Knokke-Heist   25.12.1974/2.1.1975

NOTES   ON   HOLLIS   FRAMPTON

HOLLIS FRAMPTON ON HOLLIS FRAMPTON

Hollis Frampton was born in Ohio, United States, on March 11, 1936, towards
the end of the Machine Age. Educated (that is, programmed : taught table
manners, the use of the semicolon, and so forth) in Ohio and Massachusetts.
The process resulted in satisfaction for no one. Studied (sat around on
the lawn at St. Elizabeths) with Ezra Pound, 1957-58. That study is far
from concluded. Moved to New York in March, 1958, lived and worked there
more than a decade. People I met there composed the faculty of a phantasmal
'graduate school'. Began to make still pho ographs at the end of 1958.
Nothing much came of it. First fumblings with cinema began in the Fall
of 1962; the first films I will publicly admit to making came in early
1966. Worked, for years, as a film laboratory technician. More recently,
Hunter College and the Cooper Union have been hospitable. Moved to Eaton,
New York in mid-1970, where I now live (a process enriched and presumably,
prolonged, by the location) and work.

HOLLIS FRAMPTON ON HOLLIS FRAMPTON (excerpt from an interview with Michael Snow)

In the case of painting, I believe that one reason I stayed with still
photography as long as I did was an attempt, fairly successful I think, to
rid myself of the succubus of painting. Painting has for a long time been
sitting on the back of everyone's neck like a crept into territories out-
side its own proper domain. I have seen, in the last year or so, films
which I have come to realize are built largely around what I take to be
painterly concerns and I feel that those films are very foreign to my
feeling and my purpose. As for sculpture, I think a lot of my early con-
victions about sculpture, in a concrete sense, have affected my handling
of film as a physical material. My experience of sculpture has had a lot to
do with my relative willingness to take up film in hand as a physical material
and work with it. Without it, I might have been tempted to more literary
ways of using film, or more abstract ways of using film.

BILL SIMON ON HOLLIS FRAMPTON'S WORK

The term structural describes his work even more aptly because he is concerned
with the development, arrangement, and juxtaposition of structures. He
isolated an idea, a theory, a concept, usually concerning a particular aspect
or problem in the cinematic experience and creates a structure that demonstra-
tes and elucidates it. Frampton is less involved with the immediate sensuous
experience of an art object. While <u>Serene Velocity</u> may be enjoyed for its
kinetic quality and <u>La région centrale</u> for its spatial effects without neces-
sarily engaging the viewer on an intellectual level, the excitement of
Frampton's films stem largely from the ideas that are presented. His films
have a sensuous intellectuality; they thrill by their engagement in ideas.
If Brakhage's great gift is what he does with light and Snow's what he does
with space, Frampton's is what he does with conceptual structures.

Cinquièmè compétition internationale du film expérimental Vijfde internationale com petitie van de experimentele film   Fifth International Experimental Film Competition

Knokke-Heist   25.12.1974/2.1.1975

STAN BRAKHAGE ON HOLLIS FRAMPTON AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Hollis Frampton centers his consideration (always singularly) upon concept. It is a direction-of-endeavor that should have evolved supremely within the last hundred year's development of still photography. Something we might call snap cinch retarded this logical blessing -ie that photographic pictures have been taken (as an over- whelming assumption) for the purpose of prompting memory of fixing it rather than, even, as an emblematic representation of memory process. Still photography remains, as a field, crutch to thought-addendum. There are, of course, the exceptional stills we call Art; but these do almost certainly center their occasions upon a sensuosity which we might refer to as overtures to or over- tones of concept. In short, the Art of still photography sits, for the most part, in a rather normal Romantic trap. The medium itself was almost perfectly designed to approximate the split-second instances of arrived at thought - Eureka! etc. etc.; but this designation in the hands of lazy humans was made way-station, an endless series of waiting-stations, along a line of wishful thinking. Perhaps it was the over-riding 19th century belief in Progress which did thus retard the assumptive values of the field of still photography. The artists did, as always, escape the medium and its box of limited expectations; but they did sacrifice some of snap's most immediate possibilities in their abounding tonal considerations and clims up gray scales, etc.

Hollis Frampton was never inclined, in this fashion, to the open end of Romanti- cism. His temperament must always have demanded something more like a movable box. He was never surely temperamentally inclined to prop himself with pictures while waiting for a train-of-thought. Concept was certainly too huge a consi- deration for Hollis Frampton to think Of it. Concept must always have been, for him, akin to instantaneous revelation of the conceivable, including the process of arriving at such an instant. Mathematics and poetry did surely fascinate him because the assumptive life of both these fields in the 20th century is that they be emblematic of concept (in the first place) and that at worst the be sign-posts directing one to the event of concept in both time and space. Action painting was a natural for his admiration because it primarily demonstrated frozen instants of momentum along a line of possibilities. The action painters did not often pretend to concept. Hollis had to exhaust the definite pretensions of still photography for himself.

Knokke-Heist   25.12.1974/2.1.1975

HOLLIS FRAMPTON / A FILMOGRAPHY

MANUAL OF ARMS, 1966 / 17' / BW / silent
PROCESS RED, 1966 / 3'30" / color / silent
INFORMATION, 1966 / 4' / BW / silent
STATES, 1967 / 17'30" / BW / silent
HETERODYNE, 1967 / 7' / color / silent
SNOWBLIND, 1968 / 5'30" / BW / silent
MAXWELLS DEMON, 1968 / 4' / color / sound
SURFACE TENSION, 1968 / 10' / color / sound
PALINDROME, 1969 / 22' / color / silent
CARROTS & PEAS, 1969 / 5'30" / color / sound
LEMON, 1969 / 7'30" / color / **silent**
PRINCE RUPERTS DROPS, 1969 / 7' / BW / silent
ARTIFICIAL LIGHT, 1969 / 25' / color / silent
ZORNS LEMMA, 1970 / 60' / color / sound
HAPAX LEGOMENA I/NOSTALGIA , 1971 / 36' / BW / sound
HAPAX LEGOMENA II/POETIC JUSTICE, 1972 / 31'30" / BW / silent
HAPAX LEGOMENAIII/CRITICAL MASS, 1971 / 25'30" / BW / sound
HAPAX LEGOMENA IV/TRAVELLING MATTE, 1971 / 33'30" / BW / silent
HAPAX LEGOMENA V/ORDINARY MATTER, 1972 / 36' / BW / sound
HAPAX LEGOMENA VI/REMOTE CONTROL, 1972 / 29' / BW / silent
HAPAX LEGOMENAVII/SPECIAL EFFECTS, 1971 / 10'30"
APPARATUS SUM, 1972 / 2'30"/ color / silent
TIGER BALM, 1972 / 10' / color / silent
YELLOW SPRINGS, 1972 / 5' / color / silent
LESS, 1973 / 1" / BW / silent
NOCTILUCA, 1974 / 3'30" / color / silent
BANNER, 1974 / 1' / color / silent
SOLARIA MAGELLANI ,: VERNAL EQUINOX, 1974 / 70' / color / silent
SOLARIA MAGELLANI : SUMMER SOLSTICE, 1974 / 32' / color / silent
SOLARIA MAGELLANI :·AUTUMNAL EQUINOX, 1974 / 27' / color / silent
SOLARIA MAGELLANI : WINTER SOLSTICE, 1974 / 33' / color / silent

all films are 16mm.

NOTES ON SOME OF FRAMPTON'S FILMS

HETERODYNE

I began to make it when I had no money for raw stock and only several rolls of colored leader but nevertheless (had) the need to make or work on a film. As I first conceived the film, I intended it to be a kind of revenge done with the bare hands against -first of all animation- or cell animation in particular and secondly, against abstract film with a capital A as they were practiced in the late 40's and 50's as a kind of engine cooler for the art houses where I first saw serious foreign movies. As I thought about the film, I wanted it to have a very open, resilient kind of structure with the maximum possible amount of rhythmic variety, both in terms of count, beat and variety in the rhythmic changes of shapes and the rate of the rhythmic change. I used a debased form of matrix algebra to make up, in advance, the structure of the film, and tried out several arithmetic models for that structure... with very short film pieces, before I found one that seemed to suit me. As I came to make the film, it consists entirely of 240 feet of black leader into which are welded about 1,000 separate o events. Each consists of one frame, and there are 40 kinds of frame, ranging from a frame that consists entirely of red or green or blue to a frame which may consist of red leader with a triangle of blue leader welded into the middle of it. I say welded because the film was put together using three colors of leader and 3 ticket punches -a square, a circle and a triangle- which I felt to be constantly recognizable and also impersonal shapes- and where one color is let into another, or where a color shape is let into black leader, it is literally welded in with acetone. I was doing all of this under a magnifying glass with tweezers and brushes and so forth... they're disposed along the continuous line of film by a scheme roughly the following : in order to avoid a scheme in which certain types of frames would, by rhythmic recurrence, fall at the same spot in the film, or in the same exact frame, I decided to use prime numbers, that is, numbers divisible only by themselves and as a starting-point since they begin to share harmonics extensively only in their very high multiples- I further decided that I could use no prime numbers less than 40, because 40 is the number of frames in a foot and I didn't want any single type of event to occur any more often than once every one and two/thirds seconds, and then I subjected my list of prime numbers over 40 to a series of tests that involved the sums of their digits-casting out those that didn't meet the tests so that as it turned out the commonest event, a frame that is entirely red, occurs every 61 frames in absolutely regular repetition throughout the film; and the least common event, a red triangle on a black ground, occurs every 2,311 frames-all of this necessitated an amount of arithmetic which I did over a period of 6 weeks-reduced it to a large stock of 3X5 cards and collated them, and sat down which my rewinds and splicer and simply put the thing together-altogether on the level of personal logistics,it...tied up my time and need to be making a film for about three months at the end of which I found myself with a little more money for raw stock and I could go on and make other kinds of films.

MAXWELLS DEMON

I wanted to do something -to put it as sentimentally as possible-for James Clerk Maxwell who is, or was, either the last qualitative physicist or the first quantitative physicist. Maxwell is known and admired among physicists for his work in thermodynamics, which is something I don't know or understand very much about. I believe we're all steeped in thermodynamics in the physical sense; but I have particularly revered Clerk Maxwell because he became, in a very brief aside in a lecture delivered at the Royal College of Edinburgh or some place like that, the Father of the Analytical theory of color, which,in it's applications and ramifications, has given us color photography and color cinematography.

SURFACE TENSION

Quite frankly with Surface Tension, I didn't propose to attack so grand a fortress as the Sound-Image relationship. I wanted to make a film out of a relatively small number of simple elements, which would be of a piece, to see how much resonance I could generate among those elements. As you know, the film fundamentally contains 3 shots -a man talking while his digital clock runs; a single dolly shot from the middle of the Brooklyn Bridge to the lake in Central Park; and a goldfish swimming very slowly back and forth in a tank outside the sea. Further, it contains only 2 quite simple sounds : one, the sound of the telephone ringing 37 times; and the other, a prose description which for the average speaker of English comes through as a single prolonged sound because it's in a foreign language -in this case,German. Naturally, I had other and more subtle concerns to work out within the body of each of the 5 or 6 blocks of material that I was using. I did certainly want it to be a sound film and I didn't see how I could do it without sound to build up the internal reverberation I wanted among the various parts of the film... but I wanted it to be a very simple sound film, or a film that used sound in a way more simple and obvious than most sound films have-namely, in part as the most direct kind of sensation and presentation rather than as a directly parallel explication or echo or reminder of something that happens to be going on on the screen. Maxwells Demon, as you remember, is also a sound film, and one reason I chose the sound I did -the sound of film perforations- just plain film perforations- was not only to increase the mass of some of the interspersed shots in the film, but also because I wanted to use the first sound that film ever made which is the sound of film itself. I wanted to use the most fundamental kind of sound in Surface Tension, perhaps, simply as the next stage. As a general footnote, I should say that Ithink of my films in part as an effort to reconstruct the history of films as it should have been.

ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

Artificial light repeats variations on a single filmic utterance twenty times. The same phrase is a series of portrait shots of a group of young New York artists informally talking, drinking wine, laughing, smoking. The individual portrait-shots follow each other with almost academic smoothness in lap-dissolves ending in two shots of the entire group followed by a dolly shot into a picture of the moon. In the following synoptic outline, this entire phrase, which lasts about one minute in black and white, will be called A :

Artificial light

1. A, upside-down and backwards
2. A, in negative
3. A, with superimposition of sprocket holes
4. A, with eyes painted blue and mouths red
5. A, scarred with a white drip mark
6. A, covered with transparent stripes of red and green
7. Still shots in sequence from A; a stroboscopic or flicker effect
8. A, almost obliterated by scratches
9. Shots from A, toned different colors by dye, in an asequential order
10. A, with faces and hair outlined by scratches, dissolves marked with a scratched slash (/)
11. A, spotted with multicolor drops
12. Superimposition of A, with a copy of A in which left and right are reversed
13. A, with all faces bleached out
14. A, with a flicker of colors (red, green, blue)
15. A, covered with art-type printers dots
16. A, toned sepia
17. A, superimposed over itself with a lag of one-and-a-half-seconds
18. A, interrupted by two-frame flashes of color negative
19. A, colored, as if through an electrical process, in a series of two primaries
20. A, with a closeup of a moon crater substituted for the expected moon shots

It should be obvious from the outline that the filmic phrase functions like a tone row in dodecaphonic music and serial composition. Frampton has made two very interesting manipulations of the experience of this phrase. In the first place, by opening the film with a backwards and upside-down run of it, he dislocates the viewer for several repetitions; one comes gradually to realize that there is a fixed order or direction. That progression is rigidly fixed by the first third of the film. The ninth variation violently jars us with its elliptical disorder. The rest of the film proceeds logically until the last shot which has a feeling of finality both from its variation and from being held on the screen longer / P. Adams-Sitney, Film Culture Reader.

ZORNS LEMMA
Frampton's film is an exercise in mathematical logic in cinema. Or is it a
mechanical logic ? Three viewings do not help me to explain to you what the
film is all about. It's about alphabet. It's about the unities of similarities.
It's about sameness in a confusion. It's about logic in chance. It's about
structure and logic. It's about rhythm / Jonas Mekas, Movie journal.

Zorns Lemma is divided into three sections : an initial imageless reading
of the Bay State Primer; a long series of silent shots, each one second
photographed signs edited to form one complete Latin alphabet; and finally
a single shot of two people walking across a snow-covered field away from the
camera to the sound of a choral reading.
The first of several intellectual orders which Frampton provides as structural
models within the film is, of course, the alphabet. The Bay State Primer
announces, and the central forty minutes of this hour long film elaborates
upon it. Within that section a second kind of ordering occurs; letters begin
to drop out of the alphabet and their one-second pulse is replaced by an image
without a sign. The first to go is X, replaced by a fire; a little later Z is
replaced by waves breaking backwards. Once an image is replaced, it will
always have the same substitution; in the slot of X the fire continues for
a second each time, the sea roll backwards at the end of each alphabet once
the initial substitution occurs. On the other hand, the signs are different
in every cycle.
The substitution process sets in action a guessing game and a timing device.
Since the letters seem to disappear roughly in inverse proportion to their
distribution as initial letters of words in English, the viewer can with
occasional accuracy guess which letter will drop out next. He also suspects
that when the alphabet has been completely replaced, the film or the section
will end.
A second timing mechanism exists within the substitution images themselves,
and it gains force as the alphabetic cycles come to an end. Some of the subs-
titution images imply their own termination. The tying of shoes which replaces
P, the washing of hands (G), the changing of a tire (T), and especially the
filling of the frame with dried beans (N) add a time dimension essentially
different from that of the waves, or a static tree (F), a red ibis flapping
its wings (B), or cat-tails swaying in the wind (Y). The clocking mechanism
of the finite acts is confirmed by the synchronous drive toward completion
which becomes evident in the last minutes of the section.
In Zorns Lemma Frampton followed the tactics of his two elected literary
masters Jorge Luis Borges and Ezra Pound. From Borges he learned the art
of labyrinthine construction and the dialectic of presenting and obliterating
the self. Following Pound, Frampton has incorporated in the end of his film
a crucial indirect allusion; it is to the paradox of Arnulf Rainer's reduction.
In Grosseteste's essay, materiality is the final dissolution, or the point
of weakest articulation, of pure light. But in the graphic cinema that vector
is reversed. In the quest for sheer materiality -for an image that would be,
and not simply represent- the artist seeks endless refinement of light itself.
As the choral text moves from Neo-Platonic source-light to the grosser impurities
of objective reality, Frampton slowly opens the shutter, washing out his snow-
scape into the untinted whiteness of the screen / P. Adams-Sitney, Visionary
film.

HAPAX LEGOMENA

Hollis Frampton hasuused the participatory film for the indirect and serial
autobiography, Hapax Legomena, a title derived from classical philology,
referring to those words of which only one instance survives in the ancient
texts./ P. Adams-Sitney, Visionary film.

HAPAX LEGOMENA I / NOSTALGIA

In Nostalgia, Frampton is clearly working with the experience of cinematic
temporality. The major structural strategy is a disjunction between sound
and image. We see a series of still photographs, most of them taken by Frampton,
slowly burning one at a time on a hotplate. On the soundtrack, we hear Frampton's
comments and reminiscences about the photographs . As we watch each photo-
graph burn, we hear the reminiscence pertaining to the following photograph.
The sound and image are on two different time schedules. At any moment, we
are listening to a commentary about a photograph that we shall be seeing
in the future and looking at a photograph taht we have just heard about. We
are pulled between anticipation and memory. The nature of the commentary
reinforces the complexity; it arouses our sense of anticipation by referring
to the future; it also reminisces about the past, about the time and conditions
under which the photographs were made. The double time sense results in a
complex, rich experience / Bill Simon.

HAPAX LEGOMENA II / POETIC JUSTICE

In Poetic justice we see a table upon which there is a plant and a cup of
coffee. A succession of sheets of paper is placed on the table, each describing
the shot of a film so that we can reconstruct the film in our mind's eye from
the written descriptions. The imagined film is in four tableaux, one of which
contains a major temporal problem. In this tableau, every second shot is
followed by one containing a still photograph of the previous shot. The
second shot in each successive pair therefore refers back to the past; the pho-
tograph freezes the action of the first shot. However, in the description for
the second shot of each pair, there are instructions that do not appear in the
description for the first. In each case, the written instruction describes an
action that occurs after the action of the first shot so that the second shot
in each pair is a rendering of the past state of events and carries the action
of the imagined film a step forward. Two directions of temporal experience
are mixed in a single image / Bill Simon.

HAPAX LEGOMENA III / CRITICAL MASS

Critical mass shows a young New York couple arguing about their relationship.
The film starts on the soundtrack; the screen is blank. Initially the dialogue
is cut up in such a way that the couple seems to stutter as they talk (Frampton
adds the stutter to such recent perceptual constructs as Warhol stares, Kubelka's
flicker and Mekas' glimpse). Lines of dialogue are cut into before they are
finished, partially repeated, stopped again, repeated, until the phrase or
sentence is finished and a new one begins in the same manner. A line like :
I'm going to leave you, comes out : I'm goin'...going to lea...to leave you...
eave you. An'.... When the image appears, we see the couple arguing, standing
against a white wall. The picture is cut to reflect the stutter, repeating it-
self and going on, finishing one phrase and starting another. Later the stutter
effect disappears and a second structural principle emerges. The sound and image
go out of synchronization so that we hear the boy speaking while we see the
girl's mouth moving and vice versa. The degree of de-synchronization varies mys-
teriously, disconcerting us.
There are two kinds of temporal tensions in this film. In the first part, the
stutter creates a future-past tension as in Nostalgia, only on a more immediate
second-to-second basis. The incomplete phrases gives us a sense of what is to
come. The repetition brings us backwards, then carries us forward, stops, and
returns. Time does not evolve in a linear way. We are continually moved from
future to past and back again, with no true sense of a present. In the second
part of the film, the sound-image disjunction brings about the temporal problem.
Because of our retarded awareness of the disjunction we are never quite sure
whether we are listening to something that has already been spoken in the
image or to something about to be spoken. We are simultaneously either liste-
ning in the present and seeing the past or listening to the past and seeing the
present./ Bill Simon.

HAPAX LEGOMENA / ORDINARY MATTER

I suppose there is extra-ordinary matter. Almost everything in the world is made
of ordinary matter. But where I got the title was...simple in a way. We think
of matter as being gas, liquid, and solid, let's say; as occupying three states,
and those are the ones that we experience directly. But there is something that
physicists call plasma, which is very attenuated gas : a hydrogen atom; then you
go on for a few yards, there is another hydrogen atom... There is hardly anything
there. And that plasma behaves differently from ordinary matter. Well, it turns
out that most of the matter, most of the substance of the universe, of the whole
universe, is not the ordinary matter which we are familiar with, but this plasma,
and what we are tuned to is these little cloths of dense, organized stuff, which
we go flying through as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world. But it
turns out that it's a very special case in the universe indeed (...). I suppose
I think of it as a kind of acceleration from Travelling matte, the eye is groping
and feeling its way and staggering, and so forth. And in Ordinary matter the need
somehow to worry about those words and still photographs, and so forth, is behind.
Ordinary matter is for me a kind of ecstatic, headlong dive.
(And it goes through nature, architecture, high peaks of contemporary civilization,
and through the oldest monuments that we have -the scope of it in time and space
is so wide...) and finally the eye that was trying to see out, through the little
hole -through the fist, in Travelling matte opens up and does, to an extent,
really see out, or I feel it does, and ends with something that is a very old
image in my eye, of running through corn fields as a child, with the leaves slapping
me in the face, and the sun hitting me, and so forth.../ Jonas Mekas interviews
Hollis Frampton, Village voice.

HAPAX LEGOMENA VI / REMOTE CONTROL
I hardly can talk about Remote control at all. There, of course, the images
speed up to the point where every successive frame is different from every
previous frame, so that if there is an image in it, it's a kind of inner voice
within the images, as sometimes music will have many voices that can be written
out on the paper, and then in the listening the real shape of the music is to
be found in the voice that is generated among them. (...) Remote control is
silent. Remote control is noisy enough, I think, without a sound-track. It
was again begun as video. It was shot in a single evening, off the tube, right
off the ordinary TV set, in the course of evening. Actually, I did it twice,
I didn't like the first evening. But it was made one frame for one shot.
Every time the shot changed, or every time it panned, so it was completely
displaced, I made another frame. Exceptions are graphic things, for there's
type in commercials, so that was cut out. I have to admit, I tinkered with it,
I took out some frames, quite a few frames that didn't seem to be beworking /
Jonas Mekas interviews Hollis Frampton, Village voice.

HAPAX LEGOMENA VII / SPECIAL EFFECTS
It's a black frame, a white dotted line. You're seeing in the negative...just
the same. (So this frame, it's not steady, it keeps sort of shaking, as if
the camera is not steady or the frame is not steady) There is a little jiggle
to it. That white dotted line is the frame. I wanted to affirm and honor the
film frame itself. Because so much of what we know now, so much of our expe-
rience is something that comes to us through that frame. It seems to be a kind
of synonym for what we are conscious of. I have only seen the pyramids of Egypt
within that frame. I have only seen -endless things- most of what I believe
I have experienced I have in fact seen at the movies. I've seen it inside that
frame. But then, it's just my frame too, it's not everyone's. So that rather
than filming it as a rock-steady kind of monument, I did film hand-held, and
with a long lens, and put myself in a physical position where it would be
impossible to hold the camera steady. I wanted to shake while... That is my
own frame, that is the vibration, let's say, of my own imagination and my own
body, in relation to that bounded possibility of consciousness. Then you can
imagine whatever you want inside of it / Jonas Mekas interviews Hollis Frampton,
Village voice.

SOLARIA MAGELLANI
The film proposes a fully rigorous, but nonlinear and non-narrative method
for the montage of film images in a temporal sequence / Hollis Frampton.