

2022 spaceport booster

a bleak crackerjack snapshot

After he wrote "The Coming Anarchy," Robert Kaplan came to St. Louis. It was for another book, "An Empire Wilderness: Travels into America's Future." Kaplan showed up under the Arch to fill a notebook.

An Average American City is the St. Louis chapter.

Kaplan wanted to know what role America could play on a dystopic world stage. What's the American map-mind set. Will American make a difference? What might the world expect? Does America matter? Where's the dial set?

Kaplan moved around and about St. Louis and East St. Louis. He met and talked to rabbis, police officers, politicians, regular folk and country club kinds. One of them was Al Kerth. Kerth was the face of something called St. Louis 2004. St. Louis 2004's money was used for map r + d, used to move the "sisters" and a nightclubs's pattern recognition protocol out into the street. St. Louis 2004 backed the street media lab. The money helped a post-Heuduck remix posse find shelter and press on in search of a space of appearance.

...St. Louis, which Kaplan describes as a corporate fortress circled by high-security suburbs of lonely and overworked people, and desperate slums of blacks who are irrelevant to the American economy." The Wasteland," Thurston Clarke NYT Book Review, September 06, 1998

Kaplan on Kerth and St. Louis 2004, THE EXCERPT.

LATER THAT DAY I parked in a monitored underground garage beneath a tall building, rode an elevator to an upper story, and stepped into a quartz-and-steel lobby, like a mini-atrium, brightly lit by halogen lamps. A series of clocks showed the time in Atlanta, Belfast, Brussels, Beijing, and other places. On a table were foreign newspapers. The silken-voiced receptionist from Fleischman-Hillard International Communications, a public relations firm, ignored me for a few minutes while she transferred voice mail messages and took calls. Then she apologized and escorted me into a room decorated in gray leather and marble with a panoramic view of the Gateway Arch, a short distance away. The Gateway Arch, completed in 1965 to commemorate the “Opening of the West” by Lewis and Clark, is St. Louis’s totem, a shimmering steel rainbow sixty stories high (632 feet from base to apex) rising beside the muddy, reddish Mississippi River. On the eastern side of the river I saw cement silos and frayed brown buildings barely rising above the greenery. Since the late eighteenth century, those lowlands have been known as the “American Bottoms”; today, partially hidden behind a screen of foliage, East St. Louis, Illinois, one of the worst inner-city slums in the United States, worse than north St. Louis where I had just been with Major Hawkins, lies there. But next door to this building on the western side of the river were luxury hotels. “Mr. Kerth will be in shortly,” a secretary told me. “Feel free to phone anywhere.” Al Kerth gave me a hearty “Hello,” then immediately sat down in one of the leather swivel chairs, leaned back, cupped his hands behind his head, and called me by my first name in a booming voice, as if we were old friends. We could have been in Manhattan, Paris, or Milan. Kerth wore a wide bright yellow tie, suspenders made of braided leather, and glasses with fashionable frames. He represented St. Louis 2004, a nonprofit organization marking the centennial of the 1904 World’s Fair and Olympics and the bicentennial of both the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition. Kerth told me that his organization wants to channel “forward-thinking energy for the future.” He handed me a glossy folder with fact sheets enclosed, then walked over to a blackboard, where he wrote;

REGION WIDE VISIONARY PROCESS. THIS PROCESS WILL CONSIST OF REGIONAL GOALS IN KEY AREAS: WORK, LEARNING, HEALTH, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.

“Income-sustaining jobs, for instance,” said Kerth, lowering his voice as he walked back to the leather chair. “Bio and nanotech jobs. How do we attract them? That is the question St. Louis 2004 must answer.” Will anyone in north St. Louis, or East St. Louis for that matter, be qualified for nanotech jobs? I wondered. “Of course, it helps if we construct a positive environment within which firms can operate. That means good housing, infrastructure, cleaning up poverty stricken areas, and so on.” Kerth continued, “We are in a race with cities around the world. **For instance, there may be airports in every city, but there won’t be spaceports. But we plan to have the mid-American spaceport. We believe that private corporations will be regularly sending people in space on orbital and suborbital flights in the twenty-first century. Low-cost, reusable-launch technology will get people from St. Louis to Beijing, for example, in forty-five minutes. Our public relations battle to host the spaceport for mid-America is already on. Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic to win a \$25,000 prize. Well, we’re supporting a multimillion-dollar intentional space prize series for advances in aviation technology. We even have an idea for an orbital hotel charging \$50,000 for a gravityless weekend honeymoon in space, reached from the St. Louis spaceport.**”

I was flabbergasted by Kerth’s boosterism. He seemed to me a typical American type of a sort now found in cities around the world, at once very successful and naive. He was so optimistic that all argument seemed pointless. So I just took notes as he spoke.



“An Empire Wilderness : Travels into America’s Future”: The Opening Passage:

THE WORLD In the foreseeable future will depend more on the preferences of Americans than on any other single factor. Whether in preserving the balance of power in Europe, in Asia, or in the Middle East or in restructuring the United Nations, the wishes of the United States will be impossible to ignore. America’s enormous technological advantages will sustain it as the military superpower for decades hence. But America’s foreign policy, like that of any other country is an extension of its domestic inclinations and conditions. Thus it is of the utmost importance to understand the direction American society is going in.

paul guzzardo, 9/30/01 12:36 PM -0500, action items and the big picture
From: "paul guzzardo" <zio11@mindspring.com> To: "Michelle Cohen" <mcohen@stlouis2004.org>, "Tim Ewing" <time@downtownnow.org>, "Margaret Newman" <mmnewman@earthlink.net>
Subject: action items and the big picture.
Date: Sun, 30 Sep 2001 12:36:47 -0500

Tim - Michelle - Margie After our meeting I thought it might be helpful for me to organize thoughts on what I see as the fundamentals regarding the media lab, how the lab might be presented to potential funding partners and to the larger community. I thought it would be good to have this before we meet with Al Kerth. Also I'm sending this now to give Margie a chance to take these ideas into account as she prepares a rough budget/ equipment inventory.

ISSUES TO BE EXAMINED: audience - multiple labs - fixed versus mobile -technical hardware issues- role of Downtown venue-content issues- artist diversity - inclusion- the IT/ART paradigm.

To increase the media lab's audience we need to design a portable lab system. Currently we do not have a system that can be moved from place to place. A design allowing the computer, projection and switching equipment to be easily transferred from one storefront to another storefront, in another neighborhood, is not particularly difficult or expensive. A portable system, including a couple of lightweight projectors, portable lap top systems, monitors, and a digital mixer and switcher, can be up, moved and operated with minimal effort and cost. Since the hardware is becoming more efficient and smaller, the only fixed services necessary are the electrical and data lines- a wireless data service would even reduce that problem.

These satellite labs would increase the audience the media lab serves and the lab's visibility. Our credibility is somewhat depended on the size of our audience. Suggested temporary lab venues to be considered are Grand-Center - the loop - CWE - South Grand. Hopefully in addition to the expanded audiences, this would forge partnerships, which would assist funding prospects.

The current lab would, of course, still be MEDIA LAB CENTRAL. Its location, both as an entry to the Washington Ave. District and its site across from the Lot, certainly suggests its importance. Not to belabor the point but there is a similar logic between the Media Downtown Lab, the temporary satellite labs, and the relationship between Downtown St. Louis and the Metro area. Downtown is a focal point but not the exclusive gathering place. If we can increase the audience and visibility by using portable labs, possibly we can raise the funds to establish a more robust downtown lab, and expand the downtown media lab to the street, i.e. the lot across the street.

The other issue is inclusion, both in terms of content and community. Placing a lab in a particular neighborhood (even on a temporary basis) offers the opportunity of more inclusive content by referencing particular issues common to those neighborhoods. For this project to become some more than a curiosity piece, it needs to engage a broad range of "participating artists" in the production of lab content. This isn't a simple task. The digital divide is real and while MediaARTS and Downtown Now! are in no position to resolve it, there are some things that can be done.

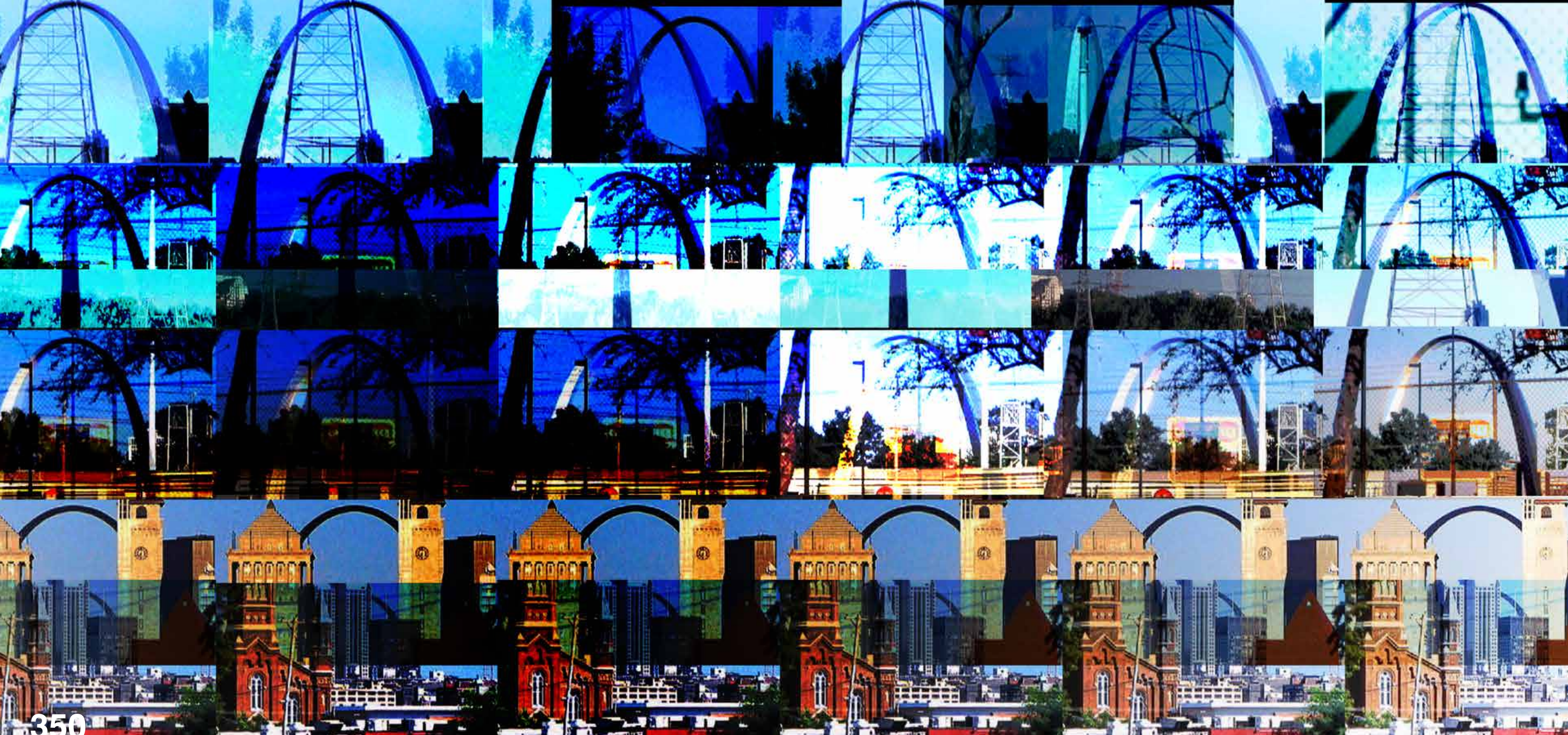
We need to try to engage members of the community who have various levels of skill in both the traditional arts and in digital imaging languages. This would open the lab to a larger and certainly more diverse crowd. It also would establish the educational component of the lab. To do this we need to re-think the basic lab paradigm. Rather than seeing the media lab artist as someone who paints or sculpts but uses digital tools, we need to think about. Printed for @ 1

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the content provider more as a Director, a Director with a collaborative artistic crew. If there is anything that I've learned in being one of the few people working in this area, is that the theatrical model (Multimedia Theater) is very helpful and more useful than a traditional artistic/fine art model. The theatrical model works better not only in terms of criteria for creating content but for reasons of inclusion. Projects will take on a more collaborative / inclusive nature with a theatrical model. "Media lab Directors" while serving as the artistic primary voice, would incorporate/assemble other digital and non-digital artist in the preparation and making content. It allows the greatest level of inclusion in a period of "hyper technology flux."

Final Thought- the People Projects ends in the next 30 days. This was the main public art project for the region, and it addressed regionalism and inclusion. As far as I know, there is nothing out there to replace it. The timing might be right for the media lab.

paul





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al kerth
st. louis 2004