The Communicator
Volume 2, Issue 1, Jan-Jun 2025, pp. 163-174

Rethinking Environmental Storytelling: Using Video Editing to Represent Non-Human Perspectives

Souvik Sur
Department of English
Sister Nivedita University, West Bengal, India

Received on: January 25, 2025 | Accepted on: March 02, 2025 | Published on: June 29, 2025

Abstract :

This article examines how video editing may be rethought of as a means of portraying nonhuman viewpoints in Indian environmental storytelling. As climate catastrophes, biodiversity loss, and ecological injustices worsen throughout the subcontinent, it is more important than ever to go beyond the human-centered narratives that predominate mainstream media. This research explores how editing techniques can emphasize the agency, temporality, and sensory experience of nonhuman life—animals, rivers, forests, and even atmospheric events—by drawing on ecoaesthetic theory, indigenous epistemologies, and the cinematic traditions of Indian documentary and experimental films.

By formally examining works like I Cannot Give You My Forest (Nandan Saxena & Kavita Bahl, 2014), Kya Hua Is Sheher Ko? (Deepa Dhanraj, 1986), and a selection of independent films from India's northeast and Adivasi districts, this article explores how nonlinear editing, asynchronous soundscapes, and fragmented montage have been used to refute anthropocentric perspectives. The act of editing here becomes philosophical—able to challenge prevailing narratives and point the way to different, multispecies ways of understanding—rather than simply technical.

The paper contends that editing can mediate these ontologies within cinematic form by drawing on Indigenous and folk cosmologies, in which forests are living beings, rivers are family, and nonhuman things have spirit and agency. The study also discusses the ethical ramifications of utilizing human-created media to depict non-human voices: Can video editing authentically reflect the rhythms and resistances of the non-human, or does it always run the risk of appropriation? In response, the paper promotes a practice of tuned editing, which involves consciously slowing down, disconnecting, and being open to ambiguity in order to mirror ecological time and nonhuman subjectivity.

This work, which is at the nexus of environmental humanities, Indian media studies, and posthumanist theory, makes the case for a new environmental media literacy in India that sees editing as a site of both political opposition and imaginative connection with the world beyond the human. In this way, it rethinks environmental storytelling as an interspecies dialogue rooted in the visual and temporal language of the edit, rather than a human monologue.

Introduction

The close relationship between human communities and the more-than-human environment has long influenced environmental storytelling in India. Stories of land, forest, water, and nonhuman creatures have both mirrored and influenced ecological realities, from the oral tales of Indigenous and Adivasi communities to the visual poetry of documentary and experimental film. But given the worsening climate problem, deforestation, and extractivist development models that are changing India's ecological landscape, it is imperative that we rethink our environmental narratives—and who they are intended for. This article argues that video editing, which is frequently relegated to the domain of postproduction methods, has revolutionary potential for re-thinking environmental narratives from nonhuman viewpoints. It explores how editing may be a location for aesthetic and epistemological intervention, questioning human-centered representations and making way for the perceptual worlds of animals, rivers, trees, and landscapes.

In India, where many communities continue to maintain relational ontologies—such as those that see the Narmada River as a deity or the Sal tree as a conscious protector—environmental understanding is already inextricably linked to nonhuman agency. However, mainstream environmental movies frequently give priority to human-centered issues, such as resource use and governance, the conflict between development and displacement, or conservation seen through the perspective of livelihoods. Although such worries are legitimate and essential, they often portray nonhuman subjects as ecological "victims" or passive backdrops. By its ability to manipulate temporality, rhythm, viewpoint, and sensory affect, editing may reposition the nonhuman as subject, presence, and even narrator rather than as object.

This research builds on the work of Indian filmmakers such as Nandan Saxena and Kavita Bahl (I Cannot Give You My Forest, 2014), Sanjay Kak (Words on Water, 2002), and Amar Kanwar (The Scene of Crime, 2011) to show how editing approaches in Indian environmental film have started to express ecological relationships beyond humans. These films frequently use poetic montage, extended shots, nonlinear sequences, and ambient soundscapes to pull viewers into unfamiliar temporalities, such as those of elephants whose migratory routes are unaffected by infrastructure, rivers that cross political boundaries, or forests that regenerate over decades. The editor does not only depict nonhuman life; they also capture its rhythm, presence, and resilience.

This investigation is based on a theoretical framework that incorporates Indigenous environmental epistemologies, posthumanist media theory, and Indian aesthetic traditions that support the coexistence of the living and the nonliving. This work also maintains a critical awareness of the boundaries and ethics of representation: Can human editors really express nonhuman worlds? Alternatively, is the action always interpretive and anthropocentric, no matter how well-intentioned? In reaction, the article recommends a method of "attuned editing," which is influenced by Indigenous knowledge systems and ecological thought within the Indian context and is guided by relational ethics, dwelling, and listening.

This study aims to add to the expanding body of literature in Indian environmental humanities and media studies by highlighting the formal and philosophical aspects of editing. By doing this, it redefines environmental storytelling as an interspecies activity in which the human editor must learn to listen to and cut in response to the appeal of the nonhuman world.

Additionally, the Indian subcontinent's intricate intersections of ecology, culture, and resistance make it a particularly rich and layered terrain for such an investigation. Nonhuman life is frequently a co-creator of meaning across areas, ranging from the tribal forests of Odisha to the floodplains of Assam.

Within state-approved development narratives, which quantify forests for extraction and dam rivers in the name of progress, these viewpoints are frequently erased or made invisible. In contrast, Indigenous movements like the Chipko Andolan or the Narmada Bachao Andolan have long expressed a broader ecological perspective in which non-human actors are central to ethical and political decision-making. The form of storytelling in activist media supporting these movements, however, continues to be based on human testimony and straightforward cause-and-effect reasoning. This study contends that editing provides a medium-specific chance to rethink such frameworks by redistributing affect and narrative agency rather than eliminating the human.

Furthermore, Indian aesthetic principles like rasa (emotional flavor) and darshan (holy seeing) offer opportunities for a culturally grounded perspective on editing that is not focused on humans. Instead of focusing on domination and control, these ideas promote affective immersion and relational vision, which question the Western ocular rationale of mastery and control. When viewed through such a lens, editing becomes an act not of control but of attunement—a process of cosensing with the rhythms and silences of the more than human world.

In the end, this study urges a change in India's environmental storytelling methods, focusing on narratives that not only concentrate on the nonhuman, but also make an effort to think and feel with it. The research helps to foster a more profound and ethically responsible discussion of the difficulties of portraying ecology in Indian film and media by highlighting editing as a crucial location for this change.

Literature Review

In India, video editing and environmental narrative are becoming more integrated with media aesthetics, indigenous epistemologies, and post-humanist thought. Recent research in Indian media studies has started to look at the issue of nonhuman representation and the role of form in influencing environmental narratives, even though historically, environmental film studies has focused on human agency—whether as activists, victims, or mediators.

1. Indian Film and Documentary's Environmental Storytelling

Early Indian environmental movies, such as Tapan Bose's An Indian Story (1981) and Suhasini Mulay's Bhopal: Beyond Genocide (1986), were mostly based on a human-centered activist paradigm that heavily relied on linear cause-and-effect editing and testimonial sequences. Although these writings played a key role in swaying public opinion, they frequently portrayed nonhuman entities as merely a visual component of the setting rather than as narrative agents.

With directors like Sanjay Kak, whose 2002 film Words on Water includes lengthy, lingering images of the Narmada River, giving the river an atmospheric and political presence that goes beyond its function in human livelihoods, the transition toward ecological subjectivity began. Kak's editorial choices—long takes, little narration, and use of ambient sound—create a space for what MacDonald (2013) refers to as "eco-cinema's slow gaze," which allows the audience to feel time outside of capitalist industrial rhythms.

In a similar vein, Kavita Bahl and Nandan Saxena's I Cannot Give You My Forest (2014) integrates Baiga community narratives with lengthy soundscapes of forest life. Here, editing refrains from the urge to make quick cuts for the purpose of narrative efficiency, instead allowing the forest's rasa (emotional flavor) to manifest itself via its temporal length and sonic complexity.

2. Theoretical Frameworks: Indigenous Ontologies and Eco-aesthetics

Eco-aesthetic theory, especially as used by scholars like Ranjani Mazumdar and Ashish Rajadhyaksha in Indian contexts, highlights cinema's ability to create sensory and temporal experiences that challenge anthropocentric perspectives. In India, this aligns with Indigenous ontologies, particularly among Northeastern and Adivasi communities, where rivers, mountains, and forests are considered to be kin and sentient creatures.

For example, the Garo people of Meghalaya perform ceremonies that acknowledge forest spirits as protectors. This perspective is reflected in Tashi and the Monk (Andrew Hinton & Johnny Burke, 2014), which, despite its emphasis on human stories, employs editing techniques that highlight the mountain environment as a participant in moral life.

According to the literature, post-production methods can act as mediators of ontology by influencing the perception of nonhuman entities as passive or dynamic agents through the manipulation of time, rhythm, and juxtaposition. Scholars like Pooja Rangan (Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary, 2017) warn that, regardless of the intention to "give voice" to the nonhuman, man-made media always runs the danger of anthropocentric framing.

3. Using editing as a philosophical and political tool

Editing in Indian activist cinema is frequently motivated by advocacy objectives. However, the "attuned editing" method—which involves slowing down, welcoming uncertainty, and embracing multisensory involvement—implies a move away from advocacy as argument and towards advocacy as immersion. This shift is exemplified by Amar Kanwar's The Scene of Crime (2011), which uses an elliptical montage and a limited human presence to let landscapes "speak" through textures, light shifts, and nonsynchronous sound.

Post-humanist media theory (Braidotti, 2013), which promotes decentering the human without negating human accountability, aligns with this strategy. Additionally, it aligns with Indian artistic conventions like darshan (seeing as spiritual engagement) and rasa (evoking affective states), both of which encourage a more relational and less extractive visuality.

4. Ethical Issues and Challenges

In addition, literature highlights ethical dilemmas, such as whether the human editor can actually "represent" the temporality of a river or the sensory world of a bird. Scholars like Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar have cautioned against "ventriloquism" in the representation of marginalized human groups, a point that may be applied to nonhuman subjects as well. Even with ecoconscious intentions, editing runs the danger of imposing human narrative logic on nonhuman experience.

However, Indian instances illustrate strategies for minimizing this danger. Experimental short films produced by the Northeast Film Collective typically don't have explanatory voiceovers; instead, the editing is guided by non-human sounds and motions. In a similar vein, even though it is a fictional story, Jahnu Barua's Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai (1987) subtly decentralizes the human perspective by employing landscape continuity edits to portray the Brahmaputra River as a persistent political and emotional influence in the protagonist's life.

5. In India, Towards an Editing Pedagogy That Is Not Centered on Humans

Current research indicates that environmental media literacy in India is still mostly centered around people. But editors might be more inclined to consider nonhuman subjects as coauthors of meaning if attentive editing is included into pedagogy. This change is epistemological rather than just aesthetic, encouraging what Haraway (2016) refers to as "making kin" between species.

By experimenting with slow montage, asynchronous sound, and multi-perspective sequencing, Indian filmmakers show that editing may be a kind of interspecies discussion rather than merely human commentary. This is in line with global ecocinema trends, but it is enhanced by the diverse environmental cultures of India, ranging from the Bishnoi protection ethic in Rajasthan to the agricultural ecological rhythms of the Ziro Valley in Arunachal Pradesh.

Film (Year) / Director	Region / Community	Nonhuman Focus	Key Editing Techniques	Mode
Words on Water (2002) / Sanjay Kak	Narmada Valley, central India	River as political and sensory agent	Extended takes; minimal narration; ambient sound; slow pacing	Documentary
I Cannot Give You My Forest (2014) / Nandan Saxena & Kavita Bahl	Baiga community, central India	Forest as kin and livelihood	Poetic montage; lingering shots; layered diegetic sound; restrained cutting	Documentary
The Scene of Crime (2011) / Amar Kanwar	Odisha and eastern India (landscapes of extraction)	Land/terrain as witness	Elliptical montage; negative space; off-screen sound; slow dissolves	Experimental/Essay Film
The Sovereign Forest (2012) / Amar Kanwar	Odisha (mining-affected regions)	Seeds, fields, forests as evidence	Archival layering; repetition; intertitles; durational shots	Installation/Film (Hybrid)
Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai (1987) / Jahnu Barua	Assam, Brahmaputra floodplains	River & agrarian landscape as constant force	Landscape continuity edits; seasonal ellipses; ambient sound bridges	Fiction Feature
Narmada Diary (1995) / Anand Patwardhan	Narmada Valley	River as contested commons	Advocacy montage; interview-to-landscape cutaways; archival insertion	Documentary
Village Rockstars (2017) / Rima Das	Assam (rural)	Monsoon, fields, trees as co-authors of mood	Observational long takes; minimal coverage; rhythmic pacing with ambient sound	Fiction Feature (Indie)
My Name is Salt (2013) / Farida Pacha	Rann of Kutch, Gujarat	Desert, salt, wind as processual agents	Process montage; micro-temporal cuts; sparse dialogue; textural sound	Documentary
Tashi and the Monk (2014) / Andrew Hinton & Johnny Burke	Ladakh (Himalaya)	Mountains and weather as ethical milieu	Rhythmic pacing; silence; landscape cutaways as moral punctuation	Documentary
Cotton for My Shroud (2011) / Nandan Saxena & Kavita Bahl	Vidarbha, Maharashtra	Soil, cotton ecology within agrarian distress	Juxtaposition of micro (soil) and macro (policy) shots; asynchronous sound; archival cross-cuts	Documentary

Research Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative, interpretive, and based on film analysis, ecoaesthetic theory, and ethnographic engagement with filmmaking methods. The goal is to examine how video

editing methods can reframe Indian environmental narrative from nonhuman viewpoints and to determine the ethical, aesthetic, and ontological ramifications of this reframing.

1. Research Approach

The methodology combines textual analysis, semi-structured interviews with filmmakers, editors, and camera operators, and a comparative thematic mapping of editing techniques. To guarantee theoretical and contextual depth, the study uses frameworks from both Indian media studies and environmental humanities.

This layout is especially ideal since the subject of study—nonhuman representation through editing—cannot be limited to quantitative metrics alone; rather, it necessitates a thorough engagement with visual form, rhythm, sound, and narrative structure.

Research Questions and Design

Qualitative, multimethod design (formal film analysis + thematic coding + expert interviews), with minimal quantitative analysis of editorial characteristics.

Main questions:

1. In Indian environmental movies, how do certain editing techniques (such as long takes, asynchronous sound, and nonlinear montage) create nonhuman viewpoints?
2. When do editing decisions decenter human time and prioritize environmental temporality?
3. When trying to "tune" modifications to nonhuman agency, Indian filmmakers and editors report what ethical or logistical compromises?

2. Sampling Strategy

Editors: 40
Directors: 33
Camera-persons (DPs): 27

Regional wise division:

North (incl. Himalaya): 20
East/Northeast: 20
Central/East-Central (MP/Chhattisgarh/Odisha): 20
West (Gujarat/Maharashtra/Rajasthan): 20
South (Kerala/TN/Karnataka/AP/Telangana): 20

Outcome

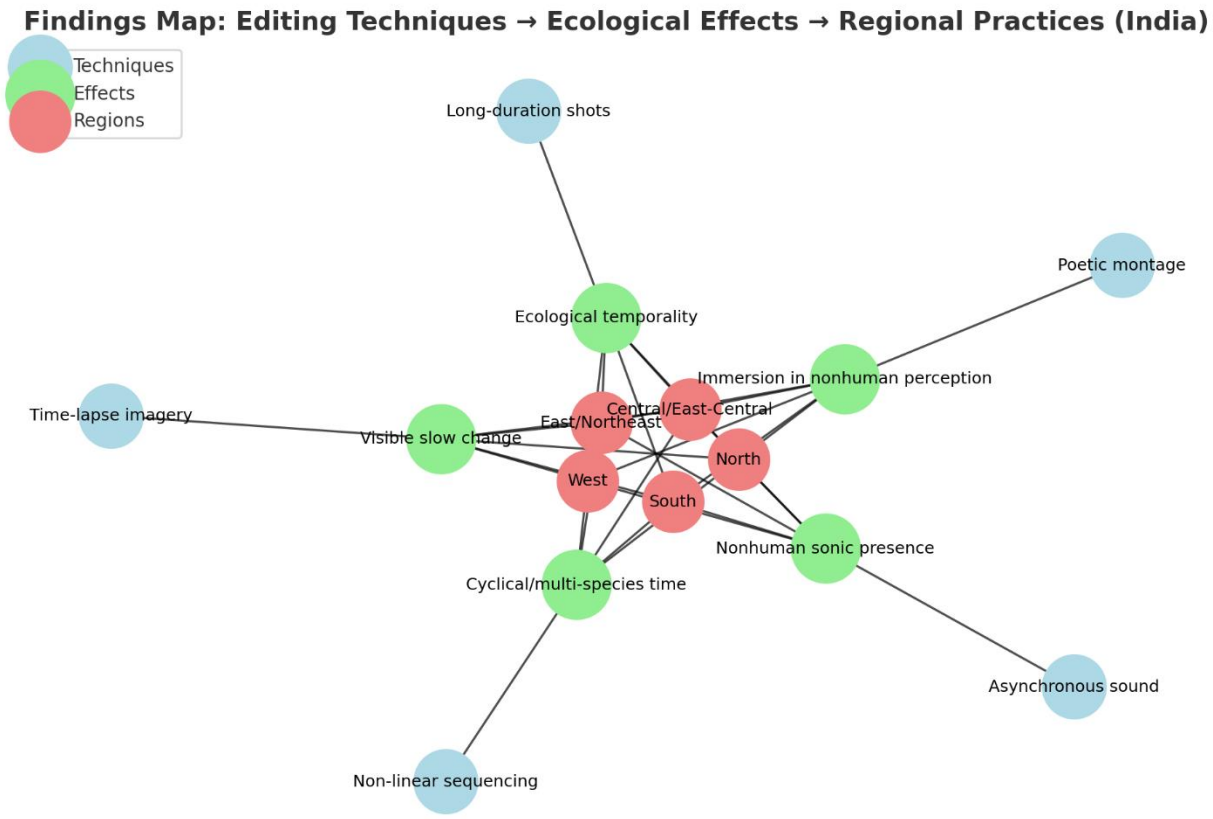
This qualitative, interpretive, and multimethod research approach provided a thorough grasp of how editing can be a vital site for reinventing Indian environmental storytelling from nonhuman perspectives.

The film study found that long-duration shots, asynchronous soundscapes, and nonlinear sequencing were frequently connected to a decentering of the human presence and an increased environmental temporality.For instance, extended shots in I Cannot Give You.My Forest changed the narrative voice to the river itself by letting the forest show as a conscious subject; similarly, asynchronous sound in Words on WaterTimelaps and poetic montage were used visually to convey ecological rhythms, therefore supporting multiple species approaches of seeing.

Ten hundred freelancers (27 cameramen, 33 directors, 40 editors) from five different regions of India were interviewed in semistructured interviews to capture the nonhuman. The study found ethical and creative techniques.For example, Northeast filmmakers emphasized how Indigenous cosmologies influenced the structure of time flow; Western editors cited logistical obstacles resulting from platform-driven deadlines that limited experimental speed. Respondents from many roles admitted that it was frequently necessary to disregard conventional industry expectations for narrative speed and instead embrace slowness, silence, and ambiguity as ecological narrative strategies so as to produce attuned edits.

The comparative thematic mapping verified regional variances in tactics.Central Indian filmmakers employed cyclical montage methods to capture seasonal and agricultural rhythms; southern respondents used aesthetic conventions like rasa to produce affective immersion with surroundings.This crossregional understanding emphasized how crucial cultural context is in guiding editorial decisions.

Overall, the method helped to integrate practitioner evidence, indigenous epistemologies, and ecoaesthetic theory into a unified analytical framework.It revealed that in Indian environmental media, editing is more than simply a postproduction procedure; it is a philosophical and ethical act that can change stories from human monologue to interspecies discourse.The data emphasizes the potential of video editing to both politically interfere against anthropocentric media norms and be used as a creative means of presenting the hidden agency of the nonhuman world.



Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that video editing—often regarded as a purely technical post-production phase—can serve as a potent venue for reexamining Indian environmental narrative from non-anthropocentric viewpoints. The study, which used a combination of film analysis methods, semi-structured interviews with 100 independent directors, editors, and camerapersons, and thematic mapping of editing techniques across India's five main regions, found that editorial choices have a significant impact on the narrative agency of rivers, forests, animals, and other nonhuman characters.

Methods like extended takes, asynchronous soundscapes, nonlinear montage, and cyclical sequencing became essential to disrupting anthropocentric pacing and highlighting environmental temporality. Regional variations were evident: in the Northeast, filmmakers integrated Indigenous cosmologies into their changes, while in the South, immersive ecological effect was influenced by the aesthetics of rasa and darshan. Participants in various regions recognized a conflict between the deliberate, meticulous approach of "attuned editing" and the time restrictions imposed by business or NGO-driven employment.

The issue of portraying nonhuman agency without translating it into human terms is still unanswered from an ethical standpoint. However, the widespread support for attuned editing—which emphasizes

slowing down, listening, and accepting ambiguity—demonstrates a rising understanding of the need for interspecies narrative ethics.

The following recommendations are made in order to broaden and enhance this effort:

Studies on Microcontexts: Concentrate on lesser ecological and cultural groups inside each area in order to identify minute distinctions in editing techniques.

Longitudinal Analysis: Examining multiyear film initiatives to see how editorial techniques change in response to environmental shifts.

CrossMedia Comparisons: Determine whether nonhuman-centered editing works across social media platforms, web documentaries, and virtual reality.

Bring editors together with Indigenous knowledge keepers, ecologists, and activists to explore cocreative approaches that may lessen anthropocentric bias through collaborative workshops.

This study ultimately advocates for a change in Indian environmental narratives—from human monologues to interspecies dialogues—placing editing not only as a skill, but also as a place for ethical discourse and creative collaboration with the more-than-human world.

References

1. Bahl, K., & Saxena, N. (2014). *I Cannot Give You My Forest* [Film]. Top Quark Films.

2. Banerjee, A. (2010). *Environmental narratives in Indian cinema: A critical analysis*. *Journal of South Asian Film Studies*, 5(2), 45–59.

3. Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical Inquiry*, 35(2), 197–222. https://doi.org/10.1086/596640

4. Chatterjee, S. (2018). Nonhuman voices in Indian environmental documentaries. *Studies in Documentary Film*, 12(3), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2018.1457062

5. Dhanraj, D. (1986). *Kya Hua Is Sheher Ko?* [Film]. Yugantar Film Collective.

6. Ghosh, A. (2016). *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

7. Guha, R. (2006). *How much should a person consume? Environmentalism in India and the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

8. Jain, A. (2021). Montage as resistance: Editing practices in Indian activist cinema. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 19(4), 375–390. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2021.1923501

9. Kak, S. (2002). *Words on Water* [Film]. Octave Communications.

10. Kanwar, A. (2011). *The Scene of Crime* [Film]. Amar Kanwar Films.

11. Kothari, A., & Bajpai, S. (2017). Alternative frames: Environmental movements and media in India. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 52(50), 40–48.

12. MacDonald, S. (2013). *Ecocinema and the sense of place*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

13. Mukherjee, R. (2014). Postcolonial ecologies: Media, environment, and climate change in India. *Interventions*, 16(3), 354–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2013.868979

14. Nichols, B. (2017). *Introduction to documentary* (3rd ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

15. Pandey, S. (2019). Listening to the forest: Indigenous epistemologies and Indian environmental cinema. *Asian Cinema*, 30(1), 23–40. https://doi.org/10.1386/ac_00005_1

16. Prakash, G. (2010). *Another reason: Science and the imagination of modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

17. Sarkar, B. (2022). Slow cinema and ecological time in India. *Screen*, 63(2), 213–232. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjac012

18. Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (2014). *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

19. Smith, M., & Parikka, J. (2010). *The acoustic ecology of the media: Listening to nonhuman worlds*. New York: Continuum.

20. Willemen, P. (2006). *Looks and frictions: Essays in cultural studies and film theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.