

# 'Powaqgatsi' sends powerful message; 'Kansas' tries, but fails

By RICHARD SMITH  
Staff Writer

"Powaqgatsi" is not standard cinematic fare. Director Godfrey Reggio is riding on the acclaim of his 1983 film, "Koyaanisqatsi," (a Hopi Indian word meaning "life out of balance") with this second in what could become an impressive and profoundly important series.

"Koyaanisqatsi" concerned itself with the contrasts of the United States, using pictures and music alone to study the differences and similarities between the natural and the manmade in our society. It was experimental, and it was entertaining.

With "Powaqgatsi," Reggio's experiment has reached a more exciting stage. The subtitle of this one is "life in transformation," but more specifically powaqgatsi is an entity that consumes other lives purely for its own gain. Thus Reggio swoops his camera through the Third World in an urgent attempt to bring the true condition of our planet into the forefront of our minds. It is stunningly effective.

Reggio's vehicle drives in virtually the same way as before. There is no story as such; no dialogue. A plethora of images and a driving, reverberant score by Phillip Glass lead us from Peru to Israel, from Kenya to Nepal. It is deliberately unsettling; the audience never really knows where it is, in space or time. Reggio is very keen on the time-lapse and the mesmerizing slow-motion shot. He does not direct so much as choreograph the

world onto the screen. And we can do nothing other than join the dance.

Before our very eyes, fields of wheat melt into a sunlit sea. City traffic flows like a polluted river. Canted screens make airplanes dive into the ground and urban skyscrapers resemble pins in a faulty plug. Characters come alive; their faces alone say so much more than a word ever could. The camera pans in close-up a group of young children, focusing on each face in turn. An old, one-toothed man smiles into the camera and then, with excruciating slowness, his smile disappears from his face. A small girl stops to look at the camera; scrawled on the wall behind her are the words, "Viva la guerra de guerrillas." We see the nobility and integrity of these peoples against the crazy, all-encompassing influence of our world. Reggio has us exactly where he wants us, and it hurts.

"Powaqgatsi" has an immense scale and a message of supreme importance. Reggio makes his point with extraordinary vitality. It is rare to see a movie that can change the way you view the world.

"Kansas" is not quite as different a kettle of fish as one might expect. With such a presumptuous title it is clear that director David Stevens intends a slightly expansive frame of reference. The trouble is, it is all too general and stereotypical. Only when Stevens delves into the specific does his film succeed.



Pantyhose head Matt Dillon threatens to blow Andrew McCarthy's brains out in Kansas

"Kansas" storyline creeps up from seemingly nothing, which is its initial beauty. Two drifters, Doyle Kennedy and Wade Corey (Matt Dillon and Andrew McCarthy), meet by chance on a train and make their way to a town where the governor is making a highly-attended appearance. Together, while the rest of the town is preoccupied, the two men rob the local bank. Dillon is the instigator, but McCarthy is not as reluctant as one might expect for a good guy.

The getaway is muddled. The police, in their overzealous attempt to catch the robbers, create an accident that involves the governor's daughter and from which Corey emerges a hero. Suddenly all the pieces of Spencer Eastman's script start clicking together. Elements that previously appeared irrelevant deliciously come into play.

It's looking good at this stage and continues to for some time. The story spirals outward involv-

ing a great number of interesting peripheral characters and Kansas becomes a real, "big" place. But our interest is split in two when Dillon and McCarthy are separated, and this starts the film's undoing.

While Stevens takes great delight in slowly revealing just how dangerous Kennedy is, McCarthy goes to work on a farm where there is what we might call "love interest." It is melodramatic and dull, and a shame since Eastman's script has so far risen above such cliché.

From here on in, it quickly becomes obvious that "Kansas" lacks development in several fields. It is not clear what Stevens is trying to say. A violent man in small town America. An unlikely hero who wrestles with a guilty conscience. It all has potential, but lacks focus and vision. "Take a deep breath," Dillon tells McCarthy. "Smell that? That's America." They're standing next to a gas station, so make of that what you will.

McCarthy remains a staunchly unconvincing actor, despite this slight change of pace. Dillon gives another impressive performance in another mediocre film. "Kansas" is commendable for trying, but, somewhat inevitably, it falls short.

"Powaqgatsi" is playing for only one more night (Thursday) at the Carolina Blue and White on Franklin Street at 7:15 p.m. only. Run, run, run!

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