



STEVE MCQUEEN SYMPOSIUM

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Hannah Andrews

Associate Professor in Film and Media, University of Lincoln, UK

Hannah Andrews is the author of *Biographical Television Drama* (2021) and *Television and British Cinema: Convergence and Divergence Since 1990* (2014). Her research focuses primarily on British cinema and television, and interests include industrial and intermedial relationships between television and film, biographical media, and political comedy on television.

Abstract | *Small Axe* and/as Cinematic Television

“These are cinema. These are films that happen to be on TV,” Steve McQueen said of *Small Axe* (BBC One/Amazon Studios, 2020). That McQueen had to make this statement speaks to the rhetorical divergence between cinema and television that is becoming increasingly unsustainable in a converged industrial context. In a year in which global COVID-19 lockdowns forced film viewing to largely take place in the home, the category confusion over *Small Axe* was all but inevitable.

This paper analyzes *Small Axe* through the conceptual lens of medium specificity, focusing particularly on the contested concept of “cinematic television.” Existing analyses of cinematic television focus on matters of aesthetics (Restivo, 2019), cultural legitimation (Newman and Levine, 2011) and intertextuality (Wadia Richards, 2021) which respond specifically to American texts. This leaves a gap in our understanding of how cinematic television emerges in other national contexts. This discussion of the *Small Axe* series considers the longer history of convergence between cinema and television in the UK (Andrews, 2014) and McQueen’s unique position therein as an artist-filmmaker.

This paper will combine analysis of this context of aesthetic and industrial convergence with a discussion of affect-driven (post-)cinematic aesthetics. It will evaluate the ways the *Small Axe* films appropriate cinematic forms of affect for television. The paper will consider how *Small Axe* represents a fusion of cinematic aesthetics and affect with televisual access and address, attending to the specificity of representation of, access for, and address to a Black British audience.

Delinda Collier

Professor and Interim Dean of Graduate Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Delinda Collier is the author of *Media Primitivism: Technological Art in Africa* (2020) and *Repainting the Walls of Lunda: Information Colonialism and Angolan Art* (2016). Her articles and essays appear in *African Arts*, *Critical Interventions: African Art and Culture*, *Africa is a Country*, *Third Text*, and more.

Abstract | Blackness in McQueen's *Western Deep*

In this paper, I discuss Steve McQueen's *Western Deep* (2002) in relation to blackness in historical abstraction. I begin with the flickering of light and preponderance of darkness in the camera's struggle to film earth's substratum in a South African gold mine and compare it to other attempts to represent mining in the history of modern South Africa. I then relate the notion of blackness to the recent discovery of a quotation by Alphonse Allais underneath Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1917). Specifically, I argue that the film's collapsing of the figure/ground dyad negates the two fictions of total darkness and racial difference. In suspending representation in a field of indeterminacy caused by a profoundly artificial space of the mine shaft and the camera body/black box, *Western Deep* evokes the history of blackness and its relationship to mass extraction and exploitation. This was the "discovery" of Allais's remark under the most "pure" work of abstraction, according to Hannah Black: the relationship of freedom and abstraction. Set against McQueen's other work exploring the limits of the media apparatus to take in the parentheticals of representation, *Western Deep* is a deeply meditative and monumental work in the history of image and sound.

Sarah Durcan

Artist and Head of Media, National College of Art and Design, Dublin

Sarah Durcan, PhD, is a writer and artist based in Dublin, Ireland. She is the author of *Memory and Intermediality in Artists' Moving Image* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) which addresses the preoccupation with memory in contemporary artists' moving image installations. She is currently working on a film project, *The Invisibles*, a Platform Commission for the fortieth EVA International 2023, curated by Emily Jacir and Pádraic E. Moore. In 2021, Durcan received an Arts Council of Ireland Visual Arts Bursary Award. Recent curatorial projects include *Intermedial Encounters*, BIMi, Birkbeck, London, 2021, and *The Memory Image*, IFI, Dublin, 2019. She has just been appointed acting head of Media, National College of Art and Design, Dublin.

Abstract | Genealogies of Film in Steve McQueen's Video Installations

Steve McQueen's works of the mid-1990s are notable for the ways in which they bring together two distinct genealogies of the moving image: artists' film and narrative cinema. His projected video installations *Bear* (1993), *Five Easy Pieces* (1995), and *Deadpan* (1997) mobilize and "replay" film aesthetics from the historical avant-garde to the cinema of Buster Keaton, the auteurs of European art cinema, and neo avant-garde film practices of the 1960s. By insinuating himself

as a performer into “remembered” film aesthetics, McQueen activates multiple temporalities of the moving image. These temporalities range from rhythmic pulsating time to the durational time of performance and diegetic time. The earliest critical writing on McQueen’s work invokes a historical canon of directors like Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Bresson, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Resnais in addition to artists such as Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, and Bruce Nauman. Through these references McQueen challenges the avant-garde call to show “life as it is” in both senses of the term; on an ideological level and a technological level (Vertov, 1984). To show “life as it is” might mean that reality includes otherness in the form of the largely unrepresented Black body within avant-garde film of the 1920s. I develop a reading of McQueen’s installations in terms of what Gilles Deleuze calls a ‘crystal image’ as viewers experience the existence of multiple pasts and presents within the film image. Extending and pressurizing avant-garde aesthetics, McQueen asserts the moving image as a material of memory.

Elisabetta Fabrizi

Independent Scholar

Elisabetta Fabrizi is an academic and curator based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Her primary research interests focus on the role of contemporary art curators within the economic and political processes that inform film and video cultural production in Britain, as evidenced by her recently completed Newcastle University-funded PhD titled *Curating the Moving Image in the 21st Century*. Alongside the formal and conceptual properties of the works, her research appraises the strategies curators and artists employ to navigate the institutional framing and economic structures that they work within.

Fabrizi brings to her academic research an extensive empirical experience of curating and commissioning film and video projects, including as head of exhibitions at the British Film Institute (BFI), London, where she created the remit and curated the program of the BFI Gallery, the BFI’s purpose-built space dedicated to artists’ moving images. Her curatorial practice has been characterized by an interest in commissioning new work and, in the course of her career, she has worked with a range of artists and filmmakers including John Akomfrah, Yvonne Rainer, Michael Snow, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Her practice and research both emerge from a long-standing interest in the interrelations between art and film, a topic that she also explored during her cum laude degree in film studies and art history at Bologna University, and her master’s in curating contemporary art at the Royal College of Art, London. Fabrizi is currently working on a book dedicated to the curation of artists’ moving images in Britain. She is also guest-editing a special issue of the *Museum History Journal* dedicated to British curatorial practices and finalizing a manuscript exploring the role of private economic capital in Tate Gallery’s approach to the exhibition of artists’ film and video post-1990.

Abstract | *Exodus to Small Axe*: Steve McQueen's Filmic World of Two Halves

Halfway into *Mangrove*, one of Steve McQueen's five episodes making up the *Small Axe* BBC series (2020), a sequence portrays a violent police raid on the Mangrove restaurant, the center of the film's narration. McQueen disrupts the dramatic sequence by including a shot that lingers on the floor of the diner's kitchen. The take is still, and the camera is positioned on the floor, in a corner, at an uncomfortable angle. As a result, the viewers' bodily self-awareness is elicited; the composition, duration, and camera placement force the spectators to feel as if they are hiding under the furniture alongside Frank Crichlow (Shaun Parkes), the innocent Trinidadian immigrant owner of the restaurant.

Shots like these have become synonymous with McQueen's cinematic style; often structured as diptychs in which an abstract, indistinct part and a sharply detailed half are neatly separated, they employ the trademarks of the artist's gallery work, both in terms of image composition and audience activation. This paper will consider the development of such cinematic language and political approach to filmmaking by analyzing the role played by McQueen's early gallery work. It will do so by focusing on the artist's first ever use of film in *Exodus* (1992–97) – an 8mm, unscripted sixty-two seconds student work steeped in *cinéma vérité* – and *Bear* (1993), an installation characterized by precise, fragmented, physical image-making and the first work shot on film ever exhibited by the artist. The paper will examine how McQueen has developed these two distinct filmic approaches in his art and feature films, and how this has allowed him to challenge the spectators' social and political understanding of the lived experience of marginalized individuals. Alongside the formal and conceptual properties of the works, the paper will appraise the strategies employed by McQueen to navigate the institutional framing and economic structures of both the field of contemporary art and that of cinema. To do so, using examples from across the artist's career, the presentation will offer a reflection on the circulation and sale of McQueen's films, which, functioning as either mass entertainment products or limited-edition artworks, form two halves joined by common objectives and yet divided by conflicting methods.

This paper stems from a recently completed PhD research project funded by Newcastle University, UK.

James Harvey

Lecturer in Film, Queen Mary University of London

James Harvey's research focuses on the politics and aesthetics of contemporary film, with a particular interest in artists' film, art cinema, and documentary. He is the author of *Jacques Rancière and the Politics of Art Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), the editor of *Nationalism in Contemporary Western European Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and the author of the first monograph on the films of celebrated artist-filmmaker John Akomfrah (Bloomsbury/BFI Publishing, 2023).

Abstract | Surplus Liveness and Black Male Performance in *Girls, Tricky*

Steve McQueen's 2001 video installation, *Girls, Tricky*, is an exhilarating fifteen-minute portrait of trip-hop artist Tricky (Adrian Thaws) in the studio, recording the song *Girls*. The intensity of Tricky's performance style is amplified through McQueen's approach – a static camera positioned in tight proximity to the microphone. Shifting between improvisation and structure, this union of the two artists provides an exemplary, albeit minor rendition of some of McQueen's core aesthetic tendencies.

I adopt Alessandra Raengo's conceptualization of "surplus liveness" (Raengo, 2015) to analyze the film's interrogation of Black performance, through moments that amplify the bodily movement, stasis, and the role of film technologies in this interrogation. I engage with the work of others, who have found similar significance in his narrative films. I am interested here, though, in analyzing McQueen's engagement with Black movement and stasis in a space of performance – tarrying with the word's dual function to examine the deployment of a familiar aesthetic style in the context of Black performing bodies. Following Grant Farred's articulation of the "disjunctive synthesis" of disruptive acts by Black performing bodies (Farred, 2014: 44), I argue that *Girls, Tricky* signals a rare intervention by McQueen into the political aesthetics of popular culture. The affective force of the on-screen body produces "new relationships of proximity" (Demos, 2005). I shall explore this in relation to the diegetic relationship between the human body and instruments of technology, which signal perceptual alignment between the human and nonhuman.

Charlotte Ickes (Yale BA 2008)

Charlotte Ickes, PhD, is an art historian and curator of time-based media art and special projects at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. In June, she curated a new performance by artist Maren Hassinger. In 2021, she cocurated (with Saisha Grayson and Marina Isgro) *Viewfinder: Women's Film and Video from the Smithsonian*, a yearlong virtual screening and conversation series supported by the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative. She is part of the curatorial team for the forthcoming group exhibition *Kinship* (2022). Previously the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, she has held fellowship appointments at the Whitney Independent Study Program, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. Ickes has curated and cocurated exhibitions and public programs at multiple institutions and cultural spaces, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Slought; the Studio Museum in Harlem; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Anthology Film Archives; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Ickes received her BA from Yale University and MA and PhD from the University of Pennsylvania.

Abstract | "Nothingness in the Cage": Darkness, Blueness, and Blackness in the Work of Steve McQueen

Steve McQueen's installation *Western Deep* (2002) descends into TauTona, known as Western Deep, one of the world's largest gold mines located near

Johannesburg. With limited sources of light, the camera often records total darkness. Beyond solely figuring absence or death, darkness in *Western Deep* abolishes the distanced perspective or standpoint through which Western civilization sees itself and others to make room for what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney might call “the touch of the undercommons.” *Western Deep* was neither the first nor last time that McQueen experimented with an aesthetic of total darkness and immersion. *Pursuit* (2005), *Giardini* (2009), and *Blues Before Sunrise* (2012), all sited or filmed in public parks, deny visual omniscience, and some even threaten to erase the optical realm altogether. Other sensory modes come to the fore and supplement vision as the primary way of understanding common space and relations.

Alan Longino

PhD candidate in Art History, University of Chicago

Alan Longino’s research focuses primarily on Japanese conceptual art, film, as well as performance and collective studies. His writing has appeared in *Heichi* and the *Haunt Journal of Art*, UC Irvine.

Abstract | The Blues of Steve McQueen

Over a period of two weeks in 2012, the streetlamps of Amsterdam’s Vondelpark glowed blue in the evenings and early mornings. Each of the 275 lamps had their bulbs replaced with a blue light which illuminated the walkways of the city’s largest park. The work, *Blues before Sunrise*, was an intervention by Steve McQueen, and took as its reference the 1934 Blues song by Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell. Being the focus of the Amsterdam work, the atmospheric application of the color is also heavily employed in his first two motion pictures, *Hunger* and *Shame*. In both, the violence internalized by the main characters – Bobby Sands and Brandon Sullivan – is doused in blue light. In consideration of these works, as well as others by the artist, this paper examines the use of the color blue as a recurring element and character in the artist’s work. While others have looked at the issue of race in cinema within McQueen’s work, this essay considers the employment of blue as an agent which surrounds the characters and correlates their psychologies into a shared narrative. The paper argues that the color is a stylistic as well as narrative decision, and that its insertion creates temporal lapses, allowing the artist to bridge identities with histories, binding together characters’ beliefs and moods which otherwise go unspoken. In McQueen’s work, blue is not only a tool which explicitly explores identity but one that subtly confronts the histories which binds these identities.

David Sledge

PhD candidate in Art History, Columbia University

David Sledge is completing his dissertation, *Contested Modernism: Black Artists and the Spaces of Modern American Art, 1925-1950*. Sledge finished his undergraduate studies at Indiana University and received his MA from Williams College. He has worked in curatorial roles at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Indianapolis Museum of Art, and Williams College Museum of Art as well as publishing in venues such as *Art in America* and *caa.reviews*.

Abstract | Steve McQueen's Holding Time

This paper considers the nature of bodily stasis in Steve McQueen's work. Specifically, it addresses the static and largely unmoving bodies of the artist himself in *Deadpan* (1997) and of Michael Fassbender's portrayal of political prisoner Bobby Sands in *Hunger* (2008) against their relationship to filmic time or narrative. In both, McQueen depicts the confined body subject to repeated trauma with no visible release. Rather than a retreat or pure deadlock, however, this paper argues that the artist locates in that position of bodily immobility an active refusal through which to imagine and instantiate alternate paths outside of normative political time. Engaging with scholarship on necropolitics and slow death, I track McQueen's use of such bodies across two different filmic modes: first in *Hunger's* narrative feature, in which individuation becomes structurally alienated in and through prison; and second in the short looping *Deadpan*, where the artist studiously avoids transparent narrative or temporal coherency with its single repeated action. Across both films and others in his career, McQueen mines the abstraction of an individual while activating the body and its affective capacities as a means from which to imagine a relationship between historical stasis and change.

Karen Alexander

Independent Curator and Lecturer

Karen Alexander is an independent film and moving image curator, writer, and researcher. She has worked with and for the British Film Institute (BFI), the Royal College of Art, and as a consultant for a diverse range of national cinemas, galleries, and arts organizations. Alexander works across media, arts and culture, programming, and running courses on Black British representation, independent cinema, national identity, and collective memory. She has lectured and spoken widely about UK artists' film and video and post-colonial politics of representation and gender. In 2014, Alexander founded Curating Conversations, a practice-based professional development initiative aimed at emerging visual artists. She curated *Whip It Good: Spinning From History's Filthy Mind* (2015) with Danish/Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers and launched Black Atlantic Cinema Club (2016) with Autograph, London, and Watershed, Bristol. Selected projects include *Black Star* (BFI, 2016), *Philomela's Chorus* (2017), a moving image commissioning and exhibition platform for women of color, *Dream Time: We All Have Stories* for Nuit Blanche (Toronto, 2018), and *A Passion for Remembering: The Films of Maureen Blackwood* (2019). Alexander is a guest curator and consultant for Cinema Rediscovered in Bristol, is on the board of Longplayer, and is currently a lecturer at Central St. Martins, University of the Arts, London.

Stuart Comer

Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Stuart Comer oversees the collection and diverse program of exhibitions, events, and acquisitions for the Department of Media and Performance at MoMA. He also leads The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio, the museum's new space dedicated to performance, music, sound, spoken word, and expanded approaches

to the moving image. In addition to helping reimagine the museum's collection galleries, Comer is cocurating the forthcoming exhibition *Signals: How Video Transformed the World* (with Michelle Kuo, 2023). Other recent projects at MoMA include *Adam Pendleton: Who Is Queen?* (2021); *member: Pope.L, 1978–2001* (2019); *Haegue Yang: Handles* (2019); *Tania Bruguera: Untitled (Havana, 2000)* (2018); *Mark Leckey: Containers and Their Drivers* (with Peter Eleey, at MoMA PS1, 2016); *BRUCE CONNER: IT'S ALL TRUE* (with Laura Hoptman, Rudolf Frieling, and Gary Garrels, 2016); *Bouchra Khalili: The Mapping Journey Project* (2016); and *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* (with Roxana Marcoci and Christian Rattemeyer, 2015).

Comer was cocurator of the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2014 Biennial, and from 2004 to 2013 served as the first curator of film at Tate Modern, London, where he established the Tate Film platform, oversaw film and video work for the Tate collection and displays, and helped conceive and program the Tanks exhibition and performance space.

Donna De Salvo

Senior Adjunct Curator, Special Projects, Dia Art Foundation, New York

Donna De Salvo has spent more than three decades in curatorial and senior leadership positions in museums in the United States and UK and is known for her close collaborations with artists and artist- and context-driven approaches to exhibitions.

De Salvo joined the Dia Art Foundation in 2020 as senior adjunct curator, special projects, where she provides guidance to the director and curatorial team on its program, acquisitions, and archives. She is cocurating with Matilde Guidi-Guidelli a forthcoming exhibition at Dia Beacon of Jack Whitten's *Greek Alphabet Paintings*.

De Salvo spent fifteen years at the Whitney Museum of American Art, was its first chief curator and deputy director for programs, and was instrumental in the design of its new building and curatorial program. She directed a multiyear Luce Foundation-funded analysis of the permanent collection leading to acquisitions that substantially increased the museum's holdings of works by women, artists of color, and geographic region. She led the team for its inaugural exhibition, *America Is Hard to See* (2015). In 2016, she organized a presentation of Steve McQueen's *End Credits* as part of the series *Open Plan*.

Prior to joining the Whitney, from 1999 to 2005 De Salvo was a senior curator at Tate Modern and organized exhibitions including *Open Systems: Rethinking Art, c. 1970* (2005); *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective* (2002); *Anish Kapoor: The Unilever Series* (2002); *Giorgio Morandi* (2001); and *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis* (2001).

A noted scholar on the work of Warhol, De Salvo has lectured and written extensively on the artist and curated numerous exhibitions including *Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (Whitney Museum of American Art (2018)). She served as adjunct curator for the Andy Warhol Museum (1989-1991). De Salvo is a recipient of the Alfred H. Barr Jr. Award from the College Art Association and serves on the Third Academic Committee of the Power Station of Art in Shanghai, China.

Cheryl Finley (Yale PhD 2002)

Associate Professor of Art History, Cornell University

Cheryl Finley is the inaugural director of the Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective and distinguished visiting professor in the Department of Art & Visual Culture at Spelman College. Committed to engaging strategic partners to transform the art and culture industry, she leads an innovative undergraduate program at the world's largest historically Black college and university consortium in preparing the next generation of African American museum and visual arts professionals.

A curator and contemporary art critic, Finley is also an award-winning author noted for *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton University Press, 2018), the first in-depth study of the most famous image associated with the memory of slavery – a schematic engraving of a packed slave ship hold – and the art, architecture, poetry, and film it has inspired since its creation in Britain in 1788. Her coauthored publications and exhibitions of note include *'Free as they want to be:' Artists Committed to Memory* (Daminai, 2022); *My Soul Has Grown Deep: Black Art from the American South* (Yale University Press, 2018); *Teenie Harris, Photographer: An American Story* (Carnegie Museum of Art, 2011); and *Diaspora, Memory, Place: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z* (Prestel, 2008).

Finley's current research examines the global art ecosystem, focusing on the relationship among artists, museums, biennials, and migration in the book project, *Black Art Futures*, and the interdisciplinary project, *Mapping Art History at HBCUs*, designed to harness the power of art history and the promise of technology to revolutionize the art industry. She is passionate about teaching, mentoring, and advising students as well as exposing them to art, industry leaders, and artists around the world through her immersive Art Insider field study experiences.

Her scholarly endeavors have been supported generously by the Ford Foundation; the American Council of Learned Societies; the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art; the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, Harvard University; the Alphonse Fletcher Sr. Fellowship; and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. On leave from Cornell University, where she is an associate professor of art history, Finley is also a visiting professor at the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre at the University of Johannesburg. She received her PhD from Yale University in African American studies and the history of art and her BA in Spanish with honors from Wellesley College.

Kimberly Juanita Brown (Yale PhD 2006)

Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing, Dartmouth

Kimberly Juanita Brown's research and teaching gather at the intersection of African American/African diaspora literature and visual culture studies. In particular, she is interested in the relationship between visibility and Black subjectivity. Her first book, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary*,

was published by Duke University Press in 2015. She is currently working on her second book, tentatively titled *Mortevivum: Photography and the Politics of the Visual*, which explores the relationship between photography and histories of antiblackness on the cusp of the twenty-first century.

Hamza Walker

Director of LAXART, Los Angeles

Hamza Walker is director of LAXART, a nonprofit art space in Los Angeles. Prior to joining LAXART in 2016, he was director of education and associate curator at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, a non-collecting contemporary art museum. Recent exhibitions at LAXART include *Takers* (2022), a video installation by Nikita Gale; Kandis Williams/Cassandra Press's *The Absolute Right to Exclude* (2021); and Postcommodity's *Some Reach While Others Clap* (2020).