

Tony Conrad: Completely in the Present

program 2: Films of Tony Conrad

March 26, 2017 at 7:30pm — Center for New Music

presented in association with Canyon Cinema Foundation

Composer, filmmaker, conceptual artist, media activist, radical mathematician and more, Tony Conrad (1940–2016) was one of the most influential and inspiring American artists of his time. *Completely in the Present*—created over Conrad's twenty-year friendship with director Tyler Hubby—portrays Conrad as arch, impish intellectual, perpetually curious, always learning and questioning. Documenting Conrad's experiences with filmmaker Jack Smith, composer LaMonte Young and the Theater of Eternal Music and the formation of the Velvet Underground, as well as his own avant-garde filmmaking the film traces the artist's life and career up to his re-emergence in the 1990s as a central figure in underground music and his profound impact on generations of artists. Combining intimate footage of Tony and his collaborators shot over the last twenty years, his own archive of recordings and films, and interviews with colleagues, the film reveals not only a playful approach to life and art making but one that is motivated by a deep sense of powerful, political radicalism.

Film Feedback (1974) by Tony Conrad; 16mm, b&w, silent, 15 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

"Made with a film-feedback team which I directed at Antioch College. Negative image is shot from a small rear-projection screen, the film comes out of the camera continuously (in the dark room) and is immediately processed, dried, and projected on the screen by the team. What are the qualities of film that may be made visible through feedback?" (Tony Conrad)

Articulation of Boolean Algebra for Film Opticals (Finale) (1975) by Tony Conrad; 16mm, b&w, sound, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

"One contribution of *Articulation of Boolean Algebra for Film Opticals* is the clear separation of sound and vision, in a composite medium of presentation. The interactive component in careful examination of this particular filmstrip by means of a 16mm projector cannot fail to stand revealed: the mediating element is precisely the strip of film, which of course has no frame lines or separate sound channel. I hope to define the simplistic metaphor of the filmstrip so concisely that it becomes incumbent upon the viewer (-hearer) to diagnose the mechanism of externalization in the sound-sight construction. Could you design a projector after seeing a sprocketed filmstrip run through one?

"Of course, machines exercise a freedom of adaptability in modalities of examination that is very heartening." (Tony Conrad: "Articulation of Boolean Algebra for Film Opticals." November 2, 1975. www.vasulka.org/archive/Artists1/Conrad,Tony/BooleanAlgebra.pdf)

Straight and Narrow (1970) by Beverly Grant Conrad and Tony Conrad; 16mm, b&w, sound, 10 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

"*Straight and Narrow* is a study in subjective color and visual rhythm. Although it is printed on black and white film, the hypnotic pacing of the images will cause viewers to experience a programmed gamut of hallucinatory color effects. *Straight And Narrow* uses the flicker phenomenon not as an end in itself, but as an effectuator of other related phenomena. In this film the colors which are so illusory in *The Flicker* are visible and under the programmed control of the filmmaker. Also, by using images which alternate in a vibrating flickering schedule, a new impression of motion and texture is created." (Tony Conrad)

Eye of Count Flickerstein (1967) by Tony Conrad; 16mm b&w, silent, 7 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

“The sustained dead gaze of black-and-white TV ‘snow,’ captured in 1965 and twisted sideways, draws the viewer hypnotically into an abstract visual jungle.” (Tony Conrad)

The Flicker (1966) by Tony Conrad; 16mm b&w, sound, 30 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

WARNING.

The producer, distributor, and exhibitors waive all liability for physical or mental injury possibly caused by the motion picture “The Flicker.” Since this film may induce epileptic seizures or produce mild symptoms of shock treatment in certain persons, you are cautioned to remain in the theatre only at your own risk.

A physician should be in attendance.

Tony Conrad: [...] I made a film [*The Flicker*] and it turned out to be excellent, and it endures, and you look at it again, and here it is, 2009—we’ll look at it tonight. And it’s still good. And that’s just a great, great piece of good fortune on my account to be associated with something that just simply works as well as this film works—every time. But it’s not really something you can count on doing. I mean, I can’t count on doing it either. But I don’t expect this of other people either. I always think that if anybody really succeeds in impressing me, even once with their work, that they must be really wonderful. Because it’s so tough to get there. [*laughs*]

Steve Polta: *You mean to impress you, Tony Conrad, or just to push the rock up the hill?*

Tony: To push the rock up the hill. It’s so tough, and you can fail a lot, but if you succeed in a striking way, it’s really something else.

This program is presented in association with Canyon Cinema Foundation
www.canyoncinema.com

“Aggregate and Separate: A Conversation with Tony Conrad”
2009 interview with Cinematheque’s Artistic Director Steve Polta
read it here:

<http://www.sfcinematheque.org/blog-article/a-conversation-with-tony-conrad/>

