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The cover design is based on an Athenian silver tetradrachm from the 5th century B.C., depicting Athena on the obverse and her owl on the reverse. Courtesy of the Ancient Coin Forum.

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THE FEMALE GROTESQUE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE

Anna Kérchy

> "If Barbie is a monster, she is our monster, our ideal."
> (Anne DuCille 565)

Western culture's obsessive male gaze (Doane 180) seems always to have outlined the female body antagonistically: object of scopophilic desire and enigmatic vessel of life and death, sublime essence of beauty and abjectified (Kristeva 9), uncanny other against which the speaking subject can define himself. Tempting and threatening, sacred and profane, corporeality associated with femininity remains an unresolved paradox. This trend seems to accelerate radicalized in 21st century Western societies, interpellating the female body as simultaneously idealized *and* normativized, decorporealized *and* pathologized, eroticized *and* asceticized, producing via the impossible expectations of the engendered body discipline grotesque female bodies. Contemporary America is the hotbed of the female grotesque by being home of the anatomically deformed Barbie doll, the excessively skinny anorexic or the abnormally obese fast food junkie, of steroidized female body builders, of plastic surgery-addicts, of hyper-technological cyborgs, of maniacally stylized and designed, tattooed, pierced, dyed, shaved, "made-up" female bodies. This ever-expanding spectacular society of simulacrum (see Debord 3 and Baudrillard 10) hatching irrealistic, un/superhuman grotesque bodies elicits "female body dysmorphia" also known as "body image distortion syndrome" (BIDS), a new form of female malady (succeeding hysteria and depression) that nevertheless can be interpreted as a manifestation of dis-ease and as such a mode of radical transgression. Accordingly, the current grotesque body modifications may be read as body-controlling manipulations of the Foucauldian technologies of biopower (Foucault, *Power* 58) of the

dominant patriarchal ideology influenced by the economic interests of consumer society's major business fields targeting woman in the form of beauty industries. But they might also signify innovative technologies of the self (Foucault, "Technologies" 16), (re)writing the body as a mode of feminist empowerment, creating a subversive anti-aesthetic carved onto one's very flesh. The aim of this article is to examine whether these current forms of female grotesque are desperate attempts at the carnivalesque destabilization of the conventional social order and of traditional ways of seeing, enacted by victims of the inevitable scenario of the ideology of representation or whether they are, on the contrary, self-reflexive, ideology-critical subversions of woman warriors rewriting myths of "American beauty" and femininity via performative identities and heterogeneous, self-made selves in monstrous metatexts. Thus, the feminized body may be examined both as a point of struggle over the shape of power and a site of production of new modes of subjectivity. The paper, inspired by and relying on Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body,*[1] analyzes the female grotesque body as it emerges in various business branches of the beauty myth, such as fashion, diet, fitness, plastic surgery body disciplining industries, and also studies subversive forms of the female grotesque in photographs by contemporary American women artists, Diana Thorneycroft and Cindy Sherman.

Mattel's Barbie doll, a more than 50-year-old toy with an unbreached popularity, remains an icon of authentic white femininity, insidiously interpellating its young owners into Naomi Wolf's "iron maiden of beauty myth" (Wolf 30) embodied by the unchanging plastic mould of this anatomically deformed, biologically impossible, culturally mythicized collectible. The paradoxical femininity inscribed on Barbie's idealized and normative body certainly causes feminist concerns, as the trademark Barbie features are likely to be traumatizing for young women-to-be. Barbie's grotesque body is extremely sexualized, with her hourglass figure, big breasts, long thighs, full lips, and great hair she resembles an inflatable sexual prop destined to fulfill male desires, yet her sexuality is veiled, hidden, her pleasure zones are erased as she has no nipples, and her

[1] From Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1993) see especially the chapters entitled "Whose Body is This? Feminism, Medicine, and the Conceptualization of Eating Disorders," "Hunger as Ideology," "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture," "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," and "Reading the Slender Body."

genitalia are also entirely missing (while Barbie's male counterpart, Ken and company have simulated plastic underwear with suggestive bulges). Thus, Barbie embodies both the stereotypical (and theoretically incompatible) whore and madonna image. Instead of being the traditional baby doll encouraging an easy identification or at most the rehearsing of parenting in little girls, she is an adult doll, a fashion doll, an insidious tool of the "ideological technology of gender" (De Lauretis 18), designed as a role model teaching didactic lessons about femininity, sexuality, corporeality, fashion and socially available subject positions. The "Mother Barbie" has a detachable prosthetic stomach, hiding a perfectly flat, desirable, "feminimized" abdomen. The "Presidential Candidate Barbie" comes with adorably feminine red, white and blue inaugural ball gowns, costumes worthy of her princess-like figure put on display. Alternative versions of Barbie, such as the black or the disabled Barbie, instead of rendering visible as an autonomous entity on its own right the marginalized other, contain and (re)interpret it according to the "logic of the same" by using the very same mold of the classic blonde, white, and beautiful Barbie, keeping the trademark long, silky hair and the flexible, feminine limbs, and merely changing the props and costumes, or the shade of the plastic used. Barbie remains Barbie, and so it would be, according to comic fan websites, were there more radical Barbie versions, such as the "Shock Therapy Barbie (car battery and wires included)," the "Homeless Barbie (complete with stolen K-Mart shopping cart)," the "Junkie White Trash Barbie (complete with needles)," the "Bulimic Barbie (feed her then make her throw it back up!)," or the Alcoholics Anonymous Barbie (with coffee mug and 12-step guide). My personal favorites of all the on-line suggestions, particularly highlighting the grotesque nature of Barbie, are the "Cadaver Barbie (with removable internal organs)" and the "Realistic Teenage Barbie (with flat chest, braces, and acne)." The collectible Barbie doll's paradoxical world is that of perfection and simulacrum, idealization and normativization, aestheticization and eroticization, consumption and anorexia (the Titanic Barbie turns actress Kate Winslett's roundness into culturally prescribed super-slimness).

As Anne DuCille has highlighted, Barbie is a gendered and racialized icon of contemporary commodity culture, engulfing cultural difference as a merchandisable commodity, framing Nigerian, Chinese, Indian or Eskimo female bodies in the mold of the prototypical Caucasian doll as "dye-dipped versions of the archetypal white American beauty" myth (553). In DuCille's view, the multicultural Barbie is a symbol and symptom of what multiculturalism has become at the hands of late capitalist commodity culture: a Euro-centrism that

apparently faces cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference: consumerism and commodity culture ruling over intercultural awareness: profit orientation and marketability predominating over realistic representation of authentic and autonomous difference: othering, containment, universalization prevailing over heterogeneity, solidarity and veritable multiculturalism.

Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye,* while depicting the catastrophic effects of the white beauty myth on a black female child, also outlines a challenging subversion of the ideological process of consuming, containing, controlling/producing the other in order to reinforce the norm, the normalized self. Here, it is the marginalized heroine, a black little girl, Pecola who maniacally and cannibalistically devours food associated with icons of normative white femininity: gulping milk from Shirley Temple mugs, sucking on Mary Jane candies, she devours "that which is not-me" in order to give birth to her self, regurgitating, amidst the abjectification of the subject (Kristeva 9), which finally leads both to her nervous breakdown, to the dissolution of the white Dick and Jane primer's narrative, constituting narrative cornerstones (de)composing the black feminist text, and to the thorough destabilization of the status of the other.

New editions of the eternal Barbie toy-doll collectibles and the changing trends of fashion-industry-parading mannequins mutually affect each other, to propagate doubly reinforced their sexist, racist, ageist feminine ideal associated with an image of beauty, power and success. Catwalks like beauty pageants permit merely touches of the exotic framed (black models have white bone structure, black skin is associated via stereotypical props as ethnic fabrics or jewelry with "racial features" as animal instincts), yet the beauty industry's obsession with the numericalization of bodies, identified by the numeric data of chests, waist, hips, height and weight uncannily recall the slave market's logic by relying on the objectification of the subject. Moreover, the corporeal parameters prescribed are pathological, causing the new disease of fashion models coined "vocational bulemics" (Bordo 66), which heightens an epidemic of anorexia among women in a country of overweight majority, and contributing to the apparition of perhaps the most shocking example of contemporary American female grotesque: 8-year-old Barbie alter-ego beauty queens going on diet: living patchwork dolls made up of stereotypical clichés of femininity, sparkling singular personalities speaking from the uniform mold of Barbie, uttering the compulsory lines wishing for world peace in a world that belligerently eliminates difference.

Symptoms of eating disorders induced by psychosomatic

illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa usually appear in young female patients, seriously frustrated by the social expectations of femininity associated with slimness and eternal beauty. The patient, unable to conceive her objective body image and tormented by irrealistic phantasmagoria of her irreducable obese corporeality, feels a compulsion to over-eat, elicited by obsessive thoughts about the desired food that paradoxically also provokes an emotional, psychic disgust in her. The patient becomes an addict of "binge and purge," a compulsive devouring and disgorging of food, a recurring over-eating followed by (spontaneously or consciously produced) vomiting or diarrhea, which results in fatal digestive disorders, a drastic loss of weight at accelerated speed in excessive amounts, and may even lead to death.

As Helen M. Malson's and Susan Bordo's descriptions of the disease suggest, the major characteristic of the grotesque body of the anorexic and particularly the bulimic patient is a painful oscillation between the binary gender (op)positions (see Bordo 170, Malson 233, 239). On the one hand, drastically influenced by the patriarchal beauty myth, she *over-internalizes* the traditional masculine ideal of slender, suffering *femininity*, while, on the other hand she wishes to compensate for her lack of status and power in society, to gain empowerment, by *becoming masculinized*, synonymous with the agency of autonomous subjectivity, that is by accomplishing a triumph of the mind and the will over the ruthlessly controlled body. On the one hand, her disgust at disorderly fat, at erupting stomach, unwanted protuberances and excess flesh signals her *disgust of traditional femininity* confined to the domestic sphere and maternal nurturing. Her self-starvation, purging, self-purifying vomiting marks an *attempt to disappear as feminine excess*, to reach a complete disembodiment, a *dematerialization of* the threatening and the traditionally over-eroticized *feminine body*. The ceasing of female corporeal functions like menstruation and the appearance of masculine bodily attributes like facial hair are often heralded as a *triumph of masculine self-management*, *eliminating the pathological, fragile, emotional aspects of femininity* and gaining complete mastery of the self. In the meanwhile, she *embodies exaggerated stereotypical feminine traits* in an unlimited excess, becoming a caricature of the standardized visual image of the norm of feminine hyper-slenderness, "a virtual, though tragic parody of 20th century constructions of femininity" (Bordo 170). On the one hand, the patient obsessively *incorporates the stereotype of femininity as physical and emotional nurturer of others*, developing a totally other-oriented emotional economy, suppressing her own desires for self-nurturance,

hunger, independence, and considering self-feeding as greedy and perversively excessive via her strict control of female appetite. On the other hand, her compulsive over-eating marks her female hunger for public power, independence, sexual gratification, public space, autonomous will, and her insatiable voracity, her unrestrained consumption *stages exactly the stereotypically uncontrollable female excess*, uncontained desire, combined with all-wanting determination, and unbound free will. The bulimic's traumatic vacillation between compulsive over-eating and purifying vomiting, between insatiable appetite and ascetic self-starvation, between bingeing and purging, devouring and disgorging marks the paradoxically positioned feminine subject's vertiginous oscillation between the socially, culturally available gender positions, between the ideologically prescribed passive or excessive femininities and the always already masculinized autonomous self-mastering subjectivity.

According to Bordo, the bulimic body-politics reflects, besides the politics of gender, the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism's oscillation between consumption and production, non-productive expenditure and accumulative restraint, desire and its controlling containment (199). The neurotic bodies of anorexic or bulimic female patients also constitute texts making ideology-critical statements about the violently ambiguous social construction of femininity, while virtually and dramatically embodying the dizzying see-saw of the paradoxically interpellated feminine subject always already associated with corporeality and suffering, incompatible with the pleasures of masculinized agency, doomed to sway between mutually exclusive, antagonistically engendered identity positions, bingeing and purging herself in the passion of becoming a woman. In a recent trend elegantly designed, highly self-conscious pro-Ana (anorexia), pro-Mia (bulimia) and pro-ED (eating disorders) web sites, with names like "Anorexic Nation," "Invisible Existence," and "I Love You to the Bones," have become more and more widespread (today numbering around 400), constituting solidarious Internet communities, which feature extreme dieting tips, such as consuming only celery, diet soda and cigarettes; "thinspirational" slogans, such as "Anorexia is a Lifestyle Choice, Not a Disease;" photo galleries of emaciated women; and chat rooms where visitors share personal stories intended to help one another embrace eating disorders and reach their dangerously low weight goals[2] (Zwerling 11) .

[2] Suggestions found at the site "Good Anas Never Die" included: "Swallow two tablespoons of vinegar before eating to suck the fat out of your food; use Crest White Strips (you can't eat when they're on); make your mind think that the pain from being

Nevertheless, as Bordo points out, even though these "duly" modified bodies may suggest androgynous independence, by fulfilling their "challenging" aims and incorporating both genders' archetypal traits, yet in a "*pitiful paradox*" their parody exposing the interiorized contradictions finally becomes a "*war that tears the subject in two,*" destroying her health, imprisoning her imagination. Body dysmorphic patients, unlike Judith Butler's revolutionary gender-troubling performers (1-35), merely mark "*pathologies* of female protest" "written in languages of *horrible suffering,*" functioning "paradoxically, as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them, yet reproducing them rather than transforming, precisely that which is being protested" (Bordo 174, 176, 177) .

Although female body builders seem to be very far from anorexic patients, as Bordo notes, their pleasure in the experience of embodiment, in building up the body is overruled by maniac fantasies of absolute control, perfection, purity, will and independence, realized through a masochistic, ascetic modification of the body, characteristic of anorexics. Accordingly, female body builders are compulsive exercisers, new puritans conceptualizing the body as an alien entity to be ruthlessly mastered, shaped, chiseled, constantly conquering physical pain, exhaustion, and bodily limits in the obsessive quest for the perfect body, which has more to do with a disembodied, purely aestheticized mental concept than the actual, materially present, corporeal reality. The muscular body is no longer an exclusive attribute of pure masculinity, or of the animalistic, uncivilized, uncultured proletarian, racialized, marginalized lower class; on the contrary, the finely built, muscled body becomes a symbol of intelligent (self-)managerial abilities, a glamorized cultural icon of androgynous, metrosexual yuppies workaholically "working out" in a body-fetishizing society of spectacle and simulacrum. As Bordo underlines, body building plays a significant role in the reinforcement of ideologically governed social fictions, consolatory illusions: it constitutes a fantasy of self-mastery in an increasingly unmanageable culture—in reality merely contributing to pathological disembodiment, body dysmorphia, a neurotic loss of

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hungry is just really that you're full; (and) water, water, water! . . . Remember no one can know about Ana, so if you stay hydrated, you are less likely to pass out." "Metabolism shutting down, need advice!" began a recent entry on the "Pro-Ana Suicide Society" Web site's chat room. "Okay, I've been doing the fast/restrict thing very meticulously for a little over a month now, and I'm nine pounds above my lowest weight ever. That was still way too high, but c'est la vie . . . However, I've been on about 150-300 calories a day and stayed the same for about one week now. Metabolism's absolutely gone. I guess it's time to refeed? How many calories do you recommend, and for how long should I do it before starting my 'diet' again?" (Zwerling 12-13).

the self—a fantasy of (self)transformation and rearrangement promising the effacement of social inequalities—in reality merely effacing non-normative, individual, cultural differences—a fantasy of alliance with culture against all reminders of the decay and death of the body—in reality merely submitting to the decorporealized, illusory, economically/ideologically manipulated icons of the ageist beauty myth. Annette Kuhn heralds the cinematographic representation of female body builders body as a source of scopophilic pleasures of the female gaze, allowing for the possibility of identification with strong women, challenging gender standards, an enabling experience shared by a solidarious community of feminist spectators (198). Nevertheless, Bev Francis and Diana Dennis, iconic American female body builders, seem to remain trapped within conventional gender norms, by keeping compulsory feminine corporeal features and props, such as make-up, great hair, long nails, sexy underwear, jewelry, stiletto shoes, staging the muscular body in stereotypically stylized feminine poses.

Another significant branch of the beauty industry is cosmetic surgery, perhaps the most radical form of contemporary feminine body management, producing paradoxically judged grotesque corporealities. *The American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, the most powerful cosmetic surgery lobby, understandably presents itself as a protector of difference and individual choice fighting against global homogenization, normative universalization. Yet, it is much more interesting that even many feminists regard cosmetic surgery as a feminist gesture synonymous with taking one's life into one's own hands, and consider the proposal to ban or regulate health-risking silicone implants as a totalitarian interference with feminist self-determination, choice and freedom. The problem is that cosmetic surgical interventions are becoming more and more ordinary and popular—shockingly, especially among women as young as in their 20s or 30s—usually reinforce the normative, idealized, ageist, racist, sexist beauty ideal (no-one wishes for a Jewish or African nose or Chinese eyes). Influenced by the "knife-styles of the rich and famous," surgically transformed women paradoxically want "to become like" in order to realize oneself, to gain Angelina Jolie's lips, Liz Taylor's nose, Pamela Anderson's breasts, which are not natural given, but surgically created images, empty abstractions, hyperreal simulacra of ideal feminine features. The artificially reconstructed bodies fit into the contemporary compulsory omnivisibility of oversexualized bodies yet, lacking individual eroticism, they are also androgynous "cyborg" bodies—like Cher's or Michael Jackson's monstrous faces—plastic products of excessive surgeries. The plastic surgery industry sells

the illusory "postmodern construction of life as plastic possibility and weightless choice," comparing easy and fast cosmetic/surgical interventions—such as tattooing of eyebrow/eyeline/mouth contour, collagen implants for fuller lips, breast enlargement, liposuction, cellulite management, botox treatment—to consumable, changeable fashion accessories enabling the rewriting of the image of one's self. Nevertheless, the average plastic surgery patient or addict is probably very far from cosmopolitan multimedia performance artist, Orlan who uses cosmetic operations for self-conscious ideology-critical ends: having ideal traits of femininity carved on her very flesh only to deconstruct her autoportrait, this immaculate essence of femininity, by complementing it with features borrowed from alternative aesthetic ideals of foreign civilizations, squinting eyes, cranial protuberances and nose supplements of Maya and Aztec cultures (see Bourgeade 23, Orlan 51-80). Contemporary poly-surgical addicts, who "return for operation after operation in a perpetual quest of elusive yet ruthlessly normalizing goal, the perfect body" (Bordo 248), are very likely to become victims of their self-deconstructing, body-rearranging obsession, which leads to fatal consequences like the monstrous 'cat-woman' Jocelyne Wildenstein's or the androgynous Michael Jackson's facial decomposition and neurosis or to Lolo Ferrari's painfully deformed freak-show body, her over-inflated 54G size breasts (each silicone implant weighing 6lbs 20oz, the equivalent of six pints of beer, as calculated by a men's magazine), leading to her suffocation.

Despite the paradoxical interpretation of the contemporary American female grotesque body, photographers Diana Thorneycroft and Cindy Sherman have tried to provide subversive re-readings of grotesque femininity through their own daring and defaced autoportraits.

Canadian artist, Diana Thorneycroft, in her 2001 exhibition, a survey of her last 10 years, tellingly entitled *Diana Thorneycroft: The Body, Its Lessons and Camouflage* explores issues of gender, identity, sexuality, (self)representation and their limits at the site of the troublingly denuded human body, a telling striptease of the artist herself. In her Untitled Self-Portrait series with Masks, she portrays herself as members of her family, hiding her face beneath masks made from relatives's photographic portraits and using stereotypically engendered, emotionally loaded props like toy guns for the brother, kitchen utensils for the mother, and sometimes more radical appendices like plastic male sex organs, to costume her own androgynous body, which by transcending the compulsory feminine body-frame, becomes apt to enact shifting, heterogeneous identity positions, to challenge corporeal frames, gender limits, and contained desires.

Thorneycroft's *Self-Portrait in Field of Dolls* (1989) demythologizes the Barbie doll's unproblematic femininity by recalling the cruelty of body-managing practices through its presentation of a disillusioning and uncanny self-portrait: her own hopelessly vulnerable luminescent naked body, lying among denuded dolls, recalling victims of a mass massacre, addicts of the beauty myth, dazed by Sleeping Beauty's false daydreams—all mutilated by picture frames, floating out of the focus like vanishing selves. The *Doll Mouth Series* (2004) shows a collection of toy dolls' mouths represented in nauseating excess, where these premier plans of plastic female oral orifices perform a revision of the female body as they reveal beneath the mythical kitsch, miniaturized, infantile, light and pleasurable hyper-femininity a disturbingly erotic, tempting-threatening abject aspect incorporated by stereotypically feminine icons like the *vagina dentata*, the abject grotto-like, grotesque cave of the mouth of the womb, while they also highlight beyond the grotesque fragmentation, libidinal territorialization, objectifying *othering* of the female body the possibility of viewing female anatomy in its abstraction as an infinite sublime landscape, providing an other view. As Vivian Tors has pointed out, Thorneycroft's art is grotesque as it paradoxically combines stylistic beauty with repulsive content; it uses traditional artistic conventions to explore unconventional terrains, draws on autobiographical experience and obscures itself in overplayed, theatricalized stagings, photographs the photographer's own denuded body as an alienated other, arouses intense emotions and remains emotionless, melts an impartial objectivity into surrealistic dream scenes, while it generates volumes of questions and avoids authoritative answers (1729-30). Likewise, contemporary American photographer Cindy Sherman is heralded as a "quintessential postmodern artist" "advocating a deconstruction of the power-structures embedded in late capitalist patriarchal society" (Lemmon 2). She is applauded for "making pop culture image into a whole artistic vocabulary" (Galassi 4) and is admired as a feminist, boldly confronting issues concerning the female body, the male gaze, and the socio-cultural constructedness of femininity in ambiguous and eclectic series of photos all featuring herself. Already her 1978 *Untitled Film Stills*, on display since 1995 at the New York Museum of Modern Art, frames Sherman herself in shots from imaginary black and white B grade films of the 1950s, reflecting archetypal representations of Woman engendered by phallogocentric ideology, trapped in clichés like the sexy schoolgirl, the docile housewife, or the femme fatale. Sherman performs a feminist revision by providing a parodic and political repetition of the patriarchal icons of femininity, making ideologically interpellated female

spectators recognize their misrecognition, as she playfully acts out photographer/model/imaginary actress/mythical Woman/and singularly heterogeneously "a-woman" (De Lauretis 124) in her series of grotesquely defaced auto-portraits of simulated femininity, where the fictional selves' gaze consistently transgresses picture frames and the borders of patriarchal imagination, violating representation's limits, thriving for revision, a view from elsewhere, a view beyond. Her *Disaster Series* (shot from 1985 to 89) as well as her 1992 *Sex Picture Series* uses plastic surrogates, doll parts or prosthetic body parts to complement or substitute for her own, while she portrays female corporeal reality (dis)appearing among abject body fluids, like vomit, blood, and feces, tracing a violent disintegration of the body shattered by compulsory social fictions of femininity, sexuality, beauty, ageing, etc. The self-sufficient presence of the reassured, homogeneous, Cartesian subject is substituted by a grotesque subject in disappearance, mirroring the (dis)ease of the paradoxically and painfully positioned feminine subject, and reflecting a De-Manian defaced auto-portrait in the mirror of Sherman's shattered glasses (see *Untitled* 1987). In her *Historical Portraits Series* (1988-90), Sherman casts herself again in archetypical feminine roles on simulacra of canonized masterpieces where she defamiliarizes representation by deconstructing familiar yet non-existent originals on her subversive copies, thus successfully creating a space for the heterogeneous ever-changing feminine self. Her most recent show at her New York gallery, Metro Pictures, still displays a series of mock-portrait images of herself in the guise of stereotypical women from California, like The Personal Trainer, The Divorcee or The Neurotic. Sherman's auto-fictionalizing work is paradoxical as it uses conventional portrait techniques like setting the figure against a neutral background, yet she utterly depersonalizes her work by repeatedly performing a grotesque masquerade of photos consistently titled "Untitled".

Both Thorneycroft's and Sherman's photography recalls Susan Rubin Suleiman's concept of bifocal vision. The contemplation of these contemporary art works elicits a view that combines a restful, classicizing contemplation of a reassuring aesthetic ideal and a restless, contemporary struggle with and against an inventive, irritating, witty alternative anti-aesthetic (Suleiman 147). Their photography thus implies a parallel perception of traditional femininity and of (its) ironically grotesque, feminist metatext.

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