

At the edges: A question of audience invisibility, disappearance, and failure

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Herbert Blau suggests that to watch performance is to watch someone dying right before your eyes (Blau 1982: 134). What then, is being experienced in those exchanges designed to separate the audience and the performer, where the interaction is understood through some form of mediation? Rather than consider the generalities of performance work which attenuates the space between the maker and the receiver of work, this chapter engages with the specifics of a piece which extends affective encounters to include both real world and online exchanges. By moving beyond the representational space of the art venue and instead blending the real / fictive landscape of IRL / online encounters, Blast Theory's *Uncle Roy All Around You* opens valuable space to consider the role of failure in meaning-making in co-constitutive arts practice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, any reference to failure and performance evokes the writing of Samuel Beckett in *Worstward Ho*: 'All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better (Beckett [1983] 1989: 101). Beckett positions failure as a starting point, a place from which to begin. He understands failure as a process, not an endpoint. This chapter seeks to hold to the idea of failure as process and consider how it informs the reading of work predicated on a success / failure binary and what subversion, however unintended, means for the audience.

Our failure

In 2001, Jay Schneider and Gerd Kortuem published "How to Host a Pervasive Game: Supporting Face-to-Face Interactions in Live-Action Roleplaying" to reflect on the development of live-action roleplaying games to include the inclusion of readily available

technologies. In their essay they reflect upon the evolution of the board game to include a range of assistive technologies, first VCR, then DVD and eventually computing technologies. From this, they developed the term ‘pervasive gaming’, which is one way that Blast Theory has since defined *Uncle Roy All Around You*. When considered through the lens of gaming, success and failure are necessarily central to the potential reading of the work. However, in the Spring of May 2004, the term ‘pervasive game’ had yet to reach the kind of cultural saturation necessary to make it part of common parlance. Instead, we approached the work as a piece of site-specific performance, related to other immersive and sited acts of storytelling, a strategy that still holds nearly twenty years later.

Our failure began before we had even begun to engage with the piece. Believing that he could keep all the information in his head, Lee failed to bring any of the venue details with us and confidently drove us to the Contact Theatre just off Manchester’s Oxford Road. We walked towards the Box Office:

“Hi, I have some tickets booked in the name of Miller.”

After consulting the computer, Lee was informed that there was no record of him booking any tickets and was asked the name of the piece.

“Sorry, I can’t remember – the group is Blast Theory if that’s any help.”

It turned out to be a great deal of help as the person in the Box Office was able to tell us that we were at the wrong venue. We needed to be at the Cornerhouse not the Contact. Bob’s

supportive response to this initial error was to point out that at least Lee got the first two letters of the venue correct.

Before we had even begun, we had failed to follow a simple instruction. This kind of failure, the inability to be in the right place at the right time is of a significantly different order than the subsequent success-failure elision that would follow. In these first moments, those that lie beyond the formal start of the work, there is no doubt that the actions of the two key players in the narrative are flawed. A failure to bring the correct information, to arrive at the right venue with enough time, these are behaviours that very nearly derailed the experience before it had the chance to properly begin. The borders of this type of failure are clear and defined; there is little room for nuance in regard of what went wrong here. Failures such as these have sharp edges, the kind that indicate the point at which something ends. In contrast, the ‘failure’ that follows has porous edges, and speaks more to Heidegger’s boundary as a line which marks the edge of a territory, the point from which something else might begin to emerge. This understanding of failure is much more useful when considering what might be happening in the space between an audience and a performance. It is the failure of Beckett; processual and moving constantly forward and towards an ending. It strikes us that failure of this kind might be described as ambient; quietly working in the background with an intention ultimately to move forward. Certainly, in terms of our experience of Blast Theory’s *Uncle Roy All Around You*, we experienced a failure that might more comfortably be thought of as ambient than catastrophic.

This processual form of failure serves as a boundary line between what was and what could be. The experience of failure points towards the next steps but only if we are willing to follow the path: when Lisa Le Feuvre posits in her essay ‘Strive to Fail’: ‘we can sometimes only become truly attentive when something is indeed wrong’ (2010 14). Our experience of *Uncle Roy All Around You* could have ended at the Contact Theatre. We could have decided

to stop for a coffee, abandon our plans and walk to the nearby Manchester Museum or the Whitworth Art Gallery. The failure to be in the right place at the right time presented us with a boundary, the choice to cross it was ours alone. As Heidegger reminds us, '[a] boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing' (Heidegger 1971: 152–3).

The idea of a boundary, a line which marks the edge of a territory, is particularly useful when considering what happens in the space between success and failure or rather when recognising the potential to move beyond binary thinking. Heidegger's reminder that a boundary is the point from which something emerges offers a different perspective to the more commonly understood sense that a boundary indicates the point at which something ends. In performance and particularly at the point where the audience and the performer meet, it is more helpful to think of the presencing offered by Heidegger than of more formalised demarcation of behaviours that seek to keep the audience and performer in their separate spheres of influence. Blast Theory positioned *Uncle Roy All Around You* at just such a boundary, describing the piece as the moment 'where espionage movies become interactive, where the console game breaks onto the streets. It is a game that pitches online players around the world alongside players on the streets of a real city' (Blast Theory 2003). The invocation of game-structure, one that repositions audience as players, clearly opens a discussion about power, control, and hierarchy. While the concept of 'play' opens conversations around ludic interaction, the concept of 'game' invokes rules, structures, and the potential for winning. The real-world environment and the potential for chaotic, ludic abandonment, sits alongside the deliberately structuring structures of an online, closed system.

Uncle Roy All Around You

Uncle Roy All Around You occupies an interesting place in performance history. First presented in collaboration with the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London in 2003, it had a further seven public presentations between 2004 and 2013. We experienced the work at the Cornerhouse, Manchester in 2004 as part of the *Digital Summer* event. Even some sixteen years later, the kind of challenge to the status quo offered by *Uncle Roy All Around You* retains a sense of novelty. By adopting a structure more familiar to MMORPG participants, and blending live and online elements, *Uncle Roy All Around You* placed the audience / player in a situation that required problem solving and co-operation to reach a conclusion. Rather than the denouement of traditional performance product, the work required adherence to a set of pre-determined rules for the audience member to experience completion.

This was not our first experience of Blast Theory's game playing / performance hybrid. In 2001 we had participated in *Desert Rain*, a piece that required the successful completion of an interactive game to open access to the subsequent installation. *Uncle Roy All Around You* developed this game structure further, and in his chapter 'Frames and Bystanders: Uncle Roy All Around You', Stuart Reeves describes it as a pervasive game. Reeves explains that the game is constructed for both the online and real-world players and relies upon co-operation between the two. He notes that '[o]perating behind-the-scenes in a control room and out of sight on the streets are a team of orchestrators (described as 'control room staff' and 'street performers' respectively)' (Reeves 2011: 134), with 'orchestration' used to keep real-world players safe and supporting their progression through the game. According to Reeves account, real-world players were given a PDA device to navigate through the city / game, which used 'self-reported positioning' rather than location tracking and allowed them to record and send short audio clips to the online players. It is somewhat dislocating to read Reeves account of the work, not simply because he, quite understandably,

positions it entirely as a game but because of the clarity with which he explains how the various systems work.

Ambient failure

Maybe it's because we arrived late, already reeling from an earlier failure but our memory of the rules and the interface lacks the clarity afforded by Reeves' description. We remember arriving and rushing up the stairs to the first floor of the Cornerhouse. We remember the staging area, where we were prepared for what would follow. Mostly we remember being separated. Being told firmly that this was an experience for one person at a time. We remember surrendering our personal belongings, emptying pockets and handing over bags. We remember being given the thing we always thought was some kind of GPS enabled handheld computer and having its functions explained to us. Here the stickiness of failure grew snowball-like, as Ricoeur noted in his essay 'Memory and Imagination', [t]o the misfit is added the erroneous grasp, the mis-take' (Ricoeur [2000] 2010: 71). Evidently, we didn't really understand the exchange because it wasn't a GPS at all. Apparently, it allowed self-reporting. This aspect of 'mis-take' might be important. It might make more sense of the smearing success-failure that Bob would later experience. We remember a briefing and we remember walking out of the building, separately. However, we have no memory of recording clips for online players, although we do remember text exchanges. A good friend, Tamsin, was an online player, and Lee remembers multiple exchanges with her - but in his memory these were the simple back and forth of text messages. Bob has no memory of communicating with online players at all, remembering instead the importance of location and a desperate urge to communicate with the actors responsible for the 'orchestration' of the real-world environment; 'live performers played several significant roles in the experience,

ranging from planned and rehearsed performances (the initial briefing, phone call and interview in the car) to more general orchestration duties on the streets, including monitoring players' progress and occasionally improvising interactions with them (e.g., fixing technical problems as is presented below)' (Reeves 2011: 124-125).

In contrast, Lee's experience was less complex, more straightforwardly a 'failure'. Upon leaving the Cornerhouse, he turned left when he should have turned right. This wasn't from any sense of wishing to be belligerent, simply from an inability to follow a map. Lee has always been a wanderer with a propensity to turn left if he is unsure which way to go. Interestingly, there was no mechanism to catch this initial error, despite the assertion in Reeves' article. It is important to note that this is avowedly not offered as either a critique of Reeves' account, nor is it intended to critique the 'orchestration' offered by the company and those providing support on the ground, it is offered only to note that there is a gap between the authorised narrative of the work and the experience of two participants. We have already considered the unreliability of memory and the potential unruliness of subsequent narratives but to suggest that this is the only reason for slippage is to miss the complexity of a large-scale ambient narrative / locative game structure and the potential for failure of both audience and the work.

The fact that Lee struggles with map-reading and initially went in the 'wrong' direction could be seen as a catastrophic failure of both the player and the game. However, the more ludic interpretation of Lee's wrong-turn is that it opened him up to the experience of ambient failure, in which he was able to use the architecture of the game / performance to have encounters that would otherwise not have occurred. By failing at such an early point, too much time was lost to be able to successfully reintegrate himself into the goal-oriented structure of the work, leaving him free to embrace a version of play that does not really work in a game context. Lee's failure took him outside of the structure of the game, providing him

with an opportunity for a gently guided derive through streets he knew. By drifting in this way, he remained guided by the meta-structure of the work without fully functioning as part of it. Rather than use the portable computer to play the game, it served as a useful motor for social engagement, prompting conversations with strangers, real and imagined, before eventually 'timing out' and requiring him to make his way back to the starting point and wait.

And wait. The waiting came about because of Bob's experience. If we think of ambient failure as a kind of matrix, a scale of failure within which to be positioned, Lee's falls very much at the limits. Perhaps his failure creates what film theorist Deborah Linderman calls a 'limit-text'; works that 'query a boundary that is normatively repressed in other texts' (Linderman 1982: 200). By creating space for a ludic engagement in this way, there is little doubt that his potential to offer a stable critical analysis of *Uncle Roy All Around You* is impacted. Of course, all readings are subjective; they are a product of gendered, social, and cultural construction. In this sense, analytical readings are no more accurate than those based purely upon feelings. However, to attempt to offer some kind of analysis of a text that has been so avowedly stepped outside of would be a perverse assertion of the subjective voice. There is some of Lee's experience work that remains valuable, as it speaks to the potential of accounts that sit outside of the authorised version to interrogate the received wisdoms of what 'happened'. But it sits within the matrix of failure in such a way that obviates any real analysis. While not deliberate per se, Lee's failure was much closer to catastrophic than ambient. Simply put, there is little to be learnt about the audience interaction from his wrong turn, where he transformed 'into a lost object to be found' (Benford et. al. 2006: 431)

In contrast, and fundamentally more interesting, was Bob's experience. She followed the clues and found her way to Uncle Roy. Or rather, the limited technology of the self-

reporting location software contained within the hand-held computer was certain that she has found Uncle Roy. As the clock ticked down, Bob followed the clues and made her way towards Uncle Roy. She opened the door, climbed the stairs, turned the handle and went in. But Bob had not found Uncle Roy, instead she had somehow found her way into a different building; '*Uncle Roy All Around You* invited participants to enter an office that had been rented for the occasion, but in so doing raised the possibility that they might try enter some other office' (Benford et al. 2015).

To all intents and purposes, Bob had been successful. She had followed the instructions, made her way up to the second floor and into an empty hotel room. All the prompts from the small screen in her hands were telling her that she had succeeded and there was no reason that she should think otherwise. After all, she was standing in an empty hotel room, a room that had not been locked. She had walked past the front desk unchallenged, made it up the stairs and into a room. By her reckoning, this must be part of the experience. An instruction on the screen required her to pick up the phone. She was in a hotel room. That was totally possible. She picked up the phone and all that met her was a dial tone. Somewhere, in a building nearby, a phone was possibly ringing. That phone went unanswered. Street actors who had been ghosting her footsteps were deployed to hasten the performance to its pre-determined close. The performers found an empty room, yet the digital dialogue absolutely assured them that the game had been successfully completed. And the phone rang on.

It is because of this ambient failure that we understand Bob's experience to be much more valuable in terms of analysis. If failure is understood as a spectrum, Bob's experience lies much closer to success than Lee's but is a failure, nevertheless. The complexity, and thus the interest here, is that the game positioned Bob in terms of success. Her device was communicating completion, without her having been able to complete the necessary task. If

understood in the context of a console game, Bob somehow missed the ‘boss battle’ (Zagal et. al. 2008: 189) but was still able to proceed to the next level. Except of course she couldn’t. In the real world, bricks and mortar rather than pixels stood in the way of her progression.

Perhaps this exploration was informed by our experience of *Desert Rain*. Following the completion of the interactive game element:

visitors find the exit corridor is blocked by a large pile of sand. Having climbed up the sand and down the other side they reach the final room of the installation. The walls of the final room are full scale photographs of the walls of an English hotel room. The room contains no objects apart from a magnetic card reader and a monitor cut into the wall exactly where the television is in the hotel room (Blast Theory, 1999).

Finding herself in an empty hotel room, Bob did not feel particularly out of place. The immediate absence of any human presence was also not especially disconcerting. Certainly, after an extended online / real-world treasure hunt, searching for clues in an empty hotel room did not present any anxiety. As time passed, with nothing in the room yielding any information and with no one arriving to move the dialogue forward, Bob settled into a way of being familiar an audience member of Robert Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach*. In the time Bob spent exploring the empty hotel room, she did not feel frustrated by the lack of conclusion. Seeing her quest, and eventual location in an empty hotel room as an opportunity that wouldn’t have normally been afforded in daily life, Bob’s approach echoed that of Tim Ingold when he suggests that ‘what matters is not the final destination, but all the interesting things that occur along the way’ (2007: 170). Uncle Roy remained absent, but she enjoyed looking for his traces, sitting on the bed she thought he had recently vacated, wondering if he

would knock at the door. When no-one came, and when my searches of the space yielded nothing, she was not irritated. She had Sophie Calle for company, and they were in this together. Ultimately, the certainty of the instructions on her handheld device inoculated her from the reality of the situation, and Bob found herself emboldened, happy to play within the confines that had been offered. Even if that playing was unintentionally rule resistant.

It was when Bob eventually made her way back to the Cornerhouse that the complexities of the failure really began to emerge. Because she had believed herself to be in the right place, there had been no incentive to leave the room. There was no context for 'right' or 'wrong' behaviour whilst in the room. Somehow, none of the hotel staff were aware of her presence and so this interloper had triggered no alarms and the time she spent in the hotel room was entirely peaceful. It was only as she started to wonder about which room Lee might be in, and what was happening in his room that she began to think about returning. When she eventually made her way back to the Cornerhouse, she was greeted by a small-scale panic. The anxiety was that the technology had failed them, that somehow, she was a long way from where they thought she was. Her return was met with relief and irritation. Perhaps there had been anxiety imagining the negative press that might have been generated by the disappearance of a participant, which is gently ironic from a company that made its name kidnapping strangers.

The spectrum of failure

None of this is offered as a slight, rather it is intended to reflect upon the tense relationship between 'game' and 'play' in the work and how its rule-based structure obviated space of ludic exploration. As we have already discussed, our inauspicious 'way in' to *Uncle Roy All Around You* highlights failure as a continuum, with catastrophic at one end and ambient at the

other. Much like the potential gap between intention and reception, the failure of Bob to reach the conclusion of the piece in the way designed by Blast Theory underscores the slippage between the two ends of the spectrum. The anxiety that Bob returned to suggests that the type of failure she experienced was unexpected and highlights the interplay and potential for schism between 'players' and the 'game'; a reminder of the game being 'both object and process' (Aarseth 2001). Media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) states, '[g]ames are popular art, collective, social *reactions* to the main drive or action of any culture' (1964: 235, original emphasis) and Alexander Galloway further describes the concept of game-play as a spectrum of possibilities:

[a] game is an activity defined by rules in which players try to reach some sort of goal. Games can be whimsical and playful, or highly serious. They can be played alone or in complex social scenarios (Galloway 2006: 1).

Galloway's 'rules' are significant here; rules define the parameters of the interaction, and the prescribed guidelines for *Uncle Roy All Around You* point to expected audience conduct. The expectation though needs to be shared. In Bob, *Uncle Roy All Around You* was met by an expert player, albeit one operating to a set of behaviours quite distinct from those expected to be at play. As a performance maker highly skilled in task-based and durational improvisational strategies, Bob has an ability to meet offers and to stay with an experience, perhaps beyond the point of comfort. While these may be valuable skills for an audience of and participant in a wide range of performance art practice, it is perhaps less valuable in relation to more traditionally structured game playing. Bob's presence in the hotel room, a venue that was both wrong and right in the same moment could be thought of as a glitch, one that had not been anticipated in beta-testing.

The glitch

In the context of *Uncle Roy All Around You*, it is worth interrogating the idea of the glitch, especially in relation to rules that are broken by accident or through misunderstanding. Bob being both inside and outside the game, a victor and loser in the same moment evokes the writing of Peter Krapp, who wonders about the possibilities of creating a 'ludology for losers' to open rather than 'obscure the domain of the error' (Krapp 2011: 75). In this way, the breakdown of our understanding of the rules of the game within the performance of *Uncle Roy All Around You* could provide a contingency, what Galloway calls 'counter-gaming'. He offers this idea not as an emancipation of docile bodies, rather as a recognition of the need for 'alternative algorithms' within the labour of games (Galloway 2006: 107-126). If to 'win means to know the system' (Galloway 2006: 91) then Bob's 'mistake' serves as an example of 'unexpected information' (Clark 2010: 164). Through the unintentional forcing of a glitch into the system, Bob opened a state of circular relations in collaboration with the piece, albeit one that couldn't quite be held by the mechanics of the system in play. In his book *The Space of Encounter*, architect Daniel Libeskind offers a chapter called 'endless space(s)' in which he seeks to rediscover space to 'materialize, create, investigate, illuminate, construct, touch, redeem' (Libeskind 2001: 65). Given the real-world location of *Uncle Roy All Around You*, the potential for encounter that fell beyond the parameters of the game opened the experience to the ambient failure, with all the attendant possibilities for expanded encounter and alternative types of play.

It is hard to offer a response to a piece without appearing critical of said work, especially when to do so requires discussion of the concept of failure. From this perspective hindsight is a marvellous thing, it offers a 20/20 vantage point. It is all too easy to reflect

upon our experience and wonder why it wasn't fixed in advance, or better yet, why our experience wasn't mapped into the structure of the piece in the first instance. In all truth, this is not something that we are asking for. In fact, we are not particularly critical of the piece, no matter if our musings suggest otherwise. Rather, we are reflecting upon the potential for slippage in ambient narratives, and how anticipating and embracing these glitches might open a space in which the audience can become visible.

Unreliable narrators

If thus far we have constructed a narrative that appears critical of *Uncle Roy All Around You*, it becomes equally pressing to hold to our own failures. Hopefully we have already communicated how our actions left us culpable in the subsequent failures of experiencing the work but as we return to the experience to offer this chapter there is a further failure worthy of consideration. Given that these words are being written some sixteen years after the event, we must wonder how reliable we are as narrators of an any experience. Most of this account was written without recourse to contemporary reflections, relying instead on our memories, and the narratives about the experience that have accrued over the years. We understand that the readings we offer are like pebbles on the shoreline; smoothed and rounded over time, the rough edges polished by the passing tides. Memory plays an interesting role in the sharing of stories, and the process of reading the description offered by Stuart Reeves does not evoke our experience, it serves only to marginalise us further, reinforcing the sense that our experience was a failure. By returning to an 'official' account of the practice, our memories are cast into doubt. Reeves is clear that a ten-strong team of actors was deployed to keep players on track, but our memories feature no such figures. Or rather, we remember no

support from these figures, only that there were people who seemed to be aware of our presence in the city, ghosting our footsteps for some of the time, but absent at others.

Reading Reeves' words, we wonder if we have become 'unreliable narrators' in our own story. This term is introduced by Johanna Shapiro, writing about the role of the patient in narratives of medical practice. Rather than hold to this as a critique, Shapiro goes on to 'call for patient-centred and relationship-centred care, both of which reinstate the value of the patient's story in caring for patients' (Shapiro 2011: 68). The prescribed narratives or the 'truths' of any condition are for the most part within a Western biomedical understanding, controlled by the clinician. The unreliability of the patient occluding what 'should' be experienced in order that a speedy and reliable diagnosis can be made. Shapiro's work attempts to reconcile these 'unruly narratives' (Shapiro 2011: 69-70) by calling for humility from the listener to *all* narratives, whether fallacious or not. In so doing, she is encouraging the listener to respect the agency of the teller. In a clinical setting, the responsibility is then placed on the recipient of these stories. Of course, the stakes in this type of storytelling are high; how we are listened to, how we listen might impact upon the type of care patients are given. In contrast, the unreliability, or unruly memory of two academics excavating their conjoined experience is of considerably lower temperature and there is clearly no direct analogue between what Shapiro is doing, and our call for the audience experience to be valued differently.

Ambient audience practices

That said, thinking through stories and thinking about how those stories are told is central to understanding the audience practices in the extended contexts of the ambient. When experience is singular, consensus becomes much more difficult to reach; each audience

member goes through the process differently to the next, so it stands to reason that any subsequent reflection will differ. As Shapiro notes, '[e]very narrative is a negotiation about what reality is really like' (Shapiro 2011: 71). It occurs to us that the ambient narrative opens space for the unruly in which 'failure' can be given the same status of 'success', as we all become the unreliable narrators of our experiences, the teller of our own stories. Or rather, there can never be an authoritative account of ambient storytelling. There can be intention, and reception, and if the gap between the two is too big, there is no need to attempt any reconciliation, only the negotiation of realities suggested by Shapiro.

Of course, because we tend to work in binary thinking and because academic writing such as this works hard to reach 'valuable' conclusions that might contribute to the sum of knowledge, it is easier to accept the authorised account of an experience as more trustworthy, even when we know that authorised accounts occupy hierarchically elevated status. In contrast to the secure account of the maker, we find ourselves writing from a position evoked by Elizabeth Grosz in her book *Architecture from the Outside* when she asks, 'what does it mean to reflect upon a position, a relation, a place related to other places but with no place of its own - a position in-between' (2001: 90). This type of untethering feels closer to the experience of the ambient (whether this is an ambient narrative, or an ambient failure), where the question of agency comes not just in the moment of exchange but also in later reflections upon the experience. The inherent mistrust of memory is endemic in much cultural discourse. Claude Lévi-Strauss refers to his memory as 'a self-destructive thief', and outlines the strategies he employed to coral it into behaving, citing the use of notes, postcards and journals:

I get by when I work by accumulating notes—a bit about every- thing, ideas captured on the fly, summaries of what I have read, references, quotations [...]

And when I want to start a project, I pull a packet of notes out of their pigeonhole and deal them out like a deck of cards. This kind of operation, where chance plays a role, helps me revive my failing memory (in Eribon 1991: vii–viii).

Does our account have more weight if we include here a short extract from Bob’s journal, written soon after her experience:

As I walked away from the Cornerhouse, I reflected that the interaction was what had wrong footed me; the intention was that I should have used the online players as guides, but the gnomic text messages that wanted something from me before they would offer advice bored me. I didn’t want to walk around a city with my head down. The screen intervened in an unhelpful way for me, requiring transaction rather than exchange (Whalley, 2004: unpaginated)?

Does this contemporary reflection elevate our subsequent analysis and does being able to access the responses Bob had in the days after the experience lend more credence to the detail being offered here, some sixteen years later? To ask this is to direct the enquiry of this chapter down a different avenue. Felicity is only part of the narrative here. There is a space between intention and reception, and similarly a space between events and experience.

Which brings us towards a tentative conclusion, one that recognises the role of the audience in the context of ambient storytelling as quite different from the intersubjective exchange of what might be understood as more traditional performance exchanges and how the potential for shared affect is unsettled in the type of interactive media performance presented by Blast Theory. Being out in the world opens the audience to radically different

exchanges than those in the controlled environments of performance space. As Alain de Botton observes:

[j]ourneys are the midwives of thought [...] There is almost a quaint correlation between what is in front of our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our head: large thoughts at times requiring large views, new thoughts new places (Botton 2002: 57).

While Blast Theory's use of immersive environments might well have informed subsequent theatrical product, this kind of blending of real-world and immersive tactics remains a rarity. Agency and autonomy thus become interestingly vexed issues in *Uncle Roy All Around You*, especially as we ventured out into the world with only the hand-held computers; no wallet, no keys, no phone, no markers that make us 'us', just a lump of technology that connects us to 'them'; 'street players' are introduced to the game through a ritual briefing in which they are asked to hand over all of their personal possessions, bags, phones, money and identification in return for the PDA that they will use to play the game' (Benford et. Al 2006: 428). There is something about being shorn of the usual clutter and then left to explore real-world locations with online support / clues, filtered through the meta-structure of game play that offered a *dis-locating* experience alongside the controlled interface which reported position and connection status and history. It is here we find comfort in our 'little failures' and in Ian Bogost's discussion of 'serious games', which he articulates as those designed to 'invoke, support, doubt, or debate [the] validity or desirability, or universality' of a given situation (2007: 58). The ambient nature of our failure allows us to fail upwards, or succeed downwards, to lose ourselves in the confusion of streets and pixels.

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