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## Theme: The Mediated City and the Public

### The Media Maelstrom and the Public Sphere

Whether consciously or not, we all hold images of cities in our minds, and the question becomes, "Do we live in the city, or does the city live in us?" Whether we think of Times Square or Hollywood, whether we've left our hearts in San Francisco or our hats in Chicago or Dallas, we have a long-term relationship with cities and the various media that depict and comprise them.

Cities consciously promote and control their images, yet it is often uncontrollable events that define how they are seen and known. For those who witnessed the Twin Towers tumbling down, New York will forever be associated with those images and experiences. Yet to explore New York as a "mediated city" would take a lifetime, with only the eye of the beholder to provide a frame to explore within. In October 2014 in Los Angeles, Woodbury University will host a four-day conference to explore the theme of the "Mediated City," yet such a conference is only a beginning (<http://woodburymcd.wix.com/mediatedcityla#!schedule/c17b1>).

Recently, images of Ferguson MO have dominated the news, and these images are inevitably associated with public perceptions of St. Louis. Yet at the same time, St. Louis has been the focus of experiments in what it means to be a "mediated city," as all cities are.

For over two decades, Paul Guzzardo, media artist, lawyer, and activist, has made it his life's work to re-shape the social and media landscape of Saint Louis. One of the recurrent themes in his projects is the dilemma audiences face when they attempt to extract meaning from the constant stream of digital media to which they are exposed. In a semi-feature-length video titled "buildbetterbarrel," Guzzardo recounts one of the original 'media literacy moments' in Marshall McLuhan's first book, *The Mechanical Bride*. The book opens with a re-telling of Edgar Allen Poe's "Descent into the Maelstrom," a story in which a sailor is quickly sucked into a whirlpool, clings to a barrel, and is vomited back out of the abyss. Guzzardo reflects, "For McLuhan, the maelstrom was a metaphor, for all the mechanical, technological forces that overpower us, sweep us away. The press, radio, movies. Advertsing. All around everywhere. Whirling, going faster and faster. McLuhan saw these things, as the things that drown us. They empty us out. They leave us hollow. This maelstrom is the place we find ourselves. It's home. We need the barrel as a way out. To stay whole. The barrel is a new platform."

In an earlier, 2010 exhibition, "The Cartographer's Dilemma," at Western Illinois University, Guzzardo (as lead curator) linked the media maelstrom with the themes of history and mapmaking. This time, he drew on the work of early 20th century critical theorist Walter Benjamin. In a January 2010 interview with Tri-State Public Radio, Guzzardo explains, "It deals with Walter Benjamin's concept of history--is history progress, or it is chaos? And that's an issue that cartographers have to deal with. Whether this information is nothing but chaos, or there is some way of sorting through the information and giving it order."

How can the average audience member navigate the maelstrom? Guzzardo answers in very elliptical fashion in his text and media collage *A Hackerspace for Mythmaking--A Manual*. He references political philosopher Hannah Arendt's essay "Power and the Space of Appearance" from *The Human Condition* (1958), in which Arendt argues that the Greek *polis* was not the city-state itself, but a reality and a power constructed by public speech and action. Presumably, this is the power which will help the audience-citizen navigate the digital media maelstrom. The space of appearance is also an ephemeral thing: "Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (199). It's not surprising, then, that Guzzardo links the protean 'space of appearance' to new media: "Hannah Arendt's book is a tool chest for remix tinkers. It's a check list for designers in a skirmish with the flat. And more than that, when all hollows out, it's the map out."

Like many artists, Guzzardo is not ready to make all things intelligible to his audience, but lessons in media literacy can still be drawn from his work. For example, the "window" segment of "buildbetterbarrel" showcases new media art produced by Guzzardo and his colleagues which provide clear opportunities for navigating the maelstrom through public reconstruction of memory. In this segment, digital remix artist Alan Brunettin comments on the short but productive career of MediaARTS lab in Saint Louis, which occupied a downtown storefront lobby from 1999 to the end of 2001. A large array of video screens was mounted in the windows, and the virtual jockeys (VJs) on duty produced and displayed thousands of digital media images--images grabbed from the Internet, remix works, surveillance-as-spectacle webcam videos of people in the vicinity of the storefront, messages about digital media (e.g., "How will the digital agora change the way we interact?"), and images of people from far corners of the globe, especially on New Year's Eve 2000. In the days after 9-11, MediaARTS displayed huge *memento mori* of the attacks--images from ground zero, the list of victims' names, transcripts of their final phone calls. Many gathered at the corner of Tucker and Washington to watch.

A powerful media literacy lesson is implicit in the work of MediaARTS: the public, which can be so hard to define, can take the immediacy of the real through acts of witness. As Stephen Coleman and Karen Ross write in *The Media and the Public*, "It is impossible to live in the globalized world without depending upon events, information, and expertise which originate from far away. We cannot hope to rely upon direct, sensual experience as our principal means of accessing the world. . .In such circumstances, the 'we' who constitute the public is widely dispersed and dependent for self-knowledge upon mediated and indirect accounts of itself. Only through technologies of mediated witnessing can publics emerge and come to know themselves" (21).

In this issue of *Connections*, we examine the potential for media in urban spaces to encourage audience re-investment in the public sphere. In our first research article, we explore historical developments which have led most audiences to accept the dominance of private and commercial media spaces in the city, and in our second research article, we discuss the different roles that media--specifically screen media--can play in urban public life. In our

resources section, we discuss Paul Guzzardo's brand of urban media activism at a little more length, and point to the media literacy issues highlighted in his new media works. We also direct you to organizations and readings which can help you continue the conversation on this timely topic. And in our MediaLit Moment, your upper elementary and middle level students will have some fun as they learn how branding is always implicit in the formation of public identity.

## Research Highlights

### Media and Urban Public Space: Barriers to Connection

In the contemporary urban landscape, media generally do little to connect people in public spaces. According to cultural philosopher Leven De Cauter, the ubiquity of screens amounts to a 'capsularization' of the city: "One could even go so far as to say that every screen creates its own capsular time and space, virtual or otherwise" (quoted in Schreuder, *Pixels and Places*, 127). With smart phones and iPods, individuals encapsulate themselves in private media spaces everywhere in the city. Moreover, city dwellers continually move back and forth between regulated shopping centers, airports or amusements parks, each with their own media regimes. For example, airports typically place large banks of television monitors in waiting areas that carve out diminutive individual zones of private media space (McCarthy, *Ambient Television*, chapter 4).

Perhaps the two most common functions of media in public spaces are spectacle and surveillance. By one estimate, there is one CCTV camera in the UK for every 14 British citizens (Coleman and Ross, 22). Ironically, surveillance cameras are sometimes deployed to fill the gap created by underutilized public spaces. While the familiar commodity spectacle of advertising in urban spaces continues unabated, the staging of screen media in some cities has become increasingly massive in scale. Mirjam Struppek, independent curator and founder of the Urban Media Research project, points to the many urban revitalization strategies promoted "in the framework of city marketing, such as the idea of the 'event culture,' the 'creative city' shaped by the creative class, or the 'festivalization' of public space" (2). With such marketing campaigns, the city becomes a theatre stage with carefully produced and enjoyable infotainment. And, as Struppek astutely observes, "Public space is turned into a planner's test object, taking away the responsibility of the citizen for creating their own liveable space" (ibid).

How did we arrive at such highly privatized and surveilled urban media spaces? University of Melbourne professor Scott McQuire deftly weaves the threads of this history in an essay for the online journal *First Monday* and in his subsequent book *The Media City* (2008). The first 'devolution' of the public sphere in the city may be attributed to the figure of the *flâneur* in mid-19th century Paris. Described at length by French poet Charles Baudelaire and by Walter Benjamin, the *flâneur* is in one sense the antithesis of the actor in the public square. Instead, he is an urban spectator who thrives vicariously on the energy of the crowd, lingers along the city's boulevards, and consumes the visual spectacle of its fashionable shopping arcades. The arcade features more prominently in Benjamin's work, as the *flâneur's* 'unproductive' visual consumption of goods is later channeled into the 'productive' practice of shopping in the modern department store (*Media City*, 136).

As the 19th century progressed, social management became a factor in urban life. When Baron Haussmann re-designed the streets of Paris in the 1850s, he did so with an eye to

making the radical working class more visible, and so more easily controlled ("The Politics of Public Space," n.p.). Later, administrative agencies began to play a paternalistic role in the lives of urban dwellers. Reflecting on this history, contemporary sociologist and theorist Anthony Giddens argues that modern public life is characterized by a kind of 'civil indifference.' Such indifference is made possible when personal knowledge of others is replaced by more abstract administrative forms of control and increased reliance on expert technical systems (*Media City*, 133).

By the 1920s, calls for urban planning as a form of social management only intensified. During the inter-war period in Europe, fear of revolution mingled with antipathy to the growing squalor and chaos caused by rapid industrialization. The work of Le Corbusier and his modernist contemporaries can be justified to some extent, in that it was meant to combat the problem of living spaces barely fit for habitation, and the health crises endemic to the industrial city. The reigning belief was that rational building was the key to rational social form (*Media City*, 137). Decades later, the problem of public space became more apparent. McQuire frames the problem with a question: "At what point do attempts to rationally plan increasingly complex urban spaces and circulatory systems collapse into prescriptive attempts to control public behavior?"(ibid.)

While the changes wrought by suburbanization in the post-war era may be familiar to readers, the impact of those changes is astonishing nonetheless. Between 1940 and 1947, 60 million Americans--nearly half the population--moved to new homes (*Media City*, 139). Suburbanization also starved neighborhoods of public space, as suburban homes replaced front porches and stoops (which faced the street) with spacious backyards and decks.

At the same time that the suburbs were spreading, broadcast media were flourishing. To a large extent, the public encounters typical of life in older urban settings were displaced onto electronic media. Radio and television constructed alternate means for virtual participation in collective social life, and the private, suburban home became a media center-- a node within radio and television networks. Among other things, these developments condensed public life into public *image*, especially in the realm of politics. With the new technology of television, close-ups gave access to facial expressions, and personalities were delivered straight into the living room (*Media City*, 140).

Media theorist Paul Virilio gives us a view to the trajectory set in motion by suburbanization: "The public image has today replaced the former public spaces in which social communication took place. Avenues and public venues are from now on eclipsed by the screen, by electronic displays. . . Really once public space yields to public image, surveillance and street lighting can be expected to shift too, from the street to the domestic display terminal (quoted in McQuire, *Media City*, 131).



## The Social Potential of Urban Screens

Media can be used to reveal the political dimensions of urban public spaces. For example, in 2006, a group of youth in Minsk, Belarus used mobile phones to coordinate a 'flash mob' gathering in a public square. Each participant slowly consumed an ice cream cone. Before long, plainclothes policemen came out to disperse the group. The gathering was a powerful test of the limits of free assembly in a post-Soviet authoritarian state. (Molnár, "Reframing Public Space," 50).

Most often, though, the social potential of media in urban spaces lies in the disruption of daily routines which urban public spaces reinforce. And clearly, there's something worth disrupting. For example, media researcher Zlatan Krajina conducted ethnographic research with passengers' encounters with media on the London Underground (a place where daily commuters are more or less captive media audiences) and found that they typically responded by making situational use of media, often by focusing on the images in travel advertisements and imagining themselves in a desirable 'elsewhere' without reference to the travel offer itself ("Domesticating the Screen Scenography," 231-232). While such practices allow passengers some agency with regard to their media consumption, the "mind share" they are able to re-capture from such uses of media seems limited indeed.

The desire to interrupt the routine created by modern urban planning is not new. Among other things, French social theorist Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) called for an interdisciplinary study of cities as geographical, sociological and emotional spaces (Schreuder, 124). In the late 1950s, Guy Debord drew on LeFebvre's theoretical work to found the Situationist movement. The most typical practice advocated by the Situationists reflected the motivation and ethics of the *flâneur*, but with a difference. The *flâneur* walked the streets of Paris as a connoisseur of the urban scene. In the *derivé*, Situationists walked the streets of the city with the intention of quite literally losing themselves in the city, in the hope of discovering aspects of the urban landscape they had never considered.

Screen media in public spaces clearly have the potential to shift the mental and emotional states of urban denizens going about their business. With Susan Collins' *In Conversation* (1997), passers-by in the English seaside town of Brighton encountered the image of a speaking, animated mouth projected onto the sidewalk, its voice amplified through hidden loudspeakers. The mouth spoke the words of online users watching the street in real time via webcam, whose text messages were spoken by the mouth through text-to-speech software. When first exhibited, people kept returning to the installation day after day to continue conversations. It attracted web users as well, with more than a thousand hits daily. When the exhibit was later installed in Amsterdam, a man on his way home was captivated by the piece. After many instances of leaving and returning, the online visitor(s) eventually asked the man for a kiss. With little hesitation, he bent down and kissed the projection of the mouth on the pavement (Dixon, *Digital Performance*, 412-413).

Another salient characteristic of screen media in public places is the counterpoint it plays to the gravity and permanence signified by pieces intended to fulfill traditional functions of civic art. Screen media highlight the heterogeneity and variability of public spaces, including situations created by unique, minute-to-minute changes in the urban environment (Schreuder, 119, 133). For example, the *Urban Diary* project in Berlin (2001-2002) provided anyone who passed by the means to convey "daily thoughts" by text message to a screen in a local subway station.

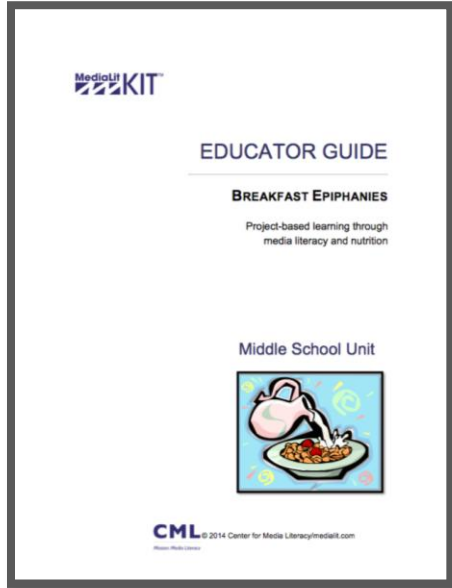
Digital and screen media also excel at making marginalized places and people visible. In *Body Spaces* (2000), Petra Kupper's The Olimpias company worked with young disabled people to create three installation spaces within a large hospital in Manchester, England. Pathways defined by images of footsteps and the traces of a wheelchair wheel were marked on the floor. Visitors moved through motion-sensor activated environments which triggered digital video projections and programmed multimedia sequences on hanging screens, as well as images and text. The piece allowed the young patients to represent themselves, including their dreams and fantasies. In addition, it explored the aesthetics of disabled dance, and provided new perspectives on everyday hospital spaces (Dixon, op. cit., 415).

Some urban screen installations do aim to encourage civic participation. For example, *Re:site Projects* (2002-2003) formed part of a special arts program which guided the growth and development of a new urban community near Munich. The aim of *Re:site Projects* was to create space for people to express and exchange opinions on local urban development and change. A simulcast from video streams recorded in public spaces was matched up with relevant videos from local youth; automatically selected cut-outs from a database and text contributions from the interactive chat function on the *Re:site* homepage were displayed in these projections as well. In time, a collage was developed from a fleeting present and a remembered past. In *Energie Passagen* (2004)--an installation with a clear media literacy component--headlines from online newspaper articles were projected onto the pavement to draw the attention of passers-by. Next, they were offered the option of revising the headlines via a text input device and generating alternative news feeds on a larger screen.

Finally, in some cases, screen media deserve to be considered as serious works of public art in their own right. One piece widely cited is Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Body Movies*. First staged at the Rotterdam Theater Square in 2001, the installation utilized large-scale images, comprising over 1,000 portraits taken on the streets of Rotterdam, Madrid, Mexico and Montreal, which were projected onto the facade of the Pathé Cinema building using robotically controlled projectors. The portraits were rendered invisible by powerful xenon lights saturating them from ground level. When people walked through the square, their silhouettes 'revealed' the projected portraits. A camera-based tracking system monitored the location of the shadows in real time. When shadows matched all the portraits in a given scene, revealing the entire image, the control computer changed to the next set of portraits. As McQuire writes, "This complex interface created a delicate balance between personal participation and collective interaction, between active engagement and reflective contemplation. While it



employed 'real time' interactivity, *Body Movies* was not simply about intensifying the 'now', but enabled a more diverse set of temporalities to emerge" (*Media City*, 153).



## ***Breakfast Epiphanies: Project-Based Learning Through Media Literacy and Nutrition***

Gaining media literacy skills while producing media messages about nutrition is now possible using CML's new curriculum: *Breakfast Epiphanies*. Students learn to discern meaningful nutrition information using online resources, while also working as a team to create healthful messages that they design using technology tools.

CML's reliable methodology, featuring the Core Concepts and Key Questions for both deconstruction and construction (called Questions/TIPS or Q/TIPS), forms the basis for this five-lesson curriculum. Students are encouraged to use the Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action to change habits of mind and eating habits, too.

This curriculum exemplifies how to teach critical thinking as students create their own media while collaborating with each other and communicating beyond the classroom. Go to [www.medialit.com/store](http://www.medialit.com/store)

## **CONSORTIUM for MEDIA LITERACY**

*Uniting for Development*

### **About Us...**

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communications that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://consortiumformedia literacy.org>

## Resources for Media Literacy

Paul Guzzardo -- <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/geddesinstitute/people/fellows/guzzardo/>

This is Paul Guzzardo's profile page at the University of Dundee, Scotland. This page contains useful links for following Guzzardo's work. In general, Guzzardo's artistic output has been spread across the Internet in anything but a tidy manner. In most cases, your patience will be rewarded with thought-provoking videos and installations, as well as his theoretical and agitprop statements in print.

buildbetterbarrel -- <http://vimeo.com/47756996>

In our theme article, we discussed the "window" segment of this video by Paul Guzzardo. But there's also a segment of the video--"bench"--which comments on issues of copyright and fair use. The segment includes excerpts from a 2003 Supreme Court hearing on a major copyright case (hence the 'bench' title). The case focused in part on an early copyrighted media text, "Steamboat Willie," Walt Disney's first animated feature (which also introduced the character of Mickey Mouse to the public). The segment also affirms and exemplifies the doctrine of fair use with excerpts of "Steamboat Willie" interwoven with remix audio and video. A full written commentary on this segment can be found on page 7 of the "bad code introduction" section of *A Hacker Space for Mythmaking--The Manual*, accessible at:

<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/geddesinstitute/library/hackerspace/>

SECRET Baker -- <http://www.buildbetterbarrel.typepad.com/files/fugitive-databank.pdf>

SECRET Baker is a 2005 stage play, documentary and multimedia production which delivers a thematic commentary on some of the media literacy issues discussed in this edition of *Connections*. It treats three historical figures--J. Edgar Hoover, Walter Winchell, and Josephine Baker--as allegorical characters in an "information age morality play." Baker, an African-American dancer who became an international celebrity during the inter-war period, was an outspoken critic of racism and racial politics in the U.S. During Hoover's tenure, the FBI maintained a substantial file on Baker's 'subversive' activities, and attempted to deny Baker re-entry to the United States after World War II. Winchell may be credited as one of the first on-air personalities to make celebrity gossip, 'true crime' and infotainment a staple of the television landscape.

In this allegorical scheme, Hoover represents media as surveillance, and Winchell media as popular spectacle. Where Hoover and Winchell had the power (through the media) to create specific identities for people who were the focus of their attention, Baker had a striking talent for personal re-invention. It's not a huge stretch to imagine Baker as the kind of disruptive force which makes it possible for average citizen-audiences to imagine alternative uses of media in public spaces. Guzzardo calls her a "trickster" and an original remix artist. With all 400 pages of Baker's FBI file to work from (some passages are blacked out, some de-classified), Guzzardo's multimedia remix of the files provides a good focal point for reflection on the history of information technologies, and for questions about political, social and moral aspects of these technologies in the present and future. SECRET Baker is featured in the "truck" segment of buildbetterbarrel. More material can also be found in *A Hackerspace for MythMaking--The Manual*, segment 19, "a trickster and a walkabout."

## Organizations and Projects

Urban Screens -- <http://www.urbanscreens.org>

Mirjam Struppek may be the foremost scholar on the social uses of screen media in public places. Her site features a substantial blog on developments in the field.

Streaming Museum -- <http://www.streamingmuseum.org>

Streaming Museum presents contemporary-themed exhibitions of international fine arts, pop culture and cross-disciplinary perspectives to a global audience through an expanding network of screens in public spaces on 7 continents, partnering cultural and commercial centers, and StreamingMuseum.org.

Urban Projection -- [www.urban-projection.com](http://www.urban-projection.com)

Blog features urban screen projections from artists around the world

UrbanScreen -- <http://www.urbanscreen.com>

While this collective has some good pieces to show off, the "about" section of their site includes a very interesting Q&A on the interdisciplinary and practical work needed to successfully mount site-specific urban screen art pieces.

### Sources Cited in this Issue:

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958/1989.

Berry, Chris, Janet Harbord, and Rachel O. Moore. *Public Space, Media Space*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Coleman, Stephen, and Karen Ross. *The Media and the Public: "Them" and "Us" in Media Discourse*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Dixon, Steven. *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. Boston: MIT Press, 2007.

Krajina, Zlatan. "Domesticating the Screen-Scenography: Situational Uses of Screen Images and Technologies in the London Underground." In Berry, Harbord and Moore, eds. *Public Space, Media Space*. 220-247.

McCarthy, Anna. *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

McQuire, Scott. *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.

----- . "The Politics of Public Space in the Media City." *First Monday* Special Issue #4 (2006): Urban Screens: Discovering the Potential of Outdoor Screens for Urban Society.

Accessible at: <http://www.firstmonday.org/index>

Molnár, Virág. "Reframing Public Space Through Digital Mobilization: Flash Mobs and Contemporary Urban Youth Culture." *Space and Culture* 17.1 (2013): 43-58.

This article is worth comment because it makes a persuasive, well-researched case that flash mob participants are primarily motivated by a desire to turn cities into more 'sociable' places.

Schreuder, Catrien. *Pixels and Places: Video Art in Public Space*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2010.

Struppek, Mirjam. "The Social Potential of Urban Screens." *Visual Communication* 5.2 (2006): 173-188.

-----."Urban Media Cultures Reflecting Modern City Development." *Screen City Journal* Special Issue #4. Available online at: <http://screencitylab.net/journal/issues/172-scj-4-special.html>

### **Recommended:**

Berry, Chris, Soyoung Kim, and Lynn Spigel, eds. *Electronic Elsewheres: Media, Technology and the Experience of Social Space*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

The international emphasis of this book is welcome, as are contributions on "smart houses," domestic technologies, and the simultaneous separation and blurring of private and public space.

Couldry, Nick, and Anna McCarthy, eds. *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*. London: Routledge, 2004.

While none of the contributors focus on screen media in public places, the book makes a sophisticated attempt at welding theoretical discussion with analysis of ways media are situated in physical spaces.

Novy, Johannes, and Claire Colomb. "Struggling for the Right to the (Creative) City in Berlin and Hamburg: New Urban Social Movements, New 'Spaces of Hope.'" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.5 (2013): 1816-1838.

As we mentioned in our first research article for this issue, many cities are using media in public spaces as part of a coordinated 'creative city' marketing campaign to attract investment and stimulate development. In this article, the authors demonstrate how "creative" professionals--in alliance with other urban constituencies--have successfully thwarted gentrification of urban arts districts (and resisted co-optation of urban sub/counter-cultures as well).

Hopkins, Elaine. "Paul Guzzardo and the Lost Heritage of St. Louis." PeoriaStory (online news source). 18 September 2013, with updates. Available at:

<http://peoriastory.typepad.com/peoriastory/2013/09/paul-guzzardo-and-the-fight-for-the-heritage-of-st-louis.html>

Paul Guzzardo has been involved in a similar conflict over redevelopment in Saint Louis, though in his case the conflict involves alleged intellectual property theft of original concepts

and designs, and use of those concepts for an installation which more closely reflected a "creative city" marketing campaign. The link given in this story to Guzzardo's lawsuit, filed in June 2014, is likely to be more accessible (and possibly more useful) than the "epilogues" section in *A Hackerspace for Myth Making--the Manual*.

*Screencity Journal, Special Issue #4*. We mentioned this issue in our sources cited list. The special issue features papers from a 2013 "Screen City" conference in Stavanger, Norway. Some of these papers represent the state of the art in scholarship in the field, particularly contributions by Simon Biggs and Tanya Søndergaard Toft.



## MediaLit Moments

### What's Your Brand?

Most of us have a personal philosophy, or at least a set of values and beliefs which we use to explain our personality and character to ourselves and others. When we interact with people who are relative strangers, we must convey a public image of ourselves as well. The fidelity of public images preoccupies many of us when we encounter public personalities via the media. Is this politician making himself out to be somebody he's not just to get my vote? In this MediaLit Moment, your upper elementary and middle level students will have the chance to learn about public image and personal branding by 'trying on' the role of someone who spends much of their time in the public eye. They'll also have a lot of fun in the process.

**Ask students to construct a public personality for themselves which includes their own real-life character traits.**

AHA!: When I present myself to the media, I'm presenting a personal brand!

Grade Level: 5-7

**Key Question #4 for Producers:** Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

**Key Question #4:** What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

**Core Concept #4:** Media have embedded values and points of view

**Key Question #2 for Producers:** Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?

**Key Question #2:** What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

**Core Concept #2:** Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

**Materials:** Screen, LCD projector, computer with high-speed Internet connection  
For production activity: Paper, pencil, imagination

**Activity:** Ask students to name different kinds of public personalities--sports stars, politicians, rock musicians, talk show hosts, etc. Who are some of their favorites in these categories? If you wish, screen a video excerpt of a particular public personality, and discuss the kinds of character traits he or she appears to embody. Introduce students to KQ #4 and discuss how people promote their public/celebrity image on screen.

Next, ask students to imagine themselves as one of these kinds of personalities. What would they be doing or saying in this role? (Students are likely to be familiar with the conventions of each role, but introduce them to CC #2 if needed). How does this personality still genuinely represent their character? How does it feel to promote themselves in this way? Ask students to write a 30 second script for themselves in this role. Make sure that students have one or more partners for feedback.

Enjoy sharing and performing scripts in class.

**Extended Activity:** Students create a 'demo reel' of themselves as a number of different public personalities.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2014, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>