

NICODIM

Trent Harris: Mondo Utah



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“This is the place!” Brigham Young declared, divined even, as the Prophet stood upon Ensign Peak and saw the glistening waters of the paradise Heavenly Father promised them in the valley below. Thousands of weary religious pioneers had finally reached the end of their Exodus and obtained their Holy See as prophesied by Brother Brigham in an earlier clairvoyant vision in a location believed to be California and the Pacific Ocean.

It was a dead lake.

But prophecy had spoken.

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Salt Lake City is a geographic umbilical of earth, water and salt. Every landscape is present in its most sublime and extremist form. The settlement became the most important and recent civilization founded on a new religion, one that would prove to be the defining proto-New Age movement in its approach to divination, as Harold Bloom has declared it, the American Religion. The Latter Day Saints were all granted a personal and direct conduit with His voice and the mysteries of the universe. This place of places is the primordial soup of savage creation, a land where spiritual survival is an avant-garde destiny.

Within the confines of Salt Lake City one feels the energies of every sectarian form pushing and pulling the cultural languages that together make up this special human experiment. The grand influence of Mormonism from within and without holds an enchanting control over the people, each child of God channeling that energy into transcendental aspirations of their own design through personal revelation. Art is used undeniably as a vehicle for spirituality in evangelized forms. From the Spiral Jetty to the Cosmic Christ in the LDS Temple Square Visitor Center, this place also gave us Paul McCarthy, Matthew Barney, and the aesthetics of repression. New religious groups form freely here, enabled by a prophecy that is self-fulfilling. Folklore reigns as King.

This is Mondo Utah.

Trent Harris was part of a small group of avant-garde filmmakers who worked at KUTV-Channel 2. The station's president George Hatch and father of Dianne Orr - another important filmmaker within the group - gave the group carte blanche to develop a new language of journalism that would air every Sunday. One that would be gonzo, off the cuff, esoteric and even surreal - EXTRA. Harris would develop a style of his own that would mix genuine human awkwardness and the absurd with camp narratives born from the world of Utah and Deseret. He summoned several feature films including his acclaimed *Rubin and Ed* (1991) as well as his legendary cult masterpiece *The Beaver Trilogy* (1979-2001). The latter remains one of the most important and yet underrecognized hallmarks of recursive filmmaking.

For this presentation at Galeria Nicodim, Bucharest, we present a cosmology inspired by the legacy of Trent Harris. "Mondo Utah" or "the world of Utah", is taken from the artist's eponymous book, a publication of contemporary mythology that looks into the fables and idiosyncrasies originating from the Beehive state. The word "Mondo" references a filmmaking genre dating back to the early 60's from Italian filmmaker Gualtiero Jacopetti whose 1962 film *Mondo Cane* pioneered a filmmaking style known for cinema verite and pseudo-documentary that blurred reality and fiction. The work was structurally divided into short, unrelated vignettes or stories that takes the viewer through a panorama of events unfolding before the camera.

In the gallery is an archive of material dedicated to the stories that Harris pioneered in his work as journalist, television documentarian, gonzo anthropologist and psychonaut. *The Beaver Trilogy* will be shown in cinematic form alongside his other cult masterpiece *Plan 10 from Outer Space* (1995). The latter is a science-fictional telling of Mormonism's most esoteric mysteries channeled in true Trent Harris style.