



A CINEMATOGRAPHIC MEDITATION

Baraka's sequel is a lot like, well, Baraka

SAMSARA: Directed by Ron Fricke. Concept and treatment, Fricke and Mark Magidson. Editors, Fricke and Magidson. Music, Michael Stearns, Lisa Gerrard and Marcello de Francisci. Oscilloscope Pictures, 2012. PG-13 102 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Samsara, according to the film's website, is a Sanskrit word meaning "the ever turning wheel of life." The film, which has taken this word for its title, has no dialogue, no narrative; it consists of a series of images the filmmakers describe as a "nonverbal, guided meditation."

Does that excite you or make you want to roll your eyes? Your response to that question is probably indicative of your response to *Samsara*. *Baraka* director Ron Fricke's new film was shot over five years, in more than 25

countries, and is full of lovely cinematography carefully edited and overscored for maximum effect. Yes, you get a stunning tour of places you'll probably never get to visit, but this journey comes with a guilt trip.

Samsara is what might result if you smashed together the heavy-handed effectiveness of a Michael Moore film and the gorgeous imagery of a Tarsem Singh film, then stripped out all that pesky narrative and dialogue: It's a string of images that flip between breathtaking natural wonders, beautiful relics of the past, stoic tribesmen (and women, and boy, does this camera have a male gaze) and the detritus of modern living. Here, a factory that makes sex dolls, which are extra creepy without their heads! Here, poor children picking through a mountain of

garbage! Here, chickens being packed into crates for slaughter! (We skip the actual killing, going from fluttering chickens to slabs of meat.)

On the flip side, we have glorious Petra, beautiful waterfalls, graceful women carrying all manner of things on their heads, and a stunning Namibian national park, among other gorgeous images (but never any context as to who, where or what you're seeing; the film's website identifies only a few locations). Fricke may like to think he's taking you on a deep meditation about the cycle of life, man, but these images are carefully calculated and so intensely predictable that what I wound up meditating on was how cynical and predictable the whole thing seemed.

It's college-level cliché: the fetishized view of the other, who lives more simply and nobly than "us"; the juxtaposition of the wonders left by previous eras of humanity with the mess we're making; the modern world presented as ugly and misguided more often than not (though the time-lapse shots of highway traffic were magical). I left the theater thinking, yes, consume less, stop making garbage, all our time is spent on silly things, yes, I know. *Samsara* is a beautifully filmed confirmation that everything you feel guilty or doubtful about is probably worth feeling guilty and/or doubtful about. The elaborate skyscrapers and glorious cities, well, you can appreciate those, but do it the right way.

I can't fault the film on a technical level — certain images, such as the aerial shot of Mecca, are indelible — and I can appreciate the years of work that went into it. But it's manipulative and condescending, a series of striking visuals appropriated and arranged into a film that's not half as deep as it thinks it is. If you just need something nice to look at, you could do worse, provided you can stomach the film's back-patting message and dispassionately sincere, New Age-y soundtrack. Just take your iPod. I suspect you could make *Samsara* considerably more palatable just by changing the score. ■


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9/27 THU	9/28 FRI	9/29 SAT	9/30 SUN	10/1 MON	10/2 TUE	10/3 WED	10/4 THU
RUBY SPARKS 5:25 FINAL SHOWING!	SAMSARA 4:50 7:10 9:30	2:30 4:50 7:10 9:30	2:30 4:50 7:10 9:30	4:50 7:10 9:30	4:50 7:10 9:30	4:50 7:10 9:30	4:50 7:10 9:30
	A CAT IN PARIS 6:00	1:40 6:00	1:40 6:00	4:20 6:15	4:20 6:15	4:20 6:15	4:20 6:15
7:00	SLEEPWALK WITH ME 4:00	8:15	8:15	8:15	8:15	8:15	8:15
9:00	SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED FINAL WEEK!	10:15	10:15	10:15	10:15	10:15	10:15
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SAMSARA

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