From the Private to the Public:
Photography, Film, and the Transmission of Cultural Memory in Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)*

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This article explores the compelling 1971 film, (nostalgia)*, made by U.S. photographer and avant-garde film maker Hollis Frampton (1936-1984). The author argues for the film's viability as a rich and instructive mode of cultural critique that interrogates the dynamics of nostalgia, identity, and meaning. In burning a series of thirteen still photographs to the accompaniment of disjointed voice-over narrations, Frampton effectively merges the private and the public in a way that usefully calls into question the validity of photographic images—and their attendant autobiographical stories—as accurate depictions of the past.*

> *If photography does not give us the past, it tells us that perception must be thought in relation to what is no longer present, in relation to the structure of memory in general. To say this is to say that perception begins only at the moment when it begins to withdraw, when what is seen cannot be seen.*
>
> —Eduardo Cadava (1997:92)

Introduction

Is nostalgia "the lie in the void," as declared by Peter Carroll in an attempt to confuse remembering with escapism and nostalgia with amnesia (Carroll 1990:206)? What if, as argued by Roberta Rubenstein, what is remembered "never actually existed, or *never could have existed*, in the form in which it is 'remembered'" (Rubenstein 2001:5)? If, according to Jonathan Steinwand, "the imagination is encouraged to gloss over forgetfulness in order to fashion a more aesthetically complete and satisfying recollection of what is longed for" (Steinwand 1997:10), then is nostalgia a legitimate act of memory? In defense of nostalgia as an authentic approach to perceptions about the self in the present and directions for action and thought in the future, this essay explores memory, absence and meaning through the medium of film. Both private and public memories rely on nostalgic remembrance for the creation of personal and social identities as well as internal and collective meaning. I will argue that nostalgia as represented and explored in photography, film and story-telling has the potential to further both self- and societal understanding through reflection, reinterpretation and ultimately transformation. The film *(nostalgia)* (1971) by photographer and filmmaker Hollis Frampton (1936-1984) is a powerful document of cultural memory that articulates and demonstrates vital issues of memory, such as the use of autobiographical film, to explicate identity formation and the intricate relationship of photography and film to absence, memory and meaning. To begin, however, I will discuss the historical associations of nostalgia in order to differentiate it from its siblings homesickness and melancholy.

"Originally defined in the seventeenth century in terms of a set of physical symptoms associated with acute homesickness"—*nostos* (home), *algos* (pain)—

nostalgia's contemporary association is as an emotional disorder, acknowledges John Frow (1997:79-80). Rubenstein describes nostalgia as "an absence that continues to occupy a palpable emotional space" and argues that "the felt absence of a person or place assumes form and occupies imaginative space as a presence that may come to possess an individual" (Rubenstein 2001:5). Perhaps it is unsurprising that nostalgia is historically associated with the "open wound" of Sigmund Freud's melancholia, the neurosis of failed mourning.

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (Freud 1984 [1917]:252)

Rubenstein's description qualifies the "painful awareness" of nostalgia as melancholic while simultaneously describing nostalgia as a response to "universal inevitability of separation and loss" and "the existential condition of adulthood" (Rubenstein 2001:4-5). As opposed to the spatial or geographical separation of homesickness, nostalgia according to Rubenstein reflects a temporal dilemma.

> One can never truly return to original home of childhood, since it exists mostly as a place in the imagination. Although the meaning of nostalgia itself has changed over time, essentially it has come to signify not simply the loss of one's childhood home but the loss of childhood itself. (Rubenstein 2001:4)

Pietro Castelnuolvo-Tedesco also discusses the temporally lost characteristic of nostalgia; homesickness may be "resolved or alleviated by a return home or even simply by the promise of such a return, but no such ready solution is effective for the nostalgic's plight, inasmuch as what he yearns for belongs to another time" (Castelnuolvo-Tedesco 1971:120). Steinwand argues that nostalgic images offer "compensation for the forgetfulness, homelessness and alienation" (Steinwand 1997:10). Whether nostalgic images lie in the mind, in objects such as photographs, or in objectless media such as film, the premise of absence is necessary for reflection and reinterpretation to emerge.

It is precisely what Rubenstein calls "the *presence of absence*" (Rubenstein 2001:5, original emphasis) that makes nostalgia apposite to my discussion of film and particularly Hollis Frampton's film *(nostalgia)*. Through the treatment of photographs as malleable objects that are ritualistically destroyed on film, Frampton's avant-garde film addresses the decay and destruction of image and memory. Here, story-telling serves as a—perhaps unsuccessful—preservative for memory that accompanies a visual transition from the private to the public.

While charting Frampton's rise and decline as a photographer—from "the first photograph I ever made with the direct intention of making art" (Frampton 1972:105) to the final photograph that "fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph again" (Frampton 1972:111)—this structural film offers a witty yet profound approach to cultural

memory, serving as the primary source for my discussion of the role of photography and film in the destruction and reconstruction of memory and the self.

(nostalgia) is the location for the transition of the individual into the social: photography becomes film, anecdote becomes analysis, the internal becomes didactic. Within its very structure, Frampton's film illustrates the impossibility of representing history as fixed instances in linear time due to the fact that "history" is always happening and never fixed, even in story.

Theoretical Groundwork, the first section of this article, examines the radical nature of avant-garde cinema as counter-cinema to dominant ideology and Frampton's *(nostalgia)* within it. This section further addresses the notion of nostalgia as a valuable act of memory and a legitimate form of meaning-making. Lastly, I provide a brief introduction to photography on film. The second section, *Photography, Film, Memory*, addresses the photographic object's malleability and ultimate evocation of absence. In the third section, *Story-telling, Structural Film, Cultural Memory*, I explicate how *(nostalgia)* reflects and represents issues of memory, meaning making and narrative. I argue that Frampton's unreliable narrator and delayed voice-over create nostalgia within the viewer; the film's structure emphasizes the viewer's longing for stories more than the desire for images. Finally, in *Closure* I examine Frampton's structural film as a container for memory. "The structural film," as defined by P. Adams Sitney, "insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline" (Sitney 2002 [1969]:227). One of the three common characteristics of structural film that *(nostalgia)* embodies is the fixed camera position; the other two common but not prerequisite characteristics are the flicker effect and loop printing. Sitney argues that in this type of avant-garde cinema, "the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film" (Sitney 2002 [1969]:227). Also in this section I look at the exteriorization of memory through art, and the merging of private and public illustrated in *(nostalgia)*.

My goal is to explicate Frampton's *(nostalgia)* as a revealing example of counter-cinema to dominant ideology (both culturally and cinematically) and as an important document of cultural memory. I believe the renewal of vision which defines avant-garde cinema is also the renewal of self which defines memory work's meaning-making through reinterpretation. Frampton's shift from photography to filmmaking marks the transition from the interior to the exterior and his publicly enmeshed private transformation. *(nostalgia)* depicts and transmits the memory of a culturally specific time in art history through its images, stories, and structure while simultaneously representing the problem of linear time and the consequent impossibility of fixing history, identity, or meaning.

Theoretical groundwork
Avant-garde cinema as counter-cinema to dominant ideology
According to Michael O'Pray, the military term "avant-garde" refers to "an advanced group forging an assault on the enemy ahead of the main army" (O'Pray 2003:3). Lauren Rabinovitz states that the words themselves "signify that the

avant-garde has a fundamental charge to oppose and even to overthrow existing art practices" (Rabinovitz 2003 [1991]:14). Unconventional filmmaking practices—particularly the innovative work of the structural films within the 1960s and 1970s New York avant-garde movement—provide acts of seeing that are radically different from the vision articulated and promoted by dominant cinematic language.

Avant-garde films reveal cinematic language's potential to redefine acts of seeing by engaging an awareness of the viewer's own perception, subjectivity, and identification. Typically known for what Patricia Mellencamp calls "frequent disjunction of sound and image" and an "undermining of conventional representation, including continuity editing, point-of-view structures, and emphasis on the human figure" (Mellencamp 1990:73), avant-garde films deny and challenge dominant cinematic practices—and ideology—through the structure of the film itself.

"The spectator," according to Sonya Michel, "is forced to play an active role not only in interpreting the film but in constructing its very meaning by piecing together disparate, incomplete, incongruous, or contradictory images and sounds" (Michel 1990:239-240). A.L. Rees further articulates the necessity of the active viewer in avant-garde spectatorship: "The avant-garde rejects and critiques both the mainstream entertainment cinema and the audience responses which flow from it. It has sought 'ways of seeing' outside the conventions of cinema's dominant tradition" (Rees 1999:1). By engaging new *ways* of seeing, the avant-garde film movement encourages a renewal of vision and a renewed *awareness* of vision. This inevitably must include an attention to the film-ness of film itself.

The "film-ness of film" of Frampton's *(nostalgia)* involves visual and verbal language. The use of spoken word in a potentially language-less medium draws attention to representation and time, story-telling and (re)interpretation. The complicated relationship between visual and verbal on film is deepened by this film's structural form, which separates and displaces story from image—the verbal narrative precedes the image it describes. The images and descriptions represent Frampton's private life and personal development and also serve as cultural artefacts that reflect and mock various art movements and their attendant discourse.

As will be discussed, *(nostalgia)* envelops and informs a particular moment in art history. It is one structural film *within* the 1960s and 1970s New York avant-garde movement *within* avant-garde cinema. The weight of avant-garde cinema's radical nature and the ways in which it reflects and informs cultural memory involve larger issues of ideology. Graeme Turner argues that every culture contains a "theory of reality" that determines right/wrong dichotomies. This underlying "theory" can be understood as ideology:

Ideology is the term used to describe the system of beliefs and practices that is produced by this theory of reality; and although ideology itself has no material form, we can see

its material effects in all social and political formations, from class structure to gender relations to our idea of what constitutes an individual. (Turner 1999 [1988]:155)

Dominant ideology attempts to fix the past by promoting a closure of history. Turner's appeal is "to see film as communication" and "to place film communication within a wider system for generating meaning—that of the culture itself" (Turner 1999 [1988]:52). Rabinovitz furthers this belief of film as a mode of socio-cultural communication in arguing that "the avant-garde may be understood as a social phenomenon rather than as a purely aesthetic one. It is the locus for unified aesthetic, social, economic, and political practices.... It is constructed in relation to conflicts in the art world and to the larger culture" (Rabinovitz 2003 [1991]:15). Annette Michelson argues for the inherent "radical aspiration" (Michelson 2000: 404) of avant-garde cinema as a moment of eruption in the face of dominant ideology.

By refusing to subscribe to mainstream forms of story-telling and by "challenging the modes of identification and subjectivity set up by dominant cinema," *(nostalgia)* functions as a document of counter-cinema that, to again refer to Annette Kuhn, "subvert[s] the operations of dominant cinema" through its visual content and film structure (Kuhn 1990:251). This film defies dominant cinematic language *and* ideology through its use of image and voice-over content, as well as within its composition, editing, timing and structure, thus requiring active viewing and interpretation.

In an unusual break with the avant-garde's typical focus on image over sound, *(nostalgia)*'s soundtrack is only partially silent and otherwise word-heavy. Frampton's innovative use of narration in combination with the radical filmic techniques of the structural avant-garde qualify *(nostalgia)* as an important example of counter-cinema to dominant ideology and even avant-garde ideology. The film's specific location in avant-garde discourse within art history is revealed by the film's structure, images and stories. The discursive practices surrounding the art and artists of the 1960s New York avant-garde scene are not merely referenced by Frampton in *(nostalgia)* but are imitated, made fun of, and transformed. In fact, and as will be discussed in more detail below, Frampton's shift from the private to the public relies entirely on the texture and composition of this "public." Marita Sturken argues that "the notion of a private realm separate from the public has always been a fallacy" (Sturken 1999:193). Similarly, Laura Marcus believes there is no such thing as "pure interiority or exteriority" because "individual memory only takes its form in social frameworks" (Marcus 1994:146). As a result, *(nostalgia)* becomes a key document for unravelling complex issues of representation, memory and the many potential ways of seeing as represented and approached by the avant-garde film movement of this time.

The word "nostalgia"—sentimentality, meaning, memory

Is it possible for nostalgia to be a legitimate work of memory? Does nostalgia necessarily imply an unhealthy relationship to the past, or is it possible for nostalgia to be an authentic approach to perceptions about the self in the present and

directions for action and thought in the future? Jo Labanyi describes the primary symptom of both nostalgia and melancholy as "a sense of loss without an object" (Labanyi 2000:1-2). Similarly, Raphael Samuel argues that "nostalgia, or homesickness, is famously not about the past but about felt absences or 'lack' in the present" (Samuel 1994:356). Steinwand explains,

the distress that inclines one homeward uproots the relation to the present by drawing one toward where one remembers feeling a sense of wholeness and belonging. The homeward pain of nostalgia presupposes that one's present place is somehow not homey enough. Nostalgia therefore is generated by a sense of having lost a wholeness only vaguely recollected…. The vagueness of the recollection often inspires the idealization of this past. (Steinwand 1997:9)

While Fran Lloyd similarly describes nostalgia as "a continual revisiting or replaying of the past that has often lost any direct contact with this past," she also claims that nostalgia "enable[s] us to reclaim a past and, sometimes, to change our experience of it in the present" (Lloyd 2001:142). This ability to alter the experience of the past by re-examining it in the present moment importantly forms identities and behaviors for the future. The unattainable objects or immaterial experiences of the past which constitute nostalgia are actual material of the self. Through changing one's relationship to the past, one's interiority is also altered, thereby changing one's relations with others.

If, as Michael Sheringham asserts, "memory holds the key to our personal homeland" (Sheringham 1993:288), then nostalgia as a work of memory is necessary for the continued integration of the past into present/future selves. Milan Kundera articulates the importance of remembrance in self identity:

[R]emembering our past, carrying it with us always, may be the necessary requirement for maintaining… wholeness of the self. To ensure that the self doesn't shrink, to see that it holds on to its volume, memories have to be watered like potted plants, and the watering calls for regular contact with witnesses of the past. (Kundera 1999:43)

Despite its association with melancholia's unhealthy acts of longing and self-destruction, nostalgia is a legitimate work of memory that actualizes the self in the present moment, necessarily relying on the past as an unfixed entity to learn from, to reinterpret, and to grow from. Without nostalgia, without remembrance and longing for that remembered, any attempts at 'wholeness of self' would be impossible.

Frampton notes that the word nostalgia in Greek means "the wounds of returning" (Frampton 1970:159). The film *(nostalgia)* is the first part of a seven part serial film titled *Hapax Legomena* (1971-1972). P. Adams Sitney defines this second title as a classical philological term that "refers to those words whose sense is ambiguous because they only occur once in surviving texts; their meaning can only be determined from context" (Sitney 2002 [1974]:380-381). Similar to ancient words that only survive in one instance and require context or interpretation to make meaning, memory recalls a moment that also occurs in only one historical instance—yet that one moment survives in memory and is perpetuated through story-telling, requiring interpretation and narration to make

meaning. If, as Paul Auster states, memory is "the space in which a thing happens for the second time" (Auster 1988 [1982]:83), then photographs and films are documents of memory that also allow things to "happen" again.

Ultimately, remembrance occurs in the present moment. Whether knowledge about self and world occurs through direct experience (the five senses) or through interpretation of that experience lies beyond the scope of this essay; however, I believe that a postmodernist approach to the interpretation of the present moment is useful. If "knowing" (either in the form of cognitive comprehension or emotional understanding) occurs through interpretation rather than direct experience, then nostalgia offers an opportunity for re-interpretation of the past and therefore a redefinition of the self in the present. According to Mark Currie, "we have no access to things in themselves except through their interpretations" (Currie 1998:12). Acts of memory, like nostalgia, further self and societal insight by providing images that resonate through time and penetrate perception in the journey to self actualization and worldly understanding. Georges Gusdorf argues that as "a second reading of experience," autobiography tends to be "truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it" (Gusdorf 1980:38). Although the consiousness-infusing practices of autobiography and reinterpretation highly complicate what is authentically the past and what an understanding of that past looks like in the present moment, it is precisely this "adding consciousness" to experience that shapes the heart of nostalgia's personal and social significance. This process, however, is undoubtedly a messy one.

If the human condition is inextricably tied to loss, and if meaning occurs only through the interpretation of that loss, then autobiographical art forms serve as partial solutions to the disappearance of time, objects and experiences. A goal of the avant-garde film movement is "adding consciousness" to the act of seeing. Frampton's autobiographical film performs the work of nostalgia by providing a layered series of second readings or second opportunities for reading. Nostalgia's way of remembrance may be defined as a second reading or interpretation, thus lending it healthier attributes than its sibling, melancholy.

The decay and destruction of memory (and the inevitable passage of time) are addressed in *(nostalgia)* through the burning of thirteen photographs. The demise of each photograph, as it is placed on an electric burner, consists visually of smoke, flames, blackening of image and shriveling of photograph into carbonized paper and disintegrating ashes. The camera lingers, recording the ashes' afterlife, their strange and poetic crumpling and movement-in-death. Each photograph is accompanied by a voice-over narration containing factual and anecdotal information regarding the photograph not yet viewed (and subsequently destroyed) but about to be. One voice-over and one image are missing: the first photograph lacks a description (the description provided refers to the second image) and the final description lacks an accompanying image (due to the ending of the film).

The narration consistently begins approximately twenty seconds after each cut, causing the voice-over to accompany the photograph's prime-time of active destruction. Occurring simultaneously with the burning, spoken words are either

acts of preservation in the face of death or are linked to destruction and decay (and may even be its cause). Although words and stories generally are attempts at preservation, the viewer quickly learns the pointlessness of fixing words to image. The narrative is mistimed and the images are systematically destroyed.

The film's structure and the images within it invoke notions of nostalgia by relying on absence on all levels—absence of the thing photographed, absence of the photograph, absence of a properly-timed story, absence of truth or accuracy in the narrative's content, absence of the filmmaker's voice (fellow filmmaker Michael Snow provides the voice-over), absence of the filmmaker (who passed away in 1984) and absence of the film itself (which, due to deterioration, is rarely exhibited). These absences, both structural and contextual, do not signify emptiness, however. If, as Lloyd writes, "remembering is the difference between absence and presence" (Lloyd 2001:153), then Frampton's *(nostalgia)* is, paradoxically, an act of remembrance and preservation even as it intentionally attempts to forget and eliminate the past

Photography on Film

Philippe Dubois poses a key question regarding the complicated relationship between photography and film: "how can the photograph speak, or be made to speak, in and through film?" (Dubois 1995:154). A further question I pose is, in what ways do photography and film symbolize or complicate memory? The destroyed images cannot be fully erased from existence: not only are the negatives themselves preserved but the burning ritual is documented on film. Bruce Jenkins notes, "by inscribing his act of destruction onto film, [Frampton] succeeded as well in transferring the content of one medium into another" (Jenkins 1984:15). Photographs transform into moving images; they become animated in their death and are given new life. While photography cuts into time and attempts to seize hold of an instant, this film (in combination with historically-specific references such as words) destroys fixed instances and offers an alternative to the timelessness of the photograph.

Whether producing still or moving images, every camera is, according to Frampton, a "direct, frontal assault on narrative time" (Frampton 1983:101) and functions as a tool against time's otherwise unstoppable progression. Wim Wenders also speaks in terms of combat, "the camera is a weapon against the tragedy of things, against their disappearing" (Wenders 1991:2). The documentation of Frampton's decline as a photographer produces Frampton's new role as a filmmaker. Frampton burns sample evidence from his photographic career, yet he cannot help but produce more images in the process. According to Susan Sontag,

to consume means to burn, to use up—and, therefore, to need to be replenished. As we make images and consume them, we need still more images; and still more ... images consume reality. Cameras are the antidote and the disease, a means of appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete. (Sontag 1982 [1977]:179)

Frampton's representation of an unsuccessful attempt to completely consume/ destroy images reflects the impossibility of fully consuming memory or turning the past into a stable event in history rather than a living memory that constructs present perception and influences future behavior. If, in the words of Kate Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "the past is constituted in narrative, always representation, always construction" (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003:2), then the past is a living and continually changing entity that depends on (re)interpretation *and can never be fully consumed* because of its inherent instability.

Hal Foster states, "there is no simple *now*: every present is nonsynchronous, a mix of different times" (Foster 1996:207). Frampton is unable to truly consume any*thing*—the past, photographs, stories, even himself. His attempt to consume images of the past fails because nothing actually exists to consume but his own constructions of self (disguised in the form of photographic depictions) and the acknowledgment of time and decay (illustrated in film and fire). The destruction of the image produces more images and the telling of a story produces more stories; attempts to 'fix' history in linear time are impossible because history is the re-interpretation which only occurs in the present tense.

Photography, film, memory
Memory, decay and the daily
Featuring images of famous artists such as Carle Andre, Frank Stella, James Rosenquist, Michael Snow and Larry Poons, *(nostalgia)* offers portraitures of specific people and places. Rachel O. Moore suggests that Frampton's "treatment of these fellows in the film, not only Andre but Stella, the nameless painter upstairs in his building, and even Rosenquist, amounts to a Dadaist assault. He burns their paints and varnishes, steals their girlfriends, and takes ridiculous pictures of them" (Moore 2000:152). The voice-over in the film refers to a Mulberry Street apartment, a shop "on the west side of West Broadway, somewhere between Spring Street and West Houston" (Frampton 1972:106), Rosenquist's red brick building at 5 Coenties Slip, and "a borrowed loft on Bond Street, near the Bowery" (Frampton 1972:107). The verbal and visual references to specific places are as relevant as the famous artists depicted—both portraiture types reveal the places, people and mood of the 1960s New York avant-garde scene. Rather than essentializing these portraitures, however, these references function to dismantle the authority and reverence of these people and places and turn them into elements that informed Frampton's reality and were changed because of Frampton's presence.

Photographic depictions are not neutral or void of public relevance; images rarely remain private and have vast potential to form and influence public memories and cultural identities. This hyper-awareness is illustrated in the film's opening shot, described by Jenkins as "a Polaroid of Frampton's darkroom at his Walker Street apartment [that] presumably portrays the site in which this and all the other photographs were produced" (Jenkins 1984:15). *(nostalgia)*'s attention to the production of images reflects respect for the world in its photographable form and draws attention to the ways in which meaning is constructed

and memory produced. Frampton's interest is in creation (of photographs, individual identity, social meaning) and death (of representation, memory, self). In accordance with Frampton's approach to photography as a process rather than a predatory act is the artist's fascination with the natural, and at times social, birth and death of things. This is most obvious in the fourth and tenth images, which depict different objects in the process of deterioration. The narratives corresponding to these images are vital to understanding Frampton's curiosity about decay.

The fourth image is the only surviving photograph of a series made of a cabinetmaker's shop window over the course of two years (ironically, Frampton destroyed the others). At the time of exposure/development, the six photographs disappoint him; the voice-over explains, "each time, I found some reason to feel dissatisfied. The negative was too flat, or too harsh; or the framing was too tight" (Frampton 1972:106). When comparing the prints, a natural progression of decay is evident: "I was astonished! In the midst of my concern for the flaws in my method, the window itself had changed, from season to season, far more than my photographs had! I had thought my subject changeless, and my own sensibility pliable. But I was wrong about that" (Frampton 1972:106). The documentation of decay's progression otherwise unnoticed by the daily human eye marks the beginning of Frampton's fascination.

The image of rotting spaghetti provides an experiment in decay, the result, according to the voice-over, of "a painter friend [who] asked me to make a photographic document of spaghetti, an image that he wanted to incorporate into a work of his own" (Frampton 1972:109). Jenkins notes that Rosenquist uses Frampton's photograph "*Spaghetti and Grass*, 1965, where the strands from Frampton's image form the upper half of the lithograph" (Jenkins 1984:21). Frampton documents the spaghetti's demise by photographing it every day.

> [T]his was the eighteenth such photograph. The spaghetti has dried without rotting. The sauce is a kind of pink varnish on the yellow strings. The entirety is covered in attractive mature colonies of mold in three colors: black, green and white. I continued the series until no further change appeared to be taking place: about two months altogether. The spaghetti was never entirely consumed, but the mold eventually disappeared. (Frampton 1972:109)

Frampton's attention to the "mundane" (from the Latin for "dailiness") is typical of Mellencamp's description of the avant-garde's "restructuring of conventions of visual pleasure" (Mellencamp 1990:xvii), and what Andrew Light calls "an aesthetics of the 'everyday'" (Light 2003:55). Roland Barthes argues, "bliss may come only with the *absolutely new*, for only the new disturbs (weakens) consciousness" (Barthes 1975:40). Frampton's attention to ever-changing physical objects in the world creates opportunities for bliss and renewal of vision. Furthermore, the photographic exploration of decay in Frampton's career foreshadows his filmic treatment of deterioration in *(nostalgia)*: the death of the photograph as a still image, its rebirth as a moving image and, ultimately, the demise of objecthood. The decay of worldly physical objects and the demise of

Frampton's photographs on film are useful analogies for memory. In the next section I continue to explore how Frampton's treatment of the photograph as both image and artefact signifies the defining characteristic of nostalgia: the absence of the longed-for object.

The photograph's (or photography's) malleability and evocation of absence
Frampton's filmic treatment of photographs as objects heightens their material nature and malleable condition. Photography and film are fragile media that naturally decay and are bound to eventual loss of reference—Paolo Cherchi Usai states, "let's face it: the most stable medium known by human civilization is ceramic" (Usai 1999:43). Even exhibitions of photography and film, not to mention chemical deterioration of film stock, are potential causes of their demise—Polaroid photographs fade from sunlight, projection weakens the film strip significantly over time. Jenkins notes that Frampton's early work was "destroyed by use" (Jenkins 1983:88) and over-projection. Projection itself is dangerous due to the projector's heat and celluloid's flammability; Mellencamp notes, "if the image doesn't move, it will be destroyed" (Mellencamp 1990:99). In *(nostalgia)*, however, the image (the photograph) moves *because* it is being destroyed. This film is moving *and* the visual content is being destroyed. As the primary source of movement, burning may be viewed as a complete exposure—of the photographs within the film and the film itself.

Dubois' discussion of photographs as fetishized objects highlights their dual nature of presence and absence, "the photograph is an object that can be touched, framed, collected, enclosed, burned, torn up, and embraced, yet it can only show us the untouchable, the inaccessible, a memory, an absence" (Dubois 1995:167). Frampton claims the actual product of a film is, like music, object-less: "the instant the film is completed, the 'object' vanishes" (Frampton 1983:115). Sontag argues that photography "actively promote[s] nostalgia" (Sontag 1982 [1977]:15) by evoking that which is absent in a physical form that can be fetishized. By burning photographs, Frampton removes their fetish quality and highlights their physical presences as paper and emulsion (which also signify impermanence, malleability and ultimately absence).

These many levels of absence are defining characteristics of photography, film and memory. Frampton structurally incorporates this undeniable aspect of absence into the film itself by provoking the viewer to imagine objects or images that are either not immediately shown or not shown at all. In both cases, but particularly when *(nostalgia)* refuses to exhibit the image described by the voice-over, the discomfort of delayed image or missing vision serves as an intentional jest at the expense of the viewing subject. This occurs most significantly in the third and thirteenth descriptions. The third description narrates Frampton's dissatisfaction with six photographs taken over two years of the same subject, "so I chose the one photograph that pleased me most after all, and destroyed the rest. That was years ago. Now I'm sorry. I only wish you could have seen them!" (Frampton 1972:106-107). In addition to the temporary absence of the image

due to the structural form of the film (descriptions always precede images), the narrative refers to images the viewer will never see.

Frampton remarks that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" (Frampton 1983:87). The absence of so-called evidence (the missing depiction of something) does not indicate absence of meaning. Historians and photographers deal with the world through its traces. Paul Connerton describes these traces as "the marks, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind" (Connerton 1989:13). Photographs are traces of specific moments in time retrievable only through their image, and even then not entirely. The photographs in *(nostalgia)* contain traces that are embarrassing (documenting his various attempts at fine art) or haunting. The thirteenth and final voice-over describes a shot spoiled by the untimely arrival of a truck, which he took anyway.

> When I came to print the negative, an odd thing struck my eye. *Something*, standing in the cross-street and invisible to me, was reflected in a factory window, and then reflected once more in the rear-view mirror attached to the truck door. It was only a tiny detail. (Frampton 1972:111)

According to Sontag, photographic realism is defined not by what exists but what is perceived; every photograph implies that "reality is hidden. And, being hidden, is something to be unveiled. Whatever the camera records is a disclosure" (Sontag 1982 [1977]:120-121). The more Frampton enlarges the image the more his ability to see is impaired, hinting that the closer one looks the further one gets.

> Since then I have enlarged this small section of my negative enormously. The grain of the film all but obliterates the features of the image. It is obscure; by any possible reckoning, it is hopelessly ambiguous. Nevertheless, what I *believe* I see recorded, in that speck of film, fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph again. Here it is! Look at it! Do you see what I see? (Frampton 1972:111)

In some ways this ending exaggerates how *(nostalgia)* mocks and makes impossible acts of seeing and understanding. However, the final image offered in answer to this question is not merely an absent image but a black-filled frame. The described photograph remains veiled on all levels—from the original unspoiled composition and physically absent outcome of the exposure to the assumed, unnameable object of dread. Barthes argues, "what I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance" (Barthes 2000 [1980]:51). Frampton's inability to name the "something" of dread is enacted through the film's inability to show the photograph that contains a trace of that "something." The final image of a black frame haunts the viewer, re-enacting the haunting that is originally provoked in Frampton's viewing and enlarging of the photograph.

Although, according to Barthes, "Every photograph is a certificate of presence" (Barthes 2000 [1980]:87), Frampton dismantles the photograph's evidential power not only by burning the signifier but also by structurally placing an emphasis on the narration rather than the photographic image. *(nostalgia)* provides a "tell-and-show" rather than "show-and-tell," thus authorizing the narrative (as opposed to the anticipated image) as the original and perhaps more authentic approach to representation of memory. With the exception of the initial photograph, Frampton's photographs are always presented in relation to stories. These photographs have no agency themselves but are valuable as delayed reference points for the narrative and flammable material for Frampton's burning ritual. This directly relates to the narrative's role and the nostalgia-producing voice-over.

Storytelling, structural film, cultural memory
Nostalgia for the verbal, visual, and narrator

By physically invoking the objectless-ness and absence of photography and film, *(nostalgia)* relies on narration for meaning to be made. As the narrative occurs, the viewer imagines the photograph. When the anticipated photograph is provided, a longing for the previously spoken text occurs. The expected but surprising image is systematically destroyed and turns to ash, creating a feeling that all answers are lost and full comprehension or meaning may never be grasped. Simultaneously, another narrative is being presented, perpetuating the impossibility of synchronicity and increased feelings of loss. The viewer is caught in a backwards cycle which requires piecing the elements together while the image on the screen itself is changing in shape and meaning. Splitting the narrative from its properly-timed image and owner draws attention to the complicated relationship between visual and verbal that is representative of the viewer's relationship to memory, storytelling and meaning making.

The weight of nostalgia and feelings of incompletion are not due to the quickly disappearing surface image of the photograph but rather the already completed narrative. The structure of the film causes *stories* to be longed for more than the content of the burning photographs, despite visual focus on the constant and active destruction of the photographs. The life of each photograph exists in the story which precedes it and in its demise. This reverses the way photographs are historically used, illustrating a rare instance where the visual weight of the photograph does not lie in the image once evident upon its surface but on the consumption and death of that image. The voice-over, which creates nostalgia within the viewer, is further complicated by the fact that it is written by Frampton but read by Michael Snow. In addition to the final joke of the ending (the final, mysterious description produces no photograph), the deception of voice-ownership is the lie of the film.

(nostalgia) was made the same year Philippe Lejeune argued for the legitimacy of autobiography as a genre. Lejeune's notion of the autobiographical pact implies that the name on a book's cover is the same individual whose story is told (Lejeune 1989 [1971]:104). The deception of voice ownership in Framp-

ton's film highlights the unsatisfactory and unreliable ability of language itself to depict memory or to distinguish memory from reality. This is also shown in the narrative's failed attempt to recall specific details, exemplifying the inherently faulty nature of memory-recall and the consequent questioning of meaning making. Frampton as the narrating subject is fragmented and missing on many levels, from physical absence due to film's nature (or Frampton's actual death) to basic refusal of voice-ownership. Frampton seeks to create new self-definitions and identities, not just as a photographer or filmmaker but as an inherently changing individual who is at once his art and not his art, his voice and body yet not his voice or body, himself but not himself.

The most accurate illustration of this tension between self and other in the past and present is the second occurrence of the voice-over, which "promises," in Sitney's words, "a self-portrait of the artist at twenty-three years old" (Sitney 2002 [1974]:380). The photographic portrait speaks of absence *and* presence, reconstructing memory and challenging it, thus implying nostalgia on all levels. Frampton distances himself from his self-portrait, drawing attention to the problems of representation on philosophical and biological levels:

> The face is my own, or rather it *was* my own.... I take some comfort in realizing that my entire physical body has been replaced more than once since it made this portrait of its face. However, I understand that my central nervous system is an exception. (Frampton 1972:105-106)

The portrait actually depicts an *impossible* person, an absent person on every possible level (taking into account cellular renewal). Sitney summarizes how the voice displacement perpetuates this absence, "there is considerable humor in hearing Snow delight in not being Frampton, or Frampton in not being himself, depending upon where one locates the narrative voice. If we believe this witty text there is hardly anything which connects either Snow *or* Frampton with the picture of the young man of a dozen years earlier" (Sitney 2002 [1974]:380). Both cellular renewal and photography become *(nostalgia)*'s analogies for memory.

Transition from private to public

Frampton's *(nostalgia)* exaggerates and extends the way autobiography reflects and informs notions of identity, memory and group membership as public or private. Socially situated in the 1960s New York art scene, Frampton's autobiographical memories appropriately reflect that specific cultural moment through the film's images and stories as well as the voice he borrows to tell those stories. Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser state that "through autobiography we locate ourselves in the symbolic world of culture" (Bruner and Weisser 1991:144). I believe that *(nostalgia)* is apposite for demonstrating what Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith define as cultural memory: "cultural memory... can best be understood at the juncture where the individual and the social come together, where the person is called on to illustrate the social formation in its heterogeneity and complexity" (Hirsch and Smith 2002:7). The film's location of the self

within society incorporates culturally significant figures in photographic depictions, verbal stories, and the voice used to narrate these stories. Not only do we see key figures from art history, such as Frank Stella and others, but we are given imitations and examples of Surrealism, Dada, action painting, and high-brow art history discourse. Given Frampton's concern for commenting on art and art practices both historic and contemporary, *(nostalgia)*'s form and content illustrate how the personal is formed and influenced by the social.

The ultimate illustration of Frampton's transition from private to public and, consequently, from photographer to filmmaker is the use of a found photograph for the final shot of the film. This final image marks the grand finale of Frampton's progression from the secret and sacred interiority of the darkroom (the first image of the film) to the exteriority and disposability of a newspaper photograph. The darkroom is the site of meaning, the location for the creation of artistic self, both individual and social. Frampton's outward progression from the darkroom leads to two different mass-consumed objects: newspaper and film. Both are tools for the transmission of memory across cultures and generations. Simultaneously contemporary *and* historic, of the present *and* the past, the images and stories of newspaper and film pervade all boundaries; both can be made numinous through their preservation and distribution, and both can be disposed of (burned) easily.

Frampton ceases to provide images from his personal photographic collection; the final image of the film belongs to the public world of photojournalism. Despite the narrative's usual hyper-attention to the negative's exposure and the process of photograph production, Frampton admits lack of knowledge of the photograph's origins. The narrator proceeds to offer a critical approach to the image, treating it with the attention of an art historian as an object of fine art rather than pulp newspaper:

> [A] stubby, middle-aged man wearing a baseball cap looks back in matter-of-fact dismay or disgruntlement at the camera. It has caught him in the midst of a display of spheres, each about the size of a grapefruit, and of some nondescript light color. He holds four of them in his cupped hands. The rest seem half submerged in water, or else lying in something like mud. A vague, mottled mass behind the crouching man suggest foliage. (Frampton 1972:110)

For the first time, the narrative initially gives weight to the visual content of a photograph and offers a purely hypothetical approach to the image rather than an anecdotal one. Although this serves as another joke on the viewer—the Texas grapefruit farmer squatting beside his flooded grove on September 22, 1967 may be considered banal and undeserving of such an elaborate description—this treatment of the image invites the viewer's imagination to explore the possible outcomes of such a description. By attentively describing various visual aspects of the image prior to the logical explanation or conditions of the photograph, the viewer is primed for the final voice-over which, unlike the current voice-over, does not produce a photograph but rather fifteen seconds of blackness. The ending image is of darkness, of nothing, of everything taken away from the potentiality of the film screen.

(nostalgia) literally illustrates the transition from private to public through the use of privately acquired and viewed images to those that are publicly produced and distributed, thus utilizing already established forms of public memory. Importantly, this occurs in film form, further highlighting the difference between individual or private viewing of personal photographs and social or collective viewing of newspaper images and film screenings. The manner of seeing is as important as that being seen; the method of spectatorship determines and defines the meaning as either private or public, individual or collective, personal or social.

Closure

Structural film as memory's container

Frampton's shift from photography to film and private to public is indicative of autobiographical memory's unreliability and inherent tendency to alter the past. The impossibility of accurate memory is shown in both the film's narrative and structure. By requiring the viewer to remember the previous voice-over in order to make meaning of the current image, the act of viewing becomes a re-enactment of memory itself. One may say the formal nature of *(nostalgia)* is a complication of memory, relying on the viewer's inaccurate recall to illustrate key dilemmas of memory, meaning-making and time. At the same time, however, *(nostalgia)*'s highly structured element serves as a container for remembrance to take place in—simultaneously restricting and containing it. The examination of each shot's duration reveals how *(nostalgia)* gives rise to an understanding of the past that ultimately transforms acts of memory into instances of meaning making.

With the exception of the last image, each shot is two minutes and forty two seconds long (the equivalent of one camera roll, approximately 100 feet of film). Each voice-over begins fifteen to twenty seconds after the new photograph appears, precisely the amount of time permitted before the photograph's destruction visibly begins. As perceptively noted by Moore (2000), the voice-over occurs during the active period of destruction (smoke, flames, blackening of paper, ash). The final shot's voice-over uniquely begins exactly five seconds after the image appears (much less time than the typical eighteen seconds). The voice-overs for each shot vary—from one minute to one minute and forty-two seconds—with the exception of the last two voice-overs. The viewer is generally left to watch the shrinking, crumbling and shrivelling ashes in silence, a process that lasts from thirty seconds to one minute and forty-two seconds. Voice-over thirteen is the longest at two minutes and twenty-five seconds. This final image promptly ends with the completion of the narrative, marking the end of the film.

The structure and form of the film serve as the suitcase for carrying and containing memory. The editorial precision of timing and duration of voice and image is immaculate. The use of an appropriated news photograph for the final image indicates Frampton's transition from private to public. It is precisely this moment when the film's structure collapses, suggesting that private memory may be more easily contained. The moment a memory is made public it must

alter form in order to be presented and, therefore, make new meaning. This also implies that changes in the self can only be demonstrated through the presentation of a public self, but in order to do so a structural shift is required. A story is told to examine the transition from inner to outer and emotional to verbal. Telling the story itself *and experimenting with the actual shape of the story* are the purposes of this structural film, drawing attention to language, time and (re)presentation.

Exteriorization of memory—merging private and public

Frampton's structural film serves as a container for memory and an embodiment—or physical manifestation—of memory. Most art forms provide a location for acts of memory to inform identity and demonstrate the continual conversation between the private and the public realm. If, as argued by Sheringham, "memory turns anterior into interior, and converts time into (inner) space" (Sheringham 1993:289), then art works are the place for that (publicly influenced) private memory to be reflected and projected back onto the public. Filmmaker Stan Brakhage argues that "the entire act of motion picture making... can be considered as an exteriorization of the process of memory" (Brakhage 2001 [1971]:149). In addition to acknowledging the private self as undeniably influenced by—and enmeshed in—the social context, film's "exteriorization" of the private, inner self is an access point to understanding cultural memory.

Hirsch and Smith's understanding of cultural memory is revealing because they point out its mediated nature.

> Cultural memory is the product of fragmentary personal and collective experiences articulated through technologies and media that shape even as they transmit memory. Acts of memory are thus acts of performance, representation, and interpretation. (Hirsch and Smith 2002:5)

Similarly, Mieke Bal notes, the term cultural memory "signifies that memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one" (Bal 1999:vii). Bal's language indicates the difficulty in separating the individual from the social. Films reflect and inform the personal and the cultural simultaneously. Films are a complex form of illustration and communication, providing not just a narrative but also a dialectical tension between private and public.

Autobiographical films such as Frampton's *(nostalgia)* are highly significant documents of cultural memory due to their capacity to contain and provoke narrative. Autobiography is, borrowing the words of Gusdorf, not just "the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (Gusdorf 1980:33) but also the crucial meeting point between self and other, past and present, personal and cultural. Autobiographical narrative is crucial to the formation of identities both individual and societal. Perhaps this is best articulated in Lejeune's statement that "autobiography is not an act of analysis but a lived activity of synthesis" (Lejeune 1989 [1971]:104).

Final interpretation

This "activity" of autobiography which Lejeune speaks of is complicated by Frampton's treatment of memory, photography and film. Frampton's burning ritual and displaced voice-over techniques (in time and also voice ownership) highlight the viewer's eagerness to make meaning, the impossibility of doing so, and the filmmaker's role in meaning-making. While *(nostalgia)* complicates time, language and vision through its very structure, it also critiques the validity given to the temporally correct, verbally honest, and visually coherent. While Frampton declares that "language and image are the substances of which we are made" (Frampton 1983:9), the film's treatment of the verbal and the visual destabilize and deconstruct their validity and coherence. By drawing attention to the manipulated and potentially manipulative nature of language and image, Frampton offers a significant alternative to ordinary ways of seeing and comprehension.

The highly reflexive nature of *(nostalgia)*—and the consequent reflexive nature of viewing *(nostalgia)*—may offer a final, hidden message. As each sacrificed photograph burns, the coils of the electric hotplate are revealed from underneath the photograph. Due to the fact that each photograph is consumed and collapses in a unique fashion, the way in which the circular coils from beneath the photograph are revealed varies from shot to shot. However, the coils consistently blacken the parts of the image directly above the heat, causing a blackened circle to appear in the middle of each photograph before it is entirely consumed and turned to ash. The continual recurrence of this circle is symbolically significant, as it refers to the circular and repetitive nature of memory and perception.

By burning a hole in the center of each image, the hotplate succeeds in causing irreparable damage to the information once available upon the photograph's surface. Photographic vision is compared to the world of surfaces that lack depth by denying death and avoiding decay. By intentionally destroying the photographic image, Frampton destroys and challenges the shallow vision of surfaces and requests a renovation and transformation of visual processes and acts of seeing. Ironically, the location for this defiance of boring or ordinary vision can only be revealed through another photographic depiction: the moving image(s) of film. Historically, the camera has been compared to the human eye. The eye of Frampton's (film) camera documents the destruction of another (photographic) eye: the eye of ordinary vision that systematically confines the world to one moment in time. Film is the apposite medium for the transmission of cultural memory and cultural renovation due to the inherent nature of its form, the fact that it is *moving*. Through the exploration of movement, death, renewal, and revision, Frampton's *(nostalgia)* is the articulation of an essential transformation of perception and an ever-evolving memory of the future.

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