Act Otherwise: Art and Ethics
Notes from the Seminar on 13th-15th February 2013

Introduction
This document contains notes from Act Otherwise, a workshop that explored the ethical challenges of staging and studying interactive performances. This was held at Blast Theory's studio over three days in February 2013 and was attended by – at various times – up to 40 participants comprising a mixture of artists, curators and academics. The first part of the workshop was an open, but undocumented, discussion among participants. In contrast, the second part (spanning the end of day two and all of day three) was publicly webcast and is summarised in these notes by the workshop organisers (with the deliberate exception of one closed session). Please bear in mind that these are our notes – an attempt to summarise what was said and done as we heard it. We intended them to provide a resource to enable participants to look back and reflect. They are not however intended to be analysis of what took place or the synthesis of a coherent argument from this. Neither should they be read as directly quoting named individuals or representing final or fully-thought through views. The workshop was an open discussion and these notes chart out some of the interesting places where it went from our point of view.

Introduction: Background and Agenda
Collaborations between artists and researchers to create interactive performances raise interesting ethical issues in areas such as the framing of experience; the nature of consent; the treatment of personal and scientific data; deliberately causing discomfort; engaging bystanders in public settings; and safety and risk management. Dealing with such issues can become particularly challenging when a single project has to answer to both artistic and research ethical processes in order to be acceptable both as an artwork and a research study.

The Act Otherwise workshop therefore drew together artists and researchers to explore the ethical challenges of interactive performance, identifying key issues, current approaches for dealing with them, and discussing implications for both practice and research. It was structured around a series of case studies, drawn from the work of multiple artists, which were considered alongside studies, concepts and methods contributed by researchers from varied disciplinary backgrounds.

The workshop was structured into two parts over the three days:
- A discussion around the ethics of a series of case studies involving about 20 artists and researchers. This focused on the work of a selection of artists and practitioners (Blast Theory, Aerial, Active Ingredient, Urban Angel). It ran from lunchtime on Day 1 to mid-afternoon on Day 2

- A further day-long event that broadens both the audience and the discussion, presenting the findings of the first two days, hearing from further contributors, and widening the discussion. This ran from the afternoon of Day 2 to the afternoon of Day 3

Participants

Adam Sporne, Artistic Director, Urban Angel
Anne Nigten, Director, The Patching Zone
Barbara Gorayska, Artist
Ben Eaton, Artistic Director, Invisible Flock
Bob Anderson, Horizon Research Ambassador, University of Nottingham
Brendan Walker, Artist, Aerial
Bronya Norton, Knowledge Transfer Officer, Horizon Digital Economy Research at University of Nottingham
Chris Greenhalgh, Professor of Computer Science, University of Nottingham
Clara Garcia Fraile, Artist, Me and The Machine
Dan Lamont, Administrator, Blast Theory
Dominic Shaw, Artistic Director, Urban Angel
Emilie Giles, Producer and Artist, Freelance (Rapporteur and documentation for Act Otherwise)
Giles Lane, Director, Proboscis
Jem Wall, Artistic Director, Hydrocracker Theatre Company
Joe Marshall, Leverhulme Research Fellow, Mixed Reality Lab at University of Nottingham
John Hunter, Artist, non zero one
John McGrath, Artistic Director, National Theatre Wales
Jon Pratty, Relationship Manager for Digital and Creative Economy, Arts Council England
Ju Row Farr, Artist, Blast Theory
Kate Genevieve, Artist, Chroma Collective
Kirsty Jennings, Business Manager, Blast Theory
Lesley Fosh, Intern, Blast Theory / PHD Student, Horizon DTC and Mixed Reality Labs
Lisa Finch, Co-Director, Fabrica
Marina Jirotka, Reader in Requirements Engineering, Computing Department at Oxford University
Martin Flintham, Transitional Fellow, University of Nottingham
Mat Trivett, Creative Producer, Broadway
Matt Adams, Artist, Blast Theory
Matt Locke, Director, Story Things
Nick Tandavanitj, Artist, Blast Theory
Niki Woods, Associate Artist, Blast Theory / Lecturer in Performance, University of Salford
Rachel Jacobs, Artist, Active Ingredient
Richard Warburton, Artistic Director, Invisible Flock
Sally Jane Norman, Professor of Performance Technologies, University of Sussex
Sarah Burrell, Artist Assistant, Blast Theory
Sarah Julia Clark, Volunteer, Blast Theory / Artist & Illustrator, Sarah Julia Clark Visual Communication
Steve Benford, Professor of Collaborative Computing, University of Nottingham
Tassos Stevens, Co-Director, Coney
Victoria Pratt, Artistic Director, Invisible Flock

Feb 14th, Day 2: Emerging Themes and Introduction to the First Public Session

The session began with an introduction by Blast Theory's Matt Adams. This forum was the second Act Otherwise event, the first one being *Act Otherwise: A Harbourside Meeting Of Ingenious Minds'* which happened last year at the Blast Theory studio. The writeup of this can be read on the Physical and Alternative Reality Narratives wiki page here. It was part of a series of forums and workshops with support from the Culture Programme (2007-2013) of the European Union. This version of Act Otherwise has been organised in partnership with the University of Nottingham. Matt Adams thanked Steve Benford who has helped shaped the structure for the three days.

Review of the Previous Two Days

Matt spoke about the two days of work which happened prior to the start of this session.

A small group of artists and researchers had looked in depth at particular case studies, to explore ethical questions around interactive work from Wednesday morning until Thursday afternoon.

Matt invited Steve Benford and Chris Greenhalgh to summarise the previous days sessions. Steve explained his background and his perspective on ethics. He is a researcher, a Professor and Head of the School of Computer Science at the University of Nottingham, working in the field of human computer interaction. The school now has an ethics committee and they often collaborate with artists. There haven't been any major problems yet but conversations aren't always easy as the work they do is often unusual and provocative, at least when seen from the perspective of Computer Science research. They often find themselves involved in debates around each project about what is the actually the base of it and how does it shape their research.

For Steve, part of the workshop was aimed at exploring what the issues are, how we treat personal data and what happens when scientific data is involved in artistic projects and creating discomfort.

Chris summised the four bodies of work (Blast Theory, Thrill Laboratory, Active Ingredient and Urban Angel) that shaped the first days discussion. Matt presented a range of Blast Theory's work, involving often quite sensitive interaction and participation including people being invited to shoot members of Blast Theory (Gunmen Kill Three), be kidnapped (Kidnap) and almost robbing a bank (A Machine to See With). A common theme appeared around the crafting of these experiences and how the ethics is thought about with regards to respecting the participants, their autonomy and their facility to engage with potentially challenging material of choices.

Brendan Walker's Thrill Laboratory is a series of projects exploring biological physiological monitoring and thrill. Some issues that emerged were in terms of performance and genre and the extent to which the performance sometimes plays with the motifs of science whilst simultaneously doing HCI research at the same time.

Rachel Jacobs on behalf of Active Ingredient focused on personal and biological data, personal stories and climate change data. Common points of ethical tension were identified in each of

these areas of study, such the notion of artistic integrity vs. public engagement in installations. Also noted were the tensions between climate scientists view of their own integrity with artistic data and how scientific data might normally be presented. A further element identified was the relationship between the researchers who study such experiences, especially when some of these are also the artists. This all shows the complicated relationships which might occur when working on the same shared topic, as well as the complexity of negotiation with regards to making it work when there are so many different perspectives involved.

For Urban Angel's alternative reality game, the framing was the complicated factor with there being a great deal of role playing by actors and participants alike. So while researchers from of the Mixed Reality Lab are able to inform participants that they're they are studying the game, participants may appear not to believe them and rather assume that they are part of its fictional narrative.

Research and research governance were also discussed, as well as some reflections on uncomfortable interactions.

Further to these four case studies, there had also been a breakout session on day one to discuss key questions including:

- What might one do about these issues in the future?
- Who cares about ethical issues and why?
- Are ethical frameworks in the interest of practicing artists and how would you communicate them?
- Should they be explored through educational courses, mentoring and workshops?
- How might you influence the research environment and persuade them that this kind of research is different to currently the dominant paradigms, especially those that have emerged from medical research which focus on 'informed consent'?
- How would you engage the general public in with these such questions?

Introductions and Opening Statements
The people who had come to participate in the seminar were varied in their backgrounds, among them being artists, researchers, producers and artistic directors, working in performance, academia and arts organisaions.

All attendees put forward an ethical question, challenge or problem that they have with their line of work. These questions were noted down as a point of reflection thoughout the seminar. A range of ethical dilemmas came to light including issues around data, the illusion of choice, the boundaries around fiction and reality and how as an artist you take responsibility for yourself and the audience members.

Beginning the Discussion around Ethical Concerns
To start things off, John Hunter picked up on Clara Garcia Fraile's earlier point about the cultural gap referencing Non Zero One's piece *You'll See (Me Sailing in Antarctica)*. The show is about perception and memories connected to the past present and future. Participants visualise how they see themselves in the future and are asked to contribute to the show by responding to the line "We'd like you to see this as an opportunity not an obligation". The structure of the show meant that they felt they had to contribute and of course Non Zero One wanted them. John told

us one participant had commented that there is an imbalance between bringing people into a situation where they contribute something quite personal as the level of honesty makes the stakes being quite high. For Non Zero One, they had rehearsed this many times before and had a framework so there were no mistakes. John's question was that as makers are we always going to have rehearsed things or would we have the stakes high (like the participating members of the public so) where we don't know what is going to happen? Would we put ourselves in the same situation? If we aren't going to do that, do we have to be upfront about it? Is the problem pretending that we are all in the same position and is this ethically correct?

Clara told us how Me and the Machine had been asked to make a piece for a German festival. The dilema they were faced with surrounds the creation of the work reflecting the memory of the institution, rather than the author who they are crafting the work around. The dilemma deepens with the work being funded by the institution. They've been trying to work out how they can make the piece in a coherent way.

Anne Nigten, from The Patching Zone, had a dilemma surrounding a piece of work with young people. They're working with 30 young people from a vocational school and also with young people from the street. They want them to design a game which could be played in two different parts of the city. There is a divide between people living south and north (there is a river which divides it) and one side is rich whilst the other is poorer. There is little interaction between the two parts of the city and the public library is hosting the game in the north part of the city whereas their lab where they're working from is south. They've been working since August 2012 with the school and the young professionals on the game and have developed the narrative and form of it. The relationship of the young professionals and the young people was a form of peer coaching and learning. This brought up a dilemma for the young professionals for shaping a concept for the idea. They wanted to create all the ideas from the young people which resulted in an interesting discussion about a democratic process of design. The professionals had to step out of their peer position with the youngsters and act more like artist and designers again which brought up dilemmas. The profressionals felt like they were betraying the people who had come up with the concepts. In the end it worked out fine, but it was a difficult process. The additional complication was that they were acting as a group of peer teachers but then had to act like a group of artists and designers. They of course had their own idea of what would be a good game and had to execute the democratic process. It was hard for them to change their position in the process. Anne wishes there was an easier process of changing your position in a situation like this. Anne stated that with community arts projects people take the participants they're working with so seriously that it's hard to step back and act like an artist or designer in the middle of the process without the participants losing their trust in you.

Jem Wall from Hydrocracker discussed an immersive theatre piece of work which focussed on freedom of speech. In this piece, the audience would start their journey in a posh room representing a comforming society before being taken down to the basement where they see the torturers who keep democracy clean. The strongest moment in the performance is where the audience sees a child, who they've seen earlier, being taken off somewhere and they know something unpleasant is going to happen to them. In this situation, people are being placed in emotional jeopardy. Several audience members did try to intervene and go for the child and it makes you ask 'as a maker, have I gone too far?' It makes you question your responsibility and what you're putting people through. It is about play but how much have they consented to the experience?

Brendan spoke about one of his 'experiments' with the Mixed Reality Lab. He made gas masks which monitored respiration and sent out real-time data to a display. One of the contexts in which this was explored was in an entertainment context at Thorpe Park in the *Saw Alive* maze. People participated as FBI agents going through the maze and were relaying information about what was going on back to their group who were outside the maze. This was changing the relationship between the audience as normally in a horror maze you don't know what's happening to the person inside. There was an example where a mother was going through the maze with her daughter outside monitoring her. The daughter got worried and thought the mother was having a horrible time, she asked Brendan to get her mum out but he made the decision not to. When the mother emerged it transpired that she'd been laughing and having had a great experience. Brendan thought that he wasn't causing any out of the ordinary distress to participants in the maze, but what he hadn't considered was the distress caused to the daughter outside the maze listening in as this relationship hadn't existed before.

During the studio discussion, the point was made that the daughter is stuck having to listen to it, there is no way out with her. However, the daughter was a young woman, around 18, not a child. Ju Row Farr suggested that as a maker, she would have looked at the daughter and made some kind of judgment about her psychological damage to assess the course of action. Brendan told us that this piece was created to allow an audience member to have an insight and to have a sense of empathy, and it worked. Rachel Jacobs asked if the daughter could have run into the maze? Brendan said she could have but she was confined by social pressure and perhaps felt limited in what action she could take.

Matt Adams wrapped up and thanked everyone for the session. He told us how he would start to look at clusters on the board, inviting others to help him, and would think about ways for looking at them.

Feb 15th, Day 3: Public Presentations

Day three started by Matt Adams introducing the threads which emerged from all the post-its created at the forum during the pervious day. The first session of the day was to be based on *Control and Openness* with Sally Jane Norman steering the conversation. The second session was to ba closed session led bu Marina Jirotka to give room for people to discuss how they may have navigated specific systems or structure ethical challenges in making their work. The final session of the day would focus on data and ethics.

Session 1
Control and Openness

Sally Jane began by looking over the post-its on the board so that we could get a sense of everyone's thoughts with regards to control and openness. One participant had noted 'What is an uncontrolled divide?' - Sally Jane suggested this was a wondering about the ethics of the degree of control that someone might seek to override and how the audience take control, the audience overriding the provisions of the the artist. What happens when the audience begin to guide the process?

Illusion of Choice

We moved onto discuss the questions: How responsible are we for making the rules of immersive theatre? If we're asking the audience to play into the role of the show how far should we let them be engaged? Jem spoke about his experience as a theatre practicioner, immersing the audience in a different world. Sally Jane asked whether giving people an illusion of choice is a pretend openness. He agreed stating that in these shows you're setting up one premise and it gets changed; it's about play and it's like a game they're playing. The rules aren't so clear in immersive theatre. Adam Sporne spoke an Urban Angel's pieces where the audience had been presented with a number of difference choices but rejected them all, in favour of doing their own thing. Adam said this was good as it made it a lot more exciting but it did cause problems as they had to do things they weren't planned for at all. They had to keep control, but the audience essentially had more control. As performers they were facilitating what they wanted.

Devices and Space

Matt Locke was interested in the noticeable change in recent years of people's understanding of devices in spaces. It's now very sophisticated. He wondered if this has had an impact on how artists devise rules around these spaces now. Adam said yes; they didn't even know the audience would pre-plan and pre-record things. If something was recorded by a participant then it had to be incorporated into the story, even if it hadn't been thought through. An example of this was a participant saying they'd like to create their own application for communication, with an actor saying it was a good idea not knowing that the participant would go and make an application which used Facebook messages. It created more of a barrier for new people to get involved through having to go through comments on a website to follow dialogue.

Narrative, Story and Tension

Matt Adams commented on situations where people will cluster and act spontaneously, often when people are drinking. There is a fundamental tension between narrative, which is to do with withholding information and story, what is going to happen next? We're all creating social spaces that are open to transparency which is essential for communication. These things are in direct conflict with one another.

Openness and Boundaries

Sally Jane questioned how much openness one wants to encourage among people we're generically calling 'the public'. People have varying levels of literacy with regards to technology. We've been talking about openness as if the only relationship which matters is between the maker and the receiver but with regards to 'trust' it's also about what level of fluidity you want to put across. Matt said how ARGs (Alternate Reality Games) are notoriously very pyramid-like in their structure; a cluster of people go crazy for it and there's a group of people on the edge. Matt Adams said that one of the ethical challenges here is that you have one group who are very professional players, very aware of what you're doing and then you have other people who come in who are less sure and are less able to judge whether behaviour is ok or not. Ju added that people come along to engage in Blast Theory's work who are tech savvy and think they will know how to do it, and actually they end up getting less out of it than others because they think it's not game-like enough. How does a participant in a work affect it by bringing their own preconceptions? Many of the speakers agreed that people who have a pre-conception of the work often have a very narrow channel of experience and the people who are less experts often do very extraordinary things that you wouldn't imagine. Matt Adams commented on how you will get techno hipsters, mostly male, who think they know what they're doing and then you'll get those who are less certain about the technology, but end up having a much stronger experience as they are more open to what it is.

Sally Jane moved onto question the clarity of boundaries. Ben Eaton from Invisible Flock said that he's had experiences where not clarifying it enough can be seen as bad design, but in other cases not clarifying something is actually part of the work itself and through the lack of clarity people define their own interaction. It's very dependent on what you want the interaction to be.

John Hunter posed the question 'if your work relies on a naivety of your participants is that necessarily an always exploitative thing?' John's found some problematic work which is very clearly exploitative but the participant might not feel like it is as they don't interrogate their experience. Sally Jane read out John's post-it which referenced Matt Truman's reaction to *Internal* by [Ontroerend Goed](#). He said that the success of the show *Internal* was dependent on his naivety and so it was dependent on him not having a shared understanding of the rules of the social situation. As a participant you are invited into a blind date setup, where you confide in performers in a booth. After this the performers perform a character assassination for each participant and betray everything you've told them. Through the setting there are implicit rules that your discussions are in confidence, but this is never confirmed. Things being withheld is part of the narrative of the work; someone has decided to keep you in the dark. John reflected that as a maker you're making a call for some kind of greater good and sometimes it crosses over to being exploitative.

Matt Adams said that something potentially radical about the immersive field is that it's breaking the boundary between the art work and the real life; it's shifting and blurring the border between the two. The frame of the work is choosing. For example, *[Desert Rain](#)* was set up to look like a computer game when people went in it, but then the piece shifts and you realise that the characters in it were in fact really involved in the first Iraq war. The piece moves you from a playful state to being in a room watching people talk about being soldiers and hearing their war stories. People are moved dramatically from what they think the rules are and this can be seen a lot in interesting immersive theatre projects. Where is the theatre and where is the real life?

Transgression

Matt Locke spoke about how he uses the word transgression a lot in the work he does with broadcasters and publishers. This is because transgression is inevitable with regards to digital networks and their openness and their share-ability. It's the nature of circulation rather than distribution and it's being circulated rather than distributed by institutions. He asked what levels of transgression do you design into the experience? Some of the best theatre has taken this into consideration. Using the rehearsals of the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics as an example, Matt went on to explain that in order to encourage the audience to keep the secret of what was going on in the stadium a hashtag was created which they could use as part of the experience, allowing the audience to be part of it. This gave the audience a shared language which they could transgress rather than banning all phones which the audience would have rebelled against. This allowed the audience to be part of the work. In our current times it's about looking at these velocities of transgression and designing for them, or perhaps even against them as you might want to create barriers to frustrate the audience. How you design for it drives the experiences which the audience will have.

Matt further stated that in rule-spaces people can test the boundaries which affects their understanding of the world. People love testing boundaries and the glitches in games - it's about the transgression of rule spaces.

Visceral Experiences

Niki Woods discussed her experience of taking part in the Punchdrunk piece, *The Crash of the Elysium,* with her child. The work is connected to Doctor Who and explores the disappearance of a Victorian steamer named the Elysium. Two things happened in the space; one of the adults in the space told her that her child was crying so she had to go and rescue him. She then realised that it wasn't her child and was faced with the dilemma of the responsibility and whether to stop the narrative or not. She considered whether she should walk away. She then did find her child and he was actually crying. For a 6 year old it's quite an experience. The audience were defined by the biohazard suits they wore, being part of the action but knowing their place. In the same space was a weeping angel with strobe lights coming towards them with one of the actors shouting "the door won't open". To Niki's child the experience felt very real, but to another child they saw through it and commented on the wheels under the angel. It's interesting how the actors contain the narrative in a very visceral yet exposed experience.

Different Approaches to Experiences

Kate Genevieve spoke about how in a light space actors can respond to the different levels of experience. When distributing an immersive narrative over something like an app where you don't have that responsive, improvisational way you're not in control of how a chunk of your narrative is delivered at say 9pm to whoever had signed up to do that narrative. Kate felt that a lot of the discussions which had been happening at the forum so far had been pushing for better performance design to enable better response to situations. She would be interested in finding out ways that people might be doing it with regards to apps so that it interfaces with people's real lives, because you can't learn from experience. If you're sending out messages how are the audiences receiving and responding to them, and how do you gather information from that. She also brought up the idea of giving people a language and an environment rather than a sense of hidden structure which just the performance designers know about. When safeguarding the space of the unknown; when you get into the place where no-one knows the rules and the audience need to start making them, something very creative can occur. You can find your own

ethics in those situations. Kate referenced a piece by Coney called *A Small Town Anywhere* where people are given roles in a village and at a point where everyone is shouting at each other, as an audience member you need to bring order to it. Safeguarding that space where the audience have to make their rules is essential.

Interaction and Endings
Sally Jane combined the idea of safeguarding the space where the audience have to make their rules and the need to think about control as a maker assuming responsibility. She brought in another of the post-its which asked 'Once you invite interaction when, as an artist, is it ok or appropriate to end it?'

A hyperthetical comparison was made to fairground rides: once someone is on they have to finish the ride. Are we doing the audience a disservice by making them experience these pieces to the end because of what we think they're going to get out of them? Steve asked how do you balance the long-term and immediate consequences of that?

Giles Lane suggested that wouldn't it be perhaps worth thinking about when people engage in some kind of environment that there is an implicit degree of trust, that you will have thought through and make decisions for them? For example, in the cinema we trust that if there is an emergency the lights will go on and we'll find our way out. People participate in these processes because they think that in the process of the design these questions will have been considered; this is part of their engagement.

Systems and Models of Openness
Matt Locke spoke about Blast Theory's *Ivy4Evr*, an SMS piece which was commissioned by Channel 4 Education. It was created as a way for young people to find a way to reflect on thoughts in a more intimate space. They had an instance where a young person messaged that they were going to commit suicide. This caused an ethical dilemma around how they should react to this. What they decided on was to pull out the message from the system so that they could find out the participant's number and proceed by sending them a message with the Samaritan's details, encouraging them to contact them. It turned out that the participant was just pushing the boundaries and so were very apologetic about the message. Matt commented that when you give people an open system they like to test the boundaries. When working on a piece like this you do in fact have to rehearse scenarios of what may happen and communicate with your colleagues about what is going on and how you're dealing with it.

Ben Eaton commented that people are making models which allow for openness but as an artist making interactive work, openness is not necessarily a duty. Having strict boundaries and edges is absolutely fine but it's about being able to communicate that. Ben told us about a piece which featured at the Edinburgh Festival a couple of years ago called *The Factory* by Badac Theatre in which participants become part of an immersive theatre as victims of the Holocaust in Auschwitz-Birkenau; the piece aims to give you the experience of going into a gas chamber. The performance is a very shocking one with actors screaming at you and ordering you to comply with their commands. Ian Shuttleworth who writes for the Financial Times and Chris Wilkinson, who writes for The Guardian, both attended the performance separately and had similar experiences of it. When Wilkinson attended and refused to do as the actors said, it resulted in the actors not knowing how to respond, getting more abusive with him and then just ignoring him for the rest of the performance. Wilkinson's article on this begins with *How do you deal with an*

audience member who doesn't do what they're told?, and it seems like the theatre company had no consideration for what might happen if the audience fought back.

Rules vs. Flexibility
Anne Nigten spoke about how the whole issue of the shifting and flexibility with transgression with rules is so familiar in the arts that when you start to include new audiences, you're also continuing your experience with new forms of art. She thinks you should be aware that you're creating layers of experiments at the same time. The audience aren't used to your experiment art form probably. She thinks it's fun to push the borders as a maker. When having conversations with funders you have to meet transparencies and have formal rules. She thinks there are lots of interesting new things such as commercial games and digital systems which are related to politics and different framings. She thinks that we're more complicated than we dare to phrase right now. She thinks that it's not just design issues we've been talking about but there is a shift in the form of interactive art pieces.

Matt Locke spoke about how transgression happened in the 60s in the arts and how you needed specific spaces for it but how now it's at the heart of all culture. Anne said how pop culture and art mix is so interesting and how it's so new for us: you're not making things for a handful of people anymore, you have the potential to reach millions.

Rachel Jacobs suggested that by having contact with participants, you're still involved with the set of rules and making a decision about how you feel about their personal experience. With regards to commissioning work, she feels that commissioners also need to think about how people would feel about the work. What kind of experience are you supporting?

Responsibility with Pieces
John Hunter brought in the point that you cannot separate due diligence from what you find acceptable as a human being. He referred back to the example of the Punchdrunk piece where the child was crying and said that as a maker you need to consider whether you find it acceptable to make a 6 year old cry. Sometimes, you do in fact need to make some people cry to give others the time of their life. He further stated that if a participant were to kill themselves, would you be responsible for it? You can never predict the way someone is going to respond to something that you've created.

Matt Locke said how the compliance team at Channel 4 have said that you can't design everything for extremists. To design for the most extreme response you're going to get is unrealistic so you need to get an understanding of what the broad behaviour is going to be. From this you can have systems. You can't design to control extreme behaviour.

With regards to Blast Theory's *A Machine to See With* and Matt Adams' question about whether some participants who were unhappy with the experience had the right to feel outraged, John pointed out that people pay money for their choice to be restricted and the piece leading you through the scenarios. If the restriction didn't occur then they'd just be walking around living their life. There is an expectation when taking part in the work and an investment which needs to be rewarded. They have a disappointment when there is not a direct payoff. He thinks that with the Punchdrunk piece if people had demanded to have been let out then they would have obliged. Niki doesn't think they would have as there was no space to get out; it's not until the next space that there is an exit.

Sally Jane came back to Matt Locke's point about designing for foreseeable behaviours with regards to Channel 4. She spoke about how in industrial design they design for a 'beyond normal accident'. She said how this was an extensions of the telecommunications industry response. She came back to the post-its and read one out which said 'When is it appropriate to end a relationship?'. We build up a relationship of trust with people and they've made themselves vulnerable. How and when does the trust end?

Audience Relationships with the Work and Exits

Dominic Shaw spoke about how the core players/audience of these pieces have tried to become part of the shaping process of the work. Players have been known to email about how the next game could start. They have also tried to force the evaluation process.

Mat Trivett spoke about the dichotomy between control and openness. When creating a space for transgression and an exit strategy, there should always be a controlled openness. Ju told us how she was thinking of an exit strategy rather than ethical strategy. There needs to be a frothing space where people can have a psychological de-brief.

Dominic said how people who have taken part in their work have carried on their own community. He feels bad for not being able to respond to them about things once the piece is over, but when he does this is just goes on and on. Matt Locke pointed out that people don't discuss design patterns around endings enough. He gave the example of how they had to think about how to close down the Big Brother community and the diffculty of that. Jem discussed how in traditional theatre practice the experience ends with the lights coming up and the audience clapping. Having immersed them you then return them to the 'real world'. With immersive theatre, how do you do this? There is no clapping or end curtain call or a bar to go to for discussion.

Giles Lane followed up on John's comments about ethics with regards to the intention of the audience. He thought this was interesting as it's always to do with the intention of the artist. It brought him back to a thought about what Mat had said about managing transgression. The attention and expectations of the audience is different to 40 years ago. He thinks there is more *story-making* going on now as opposed to *story-telling*.

Victoria Pratt told us about their SMS piece *Your Government has Gone to Sleep* which Invisible Flock created two versions of. In one of the versions the narrative voice inside the work was slowly removed, which Victoria thinks felt insincere in the end. In the second version there was a countdown for it shutting down, showing participant's that this was their last chance to communicate. After this exchanges between players over the network continue with their own momentum.

Brendan brought in a point about the SMS dilemma with regards to who is ultimately in control of making the ethical decision. As an artist you grow an ethical consciousness through a process of reflection. What about having to function in an institutional framework? You're having to work in someone else's ethical framework.

Matt read a tweet from @Mocksim which was: '#actotherwise "Our whole concept of control is naïve, primitive, ridden with an almost retributive idea of causality" Stafford Beer'

Session 2
Integrity and Deception (**Closed Session)**

This session was led by Marina Jirotka. It was a closed session with no tweeting or filming of the conversations This was to give delegates the chance to discuss openly concerns which face them, or ethical challenges that they've had to deal with in a more confidential environment.

Session 3
Next Steps

Matt Adams began the session by asking what the outcomes of the seminar might be.

Rachel said that she thinks we've seen some interesting examples and that it might be worth looking at how to interpret them, rather than write a manifesto. Mat Trivett asked what would be a useful mechanism to support those in practice? Case studies are good for supporting previous experiences, but if you're teaching the delivery of a piece what else could there be?

Rachel brought in the idea of mentoring. People often contact Active Ingredient and ask them about their practice for advice. Anne told us that her team decided to publish a paper for a journal.

Marina said that talking about it in different practices has been useful as it means different things in different contexts. Ju was interested in it with regards to legal risk. Giles was intesretsed in the distinction between ethical choices and moral ones. To him an ethical approach is to take something on board, whereas a moral one is to decide not to do a certain type of work anymore. The two are quite fundamentally separate. To him ethics is about *why* you do what you do and morals are about *how* you do what you do.

Anne was interested in the collaboration between artists and researchers and wanted to know what kind of actions are being proposed in this relationship. Rachel emphasised the value of the artists role and the impact that they have in experiential ways. They can do things in a clearer and explicit way than government might do.

Kate questioned what we mean by 'the public' and emphasised that phones are cultural actors. Performances which use phones are acting for a small part of culture. Do we need to think ethically about *who* the performances are reaching?

With regards to technology and performance, Tassos Stevens discussed the importance about who the work is reaching and how it is reaching them. With regards to consultancy he's doing at the moment one of the questions asked is 'what would the Daily Mail think of this?' It's about how the greater audience would hear about work, which is the audience connected to something like the Daily Mail.

A Case Study on Gifting

Tassos Stevens presented to us a case study of a piece that he worked on. He began by telling us a bit about his background and that of Coney. He comes from a psychology background, having a doctorate in this area. The case study described was carried out in a pilot, an act of 'extreme gift giving'. A gift was made to a stranger via an elaborate process. He discussed the mechanisms of consideration and safeguarding required to do this kind of gifting well, and what

13

that might reflect on ethical processes generally.

Adam said that it reminded him about a project by Robin Hely called *Neurocam* in which he kidnapped himself. He put a billboard in Melbourne saying 'Neurocam - open your mind' and let people join the website. You would be inducted into it and then abducted and interrogated by people. Participants were told to spray-paint across the billboard what they thought Neurocam was. Tassos also knew of this project and explained how people were set assignments to work out what this thing was. The two rules were that if you fail the missions then you would be dismissed and if you spoke about it to anyone you would as well. You were told that you were an employee of Neurocam.

Can You See Me Now and Ethics
Niki told us about a run of *Can You See Me Now?* in Amsterdam. The game runs as a game of chase with runners in the physical world pursuing online players in a mixed reality world. At the beginning of the piece, participants are asked to name someone they haven't seen in a while. Throughout the game this person is referenced by the runners whenever they see or catch one of the participants, bringing in issues surrounding *absence* and *presence*. How this transgresses is explored through the nature of the game. When Niki was performing as a runner in this piece, she had caught a player and was confronted with having to say "Runner 1 has caught Madeline McCann" as they had named her as their unseen person. As a performer in that context she had to make a decision about whether to say it or not and she decided against it. At the time it felt too current and she did not know what the intentions of the participant were, whether it was political or a crass statement. The player kept coming back and still using Madeline McCann as the unseen person. Niki and the other players made a joint decision to block the player from the game. To this day she still doesn't know what his intention was.

Tassos discussed the relationship between different personality types and player's role choices in games. There is the *achiever*, who looks to do what they can and level up, there is the *socialiser* who wants to chat to people, there is the *explorer* who wants to see what the game world has to offer and then there is the *griefer* who wants to break the game or experience of other players. If someone is griefing perhaps it is the right decision to take them out of the game.

Moderating Work
Matt Adams linked back to Matt Locke's discussion about broadcasters having procedures and artists having to question these things in a different way. Blast Theory have a friend who often takes the name 'Arabfag' when he's playing games online. When 'Arabfag' turned up to play one of Blast Theory's pieces with that name, Matt Adams was ready to remove them from the game.

Ju discussed moderating in relation to Blast Theory's piece *Rider Spoke*. In *Rider Spoke*, people are asked quite innocent questions as they cycle around the city. The answers are recorded and later ranked to form a database of answers for future cyclists to listen to as they ride. To sort the recordings, Blast Theory rank the answers from 1 to 5. There are lots of answers which come back that don't sit comfortably with the Artists, a lot to do with religion, but these are included in the recordings to try to keep the piece without bias. Matt Adams said how they had a huge anxiety about how to sort the recordings ethically. They tried to do it in a rational way, especially as the recordings were not sorted by just one person and so they had to come up with a standardised rating system:

5 = I would love to listen to this
4 = I would enjoy listening to this
3 = I don't mind listening to this
2 = I wouldn't want to listen to this
1 = I can't hear this or I would never want to listen to this

It was very subjective and they were making a very personal response to the recordings.

Session 4
Ivy4Evr and Ethics
For the last part of the day Matt Adams discussed the ethics around Blast Theory's work *Ivy4Evr*

An Overview
The piece gives an insight into the fictional life of Ivy - a 17 year old teenager who is in a band, lives in a small town and takes risks. She's going through a week which is dramatic and full of change. Once signed up to the piece Ivy will talk to you about things such as sex and music. The more you respond the more she'll text you back. At the start of it you receive a text from her saying that a photo of a used condom has been posted on Facebook and tagged with her name and her ex-boyfriend. She feels humiliated by this and so goes to stay with her friend Adz in another town for a few days.

On Ivy's first night away she sends you a text asking if you've ever missed their period. The software which was built for the piece allows for you as a participant to build on certain conversations with Ivy.

One of the reasons that they wanted to use SMS was for the personal quality and intimacy. They felt that by the piece being in an SMS format it would give an opportunity to engage teenagers in discussions about sex and drugs. Texts are more anonymous.

Interactions in *Ivy4Evr*
Matt Adams presented a conversation between a 13 year old girl called Caitlin and Ivy. Ivy responds to Caitlin based on keywords which trigger her reply, Caitlin is having a real conversation with Ivy; her responses are in real time. This brings into play fictional conversations and ethics. Matt said that this conversation is both compelling and disquietin. Matt Locke pointed out that from the research they conducted, the participants *are* aware that it's a fictional conversation that they're participating in.

Matt Adams has led presentations on this piece of work before and people have been outraged by this exchange because they feel like a young and vulnerable person has been tricked into engaging in a fake conversation that is private and very real within a fictional construct.

Matt Locke explained that the young people were aware that it was fiction when they signed up. Channel 4 receive conversations on forums and Twitter about programmes such as *Skins*, *Misfits* and *Hollyoaks* in a very similar way to this. This fictional context has proved to create more awareness of sexual health messages for teenagers, as a result *Hollyoaks* actually got government funding to promote awareness of these issues. The experiment here was seeing how a more intimate setting of SMS could raise more awareness.

Were the texts monitored? Matt Adams explained that the system reports keywords such as 'rape' or 'abuse'. If these came up then they'd be flagged to an operator.

Anne questioned if they could be sure that Caitlin was having a *real* conversation with Ivy as it might be a character for her as well. Lisa Finch brought in the ethics around there being a bit of an age gap between Ivy as a young women and Caitlin as a 13 year old. Kate compared this to research which has been done about robots caring for the elderly and it's been shown that there are lots of benefits of this so that they have social contact but yet it makes people feel uncomfortable.

Tassos stated that *Ivy4Evr* is about play and performance but because the player is younger, people get more actively outraged, saying it's deception instead.

Conversations in the Piece

John Hunter was working with Blast Theory at the time of *Ivy4Evr.* John explained that with the piece being automated the aim of the work was to create something which could run itself. In an ideal world you'd have a million real Ivys talking to real Caitlins but in order to reach more Caitlins they had to use a computer to do this. For John, this comes back to the idea of what's being contributed by each party and what's being exchanged. It's inviting an earnest contribution form Caitlin but there's nothing at stake from Ivy as everyone will get the same message from her and so for John, that's an issue. Matt Locke pointed out that Ivy never asks you direct questions but rather words things in such a way that you're asked to reflect. You're never asked to reveal anything about yourself. Before Matt Locke took over Channel 4 Education in 2007 there were documentaries in the morning during school transmission hours, with young people who were 16 and above talking about their sex lives and being interviewed by people. There was an ethical issue there as these teenagers who were now in their twenties started contacting Channel 4 saying they didn't wanted the programme with them in shown anymore as it was embarrassing for them. *Ivy4Evr* does not expose Caitlin to that kind of attention. They knew that this was all about private space.

Steve suggested that by being so concerned about being ethical they monitored Caitlin's conversation to the point where if she'd said something you'd they'd have felt compelled to act. Matt Locke said they would only flag the conversation if it hit certain criteria. Brendan said that the exchange doesn't bother him but it's more about using a trusted form of communication like a phone and there's the expectation that there is someone at the end of the text.

Keywording, Triggers and Ethics

Rachel said that, remembering being a teenage girl, she remembers certain judgments being made on keywords that could be ethically difficult for teenagers. She spoke about how when talking to her friends, if you started asking them about their relationship with their parents it would potentially bring a confession on. This brings in the idea of how certain keywords can bring out difficult confessions and also about how Tony White was writing the script and who was making the judgments on what could be contentious. Matt Locke told us about how there were play-tests and paper-tests as well.

Ju spoke about how as a group of artists they were, and still are, at a point in their development where they were trying to push intimacy to scale and to see what that means. Ethically, as she

looks at the issue of not being able to respond to someone one on one, she's ok with it but another ethical problem she has is that it's actually a group of near mid 40 year olds pretending to be 16 year olds. Ben spoke about how he did start playing the game but then stopped as it felt creepy as he's not the target audience.

Matt Adams brought in an example of how the keyword trigger went very wrong. This was with regards to Ivy saying "....you're lucky I can't talk to my parents about this stuff though, can you?" and a participant responded saying "Not really, my dad passed away a couple of years ago" to which Ivy responded "You're lucky". The software had detected *dead* and not *passed away*. That is a fault in the system which they're trying to design out.

John Hunter came back to the point about never asking for information, as he disagrees with it. Asking someone about their parents is asking for information. If people did volunteer personal information it can be seen as a success, as there is a hope that people will deeply engage with it to get the most from the experience. What's interesting is why is it against the aims of the projects? Why was creating a virtual 17 year old girl the way to achieve it? You need to suspend their disbelief that it's a computer to get something from them.

Steve said that what's interesting is how does the story unfold after everything? Does Ivy take a set of decisions about things? It's about the whole story and where she ends up.

Victoria brought up how for a teenager it's really exciting having an older friend and for a lot of teenagers who don't have many friends, getting texts is an exciting thing and this is a strength of the piece.

Giles wondered whether everyone was playing out their adult feelings about the experience and so was curious about how teenagers would respond to it; would they be uncomfortable? Matt Adams told us how they worked with a number of teenagers on tests for *Ivy4Evr* and they were very relaxed about it. Ju suggested that when we're talking about ethics and our anxiety with the audience with regards to everyone being vulnerable, we sometimes do it as if people don't have a brain for themselves.

System and Structure
Matt Adams told us about how there is a skill in writing for interactivity. Everything has to have a call for action. Writing in only 140 characters is quite tricky as well, as it's about always being able to answer a call with a subsequent call. This is quite structural and mechanical. Finding language which works in interactivity is a big challenge. Each of the text messages is looking for 3 or 4 keywords.

Niki thought there was something interesting here about training a system to respond. What would the difference be to train a real teenage performer to respond to these messages?

Fiction and Reality
Matt Adams summed up the discussion surrounding the boundary between fiction and reality. If this is safely framed in a fiction then the issues evaporate. However if it spreads out into a reality and for whatever reason someone thinks they're talking to a real person, then the ethics shift. All the works which had been discussed over the last couple of days are all, in some way, blurring the boundaries of fiction and reality. They're all pushing at an edge where there is ambiguity.

Conclusion for Act Otherwise

To finish Matt Adams asked for people to volunteer to tell everyone what ethics is to them and in relation to their practice.

- Tassos Stevens said that it's an active and involved processes of empathy and consideration

- Dominic Shaw said that it's about balance

- Adam Sporne said it's a way of justifying what you're doing

- Mat Trivett said that it's the reflective act of negotiation

- Brendan Walker said that it's almost an extension of the risk assessment process. It's the moral and spiritual jeopardy which you have to think about

- Giles Lane said that ethics isn't always about the risk and liability issue but also about the quality of your intention behind doing it. It's not just about limiting danger but the commitment to delight and joy. This is often why people become artists: it's about wanting to inject positivity and difference into the world

- Rachel Jacobs said that it's something about the confidence in what everyone had shared over the last few days. She thinks that there are people involved in ethics committees who would be amazed by these conversations. What we do with it she doesn't know

- John Hunter said how he thinks respect comes into it, but he doesn't know how. He thinks that with regards to the work he makes it's about avoiding exploitation and having equality and respect; he knows they're different concepts but are linked with regards to how we make ethical decisions

- Ju Row Farr told us that she's written down something about not knowing what the position is. Whether it's stuff out of sight, activity you can't control, audiences that you don't quite know who they are, and subjects you're pushing forward with - both extreme and delightful. She thinks it's something about not knowing and how we position ourselves with that. We often don't know and it's not a feature of being an artist, it's a feature about life that we have to know some things in advance, make some things up as we go and know that some things are going to go wrong. Ideally we'd like to know how we would handle those things but we can't. It's about accepting that we don't know.

- Tassos Stevens said that the idea of respect was interesting. There is often an assumed passivity or a view that that people are like sheep, at risk, and it's about how we look after our sheep. But in the work which has been discussed, the audience is taking an active role in their own experience and as a maker you have to accept the fact that they are taking on some of the stuff themselves. Also he thinks it's something about where someone gets left at the end of the work. It's about respecting that you don't have to take care of everything and the audience can take care of some things themselves.