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article

From Pictorial Collage to Intermedia Assemblage: *Variations V* (1965) and the Cagean origins of VanDerBeek's Expanded Cinema

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Abstract Post 1964, after a half-dozen years pursuing an increasingly successful career as an independent producer of animated films, Stan VanDerBeek began to devote himself to a more performative and interdisciplinary practice he termed 'expanded cinema'. This article contends that the most significant moment and motivation in this transition was the artist's close collaboration with John Cage and Merce Cunningham in the production of *Variations V*, and that an examination of VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* in the context of that production helps us to understand the important role played by his former Black Mountain College teachers in the genesis of this vision. The author proposes that an interdisciplinary rhetoric of 'assemblage' in this period can help bridge the aesthetic and conceptual gap between the artist's early practice of collage animation and his later turn to expanded cinema and intermedia performance.

Keywords animation, assemblage, authorship, dance, expanded cinema, John Cage, performance, Robert Rauschenberg, spectatorship, technology

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> Disorder is simply the order we are not looking for.
> (Henri Bergson, *The Possible and the Real*, 2005[1920]: 228)

In his volume *Moving Pictures* (1912), F.A. Talbot declared: 'what we describe as animated photography is not animation at all. All that happens is that a long string of snap-shot photographs . . . are passed at rapid speed before the eye' (p. 7). Talbot's use of the term 'animation' was not uncharacteristic, nor was his critique. The French philosopher Henri Bergson – arguably the foremost thinker of temporality and movement during cinema's first decades – had articulated just such a critique, originally in relation to the chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, and later to the cinematographic projections of the Lumières. Citing Zeno of Elea's famous paradox, Bergson reasoned that all change, all movement, must be absolutely indivisible. In *Creative Evolution* (1913[1911]), he deliberately contrasted the regularized mechanism of cinematographic animation with the dynamic and essentially creative process of human intuition:

> Such is the contrivance of the cinematograph. And such is also that of our knowledge. Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality. (p. 307)

This distinction between animation and 'mere' movement predates by many years the birth of cinema. Perhaps the 18th-century Scottish physician George Cheyne (1991[1773]) expressed it best when he succinctly declared: 'Mere Mechanism . . . can never account for Animation.' Cheyne's dictum helps us to understand that the longstanding critique of the cinematographic 'illusion' of false movement – not simply in these early accounts of Talbot or Bergson, but also in its revitalization in the critiques of cinematic 'illusionism' within early apparatus theory – cannot be considered wholly from the perspective of an Enlightenment rationality. For, like our rhetoric of 'originality' and 'creation', the term 'animation' continues to bear the traces of its older, theological origins. A creator (originally, the Creator) imbues inorganic material with life. But for Bergson, the mechanical animation of cinema certainly did not automatically 'give life'. Insofar as he understood life as endless modulation, transformation and becoming, cinematographic animation seemed to reinforce the positivistic fallacy that time and movement were best understood as regular and uniform. But the nature of temporal experience could not be reduced to an imperious ordering of clock time, nor the experience of movement to the logic of the assembly line. For Bergson, the making and experience of art – through its seeming incongruity of imaginative leaps and starts – was alone capable of intuiting the nature of creative evolution irreducible to the positivistic worldview. For the motion picture to accomplish this, it would need to work against the very source of its initial fascination: the automatic reproduction of reality seemingly engendered by its mechanical linkage of movement and time.

Bergson's critique of cinematographic animation helps us to understand why VanDerBeek could be so fascinated by animation, yet reject traditional methods of cinematography and animated film. Any attempt to understand VanDerBeek *as* an 'animator' is fraught with difficulty, for his interest in film's animating movement was in its movement away from the balkanizing tendencies of 'medium-specificity'. Thus from the very beginning, VanDerBeek refused to call himself a 'filmmaker', devising various neologisms for his works such as 'Flims' or 'Visibles'. The playful distanciation in these terms concealed a more serious undercurrent. For in the first decade of VanDerBeek's work – from 1958–68 – a wide range of artists would converge around the technology and culture of the moving image, despite having no cinematic training nor any desire to see themselves as filmmakers per se. By the early '60s, 'film' was already an established field, with complex forms of regulation – spoken and unspoken – as to what was allowed to transpire both on and off screen. And even if Hollywood's industrial practice occupied the mainstay of cinematic consciousness, the postwar European Film Art movement – centered around festivals such as Cannes and Venice throughout the '50s but brought to New York with the founding of the New York Film Festival in 1963 – increasingly sought to delimit the ways in which film would be understood within the domain of modern art.

Already in his 1961 essay 'The Cinema Delimina – Films from the Underground' for the academic journal *Film Quarterly*, VanDerBeek had inveighed against what he understood as the complacency inherent within the growing cultural legitimation of cinema. He foresaw a growing gulf between the legitimation of the art of cinema through institutions like the New York Film Festival and the Museum of Modern Art's film lending library, and his own belief in a moving image practice which could break with the norms of theatrical exhibition and spectatorship in order to confront and transform the field of contemporary art more broadly. What was at issue was the institutionalization of film art: not simply the material form of exhibition and the ways in which this form structured the spectatorial experience, but the cultural and financial implications of these different exhibitionary models. VanDerBeek's playful neologisms thus spoke to the more tumultuous confrontation then taking place between the 'underground' film art of the New American Cinema and the decidedly 'above ground' conception of the European Art Film being championed at Lincoln Center.

Yet in the winter of 1965, VanDerBeek would bring a glimpse of this new vision to audiences at Lincoln Center and, perhaps fittingly, it would not take place during the New York Film Festival. In fact, it did not take place during any kind of cinema program, but rather within a curious hybrid production of contemporary musical composition and dance choreography organized by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. It was a marquee performance for the artist who, only a few years before, had had to steal into his former employer's animation studio after hours to work, and then screen his creations at his own storefront theater in the East Village. Yet, within those few years, VanDerBeek's dozens of short, satirical collage animations had proved remarkably successful with the audiences of New York's independent cinemathèques as well as with international juries of experimental and animation film. Through his writings in *Film Culture* and elsewhere, and lectures and interviews at local television stations and museums in the New York area, VanDerBeek had emerged as something of a spokesman for the 'underground film', a term he was widely credited with inventing (Renan, 1967). The year before, his major work *Breathdeath* (1964) had proved a high-water mark, winning awards internationally, and helping him to secure the financial lifeline of a Ford Foundation grant as well as a position teaching animation in Columbia University's nascent film program. Despite, or perhaps because of what he had already achieved within this field of collage animation, VanDerBeek used the financial freedom of his Ford Foundation grant to institute an abrupt change of direction. His interest in collage would remain, as would his interest in the idea of animation. But his primary medium was no longer the animated film. Instead, he began to *spatialize* the idea of animation through an interdisciplinary collage of film and performance. It was a practice for which he would invent the term 'expanded cinema'.

For while VanDerBeek had long been drawn to the movement inherent within cinematic animation, he had also been drawn to animation and movement in a more interdisciplinary sense. One of his earliest published illustrations from his Black Mountain days, the abstract 'Map of Moves' (1951) for Charles Olson's dance play *Apollonius of Tyana*, typifies the kind of interdisciplinary collaborations for which the faculty and students there were known (Harris, 2002: 198). VanDerBeek had studied with Merce Cunningham and John Cage at Black Mountain, and had closely followed their groundbreaking collaborations in dance, music and visual art for over a decade. But in 1964, the three men's lives became much more tightly intertwined when VanDerBeek's Manhattan brownstone was condemned by the city. Tired of his peripatetic life downtown, he accepted an invitation by Cage and Cunningham to join them in a small artists' community in Stony Point, New York, where a number of former Black Mountain colleagues had gathered. Building a house, a studio and beginning work on his 'Movie-Drome' theater there, VanDerBeek quickly became fascinated by the possible intersection of film and live performance. His vision of this intersection – a redoubled animation in which the moving image was itself aligned with movement, itself placed into motion – came about as a result of his first major collaboration with his former professors. Occupying what had traditionally been Robert Rauschenberg's place as the company's resident visual artist, set-designer and 'muralist', VanDerBeek was asked to work with the

Cunningham Dance Company on what could arguably be considered its most ambitious work to date: the production of Cage's *Variations V* for the Philharmonic's well-advertised and heavily promoted 'French-American Festival' at Lincoln Center.[1]

Even by Cage's standards, the interdisciplinary conjunction of art and technology within *Variations V* was unprecedented in its scale and its complexity.A 50-channel mixer was constructed specifically for the performance by Max Matthews of Bell Laboratories to be manned by David Tudor and John Cage (Miller, 2001: 552). The composers Fredric Lieberman, James Tenney and Malcolm Goldstein together manned two dozen tape recorders and radios that provided the live audio signals to this mixer.These signals, in turn, were triggered by two sets of electronic relays that were distributed across the stage.The first set, created by Billy Klüver, the Swedish engineer who had collaborated with Jean Tinguely to build the infamous *Homage to New York* (1960) a half-decade before, consisted of a series of photoelectric cells oriented towards the stage lights that would be triggered as the dancers interrupted the beams.The second set, engineered by Robert Moog, consisted of a dozen 5-foot electromagnetic dipoles, capacitance antennae which responded to the proximity of the dancers.'A sparse forest of electronic spears', according to *The New York Times* review, the stage was thus suffused with an invisible electromagnetic field (Hughes, 1965: 10).As the dancers approached and receded from these thin metal poles, or cut cross the path of the stage lights, sound events would be triggered, tape-recorders and short-wave radios would be turned on or off, indexing and transcoding the dancers' visible movement on stage into an invisible collage of sound. Contact microphones were another way the dancers' actions were translated into sound. An artificial plant fitted with these devices was repeatedly disassembled and reassembled, and these subtle movements were magnified through their contribution to the soundscape.

Throughout the 1950s, Cage and Cunningham had established a collaborative relationship based upon what might be termed 'autonomous complementarity': 'the belief that neither dance nor music need function as a dependant of the other, that the two have nothing arbitrarily in common but custom' (Klosty, 1975). In so doing, the pair had sought to shift modern dance away from the implicit idea of 'propulsion' within which the music was understood to govern, implicitly or explicitly, the movement of the dancers. Choreography, within this propulsive conception, was a kind of musical interpretation, judged on its ability to form a singular synaesthetic coherence in the experience of the audience.[2] It is close to the use of the term 'Mickey-Mousing' within film music, after the tradition of early animated films employing a musical score that slavishly follows and amplifies the visual animation.[3] Cage and Cunningham intentionally segregated the creation of the sound from the creation of the movement until the performance when, asserting their mutual independence as co-equal elements, neither were placed in a relationship of subordination to the other, nor were both subsumed within a preordained totality. For Cage, this was as much a social and ethical decision as it was a musical one. In contrast to the traditional plastic arts, Cage (1990) described the necessarily 'public' or 'social' occasion implicit within the musical performance as a metaphor for social relations more broadly understood: 'though we are not living in a society which we consider good, we could make a piece of music in which we would be willing to live . . . a representation of society' (p. 177). This representation was of a society that did not involve leaders and groups, but rather an anarchic collaboration of individuals:

> He envisioned, and wrote music for, an ensemble or orchestra without a conductor, without a soloist, without a hierarchy of musicians: an orchestra in which each musician is, in the Buddhist manner, a unique center in interpenetrating and nonobstructive harmony with every other musician. (Retallack, 1996: intro, p. xxx)

In his obituary for the composer, Kostelanetz describes Cage as a 'libertarian anarchist', 'creating artistic models of diffusion and freedom' by means of structures that were 'nonfocused, nonhierarchic and nonlinear . . . presented without climax and without definite beginnings and ends', claiming that this model 'is less a negative structure, even though I am describing it negatively, than a visionary aesthetic and political alternative' (Kostelanetz, 1993).

Variations V marked a major shift for Cage and Cunningham in that it replaced their previous model of anarchic *autonomy* with a new paradigm of anarchic *interdependence*. Cage describes wanting to push into a more interactive space 'to implement an environment in which the active elements interpenetrate . . . so that the distinction between dance and music may be somewhat less clear than usual' (Pinch and Trocco, 2002: 76). Under the 'propulsive' model, dancers might justifiably be considered human antennae, able to receive and instantaneously translate sonic variation into human movement. *Variations V* was an almost programmatic rejection of this paradigm: Cunningham's dancers were not antennae, but rather *transmitters* of sound through movement. Yet if the music had simply been *controlled* by the movement, one model of subordination would have merely been exchanged for another. Instead, the relationship between the two was intentionally complicated through a range of mediating technologies that themselves introduced new dimensions of authorial input.

According to Cunningham, the microphones were not used 'to produce a sound which you then heard, but which was made available, like a library' (Cunningham et al., 1998: 26). While the dancers' movements were not themselves directed by sound, as in a traditional performance, neither did their movements serve to direct the final soundscape the audience would hear. Rather, the movements on stage set a certain train of sonic events in motion. These events, in turn, were influenced by the choices made by Tenney, Goldstein and Liberman as they operated an orchestra of tape recorders and AM/FM radios. Due to the structural parameters established through these various mediating technologies, the relationship of sound and movement was kept indirect rather than determinate. Suggestive rather than prescriptive, it oscillated between independence and interdependence.

Yet the movements of the dancers on stage were set against another field of movements occurring in the space above and behind it. There, in the place where Robert Rauschenberg had often designed gigantic murals for the Cunningham Dance Company's prior performances, was something entirely unprecedented: an immense variety of imagery, both still and moving, generated from a dozen different projectors organized around the space. VanDerBeek called it his *Movie-Mural*, and despite an almost total elision from the existing literature on *Variations V*, it was described within many of the initial reviews as perhaps the most striking and unconventional aspect of the work. In her recent memoir of the 20 years she spent dancing with the Cunningham company, Carolyn Brown goes so far as to claim that the *Movie-Mural* 'stole the show' (Brown, 2007: 459). While Rauschenberg's murals had established a precedent for competing centers of visual attention, the visual environment VanDerBeek created for *Variations V* was of a wholly different order. Moving from the background to the foreground, it competed directly for the audience's attention, provoking complaints that it did not know its place as décor. The reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune* complained that the films

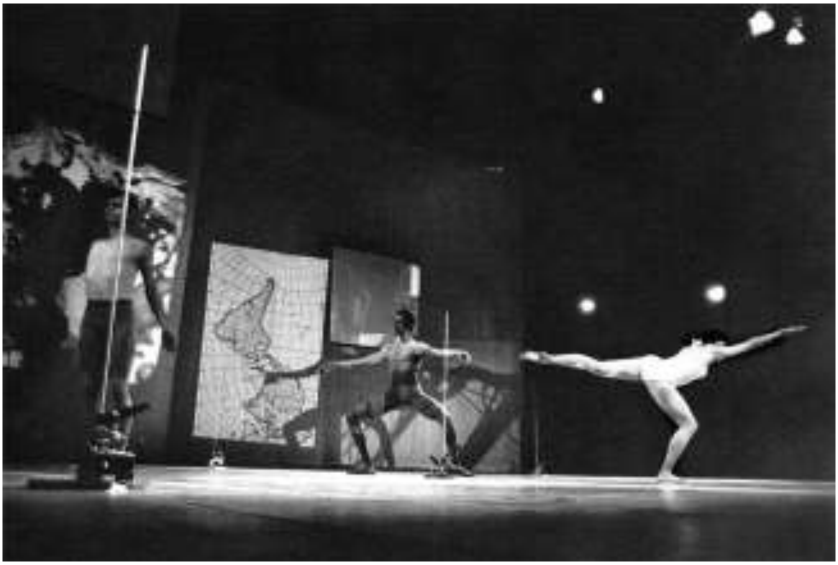

Figure 1 Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Variations V* (1965). Albert Reid, Gus Solomons Jr., Sandra Neels. Photo: Oscar Bailey, 1968.

were so large, so surprising and so amusing that they distracted one's attention from the dancers (Terry, 1965: 4).

This would have been precisely the point. For through the use of multiple slide and film projections, and the active transformation of these multiple projections during the course of the event, VanDerBeek's images would move with no less variation and complexity than the dancers. The *Movie-Mural* thus itself became part of the dance, an active collaboration with the other 'living' movements onstage. Neither an autonomous spectacle nor a mere stage decoration, it invoked a movement of the so-called moving image outside the fixity of the cinematic frame, profoundly destabilizing the projected image. Within it, VanDerBeek recast the possible movement of the 'motion picture' in terms of a multidirectional spatialization, creating a fractured landscape of still and moving image material.

That this mobilization was both a literal and metaphorical issue for VanDerBeek can be observed from perhaps the most curious formal property of the *Movie-Mural* as a whole: the images are constantly engaged in breaking their frames. VanDerBeek deliberately mismatched the size of his projected images with the physical screens meant to receive them, so that there was a large degree of spillage or overlap between the various images. In so doing, he took up Cage's stated desire to 'accept leakage' as a formal and conceptual principle, orchestrating a continuous movement of framing and deframing. Eliminating the natural correspondence between the projected image and the receiving screen, these deframed images seem to invoke both a spatial as well as a psychological dynamics of projection. Cultivating such 'leakage', he placed an array of small screens towards the rear of the stage. When projected, his larger images would become split, diffracted, or splayed out across multiple surfaces. Images, though still recognizable, became internally divided. Slide and movie projectors were deliberately positioned so that their beams would cross the path of the dancers like the active photocells of the work's soundscape. As this happened, the projected images would constantly be interrupted, the 'deep space' of the photographic image cut apart by the dark voids of the dancers' indexical silhouettes (see Figure 1).

Cage had described his aim within the work as seeking 'to implement an environment in which the active elements interpenetrate' and, like the proximity microphones and photo sensors, the *Movie-Mural* actively promoted an interpenetration of live and mediated activity (Redvill, 1993: 212). VanDerBeek began by shooting footage of the dancers during their rehearsals in the days leading up to the performance. During the live performance, these images were then projected beside the live dancers on stage. Various close-ups were shot of dancers' feet and hands in subtle movement, and certain sections of the larger movements of the body were slowed to quarter speed. The audience was thus witness to a curious overlapping of past and present performance, as well as a separate and distinct perspective on many

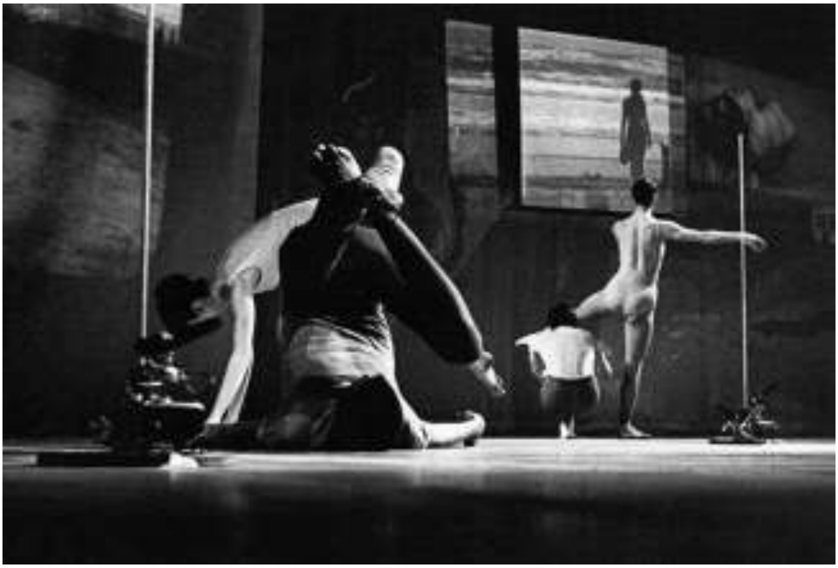

Figure 2 Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Variations V* (1965). Sandra Neels, Gus Solomons Jr., Peter Saul, Carolyn Brown. Photo: Oscar Bailey, 1968.

of the very actions then taking place on stage. Feet gathered together and then suddenly sprang outward; a hand gracefully twisted and arced as it traced a line of movement through the air. Movements seemed to take place on stage and in the images, and occasionally cross over from one to the other. Like the sound-triggering sources, VanDerBeek's images did not supplement, enhance, or reflect the dance choreography in a direct way, but rather acted in a relationship of relative autonomy. Motivated, but not conditioned by the other aspects of the work, they provided what was, in effect, a different layer of movements against which the dancers' movements would be juxtaposed (see Figure 3). These images did not provide an intentional complementarity for the audience to grasp, but a series of largely unanticipated and unintentional correspondences between the movements on screen, the movements on stage and the movements in sound.

The images of the *Movie-Mural* not only moved *like* the dancers but, from the perspective of the audience, moved *in and amongst* the dancers. To the redoubling of live and pre-recorded dance previously mentioned, the light from both the film and slide projectors was constantly being interrupted by the movements of the dancers as they crossed the stage. And just as Billy Klüver's photo-diode sensors made a sonic impression of the movement every time a dancer 'tripped' the light beams crisscrossing the stage, so too VanDerBeek's moving images themselves were overlaid with the shadows carved out by the dancers as they crossed in front of the multiple beams of projection. Images became actors on stage, not in such a way as to make the

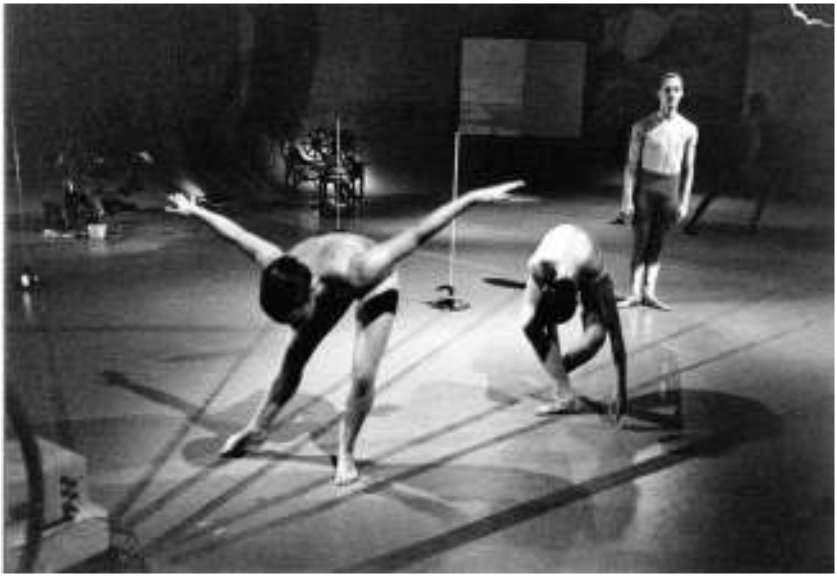

Figure 3 Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Variations V* (1965). Barbara Dilley Lloyd, Sandra Neels, Peter Saul, Valda Setterfield. Photo: Hervé Gloaguen 1966.

audience mistake the images for the actors, but to set up a range of correspondences, duplications or reflections between the different dimensions of spatiality and movement. In their duet, Cunningham and Brown specifically draw our attention as they cross the stage and seem to circle two 16 mm projectors being operated on the left. Those projectors themselves throw their beams back across the stage to the right, striking a far wall where one imparts the image of a dancer – Cunningham himself – in a circling series of movements. Rather than their traditional position behind or even parallel with our gaze, the perpendicular orientation of these projectors foregrounds the circling movements of the film reels, a movement itself redoubled by the circle Cunningham and Brown create around them through their dance. Cinematic projection is itself presented as theater, as another series of movement orchestrated and on display. Our gaze traces lines and circles that are reduplicated across the stage in real bodies and projected images, in past and present tense, all in motion.

These various movements are neither deliberately aligned nor deliberately juxtaposed but, in their intentionally imprecise alignment, function solely to pose the question of relationship for the spectator. VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* maintains the relative autonomy of these distinct media elements even as it places them in a 'living' relationship of partial correspondence and occasional harmony since what relationships could be seen would have to be picked from a vast sea of visual stimuli. Alongside the images of rehearsal, VanDerBeek showed drawings, paintings, diagrams, classic photographs, television commercials, animated shorts and Hollywood movies – a virtual cacophony of heterogeneous visual material through which the audience was invited to wander. In the diversity of images, we catch a glimpse of a commercial for *Pan Am* airways, a TV cartoon called *The King and Odie*, and the Cukors' popular romantic comedy *Born Yesterday* (1950). These are not only different moving images, but different *kinds* of moving images – each of which implies a certain modality of spectatorship. Are these sequences situated 'inside' or 'outside' the work? By what criterion would we say either? How do they engage – formally, conceptually – with the actions taking place on stage? *Born Yesterday* would most likely have been a familiar reference to many in the audience. VanDerBeek had probably refilmed a short sequence of it as it was being rebroadcast over the TV. Perhaps he had simply stumbled upon the old stock and decided to include it. Regardless, it was probably employed for the associative significance of the title alone, rather than for any profound meaning to be discerned within the work's formulaic narrative. As such, the audience confronted a short clip, even a single title, that would have brought up certain idiosyncratic and possibly vague memories, now deliberately ripped out of its mnemonic associations with the past, and restructured into a new and entirely futuristic set of associations.

The diversity and heterogeneity of the images VanDerBeek employed within the *Movie-Mural* would have naturally led to its being understood, within the rhetoric of the time, as a kind of 'assemblage' or 'combine'. These terms could be said to have characterized a whole variety of artistic practices in the '50s and early '60s, from the 'cut-up' writings of William Burroughs to the frenetic animations of Bruce Conner and Robert Breer. But the single most influential reference point within the New York art world of that period was incontestably the work of Robert Rauschenberg. Given that VanDerBeek quite knowingly took over Rauschenberg's role in designing the visual environment for *Variations V*, it seems important to understand how Rauschenberg had reconceptualized the idea of painting, helping to contest the postwar ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism and prepare the space for a diverse range of artists that John Gruen (1966) would memorably term 'the Combine Generation'.

While there was an obvious formal similarity between the collage aesthetics of Rauschenberg and VanDerBeek, a much more important connection between them lay in their understanding of idea of assemblage as a new paradigm for exhibition and spectatorship in the postwar era. Rauschenberg's 'combines' of the 1950s existed somewhere between painting and sculpture, expressivity and non-intentionality. Their definitive acceptance within the canon of postwar art occurred with Robert Seitz's 1961 exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* for the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. In his catalog essay for that exhibition, Seitz sought to break the term's common conflation with collage as the mere incorporation of heterogeneous material within the singular pictorial frame of the canvas. For Seitz, this 'radical juxtaposition' of assemblage was understood not simply as a formal combination internal to a given structure or field, but rather as a kind of bridge between the inner and outer space of the aesthetic frame – a setting of the work's internal frame over and against the institutional frames within which that work was exhibited and seen. Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912) had already intuited this conception in the way its rope frame and fragments of wallpaper exceeded the work's pictorial frame to invoke the literal space shared by the painting and its spectator. Seitz located premonitions of this idea within the work of Picasso, Duchamp and Cornell, but it was clear that the 'combines' of Robert Rauschenberg served as his primary example for the postwar development of the form.

In Leo Steinberg's famous interpretation, Rauschenberg's work upended a centuries-old representational doxa – unbroken even at the height of abstraction – that took the canvas as a figurative window-on-the-world. This reorientation – which Steinberg described not as a literal configuration of the image, but rather of what he called its 'mode of imaginative confrontation' – exchanged the vertical metaphor of the 'picture window' for a newly horizontal metaphor of the drafting table or shop room floor. It was analogous to a 'receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed – whether coherently or in confusion' (Steinberg, 1972). No longer referring to a perceptual encounter with the world, the work of art now seemed to implicate the 'operational processes' of information management. As such, this kind of work was not 'pre-formulated' for the viewer, but came about only through an idiosyncratic performance of informational management by the spectator. The idea of Rauschenberg's canvases as 'receptive' rather than 'expressive' goes all the way back to the artist's first *White Paintings* of 1951 exhibited to Cage at Black Mountain College. For while many saw the young painter's work as an unseemly combination of 'passive' and 'aggressive', Cage tellingly understood them as 'hypersensitive'. Like the contact microphones Cage would increasingly come to employ, Rauschenberg's canvases served as a conduit for information: 'one could look at them and almost see how many people were in the room by the shadows cast, or what time of day it was', Cage would say, 'they became "airports" for the lights, shadows, and particles' (Cage, 1961: 102).

The first live performance of the *Movie-Mural* at Lincoln Center in the summer of 1965 quite literally adopted Cage's metaphor of the white canvas as a receptive surface. A 30-foot white canvas was set up behind the stage and VanDerBeek's moving images and slides were quite literally projected upon it. In taking Rauschenberg's place as the Cunningham company's 'muralist', VanDerBeek both adopted

Rauschenberg's conception of the 'combine' and translated it into a kind of cinematic assemblage. Instead of the paint and cloth and assorted material objects that made up Rauschenberg's canvases, VanDerBeek would employ Hollywood dramas, television commercials and animated cartoons, alongside graphical patterns, historical works of art and recently shot close-ups of the dancers on stage, to create a kaleidoscopic visual field of past and present, local and distant, high art and popular culture – a kind of 'dumping ground' through which the audience would themselves be forced to 'sift'. The point is not that Rauschenberg and VanDerBeek quite evidently shared a formal aesthetics of collage. Rather, it is that VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* was a quite deliberate attempt to reconceptualize the paradigm of cinematic spectatorship according to the principles of non-intentionality and anti-immersivity to which Rauschenberg, Cage and Cunningham had long been devoted.

As the only non-filmmaker invited to the 1967 *Cinema Now* symposium, Cage praised VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* as perhaps the furthest cinema had yet gone towards an aesthetic of non-intentionality. Significantly, Cage did not describe the work as a form of audiovisual communication, but as a certain abdication of the speaker's place altogether: 'a renunciation of intention which is effected by the multiplication of images. In this multiplicity, intention becomes silent, as it were, in the eyes of the observer' (McGinnis, 1968: n.p.). 'Multiplicity' was a term Cage often used to describe Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings. As such, it can be understood to link VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* within this distinctly new form of non-intentional, non-expressive tradition: one promoted not through an aesthetics of formal reduction – as in Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, Cage's own *4'33'*, or Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1964) – but through a sufficient density of image information (Cage, 2000). Since, as Cage explained, within these works

> a person can't look in all directions at once, one's observation is no longer focused; rather, it's given some freedom . . . individuality that can enter into the state of observing in contrast to the observer being given what someone else has already pre-digested.

In speaking of the 1952 'Black Mountain event' that originally brought these three artists together, Cage describes how the idea of theater in the round, while supposedly challenging the traditional fixity of the proscenium stage, retained an identical focus upon the single, privileged point of attention. Sitting in different positions, viewers might see the action from slightly different angles. But it remained the action of the play and, just as the spectator was obliged to observe it, the director and actors were obliged to make it equally intelligible from all possible perspectives. By contrast, Cage's performance at Black Mountain, often described as the first 'happening', sought to create a situation 'more pertinent to our experience' by placing the *performance itself* in the round, thus ensuring that there could be no single or privileged perspective from which all of the events could be easily seen. For one thing, it was simply impossible to take in all the diverse elements of the work in their entirety, as had always been a necessary component of the synthaestic vision. M.C. Richards described the performance as potentially 'very stressful' for anyone trying to give each element their full attention, concluding, 'you have to just sort of let it roll over you.' Cage describes a spectator who

> had made a point of coming very early in order to get the best seat. And she asked me where the best seat was and I said they were all equally good . . . she saw that she wasn't getting a reply in relation to her question so she simply sat down where she chose. She had no way, nor did I, of telling where the best seat was, since from every seat you would see something different.

In so doing, it staged a renunciation of the aesthetic unity of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in favor of a deliberately disunitary form of audio-visual assemblage.

VanDerBeek's performance, true to the 'expanded' conception of assemblage Seitz had articulated a few years before, signaled a shift of emphasis from the interior construction of the image to the exterior conditions of its encounter. From the signification of the moving-image as self-contained entity, the *Movie-Mural* gestured towards a new mobilization of the moving image as but a single component of a larger intermedia assemblage, one whose necessary complexity would preclude singular authoritative control. Yet alongside this conceptual coherence, there was nonetheless a quite dramatic formal divergence between Rauschenberg's 'combines' and VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural*, and this divergence took on added weight in the context of a live performance. While Rauschenberg's works would have competed for attention with the dancers on stage, they necessarily remained static, plastic constructions, quite easily contrasted to the dancers' living movements around the stage. By contrast, VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* would 'animate' this background on multiple levels, erasing the traditional distinction between stage and décor. Moving images of the dancers on screen competed with the images of movement provided by those same dancers onstage. But additionally, this 'slippage' between on- and off-screen movements could be found in the moving images of 'non-dancing' bodies – George Cukar's *Born Yesterday*, for instance – such that the 'prosaic' movement of Judy Holiday on screen would now implicitly be considered in relation to the 'dance' movement occurring all around it. In so doing, VanDerBeek revealed his alignment with the members of the Judson Dance Theater of that period in their efforts to exchange Cunningham's neo-classical techniques for the simple and 'prosaic' movements of everyday life.

Within traditional animation, still images are placed in motion. Within the *Movie-Mural*, VanDerBeek sought to destablize this distinction between the still and moving image, casting both outside their traditional 'frames'. Both are 'animated', as it were, both placed into the display of living movement on stage that Cunningham's dancers – themselves loosely tethered to the electronic soundscape – sought to engender. Not only do the images surpass the boundaries of the screens – spilling out onto the walls of the space and interacting with the dancers on stage – but both are constantly being manipulated, in real time, by projectionists who must now be considered 'dancers' in their own right. In the 1966 performance recording, we can see the two film projectors on stage being stopped and started, reloaded and reoriented, across from the images being projected. But even the 'still' images have been placed in motion: no slide projection remained constant for any length of time before it 'shifted out' for another. We could easily imagine these shifts being mechanized, either with a straight mechanical advance, or the kind of A to B dissolve that would become commonplace within trade presentations. But VanDerBeek has done neither. The slides' movements are clearly performed by hand – their artisanal quality is evident through their irregular movement within the context of the performance. The spectator is consistently brought back to the origin of their movement in the movements of the human animator – VanDerBeek, or one of his collaborators – himself an active participant in the movement on display. In terms of Bergson's critique, this might be understood as a mode of reversing the traditional process of cinematic animation. Rather than still images placed into effortless motion, the projection of this effortless motion is itself mobilized through a display of effortful activity. VanDerBeek's slides shift and change through a somewhat clumsy mechanical labor that leaves no doubt as to its cause. And as if to underline the point, the animator's hand itself makes an appearance towards the end of the performance, indexed on stage and screen by the silhouette of an overhead projector in a series of rhythmic gestures. In so doing, it models a transference between the human and the mechanical that takes place throughout the performance. The dancers on stage take on 'mechanical' poses, but these poses only serve to convey the great human effort required to obtain them. Like these arduous performances of mechanization beneath it, the spatialization of VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* images – their constant ceaseless movement outside their frames – depicts an act of human animation that stands opposed to, but also modeled on, the mechanical animation of the moving image projections (see Figure 4).

VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* modeled a new paradigm of animation, one in which the image was placed into a living motion through techniques of projection, displacement, and movement and correspondence. As such, it can be understood as part of a more broad-based interest in mobilizing the *site* of the moving image away from the static fixity of the theatrical paradigm. Situating his 'moving image' in the very different institutional space of the dance performance, VanDerBeek was able to maintain the aesthetic and even ethical paradigm of intermedia assemblage to which Cage, Cunningham and

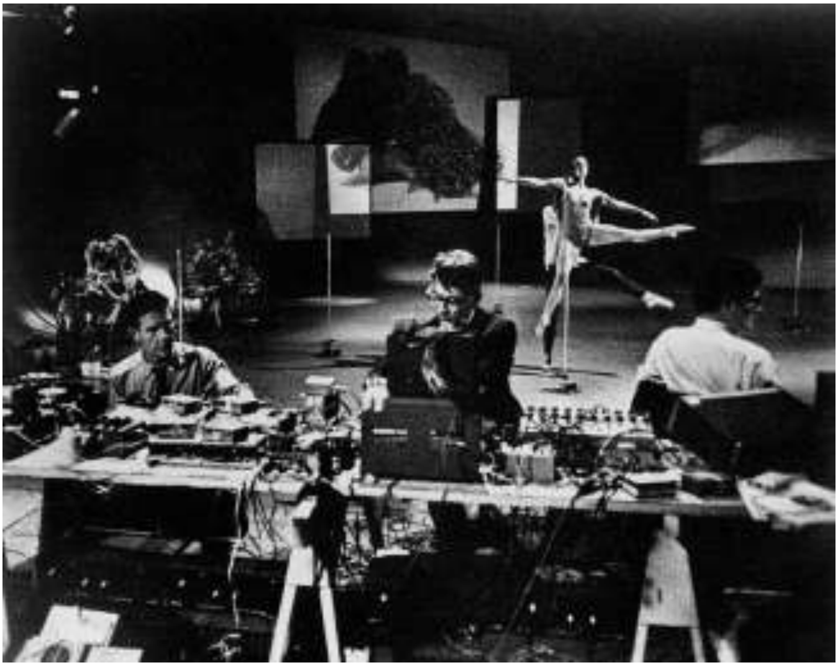

Figure 4 Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Variations V* (1965). John Cage, David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, Carolyn Brown, Merce Cunningham and Barbara Dilley Lloyd. Photo: Hervé Gloaguen 1966.

Rauschenberg had long been devoted, while simultaneously asking us to reconsider the animating movement of dance through the animating movement of cinema, and vice versa. In his *Move Movies* that winter for the Expanded Cinema Festival, the artist literally picked up the film projector to destabilize the projected image, allowing it to become a tool of collaborative performance in real time. For Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas, the camera had become an extension of their body and thus an embodiment of their vision of the world around them. VanDerBeek, by contrast, followed Rauschenberg and Cage in exchanging a model of expression for one of reappropriation. He and his collaborators used handheld 8 mm *projectors* in a new vision of cinematic choreography, animating their appropriated moving images in space and time, recycling found footage in a real-time collaborative performance. VanDerBeek intuitively understood what Colin MacCabe (2003) would later state:

> In a world where we are entertained from cradle to grave whether we like it or not, the ability to rework image and dialogue, light and sound may be the key to both psychic and political health. (p. 301)

MacCabe thus placed less of an emphasis on the ceaseless novelty of production than on developing new means of refashioning or post-production. This was not a matter of producing new moving images but rather, a new mobilization of the images that were given – a mobilization that involved reimagining the possibilities of moving image exhibition and spectatorship outside the static norms of the theatrical presentation.

VanDerBeek saw the exploration of human movement as a way of animating in the sense of giving life, through movement, to an emerging postwar art of the moving image. The *Movie-Mural* brilliantly encapsulated a metaphorics of experience in the televisual age – simultaneously live and mediated, chaotic and predigested, focused and diffuse – which allowed the spectator a variety of options from which to choose, yet which could instantly distract the eye with a particular action or scene in magnification. Its unstable field of correspondences was one that might be understood as newly 'vulnerable' – open to and dependent upon the spectatorial motivation of his audience as never before. Freed from an obligatory point of focus, spectators are what Sartre might have described as 'painfully free' – free from the burden of being led, and thus given the responsibility of making what sense and significance of the work that they choose. The spatialization of cinematic projection and its real-time manipulation in performance were both attempts for VanDerBeek to reconsider the idea of spectatorship outside the idea of communicative 'reception', understanding it as a complex event of creation in its own right. Rather than broadcasting a 'content' for their audiences to 'receive', both artists sought to orchestrate environmental situations within which unanticipated forms of communicability and correspondences could spontaneously erupt.

The intermedia assemblage that was *Variations V* can be seen as a collage made of discontinuous elements and disjunctive media. But the important point is that, in its self-understanding as 'assemblage', it is only ever provisionally 'made' at all, for the temporality of assemblage belies the finality of a construction. The work of assemblage, we might say, is always only a work *to-be-constructed* through an act of collaboration with its spectator, a site where the spectator is actively solicited to rework light, movement, sound and image. If animation traditionally connoted a singular act of 'bringing to life', the kind of 'life' granted by VanDerBeek's *Movie-Mural* was a flickering, contingent one. It offered an anarchic conception of the social, based upon an irreducible respect for the singularity of the individual over and against all forms of collective interpellation. True to their memories of Black Mountain and their contemporary efforts at *The Land*, these performances functioned as a transient microcosm of utopian freedom, a glimpse of a society within which 'you would be willing to live'. They did not do so through the seemingly chaotic profusion of imagery, sound and movement alone, but in the complex and fleeting relationships of complementarity and correspondence that arose between them – relationships uncovered through the spectator's own work of construction, their own participation in the performance.

Notes

1 Personal communication of author with Gordon Mumma, 2 December, 2009. For a complementary interpretation of *Variations V*, see Bartlett's essay above.

2 Copeland (2004) notes how even in modern dance in which the music may have been composed after the choreography, the two elements remained so associated in the traditional manner of exhibition that they would necessarily tend to be read together as a synthetic construction. Cunningham's practice was thus an active and pronounced rejection of this synthesis, a kind of cool detachment through which his dancers would often have to fight their inherent desires to 'sync up' with the music they were hearing.

3 The term was used already in the 1930s and is included in the current *Oxford English Dictionary*. Cage and Cunningham both describe wanting to avoid this kind of 'Mickey-Mousing' in the sound–movement correspondences. Space unfortunately precludes discussion of the relevant, yet extensive historical debate that took place between Adorno and others over 'Mickey-Mousing' and its larger relation to animation history and the theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This question of audiovisual synthesis often lies at the heart of early abstract animation, such as in the works of Oscar Fischinger or in Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). For an overview, see Buhler et al. (2000).

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