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**METHOD IN DELIVERY: THIS MUST BE THE PLACE**

*MPB CURATES 2007*, MPB carrier Valerie LeBlanc, World's Largest Dinosaur exhibit,  
Drumheller, AB

In his essay, “A Life in the Arts,” David Hickey reflects on the life of Jazz legend Chet Baker and “Baker’s premise: that the song plays the music and the music plays the player and that, consequently, the song, as played is not a showcase for the player’s originality, but a momentary acoustic community in which

the players breathe and think together in real time, adding to the song's history, without detaching from its integrity, leaving it intact to be played again."<sup>[1]</sup>

MediaPackBoard (MPB) operates in a similar improvisational manner offering a genuinely porous, thought provoking interactivity between artists and public. Contrary to the societal pressures to buy into corporate tech accounts in order to experience true mobility, and contrary to formulaic prefab musical standards, MPB breaks the mold to bring media consumption into the world of imaginative reflection and contemplation. Much like Chet Baker's jazz, MPB animates the urban nightlife. By using a performance-oriented media crew, it is able to bring conversations together around our self-inflicted debt to modern communications devices. In his book, *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich identifies technology's role in merging work and home for the sake of both convenience and marketability when he writes, "we now use the same interfaces for work and for leisure, the condition exemplified most dramatically by Web browsers."<sup>[2]</sup> Our mainstream media repeatedly boils down our culture down until it becomes so unfamiliar it congeals into a new substance that becomes qualitatively obscure, and beyond our control. We take shortcuts that seem convenient, but that also fragment our cultural experiences. It seems convenient to have all of our editing and production in one place on the computer, yet the effects on our body drastically affect our health, while completely changing the perception and definition of our relationship to media. In other words, our *qualitative* experience with media is compromised through a quantitative methodology. MediaPackBoard propels the time-sensitive medium of camera-to-screen into spontaneous momentary activity, provoking "real life" circumstances that allow us to experience art through accidental encounters.

MediaPackBoard relies on the idea that television and radio broadcasting fundamentally changed how the public interacted with media, and that to listen to and watch live media suddenly became more passive. The Churchill government denounced the BBC as a communist operation, leading to the Pressure Group, a campaign for commercial television in England in the 1950s.<sup>[3]</sup> Throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s, our tolerance and appetite grew to accept commercial broadcasting in our daily lives.

Since the mid-twentieth century, television and galleries occupied our first thoughts when consuming culture, while portable galleries and other mobile projects, including some early video art, have often worked intentionally against the grain. Aesthetically, MPB reminds us of early 1970's video art, not television. It exposes the performative aspects of early independent video, while at the same time, MPB is an open venue for experiences and spontaneous interactions with the city nightlife.

During the *World Portable Gallery Convention 2012*, Eyelevel Gallery hosted a panel discussion with artist-curator Hannah Jickling of *Coat of Charms*, Gordon B. Isnor and the *Alopecia Gallery* and Valerie LeBlanc and Daniel H. Dugas of *MediaPackBoard* at The Seahorse Tavern, Halifax's oldest pub located directly across from the construction site of Halifax's newest club, The World Trade and Convention Centre. The fundamental contrast between pub and club culture is familiar in Halifax's downtown, and the contrast between these two very distinct environments made this juncture the ideal location to launch all three of the mobile venues featured in the panel into Halifax's busy downtown nightlife.

When first experiencing the MediaPackBoard during the *World Portable Gallery Convention*, I was brought back to images of the Sony Portapak being carried through the streets of New York by Nam

June Paik in 1965. Also during this time, art centres around North America and Europe were springing up and gaining access to media equipment and knowledge. The use of the Portapak by Paik and others at the time is considered by many as the beginning of Video Art. Until recently, the stationary nature of the modern television set, originally designed as a central piece of furniture in the North American household, demanded that the viewer consume the content *in situ*, but this all changed with the mobile Portapak. Early video and performance art purposefully resisted static, passive media consumption, and instead activated the space of the moving image to engage in provocative dialogues and experimentation.<sup>[4]</sup> As long as television and other media, including commercialized Internet, YouTube and other corporate platforms, continue to underestimate user intelligence and prioritize corporate gain through credibility from a body of active public participants, we will forever be passively disengaged from media, from what potentially could be active conversation. MPB provides an open channel for two-way conversation, to actively engage within the cityscape through improvisational media.

Daniel H. Dugas and Valerie LeBlanc noticed a lack of exhibition opportunities for artists when they returned to Atlantic Canada in 1996, so they took matters into their own hands and opened TRUNK© gallery, which exhibited new work every month in the trunk of their 1981 RCMP blue Citation. This was perhaps the start of a repurposing revolution in Atlantic Canada where portable and alternative venues began erupting out of suitcases, wallets, beaches and a variety of other imaginative solutions informed by the memory of artists like Paik, whether through impulsive practical circumstances, or thoughtful social-political measures.

Canadian artists and audiences alike are fortunate to be living in a time where access to pioneers of alternative spaces is still not far out of reach. In Atlantic Canada, we have Michael Fernandez, John Greer, Charlotte Wilson-Hammond, Julia Schmitt Healy and Roger Savage, all founding members of Eyelevel Gallery, Atlantic Canada's oldest Artist-Run Centre (ARC) (1974).<sup>[5]</sup> Without coincidence, all too are participants in NSCAD University's legendary transformation into a North American landmark for contemporary art education. This was also the same generation who brought us the Velvet Underground, Talking Heads, Guerrilla Girls, Fluxus and, of course, CARFAC.<sup>[6]</sup> Canadian ARCs share many fundamental characteristics with portable galleries and alternative spaces such as TRUNK© and MPB. Eyelevel Gallery, in particular, has moved ten times in its 40-year history, which has made the gallery constantly reconsider its physical space and relationship to audiences. This state of flux has caused the organization many economic and pragmatic challenges, but it has also strengthened its ability to adapt. Similar to portable galleries, Eyelevel Gallery has continued its initial experimental approach to regularly reinventing and reconsidering the organization's role within its rapidly changing community. By seeking and acknowledging cultural value within contentious and unexpected spaces, Eyelevel Gallery actively considers its own assumptions about how effectively alternative spaces demystify pretention and hierarchical behaviors.

Regardless of whether these spaces are utilized as practical and immediate solutions to accommodate a need to exhibit emerging and truly experimental work, or if they are an exploration of challenges intrinsic to making and displaying work in a complex, intimate and/or limiting space, there is no escaping self-reflection when you are curating and coordinating projects in such unique spaces. In such

cases, there is open and continuous dialogue with those experiencing the work, which calls for a highly social and versatile set of skills to maneuver through complex public spaces and interact with diverse publics.



*MPB France (2006), Valerie LeBlanc screening La Dauphine, Vallauris, FR*

Recently, while visiting family in Clayton, Ontario, I found myself indulging in the American reality TV show, *The Amazing Race*. In this particular episode, the excited contestants scrambled through the streets and roads of Vietnam to compete for the one-million-dollar grand prize. In *Constituents of a Theory of the Media*, Hans Magnus Enzensberger discusses many of the technological developments within media, and their potential use as either repressive, or emancipatory agents. Jody Berland and Lev Manovich note Enzensberger is acutely tuned towards the many ways consumptive media such as television depoliticize a massive number of people.<sup>[2]</sup> Yet, we still instinctively follow the glow, looking for warmth and comfort in the tube, a respite from the pressures of our daily lives. Sadly

this desire for social connection and interactivity often only results contradictorily in our frustrated isolation and inactivity. The emergence of reality TV tells us that mainstream media has once again streamlined artists' ideas into a marketable and easily consumable smorgasbord of culture. *MediaPackBoard* demonstrates how many artists are still interested in establishing direct contact with the public through the use of alternative media that might disrupt the seamless reception of competition-based media enterprises. MPB addresses the differences between a productive public and a consumptive public, bringing into the spotlight the politics of what it means to question media through actively receiving and transmitting information, instead of understanding media as something only to be consumed.

*MediaPackBoard* brings the experience of underground media to the foreground to liberate media experiences from the confines of the living room. Valerie LeBlanc and Daniel H. Dugas'

MediaPackBoard interacts with accidental audiences as they explore the nightlife of populated public spaces. Like Chet Baker, MPB artists work in real time to interact directly with the public and respond to individual circumstances; they play with and listen to the culture, while being full participants in the nightlife.

Michael McCormack

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1. Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, The Foundation for Advanced Critical Studies, 1997), 81. ↵
  2. Lev Manovich, "The Screen and The Body," in *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), 103–109. ↵
  3. Lord Moran, *Churchill at War 1940 to 1945: The Memoirs of Churchill's Doctor* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2002), 307–308. ↵
  4. Fluxus has paved the road for this discussion for some time now, particularly George Maciunas' Fluxfests and Fluxkits in the early 1960s, but a resurgence of interest during the 1990s and early 2000s in Canada stimulated a more reflective approach to mobility. Hannah Jickling's online archive, *There's a New Beard In Town*, illustrates how widespread the phenomenon of portable galleries and venues were during that time. "Or Gallery, Web Projects, Hanna Jickling," last modified May 26, 2013, <http://www.orgallery.org/webprojects/hannah/> ↵
  5. For further information visit: "Launch: The Inventions Library & Archives + Exhibition," last modified May 26, 2013, <http://www.eyelevegallery.ca/exhibition/launch-inventions-library-archives-exhibition> ↵
  6. Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) is incorporated federally as a non-profit corporation that is the national voice of Canada's professional visual artists. ↵
  7. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," *New Left Review* 64, 1974, 13–36. ↵
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