



Saturday 24 October 2009, NFT 3, 14.00

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: HAPAX LEGOMENA

Hapax legomena are, literally, 'things said once'. The Greek scholarly jargon refers to those words that occur only a single time in the entire *oeuvre* of an author, or in a whole literature. The title brackets a cycle of seven films, which make up a single work composed of detachable parts, each of which may be seen separately for its own qualities. The work is an oblique autobiography, seen in stereoscopic focus with the phylogeny of film art as I have had to recapitulate it during my own fitful development as a filmmaker.

Hapax Legomena incorporates what I could learn along the way of making it, and includes my own false starts and blind alleys ... what T.E. Hulme once called 'the cold walks, and the lines that lead nowhere'. Such 'double-vision' – that is, the superimposition of a personal myth of the history of one's art upon a factual account of one's own *persona* – certainly does not originate with me. At least, I believe I see ample precedent in the last two books of James Joyce. (Hollis Frampton)

(NOSTALGIA)

Hollis Frampton | USA 1971 | 36 mins

The narrative art of most young men is autobiographical. Since I have had little narrative experience, it seemed reasonable to accept *biography* as a convention, rather, however little information was available to me. My subject, hoping abjectly to be taken for a man of his time, had practiced rigorous self-effacement for a decade or more. So I was forced into examining his leavings and middens, like an archaeologist sifting for ostracizing pot shards. Since he had once been myself, I knew exactly where to look. Random debts and documents aside, he had left behind some thousands of still photographs made during his apprenticeship to the art I expound. Because my results were to be made public, I chose a mere dozen of these specimens to examine, leaving the rest for later investigators who would be doubly fortunate: first in their sentiment for their antagonist, and again in their intimacy with his work. (HF)

POETIC JUSTICE

Hollis Frampton | USA 1972 | 31 mins

In *Poetic Justice*, Frampton presents us with a 'scenario' of extreme complexity in which the themes of sexuality, infidelity, voyeurism are 'projected' in narrative sequence entirely through the voice telling the tale – again it is the first person singular speaking, however, in the present tense and addressing the characters as 'you', 'your lover', and referring to an 'I'. We see, on screen, only the physical aspect of a script, papers resting on a table ... and the projection is that of a film as consonant with the projection of the mind. (Annette Michelson)

CRITICAL MASS

Hollis Frampton | USA 1971 | 16 min

As a work of art I think *Critical Mass* is quite universal and deals with all quarrels (those between men and women, or men and men, or women and women, or children, or war.) *It is war!* ... It is one of the most delicate and clear statements of inter-human relationships and the difficulties of them that I have ever seen. It is very funny, and rather obviously so. It is a magic film in that you can enjoy it, with greater and greater appreciation, each time you look at it. Most aesthetic experiences are not enjoyable on the surface. You have to look at them a number of times before you are able to fully enjoy them, but this one stands up at once, and again and again, and is amazingly clear. (Stan Brakhage)

– 10 minute intermission –

TRAVELLING MATTE

Hollis Frampton | USA 1971 | 34 min

One aspect of the film seems quite clear. Frampton is creating a metaphor for the artist, whose hand frames or moulds the world available to his perceptions according to the components of his vision and the limitations of his medium. Other aspects of this metaphor are suggested by Frampton's inclusion of this revealing comment by Stan Brakhage in the Filmmakers' Co-operative Catalogue: 'This film metaphors an entire human life: birth, sex, death – the framing device is the fingers and palm of the maker's hand, wherein others only attempt to read the future.' While the events one sees through the opening in Frampton's hand are generally fleeting and unspecific, it is possible that Brakhage's description relates to the events we see through the hand: that the artist's life begins when his medium begins to function, that he wanders through the world like a character out of Samuel Beckett, seeing various things, moving uphill for long periods until he attains, at least momentarily, a fuller vision (in one instance the hand comes away from the lens for a second), then moving back downhill until 'his batteries run down' and all sensation ceases. (Scott MacDonald)

ORDINARY MATTER

Hollis Frampton | USA 1972 | 36 min

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 ... (HF interviewed by Jonas Mekas)

REMOTE CONTROL

Hollis Frampton | USA 1972 | 29 min

A 'baroque' summary of film's historic internal conflicts, chiefly those between narrative and metric/plastic montage; and between illusionist and graphic space. It incorporates three apposite 'found' narratives, condenses five ways of making, and includes a 'surprise' out of Haydn (or S.M. Eisenstein's *Ivan, Part II*). (HF)

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Hollis Frampton | USA 1972 | 11 min

The frame itself, which divides what is present to consciousness from what is absolutely elsewhere, is tempered here by the breath, tremor, heartbeat of the perceiver. People this given space, if you will, with images of your own devising. The soundtrack was generated on a Buchla synthesizer at the University of Pittsburgh, through the kind intercession of Victor Grauer. (HF)

Hapax Legomena has been preserved through a major cooperative effort funded by the National Film Preservation Foundation and undertaken by Anthology Film Archives, MoMA, the New York University Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program, and project conservator Bill Brand.

'On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton', edited by Bruce Jenkins, was published by MIT Press in April 2009. The collection presents Frampton's critical essays (many written for Artforum and October) along with additional material – including lectures, correspondence, interviews, production notes and scripts – which display his distinctive perspectives on photography, film, video, and the plastic and literary arts.

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