



British production treats the heist as interactive art

by [Euan Kerr](#), Minnesota Public Radio
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Several hundred people are expected to try to rob a Minneapolis bank this weekend. It's not a crime spree. In fact, it's all in the name of art. MPR's Euan Kerr got a sneak preview, and tells us about his experience.

Minneapolis, Minn. — It's early afternoon in an undisclosed Minneapolis neighborhood. I'm following instructions received earlier in the day. I'm standing under a bridge, and I'm muttering to myself.

I am at the starting point, looking around. There are other people here, but I am not sure if any of them are actually involved in what we are doing. I have to admit I am a little nervous.

Things that start under bridges rarely end well.

The phone rings, and I answer.

"This is a machine to see with," says an authoritarian female voice.

A machine to see with? What does that mean? She asks my name. I tell her.

"OK, your answer has been recorded," she says. "I don't know what your name is, because this is a recording, and I am thousands of miles away. I could be in Delhi, or Derry, or Denver. But you are under a bridge in Minneapolis."

The voice tells me we are going to commit a robbery. Or we may be making a movie. It instructs me to start moving down the street towards the objective.

What am I doing? Well, "A Machine to See With" is a production by a British group called "Blast Theory." At this moment, I'm the performer.

The heist plan plays out over the next hour or so. All along, the voice gives instructions. It also asks questions about my morals. After maneuvering me into a public restroom it threw out this one.

"If I gave you the statement, 'I see myself as the kind of person who could rob a bank,' and you agree with that statement, you would press 1."

As I checked my moral compass, a guy walked into the restroom and found me emptying my wallet as instructed by the voice. He left quickly, announcing he'd go somewhere else.

"This is a recording, and I am thousands of miles away. I could be in Delhi, or Derry, or Denver. But you are under a bridge in Minneapolis."

- The voice

It's a little awkward. Yet it's also strangely exciting, particularly as I learn others are also working on the bank job.

Soon I'm running through the neighborhood, trying to keep up with the instructions. I head for the top floor of a parking ramp, where I may meet up with one of the other people planning to rob the bank. I start looking around, but try not to be too obvious.

A woman I don't know walks up, hugs me, and then leaves without a word. Did I say this is strangely exciting?

There are other interactions, too, but the voice told me not to talk to anyone about them. There are also references to camera angles. As I run down from the ninth floor of the ramp, another instruction comes through.

"On the fifth floor, exit the stairwell and find a quiet spot to view the bank," the voice says.

I've already made it down to the third floor, so I have to turn around and run up as fast as possible.

It would spoil it to say what happens next, but I did make it through without being arrested, which was my biggest concern.

I wanted to find out more, so I made another call, to Ju Row Farr, who is one of the three Blast Theory artists who created "A Machine to See with."

She's also the autocratic voice who delivers the instructions to participants. She says the piece grew out of a love of cinema.

"Particularly movies, where the line between what's real and what's fictional is sort of blurred," she said.

Farr says it's also a test of how people might react outside their comfort zone, interacting with strangers engaged in a common task.

"That we might therefore perhaps do things together that we hadn't considered doing before," said Farr.

Like plan to rob a bank.

"A Machine to See With" is sponsored by the Walker Art Center. It runs through Tuesday, but they've already had to add extra slots because of high demand. About 600 people can take part, up to six at a time.

I had one final question for Farr: Does the bank, and other businesses in the area, know what's going on?

"I can't tell you," she says with a laugh. "I'm not meaning to be cryptic, but we just made a decision which we thought was best for the work."

It could be the end of this script has yet to be written.