Editors’ Note: This chapter explores differences in masculine and feminine comportments and how these styles of enactment become encultured and objectivated in the art of photography. The project of constructing/apprehending reality through photographic art has as much to do with imagined spatiality as with the perceptual. Imagining involves the virtual body—the ability to consider alternatives. In order to break away from the masculine hegemony in the photographic art, the feminist photographer, sensitive to the differences in masculine and feminine body schema, attunes herself to the felt experiences of feminine embodiment, eschewing the body schema that traditionally binds photographic art to the masculine. The body schema and the virtual body involve a tensional dialectic that constitutes the imagining body. So the feminist photographer attunes herself to feminine embodied resonances and through the virtual body considers alternatives resulting in the imagined enactment of spatiality that become the photograph. Masculine alternatives are not resonant with the feminine body schema and so are not selected. The photograph provides a fine example of the intertwining of the perceptual and the imagined and the author provocatively articulates what we might label as “the gendered landscape.” Photographie féminine allows for the exploration of the spatiality (geographicity) of feminine symbolizations.

11.1 Introduction

Photography is a primary medium through which people relate to visual images and make them their own. In other words, once a picture is seen and filtered through the human symbolic system, it is externalized once again in the production of other pictures and in the act of selecting what to see. This active selection involves both sensuosity and sensibility.1 Selection is a mode of bodily comportment; it is not merely a mental act. It is an aesthetic engagement expressible in, for example, landscape photography. This issue is particularly significant in stressing the notion that a landscape is a selected re-presentation as well as the point that it is often the
aesthetics of the beautiful, the sublime or the picturesque that is conveyed. The
simplistic notion of photography capturing “reality” is therefore contested; “a slice
of reality” presented in the landscape photograph is determined through aesthetic
choices that follow art traditions that have been historically marked through a mas-
culine comportment and discourse. Bright surmises, “the art of landscape photog-
raphy remains so singularly identified with a masculine eye.”2 The beautiful, the
sublime, and the picturesque are masculine aesthetics that are focused on the mas-
tering gaze (the disembodied seer capable of establishing an all-encompassing
view of the seen/scenic). In contrast, in my photographic work there has been a re-
sistance to the masculine aesthetic structures of landscape photography. The mas-
culine photographer, the transcendental observer, creates a division between self
and other. Moreover, the aesthetics utilized in landscape photography, as Bohls
suggests “argues without arguing. Its vocabulary of visible surfaces represents
power relations as natural and unchallengeable precisely by casting them as irrele-
vant to the compelling business of the quest for beauty through the senses and
imagination.”3 Unlike the categories of the beautiful and the sublime, which follow
a masculine comportment (the disembodied gaze still involves comportment, a mas-
culine style of comportment), discourse of containment, and thus an aestheticization
of disengagement, the uncanny provides an alternative form of expression as it aims
to disrupt masculine boundaries and divisions. If feminine symbolization is different
from the masculine, the source for the differences is in comportment—feminine
embodiment negotiating space within the milieu. Let us begin to characterize this
comportment.

The uncanny, as a counter-aesthetic category, has been associated by Freud4 and
later by Cixous5 and Giblett6 with the feminine because it shares the same charac-
teristics of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and is in contrast to the masculine modalities
of authority and of closure. It acknowledges the sensory experience and engagement
of the lived-body situated in the environment, which conveys an ambiguous gestalt,
incapable of subject-object partitioning. Significantly, the uncanny can be closely
aligned with personal interactions negotiating spatial inscriptions of meaning, rather
than the notion of encompassing a spatiality, i.e., dictating its meaning (as land-
scape—shaping the land), which has become recognized as a masculine construct.

This article brings together the notion of photography of the urban built envi-
ronment as a medium to explore space, and as a woman, my feminine encounters
with it. It is concerned with the geographicity (spatial inscription) of the lived
experience, which I argue is influenced by gendered interactions. Following de
Certeau in his discussion of practices of space, the photographic work examined in-
volves tactics that “play upon ‘opportunities,’ catch occurrences, and the opacities
of history.”7 Moreover, these (feminist and subversive) tactics are characterized by
the uncanny in evoking uncertainty and indeterminacy in its re-presentations of the
built environment. An example of feminist tactics would be use of the photographic
blur to capture transience, or the incorporation of shadows and abstract forms in the
photographic frame. It is not about re-presenting clearly the knowable or the certain,
but more about recording the imaginative perception of the embodied experience.