Naturalizing the Global: A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis of Visual Signification in 'Samsara' (2011)

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Abstract

Non-narrative documentary cinema conveys meanings entirely through visual language, without relying on dialogue or narration. Therefore, this study attempts to analyze the visual signification in 'Samsara' (2011), a non-narrative documentary directed by Ron Fricke, through Roland Barthes' semiotic concept, 'denotation and connotation.' While denotation and connotation represent the core levels of Barthes' semiotic concept, 'myth' stands at the prominent level as it rises from the connotative level. Barthes suggests that visual images carry deeper ideological meaning through 'connotation and myth.' However, the ideological construction of the non-narrative documentary cinema through a critical semiotic perspective is the main gap of this research. Therefore, this study raises the research problem: How does 'Samsara' (2011) construct and naturalize a globalist ideology through visual signification? Moreover, this research aims to examine the visual signs, to identify the connotative meanings, to analyze how Barthesian myth functions through visual signification to naturalize globalism, and to critique the globalist ideology served through visual language in 'Samsara' (2011). This research employs a qualitative research approach, applying content analysis as its primary research method. The selected scenes and sequences of 'Samsara' (2011), a non-narrative documentary, are analyzed through Barthes' two orders of signification, denotation and connotation, to reveal the mythological meanings rooted within the visual language. Furthermore, the study expects to reveal that the visual language of 'Samsara' (2011) prevailed by powerful signs that construct connotative meanings beyond the literal meaning. And it operates as a Barthesian myth, naturalizing globalism. The analysis is expected to indicate that 'Samsara's (2011) visual language serves as a powerful ideological tool. Finally, this analysis concludes that the non-narrative documentary cinema doesn't require narrative to construct ideology but rather embeds it silently within its visual language. By exposing connotative meaning and mythological concepts, the study contributes to grasping how visual media forms ideological perception. Finally, the findings provide the need for critical engagement with visual language in contemporary documentary cinema.

***Keywords**: Documentary Cinema, Semiotics, Denotation and Connotation, Mythology, Visual Language.*