

Tony Conrad

Beholden to Victory

2 September
– 22 October 2016

Tony Conrad filmed *Beholden to Victory* in 1980 on sound Super-8 film. Using the devices of the war film genre, Tony Conrad cast his film with friends and colleagues, such as Mike Kelley, David Antin, Sheldon Nodelman, and Tony Oursler. Rather than directing the actors, he presented them with unscripted scenarios that could only be enacted within the strictly defined roles of *officer* or *soldier*. Each title carried its own set of rules and restrictions. *Beholden to Victory* extends and echoes the militaristic themes and power relationships depicted on screen between the soldiers and officers within the film to the hierarchies constructed between the actors and the camera, the camera and the director, and the audience and the film. We present the film as a configuration of the material that Tony Conrad developed in 2007. The film material is being digitally projected as a random-edited computer video, which runs differently in every presentation.

"Beholden to Victory" is an edited video version of the full-length Super-8 'war movie' genre picture "Hail the Fallen". (...) The film was not directed in the traditional sense, as there was no script, and the actors were required to play as in a game – to follow certain rules, or, more precisely, to observe certain restrictions. They were told only what they were not allowed to do. Because of this strategy there are few edits in the film, and the only parts edited out are examples of the actors doing what they were not supposed to do. The film thus consists of a series of scenes that are examples of correct behavior.

I met Tony Conrad when I did a presentation in his class while he was a visiting professor of media in the visual arts department at the University of California, San Diego. I was a great admirer of his position in the 1960s New York art music scene and also of his early structural and demonstrational films (such as the famous "flicker" film and his "cooked" films). So I was surprised to see him tackle the genre film, an act that he told me was not looked upon kindly by his peers. At this time I was sharing an apartment in Hollywood with the video artist Tony Oursler and we were, among other things, making noise music. Tony Conrad would sometimes stay with us when he came up to Los Angeles, so it was only natural that Tony and I would end up in this film. We were outfitted in military gear and taken to the desert for a mission. Then we were informed of what we were not allowed to do and were left to struggle with what we could do.

Mike Kelley, in: *Minor Histories. Statements, Conversations, Proposals*, edited by John C. Welchman, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004, p. 180-181.