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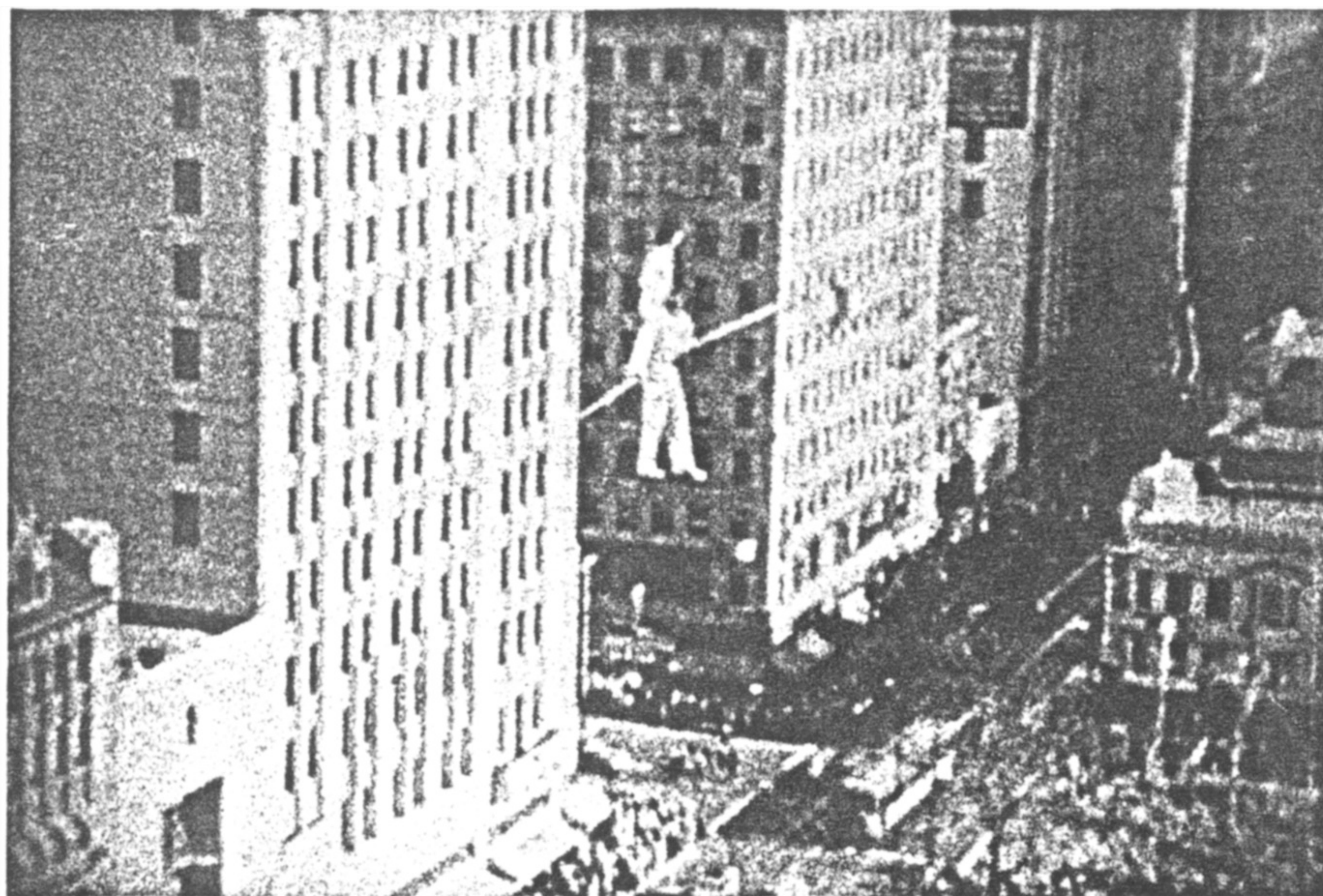
## SEMINAL FILMS ON TAPE

**Bruce Conner Films: I;** *Ten Second Film*, *Permian Strata*, *Mongoloid*, *America is Waiting*, *A Movie*; 24 minutes; black & white; \$75. **Bruce Conner Films: II;** *Breakaway*, *Vivian*, *The White Rose*, *Marilyn Times Five*; 29 minutes; black & white; \$75. Canyon Cinema, San Francisco.

### Tony Reveaux

Bruce Conner's film *A Movie* (1958) was originally meant to be seen on a screen smaller than that of most TVs. It was unveiled as an installation piece in a show of Conner's paintings and collages at a San Francisco alternative gallery. One at a time, visitors would peer through a peephole into a mysterious tall, narrow box. What each person saw was a segment of a continuous loop of images spliced together from old newsreels, girlie films, focus leaders, instructional media, documentaries and trailers, all set against the background of Respighi's romantic, surging, melodramatic "Pines of Rome." Issues of plot aside, most viewers left feeling that they had indeed seen some kind of movie.

Conner is one of the most strongly original and deeply thoughtful artists of American independent cinema. His creative strategy of motion collage—the inspired restructuring of carefully chosen fragments of the world's castaway celluloid skin—reflects upon our society while expressing his personal vision. That vision has retained its integrity while responding to stylistic shifts and changes, from beatnik irreverence to new-wave irony.



Bruce Conner, still from *A Movie*, 1958.

These two volumes on videocassettes give us the chance to see for ourselves works that can yield greater understanding with repeated viewings. Unlike some underground filmmakers who would use the aleatory, shotgun-and-confetti approach to collage, Conner gives his assemblages the internal precision of a digital detonator.

*Ten Second Film* (1965) was designed to be the opening screen signature for the New York Film Festival, but at the last minute it was decided not to show it. It is a silent expressionistic streamer of numerical imagery, based on motion-picture

countdown leaders. *Permian Strata* (1969), though perhaps not his strongest film, is a warmly wry hippie spoof on organized religion. To the lyrics of Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Woman #12 & 35," Conner draws and cuts footage from one of those piously amateur bible films in which actors' shadows fall upon painted-sky backgrounds.

Two new-wave films—*Mongoloid* (1978), with music by Devo, and *America is Waiting* (1981), with help from David Byrne and Brian Eno on the soundtrack—glint with razor-sharp panache. *Mongoloid* celebrates and eulogizes postindustrial

man as both victim and conqueror of our technological society. *America is Waiting* reveals aggressive national defense, as well as the darker side of patriotism. Two boys in a TV toy commercial demonstrate futuristic plastic weapons with chilling, deadly seriousness.

In Volume II, *Breakaway* (1966) captures the choreography of Antonia Christina Basilotta with gestural, high-contrast light smears in a continuity that reverses itself to conclude where it began. When he chooses to, Conner can use a camera as well as he can an editing bench. *Vivian* (1964-65) follows Vivian Kurz with a handheld camera that swoops and pounces in fast-moving adagios as she explores an exhibition of Conner's sculptures and paintings. *The White Rose* (1967) is a compassionate record of the removal of artist Jay De Feo's painting, so large and heavy that a wall of her apartment had to be cut through so that the work could be saved.

*Marilyn Times Five* (1969-73) is a structural exercise that confronts the pathos implicit within commercial eroticism. The young Marilyn Monroe portrays a stripper in the scratched, grainy arena of an early stag film. Her voice is heard singing "I'm Through With Love" on the sound track. This scene is repeated five times, emphasizing the joyless treadmill of love for sale. The last shot terminates with a stillness as Marilyn, the movie star, is seen crumpled on the floor. Conner's films continue to bring esthetic insight and enjoyment to the viewer—through a screen of any size. □