

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Days On Earth – A Love For Experimental Film. Epitome.

Our Friends · Thursday, September 17th, 2020

*“This is true freedom: to be capable of leaving ourselves, crossing the boundaries of our little world to open up the universe.”*

? Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Psicomagia*

If a film is like poetry, then experimental filmmaking is like creating free-verse poems, making you fall in love with their wild beauty.

Today I chose some of my favorites – *Man With a Movie Camera*, *At Land*, *Koyaanisqatsi*, and *Gambling, Gods, and LSD*, all of them depicting human life on Earth, but all of them through different prisms.

While *Man With a Movie Camera* portrays the Soviet society after the Revolution, *Koyaanisqatsi* delineates the collision of two worlds—urban life and nature. Despite their unique approaches, the subject of each film is human life, as depicted through the filmmaker’s lens.

### A Film as “Experimentation in the Cinematic Communication...”

*Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is a silent documentary film, directed by experimental documentary pioneer Dziga Vertov. As he points out: *“The film represents experimentation in the cinematic communication of visual phenomena without the use of intertitles, without the help of scenario, and without the help of theatre.”* The intention was to show 24 hours in a single day of a Soviet city. Vertov filmed in four cities—Moscow, Odessa, Kyiv, and Kharkiv, and it took him four years to film that single day.

In this work, he introduces us to a few Soviet workers, including how they spend their free time. The film tackles the idea of a structured society that works similarly to how machines work, something we will see Godfrey Reggio warn us about in *Koyaanisqatsi*. The process of filming took on a different form than that in *Koyaanisqatsi* as it included hidden cameras positioned in school tavernas, factories, taverns, streets, and marketplaces to capture live images.

The director used an innovative cinematographic method to depict the modern Soviet society and it was techniques like fast and slow motion, multiple exposures, and freeze frames that made this movie famous. Vertov also invented and developed unique techniques like split screens, extreme close-ups and reversed footage,

It's no surprise then, that the British Film Institute's *Sight and Sound* magazine, ranked *Man With a Movie Camera* eighth out of 100 greatest films of all time.

### **The Truth Behind a Dream Like Film**

*At Land* (1994) by Maya Deren is another silent experimental film but unlike *Man with a Movie Camera*, *At Land* features characters, scenarios, and acting. Maya herself is cast as the protagonist.

The movie starts with a woman lying on the beach, from where she goes on a strange journey. She climbs a tree, after what she suddenly finds herself watching chess playing while she crawls on a table in front of people who appear to not seeing her at all. At once, she is in the forest walking with different people, and when the scene changes, she is once again encountering chess players. This time, she steals the figure and runs away.

With a dream-like narrative, *At Land* describes one's struggle to preserve personal identity going on a strange journey meeting other versions of herself and other people [we can all fully follow through online](#).

The big question this movie awakens is if there is a final version of us to be reached at all or we are just a strange composition of memories fitting together to make a nostalgic melody? Do we ever reach the long wanted balance? And, whether that machine-like society depicted by Godfrey Reggio in *Koyaanisqatsi*, as we will see below, produces this loss of identity and the strive for finding our own truth?

### **Life Out Of Balance**

Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) is an experimental documentary film, the first of the QATSI trilogy, and Reggio's debut as a movie producer and director. The title comes from an Indian word, and it means "*life out of balance*." Created from 1975 to 1982, it presents the apocalyptic vision of the crash of two worlds—technology and urban life versus the environment.

The film tries to warn us that we have alienated ourselves from nature, how people have locked themselves in an artificial environment, and are losing the ability to see beyond. Living in the globalized world of high technology has made us believe that our lifestyles are perfect, but all we can see are layers of superficial commodities.

Just as Peter Mettler in *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, and Deren in *At Land*, the director intends to provoke and ask questions only the audience can answer. He also says the highest value of any work of art is the meaning gleaned from the experience of the viewers. The bottom line is—the meaning of the *Koyaanisqatsi*, and its power is whatever the viewer wants to make of it.

Since its premiere in April 1982 at Santa Fe Festival, the movie provokes deep transformations in the human psyche. Even though it is the best choice to enjoy it in the cinema, it can be found on youtube and watched in the home setting.

### **In a Search for Happiness**

*Gambling, Gods and LSD* is an experimental film, directed by Peter Mettler. It was shot in the US, Canada, India, and Switzerland. Though making a film requires choices and decisions, the director once said it's essential for the project not to depend on a shooting plan or a script. As Greg

Klymkiw simply said: “*Gambling, Gods, and LSD is Koyaanisqatsi with content.*”

The movie consists of four segments, each showing what people do to find happiness and discover themselves. Just as Maya Deren is meeting her other Selves in *At Land*, we here see a man on a journey encountering and filming other versions of himself – other people.

In the first segment, Mettler interviews John Paul Young about finding God, while in the second, we find him in Las Vegas. Being the thrill-seeker I am, these scenes are my favorite and immediately remind me of the *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* scene when Duke says “*Who are these people, these faces? Where do they come from?*”, followed by memories of everything this slot-heaven has to offer. This movie is sure to tap into some [nostalgia for playing slot games](#) in Vegas, something possible only for a select few as of March 2020, which is why online slots are in demand this year.

The third segment of the film gives us Albert Hofmann, the Swiss scientist, who discovered LSD. The fourth segment was shot in Hampi and Bombay. And lastly, the Bombay scenes from the fourth segment, include a visit to the Laughing Club, where members find peace in making faces at one another and laughing.

*Photo by [Noom Peerapong](#) on [Unsplash](#)*

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