



VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP PRESS

Circles of Confusion

Film/Photography/Video Texts 1968-1981
by Hollis Frampton,
foreword by Annette Michelson

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photographs

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Hollis Frampton is most well known as an independent filmmaker, but has been lecturing and writing about photography, film and video for a long time and in many places and publications. Circles of Confusion assembles eleven articles from exhibition catalogs and from October and Artforum. What Frampton does as a critic is much like what he does as a filmmaker, which is to strip the creative process down to its basic elements, then arrange and display the components....

Frampton's role in this is critic-as-conjurer. He prestidigitates ideas and illusions from everywhere--history, psychology, philosophy, literature, even archaeology, whatever might apply. However much he may circle, though, he always comes back to basic ontological questions. What is photography? Film? Video? What are the properties that make them unique? What has film to do with narrative? Photography with space and time? Beyond a king these questions Frampton also conjectures about the possible ways of asking them and the likelihood of getting an answer. He also plays the role of critic-as-authoritative-voice, but by exposing the jagged mechanisms of thought makes the reader much more than a participant in the process than is usually the case.

Dan Meinwald

It is only with the intervention of photography, along with its evolutionary progeny, film and video, that a reproducible and verifiable stream of images begins, just as the historic stream of words begins, for us, not with the articulating voice but with print, the sociable image of language. Language and image are the substances of which we are made; so it is much more than a matter of interest--it is our most inescapable and natural desire--that we undertake to invent, and to specify (using language, and even subverting it, if we can) the system of images. Such a project needs forbearance: even the notion of a grammar of the image, which must, itself, finally wither away in favor of a syntax, recedes perpetually, merging imperceptibly into that zone where intelligence struggles to preserve a distinction between what may be brought into focus and what may not.

Eventually, we may come to visualize an intellectual space in which the systems of words and images will both, as Jonas Mekas once said of semiology, "seem like half of something," a universe in which image and word, each resolving the contradictions inherent in the other, will constitute the system of consciousness.

Hollis Frampton
from the preface

Fictions and the fictions of theory are elaborated and deployed in this discourse upon film and photography seen as the projections of "the philosophical toy." They are philosophical in the sense of the period of their birth: the nineteenth century. "Scientific," we say.

The singularity of this discourse, the intonation of its voice are those of the theorist as fabulist, the artist as savant, engaged in the persistently playful questioning of the thin and fragile certitudes of the newest of artistic practices.

Annette Michelson

Hollis Frampton is a frequently published theorist of film, still photography, and video. Most of the articles collected here originally appeared in Artforum and October. Frampton has taught filmmaking, photography and film history at the Free University, the School of Visual Arts, the Cooper Union, Hunter College, and the Visual Studies Workshop. He is currently Associate Professor in the Center for Media Study at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Frampton has completed over forty films. His work is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art; the Anthology Film Archives, New York; the Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; and elsewhere. The Royal Film Archive of Belgium, Brussels, preserves the entire body of Hollis Frampton's work. He has had major retrospective showings at the Walker Art Center, 1972; the Museum of Modern Art, 1973; the Fifth International Festival of Experimental Film in Belgium, 1974. Since 1972, Frampton has been at work on Magellan, a film cycle of epic proportions.