Frampton ruptures the synchronicity of linguistic and iconic messages of photographs in (nostalgia) through exploiting the varying temporalities of image and film outlined in Barthes’s “The Photographic Message” and “The Rhetoric of the Image”. The asynchronous interplay of image and text within the narrative of (nostalgia) produces an unconventional anchorage and relay between the text and image that redefine signification, and that imposes highly personalized connotations on images that are not always married with the image’s denoted message. In addition, Frampton’s asynchronous interplay of text and image sunders the relationship between spectator and auteur, underscoring the temporal specificity of (nostalgia) as an emotion much akin to Barthes’s assertions about traumatic images. The asynchronicity of image and text (i.e. photographs and voice-over narration) in (nostalgia) produces an “inbreeding in cause and effect”[[1]](#endnote-1) that is mediated by the burning of the images sequentially which gives rise to a new temporality of “I have remembered; I will remember; I may remember”. Frampton’s newly defined temporality juxtaposes “future contemplation” along with Barthes’s ‘present reflection’ and ‘past reality’ from his consideration of traumatic images. This third temporality of ‘future contemplation’ brings about a tri-dimensional sense of emotion and may explain spatio-temporal connotations in the concept of ‘nostalgia’ as well as providing the possibility for inherent (potential) connoted messages at the level of denotation in the photograph that would restructure and rectify the structural and ethical paradox of the photograph as outlined by Barthes.

In “The Photographic Message”, Barthes provides a structural analysis of the photographic image. The message from photographs is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission, and a point of reception.[[2]](#endnote-2) The linguistic and image become two separate but cooperative structures through the channel of transmission.[[3]](#endnote-3) For Barthes, film is an “imitative art” that has a style in the reproduction of images and implies necessarily both denoted and connoted messages - and is without the prestige of the photograph and its perfect analogous nature.[[4]](#endnote-4) Frampton’s asynchronous narrative has a tendency to accent this prestige of the photograph while also defying it. Images, such as the moldy spaghetti, are rendered so independent through the asynchronicity of the narrative that their denoted message is far more pronounced in many regards (than were they not cooperating with a linguistic message at all). Once a spectator has accepted that the spaghetti is not related to the narration synchronized with it, then it becomes equally apparent that the spaghetti photo is essentially and simply a photo of spaghetti, and nothing more (provided there is no “imported connotation” from the narration of the previous sequence).

Additionally, Barthes understands the perfect analogous nature of the photograph to have a relationship with connoted messages that directly implies and necessitates a change of structure so that signification is displaced.[[5]](#endnote-5) Using the spaghetti sequence once more, prior to a spectator exhausting the possibility to render the text and image relatively synchronous, possible connotations may arise - perhaps a spectator will attempt to conceive of the spaghetti being a profile of Michael Snow (as described in the text/narration). This forcing of connoted meaning on the image of the spaghetti does change the structure of the image so that the connotation would render the image as signifying something different from what is shown (a spaghetti profile of Snow as opposed to simply a photo of spaghetti). Frampton uses the asynchronicity of the narrative in a defiant manner that highlights the process by which photographs can be infused with their connoted messages.

Frampton seems to challenge Barthes’s “paradox of the photograph” through the asynchronous narration by underscoring that a connoted message does not develop on the basis of a message without a code, but instead develops on the basis of a “coded temporality” inherent to a photograph. The narration during the spaghetti sequence (ie. visual sequence) conjoins a past-present (“still troubles me”) with present-future (“I wish I could apologize”) tense, revealing that potential future contemplation (ie. present-future) of the photograph infuses the denoted message of the photograph with a connoted message (albeit only a “potential” connoted message). The more personal the photograph to the spectator, the more imminent the potentiality for a connoted message based on future contemplation. Frampton, however, may be pointing out that this connoted message is as “prestigious” as the analogous nature of the photograph. In effect, there is no Barthesian ethical paradox - the photograph need not be inherently objective to also be a perfect analogon of the reality it reproduces - the photograph can hold an inherent potential connoted message through the temporal present-future state (future contemplation). This could be considered a “connotation state” through its inherent potentiality and should not be confused with external connotation procedures. Perhaps, Frampton would consider this inherent connoted and coded message to be as prestigious as the uncoded denoted message of the photograph; his final remarks in the film’s narration are a testament to its incorruptibility as well as its necessary existence.

Barthes’s connotation procedures with regards to Frampton’s (nostalgia) requires more attention. The visual sequences that involve burning the photographs can be regarded as a superimposition of certain connotation procedures (such as, trick effects), however the burning is part of a moving-image sequence that helps compose film form - an imitative art according to Barthes, and one that certainly comprises connoted messages by virtue of its form. It is moot to examine the photographs for perfect analogous representation as they are not independent of their incorporation into film form in any way by virtue of them being objects in a film. Barthes holds that objects in photographs are “excellent elements of signification” because they refer clearly to familiar signifieds.[[6]](#endnote-6) The photographs themselves are abstracted by one degree and rendered mere objects in a film. This begs the question as to whether Barthes would consider - or be able to consider - the photographs in Frampton’s film as being uncoded. That being said, an abstracted consideration of the photographs retains an “air“ of pure denotation in that the spaghetti is simply that - a photo of spaghetti, which Frampton himself underscores through the asynchronicity of the narrative in the film (as mentioned above). The photo of moldy spaghetti is not purely that, however, once the photographs become objects within a stylistic imitative art such as cinema. In some manner, Frampton is utilizing film form to enact an example of Barthes’s photogenia connotation procedure - the burning of the photographs renders the photograph into a connoted message through the technique of filming a physical transformation of the photograph.[[7]](#endnote-7) That being said, I believe that there is a more ethical concern for Frampton with regards to the burning of the photographs and as it relates to temporality specifically.

For Barthes, text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image.[[8]](#endnote-8) This parasitic constitution is played out throughout Frampton’s film via the asynchronous narrative. In (nostalgia) there are episodic returns to denotation as photographs are presented after connoted principal messages (text/narration). The text is virtually meaningless on it own and requires the photograph to support it, thus accenting the prestigious denotation of the photograph once presented and underscored by the asynchronicity of that presentation. Frampton provides Barthes with a concrete example to match the theoretical question he poses - “does the image elucidate or realize the text or does the text sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image?”[[9]](#endnote-9) For Barthes, the text is a “secondary vibration”[[10]](#endnote-10) to the objective denoted message (which is obvious from the aforementioned necessity to present the image for purposeful meaning), however, the asynchronicity of the narrative in Frampton’s film furthers Barthes’s own opinion that the less the text duplicates the image, the more the image will be infused with connoted meaning via the “integrity” and “pronouncement”[[11]](#endnote-11) of the connoted text. In Frampton’s film, the asynchronicity of text and image de-amplifies the connoted message providing a relief (as opposed to a stress through amplification via synchronicity) that Frampton may be utilizing to define his own temporal thesis as specified through the concept of nostalgia (an emotion encompassing all three temporal states of past, present, and future).

For Frampton, new signifieds are produced (invented) through the asynchronicity of the narrative that elucidates a third temporal state in the denoted image. The text explicitly plays between all three temporal states while the asynchronicity of image and text further supports temporal distinctions and overlaps. For Frampton, the images present denotations along all three temporal states (as opposed to Barthes’s two of past and present[[12]](#endnote-12)). Photographs in the film give rise to “I have remembered; I will remember; I may remember” temporalities in the denoted message. For the spectator, the asynchronicity produces a very subtle alienating effect that Barthes would identify as a “compensatory connotation”.[[13]](#endnote-13) This compensatory connotation renders the film personalized for the spectator but is highly distinguished from the meaning for Frampton. This is the essence of nostalgia - a highly personalized sense of temporality merging past, present and future. Although the spectator is infused with a sense of past from the asynchronicity of text and image and then has the message relayed to the present, there is no future contemplation for the spectator inherent in the denoted message of the photograph (in effect, there is little or no anchoring). Frampton emphasizes this point by annihilating the images at the end of each visual sequence as he pointedly and explicitly supports through his remarks at the end of the film about how we cannot see what he sees in the image and never will!

Barthes is quick to affirm that the code of connotation is cultural, personal, and requires knowledge.[[14]](#endnote-14) Frampton subjects the denoted message to a similar treatment through adding a third temporality of present-future (future contemplation) to the denoted message of a photograph. For Frampton then, the photograph is a perfect analogon of reality and is objective, however, it also has an *inherently* connoted message that exists with *potentiality* as opposed to necessity. In effect, he remedies Barthes’s paradox of the photograph through re-structuralizing (adding a third temporality to the denoted message) and demystifying any ethical paradox that would thus arise. Also, as opposed to Barthes’s traumatic image creating suspension or blocking of meaning[[15]](#endnote-15), Frampton’s future contemplation gives rise to nostalgia and the “sustained emotion”[[16]](#endnote-16) that represents a profound continuity of meaning. The irony of (nostalgia) is that the asynchronicity of the narrative represents and demonstrates the assimilation and co-existence of denoted and (potentially) connoted messages into the structural signification of the photograph.

1. Hollis Frampton, “Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video: Texts, 1968-1980,” (New York: Writers & Books, 1983), pp. 1-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message” and “The Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 15-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. ibid, pg. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. ibid, pp. 17-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ibid, pg. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. ibid, pp. 22-23. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. ibid, pp. 21-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. ibid, pg. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. ibid, pg. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. ibid, pg. 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. ibid, pg. 25-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. ibid, pp. 27,44. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. ibid, pg. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. ibid, pp. 27,32,39. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. ibid, pg. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Rachel Moore, “Hollis Frampton: (nostalgia),” (Michigan: Afterall Books, 2006), pp. 1-5.

    Paper Assignment #1 - Temporality and Synchronicity: Hollis Frampton’s “(nostalgia)” and the Demystification of Barthes’s Ethical Paradox of the Photograph

    INI315 - Film Cultures II: Politics and Global Media

    Instructor: Prof. Cahill

    Section TA: Sarah O’Brien

    Student: Adam Stangeby

    990120560 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)