

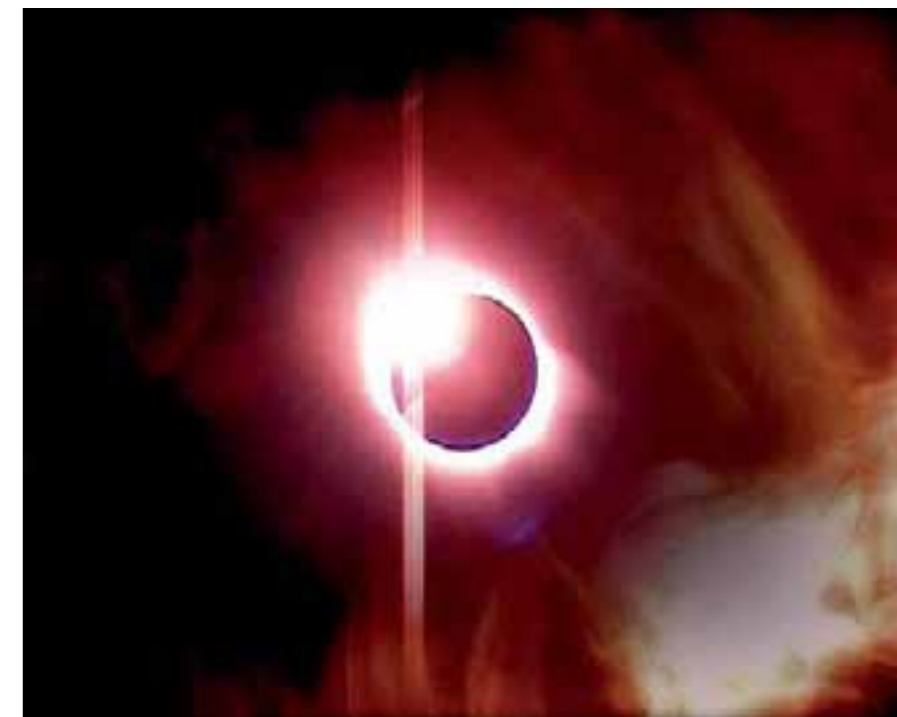
ALL IMAGES
*Chronicles of a New
Human Organism*, 2010
Video still
XX x XXcm

DARREN TOFTS

TRANSITION ABORTED

ARTIST IAN HAIG
CHRONICLES OF THE NEW HUMAN ORGANISM

IAN HAIG DESCRIBES HIS MOST RECENT PROJECT AS A "SCIENCE DOCUMENTARY GONE WRONG, A PERVERSE HYBRID OF EDUCATIONAL VIDEO, NEW AGE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN AND CULT MANIFESTO: THE MONDO MOVIE GENRE WITH A GOOD DOSE OF FUCKED UP PSEUDO SCIENCE." WHILE NO ONE ELSE WRITES FILM TRAILERS HALF AS GOOD AS THIS, HAIG ACTUALLY UNDERSTATES THE FILM'S SIGNIFICANCE. *CHRONICLES OF THE NEW HUMAN ORGANISM* (2010) IS THE FIRST MONDO FILM MADE FOR THE AGE OF THE INTERNET AND THE DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA, AN EXPLOITATION FILM THAT FRANCO PROSPERI AND GUALTIERO JACOPETTI WILL REGRET THEY NEVER MADE.





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As a mixed media artist Haig has always been “critical of some of the more utopian ideas surrounding technology, evolution and cyberculture, particularly of the shameless futurism that presumes that technology is an intrinsically positive force.” In this sense *Chronicles* satirises the genre of futuristic thinking itself, defamiliarising its desire to escape the gravitas of the ‘human’ as we understand it. Haig is one of the great contemporary skeptics when it comes to acquiescing to the promises of technology and its potential to transform and heighten things for the better. He is especially critical of the transformative and transcendent claims made by new age thinking, such as the Extropians’ belief in the pursuit of indefinite life made possible through technological advancement. One of the aims of his film is to short-circuit the notion of categorisation, the framing narratives of concepts such as human, alien and trans-human. In this Haig

has drawn inspiration from the Museum of Jurassic Technology in California, a sublimely ambiguous institution to which the artist irresistibly returns. The museum’s curatorial approach synthesizes crypto-zoology, outsider art, biology and cultural history into a form of magical realism that “presents itself as being real, partly real and clearly not real”. This slippage between fact and fiction has provided Haig with a “device to engage the viewer”. It invites us to re-think the possible in the context of what we know is not possible, and vice versa. Which brings us to Mr Newton.

Mr Thomas Jerome Newton, the displaced alien played by David Bowie in Nicolas Roeg’s 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, represents a point of view that defamiliarises everything that we take for granted about the world we live in. Coming from a dying, drought-ravaged planet, Newton sees the earth as a place of taken-for-granted bounty and resources, particularly water. His otherworldly

gaze reminds us of J.G Ballard’s notion that life is a strange form of science fiction that is weirder than the worlds imagined into being by writers of that speculative genre, not to mention the nuts who banked on a ride from the Hale-Bopp comet. Haig avers to Ballard’s view, urging us to take a look at how truly strange the world is. And it is the film’s imagery that most forcefully captures this strangeness, its visual language ostensibly derived from the perspective of the other, the alien visitor, the stranger in a strange land.

Haig found some of the weirdest places on the planet to shoot his visuals. A latter day Mr Newton with a video camera, he traversed both sides of the Pacific to see the world as if for the first time. Like Dziga Vertov with his kino eye, who represented the world in ways that hadn’t been seen before, the alien eye of Newton travels to Yellowstone National Park, with its extreme landscapes of geysers and boiling mud. He found echoes of this primordial energy in



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the prehistoric tar pits of La Brea in California and the hot springs of New Zealand. In the Pinnacles National Park in Western Australia he also encountered a timeless landscape of the kind that Erich von Däniken made such a fuss of in *Chariots of the Gods*, with its ambiguous rock formations masquerading as navigational guides for the mother ship. The ambient eroticism of the fertility shrine in Sinnam, South Korea, with its forest of erect phalluses, stands as testimony to ancient stories of love, tragedy and rejuvenation. Unaware of the memorial and “untamed world” connotations of such natural wonders, Newton’s perspective underlines how elemental, unstable and resonant with echoes of the past our world actually is. This preternatural sound design of PH2 (Philip Brophy and Philip Samartzis), and it’s worth remembering that one of the astonishing and lucrative patents Mr Newton files in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is for hi-fi.

Haig and his ocular persona Mr Newton are

also finely attuned to the minutiae of earthly life, including the twitching of a lizard’s dismembered tail, an infestation of ants and a writhing swarm of worms. The most alarming and, dare I say it, alien image in the film is – for me – a blowfly on its back pumping out maggots. An image normally beyond visual apprehension, this unsightly tableau is at once repulsive and seductive, like the car crash you want to look away from but can’t.

The eye is a prominent feature in Haig’s film. From the wan countenance of Alan Turing to the inscrutable spell of a komodo dragon, the troubling inertia of copulating effigies in Japanese sex museums and the Mount Wilson observatory in LA with its permanent eye on the sky, to the skulls in the Paris catacombs and faux Egyptian gods in Las Vegas casinos, eyes hold our gaze with an impenetrable urgency. Perhaps this urgency implies a human consciousness beyond the visible world that we can see. A consciousness manifest, perhaps, as

sound, like the grindcore yowls and screeching of Yamatsuka Eye, the Japanese artist and sometime collaborator of John Zorn whose ancestry in the Japanese Oomoto religion lays claims to visions of other worlds. Anyone who has ever listened to a Naked City album will be aware of Eye’s mutant, Artaud-like expletives. But far from being alien or other, they are of the body, Eye’s body, and they gesture to a language that we haven’t yet mastered. And, in this, Eye’s hysterical glossolalia crystallizes the ocular imperative of *Chronicles of the new human organism*, which cautions us to question the belief that we have seen or heard everything there is to know about the world we live in. If we attend to the foreign nature of our own world we may well pass on a trip elsewhere with a packed lunch when the mother ship arrives.

