

Postmortem

Introduction

This portfolio is the final product of the writing practices minor at the University of Denver. It was constructed in the final class of the minor and showcases some of the work I have created while an undergraduate. When I first learned that the final project of this course would be an online portfolio, I was ecstatic. I have created quite a few websites over the years: starting with my old HTML websites in middle school. I assumed this would be a simple step up from that, yet I was thankfully proven to be quite wrong.

In effect, I threw most of what I thought I knew about website creation and design out the window and learned the more nuanced details of web-design, such as font selection, color schemes, and how to convey the ethos of my portfolio through the structure and design of the site. Prior to this class, website design seemed very simple to me. I have always enjoyed creating artifacts for online presentation, though I now realize that I did not truly dive into the experience as I did for this project.

I realized that I needed to rethink what I 'knew' about online design after watching Sue Jenkins' "Design Aesthetics for the Web." This video gave me the vocabulary to describe certain elements of design, such as the rhythm, motion, and unity of a site. It also drew my attention to certain aspects of design that I had not thought was important, such as the type used in the design. I was particularly concerned with type, unity, rhythm, balance, and simplicity during the construction of the portfolio.

What Went Right

One of the best decisions I made during the construction of the portfolio was the preparation before the creation of the website. Once I had decided to use Wix as my platform, I set aside an entire weekend to experiment with Wix. Before I even started on my 'final' portfolio page, I created a series of beta pages. I was able to experiment with a variety of different themes and how to customize those themes to create something unique. I also uploaded several fonts that I thought worked well for each theme. Of the two days I set aside for the basic construction of the portfolio, this process took up nearly 75 percent of the time.

Due to the longer preparation time, the actual basic construction of the site went quickly and smoothly. Before its creation, I knew what I wanted the portfolio to look like. I had the font, color scheme, and layout already decided. This process also allowed me to have a certain sense of security about my design decisions, since I had tried out several different options before settling on one.

What Went Wrong

One of the first critiques I received was that a lot of the pictures on my site were unnecessary and detracted from the overall effectiveness of the site. In the first few 'drafts' of the portfolio there was a separate page for photography and several photographs were featured on the home page. This was a hard critique for me since I really enjoyed the opportunity to share some of my favorite

photographs, but it led to one of the most important decisions I made for the portfolio. It made me realize that the purpose of this portfolio was to showcase my writing and that I really was detracting from the main purpose of the portfolio by trying to incorporate another large element. Therefore, I decided to use the photos to enhance the writing and ethos of the site rather than act as a separate element.

Another useful critique I received was that the order of the writing on the 'Featured Writing' page could use more direction and meta-awareness. I absolutely agree with this thought, but I continue to struggle with a solution. The solution I settled on was to separate the writing into two sections: 'Creative and Multimedia' and 'Academic and Theory-Based.' I did attempt a more curated solution that involved the creation of another page titled 'About the Site' that would provide more explicit thought and motivation behind the structure of the site as a whole and particularly the ordering of the writing. However, I thought that this extra page disrupted the balance of the site and its inclusion in other pages disrupted the simplicity that I really enjoyed.

Applying the Lessons

One of the main takeaways for this class is my awareness of design in general. While I gained greater literacy in general web design, I also have been reapplying the design knowledge to other areas. For example, for my (revised) review of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I took greater care in font selection and heading style than I would have previously. (I actually downloaded two separate fonts in order to convey *The New Yorker*)

I also used specific font selection and awareness of unity, balance, and space in my first self-published photography book that is also featured on the portfolio, *Covert Melancholy*. The inclusion of this work is also something that I was unsure of in the final draft of the portfolio since it is *mostly* a book of photography and is quite personal. While I have a continuing interest in text and photography that is exemplified in this work, I was unsure of its placement in what I considered an academic and professional portfolio. However, at the showcase many writing faculty conveyed support for its inclusion and I am quite happy with its placement in the final portfolio.