

Hollis Frampton

(Wooster, Ohio, 1936—New York, NY, 1984)

Hapax Legomena (nostalgia) is considered a masterpiece of film by one of the greatest directors involved with conceptual research. The work is made up of innumerable shifts in meaning that originate in the encounter between filmic time and photographic time, between the time contained in images and the time of the off-screen story. Frampton had begun his artistic investigations in the field of photography, before moving on to an almost exclusive interest in experimental cinema. In this work he seems to reflect precisely on the expressive outcomes of this change of language.

The feeling described by the title is not only that conveyed by every old photograph, but is also a more layered feeling. The entire film is thought of as a potent mechanism of loss, of the progressive creation of an absence.

The film begins with a black screen, while the words of the director begin to refer to images that still do not appear, and when the first photograph finally does appear, we realize that the description contained in the sound commentary to which we are listening does not correspond to it at all. While the viewer still attempts to link the image with the words, the framed photographed begins to change and one gradually comes to understand that it is resting on the scorching burner of an electric hot plate that is burning it and already beginning to curl it up, turning it into ashes and smoke. One witnesses a veritable consumption, an organic deterioration of the photographic image, which, in our culture's imagination, ought to be made to preserve in eternity the moment and its memory.

The sound recounts how each of the 13 photographs placed in front of the lens contains a precise moment. Frampton indicates the year, month, day, and hour when the photo was taken, but he also reveals the infinite temporal dimension that remembrance can pass through, beginning with the recording of a single instant, rediscovering, in the observation of the image, the reasons for its realization, the affective atmosphere that determined it and the long chain of events of which the moment of the photo's shooting is only one of the innumerable links. (EV)