

# THE MIRROR EFFECT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>SOCIETAL INFLUENCES:</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>ARTISTS, WRITERS, AND FILMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES:</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>THESIS WORK – THE CRUEL MIRROR</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>POST THESIS WORK</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>IMAGE LIST</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>53</b>

## INTRODUCTION:

“because wherever I sat—on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok—I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air.”

-Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* <sup>1</sup>

As a female artist, I make work that explores psychological issues affecting women’s self-images, identities, personal relationships, and roles in society, as well as the consequences women face when deviating from perceived societal norms. My work combines text and visual images that relate to these struggles, focusing, in particular, on my own individual experiences with and perspectives on these matters. I feel compelled to make work about these issues as I believe that the challenges related to them persist today in the United States. Women now advocate for themselves in areas of inequality that feminists of the 1960s and 70s did not fully achieve—e.g., equal political representation, the elimination of sexual harassment, and less distorted body images pervading mass media, along with inclusivity that addresses inequalities connected to prejudicial attitudes toward racial minorities, sexual orientation, and physical disablement.<sup>2</sup> My thesis work directly discusses the problems women face with respect to body image and beauty standards.

In addition to addressing these issues, my work likewise focuses on the psychological effects of these challenges on women (though I am personally also sensitive to the ways in which men are involved in these issues, whether as perpetrators or themselves victims, but I will not address these issues in this paper). Mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, body

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 185.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Osborne, *Feminism: The Pocket Essential Guide* (Herts Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2001), 25-27, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=266797&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

dysmorphia, obsessive compulsive disorder, and eating disorders are prevalent yet too often ignored. It is these conditions that have become so common that they are part of contemporary society, and yet it is insisted that a simple prescription will fix the problem. Like many of my friends and family members, I have struggled personally with a number of these issues. I have found that many people are ashamed of the feelings that result from these conditions. As a consequence, these men and women often hide or ignore the issues, rarely seeking professional help or even acknowledging the existence of their problems. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, “Nearly one in five U.S. adults’ lives with a mental illness,” and approximately, “44.7 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States [live with any mental illness].”<sup>3</sup>

#### SOCIETAL INFLUENCES:

American beauty standards put pressure on women of all ages, further contributing to these warped perceptions of what is acceptable and unacceptable. With the rise of social media, carefully curated, idealized representations of people—whether one’s peers or celebrities—define the behavior and appearances that come to be viewed as “normal” in mainstream society. As a result, more and more people are taking drastic measures to meet these standards—whether in the form of expensive beauty treatments or surgical procedures—to feel comfortable in their own skin. In 2017, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) reported the top five surgical and non-surgical procedures performed in America. The number one surgical procedure was breast augmentation (333,392 procedures) and the number one non-surgical procedure was the injections of Botulinum Toxin (1,548,236 procedures). Other popular

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<sup>3</sup> “NIMH » Mental Illness.” Accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>.



procedures included liposuction, breast lifts, laser hair removal, chemical peels, and so-called “tummy tucks”.<sup>4</sup> In short, the popularity of each of these procedures has increased dramatically every year. While it is worth noting that vanity and related beauty modifications have been popular with humanity for almost as long as we have existed, I believe that today’s modifications are increasingly inextricably linked to self-esteem issues caused by the rise and pervasiveness of unattainable standards disseminated by social media and pop culture in our society.<sup>5</sup>

Social media has become such an important part of our lives that, timewise, it consumes a great fraction of our day, thus serving as the main element of go-to entertainment modes. Social media plays a large role in many Americans’ compulsion to invest in unachievable goals of perfection. Many public profiles, and especially those of celebrities, are curated to look and appear a certain way.<sup>6</sup> Users accomplish this by taking several—sometimes hundreds—of photos, editing them, and then only posting the “perfect” ones. These posts appear “natural” or “real” despite the fact that some people even go to the extent of even putting up camera lights and using professional cameras to their photos. Most of us know that when we see an image it is highly possible that it has been edited in some way. Photoshop skills are much more common these days, and almost everyone knows someone who can use the program with ease. Moreover, many of us do not even need to learn Photoshop because our smartphones have apps with built-in filters, allowing average individuals who are not so tech-savvy to manipulate the appearance of their photos. This in turn has increased the obsession with and the emphasis on appearance in our society. I have come to realize that my awareness of my appearance has always been connected to my daily rituals and that often I find myself evaluating my body and appearance throughout

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<sup>4</sup> “Media - Statistics.” Accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.surgery.org/media/statistics>.

<sup>5</sup> Camille Paglia, *Free Women, Free Men: Sex, Gender, Feminism* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2017), 148-63.

<sup>6</sup> See Figure 1, 2, and 3 for examples of posts

the day. I cannot help the impulse to worry about my appearance—and especially my appearance to men. This issue of being aware of my appearance to others is also where my understanding of my appearance on film comes from. Growing up as a millennial, and specifically, a female millennial, I know exactly how I look on camera and I know exactly how to pose to get the best shot in order to avoid a “bad” photo. Many others of my generation, like myself, have memorized certain poses that work best for all of the possible photos: group shots, single shots, face shot, full body shots, face angles, eye position, posture, etc. I know to tilt my head down to make my chin and nose appear smaller; I know to straighten my shoulders and suck in my stomach just the right amount to appear thinner; I know how to angle my face to appear “cute”. All I need is five seconds and everything can be put in its “correct” place. The only way one achieves so immaculate of a result is by surveying oneself, by having their photo taken, and by studying the results over and over. This action is normal to me. When it happens, I do not think twice about it. Then there are times where I get my photo taken instantaneously or without my knowledge and it can be the most embarrassing or upsetting thing, which is of course another bizarre reaction—but I know many others can relate to this experience. The problem with attempting to appear flawless all of the time is that it is not possible and never will be.

#### ARTISTS, WRITERS, AND FILMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES:

Cindy Sherman, Sophie Calle, and Lesley Dill have all produced both individual objects as well as series that have directly influenced my current body of work. All being artists who grew up during the post-war era, these women pushed boundaries by exploring the emotional terrain and psychological ideas of freedom, gender, intimacy, and distant human relationships.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Post-war American Art merely defines a time period, often referring to art created between 1945 and 1970.

These artists use photography as a form of expression in a way that challenges the notions of the cultural tropes and stereotypes of popular culture.

Cindy Sherman (b. Glen Ridge, NJ, 1954) is best known for her conceptual self-portraits as part of the *Picture Generation*.<sup>8</sup> In the 60s and 70s she had studied performance art, body art, and film theory, all of which ultimately inspired her through the work of her self-portraiture. Throughout the years, Sherman's work has examined women's roles throughout history and in contemporary society, a subject that my own work is expressing. She leaves her work open to interpretation, yet she is generally perceived as a feminist artist. Sherman was greatly influenced by female artists: Lynda Benglis, Eleanor Antin, Adrian Piper, and Hannah Wilke, all of whom used their own bodies in their work. By making the choice to transform and manipulate her own body as the subject, she is "putting roots in the feminist discourse of ideation established by these pioneering female artists."<sup>9</sup>

In Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), a series of 69 black-and-white self-portraits, she is acting out the female clichés of twentieth century pop culture in order to subvert the stereotypes of women in media.<sup>10</sup> Sherman is critiquing traditional film stills from the Italian Neorealism or American Film Noir of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s.<sup>11</sup> In these types of films, there are two archetypal female characters, the *whore* (dark and sexual) and the *Madonna* (the virgin).

These analog shots of the actresses were then often used to advertise the film by showing a

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<sup>8</sup> The *Pictures Generation* is a loose affiliation of artists, influenced by Conceptual and Pop Art, who utilize appropriation and montage to reveal the constructed nature of images.

<sup>9</sup> Cindy Sherman, et al. *Cindy Sherman: Working Girl*

<sup>10</sup> See Figures 4 & 5 for "Untitled Film Still #10" & "Untitled Film Still #21"

<sup>11</sup> Italian Neorealism is also known as the Golden Age of postwar Italian cinema stretching from 1943 to 1952; moreover, this is a movement characterized by stories set amongst the poor and working class, filmed on location, and frequently staffed by non-professional actors. American Film Noir is a cinematic term used primarily to describe stylish Hollywood crime dramas, particularly those that emphasize cynical attitudes and sexual motivations, and produced between 1943 and 1952.

single moment of the movie in which the protagonist(s) are engaged in exaggerated poses or behaviors to create a romantic mythology for viewers.<sup>12</sup> Early Hollywood film productions did their best to present the process as something magical by hiring photographers to document every phase of the production, from the process of filming on set to the dressing rooms of the stars and even the studio lots. Sherman uses the same format, size, and photo finish of those historical film stills to critique the kind of the objectification of (especially) female actresses therein. Sherman dresses herself up, acting out the different cliché female roles such as a librarian, office girl, housewife, seductress, girl on the run, and so on. She limits the environment of these shots to common areas such as streets, yards, pools, beaches, and interiors. They are often posed alone, expressionless, and in private, always looking away from the camera. Her heroines were those that did not follow conventional ideas of marriage and family; rather, they tended to be rebellious women who were not tamed by society. The fact that all of the images are “untitled” arguably preserves their ambiguity. In contrast, the subject seen in my own photography is fighting the urges to succumb to society’s expectations of women, as I will further discuss later in this paper. Sherman’s work, as well as my own, discusses how these traditional roles are considered the norm in American standards and that by rebelling against, is considered unusual and unexpected.

Additionally, Sherman continues to work without studio models. She incorporates objects and transforms herself as the main subject of her work. In my own practice, I choose to be the subject and object by rejecting the use of studio models, the same as Sherman has done throughout her career. Photography has always been fascinating to me as an artist because of the

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<sup>12</sup> Jan-Christopher Horak, “Using Hollywood Film Stills as Historical Documents,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, Vol. 10 (March 1990): 92.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f3h&AN=9707160612&site=eds-live&scope=site>; See Figure 6 and 7 for examples of classic film stills.

way in which it mimics life. It will always appear as something different and unique depending on how we encounter and interact with the image. The photo itself only holds a certain amount of information, and it is really just a glimpse of a moment in time. Even the most high-tech cameras cannot mimic the human eye. Sherman speaks about this phenomenon by bringing up one of her early boyfriends, saying, “I thought: he is just so handsome, and I would show a picture to somebody and they would not see it at all. In a still photo you only sometimes get the essence of a person. I have always been fascinated by why that happens.”<sup>13</sup> This idea is why I am attached to portraiture; in short, it creates a new way of seeing someone or something, in that the viewer has access to only a limited amount of information about the figure being portrayed. In other words, one really does only encounter the essence of the figure and can only read what is actually shown. Sherman's entire lifetime of work is an example of this phenomena. As I mentioned before, in her early series of *Untitled Film Stills*, she photographs herself as various *types* of women by dressing up, changing facial expressions, changing the scenery, etc. The photographs mimic the look of a film still and thus—allows the viewer to question the narrative of what the main character is doing/portraying. She could be in a library pulling a book off the shelf, crouching down to pick up spilled groceries, or sitting on a window seal viewing the streets below.

Alternatively, in Sherman's later work, she creates *Disasters* (1986-89), a series that explores grotesque chaotic subject matter where the scene is covered in things such as decayed food, vomit, hair, old dolls, ripped clothing, and corrupt remains. She is almost completely removed from these photographs, only appearing slightly in the frame. In *Untitled #175*, a chromogenic color print, Sherman is only visible through the reflection of the pair of sunglasses

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<sup>13</sup> Tim Adams. “Cindy Sherman: ‘Why Am I in These Photos?’” *The Observer* (July 3, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jul/03/cindy-sherman-interview-retrospective-motivation>.

in the top right corner.<sup>14</sup> Here the glasses lie next to a pile of vomit and the person in the reflection has their mouth and eyes open, yet they appear to be dead. Likewise, her previous work also allows the viewer to create their own narrative to the scene. Her work may have shifted from capturing a casual day as a woman on the town to a grotesque horror scene of an overdose or murder, but Sherman still remains in the work and she is achieving the goal of manipulating her body to become an entirely new subject to the viewer. These works can also be seen as de-fetishizing the female body through the context of abjection.

One of Sherman's series that relates to my own photography is *Centerfolds* (1981), which features photographs that mimic the photographic double spreads of men's magazine centerfolds.<sup>15</sup> They are close-cropped close ups that portray various female roles from sultry seductress to frightened victim who may have of just been raped. The series was initially commissioned by the magazine *Artforum* but was never used do to the subject matter. In *Untitled #96*, Sherman is dressed in an orange sweater and skirt, lies on a linoleum floor clutching a "Personals" ad torn from a newspaper. This series seeks to denounce the daily sexism that every woman is a victim of, whether consciously or not.<sup>16</sup>

By mimicking the center spread of a magazine, she is singling out the oppressive influence of the media on collective and individual ideas. The composition as well as content of *Centerfolds* directly relates to my artist book, *Reflections* (2018). *Reflections* also mimicks the centerfold composition while simultaneously suggesting a connection to the typical Instagram format of a square image on a white background. Moreover, the content of *Reflections* is of a

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<sup>14</sup> See Figure 8 for *Untitled #175*. Paul Moorhouse. *Cindy Sherman*.

<sup>15</sup> See Figures 9 & 10 for images from series *Centerfolds*; Grace Glueck, "ART IN REVIEW; Cindy Sherman – 'Centerfolds, 1981.'" *The New York Times* (May 23, 2003), <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/23/arts/art-in-review-cindy-sherman-centerfolds-1981.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

nude female expelling and engorging plant excrements. This series is also aiming to use abjection to deflect the male gaze. Sherman continues to work in self-portraiture today, and her most recent work takes on the topic of aging as a woman.

French writer, photographer, and artist Sophie Calle (b. Paris, France, 1953) has a propensity for combining image and text in her photographic and mixed media works; in particular, she distinguishes her work by using arbitrary sets of constraints that evoke the French literary movement of the 1960s known as Oulipo.<sup>17</sup> Her work frequently depicts human vulnerability and examines identity and intimacy. In 2007, Calle received a “break-up” letter from her then boyfriend which inspired the creation of an entire body of work for the French pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale, which she then titled after the letter’s last line: *Take Care of Yourself*.<sup>18</sup> The work comprises 106 elements of films, prints, and text.<sup>19</sup> For this project, Calle describes how she began this body of work: “I asked 107 women (as well as two hand puppets and a parrot), chosen for their profession or skills, to interpret the letter.”<sup>20</sup> The letter was transformed in various ways from simply adding notes or editing the letter in red pen, to highlighting and mapping the letter, to mounting the letter wood and shooting at with a gun, leaving bullet holes in the remaining piece, to a video of a woman typing the letter into a laptop with a combination of computer-generated playback and strips that cast light onto her placid face. She enlisted women whose professions ranged from graphic designer, advertising executive, philosopher, composer, clairvoyant, psychiatrist, accountant, and more to provide an explanation, interpretation, or analysis of the letter. Critics and reviewers have argued that this is

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<sup>17</sup> Oulipo was a movement during the 1960s of French-speaking writers and mathematicians who sought to create works using constrained writing techniques.

<sup>18</sup> See Figure 11 for image and text of “Take Care of Yourself” letter; Slow Words. “*Sophie Calle – Take Care of Yourself*” Paula Cooper Gallery.

<sup>19</sup> See Figures 12 & 13 for photos of the Venice Biennale show of *Take Care of Yourself*.

<sup>20</sup> Slow Words. “*Sophie Calle – Take Care of Yourself*”

not only a social experiment and method of art making for Calle, but also a therapeutic method for her as well as a means of “sharing the pain”. I myself aim to connect the people of the past to the people of the present in order to bring attention to the relevant feelings of human existence and the negative aspects of life.<sup>21</sup>

This work of Calle is interesting for the way she chose to deal with this experience in her life. She not only shared the letter with 107 women, but she also posted and published it for the rest of the world to read and review. She didn't hide the personal message, which was intended only for her. Her means of recording these responses took on a view of all angles of the situation by projecting the possibilities of handling a break-up. Interestingly, Calle is not directly saying anything bad about her relationship and is not expressing her own feeling of pain but is enlisting other women to express variations of how they feel from experiencing this moment of her life. She is connecting with other women and their feelings on the matter. I think this is an interesting point to note about Calle's work versus my own, considering I intentionally avoid collaborations. It is not just the work in *Take Care of Yourself* where Calle openly reveals the source of the project. She collaborates with someone or something, as seen in her works *Le Divorce* (1992), *The Sleepers* (1979), and *Birthday Ceremony (1981)* (1992) where Calle is collaborating and thus finding new connections with her friends as well as strangers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Figure 14 for image of *Take Care of Yourself* letter.

<sup>22</sup> *Le Divorce*, A photo exhibited with text where Sophie Calle is writing about her relationship with her ex-husband Greg Shepard. Calle explains her fantasy of being a man and how one day Shepard invited her to assist him in the act of peeing. Calle explains how this became a ritual between the two of them. When the two filed for divorce, Calle asked to take a photo souvenir of the act; Figure 15; *The Sleepers*, A series of photos taken of Calle's bed where Calle asked strangers to sleep in her own bed while Calle observed them and took their photo as they slept; Figures 16 & 17; *Birthday Ceremony (1981)* A ritual Calle performed and recorded during the years of 1980-1993. This ritual was about her fear of being forgotten on her birthday, so each year on her birthday she would host a dinner party with the same number of guests as her age. She would save the presents and display them in a cabinet until the next birthday of the following year. She recorded this event by photographing the cabinet each year; Figures 18 & 19.



In a similar but different vein, Lesley Dill (b. Bronxville, NY, 1950) works fluidly across medias such as printmaking, sculpture, and performance while appropriating verbs, nouns, phrases, and metaphors from poets such as Emily Dickinson, Salvador Espriu, Tom Sleight, Franz Kafka, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Much of Dill's work is unique in that she marries text and media together to create these emotional, body-like pieces. Here Dill explains her relation to text and the human body: "I think if you were to cut us open, what would fall out would not be our intestines, and our pancreas; I think what would fall out would be words...the unlippped and untongued words that we hold inside."<sup>23</sup> Her method of artmaking connects to the body more than one might initially realize. She uses forms of the body such as hands and figure silhouettes as well as the literal body itself, as seen in her photography pieces.<sup>24</sup> Dill has called herself a "fingertip artist" in that she puts special significance on hands in her work. They represent the creative process of making and are vital sensory tools. In addition, her pieces mimic our internal thoughts, emotions, and perceptions by covering the substrate in poetic lines in large, eye-catching bold fonts. An example of this can be seen in artist book *The Thrill Came Slowly* (1996).<sup>25</sup> In this book, Dill pulls text from Emily Dickinson's poem "The Thrill came slowly like a Boom" and other sources. As the reader, you find yourself slowly turning the delicate tissue-like pages through a series of images of hands, bodies, and silhouettes of various figures. The figures are then paired with large text that is intentionally smeared to be illegible on certain pages. Dill described the experience to be "protective" and "nourishing", but some of the ghostly greenish-yellowish figures create an uncanny feeling. The combination of fragile pages with smeared text adds another challenge for the reader, slowing them down and forcing them to view

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<sup>23</sup> See the exhibition catalogue *Lesley Dill*, Edited by Lexi Lee Sullivan (New York: deCordova Sculpture Park, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> See Figure 20

<sup>25</sup> See Figure 21

each page with care. Furthermore, it is admirable in the way she thinks about the book as a literal bodily representation. She compares the spine of a book to the stability of a being and the pages and paper of the book as the skin, by it being fragile yet strong. This concept of the book being a metaphorical body is similar to the way that I view my own artist books. I view my books as a memory of an experience, of thoughts and observations. In addition, hands are also something I have been drawn to time and time again. Although in my own work, they are representing the influencer, manipulator, or controller of the body. Following my artist book *Reflections*, my artist book *Sweet-Talk* (2019) features hands that symbolize this precisely by pulling, stretching, and touching the face to examine the being as an object. In *Reflections*, I was exhibiting the reoccurring thought that I wasn't good enough for someone through a series of photographs where the subject (posed by me) is forcibly regurgitating a plant-like substance, representing the negative reoccurring thoughts within. *Sweet-Talk*, however, explores feeling, asking if I am being over analyzed by others as well as myself by shedding light on the objectification of women. This piece also illustrates examining my self-value as a woman and in turn that means examining myself as an object for others.<sup>26</sup>

My influences are not limited just to visual artists; rather, my work is heavily influenced by literary figures and specifically, Sylvia Plath whose poems and novel *The Bell Jar* have driven my work into the discussion of women's domestic roles and mental illness. Other influences and subject matter relevant to my work that I will address in this paper are the media influences of the film *Black Swan* (dir. Darren Aronofsky, 2010) as well as an episode from the series *Black Mirror* (Dir. Joe Wright, 2016).

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<sup>26</sup> *Sweet-Talk* will be discussed further into detail later in this paper.

To resume, as a young woman, literature had a huge impact on me while growing up in the United States. While struggling with my identity, stress, and depression, literature helped me to understand myself and my internal struggles as a young teenager. I was introduced to American poet, novelist, and short-story writer Sylvia Plath (b. 1932, Boston, MA) during a psychology course, and since then, she has remained an author and poet whose work I find myself continuously referencing to augment my own.<sup>27</sup> She inspires me with the way that she describes the thoughts and emotions that no one wants to discuss in society. Clinically depressed for most of her adult life, she was treated multiple times with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) though she was never able to overcome her troubles and mental illness. She committed suicide in 1963 by turning on her gas oven and sticking her head inside until she passed out from the fumes.

In 1952, Plath published in *Mademoiselle* magazine and later won the *Mademoiselle* magazine guest editor competition in 1953. This was a major event in her life and in which she later wrote about the experience in her novel, *The Bell Jar*. Although fictional, *The Bell Jar* clearly addresses her own life experiences, including the magazine competition and her interpersonal interactions. This novel reveals her dark account and her downward spiral into mental illness in a very poetic way and is the novel she is most famous for. Her confessional poetry style of the 1950s and 60s is what separated her from the rest of the poetic trends of that time. This movement dealt with subject matter that previously had not been openly discussed in American poetry. She wrote lines such as this in *The Bell Jar*: “That’s one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like

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<sup>27</sup> See Figure 22 for image of Sylvia Plath.

the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket.”<sup>28</sup> This was unheard of during the 50s for a woman to reject the idea of marriage and to talk as if it was a bad thing. She often wrote about suicide and did so many times in *The Bell Jar*, “But when it came right down to it, the skin of my wrist looked so white and defenseless that I couldn't do it. It was as if what I wanted to kill wasn't in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, and a whole lot harder to get.”<sup>29</sup> Writers of the Confessional movement often focused on these private experiences of feelings about death, trauma, depression and relationships often written in an autobiographical manner. This new movement still uses traditional structures and is still working within the constraints of poetry. It uses everyday language and discuss everyday events but is working in a confessional style by exhibiting thoughts of mental illnesses that were previously covered up in society. Before the confessional style, people did not put these thoughts and feelings on display like this. Plath often discussed the life as white middle-class females who were expected to become “obedient perfect housewives and mothers”. She rejected this idea and criticized it in her work.

When the second wave feminist movement started in the 1960s, women looked at these female writers, such as Plath, as leaders and artistic role models to the movement. Plath’s writings and my artwork are parallel in that our work is expressing similar ideas. In Plath’s writings she wrote traumas, depression and most importantly the expectations of women in the 1950s & 60s, as being expected to be a perfect housewife and stay at home mother. These may seem like issues of just the 50s and 60s, but they still relate to modern day feminist issues. The social norms and expectations of women in the United States are things such as expectations of pristine organization/cleanliness, appearing “sexy” at all times, and maintaining an orderly house

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<sup>28</sup> Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 136.

while also managing children and most likely a career on top of all of that. Plath was asking why are we taught that these societal “goals” are going to be the answer of our happiness or why are they necessary? Why is it that there so many people unhappy with following these paths?

Marriage is arguably the idealized ultimate goal of a relationship, yet divorce is so common in the United States and is becoming more common as generations pass. Why is it that this is such a pressure put onto women? Why is marriage still something we consider an expectation of a relationship given that the origin of the tradition is no longer relevant to modern society?

History will always play a huge role in influencing the way we act in contemporary society. As a community, we either continue, reject or transform historical traditions. *Black Swan*, exposes the horrors of obsession over desire for perfection. The film is an American psychological thriller starring Natalie Portman, Vincent Cassel, and Mila Kunis.<sup>30</sup> The plot revolves around a production of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* ballet by the prestigious New York City Ballet company. The production requires a ballerina to play the dual role. The innocent and fragile White Swan and the dark and sensual Black Swan, two polar opposite characters. Nina (Portman) then is overwhelmed by a feeling of immense pressure trying to perfect both personalities, causing her to lose her tenuous grip on reality and descend into a living nightmare in her impossible quest. She begins to have extreme hallucinations that progress into fits of harming herself as well as unexplained scratch marks that keep reappearing on her back. Aronofsky’s films often follow a character study of an individual whose own downfall is from psychological torment from their ambitions and obsessions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Mike Medavoy, *Black Swan*, directed by Darren Aronofsky (2010; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2011), DVD Blue Ray.

<sup>31</sup> Matt Goldberg. “Darren Aronofsky’s Movies Ranked from Worst to Best,” *Collider* (blog), September 18, 2017, <http://collider.com/darren-aronofsky-movies-ranked/>.

The themes in *Black Swan* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the expectation on women to possess qualities of a sexual sensuality type, the black swan, while also possessing a sweeter innocence and graceful side to their personalities, embodying the qualities of the white swan. The pressure that women often experience from trying to achieving polar opposite expectations (such as the *whore* and the *Madonna* extremes referenced in Sherman's work) can lead to feelings of frustration from trying to become a balance of the two. Although, the film is a psychological thriller, the actions from this movie are not far off of certain women's reality they live day to day trying to balance two identities.<sup>32</sup>

A common theme, but especially heavily used in *Black Swan*, is Aronofsky's use of film shots that incorporate the use of reflections from mirrors.<sup>33</sup> In *Black Swan*, the mirror is a constant prop used to display the battle of external beauty and internal turmoil.<sup>34</sup> Aronofsky's films and my own artist books similar in that we both are using the mirror as a symbol for these external and internal struggles. In the film, Nina's appearance is crucial for her success as a ballerina. Throughout the film we see her looking into mirrors to make sure her internal unraveling doesn't leak into her external appearance. This display shows the duality of the inner and outer selves and the struggle she faces with keeping it all together. The film comes to an end with Nina spiraling out of control with her hallucination. She hallucinates that she murdered Lily with a glass mirror shard, but later realizes she had actually stabbed herself. She again ignores the wound and goes out on stage and preforms the second half of her role as the Black Swan. She gives an immaculate performance by the ballet's standards. The screen fades to white and the

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<sup>32</sup> Mike Medavoy, *Black Swan*.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Adler, "Is He the Most Controversial Director of All Time?", *The Telegraph*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/mother/most-controversial-director-darren-aronofsky/>; See Figure 23 and 24 for images of *Black Swan* mirror shot examples.

<sup>34</sup> Mike Medavoy, *Black Swan*.

implantation is that she dies immediately after she completes her performance. Nina achieved her dream of becoming the perfect Black Swan, but at the cost of losing her ability to be the White Swan. Thus, she never was able to be both personalities despite her dedication to the challenge and lost her mind and life in the end. The point of this film is that, Nina was willing to die for a chance to be perfect and literally gave everything up to be the perfect Black Swan.<sup>35</sup> Although a glass shard is more dramatic, many women succumb to risks achieving what they deem as perfect such as plastic surgery, eating disorders, chemical manipulation.

Moreover, *Black Mirror* is a British science fiction series featuring stand-alone dramas that explore near-future possible realities and sci-fi worlds.<sup>36</sup> The series can be described as a contemporary reworking of *The Twilight Zone*.<sup>37</sup> In episode 1 of season 3, titled “Nosedive”, this episode is set in a world where everyone is able to rate each other based off of any interactions that they have, which effect their socioeconomic status.<sup>38</sup> Lacie (Bryce Dallas Howard) is a young woman who is obsessed with her ratings and is always trying to find opportunities to elevate her score in order to move into a luxurious residence neighborhood that requires at least a 4.5 rating just to apply. She is chosen to be a maid of honor for an acquaintances wedding and encounters several mishaps while traveling that result in a rapid reduction in her rating score. Her motivation to attend the wedding was that it would have been an opportunity to gain more rating. Do to the mishaps, she becomes rejected by the people around her after they see her low score. She is treated as an outcast despite her efforts and is judged harshly by everyone around her.

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<sup>35</sup> Tim Adler, “Is He the Most Controversial Director of All Time?”

<sup>36</sup> Laurie Borg, “Nosedive”, *Black Mirror*, season 3, episode 1, directed by Joe Wright, October 21, 2016, Netflix.

<sup>37</sup> The *Twilight Zone* is a black-and-white 1950s television show that is a mix of horror, science-fiction, drama, comedy and superstition. Each episode is concluded with a surprise ending.

<sup>38</sup> Laurie Borg, “Nosedive”.

This episode explores the negative aspects of social media and critiques the current way we value social media as a relevant source for information on someone.<sup>39</sup> Although this pretrial of social media is dramatized, it comes awfully close to reflecting the world we live in. Lacie's obsession dictates her appearance, interactions and decision making, thus—morphing reality into a pastel-colored nightmare of aggressive cheeriness in an attempt to out rate one another. Similar to that of the 1950s magazine portal of the perfect family, in this episode everyone is on their best behavior, 100% the time.<sup>40</sup> The rating system controls every aspect of their lives and they are judged based off their rating resulting in a totalitarian society. Anyone who rejects this way of living, like Lacie's brother in the episode, is outcasted and is given low ratings and thus—privileges are taken away. In turn, Lacie spends much of her free time practicing happy faces in the mirror, composing photos for her timeline, and upping other individuals scores in hopes they will give her a high rating back. Much like the contemporary need for “likes” on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram.<sup>41</sup> Appearance dominates society.

## THESIS WORK – THE CRUEL MIRROR

Growing up in the early 1990s, I had the luxury of taking feminism's previous achievements for granted for most of my life. I was surrounded by a number of strong females who had high success in their career fields.<sup>42</sup> The 90s was the beginning of the third-wave-feminist movement where the United States began to have new attitudes towards gender and

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<sup>39</sup> Sophie Gilbert, “‘Black Mirror’ Is Back: ‘Nosedive’ Is a Sharp Satire About Social Media.” *The Atlantic*, October 21, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/10/black-mirror-nosedive-review-season-three-netflix/504668/>.

<sup>40</sup> See Figure 25 and 26 for comparison.

<sup>41</sup> See Figures 27 and 28 for *Black Mirror* examples of social media.

<sup>42</sup> My mother is a Center Director of a pre-school, my aunt is a Vice President and Manager of a bank, and my grandmother who started working as a loan officer without a high school diploma but retired as the Executive Vice President. These women all played roles in raising me and it is amazing in that they were all paid a higher salary than their husbands and partners, while also still carrying the main burden of domestic responsibility.



sexuality.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, we had other areas of mainstream culture that was contrasting these new ideas, such as hip-hop music, which highly sexualized women in the lyrics and music videos. Growing up, I was constantly encouraged and challenged to think in unconventional ways. As a teenager, I quickly became interested in counterculture movements. Genres of music caught my attention such as grunge and punk rock, as well as literature classics like *1984*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *The Bell Jar*.<sup>44</sup> These interests and experiences guided me to discuss the issues that I feel affect me as a woman as well as an individual.

In my work, I choose to use my own body as the subject. By using images of my body, it gives me to control of what is being projected and forces me to work with my flaws and personal irritants of my appearances. Personally, it feels more genuine to use my own body instead of hand-pulling another female body that I deem fitting. If I were to choose another female body for my work, I would then be playing the surveyor and acting as a judge to another female's appearance, which is not what I want. In my photos, it is important to know that although it is images of myself, I view this process as a form of role playing. I may be reenacting events I have experienced, but the purpose is to connect to a broader audience. I am simply using the image of a woman who is played by myself, much like Cindy Sherman does in her portraiture. In contrast to Sophie Calle, I prefer to work alone and without any collaboration and I do not want input on how I should react to personal experiences.

As a visual artist, I do not believe in limiting my work or defining myself as just a printmaker or photographer. I use a combination of visual elements to express my ideas, and, for my prints and artist books, I often combine non-silver photography, such as Vandyke brown, and

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<sup>43</sup> Osborne, *Feminism: The Pocket Essential Guide*, 25-27.

<sup>44</sup> George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Plume, 2009); Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, Repr. (New York: Norton, 2001); Plath, *The Bell Jar*.

other techniques such as papermaking, printmaking, and letterpress printed elements. Not all processes are always used and sometimes I add in new methods and mediums. Working in layers is analogous to how our emotions run deep within us, often stratified in that they require excavations to uncover. They are much more than that and often intermix with other memories and feelings creating something unique and utterly unexplainable. I feel that this is one way in which my own work is aligning with the work of Lesley Dill because our work both combines appropriated text and layers of different mediums. Moreover, the symbolism in Dill's work is close to the subjects I use in my prints such as the dress, hands and face as symbols of femininity and revealing/concealing.

One of my biggest fears is succumbing to society's expectations of what a woman *should* be. My fear is that if I fall into a cookie cutter way of living, that it will result in a feeling of incompleteness as an individual. My way of coping with these fears, feelings, realities, and pressure, is by creating these pieces that speak to my thoughts about a woman's role in society and in the home. I hope by speaking out these issues will be brought to others attention and society as a whole can move forward in a better direction for all. In my artist book *Reflections*, it portrays the warped perception of oneself and embodies the recurrence of pessimistic thoughts.<sup>45</sup> The book comprises a series of photographs of the subject consuming and regurgitating the vines of a plant or weed. The fresh basil was chosen not only for its appearance, but also for its historical symbolism. During the Victorian era, plant symbolism was very important to the common people. Individuals would often gift plants and flowers to express feeling for one another. Basil was a negative plant to gift as it represented hatred.<sup>46</sup> It is not necessarily

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<sup>45</sup> See Figures 29, 30, 31 and 32 for images of the book *Reflections*.

<sup>46</sup> Condé Nast, "'We're Nobody's Third Love, We're Their First Love'—The Architects of the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show Are Still Banking on Bombshells." *Vogue*, Accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.vogue.com/article/victorias-secret-ed-razek-monica-mitro-interview>.

important to know this when looking through the book. One can just as easily understand this idea without this detail of information. *Reflections* refers to myself reflecting on my own body issues which have resurfaced repeatedly in the course of my life since adolescence. As such, this represents a cycle of negative thoughts as well as the condition of bulimia.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout high school, my best friend and I had the same body issues and saw warped versions of our figures. As I became a young adult, a lot of these feeling about my body went away, and I became more confident. Although as a single woman, I still encounter men who hold this idea that a woman should be a certain kind of way or they are unacceptable to date or marry. My observation is that the main pool of young men in the United States still struggle with this fantasy of the idealized perfect woman—the same way in which many women struggle with achieving this desired fantasy with their own appearance. I have witnessed my mother, step mother, grandmother, aunt, stepsister, and many female friends all fall into this routine of playing picture perfect housewife for their partners. They have dieted and starved themselves, stressed over their weight and image and one even went as far as getting plastic surgery to appear younger. I find it alarming how many women I know who struggle and obsess with such minor things, such as a few pounds or some wrinkles. I suffer from these thoughts myself, and I am only 26. I can't help but to notice every ideal figure I see in media, online and on the streets and every wrinkle or grey hair that suddenly appears. I find I am even blinded to seeing others who do not fit the standard.

*Reflections* shows the loop of depression that I have been stuck in time and time again. In reference to this idea, the text in *Reflections* is excerpts from Wallace Stevens poem titled

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<sup>47</sup> *Bulimia*: An emotional disorder characterized by a distorted body image and an obsessive desire to lose weight, in which bouts of extreme overeating are followed by fasting or self-induced vomiting or purging; Oxford dictionary, "Bulimia" <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bulimia>

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”. The text was selected for its historical symbolism for comparison and viewpoints of an event or being, as well as the things that happen in between the grey areas. In *Reflections*, I mimic this idea by using thirteen images with thirteen chosen lines from the poem. With this text, I use the bird as a symbol for the subject in the photos (myself) and the text is evoking ideas of comparison referencing the struggles of obsession with being something that is considered perfect. One line reads, “Why do you imagine golden birds?” This is a direct reference to this thought process of comparing oneself to others, attempting to be perfect, imagining perfection, or judging others on their appearance or lack of relation to the idealized form of beauty. Another line reads, “I do not know which to prefer, The beauty of inflections? Or the beauty of innuendoes?” This stanza is questioning the nature of what we define as beauty. In the context of a blackbird, is it the musical whistling of the blackbird, or the thought-provoking, less tangible beauty of the silence afterwards? By choosing this line—arguably the most important line in my artist book—I am challenging and questioning the way we judge beauty. Do we judge people based on appearance or by who they are as a person? Which is more important? Most would like to say, no we judge based on personality, but naturally and biologically we judge people based on appearance first. It is this underlining biological drive to observe appearance is what is driving us out of control with the need to be perfect. It turns into an obsession.

All of this discussion on beauty and appearance has led to my final project for my thesis work, an artist book that focuses on the objectification of women by women. In this artist book, *Sweet-Talk*, it is discussing the idea that not only do men objectify women, but that women are taught to objectify themselves and are continuing the cycle.<sup>48</sup> The book uses an excerpt from

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<sup>48</sup> See Figure 33 & 34 for images of *Sweet-Talk*.

John Berger's, *Ways of Seeing*, as the main text of the book. This is the entire excerpt used in *Sweet-Talk*:

“From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another... Thus, she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.”<sup>49</sup>

It is important to note that this was written by a man in 1972. Although my book is about contemporary women, I feel that his essay on the female nude is still very relevant and needs to be part of the feminist conversation. The excerpt I chose is from chapter 3, which discusses the female nude in art. He argues that in western nude art and present-day media, women are shown and treated as objects and that the gaze is for the pleasure of a male. He argues that not only do men do this, but that women are taught to view themselves in this manner and that they are subconsciously always aware of the viewer. He discusses that, historically, women have always been judged and viewed by their appearance to men. Although, this text is now 47 years old, it is still a valid argument. Victoria's Secret is the largest American designer and retailer of women's lingerie. The company has been challenged and critiqued many times throughout the years for their image they sell to women, yet it still remains the top seller. Their ads are an example of the male fantasy, yet they are selling products to women. Why is it that an ad that portrays this male fantasy of the idealized female figure promotes sales by women? Website *Dazed* wrote an article about why John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, is still relevant today. This essay uses a detail of

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<sup>49</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series with John Berger* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 46-47.

*Judgement of Paris*, by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1530) in a comparison with a Victoria's Secret ad from 2012.<sup>50</sup>

*Ways of Seeing* was a book that hit me hard as a woman. I found it infuriating and personally relatable at the same time since seeing myself in this way is something I have always done. Never once have I been self-conscious of this or found it unusual to obsessively critique my appearance. Reading this text caused me to reflect on myself as a woman, and I came to realize just how different men and women view themselves and historically how we have and still are treated differently. My artist book *Sweet-Talk* asserts the idea that, as women, many of us still struggle to alter this way of thought of objectifying ourselves.

In *Sweet-Talk*, I positioned the text so that it is broken up through a series of photographs and prints. The photographs switch back and forth between cheerful posed colored photographs on soft Japanese Mulberry paper, and somber monochromatic photos on rigid transparent abaca paper.<sup>51</sup> Each photo is accompanied by a larger word that is used to describe the female such as “luminous,” “mesmeric,” “domineering,” “sullen,” and “noxious.” These words are directed at females either as desires, fears, or common labels. This book shows the split between the two selves of a women, exposing a picture-perfect performative side as well as a vulnerable, dark side of women that no one usually sees. This book puts the reader in the surveyor's position, seeing all perspectives of a woman, as an object and as a subject, highlighting how a woman may act differently for others, how she wants to be seen, how she views herself in private, how she can be viewed in a positive way or negative way, and how she is aware of all of these perspectives, at all times.

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<sup>50</sup> Emma Hope Allwood, “Why We Still Need John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*.” *Dazed*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/34166/1/why-we-still-need-ways-of-seeing-john-berger>; See Figures 35 & 36

<sup>51</sup> This handmade abaca paper is translucent, off-white, and has a stiff appearance and feel.

In addition to the photographs, there are two spreads in *Sweet-Talk* that are monoprints of objects related to beauty. In the production of these prints, actual false-eyelashes and hair pins were used to print the imagery. This book largely focuses on a woman's face, and so I felt it was appropriate to use small products that women wear to beautify themselves. These objects have a historical significance as well. Women have been trying to find ways to lengthen their eyelashes for centuries. In ancient Rome, short lashes were considered to be a sign of aging and long lashes were linked to youthfulness and fertility. During the nineteenth century, books were published on the subject suggesting theories, and methods such as trimming the lashes to encourage growth, washing the lashes in water with walnut leaves, sewing head hair onto the lashes, and implanting lashes into their eyelids by needles.<sup>52</sup> During the 1968 feminist *Miss America protest*, eyelashes were thrown into the "Freedom Trash Can" which were listed as "instruments of female torture."<sup>53</sup> As for hairpins, their history also dates back to ancient civilizations. The earliest pins were found in Egypt and in Great Britain, France, and Belgium at the end of the Bronze Age. Early pins were made from bone or wood and later designs by the Spanish, English and French were casted in various metals. These had intricate designs of animals or jewels placed on it and worn by the wealthy and elite.<sup>54</sup> Both of these tools were used to assist in the process of beautifying women throughout time. Until recent decades, these were objects only worn by women and used to amplify their beauty. Due to this historical significance of lashes and hair pins, I am showing two alternative monoprints of lashes and pins to accompany this book. These prints are gold dusted and are of excessive amounts of pins and lashes.<sup>55</sup> The lashes represent the

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<sup>52</sup> Rachel Lubitz, "The truly bizarre history of fake eyelashes: From needles and human hair to Anna Nicole Smith" *Mic Network Inc.*, July 5, 2017, <https://mic.com/articles/181378/the-truly-bizarre-history-of-fake-eyelashes-from-needles-and-human-hair-to-anna-nicole-smith#.XMqNDYoxD>

<sup>53</sup> Susan Osborne, *Feminism: The Pocket Essential Guide*.

<sup>54</sup> Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion, "Hair Accessories.", Accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/fashion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/hair-accessories>

<sup>55</sup> See Figure 37 for images of *Impressions* diptych.

mass amount of lashes a woman might use in just one week and alternatively how many pins a woman might use to keep her hair up for one day. These are both gold-dusted to connect back to the theme of glamour and excessive use of curation of a woman's appearance.

To relate back to the topic of medium choice, non-silver is a process that has become particularly important to my art practice because of the relation the medium has to the emotions present in my work. While creating Vandyke prints, I transform images from a transparent film, to being exposed or burned into a fiber substrate, to being washed and fixed with chemicals, to then restraint drying to finish the print. The dark tones of the Vandyke print increase as time passes, much like depression can weight on one's mental state and even personality over time. The process also lends itself to the appearance of the image. In my artist book, *Compact* (2018), the images are intentionally inverted; moreover, this book includes a series of close up cropped images of the subject applying makeup in a mirror.<sup>56</sup> The book itself represents a compact mirror, and thus is why in most instances the figure is almost completely cut out of the frame. The images are inverted to represent the experience one has with staring at something too long where the image is temporarily burned into your eyelids. This action can be tested by staring an object for five seconds and proceeding with the eyes shut to see the inverted image appear on the back of the eyelids. The Vandyke brown solution resembles the glow and slight fuzziness that this action creates. In other works, such as *Sweet-Talk*, the Vandyke brown printing adds a grungy and unkempt feel to the image to represent the hidden side of a woman that would not be the same if it was performed in another process such as inkjet or photo lithography. The image truly transforms when one turns it into a Vandyke print, losing areas of detail as the contrast and overall feeling of the image are transformed.

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<sup>56</sup> See Figure 38 & 39 of images of *Compact*.



For my thesis installation, my books will be surrounded by large Vandyke prints that form a series called *Untitled No. 1-3* (2019).<sup>57</sup> Close-up, cropped areas of my face, these prints aim to exude a painful feeling of being uncomfortable with one's own skin. The subject poses wearing gloves and is again pulling and pushing the face. The element of the gloves, size of the prints, and lack of text distinguishes these prints from the Vandyke brown prints in *Sweet-Talk*. The presence of the gloves amplifies the theme of close up examination and likewise puts confusion into whether or not the hands are my own or another human presence in the room. The close up-ness of the prints imparts a rawness to the piece, exposing facial pores, skin blemishes, and other imperfections. Similar to how Sherman's work creates a sense of ambiguity, these images are not paired with words, like the prints in *Sweet-Talk*, but instead provide the viewer with more questions about what might be happening outside the frame by virtue of a lack (rather than addition) of information and context to where or what the subject is doing.

## POST THESIS WORK

Post-graduate school, I plan to continue this body of work about female expectations and societal norms. I plan to focus in on areas that I have thus far only glazed over in my work and to delve into further detail with them. At the suggestion of one of my peers, I plan to conduct research into the history of flower games, such as the *Daisy Oracle*. This is the adolescent game in which one plucks off the flower petals of a flower one by one, reciting the words "He loves me, he loves me not." This game dates back to Medieval times and has multiple language translations, such as French (its original origin) and German. The non-English versions have longer versions of the poem with multiple outcomes of the "types of love" you can end up with,

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<sup>57</sup> See Figures 40, 42 and 43 for images of *Untitled* series.

such as “jealous love,” “mad love,” and “tenderly love.”<sup>58</sup> This is just another aspect of our culture that survives today whereby females are taught to direct their desires towards a male counterpart.

In addition, I plan to make work that confronts social media influence, as I feel this is a related issue that my work has not yet not directly addressed. For this project, I will incorporate problematic Instagram and Facebook posts, how text is used and positioned in these posts, and how software such as photoshop and various filters have been used by women creating posts to garner male attention. This body of work may be conjoined with the flower project to critique these two realms simultaneously.

This experience in graduate school has led to solidifying what I want out of myself as an artist. My practice has developed into something new as I have discovered more efficient ways of producing my work. I have found new mediums that help to convey my ideas in a more clear and concise manner. As an artist, I have discovered that in order to create successful pieces, I need to continue to develop and question my ideas. I have learned that, as a student, it can be difficult to produce the type of complex artist books that I crave to make in just a single semester. Typically, artists books require over a year or more for planning and execution. For future artist books, I plan to complicate my designs and to develop them over a period of several months or even a year.

While attending artist conferences, seeing peers’ work, and visiting various special collections around the country, I have formed my own opinion on who I want to be as a visual artist. My future work will feature more color and will experiment with fresh ideas that the art world has yet to see, especially the world of book artists. Specifically, I plan to break out of these

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Gerdler, “The Daisy Oracle,” *Good, Better, Best Love* (blog), March 30, 2014, <https://markgerdler.wordpress.com/2014/03/30/the-daisy-oracle-part-3/>.

trends that are heavily used in book arts such as; muted colors, repetitive spreads, and minimal small text. As a visual artist, it is important to my own sanity and health that I continue to create work, and, more specifically, that I express and explore the issues in contemporary society. I believe it is imperative that as we make historical references in art and preserve ideas about our cultural origins that we continue to reflect on how together as a community we can move forward and transform our way of thought and traditions into a more progressive way of living and interacting with one another in a respectful and inclusive manner.

## IMAGE LIST



Figure 1: Kylie Jenner with her baby. Showing full leg with no stretch marks.



Figure 2: Popular Instagram page featuring places to go on vacation.



Figure 3: Instagram page of a personal trainer. She is sponsored by Better Bodies and promotes their products.



Figure 4: Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Film Still #2", 1977



Figure 5: Cindy Sherman – "Untitled Film Still #7", 1977



Figure 6: Film Still from "Touch of Evil" 1958



Figure 7: Film Still from "Kiss Me Deadly" 1955





Figure 8: Cindy Sherman – “Untitled #175”, 1987. Chromogenic color print. 46  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 71  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. Edition of 6



Figure 9: Cindy Sherman – “Untitled #96”, 1981. Chromogenic color print. 24 x 48 in



Figure 10: Cindy Sherman – “Untitled #92”, 1981. Chromogenic color print. 24 x 48 in

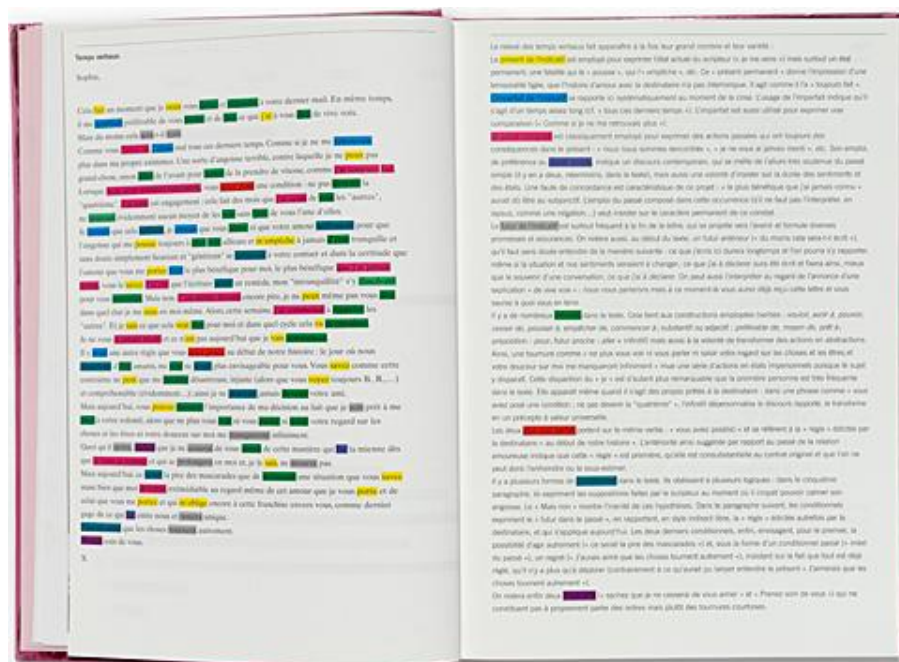


Figure 11: Sophie Calle, Image of the Break up letter dissected by one of the professionals





*Figure 12: Photo from the French pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale where the work of Take Care of Your-self was exhibited*



*Figure 13: Sofie Calle with "Break Up Letter" projected onto her*



Sophie,

Cela fait un moment que je veux vous écrire et répondre à votre dernier mail. En même temps, il me semblait préférable de vous parler et de dire ce que j'ai à vous dire de vive voix. Mais du moins cela sera-t-il écrit.

Comme vous l'avez vu, j'allais mal tous ces derniers temps. Comme si je ne me retrouvais plus dans ma propre existence. Une sorte d'angoisse terrible, contre laquelle je ne peux pas grand-chose, sinon aller de l'avant pour tenter de la prendre de vitesse, comme j'ai toujours fait. Lorsque nous nous sommes rencontrés, vous aviez posé une condition : ne pas devenir la "quatrième". J'ai tenu cet engagement : cela fait des mois que j'ai cessé de voir les "autres", ne trouvant évidemment aucun moyen de les voir sans faire de vous l'une d'elles.

Je croyais que cela suffirait, je croyais que vous aimer et que votre amour suffiraient pour que l'angoisse qui me pousse toujours à aller voir ailleurs et m'empêche à jamais d'être tranquille et sans doute simplement heureux et "généreux" se calmerait à votre contact et dans la certitude que l'amour que vous me portez était le plus bénéfique pour moi, le plus bénéfique que j'ai jamais connu, vous le savez. J'ai cru que l'écriture serait un remède, mon "intranquillité" s'y dissolvant pour vous retrouver. Mais non. C'est même devenu encore pire, je ne peux même pas vous dire dans quel état je me sens en moi-même. Alors, cette semaine, j'ai commencé à rappeler les "autres". Et je sais ce que cela veut dire pour moi et dans quel cycle cela va m'entraîner. Je ne vous ai jamais menti et ce n'est pas aujourd'hui que je vais commencer.

Il y avait une autre règle que vous aviez posée au début de notre histoire : le jour où nous cesserions d'être amants, me voir ne serait plus envisageable pour vous. Vous savez comme cette contrainte ne peut que me paraître désastreuse, injuste (alors que vous voyez toujours B., R....) et compréhensible (évidemment...) ; ainsi je ne pourrais jamais devenir votre ami.

Mais aujourd'hui, vous pouvez mesurer l'importance de ma décision au fait que je sois prêt à me plier à votre volonté, alors que ne plus vous voir ni vous parler ni saisir votre regard sur les choses et les êtres et votre douceur sur moi me manqueraient infiniment.

Quoi qu'il arrive, sachez que je ne cesserai de vous aimer de cette manière qui fut la mienne dès que je vous ai connue et qui se prolongera en moi et, je le sais, ne mourra pas.

Mais aujourd'hui, ce serait la pire des mascarades que de maintenir une situation que vous savez aussi bien que moi devenue irrémédiable au regard même de cet amour que je vous porte et de celui que vous me portez et qui m'oblige encore à cette franchise envers vous, comme dernier gage de ce qui fut entre nous et restera unique.

J'aurais aimé que les choses tournent autrement.

Prenez soin de vous.

X

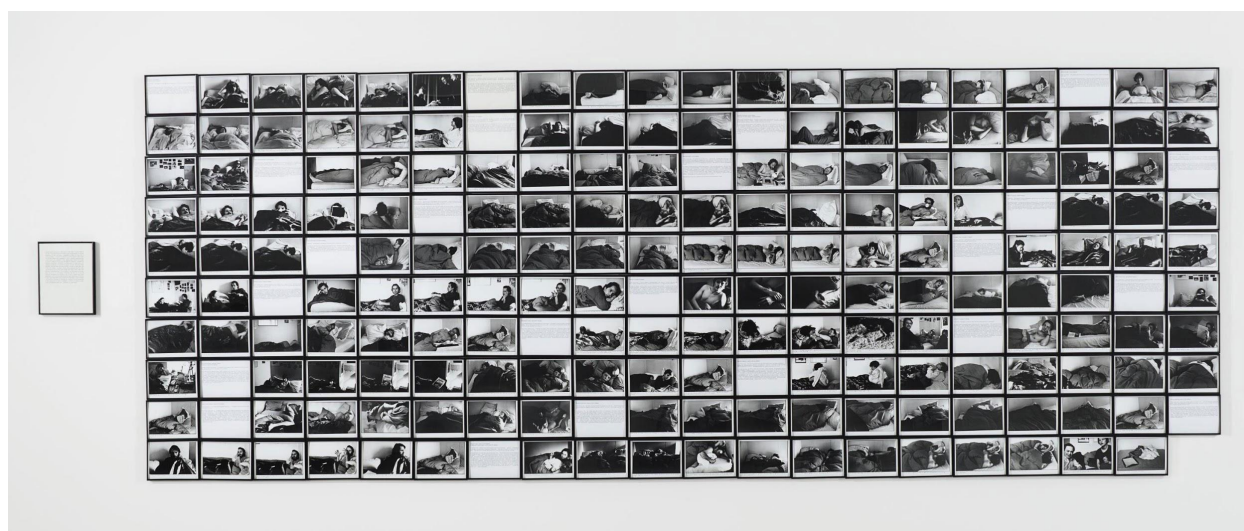
Figure 14: Sofie Calle, "Break-up letter" in French as it was written



Figure 15: Sophie Calle, "Le Divorce"



*Figure 16: Sophie Calle, "The Sleepers", 1979 (detail shot)*



*Figure 17: Sophie Calle, "The Sleepers", 1979*



Figure 18: "Birthday Ceremony", 1981



Figure 19: Detail shot, "Birthday Ceremony" (1981)



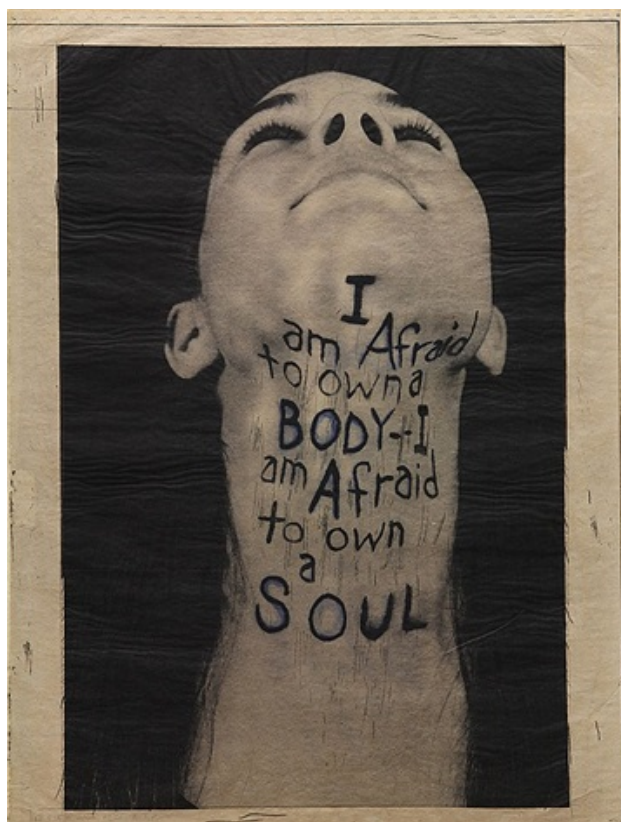


Figure 20: Lesley Dill, "I am afraid to own a body...", 1994. Photogravure and Thread 27.5 x 18.25 in



Figure 21: Lesley Dill, "The Thrill Came Slowly", 1996



*Figure 22: Portrait of Sylvia Plath*



*Figure 23 & 24: Black Mirror, scene clips showing use of mirror shots.*



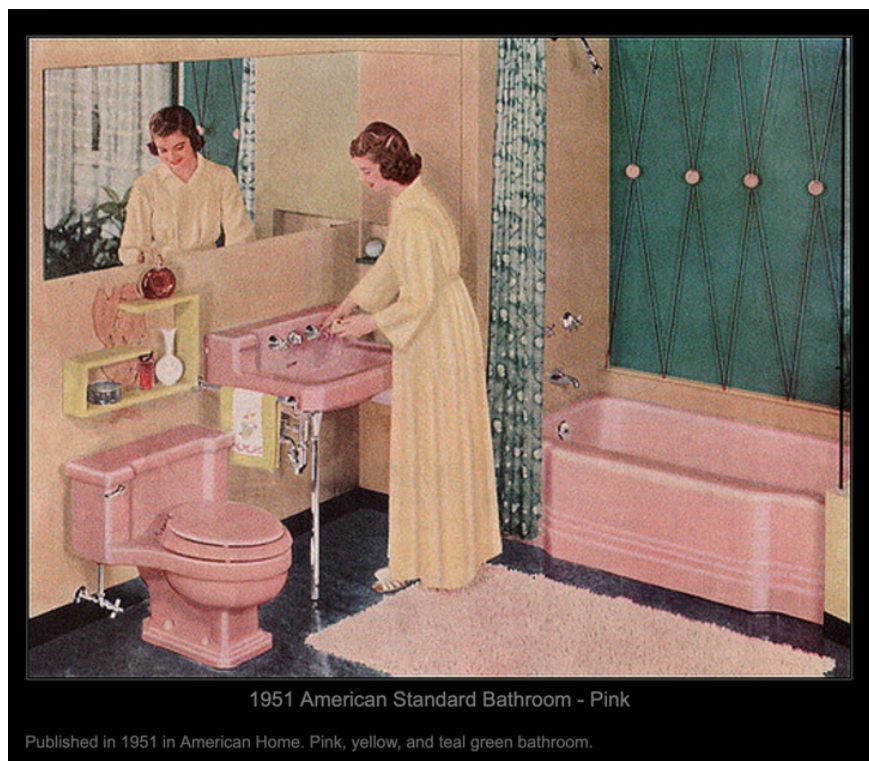


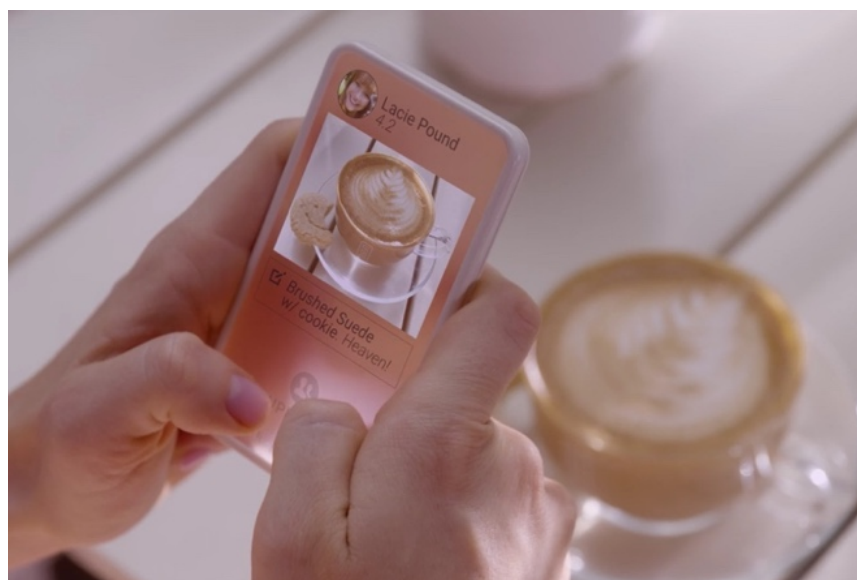
Figure 25: Image featured in "American Home Magazine" in 1951



Figure 26: Scene from Black Mirror, "Nosedive"



*Figure 27: Scene from Black Mirror "Nosedive"*



*Figure 28: Scene from Black Mirror "Nosedive"*



*Figure 29: Spread from "Reflections"*



*Figure 30: Spread from "Reflections"*

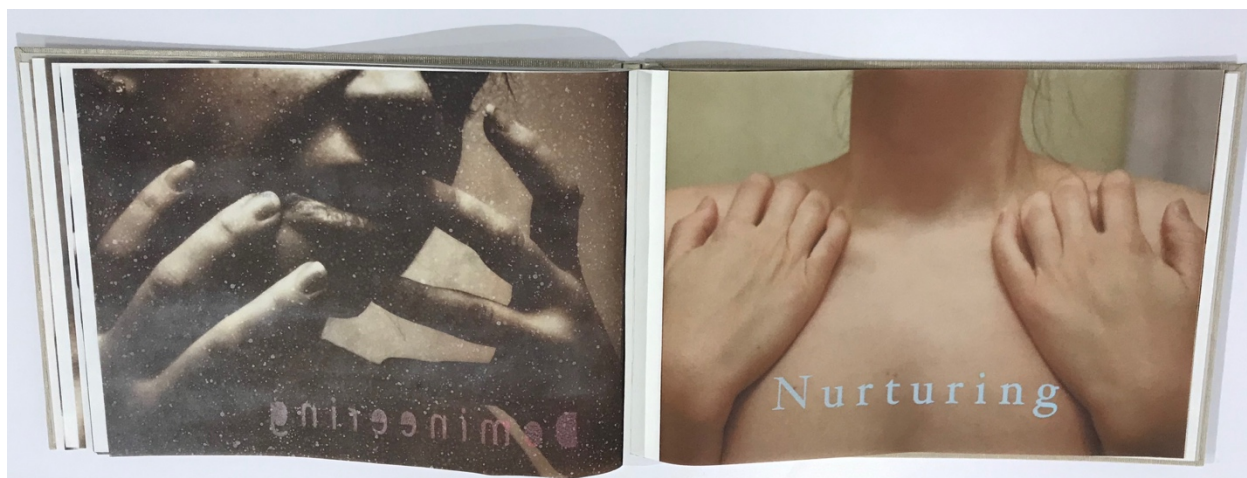




*Figure 31: Spread from "Reflections"*



*Figure 32: Spread from "Reflections"*



*Figure 33: "Sweet-Talk" page spread*



*Figure 34: Detail of "Sweet-talk"*



*Figure 4: Photo from Victoria Secret's Facebook Page*



*Figure xx: Dazed example of comparison of historical western painting and Victoria Secret ad*





Figure 37: "Impressions" (diptych)



Figure 38 & 39: Images of front and back of "Compact"



Figure 41, 42, 43: Images of “Untitled” series

## APPENDIX A

Sofie Calle *Take Care of Yourself* Letter:

Sophie,

I have been meaning to write and reply to your last email for a while. At the same time, I thought it would be better to talk to you and tell you what I have to say outloud.

Still, at least it will be written.

As you have noticed, I have not been quite right recently. As if I no longer recognized myself in my own existence. A terrible feeling of anxiety, which I cannot really fight, other than keeping on going to try and overtake it, as I have always done. When we met, you laid down one condition: not to become the “fourth”. I stood by that promise: it has been months now since I have seen the “others,” because i obviously could find no way of seeing them without making you one of them.

I thought that would be enough, I thought that loving you and your love would be enough so that this anxiety – which constantly drives me to look further afield and which means that I will never feel quiet and at rest or probably even just happy or “generous”- would be calmed when I was with you, with the certainty that the love you have for me was the best for me, the best I have ever had , you know that. I thought that my writing would be a remedy, that my “disquiet” would dissolve into it so that i could find you. But no. Infact it even became worse, I cannot even tell you the sort of state I feel I am in. so I started calling the “others” again this week.

And i know what that means to me and the cycle that it will drag me into. I have never lied to you and I do not intend to start lying now. There was another rule that you laid down at the beginning of our affair: the day we

stopped being lovers you would no longer be able to envisage seeing me. You know this constraint can only ever strike me as disastrous, and unjust (when you still see B. and K. ...) and understandable (obviously...); so I can never become your friend.

But now you can gauge how significant my decision is from the fact that I am prepared to bend to your will, even though there are so many things – not seeing you or talking to you or catching the way you look at people and things, and your gentleness towards me – that I will miss terribly.

Whatever happens, remember that I will always love you in the same way, my own way, that I have ever since I first met you; that it will carry on within me and, I am sure, will never die.

But it would be the worst kind of masquerade to prolong a situation now when you know as well as I do; it has become irreparable by the standards of the very love I have for you and you have for me a love which is now forcing me to be so frank with you, as final proof of what happened between us and will always be unique. I would have liked things to have turned out differently.

Take care of yourself.

X

## APPENDIX B

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird  
By Wallace Stevens**I**

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

**II**

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

**III**

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

**IV**

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

**V**

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

**VI**

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

**VII**

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

**VIII**

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

**IX**

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

**X**

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

**XI**

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

**XII**

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

**XIII**

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs.



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