

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.

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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

primitivist discourses of the time. The colonialist imagination rendered her an ethnographic curiosity and spectacle even when she was the purported “star” of the films in which she was featured. Baker was consistently marginalized in narratives that should have rendered her desirable and worthy of love and attention; instead, such reciprocity was reserved exclusively for white stars.

Francis employs the concept of the “cinematic prism” as a tool to analyze the resulting images and discourses surrounding Baker’s on- and off-screen performances. Positing her as a “self-referential image,” Francis demonstrates how Baker productively understood and utilized the varying conceptions surrounding her celebrity, as well as her own audacious public performances, to powerfully engineer her career and maintain “authority over her image” (160).

To begin, Francis uses the concept of the prism to organize and identify some of the ways that Baker’s legacy continues to circulate around and within specific cultural and political paradigms. In one example, she identifies what she calls the “Imperialist Banana Prismatic” and brilliantly historicizes the colonialist export and appropriation of the banana in order to explicate how Baker’s *dans des bananes* (the origination of the iconic banana skirt), performed in her *La folie du jour* (Joe Francis, 1926) performance, came to infamously represent the meeting of the ethnographic spectacle and the modern. By identifying other modes of relation, such as Baker’s “Africanist Prismatic,” “Pop Culture Prismatic,” “Academic Prismatic,” and so forth, Francis is able to comparatively situate Baker’s film career alongside her ever-evolving persona and legacy.

Chapter 1 provides a necessary overview of the cultural specificities through which Baker navigated, first as a traveling chorine in the United States and later as an expatriate and Parisian headliner. The author affirms Baker’s rightful inclusion within the domestic and international circulation of early-twentieth-century Black popular music and culture by clarifying how her stage and film performances retained aspects of travel and mobility that originated from the blues sensibility popularized by Black women artists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. The recognition of this sensibility, combined with examples that establish Baker as an agentic actor in her performances and overall narrative, undermine much of the preexisting scholarship that has argued otherwise. Francis makes this critical intervention through her application of the prism metaphor as well as a valid consideration of, and engagement with, the American Black press. The solid historical and cultural anchoring in this chapter, coupled with the exceptional utility of the archival material,

builds the foundation for Francis’s formidable analysis of Baker’s cinematic prism.

In the following two chapters, titled “Shouting at Shadows” and “Unintended Exposures,” respectively, Francis delves into the contextual nuances and representational complexities of Baker’s earliest films, *La sirène des tropiques* (Henri Etievant and Mario Nalpas, 1929) and *Zouzou* (Marc Allégret, 1934). She productively compares and contrasts Baker’s film career with the representational politics and critical reception of images of blackness in Hollywood films happening concurrently. This is where her utilization of archival material from the black press does substantive and crucial work, as she is able to prove that by the time of the release of *La sirène*, Baker’s public persona and reputation were already in place. Black publications had been documenting her standout performance style since she was a chorine with *Shuffle Along* and followed her headlining Parisian stage success, as well as the extraordinary persona and audacious public antics that soon characterized “La Bakaire.”

Subsequently, early coverage of her feature-film debut in black papers was mostly eager and hopeful at the idea that her success could mean more meaningful opportunities for Black performers in the burgeoning film industry. Its reception, however, was mixed for reasons related to its perceived mishandling of race relations as well as the fact that, as Francis contends, “Baker brought an outdated silent film to American screens at the dawn of talkies” (76). Already self-conscious about how her stage performances would translate onto the silver screen, Baker was rightfully skeptical and found the overall film, and her experience in making it, disappointing. Nevertheless, she continued to execute a valiant effort as a film star despite an existing cinematic structure that denied her the narrative rights and privileges that should have characterized stardom.

Moreover, Francis conjures the history of the “ethnological spectacle,” most recognizably exemplified through the life of Saartjie Baartman, as a haunting that continued to interpolate itself onto the career of Baker. Nearly all of Baker’s characters onstage and on-screen were “drawn from a shared core of types,” reflecting the “colonialist unconscious” and informed by the legacy of Baartman’s carnival exploitation (108, 109). Through adept close readings, Francis is able to relay how formal decisions such as juxtaposition, lighting, shot selection, and pacing continuously undercut Baker’s stardom in *La sirène*, *Zouzou*, and *Princesse Tam-Tam* (Edmond T. Gréville, 1935). Yet, the reality of her narrative confinement also underlined the conditions

against which Baker creatively authored and visualized burlesque as a means of strategic performative engagement. Francis explains that, in doing so, Baker “brought together her public performance of La Bakaire and her film characters . . . into multiple and simultaneous incarnations that reflect her shifting response to different and incoherent onslaughts and critiques” (123).

Accordingly, chapter 4, “Seeing Double,” impressively elevates the rigor and comprehensiveness of the cinematic prism as an apt and prescient framework for understanding Baker’s performative polymorphism. It is Francis’s cogent and meticulous textual analyses that distinguish this project, and Baker’s films, as ripe for engagement. She incisively reads Baker’s prismatic dance performances in *Princesse Tam-Tam* as the “pretext for employing camera tricks that manipulated cinematic perspective, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy, subject and object” (132).

Therein lies the complication inherent in summations of Baker’s agency and creative authorship, and thus, the intervention that Francis successfully argues. As she notes in her epilogue: “A query that seems to limit Baker is actually a gateway to understanding how Baker used her paradoxes as a dialectic for her own amusement and reflection” (173). The “failure” of Baker’s film career is in actuality an indictment of the unimaginative formations of a broken cinematic medium, unable to yield to the luminosity of Black stardom. Baker’s legacy and its resounding prismatic wavelengths structure the lens through which Black women performers continue to be both not enough and too much. The ever-present conjuring of Baker’s image and spirit substantiates a necessary return to her least-considered professional endeavor as a leading performer. Baker’s cinematic prism engenders a way of knowing, thinking, and seeing that transcends the limits of space-time and productively reconsiders how Black women’s labor can be assessed and valued. The method through which Francis conducts this thoughtful, yet rigorous, analysis will hopefully inspire those who evoke Baker in the future to do so in the same collaborative spirit as Francis, who describes her work with Baker as a “duet” in which they “frame one another, waywardly, faithfully, and tenderly while, naturally, retaining . . . [the] pleasures in opacity” (5).

BOOK DATA. Terri Francis, *Josephine Baker’s Cinematic Prism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021. \$70 cloth; \$24 paper; \$23.99 e-book. 216 pages.

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FREDERICK WASSER

Videographic Cinema: An Archaeology of Electronic Images and Imaginaries by Jonathan Rozenkrantz

Videographic cinema designates the subfield within cinema studies in which Rozenkrantz conducts his close readings of electronic imaginaries. This is a subfield that has, in the last decade, attracted great attention in media studies. Rozenkrantz traces the coinage of the term “videographic cinema” back to Gene Youngblood’s *Expanded Cinema* (1970), which has become a foundational text in video studies. However, he judges Youngblood’s treatment of videography to be too exclusive and limited by being relegated to a subcategory of media art. In contrast to Youngblood’s vision of video transforming filmic narratives into an expansion of the senses, Rozenkrantz organizes his own book by first defining videographic cinema as theatrical films’ incorporation of analogue video images. Rozenkrantz relies on Raymond Bellour’s conclusion that video brings cinema closer to painting and literature. This has the pleasant advantage of foregrounding Rozenkrantz’s premise that “things occur when media reflect on each other” (15).

Following a chronological progression, Rozenkrantz describes the first use of video as a plot point within the cinematic narrative. He starts with an inspiring reading of classical-style narratives such as *A Face in the Crowd* (Elia Kazan, 1957) and *Seven Days in May* (John Frankenheimer, 1964). The discussion begins in earnest with *OffOn* (Scott Bartlett, 1967) and *Electronic Labyrinth: THX 1138 4EB* (1967, George Lucas) and how these films use video “as a new brand of realism: cold, distorted, vibrant, tangibly material, yet profoundly estranged (58).”

While *OffOn* and *Electronic Labyrinth* come from San Francisco’s experimental culture, Hollywood is also taking notice. For example, *A Face in the Crowd* is a direct cinematic attack on the power of video’s immediacy. In the film, its lead character, Lonesome Rhodes (Andy Griffith) projects his “authentic” backstage self into everyone’s living room using the TV apparatus. Rhodes, by revealing the backstage to the public, gains tremendous popularity. When his mentors realize that they have created a self-aggrandizing monster, they destroy him by broadcasting the even more authentic backstage view of a Lonesome Rhodes who expresses utter contempt for his fans.

Rozenkrantz turns to critical visual juxtapositions to support his argument, such as the moment when Rhodes turns the video monitor to face the TV camera—an act that generates cinema’s first videographic hall of mirrors. A variation of this mirror iconography reappears in *Seven*