

## Hollis Frampton

### *Zorns Lemma* and *A Lecture*

Thursday, October 29, 2009 — McBean Theatre at the Exploratorium  
presented in association with the Exploratorium's Cinema Arts Series  
introduced by Michael Zryd

In his drive to explore and catalog the possibilities and parameters of cinematic representation, Hollis Frampton delighted in paradox, frequently creating complex conceptual structures that pitted the precision of language against the abstraction and excess of photographic representation. Visiting Frampton scholar Michael Zryd of York University, Toronto, presents two of Frampton's most significant cinematic propositions. Taking the projected white rectangle as a maximalist basis of all cinema, *A Lecture* evokes a profound consideration of cinematic "aboutness" and stands as one of the cinema's most significant challenges to a reconceptualization of the art form, while his 1970 masterpiece, *Zorns Lemma*—described by Peter Gidal as "the attempt to break down the authority of language"—leads viewers away from logical and linguistic order into an exhilarating world of imagery, color and light. (Steve Polta)

#### ***A Lecture*** (1968) by Hollis Frampton

In contrast to the busy proliferation of images at play on other cinema screens in 1968, *A Lecture* wipes the cinematic palate clean as the white light of a projector dominates the work. But as Frampton says in the piece, that white rectangle is also ALL films, and the density and resonance of *A Lecture* becomes evident. Frampton's text, heard over the white light, is a characteristically brilliant disquisition on the nature of cinema. But it is also a commentary on authorship as the text is given to us at two removes from the artist: it is recorded and it is someone else's voice. Frampton defers to the "tape recorder [...] a mechanical performer as infallible as the projector." *A Lecture* is a self-consciously pedagogical work, devised for a guest lecture that Frampton was giving at Hunter College October 30, 1968, and presaging Frampton's subsequent teaching career at SUNY Buffalo's influential Centre for Media Study from 1973 until Frampton's untimely death in 1984. Finally, the work is an important early work of projector performance, contemporary with Fluxus and Takehisa Kosugi (referenced by Frampton in the work) and inspirational to the many artists and teachers who have since reenacted the performance. (Michael Zryd)

The original reel-to-reel audio recording of *A Lecture* was identified by Frampton scholar Ken Eisenstein, and has been preserved and made available for this event by kind permission of the Harvard Film Archive.

#### ***Zorns Lemma*** (1970) by Hollis Frampton; 16mm, color, sound, 60 minutes, print from the Film-Makers' Cooperative

*Zorns Lemma* traverses the physical and cultural universe, starting with the letter A and ending in infinity. Like *A Lecture* it is a profoundly pedagogical work—though way more fun and challenging than the term "pedagogy" usually connotes. The film begins with a lesson on learning the alphabet from the Puritan *Bay State Primer*. Embedded in the third act is Frampton's own abridged translation of Bishop Robert Grossteste's 13<sup>th</sup> century text, "On Light, or the Ingression of Forms"—a wacky medieval take on light, numbers and unity, delivered in staccato form by a sextet of female voices. But it's the middle section that is most instructive, as the film teaches us, through serial repetition, how to move from what he called "word images" to "replacement images"—where the world replaces language, "replete" as he insisted, with a plethora of perspective on space, time, and movement. *Zorns Lemma*, like all of his work, finally, sets up a tension between language (what Frampton calls the master code of culture) and the image: "a celestial mechanics of the intellect might picture a body called Language, and a body called Film, in symmetrical orbit about one another, in perpetual and dialectical motion." That motion is, in the end, enacted by the spectator of Frampton's cinema; as he says in *A Lecture*, "This is where we came in." (Michael Zryd)