

Reaction GIF: Moving Image as Gesture Collection

A reaction GIF is an animated GIF, typically of a body in motion and primarily excerpted from a film or television show, that is used online as a response or reaction. These have proliferated as a vernacular creative form on the web. The creation, sharing, and use of these GIFs play a significant role in online communication.

Description of potential collection: In preparation for an exhibition at the Museum of the Moving Image on reaction GIFs, curator Jason Eppink engaged in participatory research with participants in the reddit community to define and describe some of the most significant and important GIFs to exhibit. He is willing to offer both the final GIFs he exhibited as well as primary documentation of the process by which they were selected and described.

Extent: The extent of the collection would include: 1) the 37 GIFs that were exhibited (50 MB) as well as the 80 GIFs (138 MB) that were considered but did not make the final cut for the exhibition, 2) a copy of the 2 saved webpages with discussion threads from Reddit where initial nominations were made (609 files, 242 MB), 3) a spreadsheet with descriptive metadata including numbers of search returns in Google Image Search and TinEye, 4) 22 photographs (100MB) of the installation of the exhibition, 4) all media assets (94 files, 437 MB) used in the installation, including the WATCHOUT file (a digital signage application that ran the show.) In total, the collection would include 843 files and be 967 MB.

Technical Issues Acquisition & Preservation: To ensure fidelity of the materials, Jason would arrange them in a set of directories, bag directories using bagger, and submit them via Signiant. In terms of preservation, this would be a heterogeneous mixture of different file formats (images, copies of web pages, spreadsheets, etc.) Much like materials in the Web Archives, data from media found in manuscript collections, the intention would be to acquire and preserve them in their original formats. With that said, the formats of the files are widely used and thus likely to be widely usable in their current form or to be able to be opened by specialists through emulation or virtualization techniques. Of particular importance, the animated GIFs themselves render and play in contemporary web browsers and several open source browsers (like Firefox) which render GIFs offer a means for long term persistent access to the materials going forward.

Technical Issues Access: At the most basic level, a collection level record would be created for this with an attached set of files which scholars could download. To make the materials more broadly accessible, item level records/pages could be created based on the title and description information provided in the Jason Eppink's metadata spreadsheets.

Potential Rights Considerations: Like many archival collections, the collector/curator of these materials does not own the rights to these materials. Along with that, the materials include two layers of potential rights issues. Many of the GIFs are low resolution sequences of images from television and film, so there is a consideration of the original works used as the basis of these images. Along with that, there is the rights consideration of the original creators of the GIFs themselves. These original creators are generally unidentified and likely unidentifiable. With that noted, there is some good reason to believe that there are fair use cases to be made for making them broadly accessible in both instances.