Notes on Metz, "Photography and Fetish"

Differences Between Photography and Cinema

1. Two features — **smaller size** and the possibility of choosing the **length of viewing** — make photography more likely than film to function as a fetish.

2. Photographs tend to be more personalized and private than cinema, even though there is a social practice of photography as art and private uses of cinema.

3. The silence and immobility of photography is unlike the sound and temporal development of cinema.
   a. Immobility and silence are associated with death — they "figure" it.
      - **memento** (aid to memory)
      - **mirror** (witness to our aging by freezing an image)
      - **fragment** (a "taking" of an object from one world and putting it into another world. Note that the fetish expresses both loss — symbolic castration — and protection against loss. This is crucial to Metz's approach.)
   b. Cinema gives the dead a lively semblance; photography presents the dead as dead; an unchanging object from one world is put into another world which is constantly changing.

Castration and Frame

"The fetish is related to death through the terms of castration and fear, to the off-frame in terms of the look, glance, or gaze."

It functions both **metonymically** as an object associated with the moment prior to looking and **metaphorically** as a substitute or equivalent of the missing object.
Off-frame is "substantial" in cinema — anything out of the frame momentarily has the possibility of reappearing and, even while off-frame, being heard. In contrast, off-frame is "subtle" in photography. But the excluded often makes its lack present or felt as fascinating, which suggests the lack implied in the fetish. (Cf. Barthes' concept of the punctum — "the point of sudden and strong emotion, of small trauma". It calls up a subjective association of something off-frame as a metonymic expansion of the punctum.) Figures are "cut-off" by the click of the shutter.

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