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Metaphysic Of the Photograph and the Mirror

INTRODUCTION

Photography is an important foundation of my art practice. However, I could never really analyse exactly why I value it so much. It goes beyond the simple obsession with memorialization, and fetishing the past due to loss and oblivion. Since I have started to create as an artist, I have used -the essence of- photography to lead my work to introspective questionings about identity and time, and its ceaseless metamorphosis. However, what do I mean by the essence of photography? I am aware that I need to understand it in order to master it and understand why I have the need to base my work around it, and in addition to link together all my artistic impulsions to build a whole that will make a clearer sense. After reading various essays and theories about the idea of an essence of photography, I understood that I needed to find my own way, based on my research. Through both my practice and my readings I recently discovered the interesting complexity of the specular[1] [1] image and how much it can be related to identity, in a metaphorical as well as in a scientific way. I believe that photography is closely implicated with how we make identifications, and I have this idea of linking the act of looking in a mirror with the act of looking at a photograph. What if the power of photography, in my own work in particular, lies in the fact that you can see your own reflection in the image of someone else? To be clear, the reflection I am talking about is not just a physical self-reflection but more a subjective metaphorical 'reflection'.

My research for this paper began to take an interesting direction after reading a passage from *L'acte Photographique*[2] by Philippe Dubois where he interprets the myth of Narcissus and the myth of Perseus and Medusa through the perspective of the act of photography. Dubois'

[1] A Specular reflection is the mirror-like reflection of light (or of other kinds of wave) from a surface, in which light from a single incoming direction (a ray) is reflected into a single outgoing direction. (*Wikipedia*)

[2] DUBOIS P., (1983) *L'acte photographique*, ed. Nathan Université

analysis was not very developed but his idea was interesting to start with. I decided to focus on Medusa and Perseus because the story relates more to my artistic research in many aspects: the frozen images, which photography appears to give us, the ambiguous presence of life and death at the same time, and the notion of identification. This quickly led me to psychoanalytic interpretations of the myth. Again, there were many different points of view and I put aside some of them such as Lucian Freud's interpretation of sexuality. From there I was plunged into the world of psychoanalysis to understand what 'identification' means. Psychoanalysis is very complex but extremely revealing to my research as well as my practice. Starting to understand one psychoanalytic concept led me to a vast new complex world with concepts and theories that appear related to each other. My quest started to make sense with Jacques Lacan's theories and I am particularly going to emphasize his *mirror phase* theory[3], which was afterwards extended and developed by Donald Winnicott. With this research I ended up being able to relate different aspects, topics and theories and this has brought me to a deeper understanding of my work. I propose to examine the myth of Medusa as a basis to understand how much photography is related to identification, and to attempt to make a real association between a photograph and a mirror.

[3] LACAN J., (october 1949), Jacques Lacan, *Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je : telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique*, Revue française de psychanalyse, p. 449-455

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Chapter One

The myth of PERSEUS AND MEDUSA

A very long time ago, there were three sisters, three Gorgons, daughters of marine deities. Two of them, named Stheno and Euryale, were immortal and had a unique eye that they had to share. The third one, named Medusa, was mortal. 'Medusa was once most beautiful, and the jealous aspiration of many suitors. Of all her beauties none was more admired than her hair' (*The Iliad and the Odyssey*, Homer). She was so attractive that sea god Poseidon raped her in Athena's temple. Athena became furiously jealous and decided to change Medusa's magnificent thick hair to foul venomous snakes. In addition to that, anyone who would look at her in the eyes would be immediately turned into stone. From that moment on, being attracted to Medusa meant death.

Medusa and her two sisters became in charge of guarding the Kingdom of the Dead and making sure no living human would enter. Demigod and Greek hero Perseus got the mission from the Gods to go kill Medusa and bring them back her head. For his expedition, Hermes gave him his winged sandals so that he could fly, Hades gave him his helmet and his sharp gold sword, and Athena gave him her shield with polished outside like a mirror. After stealing Stheno and Euryale's unique eye while one was passing it to her sister, Perseus walked through a long journey towards Medusa's land at the entrance of the Kingdom of Dead. While he was getting closer and closer, he could see more and more stone statues of humans and animals who had gotten instantly frozen in their action at the moment they had eye contact with Medusa. Finally, Perseus found himself in front of the gorgeous and terrifying Medusa. To accomplish his mission, he had to be clever in order not to be changed to stone like any other human who tried to face the Gorgon before him. When he got in front of her, he only looked at her through her reflection in Athena shield. In order not to look at Medusa's eyes and to turn her murderous power against herself, Perseus replaced his gaze by the gaze of his enemy by putting Athena's reflecting shield right in front of his face. This way, the Gorgon had no other choice than looking at herself in her own eyes. Medusa didn't understand she was looking at herself for the first time. Frightened, she screamed of terror. In the short moment while she was still made of flesh, but in the process of becoming stone, Perseus quickly brandished Hades' sharp sword and cut Medusa's throat. The winged horse Pegasus and his brother Chrysaor appeared from the blood that flowed from Medusa's neck. These two creatures come from the sexual union between Medusa and Poseidon. From then, Medusa became a statue of stone and the reflection of her last face expression as a living soul stayed fixed on Athena's shield forever, allowing the goddess of war to use Medusa's power against her enemies. Perseus accomplished his mission and brought back the Gorgon's head made of stone to the gods.

Chapter Two

PERSEUS AND MEDUSA
LIFE, DEATH and PHOTOGRAPHY

I am aware that there is a slight gap between interpretation of temporality and mortality in terms of how we look at an image and how another dynamic process about identification takes place. However, both topics are part of my practice, and, especially with Medusa myth as a start, I think it is interesting to develop both.

-DEATH IN LIFE AND LIFE IN DEATH-

Medusa escapes from any gaze because she cannot be seen. Having eye contact with her means being exposed to death. You lose your soul before your body gets frozen to stone and frozen in time. Death can be found at several levels in Medusa's myth, in an ambiguous relationship with life.

First, Medusa is in charge of the entrance to the Kingdom of the Dead. As long as she is alive, no one would be allowed to enter. Any human being who would try to get too close to the next world gets trapped in a stage of petrification, somewhere between death and life. The victims of Medusa are obviously not alive anymore but their incarnation in ruins of stone means they are present in the living world. They exist in a way, through the capture and the trace of their last action they performed during the infinitesimal moment of their petrification.

Second, once Medusa turns herself to stone by reflectively looking at herself, she suddenly finds herself in the same condition as all of her victims. However, Medusa's metamorphosis into petrification is accompanied by two important facts that are opposite to death. First, she gives birth to Pegasus and Chrysaor (depending on the versions of the myth the two creatures are either "liberated" from her body or they got made out of Medusa's blood). Second, Medusa's final facial expression of terror got set in Athena's shield. In other words, the magic shield that was so shiny that it was like the mirror had stopped being reflective and became a still image. It registered not only the image of Medusa's face, but also her power. Thus, her unique ability, through her gaze to change people to stone remained alive forever by being transferred from her living body to Athena's shield.

In this myth, we can see that Death and Life are not fully defined. There is an ambiguous relationship between one state and the other.

-THE ACT OF PHOTOGRAPHY-

In the myth of Perseus and Medusa, Philippe Dubois sees several metaphors of the essence of photography in his book *The Act of Photography*.

The act of petrifying human or animal beings through her eyes can be compared to the act of photography. In this interpretation, Medusa would be the photographer, or the camera itself, directed by the photographer to be more precise. Her eyes would be the lens of the camera. The magic metamorphosis of her victims from flesh to stone can be seen as the analogical process between the precise moment when the photographer decides to activate the shutter release of the camera and when the light prints the image on the film. The results is a still image on the negative as well as on the final photograph (positive), that are, in the myth, statues of stone. These statues are human beings or animals in action, frozen in time. Therefore, we can see a metaphor of the act of photography through Medusa's act of petrification.

Dubois compares the instantaneous decision of the photographer to shoot a subject at the decisive moment of exposure of light to the negative (opening the eye of the lens) with the precise moment when Perseus beheads Medusa with his sharp sword (at the exact same time she looks at herself in the shield). It is a crucial moment that has theoretically no length, like a point on a line. If the action is not made at a precise time, the consequences can be completely different from what is expected. Indeed, if Perseus had done this action a bit before, Medusa wouldn't have had time to see her reflection. Or if Perseus had done this action a bit after, Medusa would have already been transformed in a statue and Perseus would have broken his sword by hitting it against stone. Likewise, a photograph is an image that is unique and critically distinct in the life of the subject. It is a moment like no other.

Dubois relates the destruction of Medusa by Perseus by means of retaliation (reversal of the reflection of the mirror) to photography. He explains that there is an interesting relationship between the reflective shield and the negative as well as between the gaze of the lens of the camera and the gaze of Medusa. The fact that Medusa's reflection stays frozen as a still image in Athena's shield surprisingly and literally refers to what the technique of photography originally is: a light imprint. This ancestral myth (in some of its versions) is an illustration can be applied to the invention of photography that would occur 2000 years later.

-PHOTOGRAPHY IS LIFE
PHOTOGRAPHY IS DEATH-

The oscillations between life and death that occur in the myth of Medusa are also related to different theories or opinions on photography that are sometimes seen as symbol of life, and sometimes seen as a symbol death.

> 'Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing', I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice. (…) Photography represents the subtle moment where, really, I am neither a subject, nor an object. But rather a subject that feels itself becoming an object: I live a micro-experience of death (…) I really become a phantom.' (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* p.30)

In his essay, Roland Barthes uses as an example a picture of his mother taken when she was a child posing in a garden. This "*Winter Garden Photograph"* is the only image that Barthes discusses at length but does not reproduce within his text. Writing shortly after her death, Barthes relates his desire to know and to recognize his mother as he goes through the photographs that were in her apartment. The image of his mother as a young child leads Barthes to confront the connection between photography and death. All photographs carry an indexical relationship to their referents. Barthes notes that he 'can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition of reality and of the past' (*Camera Lucida,* p.76). Barthes associates this persistent presence of the referent with the essence of photography and the 'That-has-been'. In other words, he cannot refute the reality of his mother's presence within that winter garden many years before he knew her. Each picture, and for Barthes especially this picture of his mother, has a strong relationship to time and therefore to death. Barthes writes that the 'That-has-been' is a frozen moment that will 'touch [him] like the delayed rays of a star' and so the photograph carries with it an element of what we might call this-will-die (*Camera Lucida,* 81). In other words, Barthes can see in the *Winter Garden Photograph* both the reality of his mother before he knew her and he can recognize that she will die and he sees that her death implies his own. The ultimate effect of the *punctum* is the intimation of death.

> 'The person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon[4] emitted by the object, which I would like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it that terrible thing which is present in every photograph: the turn of the dead'.

Artist Christian Boltanski, has a different opinion about the relationship between photography and death. In 2009, in a discussion with Daniel Mendelsohn he said:

> 'Photography allows us to see, through a magic opening, what during our lifetime is only passing through and disappearing. It has the power of holding our lives and predicts our death at the same time. Photography doesn't lie. It embodies the truth, the image of a particular moment. Photos are the proof of an instant henceforth immortal. Photography faithfully reconstructs an event or a character. It is objective nothing escapes it. It captures the smallest detail of life. (…) With photography, past lives inside us through an intermediate life. Memory doesn't resurrect people but makes them phantoms. Inseparable element of memory, photography takes from time its images through actions and faces. The essence of time is inseparable from photography because it allows, through the pause, the shot. On the other hand, through the act of photography, time is suspended. This suspension of time allows the images to stay frozen forever. Then time becomes sensible and palpable. Photographs are made to keep alive'.[5]

[4] An eidolon is a spirit-image of a living or dead person in ancient Greek thought (*Wikipedia*)

[5] MENDELSOHN D., (2011) *Boltanski*, ed. Flammarion Institut Français

Chapter Three

FROM MEDUSA TO LACAN AND WINNICOTT

What always stares at us as soon as we look at it is our reflection in a mirror. The face of Medusa, is the 'Other of ourselves', our double, an image that would grab us. Instead of reflecting the appearance of our own face, it would represent, in its grimace, the terrifying horror of a radical otherness with which we identify ourselves while becoming stone. Sigmund Freud, in his essay *Uncanny* (1919), relates a similar experience that gave him the distressing feeling of combining the intimate and the unfamiliar. Once, he saw in a train an old man that was coming to him. It was actually his own reflection in the mirror that he didn't recognize.

> 'Medusa and Perseus maybe represent the oldest urge that go through the new-born when, repeating the action that took him away from his mother, takes himself away from the inert world that surrounds him from which he doesn't see the borders to slowly become aware of dwell in his own body'. (Jean Clair, 1989, *Méduse*, Gallimard).

Just before she got beheaded by Perseus and turned herself to stone, Medusa saw herself for the first time in her life. Athena's shield that was so polished that it was as reflective as a mirror. She experienced a process of identification through self-reflection. However, she didn't complete this process since she believed that it was someone else, another monster, and of course, she never saw herself as a monster. This explains why her last facial expression, imprinted on the surface of the shield, showed her terrified, just like any of her numerous previous victims. The petrifying shock of Medusa's failed identification has been the subject of several studies, and especially psychoanalytic studies on identification.

In his book *Méduse*, Jean Clair relates Medusa's experience of identification to the psychoanalytic concept called "the mirror phase". According to definition in *Dictionnaire de la Psychanalyse* (Larousse, 2009), the mirror phase is a phenomenon consisting in the recognition by the child from six months old in his reflection in the mirror. This phase sets the constitution of the *Ego*[6] unified in the dependence of an alienating specular identification and builds the basis of the lack of self-knowledge that every man will sustain on the truth of his being. French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) first talked about this concept in 1936 during the congress of Marienbad. He went on to develop this theme through his whole life. The mirror phase is the advent of narcissism because it indicates death. The baby recognizes

[6] The Ego is the "I" or self of any person; a person as thinking, feeling, and willing, and distinguishing itself from the selves of others and from objects of its thought. (*Dictionnary.com*)

itself as a live being and therefore mortal and who needing its mother to survive.

Indeed, it is a phase of constitution of the human being aged between 6 to 18 months. Before the mirror phase (the pre-specular phase), the child lives like if he was made of several body parts that were not linked together. He makes no difference between his body and his mother's body, between himself and the outside world. However, during the mirror phase, the child hold by his mother will recognize his image. Indeed, we can watch him turning around to look at the reflected environment. It is the first sign of intelligence. His jubilation shows the evidence of the recognition of his own image in the mirror. He is going to experience the relationship between his movements, his image and the reflected environment.

Medusa, taken by surprise, never had the chance to go through all this process. No mother or any relative was there to help her with that. Therefore, the specular image gives to the child the intuitive form of his body in addition to the surrounding reality. The child is going to imaginarily anticipate the whole shape of his body. "The subject sees himself as doubled, constituted through the momentary and fugitive reflected image. He imagine himself a man only from what he imagines". (J. Lacan, 1964, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*). What is essential in the mirror phase is that the child, held by his mother, whose eyes looks at him, turns himself to her like to ask her to authenticate his discovery. It is the recognition of the mother that will turn the 'this is you' into 'this is me'. It is never with his own eyes that the child sees himself but through the person who loves him or hates him.

The foundation of narcissism is made from any kind of love from the mother and from the view applied to the child. In order for the child to take control of his own image and then internalize it, it needs what Lacan calls 'the big Other' (in this particular case, the mother). The *Ego* of the child is going to build itself through the recognition of the mother. 'If the mirror phase is the original adventure which through the man experiences the fact that he is a man, it is also in the image of the other that he recognizes himself. It is as someone else that a man first sees himself and feels himself.' (Lacan). Indeed, in parallel to the recognition of himself in the mirror, Lacan observes in children a particular behaviour towards children the same age. A child imitates the other through his gestures, tries to seduce him or impose himself to him. This is not only a game. Through this behaviour, the child tries to find his own social place. It is important to him to be recognized by the other that will recognize him. These behaviours performed by young children put face to face are characterized by what Lacan calls 'transitivism', an appropriation by the image of the other (this becomes pathologic if this still happens during the adult age, it is an aspect of schizophrenia). For

example, a child that saw another one beaten says that he was beaten himself, or starts crying if he sees another one falling, etc. This is an interesting illustration of the structure of imagination, and the confusion between oneself and the other. In conclusion, the *Ego* is the image of the mirror in its reverse structure. The subject confuses himself with his image and, in his relationship with one's fellow subject, appears the same imaginary reflection of his double. He becomes alienated by the image he wants to give of himself while ignoring he is alienated.

English paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971) studied Lacan's mirror phase to scrutinise what happened before since the birth in terms of identification. In his book *Playing and Reality*, in the chapter entitled *Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child development*, Winnicott compares the mother to a mirror. He hypothesizes a theory in which the environment plays a key role during the first phase of the emotional development of a baby. 'The support and the handling of the recently born child are going to transmit a sense of existing and being a differentiated unity. During the first months of his life, the child does not distinguish yet the *Ego* and the non-Ego. The separation occurs progressively depending on his environment. According to Winnicott, the Ego is a real construction and its success depends on the interaction between the child and his mother. During the breast-feeding, the baby particularly looks at the face of his mother, which leads Winnicott to ask himself what the child sees. According to him, what the baby sees in his mother's face is himself. Indeed, when the mother feeds her child, she looks at him and the expressions on her face express what she sees. She will express in her eyes the love and the wonderment that her child inspires her, which will allow him to build up the image of himself. Winnicott says that 'being really seen by one's mother means existing'.

To illustrate his theory, Winnicott refers to Francis Bacon.

> "I refer here not to the Bacon who said: 'A beautiful face is a silent commendation' and 'That is the best part of beauty, which a picture cannot express', but to the exasperating and skilful and challenging artist of our time who goes on and on painting the human face distorted significantly. (…) Francis Bacon of today's date is seeing himself in his mother's face, but with some twist in him or her that maddens both him and us. I know nothing of this artist's private life, and I bring him in only because he forces his way into any present-day discussion of the face and the self. Bacon's faces seem to me to be far removed from perception of the actual; in looking at faces he seems to me to be painfully striving towards being seen, which is at the basis of creative looking."

Winnicott concludes that at the moment when we look at ourselves in a mirror, there is an exchange look, an eye contact with

ourselves. To look implies to be looked at and this exchange gives us the feeling to exist, to be real. This feeling of being real did not happen for Medusa since she did not recognize herself. As she never experienced any mirror phase, her reality does not match with her reflection.

John Rothenstein (director of the Tate Gallery from 1938 to 1964) wrote the introduction of *Francis Bacon: Catalogue raisonné and documentation*:

> 'To look at a painting by Bacon is to look into a mirror, and to see there our own afflictions and our fears of solitude, failure, humiliation, old age, death and of nameless threatened catastrophe. (…) His avowed preference for having his paintings glazed is also related to his sense of dependence on chance. The preference is due to the fact that glass sets paintings somewhat apart from the environment (just as his daisies and railings set his subjects apart from their pictorial environment), and that glass protects but what counts more in this case is his belief that the fortuitous play of reflections will enhance his pictures. His dark blue pictures in particular, I heard him observe gain by enabling the spectator to see his own face in the glass. This illustrates what Winnicott was explaining about the relationship between the mirror and the reflection'.

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Chapter Four

IDENTIFICATION
SELF-REFLECTION IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Sigmund Freud was the first psychoanalyst to work on identification. He distinguishes two kinds of identifications that are almost opposite. The first one is called the primary identification. This identification is towards oneself. It is the first one that happens in our life and stands for Lacan's *mirror phase* and the Winnicott's *mirror-role of mother phase* put together. The second one is called the secondary identification. It happens after the child has began to be aware of his *Ego* and starts to identify towards the *Other*(s) (same sex parent, opposite sex parent, family members, friends, celebrities, etc.). Thus, secondary identifications happen many times through the whole life, on different levels. This why it is often expressed in plural while primary identification is often used in the singular. The latter one is the foundation of the *Ego*. However, primary identifications can also happen through reminiscences if the subject is involved in this process again. For this to happen, the subject needs to be in the same context of the environment of his original primary identification. Firstly, he needs to be in front of what was showing him his reflection: a two-dimensional image. Secondly, the subject needs to be in the position of looking at someone (like when he was looking at himself in the mirror, or looking at his mother). Thirdly, the person he is looking at needs to be looking at someone or something (his mother looking at him, or his reflection looking at him). From this statement, we can now apply this to photography.

First, photography is a two dimensional image. Second, when a viewer stands in front of a photograph, he sees exactly what the photographer saw in the viewfinder of his camera at the precise moment he decided to press the release button. The photographer being absent from the picture (we are excluding here self-portraits that are particular cases), the viewer does not know what he looks like, which is similar to the *mirror phase*. Indeed, the child originally didn't know what he looked like. Thus, in this first step that is common to most of photographs, there is here a fusion between the viewer's eye and the photographer's eye. Thirdly, when the character that is photographed is looking at the

camera (and at the photographer, and at the viewer), the structure of the mirror stage is fully repeated, and a primary identification can occur.

Therefore, in this particular situation, we can consider that the viewer is experiencing a self-reflection in a photograph; the comparison between a mirror and a photograph takes its full meaning.

The situation described above is the best context to experience self-reflection in photography and what would happen with every viewer. However, we have to admit that it is basically limited to photographic portraits with the character looking at the camera. However, this situation can still happen with a lower impact if it is not fully reproduced. This can apply to almost any kind of photograph. When the reminiscence of the primary identification is less important, the secondary identifications take advantage. Thus we can still identify but to the *Other*, instead of to the *Self* in which the *Other* is projected and vice versa. From that I will give just a few examples because there are as many examples as there are photographs. The character in the portrait could not be looking at the camera, or the character could be looking at someone that is looking at the camera, or be looking at something. The photo could be a group portrait. Besides, what happens with a photograph with no characters in it? For instance, the portrait of an animal, or a landscape of nature, or architecture photography? In these examples, the primary identification occurs more or less according to the experience of the viewer and his capacity to personify what he has in front of his eyes. If the viewer likes animals a lot, he may personify the animal. If the viewer sees a picture of where he grew up, he might personify the landscape as himself.

Also, there are some kinds of photographs that will not allow any primary identification. For instance abstract photos, or blurry photos. Also when the presence of the camera is too obvious (like in self-portraits in mirrors, or selfies), the magic won't happen because the confusion between the objective of the camera and the eye of the photographer needs to make one. In *L'acte photographique*, Philippe Dubois repeats several times that "any viewing of a piece of art is an act of narcissism". According to the *Dictionnaire de la Psychanalyse*, narcissism is the love dedicated to the image on oneself (the use of the word image is here very important). An image may be two-dimensional, such as a photograph, screen display, as well as three-dimensional, such as a statue or a hologram. Therefore, to finish with this explanation, we can ask ourselves if self-reflection can also happen with other kinds of art. In other words, can other mediums give rise to primary identifications? The fact that the image is frozen like in a photograph, or changing like in a video does not make any difference. Moreover, professional scriptwriters and moviemakers know how to play on primary and secondary identifications in order to capture the attention

of the spectator. Also, the scale of the image does not have much influence either, unless we are very close to a huge image or very far from a tiny image. This is why we can have a harder time following a movie at the cinema if we sit in the first row. Then, paintings can involve primary identifications if they are visually close to photography (hyperrealism for example), or if the painter is talented enough to put a detail that will lead us inside the painting. Finally, three-dimensional works such as sculptures do not create any primary identification because the viewer needs to be involved in the point of view of someone else. In the case of a sculpture, even Duane Hanson's hyper realistic sculptures, no primary identification is happening. However, secondary identification is obvious in sculptures.

Both primary and secondary identification are related to death. First, during primary identification, the child sees himself in the mirror and understands that he is a human being, fully alive, and as a whole, which leads to the fact that he is mortal. This could not be more obvious in the myth of Perseus and Medusa since she dies as soon as she sees herself in the shield. Second, secondary identification being the identification towards the *Other*, it is when the child takes into consideration that his parents are two different human beings, that are also different from him. He comes to be aware of the possible loss of his parents. 'Parents can die, as well as me, as well as any other human being'. Therefore, we can assume that this could partly explain this dual relationship between life and death, absence and presence that occurs in photography. In her 1987 essay *Re-reading Edward Weston. Feminism, Photography and Psychoanalysis*, Roberta McGrath writes about a comparison between a photograph and a fetish. She notes 'although we know that photographs are only flimsy scraps of paper, we tend to over-invest them with meanings and make them stand in for missing objects'.

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CONCLUSION

Photography as a mirror could be seen as a theory, a system of hypotheses based on other theories, implying interpretations of facts and acts. We might agree or disagree with it. Why was it so important to me to write a demonstration of it? Because every aspect in the development of this paper is the result of a particular research. My research was rich with discoveries that are going to feed my practice and make my artistic purpose stronger. Like the shield of Athena that pictures a possible confusion between photography and a mirror, I believe that photography can be seen as a mirror and has a big impact in the construction of who we are. It was a feeling before and now I understand why I felt this way. It is a tool to slow time down and look back at every phase of the metamorphosis of our identity. Moreover, I think that primary identifications, towards photographs of people other than ourselves, are uncommonly poetical, melancholic, metaphysical, and almost spiritual, as a beautiful reminiscence of our origins. The idea that we could build our own identity by seeing ourselves in frozen images of others is inspiring. Furthermore, proceeding to primary identifications in front of a frozen image brings it back to life. This is why a photograph is not just a frozen image (in that context, the analogy between Medusa myth and photography is not accurate). As our own identity evolves, the way we look at a photograph is in a process of a perpetual metamorphosis. This makes the relationship between the viewer and the photograph even stronger.

While researching and writing this paper, I discovered and re-discovered works of art and I decided to include a selection of them to my conclusion, as a virtual exhibition in order to propose some metaphors, interpretations or extensions of what I wrote. I am also introducing two of my videos that will be presented for the degree show.

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CARAVAGGIO

Medusa, 1597-1598

Oil on canvas
55 x 55 cm
Uffizi Gallery, Florance, Italy

BENJAMIN RENOUX

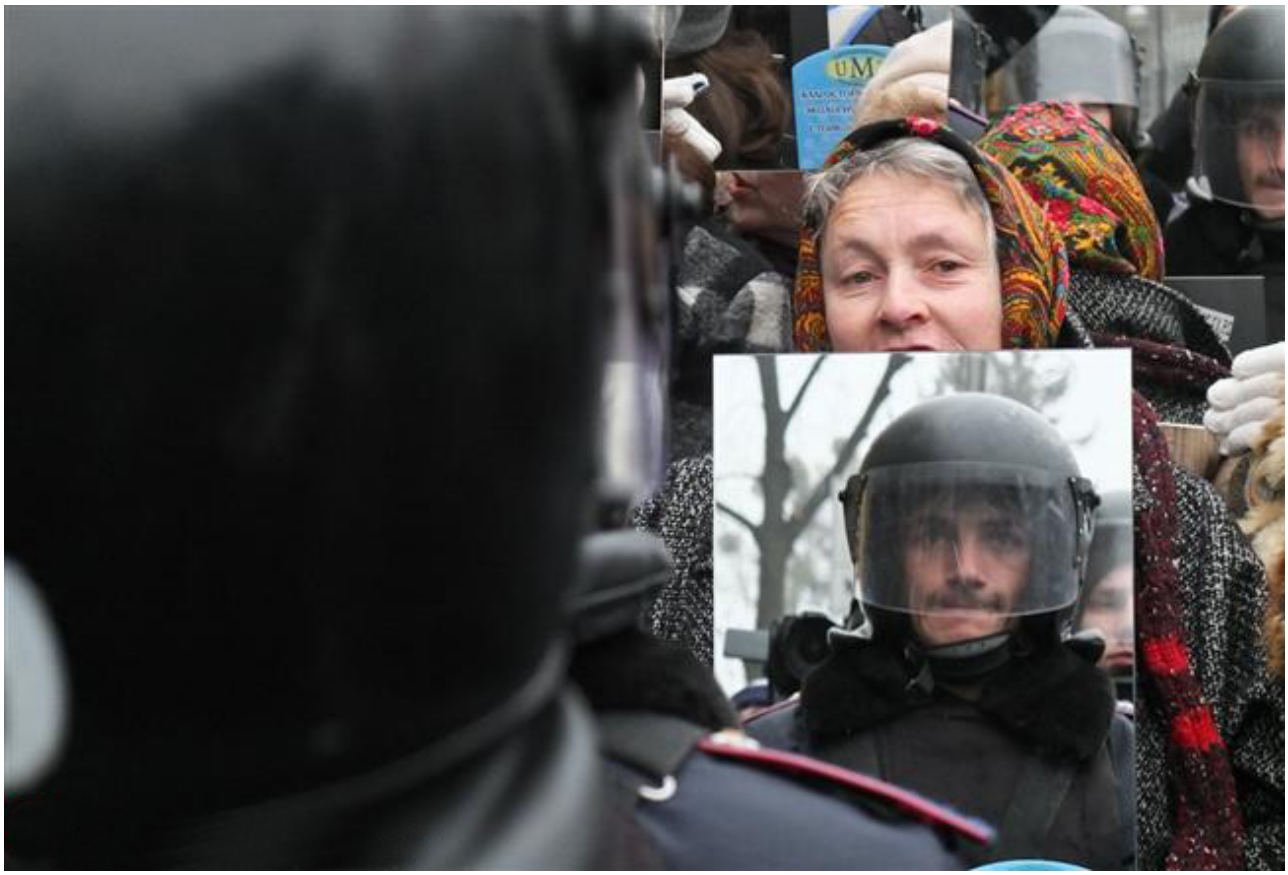
Face-to-face, 2014

Digital Video (93 minutes), Screen, Frame
80 x 60 cm

BENJAMIN RENOUX

Us, 2014

Digital Video (9 minutes), Screen, Frame
30 x 23 cm



Олександр Перевозник

Shield against Riot Police

December 2013
Digital photography
http://news.liga.net/ua/photo/politics

Giuseppe PENONE

Renverser ses yeux, 1970

Performance and Series of photographs

Wendy McMURDO

Helen, Backstage, Merlin Theatre (The Glance)
1995

Pigmented inkjet print
Courtesy of the artist

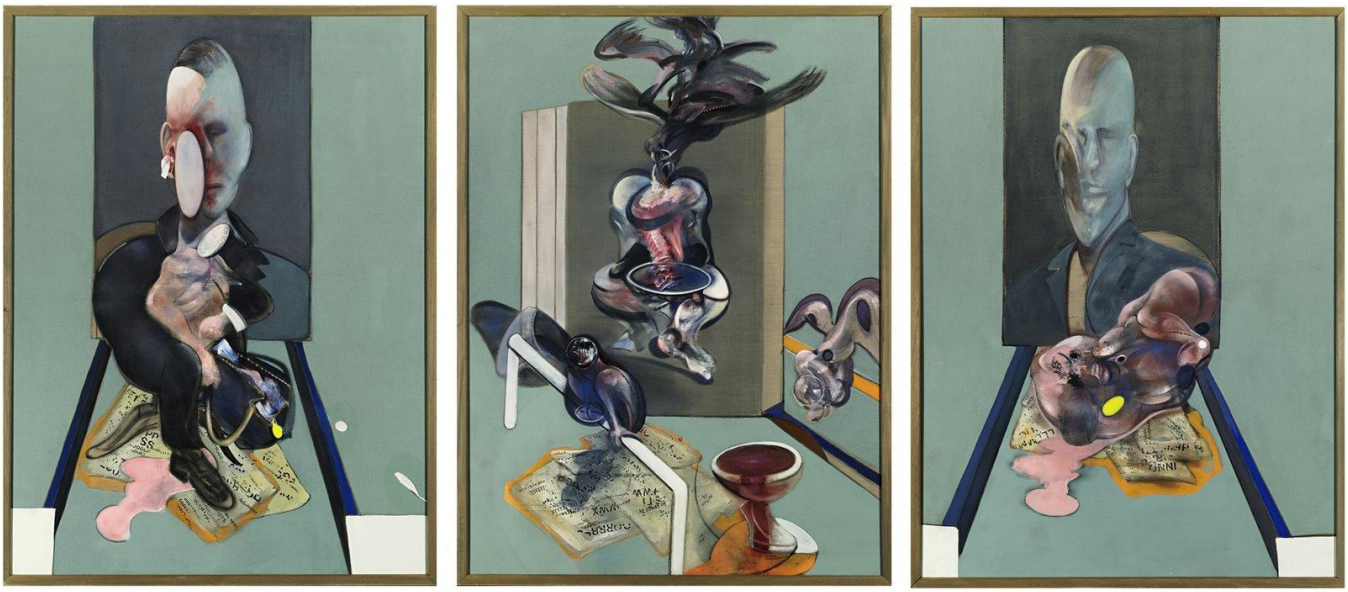
David LYNCH

Mulholland Dr., 2001

Movie

Jeff WALL

Picture of a woman, 1979



Francis BACON

Triptych 76, 1976

Oil on canvas
Private collection