Make It Old: Hollis Frampton contra Ezra Pound

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> *I visited Pound nearly every day during this time, while he was finishing the part of his* Cantos *called* Section: Rock-Drill*, commencing work on* Thrones*—and had undertaken, for the benefit of his visitors, to read aloud . . . and to annotate, orally, the entirety of the epic poem. Thus I became privy to a most meaningful exposition of "the generation of the '80s." At the same time, I came to understand that I was not a poet.*
>
> —Hollis Frampton[1]

Hollis Frampton's account of his time spent with Ezra Pound has come to stand as an origin story of his artistic formation. Two special issues of this journal (1985; 2004) were dedicated to examining Frampton's filmography, with most of the articles placing him squarely in the lineage of modernism's originators.[2] Even more than critics of his work, though, Frampton himself often appears invested in solidifying his self-image as one of the modernist heirs apparent. Throughout his life, he would consistently gesture at his place in this genealogy, and in his final years, Frampton penned a brief bio for himself in a book of dialogues with sculptor Carl Andre that included the following line: "Studied (sat around the lawn at St. Elizabeth's) with Ezra Pound, 1957–58—that study is far from concluded."[3]

There is no denying that Frampton's theoretical writings and artistic practice owe much to the legacy of modernism and that his direct connection to one of its

1. Quoted in Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane, *Hollis Frampton: Recollections/Recreations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), p. 109.

2. Annette Michelson introduces the first of the special issues by stating that its purpose is to examine "that large project which identifies Frampton as claimant in the lineage of both Pound and Joyce." Annette Michelson, "Poesis/Mathesis," *October* 32 (Spring 1985), p. 6. The second special issue devoted to Frampton was *October* 109 (Summer 2004).

3. Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, *12 Dialogues, 1962–1963*, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), p. 127.

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foremost practitioners supplied him with firsthand experience of its technical operations. But the degree to which Frampton endorsed the most central of modernist precepts and redeployed them in his own work has been overstated. Even the above epigraph, for all its admiration for Pound, ends in a renunciation. While Frampton's early films, with their attention to the material properties of their medium, fully adhere to the modernist program, his unearthing of history in his *Magellan* cycle (1972–1980) functions in opposition to the excesses of modernism as well as to the troubling political manifestations that arose in conjunction with it. Reconceptualizing Frampton's career in relation to his artistic forebears as one of revision, rather than emulation, opens a space for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between modernist poetics and postwar American avant-garde cinema.[4] Frampton, in particular, shows that these filmmakers developed a modernism for an inherently vernacular medium by turning not outward to the literary arts but inward to film's historical origin.

The Cantos *and the Subject of History*

Before delving into Frampton's *Magellan*, it is necessary to understand what Pound's *Cantos* meant to Frampton, even if it ultimately supplied him with a negative example against which to base his own epic. Michael Bernstein's *The Tale of the Tribe* (1980) remains one of the most helpful accounts in grasping the larger aims and the basic premises of this modern epic in verse. "One of the dominant goals of *The Cantos*," writes Bernstein, "a concern governing the work's internal order and historical stance, is just such a quest for the necessary structure of a new epic, a structure that would emerge in the literary articulation of the poem itself and not in its adherence to external criteria."[5] Unlike the methodical schemas that other modernist writers would give their works, a sturdy foundational structure is not a foregone conclusion for Pound; indeed, structure seems to be a sort of grail that would organically reveal itself upon completion. In seeking such a form, Pound utilizes four compositional strategies, according to Bernstein: the presentation of a mythic heritage; the use of a communal and not a singular voice; the interpellation of the reader as a member of a tribe; and the bestowal of lessons necessary for this group's survival.[6] The driving force is thus centripetal in all aspects: to assemble a common history for and by a collective, so that it may fortify itself as a whole to ensure its continued existence.

4. For examples that read modernist poetry and avant-garde film as a continuum, see the following: P. Adams Sitney, *The Cinema of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Scott MacDonald, "Poetry and the Avant-Garde Film: Three Recent Contributions," *Poetics Today* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 1–41; R. Bruce Elder, *The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Charles Olson* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998).

5. Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 11.

6. Ibid., p. 14.

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Of course, the extent to which *The Cantos* achieves such a unity has long been cast into doubt, and the authoritarian bent that pervades the poem, most pronounced in its middle sections, calls into question what such a unity would look like. The sense of alienation that inevitably overtakes even the most steadfast of readers underscores the issue of exactly who belongs in this tribe; at times it appears to consist only of Pound himself. The fact that some of the most famous lines in the poem, specifically the apologia near the end, concede its failure to cohere goes a long way in undermining any supposed achievement of order. At the same time, the failure of *The Cantos* to cohere, its collapse of unity, may also be what gives it value; as Bernstein contends, the "liberating fragmentation … in effect transforms *The Cantos* from a totalitarian ideogram into an open-ended *grand collage*. And it is exactly in this incomplete form that *The Cantos* has proved so fruitful a model for subsequent writers."[7] More than most other literary works, *The Cantos* has come to stand more for what it does *not* do than for what it does, its story more the one surrounding it than the one contained within it. Even for Frampton, who witnessed an annotated reading by its author, the poem is beyond redemption: "In its failure—and I believe that as a poem, as a whole work of art, it is a failure, as Pound believed—it represents an incredible catastrophe within modernist poetics. It is one of the supreme attempts, and it is one of the supreme failures. It is an immense catastrophe."[8] Thus Frampton, too, identifies the distance between the intention and the result as the primary legacy of the poem.

For Frampton, the reason for the failure rests in Pound's definition of the genre to which the poem belongs. Pound succinctly summarized the epic, that most expansive of literary forms, as "a poem including history."[9] But this fundamental component is precisely what Frampton sees as lacking in *The Cantos*:

> I don't think that it's possible—and I suppose here my theoretical Marxist leanings begin to emerge, at least—possible or feasible to bring off a project of those dimensions without a theory of history, in a word. And I don't think Pound had one. Thereby unfortunately depends the anti-Semitism. Pound didn't have a theory of history; he had a child's view of history—namely, that it was quite clear that everything was going downhill. (*CA*, 183)

The simultaneous timelines that Pound weaves in and out of his epic—the Renaissance, the Confucian era, early American history, the age of the troubadours, the contemporaneous moment—can only really map onto each other if

7. Michael André Bernstein, "Robert Duncan and the Individual Tradition," *Sagetrieb* 4, no. 2/3 (Fall/Winter1985), p. 189.

8. Hollis Frampton, *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, ed. Bruce Jenkins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 183. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *CA*.

9. Ezra Pound, "Date Line," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 86.

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one disregards specific historical circumstances. Frampton elsewhere speaks of Pound's approach as constituting "the continuous copresence of everything," which necessarily depends on viewing the effects of time and geographical location as negligible.[10] If the past epochs that Pound includes in his all-encompassing present are not really past, then they belong just as much to the contemporary scene as any current event. Pound's view of literary criticism further emphasizes his belief that the past only matters in terms of the present: The work of the critic, he maintains, is "analogous to that which a good hanging committee or curator would perform in a National Gallery or in a biological museum. The ordering of knowledge so that the next man (or generation) can most readily find the live part of it, and waste the least possible time among obsolete issues."[11] This pragmatic belief in criticism's raison d'être hints at self-effacement: To practice criticism is to lay the groundwork for future critics. At the same time, the remark exhibits a deep skepticism as to history's capacity to do anything but reflect present concerns: The past is inaccessible, the present inescapable. The statement is innocuous enough, but if it is taken to the extreme—as arguably Pound does in his epic—a congruence begins to emerge between this sort of anti-theory of history and fascism's simultaneous nostalgia for a mythic origin to support its radical overhaul of present conditions.[12]

Frampton never directly links his own unique conception of history to his belief that Pound's inability to conceive of a viable theory of one resulted in the faulty underpinnings of *The Cantos*. Yet Frampton's numerous essays that take up the subject convey his desire not to err as his predecessor had, and instead to crystallize history as a dynamic, complex process, one that does not necessarily lend itself to the imperatives of the present. Frampton sets himself the task of theorizing history in this manner when discussing Lumière's puzzling claim that "the cinematograph has no future."[13] What could be taken as an ironic lack of foresight from one of cinema's inventors Frampton instead interprets as a call to historicize: "Until such a time as there is a past of some sort—a history furthermore, of some sort—a past which has been examined, has been subjected to a critical, a theoretical analysis, there can be no future, because there is no apparatus for prediction and extrapolation" (*CA*, 180). Frampton's entreaty for a rigorous historicism, one based in both critical and theoretical traditions, presents itself as a possible remedy to Pound's ramshackle approach.

10. Hollis Frampton and Peter Gidal, "Interview with Hollis Frampton," *October* 32 (Spring 1985), p. 100.

11. Ezra Pound, "Date Line," p. 75.

12. David Barnes makes this point in "Fascist Aesthetics: Ezra Pound's Cultural Negotiations in 1930s Italy," *Journal of Modern Literature* 34, no. 1 (Fall 2010), pp. 19–35.

13. Quoted in Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses," *Camera Arts*, p. 131.

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Film History as Metahistory

To call Frampton a rigorous historicist does not mean that he practices history in any conventional way. Idiosyncrasy, a defining trait of all his essays, which often include the adoption of personae like Robert Browning or Jorge Luis Borges, is at the core of his historical project. His 1971 essay "For a Metahistory of Film" contains his most sustained and irregular consideration of the topic. He distinguishes between, on the one hand, the historian of cinema, who "faces the appalling problem," the impossible task, of accounting for every frame of all extant feature films; and, on the other, the metahistorian, who invents a tradition, who brings into focus "a coherent wieldy set of discrete monuments, meant to inseminate resonant consistency into the growing body of his art" (*CA*, 136). The historian searches for order; the metahistorian forges it. Whereas Pound's solution to the problem of abundance depended on a palimpsestic meshing of separate eras into one, Frampton seems to take a cue from T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," wherein the present enters into a matrix of relations with the past to create an altogether new network of arrangements. The metahistorian, moreover, does not privilege feature films above other forms, as does the historian, but considers "instructional films, sing-alongs, endoscopic cinematography, and much, much more" (*CA*, 136). Anything recorded onto celluloid is fair game for the metahistorian, who navigates such excess in order to put together patterns of meaning.

In what resembles a filmic equivalent of the Borgesian infinite library, Frampton posits an infinite cinema that will occupy the attention of the metahistorian:

> A polymorphous camera has always turned, and will turn forever, its lens focused upon all appearances of the world. Before the invention of still photography, the frames of the infinite cinema were blank, black leaders; then a few images began to appear upon the endless ribbon of film. Since the birth of the photographic cinema, all the frames are filled with images. (*CA*, 134)

And yet, in the same essay, having conceived of this never-ending filmstrip, he also proclaims the death of cinema. According to Frampton, the cinema belongs to the "Age of Machines," which has now ended, rendering the cinema obsolete (*CA*, 136). Paradoxically, it is only by turning the cinema into a relic of a bygone era that the metahistorical goal of fathoming the sum total of all recorded images can be achieved. Frampton concludes the essay by saying he "glimpse[s] the possibility of constructing a film that will be a kind of synoptic conjugation of such a tour—a Tour of Tours, so to speak, of the infinite film, or of all knowledge, which amounts to the same thing" (*CA*, 138). This glimpse is the germ of *Magellan*, Frampton's attempt not to produce the infinite cinema but to conduct a voyage *by way of* it and, in doing so, compose a metahistory for film.

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A Film Outside of Film

Magellan is metahistory in action. Brian Henderson describes this massive work as "at once a cycle of films and one large cyclic film."[14] These cycles within a larger cycle suggest a calendrical form, which Frampton planned to reinforce by showing a segment or two each day of the year. The section entitled *Birth of Magellan* covers the last two days of the annual cycle; *Straits of Magellan*, 720 one-minute films (with two projected per day), spans the majority of the twelve months; *Death of Magellan* screens at the start of the New Year; finally, a series of Frampton's old films shows on the equinoxes and solstices as well as the filmmaker's birthday. He completed only eight hours of the planned thirty-six before his early death. Despite being only one-quarter complete, *Magellan* has been subject to a number of critical accounts. In fact, its very incompleteness—the sheer implausibility of ever finishing such an ambitious undertaking—seemed to be part of the work itself. Frampton would express both the impossibility and the necessity of reaching the end of it, sometimes in a single utterance: "This is something that will never transpire. Although, of course, I will do it eventually."[15] These paradoxical qualities—the improbable and the inexorable aspects of its realization—reflect the same contradiction inherent in its source: the unfathomability of circumnavigation prior to Magellan and the inevitability of its happening in due course.

Yet Frampton stressed that, compared to the precedent set by unfinished literary epics, film lacks any such model of incompleteness:

> I cannot in the same sense assume the existence of film . . . film has not thus far achieved levels of organization that are in any means comparable with literature, and especially, I think it has not constituted itself as a mode of production on the one hand or a field of cultural potentialities on the other such that it can contain the large work. This is film outside of film, for the most part. So that I'm not interested nearly so much in performing a special task within film as I am of, not seeking, but redefining the boundaries of filmic discourse. So that my worries aren't the same as they would be if I were, for instance, writing a 1,000-page novel. I worry about other things, like, for instance, am I totally haywire? Seriously. Am I going to finish this goddam thing? You see, this is a serious problem. If you don't finish an epic poem it is a more or less magnificent ruin. *The Canterbury Tales* … *The Cantos* … This I probably have got to finish or have blown the whole thing, in my own mind, since it has the problem of establishing its own context.[16]

14. Brian Henderson, "Propositions for the Exploration of Frampton's *Magellan,*" *October* 32 (Spring 1985), p. 135.

15. Hollis Frampton, interview with Robert Gardner, *Screening Room,* January 1977, https://www.kanopystreaming.com/product/screening-room-hollis-frampton.

16. Hollis Frampton, "St. Hollis (Part 2)," interview with Henry Hills and David Gerstein, *Cinemanews* 3/4 (September 1978), p. 15.

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Such a claim would appear to consign *Magellan* to oblivion. The instances of metahistory that the fragments of *Magellen* do contain, however, constitute enough of a foundation to justify the work of analysis. And if we are to take Frampton at his word, that *Magellan* is a film outside of film, then the question arises: What is it inside of, where does it belong? An example towards the beginning of *Magellan* will demonstrate how Frampton enacts metahistory in three contexts—Odyssean, sculptural, and archival—that stand in contradistinction to Pound's own use of them in *The Cantos*.

A Cinematic Circumnavigation

Magellan opens with the sounds of an orchestra tuning up and images of a lightning storm, insinuating itself into an incipient, primeval setting. After this prelude, it cuts between a scene from a contemporary wedding and a piece of film's early history, *A Little Piece of String* (1901). In the wedding video, the spatial arrangement of those in the frame resembles that of *String*. The groom stands to the left of the bride as another woman holds the fabric of the dress's train. The latter clip presents a visual gag on politeness. A young man and young woman converse while a second man notices a string dangling from the woman's clothing. He pulls it until eventually, to his embarrassment, the woman's dress falls apart. The juxtaposition of these clips in *Birth of Magellan* suggests not only that the display of sexuality has been integral to the medium since film's conception but also that the medium itself is a form of striptease in its promise to reveal what it cannot actually deliver. It is thus a proper initiation for a film based on a voyage around the world that contains zero images of such.



Hollis Frampton. Birth of Magellan: Cadenza I. *1977–80.*
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Frampton. Birth of Magellan: Cadenza I. *1977–1980*.
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A beginning that enacts a return to origins can also be found in *The Cantos*, but the discrepancy between these returns intimates that Frampton and Pound are conducting two different types of voyages. While Pound stated that "all poetic language is the language of exploration," beginning *The Cantos* with a translation of Homer imbues the epic with the feeling that everything has been preordained and has, in a sense, already transpired: "The ocean flowing backward, came we then to the place / Aforesaid by Circe."[17] The caesura gives the line an antiquated meter, reinforcing its rearward motion by melding echoes of old English verse with the content of Greek epic. The metrical inversions swim against the flow of the line so that the meter inhibits the verse's progression just as much as it propels it forward. When Odysseus then encounters the shades of his former crew members, this brief surfacing of the underworld makes plain that Pound's odyssey embarks with multiple acts of excavation.

In contrast to *The Cantos* beginning in retrograde, Frampton establishes an orientation of immediacy to his source material. The most important primary document on Magellan's voyage is the journal kept by the passenger Antonio Pigafetta, who "was a close observer and a scrupulous recorder, often writing in his ever-present notebook during the actual occurrence of events."[18] Frampton

17. Pound, "Vorticism," *Early Writings*, p. 285. Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 3.

18. Herman W. Liebert, "Foreword," in Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*, trans. and ed. R. A. Skelton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. xi.

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reconceptualizes the activity of viewing in light of Pigafetta's style of transcription, an essential fact of which is its indiscrimination of subject matter written in the moment in which the experience transpires. He wrote down anything and everything—from observations on the climate and geography of where they made landfall to records of the ship's navigational coordinates, from descriptions of the customs and dress of the peoples they encountered to the attempted mutiny of his shipmates and the death of Magellan in battle. Frampton draws an underlying connection between this scrupulous record-keeping and the manner in which the earliest films were made; namely, a camera operator would load a reel of film and start recording until the reel ran out. The defining feature of this early technology is that too much would be recorded: Whatever happened to pass in front of the lens, however extraneous or insignificant, would go into the film. Like Pigafetta's all-inclusive note-taking, the incidental details are just as relevant as anything else.

This model of spectatorship based on a record of seafaring exploration establishes a new set of relations to film. As Frampton explains it, the experience of the film viewer blends with that of the filmmaker.[19] The calendrical form of *Magellan* turns watching into a daily, ordinary task like any other part of one's routine. Indeed, Pigafetta's journal makes it clear that exploration has its own routinized operations. At every port, Pigafetta follows a checklist of details to give an account of the location and its inhabitants, making the unfamiliar familiar by compiling standardized information. For Frampton's spectator, the images stand in for the uncharted waters that the film attempts to navigate. The metaphor of circumnavigation contextualizes each scene, inviting the spectator to look at the opening clip of the wedding, for example, as though seeing a ceremony such as this for the first time. Frampton correlates a spectator's disposition toward the image to an explorer's inclination for the unknown. And because Magellan's voyage ultimately circles back on itself, returning to its original point of departure and encompassing the entire Earth, the ever-present implicit question throughout *Magellan* is, How does each of its constituent parts fit into all of film, into the infinite film that it approaches? Crosscutting between *A Little Piece of String* and footage from a wedding implies a genealogy from the medium's beginning until the contemporary era, a study in contrasts not only of film at different moments in history but also of courtship, attitudes toward sexuality, gender roles, dress, entertainment, and so on—numerous cultural customs and norms that reincarnate the spectator as traveling diarist.

19. Frampton, *Screening Room.*

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Scalar Incongruities

The second context to which the opening of *Magellan* belongs is sculptural. In discussing the initial juxtaposition of clips, Michael Zryd contends:

> Material from the point of origin of cinema is not valued for its own sake (Frampton does not share certain archivists' fetishization of early film). In fact, in itself, *A Little Piece of String* is "idiotic." The metahistorian searching for the quintessence of early film is faced with its "infantile" rawness. However, by appropriating *A Little Piece of String*, segmenting and intercutting it, and placing it within the larger conceptual framework of *Magellan*, Frampton transforms its slim narrative into a grand metaphor. This metaphor doubles back to ironize the grandeur of its correlative, the already self-ironic Duchampian modernist masterwork [*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*] it echoes.[20]

Frampton, who once quipped, "If Ezra is my father, then Rrose [Duchamp] is my mother," positions *Magellan* outside of film and inside sculpture by means of montage.[21] Duchamp's sculpture also appears to enact a fusion of frames. The structure stands nearly nine feet tall with its two large glass panes. The top "frame" contains the mechanical bride with a cloud-like shape trailing behind her, which Duchamp described as a "cinematic blossoming" of a halo or the Milky Way.[22] Below, nine suitors and their chariot make up the bachelor machine, along with nearby farming equipment including a mill and grinder. This montage of glass panes separates "the mass-produced readymade from the readyfound."[23] The inclusion of objects such as a comb, wheel, and shovel (the readymade) and the amalgamation of assorted materials (the readyfound) resemble Frampton's integration of stock wedding footage with the found film from the turn of the century. In addition to the overlap of procedural method, Frampton and Duchamp see eye to eye in how they want the spectator to engage with their work. Duchamp's gendering of the mechanical gears and levers of this primal agricultural apparatus gives some indication of how it would operate, but in its unanimated and, like *Magellan*, unfinished state, the spectator is left to imagine "the throbbing energy of this robotic world."[24] Frampton follows Duchamp's claim that he "attaches even more importance to the spectator than to the artist" and takes it even further by offering "the spectator the possibility of a posture that's so active in relation to the

20. Michael Zryd, "History and Ambivalence in Hollis Frampton's *Magellan*," *October* 109 (Summer 2004), p. 141.

21. Quoted in Ragona Melissa, "Hidden Noise: Strategies of Sound Montage in the Films of Hollis Frampton," *October* 109 (Summer 2004), p. 116.

22. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even,* trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., 1960), n.p.

23. Ibid.

24. Richard Hamilton, "The Green Book," in Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare,* n.p.

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work that it borders on the utopian or is utopian" (*CA*, 235). In regard to either the *Bride* or *Magellan*, the spectator must consult each's corresponding documents, be they the clutter of notes in Duchamp's *The Green Box* or Pigafetta's journal and Frampton's essays. Both works use textual forms to supplement their visual ones, entrusting the spectator to envision an ensemble.

Yet, even with the substantial scale of Duchamp's sculpture, an incongruity remains between its size and the forty-foot screen that Frampton intended to project his film onto. Frampton's outsized proportions hint at a tension in *Magellan* between the notions of grandeur that exploration elicits and the imperialistic consequences of such an odyssey. Mark McGurl has recently argued that problems of scale can give rise to the colonial drive to assert mastery by reining in disproportion. McGurl's most prominent example is Robinson Crusoe's reaction to finding a footprint larger than his own on the island. The inner turmoil caused by such a contrast in scale "won't be fully quieted until Robinson takes virtual colonial possession of the racial other who is Friday and everything is adequately, realistically explained to his satisfaction, the small triumphing over the large."[25] The same could apply to the events that transpired on the southernmost tip of the Americas during Magellan's voyage. Pigafetta relates how they encountered people whom he describes as "Patagonian giants" and how Magellan tricked two of them, chaining them and taking them captive on one of the ships. They were to be presented to the Spanish royalty upon their return, but they died in transit. This abduction exemplifies the symbolic import of the first circumnavigation as a proclamation of supremacy over the Earth's boundary, a claim to dominion over the horizon itself and a foundation for European colonial rule.

That Magellan's voyage was not without a sordid underbelly was not lost on Frampton. If the disparity between screen and sculpture evokes colonial conflict through its scalar incongruity, the middle portion of the film, *Straits of Magellan*, confronts it head-on. This section's title locates it in the site of the kidnapping of the "Patagonian giants" by Magellan. Frampton shot a number of sections from *Straits* in a steel mill, capturing sprays of sparks and glowing embers, thereby locating this section in an inferno-like underworld. One clip jumps aboveground and shows a boy holding a frog caught on a fishing line immediately in front of the lens. The proximity of the boy to the camera magnifies his stature; he dwarfs even the house in the background. In speaking about this clip, Frampton said, "The frog looks so much like a little man that then the scale of the little child is magically changed."[26] The scene undoubtedly has a playfulness to it in how it upends spatial perception, and perhaps exemplifies what McGurl identifies as the role of giants in literature, which is to teach children how to understand themselves in relation to larger objects, including giant-sized adults, by converting "a primary human cognitive developmental necessity into an aesthetic structure of mobility

25. Mark McGurl, "Gigantic Realism: The Rise of the Novel and the Comedy of Scale," *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2017), p. 411.

26. Frampton, *Screening Room*.

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Frampton. Straits of Magellan. *1974*.
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and mastery, *the pleasure of measure*."[27] When confronting larger-than-life figures—this child who morphs into "a mighty hunter," for example—the audience must adjust, expending cognitive effort on what, before becoming automatic, had to be learned in infancy. This temporary regression to the state of childhood inevitability carries with it some delight. Yet the role reversal doubles as a reenactment of Magellan's seizure of the indigenous couple, the colonial other represented here as subhuman from the perspective of Magellan and his crew. Frampton also spoke of this scene as his "one-minute horror movie," and however glib he might have been, the implication is nevertheless present that it critiques the colonial project as the manifestation of infantile urges, as signaling a sort of arrested development that insists on the diminishment of the physiques of others as compared to the colonizers.

Pound, too, evokes the dynamics of sculptural dimensions by pitting mismatches of scale against each other, most memorably in the much-analyzed "magic moment" of Canto 81 in *The Pisan Cantos*. George Kearns encapsulates the arc of this canto as a movement "from egotism (me, *my* life), through participation in traditions of craft and song, to humility and a sense of the prisoner's true scale within nature."[28] It is in the third division of the canto that the poet-prisoner speaks the line "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world."[29] The amplification of

27. McGurl, "Gigantic Realism," p. 414.

28. George Kearns, *Guide to Ezra Pound's* Selected Cantos (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980), p. 159.

29. Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 521.

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the micro-creature is startling in itself, but the unspoken other side of the equation forms a picture of an utterly humiliated poet, lying on the ground and looking up in awe at an insect. This line of pentameter, mostly iambic, goes against the poet's earlier declaration that he would break lines such as these. Despite speaking of disproportionality, this orderly line defies the poet's riotous intentions toward the traditional lyric and humbles him in the process. A few lines down, the poet reflects on his insight into the inversion of sizes: "Learn of the green world what can be thy place / In scaled invention or true artistry."[30] Compared to the monosyllabic words in the first half of the sentence, the two trisyllabic words contract the length of the second line, enacting the scalar diminution that the poet himself undergoes. Although these lines have also been read as an entrenchment of Pound's aggressive defiance—*thy* could address the Allied nations just as easily as Pound himself—they nevertheless convey that he at least contemplated the implications of proportionality via poetics.[31] The famous refrain that follows, "Pull down thy vanity / I say pull down," continues to deflate the ambiguous addressee. While Pound's repentance or defiance is uncertain, the stylistic virtuosity of the canto suggests that Pound also takes some *pleasure in measure*. Where Frampton and Pound depart from each other in their respective use of scalar incongruity is thus less in the possible critiques that they both levy but in how they locate the pleasure of their craft. For Frampton, it's a medium-intrinsic property—the screen enlarges bodies that in turn make the spectator feel small—while Pound simultaneously presents a lowly self-image while elevating the register to its highest lyrical potential, effecting an aestheticized grandeur in its virtuosic display.

Out of the Archive

Michael Zryd's view that the metahistorian aims not to fetishize but to recontextualize early cinema captures an essential characteristic of Frampton's attitude toward archival material. Frampton made this point more or less when he said there is nothing within "the structural logic of the filmstrip that distinguishes 'footage' from a 'finished' work," and, consequently, "it may be possible for a metahistorian to take old work as 'footage,' and construct from it identical new work necessary to a tradition" (*CA*, 136). This recourse to the already made owes a debt to the verbatim rewriting of *Don Quixote* by Pierre Menard as imagined by Borges: The context in which Menard composes the facsimile results in an original work despite the fact than an identical work already exists. In this vein, Bruce Jenkins considers the instances in *Magellan* when Frampton reaches into the archive as establishing a "postauthorial understanding of cinema" that derives from the original role of the filmmaker "as recorder *and* presenter inherent in the conceptual and mechanical basis of cinema's own first device, the cinematograph,

30. Ibid.

31. On this issue, see Peter D'Epiro, "Whose Vanity Must Be Pulled Down?," *Paideuma* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1984), pp. 247–52.

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which functioned both as camera and projector."[32] Jenkins extends Zryd's observation to suggest not only that Frampton treats the cinema as an archive but also that he treats the antiquated technology as an archive in its own right. Further, it is possible to add another type of archive that Frampton sifts through: his own filmography. The most illustrative example of this case spans Frampton's entire artistic career: He originally intended to use the title *Hapax Legomena* for a volume of poetry but eventually applied it to a series of films that then became part of *Magellan*.[33] Frampton's meshing of personal and historical archives ensures that metahistory does not exile biography from its purview.

This propensity to recover an alternative tradition finds one final outlet in film criticism. Frampton pinpointed what, to his mind, was the most underutilized and least understood of all concepts of film theory. Surprisingly, it comes from one of the most canonical of theorists on the subject for which he is most well known: Sergei Eisenstein on cinematic montage. Frampton unearths a forgotten component of Eisenstein's writings, namely, vertical montage. If the influential theory of montage focuses only on images, positing a dialectical relation between sequential frames separated by a cut, vertical montage introduces the element of sound into the equation. It is a concept that Frampton was still experimenting with at the time of his death, but in his writings he stresses the possibilities he envisioned in such a practice: "Vertical montage at least permits—I would suggest, almost enforces—the simultaneous availability of essentially covalent chains of causal linkage of one kind or another" (*CA*, 242). He goes on to give an example in which he introduces the noise of a jackhammer first to the image of a cactus and then to the image of a river. He gives a rundown of the revolving set of associations between image and sound that this produces:

> We have, on the one hand, a cactus, which is prickly, irritating, an abrasive thing, set against the pneumatic hammer, which is generally, even in the abrasive sonic environment of the city, a particularly noticeable, inescapable annoyance and interruption, likewise abrasive. On the other, it is also true that the cactus is phallic in form and thereby, because it is spiny, at least moderately sadistic in its implications. And the pneumatic hammer, of course, is a penetrating agency, which disrupts what it penetrates and functions phallically in a painful and destructive way. But then, of course, the image cut crosses the sound cut and one does have something like the gentle image of flowing water. The valence of sound immediately changes entirely. (*CA*, 242)

The vertical montage disrupts the initial sonic-visual equivalence between jackhammer and cactus, switching to a discordant relation between its two modalities.

32. Bruce Jenkins, "The Red and the Green," *October* 32 (Spring 1985), p. 91.

33. P. Adams Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 107.

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In this instance, the inflated masculinity that the first combination presents is exposed as an artifice, representative of what Frampton called "the supreme fiction of film: that we're hearing what we're seeing."[34] In moving toward the de-synchronization of sound and image, Frampton seems most interested in undoing unnecessary constraints imposed by the expectations of realism and verisimilitude in commercial film. Resurrecting the overlooked technique of vertical montage demonstrates the task of metahistory: to lay the foundation for a more artistically aware and a more self-conscious tradition of film history.

Critics of Frampton's work have often lamented that he did not have the chance to explore the possibilities of Eisenstein's lesser-known theory further in *Magellan*. Yet the beginning of the film gestures at more potential applications of this added dimension to montage. Whenever Frampton cuts from *A Little Piece of String* to the clips of the wedding, he overlays the sound of applause from an audience. When the bride and groom appear onscreen, sound and image are unwedded from each other. The clapping echoes the atmospheric sounds of rain and thunder in the overture and also anticipates the film's end not only by signaling the cessation of a performance but also by suggesting the thunderclap at the beginning of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, to which the finale of *Magellan* pays homage. Thus the soundtrack of *Magellan*, like its calendrical structure, circles back on itself. The recorded applause also subtly brings the two simultaneous performances into relation with each other: the wedding and the cinematic projection. By doing so, Frampton invites the spectator to consider how different types of spectacles determine the expectations of audience behavior, especially the peculiar phenomenon of applauding after a film. The repetition of the applause track poses the question, When applause occurs in a movie theater, whom is it for? Neither the director nor the actors are present to hear it, though it could be understood as approbation sent from afar. Yet, like applause at a wedding that both praises the newly married couple and gives an auditory confirmation that the ceremony was indeed witnessed, this vertical montage hints that in those occasions when the audience members clap for a film, they clap, in part, for themselves as a collective, affirming the communal experience they just shared with one another. This is the sort of action that Frampton wants *Magellan* to inspire in those who view it: to claim a stake in the film and to realize that their role is just as essential to it as his.

Frampton uses the archive to encourage a collaborative effort between the spectator and himself; Pound, by contrast, resorts to it mostly in order to barricade himself within, especially when facing the precarious situation of being imprisoned in an outdoor cage at a U.S. military detention center during the composition of *The Pisan Cantos*. Moreover, Frampton encourages spectatorial participation by breaking the unity of image and sound; Pound, by contrast, in his moments of greatest distress strives against the overwhelming discord to find a

34. Frampton, *Screening Room*.

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resemblance between the visual signifiers and the verbal cadence of his verse. One possible example of this strategy is Pound's use of the ideogram, which to him, in almost every case, stands for order and coherence. The ideogram's appeal to Pound, though, resides predominantly in its visual immediacy, in how its signifier approaches transparency, which, as many critics have pointed out, is a result of Pound's superficial understanding of Chinese written characters.[35] Sound does not play a significant factor in Pound's incorporation of the ideograms, and indeed they seem to embody a peaceful silence when they appear in *The Cantos*, like the paradisal quiescence that one of the final cantos venerates. A more apt example of how Pound attunes image and sound is the motif of "Le Chant des Oiseaux" that runs throughout *The Pisan Cantos*. This musical composition that imitates birdcalls dates back to the sixteenth century, and Canto 75 consists almost entirely of its score. The score is a rare insertion of an archival document in *The Cantos*, one written not in Pound's hand.[36] The line that precedes the pages of music, "not of one bird but of many," will be echoed by the self-referential ones in Canto 94 ("This is not a work of fiction / nor yet of one man"), thereby giving this chant of the birds a significance that bears on the entire symbolic structure of *The Cantos*.[37] Pound would, in fact, often resort to musical notation when asked to explain his epic: In a letter to a friend he drew the notes of an F major chord on a staff to explain the work's organizing principle.[38]

References to birdcalls permeate the remainder of *The Pisan Cantos*. The poet, exposed to the elements while imprisoned in his open-air cell, spots a group of birds on a wire fence that call to mind the piece of music not only because singing birds evoke the composition's title but also because the scene resembles an image of notes on a scale. As the birds move around ("with 8 birds on a wire / or rather on 3 wires") and around ("4 birds on 3 wires, one bird on one"), their positions create an evolving score that the poet eventually transcribes:

f f
d
g
write the birds in their treble scale[39]

Pound fashions a hybrid form of writing music, part treble scale and part tablature, that reflects the combined image of birds and musical notes superimposed over each other. Birds become letters become music, in other words. The canto closes on a moment of crisis—"the loneliness of death came upon me / (at 3 P.M., for an instant)"—that then immediately transforms into one last birdsong: "three

35. As Jessica Pressman puts it, "It is precisely because he did not read Chinese that Pound could claim, as he did, that the Chinese ideogram is a universal medium for poetry." Jessica Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 140.

36. The score is written in the hand of Olga Rudge, a violinist and a mistress of Pound's.

37. Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 450.

38. William Cookson, *A Guide to* The Cantos *of Ezra Pound* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. xx.

39. Pound, *The Cantos*, p. 525.

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final half notes / their white downy chests black-rimmed / on the middle wire."[40] The distance between the notes disappears, resolving the avian counterpoint into the tolling of a bell marking the moment when Pound expected to face execution for treason. But the threat that this ringing would resound as his own death knell subsides, and the final word of the canto, *periplum,* situated alone in the center of the line, signals the voyage of the sun across the sky, the passage of a day and the prolongation of the poet's life. These birds provide comfort, respite, and brief harmonious interludes for the prisoner from the impending dangers, both physical and psychological. The image of the birds insulates the poet from the chaos without by protecting the music within. This withdrawing from the world into an inner realm thus contrasts with the opposing movement of Frampton, who dismantles barriers, unsettling his film through discord between image and sound and exposing it to extrinsic involvement.

A Vaudeville of Light

As much as the primary strategies of Frampton and Pound are antagonistic to each other, it must be admitted that at least one significant overlap exists between *The Cantos* and *Magellan*. Canto 47 identifies one of Pound's central odysseys with the directive "must thou sail after knowledge."[41] Following suit, *Magellan* quests after the creation of a sort of epistemological logbook, or, as Frampton puts it, "the largest possible inventory of modes of classifying and perceiving experience."[42] And just as Pound presents *The Cantos* as "the tale of the tribe" that imparts lessons necessary for the survival of the tribe, Frampton writes in the essay in which he outlines *Magellan*, "Survival of our species depends upon our having correct information at the right time" (*CA*, 135). This survival instinct, moreover, inheres within Frampton's source material: Pigafetta, the voyage's diarist, beyond the wide scope of information he documented, "displayed another quality important in a recorder, namely a remarkable faculty for survival."[43] Out of the nearly 240 sailors who began the expedition, Pigafetta was one of only eighteen to still be alive three years later when the voyagers returned to their point of origin, and consequently his journal reads in part as a survival guide. If Frampton and Pound share this same purpose—an epistemological end point that gives them a direction to set their compasses to—it would seem to overshadow the discrepancies between their diverging routes to arrive there and cast into doubt whether Frampton actually seeks to separate his brand of modernism from the literary tradition established a generation earlier. Especially when one considers the final completed portion of the film, *Gloria!*, one of the concluding segments of *Death of Magellan*, the conspicuous allusions to the modernists, Joyce in particular,

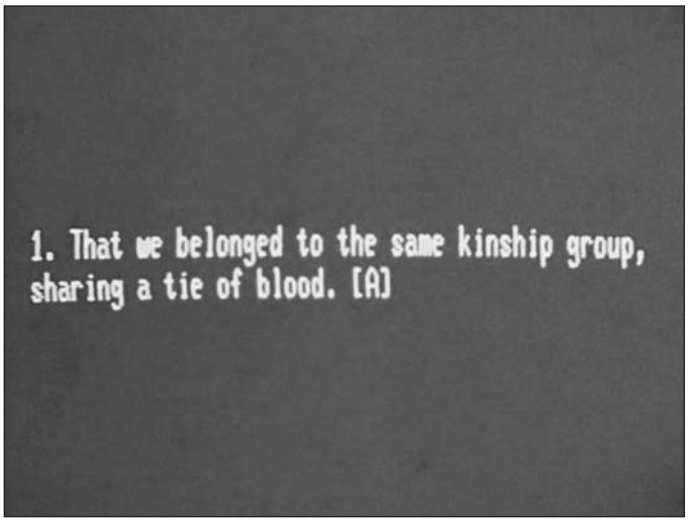
40. Ibid., p. 527.

41. Ibid., p. 236.

42. Quoted in Henderson, "Propositions for the Exploration," p. 144.

43. R. A. Skelton, "Introduction," in Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage*, p. 7.

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Frampton. Death of Magellan: Gloria! *1979*.
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further suggest that Frampton resolves to forsake a cinematic inheritance for a literary one.

On the whole, however, *Gloria!* does not celebrate modernism's legacy so much as present it as one mode of classifying experience among many. It challenges modernism's supremacy by interpolating into the metahistorical unveiling of film's forgotten origin. *Gloria!* is made up of two parts: The first displays digital text over a green screen that involves Frampton's reminiscences of his Irish grandmother, and the second consists of an early film version of the ballad of Tim Finnegan. Frampton presents the reminiscences as propositions doubly ordered, alphabetically and numerically, which flattens expressive language into digital code. The tone owes something to the catechismal question-and-answer form of the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*.[44] The first proposition states: "1. That we belonged to the same kinship group, sharing a tie of blood [A]" (*CA*, 253). Just as Joyce engineers a disconnect between the discourse of Catholic instruction and the narrative content, Frampton employs the discourse of programming to compose an elegy for his grandmother. This digital art, the only instance of it in *Magellan*, completes the metaphor of circumnavigation by signaling the global connectivity made possible by computer technology. The navigational circuit that Magellan's ships perform prefigure the fiber-optic internet cables strewn across the ocean floor. This episode of homecoming also involves Finnegan's resurrection, a conspicuous nod to Joyce but, even more significantly, the capstone of Frampton's metahistory, the recovery of an alternative tradition for film. For Frampton, the origin of this

44. Jessica Pressman draws the parallel between digital code and the style of "Ithaca" in *Ulysses* in *Digital Modernism*. See page 144.

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Frampton. Death of Magellan: Gloria! *1979*.
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tradition lies not in the movie theater but in the variety performances and magic shows that interspersed film clips throughout miscellaneous other acts: "When film was very new and was a real novelty you really would find films, little films, shown in the middle of a kind of vaudeville of light."[45] This vaudeville of light—comprising not only short films but everything from demonstrations of X-rays to see inside the performer to phantasmagoria performances to terrify the audience with spectral images projected onto clouds of smoke—would eventually be articulated within film criticism as the cinema of attractions, giving a belated vindication to the realization of metahistory in *Magellan*.[46]

As much as high modernism permeates the films of Hollis Frampton, his own epic reverses Pound's dictum to "Make it new." His voyage after knowledge ultimately strives to make a new medium old, to return to its starting point and dwell within it, to recuperate the burlesque beginnings that it sloughed off when the industry of commercial filmmaking took over. Frampton's ludic modernism, in turn, foregrounds the playfulness of the authors who—at least in his time—were often mischaracterized as capable only of high-toned solemnity. Frampton often cited an interview that Joyce gave in the '30s in which he complained that no one had yet observed the humor in *Ulysses*.[47] But even with Frampton's proclivity for irreverence, the serious side of *Magellan* should not be entirely overlooked.

45. Frampton, *Screening Room*.

46. See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, no. 3/4 (Fall 1986), pp. 63–70.

47. Frampton references this interview with Joyce in *Recollections*, p. 118.

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Metahistory is, after all, a sincere search for a silly source. And while Frampton's epic-in-film bears the likeness of Pound's epic-in-verse with regard to its global and encyclopedic ambition, if one considers Frampton's entire artistic output, *Magellan* functions as his most significant point of divergence from Pound. Reading *The Cantos* and *Magellan* contrapuntally leads to a new angle on Frampton, complicating the notion that his modernism is a transposition or an extension of the literary one he so admired. The contingent of postwar structural filmmakers to which Frampton belonged produced much more than a sort of delayed death rattle of the literary experimentalism that they were weaned on. Frampton, who of all those filmmakers owed one of the greatest debts to the modernists, found a way through—one that did not leave behind formalist concerns altogether but placed them alongside the trivial, the senseless, and the diverting qualities inborn in the cradle of cinema.

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