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“Prelude to the Energy Era in Film Studies:  
Review of Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint:  
Lights, Camera, Natural Resources*”

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Nadia Bozak. *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012. 241 pp. Paper \$26.95. ISBN: 978-0813551388

#### REVIEW BY GEORGIANA BANITA

Over the past few years, the conflation of energy and culture has yielded a dynamic research field whose freshness and enthusiasm are at once its glory and its bane. While work towards a reorientation of literature around energy logics and reading protocols continues apace, Canadian novelist and scholar Nadia Bozak has produced a book that makes manifest the under-excavated entanglements of *cinema* and energy as a way of complicating the dyad of analogue and digital filmmaking that dominates the field. What do we expect from such a study? A damning investigation into the wasteful mechanics of film production, or a subtle unveiling of the more ethereal energies of the cinematic as a medium of power, consumption, and the pleasurable excretion of material and imaginative waste?

Bozak's study offers both, and is nothing short of a revelation. *The Cinematic Footprint* is an environmentally conscious, conceptually persuasive account of, firstly, how to frame the current absence of an energy discourse within film (and more broadly visual) studies, and in a second step, how to proceed *back* from the assumed imbrication of film and the "hydrocarbon imagination" (12) to reconfigure the production, circulation, and aesthetic of cinema. On this two-lane track, Bozak provides both an impressive overview of resource media and close readings to shore up her central argument that "cinema is intricately woven into industrial culture and the energy economy that sustains it" (1). The author is certainly aware of the abundant material her questions force into view, and shrewdly limits her terrain to documentary and experimental films, Third and Fourth Cinema, photography and installation art.

My quibbles with this book are minimal and can be quickly summarized. Because Bozak unearths an understudied energy consciousness in cinema, the questions she asks are sometimes awkwardly linked and their phrasing is often disorienting: how does peak oil affect the movie picture industry? In what ways is the image not only biophysically grounded, but also a key pedagogical tool of the environmental movement? If cinema is connected with unsustainable energy systems, how does cinematic resource consumption differ from the energy feedback loops of, say, the car manufacturing industry? Obviously, a key dimension of cinema's entwinement with hydrocarbon culture is cinema's own obsession with energy production and consumption, and it is in sections where this formal and thematic 'energy imaginary' comes to light that the book shines most brightly. Indeed for me, its highest metabolic temperature isn't reached until the central conceit of what Bozak calls "resource image" (2) takes clear shape. If energy consumption is, by the author's own admission, mostly intangible and invisible, how do we conceptualize a resource image? What energies are deployed to visualize resource power, and what aesthetic forms does this transformation ultimately (and concretely) fuel? At its most provocative, the book asks how cinema circulates, emplots, and envisions energy in specifically cinematic ways, whether mechanical or auratic.

The book's brilliant observations are many and can be found in each of the five economically headlined chapters: "Energy," "Resource," "Extraction," "Excess," and "Waste." Bozak seeks to articulate not only a taxonomy of cinema practices from the viewpoint of their carbon footprint, but also a usable grammar for a cinematic energy discourse. "Energy" delineates a capacious and quite striking notion of the cinematic image as "fossilized sun" (18). Bozak uses the Bazinian concept of temporal fossilization to analyze the "carbon dating" procedures of films such as Chris Marker's *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil* in order to distil the outlines of a carbon-neutral cinema not merely as one dedicated to neutralizing its carbon emissions, but also to an aesthetic and ephemeral neutrality whose binary implication of luminosity

and darkness Bozak traces back to the constitution of the image—from early photography to impressionist painting to Michael Haneke and Lars von Trier—through capturing and refining the power and imprint of light. It's an important chapter that grounds the question of cinematic energy in the history of photographic practice and cinema kinetics, although it lacks a sense of a causal genealogy and the examples, though apposite, don't fully cohere into a narrative of the kind that the image of solar fossilization seems to promise. In reading Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* and Deborah Scranton's *The War Tapes*, "Resource" more precisely establishes how cinematic energy circuits enfold ideological and geopolitical tensions. To highlight only one key moment in this chapter: Bozak discusses CNN's live and on-demand news channel referred to as Pipeline and opened in 2005 at the height of the Iraq war. She writes: "Not only does the term describe news and information as resources, it also ironically aligns CNN's live images of Iraqi horrors—the dominant source of the service's content—with the same petroleum politics that were the rationale for the U.S. invasion" (64). "Extraction" is worth reading for its exhaustive analysis of Edward Burtynsky's photographic portraits of hydrocarbon culture's industrial wastelands. "Excess" is, I think, the strongest section for its inspired argument that uncovering the obscured dimension of energy adds new scope to our views of classic cinematic techniques and tropes, such as the long take, seen here by way of Andy Warhol's *Empire* and Georges Bataille as "a gratuity, an opulence of choice and an indulgence in materials, as well as in space, time, and energy" (122). What Bozak says about resource-conscious films "displaying a lack of energy in order to reveal energy's totalizing presence in culture at large" (137) resonates deeply with a panoply of cinematic styles and will certainly spark other incisive readings in the same vein. Revolving around what Bozak calls "secondhand cinema" in a gesture that aligns Agnes Varda's randomized digital cinema with documentary accounts of Hurricane Katrina, the section titled "Waste" innovatively links cinematic detritus (the residual waste of production equipment and so on) with a "biopolitics of expendability" (178) that foregrounds the disposable human subject. The book concludes

with a critical response to the Harper government's oil-motivated interest in the Canadian North and its unfortunate nomenclature (*Operation Nanook*), which Bozak unpacks—with recourse to Robert J. Flaherty's silent documentary *Nanook of the North* (1922)—as obscuring "what the Inuit can teach us about surviving in a post-hydrocarbon world" (202).

*The Cinematic Footprint* eloquently widens the horizons within which film production, cinematic image, and film time may be understood as biophysical resources. While far from encyclopaedic, the wealth of material gathered here should encourage scholars to not only catalogue the traces of fuel consumption in the global visual imaginary, but also become more attuned to cinema's petrochemical origins and of the necessity to position the resource image not merely as a bottomless archive of energy's visual avatars (although Bozak cites countless useful examples of energy-oriented works), but especially as an aesthetic strategy and a way of seeing. For everyone with an interest in the origins and futures of energy cultures, this book is indispensable reading.

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