**Mega/City/Crime**

**Notes on the Cultural Significance of Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982)**

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**Abstract**

In his “non-narrative” film *Koyaanisqatsi* (Hopi for 'life in imbalance') Godfrey Reggio documents the ecologically disastrous 'imbalanced' life in modern, industrialised mega-cities. In the film, he seems to mourn the loss of what he suggests was a more 'balanced' form of life, when Man was one with nature. This contribution draws on elements in Hopi culture and reads Reggio’s iconic film as part of a cultural trend in which submission, in all its guises, is no longer accepted. In this cultural trend submission always is submission to code (that is: to a certain structured solidity or ordered coherence), and *therefore*, to wasteful destruction and to ‘life in imbalance’. This trend has, however, in the course of the decades, also spawned a void of “Luciferian” desires of absolute sovereignty, and has done this to such an extent as to undermine the conditions of possibility for anything like a non-submissive life ‘in balance’ to endure.

**Key Words**

Hopi culture – *Koyaanisqatsi* – sovereign Self – Luciferianism – conservationism - non-submission

**Introduction**

Those that were fortunate to watch Godfrey Reggio’s “non-narrative” film *Koyaanisqatsi* in 1982, when it was first released, are unlikely to ever forget the experience. What is surprising though is that the film, for all its path-breaking energy, never succeeded in attracting the sustained attention of scholarship. One of the reasons for this is to be found in the fact that a dispute about copyright saw the film being taken out of circulation for a number of years. But another, possibly deeper reason, could be that the film, once categorised as a film about environmental destruction on the one hand, and visually instilling the shock of environmental awareness on the other, its life got sealed into the corresponding cultural box. Recently however scholarship seems to be rediscovering the film. Whereas some of those more recent contributions are inclined to read *Koyaanisqatsi* as an “environmental film”, steeped in “romanticism” [28], others are stressing not so much its environmental credentials as its “anti-modernism” [2], or its critique of the “inhuman” [6] and “post-human” [33] dimension of late modern, radicalised, cybernetic life (see also [10]). That is: mindless, unaware, non-reflective, unthinking but also insensitive life in an age that, as Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Bern [25] and Bernard Stiegler [29] have recently analysed, is spun out of the abstract workings and “automatic” steering and impacts of an “algorithmic governmentality”. This governmentality instils in its vectors (i.e. you and me, if we’re not careful) neither meaningful past nor future projects, leaving them incommunicative, knowing *no other* and *nothing else*, and living their sterile lives from one instance of the present to the next.

It is not our intention here to refute any of these readings. They all make sense, and indeed in what follows they will re-appear in one guise or another. However, we will make an attempt to complement this scholarship through a reading of the film both as an expression and as a harbinger of deep cultural shifts. Those cultural shifts are ‘deep’ in the sense that they, in our reading at least, took and continue to take shape at the level of what could be called the operative “default logic” in late modern culture. We will of course be able to revisit this in detail below. For the purpose of this introduction allow us to state that the aforementioned cultural shift is one from a culture that operates according to a default logic that holds: “if all else fails, submit to code”, to one that operates on a logic that commands, quite paradoxically so: “if all else fails, refute all code”. This new default logic is one that abhors the crime of submission. It *is* radical non-submission. The gist of the overall argument follows in the remainder of this section but in subsequent sections of course we will make an attempt to unpack the issues in more detail.

The word ‘Koyaanisquatsi’ is Hopi for ‘life in imbalance’. It seems odd that although Reggio, in his film, made the connection with Hopi cosmology visually clear, little in scholarship addressed the relevance of this connection. We hope to be able, in this contribution, to partially redress the balance. In referring to Hopi culture and, more broadly, to its roots in *pueblo* culture (the ancient culture of pioneers and experimenters in town and city living), Reggio made a connection with a culture that had –and continues to have- non-submission at its heart. To be clear: Hopi non-submissiveness is, it too, quite paradoxical. It submits to the code that commands: “Thou Shalt not Submit”. Moreover, non-submission, in Hopi culture, tends to be non-submission in order to preserve the balance between an infinite multiplicity of codes. In other words, it submits, yet again paradoxically, to a code, i.e. one that urges: “Thou Shalt Preserve Coexistence. Thou Must therefore Achieve Balance. And Therefore Thou Shalt not Submit to any Code in Particular”. In Hopi cultural life individual non-submission is the main road towards “balanced” coexistence. Non-submission here has a conservative, indeed conservationist finality. The web of coexistence thus preserved should then, in turn, guarantee and sustain the individual’s life chances.

In Reggio’s *Koyaanisqatsi*, this ancient culture is subtly mined and articulated, however implicitly, within the film’s unspoken call for non-submission to the blank, abstract code that, mindless, unaware, non-reflective, and unthinking, criminally constitutes and maintains the cybernetic organism of Mega Capital/City. It may however not just have been Hopi conservationist non-submissiveness that fuelled Reggio’s project. We will make an attempt to argue that the call to non-submission in the film also marks a watershed moment in the deep cultural shift that we mentioned above, i.e. the shift towards a form of life that turns on the default operating logic that is coded as follows: “All else failing, refute all foundation”, or, again paradoxically: ‘*Refute all code!’* The history of this shift has long roots and Peter Sloterdijk has probably laid bare most of those in his *Terrible Children of Modernity* [27; but see also 26]. There has always been, in Modernity, writes Sloterdijk, a strong “anti-genealogical” undercurrent, carried by “bastards” (literal bastards, at first, then “bastards” more broadly) who, turning their backs on the codes of tradition, had their eager eye on the future, and went on to create new worlds, and their own life-paths in them. But to look to the future, “anti-genealogically”, is still to accept code, and sacrifice to it. It still requires submission. The Modern “bastard”, in Sloterdijk, is still happy to submit and sacrifice to the future and to creation. One could now argue that the anti-genealogical moment has meanwhile radicalised even further in the wake of the clash of authoritarianisms that we call World War Two. The trauma of the War has, across the decades after the calamitous event took place, taken anti-authoritarianism to the point of absolute, radical aversion against *all* code. Our age is the age of aspiring radical sovereigns. They have their eye fixed on living a life in radical, absolute sovereignty. However illusory and paradoxical and, bluntly put, impossible such a life may be, the aspiring sovereign is no longer prepared to accept anything that even remotely smacks of code. The aspiring sovereign has lost all interest in the past and no longer wishes to sacrifice anything to it. He (he or she of course; henceforth: he) is completely indifferent to the future, and rejects out of hand anything that presents itself as an *ought*, a *should*, or a *must*. His time is the permanent present. He scoffs at those who desire to create. To create is to waste potential, and it is precisely the aspiring sovereign’s aim to live in a zone of pure potential; to live before (or beyond) all creation; to live before (or beyond) all code, before (or beyond) all wasteful law. His imaginary life is a life lived in absolute sovereignty, away from the clutches of the death –potential wasting death- that, he is convinced, is inherently carried by all and any code. And that includes the criminally wasteful code that we know as Law. The aspiring absolute sovereign’s desires have, in a way, become Luciferian [19]: if only it were possible, he would work towards reversing Creation itself, and he would dwell, like Lucifer himself, the ‘Morning Star’, ‘Bearer of Light’, ‘First Son of God’, out of reach of all law and all code, in a zone of pure un-wasted potential, all light, all blinding and obliterating Light. This, the Luciferian believes, is real conservationism. The aim here is to conserve pure potential, before (or beyond) the code. It is not just about preserving the balance between codes.

Luciferian aspirations have, as recent history and experience tell us, often been trapped in what could be called forms of *faux sovereignty*, such as the illusory sovereignty of the consumer who, in all his dependency on commodity/image, thinks he’s making the world his own. Most of its energies however, we now know in this troubling 21st century of ours, have been fuelling the abstractions and circulation of pure, blank value in the radicalised Mega Capital/City, where they continue to over-code desires, at their wellspring , into near-total submission to the crime of their equally pure, blank code.

This is where Reggio’s *Koyaanisqatsi* enters the scene. The film not only predicts this process of over-coding, but also marks the point when sovereign aspiration became aware of the dangers of submission to the code of Mega Capital/City. This awareness expresses itself in, or indeed: is kick-started by, the visual aesthetic of the film and the sheer experience of its viewing. Reggio himself seems to have made the decision to tap into Hopi culture for inspiration on how to live an alternative non-submissive form of life. With the benefit of hindsight it is probably fair to say that cultural life, after *Koyaanisqatsi,* did nottake Reggio’s hint. If anything Mega Capital/City and its dynamic of abstract over-coding became even more radicalised, and with the emergence of Luciferian aspiration, matters are now threatening to turn really problematic. We will be able to revisit this later. Before we do we first need to explore *Koyaanisqatsi* in more detail.

***Koyaanisqatsi***

The film opens with panoramic vistas of misty desert-scapes (*Monument Valley*, actually) at dawn. At first there is no life, but after a while it emerges, waveringly. This is life at its purest. We are witnessing pure Natural Law –the law that holds rocks and sun, wind and small creatures together in ecological balance. Wind blows and deposits. Rocks erode and create. Creatures die and generate. The world is changing steadiness, or, better perhaps, slow, steady change. No code dominates. No code causes “imbalance”. And although there is a slight shock when the camera freezes while it scans across rock paintings depicting what we assume are scenes of life among the earliest pueblo cultures, the calamity –announced by a sudden darkening of the tone of Philip Glass’s musical score- is yet way off in the future. The rock paintings show figures gazing at us from the depths of time: darkly coloured depictions of tribes-people, standing mute and motionless around a shamanic figure wearing totemic headdress. Although the tribe seems to have emerged organically, and quite inconspicuously so, out of the *raw and* *uncooked* of the desert, it is clear that, with it, Natural Law has been superseded by Totemic Law. That which holds the newly emerged tribes apart/together –the totemic images that, as Freud [13, 15] reminds us, structure and represses their *human ... all too human* origins- suddenly emerges as a proliferating set of codes that draw upon energies in their environment to sustain their internal consistency. As such this crystallization of codes here is nothing fundamentally new. The same already happened in the primordial soup. The difference under the sign of the totem is that the code here is structured around a void. It is structured around the void out of which it came. This is the void that opened up within the creature that suddenly realised that it *was* a creature and that, in sheer terror, felt compelled to make desperate attempts to cover up this gap of self-consciousness, i.e. the chasm, indeed the void, that had opened up between it and its world. The totemic code is an attempt to close that gap. In Frazer’s *Golden Bough* [12] it provides the terrified creature, just awakened to itself, a chance to identify and “magically” merge with some of the force of a world that it finds itself drifting apart from. The “magic” here is in the very closing of the void. In Ernest Becker’s work [4] the totemic code emerges as a primordial meaning system that allows the creature to find shelter, and hide from its newly acquired knowledge –terrifying knowledge- of its impending, entropic demise. In other words: the creature’s inner void –source of terror- is covered up by “meaning”, by a code, or a set of codes, that make a habitable meaningful world, that are durable (almost as durable as sheer life itself) and that therefore hold some promise of immortality.

Whichever way one reads the totemic code though, and the world it makes, the void whence it emerged and which it then attempts to cover up and hide for the creature that carries it, tends to radiate outward. It cannot be held in check indefinitely. In other words, the void is unstoppable, and it projects outward. It thus forms a plane that stretches out as an invisible blanket over the immanent bedrock of the world. This plane, the plane of Totemic Law, which is the very void itself, stretches out infinitely, and provides the totemic codes –plural, for they are of course infinitely many- with a space to proliferate, multiply, clash and change. A space, that is, to form worlds. The point to make here though is that this process of unrelenting proliferation is not bounded by a tendency towards ecological homeostasis or “balance”. On the contrary: the infinite expanse of the plane of Totemic Law, as well as its void-like texture, allow for the possibility that only a few, or perhaps just one, code succeeds in over-coding, or at least submitting, all other codes and the worlds they made. In other words: the plane of Totemic Law has the capacity to generate “imbalance”. It is on the plane of Totemic Law, then, that worlds form. Each of those worlds structures around its own totemic code, or set of codes, which have to be submitted to if they are to persist. The void in each pushes it outwards, towards other worlds and thus the potential for clashes, mergers, over-coding, and potentially, dominance ensues.

In *Koyaanisqatsi* the camera gradually moves from the Ur-totem of early pueblo civilization, to the modern totem of Mega Capital/City. Glimpses (a stretch of desert road, wheels grinding, and so on) quickly lead us to the workings of this organism. This truly is an organism, or, in the words of e.g. Ivan Villarmeia Alvarez, a “living machine” [2: 152]. It too emerges out of the stony bedrock of the desert. But, Reggio suggests, by the time of *Koyaanisqatsi* the totemic code at its heart had managed to over-code all other codes and had thus completely destroyed the delicate “balance” between them. The code that drives Mega Capital/City is one that compels the organism to suck up and exploit as much energy as possible from all and everything. For this organism all is mere resource, or indeed: mere fuel. All is reduced to mere quantifiable, pure, abstract value and then used to perpetuate the algorithmic functions (dixit Rouvroy, Berns, and Stiegler) according to which it operates. Its ultimate aim is to be dominant, to be *all.* All other codes are coded over, and destroyed. In the material world this leads to endless cycles of destruction, war, and violence. All is thereby broken up into molecularly small constituent parts and used up as fuel for further expansion. Human bodies are reduced to their molecular, ‘abstract’, value. Clad in their protective membranes (we would say, “cars”) they become mere blood cells, mere vectors of energy, in the arteries of Mega Capital/City. Reggio makes quite some effort in his film to make that particular point visually clear when he uses fast-motion and background music to such an extent that all traffic in Mega Capital/City ultimately blurs into a continuous stream that pumps rhythmically through the veins of its cybernetic organism. The organism’s code, and its crime, is that it submits all. And all submit to it. Mere quanta of abstract energy, human bodies no longer have their own code. They no longer have a “Self”. They do sometimes make an appearance in the film, and Reggio has them posing for the camera: female casino workers, all in uniform, are standing motionless whilst looking at the camera. They seem to be making efforts to bring a smile to their face. A sandwich man stares in the far distance. A fighter pilot looks straight into the lens. And so on. But something is missing. Something is no longer there. These bodies have become shells. They are no longer capable of recognising anything outside the bloodstream. They behave as if they were individual blood cells under a microscope. They have become pure, abstract matter; mere vectors awaiting instruction.

One wonders *why on earth* this cybernetic code has become so dominant. Perhaps it was because its abstractness resembles, or mimics, the void whence, like all totemic codes, it came. This may have allowed it to ripple smoothly across the skein of the void. It somehow managed to approach all other codes, rather inconspicuously at first perhaps, and looking quite innocuous in all its abstractness, only suck them into its orbit, and subsequently reduce them to its own algorithms, and to its ends. Life, in Stiegler’s words, has become “automatic”. All other codes are repressed. They may not have disappeared altogether but they have been pushed into near-oblivion, into the depths of what is sometimes called the *social unconscious*. This is, to use Freud’s [14] terminology, the *Unheimlichkeit* in the hypermodern Mega Capital/City. But that which has been driven out, chased away, over-coded, and driven underground, may return. The repressed could yet return, and in a way Reggio sets out not just to illustrate this possibility, but also to use *Koyaanisqatsi* to make it happen. The film invites other codes back in, in order to restore some semblance of “balance”.

In a few very brief scenes in the film –see also Matt Bell’s [6] and Gary Varner’s [33] recent papers- the human body, and its gaze, take centre stage. In one, a young man, caught up in the mindless bloodstream, suddenly turns around to look into the lens of the camera. The man’s gaze, for a brief moment, recognises us. Although we are outside the bloodstream, he recognises us. This man somehow recognises. What had been repressed resurfaces. Consciousness returns, if only for a fleeting moment, and sees beyond the coded workings of the cybernetic organism. The particle becomes aware for a few very brief seconds, and looks us in the eye. We are suddenly invited to establish a rapport and engage in some form of communication. In other words, the possibility of a *new code* opens up. Now

it may well be the case that any new code that we and the young man are able to fashion will itself rest upon submission and repression. But the point is that as long as there is consciousness, and therefore a capacity to look beyond, then, as we shall see below, there is space that can potentially be shared by a multiplicity of codes. There is space, in other words, for a variety of totems –each with their own little taboos and repressions- to float in, clash, merge, or perhaps simply coexist. There is here at least the possibility of “balance”.

But, as said, Reggio also uses *Koyaanisqatsi* to transform *us*. The viewer’s body, it too, is a mere particle vector in the bloodstream of Mega Capital/City. The film though, through its sheer audio-visual intensity, impacts our senses very seriously (see also [2: 153], [27]). It tears the viewer’s body away from the stupor that it has been living through as a particle in the abstractness of the cybernetic code. Going through the experience of watching and sensing the film the viewer ... experiences. The film awakens us. We become aware. Consciousness returns to our bodies. We are no longer mere cells in a bloodstream. We suddenly see Mega Capital-City for what it is: a code, or set of codes, whose algorithms refer only to abstract value, that is, to itself. Submitting us, this code never recognised us. Submitting to it, we never recognised it for what it was. What appeared to us, mere particles, as balance, now turns out to be, in our eyes, fully awake now, and fully aware, calamitous imbalance.

The question now arises: how to live a life beyond “Koyaanisqatsi”? Reggio and *Koyaanisqatsi* both hint at the need to look to the Hopi for inspiration. Not too many *Koyaanisqatsi* scholars seem to have picked up this hint.

**Hopi (I): Balance**

The Hopi, a very small tribe in Northern Arizona, descend from earlier pueblo peoples who were among the first sedentary village and town dwelling cultures on the North American continent. Although their particular way of life has, across the centuries, attracted a certain attention, and at times slight admiration, from their successive colonial overlords (Spanish, Mexican and US American), it is fair to say that genuine interest in, and extensive study of their cosmology, beliefs and attitudes did not emerge before the end of the Second World War. It is the traumatic experience of that war itself that stirred many, from ethicists [7] to anthropologists [23, 30, 34], to make attempts to unravel why it is that the Hopi seem to manage to combine, or “balance”, what is often taken to be a stubborn individualism on the one hand, with, on the other, peaceful coexistence. The Hopi way is “the way of balance” [18]. We will, in this section and the next, make an effort to explore this literature which dates back to the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. It is of course understood that Hopi culture has moved on since, but that is not the point here. The point is that this literature was crucially important in constructing a widely shared and even popularised view of Hopi culture as, to say the least, interesting. It is this view which was then mobilised not just by artists and film makers such as Godfrey Reggio, or in more recent scholarship (e.g. [5, 9, 16, 17, 18]), but also by later generations of Hopi activists and artists (or *artivists,* if you wish) themselves who, well into the 21st century, continue to make reference to their ancestral heritage, and to modern representations of it -and those include Reggio’s *Koyaanisqatsi* (see e.g. [23]).

In Hopi cosmology and mythology human people (there are also non-human people), a long time ago, “emerged” into the “Fourth World”. Many believe that this is a reference to the times, tens of thousands of years ago, when the first humans reached Northern America having crossed the frozen Bering Straits. Once “emerged”, the newly arrived were instructed by divine spirits to split up (in “clans”) and wander and cross the whole continent. This is what the clans then did, each guided by spirits (“*kachinas”*), who watched over them and who kept them on the right and peaceful path [34: 167]. Ultimately some of the clans met again (in what we now call the Southwestern United States) were they settled in villages and small towns, and started to grow crops. In other words: they formed a pueblo culture, and experimented with an early form of agriculture based urban living. One point to note here is that they chose to become farmers (their main cop being corn) in an area that is nothing short of an arid desert. They were, then, extremely dependent on environmental conditions which, all of them, had to be kept in balance.

On their wanderings across the continent, though, each of the clans had specialised in a specific set of tasks -e.g. control of the clouds and rain, or control of the winds, or the springs (few and far between), and so on- by developing skill at accessing the corresponding divine spirits through appropriate rituals. So when they finally met up to found towns and villages, each of the clans was able to bring something to the common effort of keeping the conditions of the world in balance. But keeping the world in balance also implies that the relations between each of the ritually specialised clans need to be balanced. There was of course the need to share out, between the clans, the sparsely scattered plots of arable land. But there was more. If, from a cosmological point of view, one of the clans were to dominate –and if, consequently, their specialisation dominated all others- then the whole delicate balance between the forces in the world would crumble apart, and with it, the clans, including the dominant one.

There is, it should be said, a hierarchy among the clans. The *Bear Clan*, for example, is the chief clan (as it is assumed that they were the first to arrive at the final destination after the great wanderings) leaving them to fulfil the duty of keeping the sacred tablets that were given to the human people by the divine spirits, all those eons ago, at the time of the “emergence”. But there is among the Hopi no political hierarchy. There is no centralised political structure as such. There is, for example, not even a majority rule whereby on a given issue a particular majority would decide the outcome for the whole of the Hopi community (23: 201; 34: 316-325]]. Paradoxically stated, one could say that the Hopi code goes something like this: nobody shall dominate; no rule shall have the upper hand; no code shall submit others. Although this lack of a political mechanism to decide common issues has led to problems in the past (and, on some occasions, to factional splits between villages, or within particular villages) it remains the case that the only hierarchy is religious. The overall Chief (usually a member of the Bear Clan) organises the recurring rituals and ceremonies, in which the clans take part, at appropriate times, according to their specialisation.

The rituals are varied and evoke a great number of forces and spirits. The point to make here though is that the rituals themselves do not express a moral or behavioural code or law, nor do they project a particular code around them. The rituals, in other words, do not in themselves impose a moral or behavioural code. They are meant to access the forces and spirits in such a way as to allow for the preservation of all that is necessary to maintain and support life, and that invariably and necessarily means peaceful life. Not all rituals are successful. A sudden sandstorm, for example, would be read as a sign that something went wrong with a particular ritual. To be clear: the failure would not be read as a sign that the ritual as such was a flawed, useless or obsolete one to begin with, but, rather, that something went wrong during the performance of the ritual. This ‘something going wrong’, more often than not, hints at the possibility that one or more of the performers may have taken part in the ritual when they were not pure of heart. Only those pure of heart are allowed to take part in the rituals. Each has to decide whether or not they are pure enough to be able to take part. Those that are not are implored to stay at home.

Senior clan members with religious or ritual tasks and duties usually spend time, during ceremonial days, in *kivas* [34: 126-131]. Those are sacred places, half dug-outs, with underground chambers for the senior members to withdraw into, but with an opening, and access to the world, at the top, whence they will eventually “emerge” to take part in the communal rituals and ceremonies. Dwelling in the bosom of the earth, but conversing with spirits, those in the kiva do not live in an *either/or* world. Theirs is a *both/and* one. Nothing and no-one shall dominate. All shall be in balance, “integrated” [29]. There should be little surprise in the fact that the Hopi are often mentioned in works that go under the heading of *deep ecology*. David Abrams’ *The Spell of the Sensuous* [1] is a case in point. Abrams’ notion of the “breath” of the world that connects, animates and conditions all life, and the deep interdependency of all that constitutes the world that is stressed so often in deep ecology literature, all chime well with Hopi cosmology and beliefs (for a thorough deconstruction of e.g. deep ecology’s Romantic reifications though, see [22]). Sitting in the depths of the “flesh of the world” (Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy [21] is one of Abrams’ sources of inspiration) the Hopi performer, in the *kiva*, not only knows of this interdependence (because the *katchinas* instructed his clan and his tribe in times immemorial), he also senses it through the “breath” that flows in from above, and through the physical contact with the sheer earth. But if he depends on the world and if the world depends on him, how should we live our lives? The Hopi answer is to live life, however paradoxically it may seem, in non-submission.

**Hopi (II): Non-Submission**

If all forces –or codes- in the world have to be kept “in balance” in order to be able to sustain any particular code, or set of codes –the individual Hopi farmer tending to his meagre crops in the middle of the desert, for example- and if the overall “balance” of the world in turn depends on the actions of the individual, then no code in particular should be allowed to proliferate, over-code and thus dominate all those around it. If it did, all “balance” would disappear, and “Koyaanisqatsi” would ensue. But this in turn means that no particular code should be given opportunity to bind the individual’s Self, and that, in turn, should prevent this individual Self from binding anything or anyone in the world.

When, immediately after the Second World War, between 1946 and 1948, the ethicist Richard Brandt [7] conducted ethnographic research among the Hopi, he could not but notice the lack of firm agreement between them, on issues of morality. Although most of his informers and respondents did seem to nod favourably when asked to assess hypothetical actions and behaviours that could be described as indicating self-control or peacefulness, their responses to most other actions and behaviours were more varied, with some informers accepting them, while others tended to disapprove, or remained indifferent, or outlined contextual conditions that could have an impact on their assessment. Very often though they responded by simply saying “It’s up to them”, meaning: it’s up to the individual or individuals in question to think about their actions, and to then take responsibility for them. Most of Brandt’s Hopi informers were reluctant to judge or intervene. Punishment, for example, in all its forms and shapes, was not widely supported [7: 186-187]: “It’s up to them”. Hopi people, Brandt found, were extremely reluctant to intervene in other people’s lives. One of the conclusions drawn by Brandt holds that the Hopi are “inclined to favour submissiveness” [7: 143]. But, in our reading, this may not be the case at all. Their lives, we argue, are lived in utter non-submissiveness. In Hopi culture there is little room for a censor. There is no pervasive “super-ego” coding the life paths of individuals. There is, to continue the psychoanalytical idiom, little “repression”. In a culture where it’s “up to them”, or indeed, where choices are “up to me”, there is little to repress. In yet other words: there is no overall “super-ego” code to submit to and that would, consequently, then steer the tribe into one or a few specific directions. In the words of ethnographer Walter O’Kane, who visited the Hopi in the early 1950s: “Hopis are not given to setting forth doctrines or principles of conduct” (23: 6]. Hopi Law, it could be said, is a multiplicity, or, in the words of anthropologist Laura Thompson, who penned them down in 1945, an “innate, dynamic Law” that connects “interdependencies” [30: 541].

But that does not mean that anything goes, and in a way of course Brandt did have a point when he mentioned the word “submission”. Of course one could say that the Hopi, in a paradoxical way, submit to a code that is all about preserving “balance”. And there is also paradox to be found elsewhere: in spending a lifetime honing their skills at self-control, and keeping their desires and related codes in check, the Hopi also submit to a basic fear. Theirs seems to be a deep fear of codes going on a rampage in a delicately balanced world of codes. This is probably why many Hopi accept and encourage honest, genuine, authentic speech. Speaking one’s mind openly and truly allows for the detection of potential threats to “balance” in the words of those that, unwittingly perhaps, are about to fall prey to a rabid, imbalanced code. Once spoken and in the open, though, “it’s up to the speaker”. In that sense, “the Hopi view [...] looks wholly to the individual. He and he alone determines his course, just as he alone reaps the consequences, whether good or bad. [...] [The Hopi are] deeply convinced that a person must retain sovereignty” [23: 195, 201]. We will be able to revisit this notion of “sovereignty” later.

The foremost threat to a balanced life in Hopi culture is to be found in the figure of the witch, male or female. They are called “two-hearts” because they are assumed to possess two hearts, one that hides when it speaks, and one that harbours hidden, dangerous motives. The hidden heart is fixed on and bound by a variety of desires (animal desires mostly). This animal heart, in all its uncontrollable rabidity, has the potential to seriously harm others. The witch has allowed his or her Self to be submitted by a particularly rampant code, and is therefore a constant albeit hidden threat to a balanced world and a balanced life. It should now come as no surprise to find that gossip about who might be a “two-heart” is quite rife in Hopi society (see e.g. [17]). But the existence, or even the identification of “two-hearts”, does not invite judgment or intervention from others. If someone did intervene, then he would in turn himself also be captured by the code of the witch. And, to make things worse, in a world where all codes are interconnected, the likely outcome of any intervention would be revenge and more harm. Besides, having submitted to a rabid code, the witch’s submission is punishment enough. His own submission will drag him down and make him sick [21: 161; 30: 548]. The witch’s submission to code will be his undoing. This may strike us as quite convenient a position to take [7: 332], and it may even hint at the presence, however well camouflaged, of a belief in, or a hope for a neurosis-inducing, psychosomatically active “super-ego” after all. But it does at the same time also illustrate the extreme reluctance, in Hopi culture, to activate and mobilise any particular code or law. “It’s up to them”.

It may be too easy to explain this aversion to code and the corresponding trust in balanced multiplicity by looking through a sociological lens. This would show us a tiny tribe, spread across a handful of small villages, in the middle of a desert, and entirely dependent on agriculture. Within the walls of the villages we would see, in each of them, a variety of “clans”, each with their specific ritual and ceremonial specialisation, and each dependent on a share of the meagre land in the vicinity. The need for “balance”, in such an interconnected world, does make sense. And, looking at the history of the Hopi (see e.g. [34]), it seems the Hopi way has indeed permitted the villages to persist. There have been instances of violence though, albeit that those were few and far between. On one occasion (at the end of the 17th century) the population of one village was violently attacked and massacred by the other villages. On another (at the turn of the 20th) a significant segment of the population in the chief village (Oraibi) left after a vehement dispute, and founded a new village where, according to them, the traditional Hopi way of life would continue to be honoured. In both cases the issue was that a particular code threatened to over-code the multiplicity that formed the core of Hopi culture: the population that was massacred in the 17th century intended to adopt the then coloniser’s (Spain) catholic faith, and the “Oraibi split” in 1906 occurred because the leavers were, unlike those that remained, unwilling to accept the newly arrived “modern” lifestyle [34: 258-269]. Concerns and worries about losing “the Hopi way” have not completely disappeared in more recent decades (see e.g. [9] and [18]).

Let us approach our topic from a slightly different angle. Early evolutionary psychologists such as Julien Varendonck (who actually tried to combine and integrate insights from both evolutionary psychology and psychoanalysis) suspected that “repression” is inevitable as soon as “consciousness” emerges, whether in animals or in humans [31, 32]. For consciousness to be conscious of something particular, a whole host of mostly affect-laden contents will have to be relegated to the sub-conscious. There they remain not in a state of inertia, but, on the contrary, in “psycho-dynamic” chains of associations and synthetic combinations. There is something automatic about those associations and combinations. They follow an affective logic, and they do have an impact on actions and behaviour. The associations and synthetic combinations in turn generate an unrelenting sequence of affects which, if they reach a certain threshold, will surface in consciousness and determine the outcome of conscious reflection. In animals “repression” only happens sporadically, i.e. when the animal focuses on a particular object (e.g. a tree log blocking its path), but most of the time the animal’s affect-laden life of more or less automatic, reflex-like responses to stimuli, is all there is. In human beings, though, consciousness is active most of the time as it focuses on a great variety of objects, very often in wild succession. And so, in humans, psychic contents are repressed continuously, whilst at the same time some particular combinations of contents are continually mobilised, out of a potentially infinite number of possible syntheses, in order to make anything like conscious reflection possible. All this can potentially lead to unrelenting cycles of successive complexes of conscious focus and corresponding repression, or, in other words: of synthetic affective surfacing and conscious reflection. However, it is very tempting for human beings to reduce this unrelenting complexity. One way of doing this is to submit to one or perhaps only a few basic codes and to allow those to structure conscious activity. In other words: to submit to a particular code or law, and to relegate all else to sub-conscious depths. This will make conscious life less complex, simpler. More “automatic” as well, since of course the level of conscious reflection will be reduced; reflections will tend to follow only a few restricted pathways, fuelled “automatically” by corresponding affects. In what we have called Mega Capital/City for example, where so many have submitted to the simple code that underpins the circulation of abstract value (Make money! Buy this! Wear that! Circulate! React!), life, in the near-total absence of conscious reflection, has become stupor-like, and indeed “automatic”, as Stiegler (see supra) has argued, and Reggio has shown.

That is not the Hopi way. Not so much because the Hopi, like psychoanalysis, know that all that is repressed by a strict code or by a dominant Law, will not go away, but is bound to find a way out, and discharge and express itself in the symptom (your submission to the repressive code will “make you sick”, or aggressive, or violent, or destructive, ...), but, rather, because submission makes one unaware; unaware of all that is not submitted to and, ultimately, unaware also of all that *is* submitted to.

“Balance” requires awareness, and awareness can only come about if one allows all that is repressed to surface into consciousness, where it is then examined, i.e. reflected upon, seen in a broader context, appreciated for what it can bring to life, but also how it can harm life. Once thus examined the content becomes more “integrated” in a greater web of multiple contents where it loses, to some extent at least, its capacity to over-code and dominate or bind the Self. This then provides those who live such an examined life in awareness with the capacity to move on, and not let their and others’ lives be bound by the code under examination. At which point of course the whole cycle of examination may start all over again. The psychoanalyst and Buddhist psychotherapist Mark Epstein [11] refers to the “emptiness” –un-coded space- that is required within the Self for such awareness to be able to emerge and grow. This emptiness is not a void but, rather, a continuous “process” of examined contents. Authors (e.g. [23, 34]) have found that many Hopi recognise themselves in the teachings of the Christ and the Buddha. That should now not come as too much of a surprise: the more extensive the “process” of examination, and the more “integrated”, or “balanced” the contents in the continuous process that we call the Self, the fewer the coded blockages will be, the less “automatic” and more “aware” our actions and behaviours, the lower the number of “two-hearts”, and the more “balanced” the world and the lives in it.

**The Age of Lucifer**

The mood and trend towards non-submission that found its way into Reggio’s film, it could be argued, was, if the director’s hints at the importance of Hopi culture are anything to go by, nourished by a desire for a world and lives “in balance”. For that to be possible at all, Hopi cosmology and beliefs seem to be telling us, we need Selves that are not only able to process and “integrate” a multiplicity of codes, but that actually *are* nothing but those processes themselves. Integration within the non-submissive Self, it is then hoped, will lead to integration (or “balance”) in the world, that is, in all that interconnects all Selves. Non-submission here implies a refusal to submit to particular codes. To submit to a particular code, or set of codes, and to allow those to occupy the Self, is bound to lead to lives, and to a world “out of balance”. In *Koyaanisqatsi* the particular code that, quite rabidly, was on its way of fuelling global imbalance, was the abstract code of the Mega Capital/City. This code –which imposes unrelenting circulation of abstract value- may itself have emerged, quite ironically so, as a result of attempts, in the wake of the Second World War, to avoid the dangers inherent in submission to totalitarian and authoritarian codes. We now know that this flight from totalitarianism and authoritarianism has itself turned into a totalitarian code. It has been extremely successful in over-coding Selves and in generating a world that operates, as in a stupor, “automatically”, according to its instructions. This is the danger that, we believe, Reggio wanted to point out. It is now probably safe to add here: his warning may have been to no avail.

Things may have become even worse. In the post-war drift towards non-submission, a new mood has now also emerged at the very far end of the spectrum of “default logics” which we discussed at the beginning of this essay. This spectrum holds a number of logics i.e. from the one that says “If all else fails, submit”, to the one that is its complete negation: “If all else fails, refute all”. The emphasis in this new radical mood is on the word “all” in the command “refute all”. It does mean: refute *all* code. Refute *all* Law. And that even includes the very command itself: that too will have to be refuted; which might go some way to explaining the utter agony that is inherent in this operational code. This code –“refute all code”- goes way beyond the “anti-genealogical” stance that Peter Sloterdijk (see supra, [27]) has been able to discern as a significant undercurrent in Modern culture. This code no longer accepts creation, or creativity, as essential dimensions of life. At the extreme end of this code the mere idea of submitting to Totemic Law, to any totemic code at all, anything that human beings tend to clutch at or cling to in sheer desperation, has become completely anathema. Even submission to the sheer laws of nature has become unacceptable. The Self here desires, or wills to be absolutely sovereign, subject to none, and totally free from capture by any code whatsoever. This creation-averse desire, or will, is one that could be called Luciferian [19]. The aspiring absolute sovereign, or the aspiring Luciferian, considers all code, and all Law, to be wasteful. All creation, all of Creation, and all the codes in it, are wasteful. All constitute a crime against the pure potential which, in the very process of their creation, was depleted. All are a terrible crime against the pure potential of life. In their coded structures they are nothing but restriction. They restrict potential ways of being. They are wasteful. In a world of codes, and Law, there is path dependency. Earlier choices will restrict the scope for further choices. In such a world one simply cannot eat one’s cake, and still have it. And that, the Luciferian holds, has become unacceptable. The aspiring absolute sovereign, like Lucifer himself, the Bearer and Keeper of the Light, the First Born Son of God, wants to dwell in the zone of pure potential. His desire, his will, is to be able to bathe in this primordial zone of obliterating Light, away from anything and anyone that suggest code, or Law. Like Lucifer, the aspiring Luciferian would not have a problem at all if creation, if all Creation was reversed and undone. Of course this desire, or this will, is highly illusory, paradoxical, and the cherished goal is impossible. He who aspires to be absolutely free from code is, quite simply, captured by it. But that is not the point here. The point is that the aspiring Luciferian lives in an imaginary world in which a life lived in sheer potential *is* possible.

The Luciferian may be able to walk with the Hopi on the road of non-submission, but the jointly travelled stretch may well be very short indeed. The Hopi pre-occupation with “balance” leaves the Luciferian completely indifferent. The Self here is imagined as a void. Unlike the Hopi Self, the Luciferian’s is not supposed to accommodate any process at all, let alone one that is geared towards achieving balanced integration. As a void –which, by definition, is imagined to hover in absolute isolation, away from all code and all law- the Self has a number of options, all of them problematic and self-defeating. The Self can for example decide to withdraw into hermetic isolation, not unlike the *hikikomori* in Japan, who content themselves to live an immobile life behind their computer screens on which the gradual entropic unravelling of the world plays out before their indifferent eyes. Or the Self may decide to ‘live’ in the void of death, that is, by actually eliminating all potential for anything like a code –and the impositions and seductions that come with them- to present itself before its senses. In death, there are no codes threatening to expose the Self’s vulnerabilities and inadequacies. Seen this way, suicide and murderous destruction share a common origin, i.e. the desire, or the will, to live in the void of absolute sovereignty, on the one hand, and the fear of not being adequate enough to make that happen, on the other.

The Self can also decide to put all conscious reflection on hold (its void-like nature would make that imaginable) and throw itself, as mere body, into the pure dynamics of Natural Law, perhaps in a bid to hone its illusions of control, or perhaps just to become one, and therefore all powerful, with the raw forces of nature, in the flow of what Georges Bataille [3] called “continuous life”, and Michel Maffesoli [20] “neo-tribal puissance”. A few *faux sovereigns* may, as psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smigler [8] has argued, of course also decide to engage in all kinds of perversion in a bid create their own unnatural, unholy, or indeed “devilish” codes, but one would hesitate to call them Luciferians; they are still very much captured by code, first of all by their own desire to create and, second, by the codes that they are desperately trying to invert.

All of the above strategies are self-defeating for at their imaginary, unreachable point of achievement, all sovereignty will be lost. In its imaginary void, the Luciferian Self wants to desire or ‘will’ nothing. But it also has to refute *that*. It has to also, at the same time, desire or will *all and everything*. And again: it also feels compelled to refute *that* in turn. Facing this paradox, some Luciferians are inclined to temporarily allow a number of codes into the void, only to reject them later and start all over again, denying or discarding any potential path dependency. In other words: living as if, having eaten the cake of full potential, they still had it. Recent interventions in the twitter-sphere, for example, may give us a sense of the extent to which this mode of Luciferianism has managed to pervade global political and diplomatic (or not-so-diplomatic) culture.

Luciferian life is a life of utter agony. All is repressed. Nothing is repressed. To make the problem even worse it may be possible to argue that life in the Mega Capital/City has now generated a level of awareness of its underlying code (Reggio’s *Koyaanisqats*i may have been instrumental in generating this awareness) but not, however, in the sense that it has led to a Hopi-style acceptance of a need for “balance”, but, rather, to a radicalisation of the non-submissive mood in the direction of a Luciferian “default logic” that refuses ALL code. This “default logic” is now itself operating as a code, or a Law, in its own right. It imposes a form of life on Selves who, if they accept to submit to its command, are bound to live their lives in utter agony. It may not take an Adlerian *Individual-*psychologist to see that the Luciferian command to be absolutely sovereign could never be fulfilled. It is destined to lead to the fear of failure and to all that results from this fear.

**Conclusion**

Godfrey Reggio’s iconic film *Koyaanisqatsi* was an experience when it was released in 1982. Quite literally so: the visual characteristics of the film as well as its musical score made a serious attempt to physically shake audiences into awareness. Hinting –but only just- at Hopi cosmology and beliefs, the film pointed towards the cliff-edge where the world, and at its heart, the rabid cybernetics of Mega Capital/City, were heading. In this contribution we have made an effort to explore elements in Hopi culture to see how those may be able to open vistas on alternative, less destructive forms of life. Although conservative, and conservationist, and focused very much on achieving a “balance” of multiplicities, Hopi beliefs and attitudes are also nourished from a deep wellspring of non-submissiveness. This non-submissiveness, often disguised as what some call individualism, could also be discerned in the very culture that spawned the Mega Capital/City. It could therefore be argued that the point is to find ways to mobilise this inclination towards non-submission and to steer it onto more “balanced” pathways, Hopi-style as it were. However, the very aforementioned wellspring of non-submissiveness has, over the decades, generated radical aspirations to achieve absolute sovereignty to such an extent that there are reasons to call them Luciferian. However paradoxical and illusory those aspirations may be, they do tend to undermine the conditions of possibility for anything like a more “balanced” form of life to emerge from the wastelands left in the wake of the crime that we have called here Mega Capital/City. Whether or not it might be possible for Reggio’s *Koyaanisqatsi* to have an impact on 21st century audiences the way it did on those in 1982 remains to be seen. One could have some doubts here. In a Luciferian culture the Self imagines itself to be void, unreachable by, and impervious to anything that suggests an *ought,* a *should*, or a *must.* And the Luciferian body itself has become largely irrelevant. Either it is completely discarded by a Self that hides, indifferent, in its untouchable void of sovereignty, or it is submerged, by an unthinking, indifferent and absent self, in the purely reflex-like associations and interactions of the flesh. If all this holds true, and to the extent that it does, then, in other words, there no longer is a body that knows one impact from the next. There may no longer be a Self that can be shaken into awareness.

**Coda: Lucifer’s Law**

It was always clear that Lucifer never liked law. Law, like any other code, restricts and, in the process, wastes energy, and therefore potential. Those in this age of ours with Luciferian aspiration, are likely to share the Bearer of Light’s inclination. To the extent that our age has indeed become Luciferian, and that a desire for, or will to absolute, radically absolute sovereignty away from all law and code, is now beginning to colour the default operational ‘logic’ that is underpinning a variety of forms of life at the far end of Sloterdijk’s spectrum of “bastard”-ness, the world of law is bound to experience its impact.

To the aspiring Luciferian all that rests on judgment and decision is merely an unwelcome piece of solidity and coherence that, floating in what ought to be the calm fluidity, or indeed the vacuum of life, should be eluded at all cost. Your piece of legislation, this international agreement, that verdict … all are unfortunate and wasteful obstacles that, if necessary, can and should be waded through, with something like cool indifference in the heart. The Luciferian is not afraid of paradox. If it takes judgment, legislation, agreement or verdict to elude the solidities of life, then so be it. Why, the aspiring Luciferian wonders, would he have to worry about this paradox? What is this code that he would have to submit to? The one that says ‘Thou Shalt avoid Paradox’? The Luciferian submits to no law, to no code. He calmly continues his wading.

But in the Luciferian imaginary this aspiration is just that: aspiration. In the real world the life of aspiring Luciferians is shot through with sheer agony. All attempts at eluding law and code in a bid to preserve potential are destined to waste it. The paradox hurts. Everything hurts. And everything thus pushes the aspiring Luciferian further down the road of impossible sovereignty. The road of further agony.

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