

A VISUAL NARRATIVES OF “PATRICIA PICCININI’S CARE”: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ART EXHIBITION

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: Throughout the history of mankind, art exhibitions have taken roles as the media to appreciate and publicize various types of artworks, including paintings, sculptures, dioramas, and other types of art. Aside from this role, art exhibitions are also organized as a means of narrating stories and messages, representing a particular theme. This research aims to explore the complex narratives of the art exhibition “CARE” by Patricia Piccinini, that shape the contemporary understandings of care, empathy, and the non-human, through the lenses of semiotic and discourse analysis. This research employed a qualitative study design and portrayed the exhibition as a site of multimodal communication. Through the semiotic analysis, the uses of visual signs including the sculpture forms and the spatial arrangement of the exhibition are examined. Meanwhile, narrative discourse analysis was employed to investigate the narratives, constructed through textual materials and curatorial notes, within the exhibition. The results and discussion reveal that the “CARE” exhibition effectively utilizes thematic storytelling to engage visitors, fostering emotional connections and enhancing their understanding of ecological and social issues. This research implies that cultural tourism can benefit from integrating art exhibitions as platforms for meaningful dialogue and experiential learning, ultimately promoting sustainable practices and community engagement.

Keywords: Art exhibition, semiotics, discourse, communication, tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism, often serving as a means of entertainment, has a tight relationship with cultural aspects of human life. According to Richards (2020), tourism has become more connected to the culture. This happens because culture provides content for tourism experiences while tourism provides income for cultural institutions. In other words, not only does tourism serve as a means of entertainment, but also serves as a way to showcase cultural experiences to tourists. In addition, Hung et al. (2019) argues that tourism with a cultural theme has become an important part of nowadays postmodern society which put more interest in cultural tourism. Similarly, the research from Berutu & Dhanka (2024) found that the inclusion of cultural aspects within a tourism event or destination can create a uniqueness that attract more visitors. In conclusion, tourism has become a way of promoting and expressing cultural aspects of human life.

As a form of tourism, visual art exhibitions play important roles as the cultural expression and appreciation center and as the public entertainment. Taking roles as the center of cultural expression and appreciation, visual art exhibitions facilitate the showcasing of various visual artworks including paintings, sculptures, crafts, videos, etc. Through that means, those exhibitions reflect the cultural and artistic practices of various communities that enhance understanding and appreciation of visual artworks (Ramli et al., 2020). Meanwhile, visual art exhibitions also serve as public entertainment. These exhibitions allow visitors to enjoy visual arts through the elements of entertainment. In modern visual arts exhibitions, the use of thematic installations and video series as entertainment elements has provided more interactive and emotionally resonant experiences for the visitors (Chumachenko, 2022). In addition to allowing visitors to enjoy visual arts (paintings and sculptures), these elements allow visitors to connect more deeply with the artworks and ultimately be culturally entertained. Moreover, art exhibitions can also serve as one of authentic materials for learning cultural expressions. It is in accordance to the idea that authentic materials can provide real contexts and situations for learners, resulting in more comprehensive understanding toward a particular topic (Tanihardjo, 2018). In conclusion, the existence of visual art exhibitions has pivotal roles as the cultural expression and appreciation center and as the public entertainment.

Considering the role of visual art exhibitions as the center of cultural expression and appreciation, these exhibitions facilitate the act of conveying messages and narrating stories. First, a visual art exhibition always addresses a particular theme to deliver its whole message to its visitors. It often employs a narrative technique understood by the media and public to deliver a clear message (Montpetit, 1995). Then, visual art exhibitions allow indirect two-way communication between artists and audiences. Similarly, Ștefănescu (2023) suggests that art galleries can become an influential factor to consolidate the artists and the public. Since each piece of artwork displayed has a message and a story that its artist wants to convey, a visual art exhibition is a crucial place for artists to exchange messages and stories with the audiences including critics and viewers. Lastly, visual art exhibitions can become a learning resource for students through a means of

storytelling. Visiting visual art exhibitions allows students to develop creativity by seeing, feeling, and expressing their thinking process toward each artwork and its story behind it (Hendra et al., 2019). In conclusion, visual art exhibitions can be a medium to convey messages and narrate stories through the artworks within it.

The CARE exhibition in MACAN (Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara) Museum of Jakarta is a unique and attractive cultural tourism phenomenon. One of its uniqueness appears in a way that it becomes a medium to convey a message and narrate a story. Exhibiting around 40 life-size sculptures by a renowned Australian artist, Patricia Piccinini, the CARE exhibition addresses several issues regarding ecology, biodiversity, and biotechnology (Museum MACAN, 2024). Another uniqueness of this exhibition exists within its exhibited artworks. These artworks seem to invite the visitors to see the connection between imaginary life forms and the issues of endangered species and within environments. In addition, this exhibition is widely welcomed by Indonesians. In social media, the news regarding the exhibition has received a positive response. The Instagram posts of the Museum MACAN account about this exhibition are shown to be liked by a considerable number of netizens (Museum MACAN [@museummacan], n.d.). It is in accordance to the study which found that promoting a tourist destination through social media, Instagram, can influence people's interest to visit the destination (Berutu, 2022). Also, it is known that some famous Indonesian news portals also provide a positive review of this exhibition (Fakhri Fadlurrohman, 2024; Nely, 2024). This shows how the exhibition can attract public interest.

Based on the discussion above, the exhibition focusing on storytelling, specifically CARE exhibition has become a unique phenomenon. In addition, the presented artwork also has a unique and unusual theme, different from existing exhibitions. Indirectly, this exhibition surely contributes to the economic development and also the increasing value of cultural tourism. Therefore, this research focuses on uncovering the possibilities for structuring an art exhibition as (1) a powerful storytelling medium to attract cultural tourists, and (2) as a way to enhance the visitor experience through thematic storytelling.

There are several significances of this research. First, this research will emphasize the role of art exhibitions as powerful storytelling mediums to engage visitors emotionally and intellectually. Second, this research will also contribute in enriching the concept of cultural tourism by highlighting the role of artworks in addressing social issues and increasing ecological awareness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotics Analysis

Semiotics refers to the study of signs and their meanings. Semiotics offers a powerful lens that involves the analysis and understanding of the complex messages in visual media. The core of semiotics explores the interplay between the signifier (*the physical representation of a sign*) and the signified (*the concept represented by that sign*), influenced by cultural, social, and historical contexts (Soikun & Ag. Ibrahim, 2021; Zulfani & Lusiawati, 2023). According to Roland Barthes (As cited in Wahjuwibowo, 2018), the semiotic analysis is conducted by considering the interplay between various elements, such as denotation, connotation, and myth.

Denotation is the literal and explicit meaning of a sign. Barthes explained that denotation refers to the relation between "signifier" and "signified" within a sign toward an external reality (Wahjuwibowo, 2018). In other words, denotation refers to the real and explicit meaning of a sign without any influence.

On the other hand, connotation refers to the implicit and associated meanings that a sign can evoke. In his theory, Barthes elaborated that this concept involves the relationship between "signifier" and "signified" that evokes implicit, indirect, and unfixed meanings influenced by the emotional values of the message's recipient (Wahjuwibowo, 2018). In short, connotation refers to the meaning of a sign under the influence of the context and recipient's interpretation.

Finally, myth refers to the cultural narratives and values that forms the interpretation of a sign. According to Barthes (as cited in Wahjuwibowo, 2018), myth is developed from the connotation. Within the context of myth, a "signified" can have more than one "signifier". Myth within Semiotics Theory is not to be confused with the concept of superstition or other types of fiction. The myth involves a signifier, a signified, and a sign. However, as a unique system, myth is shaped by a series of already existing meanings. In other words, myth is a higher-level system of meaning.

By examining these layers of meaning, researchers can uncover the complex messages conveyed through visual communication, whether it's in the realm of advertising, film, or any other visual medium. This holistic approach to understanding visual communication can yield valuable insights and inform our understanding of the cultural and social dynamics at play.

Narrative Discourse Analysis

The concept of narrative discourse analysis departs from concepts proposed by discourse analysts and literary critics. The differences between these concepts are within the frameworks and terminologies (Labov, 1972; Paltridge, 2000; Stein, 1982). However, each concept is similar in terms of having a common aim to identify the component that make up a story. In other words, each concept aims to analyze how narratives serve as a mean to convey themes, emotions, and societal reflections.

Narrative discourse analysis refers to a method used to examine the narrative of a particular text. The purpose of this analysis is to understand the structure, meaning, and the way a text reflects human experiences and societal context (Hammad Hussain Shah et al., 2024). To achieve that purpose, this analytical approach employs both macro-structural analysis and micro-structural analysis.

Macro-structural analysis examines the overarching constituents of a narrative, such as plot configuration, thematic evolution, and character trajectories. It investigates how these elevated components contribute to the overall cohesion and significance of the discourse (Bahaziq, 2016; Košutar et al., 2022). For example, it may scrutinize the progression of events and how they are arranged to convey a specific message or theme.

On the other hand, micro-structural analysis concentrates on the smaller linguistic constituents within the narrative, such as lexical selections, syntactic structures, and cohesive devices. It explores how these elements function in concert to sustain narrative coherence and facilitate the flow of the discourse (Xue et al., 2022). This entails analyzing references, conjunctions, and other cohesive links that enhance the text's clarity and impact.

Overall, narrative discourse examination endeavors to elucidate the elaborate structural and linguistic selections that writers employ, which augment the significance and affective resonance of their narratives. It facilitates a more profound comprehension of how narratives influence perceptions and embody the intricacies of human disposition.

METHODS

The research aims to explore the complex narratives of art exhibition “CARE” by Patricia Piccinini, that shapes the contemporary understandings of care, empathy, and non-human beings. It focusing on capturing and portraying the messages of the exhibition through various lenses and perspectives. To achieve this objective, the research employed a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach focuses on in-depth analysis of the phenomenon rather than focusing on interpreting a phenomenon within a society and culture (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

The data source of this research is collected from two data sources. The first data source is the observation result. The observation is conducted to observe and record the elements that appear in the object of research (Widoyoko, 2014; Sugiyono, 2018). The observation of this research was conducted by visiting the exhibitions of “CARE”, taking notes, and taking pictures of the exhibition's interior design and the exhibited artworks, which are the sculptors. The first data source is the subject of the semiotics analysis. Meanwhile, the second data source refers to the curatorial notes of the sculptors being exhibited. These notes contain the texts which are the subjects of the narrative discourse analysis.

To specify the data, the researcher employed purposive sampling, in which some principles are determined to satisfy their specific needs in a project (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The criteria for the purposive sampling in this research are given as follows:

- Artworks representing the relationship between humans & nature
- Interior view supporting the idea of the relationship between humans & nature

This research employed two types of data analysis, namely, semiotic analysis and narrative discourse analysis. Through the semiotic analysis, the uses of visual signs including the sculpture forms and the spatial arrangement of the exhibition are examined.



Meanwhile, narrative discourse analysis was employed to examine the narratives to understand the structure and meaning of the texts, as well as how those texts reflect experiences and societal contexts. This narrative discourse analysis focuses on both the macro and micro levels of a narrative (Bahaziq, 2016; Hammad Hussain Shah et al., 2024; Košutar et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotic Analysis

A. Humans as the Caretaker of Nature


The semiotics analysis of the exhibition of “CARE” showed how it narrates the relationship between nature and humans. The analysis showed that humans are the “caretakers” of nature and the living and non-living entities within it. The findings are shown in the following table.


No.	Visual	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1		A female figure holding a chimeric creature	A female figure is represented as a mother who is taking care of all living creatures, including humans, animals, plants, and all non-living creatures.	Human belongs to the animal kingdom according to science. However, human is blessed with intelligence. They believe in animism.
2		A male figure is holding a plant-based chimera.	Humans, especially men, have power to either take care or destroy plant. Human has the capability to raise plants from its seed stage until it becomes a full-fledged tree. They are also capable to treat plants as living creature.	Human is an intelligence animal that has power to take care and destroy plants.

B. Nature as the mother of Living Creatures

Another relationship between human and nature being visually narrated by the exhibition of “CARE” is how nature acts as the mother of living creatures. The land, nature, and the Earth itself is often referred to as “she” or a “mother” within many cultures. It is supported by the fact that the terms “motherland” is equal to the term “homeland”. It signifies how the nature is always being reflected as a mother.

The following table shows the artwork representing the relationship between human and nature which is similar to the relation between a mother and a child.

No.	Visual	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1		Dolphin-like chimaera is hugging a girl wearing blue dress.	The dolphin-like chimaera is the representation of the ocean which serves as the mother of living creatures that provides resources to both ocean and land creatures to continue their live.	Dolphine is the representation of intelligence creatures of the sea.

2		Orang-Utan is carrying two babies, a human baby and a orang-utan-like baby.	Orang-Utan is the representation of forest or the nature of the land. This sculpture shows how nature can take care all living creatures.	Orang-Utan is the distance relative of human based on the evolution theory.
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Discourse Analysis

A. Macro-Structural Analysis

This macro-structural analysis investigates the selected texts, concentrating on the themes of (1) identity, (2) interconnectedness, (3) maternal care, and (4) ecological awareness. Each text offers a distinct perspective on these themes, contributing to a broader discourse regarding the relationships between humans and nonhuman entities, as well as the implications of advancements in biotechnology.

The macro-structural analysis of these texts reveals a rich tapestry of themes centered around identity, interconnectedness, maternal care, and ecological awareness. Each narrative contributes to a broader understanding of the relationships between humans and nonhuman entities, urging readers to reflect on their roles within the ecosystem and the ethical implications of their actions. Through these explorations, the texts challenge conventional boundaries and encourage a more inclusive perspective on life and identity in the contemporary world.

1. Identity in the Age of Biotechnology

In "The Bond," the theme of **identity** is examined through the portrayal of a mother holding a transgenic child. The child's unusual features symbolize the complexities of identity in a world where biotechnology increasingly blurs the boundaries between the natural and the artificial.

"We see a mother holding a transgenic child with unusual facial features and a back resembling the soles of a running shoe. On one level, one might think of the strangely clever abilities of creatures camouflaging themselves within an environment."

This excerpt underscores the duality of existence within a biotechnological framework, prompting critical reflections on the essence of humanity when genetic manipulation challenges traditional notions of identity.

2. Interconnectedness Between Humans and Nature

"The Sapling" accentuates the theme of **interconnectedness** between humans and nature, drawing inspiration from the local Wurundjeri people's efforts to preserve a tree. The relationship between the man and the tree serves as a metaphor for the intrinsic value of nature within an artificial environment.

"The tree here becomes a metaphor for the value of nature within an artificial environment, while the man caring for the plant/animal chimera positively portrays the interconnectedness between humans and nature."

This excerpt highlights the necessity of recognizing and safeguarding the relationship between humanity and the natural world, advocating for a symbiotic existence rather than one characterized by dominance.

3. Maternal Care Across Species

In "No Fear of Depths," the theme of **maternal care** is intricately interwoven with environmental concerns, showcasing a hybrid creature that embodies both human and dolphin traits. This representation challenges conventional notions of motherhood, extending caregiving qualities to nonhuman entities.

"This moving scene places value on the importance of caring mothering relationships and also imagines a nonhuman creature caring for a human child."

The excerpt emphasizes the emotional depth inherent in caregiving, suggesting that nurturing is a universal trait that transcends species, fostering empathy towards other beings and illuminating their familial complexities.

4. Challenging Human Superiority

"Kindred" confronts the **stereotype of human superiority** over animals, critiquing the ecological destruction that stems from such beliefs. The depiction of an orangutan mother and her offspring serves as a poignant reminder of the shared genetic heritage between humans and animals.

"This stereotype is at the root of ecological destruction, with natural habitats of animals destroyed for our benefit – one example being the orangutan, a victim of deforestation, despite sharing 97% of DNA similarity with humans."

This excerpt illustrates the urgent need to acknowledge the similarities between species, advocating for a more compassionate approach to environmental stewardship and a reevaluation of our relationship with the natural world.

B. Micro-Structural Analysis

This micro-structural analysis examines the linguistic devices and stylistic choices present in the selected texts, elucidating how these elements contribute to the overall meaning and thematic richness. The analysis identifies key themes, including identity, interconnectedness, maternal care, and ecological awareness, supported by specific linguistic features such as lexical choices, anaphoric references, and cohesive devices.

The micro-structural analysis of these texts reveals how linguistic devices and stylistic choices enhance the thematic depth of identity, interconnectedness, maternal care, and ecological awareness. Through meticulous lexical selection, cohesive devices, and evocative imagery, the authors construct a rich narrative landscape that encourages readers to engage with complex ideas regarding humanity's relationship with the natural world. This analysis highlights the significance of micro-structural elements in shaping meaning and fostering critical reflection on the themes presented.

1. Lexical Choices and Identity

In "The Bond," the lexical selections underscore the complexities of identity within a biotechnological framework. The employment of terms such as "transgenic" and "unusual facial features" accentuates deviations from conventional human characteristics, prompting readers to reevaluate the essence of identity.

"We see a mother holding a transgenic child with unusual facial features and a back resembling the soles of a running shoe." (The Bond)

This excerpt exemplifies how particular lexical choices construct a vivid portrayal of the child, thereby illuminating the theme of altered identity in a biotechnology-influenced world. The unconventional descriptors evoke a sense of curiosity and discomfort, inviting deeper contemplation regarding the parameters that define humanity.

2. Cohesive Devices and Interconnectedness

"The Sapling" employs cohesive devices to reinforce the theme of interconnectedness between humans and the natural environment. The strategic use of conjunctions and anaphoric references facilitates a seamless narrative flow that underscores the relationship between the man and the tree.

"The tree here becomes a metaphor for the value of nature within an artificial environment, while the man caring for the plant/animal chimera positively portrays the interconnectedness between humans and nature." (The Sapling)

The cohesive structure of this excerpt enhances the connection between the characters and their surroundings, illustrating how linguistic choices can reflect thematic elements. The conjunction "while" effectively contrasts the artificial and the natural, thereby highlighting their interdependence.

3. Imagery and Maternal Care

In "No Fear of Depths," the imagery employed to depict the hybrid creature and its nurturing behavior accentuates the theme of maternal care. The detailed descriptions evoke empathy and illuminate the emotional bond between the characters.

"This moving scene places value on the importance of caring mothering relationships and also imagines a nonhuman creature caring for a human child." (No Fear of Depths)

The term "moving" conveys the emotional gravity of the scene, while the phrase "caring mothering relationships" emphasizes the universality of maternal instincts. This imagery invites readers to reflect on the nature of care that transcends species boundaries.

4. Anaphoric References and Human Superiority

"Kindred" utilizes anaphoric references to interrogate the notion of human superiority over animals. By referencing the shared genetic traits between humans and orangutans, the text reinforces the interconnectedness of all living beings.

“This stereotype is at the root of ecological destruction, with natural habitats of animals destroyed for our benefit – one example being the orangutan, a victim of deforestation, despite sharing 97% of DNA similarity with humans.” (Kindred)

The anaphoric reference to "this stereotype" links the discussion of ecological destruction to the earlier mention of human-animal similarities, thereby creating a cohesive argument against anthropocentrism. This linguistic strategy effectively underscores the ramifications of perceiving humans as fundamentally distinct from other species.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the "CARE" exhibition by Patricia Piccinini serves as a profound exploration of the interconnectedness between humans and non-human beings, effectively utilizing visual narratives to convey complex themes of care and empathy.

Through semiotic analysis, the exhibition's life-size sculptures and spatial arrangements invite visitors to engage with pressing ecological issues, fostering a deeper understanding of biodiversity and the impact of human actions on the environment. Meanwhile, the narrative discourse analysis further enriches this engagement by revealing how curatorial texts and linguistic devices construct a cohesive argument against anthropocentrism, challenging visitors to reconsider their perceptions of superiority over other species.

The research presents significant implications for cultural tourism, emphasizing the role of art exhibitions like Patricia Piccinini's "CARE" as effective storytelling mediums that engage visitors emotionally and intellectually. By focusing on themes of care, empathy, and ecological awareness, such exhibitions can attract diverse audiences and deepen connections with the artworks. In addition, the research encourages cultural institutions to address socio-political issues through their exhibitions, positioning themselves as active participants in cultural discourse. Overall, it contributes to the literature on the intersection of art, culture, and tourism, advocating for a responsible approach that recognizes art as a catalyst for change and community engagement.

For the further related research, there are several areas of focus that future researchers can explore. First, the future research can investigate the perceptions and attitudes of visitors after they experience "CARE" Exhibitions or other similar art exhibitions addressing ecological issues. Second, the future research can conduct comparative studies by comparing the curatorial strategies between "CARE" Exhibitions and other exhibitions addressing similar themes to identify best practices in using art as a medium for social change.

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