

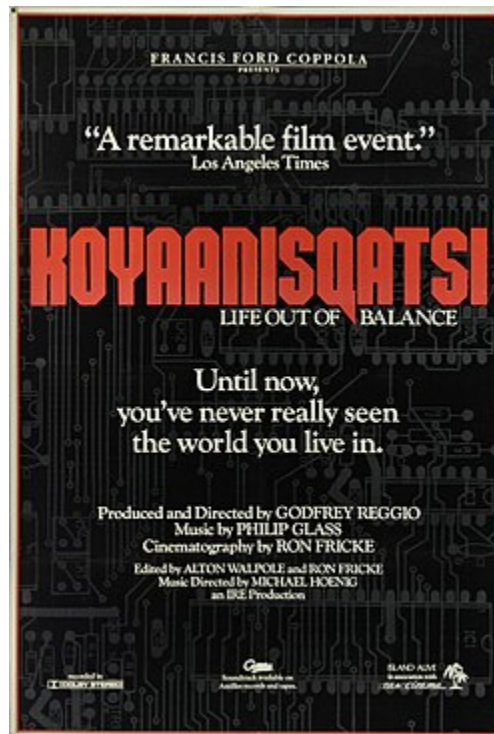
SOUNDS IN BALANCE

Exploring Phillip Glass' *"Pruit Igoe"*, from *Koyaanisqatsi*

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“Until now, you’ve never really seen the world you live in.” In 1982, this tagline was printed on movie posters. Above and below it were encouraging phrases - “‘A remarkable film event’ - Los Angeles Times”; “Francis Ford Coppola Presents”; mysteriously, the subtitle “Life Out Of Balance”. But most prominent, and most perplexing, was the picture’s title. *Koyaanisqatsi*.



“Koyaanisqatsi” poster

Ko-Ya-Nis-Katsi (From The Hopi Language) 1. Crazy Life. 2. Life In Turmoil. 3. Life Disintegrating. 4. Life Out Of Balance. 5. A State Of Life That Calls For Another Way Of Living

This text was not on that strange poster, but rather on the film’s album cover, placed between the picture’s title and an innocuous line of white text at the bottom of the sleeve: “ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSED BY PHILLIP GLASS”.

Koyaanisqatsi, directed by Godfrey Reggio, is an experimental documentary film released in 1982. The film features no presenter, narration, or dialogue, and in only one brief scene may any diegetic sound be heard. The film’s soundscape is instead entirely composed of

Phillip Glass' score. The documentary contains no explicit narrative, but utilizes shots of nature, humanity, and industry in combination with Glass' unusual score to create atmosphere and emotion.

The film was praised in its time, and remains a cult classic. Glass' score alone has been parodied, referenced, and repurposed in innumerable media properties. *Scrubs*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *The Simpsons* are among the many who have paid homage to *Koyaanisqatsi's* strange soundscape (Wikipedia contributor, n.d.). To decipher why this music has captivated so many for so long, it is important to examine Glass' process and execution through the lens of one of *Koyaanisqatsi's* most famous compositions: *Pruit Igoe*.

In the early 1950s, the city of St. Louis found itself with a housing crisis. A population of over 850,000 was overwhelming the system, and the local government believed that a radical project was in order. They commissioned Wendell O. Pruitt Homes and William Igoe Apartments, known together as "Pruitt-Igoe" (Rainwater, 1970).



Pruitt-Igoe

The result was a massive complex of apartment blocks, built to house upwards of 12,000 tenants. The project was extremely innovative for the time, featuring towering units, beautiful greenery, and visual design that was considered striking. Initially, Pruitt-Igoe was celebrated as a success by both the city and its residents. However, it would not be long before the feelings of the tenants began to change.

While the complex was legally integrated, 60 percent of its units were occupied by black citizens. This number would climb to 100 percent by the mid 1960s. In a time and place marked by racial inequality, the Pruitt-Igoe complex would quickly find itself neglected by the city who commissioned it. Maintenance slowed, then stopped altogether. As time wore on, flaws in the apartment's design began to grow clear. Tight corridors and stairwells became hotspots for

mugging, and petty violence and vandalism (the majority of which was not conducted by residents) ravaged the complex.

Pruitt-Igoe was losing money, and it was losing tenants. The city read the spray paint on the walls and decided it was time to close the book on the residency. After spending several years encouraging tenants to seek other units, demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe development began in 1972. In 2026, the site of the ill-fated complex is vacant and forested. A project once heralded as a shining beacon of modern housing and architecture was annihilated without a trace.

The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe was still ongoing during the filming of *Koyaanisqatsi*, and Director Reggio, a St. Louis resident, did not hesitate to incorporate footage of this event in his film. To score this long history of population and destruction, Glass created one of the most memorable pieces from the entire film. To understand how, it is important to first examine the scene beat by beat and decipher its intricacies through one of Glass' most trusted tools.

HARMONIC STRUCTURE

"Pruit Igoe" is a long and intricate piece. Not only does the film inform its soundtrack, but as will be discussed later, the soundtrack informed the film as well. The piece may be divided into three larger sections: an intro, body section, and outro. Within these sections are repeated segments signified by rehearsal numbers. To cover the piece and how it fits the scene, the harmony will be examined and dissected alongside a textual abstract of the scene's imagery.

Glass utilized chord cycles, ostinatos, motifs, and extensive repetition to tell different stories and emphasize moments. The harmony is a minimalist playground, doing as much as possible with as few notes as it can. This leads to a set of chord cycles with relatively few chords, especially for a film score, but through Glass's expert use of instrumentation, repetition, variation, and harmony, "Pruit Igoe" becomes an infectious vehicle for a harrowing scene.

Section 1 - Introduction



Fig. 1 - Segment 1: a cello repeats an eighth note ostinato

The piece begins with strings alone. They are quiet, piano -- a contrabass lays down a droning tonic A while higher above, a viola matches with an E. Between this fifth, a cello repeats an eighth note ostinato outlining A and E as well.

The strings begin the piece by exploring the harmonic series. In the scene, the camera remains uncharacteristically docile. It dwells on buildings and structures that while unmistakably human, lack movement or life. It is quiet and wistful. If not for the origin of these structures, it would be as it once was before humanity-- a more subdued, more natural world. These open fifths highlight this immediately. The notes, lacking a distinct quality, should be neutral, but the space between them glares at the audience like the ruined buildings on screen. These spaces sit and wait, like the camera, for something to change and contextualize this strange state.

5a. Pruitt-Igoe

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "5a. Pruitt-Igoe". It is divided into two segments. Segment 1, marked with a box containing the number "1", spans measures 1 through 4. It includes a tempo indication of quarter note = 100. The instrumentation consists of piccolo flute (picc fl), viola (va), cello/viola (vc), and contrabass (Cb.). The viola plays a sustained note with a piano (p) dynamic. The cello/viola and contrabass play eighth-note patterns. Segment 2, marked with a box containing the number "3", spans measures 5 through 8. In this segment, the piccolo flute enters with a melodic line, while the other instruments continue their patterns. A double bar line separates the two segments.

Fig. 2 - Segment 2: The voices occupying the fifth of the chord move up a half step.

Once these first repeated measures conclude, the meter gains an eighth note, while the harmony initially stays the same. The contrabass continues its A drone while the viola mimics the cellos ostinato in a higher octave. The viola deviates from the pattern by outlining the full chord in order, A-C-E. The quality of the tonic has been revealed. One measure into this new section the harmony changes. The voices occupying the fifth of the chord move up a half step. The notes have changed from A-C-E to A-C-F. The harmony has changed from an A minor to an F/A. This lasts a measure before the outer voice drops back down a half step to return to the A chord. This measure passes before the outer voice drops again to E flat, and an A diminished chord is outlined. This resolves back to A minor and the cycle is repeated again. So far, any distinct harmony has been defined by the movement of an outer voice over an unchanging bassline of A. This will not be the last instance of such a practice.

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, labeled '3', includes staves for Piccolo Flute (picc fl) and Viola (va). The second system, labeled '4', includes staves for Viola (va), Violoncello (vc), and Contrabass (Cb). The Viola and Cello parts are marked with a forte (f) dynamic and show a stepwise scalar descent on eighth notes. The Piccolo Flute part is mostly silent, with a few notes in the first system. The Contrabass part is mostly silent, with a few notes in the second system.

Fig. 3 - Segment 3: A stepwise scalar descent

The third segment features a stepwise scalar descent, played on eighth notes by viola and cello. The contrabass, normally laying down a stubborn bass note, has stepped away for the moment. The melody descends the A natural minor scale to D, climbs back up to F before jumping up to the A again. This is followed by a half step down to the leading tone on the last beat of the 9/8 bar. The starting note of A and the ending two notes of A-G# establish a pattern. The alteration comes in the next measure, where instead of descending the scale A-G and so on, the first A is followed by an F, which from there descends to B, climbs back up to D before leaping to the pattern's closer of A-G#. The next measure develops the pattern further by following the opening A with a descent from E to Bb, a climb once more to D before hitting the A-G# closing figure. To end this scalar segment, the viola and cello descend in unison tremolo notes down two octaves of the A phrygian scale, the second octave being taken over by the contrabass.

The image displays a musical score for Segment 4, consisting of two systems of staves. The staves are labeled: pic fl (Piccolo Flute), va (Viola), vc (Violoncello), and Cb (Contrabass). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems, labeled 4 and 5. The music features a steady eighth-note pattern in the lower strings and a more complex, melodic line in the viola and upper strings. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig 4 - Segment 4: Tension is built

This leads into segment 4. A near identical repeat of segment 2, the alteration comes in the fourth measure of the segment. Where before an A diminished was outlined, the inclusion of an F sharp in the viola's pattern implies an ambiguous diminished seventh chord of some variety. Though we lack a C note to complete this proposed chord, the spelling of F sharp and the presence of unchanging C in the measure prior lends the hypothetical seventh chord a very real credence. Where once this portion of the segment was held by a simple A diminished, this sound is more ambiguous. Tension is built as the audience picks up on these subtle, uneasy harmonic changes. Thus far, the harmony has tiptoed about on the floor of that ominous contrabass drone, making careful, stepwise changes. It encircles the A minor chord that waits below it all, and the motion is not unlike a downwards spiral, or perhaps, an unraveling.

The image displays a musical score for Segment 5, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system is labeled '5' and the second system is labeled '5A'. The third system is unlabeled. The staves are arranged as follows: piccolo flute (picc fl), violin (va), viola (vc), cello (Cb), and double bass (Cb). The score shows a complex melodic line in the violin and viola, with a cello and double bass drone. The piccolo flute has a tremolo pattern. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 5 - Segment 5: The introduction concludes

The larger introduction section of the piece is about to conclude, but not before the fifth marked segment. It is identical to the third segment, with its scalar pattern bookended by the A and the A-G# movement. This segment, like its original iteration, lacks a distinct harmony, and chooses instead to highlight the strange notes inside the pattern to build mystery and tension. The lack of a contrabass drone marked this segment as different, almost like a great inhalation of breath before a release. It's not entirely clear where these runs will take the piece, but that final tremolo walkdown that ends both the 3rd and 5th segments has a clear direction-- it marches for the tonic. In the last segment this meant returning to the soft, foreboding string texture of the previous segments. However, while the Phrygian walkdown that concludes the fifth segment does return to tonic, the piece will find itself completely transformed once it gets there.

Section 2 - Body



Fig. 6 - Segment 6: The opening of the main section begins

Everything changes.

Just looking at the score, one would be forgiven for thinking another soundtrack has begun.

Where once, only Viola, Cello, Contrabass, and an empty piccolo line were present, the score has included a myriad of new instruments; Soprano sax, four horns, 6 trumpets, 6 trombones, a tuba... but when the 6th marked segment, and the opening of the second main section begins, the ear is dominated by one distinct instrument.

A synthesizer plays in tight, mechanical arpeggios, its mechanical bass voice cutting through the lowly strings which once occupied the mix, and now only attempt to mimic the keyboard's robotic tones. Together, they outline an A minor chord in triplets, the rhythm and instrumentation crashing in and contrasting heavily with the opening section. The audience is given but two measures to adjust to this new soundscape before the rest of the orchestra joins in.

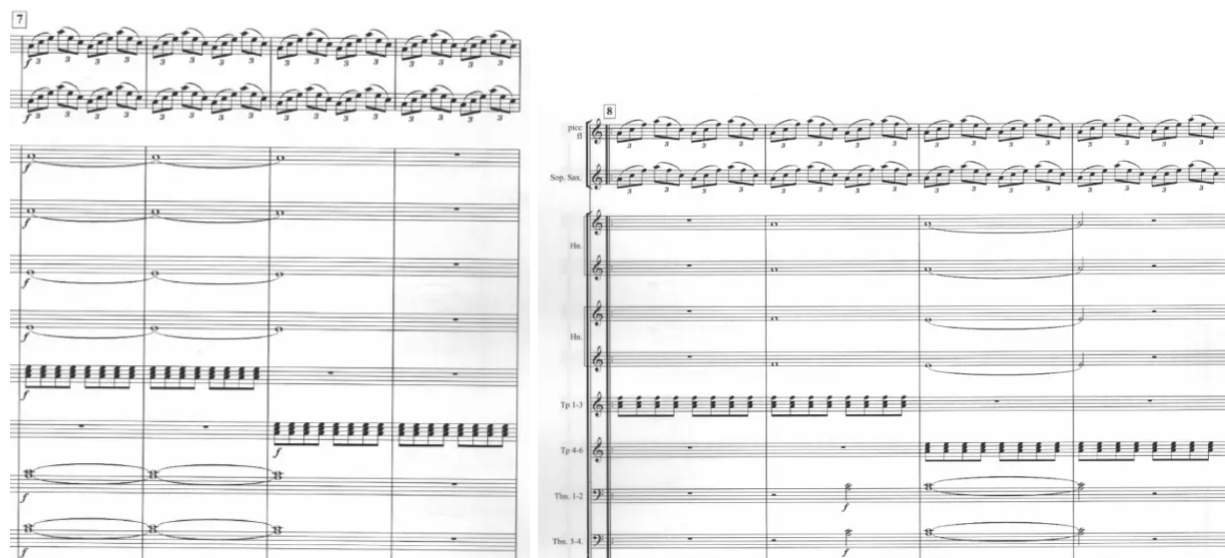


Fig. 7 - Segments 7 and 8: Glass' orchestral hammer

The previous two measures were not but a breath before Glass' orchestral hammer came down. The seventh segment arrives with a crash-- piccolo flute and soprano sax double the keyboard arpeggio, the gaps in timbre and pitch providing a frantic soundscape the fights against the mechanical triplets in which it's contained. The horns and low brass explode into the mix with sustained whole notes stating the A minor chord. Most notably however are the trumpets. They stack in thirds to cry out the same A minor chord, and these blocks are heard in repeated, marching eighth notes. In the scene, the camera has abandoned its subdued movement and proceeds to soar above the ruined giants of Pruitt Igoe. Segment 8 arrives in turn. Momentarily, the low brass drops out so the harmony can change. The outer voice in the trumpets moves up a half step to spell an F/A chord. For a moment, the piece reaches for something more positive, less ominous. The major chord is allowed to sing without the low brass pulling it back to Earth. But it is all for naught. Horns match the trumpets for their F chord on beat 3, but they only herald the return of the treacherous trombones. Though the harmony strives for something greater, it slams back down to A minor again.

Fig. 8 - Segment 9: The sound is harsh

The segment marked 9 begins like the previous, the trumpets striving for that F chord. Atop, horns pulse against each quarter note, outlining the chords spoken by the trumpets, strings, woodwinds, and keyboard. The low brass interjects occasionally before dropping out. Despite their attempts to pull it down, the harmony dares step up once more. The outer voice rises another half step, forming an F#dim/A. This too is in vain as the F sharp drops to an E flat in the next measure-- an A diminished chord. Its sound is harsh, and it puts to bed any notion of greater harmonic ascension. From this, there is only one place to go. The outer voice steps back up to E and returns to A minor, the blasting low brass marking the occasion.

So far, these segments have taken inspiration from the harmonic framework of the Intro section. While their meter has remained fixed and the chords are not an exact parallel, they still function using stepwise motion stemming from the fifth of the tonic chord. The harmony of this new bombastic section circles the tonic like a shiver of sharks that smell blood on the water.

The musical score for Segment 12 features the following parts:

- Trumpets 1-3 (Tp 1-3):** Play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *f* (forte).
- Trumpets 4-6 (Tp 4-6):** Enter with a similar rhythmic pattern, marked *f*.
- Trombones 1-2 (Tbn. 1-2):** Play a sustained note, marked *f*.
- Trombones 3-4 (Tbn. 3-4):** Play a sustained note, marked *f*.
- Baritone Trombone (B. Tbn.):** Play a sustained note, marked *f*.
- Tuba (Tbn.):** Play a sustained note, marked *f*.
- Choir:** Enter with a vocal line marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *sim.* (sustained). The syllables are "da da da da".
- Keyboard (Kbd.):** Play a continuous triplet pattern of eighth notes.

Fig. 10 - Segment 12 : the choir enters for the first time

The segment marked 12 (*the score has skipped rehearsal mark 11*) continues the chordal pattern of A minor - F/A - A minor with a very important addition. At the arrival of the F chord, the choir enters for the first time. On syncopated beats, the cry-- the voices are human, they are written unnaturally. They attack abruptly with no decay. Their syllables they sing consist only of the "BA" sound (notated as "da"), and they match the low brass' long call once the return to A minor has occurred.

Fig. 11 - Segment 13: The segment continues the pattern

This segment continues the pattern of A minor - F/A - F#dim/A - A dim - A minor. On the F chord, the voices mimic the trumpets, but return to their syncopated cries for the F# diminished and A diminished chords. Once more, they match the low brass drone for the return to A minor.

Fig. 12 - Segment 14: The trumpets of Jericho

In the return to the scalar section, the voices have changed again. They chant the chords in ultra staccato eighth notes, unnaturally synthetic in their calls. At their strange cry, the scene at Pruitt Igoe begins to unravel. The aerial shots of apartment buildings have been replaced by a shot of just one structure. Debris rockets from its bottom floors, and the building begins to fall. The Trumpets of Jericho have sounded, and the demolition has begun. Great plumes of dust burst from innumerable windows, and one after another, gargantuan apartment blocks sag and implode.

Fig. 13 - Segment 15: The harmonic foundation has collapsed

The chordal cycle of A minor - F/A - F#dim/A - A dim - A minor has finally ended. The tension was too great, and like the doomed buildings of Pruitt-Igoe, the harmonic foundation has collapsed. The texture is still booming brass, chanting trumpets and voices, arpeggiated chords and syncopated horns, but the chords tell a darker story. The destructive imagery on screen departs St. Louis as we see cranes, bridges, and more explode and implode in succession. In a haunting shot, a great, gray skyscraper, framed between a city block, collapses in a cloud of rubble. Pruitt-Igoe was officially demolished in 1972. Less than a year later, her architect, Minoru Yamasaki, would see another work of his completed: The World Trade Center in New York City.

At this change to a greater variety of destruction, the chord is a previously unheard Ab major. In a twist inversion on the previous harmonic formula of stepping up the outer voice, the lowest voice of the chord steps down a whole step to form a Cdim/Gb chord. This is brought back home to A minor in the following measures, but the piece is irreversibly altered. The simple stepwise motion that defined the harmonic cycle before has been stretched. Multiple voices now move at different intervals. While we return to a chord that sounds tonic, there is no sacred note around which the harmony revolves like before. The cycle has been warped and widened. Where before, the chords of the cycle were only slight variations from the chords of the key, this new cycle abandons any associations with a scale. This new chaos dreadfully reflects the immense shots of humanity annihilating its own creations.

The image displays two musical score excerpts for Segment 16. The top excerpt shows measures 1 through 4, and the bottom excerpt shows measures 5 through 8. The instruments listed on the left are Piccolo (Picc.), Saxophone (Sop. Sax.), Horns (Hr.), Trumpets (Tp 1-3, Tp 4-6), and Trombones (Tbn. 1-2, Tbn. 3-4). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ff' (fortissimo). The key signature is one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 14 - Segment 16: the tension stretches

With the next segment the cycle is initially repeated. This time around, Glass' additive process generates an extra measure to occupy the Ab major and C diminished areas of the cycle. On

screen, building after building collapses as the tension stretches. The final four measures of the Body section of the piece feature horns, voices, and trumpets locked together in staccato eighth notes. Each trombone blasts some register of F while everything else spells a harsh cluster chord, written as Fb, C, and Eb. At this last zenith of tension, the most chaotic shot yet greedily fills the screen-- a close up of an explosion, all dust, rubble, and splinters. Like the grating chord that screams the end of the Body section, it is unclear what this mess once represented.

Section 3 - the Outro

The image displays a musical score for two segments, 17 and 18. Segment 17 is marked 'Molto Mosso' and features staves for Piccolo, Choir, Violins (va), Violas (vc), Vocals (vb), and Cello (Cb). Segment 18 begins with a 'legato (independent breaths)' instruction and includes vocal lyrics 'lu lu lu lu lu lu lu lu (sim.)' and 'looh (sim.)'. A double bar line with a repeat sign is shown between the two segments.

Fig 15 - Segments 17 & 18: Passed without fanfare

At first, a listener may think the piece has cut to silence. However, the seventeenth segment of the piece, and the first of the outro has arrived. We return to an exact repetition of the first segment of the soundtrack from the intro, this time twice as long. This segment is passed without fanfare before the 18th segment begins. In the strings, it is an exact repetition of the 2nd segment-- the pattern of A minor - F/A - A minor - A diminished is present, alongside the

changing time signatures. Over top, the choir sings. At last, they may sing in lilting, soft syllables, “lu-s” and “ooh-s”, a welcome contrast to the hammering, type-writer chanting of the Body section. The treble voices of the choir do chant eighth note chords, but softest piano, nestled into legato so they blend into a continuous sound. The bass voices drone on their chords, mimicking the contrabass. Each chord, save for the F major, is voiced in first inversion. While the strings may have returned exactly and literally to their roots, the presence of voices reminds us that the crisis of humanity continues. The piece begins its transition to the next portion of the film, leaving Pruitt-Igoe behind, but the voices never do completely resolve to their root position. While the next several scenes are notably more positive in score and subject, featuring breathtaking city life montages and chirping keyboards, the grotesque images and sounds of Pruitt-Igoe will remain in the back of their minds.

GLASS’ PROCESS

The circumstances of *Koyaanisqatsi*’s creation are unusual in the film industry. Director Godfrey Reggio, cinematographer Ron Fricke, and of course, composer Phillip Glass functioned as a triad of masterminds, and their methods certainly yielded striking results. In the case of the film’s score, it is important to examine Phillip Glass’ unusual process, and the unorthodox relationship between his movie and *Koyaanisqatsi*’s final cut.

In his book, *Four musical minimalists : La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, author Keith Potter discussed several of Glass’ enduring musical influences. “For Glass, an interest in Indian theatre traditions had recently been augmented by his first experience of North Indian classical music” (Potter, 2000, pg. 257). These experiences with Indian classical music informed many of Glass’ works throughout his life, most notably with his continued use of additive process.

“The origins of the ‘additive process’ lie in Indian music, and the basic idea is that the technique takes a bar of music containing a certain group of notes and repeats it several times. To this group is then added an additional note, and then another, and so on” (Lodal,). On this process, Glass himself would write “A simple figure can expand and then contract in many different ways, maintaining the same general melodic configuration but, because of the addition of one note, it takes on a very different rhythmic shape” (Glass, quoted in Lodel). Following his Indian music experiences, additive process would take center stage on many of Glass’ compositions, including much of *Koyaanisqatsi*’s score. In *Pruitt Igoe* however, Glass expands

the ideas of addition and subtraction beyond rhythm and into realms of both meter and harmony. In using this technique, Glass develops a piece with an everchanging, yet coherent pulse, generating forward momentum through the alterations of notes, rhythms, and meters.

Additive process is demonstrated in Pruitt Igoe in just its first three measures. The piece opens with the eighth note ostinato discussed in the harmonic analysis section. This is repeated once before an addition is made, beginning in the third measure. The time signature changes to 9/8 to allow for an addition of one eighth note to the rhythmic ostinato.

5a. Pruitt-Igoe

picc fl

va

vc

Cb

♩ = 100

1 2

Fig 16: Additive process is demonstrated

Following this, a subtractive process is utilized to further alter the original rhythmic motif. The time signature shifts to 7/8, subtracting one eighth note from the initial motif.

3

picc fl

va

vc

Cb

Fig 17: the subtractive process is utilized

These additive and subtractive processes accomplish different things across several scales of observation. On the small scale, they create rhythmic interest by offsetting what may otherwise be an uninteresting rhythmic motif. Adding or subtracting a beat creates another level of

rhythmic tension. This is especially evident in the transition from the 7/8 bars back to the 4/4 bars. Moving from 9/8 to 7/8 drops two whole eighth notes of duration from the bar, driving the pace forward quickly without altering actual tempo. This makes the transition back to 4/4 seem like a rhythmic resolution as we return to an even time signature with a duration between that of 7 and 9/8.

On a medium scale, the changing of meters themselves, as well as the repeats that inform them, create a different sort of additive process. Looking back to the opening bars of *Pruitt Igoe*, the piece begins with two bars of 4/4. This is followed by a repeated section containing the 9/8 addition, followed by the 4/4 bars, followed by one bar of 12/8 to serve as momentary resolution before repeating. This is followed by another enclosed repeated section which adds the 7/8 bars between the 9/8 and 4/4 sections.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "5a. Pruitt-Igoe". The score is written for five staves: Piccolo Flute (picc fl), Violin (va), Viola (vc), and Cello (Cb). The music is divided into three measures, each marked with a number in a box (1, 2, 3). Measure 1 is in 4/4 time, marked with a tempo of quarter note = 100 and a dynamic of *p*. Measure 2 is in 9/8 time, marked with a dynamic of *p*. Measure 3 is in 7/8 time, marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The score shows various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A double bar line with a repeat sign is visible between measures 2 and 3.

Fig 18: The changing of meters

In doing so, Glass has carefully foreshadowed the rhythmic and time frameworks of the rest of the piece. This recurring pattern of 9/8, 7/8, 4/4, and 12/8 will appear frequently later in the piece. By introducing each of these cells, defined by a changing time signature, Glass both allows the audience to become accustomed to the changes and creates growing rhythmic tension. This is especially important in the beginning of the piece. It is notably sparser and

dynamically softer than the second main section of the piece. Because this section arrives rather abruptly via a proto beat-drop, it is important for the opening section to develop rhythmic tension to earn this sudden transition. By altering the time signatures to provide rhythmic tension and reprieve, Glass creates a palpable push and pull sensation. The audience can feel the piece building towards something, but due to the repetition and previously established additive nature of the piece, they are not sure when this release will come.

Finally, this altering of time signatures mirrors one of the main harmonic elements of *Pruitt Igoe*. Much of both the intro and middle sections of the piece function around the chord cycle of Am - F/A - Am - F/A - F#dim/A - Adim - A. These changes are accomplished through mostly stepwise movements of the outer voice, circling around the unchanged notes of A and E.

The changing of time signatures can be viewed as a mirror of this outer voice movement. Again, we begin in 4/4, representing the root position A minor chord. We add to the last beat of the time signature when we move to 9/8, mimicking the increase in the interval between the second and third voice as it rises to F and later F sharp. The time signature then leaps backwards two eighth notes to 7/8, one eighth note less than the baseline 4/4. This mimics the harmonic change between F# diminished and A diminished, as the outer voice leaps backwards 3 half steps to Eb. Finally, the time signature gains an eighth note, returning to 4/4 while the outer voices rise a half step, returning to A minor and completing the cycle.

This interplay between harmony and meter demonstrates Glass' exquisite understanding and application of minimalist processes. While the meters and rhythms change, they consistently play off each other to add balance to what would be an unstable sound. His use of additive process creates a soundtrack with a pulse that is both unusual and cohesive, providing the audience with a unique experience that both allows them to parse the musical ideas while demanding focus.

A second method Glass employs in *Pruitt Igoe* is the cyclic process. "Cyclic process, as the composer describes it, involves 'something that lasts maybe thirty-five beats and then begins the cycle again. Then you join cycles of different beats, like wheels inside wheels, everything going at the same time and always changing'" (Potter, 2000, pg. 273). Indeed, Glass' use of chord cycles goes hand in hand with the cyclic process used in *Pruitt Igoe*. Segments,

wrapped in repeat brackets, are marked with rehearsal numbers. These brackets contain the chord cycles discussed above, and while several of these segments are as short as 8 quarter note beats, most fall around 32 beats, matching closely with Glass' description of the cyclic process in *Four Musical Minimalists*.

These cycles are one part of Glass' extensive use of repetition in *Pruit Igoe*. Of the 18 key marked segments, only 4 are not enclosed within repeat brackets. Within these segments repetition can be found at every scale. Rhythms, chord cycles, and motives are all relentlessly repeated and developed with changes of dynamics, texture, and instrumentation.

The image shows a musical score for Segment 15, titled "Contrast". The score is written for a large ensemble, including Piccolo Flute (picc. fl.), Soprano Saxophone (Sop. Sax.), Horns (Hn.), Trumpets (Tp 1-3 and Tp 4-6), and Trombones (Tbn. 1-2 and Tbn. 3-4). The Piccolo Flute and Soprano Saxophone parts are marked with a rehearsal number "15" and a dynamic marking "f". They play a complex, repetitive rhythmic pattern. The Horns and Trumpets parts are marked with a dynamic marking "f" and play a simpler, repetitive rhythmic pattern. The Trombone parts are marked with a dynamic marking "f" and play a simple, repetitive rhythmic pattern. The score is written in a standard musical notation with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 4/4.

Fig. 19 - Segment 15: Contrast

There are several key effects created by this repetition, with one being contrast. Bars upon bars before the fifteenth segment hammer in a repeated harmonic cycle. While the cycle is developed thoroughly enough to remain captivating, its enduring presence is still felt as an almost immovable foundation. This is changed upon the arrival of segment fifteen and the introduction of a new chordal cycle, the change being extremely noticeable due to its contrast with the repeated structure established before. This change accompanies the scene moving

away from Pruitt-Igoe to depict other demolitions, and the noticeable break of repetition conveys a feeling of dread as the audience realizes that the story of that ill-fated apartment block is the story of all of urban America. While the repeated sections were harsh, with creeping chords and blasting horns, they were at least consistent, predictable. When this predictability is broken, the audience is captivated in the dreadful anticipation of what will follow.

However, a similar dread can be found in the initial consistency of *Pruitt Igoe*'s cycles of repetition. Their endless recurrence set to bleak and destructive imagery makes the horrors of urban life seem as inevitable as the return of a motif, or the striking of an A minor chord. The repetition reminds the audience that stories like *Pruitt-Igoe*, stories of corruption and neglect continue to ravage anyplace that humans choose to gather, and the results will be as destructive as the eventual cyclic collapse that the piece falls victim to.

Text painting is an important part of many film scores, and Glass' work for *Koyaanisqatsi* wears this on its sleeve. "To depict the decay and destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex, in St. Louis, the composer writes a monstrous neo-Baroque moto perpetuo, which, as the buildings fall, devolves into nothing more than descending scales" (Ross, 2005). Director Reggio spoke on what he intended to express with the film, which would closely inform Glass' score.

"What I tried to show is that the main event today is not seen by those of us that live in it. We see the surface of the newspapers, the obviousness of conflict, of social injustice, of the market, welling up of culture... but to me the greatest event, or the most important event of perhaps our entire history, nothing comparable in the past of this event, is fundamentally gone unnoticed, and the event is the following: the transiting from all nature, or the natural environment, as our hosts of life for human habitation into a technological mulier- into mass technology as the environment of life" (Glass, 2002, 00:09:42).

This idea of the transition from the natural order to a technological state is present in much of Glass' score, particularly so in *Pruitt Igoe*. The piece begins with a churning strings section representing the traditional, the natural. This changes when the cinematography of the scene does. As the camera begins to soar overhead, raking in the apocalyptic views of the Pruitt Igoe

development, arpeggiated electric organ takes over the piece. A second organ, whistling like the wind upon which the camera flies, and locked equally into arpeggio as its companion, joins the soundscape. Brass marches in and thunders on-- it is progress manifest. Choral voices cry out in unnatural staccato, trying desperately to turn to tradition, or even warn us of what's to come, but the sound makes no illusions about the future. As it plugs on, we learn that this new technostate was preordained, inevitable, despite the cries of the voices. Buildings are blasted away to rubble, and their dread wreckage matches uncannily with the the Raptured landscape of Pruitt Igoe.

At the piece's crescendo at 6:00, the soundscape recedes, returning to something of a subdued combination of the natural and technological sections. In a static time lapse, clouds roll over a dark, smog-choked city skyline. Voices sing softly, mournfully over a string line not dissimilar from the piece's opening. Pruitt Igoe is no more-- it is demolished, annihilated from the Earth. In the coming years, its dread wreckage would be subsumed by trees and foliage. The static shot of the city combined with the softer outro of the score tells us that humanity has moved on, even from itself. The voices of humanity still remain over the outro. Pruitt Igoe may be gone, but try as it might it cannot be forgotten. The reckless spirit of the ill-fated development lives on, as it always will as long as industrialized life persists. This musical painting cannot be credited entirely to Glass, however, as one of the more interesting aspects of the scoring process introduces another player to this music.

In the bonus features for *Koyaanisqatsi's* DVD release, Glass comments on the director's reaction and implementation of his score during production.

"When he first gave me a cut of it I divided the cut into sections and I timed the sections. There were about 12, or 13, or 14, or maybe more different moments, and then I wrote music for each section and I put it together. Then Godfrey listened to that music and he completely reassembled the images so it didn't fit it all the way I thought it was going to. So basically I tried to put them together and he pushed them apart in a certain way, and I think it was right to. What he did in effect was he took of the ambience of the music instead of the structure of the music, and he cut to the ambience and not to the structure. So he cut to the feeling of music and not the way the music was built which turned out to be the right way to do it." (Glass, 2002, 00:16:31)

This approach is unusual for most films. Typically, a score undergoes some level of editing to fit the final cut of the film, but in the case of *Koyaanisqatsi*, director Reggio recut the film to fit the score. While Reggio does not address the specific edits he made after receiving Glass' score, the director described this new interplay of music and film as a "symbiotic relationship", and led to both the music and visuals informing each other, creating the breathtaking synergy present throughout the film.

LEGACY

The 1980s were no stranger to unusual and experimental films, but *Koyaanisqatsi* has endured longer in the public conscience than most of its contemporaries. There are many factors that contribute to this, particularly the lack of narration, which lends the film a globally accessible and timeless quality. However, Reggio's film is indivisible from that which truly cemented it in the annals of film history: Glass' music.



The Simpsons, S22 E09 - *Otto enjoys Koyaanisqatsi and some mushrooms*

Each track in *Koyaanisqatsi* tells a story in tandem with Reggio and Fricke's awe inspiring visuals. Strange and captivating instrumentation mixes with a hypnotic repetition to create what Gene Siskel would praise as a "meditation" (Siskel, 1983). Even amongst Glass' myriad entrancing tracks, the slow, oppressive chants of the title track, the frantic, childlike arpeggios of *The Grid*, the careful, angelic musings of *Vessells*, *Pruit Igoe* stands out. Its repetition is uniquely purposeful, structured carefully to mirror the harmony with the very meters of the piece. Its changes in instrumentation are built up by these structures and dashed to pieces alongside the buildings on screen. The scene is unquestionably the film's most grotesque, most violent, and *Pruit Igoe* captures this expertly with pronounced use of text painting that mimics everything

from a breath of wind to a collapse of urban ideals. Among the pieces of Glass' score, *Pruit Igoe* is one of the most performed and most viewed.



Dr. Manhattan, Watchmen, 2009

A notable and thematic use of *Pruit Igoe* can be observed in the 2009 adaptation of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*. While Glass' piece plays, John Osterman, now transformed into the godlike Dr. Manhattan, recalls his origin. The character experiences every moment of time simultaneously, and the scene is shown non-linearly, interspersing cuts of Osterman's past, present, and future, placing specific emphasis on his father's watch making business. This element of time and cyclic themes is enhanced by Glass' *Pruit Igoe*. The music is divorced from its original context. Its repetition and changing meters reflects the scene's emphasis on time, and its bombastic body section provides a fittingly grand and foreboding accompaniment to the arrival of an American god.

That is just one example of the many references to *Koyaanisqatsi* that can be found throughout pop culture, and each one tells a story. It is a story of grandiose mesas and congested streets; a story of cultic chants and fax machine arpeggios; a story of creation and destruction; a story of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. *Koyaanisqatsi* communicates something profound enough to resonate across generations. Like Dr. Manhattan, we question our past, present and future. Like the residents of Pruitt-Igoe, we experience the harshest slums of urban life. Like Otto the bus driver, we sit back and simply watch it all. There is no *Koyaaanisqatsi* without Phillip Glass' music to fill the silence, and there is no *Koyaanisqatsi* without *Pruit Igoe*. A scene, stabbed like a needle dead center into the film's runtime between seductive, painterly shots of vessels and vibrant, inspiring cityscapes reminds the audience, through its

everchanging and everrepeating drive, the lengths to which society pushes humanity through neglect, expansion, and modernization. This scene breaks a stretch of otherwise uplifting moments to ground the film in a horrifying and captivating spectacle. “Koyaanisqatsi”, in the Hopi language means “life out of balance”, but at the peak of its adoration of humanity, it is Glass’ entrancing *Pruit Igoe* that brings balance to the documentary itself.

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