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UK group do new media masterclass in Adelaide

by [Christopher Wainwright](#)

Arts Hub Australia

Wednesday, January 14, 2004

This week, sixteen Australians from the arts and multi-media industries are participating in a three-day master class programme called *Blast Theory Masterclass* led by the British leading new-media artists' group, Blast Theory.

Blast Theory comprising Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj work was short-listed for an Interactive Arts BAFTA award and received an Honorary Mention at the Transmediale Awards in Berlin 2001. Their BBC interactive television series *Can You See Me Now?* won the 2003 Golden Nica Award for interactive art at last year's Prix Ars Electronica – International Competition of Cyberarts 2003.

They are presently in Adelaide as part of the South Australian government's Adelaide Thinkers in Residence program. Resident for three months since December 30 2003, they are here to undertake a number of projects including the Australian Network for Art and Technology's (ANAT) 2004 master class.

One of the main reasons for Blast Theory's visit is to develop a mixed reality game using 3G mobile phones for the 2004 Adelaide Fringe (February 20 to March 14) called *I Like Frank in Adelaide*.

I Like Frank in Adelaide performances will be taking place between Monday, March 1 and Friday, March 12 2004 at the University of Adelaide's North Terrace campus.

Adelaide Thinkers in Residence Director, Ann Clancy says, 'Blast Theory bring an enormous amount of experience and knowledge to Adelaide. The group's appointment as Adelaide Thinkers in Residence will not only leave a lasting impact on the state artistically and technologically, but will also allow South Australia's capacity in technology and the arts to be communicated to a broader national and international audience.'

During the three days of the master class, participants will be using their expertise in fields such as wearable computing, software engineering, computer animation and film making to program and develop content for *I Like Frank in Adelaide*.

'Blast Theory's performance will be the world's biggest game that's played both online and physically in the street. It's a mixture of hide and seek, chasey and treasure hunt, using the sort of technology last seen in *The Matrix*, explains Adelaide Fringe's Artistic Director, Karen Hadfield.

Of the sixteen participants aged roughly between 20 and 40, five of them are working full-time with Blast Theory on the *I Like Frank in Adelaide* project as part of an 'attachment' program that has been initiated by the Adelaide Thinkers in Resident program.

ANAT's director, Julianne Pierce says, 'The longer aim is to create innovative projects and partnerships for the development of creative content for emerging communications platforms in South Australia and nationally.'

On March 16 2004, Blast Theory will be the subject and part of a public lecture presented by the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence and the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre at the University of South Australia.



Christopher Wainwright

Christopher Wainwright is an Adelaide based freelance arts and music journalist and music critic. His work has been and is published by Arts Hub Australia, the Australian Financial Review, Eureka Street and State of the Arts. His love and knowledge of the arts have been enhanced by his postgraduate studies in classical music and arts management. Having a healthy curiosity and catholic tastes he enjoys discovering the many diverse aspects of the arts. Before establishing himself as an arts journalist in July 2003, for a number of years, he managed a successful arts management and marketing consultancy with a diverse client base. The opportunity to diversify and communicate more freely about the arts evolved in July 2002 when the Helpmann Academy and Arts SA awarded him a 12-month arts journalism mentorship, mentored by music writer and critic, Graham Strahle.

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The online home for Australian Arts Workers.

Virtual reality bites

Sunday, February 01, 2004
Arts Hub Australia

They seek him here, they seek him where? Not the Scarlet Pimpernel, not Wally, but Frank. And where do they seek him? Adelaide Fringe Festival – the Festival where you don't have to be there to be there, thanks to 3G technology.

Get ready to blast off as Blast Theory in Adelaide, South Australia, and the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham presents the world's first 3G mixed reality game from 2 March.

I like Frank in Adelaide will break new technological ground as players in the real city chat and build relationships with players in the virtual city as they search for the elusive Frank. Is this the beginning of a new and significant cultural trend of multi-player games using mobile phones? The developers believe that the blurring of virtual and real, so familiar in movies such as *The Matrix*, is on our doorstep - and Frank is about to prove it.

Building on the experience and technology of previous projects such as *Can You See Me Now?* (winner of the Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica for Interactive Art, 2003); *Uncle Roy All Around You* (currently touring the UK) and their work developing interactive television for the BBC, Blast Theory has the street cred to pull this street game off

Online players can be dropped into a virtual Adelaide from the icy wastes of the Arctic, or anywhere else in the world, to join street players running in the hot summer sun as they all go about the quest of finding Frank.

You heard it here first, so be one of the first to join in. Registrations to play are being accepted now. Tell your grandchildren that you were there (or not). They will no doubt be mildly amused by the lack of sophistication of it all.

[CLICK HERE](#) to register.

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Gaming evolution - Blast Theory in Australia

by [Tonya Box](#)

Arts Hub Australia
Friday, February 20, 2004

Where once man hunted for game in the form of mammoths, llamas and buffalo, he now hunts for a different kind of game that can deliver the illusion of a new world and a new identity. Since the first graphical computer game (a version of tic-tac-toe) was invented in 1952, gaming has advanced to encompass astounding graphics and 3D imagery that stimulates a player's sensors as much, if not more, than real life itself. In just over 50 years, gaming has evolved to include computer games, video games and virtual reality games that immerse players more and more deeply into a convincing world of make-believe. Now, as we enter the dawn of the next gaming revolution of 'mixed reality', certain organisations stand out in their achievements for furthering the realm of gaming possibilities. One such organisation is [Blast Theory](#). Based in the UK, the group is highly renowned for its influential multimedia performances. And lucky for us, they have chosen to launch the world's biggest game played both online and physically in the real world at this year's Adelaide Fringe Festival.



Gamers enter a world of mixed reality with Blast Theory's latest creation, *I Like Frank*, taking place at this year's Adelaide Fringe Festival

As audiences that grew up with computer games in the 80s and 90s grow older, studies show that many of them continue playing games well into their 30s and 40s. But in order to keep these committed gamers interested, new challenges must be invented. Of course, as these new games are invented, younger audiences' first computer games become more advanced than before, and so new inventions must again be created to satisfy the next older generation of players. Before we get ourselves into a head-spin, one need only think about how far we have come from the modest joystick to prove how advanced our gaming activities have become.

Mobile phones and the internet are just two examples of new mediums that have changed the way we play games. Most importantly for gaming companies, billions of dollars are made by these markets internationally each year. One of the newest and most profitable sort of games played on the internet at the moment are known as Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG). Also referred to as a 'virtual world' often of the medieval environment, an MMORPG is a place where players can co-habit with hundreds of thousands of other people simultaneously as they master skills and continuously develop their online persona. EverQuest is one the most popular games of this sort. With almost half a million users each paying a monthly subscription fee of \$13, EverQuest has at any given moment up to 50,000 or more people from more than 120 countries playing online in the fanciful landscapes of 'Norrath'. These dramas unfold on more than 40 dedicated Sony servers, each accommodating up to 2,000 players interacting with the program and each other. The oldest MMORPG is Ultima Online which has 225,000 players, and the largest is Lineage with 4 million subscribers, mostly in Korea. With a market for such games more than apparent, it is no wonder gaming continues to evolve at a rapid rate.

As for Blast Theory, the group identified what they consider to be inevitable conversions between games like MMORPGs and games played on mobile phones. By merging this concept with new technologies that integrate the physical and digital worlds, Blast Theory's unique mixed reality game, *I Like Frank* was created.

Movies like *The Matrix* become much easier to get a grip on when advances in gaming technology are understood. But research groups like the Mixed Reality Laboratory (MRL) at the University of Nottingham have been studying such developments for some time. MRL and Blast Theory have been working together since 1997. The aim of the lab is to look at the boundaries between real and virtual space. Its multidisciplinary team comprises computer scientists, product designers, psychologists, sociologists and ethnographers who help Blast Theory with the technical applications required for their creative ventures. The team's artistic and scientific successes are renowned internationally. Artistically, their projects are in demand all around the world, while their research papers are accepted by international conferences and publications in the scientific community.

I Like Frank is no less than a groundbreaking project that has once again resulted from this creative partnership. It will take place online at www.ilikefrank.com and on the streets of Adelaide using third generation (3G) mobile phones. Although the phones have received mixed performance reviews, they offer broadband services which include high-speed data transmission and internet and video links – features integral to *I Like Frank*. In this game, players in the real city of Adelaide can chat with players in the virtual city of Adelaide as they search for the elusive 'Frank'. Described as a mixture of hide-and-seek, chasey and treasure hunt, *I Like Frank* players can build relationships, swap information and test the possibilities of a new hybrid space. When real and online players come into close proximity of each other in their respective worlds, the online players can send text messages to the phones of the real players, and the real players can record audio messages which are relayed back to the online players.

Blast Theory believes that live multi-player games using mobile phones will be a significant cultural form in the future. The group helped pioneer the use of new technologies within performance contexts in the early 90s, and has been researching the convergence of mobile and online technologies since 2000. Previous Blast Theory projects have included *Can You See Me Now?*, which won the Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica for Interactive Art in 2003, and *Uncle Roy All Around You* which is continuing its UK tour this year. *I Like Frank* builds on the experience and technology of these projects integrating mobile phone technology for the first time.

Comprising a creative team of three, Blast Theory formed in 1991 and is made up of Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj. Adams told *Arts Hub* that Blast Theory feels now is a very rich moment for mixed reality games.

'Many people are bored playing games like *Tombraider* all the time and are looking

for different things,' says Adams. 'And there's tremendous interest in the arts community for creating works that deal with games.'

As for why they chose Adelaide to launch *I Like Frank*: 'Adelaide is one of only a few cities in the world that offers a 3G mobile network. We've been given the use of the networks, handsets and call time to do whatever we want to explore the technology, and this acted as a big plus in coming to Adelaide,' says Adams.

The South Australian based m.Net Corporation linked Adelaide to its 3G network in October 2002.

'The development of mobile services is not about translating the World Wide Web onto the tiny screen of a video phone,' said m.Net CEO Andrew Ekiert at the time. 'This is about building relevant business models for a future of human communication that has not yet been imagined.'

Blast Theory was invited to undertake the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence program which aims to establish South Australia as an innovative and dynamic leader in new media cultural initiatives. It is a 12-week program that brings world-leading thinkers to live and work in Adelaide.

Ann Clancy, Director of Adelaide Thinkers in Residence says of Blast Theory: 'The group's appointment will not only leave a lasting impact on the state artistically and technologically, but will also allow South Australia's capacity in technology and the arts to be communicated to a broader national and international audience.'

I Like Frank will take place from March 1-12 as part of the Adelaide Fringe Festival. To register, go to www.ilikefrank.com. Blast Theory will present a public lecture as part of the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence program on March 16 at the Adelaide Town Hall from 6pm. Entry is free and bookings can be made online HERE.

The emergence of new technologies such as mixed reality games always raises the question of what could possibly come next. Blast Theory is already taking that next step, currently working with the BBC to develop an interactive television program that includes both real players and online players. Blast Theory can't divulge much more information about the project, except that they are due to shoot the pilot this British summer.

The game certainly is not over yet.



Tonya Box

Tonya Box holds a BA in Communication and Media Studies, Anthropology and Drama. She has written for various online publications and worked with a range of arts companies and events from Cirque Du Soleil to the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Tonya also studied at the Australian College of Journalism. She writes for Arts Hub to help foster a thriving and proud Australian arts culture.

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