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*Naqoyqatsi* is a film experience truly beyond words: a feature film devoid of dialogue, character or linear narrative, resting instead solely on the marriage of the moving image and music; an experience intended to provoke emotionally rather than intellectually. What interests me most profoundly is how this film encourages its viewer to see the world with new eyes. It is in the effort of presenting this most liberating and defining feature that this essay attempts the impossible: accounting this purely cinematic experience in words.

Though very much an independent work *Naqoyqatsi* would best be described in relation to its conceptual context: the *Qatsi* trilogy. The first two instalments of the series, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) and *Powaqqatsi* (1988), present the two hemispheres of human existence: the technologically advanced societies of the North and the traditional convivial communities of the South respectively. *Naqoyqatsi* in turn promised to complete the series by presenting the globalised moment in which we find ourselves. Taking its title from the Hopi language, like its predecessors, *Naqoyqatsi* translates approximately as “life as war”. The perspective of the film is a war beyond the battlefield, war as ordinary daily living.

Though following the same non-narrative form as its predecessors *Naqoyqatsi* differs profoundly in that its images are composed primarily from library footage. While the images of *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Powaqqatsi* were captured through original photography, in a documentative engagement with their subject, *Naqoyqatsi* “locates” on the iconic images of our time. Taken from hundreds of disparate sources (television adverts, eye witness footage, and so on) the footage is integrated under heavy digital treatment. Colourized, stretched, re-textured, every image becomes a special effect, creating a unique visual language for the film

The stream of these images—nuclear ballistic tests, stock market figures, sporting events—flowing to and against the rhythms of Philip Glass' hauntingly melodic score creates a virtual, synthetic, futuristic impression of the world. Presenting, at least from my perspective, a war between life and simulation, extremes of promise, spectacle, tragedy and hope. This computer-enhanced visual fabric is not real, yet from some perspective it IS real. What *Naqoyqatsi* is suggesting to me is that the main event of today is not witnessed by those of us who live in it.

The artistic challenge of *Naqoyqatsi* then is in stimulating us to see with new eyes; a challenge, I believe, in which the filmmakers succeed most profoundly. The revelation of *Naqoyqatsi* is that in taking the images from our everyday reality out of their everyday context they appear exotic, alien and surprisingly impactful. Through digital manipulation the images are “re-animated” in startling and emotionally provocative ways. Much like the sped up images of cars in *Koyaanisqatsi* this technique of digital manipulation successfully affords a different perspective on the subject.

Intriguingly, I believe, the viewer is also opened up to new perspective by the measured

distance between image and music. With a passionate cello performance from Yo-Yo Ma, Glass' score presents a light and distinctly human voice in emotional counterpoint to the abstract and dark images and themes of the film. This brings a necessary lightness and accessibility to the film but also, I believe, creates space for interpretation from the viewer. When the spectator enters that space between image and music they create their own interpretations and are able to personalise the event.

*Naqoyqatsi* in its non-narrative form is not about expressing information or stories about a knowable event. This film goes straight in to the sensibility and the soul of the viewer. By removing the traditional foreground of a feature film (the actors, the story, and so on) Reggio moves the background, the everyday life, up to the foreground. "The magic" of this film is in presenting a new perspective on the world by using the very images of everyday life themselves; by the virtues of portraiture there is ample reason to question each and every image in *Naqoyqatsi*.