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[Sundance Film Festival: Blast Theory](#)

[New Frontier](#) is a multimedia art installation segment of [Sundance Film Festival](#). 5th year running, New Frontier converges technology, art, light and space while pushing the boundaries of the moving image. Within New Frontier, [Blast Theory](#)'s *A Machine to See With* is an interactive film experience in which you are invited to take on the lead role in an imaginary heist movie. Led through the streets of Park City with a series of automated voice messages, participants are given choices during their journey that determine the fate of their experience. Technology used? Basic cellphones. Length of film? Approximately one hour. Film equipment? Your own mind.



I arrived to Park City for the first time, lost in the reflective mounds of snow. Straight off the plane to New Frontier, where I was to participate in a test run of *A Machine to See With*, before it opened to the public the next day. Knowing nothing more than the description above, I gave Nick Tandavanitj and John Hunter, the *Blast Theorists*, my cell phone number and anxiously waited for my first call.

[Sound Bite: “This is A Machine to See With...”](#)

The mysterious deep toned Brit instructed me to ignore any other incoming calls or messages. What if I get a call from my— FORGET IT. As I began to walk around following the instructions, *The Voice* knew what I was looking at. It knew what I was passing. It sensed the fear in my eyes as the camera zoomed in closer. It was talking so overwhelmingly fast, I was afraid I would miss something. My paranoia excelled along with my pace. Everyone was in on it. It was *The Truman Show* with an evil twist.



Could I actually get away with a bank robbery in Park City? Did I really have the guts to do it? If the words “scavenger hunt” come to mind, erase them. No, this was not a “scavenger hunt”, for there were too many emotions attached to the experience. It was not a search for objects but a search for courage within. The first major task forced me to lock myself in a bathroom stall, take out all my money from my wallet, and examine it.

[Sound Bite: “Now hide the money... somewhere they’re not going to find it...”](#)

I could have easily pretended to hide the money, but what if something happened? What if someone was watching? I decided not to use the bathroom even though I really needed to go.

The car in the empty lot was the next obstacle. As the voice instructed, I opened the door and sat inside, as if it was my own. And now was the time to *Choose My Own Adventure*. “A person will approach the car and knock three times. If you trust them, open the door,” instructed *The Voice*. A collaborator. A partner in crime. I didn’t trust her at all, but was too afraid to do this on my own. We devised our plan... I’m stashing the money. She’s distracting the teller. Then, *The Voice* separately asked a series of questions about what we thought of each other. No, I did not think she would remember to smash the bank’s video footage and steer off plan before running away with the money. She seemed by the book. Were my answers the reason we were asked to split up again? We were instructed to go off in different directions and avoid each other as we approached the bank. The countdown began. “Your hand should reach the door of the bank in 5... 4... 3... 2...”



This project is an example of Locative Cinema, taking the traditional cinematic viewing experience outside of the black box. *A Machine to See With* was selected for the Locative Cinema Commission, a joint project of [ZERO1: The Art and Technology Network](#), [The Banff New Media Institute at The Banff Centre](#), and the New Frontier program at the Sundance Institute. For me, the interweaving of reality and fantasy was the most interesting part. The spontaneity and uncertainty of this project was fresh and exciting and kept me on my feet, with an over awareness that a film from my sofa could never evoke.

Over 400 people participated over a nine day run. Out of those 400+, only one outraged participant cursed out the *Blast Theorists* for not being able to locate the bank. Only one person misunderstood the directions and hid their money with the toilet seat covers, giving a New Frontier staff member a bonus while in the loo. At least 4 reported participants returned to the film's locations after their initial run, to heighten the experience for other participants... Three of them entered the back seat of the car yelling "We've REALLY gotta go through with this!" Another called out "Get in the van" as their unmarked vehicle crept alongside. One gal even returned to the *Blast Theorists* unable to find the money she had hidden in her shoe. At that moment, she realized that an anonymous man had approached her friend moments earlier when they were asked to split up and said "I think you dropped something." \$100 to be exact. "Is it part of the film?" she asked. Only in Park City... I thought.

Stay tuned for Blast Theory's *A Machine to See With* in your hometown. Next stop: [Walker Art Center](#) in Minneapolis.

Other Blast Theory Projects shown at New Frontier 2011

Kidnap lottery / 1998:

http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_kidnap.html

Online virtual game with gps on live players / 2003:

http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_uncleroy.html

Historical reenactment / 2009:

http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_ulrikeandeamoncompliant.html

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