

Dada in Walla Walla: A Digital Archive

Project Description and Aims:

It sits on Main Street, behind a glass door and up a dusty staircase, in a small, cramped room. It's open on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., or by request. It is The Museum of Un-Natural History in Walla Walla, WA. Our digital project explores this space from the perspective museum's founder and host, the perspective of Gerry, the museum's founder and host. Through photos, video, audio, and more we ask how the museum and its objects came into being, what they mean to Gerry, and how the museum participates in the Walla Walla community. In doing so, we illuminate (and sometimes complicate) how Gerry relates to the items in the museum, as well as how the museum's items relate to one another. Additionally, this project aims to expand the museum's reach, allowing Gerry and his unique work to spread across cyberspace.

Digital Concepts and Tools from the Class that were Used:

Our project primarily responds to our class' study of digital storytelling and archives. We aim to convey the story of Gerry and The Museum of Un-Natural History in a non-linear way, allowing viewers to order the media into narratives of their own. As a digital presentation, this project in some ways also functions as an archive. Our documentation of Gerry and the museum's objects may outlive the museum. (After all, Gerry is 86 and has yet to find someone to conduct the space into the future).

Current Project's relation to your Earlier Aims:

We originally planned to create an Adobe Spark story or Omeka exhibit, but we found each platform lacked the capabilities (both aesthetic and functional) that our project required. Hence our use of the Tumblr archive. We also originally planned to interview patrons of the museum, but instead included excerpts from the guest book.

The Unfolding of the Creative Process:

"I have been a clown, a comic actor, and the voice of Sugar Bear. I have rowed around the toilet tank for Tidy Bowl and thrown pies at Lamb Chop. In short I've spent many years performing in every venue short of strip dancing to make a living without having to hold down a respectable job." So says Gerry Mathews on the museum's website. His enthusiasm, unique philosophy, and energy immediately drew us in. We then brainstormed the content and form of our project, and planned a meeting with Gerry at the museum. We gathered audio, video, and photographic data, and then sorted through it all to discover what was most interesting and what stories we had missed. We returned again the following Saturday to fill in those gaps, and then began working

on our Tumblr page, pairing different pieces of media together and uploading them to our account.

Moments of Failure:

We experienced many small failures and bumped in to the limits of our understanding all along the project. From finding our technical skills lacking, to navigating the troubles of different forms of media capture, to figuring out how to piece together all of our data, we encountered many situations from which we could learn and grow.

Places where this Project might Expand:

To expand our project, we could document more of the museum's objects, more comments from the guest book, and more of Gerry's voice. In doing so, we could create a more robust digital archive of the museum.