

TOO MUCH INFORMATION – TAKING A WALK WITH BLAST THEORY



Jenny Brown takes an audio walk around the streets of Manchester with Blast Theory.

Since we're about to launch a new project with Blast Theory, I was keen to try out its latest work, *Too Much Information*, in situ on the streets of Manchester as part of this year's [FutureEverything Festival](#).

An artists' collective based in Brighton, UK, Blast Theory has established a reputation for placing its audience at the heart of the action. From asking members of the public to enter a lottery to be [kidnapped](#) with the unfolding event streamed online, to [My Neck of the Woods](#) that invited teenagers from Manchester to use live mobile video to ask questions about their lives and futures to an online audience, the company's work is always exciting.

The group creates new forms of performance and interactive art that mixes audiences across the Internet, live performance and digital broadcasting. Drawing on popular culture and games, the work often blurs the boundaries between the real and the fictional, and explores the social and political aspects of technology. Speaking at FutureEverything, Blast Theory's Matt Adams described the aim of its work to "create platforms that enable people to have rich discussions and interactions with strangers"; this certainly was my experience of a cold but dry meander through Manchester's city centre.

Too Much Information presents a series of recordings revealing the innermost thoughts and recollections of members of the general public. Armed with a smartphone and headset you navigate the city and a set of stories using GPS. As you reach specific points the audio kicks in and you pause to listen.

From irreverent memories – an elderly woman recalls a comic moment of mishap in the bedroom – to heart-wrenching revelations – a young male voice describing his feelings of inadequacy – the audience is taken on a 40-minute walking tour of intimate, sometimes funny and always frank testimonies.

Stood on a bridge overlooking the River Irwell, I was privy to a harrowing account of abuse, described by an elderly man who had buried the incident in time. I found myself unwittingly selecting objects within my line of sight that related to what I was hearing. A football floating on the water became a symbol of boyhood innocence, and a cluster of mannequins served to illustrate a young girl's experience of growing up and her discovery of female sexuality.

What is remarkable about this artwork is how you, as the participant, create connections between these poignant stories and the environment around you. Add to that the fact that you decide the route and therefore the order in which you hear the stories, and the experience becomes completely your own.

Accompanied by a simple, generative electronic soundtrack, specially scored by the Human League's Martyn Ware, *Too Much Information* is a clever marriage of mobile navigational technology and storytelling to create a thoughtful and personal journey through the city.

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