ETC

Kit @ Deaf 98
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Michael Burton

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ROTTERDAM
KIT@DEAF 98

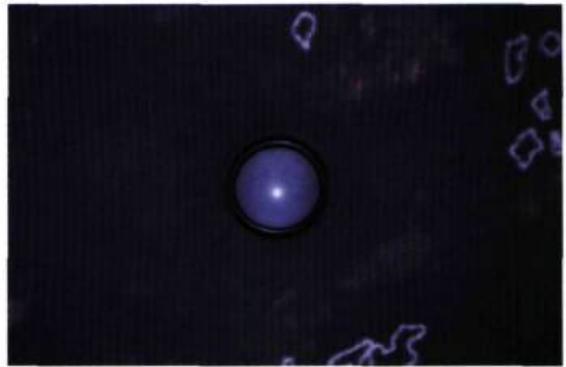KIT, *C.O.T.I.S.*, 1998. Exterior view of C.O.T.I.S. Container.
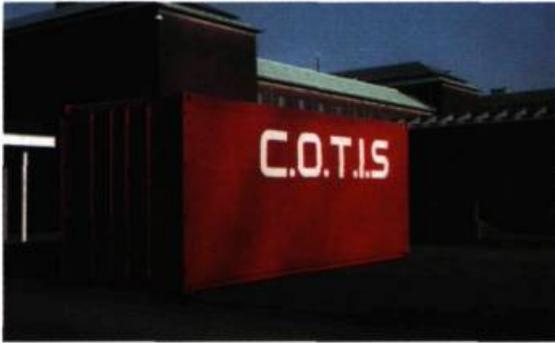
KIT, *C.O.T.I.S.*, 1998. Interior view of C.O.T.I.S. Container.

The productive potential of the crash, within culture and society in general, and within the new media specifically, formed the basis of the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival 98 showing in Rotterdam. The crash metaphor was extended to encompass rupture, malfunction, unpredictability and instability, viewed often in the negative, but capable of producing desirable, if serendipitous creations, which, especially in the arts, can and should be embraced, even cherished. Consequently, if, as suggested by the DEAF organisers, principally the V2 organisation, the crash is inherent in technology, it would then necessarily be foolish not to expect the unexpected and utilise it accordingly.

To this end, scenes were created, inviting participants to experience, play with, involve themselves in, experiment with or alter the ingredients making up the physical and digital territories, all of which illustrated the complexities and joys of chaos, instability and the resulting crash potential.

Perry Hoberman's use of an interior space, furnished with portable furniture, to be manoeuvred manually, and replicated on screen, where it could be manoeuvred digitally, then synthesised into a single image large scale projection, offered the chance to upset the balance of the traditionally stable environment in favour of a random and chaotic outcome... game playing maybe, where the technical complexities seemed to override the simplicity of the metaphor, though I may have missed something here !

More fitting to the nature of the event, in terms of the creation of a techno-chaotic aesthetic, was the installation by dutch web artists JODI. A network of grids and matrices brought up onto a multiscreen interface, via net sites visited, which consequently led to unexpected destinations, involving sound and visuals, which enmeshed the "player" in a web of confusion as they try to make sense of

random worlds they find themselves introduced to by accident. This made a convincing case for the inherent existence of illogicallity in a supposed world of logic, highlighting the paradoxical nature of the idea of the "beneficial" system crash.

On entering the enclosed capsule of Seiko Mikami, which was to be the slightly claustrophobic setting for work entitled, "World, Membrane and Dismembered Body" the apparent apprehension emitting from the 10 to 15 entrants, was reminiscent of doing the scary stuff at a fair, a combination of the slightly unnerving aspects of the unexpected occurring in an enclosed space, and natural curiosity, all moved along nicely by the dynamic of the groups, "all in it together" attitude. The chamber was really a speaker cabinet on a grand scale, with surround sound capability, and what we listened to, after time lag delay, was the erratic sounds of a willing (ish) participants heartbeat, or the sound of blood coursing through veins, or various internal organs at play. On occasion, this was to prove distressing for the now less than willing participants, as the massively amplified sounds seemed irregular, to the point of being almost random at times, this would in turn induce more rapid "beats or rhythms" begging questions of mortality, or the distressing scenario of the crash metaphor being applied to the living form. However in terms of an aural experience, there was something haunting, even beautiful in the messy irregularity of the soundscape produced.

Though few contemporary buzz words possess the ambiguity of, "interactivity", what is apparent immediately with "Happy Doomsday" is the actual physical effort needed to fuel the necessary navigational potential of the work by Calin Dan. A bastardised fitness machine/alien techno-gismo warrior is the vehicle by which a user manually manoeuvres through digital territories projected on large scale, referencing images depicting facets of European histories and stories. The structuring of the visuals is very much based on the computer game style of graphics, and consequently produces a thrill of the chase effect whilst referencing serious subject matter. As a vehicle for interactive education, his work was a little monumental and possibly a little cumbersome, but there was a playfulness in the methodology which was negated only slightly by the amount of physical exertion apparently required to effectively interact with the work to its fullest capacity. Instability, and the propensity to crash appeared to be inevitable to the piece in similar fashion to the historical

KIT, *C.O.T.I.S.*, 1998. Exterior view of C.O.T.I.S. Container.
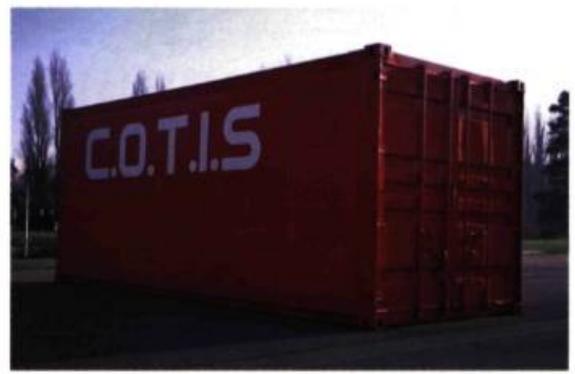
KIT, *C.O.T.I.S.*, 1998.
Interior view of C.O.T.I.S. Container.

events referenced, and the growing reliance on technology as the key to future development.

Located near to the main V2 lab, though far enough away to seem removed and even isolated from the bulk of the work, and placed suspiciously in an urban wasteland setting, was a red shipping/freight container by the KIT collaboration. On closer examination this was indeed verified, the strangeness being enhanced by the large-scale lettering adorning the sides of the vessel reading C.O.T.I.S.... in truth, I did not immediately identify this acronym with, *Cult Of The Inserter Seat*. This would all be explained duly as participants were made aware of the fictional existence of the fictional cult and global collective of C.O.T.I.S. by KIT. The red container was actually a type of urban black box. The colour scheme mimicking the colour of black boxes on aircraft which are actually red, so that they can be spotted more easily in the event of a crash.

On entering the red container, a single light barely illuminated four walls that were upholstered with prints of aerial photography depicting scenes of air crashes, the space being simultaneously filled with sounds of carnage, well, at least to these ears. The soundscape was in fact recreated from recordings made from the final vocalisations taken from the on-flight recorders, the fabled black boxes. It made for pretty depressing listening, yet possessed strange ethereal qualities given the extreme conditions under which the information and raw emotions were captured.

Attention was drawn to a small optical device embedded in one of the upholstered walls of the container. Peering through this "looking glass" revealed a hidden chamber behind the wall which had outlined images of air crash destruction projected into the space. The whole environment knitted together perfectly to create a physical vehicle which encapsulated a theoretical treatise, albeit fictional, on the nature of re-insertion and reintegration of the human body back into the earth, through the mapping of the trajectories of air crashes, reversing the idea of the ejector seat in favour of the inserter seat. A doctrine very much at odds with the current developments in technology that drive for what has been termed by Mark Dery as an "escape velocity". Thus where attention is focused wholly on escaping the physical, via accessing the virtual, escaping the earth for the purposes of planetary colonisation, or escaping identity through the re-invention of other selves in order to masquerade in cyberspace. In direct opposition, reintroduction, reembodiment and reempowerment... those features favoured by C.O.T.I.S. will tread a more desirable road to the notion of "progress".

In fact the Cult of C.O.T.I.S have a theoretical basis which sits between black humour, rampant cult style propaganda and researched scientific rationalism which gives the audience a number of inroads into interpreting this complex project. The black humour arises from their proposed search for the ultimate fusion between man and machine, thus the aircrash. The reverential treatment of this symbolic spectacle proposes the inversion of any notion of innocence inherent in the "return to earth".

C.O.T.I.S. seeks and worships the sacred co-ordinates of the crash site, and insert their dwellings (the freight container) into the earth, within the site which has been revealed and created by the crash. These locations are pre-determined under the guise of innocent progress, they are the inbuilt reversal of technologies efficiency. The dystopia of the crash and failure of travel technology, carry on the narrative relay of travel and communications technology in the form of the "report" – the evangelical satellites of news media and communication systems carry the story to our front rooms. There is nothing which causes these relay systems to pass the narrative baton as fast as a crash. The spectacle of disaster in the collision between earth and technology becomes the lense through which we try to locate a lost innocence of pre-impact. Obseletion being an integral process of the progress, means the built in crash is where these narratives are born, and here is where the paradox lies. The locating (technological) devices are soiled (part of the same system), contaminating the process from the start.

C.O.T.I.S. attempts to capture and frame the meaning of innocence in the point of impact, their red freight containers being worshipful spaces which reflect upon the site of the crash as sacred co-ordinates.

Being the only off-site installation at DEAF gave KIT's project a mysterious and alluring air, which seemed to delight as many as it disturbed i.e. reports of two audience members running out of the container screaming and having to be calmed down by invigilators. All in all it was the project which most eloquently examined and fabricated the symbolic and actual effects of the accident, into a perverse world where the black box provides the black humour.

MICHAEL BURTON