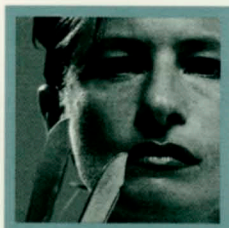


on tour

UK DRAMA & DANCE 2004

COME UP TO THE LAB → A SCIART SPECIAL
**BOBBY BAKER_RANDOM DANCE_TOM SAPSFORD_CAROL BROWN_CURIOUS
KIRA O'REILLY_THIRD ANGEL_BLAST THEORY_DUCKIE
CHEEK BY JOWL_QUARANTINE_WEBPLAY_GREEN GINGER
CIRCUS_DIARY DATES_UK FESTIVALS_COMPANY PROFILES**
 **BRITISH
COUNCIL**

FEATURES

on tour 024 →


4

**WHAT DOES LONDON
SMELL LIKE?**

Louise Gray sniffs out the latest projects by Curious, Kira O'Reilly and Third Angel


**COME UP TO
THE LAB**

Lyndsey Winship asks why UK choreographers are turning to the science lab for inspiration



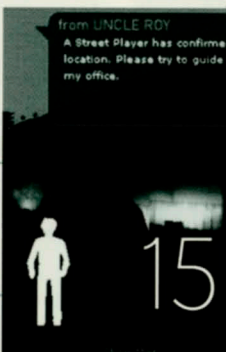
8

**THE PERFORMANCE ARTIST
AND THE PEA**

John Daniel on Bobby Baker's plan to teach the world how to live

**THERE'S A CITY IN MY
MOBILE PHONE...**

Samara Mitchell plays Blast Theory's latest interactive game in Adelaide



15



18

WEBPLAY

Sydney Thornbury reports on an internet-based project that brings theatre into the classroom

20

**'ALL THE WORK I DO IS
UNCOMPLETED AND
UNFINISHED'**

Dominic Cavendish talks to Declan Donnellan about his latest production of *Othello*



24

**THEATRE
WITHOUT
BOUNDARIES**

Lyn Gardner goes into Quarantine



26


OH WHAT A CIRCUS, OH WHAT A SHOW

Dorothy Max Prior marvels at the latest UK circus spectacles

**'THE LAST THING I
WANT TO DO IS
ENCOURAGE
PEOPLE TO GO TO
THE THEATRE'**

Sophie Travers analyses the Duckie mentality



30



33

ACTING STRANGE

Terry Lee takes twenty life-size latex heads to Réunion

FOR MORE THAN SEVEN YEARS BLAST THEORY HAS BEEN EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW PARADIGMS FOR GAMING AND PERFORMANCE THEATRE

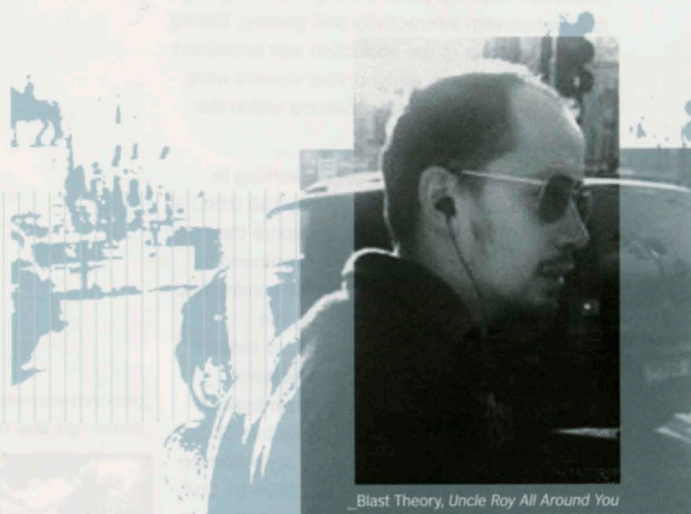
THERE'S A *city* IN MY *mobile* PHONE...

In March this year over five hundred people hit the streets of Adelaide, Australia to play *I Like Frank in Adelaide*, a vast interactive game connecting players on the street with players online, developed to coincide with the 2004 Adelaide Fringe. **Samara Mitchell** went in search of the elusive Frank

Thursday March 4 2004, 2.45pm. The mid-afternoon sun is cutting through my sunscreen at a sharp angle. The city grid is baking and I'm cooled only by the need to concentrate and by the metallic casing of a Third Generation (3G) mobile phone in my left palm, currently displaying a street map of the CBD. I'm the one walking down North Terrace who looks like a small, roving, red blip. Working my way towards the game's entrance point - and cheating just a little bit - I punch in my coordinates and await further instructions. 'Walk NE into the city...'

In March, I was a player in the latest game designed by Blast Theory, a partnership of new media artists from the UK, whose founding members include Nick Tandavanitj, Ju Row Farr and Matt Adams. In conjunction with Professor Steve Benford, Martin Flintham, Jan Humble and Ian Taylor from The University of Nottingham's Mixed Reality Lab, Blast Theory was in South Australia as an invited guest of the Adelaide Thinkers in Residency programme.

It was British artist Wyndham Lewis who first coined the phrase 'blast theory, bless practice'. Appropriating the title from an anarchist's fanzine, Blast Theory was formed by an eclectic circle of work colleagues in a central London →

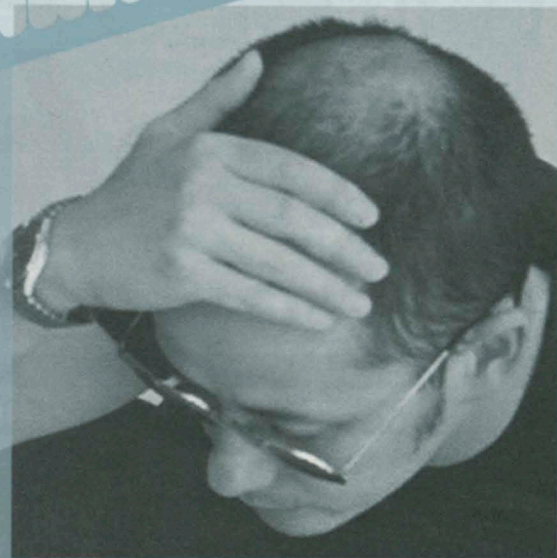


Blast Theory, *Uncle Roy All Around You*

ASSESSING THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CITY HAS BEEN VITAL TO THE NUANCES OF THE GAME'S NARRATIVE

arthouse cinema. They would hang out together whenever a film was in session and discuss ideas for future performances. The catalyst for Blast Theory's first public performance was an article that Row Farr and Adams spotted in The Guardian under the headline "Gunman Kills Three at Mobil Shop". This tabloid caption was to become the basis for the multimedia performance piece *Gunman Kills Three*. But it was Blast Theory's nation-wide performance event *Kidnap* (1998) – a lottery in which volunteers were kidnapped and held as willing captives – that signposted the group's ongoing fascination with interactivity and gaming. During *Kidnap*, footage of the abduction was broadcast live on the Internet, whilst online viewers were able to remotely operate a camera within the holding cell.

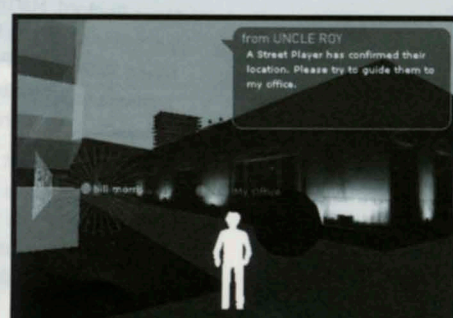
After *Kidnap*, Blast Theory began working in collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab (MRL) at The University of Nottingham. For more than seven years, together they have continued to experiment with new paradigms for gaming and performance theatre, investigating the ethnography of game-play in order to custom design interactive technologies and game interfaces. During the pre-millennium hype of 1999, the group exhibited an interactive 3D installation, *Desert Rain*: a military style mission loosely based upon events in the 1990-91 Gulf War. Six players were connected at one time to interact within a virtual 3D landscape that was projected onto a 360° screen of rainwater. The presence of water lent a sensual dimension to the typical flatness of virtually simulated environments and acted as a constant reminder to players that there was a controlled surface tension between the real world and the imaginary one.



CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'VE FINISHED THE GAME. DO YOU FEEL ANY CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE ON THE STREET AROUND YOU?

_(Main and bottom left) Blast Theory, *I Like Frank in Adelaide* (Photographer: Rosey Boehm)

_(Bottom right) Blast Theory, *Uncle Roy All Around You* (Image: Blast Theory)



Unlike traditional 3D games, the virtual characters that represented each player in *Desert Rain* did not inherit any god-like abilities – unlimited armour, supra-human strength or hyper-mobility. Nor did the game subscribe to traditional console values. Instead, players involved their whole bodies in the process of navigation, working towards a hidden objective by using a series of hand gestures and by swivelling upon a small platform beneath their feet.

During Blast Theory's residency in Adelaide, members of the group conducted a series of master classes with artists from around Australia, focussing primarily upon the social and psychological foundations of a game's development, well before the introduction of any gaming devices. For a game such as *I Like Frank In Adelaide*, assessing the psychology of the city has been vital to the nuances of the game's narrative. The group conducted extensive surveys, collecting anecdotal and historical knowledge of Adelaide in order to develop a theatrical environment that would be engaging for street players as well as the 2,800 online players that participated during the game's Fringe Festival season. By adopting 3G mobile networks, Blast Theory was able to connect street-players roaming the 3G test-bed area in the north east of Adelaide's CBD, to online players accessing the game via a virtual 3D map of Adelaide.

Thursday March 4 2004, 2.50pm. Bearing down to the South Australia Museum on North Terrace, I receive a poetic text message. Presumably it's from Frank: 'Remember when I pushed you into the fountain and you gave chase...?' I don't remember, but I can imagine it. Having an idea of the fountain Frank might be reminiscing about, I go to that position and punch in my coordinates. My phone clamours with messages from online gamers: 'Go to Rundle Street!', 'Go to the nearest post-office', 'Go to the second bike outside the Post Office!' I pick the latter of these options and retrieve a postcard from a small bag hidden beneath the bike. Printed on the back is a question: 'Who are you responsible for?' I try to leave a voice message for one of my online accomplices to say that I have retrieved the item, but someone seems to have broken the Internet. Or my phone is down... Crossing to a phone box to dial in for technical assistance, I ruminate over the last hour spent chasing the elusive Frank. Waiting for help, I notice a lady watching my reflection as she pretends to window shop. Is she part of the game? An informant perhaps, or an extra? Hyper-vigilant but playing it cool, I

pretend not to notice her as I'm booted back into the game. Minutes later my phone rings and I am guided by voices to "Future Land", a sunken courtyard surrounded by trees and empty, mirrored apartment blocks. 'Congratulations, you've finished the game. Do you feel any closer to the people on the street around you?'

Truthfully, I had felt frantic and somewhat disconnected until the moment the question was asked. It was then that a transcendent affection for the people in the city drifted gently back to me. I quickly penned an answer to the question on the back of the postcard and moved to return the handset back to base. My short walk back to the University grounds was unhurried and contemplative. I didn't find Frank in any kind of embodied sense, but his trace encouraged me to be a tourist within my own city, and to keep seeking out those individual and uncommon details that struggle for recognition within the everydayness of public life.

Blast Theory has impressed upon Adelaide audiences a valuable model for the role an artist may play in society, at the grassroots creative level, and at the upper tiers of government and industry. As part of the legacy of the company's visit to South Australia – in the form of a groundbreaking festival event, industry liaison and numerous public appearances – several businesses have formed partnerships in order to fully explore the promise of 3G networks, as a gaming platform and other cultural activities within the state. South Australia's Office for Youth is also in the process of developing a proposal to develop a program that will bring young people into the games and content industry.

As for future Blast Theory projects, the group is currently working alongside the Mixed Reality Lab in Nottingham, Sony, Nokia and various research centres as part of a European Union funded research program, in order to look at how the face of gaming may develop in light of emerging technologies. □

Samara Mitchell is a freelance writer, visual art educator and public artist based in Adelaide, South Australia. She is currently writing and presenting an educational series for ABC Asia-Pacific television called Digital Daze, examining the relationship between technology and culture. Excerpts of this article have been taken from the April/May 2004 issue of RealTime magazine (www.realttimearts.net).

www.blasttheory.co.uk

FIND OUT MORE

CULTURE LAB

Each month, the British Council's online magazine *Culture Lab* carries a range of science-related stories covering the fields of film, music, fashion, design and digital culture.
W www.culturelab-uk.com

AHDS PERFORMING ARTS

Promotes the use of digital resources to support research and teaching across the broad field of the performing arts.
W www.pads.ahds.ac.uk

BODY SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY JOURNAL

Interdisciplinary academic journal exploring performance and technology.
W www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/pfa/bstjournal

DIGITAL PERFORMANCE ARCHIVE (DPA)

Traces the rapid developments in activity that combines performance with new digital technologies.
W http://dpa.ntu.ac.uk/dpa_site

DIGITAL RESEARCH UNIT

Delivers a dynamic range of work from artists at the forefront of digital media practice.
W www.druh.co.uk

I-BEAM

Alongside Forced Entertainment, CandoCo, Lone Twin, Siobhan Davies and Rosemary Lee, Blast Theory has been commissioned to create a new typeface for the latest CD edition of I-BEAM – a national project to see what happens when you ask leading dancers to design their own typeface. *I-BEAM The Dancers Edition* is published by Plymouth Arts Centre and the Institute of Digital Art and Technology and promises to provide a fascinating insight into how dancers design and think.
W www.i-dat.org/projects/ibeam/

LOVEBYTES

Arts organisation that explores the creative and cultural potential of digital technology.
W www.lovebytes.org.uk

SCIENCE MUSEUM

Blast Theory has been commissioned by the Science Museum to create a permanent interactive exhibit for its new Energy gallery which opened on 23 July 2004. *Energy – fuelling the future* is a collaboration between the Science Museum and invited media artists and designers to find ways to prompt visitors to consider for themselves the issues around energy in stimulating and interactive ways.
W www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

WEBPLAY

THE POWER OF
TECHNOLOGY IS THE
ABILITY TO FACILITATE
COMMUNICATION AND
COLLABORATION
BETWEEN PEOPLE
ACROSS GREAT
DISTANCES



webplay

In the last four years, writes **Sydney Thornbury**, thousands of children have been connected across the Atlantic via WebPlay, an internet-based project that brings theatre into the classroom

When I created WebPlay four years ago, I was interested to see how technology could be used to support and enhance the live theatre experience for young audiences. At that time, there was a lot of fear in the theatre world about technology somehow replacing or diluting the live theatre experience. This view was exacerbated in the children's theatre world by a strand I like to call the "mouldy figs" – a group who felt it was somehow a violation of their idealised (and out-dated) notion of childhood to incorporate anything more technological than a silk parachute onto the young people's theatre stage.

Given that technology is a natural part of the child's world today, this fear seemed ridiculous. When you think that theatre is one of our oldest forms of communication and technology is our newest, doesn't it seem possible that together they could be a potent force to help develop the theatre aesthetic in young people? For me, the power of technology is the ability to facilitate communication and collaboration between people across great distances. I wanted to use it not only to link a children's theatre company with a schools

audience, but with numerous schools audiences across the world. I also wanted to link children from different countries to experience the production and create something together.

The result was WebPlay, a project that enables primary school children to create and produce plays while working in collaboration with a professional theatre company and children from partner schools in different countries. During the collaborative development and exchange of working on their plays, partner classes learn about each other and the cities they live in, while also interacting with the theatre company to learn about and see a live professional production.

WebPlay happens in Year 4 and 5 classrooms over the course of the school year. The project sits on Think.com (www.think.com), a secure and advertising free online platform created by Oracle that enables communication between schools around the world. The project consists of four phases:

WebReady – the preparation phase in which children build their own individual webpages and learn how to be safe on the Internet.

WebPartners – partnered classes in different countries (or contrasting regions) learn about each other with their research forming the basis for short plays to be created at the end of the project.

WebDrama – classes learn how a professional production is created, communicating directly with the writer, director, actors and designers. They read articles, watch video clips, look at designs, download the script and monitor an online production journal. The theatre company then tours to each city so that all the classes can see the play live and take part in a workshop on creating their own plays.

WebPlays – combining everything they've learned during the project, pupils create their own plays about their partner city. These are performed, digitally videotaped and uploaded to the website for all the classes to view and enjoy.

What has the impact been? Educationally, we have seen an increase in pupil skills - literacy, technology, drama, social studies and citizenship. But even more interesting to me has been the development of children's "soft skills". Teachers