

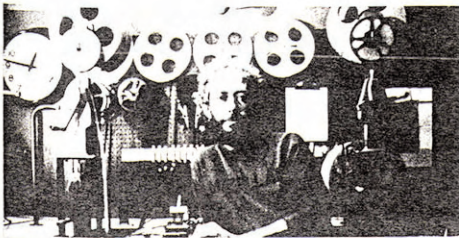
FOUNDATION FOR ART IN CINEMA

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# Words into Film: Toward a Genealogical Understanding of Hollis Frampton's Theory and Practice\*

FEDERICO WINDHAUSEN

*This whole business of words—the whole sense of tense and complicated problems about knowledge, about making things in relation to all the things that were already made with words—seems to have fallen into film.*

—Hollis Frampton, 1971

That the American filmmaker Hollis Frampton raised objections to critic P. Adams Sitney's term "Structural film," on the grounds that Sitney was giving new life to "that incorrigible tendency to label, to make movements," is notable, but hardly surprising.<sup>1</sup> During a 1976 talk, published the following year in *Cinemanews*, Frampton voices a familiar complaint about modern critical commentary, decrying the manner in which its classifying names and terms tend to "render the work invisible." Presumably, Sitney's grouping was no more popular among the independent filmmakers emerging in the 1960s than Minimalism had been with the painters and sculptors of the same era. But in Frampton's witty discursus (which carries off a transition, on its way to Sitney, from the failure of Cubism and French Structuralism as descriptive labels to the snobbishness of the New York painting scene of 1969), the objection to critical generalizations eventually leads to a more telling point about another topic, the relationship between the postwar American avant-garde cinema and English-language poetry. Addressing himself to fellow filmmaker James Broughton, Frampton claims that in Sitney's book *Visionary Film*, the interpretative framework is

derived largely from an undergraduate seminar in romantic poetry with Harold Bloom at Yale. That makes something of a Procrustean bed. Brakhage gets to be Wordsworth, by an extraordinary piece of

\* First and foremost, I thank Annette Michelson for her counsel. Thanks also to Malcolm Turvey for helpful suggestions, to Edoardo Moretti for an early reading, and to Michael Zryd, Anthology Film Archives, and the Museum of Modern Art Archives for invaluable research assistance.

1. All quotations in this paragraph are from "Hollis Frampton in San Francisco," *Cinemanews* 77–6 (1977), pp. 8–9.

prestidigitation. And Stan professes at least not to be totally uncomfortable with that; I mean, how one squares the Stan Brakhage one knows and loves up with the notion of emotion recollected in tranquility I'll be goddamned if I understand. And it's mercifully not cartooned out too heavily. I mean, we don't have Harry Smith as Robert Browning and Lord, isn't it wonderful? Peterson as Keats, and who the devil are you, James? But that was the extent of the intellectual tool kit that he had to tinker and unlock this strange device. It worked a little—you can sort of pile a little Freud on top of that, and so forth. Freud according to the American gospel only and the Freud of course of *The Interpretation of Dreams*; not, for instance, of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, but that's it.

Frampton goes on to imply that Sitney's Romantic tool kit leaves him ill-equipped to treat the body of films he labels "Structural," even though the attempt "to square it away and bring it up to the light, and so forth" is the work of an "honest" critic. For dramatic effect (offering a pronounced bodily utterance that the transcriber for *Cinemanews* feels compelled to identify, in brackets, as a sigh), Frampton laments that Sitney's essay "ended with me."<sup>2</sup>

Frampton's characteristically performative critique does not offer us, in any explicit manner, alternative interpretations of the films of either the post-Romantic visionaries or the Structural group. Despite the artist's reluctance to show his hand, however, we are provided with clues to important aesthetic issues. Frampton acknowledges that Sitney was working with "strange" and difficult films and, more importantly, that the young critic sought to make sense of newer work, Brakhage's in particular, by tying it to an older tradition, as interpreted by the elder critic Bloom. Frampton does not attack Sitney for being possessed of a tool kit; he merely suggests that the historical and conceptual connection it constructs is not a convincing one, especially given the evident lack of "tranquility" in an oeuvre as impassioned as Brakhage's. Notice that Frampton is not concerned with disputing the value of criticism and its interpretations; rather, he is intent on questioning the usefulness of frameworks derived from Bloom and from the Americanized Freud, while hinting that other perspectives could serve as more valuable critical instruments.<sup>3</sup> Frampton's public criticism of Sitney is motivated not only by his professed allegiance to modernists who set themselves against the Romantic

2. Sitney concludes his text by placing Frampton's work within another subcategory of the Structural film, one he calls the "participatory" film, a "form which addressed itself to the decision-making and logical faculties of the viewer." P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 392.

3. The nature of Frampton's interest in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is stated more clearly in other texts, where Frampton consistently connects Freud's thesis to the fact that film footage needs to be processed before it can be viewed. Thus, "film-making is an edifice of delayed gratification; by a kind of inversion of Freud's thesis in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, one is constantly reassured in film-making that one is engaged in a civilized activity." Scott MacDonald, "Hollis Frampton," *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 67.

canon, but also by his understanding of the critical and theoretical alternatives to Bloom's views.

One of these alternatives was provided by Hugh Kenner, the influential writer on modernism whose views are often set in opposition to Bloom's in the domain of American literary criticism and scholarship. As Sitney himself has acknowledged, in a text published after the filmmaker's death, Kenner was "one of the few critics Frampton seems to have admired."<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I show how Frampton's ideas, particularly the filmmaker's notion of "epistemological inquiry" and key aspects of his view of modernism, were shaped by Kenner's writings. It was in part due to Kenner's influence, I argue, that Frampton objected to Sitney's characterization of the relationship between the postwar American avant-garde cinema and English-language poetry.<sup>5</sup>

\*

None of the earliest available references to Kenner in Frampton's published texts and transcripts were initially intended for publication. In the two most significant early instances, Kenner is cited by name, first in a typed dialogue with Carl Andre, from 1963, and a few months later in a letter to a friend who had been corresponding with Kenner.<sup>6</sup> Both texts suggest a familiarity with Kenner's 1962 article, "Art in a Closed Field," and his book on Beckett, Flaubert, and Joyce, whom he calls "stoic comedians."<sup>7</sup> One indicator of the lasting value of Kenner's writings for Frampton is the length of time he spends citing the critic—he recounts the book's main theses as late as 1976 to an audience at the San Francisco Art Institute.<sup>8</sup> He also paraphrases a passage from the same book in an interview in 1977, albeit without naming Kenner in that context.<sup>9</sup> Only two explicit citations of Kenner appear in writings initially intended for publication, in the essays "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses," from 1971, and "Digressions on the Photographic Agony," from 1972.<sup>10</sup> The texts referenced in those essays are Kenner's *The Counterfeiters: An Historical Comedy* and

4. P. Adams Sitney, "Re-Viewing Frampton," *American Film* (April 1986), p. 67.

5. Janissaries and devotees of Frampton esoterica can rest assured that I do not present Kenner's work as the master key that will unlock the filmmaker's project. No such key exists, of course.

6. Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, "On Movies and Consecutive Matters," *12 Dialogues: 1962–1963*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1980), pp. 53–56; Hollis Frampton, "Letters from Frampton 1958–1968," *October* 32 (Spring 1985), pp. 41–42.

7. Kenner, "Art in a Closed Field," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 38, no. 4 (Autumn 1962), pp. 597–613; Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians: Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962).

8. "Hollis Frampton interview 4/23/76, SFAI," unofficial tape transcript, Pacific Film Archive, p. 7.

9. Mitch Tuchman, "Frampton at the Gates," *Film Comment* (September–October 1977), p. 58. The passage from Kenner is from *The Stoic Comedians*, p. 3.

10. Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses" and "Digressions on the Photographic Agony," *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video, Texts 1968–1980* (Rochester, N.Y.: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), pp. 108, 185.

his major study *The Pound Era*.<sup>11</sup> Finally, as R. Bruce Elder has pointed out, a passage from Frampton's essay "A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative," first published in 1972, bears a strong resemblance to a passage from *The Pound Era*.<sup>12</sup> The process of constructing a genealogy of Frampton's ideas begins with these direct and indirect references.

In January 1963, Frampton and sculptor Andre were continuing their unique exercise in artistic debate, begun in October 1962, with a typed dialogue entitled "On Movies and Consecutive Matters."<sup>13</sup> At a point in the exchange when Frampton is broaching the topic of artistic method, he writes, "Hugh Kenner has said that for the purposes of understanding a work of art, it is often helpful to think of it as though it followed certain rules, like a game."<sup>14</sup> In April of the same year, Frampton writes to his friend Reno Odlin: "Might I paraphrase Kenner thus: 'Poetry (and the arts at large) is not a subject to be studied and certified in, but an enterprise to be inquired into.'" He adds,

For a working artist, this is the necessary point of view. Otherwise, we must, like the adolescent I once was, believe that art is something done by "other people." We must close the set upon a finite group of monuments that excludes our own work. And that is the viewpoint of those who sd/ of the *Cantos*, ok latin, ok greek and french and italian tags, but no chinese. We wish to develop the sensibilities we already have, not to extend the range of our sensibilities. It seems to me that Kenner wd/ have the reader move his consciousness out of the pathetic and into the operational view of art.<sup>15</sup>

These are primary clues, delivered by an artist in formation, one who has yet to develop the public persona of a playfully erudite man of letters. Frampton articulates, through the prism of his own interests, the belief that a particular set of interrelated practices, namely those of the artist and those of the interpreter, need to be democratized. For Frampton, the young artist who seeks to expand beyond a fixed canon of "monuments" and create work that will "extend the range of our sensibilities," Kenner's concepts will be functional and pliable enough to serve his needs for well over a decade.

The intersecting concepts of the open/closed field and the rule-bound game first appear in Kenner's work in "Art in a Closed Field," and again soon afterward in *The Stoic Comedians*. Given that Frampton refers to the game concept

11. Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters: An Historical Comedy* (1968; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

12. R. Bruce Elder, *The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), pp. 100–02. I shall not review the allusion Elder mentions, but I note here that the passage from the "Pentagram" essay is one of many examples of the ironic essentialism discussed later in this essay.

13. Andre and Frampton, "On Movies and Consecutive Matters," pp. 53–56.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

15. Frampton, "Letters from Framp 1958–1968," pp. 41–42.

prior to the publication of the book, it is likely that he read the 1962 article first. Kenner's article argues that poets and novelists of the modern era redefine the boundaries of their respective practices by selecting specific elements from the culture and ordering them according to self-made laws or rules. Describing this method as the arrangement of a finite set of elements within a closed field, Kenner acknowledges that this "sounds like a game," but the game analogy receives only occasional mention, since the closed field is presented as "the dominant intellectual analogy of our time."<sup>16</sup> Resonating with the modernist interest in science and mathematics, the closed field analogy is said to develop from the theory of fields in general number theory.<sup>17</sup> In the 1962 book, Kenner argues that modern literary practice responds and contributes to a post-Enlightenment culture shaped by a variety of functional systems, "proper to the world of IBM, of probability theory, of concern with modes of short-range and long-range causality, historical, sociological, psychological. . . . Inside this analogy The Stoic Comedians elected to imprison themselves, the better, in working out its elaborate games, to mime the elaborate world."<sup>18</sup> In *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Flaubert parodies the encyclopedists who believe in facts but are not possessed of comprehension; in *Ulysses*, Joyce attempts, impossibly, to exhaust an infinite topic, the city of Dublin, within the confines of a finite book. In contrast, Beckett begins with simple, reduced scenarios that expand beyond their pronounced constraints, toward a "paradoxical fecundity."<sup>19</sup> Kenner's stoic comedian feigns a dual closing—of the practice of writing, through a calculated approach to method, and of the manifest subject matter of the text, through a seemingly systematic or reductive approach to structure and/or content. For the comedian, what is funny here is the high-mindedness of those who would, like the Stoics, present a deterministic and moral picture of a world comprised of harmoniously ordered and readily apprehensible parts. The comic game exposes the Stoic's folly through its deployment of structuring principles, which seem to displace beliefs about the power of empiricism, rational systems, and logical orders into the domain of art.

Before reviewing the historical narrative linked to Kenner's concepts, we can begin to examine how this "deliberately wielded" analogy, used to "lend structure and direction to our thoughts," serves Frampton's practice.<sup>20</sup> Immediately following the Kenner reference in the 1963 dialogue, Frampton recalls a significant discovery generated by the production of a series of photographic portraits of Frank Stella, from 1959. The photographer's series can be programmed to include elements he considers errors, "imperfections of my invention," created by his own

16. Kenner, "Art in a Closed Field," pp. 599, 605.

17. It should be noted, however, that Kenner does not offer empirical evidence to support this claim, just as he fails to cite direct references to the analogy in modernist literature, thereby leaving unresolved the issue of whether the critic is creating a new analogy for instructive purposes or identifying an analogy already in circulation.

18. Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians*, p. 96.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

20. Kenner, "Art in a Closed Field," p. 605.

“warning mechanism” or “system.”<sup>21</sup> Retrospectively, Frampton’s discovery can be seen in Kennerian terms: struggling against the narrow confines of a single “sensibility” or style, Frampton designates imperfect and “dangerous” elements for his field in order to ensure some measure of heterogeneity. The game he plays is most valuable when it is expansive, generating diversity in the field of photographic practice and undermining the viewer’s sense of how and why a picture in a series can appear to be “right” or “wrong.” By 1970, when Frampton completes a film, *Zorns Lemma*, which is largely predicated upon the viewer’s discovery of deliberate errors in an ordered structure, he has considered these issues long enough to add a few masterstrokes: he employs the alphabet, an order that is directly linked to processes of learning, and, through the title, makes reference to set theory, thereby signaling the importance of the elements-field relation.

Tellingly, Frampton first refers to the game analogy when discussing method and practice. Frampton shares Kenner’s view that “it is helpful” for artists to think of art as a game because it allows for the reconceptualization of artistic practice as a deliberative act—imaginative, but also selective, purposeful, even practical. The selection of elements for the art work and the creation of rules for the interaction or use of those elements cannot be properly described as merely intuitive activities, since they involve unmistakably cognitive processes of thinking and making. Thus, in an interview from 1980, Frampton maintains that he does not take issue with Sitney’s use of the phrase “sumptuous optical rhetoric” in an analysis of his films.<sup>22</sup> “Rhetoric,” with its intimations of studied presentations and calculated effects, is an acceptable term for the filmmaker who once joked, “All my intentions are conscious.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on, in the interview, to surmise that “Brakhage would be extremely uncomfortable to have it suggested that his cinematography, his diction, his camera vocabulary, was in any sense rhetorical or that it had been deliberately chosen and adopted for a particular reason.” The main implication in Frampton’s statement is that Brakhage refuses to concede that his expressive visual style entails some measure of rational, deliberative choice. Frampton accepts that his practice could be categorized as poesis, but in this case he uses Brakhage as a foil, as he often does from the early 1970s onward, in order to assert that he is not tied to Romantic notions of individual style. This is not necessarily because he rejects the notion of the artist as an expressive individual, but rather due to his view of the limitations of any one particular style, which would seem to provide only one way of seeing things. One of Frampton’s primary models, Pound’s *Cantos*, attempts to “turn the closed field inside out, and make it an instrument of possibilities, not foreclosures,” in Kenner’s words, and as we shall see later, Frampton is

21. Andre and Frampton, “On Movies and Consecutive Matters,” p. 55.

22. Bill Simon, “Talking About *Magellan*: An Interview with Hollis Frampton,” *Millennium Film Journal* 7/8/9 (Fall–Winter 1980–1981), p. 21.

23. Frampton, “Hollis Frampton. IV,” Sound Recording no. 73.6, March 10, 1973, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

highly aware that his own expansive approach, his own version of the open field, has a utopian dimension.<sup>24</sup>

Kenner's broad framework allows an artist such as Frampton the freedom to reconceptualize and revise artistic practice through contemporary methods and concepts that appear to be deeply rooted in the culture. In his discussion of Pound in the final pages of the article, Kenner provides a schematic placement of the poet in an American tradition of independent learning, innovative selection, and perpetual self-invention.<sup>25</sup> Given the fact that American libraries, in their search for material to feed the educational curriculum, have devised their collections with carefully considered choices, in direct contrast to the long-standing European method of expansive accretion, the production of the *Cantos* "parallels the act which for three centuries has constituted the continuing history of the United States: selection, definition, choice, imposed first by frontier circumstances, later by pedagogical necessity, and finally by national habit." In Kenner's view, the inclusions and exclusions in the *Cantos* are decided through a careful process of appraisal, rich with implicit significance. And "what Pound seems to be implying is an adventurous comedy . . . a comedy of discovery." What is funny in this particular comedy is perhaps the lone American autodidact's hubris, his notion that he can build an original curriculum and a new cultural heritage completely on his own, encompassing "any, but any, level of diction, of tone, of subject, personal or public." What is worth taking seriously is the manner in which his deployment of the open field provokes questions—about practices of reading and interpreting, about the self-reliant reformation of tradition, about the relation between structures of order and knowledge, and so on.

It is highly likely that Frampton also read *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, the 1951 book by Kenner that succeeded in alerting the literary community to the scholarly neglect of Pound. Particular attention is paid to Pound's rhetoric of vision, evident in the poet's championing of the "luminous detail," the distinct poetic "image" that communicates directly to the reader. When addressing this issue, Kenner reminds us that "Looking about the world, we know things" and that "knowledge resides in the particulars."<sup>26</sup> In other words, if something like a theory of knowledge can be gleaned from Pound's anti-Romantic practice, then its base claim would be that we begin not with ideas, as Kenner says Descartes would have it, but rather with the apprehension of particulars, in phalanxes, groups, collections, assemblages. Once the base claim is accepted, the poet needs to determine whether ideas can be communicated, with any sort of immediacy, through carefully ordered combinations of specific, apprehensible words.

24. Kenner, "Art in a Closed Field," p. 611.

25. All quotations in this paragraph are from Kenner, "Art in a Closed Field," pp. 611–13.

26. Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), pp. 77, 84.



With the appearance of these theoretical issues, as well as the reference to Descartes, we encounter the basis for important points of distinction between Kenner's modernists and Bloom's Romantics. Consistently concerned with the inter-related issues of epistemology and communication, Kenner's Pound develops an "Ideogrammic Method" that is valued for its inauguration of an analytic tendency in the writer, who must choose the words most appropriate to the phenomena under consideration, and of a cognitive process in the reader, for whom the world has been presented anew through the language of the modernist text. The experiences of both the writer and the reader are to be heightened or intensified by a revived awareness of the word's ability to reach its recipient with immediacy. In Kenner's view, it is the avowal of this belief in the communicating word that sets the modernists apart from the Romantics. Although Kenner never cites it, the following statement by Shelley, from his "Defence of Poetry" of 1820, condenses what the modernist critic takes to be an essential Romantic claim: "when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet."<sup>27</sup> In *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, Shelley and the poets of the "post-Cartesian Romantic Movement" are characterized in terms of a collectively shared and deep-rooted skepticism with regard to language. Kenner discerns in Tennyson and Shelley "an identical distrust of the possibility of any communication, especially of emotional states, without constant comment, constant overt appeal to the reader's experience, habits, and day-dreams." Unlike the Romantic who is "conscious of an audience to be influenced rather than of a poem to be made," the modernist poet avoids "exhortation" by situating emotions and ideas "there on the page—there among the images," for our "steady contemplation, there whenever we return."<sup>28</sup>

Almost ten years after the publication of Kenner's book, Bloom begins to present his interpretation of the Romantics in *Shelley's Mythmaking*. In any number of texts by Bloom published from the sixties through the mid-seventies, Frampton would likely have recognized the claim that Shelley distrusts language. Bloom and Kenner both agree that, for Shelley, conception forms the ideal imaginative state, with linguistic composition marking the onset of creative decline. But alongside this standard interpretation, the reader of Bloom finds the contention that Shelley's view of poetic practice constitutes a heroic position. Within Bloom's canon of visionary poetry, the highest rankings belong to those writers who fully embody the value system articulated by Shelley. If Kenner suggests that the Romantics neglect the "poem to be made," then an analogous point is made by critics who have asserted since the early sixties that, in Bloom's work, the emphasis placed on Romantic poems as visionary "commentaries" facilitates the Romantic

27. Quoted in David Fite, *Harold Bloom: The Rhetoric of Romantic Vision* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. 32.

28. Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, pp. 72, 68.

canonizer's disregard for the complex particulars of "the words on the page" and "the poem-as-object."<sup>29</sup> As literary scholar David Fite and others have noted, Bloom assumes the extremist's position, defending the will of the prophetic poet against not only the textual studies of the New Critics of the fifties but also against the culture of modernity.<sup>30</sup> Bloom's critics see his extended apologia for the Romantic imagination as a rejection of the modernist's standard gestures, in particular the attempted suppression of inspiration and instinct in favor of the demands of the modernist object.

Kenner, acting as the modernist canonizer, goes so far as to propose that Pound's art of cognition is an *advance* over Romantic solipsism and skepticism ("Pound is a far more important figure than Browning or Landor, Eliot than Tennyson or Shelley").<sup>31</sup> Kenner also rejects New Criticism's narrow version of formalism, but without renouncing detailed textual analyses, so long as the words on the page are understood within contextual frameworks, expanding outward to the whole of modern culture. In Fite's view, "the words on the page matter *more than anything else*" for Kenner because "not only are those words the life of the poet" but they also constitute "verbal embodiments of the cultural energy that has helped give them shape."<sup>32</sup> Kenner's critical analyses of Pound's texts are never so insular as to exclude exegetical stories about the culture of modernism, and this feature of his writing likely held substantial appeal for Frampton, who eventually develops, in his mature years, an essayistic combination of formal, conceptual, and historical analysis, and for whom intrinsic structures are so important.<sup>33</sup>

29. Fite, *Harold Bloom: The Rhetoric of Romantic Vision*, p. 32.

30. Obviously, a review of the many debates surrounding Bloom's writings on the Romantics would fall beyond the scope of this essay. The relevance of deconstructionist critiques, such as Jacques Derrida's writings on phonocentrism and Paul de Man's texts on Bloom, is addressed in David Fite's chapter "Humanism in the Extreme: The Predicament of Romantic Redemption," *Harold Bloom: The Rhetoric of Romantic Vision*, pp. 162–87.

31. Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, p. 19.

32. Fite, *Harold Bloom*, p. 177. See also David Fite, "Kenner/Bloom: Canonmaking and the Resources of Rhetoric," *boundary 2* 15, no. 3/16, no. 1 (Spring/Fall 1988). For overviews of Kenner's criticism that complement Fite's analysis, see Marjorie Perloff, "The Outsider as Exemplary Critic: Hugh Kenner," *William Carlos Williams Review* 19, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring/Fall 1993), and Lawrence Lipking, "kenner," *The Denver Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1977).

33. Revisionist scholarship in this area of modernist studies draws upon but also departs from Kenner's early work on Pound, in which the emphasis lies squarely in the poet's *command* of language. For example, in his study of the complex shifts in doctrine among the canonical writers of the modernist avant-garde, Michael Levenson traces the development of "a persistent ambiguity in early modernism: the desire for the autonomy of form and the claim that the root source and justification for art is individual expression." Scholars such as Levenson argue that Romantic individualism was never fully eclipsed by "the autonomy of art, logic, politics and ethics," by polemical views articulated "from the standpoint of objective truth and objective value." Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 135, 133. By contrast, Kenner's pioneering work tends to overstate the modernist rejection of individual, psychic authority. As for Frampton, his essays come closest to Levenson's argument when addressing modernist photography. Of Edward Weston, for example, Frampton writes that he attempts, paradoxically, to construe the photograph as both an autonomous, objective record of reality and a product of the artist's perceptual processes and imaginative, constructive practices.

Before encountering Sitney's adjunction of poetic and cinematic traditions in the concept of "visionary film," Frampton would have found in Kenner's book the construction of a unique analogy, one that connects Pound's images-in-movement with the moving image medium of the cinema. Kenner opens a chapter entitled "The Moving Image" as follows: "The 'motion' of the moving image is contained, ultimately, in the word-to-word jostle of language itself. The simplest sentence 'moves.'"<sup>34</sup> Kenner makes clear that when Pound asks his reader to experience and think about the movement from one word to the next, the poet articulates a modernist view of aesthetic experience that includes both sensual apprehension and intellectual processes. In a later chapter, Kenner explicitly connects the "action" of the *Cantos*, by which he means the complex rhythmic development of recurring words, to Sergei Eisenstein's concept of montage, as set out in "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form" (1949). Kenner refers to Eisenstein's famous discussion of a succession of images that would lead the viewer to "the idea of murder—the feeling of murder, as such,"<sup>35</sup> in order to explain how the *Cantos* function as a "plotless" epic of emotions and ideas, constituting a grand revision of linguistic structures and reading practices. Broadly speaking, both autodidacts, American and Soviet, develop radically revisionist projects, seeking formal and cultural transformations of the structural relationships within a text and of the demands placed upon the interpreter of that text; both use an aesthetic of juxtaposition, or montage, to direct the interpreter to specific feelings and ideas. These general points of connection between both artists are familiar to scholars of modernism by now, but in the 1950s, Kenner's treatment of Eisenstein would likely have assisted Frampton with a crucial transition, from the work of a poet to that of a visual artist working with series.<sup>36</sup> Not long after producing photographic series in his post-poetry phase, Frampton begins to work in film. As Christopher Phillips notes, the still photograph could not provide Frampton with the visual equivalent of a "characteristic element of Poundian poetics, *phanopoeia*, the play of successive images."<sup>37</sup> Eisenstein's preferred machines could, however, and Kenner suggests this quite clearly.<sup>38</sup>

34. Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, p. 62.

35. Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1949), p. 61.

36. Notably, Frampton rejects Eisenstein at an early stage of interest in the cinema. See the letter dated July 18, 1959, in Frampton, "Letters from Framp 1958–1968," p. 32. The nature of Frampton's engagement with Eisenstein's films and writings changes drastically after he commits himself to filmmaking.

37. Christopher Phillips, "Word Pictures: Frampton and Photography," *October* 32 (Spring 1985), p. 69. In a letter from 1962, Frampton notes that Pound's "*Cantos* rest on continuous articulation, almost continuous 'denouement' . . ." Frampton, "Letters from Framp 1958–1968," pp. 37–38.

38. According to Frampton's own chronology, he comes to the realization that he will not become a poet following his 1957 visits to Pound at St. Elizabeth's; after trying his hand at classical scholarship, he explores photography intensively from 1958 through 1962, the year when he first picks up a Bolex movie camera. His period of transition, which ends with the production of his first publicly screened films, lasts from the fall of 1962 until the spring of 1966. By 1973, Frampton tells an audience at the Museum of Modern Art that he has "developed such a quantity of still photography antibodies that if I

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A review of the historical narrative that Kenner develops in *The Stoic Comedians* and *The Counterfeiters* will serve as a point of transition into a key concept in Frampton's writings, namely epistemological inquiry. In *The Counterfeiters*, the counterfeiting gesture embodied in Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes emerges as merely the latest episode in a long trajectory of artists availing themselves of "problems . . . latent in the Western psyche" since art's discovery of itself as art.<sup>39</sup> "That awareness synchronized with, and may have been caused by, the ascendancy of empirical philosophies" that rejected art, in the first moments of its self-realization, on the basis of its disorderly nature. Early in the "Metahistory" essay, the text with which Frampton begins his parallel pursuit of theory and practice in the seventies, a story from *The Counterfeiters* is recounted.<sup>40</sup> A description of a society of radical empiricists who were Jonathan Swift's contemporaries, Kenner's story (and Frampton's gloss) provides an example of the uses and abuses of the experimental science and natural philosophy movements of the seventeenth century. Both Kenner and Frampton intend to remind the reader that the concept of a fact has a history, one that includes periods in which empirical data was intensely fetishized. (In Frampton's "Digressions" essay, the nineteenth-century pursuit of laws, over and above any examination of cultural "assumptions," is attributed to the legacies of Locke and Newton.)<sup>41</sup> According to the narrative endorsed by Frampton, the seventeenth century establishes a tradition of overvaluing the apparent and the sensible, of concentrating exclusively on facts and apprehensible traces while denigrating the imagination.

In the second stage of the narrative, the eighteenth century collects the findings of the new sciences in taxonomic structures. Prominent among these is the encyclopedia, an Enlightenment invention that Kenner calls "a feat of organizing, not a feat of understanding," an allegedly profound and expansive compendium organized according to the reductive and arbitrary method of alphabetization.<sup>42</sup> When Kenner points out that each entry, authored by a particular expert and speaking to a particular implied reader, may have nothing to "say" to the author or reader of another entry, he is pointing to the fragmentary nature of the whole; his depiction suggests that the encyclopedia is not a purely objective record of our world but rather a cultural artifact. In the critical environment to which Flaubert belongs, rationalist, empiricist, and positivist claims about Facts and Things

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ever tried to inhale it again I would get sick and die." Frampton, "Hollis Frampton. IV," Sound Recording no. 73.6, Museum of Modern Art Archives, March 10, 1973. In more than one interview, he attributes his conversion from photographer to filmmaker to the intensification of his interest in the successive movement of images in time.

39. Kenner, *The Counterfeiters*, p. 80.

40. Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 108.

41. Frampton, "Digressions on the Photographic Agony," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 188.

42. Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians*, p. 2.

remain vulnerable to artistic parody.<sup>43</sup> In a magazine interview, Frampton repeats the passage on encyclopedias from *The Stoic Comedians* almost word for word. Instead of citing Kenner, however, he proposes that his musings on encyclopedias developed entirely out of the voracious bibliophilia of his adolescence, thereby transforming a Kenner story into a counterfeit Frampton story.<sup>44</sup>

According to Kenner's interpretation of the canonical literature of modernism, the modernist method places its trust in the power of language, communicating to a cognitive reader through renewed words on composed pages, as the modernist critique questions the culture's faith in empiricism and rational systems. The general appeal of Kenner's work for Frampton would seem to lie in the critic's combination of a rigorously canonical approach to literature with an expansive account of modern ideas and technologies. In Kenner's books, historically significant artifacts and events, such as *Gulliver's Travels* and the conversion of the Babbage Engine into the Turing Machine, are incorporated into a winding narrative of the emergence and transformation of commonly held cultural assumptions. Kenner's network of revelatory historical details, each employed in the analysis of particular assumptions, comprises a conceptual history, and this is the genre of literary criticism that speaks directly to Frampton.<sup>45</sup>

To some interpreters, the critique suggested by Frampton's cinematic parodies of systematic structures may appear to conflict with the implication of a fundamentally metaphysical worldview in some of his essays. As evidenced in his use of terms such as "let us imagine," "let us pretend," and "let us suppose," however, Frampton prefers to explore an ambiguous form of rhetoric, frequently allowing speculations to stand unqualified. By blurring the distinctions between an imaginative conceit, a summary of another writer's theories, and a statement of his own views, Frampton writes himself into the role of a philosophically oriented ironist. Frampton the ironist displays a deep interest in essentialism, of the sort that looks for correspondences between science and transcendental metaphysics,<sup>46</sup> as when

43. Near the end of *The Counterfeiters*, Kenner asserts, "Empiricism is a game. Its central rule forbids you to understand what you are talking about. The application of this rule, when we remember that we are playing a game, yields satire." Kenner, *The Counterfeiters*, p. 173.

44. Kenner makes his point by asking his reader to consider the differences between encyclopedia articles on quaternions, the Renaissance, and waterfalls. Frampton insists that his favorite entries in the twelfth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* are quaternions and waterfalls, going on to restate Kenner's main thesis. See Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians*, p. 3, and Tuchman, "Frampton at the Gates," p. 58.

45. Looking beyond the highly serviceable field/game analogy, a number of topics and concepts appear in both Kenner's and Frampton's writings. Due to limitations of space, this essay will not analyze further points of connection. Instead, I refer the reader to the chapter-length version of this essay in my forthcoming dissertation.

46. Frampton's interest in transcendental ideas is also evident in his references to the work of Jorge Luis Borges. Borges serves as a model for Frampton's writing not only for his interest in idealism, theories of time, and the history of metaphysics, but also for his merging of scholarly criticism and fiction in a profoundly intertextual project. Under the influence of Borges, Frampton develops a writing style that Annette Michelson describes as a "concerted confusion of genres." Annette Michelson, "Poesis/Mathesis," *October* 32 (Spring 1985), p. 6.

Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of Events and Eternal Objects is somehow confirmed by neurophysiological studies of the "protolinguistic sign" in pheromonal and neuromuscular communication.<sup>47</sup> Irony permits Frampton the freedom to articulate and explore, in any manner he chooses, those positions that are articulated in Kenner's narrative.<sup>48</sup> But he differs from Kenner when he directs his attention to the primary essentialist traditions of the modernist visual arts, as laid out in his essay on Edward Weston: the medium-specific investigations and doctrines of the arts and modernism's subsequent pursuit of broader ontological questions, which moved "to strip the pretext of the visual image or the referent of the linguistic artifact to its own proper set of specifications as well."<sup>49</sup> With an eye to the former tradition, Frampton differentiates between film and video, for example; his appreciation for the latter tradition informs the connections he constructs between the concepts of science and those of idealism.

Perhaps nostalgically, but never naively, Frampton writes *as if* artists were still constructing grand metaphysical or essentialist theories of art and existence in the manner of the modernists. But Frampton's commitments lie elsewhere, in a homegrown combination of sociohistorical, anthropological, and epistemological theories.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the corpus of his published texts, works of art are analyzed in terms of their artifactual status: they are taken to be the material products of the purposeful practices of individuals and collectives, subject to change as values and norms change. He begins applying the term in his essays in 1971, when he conjures up a "class" of artifacts called metahistories. Produced by the artist who searches for the historical elements that will constitute his or her tradition, each metahistory is an active and open rearrangement of historical chronologies and verifiable facts. These imagined artifacts of historical reinterpretation "made things strong in their own immanence," constituting "an open set of rational fictions . . . [that] bid as fairly for our contemplative energy as any other human fabrications. They are, finally, about what it felt like to reflect consciously upon the qualities of experience in the times they expound." Acting as usable frames for cultural history, metahistories "remain events in themselves."<sup>51</sup> If each is "about" the thinking that went into its making, this is not only because they are

47. Frampton, "Impromptus on Edward Weston: Everything in Its Place," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 152.

48. David E. James has argued that Structural filmmakers employ "predetermined protocols" in order, in part, to "ironize" such usages, thereby creating "internal tensions" (between opposed practices, formal elements, ideas, and so on), which can be explored and elaborated through film itself. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 244. In Frampton's case, irony allows him to examine opposed epistemic views (such as historicism and essentialism) in his films and writings.

49. Frampton, "Impromptus on Edward Weston," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 142.

50. The significance of essentialist and historiographic or historicist perspectives for Frampton's writings was first addressed by Noël Carroll, "A Brief Comment on Frampton's Notion of Metahistory" (1986), reprinted in his *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 313–17.

51. Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film," *Circles of Confusion*, pp. 107–08.

created through a process of conscious deliberation but also because human reflection is embodied in artifacts.

Frampton's continued treatment of embodiment in the artifact finds him adding new terms in his 1972 essay on Paul Strand. "Let us suppose," he writes, that every art work "assumes an entire cosmology," discernible in its "deliberative structure," which is defined as "what is apparent, that is, the denumerable field of elements and operations that constitute the permanent artifact of record"; its "axiomatic substructure," made up of that which is "handed" to the artist by culture or tradition, "implies an entire epistemology."<sup>52</sup> (Combining Frampton's terms with Kenner's schema, we can say that the blind believer in Facts would look only to the deliberative structure, while the axiomatic substructure would be explored by the Stoic comedian.) The photographer becomes an "epistemologist" when investigating the cultural assumptions embodied in photography's appearances (in its prints) and in its "normative" processes. According to this particular photographic sensibility, as articulated in Strand's early essays, "the least discernible modification (from a conventionalized norm) of contrast or tonality must be violently charged with significance, for it implies a changed view of the universe, and a suitably adjusted theory of knowledge."<sup>53</sup> (Frampton parodies his own formulation in his 1974 essay on video, when he writes that he is "tempted" to view each family's calibration of the image-adjustment knobs on the household television set as "an adequation of the broadcast image to the family's several notions of the universe.")<sup>54</sup>

Two years later, the axiomatic substructure concept is developed further in a published lecture on composition, which draws upon Pound's 1931 text "How to Read." The depiction of Pound resembles that of Strand in the earlier essay, insofar as each becomes a representative of the idea that the autonomy of art lies in its materials, which Frampton compares to the Symbolist "notion that language . . . should, of its own nature, tend to secrete poems."<sup>55</sup> The autonomy issue is tangential, however, to the problem of how aesthetic texts and practices are interpreted and, more specifically, to the question of what can actually be learned from epistemological inquiry. Expanding upon the claim, made first in the essay on Strand, that axioms (by which he seems to mean both the implicit assumptions and the explicit principles that inform the production of an art work) are "subject . . . to change on very short notice,"<sup>56</sup> Frampton gives us a sense of how complex the

52. Frampton, "Meditations around Paul Strand," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 131.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 132–33.

54. Frampton, "The Withering Away of the State of the Art," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 169.

55. Frampton, "Notes on Composing in Film," *The Stoic Comedians*, p. 118. This Symbolist idea is referenced again in Frampton, "Impromptus on Edward Weston," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 145. Frampton's interpretation of Symbolism is consistent with the views articulated in Hugh Kenner, "The Poetics of Error," *MLN* 90 (1975), pp. 738, 740, and in Kenner's chapter "The Persistent East," in *The Pound Era*, *passim*.

56. Frampton, "Meditations around Paul Strand," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 131.

practices of composition and reception have become in the contemporary climate. Interdisciplinary influences and interests abound, intentional misinterpretations and the Cagean negation of deliberate decisions have acquired a heightened value, and any new axiom can be superseded once it becomes readable, thereby assuming “the historical role of all norms.”<sup>57</sup> In Frampton’s strategic response to this labyrinth of motives, assumptions, and contexts, he advances the theory that “one learns to write mainly by reading those texts that embody ‘invention,’” since “what we learn when we read a text is how it was written.”<sup>58</sup> This Poundian premise can be restated to bring out its fundamentally prescriptive point: writers must be critical readers if they are to learn their practice, and while each and every reader does not always read in order to write, all critical readers must take into consideration the practice of writing. The initial identification and isolation of works belonging to the artist’s “immediately apprehensible” tradition falls under the heading of reading; “unlearning,” as Pound calls it, follows reading with an “excerment, castigation, and transvaluation” of the axiomatic substructure of those works.<sup>59</sup> Unlike the artist, whose misreading is sanctioned if it leads to an imaginative reinterpretation of an axiomatic substructure, the critical interpreter faces a “predicament,” a cultural imperative to understand the artist’s readings and misreadings simultaneously. Somewhat less directly than in his earlier advancement of the artist who acts as an epistemologist, Frampton suggests that the active, critical interpreter must recognize both the individual and the more broadly based cultural perspectives, or worldviews, embodied in the innovative work of art and situate it in a complex historical field, or “open set.”<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, Frampton finds emblematic practitioners of epistemological inquiry in modernism, especially among its writers and photographers. Yet if Eisenstein emerges as one of only a few filmmakers discussed directly in the writings, this can be attributed to Frampton’s assessment of film history. For if Eisenstein is the cinema’s first committed epistemologist, as Frampton suggests, decades will pass before the art form witnesses the effects of his legacy, in the New York film scene of the 1960s. As the North American revival of intellectual cinema gains prominence, Frampton finds that the response of contemporary criticism and theory is falling wide of the mark; soon enough, he begins to publish his views on theoretical and historical issues in aesthetics. And while he tends to refrain from criticizing the critics in print, he remains vocal and opinionated in public discussions and private correspondence. To our opening quotation, from the 1976 talk, we might add another, taken from the corrective suggestions sent by Frampton to film critic Wanda Bershen, in response to an early draft of her 1971 *Artforum* article on *Zorns Lemma*. After dividing earlier filmmakers such as Maya Deren and Kenneth Anger along Freudian and Jungian lines, he asserts that

57. Frampton, “Notes on Composing in Film,” *Circles of Confusion*, p. 121.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 122.



The most striking break that the cinema of structure makes with previous *genera* is in its repudiation of *psychology* in favor of *epistemology*. One effect this has is to widen both the field of reference (*vide* Snow's interest in Valery, mine in mathematics) and the comprehensible "Tradition" (Landow's 'found' footage; Jacobs' *Tom Tom* which proceeds from pre-psychological, even autobiographical interests in physiognomy and gesture).<sup>61</sup>

The Structural filmmaker is a metahistorian and an epistemologist, best understood as yet another version of the American artist as self-inventing autodidact. Rejecting the clichés of feeling and conventions of form associated with the psychology model, Frampton's filmmaker-epistemologist seeks to expand the tradition of cinema on deliberative (formal, material) and axiomatic (conceptual) levels. The new tradition follows Eisenstein in its dual exploration of the nature of the cinema and of the nature of our perceptual and cognitive experiences in general. Ken Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (1969), for example, allows the viewer to reflect upon cinematic spectatorship, cinematic narrative, cinematic illusionism, cinematic tableaux, cinematic history, and so on; but it is also a film that attempts to convey a primary fascination with the human body and its movements as visible phenomena.

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Frampton the filmmaker places himself "very clearly on the side of Eisenstein [as opposed to André Bazin], drastically and, again, utopianly so," employing montage in the service of an investigation of the "special place of the spectator and the nature of the spectator's task."<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, he states that his own *Magellan* project "offers to the spectator the possibility of a posture that's so active in relation to the work that it borders on the utopian or it is utopian."<sup>63</sup> In Frampton's utopia, the manifestly schematic and permutational structures of his films signal to the viewer that his or her attention is being directed in a deliberate and purposive manner. Thus, the challenge to conventional viewing practices offered by each of his films is met by viewers who assume a reflective stance. From within that stance, Frampton's viewers consider a range of issues, including the nature of temporal experience and the ways in which meaning can be ascribed to the sounds, words, and images encountered in a particular film.<sup>64</sup> These considerations revolve

61. Hollis Frampton, n.d., Files of Anthology Film Archives, New York. Bershens's draft is titled "On Film, or the Ingression of Hollis Frampton." For the published version, see Wanda Bershens, "Zorns Lemma," *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971), pp. 41–45.

62. Simon, "Talking About *Magellan*," p. 22.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

64. In a revealing statement addressed to Jonas Mekas, Frampton explains that he is exploring how "the contents of the film frame may now resolve itself, and come to equilibrium, not only in space but in time as well—as, indeed, a whole work of film art may only come to equipoise in time. Or, if you will, in the mind, in our affections, since time would seem to be one of our supreme artifacts." Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice* (March 3, 1975), p. 75.

around the power of new montage structures, new ways of ordering the set or field, and around the thoroughly *constructed* nature of those structures.<sup>65</sup>

There is a concept that encapsulates a primary goal of Frampton's version of epistemological inquiry, one that appears in a discussion of organizational methodology as it pertains to *Surface Tension*, the 1968 film he describes as his first venture into the complexities of both horizontal and vertical montage. The "control structure" for a film, like Kenner's field analogy, is used to "hold it together," without resorting to "direct or obvious narrative."<sup>66</sup> According to Frampton's explanation of the term, the control structure becomes an instrument for the reduction or expansion of possibilities, depending upon the practitioner's inclinations. In the examples of Symbolism and Surrealism, traditions that attempt to release words or images "from the constraint of 'making sense,'" the aesthetic that attempts to liberate language from conventional structures of meaning explores the idea that "words actually construct or manufacture sense before our eyes."<sup>67</sup> Groupings of words, and of images, seem to produce their own "inherent" control structures, appearing to hold themselves together meaningfully, even within deliberately nonsensical constructions. Given the human tendency to look for meaning in the discernible elements of a human artifact, the communicating word or image often appears to be making meaning independently, "before our eyes." The reactionary response to the "rich, massive, and powerful" nature of the syntactic relations among the words and/or images of a particular artifact is reductive; it seeks to "limit the choice among those control structures and their actions," as in the essentialist attempt "to whittle painting down to intelligibility or a small set of intelligibilities." In contrast, by "mak[ing] possible a kind of naive 'use' of an enormous structure" such as language itself, Frampton's project composes control structures in order to ask the viewer to take up, within the practice of spectatorship, an expansive attitude toward the creation of meaning.

Yet the control structure is a very general concept, and in practice it cannot guarantee a realization of Tom Frampton's utopian vision. In an unpublished letter from 1971, he praises *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* because it

sorts the sheep from the goats. You gotta *love FILM* to dig it. In that sense, *ZL* [*Zorns Lemma*] may pull the punch—its [*sic*] possible to dig *ZL* (I think) through mere enjoyment of being in touch with your own head (rare enough, but perhaps not precisely the same thing).<sup>68</sup>

65. Frampton's use of montage to solicit spectatorial participation has been addressed insightfully by a few scholars. The major study is Bruce Jenkins, "The Films of Hollis Frampton: A Critical Study," Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1984; see also James Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-garde Cinema*; and Jim Hillier, "(nostalgia) (1971)," *Movie 34/35* (Winter 1990), pp. 98–102.

66. MacDonald, "Hollis Frampton," *Critical Cinema*, p. 43.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

68. Hollis Frampton, letter to Sally Dixon, May 25, 1971, Files of Anthology Film Archives, New York.

In Frampton's view, the viewer cannot bend *Tom Tom* to his or her own will. The manner in which Jacobs's film directs the viewer, through close-ups, for example, to various material or illusionistic details in the original footage, is, as the filmmaker and numerous critics have pointed out, deeply didactic. To some significant degree, the viewer must share Jacobs's epistemological concerns or reject the film altogether. In contrast, the viewer of *Zorns Lemma* may construct a pleasurable aesthetic experience by following the matches between letters, words, and images in the alphabetical middle section of the film, or, more simply, by watching a montage of interesting images that unfolds without the added complication of sound. Elsewhere, Frampton declares that "I've always thought of that game-playing aspect of *Zorns Lemma* as the fool's gold of the film" and that, in both *Zorns Lemma* and *nostalgia* (1971), this aspect "is a kind of bait, a lure, rather than the whole substance of the film."<sup>69</sup> Since the manifest structure of either film can be reordered as a simple, linear schema, Frampton wonders, in moments of doubt, whether the participatory viewer will neglect those knottier, more intricate tasks that call for a variety of interpretive approaches—formal, conceptual, intertextual, historical, even autobiographical. Thus, Frampton's utopian position appears to have been tempered by an awareness of the risks he had undertaken, or at least of the possibility that the dynamically responsive spectator he seeks, the agent willing to "move his consciousness out of the pathetic and into the operational view of art," might not be there at all.

In Frampton's last direct citation of Kenner in print, a brief discussion of "the task of criticism" is followed by a quotation from *The Pound Era* that begins, "There is no substitute for critical tradition: a continuum of understanding, early commenced."<sup>70</sup> According to Kenner, contemporary readers have a better sense of "what to make of" a literary work when it is enriched by a significant corpus of critical response, initiated upon (and continued after) the work's publication. This is an issue addressed implicitly in Frampton's 1976 criticism of Sitney's text, to which we can return once more. Having surveyed Frampton's engagement with a major critical tradition, we can see that Sitney is at least partially correct when he discusses poetic tradition in the final pages of his Structural film chapter. After all, Sitney mentions Pound in his analysis of *Zorns Lemma*, and Symbolism appears in the final paragraph, as the aesthetic to which the Structural filmmakers return, since it allows "a new imagery" to arise "from the dictates of the form."<sup>71</sup> Despite his protestations, Frampton would seem to be in partial agreement with Sitney. But the critic's claim that the viewer's "perception of the film [*Zorns Lemma*] is a participation in the discovery of the ordering," a claim with which the filmmaker would also likely find himself in accord, is not accompanied by any reference to Kenner's ideas (such as his notion that Pound's *Cantos* are comedies of discovery). Given

69. MacDonald, "Hollis Frampton," *Critical Cinema*, p. 63.

70. Frampton, "Digressions on the Photographic Agony," *Circles of Confusion*, p. 185.

71. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 397.

the depth of his debt to Kenner's version of modernism, Frampton appears to be criticizing Sitney for attaching a label to a contemporary development too readily, before providing a more extensive genealogy of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of the filmmakers he analyzes in his book. In Frampton's reading, Bloom's version of the Romantic visionaries casts a long shadow over *Visionary Film*, obscuring a modern conceptual history of epistemological inquiry.

Thus, the crucial task for the revisionist is a matter of constructing different points of connection. Frampton's own words can take us only so far. While his writings and interviews do much to illuminate obscured lines of development, his highly playful approach, which embraces wit and irony, as well as indirect allusion and intertextual intricacy, seems designed to address an impossibly learned reader. This study comprises one contemporary reply to the practitioner's call for a continuum of critical response, and it is submitted in anticipation of a return to serious scholarship on his work.