

# THE LIST

## GLASGOW AND EDINBURGH EVENTS GUIDE

# THEATRE

preview

## INTERACTIVE PLAY

### Desert Rain

Glasgow: Tramway, Thu 29 Jun-Sat 8 Jul.

The philosopher Jean Baudrillard's infamous statement that 'the Gulf War did not happen' came as little relief to the Iraqi children born with congenital birth defects as a result of depleted uranium munitions used in Operation Desert Storm. But Baudrillard was suggesting that what we witnessed through our television screens was a mediated image of war, not reality, but 'hyper-reality'. Instead of media images reflecting reality, they created a world where the simulated image became more real than the real itself.

*Desert Rain* is a political response to the Gulf War that is clearly influenced by Baudrillard's work, but which moves beyond it to look at how people can recover some of the human contact lost within the context of a purely technologically mediated experience. 'All the major news industries were reporting on the war,' states performer Nick Tandavanitg. 'But when it came to having any kind of idea about what actually happened, or how many people died, the most obvious things were still not clear. We were in the situation of having an event that we had no direct experience of but were sharing through completely constructed media. It may sound cheesy but we wanted to get to the human side of the conflict.'

Working with the Computer Research Group at Nottingham University, Blast Theory have utilised the latest technology to develop an interactive experience which is part-video game, part-installation and part-performance. The audience, limited to six at a time, is briefed about a mission before entering a space with computer software projected onto a wall of cascading water. They put on headsets, stand on a footpad and



Part-video game, part-installation and part-performance

have 30 minutes to make their way through this virtual environment and complete their mission.

'People can move around on the footpad and navigate their way through this world,' explains Tandavanitg. 'They start in a room and then move into the desert where there are underground tunnels and bunkers. Their mission is to find their target and escape. Each of the targets is a real person with a different experience of the war.'

This might be heavy material for some, but Tandavanitg highlights the appeal of the technology. 'We want people to be able to take this on different levels,' he says. 'Fourteen to sixteen-year-old computer game kids have gone through it and emerged exhilarated by having played a strange ethereal computer game and then other people have come out completely involved with the human experience that they found.'

*Desert Rain* engages with serious issues in a genuinely innovative way. Stick it in your personal organiser. (Davie Archibald)



Amusing yet serious in intent

## MULTIMEDIA EVENT

### Desert Rain

Glasgow: Tramway, until Sat 8 Jul

★★★★

George Michael might not agree, but I'm inclined to think that this is as much fun as you can have in a cubicle. This event, which eventually turns into a many-voiced discussion of the West's attack on Iraq, is both amusing in execution and serious in intent. Whether you can strictly define this as theatre is a moot point, but whatever this interactive virtual reality show is called, it's worth seeing.

Audiences at any showing are restricted to six. Each person is given a character they must seek out (a 'target'), and is led into a small cubicle. There, surrounded by a puddle of water, you navigate your

player from the desert to a mysterious tarmac area, and finally to the interior of a building full of maze-like tunnels and staircases. A footboard is used to move your character around, and a kind of communal spirit develops with other audience members, with whom you communicate occasionally through a headphone microphone set. All of this is done through the curtain of rain in front of you, which is a little irritating in obscuring the visual element of the show, but produces one truly eerie effect.

It would, once again, be telling you too much to speak of the latter part of the show, which connects us with the reality of the Gulf war, after the media unreality of the game. There is though, much for us to ponder here, with the structure, and nature of the piece adding to its chilling final effect. (Steve Cramer)