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CONNER, BRUCE. American. Born in McPherson, Kansas, 1933. Studied at University of Wichita; University of Nebraska, B.F.A.; further study at Brooklyn Museum Art School, University of Colorado. Career: 1950s to present—active as artist, making assemblage works, sculpture, painting, and drawings; 1957—moves to San Francisco; with Larry Jordan organizes Camera Obscura film society; 1958—first film *A Movie* made to be shown in exhibit of Conner sculpture; through next decade makes about a dozen films in both 8 and 16mm; 1974-75—assembles *Crossroads* from declassified footage of atomic bomb tests. Recipient: Ford Foundation Fellowship Grant, 1964; Copley Foundation Award, 1965; Gold Medal, Sesta Biennale d'Arte Republica Di San Marino, 1967; National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant, 1973; American Film Institute Grant, 1974; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1975; Citation in Film, Brandeis University Creative Awards, 1979.

Films (in 16mm): 1958—*A Movie*; 1960-62—*Cosmic Ray*; 1961-67—*Looking for Mushrooms*; 1963-67—*Report*; 1964—*Leader*; 1964-65—*Vivian*; 1965—*10 Second Film*; 1966—*Breakaway*; 1967—*The White Rose*; *Liberty Crown*; 1969—*Permian Strata*; 1969-73—*Marilyn Times Five*; 1976—*Crossroads*; *Take the 5:10 to Dreamland*; 1977—*Valse Triste*; 1978—*Mongoloid*; 1981—*America Is Waiting*.

Publications:

By CONNER:

Articles—"Interview with Bruce Conner" by Robert Brown in *Film Culture* (New York), no.33, 1964; "Bruce Conner Makes a Sandwich" in *Artforum* (New York), September 1967; "Bruce Conner", discussion with participants of 1968 Flaherty Seminar, in *Film Comment* (New York), winter 1969; "I Was Obsessed..." in *Film Library Quarterly* (New York), summer 1969; "Excerpts from an Interview with Bruce Conner Conducted in July of 1971" by R. Haller in *Film Culture* (New York), no.67-69, 1979; "Amos Vogel and Bruce Conner: 2 Views of the Money Crunch" in *Film Comment* (New York), September/October 1981.

On CONNER:

Books—*Experimental Cinema: A 50 Year Evaluation* by David Curtis, New York 1971; *Film: Space Time Light & Sound* by Lincoln Johnson, New York 1974; *Visionary Film* by P. Adams Sitney, New York 1974; *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, exhibition catalogue, by John Hanhardt and others, The American Federation of Arts, New York 1976; articles—"Report" by David Mosen in *Film Quarterly* (Berkeley), spring 1966; "3 Films by Bruce Conner" by Carl Belz in *Film Culture* (New York), spring 1967; "Bruce Conner and His Films" by Brian O'Doherty in *The New American Cinema* edited by Gregory Battcock, New York 1967; "Bruce Conner" in *Film Comment* (New York), winter 1969; "The Anti-Information Film (Conner's *Report*)" by Ken Kelman in *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives* vol.1, New York 1975; "Countdown: Some Thoughts on Bruce Conner" by L. Fischer in *University Film Study Center Newsletter* (Cambridge, Mass.), no.2, 1976; "Bruce Conner's New Films" by Anthony Reveaux in *Artweek* (Oakland), 3 April 1976; "Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner" by W. Moritz and B. O'Neill in *Film Quarterly* (Berkeley), summer 1978; "Valse Triste and Mongoloid" by Scott Cook in *Millenium Film Journal* (New York), fall/winter, 1980/81; "Avant-garde Film in the Bay Area: A Romantic Tradition" by Anthony Reveaux in *Pacific Magazine* (San Francisco), March 1981.

After graduating from the University of Nebraska, Bruce Conner moved to San Francisco to begin an exceptionally successful and still very productive career as an experimental filmmaker. Conner's production over the past quarter century manifests certain salient characteristics typical in the works of this genre. His films tend to be brief (the shortest being his 1965 *Ten Second Film*; the longest, his 1975 *Crossroads*, running 36 minutes). Beyond grant subsidy, his production is financially independent, allowing him total freedom in creativity and distribution. And his works are essentially a-collaborative, being in essence solely under Conner's control from conception through all phases of construction. However, since Conner is particularly known for the techno-structural resource of "compilation" (i.e., the use of extant or "found" footage shot by other filmmakers for various purposes), this a-collaborative characteristic deserves special qualification.

While not all of Conner's films manifest compilation (e.g. each of the brief shots that form the hectic, three-minute montage of *Looking for Mushrooms* was the result of Conner's cinematography), compilation is clearly his hallmark and the intrinsic reflexivity of compilation probably accounts for the continued success of Conner's early and later films today. "Reflexivity" is indeed that contemporary preoccupation—both inside and outside the experimental film genre—with grasping and expressing the special materiality that distinguishes film from other forms such as written literature, theatre, music, etc. Since montage or editing has classically been regarded as essential to "film as film," Conner's work can best be experienced as an ongoing exploration of montage's quintessential qualities.

Early works like Conner's *A Movie* or *Cosmic Ray* easily exemplify this thesis. Constructed from bits and pieces of such things as old newsreels, animated cartoons, Hollywood features, war documentaries, academy ("count-down") leader, home movies, and fifties pornography, the actual cinematography is at once very varied and very anonymous. Indeed, such disparate footage is largely cut together with no attempt to disguise or mitigate abrupt changes in tonality, grain, cinematographic style, or subject matter. Conner's clear exhibition of the "joints" of his montage is in contradistinction to more commercial use of library or file footage in fictive features or television news, where such visibility would prove a liability. Instead, Conner always reminds his audience that they are watching "a movie," an artifact whose very essence is bound to the extraordinary power and sometimes subtle imitations of montage.

Conner's earlier works like *Report*, a 1967 review of sounds and images from the day of John F. Kennedy's shocking assassination, tend—stylistically—more to abrupt junctures enhanced by frenzied editing rates. Also the earlier films are marked more by humor and biting ironies. Later compilation pieces such as *Crossroads* (built totally from declassified film records of early atomic bomb tests) manifest much slower pacing and more wistful moods. Comparably, *Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* employs sepia print stock to homogenize tonality, and its bittersweet representation of the past constitutes a distinct, more mature sensibility than Conner's earlier works. Still, all his production remains remarkably fresh, and remarkably appealing even to popular audiences who might otherwise find experimental production arcane or bizarre. He is doubtless one of the finest American experimental filmmakers working today.

—Edward Small