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YOUR REALITY TRANSFORMATION IS ALMOST COMPLETE

IAN HAIG'S *CHRONICLES OF THE NEW HUMAN ORGANISM*



Imagine putting a video camera into the hands of a Death Valley outsider artist convinced that the mother ship is about to land at any minute. Imagine, too, that when it arrives it brings with it a new phase of human evolution in the name of the reptilian mind and the hormonal earth. Pretty predictable fare when you think about the long and disrespected history of New Age new beginnings for the human species, from the Heaven's Gate cult, Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* books, to Extropianism and the various nuances of trans-humanist thought. But what if that artist hailed from the Antipodes and brought a colder, pragmatic eye to the very idea of transcendentalist thought to do with human evolution. Australian media artist Ian Haig has consulted the manual on transitional thinking and done something unspeakable to it. Haig's most recent work, *Chronicles of the new human organism* (2005-2010), is a film that takes the viewer on a journey through a range of ideas, systems of knowledge and questions relating to the origins of the human species, global warming, new forms of human sexuality, sacrifice, parasites, communication with the dead, and alien evolutionary technology. Did I mention Martian communication?

I met up with Haig somewhere in the astral plane to talk about his most recent project. "*Chronicles* is a science documentary gone wrong. It is 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". They don't write film trailers like that anymore. "I've 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". One of the aims of the film has therefore been to make a work that defies categorization, that short-circuits ways of looking at the categorization of the human itself, especially with respect to questions of technology and its impact on notions of the human. As Erik Davis has said of the work in this sense, it is an "uncanny and unsettling hybrid of future consciousness and mutant flesh, and therefore true to the real transformation of our times."

Inspired by numerous visits to the Museum of Jurassic Technology in LA during the mid 1990s, Haig was fascinated with its ambiguous take on the representation

of natural and cultural history that "presents itself as being real, partly real and clearly not real". This slippage, known in literary circles as fabulation or magic realism, is in a weird way the foundation of speculative thinking about radical models for trans-human and post-human futures. It invites us to postulate the possible in the context of what we know *can't be* possible. This confusion (is it real, fake or bombast) was for Haig an "interesting device to engage the viewer for 50 minutes". The film takes a pofaced approach to sonically and visually document five stages in the imminent transition of the human species: evolutionary thinking, the reptilian brain, the human body, the hormonal earth and time and space. It feels like a program on the Discovery Channel from another dimension. There is indeed something plausible about the urgency and sincerity about what is unfolding. A soothing voiceover by an anonymous narrator describes the details and logistics of the emergence of the human species' transition ("The next phase in the human transition is slowly unfolding"). With the cautious prudence of the surgeon's words before the commencement of a sex change operation, we are advised of the benefits of new reproductive organs and detoxification, experimental | 151 surgery, parasites and communication with the dead. The persistent invocation by this voice of unseen "evolutionary operators", and their offers of assistance to those of us "feeling the new waves of energy", adds to the sense of human biology's unwitting commerce with alien, otherworldly presences. The soundscape, designed by PH2 (Philip Brophy and Philip Samartzis) heightens the sense of portentous strangeness afoot. But also, in referencing the otherworldly sonic atmospheres of sci-fi cinema (Jerry Goldsmith's *Logan's Run*, Louis and Bebe Barron's *Forbidden Planet*) and the freakiness of the Italian *Mondo* exploitation films of the 1960s, it insinuates the fabricated nature of otherness and alternative belief systems as style, gesture and affectation.

Haig is fond of invoking J.G Ballard's idea that everyday life is the strangest form of science fiction we've got. Apart from some found footage very much from the *Mondo* catalogue of store-bought oddity, Haig shot most of the visuals for the film in some of the weirdest places on the planet, from the mud pools of Yellowstone and the thermal springs of New Zealand, to the La Brea tar pits in California. Peeling back the

“heritage” and “untamed world” connotations of such natural wonders (apologies to Marlin Perkins), the film actually underlines how primordial, elemental and weirdly volatile this “clonic Earth” is (thanks to Samuel Beckett). We don’t need aliens to queer it for us, thanks very much. The film’s sampling of earlier civilizations that also aspired to otherworldly transcendence is no less cynical. The traces of ancient Egypt and its iconic interstellar monuments, such as its pyramids and temples to its deities, were sourced from the Luxor Casino in Las Vegas: a kitsch hyperreality that rubs uncomfortably against the nuances of extreme belief systems in trans and post-human futures.

In this sense *Chronicles* satirizes the genre of futuristic thinking itself, defamiliarizing its desire to escape the gravitas of the human as we understand it. But it also reveals how visionary or trans-humanist thinking is a perverse revival of the modernist project, with its zeal for continuous progress and improvement. 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. An earlier online, interactive work of 1998, *Web Devolution*, exaggerates to Rabelaisian proportions belief systems such as the Heaven’s Gate cult and its use of the new medium of the internet as a promotional and recruitment platform. *Web Devolution* targets “notions of ‘digital evangelism’ and techno-utopian rhetoric, as the ramblings of a desperate, crackpot, fanatical culture promising the new utopia”. This hysterical embrace of techno-futures is for Haig a form of devolution, rather than evolution, in human consciousness. In this *Web Devolution* is the ultimate piss-take on any form of hope in “alternative” thinking.

Web Devolution is a presence that haunts *Chronicles of the new human organism* like a shadow of bad faith amid the sincerity of an Appalachian Pentecostal snake handling church. Its kooky, labyrinthine-style of hypertext leads, ultimately, to dead ends and failed promises of transcendence. *Chronicles of the new human organism* similarly invokes a trance rather than a transition, the spell that invests new age thinking with the hokey sincerity that anything is possible. I think I hear the mother ship coming.





IAN HAIG CHRONICLES OF THE NEW HUMAN ORGANISM

An uncanny and unsettling hybrid of future consciousness and mutant flesh, and therefore true to the real transformation of our times. —Erik Davis

Imagine putting a video camera into the hands of a Death Valley outsider artist convinced that the mother ship is about to land at any minute, and that when it does a new phase of human evolution and reptilian consciousness will begin. *Chronicles of the new human organism* is such a film.

Taking the form of the nature documentary exploring the strangeness of the world around us as a starting point—*Chronicles of the new human organism* takes the viewer on a journey through a range of ideas, systems of knowledge and questions relating to the origins of the human species, the significance of the reptilian mind, new forms of human sexuality, parasites, the communication with the dead, and alien evolutionary technology.

The work references and cannibalizes ideas derived from Al Fry, J.G. Ballard, Rudolf Steiner, Wilhelm Reich, The Heavens Gate cult, Carl Sagan and Oscar Kiss Maerth. Delivered with a portentous, yet strangely soothing voiceover, *Chronicles of the new human organism* reinterprets the history of visionary thinking about the human species through the po-faced filter of Erich Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* and the shockumentary style of *Mondo Cane*.

One of the aims of *Chronicles of the new human organism* has been to make a work that defies categorization or another way of looking at the categorization of the human itself. It is a perverse and compelling hybrid of educational video, new age recruitment campaign and cult manifesto: the Mondo movie genre with a good dose of fucked up pseudo science.

The sound and music for the video was composed by PH2 (Philip Brophy and Philip Samartzis). Like the visuals, it draws on a range of references in its production from Jerry Goldsmith sci-fi scores such as *Logan's Run* to pulsating electronic noise from *Forbidden Planet* and textural location field recordings of some of the weirdest places on the planet.