

# The Game about Love

## Text

### Blast Theory's: 'A Machine to See With' some reflections

Yesterday I attended Blast Theory's 'A Machine to See with' in Brighton. Blast Theory have been highly recommended to me by several people. As the opportunity came up for me to try some of their work, I jumped at the chance.



I thought it was great to see someone doing something similar (although not really in the same genre) as the Game about Love. There were many points I could learn from and ideas I wished to incorporate into my game. I'm grateful to Blast Theory for putting together this experience and overall it was a really interesting way to spend an hour in Brighton.

My deeper reflections on the experience are listed below.

Here is a brief description of the story from Blast Theory's own website:

[http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work\\_amachinetoseewith.html](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_amachinetoseewith.html).

'A Machine To See With is a film where you play the lead...On the day, you receive an automated call giving you the address you need to go to. Once you arrive on your allotted street corner your phone rings. From there a series of instructions lead you through the city. You are the lead in a heist movie; it's all about you. As you move from hiding money inside a public lavatory, to meeting up with a partner in crime and onwards to the bank, the tension rises. It's up to you to deal with the bank robbery and it's aftermath.' ... The work has three ideas running through it. It is about cinema. The artists thought about the city as a cinematic space and considered how screens might be inserted into the streets or carried through them. Their approach was to think of our eyes as the screens themselves: as Chris Hedges says in *The Empire of Illusion*, "we try to see

ourselves moving through our life as a camera would see us, mindful of how we hold ourselves, how we dress, what we say. We invent movies that play in our heads.” ...

The book is a classic of arid compressed noir. Godard took the story as a springboard for a commentary on the Vietnam war, mixing trashy violence with contemporary politics. The title of the work is taken from Godard's script for *Pierrot Le Fou* in which Jean Paul Belmondo's character says, “my eyes are a machine to see with”.

It is about the tyranny of choice and consumerism.

With the attempted robbery of a bank at its heart, money is a recurrent part of the work. It contrasts the agency of a film star, of a protagonist in a heist movie with the reality of the financial crisis since 2008. It places the adrenaline rush of revenge against the steady impotence of citizens confronted by global capitalism.’

This is an ambitious work which relies on an automated system to bring real live players together to play in the same space through an automated system. Your mobile phone is used extensively and is used to give you the narrative and direct you through the streets.

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## **My Reflections**

### **The good**

Being called and calling up a real number causes you to comprehensively break through the fourth wall [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth\\_wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_wall)].

As heist movies go, it was a good one. It was cinematic and put you completely in the centre of events.

The red herrings worked well to create a state of tension. It made look at non-playing characters in different ways.



Using mobile phones allowed the players to check in when they reached the right geographic locations. This helped to keep the story on track. It is a neat device.

### **The bad**

Going into a public lavatory cubicle to receive messages is cool. Hearing another player on speakerphone in the cubicle next to me receiving the same messages with a few seconds' delay is not.

I misunderstood some of my instructions and my hapless counter player got dumped. I can't imagine my actions made him happy, and perhaps I ruined it a bit for him (unintentionally).

The narrative seemed to jump or take a certain range of interactions for granted. I didn't take them and ended up confused.

I did not reach a state of suspension of disbelief before I met another player. This meant that we giggled a lot and this made the situation worse.

When we did speak with each other, we didn't have enough time to establish ourselves as characters. So we were a bit rude to each other.

There were other players who I was not supposed to interact with that were a little way off from me. They were clearing in the game as they, like me, were walking around listening to their mobile phone without talking. This made me feel like I was on a conveyer belt of adventure.

The mobile telephone, while essential to conveying narrative was a bit of bind to have for the entire game. I wished I was given enough freedom and liberty to create extra narrative with my co-player, and without it, I felt the experience was a little on-rails.

### **What did I learn**

Just as there is a difference between Theatre and Cinema acting, so there is a difference between the directions in a game that takes place in a controlled environment (a board game) and one that takes place in a city. There is less room for subtlety in an unpredictable game environment.

Using multiple players on different cues and getting them to coordinate is very difficult. Players get out of sync with unpredictable results.

Having two players have different set of instructions can produce interesting results. One player reading the situation in one way, and the others in another way create interesting scenes that cannot necessarily be penetrated by the other player. For example, one player could be asked to find a small object on other people's lapels, the other is told that the player looking around is looking for them and they have to hide from them.

You are asked at one point to state what kind of person you are in a short multiple choice questionnaire. This seemed to effect the story. However, because of all the other problems with the story, the modifications seemed a little too subtle to make a major change. If things like this are included in my game, they need to have a big effect to be noticed by the player. There is great potential in this mechanism. I can see the players being a choice between two different branches in the character's life, and being asked to make a choice about what the character would do based on their understanding of the character. This could lead them to one of two music venues where they would go and enjoy the music, be inspired by it and contribute to the story themselves...

Great food for thought!

Posted on Sunday September 25th

## About me



This is the public facing part of a group for those who would be interested in making the best love game in the world.

([http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_208397332537622](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_208397332537622))

We will aim to make a game that is about the beauty of the world and other people, based on bringing people together in a world of love.

Through a series of puzzle and clues, two people will be brought together through a journey of physical objects and each others' histories to a conclusion, where only their combined history can make sense of the result.

Join in if you think you can bring something to the mix. We are especially looking for writers, philosophers and artists at this stage - especially those who don't have much gaming or game