

GHAOS – Press & Response

GHAOS Starts Here!

NOW Festival (Nottingham – UK) in 2003

Ghaos Starts Here!

By Mark Patterson

Nottingham Evening Post - 24 October 2003

Nottingham's experimental art collective Reactor have had a busy few months. Yes, read that again in case you thought you'd fallen into a parallel universe of 1960s clichés. Reactor, you see, is the name of a group of Nottingham Trent University art graduates who came together when two local artists studios, Graze and Aldaran, merged. They're a "collective" because, like an anarcho-syndicalist trade union, they choose not to have a formal leader. And they're "experimental" because what they do is creative, fun, funny, chaotic, colourful, immersive, provocative and hasn't got a lot to do with looking at pictures on gallery walls.

But is it art? Probably. More certain is that Reactor create interactive happenings which may be about the way art is normally assimilated and how the usual distance between creator and viewer can be dissolved. Reactor claims to have staged eight "events" over the last 16 months, the last involving a radical makeover of the Angel Row Gallery into a kind of art funfair where stones were thrown at plaster figurines, paint was splashed and visitors were required to wear paper party hats.

Today, and for today only, the wacky funsters at Reactor turn their attention to Nottingham's own NOW arts festival in an event titled Ghaos Starts Here!. Staged in the old NOW festival office, at 55 Castle Gate, Reactor promises to offer an "alternative history" of the festival via multiple interactive guided tours lasting around 20 minutes. The tours take place in a four-storey building near the recently closed-down Costume Museum and cover gardens, basements and offices.

Reactor founder Niki Russell said Reactor had browsed the NOW archives and extracted a variety of unrelated snippets which would be re-presented at Ghaos — an effigy of NOW. For example, there's a "robotic cow" which has to be milked, a "virtual reality world" which has to be viewed through 2-D red-and-green glasses and a re-launched "NOWfm". Hang on, you'll also have the chance to tour a recreated Delux nightclub, Bonington Gallery and take a ride a "Ghost Train" which "will emerge to offer fast-track tours of NOW with an added 'scary' element".

Perhaps most intriguing is the "old guns vs new guns" shoot 'em-up in which one of the gunfighters has to wear a mask bearing the face of Prof Robert Ayers, the former artistic director of Nottingham Trent University and a man generally reckoned to have been the backbone of contemporary arts in this town until his redundancy this summer. "We're looking for someone to take the spirit of Robert Ayers," says Niki Russell. "So we have this Robert Ayers mask which someone has to wear. About ten years ago someone sent a letter which described Robert Ayers as one of the 'old guns of the arts world', so we have a shoot 'em up in which the old guns fight the new guns." Does Prof Ayers know of these proceedings? "He'll have got the e-mail, so perhaps he'll come down and play himself."

Ghaos Starts Here! is itself part of the NOW festival. Is Niki happy with this year's NOW? "I am a fan of NOW but sometimes I wonder exactly what it's for. But I can't go into any more detail on that because I'm not allowed."

Bearded Spider Gets Lost in Park

By Francesca Gavin

Marmalade Magazine - Issue 3

Reactor is a Nottingham Based artist's collective all about creating interactive art environments - almost a modern, messed-up take on a village fete where the art audience is completely involved in creating performance pieces. Past installations in and out of galleries have included radio-controlled Paint Cars, Sound Jam, The Smash-It-Up Stall, Pencil Catapult, Gallery Musical Statues and a Zombie Rave.

It's currently working on Russian Ghaos: The Fall of the Reds which takes place in an old, empty swimming pool. The edges are piled with scaffolding so the audience can watch the theatre in the middle. They call it "Donkey Kong meets Tolstoy". As Camilla Zajac says, "There's that familiar Reactor combination of demand for

compliance and playfulness, a bit like a friendly Labrador puppy that comes running up to you with a lit stick of dynamite in its mouth".

GHAOS Starts Here! Audience Response

"GHAOS was such a highlight, it is a tonic in an all to often dull art world, give me more. A success indeed when both my four year old and I had to be dragged away wanting to stay for more, after two hours and two tours. We wish we had taken sandwiches and a flask. We are looking forward to meeting the Russians."

"The world needs more GHAOS

GHAOS is the future

GHAOS is the present

GHAOS is the past

I want more GHAOS in my life, and in my past and future lives

Send me more GHAOS"

"I took a tour and tried hard to activate my conceptual inner self. The enthusiasm and commitment of Reactor to their events is very appealing. As audience I enjoy the experience of being able to participate in the 'art work'. and unfortunately, I am old enough to remember the 'Happenings' in the 60's... and am transported back somewhat..... "

"We have both been to a few Reactor events and what we are both particularly impressed with are the details that make the event. We enjoy your ability to make a party out of an event and we enjoyed your departure from that in this case. You have a response to space that we both like and in Ghaos a reaction to the history of the space which said a lot."

"It is quite disturbing, the way that one follows 'orders'..... no matter how ridiculous they are...."

"I keep seeing the trams being tested daily. I still think that they would make an ideal venue for an 'event'. ...Especially at night when they are lit up. I thought about filling a tram with 'ghost ' cardboard passengers.. I just thought Reactor could do something.. But perhaps N CT would be reluctant to let you loose on their shiny new vehicles."

"I only meant to stay for half an hour but was there for three."

GHAOS ZX: Return of the Egg Box

Screenplay (Nottingham – UK) and Shift (Leeds – UK) in 2004

A Word In Your Shell-like

By Mark Patterson

Nottingham Evening Post - 26 March 2004

Egg Boxes? Fishing Rods? A portal to another dimension? Ah yes, it must be Reactor, the Nottingham based Arts Collective who specialise in turning the concept of an 'arts event' on its head with a blend of cunning, left-field creativity and a healthy sense of deep satire.

After sending up the city's NOW festival last autumn, they surface again at this weekend's Screenplay computer-game event at Broadway cinema and cafe bar. The whole shebang has had oodles of publicity in the Post this week, so we won't repeat it. Suffice to say Reactor's contribution is GHAOS_ZX - "an exploration of virtual reality through the medium of the egg box."

We ask Reactor to talk us through it; spokesman Niki Russell emailed us back to explain that the idea was developed after Reactor's take on last year's NOW festival. He added: "Some strange events took place - one of which was a close scrape we had with the VIRTUAL - we believe that we have found a portal to this other

dimension - the egg box and that the worlds of the ATARI 2600, Spectrum ZX and the Nintendo Gameboy can in fact be reached by people from the 'real' world"

Ghaos, by the way is defined as: "1. utter light-hearted confusion. 2. cheerful formless matter supposed to have existed before the universe's carefree creation. 3. dissolute. 4. showy behaviour so unpredictable as to appear random."

Got that? Good. Expect plenty of audience interaction and the use of fishing rods as Reactor do whatever it is they aim to do in the name of the low-tech egg box and the retro high-tech of Sir Clive Sinclair's seminal PCs.

Screenplay Games Festival

By Johannes Birringer

Live Art Magazine Website - 4 March 2004

Videogames play a hugely successful role in the marketplace of popular culture and entertainment. Their venues range from arcades and pubs to the computer screen at home; their players can be found in all age groups and classes; they are solitary aficionados or congregate in massive online games (MMOG) played by teams or "tribes." Game culture has had a multi-layered and vibrant evolution in the four decades that video and computer games have been around - a history which parallels the rise of television and the personal computer. As the global market is ever-expanding, it is hardly surprising that its impact as a cultural formation is now studied, and its relations to the history of technology, film, animation, music, performance and art recognized. University programs pay attention, and so do museums.

Nottingham's "ScreenPlay" Festival, now in its fourth edition, announces itself as an annual cross-over event for "games makers, thinkers and players," and one of its strengths is its joyfully eclectic programming embedded in a relaxed and playful environment. Housed by Broadway Cinema and organized by Frank Abbott (Nottingham Trent University), Rasheeqa Ahmad (Broadway) and a team of volunteer helpers, the festival has grown since its beginnings; it invites audiences to "play with your mind," to explore "games in our lives and in our digital culture," i.e. it looks at the intersections of old and new, commercial and independent games, art and technology, animation and electronic music, staging tournaments and design competitions along with critical seminars, film screenings, webcasts and performances.

While the local dadaist Reactor troupe invaded the Cinema's cafébar on the final night with a hilarious grand-guignol performance ("GHAOS_ZK: Return of the Egg Box"), a good-natured spoof on the standard game design of virtual 3D worlds, another interactive performance featured a collaboration between Australian body artist Stelarc and jazz musicians Jan Kopinski (saxophone), Jana Kopinska (viola), and Steve Iliffe (keyboards, samplers). Presented in the main auditorium, this was a jam session of the third kind, a surreal show with moments of great eloquence and others closer to Medusa's smile of the grotesque.

Screenplay Weekend 2004

By Nick Gillett

The Guardian Guide - 28 February 2004

Where most video game conferences assiduously filter out members of the public, keeping them away from anyone that matters, Nottingham Trent University's annual Screenplay weekend seeks to involve players as well as coders, artists and industry figureheads. Features include Regain The Game, a competition to find the best new amateur game concept; The Old Skool, an arcade full of old faves from Pac-Man to Defender; My favourite Game, selected by celebrities including Lemmy; a performance of Reactor's Ghaos_ZX and a two-storey tall projected talking head. Expect free-thinking discussion, a lot of things to play on and a colossal dose of the surreal.

Reactor Barge Inn

LIFT (London - UK) in 2004

Preview Events

Out and About

The Guardian Guide - 15 May 2004

Reactor Barge Inn, Oxo Tower Wharf, London. Party to celebrate the LIFT festival, including, er, "cardboard infused live performance", art, music, storytelling and goody bags.

The Reactor Red Rooms Razzamatazz

You Are Here Festival (Nottingham – UK) in 2004

Red Rooms Razzamatazz

Nottingham Metro

Like some twisted Avid Merrion-hosted Royal Variety Performance, Nottingham art collective Reactor presents a surreal night of live mayhem. Inspired by the dying art of cabaret, Reactor is promising an evening of song, dance, comedy, quizzes, audience participation and ventriloquism, all hosted by a contorted, comedic Bob Hope lookalike.

In a night packed with surprises, and taking place as part of the You Are Here festival, highlights include Russian Dancing Bears challenging the facsimile Bob to a tap-dance duel, a moral tale involving the seeking of great fortunes told by three horses, and a grand audience singalong. Scientist Dr Gunter House will also be on hand to explain the science behind Reactor, revealing the secrets of 3D projections, egg-box cameras and GHAOS, Reactor's own developing theory that outlines their bizarre working practices.

Reactor came together two years ago, with its premises in Arkwright Street acting as a hub for the group's experiments. And having debuting Bob Hope briefly at an event in London in May, his next appearance will be an Academy Award ceremony-inspired performance called Not A Hope In GHAOS, to be staged in Germany.

Review: The Reactor Red Rooms Razzamatazz

By Camilla Zajac and Matt Davenport

YAH website

Experimenting is what Reactor, the Nottingham based art collective are all about. Their one-off night as part of the You are Here Festival continued this process. Having interacted at/experienced several of their events at Reactor Towers as well as the Toy and Dismantle events at the Angel Row, we were curious to see how their mix of familiar jokes and audience manipulations would translate to the space of the Rescue Rooms.

What followed was a night of surreal, sometimes obscure moments that focused mainly on comedy. That Reactor enjoyment of dressing up and playing games worked well with the variety show/vaudeville feel of the event. Playacting mixed with artistic imagination as the characters were introduced one by one to the stage after their 'live' arrival in limousines. Due to technical problems or something else we had to wait a long time for the show to start and were slightly demented by the time the show started, by the repeated film intro on screen. As with previous events, Reactor tried to create its own world complete with theories and language. This took time to develop but worked well at some points with surreal narratives and characters being woven around each other. Where else would you find three horse brothers, the Russian Communist regime and My Little Pony linked together? The experience of watching these moments is like falling asleep in front of children's TV and waking up in front of a surrealist European art house production with blurred subtitles. This playful sense of disorder was one of the strongest aspects of the event. The show's strength also lay in the comedy between different characters. The exchange between Bob Hope and his mini-me little puppet Bob Hope was the funniest thing we'd seen from the evening's host. Also enjoyable were the interactions between the mad, bossy professor and his downtrodden assistant Beaker.

As with other Reactor events, the pace and energy of the show varied. There were intriguing hints of themes that were never fully explained, but that was also part of the fun of it all. Watching the series of events on stage was different to exploring the varied spaces of Reactor Towers, but audience participation was definitely part of the evening's entertainment. A quiz (complete with qualifying badminton game, bizarre buzzers and glamorous assistant) provided more sly humour and a chance for the audience to win prizes. There seemed to be a bit of a conflict between trying to get us to join in with the show and just letting us sit there and watch it. This meant that when the time did come for them to round people up to go on stage, it took some time. Also not many people were ready to get interactive! Visually the experience was a weird mix of high-tech ('live' feeds of characters approaching the venue) and the homemade (papier mache and school play style painted stage sets).

Red Rooms Razzamatazz was an entertaining experiment-experience-extravaganza, which aimed to bring panto and art together. At many points it felt more focused on comedy than anything else. The use of familiar and iconic characters like the Muppets and My Little Pony suggested that Reactor were aiming to reach a certain generation and audience. In a more conventional 'stage' environment there is perhaps less scope for the type of interaction that Reactor events usually facilitate/create, with the audience being enforced into a more passive role by the nature of the space itself. More audience participation from the start would also have

shaped the night more powerfully. Whilst the show broke no boundaries, Reactor brought more than a touch of variety to the Rescue Rooms that night.

Ghouls & GHAOS: Escape from Reactor Towers

Screenplay (Nottingham – UK) in 2005

Ghouls and GHAOS

By Paul Drury

Nottingham Evening Post

Verdict: Blair Witch meets Blue Peter

Screenplay Festival 2005, free

I can hear the bear's muted roar echo ominously along the corridor, so I cast aside the remote control car I've been vainly using to try and collect golden egg boxes and stumble towards the final exit. Naturally, my way is blocked by a dancing nine-foot high joystick. There's a horrible panic, as I desperately fumble in my pack for the one thing that can save me – a copy of Daley Thompson's Decathlon, a game guaranteed to destroy joysticks of any size. I brandish it triumphantly, like a vampire-slaying priest with his silver cross. The peripheral wilts and I'm free to escape Reactor Towers...

All this would have been pretty left-field for a video game, but as a live action experience, it explores new depths of surrealism. Ghouls and GHAOS was staged by art collective Reactor as part of this year's Screenplay Festival and involved players meeting their guide Spickle, in the foyer of the Broadway Cinema, donning a cumbersome cardboard helmet, catching a ride on the 'Silver Worm' (that would be the tram then) and entering a disused building beyond the railway station.

Inside the maze of rooms and corridors contained various challenges, from spudgun fights, bursting balloons on your back whilst surrounded by yapping toy dogs and crawling through a cardboard box labyrinth in search of the egg boxes which would add up to your final score.

The whole thing played out as an affectionate tribute to videogame clichés and children's TV – being confronted by a grinning Tony Hart asking if I had any "art" for his gallery before he would let me look down his U-bend is an image that I will take to the grave – but set in an environment of dark hallways, stark white walls and hidden passages behind drapes, which was oddly unsettling.

Funny unique and physically exhausting, the 45minute "game" was certainly memorable, though my favourite moment was when Spickle, dressed all in silver foil, wearing a Robin Hood hat and holding a large cardboard recreation of Professor Yaffle from Bagpuss, took me through the streets of Hockley towards our start. He regaled me with an elaborate back-story to the game and just as he was proudly declaring that he was a hologram sent from the future, an elderly couple stopped him and asked politely the directions to St Mary's Church. He answered, they thanked him and continued on their way, and neither party batted an eyelid. Nottingham – I love this city.