The SecretBaker Cycle was a pattern recognition walkabout in search of myth. The cycle played out over three years. Venues included theaters, cinemas, concert halls, nightclubs, galleries and the street. All that time a community was being assembled to slip through gates and plot a space of appearance. Cycle productions were culled from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files of Josephine Baker, Walter Winchell, and J. Edgar Hoover. The SecretBaker story-line gave deference and berth to issues of the day: racism, surveillance, feminism. But Secret wanted more. It was greedy. It wanted something to stand up to deadbeat code, the bugs. It wanted myth as a shield against the column of super civilized monkeys Arendt saw approaching.

A Cycle Archive Follows: It is composed of newsprint, lectures, publications, website, emails, promotion, and a legion of photos. Excerpts from the stage play and documentaries also are included.
By singing the world into existence, he said, the Ancestors had been poets in the original sense _poësis_, meaning 'creation'. No Aboriginal could conceive that the created world was in any way imperfect. His religious life had a single aim: to keep the land the way it was and should be. The man who went 'Walkabout' was making a ritual journey. He trod in the footprints of his Ancestor. He sang the Ancestor's stanzas without changing a word or note — and so recreated the Creation.

The Hero Cycle, wherever found, is a story of 'fitness' in the Darwinian sense: a blueprint for genetic 'success'. Beowulf leaves . . . Ivan leaves . . . Jack leaves . . . the young Aboriginal on Walkabout leaves . . . even the antique Don Quixote leaves. And these _Wanderjahre_, and combats with the Beast, are the story-teller's version of the incest taboo; whereby a man must first prove 'fitness' and then must 'marry far'.

_Bruce Chatwin “The Songlines”_
Each iteration tells a little-known story of art, politics, race, and media power that reverberates with some of the most important themes of 20th-century America. Fashioned out of “net accessible” documents, this multimedia mosaic makes theater and public art out of a 1950's surveillance data bank.

The faded and scratched up documents with their numbing bureaucratic entries and crudely blotted out paragraphs are the residue of government surveillance files. These files contain haunting microfiche memos, telegrams, newspaper clippings and photos, that tell how Josephine Baker, the famous expatriate African-American performer, was pursued by the FBI.

An integral part of the story is the role of the highly influential radio personality Walter Winchell and his association to Hoover. This surveillance tale is an information-age morality play from a simpler time. FBI chieftain Hoover represents a force that encircles and paralyzes. Gossip master Walter Winchell is the “voice” that destroys by slashing out on the airways and in print.

Baker, the artist, embodies a creative disruptive force that struggles to soar. She is the trickster who leaves traces of her intentions as she crosses international borders and moves from theatrical stage to political stage, from the personal level to public level. The Baker FBI file opens in Paris in 1949. The file records Josephine Baker being followed and harassed all over the world by a host of federal agencies – the FBI, the State Department, and the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]. Baker is beleaguered, not only because, she’s an international spokesperson for racial equality nor because of her ongoing invectives against the USA. She is “the traitress, the undesirable” because she gravely wounds J. Edgar Hoover's closest friend and accomplice, Walter Winchell. Winchell is Old Media's MEGA SUPERSTAR.

Buried in the 400-page Baker file, a dossier prefaced again and again with the words “that she was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1906, daughter of a St. Louis washer woman” are a wealth of memos, telegrams, newspaper clippings and photos from the 1950's.

Now, however, in the electronic age, data classification yields to pattern recognition, the key phrase at IBM. When data move instantly, classification is too fragmentary. In order to cope with data at electric speed in typical situations of “information overload,” men resort to the study of configurations, like the sailor in Edgar Allen Poe’s Maelstrom.

Marshall McLuhan Understanding Media

On the terms imposed by technocratic society, there is no hope for mankind except by ‘going with’ its plans for accelerated technological progress, even though man’s vital organs will all be cannibalized in order to prolong the mega-machine’s meaningless existence. But for those of us who have thrown off the myth of the machine, the next move is ours: for the gates of the technocratic prison will open automatically, despite their rusty ancient hinges, as soon as we choose to walk out.

Lewis Mumford, The Myth of the Machine

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a story telling code

DataBank - Agit Prop propels this cycle of SECRET multimedia productions. As a visual and narrative grammar it does not ignore the incomprehensibility of exploding data systems. Fifty years ago surveillance meant “Big Brother,” and a “Dramatist/Artist” might well have used those surveillance files to fashion the “Script” and be done with it. But fifty years ago when Baker, Hoover and Winchell tangoed, the ceaseless accretion of digital information and imagery were not part of the scene. Now they are.

Today it’s naïve to simply consign a surveillance discussion to some flat normative/value-laden nowhere place. It is equally naïve for anyone who is media literate to approach these 1950 era Freedom of Information files with the simple goal of fashioning a tightly scripted dramatization or a “wall hung” installation. Certainly there’s something satisfying about sitting around the firestage and telling a start to finish surveillance morality tale or gazing at the all consuming image. But in times of virtual plenitude, something else is needed to deal with all those “all seeing eyes.”

SECRET multimedia was first shown in conjunction with a projection of text and images from Marshall McLuhan’s The Mechanical Bride. McLuhan’s ground breaking new media track was actually published in 1951, the same year Baker and Winchell had their run in at the Stork Club’s cub room. McLuhan wrote about the “cub room” and the telegraphic rattle of Walter Winchell in his Mechanical Bride. But it’s not McLuhan’s mention of Winchell that’s important, it’s his mention of Edgar Allan Poe. It’s Poe’s A Descent into the Maelstrom that hangs above and plants itself throughout The Mechanical Bride. It also shadows SECRET. A Descent into the Maelstrom is about two sailors caught in a whirlpool; only one survives. Poe’s story offers a bare survival strategy in the face of chaos - and McLuhan grabs it.

SECRET Baker Web Site 2005

DataBank Agit Prop is a survival strategy. It is about wearing, mapping and dancing with the data maelstrom. It was Josephine Baker’s strategy.
Baker came up from the bottom, the Mississippi Bottom, home to where three rivers meet, the Mississippi, Missouri, and the Illinois. Baker ran away from home, St. Louis, at 16. Joined the circus, got to Paris, became the international star Le’ Baker, and for the next 25 years appeared on big stage after big stage. And all that time she scripted and re-scripted herself and her stories. She told it every which way. She was a remix artist and a genius at it. But this remix-mixer wanted to go home. In 1951 she came home and walked right onto another stage, the Stork Club. The Stork Club was New York’s hottest hot spot. This club wasn’t home just to the 50’s celebrities and the occasional hoi polloi but to the men in suits, the ones who ran well… everything. And the man in the ring, the one with the big hat, was Walter Winchell. Winchell was a vaudeville child star who became the mega, mega media superstar of print and radio, AND he was first out of the gate in television.

Noise, News, Chatter, Celebrity Gossip and Trash - trace it all back to Winchell. This media colossus had a BEST FRIEND, a confidant, another Stork Club regular-- the number one G-man, J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover was the first director of the FBI, a job he held till he died 50 years later. Hoover made his name bringing down Dillinger and Capone, and then after Capone he went after Commies. Hoover was the man with all the files, the first one to use fingerprints. This man who never married was our father, the father of our state surveillance, the big eye. And Winchell was Hoover’s voice and ear. The Hoover and Winchell stage was the Stork Club. It was their media platform. It’s where they fashioned the world that we’ve got now. And this is where that remix artist, Baker, landed.
There are two real stars of this piece: The first is Paul Guzzardo, who assembled the very flashy and memorable multi-media montages of nightclub entertainer Josephine Baker in the time of "The Red Scare." The second is actor Joe Engel, who somehow manages to bring red-blogging broadcaster Winchell vividly to life—despite the fact that the play technically has no playwright. But rest easy, it may have something better, which it'll get to in just six more paragraphs, (promise). There are plenty of class leads to his throat, so let's play, shall we?

Mr. Guzzardo's incredible multi-media barrage of McCarthyism is terribly impressive (hint #1, at the real significance of the work), while Mr. Engel's fine, punchy delivery as broadcaster Winchell crushes every one of his wan, good-hearted classmates like a steamroller. Even at intermission, Mr. Guzzardo's Red Scare propaganda echoes through the lobby and down into the men's room (this is hint #2), in a chilling recreation of 1950's anti-communist brainwashing. In 2005, it's a timely reminder of government-sponsored hysteria. On stage, Dick Watt is a colorless figure, mostly the vapid presentation of a narrator at work. i>SECRET has no playwright, but it has twenty-one technical crew people operating multi-media equipment, and sound and light (with—hint #3—no lighting gels and not much lighting emphasis for the actors), as well as music and on a bare-bones set (hint #4), under three giant screens.

I suppose it's a miracle there's even one remotely believable character. Most of the performers are mere sock-puppets on stage for The Message (hint #5). We might extrapolate from this that Mr. Guzzardo and his team of very talented video artisans are plenty of raw material here to work with, and not just in the official history of this event. Mr. Watt could do more when a long string of pearls is thrown 'round his neck (as a friend of mine likes to say, "if you don't have a character, get a prop!"). However, the placard-type images at hyper-digitized speed are way, way beyond the wildest dreams of Mother Courage or The Good Person of Szechuan.

It's almost stated outright that McCarthyism was a sideshow to distract from the fall of Winchell?) for style ("Ding-Dong, The Winch Is Dead"?). Mr. Guzzardo can be fall-rousing thrown-in at the Stork Club, and maybe another little ditty (about the move that the show be allowed stand more or less as it is, with perhaps some rabbi-waving to break ties with Winchell, for the sake of structure. And from Hoover, we get just the slightest inkling of crocodile tears for Winchell's fall from glory, which may be another feable problem. It's clear that Winchell couldn't stop raising false alarms in his Sunday night broadcasts, but we need more of a sense of growing disenchantment from within the FBI in the acting.

All right, players, time's up! The dominant theme here seems to be that a tsunami of disinformation and innuendo drowned-out the fight to end racial injustices ten years before freedom marches and the civil rights act were finally taken seriously. It's almost stated outright that McCarthyism has somehow driven a wedge between him and his sources at the FBI, and more dangerously it has apparently alienated his sponsor, Jergens Lotion. We could really use a human face to wedge between him and his sources at the FBI, and more dangerously it has apparently alienated his sponsor, Jergens Lotion. We could really use a human face to put on Jergen's decision (presumably an "oily" face) to break ties with Winchell, for the sake of structure. And from Hoover, we get just the slightest inkling of crocodile tears for Winchell's fall from glory, which may be another feable problem. It's clear that Winchell couldn't stop raising false alarms in his Sunday night broadcasts, but we need more of a sense of growing disenchantment from within the FBI in the acting.

Samantha Rall provides a rare, pleasant respite from the monolithic propaganda campaign as Ms. Baker, but she doesn't get to sing or dance, as I recall. Wonderful catrón movies of the real Josephine Baker dance on the big screens upstairs, in a manner that is hypnotic and dadaistic. Likewise the actors' disgraced exits, up through the audience (hint #7), are also effective. So is a humorous tango between Winchell and Hoover, though that could be comically broader, still. For that matter, Mr. Watt could do more when a long string of pearls is thrown "round his neck (as a friend of mine likes to say, "if you don't have a character, get a prop!"). However, the placard-type images at hyper-digitized speed are way, way beyond the wildest dreams of Mother Courage or The Good Person of Szechuan.

In fact, the real significance of SECRET is that it amounts to a sort of 21st Century "High Brechtology," where we understand the realistic-computer-multiprojector-puppeteers' intent, but just like Brecht, Mr. Guzzardo steadfastly refuses to comply with our desire to live through the characters. In that raw, harsh light, I can only admire that the show be allowed stand more or less as it is, with perhaps some robotic movie thrown-in at the Stork Club, and maybe another little ditty (about the fall of Winchell?) for style ("Ding Dong, The Witch Is Dead"?). Mr. Guzzardo can be proud of a truly outstanding job of compiling images of a memorable time in history.
...and salute. So I'm sure I speak for all Americans and say, "Here, John Edgar Hoover, you gave him. John Edgar Hoover has amassed no loot for his years of public service, practically poor. Not long ago, he paid off the mortgage on his home, the one his mother lived in a few hours in an army of MURDERERS.

WINCHELL  New York City — Last Monday night the G-Men captured a tough guy. Taking no chances of having any more of their men killed, the G-Man used machine guns to get what they wanted, a dangerous criminal. They got him. Now newspapers and writers are attacking the G-Men and their chief, Mr. Hoover. He is belittled, belittled and condemned for making a America safer place for children to live. The women of G-Men who die for their family and mine, and the children who are the future of this country, and "Baby Face Nelson," must be appalled. Take this from one who knows how courteous the G-Men are. They are not glory hunters. They are man hunters.

WINCHELL — Mr. United States— Josephine Baker, a Negro star, complained to authorities this week that she was discriminated against at the Stork Club last Tuesday night and that she had been told that Walter Winchell was in the place at the time. Winchell was not in the Stork Club at the time of the alleged disturbances. I am appalled at the abyss and entrenchment of Mr. Hoover and Josephine Baker and her friends at the Stork Club, but I am equally appalled at their efforts to involve me in an incident in which I had no part.

WALTER  Based on an anonymous tip that the Stork Club would be blown up because it had refused to admit Negroes, the police searched all eight stories of the Stork Club. No one was found. Winchell was in the place at the time, according to the police, when he was not in the Stork Club at the time of the alleged disturbances. I am appalled at the abyss and entrenchment of Mr. Hoover and Josephine Baker and her friends at the Stork Club, but I am equally appalled at their efforts to involve me in an incident in which I had no part.

READER  More than a dozen letters, as you are being told, are slatting and having the G-Men. They are the writers of slatting columns. They suffer from mental baldness. Those editorial writers have an aggrieved case of mental diarrhea. They regurgitate their own filth. They tear down the very foundations of this country. The G-Men are not glory hunters. They are man hunters.

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SECRET: The Josephine Baker FBI Files

The documentary is a film adaption of a 2005 multimedia performance art workshop production. The production was SECRET. It was a collaboration of media artists, rap singer/DJs and actors from St. Louis, the birthplace of Josephine Baker. Subsequent media incarnations of SECRET ranged from public art wall projections to interactive media gallery work produced in locations throughout the world through 2006 in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Josephine Baker’s birth. Drawn from over a thousand FBI files and archival material, SECRET tells the story of St. Louis born entertainer, Josephine Baker, and two men who pursued her, media personality Walter Winchell and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Mixing old and new sound and images to link the present and past, SECRET uncovers Baker’s little known identity as a global human rights activist.

Produced and written by Kathy Corley and Paul Guzzardo
Director/Editor Kathy Corley adapted from the stage production workshop written and directed by Paul Guzzardo

Big Sky Documentary Film Festival February 2009
Takoma Park Film Festival November 16, 2007
2006 Black Maria Film Festival Director’s Choice Award
Newark, New Jersey, U.S.A
February 2007 (Film Festival)
Josephine Baker Centennial Celebration St. Louis Public Library
St. Louis, U.S.A
June 2006 (Theatrical)
San Francisco Documentary Film Festival
San Francisco, U.S.A

May 2008 (Film Festival)
Team Rivers Multimedia Festival 2nd Place Award: Documentary
Aimeville, N.C., U.S.A
April 2006 (Film Festival)
Western Branch University screening NACCP鬃ponsored event
Maccou, Bronx, U.S.A
February 2008 (Theatrical)
Celebrating Josephine Baker jazz concert, with SECRET film St. Louis, U.S.A
February 2006 (Theatrical)
2006 Big Muddy Film Festival
John Michael Award
Carbondale, U.S.A

February 2006 (Film Festival)
2005 St. Louis International Film Festival St. Louis, U.S.A
November 2005 (Film Festival)
Webster University Film Series – Alumni Weekend Film Festival
St. Louis, U.S.A
October 2005 (Film Festival)
2005 St. Louis Filmmakers Showcase ‘Best Documentary’ Short Film St. Louis Gateway Film Critics Association
St. Louis, U.S.A
July 2005 (Film Festival)
Premiere screening
Snapshots: Shorts Program: The most ambitious offering is an odd portrait of the troubling intersection of race and right-wing politics in America. Secret The Josephine Baker FBI Files flashes back to the 1950s, when America's color line was enforced by twin culture czars: FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover and tabloid columnist Walter Winchell. Told in a pastiche of black-and-white footage and dramatically recreated recollections from the time, the film is a tribute to the bravery and spunk of a talented black American entertainer who carved out a brilliant career in exile in France.

When art meets politics

WU exhibit a look at anti-torture measures; FBI investigation of Josephine Baker

Baker, Hoover, Winchell: The Remix

Multimedia performance

R. Paul Gonsendo

Performers:

Vigilante Carle

DJ Lea Lamont

Video, Brian

Gero Gimshie

Presented by

Film Baker

22 11

P. Luce Community College - Kent Park

Friday, April 26, 2006 - 8PM - 10PM

Winfred Moore on Webster Campus
I think this is important – so let me clarify. The Baker project – and BAKER as BAKER works for me for reasons that I think do dovetail with your research.

Let us assume that as designer I want to use new digital technologies / these digital toys to reconfigure public space. I’m interested in creating the commons-agora as a stage set for others to use. The question is who is able to occupy that stage – note the Macomb WIU – Guzzardo page and my SECRET databank agit prop page.

“The once secret, now public, FBI files of stage personality Josephine Baker and her relationship with J. Edgar Hoover and radio personality Walter Winchell are activated for visitors to wear, map and dance with.

"...Poe’s story offers a bare survival strategy in the face of chaos and McLuhan grabs it. DataBank Agit Prop is about a survival strategy. It is about wearing, mapping and dancing with the data maelstrom. It was Josephine Baker’s strategy.”

So the political USA surveillance story is really secondary to the international diva who represents the trickster archetype – it is the trickster archetype who is the actor on the stage that we are trying to design. The trickster is psychologically and maybe psychically best able to act on this stage to act on stage that dissolves architectural boundaries the trickster already has dissolved the “container” that makes up the individual agent/player. This is where Davis fits into all of this - link him as artist to Baker as archetype “trickster.” Otherwise it is too abstract – he and his types make it comprehensible.

Absent “A Baker” I don’t know why I should design and build this stage set – because it will be empty. There will be nobody out there who can occupy it.

Thought I’d pass this on.

p
Hanging from a ledge, bit by bit they plugged into a myth. Hanging from a ledge, bit by bit they plugged into a myth. Hanging from a ledge, bit by bit they plugged into a myth. Hanging from a ledge, bit by bit they plugged into a myth. Hanging from a ledge, bit by bit they plugged into a myth.