**Questions of Substance**

**The futures of the North – a symposia**

**6th, 7th, 8th December, Hull**

**Introduction**

A series of conversations about imagined futures of the north inspired by the themes explored in Blast Theory’s We Made Ourselves Over, with talks, fireside chats, debates and keynote speeches produced by Substance, FuturEverything and Blast Theory taking place over 6th to 8th December in Hull (venues TBC) prior to the Substance weekend.

The themes that inform the films will be taken as provocations for a series of conversations exploring the role and relevance of arts and culture now and in the future and how the concept of the ‘the north’ will evolve through responding to the ever-changing demands of an ever-changing world.

Some of these themes can be brought together under a single area, some may work better individually. They will be used as the starting point for discussion, taken together they explore many of the most pertinent issues facing society and an opportunity to discuss how we must adapt to face the them.

The films explore some possible changes society may experience over the next 80 years and are influenced by the ideas of ten experts and the people of Hull and Aarhus, they are set in Aarhull, a north European city, Aarhull which is an imagined composite future of both places. Some of these experts will be invited back to expand on their research, other individuals not involved in the project will be invited to respond to the themes directly.

The films will be created as part of We Made Ourselves Over a project from Blast Theory that will run through October 2017. They will be rescreened as a single film as an event within Substance and individually as introduction to each thematic session within the symposia.

In the 80 years between now and 2097 these cities have developed in some remarkable ways but they are still recognisably the cities we see today. They are as distant from today as 1937.

This world is decidedly not dystopian. It shows possible radical changes in society but this is a future that we might want to live in.

**Theme 1: Consciousness Transfer**

The technology to capture consciousness has existed for a few decades now. Originally these were recordings of a person’s memories, then it became possible to capture the synaptic connections and thus thought processes themselves. More recently, these consciousnesses became transferable, first via implants, then via laser pulses into the eyeball. The sudden surge of ‘personhoods’ that resulted and the possible immortality for every person caused great social and psychological instability. Campaigns to stop the capture and/or prevent the transfer from one person to another were widespread. In this febrile atmosphere, a social norm emerged that has now become firmly entrenched: each consciousness is captured once at death and it is given to just one younger person, the ‘nominate’ before it is destroyed.

Traditionally it is given from an older relative or mentor to a young person in their teenage years. Sometimes the consciousness will be stored until the nominate is old enough to receive it. It is stored on an elaborate, decorative object called a Fist. Following consciousness transfer some people keep the empty Fist, others bury it or destroy it, sometimes ritualistically.

**Provocations: Technology developed that radically changes how we live, work and die**

**Theme 2: The three decision makers**

In this part of the world giving power to younger people is common. As the nation state withered and cities acquired greater self determination, a proliferation of types of rule grew. In this city, the power to make decisions is given to three young girls. They are eligible as soon as they can show reason and they must step down before they can become corrupted. The girls are prized for their clarity, their fresh sense of moral purpose, their ability to side step entrenched ideas and customs. They sometimes choose to step down themselves; at other times a petition for a girl to step down is launched. In any case, it is studiously observed that if a girl takes someone else’s consciousness she will step down before doing so. Once Hessa receives the Fist from Ariadne, she knows she will step down.

**Provocations: The changing experience of youth, the role of young people in society, the future of democratic freedoms, government and post-capitalist society.**

**Theme 3: Rebuilding the city**

Societies have struggled with inequality for centuries. In the mid 21st Century a consensus gradually emerged that radical measures would be needed to address this. Whatever was tried, existing inequalities soon reemerged. Once the system of three decision makers was established, the girls were determined to do whatever was needed to tackle this once and for all. Inspired by the Shinto Jingu Shrine in Ise, they decided the whole city would be moved every 20 years to create a level playing field.

Given the unpredictable weather in the current seafront location and the rise of new building techniques made possible by molecular printers, there were many supporters for the idea. The movement started during the course of the films is the first time that this has happened.

**Provocations: The future of the built environment, city planning and sustainable living.**

**Theme 4: Molecular Harvesters and printers**

3D printing has developed to a molecular level and it is now possible to destroy any material molecule by molecule. Similarly it is then possible to print structures at almost any size using the reverse process. The harvester seen in the first film has been delivered to undertake the enormous scale of destruction required.

The vast molecular printers seen in the third and fifth films were also delivered (unseen) by the Molok.

**Provocations: Technology informing societal and cultural change**

**Theme 5: The climate**

Although we do not see the explicit impacts of climate change in the films, temperature rises have taken place. Weather is more violent and unpredictable. Sea rises have happened and adaptation has happened. Seafronts are no longer desirable places to live and only the poorest are left exposed to the sea, with wealthier people having decamped to the interior.

**Provocations: Environment, future of food production, shift in global population**

**Theme 6: Clothing**

People are dressed for hard and unpredictable weather. They are ready for a baking hot blast of sunshine and torrential, freezing rain coming off the sea. They come from generations of sailors, dockers and fishermen and women. They aren’t put off going outside whatever the conditions; it’s a source of pride and identity that they do so gladly. They love a cap, a headscarf, a neck scarf, boots, overshoes, gloves, gaiters to keep them protected. And they are ready to strip off their many layers without a thought as the weather shifts; putting garments into bags or pouches or around their waists or over their shoulders. They love colour and high performance fabrics. Smart jackets are reminiscent of farming clothes from the 20th century or

cycling wear from the early 21st. The younger people especially have a casual edge.

**Provocations: What is the future of popular culture, entertainment and the role of arts and culture in a future society?**