Chapter Three

Blinking Spaces

Koyaanisqatsi*'s Cinematic City*

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I have always marvelled at cinema's ability to capture both the *zeitgeist*—the spirit of time—and *genius loci*—the spirit of place. In this sense, every film is synchronic with its corresponding space-time, but any set of films can also be read as a diachronic document of a particular historical period. In this paper, I will try to combine both approaches in order to address those films able to depict paradigm shifts through their attention to spatial changes. I have chosen the film *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance* (Godfrey Reggio 1982) as a main case study due to its interstitial nature between modernity and post-modernity, but the proposed analysis might also be applied to similar works.

TIME THROUGH SPACE

The cinema is a technology of place, that is, a social and aesthetic practice able to produce spatiality through the moving image: on the one hand, it can faithfully depict landscapes and places; on the other hand, it can construct spaces that are either complementary or alternative to their real counterparts. Within this dynamic, an image, or, more accurately, a single framing, can contain the entire memory of a place, both for what it shows—its past or current image—and for what it suggests—its missing image, which is always associated with past times, submerged narratives, and hidden memories. Some films, especially documentaries, are even able to combine several temporalities at once to give rise to what I term *blinking spaces*, a particular type

of cinematic space in which the past and present incarnations of a film location are simultaneously depicted.

Let us do a simple experiment. Imagine that you are seeing a film—any film, it does not matter which one right now—and recognize a film location. Blink once: the image of the place corresponds to a particular time: the time of the story and the time in which the film was made. Blink again: if you pay enough attention, you will realise that both place and image contain traces of the past and offer a glimpse into the future. They are not frozen in time. On the contrary, they evolve with us, with our way of looking. They provide us with material evidence of the passage of time that is simultaneously a visual metaphor for the transition between different periods. Accordingly, blinking spaces are landmarks in time and space that expose, above all, the fleeting moment in which the old and the new meet in space without a clear hierarchy or separation between them.

Cinema has always been a suitable medium for witnessing and documenting fleeting moments and paradigm shifts. The heyday of the modern city, for example, was recorded by the urban symphonies of the 1920s just on the eve of the Great Depression. The films that make up this cycle showed the daily functioning of the great industrial metropolis of that time, contrasting their productive and leisure activities, and following a temporal structure based on the passage from day to night. These representations depict urban space as an expression of modernity and progress, emphasising "its acceleration and mechanisation, the automatism of everyday life, its rendering of privacy and anonymity [and] its opposition of crowd and individual, freedoms and constraints" (Chanan 2007, 81–82). *Manhatta* (Charles Sheeler & Paul Strand 1921) has been considered the forerunner of this subgenre, because it was "a panorama film with cubist self-consciousness," as Juan A. Suárez has defined it (2007, 66). It replaced the logic of the travelogue with that of the avant-garde by reproducing the city as "a fractured space," offering "a decomposition or dissemination of its landscape" (2007 66, 67). Later on, films such as *Rien que les heures* (*Nothing But Time*, Alberto Cavalcanti 1925), *Twenty-Four-Dollar Island* (Robert J. Flaherty 1926), *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, Walter Ruttmann 1927), *Человек с киноаппаратом* (*Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov 1929), *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metropole* (*São Paulo, a Metropolitan Symphony*, Adalberto Kemeny & Rudolf Rex Lustig 1929), or *Regen* (*Rain*, Mannus Franken & Joris Ivens 1929) portrayed the modern city as a living machine, even when they were exclusively devoted to leisure time, like *À propos de Nice* (Jean Vigo 1929), or to the world of work, as in the case of *Douro, faina fluvial* (*Working on the Douro River*, Manoel de Oliveira 1931). Let us briefly take this last film as an example: after seeing it, anyone looking at the banks of the Douro from Porto's Luís I Bridge will not only see a beautiful cityscape, but also the old workplace that was once there.

Now, blink once again and place yourself in the 2010s. Blink again if you want to return to the early 1930s. In both cases, you will find a city caught between technical progress and economic recession.

Urban symphonies passed into the background as cities became places of conflict during the Great Depression. Their avant-garde aesthetics were soon overshadowed by the emergence of sound film and further development of the expository mode, a new documentary approach that replaced visual exuberance and poetic associations with voiceover commentary and argumentative logic. Fifty years later, however, this aesthetic was recovered to depict the short interval between urban crisis and urban renewal, a time in which the modernist concept of urban planning was gradually replaced by the postmodernist notion of urban design. It is important to note that the main difference between these two ways of shaping urban space is not a matter of terms, but a matter of scale: thus, while the former understands the city as a whole, in which any intervention must be made from an integral approach, the latter rather focuses on the redevelopment of small areas extracted—and sometimes even isolated—from the whole. As the predominance of one over the other was still unclear by the late 1970s, both proposed their own solutions to overcome the urban crisis, which ultimately led to a two-stage process of spatial change in Europe and North America: the first stage, which covered the 1970s and 1980s, was characterised by urban decay; while the second, which spanned from the late 1980s to the late 2000s, resorted to the creative destruction of the city to clean up rundown areas and replace obsolete infrastructures. Such a paradigm shift left an irreversible imprint on the territory, turning once-thriving industrial cityscapes into ominous ruinscapes that have been interpreted by Venezuelan architect Guillermo Barrios in the following terms:

> The emptiness and subsequent reoccupation of the building infrastructure of a manufacturing industry on the run acquired a double meaning regarding the contexture of the city at the end of the century: on the one hand, they expressed the obsolescence of modernity's conventional project, that is, unchecked material progress displayed in a large glass case; and on the other hand, these particular buildings became real estate opportunities to relocate other economic activities and social groups in central areas of the city, taking advantage of the spatial nature of old factories (1997, 94, my translation).

These kinds of "ruinscapes" are a paradigmatic example of blinking spaces, given that they are simultaneously material remains of the past, a strong metaphor for the present, and liminal spaces full of possibilities for the future. In the 1970s and 1980s, American fiction film depicted them through popular genres such as the crime film and dystopian science-fiction, as well as by means of a series of independent features filmed in a neorealist style. Most of these works were set in the two main American cities, New York and

Los Angeles, which became epitomes of the urban crisis, even ahead of Detroit. Without going any further, New York-set thrillers such as *The French Connection* (William Friedkin 1971), *Serpico* (Sidney Lumet 1973), *Death Wish* (Michael Winner 1974), *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese 1976), *Gloria* (John Cassavetes 1980), or *Prince of the City* (Sidney Lumet 1981) captured the *zeitgeist* of the urban crisis through their decadent atmospheres and crepuscular tone, just as their Angelino counterparts did at the same time, from *Point Blank* (John Boorman 1967) to *The Driver* (Walter Hill 1978) through *Un homme est mort* (*The Outside Man*, Jacques Deray 1972), *The Long Goodbye* (Robert Altman 1973), or *Assault on Precinct 13* (John Carpenter 1976). A few years later, the dystopian science-fiction of the 1980s turned these cityscapes into "a desolate battleground traversed by human monsters on the very margins of sanity" (McArthur 1997, 31), as can be seen in *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter 1981), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott 1982), *RoboCop* (Paul Verhoven 1987), or *Batman* (Tim Burton 1989). Finally, the neorealist films directed by African American filmmakers of the L.A. Rebellion film movement, such as *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett 1977), *Bush Mama* (Haile Gerima 1979), or *Bless their Little Hearts* (Billy Woodberry 1984), offered a starker view of the urban crisis by addressing the job insecurity and existential disorientation of the people from Watts, the largest African American ghetto in Los Angeles.

Non-fiction film, meanwhile, dealt with the same issues through its own formal devices, among which stands out the already mentioned return to the aesthetics of urban symphonies. The films that updated this subgenre have been named "post-symphonies" by Barrios in order to link them with the original symphonies, although they actually present more differences than similarities with regard to their models:

> Post-symphonies stroll again through the cityscape after having adopted an environmentalist vision in full force. Thus, instead of celebrating the metropolis as the epitome of modern progress, they denounce it as the final materialisation of irrationality. The post-industrial metropolis is no longer presented as an isolated organism, with its particular name and geographical location, with its own specificity. On the contrary, it reappears as an immaterial fluid that has been incorporated to a continuous energetic dynamics.
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> In their attempt to relocate and dematerialize the phenomenon, post-symphonies synthesise the city as an amalgam of generic and universal effects, which are not exclusive from Paris or São Paulo, inasmuch as they belong to the metropolitan phenomenon at large. Place is not drawn from physical coordinates, but it is presented as a dynamic tissue and placed as part of an indivisible whole (1997, 100–101, my translation).

Barrios's main examples of post-symphonies are Godfrey Reggio's trilogy *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance* (1982), *Powaqqatsi: Life in Transforma-*

tion (1988), and *Naqoyqatsi: Life as War* (2002), as well as the documentary *Baraka* (1992), a variation on the aesthetic and discourse of the trilogy directed by Ron Fricke, *Koyaanisqatsi*'s cinematographer. *Koyaanisqatsi*, in particular, documented the collapse of the modern metropolis through a modernist device full of contradictions: it uses high technology to criticise the use of high technology, it apparently takes sides with humankind but it does not adopt the human gaze, and it is visually modern but structurally postmodern. The film is located at the turning point between modernity and postmodernity, the industrial and the post-industrial city, the external and the internal gaze at the city. This in-between position, as well as the systematic use of time-lapse cinematography, allows us to interpret *Koyaanisqatsi*'s cinematic city as a huge blinking space in which past, present, and future are closely intertwined. In what remains of this chapter, I will seek to explain the agenda and meaning of this documentary in both its historical context and the present time.

THE CREATIVE DESTRUCTION OF THE OLD INDUSTRIAL METROPOLIS

Godfrey Reggio filmed *Koyaanisqatsi* between 1975 and 1982, the hardest years of the urban crisis in the United States. This temporal frame conditioned the discursive structure of the film, which is based, according to Scott MacDonald, on "a provocative contrast between the natural world, as epitomized by the American Southwest, and modern technological society, as epitomized by the contemporary American city" (1992, 378). From the classical urban symphonies, Reggio borrowed the emphasis on montage and formalist *mise-en-scène*, specifically using "time-lapse photography to reveal the patterns of city life" (MacDonald 1992, 379). Nevertheless, *Koyaanisqatsi* differs from its models in perspective and discourse, as Barry Keith Grant has explained: first, it adopts "a new global perspective that reverses the form's traditional celebration of technological progress and the harmony of man and machine," and then, it basically shows "how modern technology is destroying the beauty of the natural world as well as humanity's soul" (2009, 110).

The main topics of the film are the contrast and interplay between natural and built environment, the contemporary forms of socio-economic development, and the everyday experience of urban areas resulting from post-war planning. Reggio's discourse, however, does not go much beyond the negative valuation of late capitalist society, given that he pays more attention to the consequences of the post-industrial crisis than to its causes. Indeed, his power of conviction does not rest on an intellectual analysis of the topics discussed, as he himself has admitted (in MacDonald 1992, 381–82), but in

the emotional impact and visual fascination of the images. In order to achieve this effect, Reggio uses techniques such as the abrupt juxtaposition of time-lapse and slow motion, the combination of zooming out and panning in the same shot, the use of associative editing, and the systematic changes in the rhythmic patterning of the film, usually timed to the closing and opening of different thematic sections. The aim of all these avant-garde techniques would be, according to Reggio, to depict "the ordinary from an extraordinary perspective" (in MacDonald 1992, 388), a purpose unconsciously inherited from Russian Formalists and French Surrealists, the two major aesthetic influences on the classical urban symphonies.

Koyaanisqatsi presents eight different sections instead of the four usual movements of classical symphonies. Its first four parts follow a clear progression from the beauty of the natural world to the ugliness of "ruinscapes": thus, the first one is exclusively devoted to the natural environment, the second and third show the increasingly aggressive human footprint on the landscape, and the fourth, the most interesting for this paper, explicitly focuses on urban crisis. This section opens with an overview of Manhattan taken from the top of the World Trade Center, the same image used by Michel de Certeau to define the *voyeur*'s perspective in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, 91). The shot conveys a dominant position over the city, which will later be reinforced by more images of skyscrapers. Shortly afterwards, however, this cityscape is contrasted with two symbols of urban decay: the South Bronx "ruinscape" and the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis, Missouri. This architectural iconography is not arbitrary: the audience may easily recognize all these places and buildings. In this regard, Reggio invites the audience to read the film symbolically by contrasting several landmarks of modernity, such as the Rockefeller Center or the Pruitt-Igoe, with the first monuments of postmodernity—the Bonaventure Hotel and the Los Angeles' urban motorway network. Undoubtedly, he was aware of the socio-architectural meanings of these structures when he chose them, especially the Pruitt-Igoe, whose images are another paradigmatic example of blinking spaces.

This housing project was designed in 1951 by Minoru Yamasaki, who was also the architect of the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center. The whole scheme consisted of thirty-three eleven-story rectangular buildings containing a total of 2,870 apartments, whose occupation was never completed. Its dwindling population, mainly African American, was forced to endure the lack of collective services and maintenance for almost two decades, a situation that caused the gradual abandonment of the complex. These problems, along with the rise of crime and insecurity, led the last tenants to ask for the demolition of the buildings, as Tom Wolfe described in *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981, 80–82). At that point, the negative perception of the Pruitt-Igoe was so widespread that architectural theorist and

historian Charles Jencks came to interpret its socio-architectural failure as the death certificate of modern architecture:

> Happily, we can date the death of modern architecture to a precise moment in time. . . . Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 1972 at 3:32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grâce* by dynamite (1977, 9).

In the 1970s, the Pruitt-Igoe case was widely used by anti-modernist criticism to bury the architectural project of modernity. That was the time of the earliest postmodern theories, when Reyner Banham realized that "the building and the symbol are one and the same thing" in Los Angeles (1971, 94), and Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour stated that architecture had become "symbol in space rather than form in space" in Las Vegas (1977, 13). In fact, in their book *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, they held that "this is not the time and ours is not the environment for heroic communication through pure architecture" (1977, 130), a statement that broke with the agenda of modernity, according to which urban planning was an effective means to solve social problems.

The conception of urban planning as social medicine was later considered a false premise by British geographer David Harvey (Del Olmo & Rendueles 2004, 26). Previously, he had already warned that "it is completely wrong . . . to lay all the blame for the urban ills of postwar development at the modern movement's door, without regard to the political-economic tune to which postwar urbanization was dancing" (Harvey 1989, 71). From this perspective, Jencks' comment on the death of modern architecture is a fallacy, because he blames the theoretical principles that guided the construction of the Pruitt-Igoe complex for its decay, as if the buildings could improve or worsen the living conditions of their residents by themselves, without taking into account the socio-economic context. Actually, what went into crisis was the very idea of development based on "large-scale, metropolitan-wide, technologically rational and efficient urban plans, backed by absolutely no-frills architecture," which was then replaced by "a conception of the urban fabric as necessarily fragmented, a 'palimpsest' of past forms superimposed upon each other, and a 'collage' of current uses, many of which may be ephemeral" (Harvey 1989, 66). Such opposition between modernist urban planning and postmodernist urban design basically came, according to Harvey, from their different spatial conceptions:

> Whereas the modernists see space as something to be shaped for social purposes and therefore always subservient to the construction of a social project, the postmodernists see space as something independent and autonomous, to be

> shaped according to aesthetic aims and principles which have nothing necessarily to do with any overarching social objective (1989, 66).

Choosing the Pruitt-Igoe images certainly places the film's discourse within the anti-modernist tendency represented by Jencks, although the whole sequence devoted to the demolition of structures goes beyond the false association between modernist planning and urban decay. Indeed, it is arguably a literal and metaphorical representation of the creative destruction practices that took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s all over the world. The sequence, therefore, documents both the systematic destruction of large areas inside old, industrial American cities and the contemporary perception of these demotions as both outcome of a crisis-generated restructuring process and as a symptom of the ongoing paradigm shift.

The fifth and sixth sections of *Koyaanisqatsi* represent, in turn, the acceleration of consumer dynamics in American society during its transition from an economy based on production and manufactured goods to another based on consumption and signs. These sections articulate a critical interpretation of production flexibility and consumption growth, but they seem to have nothing to say about the increase in capital mobility and job insecurity. The absence of these issues in the film exposes its tendency to simplify and its inability to see the big picture, two handicaps that unwittingly move the politics of *Koyaanisqatsi* away from its intended agenda: make us aware of the social and environmental problems caused by the misuse of technology. Despite the fact that there is no room for doubt about the film's overt thesis, the filmmaker's formal choices introduce a slight distortion in the message by representing the patterns of urban life through a paradox, as MacDonald has pointed out: "Reggio's use of time lapse discovers, again and again, the remarkable degree to which the city-machine *does* function . . . but at the same time, the primary product of the machine seems to be the destruction of individuality and serenity" (1992, 379). This contradiction reaches its peak when representing the operations of capitalist economy as a loop in which images from industrial production are linked to images of consumption and mobility. It is the acceleration of these shots that generates the paradox indicated by MacDonald: on the one hand, it allows us to interpret these images as a celebration of the proper functioning of late capitalism; on the other hand, it also warns against the imminent collapse of the system.

Regarding the representation of production, Reggio shows images from activities that belong to consolidated sectors, such as the food and automotive industries, and also to booming business, from electronic component factories to videogames, movies, and television. Both groups alternate in the editing, establishing a continuity that suggests their seamless integration as part of the same dynamics, even though they respectively represent the old and the new economic paradigm. Meanwhile, images of consumption are

included in these sections through associative editing: the clearest example is the rapid succession, toward the end of the sixth section, of takes of food factories and people eating at fast food restaurants in shopping centers. The spaces where these activities take place are also linked through associative editing: the main space of production is the factory, the spaces of consumption are shopping centers and supermarkets, and the spaces of mobility are transportation networks, which symbolize the perpetual movement imposed by the paradigm of flexibility.

Some phantom rides, especially one filmed through the lower level of a multi-tier urban motorway in San Francisco, are quite similar to the opening sequence of *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, in which a train approaches the city center from the suburbs at the beginning of the working day. In *Koyaanisqatsi*, however, this kind of journey no longer enters the city center, because the spatial hierarchies of the post-industrial city had been reshaped to the point where the new production and consumption centers could be anywhere, provided that they were well connected to the main transportation networks. This is the reason why the flow of people and vehicles in *Koyaanisqatsi* has no origin or destination: they just go from one place to another because their movement is essential to keep the production and consumption dynamics in operation.

The spatial triad formed by factories, shopping centers, and transportation networks becomes a quartet with the hyperreal space of the television screen: throughout half a minute, its images—a blend of commercials and infotainment—replace any other representation of what it is usually understood as "the real world," that is, the afilmic reality, "the world that exists independently of the camera," as defined by Michael Chanan (2007, 13). This sequence echoes Guy Debord's and Jean Baudrillard's ideas on the impact of the media in everyday life: while the former theorized the complete occupation of leisure time by all kinds of spectacles turned into commodities (Debord 1967), the latter directly announced the replacement of the real by simulations that occlude the referent and take precedence over it (Baudrillard 1981). Reggio seems to agree with Debord when the French philosopher says that "real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle," which "aims at nothing other than itself" (2002, 2–3). In fact, he even imitates the circularity of the spectacle by representing the production and consumption dynamics as a loop, a formal choice that explicitly mirrors the very logic of the spectacle.

The acceleration of television images also symbolizes the time-space compression, which Harvey has discussed as a characteristic of postmodernity. According to him, the postmodern viewer experiences "a rush of images from different spaces almost simultaneously, collapsing the world's spaces into a series of images on a television screen" (1989, 293). Once again, *Koyaanisqatsi* intended to denounce the negative consequences of this phe-

nomenon, but Reggio's formal choices rather produce the opposite effect: the collage of different urban spaces included in the film erases any trace of local identity, giving the impression that all cities are the same. In case there was any doubt about this point, Reggio himself has stated that "had I had the money, I would have shot *Koyaanisqatsi* in Europe and Japan, as well as in the States, because I feel that what was lensed here is equally true for any industrial zone" (in MacDonald 1992, 393).

The idea of creating a cinematic city from different geographical locations is not new: Dziga Vertov already did it in *Man with a Movie Camera* by mixing images of Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa. The Soviet filmmaker explored the possibilities of the camera to depict urban space from a subjective and emotional perspective, a project opposed to any attempt to standardize the urban experience. In order to achieve this goal, he strove to stimulate what Walter Benjamin named the "optical unconscious": the camera's ability to record those details that a person cannot consciously perceive despite being present at the time of filming. For him, a convinced revolutionary, the modern city should be a place in which individuals could free their creativity and transform their lifestyles. On the contrary, the cinematic city of *Koyaanisqatsi*—which is basically made up from images of New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and St. Louis—shows the homogenization of lifestyles caused by the vicious circle of production-mobility-and-consumption. This change in the perception of urban space reveals the influence of anti-modernist criticism, which has determined the implicit reasoning of the film: if all post-industrial cities have the same modes of production, lifestyles, and social problems, there is no difference between living in one or another, because the resulting urban experience will always be the same. Therefore, the only alternative to this life in turmoil is, according to Reggio, the return to the natural environment, a thesis that is clearly anti-modernist if not directly anti-urban.

Towards the end of the sixth section, the fast editing pace produces a tunnel effect in the subjective shots of night driving. Reggio's cinematic city loses its figurative status to become a liquid abstraction that visually expresses the jump to a hyperreal dimension. Once this point has been reached, the seventh section begins with a leap into the void: an aerial view of Downtown Los Angeles filmed with a wide-angle lens that simultaneously conveys a feeling of suspension and agoraphobia emphasized by the silence of the soundtrack. The following sequence compares satellite views of Los Angeles' urban fabric with enlarged images of electronic circuits, an association that presents the urban sprawl as a machine that devours the territory. Fourteen years after the release of the film, urban historian Marie-Christine Boyer used a similar analogy to describe cyberspace: "the new informational network on computer matrix called cyberspace looks like Los Angeles seen from five thousand feet up in the air" (1996, 14). She was probably misquot-

ing William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, a cyberpunk novel that defined cyberspace as "lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding," yet makes no mention of Los Angeles (1984, 51). This mistake, exposed by Maarten Delbeke (1999, 410), suggests that Boyer might have read *Neuromancer* with Reggio's images in mind, because *Koyaanisqatsi* had already anticipated this comparison.

From this point on, the eighth and final section uses the opposite technique from time-lapse, slow motion, to insist on the people's alienation from each other, from nature, and from their own work. For the first time, the camera's gaze stops at a series of isolated individuals within the crowd that represent the most disadvantaged groups, such as the elderly poor, ghetto neighbors, beggars, and the homeless. A shot of a patient's weakened hand in a hospital makes explicit what the soundtrack simultaneously conveys: the idea that industrial society was dying in the late 1970s. Reggio conceived this final section as a requiem for the post-war Fordist-Keynesian metropolis, in which he also included a warning against the new economic paradigm: two shots of the New York Stock Exchange in which brokers seem to move like translucent ghosts thanks to a visual trick—probably long exposure and open diaphragm on sensitive stock—that blurs the outline of their figures. These images express Reggio's mistrust that the finance sector might help to recover lost spirituality, even though it could improve macroeconomic aspects.

The end of *Koyaanisqatsi* returns to its first images in order to provide the audience with a conclusion. In the penultimate shot, the longest in the film, the launch, explosion, and subsequent fall of a rocket becomes an obvious metaphor for the excesses of late capitalism, after which the film closes with the image of an Indian painting before fading out and revealing the five meanings of the term *koyaanisqatsi*: "crazy life," "life in turmoil," "life out of balance," "life disintegrating," and "a state of life that calls for another way of living." Reggio therefore proposes a more natural and spiritual way of life, although his aesthetic solutions have nothing to do with primitivism. This inner contradiction definitely sabotages the message of the film, especially considering the lack of any metafilmic reflection on what Reggio has termed "the beauty of the beast" (MacDonald 1992, 389). This shortcoming, however, does not prevent the film's ecological and spiritual message from being interpreted, first and foremost, as a symptom of the crisis-generated restructuring processes that began with the 1973 oil crisis, as well as a postmodern reaction to the depletion of the Fordist-Keynesian economic and social models. In this sense, *Koyaanisqatsi*'s extreme fragmentation, as well as its lack of historical perspective, does nothing but express the schizophrenic mentality of postmodern society: the *zeitgeist* of the latest paradigm shift.