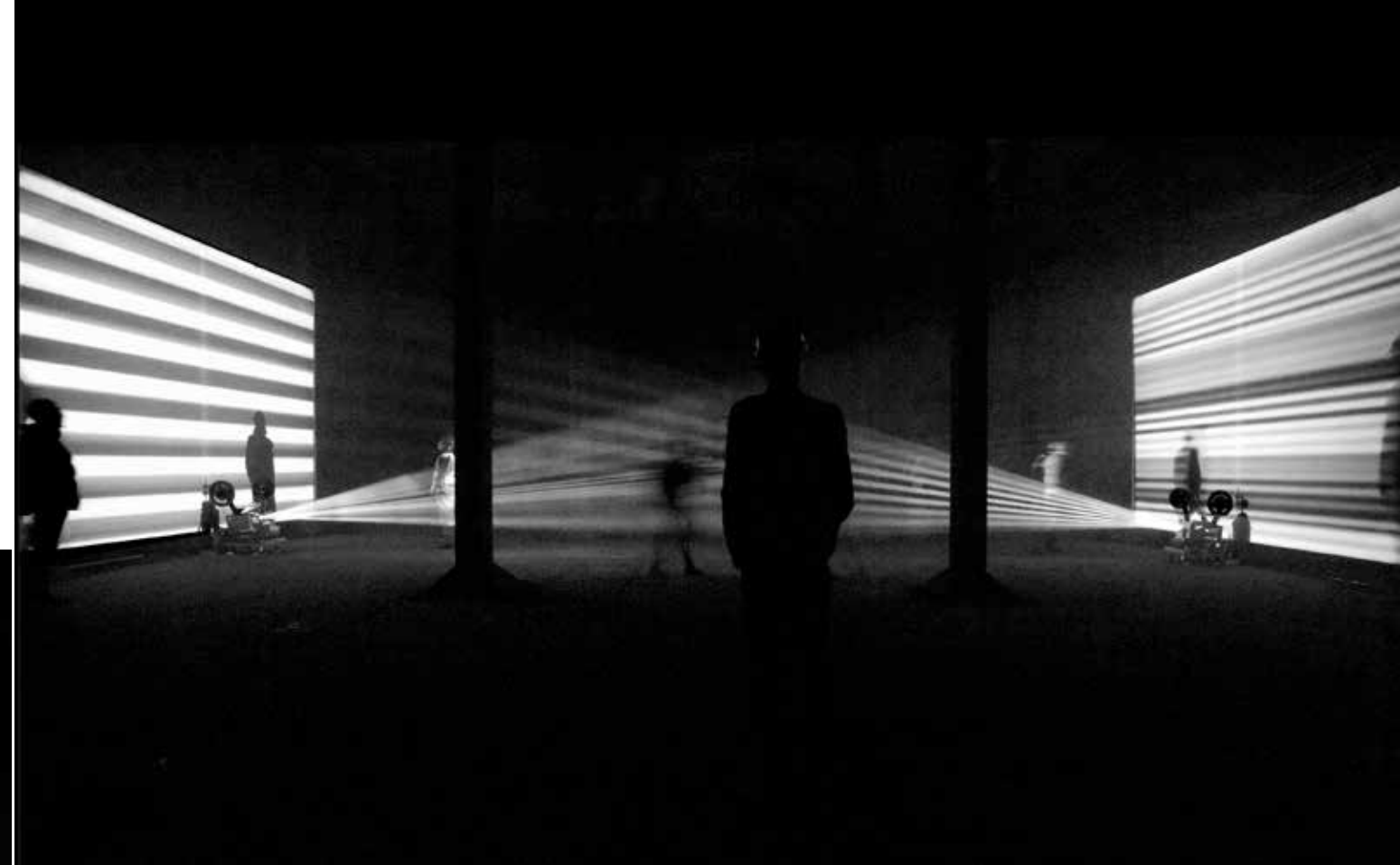


ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE IN BRITAIN SINCE 1989

Edited by Lucy Reynolds, Erika Balsom and
Sarah Perks. Published by Paul Mellon Centre
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ABOVE John Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea* (2015), installation view. Courtesy Smoking Dog Films and Lisson Gallery.
OPPOSITE Lis Rhodes, *Light Music* (1975), installation view from Tate Tanks (2009). Courtesy the artist.



This large volume is arranged in three sections; nine Scholarly Interventions, ten Curatorial Perspectives and twenty-three Artists' Statements. The sections are divided by blocks of colour plates, and there are many more colour plates within the texts.

As the editors suggest, the tone of writing over the entire book shifts from dense and theoretical to personal and anecdotal, and within the scholarly interventions section, T J Demos' essay, which surveys a range of work made by black British artists in order to create a genealogy across the last thirty years, is the most dense and ambitious. Demos draws on numerous theoretical resources to set out the complex web of political and cultural forces and ruptures around nationalism and nationality, identity, globalisation, the oceanic, geology and the Anthropocene, via a consideration of, in particular, John Akomfrah's three screen installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015). As in many of the essays, however,

there is a shortfall between the author's theoretical ambitions for such work, and a detailed explication of how the claims made for it may be realised. Here is where a detailed formal analysis would help to show how the many intertwined concepts are handled.

In this regard Melissa Grondlund's essay on the work of the 'Young British Artists' (YBAs), while much more narrowly focused, is effective in its detailed analysis of Mark Wallinger's videos. Grondlund examines Wallinger's self-conscious positioning of his work as 'educated, middle-England' (p.55), in contrast to more demotic fare by artists like Sarah Lucas, or Gillian Wearing, whose engagement with popular and TV culture is also usefully analysed.

Dan Kidner uses a discussion of the short-lived LUX Centre (1997-2001) to frame the tensions between the Centre's attempts to keep the old London Filmmakers' Co-op's (LFMC) collective ethos going in its cinema programmes alongside the LUX gallery,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Sarah Lucas, *Sausage Film* (1990), frame enlargement. Courtesy the artist.

Mark Wallinger, *Angel* (1997), frame enlargement. © Mark Wallinger. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

Gillian Wearing, *Confess all on video. Don't worry, you will be in disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian* (1994), frame enlargement. © Gillian Wearing. Courtesy Maureen Paley, London, Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Tonya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

Keith Piper, *The Nation's Finest* (1990), frame enlargement. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Béranger. Courtesy Shady Lane Productions, Berlin.

which was orientated to the rapidly growing field of video installation. Jonathan Walley's essay to some extent overlaps with Kidner's in its consideration of the tensions between the LPMC's alternativist traditions, Expanded Cinema and its supposed academicisation and institutionalisation via state funding and the re-presentation of works like Lis Rhodes' *Light Music* (1975) at Tate Modern, as well as the major conference held there that resulted in the book *Expanded Cinema: Art Performance Film* (Tate, 2011).

Throughout the book the work of Akomfrah and Isaac Julien is frequently referred to and discussed, and to some extent this overshadows lower profile artists such as Keith Piper, whose work is briefly discussed by Karen Alexander. Clearly, a key aim is to shift the focus to Black British artists whose contribution to artists' moving image has been ignored or minimised, as Alexander argues in relation to Piper.

While the foregoing shift is to be applauded, there are problems of omission with the volume as a whole. The focus is almost exclusively on artists who show in galleries. There is of course a rationale for this, in that galleries now show vastly more moving-image work than they did in 1989. Of the twenty-three *Artists' Statements*, all but one (or two, if the late Ian White is included) are by artists who exhibit primarily in galleries. Assuming the title of the book gives rise to the expectation that it is at least implicitly a survey of the last thirty years of activity, the question of what is omitted arises, since this is not indicated explicitly in the Introduction.

The editors claim that the term 'artists' moving image' incorporates the older formulations of 'experimental film' and 'video art' (p.16), yet the ongoing practices of 'experimental film' and their attendant support structures, are only mentioned in passing. Additionally, the book ignores the widespread film and video making culture in Britain that continues to exist outside the network of galleries and large institutions on which the book is focused. The most glaring omission is the work of No.w.here, the organisation founded by Noor-Afshan (then Karen) Mirza and Brad Butler, that continued aspects of the work and ethos of the LPMC. (It's ironic, but also sad that Mirza and Butler don't mention No.w.here in their Artists' Statement). No.w.here's regular *Light Reading* screening series (for over a decade from 2004) was a vital part of London's film and video culture and

their beautifully produced journal *Sequence*, edited by Simon Payne, published four issues containing a wonderful mix of critical writing, reviews and artists pages. Why wasn't Payne, a significant video artist in his own right, and a curator, with Andrew Vallance, of a number of large-scale screening events and festivals not mentioned here, invited to contribute a chapter to this book, or David Curtis, who has tracked in detail British history in two important volumes (1970, 2006)? This would have helped to redress the glaring absence of any discussion of the continuing work of artists not part of the gallery scene. Also absent are a number of albeit small grassroots production-exhibition initiatives, including Analogue Recurring, Analogue Ensemble and BEEF. Rather, film is represented (inevitably) by Tacita Dean, the go-to artist for writers who want to cover its continuing use, and artisanal practices such as hand processing (again, inevitably) by Ben Rivers. Yet here the issues are misunderstood and hence misrepresented: 'The mass-cultural obsolescence of celluloid offered artists the chance to explore the medium-specific qualities of the filmic machine at the moment of its eclipse'. p.13. This assertion is anachronistic, since numerous artist-filmmakers have been using film continuously throughout the last thirty years and more. (Kim Knowles' forthcoming book is devoted to artisanal filmmaking.)

Also absent are a number of important older artists, such as the late Sandra Lahire (died 2001), Jayne Parker, Malcolm Le Grice and William Raban, Vicky Smith, Nick Collins, William English and many others who have been working continuously since the 1970s up to the present. Thus, while there is much interesting and useful material here, the volume constitutes a significantly incomplete and hence misleading picture of artists' moving image in Britain since 1989, certainly for those not already familiar with the British scene. The book fills certain gaps in the history it represents, but also curiously disassociates itself from practices that have in fact sustained the culture.

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