

## Modern Film

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### Philosophy and the Integration of Knowledge

*Koyaanisqatsi* follows many of the principles of Modernism. The Modern era is characterized by the destruction of the traditional and the search for the new and innovative. This film exhibits the breakdowns of time, space and plot as they are traditionally understood. Not only are the traditional forms of narrative structure destroyed, but the film also breaks down the traditional ways of granting significance to the elements of the film. The different concepts shown in the film are good illustrations of Modernist ideas.

The first Modern concept that the film illustrates is a non-objective use of space and time. The locations portrayed are constantly changing from ocean, to sky, to city, and beautiful desert. Some themes do persist, for example, most of the sections set in the city are together, and the first section of the film is in a purely natural setting. However, there is no predictable direction of travel, and no way of predicting whether the next image will be of a desolate city or the wild ocean. In addition to moving in space the film also moves in time. Due to the lack of easily visible dates it is difficult to judge whether the scenes are chronologically ordered or not, but there is not a common thread of time to tie the moments together. Additionally, the rate of time passing is not consistent throughout the film. Frequently, the filmmakers used accelerated images such as cities, clouds, people and machinery. At other points the footage was

noticeably slowed down. These are examples of how the Modernist disregard for the conventions of objectively determined place and time.

The film also exhibits Modernist influences by the lack of a traditional plot. However, the film does have a message or a meaning which is somewhat counter to the meaningless Modernist worldview. The film's message centers around the relative roles of nature, technology, and humanity. The film spends time on the interactions between man and his environment, but without using a narrative to structure the progress of the message. *Koyaanisqatsi* lacks the traditional forms of a plot or characters, but it is unified according to the subjective principles that the filmmakers chose to use. The film allows the viewer to draw a subjective conclusion based on their own beliefs and experiences rather than having an objective plot.

Another interesting Modernist influence is in the way that the significance of the film elements is shown. One of the main traits of Modernism is the lack of a value-charged worldview. From a modern perspective one idea or image or concept is not more important or meaningful than another. The film juxtaposes mundane things like hotdog manufacturing machinery with vast cityscapes and powerful natural scenes. There is no indication that one is more or less important, valuable or good. Certain images and points are given more time but none of them are given more value.

There is one major contradiction to the valueless worldview of Modernism in the film. That is the title and messages at the conclusion. *Koyaanisqatsi* means, among other things, life disintegrating, life out of balance, or life that calls for another way of living. This implies that there is something wrong with Modern life in its present form. The three quotes from the Hopi prophecies continue the theme of needing change. As

this implies that there is something wrong with the present state, that means that the filmmakers are making a value based judgment on the modern era.

The discussion of the modern era also ties into the way that the urban scenes are portrayed. They change rapidly, sometimes changing from one image to another faster than the audience can process. This variety of images also ties into the emphasis on the ever increasing pace of modern life. Most of the scenes set in the city are heavily accelerated. The people and cars move so quickly that they seem more to be blurs or streaks of colored light. This blur of rapidly shifting imagery rising into a frantic chaotic blur of life and energy and change captures the constant change and energy of Modernism.

Koyaanisqatsi is a discussion of modern life that embodies many of the ideals of Modernism. The filmmakers explore themes of nature, technology, humanity and how they all interrelate. The film displays subjectivity of time and space. It disregards the traditional forms of narrative and character and is shaped by the subjective themes selected by the filmmakers. There are some values implied but the film largely embodies the valueless ideology of the modern age. The filmmakers deliberately emphasized the rapid pace of modern life and society, by using non-objective time. Koyaanisqatsi is an excellent example of the ideas that shape Modernism.