileges open to other women in their own country. *The Chinese Girls* seems at first glance to be unlike most of Grauerholz's other works, and yet it does highlight themes such as suicide by drowning, questions of representation

and the nature of documentary, that would be of greater importance in future works, such as *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*. Formally, *The Chinese Girls* also anticipates the artist's most recent work *Privation*, in which she has scanned and reproduced what remained of partially burned books. While commenting on the unevenness of women's lives around the world, Grauerholz here questions two different systems of documentary: photography and language, neither of which provides a clear "picture" in this instance. The names and faces of these desperate women are not represented in this article; they have become nothing more than a passing news item on page fourteen. Still, by not representing these women, alive or dead, she spares them from being exploited by the camera.

Postcard (fig.9) is a re-photographed postcard from the early 1960s that has been enlarged to poster size (1m 21 x 1m 62). This unusual photograph depicts an audience watching what appear to be women swimming in a series of windows. The women are wearing bathing suits and wings. Each of the four women visible to us takes a different seductive pose (there seem to be other windows, presumably also containing women that cannot be viewed from our vantage point). There is a naïve aspect to this voyeuristic image that makes Grauerholz's recontextualization so disturbing. Here, the female body is displayed as if it were for sale as store merchandise, not unlike prostitutes in Amsterdam who sit in windows waiting for "buyers," or peep show dancers who wait for viewers. This work speaks directly to the representation of female sexuality in both theatre and photography. The women are framed by their window/stage and re-framed by Grauerholz's camera. The title of the piece, *Postcard*, provides us with no factual information and the viewer is left to determine the circumstances of this performance. While the work isolates themes, such as female representation, theatre, travel and the

viewer's position, that later became important in Grauerholz's larger *œuvre*, there is a risk that this unmanipulated image may not be considered within a feminist framework, and may simply participate in reinforcing the representation that the artist is attempting to critique.

La Bibliothèque is a work that speaks of inclusion and exclusion (fig.10). While it is perhaps more emblematic of the works considered in this thesis than *The Chinese Girls* or *Postcard*, its political message is also more subtle. In *La Bibliothèque* two men stand in the immediate foreground with their backs to us, facing rows and rows of leather-bound books that stretch beyond the frame of the photograph. Paulette Gagnon suggests that "*La Bibliothèque* represents the passage of knowing through the site of knowledge, a space comprised of possible experience yet, to a certain extent, beyond the realm of possibility."⁷ While there is an element of the Sublime in this image of infinite tomes and infinite knowledge, for me it is the absence of women in this photograph, in this privileged space of learning, which speaks of exclusion. As in another of Grauerholz's photographs, *The Conversation*, in which two men relax, drinking beer in a bar, I feel as a female viewer that I am not welcome in this homosocial world. In *The Conversation* the viewer is denied entry into the photographic space by a table and chairs that stand in the foreground between us and the drinkers. In *La Bibliothèque* the viewer is restricted by the men who block our view as if to prevent our access to the books. *La Bibliothèque* calls to mind Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, in which the protagonist recounts her experience of being refused entry to a university library because she is a woman. Woolf writes:

⁷ Paulette Gagnon, *Angela Grauerholz* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1995) 52.

[H]ere I was actually at the door which leads into the library itself. I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, [...], a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction.⁸

As a female viewer I find myself before *La Bibliothèque* with no letter of introduction, no way of accessing the information held in these books. Grauerholz's interest in access to knowledge, and the shaping of that knowledge through its presentation, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

Two photographs by Grauerholz usually presented together, *The Leap* and *Nude*, each depict an unclothed woman, her head thrown back, arms in the air, as she jumps out of a forest and toward the viewer (fig. 11). These photographs are distinguished one from the other by the weight of the subjects: one woman is extraordinarily thin; the other is fleshy and voluptuous. The heavier woman, in *The Leap*, has large breasts and hips; her morphology is one that we have come to associate with artistic representations of the female body as it might be found in the works of Rubens or Manet: a fertile and soft body. The woman in *Nude* is so thin that her ribs are clearly visible, and she has no breasts; in fact, her body is entirely angular and pointy, in sharp contrast with the rounded body in *The Leap*.

For some feminist critics, *The Leap* and *Nude* have been the most problematic of Grauerholz's works. Lynne Pearce, for instance, writes: "It is clearly no coincidence that my (passing) disappointment with the Grauerholz exhibition [at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal] is also focused on the representation of the sexual body: namely the female nudes."⁹ For Pearce, *The Leap* and *Nude* represent "someone else's

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) 7.

⁹ Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, (London: Arnold, 1997) 176.

fantasy,¹⁰ that prevents her from participating in the open collective memory that Grauerholz's other work elicits. Pearce is uncomfortable with the photographic representation of the female body, which she views only as exploitive. Grauerholz has further complicated the presentation by staging these photographs in a wooded location. By presenting the female body in a forest, the artist risks an essentialist reading in which women and nature are indivisible. Rosemary Betterton explains:

In western traditions of religion, culture and science, women have always been aligned with nature, a position of inferiority shared with other marginalized groups whose difference [...] is signified by the division between body and mind. Within this dichotomy, the power to change, transform, progress within history is assigned to those inhabiting the sphere of culture against which the body has come to signify the realm of the timeless and essential.¹¹

While some essentialist feminists believe that women should feel empowered by their biology, I do not believe that this is Grauerholz's message. For me these women embrace their sensuality in a natural environment that permits them to shed the disguise of their culturally constructed self – the uniforms that distinguish their role in society - and bound with unrestricted enthusiasm. Unlike an artist such as Cindy Sherman who dresses up in order to question a constructed femininity, Grauerholz's women undress as they throw off their imposed feminine costume.

Displayed side by side, these photographs are considerably smaller than most of Grauerholz's other framed works. Their small size impacts their meaning as it necessitates a different physical relationship with them. Unlike the large works, which are optimally viewed from a distance, *The Leap* and *Nude* must be approached in order to clearly read their content. This sense of intimacy results in a private viewing experience

¹⁰ Pearce, 162.

¹¹ Betterton, 13-14.

that may seem intrusive. Paulette Gagnon has written of these works: “Their dreamlike depictions show a nude woman in motion, offering herself to the gaze and open to the unexpected.”¹² I tend to disagree with Gagnon. For me the women in these photographs seem unaware of the viewer’s presence. In contrast with Gagnon, Helaine Posner, in *Angela Grauerholz: Recent Photographs*, writes of *The Leap* and *Nude*: “[T]hey are not the traditionally passive objects of the male gaze. Neither model or [sic] muse, they remain oblivious to the outside observer. Each woman actively pursues her private rapture in an amusing liberating pantheistic dance.”¹³

I agree with Posner that these women are not performing or passively waiting for the (male) viewer, and yet I find it odd that no mention is made in either of these essays of the difference in the women’s weight and I believe that it is precisely the women’s weight that supports my interpretation of the photographs. In *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, Lynda Nead explains how the body has become a political object that is shaped and controlled by exterior powers. Nead writes: “The categories ‘fat’ and ‘thin’ are not innate and do not have intrinsic meanings; rather, they are socially constituted, along with definitions of perfection and beauty.”¹⁴ Nead goes on to explain how the female nude in art is constructed in order to limit the body, framing it with cultural markers, pictorial form, and artistic style that downplay the risk of sexuality and eroticism. “The transformation of the female body into the female nude is thus an act of regulation: of the female body and of the potentially wayward viewer whose wandering

¹² Gagnon, 52.

¹³ Helaine Posner, *Angela Grauerholz: Recent Photographs* (Cambridge The MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1993) 10.

¹⁴ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, (London Routledge 1992) 10.

eye is disciplined by the conventions and protocols of art.”¹⁵ The women in *The Leap* and *Nude* have refused to be contained by the limits of art or society: neither embodies the current ideal shape. They are not modest or demure, their body hair is visible, and they do not stand passively waiting for the viewer to validate them.

The viewer’s control over these figures is unstable. Although the camera has succeeded in recording this moment, both women seem capable of moving beyond the frame in the next instant. For Nead, this lack of containment in the representation of the female body is the difference between the naked and the nude, which she likens to the Sublime and the Beautiful. The Sublime, which I introduced in the previous chapter, has traditionally been a masculine category, whereas the Beautiful has been a feminine one. For Nead, the female body can be both sublime and beautiful; where the nude (beautiful) is controlled and contained, the naked (sublime) is unruly and unpredictable. Nead writes: “The sublime is not simply a site for the definition of masculinity but also where a certain deviant or transgressive form of femininity is played out. It is where woman goes beyond her proper boundaries and gets out of place.”¹⁶ Grauerholz’s naked women have gone beyond the nude to a place free from convention, defying the frame as they “leave the landscape.”

It is, however, worth noting that Grauerholz has titled the images *The Leap* and *Nude* – not *The Leap* and *Naked*. Because of their small size and their titles, which call to mind earlier titles such as “Dawn” and “Sanctuary,” the works can be seen as referencing the works of female Pictorialist photographers such as Gertrude Kasebier and Imogene

¹⁵ Nead, 6.

¹⁶ Nead, 29.

Cunningham, who also photographed nude women (and the occasional man) in the landscape.

Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, states that “the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any *eidolon* emitted by the object, which I should like to call the *Spectrum* of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to “spectacle” and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.”¹⁷ In *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* Grauerholz has used photography’s relationship with the spectacle and death in order to investigate several overlapping themes. I have discussed this project in terms of landscape in the previous chapter, but I feel that it is worthwhile to briefly reintroduce it here.

As already noted, *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* is presented as the work of a nineteenth-century woman photographer who lost her mind as she took pictures around the park and lakes on the property where she lived (fig.13). This fictional archive is a permanent installation at the site, where it is available for visitors to browse at their leisure (fig.12). “The title of the piece, *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, alludes to the genre of the gothic novel of the nineteenth century, a genre many women chose because it did not present a literary threat to their male colleagues and yet implied a form of expression in which fantasies of resistance could be lived out.”¹⁸ In reference to Grauerholz’s work, Helaine Posner explains that “[a]lthough disparaged as minor or escapist literature, the extraordinary nature of supernatural fiction can effectively challenge conventional notions of reason or reality to achieve a more expansive interpretation of our world.”¹⁹ The gothic novel relied

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 9.

¹⁸ Angela Grauerholz, *Aporia*, (Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995) n.p.

¹⁹ Posner, 7.

on the emotional response of the reader, a sublime reaction of fear and self-preservation, for its popularity. These supernatural stories usually take place in a lonely castle or abbey, much like the secluded Domaine de Kerguéhennec, which is heavily wooded and lush. The quintessential gothic novel remains Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, although works by Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley and Emily Bronte are also considered within this literary category. These narratives often feature a woman in jeopardy who must either wait to be rescued, or save herself from an irrational foe who is supernatural, undead, or mad. In addition to the very real physical danger that the female protagonist faces, she is usually confronted by the disbelief of those around her, who dismiss her fears as hysteria. Even when the threat is from within, the protagonist's concerns may be ignored.

Grauerholz has provided a bibliography at the end of *Aporia*, which contains the photographs from *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*; in it she has listed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Since *Aporia* has almost no text, this bibliography can be read as a list of clues to understanding the work. In Gilman's story, first published in 1892, a woman writer struggles with her own worsening madness and depression as she is continually left alone in a room with yellow wallpaper and bars on the windows. Although she is not a prisoner, she is effectively abandoned by her physician husband and denied the company of friends. As in the traditional gothic novel, the story begins as a happy tale and quickly degenerates. Gilman begins the first-person narrative with a description that calls to mind Grauerholz's landscape work: "The most beautiful place! It is quite alone [...]. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock."²⁰ As the protagonist loses her mind she becomes

²⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, 531.

obsessed with the yellow wallpaper in her bedroom, convinced that a woman is lurking behind the pattern, trying to escape. It is, of course, the protagonist herself who is desperate for freedom.

Photography theorist Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains that “historically, women have rarely been the authors of their own representations, either as makers or as models. Prior to the twentieth century there are a few exceptions in literature and letters, fewer in the visual arts, and virtually none in photography.”²¹ In *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, the protagonists attempt to express their emotions and frustrations through their art. Although both are first-person accounts, neither attempts to represent the creator’s physical self. By omitting physical representation of her fictive protagonist, Grauerholz leaves *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* open for the viewer to imagine who she may have been, or ultimately imagine themselves in her place. The use of a fictive protagonist by Grauerholz results in an unusual positioning that breaches two seemingly contradictory approaches to representation: autobiography and masquerade. Feminist artists have long used autobiography as a means of inserting their own subjectivity into a larger meta-narrative of experience that has tended to exclude them. The position that the personal is political has been an effective one for many feminists, and yet autobiography itself may be a kind of masquerade. Theorists of autobiography have come to realize that the “I” presented by the first-person narrator for the reader/viewer is not a true unedited voice, but a culturally constructed one. Additionally, as the reader/viewer experiences an autobiographical work they necessarily layer it with their own I in an attempt to identify

²¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39, Winter 1986: 72.

with the narrator.²² Fictive autobiography is unusual because it does not refer back to a real “I”; the viewer/reader must, therefore, either assume that the artist is in fact the original voice who is masquerading as the imagined character, or engage with the character as a composite of like characters that did/could exist. While Grauerholz may be seen to be masquerading as her nineteenth-century protagonist in order to create the photographs in *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, the protagonist herself avoids the masquerade of femininity by turning the camera towards the landscape. Beth Seaton explains that the trope of feminine masquerade is used by postmodern feminist artists in an attempt to subvert the photographic language that has traditionally been used to oppress women. Seaton writes: “As an untruthful, and yet only truthful, image of femininity, the tactics of masquerade have been claimed by critical discourse in order to negate the possibility of an intrinsic referent for a feminine identity.”²³ Although Grauerholz herself does not dress up, she does hide behind the personage of a woman trapped by society in the disguise of femininity.

Grauerholz’s protagonist is ultimately consumed by her mania. For Grauerholz, “Her suicide is a romantic gesture – it speaks of a dramatic act in a passive existence.”²⁴ Her existentialist decision to end her life the way she chooses may be seen as a way of preserving her true self and casting aside the artificial constructs of society. Her dream of spiritual liberation is paralleled by Kate Chopin’s protagonist Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, Pontellier drowns herself to escape a loveless marriage. Chopin writes: “It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier’s mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little

²² Sidonie Smith, “Identity’s Body,” *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, ed. Kathleen Ashley et al. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994)

²³ Elizabeth Seaton, “Imitating Authorities: Theory, Gender, and Photographic Discourse,” *Theory Rules: Art as Theory/ Theory and Art*, ed. Jody Berland et al., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 171.

²⁴ *Aporia*, n.p.

unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.”²⁵ Like the women in *The Leap* and *Nude*, Edna Pontellier eventually sheds her literal garments, as well as her figurative ones before allowing herself to be consumed by the sea. In *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and *The Awakening* the actions of the protagonists become more and more directed and frenzied as they step outside of the social role determined for them. Penny Cousineau-Levine, in *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination*, claims that “[u]nlike photographers of other cultures, Canadian photographers have an unusual propensity for posing themselves as if they were dead, or in some way outside ‘the community of the living.’”²⁶ Cousineau-Levine goes on to explain that quite often the “death” presented is not a real death but a rite of passage from one state to another; it is the moment between states that seems to interest Canadian photographers.²⁷ While Canadian art photographers may be obsessed with death, or with the passage from one state to another that is often associated with initiation, Grauerholz’s portrayal of death is less passive and more cathartic. As the tension of their mania builds there is also a climactic sense of relief in the deaths of these women; a positive death that releases them and could be described as a “petit mort,” as the French call an orgasm.

The fictive protagonist in *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* is both haunted and haunting: she is haunted by her own madness, brought on, perhaps, by her inability to realize a just self-representation, and haunting to the contemporary viewer who senses her presence in the

²⁵ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Selected Stories*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert (New York: Penguin, 1986) 108.

²⁶ Penny Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2003) 159.

²⁷ Cousineau-Levine, 155.

library, as well as on the property as one walks around looking for the location of her photographs and ultimate suicide. Photography has succeed in keeping her alive. She is “undead,” and what the viewer might have assumed was a nineteenth-century gothic tale has become a contemporary one.

“Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it.”
George Santayana¹

Grauerholz expands her photography through the use of complicated presentations that layer her work with meaning. While the photographs themselves are not manipulated, the framing of her projects in cabinets, boxes, drawers, and in book form shapes our understanding by adding an extra-photographic context that changes our relationship to the work before we confront the images. The four projects that I will consider in this chapter – *Secrets, a Gothic Tale, Églogue, or Filling the Landscape, Aporia* and *Sententia I-LXII* - despite different presentations, all require the viewer to open the works before seeing the photographs held within. Viewers must physically “unpack” the images before unpacking their meaning. As a result, all four share something of a book-like presentation – closed volumes waiting to be opened in order to reveal the knowledge held within. By presenting her photographs as contained collections in a museum context, Grauerholz imbues them with institutional, archival authority. These photographs are lacking in any clear subject matter, instead, they are unified by their presentation. Eugenio Donato, in *The Museum’s Furnace*, explains: “The set of objects the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe. [...] Such a fiction is a result of an uncritical belief in the notion that ordering and classifying, that is to say, the spatial juxtaposition of fragments, can produce a representational understanding of the world.”²

¹ George Santayana, *Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense* (New York: Scribner, 1905) 284.

² Eugenio Donato, “The Museum’s Furnace” quoted in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993) 53.

It is this fiction that Grauerholz uses to manipulate the viewer's relationship with her photographic works.

I have already considered Grauerholz's photography in term of its subject matter and it is not my intention to repeat myself here. Nor is it my goal to recount the history or meaning of the archive or the museum.³ Instead, I propose that Grauerholz has used the symbol of the archive to her advantage to question how we understand both photography and memory. John Hunter, in "Minds, Archives, and the Domestication of Knowledge," writes: "The concept that archives, libraries, and indeed, human memories are "storehouses" of knowledge seems natural, or at least common-sensical, but it is neither. It is, rather, the product of the desire to impose limits on the alienating immensity of the information that is available to be known."⁴ Hunter has neglected to mention photography as the ultimate "storehouse" of knowledge. Like the museum and the archive, photography claims mastery over the world through its transparency. While Grauerholz's photography make use of this transparency, this naturalness, in order to implicate the viewer in these constructed memories, the presentation reinforces its authority.

In order to view *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, the viewer must penetrate a number of layers before accessing the photographs: one must pass through fields and forests before entering the gates to the Domaine, pass through the door of the château, find and enter the library, open the drawers to the cabinets, and finally open the boxes and portfolios that

³ Many historical and critical writings on the museum and the archive currently exist. I have relied most heavily on Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *The Contest of Meaning*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992).

⁴ John Hunter, "Minds, Archives, and the Domestication of Knowledge," *Lost in the Archives: Alphabet City No. 8*, ed. Rebecca Comay (Toronto: Alphabet City Media, 2002) 200.

hold the photographs (fig.12). Once the photographs have been accessed their viewing is unrestricted. “Grauerholz carefully constructed a situation in which the meaning of these images had to be determined within the locale of the library setting – a place where information is compiled, cross-referenced and stored.”⁵ The beautiful antique cabinets in the château’s library reinforce a sense of timelessness and legitimacy that these photographs borrow, permitting the viewer to participate in the fiction. The photographs themselves are of the landscape, especially the water, of the surrounding park. Hunter states: “Searching for information involves going *inside* the place of storage and using search procedures that are proper to it alone. Outside the archive, one cannot search properly; one can only wander.”⁶ Grauerholz’s fictive protagonist has wandered the property taking photographs, but it is only when they are housed inside the library that they become meaningful. Part public archive, part autobiography, this collection presents itself as the trace of a past life relevant in the present. The fictive nineteenth-century female photographer attempts to order her world by obsessively taking pictures around the property; her project is doomed to fail as her abstract images are only able to reflect her own mania back onto herself. James Clifford explains: “In the West collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity.”⁷ The female photographer is able to collect and order the photographs but she is incapable of finding an authentic self – the collection is not enough to define her. As the viewer works their way through the photographs, as the “evidence” unfolds, it becomes more and more difficult to remember that the protagonist never existed. Our engagement with

⁵ Fleming

⁶ Hunter, 200.

⁷ James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993) 52.

Secrets, a Gothic Tale is in part created by the work that we must do in order to access the narrative. Once inside the project, as we gain access to the “secret,” we are sent out of the library by the images that release the viewer back into the park to wander as the protagonist did.

This play on interiority and exteriority is a strategy used by Grauerholz in all four of the works considered in this chapter. One might ask what secret is actually revealed by this archive? How much information is actually provided by the photographs and how much is imagined by the viewer who wishes to imbue them with meaning? In *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, Grauerholz uses the authority of the library/museum setting and the archival presentation in order to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality and to (mis)lead the viewer into creating a clear narrative where one does not exist. The second part of this trilogy, *Églogue or Filling the Landscape*, expands on themes that Grauerholz began to deal with at Kerguéhennec, but develops them into a more poignant and meaningful statement on our relationship with photography, the museum, and the archive.

Églogue or Filling the Landscape is presented as a neutral photographic archive, a clear Plexiglas cabinet that simply houses the photographs placed within; what emerges upon deeper reflection is more aggressive and threatening than one might imagine (fig. 15). The square cabinet that is *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* is constructed with six large drawers that hold the opaque cardboard boxes. Because the drawers open on all four sides of the cabinet there is no front or back to the piece that can be circled like a freestanding sculpture. Each of the opaque boxes is labelled with a vertical list of words that imply rather than list their contents; these words refer to both the physical landscape (grounds, thicket, statuary, water) and an emotional one (safe, wish, vague, modest).

When *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* was shown at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in 1995 it was positioned in the centre of a square room with empty white walls. Because of their fragility, access to the prints was strictly controlled by the museum. Viewing of the photographs was possible only during guided tours, at which time a selection of boxes would be opened and the images carefully shown one at a time. In contrast with *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, which provides viewers with physical control of the images, the viewing of *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* was highly restricted. During the 1995 exhibition, most museum visitors experienced the work as a closed cabinet, more akin to a sculpture than an interactive installation.

In its physical presentation *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* can be considered as a modern cabinet of curiosities. These cabinets were originally pieces of furniture in which small objects, precious artefacts, letters, and jewellery were held; in the 16th century, the term was also applied to small rooms where rare and precious objects were kept.⁸ Although usually divided into the natural and the artificial, the contents of the cabinet of curiosities mainly followed the logic and interest of its owner and served to promote his status as someone with the wealth, time, and knowledge to acquire and display an impressive collection. "They were the work of an individual serving to satisfy his curiosity and expand his fields of knowledge of the universe. Although not open to the general public, they were frequently visited – on appointment and at the owner's discretion – by scholars and illustrious travellers, which added to the prestige of the collectors."⁹ As with all collections, once objects entered the cabinet they lost their use

⁸ Jean Trudel, "L'imaginaire comme objet de curiosité: Le Musée des Traces d'Irene F. Whittome," *Parachute* 57 (January, February, March): 62.

⁹ Trudel, 62.

value in exchange for the symbolic value that their possession lent to the collector.

Occasionally, the individual objects in the cabinet of curiosities were of little monetary value (such as rocks or butterflies). It was their placement within the cabinet, within an orderly system of classification and display, that heightened their preciousness.

Returning to Grauerholz's work, the comparison with the cabinet of curiosities is most convincing in that *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* is a complex container of drawers and boxes that houses a private collection, accessible only at the artist's discretion. Unlike *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*, this work does not present itself as autobiographical, and yet the private collection is always a reflection of its author. Yolande Racine, in "The Spirit of the Collector," states: "Collecting is, above all, a private, and indeed even an autobiographical, adventure in which the collector invests a part of himself and which bears his inalienable mark."¹⁰ In the landscape chapter of this thesis I discussed the meaning of the title *Églogue*, and I here reiterate that the primary meaning of the word is "to pick out" or "to select." Marnie Fleming, in *Putting the Past in Order*,¹¹ points out: "The landscape images are selected by the artist to be photographed and then selected again for inclusion in the archive."¹² The photos in *Églogue* are "taken" twice by Grauerholz, but they are also selected for display by the museum staff – only the viewer is denied possession of the images. James Clifford explains that collecting is not simply a neutral pastime, but rather can be a consuming impulse disguised as a hobby. Clifford writes: "An excessive, sometimes even rapacious

¹⁰ Yolande Racine, "The Spirit of the Collector," *L'Oeil du collectionneur*, ed. Paulette Gagnon and Yolande Racine (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1996) 51.

¹¹ Marnie Fleming's article, "Putting the Past in Order," published to accompany *Aporia* is the most comprehensive analysis of *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* that I encountered. Fleming's article places Grauerholz's work within the history of photography and considers it in terms of postmodernism. I have attempted to work around Fleming's article in order to avoid repetition.

¹² Marnie Fleming, *Putting the Past in Order* (Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995) 12.

need to *have* is transformed into rule-governed, meaningful desire.”¹³ Indeed, the number of photographs in *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* is truly overwhelming. Early museum collections were amassed by insatiable collectors and explorers roaming poorer nations for artefacts; similarly, Grauerholz seems incapable of limiting the number of images that she *takes* to enter this formidable collection. There are so many images here that it is almost impossible for the viewer to consider all of the photographs carefully, or to remember their content. I have already mentioned how this mass of imagery may be capable of producing a sublime reaction, but it can also be seen as a political statement on multiplicity, rarity and originality, as well as memory. The quantity of images, their restricted viewing, as well as the similarity between them make it almost impossible for the viewer to know if the work contains photocopies, repeated photographs, empty boxes or objects other than photographs. We are continually bombarded with images, of which very few take on any significance and remain clear in our memories. In Grauerholz’s project nothing is clear and our ability to commit the photographs to memory is doomed to fail.

Grauerholz has used an unconventional, if not idiosyncratic, system of classification. Like the photographs themselves, these words on the boxes are fragments. Fleming explains: “While the whole structure of the piece has the look and feel of precise bibliographic science, it destabilizes classification as we create new meanings through a process of identification. In fact, [Grauerholz] problematizes the notion of classification itself, or the idea that there can be any purity in a single category.”¹⁴ As with the titles of the large framed works, the labels on the boxes do not provide the information that one

¹³ Clifford, 53.

¹⁴ Fleming, 10.

might seek for clarification. It remains the responsibility of the viewer to make decisions about the meaning and relationship of the photographs in a given box and as a whole.

Grauerholz's work was never meant to stand as a museum unto itself. Although it may at first appear to be a sort of mini-museum akin to a cabinet of curiosities, its placement within the larger museum context permits the artist to question the very institution that presents the work. The private collection in a public space creates a tension that is paralleled in the play of visibility and invisibility in the transparent cabinet and opaque boxes. This tension is further reinforced by the limited accessibility of viewing the photographs themselves. In reference to the archive, Douglas Crimp, in *On the Museum's Ruins*, asks: "Who is given access? What kind of access? And access precisely to what?"¹⁵ By restricting access to *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* Grauerholz alters her project from a simple collection of photographs, to a political statement. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida states: "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."¹⁶ By refusing the viewer contact with the archive, Grauerholz effectively subverts their power. There is hostility in this repression of the viewer who is denied a freedom that they believe they possess: access to information. The viewer may feel a sense of frustration faced with an archive that they cannot control. The transparent cabinet teases by giving a view of the boxes inside; their opacity blocks any further entry but heightens our desire to unpack the work. One wanders the gallery space, circling the cabinet in search of a way into the project – like the *flâneur*, we are

¹⁵ Crimp, 295.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 4.

outside looking in. Paulette Gagnon writes: “*Églogue or Filling the Landscape* exerts a strange fascination akin to the familiar myth of Pandora’s box.”¹⁷ While the viewer is drawn into the cabinet by their own curiosity, the hard plastic and angularity of the cabinet appears cold and threatening. In sharp contrast with the warmth of the sepia photographs held within, the clear cabinet and cold grey boxes presented in a stark white room seems menacing and sinister.

Like the wizard behind the curtain, the museum works its magic behind the scene. Veiling themselves in an “aura of innocence,”¹⁸ the museum and the archive are more active in the creation of meaning than many viewers may realize. By creating an inaccessible archive based on a questionable taxonomy and containing blurry photographs, Grauerholz examines the museum as a site of struggle. Douglas Crimp explains: “[P]ostmodern artists [claim] that originality and authenticity are discursively produced by the museum.”¹⁹ The sculptural and architectural aspect of the *Églogue*, as well as its placement within the museum, would seem to define it as a stable monument to modernism, and to the universal knowledge that it claims to promote. The artist undermines this modernist message by creating a collection of photographs without any possible narrative or factual application. The opening of the archive at fixed times layers the viewing of *Églogue* with a performative aspect – one in which the museum staff may not understand that they are participating as actors. Grauerholz explains that *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* “is neither rigorously ordered nor complete, nor will it be added

¹⁷ Paulette Gagnon, *Angela Grauerholz* (Montreal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 1995) 54.

¹⁸ Jacquelin Fry, “The Museum in a number of Recent Works,” *SightLines: Reading Contemporary Canadian Art*, ed. Jessica Bradley and Lesley Johnstone (Montreal: Artexes, 1994) 115.

¹⁹ Crimp, 16.

to.”²⁰ The showing of an incomplete archive based on an emotionally determined taxonomy calls into question the ordering of all archives and the creation of meaning. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida states: “The archivization produces as much as it records the event [...]. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives.”²¹ *Églogue* questions how meaning enters the archive, and how it is retrieved.

The third and final manifestation of the trilogy, *Aporia*, was published in book form by Oakville Galleries in 1995. Printed on creamy, thick paper *Aporia* is unpaginated and contains almost no text to guide the viewer/reader through its 287 high quality photographic reproductions. This modest-size book (6.5”x 9”) is wrapped in a translucent dust jacket on which the book’s title, as well as the definition of “aporia,” are printed; it reads:

aporia, GK.f. *aporos* impassable, 1 *Rhet.* The expression of doubt. A doubtful matter, a perplexing difficulty.
(The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary)

This definition is repeated on the back of the jacket in both French and German. *Aporia*’s actual cover is free of text and is printed with only a black and white photograph that wraps around the spine of the book. The translucent layer through which the reader can see a photograph on the opaque cover mimics the transparency/opacity of the cabinet and boxes in *Églogue or Filling the Landscape* as well as the interiority/exteriority of *Secrets, a Gothic Tale*. Like the museum and its archive, books both carry and create knowledge; the act of publishing is generally seen as proof of worth. *Aporia* is an archive

²⁰ Angela Grauerholz, *Aporia* (Oakville: Oakville Galleries, 1995) no page.

²¹ Derrida, 17- 18.

that can be carried and held, and more importantly, manipulated at will. Grauerholz has written of this work: "It is [...] its own integral piece with its own set of ideas that invites the viewer to become directly engaged rather than controlled by museum staff. The act of holding a book alone, of flipping the pages and of looking, is a uniquely personal and intimate experience."²² This experience is heightened by the luxury of the paper and the beauty of the small photographic reproductions (3"x 5") that pull the viewer into the book, as the viewer must look closely at each image to read its content. In "Unpacking My Library," Walter Benjamin writes: "Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects."²³ Indeed, owning a copy of *Aporia* makes it possible to explore the work in a way that is simply not possible in *Secrets, a Gothic Tale* or *Églogue or Filling the Landscape*, but like any relationship the work does not reveal itself to the reader fully on the first meeting.

My first experience with this book was one of confusion and frustration as I flipped back and forth through the photographs without guidance or direction. This sublime feeling was eventually overcome as I accepted *Aporia* as a sort of game in which I had control of how I read the book/archive. My first feeling was that the "doubt" referred to by the title was my own inability to grasp the meaning of *Aporia*. With time this doubt became a questioning of both photography and the archive as neutral holders of truth. As with the two other manifestations of this work, Grauerholz permits the viewer/reader to come to their own conclusions. In reference to the large framed photographs, but applicable to all of Grauerholz works considered in this thesis, Johanne Lamoureux writes: "Adding up the images, each so strongly charged with

²² Grauerholz, no page.

²³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 67.

interdeterminacy, will not suffice to bring back some kind of coalescence: that is to say the series is not here the agent of a possible coagulation: the spectator is.”²⁴ It is the viewer who creates the narrative, not the artist.

In *Sententia I- LXII* Grauerholz once again alters her photography through the use of a complicated and commanding presentation. Housed in an imposing cherry wood cabinet (7’10”x 3’3”x 6’6”), sixty-two large, vertical silver prints are hung back to back behind glass on thirty-two sliding racks (fig.14). Unlike the case with *Églogue* access to the photographs in *Sententia I- LXII* is unrestricted, and yet the viewer is frustrated by the fact that only one large print can be seen at a time, making experiencing all sixty-two images a laborious exercise as each large rack is pulled out, viewed from both sides and replaced. As one interacts with the installation it becomes apparent that the solidity of the cabinet is at odds with the fleeting blurriness of the images housed within. Like memory itself, these images are fragmented and, as if to insist on our inability to remember clearly, there seems to be a randomness to the photographs. Here, as in earlier projects, Grauerholz plays with visibility and invisibility through the use of different transparencies and textures. In *Sententia I- LXII* the coolness of the silver prints contrasts with the warmth of the reddish American cherry. The photographs themselves are often images of in-between states and places: an airplane wing, railway tracks, stairwells, photographs that seem at odds with the permanence of the cabinet. Grauerholz plays with the frame in photographs depicting windows through which little is visible. These photographs are framed by the artist, and reframed by the cabinet’s hanging glass racks.

²⁴ Johanne Lamoureux, no page

Sententia is a Latin word meaning opinion or way of thinking. Like *aporia*, *sententia* implies an openness, an ability to interpret the photographs to one's own reality from experience; photography has moved from fact to memory. By naming the photographs themselves *Sententia I* to *Sententia LXII*, Grauerholz, like a modern artist, effectively names her work *Untitled I* to *Untitled LXII*. Here, the artist has taken the museum archive and filled it with questions.

Physically reminiscent of both a museum specimen cabinet and a cenotaph, the installation dominates the gallery space. Unopened, the large cabinet appears impassable. It is the viewer's interaction with the piece that brings it to life, making it more than a beautiful piece of furniture. It is unclear if we are to respond to this structure as a positive monument to the museum archive that houses images for future use, or as a burial chamber to which photography goes to die. For Theodor Adorno the museum and the cenotaph may not be that different; Adorno writes: "The German word *museal* [museumlike] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying."²⁵ If *Sententia I-LXII* does stand as a *memento mori* then one might ask whose death we are remembering, and how are we remembering it.

²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno quoted in Crimp, 44.

“It’s déjà vu all over again”
Yogi Berra¹

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes: “Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.”² Throughout her *œuvre* Grauerholz has succeeded in producing work that is complex and layered in meaning, work that makes the viewer think. There is nothing random in Grauerholz’s production; her images are deliberately misleading. Yet these photographs can seem nostalgic and empty – a reality that has occasionally worked against the artist when viewers are not prepared to unpack the work, and simply dismiss it.

In the limited space that this thesis permits, I have chosen to discuss Grauerholz’s work in term of landscape, feminism and the archive, but this is by no means a definitive study. I have not, for instance, considered Grauerholz’s work in terms of a diasporatic production of a German woman living in Canada. Her interest in travel and memory are available for a more biographic interpretation than I have wanted to undertake here. This type of analysis would benefit from a consideration of the differences and similarities between Grauerholz’s work and that of her peers in both Germany and in Canada.

¹ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone) 297.

² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 38.

Grauerholz use of language would also profit from an in-depth analysis. When and why the artist chooses to use German, English or French, as well as works in which language is the main theme have not been fully considered elsewhere. One work *Schriftbilder* (1999), for instance, consists of a collection of text panels, of various dead languages. Like a photographic negative, these panels depict white writing on a black background. The content of these passages is now unreadable by most viewers who must experience them as beautiful patterns or as frustrating bits of lost knowledge and culture. Marc Mayer, in *The Power Plant: Members' Quarterly Newsletter* (Winter 2000), writes: "The fact that these samples are actually 19th-century transcriptions made for l'Imprimerie National de France, explains their incongruous homogeneity; the artefacts of many cultures, they have been processed to suit the purposes of one society, only to be distilled further until they have become empty metaphorical vessels for use by a single artist."³ This work anticipates Grauerholz's current work, *Privation*, in two ways: it uses photography in a less traditional way than many of her earlier images and it questions the transmission of knowledge and meaning through the written word. *Schriftbilder* deserves an analysis beyond the scope of this thesis.

The artist's more recent use of colour also needs to be considered. Why Grauerholz has abandoned black and white photography in favour of colour, and how the meaning of her work has changed as a result is another unexamined topic available for further research.

There is one discussion, however, that exceeds the scope of this thesis for reasons other than space. I have argued that Grauerholz work functions through its use of an

³ Marc Mayer, *The Power Plant: Members' Quarterly Newspaper* (Winter 2000) n.p.

indistinct temporal space. Viewers read these photographs as time past, despite the fact that the “past” depicted is relatively present at the time of its initial exhibition. Indeed, the images that I have considered in this thesis have all been produced within the last twenty years, what remains to be seen is how this work will be received in twenty, fifty, or even one hundred years after its production. Will Grauerholz’s strategy ultimately be lost as the work becomes the record of the past that it now pretends to be. Will her archive simply be absorbed into the larger institutional structure that it originally questioned? Will the importance of the author be revived, making Grauerholz’s open-ended images seem undirected? Will a new theory replace postmodernism and make the works discussed here seem naive and old-fashioned?

Photography creates history as it records it, but meaning is fluid. Some viewers may find Grauerholz’s work frustrating because of the lack of detail, lack of closure or resolution; others may find it liberating and empowering because of the control they are given. In either case Marshall McLuhan was right when he wrote: ““Nobody can commit photography alone.”⁴ Grauerholz’s gambit is that they never will.

⁴ Marshall McLuhan, “The Photograph: The Brothel-Without-Walls,” *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 189.

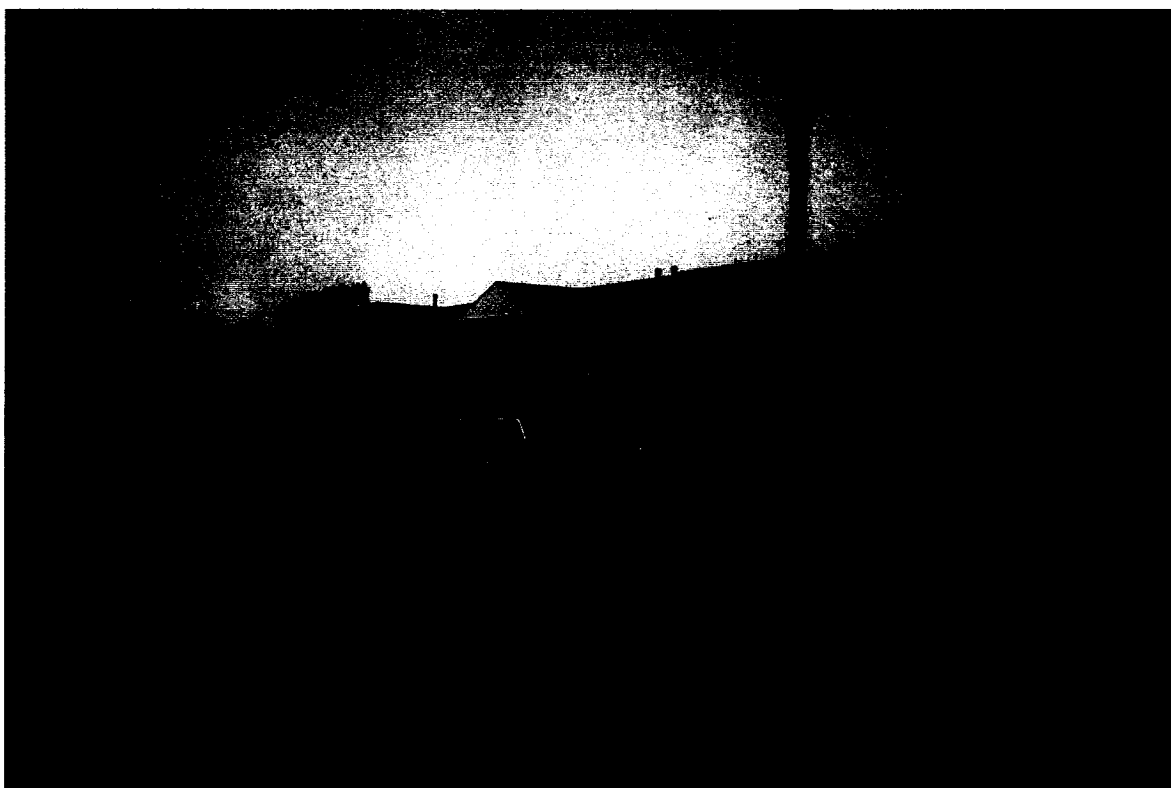


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

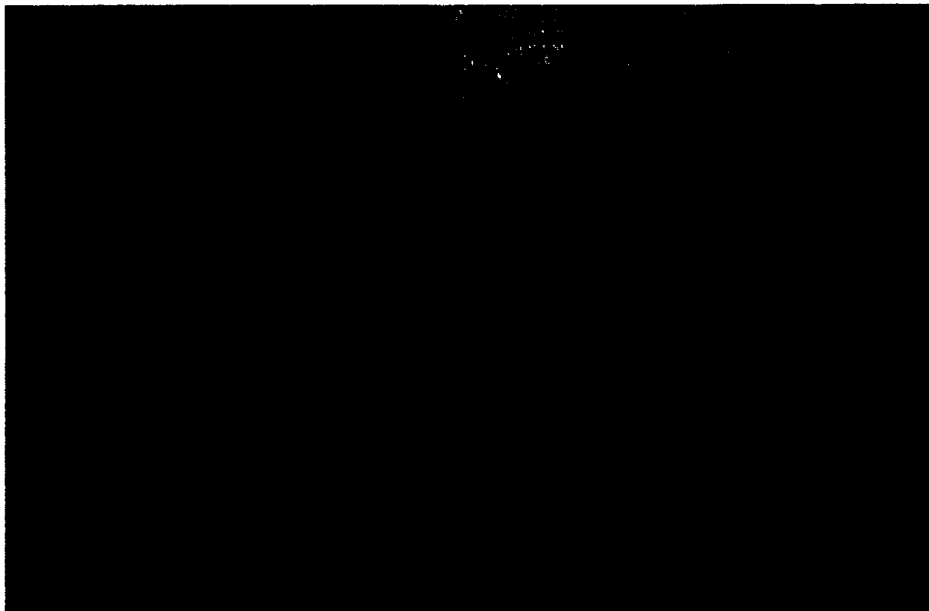


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

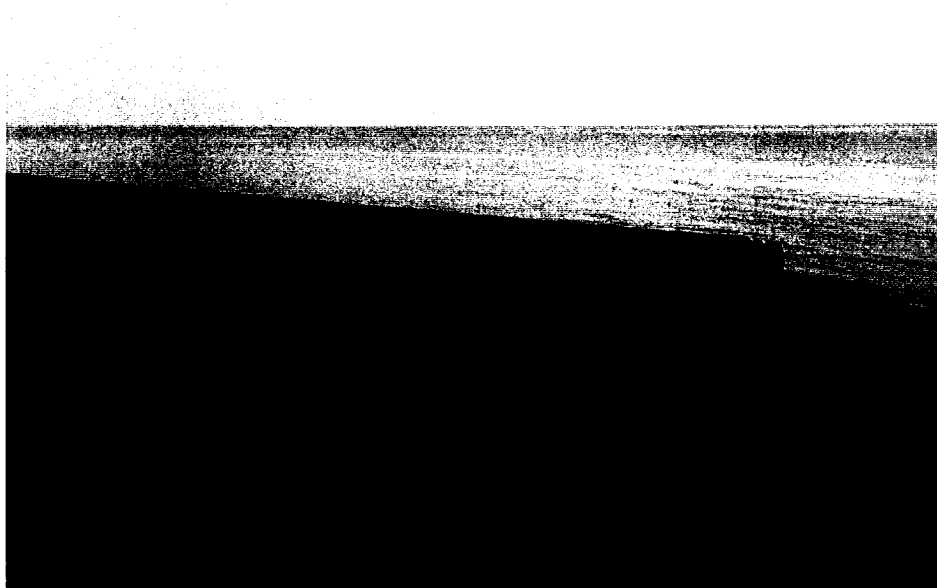


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

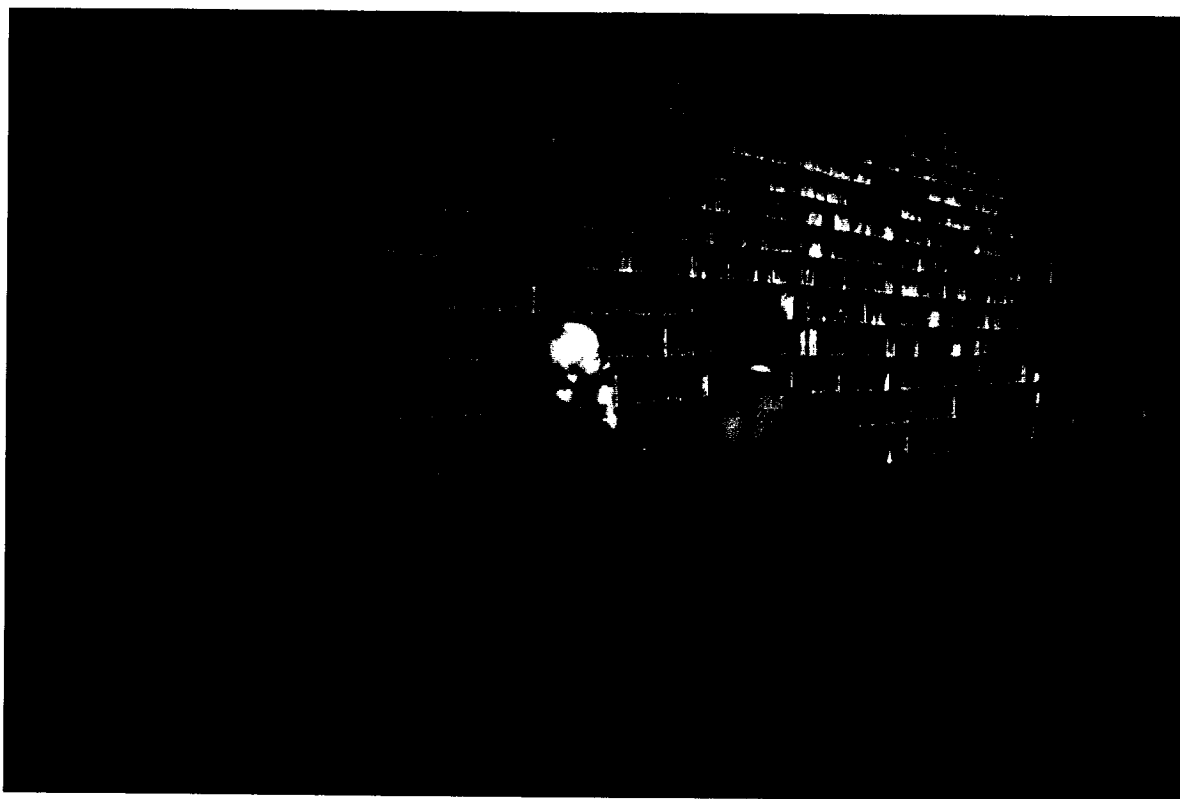


Fig. 10



Fig. 11

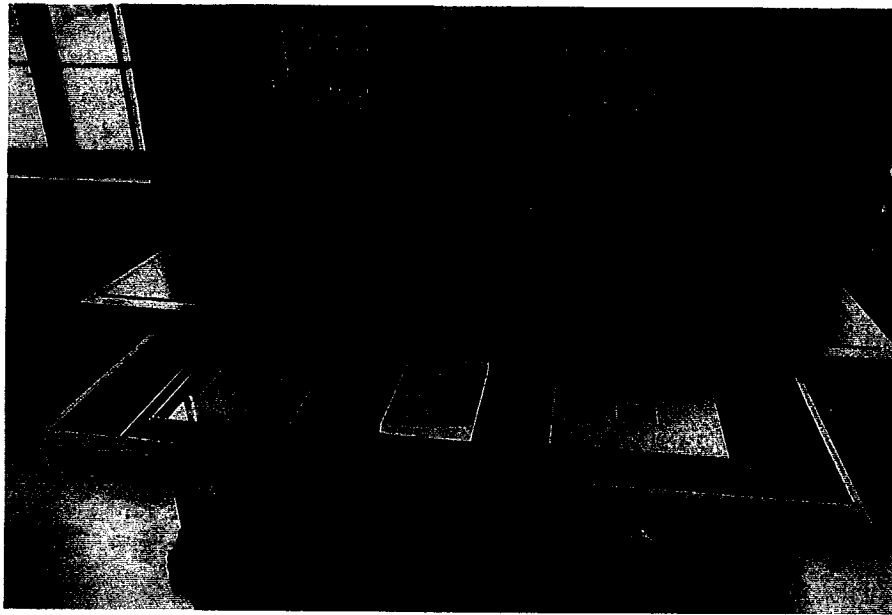


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

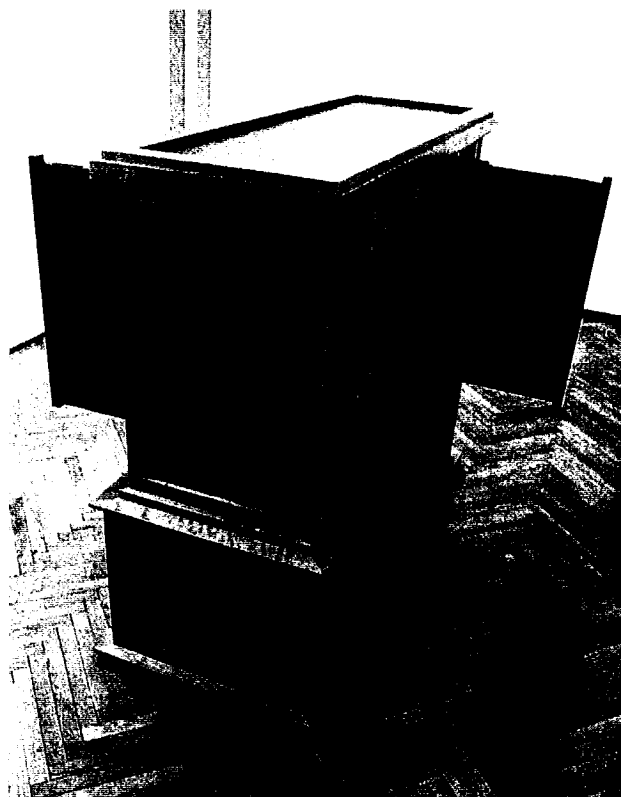


Fig. 14

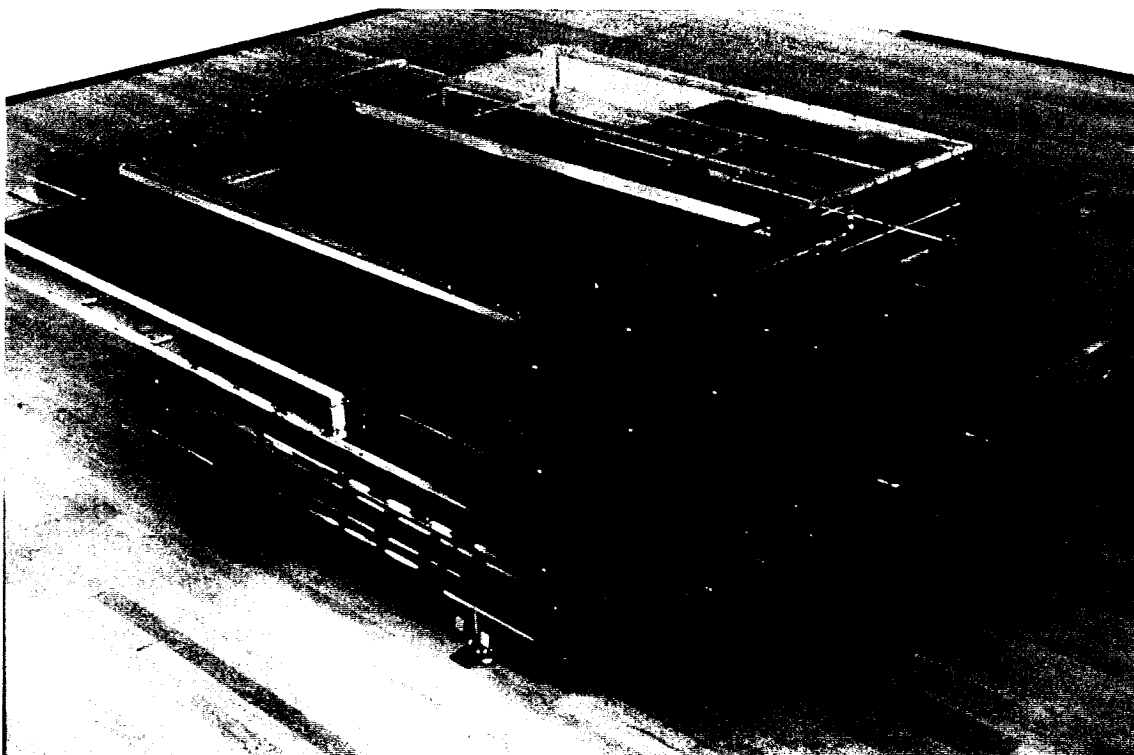


Fig. 15

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