10 tool chest
The St. Louis Posse was ballast couture, a flight jacket for a tera–petabyte world free-fall. Posse shows up in a line of agit prop assemblages, in the form of: documentaries, exhibitions, and lectures. The target for all was myth.

The first was “buildbetterbarrel.” It was a documentary. “The Cartographer’s Dilemma” next, an installation, then publication. “A Walk on the Digital Sublime” was a road-show exhibition. “Walk” triggered the documentary POSSE°S | PROTOCOLS | PERP°WALKS. It was agit-prop jacked up.

*buildbetterbarrel - nine events in new media* was a series of short vignettes that trace the media heritage and folklore of St. Louis, Missouri. Backdrops include Cahokia Mounds, the Chicago lakefront, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, and a street front media lab which was operating on September 11, 2001.

*The Cartographer’s Dilemma* examined the digital fog of image and sound and how it affects our democratic public sphere and civic identity. It asks why existing noetic economies (knowledge systems) discourage the creation of a public sphere that promotes contest, collaborations and creativity.

*A Walk on the Digital Sublime* demonstrated two “recursive urbanism” protocols. The protocols are oppositional. One protocol uses the street as an evolving search engine, a tableau you drift through, synthesizing as you move. The other protocol uses the street as a beautiful girl or guy uses a conversation; they keep turning the conversation back on themselves.

*POSSES°S | PROTOCOLS | PERP°WALKS* tracked how a bogus idea of community provoked a lawsuit, and how a St. Louis elite forfeited and obliterated McLuhan’s United States legacy, and then snagged a White House award while doing it.

* the above blurbs were used in various promotional copy.
A CITY THAT THINKS
A Walk on the Digital Sublime
Paul Guzzardo

A 'Walk on the Digital Sublime' with Lisa Liu and Joshua Morse, design artists. The theme, 'digital sublime' refers to the 'unreal' digital world. How does the digital sublime make us feel?

Genuinely 'digital sublime' occurs when a digital artwork provokes a powerful emotional response. I will discuss how digital sublime manifest itself in a digital artwork and propose some solutions to promote the digital sublime in design, video and digital art.

University of Dundee, Dalhousie (Paul Guzzardo)

Follow-up at: https://www.behance.net/urban thinker

12th-14th September 2011
Culture Lab Newcastle, UK

Newcastle University, UK
buildbetterbarrel is a road movie. It's a chain of short vignettes. Segments map a new media storyline. Backdrops include: Cahokia Mounds, a gamers' lounge, the Chicago lakefront, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, a St. Louis street front media lab.

In this road movie we meet: two suits and a trickster, mounds and Mississippians, Catholic boys and a Bible press, and we run into an Eskimo, the one who started it rolling, Nanook.
Edgar Allan Poe wrote a story about a whirlpool. He called it "A Descent into the Maelstrom." It was about a sailor in a small boat that was sucked into a gigantic whirlpool. With all hope lost the sailor watched the currents, the vortex. He saw that some objects didn’t fall, but were whirled up to the level of the sea. By studying the whirlpool, and by cooperating with it, the sailor knew his good escape. But he didn’t do alone; he did it with the help of a barrel. The sailor tied himself to the barrel, and then he threw himself into the Maelstrom. And around, and around they went, but in time the barrel lifted the sailor to the surface. He was saved.

All his life Marshal McLuhan was obsessed by Edgar Allan Poe’s “A Descent into the Maelstrom.” For McLuhan the maelstrom was a metaphor, a symbol of all the mechanical, technological forces that overpower us, sweep us up: the press, radio, movies, advertising, all around and everywhere, going, whirling faster, faster. McLuhan saw these things as the things that drown us. They empty us out. They leave us hollow. And this maelstrom is now the place where we find ourselves; it’s home. We need the barrel as the way out, to stay whole, the barrel as a new platform.

Marshall McLuhan got here in a round about way, Manitoba, Canada, Cambridge, England, Madison, Wisconsin. Here is Saint Louis University a Jesuit school. It was more direct for Walter Ong. He came from Kansas City. Ong entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1935. Two years later he was in St. Louis. That’s when the collar came under the tutorage of a trickster, McLuhan. This was in the thirties when Saint Louis University was next door to a razzle-dazzle vaudeville district, a Midwestern Great White Way. Right out the school door was a line of theaters. Vaudeville, the entertainment channel for men, woman and children, at a time when there was only one channel.

When Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan showed up Vaudeville was fading, but there were still a lot of empty seats out there, empty seats, hungry eyes and hungry ears. They sensed it first. They sensed it changing. The old and the new colliding,-speeding up. McLuhan and Ong saw it coming, saw it before almost anyone else. What they saw was a coming wave, another place, another dimension, a place below, between, above. It was electronic. It’s what we call new media. And they were the first ones to hear it. It was McLuhan who sent Walter on a quest, a quest to go back, back back five hundred years to the beginning.

Okay, no Dan Brown or Indiana Jones story line here. What came out of this quest were books, books about books. They both wrote books, books on how we see, how we hear, and how we know, books about the interconnectedness of it all, about the faint line separating today from yesterday. And what they wrote began to chip away at the idea of books. And they started writing as the ground began to shift, when print and pictures began to bounce, really bounce, when solids became soft, and when Baker met Winchell and Hoover.

It was here, next door to those leave-taking vaudevillians, that McLuhan started his first book, a book about the sights, and the sounds of our razzle-dazzle popular culture, "the bride of razzle-dazzle." He called it The Mechanical Bride.
Segment 3 - Mound  
The Stork Club wasn’t the first media platform in the lower 48. This is it. And this ain’t East 53rd Street in Manhattan. This is where our remix artist Baker hails from. It’s on the eastern rim of the American Bottoms. This platform is a mound, Monk’s Mounds, World Heritage site 1.9.8. It’s made of clay, sand, mud and more mud. It goes back a thousand years. It was at the center of the greatest city north of the Rio Grand, for that matter the only city north of the Rio Grand, Cahokia. Once upon a time Cahokia had a population of almost 20,000 people. Cahokia was home to the Mississippian people, and home to over 125 mounds. The mound I’m standing on, named after a group of monks who lived near by, was the biggest and the best of all the mounds. This was, and is, the largest ever man-made earthen plaza. With a series of terraces, a base of 1,000 feet by 800, and over 100 feet high, this was their Media Platform. Mound and myth came together on this platform. This is where the high priests, the 10th century guys in suits, ran it all, ran it into the ground. This is all that’s left of the Mississippian people. Their communications system broke down – and not just a little – but all the way – a spectacular failure - a media collapse, and one that led to ecological misstep after misstep. Planted too much corn – all in the wrong places – dammed up the wrong creeks, then tried to open them up: result flood, fires, nasty, nasty things. What happened? Why? It was their job to talk to the guy/gal or the guys/gals up there in the clouds – polytheism was then the rage. Then talk to and listen to the people down there, and then up and down. This was how a media platform from our preliterate past was supposed to work: a communication node on top of a big mud pile. But those guys maybe just stayed up here a little too long, here in the Midwest’s first gated community. Didn’t look down, didn’t listen, and when they did it was too late. The Mississippians’ myth cracked. It was a spectacular media collapse.  
So this is where our remix trickster came from, a place with an old media platform history. But I suspect you might be asking what does a story about the disappearance of people who couldn’t read or write, whose only media tool was their windpipe, have to do with Winchell, Hoover, Baker, and more importantly us today. 
And for that we have to fast forward a few hundred years and ten miles to the west, to mid town St Louis, and to two good Catholic boys, one with a collar and one with a smirk ……

The buildbetterbarrel segment Mound gave rise to the article “Is There a Digital Future Landscape Terrain?” by Lorens Holm and Paul Guzzardo. It was published in AD Landscape Architecture Site/Non-Site, with Michael Spans, editor. Spans’s Text Follows:

Lorens Holm and Paul Guzzardo speculate on a future landscape enriched by digital culture. Rather than provide sanctuary or comfort zones in the event of global environmental collapse, laser/net is a model for exploring landscape terrains that establish ‘agora'-like meeting places as a basis for electronic exchange and progression. Re-mix platforms thus become collaborative sites for all who seek to engage in this in rural, Architecture Site/Non-Site.

...Lorens Holm and Paul Guzzardo assess the potential for a digitalisation and reformulation of the site/non-site parameters in the prevailing urban/rural scenario. They use the metaphor of the Mississippian lost or abandoned city of Cahokin, seen like a laser/net narrative creation for today. The consequent focus on the defoliation of rural cultures and global warming epitomises, to the authors, a ‘style’ of today, and accepts the end-result possibility of environmental death. Holm and Guzzardo anticipate a ‘digital future landscape terrain’, utilising laser/net technology, as a synthesis for a new awareness. Technology is harnessed to good effect, to protect and reformulate landscape ecologies.

Michael Spans: Site/Non-Site, Extending the Parameters in Contem- porary Landscape.
off to distant lands in search of things not quite remembered nor under-
vaudeville district. He was working on his book when he sent Walter Ong
after coming to St. Louis. That was almost seventy years ago. It was when
was Marshall McLuhan's first book. Edgar Alan
bbb coda
platform for tricksters to dance in the maelstrom.
And maybe that's all the barrel is, a
saw it first happening, and the pair who started it rolling, faster. But they
players at the time when things began to change, the brilliant thinkers who
concrete. That evening the two Catholic sages were joined by two rough
guys from the club world. McLuhan, Ong, Winchell and Hoover were the
I projected
on a museum just a couple of blocks
ums, a symphony hall and art galleries, platforms for something. Recently
The razzle-dazzle of that vaudeville district is gone, replaced by art-muse-
years later the Mound of Mud is still around, and it marks the first collapse.
again by this swarm of electronic digital bits, the new maelstrom. Seventy
...what McLuhan clearly positions us within
for understanding our predicament, our electrically- configured
world without depending upon events, information, and expertise which
write in The Media and the Public, "It is impossible to live in the globalized
A powerful media literacy lesson is implicit in the work of MedaARTS:
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
1. As can be seen in the image above, on pages 150-1 of The Medium is the Massage, McLuhan and Fiore juxtapose an image of the surfing business man with McLuhan's own depiction of 'The Descent into the Maelstrom' in his novel The Mechanical Bride. This image, however, is not a literal example of McLuhan's own imagination: The vortexes that can form in turbulent water are a familiar sight. Edgar Allan Poe described just such a whirlpool in his short story "A Descent into a Maelstrom" which he published in 1841: "...and no particle of this slipped into the mouth of the terrific funnel…" In this passage, Poe describes one of the crucial features of these rotating bodies of fluid: that they can be thought of as coherent islands in an incoherent flow. As such, they are essentially independent of their environment, surrounded by a seemingly impenetrable boundary and with, at the same time, the medium of turbulent fluids using the same mathematics that describes black holes. While McLuhan first makes use of Poe's "A Descent into a Maelstrom" in the Preface to The Mechanical Bride, he returns to it time and again throughout his writings. For example, in his book The Gutenberg Galaxy, he returns to it time and again throughout his writings and lectures. For more on McLuhan's use of Poe's story, see this segment from Kevin McLuhan's documentary McLuhan's Wake and "Lobby" and "Chapse" from Paul Guzzardo's "BuildBetterBarrel," a series of nine new media events that takes its name from McLuhan's use of Poe's story.
that's all the barrel is, a platform for tricksters to dance in the maelstrom. and maybe that's all the barrel is,