Why do vampires avoid mirrors? Reflections on specularity in the visual arts

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Abstract
This article is an attempt to organize the general axes of a research on mirror image in the visual arts, addressing the concept of specularity and its problematic status in Western aesthetics. The argument is that, paradoxically, despite the central role of reflection in the theory of representation, specularity is constantly repressed as false and dangerous. Hence the historical duplicity of the mirror in its relation to art: on the one hand it consolidates the Western system of representation while on the other it deconstructs the very principles upon which this system is erected. Literary theory and psychoanalysis enable us to focus on the ways which, in the founding myths of representation such as the ones of Narcissus and Medusa, vision, discourse and identity are articulated around reflection, relating a physical phenomenon with the mental processes defining self-consciousness. In the field of visual arts, this articulation is operated through the opposition between two different conceptions of the image, “painting-as-window” and “painting-as-mirror”. Locating this opposition in Svetlana Alpers' reading of Las Meninas and Louis Marin’s approach of the Brunelleschian optical box, we point out the discontinuity which comes to the fore in the latter’s description of the reflexive/reflecting apparatus and which constitutes the blind spot of the classical system of representation. In contemporary art, specularity returns as a tautological figure, “zero degree” representation establishing a closed circuit in which the gaze is sent back to itself like Joseph Kosuth’s self-referent linguistic propositions. But in the same time it problematizes the process of self-reference, opening it to similar specular apparatuses which destabilize tautological circularity. Works by Dan Graham, Robert Smithson and other artists demonstrate that mirror, which in the classical system guarantees the subjugation of the gaze to the eye, can on the contrary be used in order to emancipate the former from the latter, displacing the relation between the art work and the viewer.

Keywords: reflecting surfaces; visual apparatuses; theory of representation; reflexivity; projection; self-identification; myth of Medusa

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To see one’s own sight means visible blindness

Iconographic matter, visual instrument at the service of the painter or the photographer, emblem of vanity in classical art or phenomenological object of spectator displacement in contemporary art, the mirror is intimately related to our conception of representation. The present article is an attempt to organize the general axes of a research on mirror image in the visual arts, outlining the semantic, phenomenological as well as discursive implications of specularity in Western aesthetics.

A great deal of research has addressed this issue from different points of view—optical, cognitive, historical, anthropological, phenomenological, psychoanalytic and others—providing an important bibliography which it would be too long to develop here.

For a general account of the mirror image in the classical system of representation, the reader is referred to Gombrich, Damisch and Schwarz. For a historical approach, one can consult Melchior-Bonnet, and for a psychoanalytical one, Mulvey. As for mirror and photography, the classical reference is Rudisill. The reader particularly interested in photography is also referred to Owens.

The purpose of this article is not to establish a historiography of reflection but rather to raise a certain number of questions which cross over the epistemological fields covered by the available literature on mirror and visual perception. This requirement of interdisciplinarity is hardly something new in contemporary aesthetics; but in our case it is closely related with the very object of analysis, the ambivalent nature of which invites to reconsider the methodological instruments through which we tend to grasp it. For, in spite of the diversity of approaches, specular image seems to be constantly subordinated through art history to a theory of representation that regards it as an emblem of mimesis, as opposed to language.

In “Mirror and Map: Theories of Pictorial Representation” mirror designates less a particular category of visual signs than a principle that cognitively distinguishes mimetic organisation of visual data from rational articulation of space. Significantly, it is photography that is convened to convey the “mirror effect” of representation. And yet it is precisely the cognitive status of reflection that seems to defy analytical thought and philosophical understanding of visual phenomena. Gombrich’s article opens with an account of a stroll in Vienna, where, as a child, he had to make a choice between a left and a right turn in order to go either to the Museum of Natural History or to the Museum of Art History, two identical buildings facing each other across the Maria-Theresien-Platz.

In the 13th chapter of his Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Kant attempts to demonstrate that space is not a property of the objects in themselves but the external form of our “sensuous intuitions.” Now, what is interesting, is that, in order to ground his argument, Kant has recourse to the examples of mirror and incongruent features like the left and the right hand. In doing so, he states the impossibility of pure conceptualisation of specular inversion. Incongruity—that is, enantiomorphism, mirror reflection—paradoxically appears to mark the limits of consciousness, something that resists philosophical understanding; or, in other words, the usual metaphor according to which we transpose reflexivity from vision to consciousness seems to be rather problematic. It is this unstable relationship between consciousness, language and image that this article wishes to question.

The main argument is that from the Renaissance to the digital era, the concept of representation in Western art can be regarded as a dialectical construction combining two opposite approaches of the image: as a window and as a mirror. A double-faced Ianus divided between the transparency/transcendence of the icon and the fascination with/delusion of the eidolon. On the one hand the painting, which, even when exclusively focused on its own pictorial conditions, let us look “through” it, at a metaphysical or immanent “elsewhere”. On the other hand the reflection which, strictly speaking, is not capable of representing anything at all, because:

Not only can it not be properly called an image (since it is a virtual image, and therefore not a material expression) but even granted the existence of the image it must be admitted that it does not stand for something else; on the contrary it stands in front of something else, it exists not instead of but because of the presence of that something;
when that something disappears the pseudo-image in the mirror disappears too.9

Since the Antiquity, this ambiguous status of mirror image is closely related with the problem of representation. In *The Republic*, Plato’s account of the painter as “the man with the mirror” assimilates mimetic representation with specular reflection only to establish the superficial and illusory character of *all* images.10 Nevertheless, despite Plato’s mistrust of images, Classical antiquity provides us with at least two founding myths of representation which are both tales of reflections: Narcissus and Medusa.

Indeed, during the Renaissance the platonic repressed comes to the surface but this time being inverted, that is, used as an argument for and not against image-making. Recuperating in Ovid’s account, Narcissus, Leon Battista Alberti refers to the latter as the founder of painting, associating the narrative with a reflexivity which is the one of the liberal arts, the noble arts of the spirit, rather than with a skin-deep attachment to the appearance of things. At the beginning of Book II of *On Painting*, Alberti writes, “Consequently I used to tell my friends that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus, who had turned into a flower; for, as painting is the flower of all the arts so the tale of Narcissus fits our purpose perfectly. What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?”11

Baskins points out that Alberti does not actually recount a “tale” of Narcissus, but allegorizes the account instead:

Alberti conflates two aspects of Narcissus’ transformation; the flower and the reflection in the pool both seem to signify the mimetic surface of painting. (...) The canonical interpretation of the Narcissus trope in Alberti takes the reflection of the pool to be analogous to the imitation of surface appearance, stripped of narrative components and concentrating on the physical property of water to reflect an image in the real world, Narcissus’ reflection corroborates our understanding of the naturalistic, illusionistic goals of early Renaissance painting.12

It is also Ovid who establishes the link between Narcissus and Medusa.14 As noted by Camille Dumoulie, the association of the two myths also occurs in Desportes’ *Amours d’Hyppolite* (1573) and Gautier’s *fettatura* (1857), underlining the similarity of the victimization process being at work: since the individual is considered to have been the victim of his own reflection, the victimizer is absolved from all blame. The specular image is hence associated with the narrative of an originating crime, a suicide in fact, which gives birth to representation as an image of death—the death of its own referent. Capable as it is to immobilize all who came within its purview, Medusa’s gaze was endowed with the power of creating figures. By killing her, Perseus has stolen this power for himself. The appropriation of the gaze is the principal theme of the myth, which, in Ovid’s account, begins with the theft of an eye.15 The use of the shield as a mirror stresses the split-second—photography’s instant décisif—in which Medusa had been immediately turned into stone. The mirror inverts the relation between subject and object, transforming power into weakness and vice versa. Perseus inserts Medusa into a closed system where the seer is identified to the seen.16

According to Freud, decapitation refers to the fear of castration, associated with the act of seeing, the visual shock caused by the lack of mother’s phallic which constitutes the decisive moment of fetishism. Medusa’s hair, most commonly depicted as snakes, would be in that sense substitutes of the penis, the absence of which is the origin of the horror—and desire. The multiplication of the phallic symbol hence signifies the fear generated by the visualization of its loss, making Medusa’s head a fetish, a displaced representation of female genitalia.17 Beyond the Freudian interpretation, Owens pointed out the correspondences between the myth’s central episode and Lacanian psychoanalysis, recognizing in the instantaneous identification of the act of seeing with its own sight “the duality, the specularity, the symmetry and immediacy that characterize Lacan’s Imaginary order”.18 The psychoanalytical perspective is important here insofar as it places the specular image in the heart of the structuring of the subject, crossing the philosophical—Hegelian—approach of self-consciousness as identification.19 “Lacan defines the essence of the imaginary as a dual relationship, a reduplication in the mirror, an immediate opposition between consciousness and its other in which each term becomes its opposite and is lost in the play of the reflection”.20
According to Lacan, during the mirror phase, which occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 months, self-awareness emerges through the identification with specular reflection. However, by recognizing that projection as his own, the child also imagines it to be more complete, more cohesive and hence, superior to himself. The very image that guarantees the coherence of the subject thus cleaves its identity in two, into self and objectified other. The identification with the mirror image creates the self as an imaginary construction, placing it in a relation of dependency to an external order, that of language, which unifies and divides it at the same time. Identity thus appears to be derived only “by identifying with others’ perceptions of it”. Like in the myth of Medusa, the relation between subject and object is inverted. Vision, according to Lacan, reverses the logical order of speech: first, a terminal moment of arrest of ruse and blindness, painted on the opposite hand, the world yields images of itself and is blind. For the proper noun is the equivalent of a human maker intervention of a human maker. For the proper noun is the equivalent of recognizing one’s self in the looking glass, wondering “in the illusory Babels of language, [where] an artist might advance specifically to get lost”. Mirror image thus appears to be at the centre of a dense net of relationships between the eye, the subject and the language, inside which representation is negotiated. Now, what can be the implications of all that in the field of visual arts?

In her article “Interpretation without Representation, or, The Viewing of Las Meninas”, Alpers argues that Velasquez’s painting combines two modes of visual representation “each of which constitutes the relationship between the viewer and the picturing of the world differently”. In order to demonstrate the specific pictorial traditions out of which Las Meninas was fabricated, the author takes up the classical opposition between the Italian model, exemplified by Albertian perspective, and the Northern one, meticulously descriptive. In the first case “the artist presumes himself to stand with the viewer before the pictured world”, that is, both outside and prior to it. In the second case, on the other hand, the world yields images of itself “without the intervention of a human maker” and is thus considered as “existing prior to the artist-viewer”. Not only Alpers’ iconological distinction accounts for the polarity between “painting-as-window” and “painting-as-mirror” but, as Owens
remarked, it also corresponds to the linguistic one between discursive and historical (or narrative) statements, introduced by Benveniste. In front of the “painting-as-window” the artist claims “I see the world” whereas “painting-as-mirror” shows the world “as it is seen”. In the first case, the picture presupposes the presence of an artist/viewer before it, whereas in the second case it seems to ignore him, favouring impersonality: “Nobody is speaking [or watching, may we add] here. Events seem to narrate themselves.”

According to Louis Marin, the coexistence of the two opposite modes constitutes the foundation of the classical system of representation. In the Renaissance, the function of mirror is to present and confirm the structural equivalence—the identification—of the point of view with the vanishing point, as demonstrated by Brunelleschi’s optical box. In the latter:

This equation, which is also a subjugation of the gaze and the eye, is the means by which the eye-subject is constituted. Yet the equation is only made evident in the effects produced by a mirror placed before the painting; the viewer looks at the painting in the mirror through (per-spectiva) the support, and his eye thus receives from the mirror (pro-spectiva) the projection of objects represented on the surface of the canvas: the reflection of what the painting ‘represents’.

The image is both a window and a mirror:

The representational screen is a window through which the viewer contemplates the scene represented in the painting as though he were seeing a scene in the real world. It is important to keep in mind that insofar as this screen is a plane, a surface, and a material support, it is also the reflexive/reflecting apparatus on which real objects are drawn and painted.

The visual and structural mechanisms of the classical system thus require the simultaneous affirmation and negation of the representational apparatus, that is, the combination of the support’s opacity with the opposite principle of transparency.

What is interesting here, is the way Marin synthesizes the materiality, specularity and transparency of the picture plane, addressing the paradox of the painting as one-way window by another one, that of a strange two-way mirror.

More precisely, in Brunelleschi’s apparatus the viewer stands behind the picture, looking through it. Now, when he moves to the other side to experience it directly, as one usually looks at a painting, the mirror disappears although it is conserved as an integral part of the work’s conception and conditions of visibility. One can say that it is “repressed” in a certain way. On the one hand, the use of the reflecting surface confirms what Marin calls the “subjugation of the gaze and the eye”, that is, the process of identification which gives birth to the subject of perception. But, on the other hand, the physical shifting of the viewer and the subsequent repression of the mirror insert a discontinuity into the system. In other words, if one normally can’t look at a painting otherwise but standing before it, to conceive the representational screen as a reflexive/reflecting apparatus, as Marin does, is to suppose that the glass pane that intervenes between the cornea and the world reflects on its front side what is reflected on its back side. The problem encountered here is one of positioning, inside space as well as inside language, a problem which, once related to the apparatus used by Perseus to kill Medusa, seems to point at the blind spot of the classical system of representation, the very (interstitial) place of birth of the Symbolic.

In the reflexive/reflecting apparatus, the slash inscribes in the compound noun the tiny slit between the two sides of the same two-dimensional surface, the “inframince” gap—imperceptible because integral part of the optical apparatus—between a hole “small as a lentil” and another, conical, “like the crown of a woman’s straw hat”. The interval between the reflexive and the reflecting, their discontinuity, is what suspends the transparency of the window in favour of the image’s material and historical dimension. But the particularity of that dimension is precisely its specular composition, which makes it both opaque and transparent. Contrary to the paradigm of window, the one of mirror confirms the opaqueness of the picture plane. However their relation is one of complementarity rather than of strict opposition. This is why the mirror and its repression finally consolidate the perspective system’s denegation of the picture plane and legitimate, in a metonymical way, its claim to transparency. The mirror is the opposite of the
window not only because it does not allow us to see through it, but also because it reverses what is in front and what is behind.

The surrealist artist René Magritte displayed particular sensibility to that problem. Works like The Human Condition, 1933, The Key to the Fields, 1936, or Euclidean Walks, 1955, can be interpreted as attempts to challenge the classical contract between mirror and window, casting doubt on the transparency of representation. But it is Reproduction Prohibited, 1937, that operates the complete inversion of the Brunelleschian apparatus, anticipating subsequent developments in the second half of the 20th century, related with mechanical and reproducible images (photography, film and video).

Not only the mise en abyme reflexively sends back to the spectator the very conditions of his own viewing of the painting, but, as far as these conditions are determined by the frame (the one of the glass inside the painting as well as the one of the painting itself), they tend to assimilate the pictorial and the specular surface. Nevertheless, by inverting the front and the back side of Edward James’ reflection, Magritte disrupts the illusory continuity of the system spectator/painting/mirror and establishes the independency of painting towards reality by separating the input and the output of Brunelleschi’s box.

One can remark that this separation, as well as the discontinuity and repetitiveness which result from it, are not characteristic of painting, but of photography and film. But, what is even more interesting, is the way that language and representation are negotiated in front of that eerie mirror.

For, unlike Edward James, the book on the mantelpiece (a French translation of Edgar Allan Poe’s The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket), is reflected correctly in the glass, that is, the letters on the front cover are inverted as normal. Now, what is characteristic of words as visual forms (rather than as linguistic units) is that, seen in a glass, they appear as if they were seen from behind. Magritte’s life-long experimentation with words as both verbal signs and plastic elements corroborates this argument, along with the most common experience of one trying to read letters written on a show window from inside the store. Or, in other words, in the case of Reproduction Prohibited, mirror inversion suggests a displacement of the point of view (and therefore of the beholder’s physical standpoint) which, in a way, sends the Brunelleschian ideal spectator back to his position behind the painting. The crossing of two different axes of inversion, left / right and back / front, reminds him that he is always looking at a reflection, even when the mirror is missing. Thus, following a contamination (or, rather, an exchange) between the iconic and the verbal that is common in Magritte’s work, words are formally treated like images whereas mimetic representation is treated like a linguistic sign; and as such, Edward James’ reflection is seen from behind.

There are of course two-way mirrors, the kind used in some interrogation rooms or in Dan Graham’s Cinema, 1981. This project, which today exists only as an architectural model, was initially meant to be integrated into the ground floor of a corner building, in which on the side facing the street a slightly curved projection screen made of two-way mirrored glass is inserted.

In the case of two-way mirrors, the glass looks from the one side as a window, from the other as a mirror, hence the impossibility to determine its nature (transparent or opaque) in a neutral and objective way, that is, independently of the viewer’s place. In contrast, in Marin’s reflexive/reflecting apparatus it obviously is both (window and mirror, transparent and opaque) at the same time, that is, from the same side. The act of naming works as an index marking the place of the enunciation/representation’s subject. For the suspect, the glass is a mirror hiding the interrogator while for the latter it is an one-way window allowing him to see without being seen. However, there is not a “reflective” and a “transparent” side. The difference in perception depends on the relative luminosity of the respective sides.

In Graham’s project the passer-by on the street can see the film, but reversed, and, depending on whether or not a film sequence is very bright, can look through the projection wall at the cinema audience.

In contrast, the side walls of two-way mirror glass do not allow the passer-by to see inside during a film screening, since the streets are normally more strongly lit than the interior of a cinema is by the film projection, so that the glass façade becomes a mirror
from the outside. Before and after each film screening, however, the movie audience inside can be seen as it disperses or assemblies anew. For the film spectator inside the cinema, the situation is reversed. During the film screening, the spectator not only sees the normal film image on the projection screen, but can also obtain a weak impression of life on the street and the architectonic surroundings outside the cinema through the two-way mirror glass on the sides. Before and after the screening, the spectator sees himself and the other cinemagoers in the reflecting screen, and knows, at the same time, that these mirrors are transparent from the outside.  

It is since the 1970s that Dan Graham investigates on the phenomenological particularities of mirror, its rooting in “here and now”, combining it with a different register of specularity, that of the moving image. By crossing the two registers, his performances and installations focus on the temporal aspects of the process of specular identification. Pieces like Cinema, but also Present continuous pasts or Opposing mirrors and video monitors on time delay, 1974, create a decentred viewer, completely assimilated by the work and yet constantly displaced in time and space. This way the mirrored surface functions “as a device of instant visual feedback to generate audience consciousness and participation”.  

Specularity was in fact intrinsic to minimalism and postminimalism. As Buchloh notes, Robert Morris’ Untitled (Mirrored Cubes), 1965/71, “shifts the viewer from a mode of contemplative specularity into a phenomenological loop of bodily movement and perceptual reflection”. Reflective surfaces tend to minimize the presence of the sculpture as an object in favour of its context and conditions of visibility, setting a Duchampian “eye-trap” which equates aesthetic experience to the spectator’s own positioning in relation to the work and the consciousness of that changing relation. Considered as an integral part of the work, the viewer is also constituted by the work. In that sense, “contemplative specularity” is not merely abandoned but rather reflected and recycled, undermining any definitive suture and unsettling any projection of the viewer as self-centred subject.  

Smithson, Enantiomorphic Chambers, 1964, completely “erases” the last residues of that subject, creating an “anti-Brunelleschian” device which visualizes the blindness inscribed in the very act of seeing. Composed by two structures made of steel and mirror and juxtaposed on the gallery wall, the work cancels out one’s reflected image, when one is directly between the two mirrors. As Smithson notes, “one can not see the whole work from a single point of view, because the vanishing point is split and reversed”.  

From the above it is clear that the mirror paradigm, although subordinated to the one of window, remains central to the Western concept of mimesis understood both as automatic projection and semantic substitution, natural analogy as well as symbolic convention. The representational screen can be both a window and a mirror, depending on the place the subject occupies inside vision and language. In other terms, “image-as-window” and “image-as-mirror” are not two distinct objects but moreover one and same surface considered from two opposite points of view. But the metaphor of the point of view becomes literal once it is understood that one can not validate both statements since one can not be simultaneously in two different places. In the classical system, mirror does not simply counterbalance window transparency but, more importantly, it replaces (and legitimizes) it by reflective fidelity. And the latter is dialectically legitimized (that is, simultaneously normalized and reversed/repressed) by the window, in a way that demonstrates that if mirror can be held as the paradigm of the picture plane opacity, it is—paradoxically—thanks to its transparency, a transparency opposite to the one of the window. In contemporary art, mirror image returns as a tautological figure, “zero degree” representation establishing a closed circuit in which the gaze is sent back to itself like Joseph Kosuth’s self-referent linguistic propositions. But in the same time it puts into question the process of self-reference, opening it to similar specular apparatuses which destabilize tautological circularity.  

Playing with mirrors can help emancipate the gaze from the eye. But a theory of specularity, or specular visibility, ultimately addresses the issue of the very reflexive process through which such a theory attempts to seize its object. Working on mirror is, in that sense, going back over the process of thinking itself and the path it followed in order to be identified as such. After all, if the reflexivity of the Cartesian cogito constitutes the
very proof of its own existence, it is because the mirror is supposed to show nothing but what actually exists, reality as it is. And if vampires avoid mirrors, it is because they do not exist (vampires, not mirrors), it is because the specular reflection, servile reproduction of reality, throws them in the face the tangible proof of their nonexistence. Nevertheless, from the Logos to the eye, the mirror takes account of the reflexive process of consciousness as a kind of infinite regress. For in the same time this reflection is a trap, carrying the risk of confusion and disorientation. When approaching the abyss opened between two juxtaposed mirrors, consciousness gets dizzy, at once divided between itself and its simulacra, unable to make its way in this system of imbricated mirages.

Notes

1. Robert Smithson, ‘Interpolation of the Enantiomorphic Chambers’, in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 40.

2. Ernst Gombrich, ‘Mirror and Map: Theories of Pictorial Representation’, Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences 270, no. 903 (March 1975): 119–49; Hubert Damisch, The Origin of Perspective, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Heinrich Schwarz, ‘The Mirror in Art’, The Art Quarterly 15, no. 2 (1952): 97–118.

3. Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, The Mirror: A History, trans. Katherine H. Jewett (London: Routledge, 2001).

4. Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Screen 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

5. Richard Rudisill, Mirror Image. The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971).

6. Craig Owens, ‘Photography en abyme’, October 5 (Summer 1978): 73–88.

7. This assimilation of photography with mirror on the base of their respective mimetic (indexical) properties is also the guideline of Rudisill’s Mirror Image.

8. Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §13.

9. Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press/Midland Book, 1979), 202.

10. Plato, The Republic, trans. Reginald E. Allen (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), X.

11. Ovid, The Metamorphoses, trans. Horace Gregory, (New York: Signet Classic, 2001), III, 339–510.

12. Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting and on Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London and New York: Phaidon, 1972), 61–62.

13. Cristelle L. Baskins, ‘Echoing Narcissus in Alberti’s “Della Pittura”,’ Oxford Art Journal 16, no. 1 (1993): 2.

14. In Greek mythology, Medusa was a chthonic female monster, daughter of Phorcys and Ceto, a sea god and goddess, and sister of Steno (forceful) and Euryale (far-roaming). She was the only mortal of the three Gorgons, endowed with a gaze capable to petrify anyone who would come within its purview. According to the myth, it is Perseus who, with the help of Athena, beheaded Medusa while looking at her harmless reflection in the mirror instead of directly at her to prevent being turned into stone. From the blood that gushed out sprang forth Pegasus and Chrysaor. Thereafter Medusa’s head was given to Athena to place on her shield as an apotropaic symbol, that is an evil-averting device known as the Gorgoneion.

15. Ovid, The Metamorphoses, IV, 771–8.

16. Craig Owens, ‘The Medusa Effect, or, The Specular Ruse’, in Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 196.

17. Sigmund Freud, ‘Medusa’s Head’, in Sexuality and the Psychology of Love (New York: Collier, 1963), 212.

18. Owens, ‘The Medusa Effect’, 197.

19. Jacques Lacan, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’, in Écrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977); Georg W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

20. Anika Lemaire, Jacques Lacan (London: Routledge Keagan Paul, 1977), 60.

21. Kate Linker, ‘Representation and Sexuality’, in Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art/Boston, D. R. Godine, 1984), 398.

22. Owens, ‘The Medusa Effect’, 198; Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 114.

23. Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art/Boston, D. R. Godine, 1984), 365.

24. Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense (London: Continuum, 2004), 5.

25. Robert Smithson, ‘A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art’ (1968), in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 78.

26. Svetlana Alpers, ‘Interpretation Without Representation, or, The Viewing of Las Meninas’, Representations 1, 1 (February 1983): 31–42.
27. Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
28. Émile Benveniste, quoted by Craig Owens, ‘Representation, Appropriation, and Power’, in *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 100.
29. Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 46.
30. Ibid., 47.
31. “For the distance, and the part representing the sky, where the boundaries of the painting merge into the air, Filippo placed burnished silver so that the actual air and the sky might be reflected in it, and so the clouds that one sees reflected in the silver, are moved by the wind when it blows. The painter of such a picture assumes that it has to be seen from a single point, which is fixed in reference to the height and the width of the picture, and that it has to be seen from the right distance. Seen from any other point, the effect of the perspective would be distorted. Thus, to prevent the spectator from falling into error in choosing his viewpoint, Filippo made a hole in the picture at that point in the view of the church of S. Giovanni which is directly opposite to the eye of the spectator, who might be standing in the central portal of S. Maria del Fiore in order to paint the scene. This hole was small as a lentil on the painted side, and on the back of the panel it opened out in a conical form to the size of a ducat or a little more, like the crown of a woman’s straw hat. Filippo had the beholder put his eye against the reverse side where the hole was large, and while he shaded his eye with his one hand, with the other he was told to hold a flat mirror on the far side in such a way that the painting was reflected in it. The distance from the mirror to the hand near the eye had to be in a given proportion to the distance between the point where Filippo stood in painting his picture and the church of S. Giovanni. When one looked at it thus, the burnished silver already mentioned, the perspective of the piazza, and the fixing of the point of vision made the scene absolutely real”. Antonio Manetti, *Vita di Filippo di Ser Brunellesco* (Florence: E. Toesca, 1927), English translation in *A Documentary History of Art*, Vol. I, ed. Elizabeth G. Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1992), 171–72, quoted in Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, 45–6. This cone is the measure of the paradoxical depth of the surface which the Duchampian term of “inframince” refers to here. See Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donné 1) La chute d’eau 2) Le gaz d’éclairage* (1946–1966).
32. On Magritte and photography, see Patrick Roegiers, *Magritte et la photographie* (Gand: Ludion, 2005).
33. When light meets with a transparent surface, one part of the light rays passes through it while another part is reflected. In physics, this corresponds, respectively, to the phenomena of refraction and reflection. Refraction is the deflection of a light ray when it changes speed between two different environments. When there is no refracted ray, light is said to undergo a total reflection. This applies to two-way mirrors. The “mirror” effect is artificially reinforced by increasing brightness in the suspect’s room while reducing it in the observer’s one.
34. Gregor Stemmrich, ‘Dan Graham’s ‘Cinema’ and film theory’, *Media Art Net*, www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/art_and_cinematography/graham/2/ [accessed December 30, 2011].
35. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 302.
36. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ‘Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions’, *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 134.
37. As Buchloh pointed out, *Mirrored Cubes* is an almost literal execution of a proposal found in Duchamp’s *Green Box*. Ibid.
38. Smithson, ‘Interpolation of the Enantiomorphic Chambers’, 40.