

Readers at this point must surely notice the connection between Debashree Mukherjee's discussion of the "affective vocality" of female characters justifying female public speech and performance in the self-reflexive talkie films of the 1930s and 1940s on the one hand, and the "dance socials" described by Usha Iyer for those same decades that similarly justify dancing on the other. Indeed, there is much that the two books share. Both scholars are invested not only in writing the history of women in Indian cinema but also in restoring Indian cinema's history to its women. Both scholars assume that the real—the historicity of laboring bodies and practices—must be "coaxed" out of the image, which in turn must be seen as an effect of the bodies that work to produce it, not solely as their visual ground. For instance, in her discussion her discussion of *Guide* (Vijay Anand and Tad Danielewski, 1965), Iyer expands the field of historical relations that make the movie meaningful, pointing out the parallels between the diegetic regrets voiced by the male lead in the movie for encouraging the heroine of the film, Rosie (Waheeda Rehman) to follow her passion of dancing on the one hand, and the marital discord between the 1930s dancer-actress Sadhona Bose and her film director husband, Madhu Bose, on the other.

Toward the end of her study, Debashree Mukherjee raises the issue of the relation between Bombay and regional cinemas in India. Films in regional languages other than Hindi were being made in Bombay in the years after the arrival of sound and before other regional centers of film production emerged. Conversely, even after independence, regional studios in South India were producing Hindi-language films with stars of Bombay cinema. Iyer compares the Hindi-language films of the South Indian star Vyjayanthimala, produced by South Indian studios in the 1950s, with subsequent ones produced by Bombay studios, and the variant ways in South India and Bombay showcased Vyjayanthimala's classical dance training in the South Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam.

Certainly, there are key differences in the two scholars' methods. Mukherjee's book is invested in the idea of a deeply relational cine-ecology of "multispecies actants" in which human, machinic, and other elements combine into varying context-specific assemblages (231). Iyer terms the "dancer-actress" an analytical category for the nexus between industry, narrative, and spectatorship, while the terms of such a formulation point toward the centrality of the dancing (human) bodies on-screen, no matter how cine-choreographed and "pleated" with other material elements such bodies may be (6, 9). Fascinatingly, the words that echo from Mukherjee's study are *precarity*, *contingency*,

*risk*, *vitality*, *exhaustion*, and *depletion*, whereas Iyer's account speaks of *virtuosity*, *pleasure*, *delight*, *skill*, *rehearsal*, *training*. Perhaps these differences point to the different objects of each scholar's history: production practices in one, and dancing women in the other.

The subtitle of Mukherjee's book, *Making Movies in a Colonial City*, indicates what is new about this book in terms of academic Indian film studies: a desire to formulate an object of inquiry conceived at a level so broad that it cannot be siloed into subcategories such as industrial or institutional history, or star studies, or genre history. In this, Mukherjee seems to gesture toward the titles of popular histories that one might find of, say, Hollywood, Bollywood, or Hong Kong cinema, but with the rigor of an innovative historian deeply and widely familiar with an extraordinary range of sources to pull off such an expansive account.

The subtitle of Iyer's book includes the phrase *Choreographing Corporeal Histories*, comprising in part a history of stylized gestures and movement vocabularies. It is to Iyer's singular credit that these very gestures and movements can be seen as the effects of professional networks, industry hierarchies, performance histories, and more on the one hand, and the labor and craft of background dancers, choreographers, musicians, singers, and stars on the other. Drawing thoughtfully and insightfully on a wide array of sources (archival, popular, anecdotal, and visual), Iyer turns spectacular dance numbers in Hindi cinema into complex historical inscriptions of production logics and human labor.

BOOK DATA. Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. \$105 cloth; \$30 paper; \$29.99 e-book. 448 pages.

Usha Iyer, *Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Hindi Cinema*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. \$125 cloth; \$35 paper; \$34.99 e-book. 288 pages.

SUDHIR MAHADEVAN is an associate professor at the University of Washington, Seattle, where he teaches courses in Cinema and Media Studies. He is the author of *A Very Old Machine: The Many Origins of the Cinema in India* (SUNY Press, 2015; Permanent Black, India, 2018). His more recent writing has focused on photography in 1930s India, and on Indian queer cinema.

## MARIANA JOHNSON

### *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice* edited by James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati

Explorers and exploration have been central to the evolution of cinema from the start. The earliest filmmakers harnessed the camera's ability to capture fragments of the unfamiliar, from far-flung geographical sites and their

“exotic” inhabitants, to underwater environments and the views from hot-air balloons, to new scientific and industrial phenomena. The race to develop moving images itself involved an exploration of the technological sphere and a quest to find some kind of magic in the form of the transcontinental treks of the Lumière cameramen, travelogues and lectures in cinemas, and the phantasmatic voyages of Méliès. Cinema is bound up, as invention and practice, with a collective attraction to discovery.

In *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*, editors James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati bring an expansive approach to this perennial topic by taking adventurous media practices—with “adventurous” here meaning related, either inherently or conceptually, to cinemas of exploration—and looking at them in an array of contexts, through varied, interdisciplinary methodologies. This intervention is timely. There has been, in recent years, an explosion of films and media about exploration, made possible by technological developments in cinematography, with Go-Pros, drones, and nano cameras accessing perspectives and places that go beyond the humanly possible. Widening exhibition and distribution practices, both streaming and cable based, offer an increasing number of platforms for travel-adventure media to find their audiences. There has also been a rise in exploration films within esteemed critical circuits. Cahill and Caminati cite documentaries about exploration by such leading international auteurs as Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders, as well as fictional treatments of exploration, such as Lucrecia Martel’s astounding *Zama* (2017), about a criollo bureaucrat who dreams of escape from his outpost in eighteenth-century Paraguay.

With its wide-ranging approach, *Cinema of Exploration* brings together leading international scholars with diverse methods. Although the book is fundamentally engaged with discourses on the cinema of exploration—as discovery and/or exploitation—it also puts postcolonial perspectives into a productive (if, as the editors admit, occasionally fractious) dialogue with disparate fields, including technology, experiments in perception, and ecocriticism. The last, in particular, provides one reason why this volume resonates: the existential climate crisis facing the human species. Exploration as the story of “man’s dominion over nature” has given way in more recent films to a sense of precariousness, which the editors describe as “empathy and proximity with a planet increasingly understood as fragile and limited” (8).

Cahill and Caminati have divided the book into four sections. The first, “Explorations in Perception,” looks at

case studies involving sensorial and optical discovery. In the opening chapter, Bishnupriya Ghosh examines the microbial universe, as represented in a range of post-World War II epidemiological documentaries. She shows how corporate pharmacological films, such as Pfizer’s *The Age of Promise* (1956) and the US War Department and Navy Medical Research Unit’s films, instructed viewers in the exceptionalism of American science, promoting the export of US pharmacological advances as necessary for the common good. Ghosh shows how the films’ rhetorical function was amplified by the aesthetics of insert shots of microbes in action, “cellular-scale dramas” of microscopic explorations, some leading to moments of “accidental beauty” (31).

Oliver Gaycken engages with a similar micro-iconography, but from a totally different perspective and genre. His essay examines Richard Fleischer’s 1966 science-fiction adventure film, *Fantastic Voyage*, about a tiny submarine crew traveling through the brain of a Cold War scientist to blast a blood clot. Unexpectedly positioning his analysis inside the frame of Bazinian theory, Gaycken argues that the technological and aesthetic discoveries made during the film’s production have been undervalued. Juan Carlos Kase, in a different arena, finds a kind of accidental beauty in the decidedly noncorporate pharmacological experiments conducted in the counterculture of the 1960s. In a stylish essay titled “Outer and Inner Space: Psychedelia and Selected Representations of Altered Consciousness in Experimental Cinema,” Kase considers mid-1960s hallucinogenic “trips” and moments of sensorial *extremis* as depicted in *Chelsea Girls* (Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey, 1966) and *SF Trips Festival: An Opening* (Ben Van Meter, 1967).

Moving from a microscopic scale to a colossal one, the final chapter in this section considers how drone footage, increasingly used to document climate change, may challenge ideas of what it means to mourn. Katherine Groo argues that aerial perspectives, often shown on a loop, bring viewers into contact with a kind of planetary death-in-process that is immense and incomprehensible. Building loosely on Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, Groo contrasts the instantaneous temporal break experienced when looking at a still photographic image of the dead, the sense of a thing “that has been,” with the slow undoing of environmental disaster. She sees repetitive viewings of climate-change drone footage as a form of mourning in a different, ambivalent “time” (86). At moments, this comparison recalls the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo’s concept of imperialist nostalgia: the colonizers mourn for what they have destroyed.

Groo does not cite Rosaldo, but she should. His work on postcolonial theory has been absorbed by the field of ecocriticism, which it prefigures.

The second section of the book, “Cinema of Expedition,” collects discrete studies of key figures in the history of what the editors cleverly call “pith hat” films. The term refers to the natural and geographical adventure films produced as early as 1914, when John Ernest Williamson’s invention of an air-tight, pressurized underwater camera booth made it possible to shoot footage under the ocean. This definition extends to include the “Traveltalks” of the 1930s and 1940s, narrated by MGM’s “Voice of the Globe,” James Fitzpatrick. The contributors to this section use primary sources to offer thorough accounts of men who spent their professional lives working in the expedition-film mode. Vinzenz Hediger writes on the scientist Hans Hass, an Austrian contemporary of Jacques Cousteau, whose diving films explore the ocean as “the last great unexplored part of the world.” Hediger identifies the early formation of the now-ubiquitous “entertainment-zoological complex.”

One especially imaginative chapter is Inga Pollmann’s “Environmental Aesthetics: Tracing a Latent Image from Early Safari Film to Contemporary Art Cinema.” It begins with Alfred Machin’s hunting and safari films, made in the first decade of the last century and financed by Pathé. Pollmann argues that the representation of wild nature upsets human agency in a way that infuses the milieu with mood. The dread in these films is far more enthralling than the kill, even though full visibility of the animal is really possible only once it’s dead.

Following Pollmann, several chapters in the book’s third section, titled “Narratives of Exploration,” are focused on aesthetics, offering text-based investigations of films by auteurs. Nora M. Alter, for example, contributes a close analysis of the sound in Chris Marker’s Cuban films, *¡Cuba Sí!* (1961) and *The Battle of Ten Millions* (1970). She breaks down the means by which his dialectical editing functioned to highlight the information and disinformation campaigns of the revolution’s early days. In *¡Cuba Sí!*, this involves alternating between footage of Cuban and mainstream Western media. Alter explains how Marker’s highly intentional use of Latin music works to amplify feelings of urgency, authenticity, and euphoria, and contrasts this with the muted sound design of *The Battle of Ten Millions* almost a decade later, noting the tones of skepticism in Marker’s handling of the “battle” (Castro’s failed 1970 campaign to harvest ten million tons of sugar cane). Though it appears in the book’s previous section, Ling Zhang’s chapter on

the Chinese actor-director Zheng Junli’s documentary *Long Live the Nation* (1943) also explores the implications of sound design in travel documentary. Zhang’s essay casts new light on an anti-imperialist film largely unknown in the West.

Michelangelo Antonioni made a series of diaristic journey films on his travels through Asia, including *Chung Kuo, Cina* (1972), *Kumbha Mela 1977* (1989), and *Japan 1984—7 Betacam Tapes* (1985). In Marco Dalla Gassa’s account, these films were intermittently dismissed or affirmed, depending on whether the auteurist stamp of Antonioni was invoked, offering an interesting view of their reception and afterlife.

These chapters shed light on lesser-known works by cinema’s most beloved Marxist-leaning artists, though they would benefit from a deeper critical engagement with both exploration and the auteur theory. How is one’s scrutiny and understanding of these films fundamentally altered because of their authorship, and what are the implications of auteurism as applied to documentary?

The volume’s only essay on contemporary global cinema, Malini Guha’s “Adventure Cinema in the Age of Austerity: The Case of Miguel Gomes’ *Arabian Nights* (2015) Trilogy,” examines Gomes’s twenty-first-century recasting of the classic folk tales in the context of Portugal’s economic crisis. Loosely structured by its source material, Gomes’s film diminishes the fantastical elements of the original and employs a hybrid fictional-documentary style (with reflexive elements) to conjure the present-day struggles of disparate characters. Unlike the preceding contributions, Guha explicitly takes up problems of appropriation and commercialization. In her telling, Gomes is a director who got financing for his art-film trilogy in part by selling the idea that it was “exotic,” offering a clear example of the cultural negotiation required of filmmakers who ride the line between exoticism and historical relevance in order to get their films made.

Despite its generous expansiveness in dealing with its subject, *Cinema of Exploration* could benefit from more case studies focused on work by indigenous media makers and/or the “explored upon.” The last section of the book, “Cinema of Exploitation,” would seem to be a logical place for examples that critically talk back to cinema’s more-than-a-century-long investment in narratives and spectacles of cross-cultural discovery. Karine Bertrand’s chapter, investigating the representations of indigeneity in the documentary films of Québécois Pierre Perrault and Dutch-Australian Rolf de Heer, comes closest. She contrasts the outsider-looking-in perspectives of the white filmmakers with the Inuit points of view presented

in films such as *Atanarjuat* (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001). Her essay looks at questions that align with the perennial ones posed decades ago by the anthropologist Jay Ruby when he wondered whether writers and filmmakers were “speaking for, speaking about, speaking with, or speaking alongside” ethnographic and documentary subjects. The entire collection offers little discussion, though, of indigenous film and media and does not, in its otherwise laudably interdisciplinary approach, deeply engage theories of visual anthropology, culture, or anticolonialism, even when to do so would be apt. Bazin, on the other hand, is mentioned in half of the collected essays in this final section.

Catherine Russell’s essay “Amazon Cinema: Vegetal Storytelling,” in the book’s third section, is invested in postcolonial theory, but again the focus of the piece is on films made by white men. She discusses Lothar Baumgarten’s installation *Origins of the Night* (1973–77), which aurally and visually immerses viewers in the rain forest, inscribing the names of flora and fauna, only to reveal, at the very end, that the location is by the Rhine, fairly close to Baumgarten’s home. Russell considers this fake documentary, along with *Ciro Guerra’s Embrace of the Serpent* (2015), as fictions that impart anthropological knowledge, challenge the “epistemological violence endemic to Amazonian cinema,” and “prioritize the interaction between the formal properties of vegetation and cinematography” (242).

Like Pollmann’s and Groo’s chapters, Russell’s is representative of the book’s strong scholarship regarding how the cinema of exploration impacts and is impacted by the natural environment. Brian R. Jacobson’s “Prospecting: Cinema and the Exploration of Extraction,” in the book’s fourth section, is a fascinating account of corporate films made by British Petroleum (BP) in the mid-1950s, showing how the oil company used the travelogue format to promote international oil extraction as an exciting world adventure. These films were effective and successful, with prospector-filmmaker James Hill winning the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short for *Giuseppina* (1960)—a film told from the perspective of a gas-station attendant’s daughter. Capitalizing on the film’s success, BP ran an advertisement that read, “Why Did the Oil-Man Win an Oscar?” BP’s answer? “Art and oil are both three letter words. To most minds, the connection ends there. Not to BP” (292).

The implications of this advertisement are relevant to *Cinema of Exploration* as a whole. The volume brings together a stimulating assortment of essays that expand

conversations about art and instructional films, experimental “psychonauts” and scuba documentarists, aesthetic analysis, and reception studies (like Clarissa Clò’s chapter, in the book’s fourth section, about the queer appropriation of 1960s Italian mondo films). What the book may lack in new perspectives on cultural theory and the representation of “the other” it gains in its generative approach of “cinema approaching the big Other, cinema as affirmative speculation” (308).

BOOK DATA. James Leo Cahill and Luca Caminati, eds., *Cinema of Exploration: Essays on an Adventurous Film Practice*. London: Routledge, 2021. \$160 cloth; \$34.26 e-book. 348 pages.

MARIANA JOHNSON has a PhD in Cinema Studies and is an associate professor and chair of the Film Studies department at UNC-Wilmington. Her work has been published in numerous film magazines and journals, and she is currently at work on a book about early Cuban cinema.

## PHILANA PAYTON

### *Josephine Baker’s Cinematic Prism* by Terri Simone Francis

The ability of a figure to be discovered and rediscovered with new fascination and excitement time and again is the mark of a true legend. The life and career of the international sensation and multitalented performer Josephine Baker has thus been solidified. The last few months alone have seen an announcement that a second feature-length biopic and a television series on Baker are in development. Her star persona was also deployed in a brief yet critically acclaimed scene in a late-season episode of HBO’s *Lovecraft Country* (2020). For decades, scholars across disciplines have historicized and contextualized Baker’s contribution to global politics, performance, aesthetics, and more. She remains a unique figure of study for how her performative legacy queries notions of agency, citizenship, and race. Yet, the broad array of projects available about Baker at times confine her to a dichotomous persona that is assessed as either good/bad or positive/negative. In her recent book, Terri Francis offers a fresh perspective on the icon’s laden, yet oft neglected, cinematic memory.

*Josephine Baker’s Cinematic Prism* follows through with exactly what it announces as its goal in its first few pages: to “treat Baker with care and seriousness as a producer of knowledge” (4). Despite the ways in which Baker captivated audiences early in her career with her comedic timing and her agility as a chorus girl, and then as a headliner, her creative authorship was often referred to as “natural” and/or “instinctual,” an appraisal consistent with the racialized