Worldmaking, Metaphors and Montage in the Representation of Cultures: Cross-Cultural Filmmaking and the Poetics of Robert Gardner’s *Forest of Bliss*

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This essay looks at how ways of seeing may be constructed through referential practices in montage and other forms of visual and synesthetic juxtapositioning. Reflecting on films by Robert Gardner and others as transitional documents in an age of changing media, the essay explores alternative strategies of cross-cultural production. The essay bridges theories of montage, metaphor, and the philosophy of art.

AN EMERGING CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

We begin watching a boat in the early morning water [Fig. 7], a dog on some waterside steps, a man’s bare feet as he descends to wash himself in the river, a river across which boats pass, from which animals feed, in which humans are washing clothes, beside which a civilization lives, and in which human remains are sunk [Fig. 2].

The only verbal clue for the non-Hindi speaker of what we are watching is an opening quote by W. B. Yeats:

Everything in the world is either eaten or eaten
The seed is food and the fire is the eater.

Rather, through long and short film clips, the wandering eye of the camera describes an economy, teaching us to see by forcing us to build a network of associations. The flowers that adorn the dead are also products of a home economy, decorations for a dog, and food for cows that meander around the pyres that burn on the riverside. The wood for the pyres is carried by boats, is weighed and valued; it is part of an economy and part of a landscape signifying

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death, value, income, if not other things, such as a place of bathing or of relaxation, as a measure of time, and so on. Clearly the wood is expensive and requires labor to bring it, to weigh it, to use it. Yet too, as we learn to associate the wood with the pyres—which we only begin to understand well into the film, not seeing our first fire until the film’s second hour—the wood takes on a somewhat uncanny or ominous feel, as do the weighing machine [Fig 5.] and the sounds of the logs being tossed over a high wall to the funeral parties waiting below. Meanwhile, by the river, a man ritualistically stamps yellow hand prints on the side of a boat. The prints share the color of the flowers that adorn the bodies but that also might float on the water now associated with death, but with death only among many other things.

These images are all from Robert Gardner’s film, Forest of Bliss [Gardner 1986], one of a number of films in recent years to re-examine how we learn to see and imagine other worlds through visual and audible referents. In films such as Forest of Bliss, Naked Spaces [Trinh 1984], and Mother Dao the Turtledike [Monnikendam 1995], to name just a few, ways of seeing are built through techniques of editing that expand and qualify the ambiguity of images by placing them in multiple, and even contradictory, associative and narrative fields. Shifts in perspective, uncanny tempos, and challenging juxtapositions challenge conventions of framing that impose a particular and rhetorical order on the world pictured; in these films, the images are not resolved [Fig. 1]. When objects, people, animals, and places are revealed in multiple perspectives and through varied rhythms, viewers are asked to link the fragments and reconcile the parts in an imagined vision of a whole and inhabitable world. The production choice of building a world through referents seems to grow from a desire to represent a cyclical notion of life (and death); the metaphor is found in the very structure of the film, in its representation of time, and its organization based on both form and content.

Gardner organizes the film with a loose narrative structure that seemingly follows the events of a day from sunrise to night-time; this structure, shifting perspectives and the interconnected editing style also seem designed to parallel an abstract and cyclical structure of cultural organization. The chronological order helps follow the transformations within the various interweaving sets of occurrences. The shifting moods of a day are then built through an accumulation of differing rhythms, actions, sounds, and qualities of light and color working together. Although the viewer is not given the opportunity to see these things in broader contexts—say, for example, through explanation of their cultural and historical significances or through a description of the social circumstances and conditions of which they are also a part—the viewer may nonetheless begin to learn something about the nature and practices of this place. By watching the ways people, animals and objects act and are acted upon, the viewer may develop a sense of the economies and emotions surrounding the dead and how the activities surrounding the dead share this river and riverside with so many other economies and activities.

By revealing this world slowly, Gardner undermines the potential for initial revulsion on the part of a Western audience that may have differing ideas about death, corpses, and economics. He gives the viewer tools to approach a sense of place shaped by the economy of death before we confront actual images of dead
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Figure 1 Is it a ladder? — Gardner provides long studies of ritual activities and of the construction of objects whose uses are only later explained through their place in later scenes. The viewer holds the images in mind waiting for — and seeking — explanation. (Photo, courtesy of Robert Gardner, copyright, Film Study Center, Harvard University)

bodies. Indeed, we don’t consciously see a body until midway through the film when suddenly we see many of them being carried in many different ways to the funeral site. Or rather, we are not sure at first — was that a carcass being eaten by animals in the water, were those body parts floating by [Fig. 2], was that a body the boatsmen tipped overboard from a boat? Gardner teaches us to see these as sights among others that one might encounter during a day in that riverside world. This isolation of objects and gestures creates a montage complex; the elements are understood through their relationships to each other and are part of a given reality. The quality of elements is determined by the views we take upon them and by how they hold particular and shifting meanings and importance.

MODELS OF VISUAL MEANING-MAKING

Film moves us both physically and intellectually. We respond spontaneously to the light and sound. The effect on us occurs by the very mechanism of film, the rhythms of cuts, of light and forms in motion, and by the visual content as well as by how the images help us to participate in a moment, story, and/or argument.
Figure 2. A corpse floating in the Ganges. (Photo, courtesy of Robert Gardner; copyright, Film Study Center, Harvard University.)
Early in the development of film, makers like Vertov and Eisenstein, as well as theorists like Hugo Munsterberg and Rudolf Arnheim, explored the potentials of film and cinematic montage to move us both physically and intellectually. We respond spontaneously to the stimuli of film and absorb information we may only later become conscious of in reflection or reviewing. Eisenstein, in particular, demonstrated the capacity of film to build meaning through a visual rhetoric, one made of contrasting qualities—colors, light, shapes. Film is both a psycho-physiological and an intellectual experience calling on both spontaneous and reflexive responses to both formal characteristics of the images in montage and the subject matter.

Eisenstein developed his theories of montage in response to the particular political conditions of the Russian revolution, and his interest in montage and the dialectics of the image brought together a formalist approach to cinematic practice with a particular vision of the social function of film. At the same time, his theories of film have been incorporated into a more wide-ranging set of applications in fiction and nonfiction film throughout the last century. The resurgence of Eisenstein's writings in the 1980s and 1990s in disciplines outside of film connects theories of montage to broader issues about visual information and fragmentation in contemporary culture. With cultural critics like George Marcus (1990) and James Clifford (1988) looking back to the artistic avant garde of the 1920s, we find century-long routes in how individuals negotiate the images and authority of mass culture. Gardner, too, is concerned with how the filmmaker and viewer construct worlds through visual juxtapositions, but his images often remain open-ended. His stance seems intentionally personal and naive as one looking at an unfamiliar place for the first time. It is a stance that searches for aesthetic, metonymic, and metaphor connections between images and one that seems willing to explore both the process of looking and the errors of culturally learned expectations.

Often, his camera becomes curiously distracted by seemingly irrelevant objects such as a rag or trash. The fragmented images linger in a field of memory; we are asked to find ways to justify their anomaly. Perspective shifts; the camera moving alongside a cow looking down on the events at the river evokes notions of an alternative philosophy of life and sight. Similarly, cross-cutting, say between someone preparing a boat and someone preparing a body for the water, unsettles an easy reading of either. A visit to a hospice [Fig. 3] startles viewers when a motionless old woman suddenly raises her head to wave at her visitors; in looking for death life is a shock. Perhaps the film functions thus as a preface to engaging further studies and voices by building a continually shifting and evolving field of referents. The movement between long takes and short cuts and between panoramic views and close-ups of actions reminds the audience of the biases and expectations provoked by differing viewpoints.

Take by contrast Robert Flaherty's ethnographically-minded documentary film about an Inuit hunter and his family, *Nanook of the North* [Flaherty 1922], which the critic André Bazin praises for its naturalistic representations of Nanook's world, a world Flaherty has created through the use of relatively deep focus and shots that are inclusive of the various elements in the landscape [Bazin 1967: 23–52]. In this film we follow Nanook on a series of adventures, imagining his world through the
tasks he performs to survive. Although we learn little about the thoughts or vision of the character, we are asked to imagine his world through narrative conventions and through Flaherty's lyrical shots of the blowing snow and howling dogs. Such images reinforce as tropes the bleakness and cold of the world against which Nanook must survive. Nanook performs various feats of hunting prowess. The audience is told Nanook is performing feats of great danger—at times staged for the camera—heightening a dominant narrative tension through which an audience might be eager to see him, the hero of this narrative, succeed. The audience is asked to share in Nanook's desire to overcome the challenges he faces. These are transformed into archetypal struggles and conditions that foreign viewers might be able to compare with those familiar to them more than to referents from within Nanook's own world. The various activities that are particular to his world, such as the heating of water, the hunting of a seal, or the building of an igloo, are described in general terms with few clues to what those things and activities might mean to Nanook or within Inuit culture.
In response to a sequence in which the audience watches Nanook hunt a seal through a hole in the ice [Figure 4], Bazin writes:

"it is inconceivable that the famous hunt scene in Nanook should not show us hunter, hole, and seal all in the same shot. It is simply respect for the spatial unity of an event at the moment when to split it up would change it from something real to something imaginary" [Bazin 1967: 50].

What matters in this continuity, the real object, may not be space but time, as Bazin suggests in praising Flaherty's use of the long take and inclusive shot: "Montage could suggest time involved. Flaherty however confines himself to showing the actual waiting period; the length of the hunt is the very substance of the image, its true object" [Bazin 1967: 27]. What is privileged by Flaherty and Bazin is a unity of elements depicted in the action within the *mise-en-scène* from the (voyeuristic) point of view of the camera and audience. The realism of the shot is conjured through the sanctity of the omniscient viewer judging the information by its arrangement within the world of the *mise-en-scène*.
The shot provides few clues to understanding the differing elements experienced by Nanook, as for example, the coldness or stiffness of his hands; the qualities of the harpoon; the particular qualities of this ice and seal hole that influence how Nanook chooses his fishing site; the thoughts of his family in the distance; the pain or pleasure of the reflection of the sun in his eyes or face. Even less do the shots describe how the particular actions and objects of the moment might have been learned, imagined, explained, or motivated. Instead, the viewer is asked to place the narrative into a prefigured Western and romanticized archetype of a man battling nature. The objects and people remain largely symbolic significations supporting abstractions and assumptions on the part of the audience—the viewer learns nothing of his fellow hunters and little of his family—while as a character-oriented piece one only sees Nanook's actions and learns little of his character or thought.

The long and inclusive takes amount to a privileging of the temporal constructs of the camera over any interest in forms of coevalness or competing motions, moods, rhythms or narrative directions. Meanwhile Flaherty's distance from the internal emotional character of his subjects results in a veneer of unweighted referents exaggerated perhaps by Flaherty's increasing fascination with the huskies, whose expression in the face of cold and hunger so more directly interrupts, or even takes over, the narrative. In the process, Flaherty presents a powerful poetic view of his own experience of the Arctic cold and ice revealed in the contrasting takes of snowy fields, icy winds, howling beasts, and the sleeping bodies of Nanook's family.

WAYS OF WORLDMAKING

As a spontaneous, cognitive process, films such as Forest of Bliss provide routes toward a kind of "ways of worldmaking" [Goodman 1978]. The process for the viewer is one of building a viable world out of referents. New information must be reconciled with what the viewer already knows, propelling a continual reshaping of the sets and series by which the fragments of experience are made sense of and united into a dynamic fabric of the whole. One identifies what one can of unfamiliar images and sounds and looks for confirmation of the correctness of that reading. The meanings the viewer attaches to the images thus rest equally in the images and in the construction of bridges between them. In watching film this process occurs both on conscious and unconscious levels, as the mind races to keep up with the oncoming images, building a sense of the reality from the fragments on the screen and working to anticipate the directions of actions unfolding. As Eisenstein said of film, the process is physical as well as intellectual, as the body responds spontaneously to the stimulus of these flashes of light and representations of action unfolding against the limits of the frame.

As Nelson Goodman describes it, we build our sense of the worlds around us through culturally specific, referential systems; and Gardner's methods of editing help indicate how these natural human processes of cognition may hold pertinence to the practices of ethnographic filmmaking. A parallel construction of worlds through time-based media like film involves viewers in the spontaneous
action of making sense of fragments of information—of the objects, people, and so forth that fill the frame and panorama.

Worldmaking is what one does in the act of looking. It is spontaneous, continuous, and largely unconscious; it is also shaped by our memory and motivations that are both personal and culturally learned. Goodman describes five processes of worldmaking—(a) Composition and Decomposition, (b) Weighting, (c) Ordering, (d) Deletion and Supplementation, and (e) Deformation—by which one not only places new information in relationship to the things already known but also builds new worlds or realities from old ones. While associative editing processes often parallel these receptive, cognitive processes, editing is more often dominated by linear narrative or expository interests that limit the scope by which one might imagine whole, viable worlds independent of the narrative or expository overlay.

It is in this sense that films building worlds through associative webs and contrasts are unique. They offer worlds over which certain stories develop but which also seem to depict worlds that are quite independent of the film's narrative structure. In Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Naked Spaces*, recollections and discoveries given by voice are set against repetitions of images, continual shifts in weighting, and deformations of the temporal conditions. In a story of a visit to one village, she recalls first the shock of seeing only one old woman veiled and silent. She then begins to catch the eyes of other women peeping out from behind walls to watch, until finally a young girl comes to ask her for money for oil. Continually Trinh returns to the image of the veiled woman in the courtyard, trying to juxtapose and justify the image with the unfolding story of encounters and unveiling; the sequence forces the viewer also to reconcile these images with each new piece of information and to imagine how the events in the one town combine with those in each of the other towns visited.

Following on works by Ernst Gombrich [1960], Rudolf Arnheim [1954], and others, Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking* [1978] builds upon the notion that seeing involves learned behavior by which one constantly looks for recognizable features. Seeing is motivated and built upon memory. One chooses what to look at. One captures from that experience things that provoke the viewer. One will spot movement on a still plain or may imagine creatures in the random shapes of clouds and inkblots. Films made in the narrative traditions of *Nanook of the North* commonly rely on assumptions of sameness between cultures, and our ways of seeing are narrowly determined by dominant narrative, expository, and cinematic conventions, including that of the omniscient camera. Flaherty describes his subjects as being like an American family but qualified by limited and differentiating characteristics. When they go to a trading post, Nanook and his family buy familiar things like candies. Nonetheless, they've never seen a gramophone, and their innocence defines their difference. An igloo is described in the language of a Western house, complete with "window", only this one is carved out of ice. Their eating of blubber is like the Western use of "butter", again with only a slight difference. The film builds its bridges by describing first a cultural sameness and then clarifying and explaining particular differences that are made minor. For the most part, *Nanook of the North* remains a story of a man and his family presented with the homogenizing force of the journey narrative, the Picaresque, aimed at the
and in resolution of the conflicts of the narrative itself. The content and views or expressions of the characters are, for the most part, of little relevance.

An expressive use of montage that employs ways of worldmaking as editing strategies displaces the narrative imperative that the elements of the image serve. Ideas are associated with images—death for example with a pile of wood (Figure 5) in Forest of Bliss—and grounded through them. However, the elements, such as that pile of wood, are entangled in other narratives. From any image in a referential system, one can begin to build a world. In Forest of Bliss, for example, Gardner offers one direction through the material he has filmed but the editing suggests the kind of multidirectionality more often associated with photo series (see, for example, Berger and Mohr [1982: 121-289]).

One might begin, as Gardner does, with the river, or equally with a pile of wood, or an animal eating funeral flowers, or the building of a pyre, and similarly weave through the differing other elements of that world to construct a sense of the whole. At the production level, using such worldmaking strategies provides a viewer with material from which to build worlds shaped by both the ways of
gathering images and editing choices. In terms of building a rich cognitive sense of place, the filmmaker needs to delineate the denotational and connotational value of the objects in the mise-en-scène, and give them life in editing as objects that have the potential to shape the narratives that he/she is also describing.

However, building a world through the representational medium of film inevitably also involves expressive choices. Gardner’s film proposes a way of looking but cannot—and would not want to—claim to offer the only way of looking. His argument, built up through what might be called a language of appearances, is one that incorporates sets of propositions about the life of things, their associative properties and their performative potential, while also challenging the assumed viewers’ presumptions. At the notational level, the images present the literal existence of objects in that time and place. However, in giving the objects referential value, Gardner moves them into the sphere of language where the “reading” of an image is inseparable from its possible meanings and tones. The film is an expression of a way of looking as well as a document of recordings made at some particular place over some particular period of time.

MONTAGE AS WORLDMAKING: CONNOTATIONAL ASSOCIATION AND RETURNING TO THE WHOLE

The connotations of objects are built through the poetic proposition that actions and objects are linked to natural and cultural forces, from the changing weather to the culture’s symbolic language. One’s encounter with the surface appearances in a particular site is also an encounter with the cultural framework in which the elements of these images are alive and independent of the camera. A filmmaker is inevitably making choices to translate or exclude qualities of tone, mode, mood, and so forth that run through all aspects of experience but that are subjective and vary from one perspective to another.

In trope-based cross-cultural work, much attention is given to the cultural and cross-cultural use of metaphors. Since Aristotle, metaphors have been described primarily in linguistic terms as the results of operations we perform in joining together semantic domains of seemingly unlike things that, in juxtaposition, inform our understanding of less familiar or concrete objects, places, creatures, ideas and so on. As tropes like metonymy and irony, they operate on the meanings or signified of terms, and like other tropes, metaphors shape our ways of seeing or positioning in referential domains the more enigmatic aspects of experience and identity. Aristotle [1857] wrote that “it is possible out of neatly constructed enigmas to extract excellent metaphors; because it is on the principles of metaphors that men construct enigmas” [1857: 212], and “the essence of an enigma is this, to unite things impossible, yet really true” [1857: 455].

For ethnographers working in interpretative aspects of the field, tropes can function as tools for helping to translate abstract notions and differing worldviews through ideas that may be more concrete or held in common between the subject, ethnographer, and audience. Metaphors are apt when they help us to imagine successfully the unity of perspectives in an ongoing process or performance. This aptness revolves about the recognition of multiplicity and ambiguity in the people, things,
narratives, and cultures about us seen variously from one angle or another; that is, through the lens of differing domains. The anthropologist, James Fernandez, writes:

"Such retrieval and such construction is the ultimate and recurrent strategy of the human experience…. It is the experience of returning to the depths—that room full of mirrors in which we can see ourselves—in order to return to the whole" [Fernandez 1986: 211].

Film is entirely invested in this production of wholeness out of image fragments—or shots; indeed it is that task of a filmmaker to undermine the natural unity offered by the linear and temporal constant of the technology to propose richer and more differentiated versions of worlds. However, the linearity of films, especially those organized around notions of continuity and objective observation, poses difficulties in presenting competing worldviews, each embedded in differing referential systems. Films like Forest of Bliss offer possibilities through montage. In Forest of Bliss, death permeates all the objects and actions seen and is partially, from this angle and that, described by them. However, the objects and actions are only partly about death; they are also about a commerce, about individual lives, about a sense of time on the river, and so forth. Wood as a trope anticipates stories in each of these of fields.

POLYTROPY: BINDING THE LINGUISTIC AND THE VISUAL

Developing ways by which to bridge these linguistic and visual processes rests partly on the delineation of the formal characteristics that could derive strategies of cross-cultural, documentary production. In "Polytropy" [Friedrich 1991: 17-55], Paul Friedrich presents such a set of tools. Friedrich expands upon theories of tropes in cross-cultural work through a discussion of the problems of translating a Chinese poem. The poem, “Grazing toward Great Peak” by Tu Fu (712-770 AD), conjures a series of images to describe abstract thoughts and feelings. Where Goodman’s description of cognition suggests a rhetoric by which material works upon us in time and by which we process the information spontaneously, Friedrich gives a pragmatic view into the poetics of experience and representation, the pursuit of gist that language grasps at but whose expression can often seem to exceed the capacities of language alone.

In looking for formal ways to explain how the poetic images work upon the reader, Friedrich distinguishes at least five macro-tropes: image tropes, modal tropes, formal tropes, contiguity tropes, and analogical tropes. As with Goodman’s “ways of worldmaking”, these macro-tropes define referential functions; however, as tools they spell out linguistic—and perhaps synesthetic—practices that propel one’s worldmaking into domains of cultural signification, memory, and imagination. In Friedrich’s terms, the tropes of poetry are devices used in the conveying of “gist”—the qualities of being around which language moves toward explanation, but for which literal terms are ever incomplete. The qualities of being and seeing are ephemeral, and our viewpoints forever shifting, just as Gardner’s camera seems to be, with the changing tones, events, and energies of the day, of light, of sound.
Although Friedrich's formal analysis aims to expand metaphor in primarily language-based ways, its relationship to the other arts of representation is apparent in the synesthetic aspects of his definitions which themselves rely on visual and music metaphors such as tone, mode, and rhythm. Indeed, the analysis recalls the influence of early Russian formalism in literature and cinematic writings by such directors as Sergei Eisenstein. However, applied to the interests of cross-cultural understanding, Friedrich's models point toward synesthesia, unresolvable dichotomies, and the often problematic underlying motivations of aesthetic experience. The goal is to understand the range of components by which we express a sense of being and translate that sense through our modes of poetic expression in language—and more broadly, I suggest, across media. The aim is to embrace the culturally specific qualities of places that are often lost both in social science writing and in naturalistic, cinematic representation because these qualities reside beyond the surface evidence of the framed image; such tropes function to link together surface elements in a constellation within the culture(s). As linking devices, these other tropes exceed metaphor in the ways that they interweave verbal and visual imagination. How we "see" the mountain described in a Chinese poem is a matter of how we come to feel about it—the image and the words around this idea of a place (imagined and long past).

Take, for example, the problem of color and the use of image tropes. For Friedrich the problem is posed in the selected poem by the line, "Ch'i Lu [blue-] green…" alternatively translated by various scholars and poets: "Ch'i Lu green never ends", "Throughout the whole of Ch'i and Lu one never loses sight of its greeness", "See how the greenness of the surrounding plains is never lost", and "The ancient dukedoms are everywhere green" [Friedrich 1991:18 and 27-30]. The very problem of translation is one of conveying the "gist" behind the simple description of the color of a place. In situations where color is first literal, as in the representation provided by film or video stock—all in fact with their own significantly differing color qualities—learning to understand color as a conditional term requires a demonstration of how and why that color is a quality in itself. That is, the color must be made independent of the naturalism of the film stock by making it co-dependent on other references.

In his essay on color, On Being Blue, William Gass argues that the terms of the color blue revolve around deep and intimate feelings and hence with language and underlying desires. Gass writes

Seldom was blue for blue's sake present till Pollock hurled pigment at his canvas like pies, rarer still, since such sensitivity in the brush tip is a rarity (in the penis rarer, in the poet rarest of all), color became the breath of bodies, every hue the aching limit of life, as if it rose up from within the substance it covered the way feeling changes the color of chameleon, or like those remarkable cephalopods whose configurations alter with their moods, or as, inadequately, our own blood comes and goes like sunshine dreaming among moving clouds... So—in short—color is consciousness itself, color is feeling, and shape is the distance color goes securely, as in our life we extend ourselves through neighborhoods and hunting grounds... for color is connection. The deeds and sufferings of light, as Goethe says, are ultimately song and celebration. [Gass 1975: 72-73]
The images, sounds, and words of a tone evoke feelings attached to it, feelings which, like metaphors and visual perspectives, may be as multiple and at times contradictory as the blues of music, blue movies, and blue jeans:

the language of birds, bees and flowers as sung by Longshoremen, the lead-like look the skin has when affected by cold, contusion, sickness, fear...afflictions of the spirit—dumps, mopes, Mondays—all that's dismal—low-down gloomy music...blue bloods, balls, bonnets, beards, coats, collars, chips, and cheese...the pedantic, indecent and censorious...though a scrambling of accidents, blue has become their color just as it's stood for fidelity.

In Gardner's *Forest of Bliss*, colors return to haunt our memory of images past. The links co-exist with those that are more evidently categorized, but as with the enigmas of color, parallels of cultural objects, actions, and expressions are always somewhat personal and hard to pin down. However, they also add up to some aspect of a cultural experience that makes being on the river Ganges, a Chinese mountaintop, or in an American inner city feel very different. The interrelation of images is bound not by simply what the objects, actions, and expressions are but by the underlying and culturally specific characteristics that they share with each other and which the viewer must learn to interpret; the yellow of the funerary flowers in *Forest of Bliss* [Figure 6] return with yellow hand prints on a boat, marks on shrines, and the sun on the river. If tropes work "in part to the degree to which they are involved or engaged in fear, sympathy, and other primary emotions that in one shape or another are primary facts of life in all cultures" [Friedrich 1991: 53], they speak to the ways we conjure both the particular and the universal in the satisfying interplay of language and image. In the time-base of film, the tropic connections are further complicated by the imperative of sight in a shifting world of referents. Filmmakers like Gardner explore the task of instilling the time-base with a reflexive position by using repetitions and sounds that do not tell the viewer how to look, but rather highlight a synesthesia in experience, memory, and anticipation.

Such montage need not deny the importance of the long take; in fact, it highlights the long take. In *Forest of Bliss*, for example, the slowness of a man rowing a boat across the River Ganges [Figure 7] contrasts with the many busy things happening there on the riverside. The shot provides a point of view of the man rowing and establishes a contrast between the distant view of the activities on the river banks and the close-up images of the oars breaking the waters in a slow rhythm. A quality of coevalness is enhanced by the dramatic difference of temporally described events, such as through the rhythms of movements and sounds of market areas and riverside work, in a hospital-like building where the dying are being cared for [Figure 3], or on the stone steps where pyres burn. By building a relationship between the elements that make up this particular space, based on how they are reflected by other things that make up that riverside world, one begins to construct space, character, and story as a process of making meaning. One imagines a world through this experience within it. These adaptations of montage into ethnography often extend beyond the expression of dialectical conflicts, as too beyond the spatial juxtapositions of collage within the *mise-en-scène*, to express ways we hold differing, ongoing realities simultaneously and in tension in our imaginations. The rhetoric of sounds
Figure 6 The Marigolds: The use of color is one of the most striking methods of building associations used by Gardner in Forest of Bliss. This action begins with presenting the ritual use of yellow and red marks applied to religious objects and following the collection, sale and use of the yellow funeral marigolds. These colored markers come to life as objects of work, ritual and, for animals, food—momentary markers in the representation of a cycle of life. (Photo courtesy of Robert Gardner; copyright, Film Study Center, Harvard University; see also Color Plate 1)

and images working upon the viewer direct the viewer toward an act of world-making, whereas a poetics of reflections and expressive meaning aims toward an intertextual interpretation of this worldmaking.

The experiment in pure sound and sight devoid of vocal explanation leaves the viewer asking for more knowledge that may become more easily integrated with new media. A project in temporal cognition leads one naturally to ask for further knowledge surrounding the images to which digital Web and installation environments might be particularly suited. The challenge however in bridging filmic and Web material parallels that of combining spontaneous and intellectual responses to visual information. In particular, Web environments tend to privilege the spatial organization of material over the imperatives of the all-encompassing temporal qualities of film. Video clips play within a structured environment; and digital arts combining these two forms of representation must also find ways to bring together spontaneous and reflexive ways of building worlds and knowledge. The relationship between the shot and explanation reflects mental processes,
by which one must bridge elements of knowledge and experience and hold them together in the ongoing production of some sense of a viable reality—or worldview—in which each element of that world has some essential pertinence to that reality as a whole. This movement towards a knowing by synesthetic association is one that moves one to and from the abstract and inchoate notions associated with particular things.

Using film as a means of developing a revolutionary social consciousness, filmmakers like Eisenstein intended to create dialectical models of montage that might make manifest the contradictions of being. Friedrich reorients the practice
toward one that uses tropic strategies to define the paths between domains of thought and language. Along these paths one begins to find the tensions between experiential and intellectual aspects of our awareness of worlds. Focusing on the linking devices and the movements they provoke, Friedrich helps to open the question of how to perceive—always incompletely and without authority—the web of links that embed events in the (cultural) sense of being: “the very gist and ever-widening allusiveness arises from a dialectic relation between language and a real if not always material world” [1991: 53].

CONCLUSION: SYNESTHETIC POETICS, AS A LESSON FOR EMERGING ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

In viewing Forest of Bliss as a transitional document, one might find these strategies of representation to be only partially realized in the documentary models of linear film. Entering into an age of DVD and Web media, such practices take on new potential. For these new platforms offer an ever increased potential for the bridging of language and image and for providing multiple routes through images, not only from other filmic sequences but also from sound, text, and other kinds of data. However, the challenge of building referential systems and contrasting views endures, if even made more challenging by the diminishing of a temporal constant in the viewing of material provided by having a singular time-base. Out of temporal necessity, the simple process of keeping up with the film image encourages the exploration of one’s processes of world-making. In reverse to film, the challenge of creating hypertextual environments remains one of balancing diverse views and data presented in the spatial environment of the screen with the temporal imperatives that give all the elements of the world around us and in the mise-en-scène their urgency, pertinence, necessity, or rightness.

Gardner’s methods of montage work against the more dogmatic uses of montage associated with dialectical techniques that demand synthesis and resolution as well as against the homogenizing and authoritative position of the conventional documentaries driven by vocal explanation and “objective” or categorical structures. Gardner uses the camera and edits to isolate and reveal elements residing in—and acting upon—the mise-en-scène, and thus he demonstrates their contribution to the production of space. The lesson for ethnography may rest in the ways these theories of montage might be used more subtly—without necessarily arriving at resolution—as strategies for picturing systems and situations in continual flux. They provide ways of understanding the nature of time in events through contrasting spatial evidence in the mise-en-scène and, vice versa, of developing ways of imagining the spaces through the diverse and multiple temporal actions or dynamics. This tropological ethnographic practice may move one from a montage of dialectics toward one of dialogics, in which stories unfold from tropes in an interconnected fabric of referents in worlds shown to be independent of the camera and viewer. Such a montage intends to teach ways of seeing unfamiliar things while undermining some of the instantaneous, culturally learned views of order and hierarchy at the level of one’s gut-response. Montage
as such holds the temporality of the image against that of the technology. It also isolates and articulates tensions of the seemingly temporal and nontemporal processes of imagination, such as those of the syntagmatic production of narrative versus the paradigmatic discovery of pertinences. Entering into worldviews through montage—and its likely future place in hypertextual environments—transgresses these limits of language, relying on a synesthetic poetics and the temporal necessity of uniting the elements of a web in order to make a world that is whole and inhabited with living lives, each with their own views, interests, and qualities—invested with being.

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