

# CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

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## Independent Filmmaker, Hollis Frampton, Lecture

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Sally Dixon: It is that time. Good evening. You have program notes that are giving you the facts on Hollis Frampton and he's been here before, so this is really the second time many of you have had them. I hope there are a number of you to whom they are new. Read your notes for the facts of his life and I want to just give you a brief rundown on his history in Pittsburgh, which by now is a couple of years old.

He came here to begin with on January 21<sup>st</sup> in 1971 at my invitation, or the Film Section's invitation, because I had met him at the Flaherty Seminar the preceding summer, where he was wearing an outrageous head of hair and no vest and he returns now with the same head of hair and an outrageous vest to match, which is kind of nice. So things are advancing.

He screened a number of films that first time and asked to shoot some film. By then Brakhage had begun shooting *Eyes* or I think had just shot *Eyes* and possibly begun on *Deus Ex* and the word had gotten around that it was possible to shoot things in Pittsburgh that maybe were difficult to get elsewhere. Hollis had begun hatching on this plan to do a film called *The Clouds of Magellan* which includes of course *The Straits of Magellan*. Tonight we'll see drafts and fragments from that.

For it, he felt he needed sequences to be shot of a dissection or dissections. We got permission to shoot these at the Pitt Medical School with great cooperation of Dr. Sona, and went up and spent an unforgettable day there. We kept trying to get help, someone to do the backup camera, [00:02:00] and I think ended up with one other person and me. I shall never forget that day as long as I live. What I thought was going to be a horrible experience, and was in fact horrible, was also incredibly beautiful and very moving for the three of us.

I think it comes through in the film. You're not going to see that part tonight because he's using it in a different part of the longer film. Nevertheless, it was shot in Pittsburgh and was sort of the beginning of Hollis' encounter with this city. After that, he returned and – I think it was after that – and shot a sequence at U.S. Steel, or maybe it was the reverse. They were kind enough to give him permission to shoot at the open hearth. He went for two days, accompanied by several of their people who were very helpful to him and got what I feel is some of the most beautiful footage I've ever seen, unedited.

As a matter of fact, he brought it back to show it in Pittsburgh after the it had been processed over at the new workshop and I think there were very few things that I or anyone else would have cut of it. Just in itself seeming so complete and he's leaving after this trip to go back and begin work on that. It's all weaving in even though the time passes and years pass, this isn't a work obviously that's going to be rushed. He can tell you a little bit more about the structure of it.

Another time he came back and went over to Carnegie Mellon University to investigate the possibility of working with the computers because it is a massive work and I think would maybe take him the rest of his life if he were to do it with his own workings out or the hope is that it can possibly be speeded up with the aid of some of our technology and the city has been helpful in those ways.

He also was here to celebrate Brakhage's 39<sup>th</sup> birthday – some of you may remember that day and that year – and returned again, [00:04:00] I think, showing the U.S. Steel footage to celebrate the opening of the workshop in the basement of the Selma Burke Art Center. All together he's really figured in the film life of this city or at least the sort of advent of activities of various groups, various interests in film in the city, and is now talking about coming back later in the spring because he's got to leave tomorrow afternoon.

I suggested that he come back when the workshop moves to Oakland and maybe help us celebrate the opening of that place with the edited footage of the U.S. Steel sequence which I think would be fitting since it was shot here ... Whoops. Is that us or elsewhere? No, it's not here. I think something else is alive ... His work to me is just extraordinary and I think maybe it's better that he talk about it. Those of you who are here, I think a number of you are in Bill Judson's class and I hope have done some of the background that's led up to Hollis Frampton's work historically, art-wise, film-wise.

There will be a time for questions and answers and Hollis will also talk about the films, or the pieces that he's showing tonight, before we get into them and in between. Welcome to Hollis Frampton yet again.

Hollis Frampton: It's nice to be back. When I was a kid, before the invention of fire and the wheel, there used to be [00:06:00] a kind of ritual or a social occasion which was called "going to the movies." No one goes to the movies anymore of course. One goes to see *films* or one goes to escape the tube. But there was a time when going to the movies was such a highly structured thing that it had the force and indeed the formality of the celebration of the mass – or it's as close as I ever came to it anyhow. That celebration or that ritual consisted in those days, before it got chopped down to just "swallow the Eucharist and run," of a number of parts.

Typically, there would be a newsreel. There would be a cartoon. There would be previews of coming attractions. There would be something in the nature of travel or instruction or exoticism. Then finally, we would get around to *Fu Manchu* and *Billy the Kid*; you see I'm going back to the Wayne Theater in Wooster, Ohio, which was right next to the Greyhound Bus station, about the year 1940 or something like that.

Generally, just about the time you got to the real stuff – although one did not then know it was the real stuff, one would believe that it was all part of the purifying enlightenment of going to the movies – well, you ran out of popcorn or you got into a fight or you had to go to the bathroom or something like that, so that the celebration always fell apart into two parts just as Buster Crabbe [00:08:00] was about to start doing his stuff. There you were outside and would generally check back in, since you certainly wanted to get your dime's worth, or I did.

I am taking the ritual break tonight. There will be a newsreel. There will be a cartoon. There will be previews of coming attractions. There will be an exotic travelogue and then the program will end. As they use to say in my favorite Third Avenue bar at five minutes past four in the morning, after that, "you don't have to go home, boys, but you can't stay here." The newsreel and the cartoon are fittingly brief. I'm afraid about

the newsreel in particular that I'm going to have to go into more length than I had ever thought I would.

The newsreel is a film, of course. It is the shortest film I have ever made. I believe it is the shortest film that anyone has made, that they have declared a complete work. It is one second in length. I think that beats Stan Brakhage's *Eye Myth* by a factor of seven – that is almost an order of magnitude – and it is called *Less*. As you can see, I have already spent more time talking about it than ... It's a problematical work for me because it was after year [00:10:00] 1972, in which I made two and a half hours of work; after year 1971, in which I made nearly two hours of work; after year 1970, in which I made only one film but that film was *Zorn's Lemma* and cost me ... well, let's say I feel that I can account from my time during that year.

In 1973, I made one second of film. It seems as though the situation in filmmaking was very painful during 1973. The Chinese of course say that it was the Year of the Ox. We know how you make an ox. It is different from the way you make a steer. You take a full-grown bull to make an ox. It's a more worrisome proposition. The steer doesn't know what he has missed.

It was more like, from a magnitude of what I accomplished, the Year of the Cockroach or something like that. So that amounts to a kind of aesthetic newsreel of the year 1973 in 24 frames. That should be easy, except that for the first time in my hitherto ... in a public career that as far as I know, by direct confrontation if not by innuendo, has been pure as the driven snow, I have made a film that might be considered to have prurient interest.

Such are the events in the state of Pennsylvania as I understand them – I'm an outsider, of course – as to make suddenly that questionable. Now, I'm going to have to explain the situation further. There are 24 frames in this film, each of which is visible through a fiftieth of a second. [00:12:00] Of those 24 frames, about eight reveal frontally the forbidden parts, or some of the forbidden parts, of the anatomy of a moderately attractive woman in her twenties, I would judge. That means that about eight frames or eight-fiftieths or one-sixth of a second is devoted to this material of prurient interest.

Since I have, to afford a better understanding of the work, mounted 24 prints of it on one reel, that means that this prurient interest is liable to be before your eyes for 24 times one-sixth, or four seconds all together. I'm a believer in community standards. When I am in my own house or when I am alone in my house with friends or when I'm in the houses of my friends, I feel that it is only reasonable that we not do anything among us that is not mutually agreeable to all of the people there or to most of the people there.

That is a principle that I feel to be civilized and would under no conditions transgress upon, so that it appears since we are here in this public place, we might constitute ourselves a group. Since I would not offend anyone under any circumstances with material of prurient interest, I will then simply ask you whether you want to see this [00:14:00] or not. It is up to you. I can show it other places. I can show it in my own house where I'm not perhaps offended by quite the same things that the State of Pennsylvania is offended by.

I will call then for a voice vote. May we have the yeas? The nays? It appears that the ayes have it. So before we go on to this cartoon, I think it just would be reasonable very quickly to look at the newsreel. It won't take long.

... in '73. Onward then to 1974, the Year of the Tiger, for which I have better hopes, and then to the cartoon. I began several years ago. I was looking over some old carbon copies a few weeks ago and I found that something called *The Clouds of Magellan* and *The Straits of Magellan* go back rather farther than I had thought, to 1961 it would seem. My views of what those things might be probably have changed a good many times or have undergone modification, and over a period of seven or eight years, I have made footage that I, in one way or another, felt obscurely had something to do with that work or had [00:16:00] something to do with something, and then have sat on it, like a bird sitting on her eggs, waiting to see what might come out.

I began, finally, early in January, after I had had some insights that I will describe later, to edit some of this material to begin to perhaps not so much *make* as find a shape that those images might be seeking among themselves. The portion of the work that I was editing is something that you will see later tonight. It's made from footage that was shot in November of 1972 to [J. Bartush] Meat Packing Company in South Saint Paul, Minnesota which is a slaughterhouse, footage that I had memorized, had lived with, had incubated, had had in my house for a year and a half, I would say.

The work was in one way or another making me sweat, so I decided to take a break. Well, when it's 30 degrees below zero and blowing hard in upstate New York, when you take a break, you sort of walk around the room, you see. I walk around in this room and it's a troublesome room, of course, because there are shelves on two sides [00:18:00] of it which are stacked high with cans of shot and processed footage which also represent unmet responsibilities and dreams one kind or another and so forth, and they stare you in the face.

Quite curiously, what stared me in the face was a little pile of three cans, three rolls of film that I had made very casually one night at what in fact was a very boring demolition derby on a muddy field in the rain at the Madison County, NY County Fair in the summer of 1971 that I had given very little thought to. As I looked at the tin cans, I realized suddenly and I knew precisely what to do with it. I made this film in six hours of fairly studied splicing. It is called *Noctiluca*. The noctiluca is a little animal that lives in the sea and glows when it is disturbed.

As I was finishing it, for reasons that I'm not sure of especially because I haven't tried it out on its target audience yet, I had the sense that it was a film for children – not, I think, in any cutie-pie ways, a little spooky or it's anything at all - but perhaps in the way that Bartok said that his piano pieces in the large cycle called *Mikrokosmos* or piano pieces for children. As for *Less* and perhaps I should say also for *Noctiluca* and for all of the work that will be shown tonight: three and a half minutes, color, silent, *Noctiluca* world premiere. That's the finished work. [00:20:00]

Now, I somewhat ... I don't know, we live in civilized times. I nevertheless show what follows. I suppose for some years I shall have to show most of what I show with a

certain sense of taking my life in my hands. The last person, I believe, who released, who cast adrift, who let go of pieces of anything of such magnitude that it might be referred to as Utopian or Leviathanic or something like that was James Joyce and he let out pieces, riffs of *Finnegans Wake* over a period of 17 years, at least maintaining some its connections in chimera under the title *Work in Progress*.

His experience, I think, in doing that was not all together promising. Mostly he had himself in for – in his case of course, because he was a literary artist of enormous reputation and in particular of scandalous reputation on account of a series of specialized misunderstandings about *Ulysses* which had preceded it - the subject of all kinds of [00:22:00] strange and bizarre theories about what it was about and so forth, which must be difficult to take if you don't know quite yet yourself.

However, I do this and I suppose it's necessary for me to say a little bit about what it is. First of all, there is this monstrosity floating around somewhere in the lower centers of my brain, the hypothalamus or some handy place like that which controls things like in knee-jerk reflexes and whether or not you remember not to wet the bed and that sort of thing, which reaches up and tickles my conscious lobes every now and then. It is something that I call, at least as a working title, *Clouds of Magellan*.

*Clouds of Magellan* is something that I have been at work on for some time in bits and pieces and have notions here and there of the sceme of the whole thing, and it would appear thus far that there will be seven parts: the Dream of Magellan, the Birth of Magellan, the Small Cloud of Magellan, Straits of Magellan, the Large Cloud of Magellan, the Death of Magellan, and then something that I'm not settled upon, but it would seem to be the house, personal effects, speculations, and private papers of Ferdinand Magellan.

What we need concern ourselves here with at the moment is only the *Straits*, the fourth part of seven or the pivot of it, which as projected will run, it would seem, somewhere in excess of ten hours. [00:24:00] I swear I didn't ask for it. This has happened to me before. It happened to me with *Hapax Legomena* two and three years ago. Something that I thought when it all began that I could make a nice 10-minute film of myself burning some old pictures or something like that. I woke one morning to find out that I was being squatted upon and obliterated by a three and a half hour monstrosity with which I personally still feel great discomfort, in particular it wears me out.

To see wheeling in like a kind of flying saucer or something, something even larger, which is yet only a part of something larger, still worries me. I worry especially that somebody might try to cram down somebody else's throat the whole blooming thing in one sitting. Like one of those ... if any of you have ever been to Bayreuth, I have not and hope I never will be, to have all of the *Ring* cycle jammed into you, like corn into a pathological goose meant for the production of pate, in one day, plus a certain amount of beer and some hard marble benches and mosquitos as the evening wears on and so forth. Oh, boy. That's mind-destroying, where one had hoped to share something or to have something one could oneself stand to look at, you see, without just total fatigue.

Nevertheless, how did it begin to come about? It began to come about first of all with a fascination for that most inexplicable [00:26:00] part of the whole history of film, the very early cinema, the films of the Lumière, the Lumière Brothers. It's wonderful that *lumière* means *daylight*, of course. The film was really invented by somebody – if you discount Edison, who just invented the light bulb – somebody whose name really means *light*.

They made thousands of films, of which upwards of 2,000 are still in existence, in which they had only a small camera that held 100 feet of 35mm film, more or less 30 meters. 35mm film runs through the camera at 90 feet per minute. They would find something ... They would find their film or they would see it and they would turn the camera on and it would run. When the film all ran out of the camera, the movie was over. No editing. Rarely any camera movement of any kind. No focus pulling. No filters. On a few occasions, there was acting.

The body of work is large and it stands at this kind of mythic beginning of cinema and nobody has ever found anything to do about except look at it. It has remained mysterious. Vast superstructures larger than this building have been built around the Russian films of the heroic period, if you will, the period immediately after the October Revolution or the decade thereafter. Nobody has managed to say more than “Huh” about this vast body of works, so I thought, “Well, I’ll try that out. I’ll make some one-minute things and see if I can find out how they work.”

I commenced doing that and there are now upwards of 200 of them and other considerations have intruded. [00:28:00] As I began to wonder what was going to happen with them, two things took place within about a month of each other, one of which has to do with birds and the other has to do with fat old ladies. First the birds. Where I live I am surrounded by greedy birds. The winters are hard. Like most of my neighbors I raise sunflowers for them. I was walking around in the pasture behind my house looking at a sunflower seed head in October which the greedy things had already picked clean, you see. It was supposed to last until April or something like that and there it was, empty.

If you have ever looked at the seed head of a sunflower, you’ll know that it is not simply the random packing together of so many little things squeezed as tight as they will go. Rather that it has a pattern which is intricate and is generated by a set of interlacing spirals. If you have held one in your hand, you know that the petals and sepals curl up around the edge. As I was holding it, it fell crosswise to a late sun and a series of very narrow paths or rays of light passed through that edge of the flower head.

Each path marked a series of empty cells and I had very sudden, a daydream if you will – a vision if you will not – in which there was a kind of vast symmetrical spiraling flower in which, as you turned it the light would [00:30:00] pick out different cells, but each cell contained a lens, and if you looked through the lens, a little movie was going on in there, not very long, usually quite simple.

The movies obviously were little movies of my own and I had seen some of them before. You will see some of them tonight. They were one minute in length. I began suddenly to think about ... How long have I been doing that? Climbing the empty air ...

I began to think about an ordering, a natural kind of ordering of all these things, and also some other things that I had done, which would compose a kind of cycle for the solar year, such that there would be at the core of the work, for 360 of the days of the year, a one-minute film to be seen on each day.

For four of those days, four particular feasts for the great solar holidays of the solstices and equinoxes. A single day that could be determined by a ritual audience, in which there would be no film but the participants could be free to bring their own lights to the theater. A day of rest from the whole thing to be determined by everyone. Then, as the thought elaborated itself, perhaps even a special film to be seen only once every four years on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February.

Then, because it also had the possibility of being around in space as well as around in time, I began also to think of it as a kind of city. [00:32:00] One cannot begin a thing that has to do with the year on January 1<sup>st</sup>, but there must be some way to get into it. I thought about having perhaps 12 most favorite entrances and 12 favorite paths. Where there are entrances, there must be gates. Where there are gates, there must be paths that lead to them. Where one passes in and out, there must bridges from gate to gate.

The whole thing began suddenly in my fantasy to contemplate itself. As it complicated itself, another thing happened. That brings in the fat old ladies. A woman named Fanny Elizabeth Cross who was born November 5, 1897 in Tyler County, West Virginia; died on November 25, 1973. She was my maternal grandmother. I shall miss her bitterly every day that I live and the whole of the work is given in her memory.

The prologues and epilogues will have, as time passes, and there is material already for them, more and more to do with her. That is to say, not only with someone who personally meant much to me, but in an impersonal sense in a way represents to me, I suppose, the discovery of woman within my own mind so that she represents to me this old woman – perhaps as Rose Sélavy represented to Marcel Duchamp a kind of internal counter-person – who haunts me somewhat and who seems of course to do things that I wouldn't do because I'm a Latter Day bourgeois intellectual university teacher and a maker [00:34:00] of highly structured works of film art and so forth. She makes suggestions that I would have, perhaps, difficulty in not rejecting out of hand.

Some notion then of the symmetry of this whole work which is part of the work. And for tonight in random order, because they are drafts, even because there are two or three that I'm not sure will survive all the way to the ... whatever it is, the settling of the thing, the moment which I can cast it adrift. Fifty-two of the one-minute segments, they do not bear titles. I do not sign them. Then also the extended piece which is intended as a feast for the Autumnal Equinox, which is 28 minutes in length, drafts and fragments. That then takes some while and afterwards I'll be glad to have you entertain me.

Yes?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:35:23]



Hollis Frampton: Why didn't you give me a warning about that question, which was repetitious, tedious, and unpleasant? I have to answer that. I did not go into the slaughterhouse with you in mind, to begin with. [00:36:00] I went in with myself in mind. There are in the role of spectator a number of options that anyone has. If one is seeking entertainment and feels that one is not entertained, if one is not amused, one can seek amusement and entertainment elsewhere.

Life is long to that extent. You may feel that the slaughterhouse itself is a repetitious, tedious, and unpleasant place. If you feel that way, then I invite you to think about how you feel about your food. I invite you further to think about the task you so willingly impose upon those who make your food for you because you cannot face the repetitiousness, the tediousness, the unpleasantness of it. When I went there, the men who work there – and it is a very small and very clean and very modern and highly mechanized abattoir; eighteen men work there and they slaughter 400 head of beef a day ordinarily, unless they're working overtime – were afraid that I had come to do an exposé upon them.

But they do good work, you see, and they're proud of it. It's hard work. If any of you has ever killed your own meat, as I have, you know that after the moment of killing the animal, [00:38:00] what you are essentially faced with is a hard day's work. I in fact, of course with my camera to hide behind in particular – it's a great mediator, in some of life's most difficult moments – and with all the options and all the quotations and even the recognitions of the possibilities of style that Western painting has presented with in the last 500 years which may be repetitious, tedious, and unpleasant ... I was enchanted.

I thought the experience was beautiful. I thought the men who did it were extraordinary. I felt it was one of the most rewarding days I had spent in my life. Now if you don't feel that way, I don't know what I can say. I considerate the work serious, not entertaining. The difference ... I would make a brief distinction between my feelings about the function of a work of art for a person and the function of a work of entertainment for a person.

I like to be entertained like any tired businessman, I go to the movies for instance, to the movies. They help me forget my troubles. They help me forget my bad teeth, my mortgage payments, my divorce for three or four hours if the movie's really a hot number. I don't have to think about any of that stuff. It's very nice. Daddy takes it all over for me. If he's a very understanding daddy like Sam Peckinpah I can get it off on my neighbors, vicariously, too. That really helps me have a fine evening. [00:40:00] What I usually find in confrontation with works of art is that I am, more seriously than ever, confronted with my own condition as a human being, with the defects in my consciousness, with the fact that I do have bad teeth, a divorce, mortgage payments and a whole lot more besides.

I suppose part of that is repetitious and tedious and unpleasant. I perhaps was as excessively elliptical when I merely said that the footage for *Autumnal Equinox* was made in the [J. Bartush] Meat Packing Company, a slaughterhouse in South Saint Paul, Minnesota. I thought that might conjure sufficient images in some people's minds.

Audience: I was just presented [inaudible 00:40:57].

Hollis Frampton: I do. You don't see it. There's one shot. You're talking about the killing of the animals themselves. Get back to the first part of your question, the statement part of the question. The killing of the animals is in fact rapid and exceedingly obscure. They come in to a kind of chute which is about six feet high. They cannot see around it, they cannot see out of it and so forth. A man on a kind of low balcony leans over into the chute with a gun which is called a "humane killer," curiously. It operates on ... The weapon only arms when it is pressed down against the animal, you see.

That is done as quickly as possible. It also happens to be in a dark corner and so on. [00:42:00] I did not feel and I do not feel that it's a film necessarily about death. All those acts are undertaken to sustain life, you see. We don't think of ourselves as, except in a very abstract kind of way, as taking life in order to sustain our own, but we do and there are three billion of us, you see. We take several hundred million lives a day to sustain our own.

That is one of the things we do to sustain our lives. Another, of course, to sustain our lives on a different level, is to try to look at what we really do rather than averting our eyes, and there is I think the gesture that repeats itself in the film, although I didn't at any time feel that terrified. In the large and the small, there is the constant small gesture of the eye sliding away as if something catches it, or I detect the gesture of aversion from it.

Things are dying. Gee, we're dying. I'm dying right here in front of you. You're dying right here in front of me. Death doesn't need any monumentation. We are its grandest monument because we know we're going to die. As William Butler Yeats says, "Man need not worry about death. He knows it to the bones. Man invented death. No other animal knows of its own mortality." That is not a deadly situation; [00:44:00] maybe a situation of fear, of undefined fear for the animals themselves. It's us, it's in us. We worry about it.

I don't feel that way. There's a long spectrum from the purely pictorial through the positively grizzly. I did not have, for instance ... and there's a level on which the film functions as serious parody of *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*, obviously, where Stan segues into it in relation to what he has shown. I did not have even that option where I came in on a quiet day. There are no quiet days in the slaughterhouse. You walk straight in on a cascade of guts. But those guts are good. They make sausage casings.

After all those grizzly heads are worked over for their phallic tongues that are hanging out and so forth, still the pituitary gland is removed and the hormone from that helps women in childbirth and another hormone from it and so forth and so forth. Yes?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:45:11]

Hollis Frampton: I thought subtle, natural movements were fascinating for all of us. I'll tell you a story; it's something I like. It's about an article I read about the drug Belladonna. This is a few years before Ray Birdwhistell's kinesics stuff had surfaced in the rip-off body language books and so forth and begun to parody itself. [00:46:00] There was an

article in some scientific magazine about the drug Belladonna which means “beautiful lady,” of course. Aside from inducing a certain euphoria in the one who takes it – it’s a mild euphoric narcotic – it does one very curious thing and that is it strongly dilates the pupils of the eyes.

It began to be called Belladonna during the Renaissance, obviously, when the Borgia, Sforza, Medici ladies were on the make for the Borgia and Sforza and Medici gentlemen and so forth. They believed that taking the drug made them more beautiful. They would take it before they went out on a date. And it seemed to work. The people who were researching into it flashed pictures of strangers to various people and just rated them according to how they like them – “Do you like this face? Do you not like this face?” and so forth.

They did this with hundreds of faces over a sample of hundreds of people. They changed something: in the photographic image, they changed the size of the pupil of the eye and that was all. This is a very minute part of the information you get from looking at a picture of somebody. There was a very, very pronounced pressure always towards liking the images that had dilated and disliking the images had pinpointed pupils.

Whether we know it or not, we watch subtle and small motions all the time. Birdwhistell at Annenberg in Pennsylvania and even the people who take him on subtlety and want to ... [00:48:00] The *National Lampoon* finally parodied the whole body language trip with a girl who’s going like this. The caption says that that photograph means you’re an interesting person, I’d like to get to know you better. I mean that’s not even body language ... my foot.

I always believed that we were all interested in trying to live more consciously. This is more fun. When you’re riding, really dancing with the small and subtle movements of life, then that’s more interesting I suppose than just reacting as to whether you got your toes stepped on or you’re going to step on somebody else’s. Do you know what I mean? I don’t know what to call it, my interest, my apparent need to do that in film is apparently comparatively recent. Most of the stuff in Zorn’s *Lemma* shot from a tripod, for instance, tends to be as static as possible and it has to do with what’s going on within the frame. This has to do with how I’m moving and what’s going on within the frame and a whole lot of other things beside. It’s much more complex kind of camera work.

Do I respond to you?

Speaker: Yes.

Hollis Frampton: Over there.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:49:52] [00:50:00]

Hollis Frampton: I was interested in the work. It was assumed that men were doing it. There are little ironic moments and bits and so forth where it becomes quite clear that the men are doing it. There’s one point with one of the slaughtered heads hanging where a couple of little flaps of raw flesh are sort of twitching obscenely and they go on doing that for

quite some time. Then the frame moves over just a little bit and you can see that somebody has his hand in the back of that head and he's doing something with it and it's a puppet show. It's a puppet. That's a little puppet movement that's going on there and so forth.

What you're saying really when you said that I think the evidence of human kind is offered up, I mean, arms and hands and knives and so forth, and in one occasion a particularly grim and inquiring face, are there. What you're saying when you say I don't show people is that I don't take establishing shots. There are no long shots that show the whole shop with 20 guys running around and so forth.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:51:11]

Hollis Frampton: I didn't have that kind of curiosity. I've killed and butchered animals myself. I wasn't there to find out what was happening. I was there to come to terms with what was happening when I didn't have to be responsible for that part of it myself. In the little one-minute film, for instance, that was a home butchering that I undertook with a friend of mine. The camera was sitting out just sort of off on the side, on a bale of hay. That was the only one minute in that afternoon that I had to film or I would have filmed more.

Later on, I tried to pick it up and as it happens, it was ten above zero and the camera had just totally stiffened up and it wouldn't work anymore. [00:52:00] I want to be very clear about that. I knew what was going on in the place. It was not any big surprise to me when I walked in the door. I've seen animals slaughtered since I was a child. I've assisted on such occasions at least since I was a child. I just wanted to get down into the marrow and drip of it and look for what it did to the light that I live by. That's funny.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:52:32]

Hollis Frampton: I think we're all, always, at all sorts of different stages about everything we do. Let me say this again. I said that I make my works for myself. I did not say that to be offensive. I just said it to be truthful. If I had said that I did it for you, I would have been lying. When one of the cats, the particular cat was named Reptile, caught Papa Starling, well, cats catch moles and mice, birds and so forth at my house every day. There's absolutely no reason to be upset about it. We'd be run over with moles, mice and birds. Starlings, dime a dozen, something like that.

But the cat was doing the thing which us confused baboon-like creatures dislike so much. It was playing with its food. [00:54:00] It was being cruel. That disturbed me. At the same time, who am I to interfere with the life processes of my cat? He was doing something that was perfectly natural to cats and enjoying himself and even mugging for the camera. He's looking up, giving me his best profile.

My only defense in that situation was to pick up the camera, which is always loaded, always has the motor on it, always has the batteries hooked up. That's something that happens time and again. When the little boy comes running in with the frog, I saw myself dangling on that hook. What defense do I have? There's only the one

thing I do any good. (Well, there are a couple of other things, but we can't mention them in public. It's not the sort of occasion anyway.) That is to make films.

My only hedge against my every crisis, against my every catastrophe, is the attempt to practice the art I expound. I guess I could continue through the list. Some of the crises are very pleasant. The one that's so placid of the rain falling in the grass, if you imagine it means I'm lying on my belly in the rain in the grass. Do you like that idea? I had just sprained my ankle. I had the camera in hand. I was getting soaked to my skin. Hell, make a movie. That'll put your mind off your trouble for a minute, you see.

All of them have stories attached to them. I had a clever title for each one of them, for instance. I decided that maybe I could stop being a teacher for a while and just keep those titles to myself. Not a lot of people make their own titles. That's just a little path into something, or a key. [00:56:00] That's just my view of what's right about an image.

Anyway, those are made for me. At the same time, gee, if you cut me, do I not bleed? How corny do we have to get? I have the usual complement of limbs and so forth. I'm the same size and shape with anybody else. It may be presumed, then, that I'm not so peculiar that I do not have needs that are shared by other people. So much has been based on the idea "This is for you, not for me, for you." You're going to sit there and I'm going to jam it down your throat because I made this for you.

What happened to notions like *share*? "Would you like a piece of cake?" someone says. If I had walked in to my grandmother's kitchen when I was four years old and I said, "What's that?" and she said, "That's a ginger bread man and you're going to eat it, you little bastard," she would have been exhibiting a Hollywood attitude. "You're going to love it. Four stars, you're going to love it." Maybe you're not going to love it. Maybe one minute will answer a need you have now. Maybe two minutes will. Maybe five years something will answer to a need.

Maybe five years ago those were needs and they have been answered. I don't know. I would feel very bad about closing down and narrowing and walking all over the relationship anybody else could have to these things, because I won't do that for myself. I still feel very open about them. I'm still finding out quite extraordinary things [00:58:00] about films that I made three, four, five, six years ago. I'd like anybody else who likes it to have open to them those pleasures and those terrors and all of those things that can happen out of works of art if we don't snap to attention and march through them with a pistol to our heads. I just brought them to share. I didn't give them to you. They're not yours, they're mine. Yeah?

Audience: It seems that the [inaudible 00:58:43].

Hollis Frampton: You're providing material for a whole course in aesthetics here.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:59:22] Do you have anything ...

Hollis Frampton: ... to say about that?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:59:30]

Hollis Frampton: Fifty years. I'm trying to keep control of myself at this moment. What would be the reason? We have a raft of unexamined assumptions [01:00:00] in your long, intricate, rhetorical question. Oh boy. Oh boy. It goes like this: why is it over the past 50 years that artists seem to be getting more interested in themselves? Is that right? Is that what you're asking me? I mean, if we sort of take away the golden fleece from the charging ram or something like that.

First of all, since I was born in 1936 simple arithmetic will show you that I have not been getting more interested in myself for the last 50 years. I do not speak for other artists. I would ask you though, what is wrong with being interested in oneself? Is that bad? Is that good? It is classic to pretend not to be interested in oneself. It is romantic to be interested in oneself and pretend interest in other things. It is perhaps baroque to pretend interest in both and neither at the same time.

Why am I getting interested in myself? I've got to be, man! This is my only chance! Right? In this respect, you could call me an existentialist. I do believe that this is the only life [01:02:00] I'm ever going to live. If I am to be blessed with a second life, then I have asked of course that I be a woman and a musician to round some things out. It's a matter of appetite.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:02:18]

Hollis Frampton: Yeah, you mean the one-minute things?

Audience: [Inaudible 01:02:30]

Hollis Frampton: Ah, yeah. That word "subjective." That's what it's about. No, I see it hinges upon the word "subjective." I will then return to the question, because there's that word "subjective." Is that still traveling? When I was 18 years old and trying to drag myself, kicking and screaming into the 20<sup>th</sup> century since nobody else seemed to be willing to undertake the task. When I was trying to be a modern artist instead of a 15<sup>th</sup> century artist or something, they were saying, "This is subjective." That was like saying "Aaaah...oohhhh...subjective!"

To use the word "subjective" implies a counterword or a counterweight, "objective," in a dualistic universe which consists of two parts, what is inside and what is outside. What is problematical about those two parts, of course, is that what is outside for me appears to be very largely inside three billion other people [01:04:00] in [inaudible] or it's in snails and stuff like that. They too have insides. This has insides and we're having trouble with it.

That means that there is some point always where you can say, I stop and it starts, or I stop and you start, or You stop and I start. It may be as thin as the suicide's razor blade, but it's there. Let me ask you something: if you and I are really together, or if you are really with something, "into it" like we now say, where do you stop and where does it start? If you can tell me in that moment of supreme rapture and contemplation when the self and the other face each other smiling through a two-way mirror, I'll be interested to hear it. I really will.

I don't see it. I really don't see it. I have felt at the moments when I really was alive, when I was making a thrust towards life, towards *eros* away from death, away from *thanatos*, that I was having the hardest possible telling where I left off and anything else began. At those moments when I have [01:06:00] felt most depressed, farthest from anything around me, closest to death, I have also felt most distant from the things and the persons and the minds that I was surrounded with. The best I can do is say that your dualism was made up by somebody who wasn't enjoying what he was doing.

We can't talk about making love. This is the State of Pennsylvania. But maybe you get my idea. We can all talk to ourselves about it, can't we? Are there more? Gee, subjective, objective, what nonsense. It's like communication. I won't even go into that one. That's another one I was beat over the head with and I thought for instance that the very existence of things like Arid Extra Dry and FDS, if nothing else, should have convinced us that our supreme problem as a society is not to communicate, but to suppress communication.

Is there more? Yes?

Audience: You were talking about the camera [inaudible 01:07:40]. [01:08:00]

Hollis Frampton: I do not have, as none of us do, except in the arts. I do not have a nice trapdoor in the back of my head so that others could look in and see what I see. When you make part of a work of art, you drill a couple of little holes and then maybe people can peek in if they have the right angle, if they want to, if it's that kind of day. To really answer your question fully, I would have to make upon you the impossible demand that you visualize how things will balance out within a whole, very large work and function over long distances in time and through certain kinds of similarities and dissimilarities and conjunctions and disjunctions and so forth to come into an equilibrium.

About editing. There are so many different ways of editing. There are, let us say, four here tonight. The first one is essentially an animated film in which I edited a still photograph by Leslie Krims out of existence in 24 steps [01:10:00] with a paint brush. That's editing by obliteration or something like that. The making of *Noctaluca* was perhaps what people would conventionally understand more as editing. When I want to be mean to my students and they say, "How do you edit a film anyway?" I say, "It's very simple. It's like being a sculptor with his block of marble. You have so many rolls of footage and the sculptor has a block of marble. He removes everything that is not the statue and then his work is complete, and you remove all the footage that is not the film and then your work is complete."

That's cruel. I do that on a bad morning a couple of times. We say that some things we leave in, some things we leave out. We decide where the cuts will be. Part of some shot, not part of another, this, that, and the other. Then the order in which they go and then you splice them all together and that's your film. *Noctaluca* was made like that and I have made films like that.

When it comes to the one-minute segments of *Straits of Magellan*, I do not shoot precisely 36 feet, I shoot about 50. I shoot two on a 100-foot roll. Typically, I'm not watching the footage counter of course, so I have to run half the roll through to 50

feet with the shutter closed and then open the shutter and then the film runs out of the camera. So I have 50 feet more or less and I'm looking for 36 feet, 1,440 frames precisely.

The editing process there consists in determining the boundaries which are separated from each other by an absolutely rigid interval. They must be precisely 1,440 frames apart. [01:12:00] That's the rule. That's a kind of editing too, but it's intricate and delicate. Some of them are immediate and obvious. Some of them are almost purely nominal. Some of them I have spent weeks fretting about which kind of virtually neutral frame to cut on, because then you're stuck with cutting the 1,441<sup>st</sup> frame on down the line.

With the slaughterhouse section, with the Autumnal Equinox, you may be reluctant to believe this – you may not be reluctant to believe it – I removed three shots from all the footage I shot that day and discarded them. Four pieces of film are seen out of the order in which they were shot. I did determine the most appropriate rotation for the 12 rolls that I shot. The rolls are not in order that I shot them but with the barest exceptions the shots are in the order. If you look closely, you'll see that the flash frames and the smears are still there. Everything is printed.

Nevertheless, it was cut apart, because if you look more closely still, there are single frames of green between the shots. They're more visible some times than they are others. I think maybe they work sort of far down. Green is the color that's missing. Green is also the color that those cattle are going to be missing for a long time.

That's maybe another kind of editing. That's editing that I found I had done before essentially when I came to the bench. [01:14:00] A lot of the problem of beginning to cut that work at all was realizing what we all know anyway, I think, who have ever worked with film, that editing is done in the consciousness to begin with and that I had virtually completed the process. Where there were hesitations, where there were drawings back, where there were barely converted goofs or moments when I didn't really quite have my eyes open, as registration of the movement of my consciousness in the situation, I didn't feel that I could honestly excise those either.

There are various. Of course, there are two or three that are on the order of six frames long. There's a very, very long one, I think one of the longest single shots I've seen in any film that means anything to me, which is the tumbling over and over of the head and trimming it and washing it and so forth, which is 45 feet. That's virtually a minute and a half or something like that. It's an incredibly long shot for me. I usually make things a second or something like that.

That maybe is another kind of editing. But I guess what I'm really getting at is simply that I think that it's not done on the bench. The splicer and the rewinds and so forth, those are models of the splicer and the rewind that is turning constantly in the frontal lobes, and would that we could will it into life that way without that incessant handling of material and the incessant butchering of images that we must undertake to sustain our lives because [01:16:00] a lot of that goes on too.

I would feel about editing that there are as many kinds ... there should be as many kinds of editing as there are films. It seems most reasonable. And most often I have



found that and of course because some of my films have been intricate, in particular, I have found that I just about figure out how to really cut the thing and get it going and then it's all done. Then there I am in my misery again not knowing what order to hang things up on the clothes' pins or whether I'd like to have a second set of rewinds or ... your understanding of those things always falls flat. I have to figure it out all over again.

I would be most hesitant about taking anything, trying to erect it into a 100-legged theory because the minute you do that, then you really ... *I* get in trouble. The minute I really try to own it ... Which is not to say that one cannot get wise and shrewd and cunning and so forth. After one has done quite a few things, I think then one has an idea of what one likes. Then, in the absence of specific instructions from the muse, then I just do what I like.

It takes some time to find things you like. The steel mill footage which I'll be starting to cut when I go home, since I see now how to do it, probably will not have very much more removed from it. It also smacks of virtuoso camera work and so on. Looking at it again, I have found that it would be struggle to get rid of most of it because I can't find any good reason [01:18:00] to throw it away. So I might as well keep it. It made me gray making that footage. It's all I have, at least for that day.

Then keeping it, still and all, I know already that the way things will be ordered will be very different. I'm sure of it. I could start out with the best intentions in the world of making it exactly the same and by the time I've made the first two splices, I would have forgotten all that stuff and be off on another tantrum or something anyway, standing there in my house by my rewinds with not any very clear idea what I was doing anyhow.

You find that out afterwards, or I do. What I'm doing. That's the side of my head that tells other people what's going on. It's not very interested in film. It's interested in talking. It's functioning right now, for instance. It doesn't let this guy say very much. He's sitting back here writhing in agony saying, "Ah, for Christ's sake. Have a heart, will ya?" Yes?

Audience: [Inaudible 01:19:17]

Hollis Frampton: I guess I could. You're twisting my arm, I take it. You are. It's ghastly. I can tell you very specifically what happens to me. I should probably go up a register and adopt the drastically confessional tone that we're so familiar with in a century that believes [01:20:00] art is therapy. Anyway, I don't know. I don't quite remember when I started fiddling with still photography. I always wanted to make films. I wanted to from the time I was three, I think. It cost millions. Anyway, you weren't supposed to do it, right? It was like a crime. You had to have 50 people and a Mitchell BNC. It was ridiculous. It was just ridiculous. I couldn't do that, so I didn't do that.

I was a nice guy, tried to be, well-behaved young man and so forth. I had a few stabs at it, at the same time I thought, "Well, maybe I'll sneak up on it. I'll learn as much as I can. I'll do it one image at a time." I got a certain distance. Two things happened. One was that my demon betrayed me, anyway. It would never quite let me be a still photographer. It was always forcing me into making series of things. Then I was

worried about the order in which the series was seen. There I was, stuck with all the old filmmaker's problems but not making films.

The other thing was that at a certain point for reasons that are not obscure to me, but not worth going into, I opted into the 8 x 10 posture. I decided that that was the true road to eternity or glory or true satisfaction or something like that. I went so far into it in my mind that I not only wanted to be Edward Weston, but I could feel myself bodily some days turning into Edward Weston. My soul was transmigrating from [01:22:00] Manhattan to Point Lobos. I was shrinking about seven inches. My eyes were turning brown. It was incredible. It was impossible, of course. I could not be Weston.

I finally went and terrified myself with the experience of bearding Weston in his lair. I decided that I didn't want to be Weston. At the same time, the only thing I could do and stay as still photographer was Weston. Very quickly I just petered out. It took me a long time to digest the Weston experience. It took me six or seven years. Finally, it was very simple. When something is getting you nowhere, especially after a decade, and your mind really is on entirely other things and you don't want to do it, you just stop.

That's what happened. There I was with a really magnificent dark room that I had slaved to put together and a whole collection of new camera lenses and a hundred 8 x 10 holders and things like that. If you haven't made a picture and you got 15 bucks in your pocket, you can always console yourself by going and buying another holder -- just so as to be prepared for anything. Then it just gradually became quite clear that I wasn't going to do it. That's all.

At the same time, I had kind of crab-walked into trying to make films. I didn't want to commit myself too heavily to it, for a very simple reason. That was that I did not at that time believe myself to be a masochist. I remember two years ago, [01:24:00] I was at Binghamton and I showed three and a half hours of film. I showed all of *Hapax Legomena*. As a matter of fact, it was my 36<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was a horrible occasion I must say. Anyway, somebody sitting in the back said, "I wonder if you'd mind if I ask you a personal question. Do you by any chance happen to be independently wealthy?"

He was thinking about the cost of making three and a half hours of film in one year; black and white, silent, 16mm. I looked at him and he obviously was maybe 20 years old or something like that and was a student and was poor, as I was poor when I was a student, and I still am, most of the time. All I could say to him was that he had no conception of how far in debt it was possible to get yourself by the time you're in your middle thirties.

Gradually, the pressure just became so great. I'm an emotional procrastinator, in a word, because I know perfectly ... I'm a procrastinator about my own feelings because I know that every time ... my culture has taught me carefully that every time I really act on my feelings, I get myself in a hell of a lot of trouble, one way or the other. I'm certainly walking into the new swimming pool. I'm out of my depth. Maybe there's no water in it. Who knows? So I put it off as long as I possibly could.

I'm a Midwestern, middleclass American born in the 1930s. My God, I'm anal-retentive as you can get. I'll go, "I can't stand it anymore!" It's just that simple. Finally, I couldn't stand it anymore. So having found it totally unsatisfactory [01:26:00] to try to borrow cameras from people and stuff like that, I gifted myself on the occasion then of my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday with a Bolex. It was a very, very happy day, very confusing.

That changed things, not the hardware, you see, but my having made the gesture. The hardware is rubbish. You can wear them out after a while. Quarter of a million feet of raw stock later I've gone through three Bolexes, and the fourth one is going [whining sounds]. It's complaining and crying. Poor thing. I should leave it in the pasture in the rain some day, let it return to the earth.

Have you seen a film of mine called (*Nostalgia*)? That's the elaborate suicide note of a still photographer. It's burning up all the old unsuccessful – not all of them, but a dozen of them – the still photographs from that sad time, then talking about it. There's more to it than that. It never worked for me. I recognize that it's a very difficult transition to make because I don't think the two things really have anything to do with each other at all. F-stops, raw stock, big deal.

One can also paint a dining room chair or a Picasso with the same material too, or they both use the brush. It's crazy to bother thinking about it. I do know that when I made that decision or when I did not make that decision, when I put it off so long that finally my ... some more intelligent [01:28:00] organ than my ... adding machine made it for me. I experienced first immense relief and gratitude, such as I suppose one felt in the new stone age having been newly trephined, and then afterwards, what supersedes that gratitude, which was just a kind of helpless love of which so many filmmakers have complained for some time now.

It's not an easy transition, it is not a difficult transition, because it is not a transition. You go to Denmark and they can turn you into a man and that's not a transition. You know what I mean?

*Ite missa est.*

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