

We Made Ourselves Over

Introduction

Breathing in, you might think that the air is the same but it's not. The tide covers the eaves of the Old Town. Lights twinkle on the moon.

The city is on the cusp of a new century. Over the past 80 years, its map has been redrawn: the tidal arrays growing across the Humber, the myriad canals and marine farms of the city centre encircling The Guildhall.

We grew. The deserted houses of the Ing Estate and Preston Road hummed with voices; their windows blinked with industry. The long grass was cut back from here to East Riding.

But that was a while ago. It is 2097. That hum of traffic outside the window is just a recording. Now the streets are quiet and the houses stand empty once more. After nearly a century of growth and industry, the ground has fallen away and you're floating above the city.

Now it's up to you to decide on where we go next.

We Made Ourselves Over is a science fiction event which engages its audiences in a story which is citywide. Diverse communities across Hull will work in partnership with the artists to develop a speculative future for the city employing writing, mobile gaming and film.

We Made Ourselves Over springs from the history of the city and takes its audience on a journey into the future. It reimagines the landscape of the city eighty years from today and leads its audience through the lifetime of changes that take place over that time, delving through time zones past and future, from one era to another.

Told from the standpoint of 2097, the project postulates a future in which the landscape and buildings of East Hull have swelled with life and flourished, and have then fallen into retreat and disrepair.

In a public event running over ten weeks, using phone boxes, an app for smartphones, intimate face to face encounters with players across the city and a series of five extraordinary films, *We Made Ourselves Over* will invite audiences to come together to play, to explore and to dream of new futures.

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Background

We Made Ourselves Over continues Blast Theory's concern with the social impact and opportunities of rapidly changing technology on the city and its people. We believe that new technology provides critical challenges and opportunities for cities in the future. And it allows us to create groundbreaking new forms of performance and interactive art to build rich conversations about the landscape of that city.

As with work such as our commission in Japan in 2013 - *The Thing I'll Be Doing For The Rest Of My Life* - the project builds on an inclusive research and creative development process, comprising interviews and workshops with local people and organisations to excavate the diverse economic, social and political experiences of the city and its history. Our experience in research projects working with partners in higher education and at research labs across the European Union will allow us to co-ordinate a unique collaboration between local communities and an interdisciplinary team of architects, urbanists and economists.

Among our previous work, *Rider Spoke* is one of several which interleaves new perspectives of the city with audiences' own experiences. First premiered at the Barbican in London in 2007 and subsequently shown in 20 cities around the world, *Rider Spoke* invites audiences to cycle through the city at night making recordings and listening to other people's. It uses technology to give new ways for audiences to have a meaningful voice within the work.

Through this project, we will invite people to contribute to a new vision of the city, to unleash radical, poetic and playful ideas about what is possible for Hull and what its future might be. We want to invite everyone to think in new ways about the life they lead and where they want to go as a community.

We Made Ourselves Over will situate the present day city within a longer historical cycle of economic decay and renewal. The narrative and creative vision of *We Made Ourselves Over* is inspired by the psychological landscapes of J.G. Ballard; elaborating an imagined world of the future through the personal struggles of individuals who have lived it; reflecting on loss, our sense of history and purpose, and on our capacity of resilience in the face of the unknown.

The Process

The project will begin development in June 2016 and be live for the public during late summer and early autumn 2017; building from the Freedom season into Tell The World.

In the first six months of the project, Blast Theory will engage with diverse groups from around Hull, including schools, youth groups and community organisations, and work with experts and researchers from the University of Hull to reimagine the city across four key areas:

- The environment and climate change

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- Global and local economies
- New technologies and city infrastructure
- Community, identity, family life and culture

Drawing on the writings and research of climate scientists, architects, urbanists, economists and futurologists, Blast Theory will lead a programme of thought provoking workshops to present and discuss alternative scenarios for the future of the city. Taking a playful and personal approach, each group will be invited to think about their own lives in this future city; re-inventing their own communities, carrying forward what is important, writing stories of daily life, drawing up new city plans and designing a new horizon line for their neighbourhood.

These activities will lead to a phase of intensive creative development; interpreting and collating material from the workshop and research process. In collaboration with production designers, 3D artists, and a scriptwriter, Blast Theory will bring the future city to life; developing storyboards for five films, scripts for a series of interactive phone calls and for intimate face-to-face encounters across the city.

Blast Theory will recruit and cast a production team for the film shoot, inviting participants from the community to take part in the production.

The City of Culture will provide a key role in building relationships within the University, linking the project to independent researchers and development groups, establishing relationships with community and youth groups and assembling a production team of local film-makers, visual artists, performers and makers to involve in the delivery of the final work.

The Event

We Made Ourselves Over will launch as an immersive citywide event in the summer of 2017.

Taking place over ten weeks, the project will launch a new film every fortnight, engaging audiences across the city with guerrilla style screenings, prompting audiences to participate via phone boxes and their own smartphones.

At the end of each fortnight, participants will be have the chance to be drawn further into the project – being carried away by one of a fleet of electric cars roaming the city; taking them on a remarkable and unforgettable journey of reflection into the future.

The ten weeks concludes with a celebratory finale. An outdoor screening of all five films hosted at @TheDock in the Fruit Market will provide an opportunity to bring together communities and contributors from all stages of the project, the finale will also provide a public landmark event for the City of Culture calendar.

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The Films

Five films released over ten weeks will act as a focus for local participation and an entry point to the world of the project.

Working with a scriptwriter, Blast Theory will develop a set of interlinked stories and characters set in the world of Hull in 2097; each film introducing a new character from the city and setting up a dilemma that they face.

Shot in 4K with a full crew on locations around Hull, each film will feature the spectacular motion graphics and effects to reimagine the city as never before. An experienced effects team with a track record of work in television and feature films will use 3D compositing and camera tracking to embed environments and characters into the world of the film and bring the future city to life.

Local people and participants from the workshops will be invited to take part as cast members and enlisted to suggest and document locations for each shoot.

The films will be short, shareable and provocative; showing familiar locations and landmarks from diverse neighbourhoods in Hull in a dramatic new light. Told as fact from the point of view of a character in the city, each film will reveal a new aspect of the city and its story; sometimes voiced as personal reportage, at other times, in the guise of advertising or public information films.

A specially adapted truck will tour the city to screen the films during the ten weeks. Acting as a projection platform, the truck will turn walls and billboards across the city into temporary screens. Neighbourhoods will be transformed as residents, visitors and passers by gather under the stars to watch as each new film premieres.

On its own, each film will encapsulate an idea of how people in Hull might live, providing a visually rich re-imagining of the city for sharing and discussion across social media. But it will also be a call to action; setting up a character and a dilemma as a prompt to engage with the story world further via phone boxes and smartphones.

Phone Boxes

The clock counts down. Two minutes to go. One minute. Thirty seconds. Ten. Across the city, a chorus begins. Over three hundred phone boxes jangle to life inviting passers by to answer. At the end of the line, a crackling voice asks you who you are..

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A year as City of Culture is a rare opportunity to reach out to all parts of the city, to every community and to send a message out to the wider world. Hull's iconic white phone boxes provide a brilliant opportunity to do this.

As each new film is launched, every white phone box across the city rings simultaneously. Just pick up one of the phones to drop through the rabbit hole and enter the fantastic world of *We Made Ourselves Over*.

At the end of the line is a character from 2097, pleading for your help. As you interact with them, you become a protagonist in their life. Help them with the dilemma they face – give them advice, record your thoughts and help them to reach a decision about the future.

Phone lines will be open 24 hours a day and seven days a week during the ten weeks of the event, allowing the public to explore the world of the project at anytime by calling in from any one of the city's white phone boxes. A lucky few may even be picked up from their phone box by one of a fleet of mysterious electric vehicle roaming the city and meet the character face to face.

App for Smartphones

For smartphone users, phone boxes also act as a key to unlocking an interactive video call.

One interactive video call is released to accompany each film. Walk up to a phone box and open the app to trigger the interactive video on your smartphone. Framed Facetime style, each video will feature a character from one of the films, allowing you to interact with them, giving an intimate first person window into their world and their view of the city and inviting you to help decide their future.

The app for smartphones will draw on Blast Theory's recent award winning Karen app; building on the team's experience in scripting compelling interactive video, and leveraging technology for delivering interactive full-screen video to mobile devices.

Face To Face Encounters

*You hear the crunch of tyres coming to a halt outside the phone box.
A black vehicle sits humming with the door open.
A voice asks you to get in.*

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Over five weekends, a small fleet of anonymous blacked out electric cars appear gliding back and forth across the city. These cars become the mobile setting for the public to reflect on the story and share their visions of the future of Hull.

Within each vehicle a performer will guide an interview with the participant to talk about their vision of the future in Hull. Video recordings of these encounters will be shared across social platforms as part to the project's digital strategy to provoke and grow conversations online.

As the interview ends the participant will be dropped off where they began.

Hull, the UK and the World

We Made Ourselves Over will set Hull buzzing. Whether deeply engaged through the workshops and the making of the films, thrilled by an interaction with an actor or drawn in by the projection of an eye catching film in their neighbourhood residents and visitors will feel the new sense of possibilities in the air. Local artists, actors, film-makers and the wider creative community will contribute at each stage of the project.

And the project will go further still: to reach beyond the city itself to the rest of the country and the world. A digital strategy will cast the conversations in the city out to the web and social platforms, developing conversations there that lead to the premieres of the films online. As the ten weeks of the event unfold, the films will be complimented by the voices of participants from Hull. Recordings from phone calls and face to face encounters will be compiled and published, while videos and material from the development process will be released, inspiring the design of a new city map and a striking new skyline for the future.

Finale

The ten weeks concludes with a celebratory finale at @TheDock in the Fruit Market. An outdoor screening of all five films will be complemented with contributions from participants in the workshop process and videos from the past ten weeks.

Bringing together communities and contributors from all stages of the project, the finale will also provide a landmark public event for the City of Culture's Tell The World season; inviting the city to celebrate and reflect on its potential future.