

wait to get back to Puerto 14 de Mayo and process them.
[1997, my translation]⁷

Boggiani's life could have been an invention of Horacio Quiroga (1897–1936), the Uruguayan-born writer whose short stories should be the next stop for anybody interested in this area of the world and this subject-matter. Not an armchair lover of tropical nature, Quiroga, a frontier settler in the Argentine province of Misiones, wrote about anacondas, the thoughts of a man adrift in a canoe as he lay dying of a snake bite; of European expatriates who went mad dreaming of impossible factories; of Indians who could hear the sound made by a tree that had fallen 100 years ago, because these sounds, and the forest, had an unfamiliar life of their own. Boggiani fits right in. His texts and his photographs pose questions to modern (and post-modern) ethnographers about the state of their discipline today. Because of the apparent ease and directness with which Boggiani conveys information and ambiguity, thorough documentation and self-doubt, and because all of his words are readable and literary, and recognizably Italian.

The descendants of Alberto V. Fric have to be commended for producing a book that makes accessible these extraordinary photographs.

NOTES

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *Tristes Tropiques*, is one of the few European anthropologists who mention Boggiani's work.
2. For a thorough bibliography of Boggiani see footnote 13, page 139, in: Yvonna Fricova, ". . . E procuri che non mi dimentichino i comuni amici. . . ." Two of the Boggiani books cited there are: *I Caduvei (Mbaya o Guaycuru). Viaggi d'un artista nell'America Meridionale, con prefazione ed un studio storico del dottore G. A. Colini*, and *I Ciamacoco*.
3. See Boggiani, Guido, *Viajes de un artista por la America Medional. Los caduveos. Expedicion al rio Nabilique, en la region de las grandes cacerias de venados, Matto Grosso (Brazil)* (1930) This text is a continuation of the 1895 book of similar title. Metraux added to it an introduction and a prose poem written by D'Annunzio about Boggiani, in which the ethnographer is compared with Ulisses, one who had died "unavenged . . . in an unknown land."
4. When he was killed, Boggiani had ventured into the territory of the enemies of the Chamacoco Ixira Indians he knew. The Chamacoco Bravo (or Tumaraha), were estranged kin members of the Ixira.
5. A more extensive and scholarly account of the involved history of Boggiani's manuscripts and photographs appears in: Yvonna Fricova, ". . . E procuri che non mi dimentichino i comuni amici. . . ." Both this work and the introduction to the book reviewed here have, however, some errors of fact. The most regrettable is the indictment Fricova makes of the Spanish businessman Jose Fernandez Cancio. In 1902 Cancio led an expedition to find and recover Boggiani's remains. Fricova describes him as "a Spaniard whose mercenary band had previously carried out successful attacks on Indians" (1997:34). According to Argentine anthropologist Jose Braunstein, who has more than 30 years of fieldwork experience in the Chaco and Alto Paraguay area, the only white man from so long ago remembered affectionately or at all by the Indians of today is Cancio (Braunstein, personal communication).
6. Fric was aware that both translating (one of his definitions of ethnography) and taking photographs in the Chaco were precarious activities. In his words, "if two men sing different songs, it may happen that by chance the tunes match, producing a harmony. I strive to facilitate such occurrences, I search for that harmonious tone: a language in common. What could happen if, in the process, I make a mistake? I am dead" (in Fricova, 1997:143).

7. After Boggiani's death, Fric found that the tubes of ink the Italian had employed for his paintings were being traded along the Alto Paraguay, where they were used to decorate the bodies of Chamacoco women.

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Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance, and Chance in Nonfiction Film. Robert Gardner and Ákos Östör. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. 135 pp., DVD.

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First released in 1985, Robert Gardner's 16mm nonfiction film *Forest of Bliss* is an unparalleled and controversial experiment in transcultural cinema. It has now been re-released on DVD and incorporated into *Making Forest of Bliss*, the first in the Harvard Film Archive's new book series "Voices and Visions in Film." This is an extended conversation between the film's director Robert Gardner and its co-producer Ákos Östör, talking about issues of "intention, circumstance, and chance" surrounding the film's production, recorded as they sat around an editing flatbed, stopping and starting the film at will, inspecting and dissecting it. While reflections by filmmakers on their craft are ten to a dozen and part and parcel of the craft of filmmakers' self-fashioning—one thinks of John Grierson on *Documentary*, Nicholas Ray's *I Was Interrupted*, Trinh Minh-ha's *Framer Framed*, and Federico Fellini on *Fellini*—there is really no precedent for this close reading of a work by its makers, containing as it does their later doubts and differences about the film's meaning and underlying anxiety about whether its spectators have been able to adequately apprehend their intentions.

In view of the vilification of *Forest of Bliss* throughout the pages of the Society for Visual Anthropology's periodical, *SVA Review*, in 1988 and 1989—surely the most egregious instance of a *trahison des clerics* in the history of

visual anthropology—such enduring discomfiture about this film's reception that colors their conversation is quite understandable. In his elegant and enormously suggestive introduction, Stanley Cavell construes this disquiet as a "current of urgency," stemming from their desire to do for the film something analogous to what Walter Benjamin suggests translation provides a work of literature, to prepare its "afterlife."

An unanticipated revitalization of the genre of city symphony, in the tradition of Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures*, Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin*, Joris Ivens' *Rain*, and Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*, *Forest of Bliss* is as aesthetically arresting as it is anthropologically accomplished. Dispensing altogether with voice-over narration and interviews and availing itself instead of complex strategies of editing and mise-en-scène, the film depicts the activities surrounding the disposal of the dead in the Great Cremation Ground of Benares, India. Through long and short shots, and cross-cutting between parallel narrative strands, the wandering eye of the camera homes in on the ecology and economy of death in Benares—above all, of the living preparing to die and attending to the dying. Only gradually disclosing the symbolic significance and material uses of its various subjects over the course of the film, *Forest of Bliss* invites us to build a network of associations for ourselves. It is a network that enables us to sense with rare perceptual acuity the elaborate orchestration and interrelatedness of this ritualized industry—an industry in which the sacred and the profane, the pure and the impure, the cleanly and the dirty, the human and the animal, the quick and the dead, renunciation and liberation, and nature and culture all commingle with unusual propinquity. The marigolds that adorn the dead are also products of a home economy, garlands for a dog, offerings to the Goddess, and nourishment for cows that meander around the pyres burning on the riverside. The wood for the pyres is carried by boats, is weighed and valued. Its place in the economics of death is indissociable from the other tropes of funeral rites at the river, which in turn is itself the most powerful trope, at times signifying the rituals and economy of death while at other times seen as a place of relaxation, a place to bathe and wash clothes, a site to restore and launch boats, a measure of time, and so on.

This economy is inseparable from the rituals surrounding death, from Hindu metaphysics, from Indian visual culture and riparian architecture, from the individuals who live and labor by the river, or from other activities that also take place on the riverside such as cleaning laundry and flying kites. Indeed, the film is equally the story of the river and of the sense of time on its banks, as these too are defining of the cultural significance of death as understood by Gardner and translated through film. Its loose chronological structure follows the events of a day from sunrise to sunrise, both signifying the cyclical nature of Hindu temporality, but also culminating in a second dawn—an opening, a reawakening, and, hence, the sense that life goes on, that death is succeeded by regeneration.

This assists the viewer in following changes in the moods of a day, evoked through an accumulation of differing rhythms, actions, sounds, and qualities of light and color working together. The psychology of building a cultural view and memory is mirrored in an editing practice that teaches the eye to see through repetition and variation. The gradual familiarization of the prima facie exotic (Benares, Hinduism, the particularities of the cremation rituals) simultaneously defamiliarizes much that is everyday and taken for granted (whether the abstraction of death, conceived as a human universal, or the particularities of bamboo, wood, marigolds, sand, and kites). Seemingly familiar objects become displaced, forcing a foreign (non-Indian, non-Hindu) viewer to assume an active role in attempting to imagine this distant place.

It is fortuitous that *Forest of Bliss* is now reissued on DVD, for more reasons than one. In the first place, it is undoubtedly the most aesthetically sensuous ethnographic film ever made, evoking a more heightened impression of presence and sensory stimulation than had hitherto, or indeed has since, been achieved. While the film has frequently been described as "nonverbal" and "purely visual," it is in fact as sensuous aurally as it is visually. Sounds of lingam libations, *bidi* exhalations, oars abrading their locks, and the guttural exclamations of a healer were all enhanced to great effect in postproduction. Incantations to *Ma, Ma* and exclamations of *Ram nam satya he* are so frequent in the film as in effect to be elevated to second order ritualized leitmotifs in their own right. For those who have previously only seen the film on VHS, the DVD is remarkable for its image resolution and luminance; but even those who have seen *Forest of Bliss* on 16mm or 35mm film will be astonished at the DVD's audio quality. An additional reason why *Forest of Bliss* is particularly suited to the DVD format is that the film's interwoven structure of referents, although loosely organized on a chronology, really have no linear beginnings or ends. They are part of a circular system. The river, the rowing, the firewood, the bamboo, the bodies, the marigolds, and the kites all serve as points of entry and each have stories of their own, unspoken stories in a film without narration, interviews, or subtitles. In the DVD, Gardner's approach to the latent hypertextuality of *Forest of Bliss* is to index the shots. Although of limited use by themselves, these indexed shots and sequences are supported by the splendid accompanying book—the most valuable addition to the original work.

True to the experiment of the film, the book adds minimal background cultural information. Rather, the film's new complement, including 152 film frames that are reproduced alongside the conversation, folds in on the manifold nature of the experience of seeing—the preproduction seeing of Gardner and Östör on and around the Manikarnika ghat, Gardner's seeing through the lens as he was filming, the spectators' seeing of the finished film on the screen, and now the director and producer's seeing the work piecemeal on a flatbed. Their conversation explores

the theories, methods, and circumstances lying beneath the remarkable work. Its discursive form provides the very sense of “spontaneity and gravity” that the filmmakers see in the individuals they follow. They honestly and, hence, hesitantly remember the time spent filming *Forest of Bliss*; reflecting on their respective intentions; discerning and discussing detail and significance they would later perceive in the rushes but that escaped them at the time; interrogating the ethics of their unsparing depiction of the Dom Raja, the Untouchable King of the Burning Ground; and considering how they refused the temptation to provide “portraits” of their three main characters. As Gardner notes at some point, without in any way belaboring the withering implications for conventional documentary style, “The very idea of finding a way to reproduce some reality that can be called another person is, on its face, a total absurdity.”

In short, their discussion evokes the tension between serendipity and scripting, and between happenstance and inevitability, that lies at the heart of nonfiction filmmaking. However purposeful, the open-mindedness of the filmmakers allows them to make discoveries in their process, as well as to have chosen an editing style befitting the physical, moral, and ethnographic intensity of their experience. It is a style that reinvests their profilmic experience with the kind of ambiguities that open images up to diverse interpretations rather than grounding them within the linear stories or points of view so often imposed by voice and narration. With *Forest of Bliss*, learning to see is a process of finding one’s way through the potential signifiers of the image, deriving clues to meaning through repeated encounters and detailed inspection.

While reflecting on this process, Gardner stops for a moment to consider a shot of a blind man walking, “Life is very problematic, but we develop incredible strategies despite the most daunting handicaps. This is not the best of all possible worlds, as I have already quoted from Buñuel. It has all kinds of difficulties, and not the least of them is finding one’s way.” Through detailed examination, Gardner finds a route to understand the image he recorded, shifting its meaning:

I remember when I shot this scene that what attracted me to it had nothing at all to do with what we are now discussing. It was what he was wearing. He had on the more beautifully laundered and pressed *kurta*. . . . It was the starkness of the contrast between his dress and the mess through which he was navigating so delicately that caught my eye. I finally realized by the way he was holding his left hand that he was blind. His hand was like a magic wand or antenna that informed him and his surroundings of his coming.

This attention to details—and, above all, the sensitivity to the embodied nature of experience and to experience as the ground of selfhood, so rare in contemporary anthropology—continually reveals connections and stories that become defining of the cultural moment; in watching the elegance with which the blind man finds his way, one learns about both the individual and the space he inhabits

and negotiates. The surprise of the individual’s actual blindness returns to comment on the apparent blindness of a filmmaker or viewer learning to see in a new way.

One wonders if there might not be further applications of hypermedia practice to the revelations of a film like *Forest of Bliss*. While one is grateful for the substantial technical improvements of the DVD, as well as the new facility to view and review discrete shots, it does not begin to exhaust the fecund hypertextuality of the film itself. There is still immense potential here for a more ambitious DVD that would in itself integrate and juxtapose imagery and language—from the film, the outtakes, and the sound track, as well as from verbal reflections and critical writing on the film, or even on Benares or Hinduism more generally. Yet, in an age of fast-evolving media, *Making “Forest of Bliss”* already goes a long way not only to assuring enduring access to the original work but also to providing us with a heightened means of apprehending and comprehending it on new levels.

The Ethnographer’s Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology. Anna Grimshaw. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001. 222 pp.

Visual Methods in Social Research. Marcus Banks. New York City: Sage Publications, 2001. 201 pp.

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In 1962, the Belgian Africanist Luc de Heusch remarked that on occasion “an ethnographer goes so far as to publish pictures of men he has known and liked, but does so with considerable reluctance as if the emotive power of the picture, being foreign to his purpose embarrasses him.” One symptom of the extent of this iconophobia—of the extent to which both the pictorial and the emotional remain foreign to anthropological purposes—is the concept of “visualism” (Fabian 1983). Reductively identifying observation with vision, the rhetoric of visualism has since become common currency for disparaging the fashion in which earlier generations of anthropologists are alleged to have stood above the fray, as if both observation is exclusively visual and visual experience is altogether nonparticipatory.

Anna Grimshaw and Marcus Banks, two of the leading figures in visual anthropology in Britain, have recently authored books that are very different from one another, but which are both at a definite angle to the discipline’s iconophobia. Grimshaw’s *The Ethnographer’s Eye* deploys an aesthetic that is “self-consciously cinematic” (p. xi) and is conceived as a “manifesto” that argues for a “new agenda” for visual anthropology (p. 172)—not by making a case for it as a legitimate subdiscipline but, rather, by contending that the visual, even as it may be disavowed, is in fact central to 20th-century anthropology as a whole.