
Visual Music after Cage: Robert Breer, expanded cinema and Stockhausen's *Originals* (1964)

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Within William Seitz's 1961 exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* for the New York Museum of Modern Art, the question of framing – of art's exhibitionary situation within and against a given environment – had emerged as perhaps the major issue of postwar avant-garde practice. Beyond the familiar paintings of Johns and Rauschenberg, a strategy of radical juxtaposition in this time extended well beyond the use of new materials, to the very institutions of aesthetic exhibition and spectatorship. Perhaps the most significant example of this disciplinary juxtaposition can be found in the intermingling of the static and the temporal arts. Like many artists of the twentieth century, Robert Breer was fascinated by the aesthetic and philosophical character of movement. Trained as a painter, he turned to cinematic animation as a way of extending his inquiry into modernist abstraction. While the success of his initial *Form Phases* spurred what would be a lifelong commitment to film, Breer quickly grew frustrated with the kind of abstract animation that might be said to characterise the dominant tradition of visual music. Starting in 1955, his *Image by Images* inaugurated a radical new vision of hyperkinetic montage that would paradoxically function at the threshold of movement and stasis. As such, Breer's film 'accompaniment' to the 1964 production of Stockhausen's *Originals* has a curious status. While untethered from the musical performance, Breer's three-part 'film performance' extended Stockhausen's aesthetic and conceptual framework in rich and surprising ways. It might thus be understood as a 'post-Cagean' form of visual music, one in which the sonic and visual components function in a relation of autonomous complementarity within an overarching intermedia assemblage.

At thirty years of age, Karlheinz Stockhausen had already acquired an international reputation for his pioneering work in post-serial and electroacoustic composition. In 1958, he undertook a thirty-two-lecture tour of North America, becoming a major force in promoting the 'New Music' – not simply his own post-serial conception of electronic composition, but also those still largely maligned aleatory techniques of John Cage to which he had grown increasingly attached. In 1961, on the heels of his major electroacoustic composition *Contacts* (1961), Stockhausen collaborated with the painter Mary Bauermeister to

write *Originals* (1961). Charlotte Moorman, who had recently established the New York Avant-Garde Festival, persuaded Stockhausen to present the work for the conclusion of the second Festival in September 1964. Allan Kaprow was chosen to direct a cast which reads like a compendium of avant-garde performance across different media traditions: the cellist Moorman, pianist James Tunney, composer Alvin Lucier, filmmaker Robert Breer, experimental percussionist Max Neuhaus, poet Allen Ginsberg, and Fluxus artists Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, Jackson Mac Low and Ay-O, among others.

Writing for the *New York Times*, Harold Schomberg ridiculed the production as a beatnik three-ring circus – a shallow exercise in *épater les bourgeois*. Expecting the rigorously structured serial music compositions for which the German *Wunderkind* had become famous, he had encountered what must have struck him as the height of decadence: neither music, nor theater, nor visual art, but some incomprehensible concatenation of individuals, styles and media. Yet as a temporally organised series of interconnected events, a conjunction of multiple and divergent vectors, the work's intentional structure might be precisely served by the term 'concatenation'. More productively, we might situate it within the critical rubric of 'assemblage'.

This term had entered the vernacular the very year Stockhausen had penned *Originals* through William Seitz's groundbreaking exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* for the New York Museum of Modern Art. In his catalogue essay, Seitz had sought to displace the traditional conceptualisation of collage as the incorporation of heterogeneous material within the pictorial frame of the canvas, with a more encompassing, multi-disciplinary attention to the artwork's situation within and against a given institutional environment. Seitz contended that the principle of radical juxtaposition could not be understood simply as a formal combination internal to a given structure or field, but rather had to be considered a kind of bridge between the inner and outer space of the aesthetic frame, even a point of interface or translation between different representational traditions.

For Seitz, Picasso's *Still Life With Chair Caning* (1911–12) had long ago demonstrated the work of collage as a force of radical juxtaposition well in excess of mere compositional motif. Deliberately framing his disruption of pictorial interiority with rope and wallpaper, Picasso's *Still Life* juxtaposed outer and inner space in such a way as to render the contextualisation of the work tantamount to the work itself. The work of Schwitters, Höch, Hausman, Moholy-Nagy, Rodchenko, and so many others that would follow, was no longer attending to the formalist aesthetics of the *papier collée*, for Seitz, but this more fundamental question of the frame, and the bridge it enacted between inner and outer space, world and representation. This 'opening out' of the canvas was, in turn, responsible for an activation of the physical space of the gallery, henceforth considered as essential a frame as the elaborate gilded woodwork had been a century before.

The year *Originals* premiered in New York, Brian O'Doherty, in a review of Bruce Conner's assemblage works at the Alan Gallery, would write, 'art has turned itself inside out – from the self to the environment, from total abstraction to the object ... at the moment, assemblage as a technique is permeating all of the arts with extraordinary vigor' (O'Doherty 1964). Yet it was, tellingly, not the macabre sculptural fabrications within the gallery itself that most held his attention, but rather a film entitled, rather prosaically, *A Movie* (1958):

Some of the collage images are so well known ... that they send the mind pin wheeling out of the movie on a tangent while the next sequence is demanding attention ... the film clips of reality are used as objects – not as objects prompting Surrealist associations, but as objects from real life loudly claiming attention while being forced into a relationship to contribute to the movie. The movie is split open again and again by real life hurtling through it. This is remarkably like the effect Robert Rauschenberg gets in his latest paintings.

This 'revolutionary' film was not actually part of the gallery exhibition, but rather was privately screened for the purposes of O'Doherty's *New York Times* review. The gallery thus placed itself in the awkward situation of having to explain to O'Doherty's readers that the films they had come to see were not, in fact, on display.

Like those of Stan VanDerBeek and Robert Breer, Conner's films constitute a body of work that might profitably be termed *cinematic* assemblage. Yet there is a notable difference between the three with regards to this question of the institutional frame. For while Conner largely segregated his sculptural assemblages from his work in film, VanDerBeek and Breer intentionally sought to work in the space between these traditional disciplines. For both, what was at issue was not simply the development of film as an artistic

medium, but rather a more wide-ranging transformation of contemporary art through an incorporation of temporality and performance, and a resulting aesthetics of intermedia juxtaposition.

While paintings of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were the most celebrated icons of this new movement within mainstream art institutions, a much more far-ranging elaboration of Seitz's idea of juxtaposition was then unfolding in the collision between the plastic and the temporal arts. This juxtaposition was not primarily one of materials, but rather of modes of aesthetic practice and their attendant paradigms of spectatorship: the manner in which a whole variety of disciplinary, institutional traditions – not simply painting and sculpture, but also film, photography, theater, dance and music – were being reimagined in relation to one another.

Within a year of one another, both Breer and VanDerBeek produced cinematic 'accompaniments' to major musical performances – Stockhausen's *Originals* (1964) for Breer, Cage and Cunningham's *Variations V* (1965) for VanDerBeek.¹ These film-performances are largely unconsidered within histories of film and visual art, because they cannot be easily disassociated from the more encompassing works of which they are a part. With these works-within-works, we confront not simply multiple layers of authorship, but multiple discursive and institutional frames for conceptualising 'authorship' itself. Located at the intersection of institutional traditions and aesthetic media, these performances highlight the kind of interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation that had become fundamental to a generation of artists then seeking a way out of the confines of a self-referential medium-specificity.

But working outside the safety of the prevailing critical discourse, these works carried a real risk of incomprehensibility. In the case of *Originals*, that incomprehensibility was not so much mitigated as amplified by the choice of Allan Kaprow as 'director'. For, by 1964, five years after the inaugural performance of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Kaprow's particular conception of the 'happening' had emerged as the dominant framework for conceptualising mixed-media performance within the public mind. Yet in her review of the work for the *Village Voice*, dancer and critic Jill Johnston explicitly noted how *Originals* did not emerge from the American tradition of the Happenings and painterly expressionism, so much as from a different tradition of 'Theater Music' (*Musikperformance*) derived from Cage and the extension of his compositional principles (Johnston 1964).

¹I have written elsewhere (Uroskie 2010) about the importance of VanDerBeek's 'movie-mural' for *Variations V*, and the way that collaboration served to concretise the artist's move away from film-based animation towards the more spatial and performative investigations with the 'Movie-Drome' and 'Culture-Intercom'.

Originals was fundamentally based upon Cage's ideas of aleatory structure and composition – ideas which Stockhausen, despite his early work in a rigorously structured system of integral serialism, had increasingly come to valorise and defend in international symposia. And much like Cage's Black Mountain Event, *Originals* was not so much theatrically scripted as it was musically structured: within the assigned temporal 'compartments', actors were left entirely free to improvise their own actions. The 'originals' of the title referred, in part, to the participants Stockhausen and Bauermeister sought out for the production – a wildly disparate group of interesting artistic personalities then working in Cologne (many from the European contingent of the international Fluxus group).

Like Cage, Stockhausen was confronting a problem of textual integrity that had long existed within the domain of theater and, indeed, of all scripted performance: how to balance the author's intention as manifest within the text-as-written with the interpretive freedom granted to the director and actors within the text-as-performed. At a time when advanced composers still chafed at the idea that anything within the musical performance score might go undelineated, the radical freedom given to the individual performer in the scores of Cage and Stockhausen became an intentionally provocative gesture. The title references this radical shift, implying that the 'originality' of the resulting composition resulted from a deliberate model of authorial delegation. Stockhausen's authorial gesture was to open up a space within which others were able to create: the composer as curator, we might say.

Yet the manner of the resulting 'creation' was less straightforward than this would seem to imply. For the roles called for 'a painter to come be himself, a poet to come be himself, a musician to come be himself' and so forth. At first glance, such instructions seem to resemble Kaprow's repudiation of representation in the service of a directness and authenticity – in other words, the so-called shift from 'art' towards 'life'. Yet, upon closer inspection, we find that Stockhausen's call for the performers to 'perform' the roles normally associated with their literal identities does not so much secure the authenticity of these identities, so much as to raise the question of the 'performance' of identity as such.

Questions of identity and performance would lie at the heart of Michael Kirby's conceptualisation of 'The New Theatre' more generally in this time. In his 1965 essay of that title, Kirby distinguished the contemporary performance from that of the traditional theatrical model by reference to his idea of the 'spatio-temporal matrix'. 'The emphasis on performance, which is one result of a refusal to place limits upon music, draws attention to the performer himself', Kirby wrote. 'But the musician is not acting. Acting can be defined as the creation of character and/or

place', and the musician 'attempts to be no one other than himself, nor does he function in a place other than that which physically contains him and the audience' (Kirby 1965: 25). This new model of 'non-matrixed' performance does not attempt to establish character or place other than the present space and local time of the spectatorial audience. For Kirby, this not only distinguished the 'New Theater' from traditional theatrical drama, but opened up an important new interdisciplinary inquiry across the spheres of music, dance, theatre and film. Within *Originals*, the deliberate *staging* of non-actors to *perform* non-roles leads us rather to consider the ways in which these 'performances' continue long after the play has ended, an effect not unlike Andy Warhol's contemporaneous 'screen tests' and 'portrait films', in which the theatrical performance of identity was transubstantiated into cinematic drama.

That questions of performance and re-performance were central to Stockhausen's compositional thinking at the time can be seen from the piece which immediately preceded *Originals*, and served as its aesthetic and conceptual foundation. That work, *Contacts (for Electronic Sounds, Piano, and Percussion)* of 1961, was itself a milestone of electroacoustic composition. Stockhausen described its central idea of as pertaining to the 'contacts between instrumental and electronic sound groups and contacts between self-sufficient, strongly characterized moments. In the case of the loudspeaker reproduction, it also refers to contacts between various forms of spatial movement' (Stockhausen 1964b: 105). Stockhausen's idea of 'self-sufficient, strongly characterized moments' certainly characterises the structure of *Originals*, with its temporal compartments housing individual personas and their idiosyncratic performances. But even more integral was the composer's interest in provoking correspondence across divergent aesthetic forms. Stockhausen's initial version of *Contacts*, in 1959, had been written solely for electronic sounds. But he had recently returned to the work with the idea of attempting a play of correspondences between his live musicians and the prerecorded sounds in the realtime space of the live concert performance. This second version of *Contacts*, which already juxtaposed past and present, 'live' and recorded performance, was then itself incorporated within *Originals* as a staged performance, itself tape-recorded in real time before being played back 'live' in the middle of the work.

Thus the panoply of artists performing their various public personas took place against a musical background made up of live musicians already pursuing sonic correspondences with a previously recorded work. This quality of the redoubled performance, integral to the very structure of *Contacts*, and referenced by its inclusion within *Originals*, was then again redoubled. This analogical structure encouraged a mode of

performance and spectatorship specifically attuned to the correspondences within which might otherwise have seemed to be a wildly disparate amalgamation of heterogeneous material. Stockhausen's 'theater music' (*Musikperformance*) provoked correspondences across the physical space of the concert hall, across the temporal duration of the performance, and even extended back in time to the previously recorded elements which formed the basis of the musical score.

This redoubling of live and prerecorded performance – the ambivalent encounter with temporality staged by the present-tense experience of recording technologies – would similarly constitute a structuring principle for the cinematic component. For the 1961 Cologne production, the filmmaker Wolfgang Ramsbott selected perhaps the most gregarious and dynamic participant of the group – the young Korean musician Nam June Paik – and 'redoubled' his live performance on stage with a series of prerecorded performances on screen. This cinematic backdrop disassociated Paik's body into a series of specific parts and actions: staccato movements of his leg, a gigantic magnification of his mouth silently addressing the audience, and the subtle movements of his hands before his face. Yet in undertaking the role of 'cameraman' for the work's 1964 production, Robert Breer was uninterested in following this path. His much more complex and multi-layered contribution requires stepping back to understand the artist's own conception of film and its relation to the larger modernist tradition of abstraction and 'visual music'.

Moving to Paris just as Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* was gaining international recognition, Breer would have doubtless been interested in the way that the technology of recording and playback was giving rise to a novel aesthetics based around this temporal model of collage and assemblage. Breer was, after all, from a family of engineers, and although he has described his painterly training as a way to distance himself from his father's technological bent, he would quickly evidence an interest in reconstituting technologies of mechanical recording and representation for his own purposes. He had moved to Paris to study painting, and in the 1950s painting in Paris was overshadowed by the legacy of Mondrian and geometrical abstraction. Breer quickly became disillusioned with what he termed the 'fixity' and 'stasis' of painting on canvas – the disconnect between these apollonian forms and the dramatic mutability he saw within the postwar social landscape. Calder's famous mobiles had already suggested the possibility of a straightforwardly 'kinetic' art, but more important was an exhibition of Pollock's works, in which Breer saw the possibility of simultaneously drawing the viewer into the composition, while still maintaining the picture as but a flat surface. This perceptual back

and forth fascinated Breer, and he found an kind of correlative in the kinetic abstractions of Hans Richter's *Rhythm* films of the 1920s.

Richter famously said that the problems of modern painting led towards cinema. Yet even Richter regarded a pure cinema of abstraction as an unsatisfactory resolution, given that it neglected the photographic indexicality so foundational to the medium's power. It has even been suggested, following the perceptual psychology of Gombrich, that the very idea of abstract animation is contradictory, for the dynamism of an abstract painting emerges from an implicit ambiguity between figure and ground that animation tends to destroy. The smooth motion of traditional animation tends to impart a narrative trajectory that the spectator no longer helps to *construct*, but now merely passively follows. Breer initially despaired of this problem, as his found his attempts at animating his painterly compositions 'cartoonish'. The traditional practice of animation, like cinematography in general, depends upon the psychosomatic persistence of vision, in which minor modifications occurring quickly over successive frames are blended to produce the appearance of consistent motion. With his *Image by Images* of 1954, Breer turned this paradigm on its head:

I exposed six feet of film one frame at a time, as usual in animation, but with this important difference – each image was as unlike the preceding one as possible. The result was 240 distinctly different optical sensations packed into 10 seconds of vision. By cementing together both ends of this film strip to form a loop, I was able to project it over and over for long periods. I was surprised to discover that the eye constantly discovered new images. I am only now beginning to fully appreciate the importance of this experiment ... This technique tends to destroy dramatic development in the usual sense and a new continuity emerges in the form of a very dense and compact texture. When pushed to extremes the resulting vibration brings about an almost static image on the screen. (Breer 1963)

With *Image by Images*, Breer abandons the continuity of traditional animation in order to follow Schwitters' conception of *Merz* collage into durational media. Schwitters had not only introduced radically disparate forms of pre-formed material, but further dramatised their dislocation and juxtaposition by maintaining a 'roughness' to the edges of the individual pieces. Similarly, Breer not only photographed the most disparate kinds of materials, but consistently manipulated these fragments so as to further heighten their spatial and temporal incongruity.

This short work was played so often that it literally disintegrated through its wear and tear within the motion picture projector. Breer's *Recreation* (1956) was his attempt to remake this first work in slightly longer form so that it could be exhibited in a theatrical setting. But this initial, lost work is remarkable for a number reasons. At six feet in length, the looped

film strip would have created an almost self-contained sculptural unit when fitted on a normal projector, since this is little more than enough length to thread the apparatus to begin with. Rather than the projector serving as a universal device for the projection of any film, one begins to consider the possibility of making a work of film specific to a particular projector, upon which it is indissolubly linked. The film perforce acquires a new kind of materiality and sculptural presence. But, moreover, by cementing the beginning and end of the film together to create an endless loop, Breer quite literally destroyed any possible 'beginning' and 'ending' for cinematic work considered in itself as well as in its exhibition. In what is a familiar experience to any museum-goer today, the temporality of the moving image installation becomes relatively entirely exterior to it: the viewer simply leaves off viewing at a certain point. For Breer, the piece would have ended when he decided to turn off the projector at a point that had become entirely arbitrary – for 'the eye constantly discovered new images' and hence the work of the piece had not yet concluded.

Beginning with *Image by Images*, Breer's cinematic assemblages repudiated the static 'eternity' of the painted canvas, as well as the progressive time of the cinematic narrative, through a particular juxtaposition of the spectatorial models common to painting and cinema:

I think of a film as a 'space image' which is presented for a certain length of time. As with a painting, this image must submit to the subjective projection of the viewer and undergo a certain modification. Even a static painting has a certain time dimension, determined by the viewer to suit his needs and wishes. In film, this period of looking is determined by the artist and imposed on the spectator, his captive audience. A painting can be 'taken in' immediately, that is, it is present in its total self at all time. My own approach to film is that of a painter – that is, I try to present the total image right away, and the images following are merely other aspects of and equivalent to the first and final image. Thus the whole work is constantly presented from beginning to end and, though in constant transformation, is at all times its total self. (Breer 1962: 18–19)

The importance of cinema, for Breer, did not hinge on the introduction of a temporal duration, for he recognised the inherent temporality within all aesthetic experience. But cinematic assemblage, for Breer, could create a collision or conjugation of the moving image with the experience of the modernist painting. Once divorced from the constraining teleological conception of time inherent in the traditional narrative structure, the technology of film could allow for a new way of thinking the image as a contingent assemblage – one whose creation was become more palpably incumbent upon the spectatorial action of the viewer. In his works

from *Recreation* (1956) and *Jamestown Balloos* (1958) to *Eye Wash* (1959) and *Blazes* (1961) Breer was able to facilitate this through the deliberate construction of an inherently volatile and destabilising cinematic space – one which did not reside wholly within the three-dimensional 'deep space' of the cinematic narrative, nor within the two-dimensional planarity of the modern abstract canvas, but which was constantly 'in motion' between these two divergence spatial models.

Stockhausen's *Contacts* was initially created through the recording and reperformance of sound and the kinds of correspondences to which this process of mediation gives rise, then incorporated a second level of recording and playback within the live performance of as a way of foregrounding this integral play of temporal correspondences. Breer's multifaceted contribution to *Originals* would similarly foreground and extend the kinds of spatial disruption inherent within his own practice of cinematic assemblage through a series of procedures both internal and external to the film as such.

In the performance score, Stockhausen had called for the construction of 'self-sufficient moments linked according to their degrees of intensity, duration, density, renewal quotient, sphere of influence, activity, simultaneity, sequence' (Stockhausen, 1964a). With *Fistfight*, Breer responded by making a film of machine-gun-like intensity. While Ramsbott's film had focused solely on Paik, Breer's film begins by incorporating the entire cast, through the second-order representation of manipulated photographs. Preceding the main title, this introductory sequence opens with a stern image of Stockhausen in front of his electronic equipment, yet the image is flipped upside-down. As such, it succinctly announces both the perceptual disorientation and the tonal juxtapositions to which the audience will henceforth be subjected. This image is held for four seconds and the screen goes black. The same image appears again, right-side up, for a single second. Then, alternating with black frames, comes a rapid-fire montage: a younger Stockhausen, absorbed in concentration, a cartoon image of Laurel and Hardy, Stockhausen conversing with Mary Bauermeister, alone amidst the theatrical seating, lighting a cigarette, wildly conducting on stage, and laughing while reading from a manuscript – all of which together take up perhaps a second of screen time.

Individual sequences are distinctly separated with black leader, bathing the audience in a total darkness after each visual barrage. These periods give the eye a moment of rest, and feel refreshing after the frenetic onslaught of images. Yet these dark periods are also quite palpably haunted, as the afterimages of frames barely accessible to our conscious mind still resonate within our perceptual system. Breer's work quite obviously concerns the changing mechanics of

perception itself in its time, and to see his work today – when the rapidfire montage of Brakhage and Breer has long been assimilated into mainstream televisual culture – is quite a different experience from what it would have been for an audience in 1964, when film and television were still lethargic by comparison. Nevertheless, the work remains overwhelming: despite our decades of training, the images are simply too fast to be completely taken in, at least on a conscious level of awareness.

In the course of a few short minutes, Breer's film will ask us to perceive literally thousands of discrete images across a vast range of representational forms. After a number of these discrete montages of individual cast members, we are given the film's title in a stroboscopic flicker: 'Fist Fight' handwritten in black pen on white paper, alternating with an uneven collection of white letters on a black changeable sign board. After the title card, the first half minute of the film consists of approximately twenty-two seconds of darkness, punctuated by three brief image sequences. The initial image sequence, coming after seven seconds of darkness, is just over a second long, but contains fourteen separate images including four moving image sequences. The next, four seconds long, contains thirty-six separate images including five moving image sequences. After these two 'explosions' of visual imagery, a single image – that of a wedding ceremony turned upside-down – appears for four full seconds, which now has come to feel like an eternity. We may retroactively recall this image, since it was the first to appear in the original sequence – though only for one-twelfth of a second, as it flits by right at the limit of our conscious perception.

Breer's film, for all its explosive intensity, does not feel like an assault. The continuously varying colours and forms, the strange perceptual effects created through its juxtapositions, are often mesmerising. They draw us in, even as the frenetic pace necessarily keeps them at a certain remove from our perceptual grasp. And therein lies Breer's Cagean aesthetic – for like *Image by Images*, this is intended not as some sadistic orgy of perceptual violence, but as the composition of a visual form whose structure and meaning will necessarily remain unassimilated.

Stockhausen organised the individual sections of *Originals* by means of a giant railway clock, visible from everywhere in the concert hall. But, within *Fistfight*, Breer has constructed a cinematic 'space image' whose temporality diverges as radically from ordinary cinematic time as it does from our ordinary clock time. But just as important as this temporal disjunction is its constantly shifting figuration of space. From the traditional immersive depth of the photographic image to the planarity of Lichtenstein's cartoon appropriations. From a traditional smooth animation sequence of a mouse jumping to a live

mouse tumbling down into a void. From the mere suggestion of depth within a two-dimensional cartoon, to that same cartoon with a single piece of red construction paper, sufficient – despite its flatness – to conjure up a 'real' depth capable of instantly destroying the illusory depth previously created. And in what is perhaps the film's penultimate moment, a dramatic eruption: the animation camera itself becomes dislodged from its stand, swivels around the animation studio, and veers towards the door. Exiting to the outside, we see animated frames of Breer's own walking shoes, before shifting up, into the trees, and finally fading to white as the image is scorched by a blinding sun. But only a fraction of a second after, back to the animation stand, with all manner of forms and colours shifting again over a two-dimensional field.

Watching *Fistfight*, the spectator is constantly brought back and forth across thresholds of spatial and temporal perception. And similarly, during perhaps the central moment in Stockhausen's score,

a high, bright, slowly wavering pitch descends in several waves, becoming louder as it gradually acquires a snarling timbre, and finally passes below the point where it can be heard any longer as a pitch. As it crosses this threshold, it becomes evident that the sound consists of a succession of pulses, which continue to slow until they become a steady beat. With increasing reverberation, the individual pulses become transformed into tones once again. (Clarke 1998: 225)

Breer and Stockhausen both work around the liminality of perception, its contours and cliffs, as they foreground and manipulate the conditions of its framing. This is neither the 'propulsive' or 'synaesthetic' model of classical visual music, nor the wholly autonomous disjunction of the early Cage/Cunningham pieces of the 1950s. Rather, it is a complex figuration of complementarity and correspondence across media forms.

Just as Stockhausen's investigation of the aesthetics of tape-recording in *Contacts* went 'outside itself' by itself being taped and played back within the performance of *Originals*, so Breer was not content to leave the complex play of temporality and spatiality within *Fistfight* solely on the level of the filmic text. When the film was presented during the five performances in September 1964, both the film projector and screen were themselves on stage. Whether intentionally or not, this 'staging' of projection recalled some of the first cinematic performances of the late nineteenth century, in which the spectacle of cinematic projection was itself given as much importance as the film being projected. Himself on stage, Breer turned on a projector within the scaffolding tower as the central clock gave the time for the performance to start and the lights in the hall dimmed. As the projector's beam shot across the stage, it struck a number of the other participants. Only after these actors fell to the floor could

the projection pass over them to reach the screen at the far end. As the live actors lay there, immobilised, the bright staccato flashes of Breer's *Fistfight* projected across the stage. Thus even the physical exhibition of the film became an assemblage – for, alongside the projected image itself, the pulsing intensity of the beam would constantly draw the audience's attention back to the spectacle of projection, as well as the fragmentary, sunken bodies on stage these flashes of projection rendered visible.

Six minutes later, a little over halfway through the film, Stockhausen's master clock indicated the conclusion. Breer himself took a metal frame across which paper had been stretched over – a makeshift, portable screen – and placed it over the fixed screen on stage, transferring the projected image from one to the other. He then walked slowly across the stage, approaching to the projector while the focus was kept in sync. From the audience's perspective, one saw the filmmaker literally capture the projected image, and move it across stage, while it was still 'live' and moving. Again, one's focus was radically decentred. Like a saccadic movement, the eye would jump from the frenetic action of the moving image – itself shifting between divergent levels of 'real' and 'illusory' space – to the movement of the image itself through physical space, as the screen traversed the stage. Walking over and around the still dormant bodies, Breer brought the screen closer and closer to the projector, until the moving image itself ceased moving and disappeared. The house lights came back up, and everyone in the hall returned to life.

Breer's film performance for *Originals* anticipated the diverse investigations that would take place at the festival of expanded cinema the following winter at the Filmmaker's Cinematheque, and which would develop into a major genre over the next decade in Europe and America. But we should keep in mind that Breer's performative expansion of the filmic space, his move from the 'internal' space of the screen towards the 'external' space of exhibition, was here specifically keyed to the boundaries of live and mediated performance. Stockhausen wished to explore. Stockhausen's investigation was not limited to the formal mechanics of time and space, but additionally concerned the boundaries of human theatricality and performance, the line between actors

and their roles, as they move between on-stage and off-stage space.

A correlative intervention had actually occurred even before the performance itself had officially begun. As the audience was first entering Judson Hall and beginning to take their seats, they would have seen a large television monitor at centre stage, framed by the giant scaffolding tower on and around which the various performances would take place. This television monitor was connected to a broadcast video camera which Breer was operating from the centre of the hall. As the audience entered the confusing layout of space, this bright television image at centre stage would have been one of the most obvious and visible elements on the theatrical stage, the space of the performance they had come to witness. There, upon the stage and screen, the audience saw something to which art world audiences would only become accustomed much later, in the video installation works over the next decade: they saw themselves. Which is to say, they saw themselves in real time, framed and 'on stage'. Before the performance had even commenced, they had themselves been called to see themselves as part of the drama of identity, performance and remediation that was Stockhausen's *Originals*.

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