



## A Machine to See With, or be the star of your own movie

By [Sheila Regan](#), Thu., Apr. 14 2011 @ 10:38AM



Walker Art Center

If you have a nine-year-old child, they will definitely like [A Machine to See With](#), the interactive experience by the British group [Blast Theory](#), being presented by the Walker April 15 through 19. A kind of choose-your-own-adventure, the experience leads you through a game of intrigue and suspense as you follow instructions dictated via cell phone.

At its most basic level, it's a hokey little game that makes you feel very silly as you walk around St. Anthony Main following the instructions from the voice of a British woman that is constantly telling you to keep your guard up and listen carefully.

The woman on the phone is very persuasive in making you believe the reality of the world created for you. She urges you to hurry--you only have 20 more seconds to get to that mailbox! And you do hurry. There you are on Second Avenue, running toward your "checkpoint" because, if you don't? Well, it's just a game, after all. But still, like when we go to the movies, for a short amount of time we let ourselves believe that what seems to be happening really is happening. It's fun. It's pretend. It's for kids, or at least it's for adults who haven't forgotten how to be kids every once in a while.

The event's title is a quote from Godard's script for *Pierrot Le Fou* in which Jean Paul Belmondo's character says, "My eyes are a machine to see with." The piece premiered at Sundance Film Festival, so you're supposed to think of it really as a movie of which you are the star. The streets, the buildings you walk in and out of, the parking garage that you find yourself stalking inside, these are all different

scenes, and your eyes are the camera that the British woman coaches you to focus on different ways, depending on the situation.

The film asks you to imagine yourself as a character, which is really an acting exercise. What would it be like to be a bank robber? What would it be like to shoot someone? You never really fully believe what is happening, but a certain part of you does. Just like when you are watching an escapist-type of movie, you get to imagine that there really is a car chase going on. You sit at the edge of the seat. Maybe you even gasp or scream. This experience is the same concept, only you're actually walking through the plot. And just like when you watch a particularly cheesy movie and it ends, you simply leave the theater and are not left with much. What really happened, after all? Nothing.

There is one aspect of the experience that did grasp at a deeper meaning: The way in which it forced you to look at the world, both at the objects and nature around you, but also, more frighteningly, at the people that surround you. The British woman compels you to really see strangers. Who are they? What kind of person are they?



How often do we go to the grocery store and actually see the person that bags our groceries? After the experience is over, you start to think back at all the people that you passed or interacted with during the past hour. Was that man at the bus stop that yelled something at you while you were waiting for the phone to ring part of the movie? Probably not in a planned way, but in a sense, everything is part of the movie--every person you pass. What is brilliant about it is that it reminds you of how each and every experience you have--each person that you pass on the sidewalk--is a moment that you can either pay attention to and be aware of, or you can ignore.

The best part of the whole thing is actually checking out the river and seeing how high the water is, which you could actually do without going through the interactive game, but it's a good excuse to head over to the area. In any case, make sure you give yourself enough time to go on a walk, seeing the view through your newly acquired camera lens eyes.