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A Tale of Deleted Cities: GeoCities Event at Computer History Museum

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I recently had the opportunity to attend – via Beam Telepresence robot – a talk by Richard Vijgen, creator of the 2011 "Deleted City" art exhibit, and GeoCities founder David Bohnett. The "Deleted City" was hosted in the lobby of the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, and the talks marked the end of the exhibit. I won't give a full recapping of the talk, as I always find those difficult to both write and read, but will give a few impressions alongside the video!

They were both fascinating talks, available via YouTube above. Richard's talk was fascinating in that it explored what Big Data means for historians – and recounted his experience of working with the Archive Team torrent. To me, the talk really underscored the importance of doing web history: the web really is the record of our lives today, and we need to hope that there are people there to back up this sort of information!

It was followed by David Bohnett, who explained the idea behind GeoCities, some of the technical challenges he faced, and really what it was like to preside over such explosive growth during the dot com era. As somebody who's explored ideas of GeoCities as a community before, I was interested to hear so much emphasis placed in his talk upon the neighbourhood structure, volunteer community

leaders, and what this all meant for bringing people together. As a writer on this topic, it was pretty interesting and reassuring to hear that my own ideas weren't off kilter!

I was also surprised, although perhaps I shouldn't have been, with his attitude towards the closure of GeoCities in 2009 by Yahoo! (which bought it in 1999) – that it was "better shut down than to go on as this abandoned version of its former self." Fair enough, I suppose, but again – to echo Richard's opening talk – thank god that Archive Team and the Internet Archive were there to preserve this information…

Anyways, check the video out for yourself if you're interested.

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