

# A MACHINE THEY'RE SECRETLY BUILDING

## COMMENTS & REVIEWS

### PRESS REVIEWS

“A sprint through the modern history of surveillance and the arguments states use to legitimise it makes for a chilling hour in the company of Proto-Type Theater

**This smartly intelligent hour-long whizz through the world of surveillance**, and the way governments legitimise spying on their citizens, makes you question what we mean by a terrorist and where the real threat lies. If you are reading this online, the state may be watching.

Governments have plenty to hide, and Andrew Westerside's script exposes some of those secrets as it takes us on a whistle-stop tour of the history of government surveillance from 1943 wartime London to the present day via the cold war.

The tone is lightly ironic as Baynton and Lees exchange information and gobble secret edible messages, and wrap each other in cling film. But while they may be the only human performers, Adam York Gregory's dense video design offers a constant barrage of images that sometimes reinforce text and often wittily undermine it.

**This is coolly reasoned theatre, produced by Proto-type Theater with stylish aplomb.”**

- Lyn Gardner, The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/aug/27/a-machine-theyre-secretly-building-review-surveillance>

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**“It speaks up, speaks out, blows the whistle and lifts the veil on the insidious machine of surveillance,** exploring crucial contemporary debates around personal freedoms, information and the tensions between government and citizenry.”

- Gareth K Vile, The Vile Blog

<http://vilearts.blogspot.com/2017/06/a-dramaturgy-they-are-secretly-building.html>

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**"Upending our balaclava-clad expectations from the get-go, Proto-type Theater's *A Machine they're Secretly Building* eschews easy anarchy and invites us through the black mirror into a chilling and surprisingly playful examination of the dangerous psychology behind the web of all-prevalent surveillance technology we're caught up in everyday..."**

**Westerside's narrative is crystalline throughout,** avoiding hand-wringing or scaremongering and instead constantly underscored with a refreshing self-awareness that keeps the audience on-side... **Lees and Baynton take our hands and lead us sympathetically into a dark new world...**

**Proto-type's team have such imagination and clarity of vision; their kind of theatre is a great antidote to 2017's tangled political and cultural landscape. *A Machine they're Secretly Building* is an urgent, lively and entertaining starting point for addressing the issues that affect every one of us, everyday."**

- Christine Irvine, Exeunt

<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-machine-theyre-secretly-building-tron-theatre-glasgow/>

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"Uncomfortable laughs and unpalatable home truths permeate throughout *A Machine*... Gillian Lees and Rachel Baynton present a history of surveillance, either filming themselves in Pussy Riot styled pink balaclavas, or bouncing staccato lines off each other, sitting behind a desk, their voices emulating the clicking of typewriters..."

Andrew Westerside's text suggests a climate of fear and social control, perpetuated by the media, a means of keeping people complacent and docile.

What makes the production so compelling is its even-handedness.

Proto-type leave the audience to make their own judgement on how much influence is scare-mongering, playing into a collective paranoia, and how much is necessary for survival.

**Two superb performances, intelligent and playful**, are complemented by exacting video footage by Adam York Gregory. **The kind of theatre that seeps into the sub-conscious. Pass the tin foil hats.**

Proto-type theatre company explores the pernicious threat of 24-hour surveillance in a performance that combines original text and classified intelligence documents with film from digital artist Adam York Gregory and sound design by Paul J Rogers.”

\*\*\*\* - Lorna Irvine, The List

<https://www.list.co.uk/article/90478-a-machine-theyre-secretly-building-the-kind-of-theatre-that-seeps-into-the-sub-conscious/>

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**"Bold text, excerpts from leaked intelligence documents, words from Edward Snowden and newsreel clips make *A Machine...* an immersive experience that pulls back a curtain** on organisations like the NSA and GCHQ and confronts the audience with startling truths...

*A Machine...* brilliantly pulls us in as we hurtle towards the climax, bombarding us with arresting revelations and the growing realisation that we're not really watching theatre at all. What we see and hear on stage is a masterfully devised mirror.

At the end of the show, we haven't witnessed a character arc or revelled in a twist ending. **We are being called to arms. *A Machine...* is an alarm clock, waking us up.** Leaving the theatre, you might think twice about turning your mobile back on straight away.

\*\*\*\* - Matthew Keeley, The Wee Review

<http://theweereview.com/review/machine-secretly-building/>

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"The show's devisers and performers Rachel Baynton and Gillian Lees move from the Cold War to 9/11 and beyond without ever quite giving the game away. **With a title drawn from Edward Snowden and a script pulled together by Andrew Westerside and the company, the pair nevertheless still manage to unveil a very secret history.**

In collusion with Adam York Gregory's text-heavy video projections and an electronic underscore by Paul J Rogers, this reveals a digital age where every click, text and email is recorded, saved and stored."

\*\*\* - Neil Cooper, Herald Scotland

[http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts\\_ents/stage/15225362.Theatre\\_review\\_A\\_Machine\\_They\\_39\\_re\\_Secretly\\_Building\\_Tron\\_Theatre\\_Glasgow/](http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts_ents/stage/15225362.Theatre_review_A_Machine_They_39_re_Secretly_Building_Tron_Theatre_Glasgow/)

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"Sitting stony-faced at a shared desk, Baynton and Lees take us through the post-war history of global terrorism and the parallel history of intelligence gathering, while an adjacent screen shows a collage of archive footage and statistics. **The script, by director Andrew Westerside, is written in an austere poetry of buzzwords and half-sentences, recited with steely efficiency as if to underscore the mechanical chill of information overload.**"

\*\*\* - Mark Fisher, The Scotsman

<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/theatre/theatre-review-a-machine-they-re-secretly-building-1-4422268>

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**“This piece of theatre is unlike any other**, with a clever yet foreboding presentation on how the world of surveillance affects our lives.

Even before the performance begins, the performers Rachel Baynton and Gillian Lees, create an unsettled atmosphere by staring into the audience whilst wearing red balaclavas.”

- Daryl Ames, Craven Herald

<https://www.cravenherald.co.uk/news/16149791.crowds-flock-to-biggest-ever-settle-stories-festival/>

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"Blending video, theatre, and agitprop, *A Machine they're Secretly Building* explores cyber security and the commodification of privacy in a convincing performance. Proto-type Theater's production straddles eras

from 1943 to current politics, laying bare the dangerous equation of safety and surveillance in Western democracies.

**In front of the audience and the camera, the performers expose the way an overarching gaze controls and, ultimately, shapes our every movement."**

\*\*\*\* - Marine Furet, Plays to See  
<http://playstosee.com/machine-theyre-secretly-building/>

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**"Both Baynton and Lees have a strong presence and chemistry,** which is mostly (intentionally) muted but occasionally unleashed in more comic and exuberant moments. The production as a whole maintains one's interest well despite a strong focus on the factual content of the text, through its series of slight and well-controlled shifts of tone.

**It's confident, absorbing storytelling.** There are also reminders throughout that, while we might all be generally aware of the facts, rhetorics and forces at play here (hint: security is big business), we've somehow collectively shrugged and moved on. The piece offers moments at which its performers question themselves: what is the alternative to living in this data-driven society? Going "off the grid"? Donning our collective tin-foil hats? Organising, collectivising, rioting? Well, things are generally good, and Google's quite useful. The weather's fine. Perhaps we'll riot tomorrow... **a sharing of disbelief, an articulate wail of anger and powerlessness"**

- Mark Smith, British Theatre Guide  
<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/a-machine-they-aldridge-studio-14085>

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**"...after an hour in the company of Rachel Baynton and Gillian Lees you may want to go off grid, head to the woods and never touch a keyboard ever again!** Based on Edward Snowden's revelation of the US government's "massive surveillance machine they're secretly building", writer (and director) **Andrew Westerside's history of State surveillance is both revelatory and deeply disturbing...**

Two women (Baynton and Lees) sit, newsreader like, as they guide us through Inter-Governmental data gathering. The flat, calming, malifious tones assuring us all is well, and the continued erosion of privacy is fine because 'it keeps us safe'. At least, as they tell us it isn't raining...here.

There's a chilling Orwellian matter of factness about the delivery, a complicit 'we now what is best for you' attitude, as they slowly reveal that privacy and information trading is now the new oil business. Big money is to be made from those simple clicks and swipes we make on keyboards and smartphones each day.

**Baynton and Lees' performances are compelling**, their softly spoken words carefully pitched to have us learn forward in our seat to hear every word. They use charm and humour to disarm us but make no mistake, **their message is forceful, their campaign as vivid as the lurid pink balaclavas they often don.**"

\*\*\*\* - Glen Pearce, The Reviews Hub

<http://www.thereviewshub.com/pulse-festival-2016-prototype-theatre-the-machine-theyre-secretly-building/>

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"A Machine they're Secretly Building, by Proto-type, is about the worldwide digital surveillance culture that began in the post-war period and boomed with the arrival of the internet. Our online data is being stored without our consent. Even before the guys at the New Wolsey post this online, a copy of it will sit in a huge data storage facility in Utah, because it'll be taken right out of the email I send to Jeni and Jack from the theatre's marketing team.

**Proto-type's show is fascinating.** It is heavy with information, and probably strongest when it represents facts over speculation, but is structured so well that it never feels like reading some dry essay. The space is well constructed too, with performers reading from what look like 'top secret' Cold War spy files from an old metal filing cabinet, but also live balaclava videos, like a Pussy Riot intervention. **Simple but striking... unflinching and important.**"

- Megan Vaughan

<https://www.wolseytheatre.co.uk/pulse-festival-blog-6-tuesday-31-may/>

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"With only a camera, a projector and a filing cabinet to assist them, **two women sit at a desk centre stage and within just one hour overwhelm us with information about our current predicament** regarding privacy and surveillance. Whether they're cracking jokes or

relaying the chilling facts their voices maintain the flat, neutral authority of news readers as they lead us down to the reality of the scale of mass surveillance in 2016...

when the women shed their neutral exteriors and the audience suddenly finds themselves amidst a bombastic, dynamic explanation of world affairs since Edward Snowden's revelations in 2013

Tension builds as we speed towards the historical turning point, 9/11, when the women shed their neutral exteriors and the audience suddenly finds themselves amidst **a bombastic, dynamic explanation of world affairs since Edward Snowden's revelations in 2013**. They run around, they swear, and use a number of interesting objects – from balloons to cling film – to get their point across, often being terribly funny in the process... **Their message was clear: now you have all the information, it's time for you to decide what you want to do about it.**"

- Hannah Jordan, SCAN Magazine

<http://scan.lusu.co.uk/index.php/2016/02/09/review-proto-type-theatre-a-machine-theyre-secretly/>

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**"A *Machine they're Secretly Building* is about how we got to the point where our governments are spying on us and how that's changing who we are."**

- John Freeman, downthetubes.net

<https://downthetubes.net/?p=28734>

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"Seamlessly melding performance with lecture Andrew Westerside's script manages to strike a balance between the informative and the entertaining – presenting innumerable shocking facts to great effect with a healthy dose of dry humour.

Through an expertly researched script and shrewd delivery, *A Machine they're Secretly Building* gives a solid attempt to galvanise us into action. **It is a compact, harsh assault on our conscience, wrapped in an accessible, attention grabbing package."**

- Charlie Salter, Salter Ego

<http://charliesartsblog.blogspot.co.uk/2016/05/theatre-review-machine-theyre-secretly.html>

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“...entertaining and thought provoking.”

- Student review, University of Lincoln

<https://alicejaynethorley.wordpress.com/2016/02/19/review-a-machine-theyre-secretly-building/>

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“It dealt with the subject matter in a really good way, and presented it in an easy to understand format...”

- Student review, Lancaster University

<https://lawofkillerrobots.wordpress.com/2016/02/03/theatre-review-a-machine-theyre-secretly-building/>

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“An inspired, deeply political essay rounded off by heartfelt empathy.”

- Oxford Guardian

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## **VENUE FEEDBACK**

“So brilliant having you all here - the show is fantastic - I think it should run and run - I was in Birmingham at BE Festival all last week waxing lyrically about it - the show's had such a lasting effect on me - I'm constantly looking out for cameras every time I'm walking the street, having second thoughts every time I make a card transaction, every time I open a browser. Compelling and terrifying both at the same time - congrats again, really, really terrific stuff.”

- Porl Cooper, Slunglow's HUB

“Really thought-provoking powerful show”

- Ian Morley, The Civic, Barnsley

“A Machine they're Secretly Building is proving to be a phenomenal and eye-opening piece of theatre from Prototype”

- Oxford Playhouse

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## AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

“Absolutely Fantastic – completely paranoid now and trying to figure out what I can do”

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“Absolutely Amazing! So eye-opening – will be doing extra research. Coming back tomorrow night with a pad and pen. Thank you.”

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“More & more terrifying, more and more sad, more and more strange. Fantastic”

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“Loved the show on Thursday! I can't get my head around the scale of some of it, a Yottabyte!? Also, love the Balaclavas.”

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“I enjoyed this show more than you can know, thank you thank you.”

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“A eulogy from the end of history”

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## FROM TWITTER

@sophiefullerlov “relevant, important and one of the things I’m most proud of in the season.”

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@richardveryard “@Proto-type's brilliant riff on #privacy and #surveillance "A Machine They're Secretly Building"

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@dant\_lane “Life on twitter never quite seems the same #AMTSB. Thank you to @Proto\_type for creating an enlightening show that crawls under your skin”

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@emmaatwar “Saw the excellent @Proto\_type yesterday: enlightening and chilling in equal measure (and yes, I get the irony of tweeting this) #AMTSB”

@MEImaazi “Just came out of the brilliantly written and performed "A Machine They're Secretly Building" #AMTSB (check out @proto\_type at <http://proto-type.org>) well worth it!”

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@ChroniclesofBap Proto-type “take the 4th wall and bend it into a new 5th dimension”

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@Farnhammaltings “Best contemporary theatre on our doorstep #AMTSB lifts the lid on the insidious machine of surveillance”

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@PaciaQuests “#AMTSB is full of insight, wit and what theatre is all about! Go see it!”

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@cs\_warden “#AMTSB @Proto\_type was fantastic! Terrifying & uplifting in equal measure \*puts phone in bin\*”

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@ChrisK1906 “Not sure I should tweet having seen @Proto\_type Don't know who's watching. #AMTSB is a gem dissecting how surveillance keeps us 'safe'.”

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@SpleenShot “#AMTSB is a stark reminder that we're still doused in apathy/denial/bewilderment & surrendering ourselves to surveillance.”

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@FastFamiliar “#AMTSB is smart, important stuff, performed with charm and humour. Still trying to figure out the appropriate response...”

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@charliemkemp “Scary, thought-provoking stuff from @Proto\_type #AMTSB Powerful, engaging and chilling - all eyes on us!”

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@mdpinchbeck “Shining a harsh light on how surveillance works and how we are all spied on.”

@2MagpiesTheatre “#AMTSB is a fascinating show about surveillance with stylish multimedia”

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@\_KieranSpiers\_ “#AMTSB a really prevelant, poignant and thought-provoking show.”

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@STEPHANIEL0CKE “Relevant and thought provoking piece of theatre by @Proto\_type last night. Feeling both angry and aware. Where's the line!? #AMTSB”

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@mdpinchbeck “Loved new show by @Proto\_type @LPAC\_Lincoln. Framed by fact & tin foil, fictional futures. Drove home conscious of every CCTV camera. #amtsb”

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@pheebs\_wp “You don't know how much you care until it's put in front of you on a stage. #AMTSB by @Proto\_type is unmistakably necessary theatre.”

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@FlickbookTC “#AMTSB @Proto\_type is compelling, intelligent, deeply political & gloriously theatrical. Vital watching for all internet users (that's you).”

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@Pippa\_Frith “Slick, intriguing and a little bit scary”

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@Pippa\_Frith: #AMTSB is a must see... Important and exquisitely performed

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@David Wood: I highly encourage you all to go & see 'A Machine They're Secretly Building'. A wonderfully disconcerting play.

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@PlaystoSee: #AMTSB a re-enactment of historical facts & openly political performance, expect 2 feel paranoid!

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@jimdougan: Profoundly uncomfortable by @Proto\_type A MACHINE THEY'RE SECRETLY BUILDING. Makes you wonder.

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@MattTSaint: @Proto\_type were as fantastic as usual tonight with #AMTSB, devastating but with masses of dry humour! Touring to a venue near you!

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@porlcooper: Forget 1984 & BraveNewWorld. For a terrifying vision of present & future catch @Proto\_type "A Machine...."... Just AMAZING!

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@philip\_stanier: Great show on Thursday! Hard to believe; except it's all true - Increasingly weird; except it's all real #AMTSB

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@katysnelling: Essential & urgent #AMTSB is brilliant, thought provoking theatre.

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@philipkyeo: Fantastic performance from @Proto\_type this evening on national surveillance as a moral issue. Definitely go and see. #AMTSB

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@Doctor\_Morrow: Excellent post show chat with lovely @Proto\_type after their compelling #AMTSB @LPAC\_Lincoln - grabs tinfoil hat

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@JackHeat\_On: Wow #AMTSB is absolutely brilliant. Please go & watch @Proto\_type on tour! Insightful, witty and to be honest unnerving (in a very good way)

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@TheReviewsHub: I would tell @proto\_type what I thought of A Machine they're Secretly Building but they probably already have the data

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@GilesCroft: Really liked 'A Machine they're Secretly Building' by @Proto\_type last night. Powerful, thought provoking & beautifully achieved.

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@Laura\_Potente: Absolutely blown away by @Proto\_type incredible performance of A Machine They're Secretly Building

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@AmandaMason: A Machine they're Secretly Building was amazing, truly thought-provoking. It's scary to think how much cringe worthy posts from the past...

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@AACProgrammer: Remembering cool stuff I've seen. 3. A Machine They're Secretly Building by @Proto\_type. I attribute this show and a haircut within a 24 hour period saving my summer. I'll be eternally grateful for both.

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@mail\_bird: Astounding theatre from @Proto\_type last evening @the\_spring with an audience including college students, telling us what we all should know, fear, understand. straight - gripping, intelligent; loved it!

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@sophiefullerlov: It's been a huge pleasure to work with @GillianLees and @BayntonR of @Proto\_type to bring a great night of important, riot-inducing theatre to @the\_spring #changetheworld