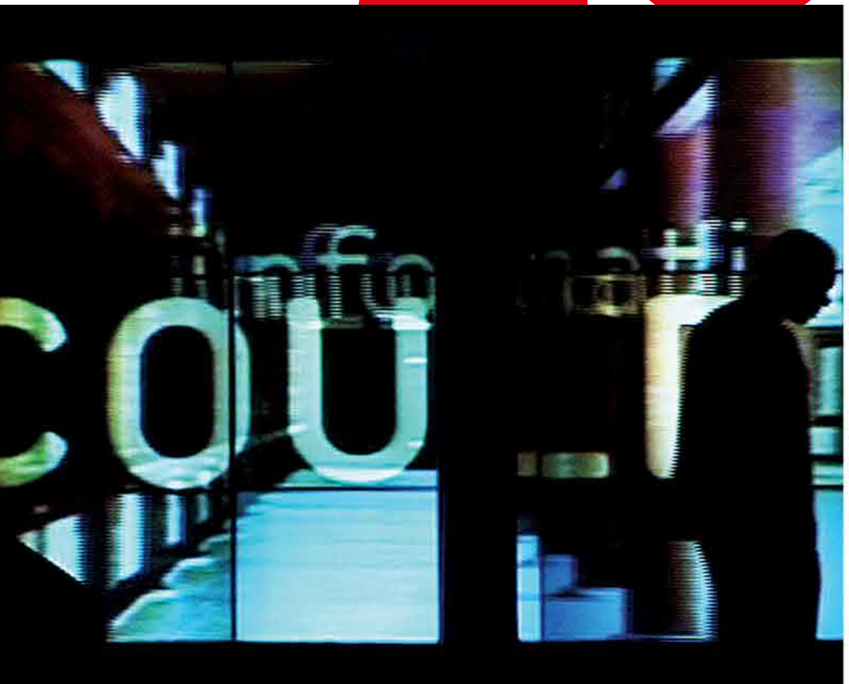
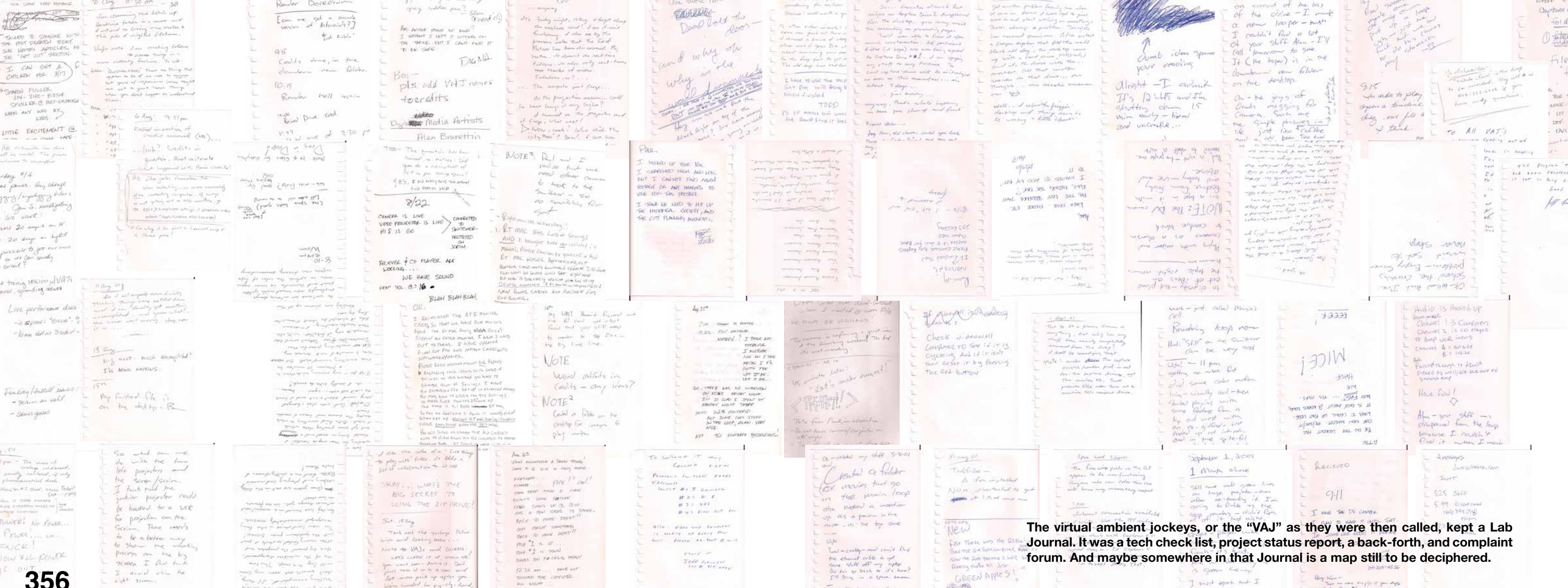
23

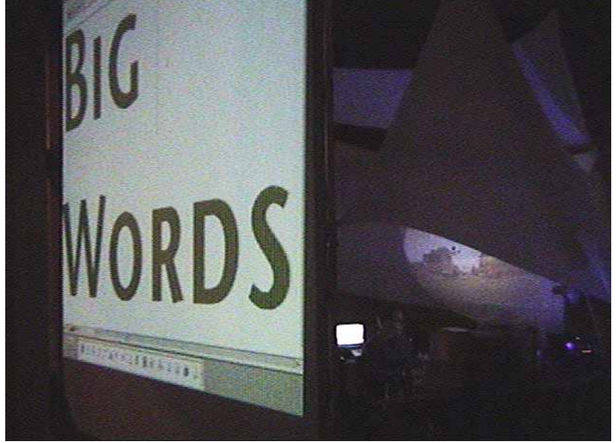
a lab



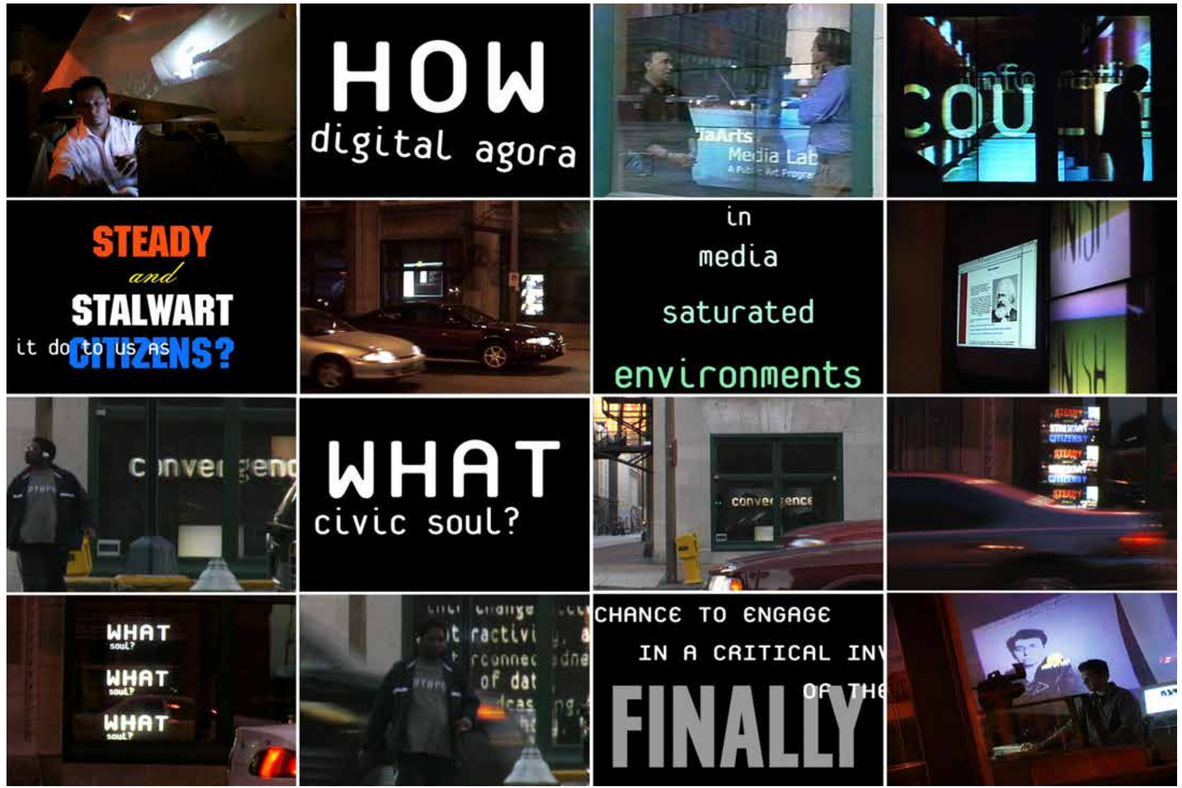
The Media - Arts street media lab opened in 1999. It was towards the river, a few blocks east of Cabool. The lab was a content generator, a factory, post not proto-Warhol. It operated off and on for two plus years. Content: meditations on film and digital editing, digital representationof art/science practice, the effect of IT on social organization, 9/11, the millennium, comic books, and Orwellian media culture. This street smithy had a simple task: take a stab at writing a history of a future and sketch a navigational chart out of a maelstrom. Chart follows.



The virtual ambient jockeys, or the "VAJ" as they were then called, kept a Lab Journal. It was a tech check list, project status report, a back-forth, and complaint forum. And maybe somewhere in that Journal is a map still to be deciphered.



mapping tools to steer through tangled intersections of information networks and street corners



The media Lab was located in an windowed first floor corner in downtown St. Louis. Housed in the Lab was a changing inventory of computers, photo imaging and editing equipment, projectors, screens and monitor walls, as well as those djs/vjs who migrated from Cabool. These post text dj/vj artists continued to use digital collage techniques as they sampled the riches of data banks and networks. “Digital art,” for a lack of a better word, was projected on screens and monitor walls facing the street. Inside cameras looking out on the street added an interactive component. Passers-by were the Lab’s customer/consumer. As a form of public street theatre, the Lab critically investigated the role of digital media on our culture by using the producers and consumers of media interchangeably, as actor and as audience. This concurrent, synchronous state of consuming and being consumed is the essence, the hallmark of new media. It is also the dominant DNA of our culture. The Lab was both an animated tableau and a viewing station into the digital city. The Lab, as an example of an urban design prototype for the digital city, was an experiment in recursive urbanism. The Lab’s topical subject-matter included meditations on film and digital editing, digital representation of art/science practice, the effect of IT on social organization, 9/11, the millennium, comic books, and Orwellian media culture.

ART FACTORIES

This paper described the development of urban prototypes to map the spatial dynamics of the band, critique traditional cultural practices, and resist the “Spectacle.” What follows is video footage documenting media artists experimenting with new mapping tools. They use digital technologies as mapping tools to steer through tangled intersections of information networks and street corners. This video footage records a street front media lab. The lab was the venue for cartographic experiments. It was a viewing station, an ocular device offering a line of sight into a networked city, this new civic ensemble made up of bricks, concrete and data packets. The lab is offered as a prototype for the networked city.

DESIGN PROTOTYPES FOR A NETWORKED CITY - AOIR

The lab occupied a windowed first floor corner in a downtown building where various applications and delivery systems were showcased 24/7. Housed in the lab was a changing inventory of fat data pipes, computers, photo imaging and editing equipment, projectors, screens and monitor walls. The artists who manned the lab, or virtual ambient jockeys as they were called, offered passers-by a chance to watch digital media types at work. They used digital collage techniques as they sampled the riches of data banks and networks. Their work – the evening’s digital amalgam - was projected on screens and monitor walls facing the street. Cameras inside, looking out on the street, added an interactive face. The lab was a stage for an ongoing “info age” critique. It played out over and over, night after night. It was also a viewing station into a networked city. It was an ocular device offering a line of sight into tangled virtual information infrastructures and street corners.

THICKENING THE WORD AND THE RETURN OF THE TRICKSTER

The lab was a blended place, a straddled one. It was on the street, a sort of polis update: Release 99…. The lab wrapped a windowed corner in downtown St. Louis. Artists used digital collage, remix to create new urban narratives, to map and remythologize the streetscape. It was street theatre, a tool to advance synthesis and awareness, with the hope that it might lead to collective action.

THE CARTOGRAPHER’S DILEMMA

This store front media lab occupied a windowed first floor corner in the former nine story headquarters of the Buster Brown Shoe Co. The lab operated for three years. Housed in it was a changing inventory of computers, photo imaging and editing equipment, projectors, screens and monitor walls. It also housed the relocated “web djs,” shifted from the dance floor to the street. These virtual ambient jockeys in their three-year run at the lab, offered passers-by a chance to watch digital media types at work. The work product - digital art for lack of a better word - was projected on screens and monitor walls facing the street. Cameras inside, looking out on the street, added an interactive face. The topical subject matter included meditations on film and digital editing, digital representation of art/science practice, the effect of IT on social organization, 9/11, the millennium, comic books and Orwellian media culture. The lab was a stage for an ongoing “info age” critique, playing out over and over.
Three Cities Conference - New Media Literacy in the Smart City

Media arts alliance promotes digital media artist in 1999 Media Arts opened a media lab incubator in the A D Brown Building located in downtown St. Louis. The Lab is at the south east corner of Tucker and Washington Avenue. Passersby could watch digital media artists work and create while their work is simultaneously projected on the screens facing Tucker Avenue. Media Arts focus is on the process of creation as well as the final product. In the modern world of scanners, graphic programs and the internet any image that can be produced can be reproduced. To see the artists work is to gain greater respect for the artists output. This lab incubator is a museum without walls. It engages its audience in the creative process. It has no perimeters or boundaries to limit this new mediums interactive character. There is always room for the unscripted the unexpected, that serendipitous event. Artists in the lab have the opportunity to work with the most cutting edge technology. And the public sees experimental high tech art on the streets of St. Louis and not just on their computer screens. Of special interest to Media Arts are those artists who conjure a sense of place and history while using cutting edge technology. Work done in Media Arts often has as its underlying theme the question, “How can technology create a community space?” Up to this point technology has created a sense of isolation, as solitary workers type on individual computers. Work at the media lab emphasizes watching the artist create the work and projecting images from the world of technology into windows and on to walls. Thus the new digital art, instead of isolating, creates a sense of community.
THE LAB, Media Arts Documentary audio track

In a world that is always coming to us already emptied, stripped, re-mix breaks it up and circulates it again, and sends it back down the road to become our mythology. From numbing spectacle to a whispered voice, creativity is dependent upon, and cannot escape from, the media environment within which it works. Re-mix is the ecology, where media environment and natural environment converge. Re-mix is an aesthetic of reuse, an ecology of images in its most literal form, a sustainable development of sound and visual images.
Is There a Digital Future Landscape Terrain?- Landscape Architecture Site/ Non- Site AD

A Project - It stared with an email. The client saw something in a window. The client wanted it. It was a new-media lab. The lab wrapped a windowed corner on a downtown street. Artists were mixing and remixing things in the windows. Night after night tableaux framed virtual jockeys _VJs_ sampled the riches of data banks and digital networks. Their work - the evening’s digital amalgam/the remix - was projected on screens and monitor walls facing the street. Remix was used to create new urban narratives, to map and re-mythologize a streetscape. The client got a first glimpse of how a street/looks sounds when information networks are injected into a concrete public streetscape. The client was Arts in Transit, AIT. AIT was the “public art wing” of Metro. Metro owns and operates the St. Louis metropolitan public transportation system. The system includes MetroLink, the light rail system, and MetroBus, the bus system.
Tunnel Vision: An Architecture of Reflexivity

MediaARTS collaborated with HotHouse Theatre Co. and New Line Theatre in their rotating repertory productions of “The Cradle Will Rock” and “It’s All True,” which were performed at the ArtLoft Theatre 1529 Washington Ave. in downtown St. Louis throughout the month of October. MediaARTS, which operates a cutting-edge digital media MediaLab exhibit, is located at 1136 Washington, 3 blocks east of the ArtLoft Theatre. The lab permits the public to watch media artists “spin” graphic art, still and moving video and computer images and footage from cameras on the street into a changing stream of digital art displayed on large video monitors. The lab operates live four nights a week. The goal of MediaARTS is not only to present exciting new media works, but also to invite the public into the process of their creation. It allows the public the opportunity to witness the creative choices the artist is making, and to see the technical inner workings of the software as it is processing the work. It brings a whole new dimension to the concept of “art and theater.” HotHouse Theatre Co. and New Line Theatre’s “The Cradle Will Rock” and “It’s All True” are set in 1937 during the Great Depression, a time of labor unrest and censorship. “The Cradle Will Rock” and “It’s All True” are representative of “agitprop” theatre, a theatre for agitation and propaganda. The “agitprop” movement was a vibrant element of popular political theatre in the 1920s and 1930s. This style is sometime referred to as political street theatre. This unique collaboration allowed MediaARTS, HotHouse Theatre Co. and New Line Theatre to recreate street theater on Washington Avenue in this information, Internet Age. This collaboration among MediaARTS, HotHouse Theatre Co. and New Line Theatre is recognition of the changes taking place as a result of the information revolution. The Internet is now becoming the primary vehicle for political protest and organization. Marginal, disenfranchised and threatened communities who once used the theater are now turning to the Internet to organize, to spread information and tell their stories.

On October 19 & 20, 26 & 27, simultaneous with the presentation of the plays at the ArtLoft Theatre, and just three blocks down Washington Ave, digital media artists told a story similar to the stories that were being told in “The Cradle Will Rock” and “It’s All True,” about the means of production, of labor organizations, and about injustice. At the media lab, the story was not told on a stage, or under a proscenium arch but on a rear projection screen, on undulating canvasses and on monitor walls. These media artists/ storytellers, using current digital information technology, fashioned their stories into a digital quilt of images and text from the Internet. At the end of the play each night the actors invited the audience to walk with them the 3 blocks down Washington Ave to the MediaLab. At the Lab the actors, in their period costumes, joined with the MediaARTS’s digital artists to continue telling the story.
Promotional Material and a St. Louis Post Dispatch Release

“That window I worked in was only a few blocks from where years before a telecom company began testing a new communications technology. The shoes were long gone by then. The company was Microwave Communications Inc, MCI. The Technology – The Internet. I got my night job in the window on account of that cloud. And it was all about show time, public street theater. The cast, actors and audience, were the producers and consumers of our media. The concurrent, synchronous state of consuming media and being consumed by it, is the soul, the mark of NEW media. And it is also the DNA of our time.”
buildbetterbarrel - script segment

born
born
born

lab case studies

case study 1

FIRST AND THIRD, Judith Barry

New York based Judith Barry came to St. Louis the week of November 14th for a collaborative presentation hosted by Washington University Graduate School of Art and MediaARTS Alliance. Barry was presenting “First and Third,” a video projection featuring commentary on the immigrant experience in America. This work dealt with the immigrant experience in America via memorable images and voices seen and heard from the street corner in the lab’s windows. The subjects in “First and Third” were projected in extreme closeup. This allowed Barry to fill an entire window panel about 6 feet high and wide with a “face.” Setting the work in a window overlooking an urban landscape - making the faces appear to be the cornerstone of the building - reinforced how individuals bringing their lives to this country have become the “building blocks” of America.

case study 2

dDNA (d is for dancing), Nell Tenhaaf

Nell Tenhaaf’s work addresses cultural implications of new technologies, and how digital representation links art practice to the biosciences and to Artificial Life. She forges connections between the scientific and artistic worlds, both through works critiquing scientific claims and works in which she adopts a “scientist’s persona.” In this piece Toronto artist Nell Tenhaaf took footage from St. Louis salsa and jitterbug classes and superimposed an animated strand of DNA to make it appear in the midst of the classes, projecting the final footage in the lab’s windows. Those who came to view this work used the piece as a jumping-off point for a larger discussion on dance and cultural mores.

case study 3

AN AUDIO DIALOGUE, Beige

Paul Davis, Joe Beuckman, Joe Bonn and Cory Arcangel of the digital art collective Beige set up an audio dialogue between an “inside and outside.” Sound-generating materials were planted on the street and in the MediaArts lab. Captured sounds — people, cars and buses — were processed by these Beige in-house programers. All was looped and repeated, pitch and playback speed changed. In this “sound capturing” there were no electronic instruments or sound generating sources. Every sound used had its source in some real event . Sounds were captured by the microphones: be it people talking into them, cars and busses passing, the performers inside the MediaARTS space giving instructions to the audience outside. “Sum-sound” was played back and combined into a musical framework and broadcast into the street.

case study 4

programs and processes on parade

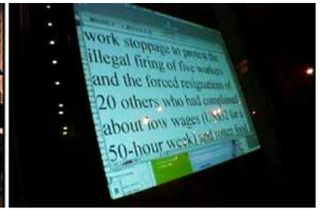
script excerpt - the Media Arts documentary: “Passersby can watch digital media artists work and create while their work is simultaneously projected on the screens facing Tucker Avenue. Media Arts focus is on the process of creation as well as the final product. In the modern world of scanners, graphic programs and the internet, any image that can be produced can be reproduced. To see the artists’ work is to gain greater respect for the artists’ output. This lab incubator is a museum without walls. It engages its audience in the creative process.”

case study 5

DIGITAL CONVERGENT LOOP
Art design Alan Brunettin, Text Paul Guzzardo

A preachy piece about media saturated environments played on a continuous loop for ten straight days, twenty-four hours a day. It started out this way, and went on and on.....
Digital convergence will affect us spatially. The interchangeability, interactivity, and interconnectedness of data, broadcasting, telephony, film, music, education and imaging will alter the places where we congregate. We will meet, share our stories, and build community in media saturated environments. Who will determine the nature of these environments, and what aesthetic and critical criteria will they use in fashioning the public gathering places of tomorrow? .....What about that recently post-pubescent socially dysfunctional junk food eating cyborg wannabe or the kid next door?

case study 6



AGIT-PROP - STREET THEATER

AGIT-PROP was a collaborative work of MediaARTS, HotHouse Theatre Co. and New Line Theatre. In the style of political street theatre, audiences were offered the opportunity to observe the impact of information technology on traditional narrative and dramatic art forms and a demonstration of the effect of information technology on social organization and social protest.

case study 7

Remediation/BIG DAN

This psychosexual cerebral adventure by Alan Brunettin took Remediation out of the “rarefied world of media theorist” and put it right on the street where it belongs, when it inserted girlie web images into “Radio Patrol and Big Dan’s Mobsters,” a 1930s detective comic book, a BIG LITTLE BOOK.

case study 8

Children of D

“Children of D” by Paul Guzzardo and Ben Kiel was constructed as a three-minute “contrived promotion” for an upcoming feature film. D stands for Drosophila. Drosophila melanogaster - the fruit fly - research and genome sequencing has revolutionized our knowledge about the connections between DNA and human behavior. “Children of D” was both a spoof on Hollywood blockbuster films and a serious mediation on DNA sequencing and sociobiology.

case study 9

We're Watching - Do You Care?

With their backs to downtown picture windows, digital artist Ben Kiel and Joyce Rudinsky pushed a mix. Their assemblage included: a stew of internet images, video feeds from inside cameras looking out, old flims clips and shotgun text. The Kiel-Rudinsky blend was projected on wrap-around street corner screens. Passersby saw passersby, themselves, all wrapped in a detritus poetic slam...of sorts.

case study 10

Intersections

An orthogonal city plan met an orthogonal cemetery plan in INTERSECTIONS. Night after night there was all night "shuffle and dissolve" between steady cam mounted video footage from Buenos Aires's Recoleta Cemetery and a live camera peering out of the media lab onto the street.

case study 11

Film Festival

"Remediation Fractal" was a "performance docudrama." Media artists shot and edited a film at a kick-off party for the St. Louis International Film Festival. They used the party for a meditation on the nature of film and digital editing. Playing with "process" the artists used montage to map the divergence of new media from traditional media and film. They juxtaposed images from the party with textual commentary about mixing, cutting, image, and time. While assembling it into the "documentary," they simultaneously projected the editing process on party walls. The remix didn't stop there. They wove Carl Dreyer's famous silent film "Joan of Arc" into the mix. It was a fractal stew.

case study 12

Flood Wall

The St. Louis flood wall and its scrub foreground was "the hood" for a multi media installation. A volkswagen was retrofitted as "an extreme projector boom box." The tailgate set for sound. The luggage rack for the two projectors. Looped and off-sync videos were projected from rack to wall. Site was a long vanishing Mississippi flood wall. Sculptural chimera was the set. The fire dancer was a bonus.

regarding the media lab
a missive from the Hearst Corporation

>----- Original Message ----- From: jcavett@hearstsc.com
> To: zio11@mindspring.com
> Sent: Wednesday, September 19, 2001 5:21 AM
> Subject: Re: please take care of
>I am still searching for the Big Dan Mobsters series I will need to review the
>details of the use to seek the proper fees.
>
>Ita Golzman
>09/17/2001 10:54 AM
>
>To: James R Cavett/ES/Hearst@Hearst
>cc:
>
>Subject: please take care of
>
>Jim-
>
>Please take care of this.
>
>Audra our attorney wrote a note regarding this e-mail. She wrote:
>
>Radio Patrol is ours. Big Dan Mobsters, can't find, but it may be part of same
>strip. Mark Johnson might know. Please let's do this only if we can get money.
>
>That is Audra's advice, it is up to you on what you want to do with this
>request. Big Dan Mobsters is part of Radio Patrol.
>
>Thanks,
>
>Ita
>---------------------- Forwarded by Ita Golzman/ES/Hearst on 09/17/2001 10:44 AM
>---------------------------
>"paul guzzardo" on 09/03/2001 11:31:26 AM
>
> To: Ita Golzman/ES/Hearst@Hearst
>
> cc:
> Subject: copyright
>
>Re: Radio Patrol
>
>Dear Mr. Golzman
>
>This inquiry is directed to you to determine if the Hearst Corporation currently
>holds the copyright on the following:
>
>Radio Patrol and Big Dan Mobsters -Based on the Famous Newspaper Strip by Eddie
>Sullivan and Charles Schmidt
>

>Whitman Publishing Co. Racine Wisconsin
>
>Copyright 1937, 1940 by King Feature Syndicated, Inc
>
>I am president of MediaARTS Alliance www.mediaarts.org a not for profit arts
>organization located in St. Louis Missouri. MediaARTS, in conjunction with
>students from local educational institutions, are examining issues of
>remediation in public space. We would like to use images and text from Radio
>Patrol and Big Dan Mobsters as part of this exercise. I would be happy to
>provide you further details regarding this exercise. I wanted first however to
>ascertain whether the copyright is held by the Hearst corporation. I can be
>contacted at this e-mail address or at 314-231-8784.
>
>Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.
>Paul Guzzardo

script segment

buildbetterbarrel - nine events in new media

the opening event: window

My father was a sculptor. He was born in Italy and moved to Chicago as a boy. He worked in wood, in stone and in bronze. I worked in a window. The windows wrapped a corner on a street. My medium was digital and I mixed and remixed things. The street where I made remixes was a mile from the Mississippi river. That's where I scanned a 1930 comic book, BIG DAN MOBSTERS, and then I remixed it with girly pictures, pictures I sliced out of the Internet. I called it Remediation, and other times I just called it Big Dan, after the comic book. I wanted to take Big Dan to other places, other windows but Hearst, The publishing Company that held the "comic copyright" wanted money. So Big Dan never left that street.

One other thing, before my window was window on a stage on a street, it was window in a lobby. A lobby of a St. Louis Shoe Company, Brown Shoe. They made Buster Brown shoes there for 50 years. They don't make shoes there any more, or shoes anywhere else, anywhere around there. Buster Brown and all the shoes got out of St. Louis, but Big Dan never did.

a fair use study

...do this only if we get the money.

...do this only if we get the money.

...do this only if we get the money.

...do this only if we get the money.

...do this only if we get the money.

...do this only if we get the money.

Memento Mori

the lab, and Yamaski's trade towers
web and script segments

media arts web site
The Media Lab in response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, suspended its regular arts programming. The walls of monitors and screens were dedicated to displaying work created as a memorial to the World Trade Center victims. This commemorative included among the tragic imagery of that day the scrolling names of those lost in the attack and the text of the sad and final phone messages of victims. The lab artists mixed their own edited video shorts with these scrolling names, the transcribed calls, and internet updates. This live collage was projected onto screens facing the street. So within a few days after the Trade Center attack, people walking in downtown St. Louis could watch digital artists wrestling with the medium as they tried to give voice to a memorial. It was a complex and beautiful performative piece. It may have been the only place in the country where something like this was done.

buildbetterbarrel script: release 1- window
When the trade towers were attacked, I was working in the lab. There were five of us working in the windows. We stopped what we were doing. We started to make our own memorial. We included the searing images, the scrolling names of the victims, messages from the cell phones, those transcripted final unanswered mobile phone calls. Those voices became words on windows. The collage, the remix, was projected on screens facing downtown streets. A few day after September 11th people on the street stood and watched, and sometimes just walked by, as I tried to give voice to a memorial.

buildbetterbarrel script: release 2, window epilogue1
The media lab closed at the end of 2001. The funding had stopped. The platform where we told stories was closed, silenced. If the lab had stayed open, I would have told stories about the ever-never-ending war that came after September 11th. That's the story that needed to be told, night after night in those windows on that corner in St. Louis. That is the memorial that I wanted to leave behind.

sorrow

sorrow

The MediaArts Media Lab closed a few months after September 11, 2001. Players and kit were scattered. Nothing on the corner to challenge the half-backed jingoistic madness on the way. Nothing to grab, wave, shout with. This was more than just a cartographer's dilemma.

The corner where the lab mixed it up was vacant for a long while, then a tenant showed up. And again it was a venue for digital medium, albeit a different sort. The tenant was an international telecom.

It was walk-in Sprint Store.

Mira Digital Publishing was above the media lab. James McKelvey founded Mira. He later went on to add the mobile pay company Square Inc. to his resume. Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey was a Mira intern. He was also upstairs.