

BraveNewWorld 'lite': The Brief

Paul Guzzardo



Monsanto Chemical Works opened its doors in St. Louis in 1901. The company's first product was saccharin. From 1903 to 1905 Monsanto's entire saccharin output was shipped to one company in Georgia: CocaCola.

BraveNewWorld ‘lite’: The Brief details a long-simmering lawsuit. The case is Paul GUZZARDO vs. VANDEVENTER SPRING REDEVELOPMENT CORP and WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY in ST. LOUIS, No. ED104288. It is currently on appeal in the State of Missouri. The case addresses the role of the courts in establishing ground rules for the use of big screen digital technology in public space. The Guzzardo case has been in and out of court for seven years. It involves a suite of law-fact issues. They include guidelines for research protocols and heritage sites, intellectual property curbs, and the use of eminent domain. But the core to the lawsuit is whether there are enforceable media ecological standards in using digital technology on the street. Can we do anything about the glut in our public spaces.

Given the accelerating 21st century media environment, this is an important issue. But there’s next to no law on how on we use these new technologies in assembling a shared civic space. There are no limits to the vapid insertion of digital *techné* in communal brick and mortar places. Guzzardo looks to *The Public Trust Doctrine* for guidance. The doctrine has been part of American jurisprudence from the start. It recognizes that governments hold essential natural resources ‘in trust’ for present and future generations. *The Public Trust Doctrine* is now being used by private citizens in the United States to sue the government on the basis that the government is not doing enough about climate change. Like man-made carbon emissions, the digital maelstrom and social media blather has an impact on all of us. Guzzardo’s lawsuit asks the question: Do governments have a duty to protect the successive generations from being hollowed out by digital buckshot coming at hyper-speed?

Like the carbon regulation, the Guzzardo’s case asks a court to place restrictions on digital noise and unfettered razzle-dazzle bytes. BraveNewWorld ‘lite’: The Brief examines what the Courts might do so our public spaces have the potential to respond critically to the ceaseless accretion of digital information and imagery. The Brief will use case pleadings, depositions, and court orders to show the role the courts can play in the design of agoras where reflective citizens gather. It is crucial to future forms of public life.

The lecture is an activists call in an era where everything that can be, is turned into a mass media spectacle. Time is short. Guzzardo believes we need to rethink the implications of the digital environment for the space we call Civic. Some might argue it is all too opaque, and too late to look to the courts for tools to play a role in bridging the gap between information

and communication. But in an era when ‘The Donald’ is becoming the model for sifting reality, these are desperate times. With the buffoons at the gate, **BraveNewWorld ‘lite’: The Brief** argues that without new legal media ecology standards we will not be able to keep them out. Like carbon emissions and environmental degradation, the spawning of buffoons in a media maelstrom is a social injustice, one for which there has to be a remedy.

By way of further background, this lawsuit is traced to Guzzardo’s platform design praxis. The platforms were for and on the St. Louis street. They were viewing stations, mirrors of a sort. The big idea behind them were to use them to glimpse ourselves sloshing around in Big Data. The Plaintiff began working on a brief to build them in the mid-1990s. But there is a history here. The ‘new media guru’ Marshall McLuhan worked in St. Louis from 1937-1944. The other player on the street was Monsanto. The company was founded in St. Louis. In St. Louis, McLuhan assembled a like-minded posse. They were the first to look down into the digital black hole. Monsanto had a first too. It’s first product was shipped to Coca Cola. The product was saccharin. It’s when the ‘lite’ got switched on.

BraveNewWorld ‘lite’: The Brief is one of a ‘5-SOME’ of projects that examines the use of technology in assembling shared civic space. **The Brief** follows *A Septic Turn in a Space of Appearance*, which was part of the 2015 exhibition, *The City is a Thinking Machine*. *The City is a...* marked the centennial of Patrick Geddes’s *Cities in Evolution* (1915). *A Septic Turn* involved a lecture and installation. In 2006, it began with the installation *Laser\net* (Lorens Holm, Paul Guzzardo, and *F15*). *The Cartographer’s Dilemma* (2010) included an installation, publications, and a documentary. *A Walk on the Digital Sublime* came next. It entailed a line of installations in England, Scotland, and the United States. The ‘5-SOME’ is chronicled in Guzzardo’s e-book *Hackerspace for Myth Making | The Manual*. Paul Guzzardo is a Fellow in the Geddes Institute for Urban Research.

dispatch from a [zombie] front

Marshall McLuhan died on December 31, 1980. At the time of his death McLuhan was being left behind, forgotten, a hacker storyteller blotted out. A professor at New York University helped turn it around. Neal Postman organized a new field of storytelling scholarship. It is called media ecology. He traced it back to ‘Geddes’s Drop’, that petri dish, and he credited McLuhan with much. Postman was after myth. This is how Neal Postman ends his 1988 essay ‘Social Science as Media Theology’ (quoted in Lance Strate, *Amazing*

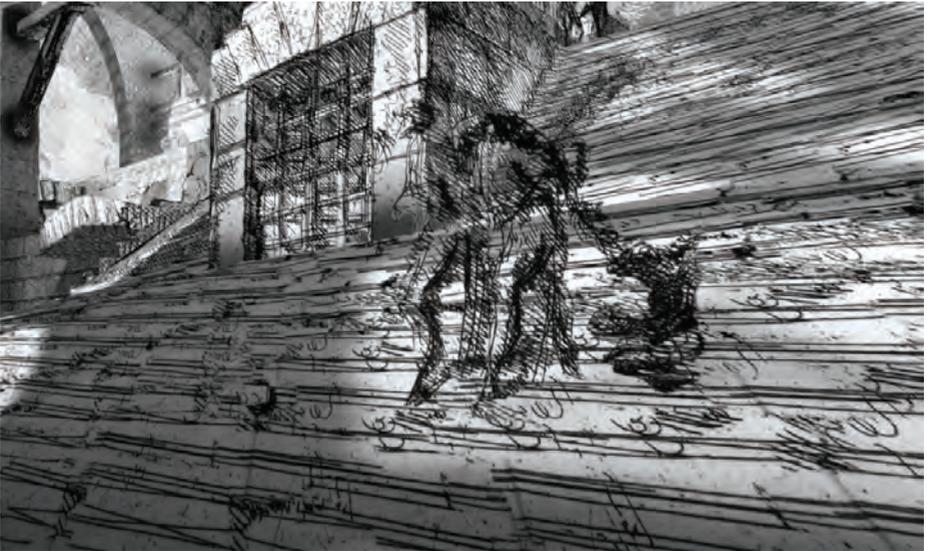
Ourselves to Death - Neal Postman's Brave New World Revisited (Vienna, Peter Lang, 2014):

‘The purpose of social research is to reconsider the truths of social life; to comment and criticize the moral behavior of people, and finally to put forward metaphors, images, and ideas that can help people live with some measure of understanding and dignity. Specifically, the purpose of media ecology is to tell stories about the consequences of technology; to tell how media environments create contexts that may change the way we think or organize our social life, or make us better or worse, or smarter to dumber, or free or more enslaved. I feel sure the reader will pardon a touch of bias when I say that the stories media ecologists have to tell are rather more important than those of other academic storytellers because — the power of communications technologies to give shape to people’s lives is not a matter that comes equally to the forefront of people’s consciousness, though we live in an age when our lives - whether we like it or not - have been submitted to the demanding sovereignty of the new media. And so we are obliged, in the interest of humane survival to tell tales of what sort of paradise might be gained, and what sort lost. We will not have been the first to tell such tales. But unless our stories ring true, we may be that last.’



Into the Drop.

It was T. H. Huxley's laboratory. A young Scottish botanist was looking through a microscope, peering at a drop of pond water. A grey great beard loomed over his shoulder. The young man stepped aside. The bearded man's eye went to the lens, and then he shouted "look they're alive". The young Scot was Patrick Geddes. Charles Darwin was looking and shouting into the drop.



Dispatch from a [zombie] front.

And so we are obliged, in the interest of humane survival to tell tales of what sort of paradise might be gained, and what sort lost. We will not have been the first to tell such tales. But unless our stories ring true, we may be that last.