

Christian metz and photography



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Task Three According to Christian Metz, there are many differences between photography and film. The first difference would be the “ spatio-temporal size of the lexis”. The lexis is a unit that one reads or receives a piece of art through. The lexis for photography would be the paper that the photo is printed on, whereas the lexis for film would be a cinematic screen. The cinematic lexis is larger than that of a photographic lexis as the film can be ‘ enlarged’, in multiple ways, by sounds, images, movements etc, whereas photographic paper remains silent and still (Metz, 2003: 1).

Another difference between photography and film would be their “ principal legitimated use” (Metz, 2003: 1). This refers to their most common or well known use. Where film is seen as more of a ‘ collective’ type of entertainment, photography is seen as a reference to more private and personal matters. Film is also generally seen as fictional, whereas photography is normally seen as more ‘ real’ (portraying images of family life or real people and events).

Where photographs are seen more as personal keepsakes, film is known to have a more “ social reception”, being shared amongst many (Metz, 2003: 2). A third difference between photography and film would be their physical nature. The physical nature of film is dynamic, whereas the physical nature of photography is more static. Film includes more types of perception than photography. Where a photograph is a single image on its own, a film consists of multiple images joined together. The joining of these multiple images and shots creates a sense of movement, whereas a photograph is immobile.

This movement in film implies that time is passing, whereas a photograph is timeless (freezing a moment in time). Photography is completely silent, whereas film includes multiple sounds such as speaking, sound effects and music (Metz, 2003: 3). Task Four There are many ways in which Christian Metz connects photographs to death. The first connection could be keeping photographs of people who have since then passed away. These photographs then hold the images of the deceased. However, even photographs of people who are still alive can be connected to the idea of death. This is because with each day that passes after the photograph has been taken, those people will be one day closer to their own deaths (Metz, 2003: 3). In a way, the moment captured in the photograph has ended or ‘died’, as is the image of the person in the photograph (not the entire person who is still living in real life) as that specific moment that the person was living in will never occur again (Dubois, 1983: 89). Photographs can also be linked to death in the way that they act like mirrors, showing people aging.

Another connection can be made through snapshots. Like snapshots, death is instantaneous and definitive. A snapshot can be seen as removing the photographed object from moving time in the living world, into another world which has a different sense of time. This is a connection to the idea that when we die, we are removed from this world and either go to another place (such as an afterlife) or that time simply stops completely for the deceased, like the stillness and timelessness of a photograph (Metz, 2003: 3).

Photographs can also be connected to the idea of death by “cutting off a piece of space and time, of keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change” and live (Metz, 2003: 4). Photographs allow us to

remember events (that have ended), people (who have died) or places (that we are currently not in). These photographs portray a “ past presence” that has since ‘ died’. The physical static nature of photographs connects strongly to the idea of death through silence and stillness (Metz, 2003: 4).

Bibliography Metz, C. (2003) Photography and fetish. In Wells, L. (ed), *The Photography reader* (pp. 138 - 145). London and New York: