

## Chase in Poble Sec, by Carmen Jane.

A performance in the Art Futura festival is about to convert the streets of the local neighbourhood into the scene of a videogame through the internet. Players will be equipped with GPS.

(Heading under photo:) Chase Dickie Eato (left) and Paul Dungworth, yesterday during a rehearsal, in the Mercat de les Flors.

Ever since Joan Manuel Serrat, it seemed like nobody else in the world of arts remembered Poble Sec. This week however, Blast Theory, a group of interactive British creators, are going to recreate an interactive virtual area of 600 metres in the local neighbourhood in order to construct a videogame: *Can you see me now?* Can you see me now? is a chase that takes place between two teams played simultaneously in the street and through the internet. The game is to represent the pièce de résistance of the multimedia Art Futura festival, which is to be held from next Thursday to Sunday in the Mercat de les Flors.

“We have recreated the buildings inside the game area, which are about 300 metres in a circular radar taking as a centre point the Mercat de les Flors, so that the players can be found on the map”, explains Caitlin, one of the producers of the game. “They are stylized imaginations, we can’t go into too much detail” she says justifying herself. Nevertheless her work, which involves verifying the ground, reproduces in a more than accurate way streets and buildings in the vicinity that lies between the streets behind the Mercat de les Flors and a small area of Montjuïc.

A titanic task, but also a perishable one, since “the game works whilst it is in play, afterwards all that is left are only the photos in our web”, clarifies Caitlin.

*Can you see me now?* reproduces the scheme of a classic game of cops and robbers, but by fusing the real world with virtual reality. Up to twenty players, connected through the internet in their homes, hide from five other players who are following their virtual signal through the streets of the neighbourhood. The players at home see the street plan and the virtual buildings; the real players have a hand computer (PDA) the representation of their loot and have to find the exact point where it lies.

“Yes, you have to run a lot”, says Sheila Ghelangy, one of the three runners who was rehearsing yesterday checking out the equipment in situ. The technology that lies behind the project is very complex and requires an important staging production. “Each player in the street has to carry a walkie talkie in order to communicate with the rest of the team, a handheld computer connected to a Global Positioning Receiver System which gives him the position of the player at home and which allows him to send text messages and take photos, and a GPS that sends via satellite his position on the map”, explains Caitlin. When it finds it out, it takes a photo and sends it to the web.

The result is five players dressed in black laden with gadgets who chase each other like fools among the traffic and passers-by.

“The funniest thing is the people’s reaction. They stop you and ask you what you are doing. An elderly woman in Germany thought that the end of the world had come”, tells Sheila, who assures to have run “hundreds of times”, and that the worst thing is “that you are so involved that you don’t even see the cars”. This is of course another item. They don’t stop the city life just for their game, which in the case of Barcelona lasts for about four hours a day.

## Other performances

Blast Theory is not a new group. They have already carried out similar performances in Sheffield, Rotterdam and Cologne, amongst other cities. They won first prize last September in the last festival of Ars Electronica in Linz (Austria) and were finalists of the prestigious audiovisual British BAFTA awards.

“We see it as a game, but some people look for the philosophy of the relation between what is real and what is virtual reality, between the person who runs and the person who chases... Some very interesting relations are generated here.” adds Caitlin.