

Film Aesthetics: Light as a Question of Existence in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul

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Abstract : This paper aims to provide a concise analysis of the symbolic nature of cinematic light portrayed in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film Cemetery of Splendour (2015). The study explores the philosophical hypostasis of lighting mechanisms, the idea of which is based on political motives and, in addition, metaphysical theories originating from the Isan region of Thailand. In the film, the colourful hospital space and narcoleptic soldiers represent the deep and tumultuous history of the Thai nation, revealing a symbolic allegory through an incurable disease that the protagonists suffer from, addressing with this metaphor a collective political apathy. Specifically, the film follows Jen, a woman with a leg disability who takes care of Itt, an ex-soldier fallen into narcolepsy amidst a multi-coloured roomful of other comatose soldiers. The film's central theme, as well as the central setting, concerns an abandoned former school now used as a treatment clinic for military patients, each connected to a mechanism of light that can affect their dreams while sleeping. The audience later discovers from two mythological figures emerging from Thailand's ancient religious past that the hospital grounds are built over the ruins of an ancient kingdom's cemetery. The symbolic political implication is that ancient rulers have captured the soldiers' spirits to fight their eternal battles, leaving their unconscious bodies in torpor, as similar politics of the past and present affect the nation to this day and enforce political apathy. In a contrasting tone, the colourful tubes are present to relieve the soldiers' symptoms and create better memories in their subconscious minds. As a result, the concluding argument of this hypothesis places Apichatpong's direction of cinematic light towards a philosophical and political commentary that, although derived from ancient national history, remains thoroughly contemporary.

Keywords : Apichatpong Weerasethakul, cemetery of Splendour, filmsophy, politics, aesthetics, direction of photography, light in cinema, metaphysics, visual philosophy

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