



ROOKIE

YEARBOOK TWO



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EDITED BY
TAVI GEVINSON

THE WORLD IS BOUND WITH SECRET KNOTS

An Interview with David Hildebrand Wilson

By Tavi



The Museum of Jurassic Technology looks like a humble little storefront on a street in Culver City, California. Upon entering, however, you find yourself in a maze of oddities—a row of microscopes on mosaics made of butterfly-wing scales, a hall of flower X-rays, tiny sculptures displayed literally in the eyes of needles (the sculptor timed his carvings by his heartbeat). At first it feels like being transported to another world, until you see what a loving representation it is of the wonders of our own. You might suspect some of the displays are made-up, or that footnotes, names, and the plaques and pamphlets sitting in the gift shop are fictionalized, until you come to love the ways in which the museum inspires that very act of questioning. Lawrence Weschler wrote in *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*, his 1995 book about this place, “It’s that very shimmer, the capacity for such delicious confusion, Wilson sometimes

seems to suggest, that may constitute the most blessedly wonderful thing about being human.”

Wilson is David Hildebrand Wilson, who founded the museum in the late 1980s. Since then he’s lived with his wife and daughter in an adjoining trailer and run the museum with the help of volunteers, visitor donations, and grants. I noticed while we were speaking that he would make these grandiose statements about life and humanity, but they were always prefaced with “I think.” Or he would describe something, and find a better word for what he’s trying to say two or three times, and list them all. You could hear his brain working. It brought back the sense of affection for uncertainty that I felt when I visited his museum in the summer, the same feeling I found when I read Weschler’s book in the fall, and the same one I was overwhelmed with by the time we finished this interview. I might have burst into tears once we hung up? I DUNNO, YOU MAY JUST HAVE TO ~WONDER~. Read on, curious one.

TAVI Thank you so much for doing this.

DAVID WILSON Oh yeah, sure, I’m honored. Rookie looks great. How long have you been doing that?

Thank you so much. I started it September of 2011.

Can you tell what the viewership is?

I can, but I don’t. I think if I look at the numbers it messes with my head.

It’s funny—I’m the same way. If people write things about the museum I never read ‘em. I’d rather not see it somehow.

I was reading an interview with Stephen Colbert yesterday, and he said reading about yourself is poison—even if it’s positive attention, it just brings you outside of your head.

Oh yeah, it’s easily as bad if it’s positive as it is when it’s negative. It’s better to just avoid what you’re doing and do it without a lot of external input. It can throw you off course.

How would you describe the museum to someone who’s never heard of it?

I think typically what we say is that we’re a small museum of natural history, history

of science, history of art, and then everything else that comes along. We’re inspired by older museums—200, 300 years ago, a museum wasn’t a museum of a particular thing, it was a museum of everything. We don’t think all museums should be that, but we think there’s a place for that kind of museum, kind of an encyclopedic museum.

Would you say then that there’s anything in particular that unifies everything you have on display?

There are definitely underlying, unifying principles to what we do, but sometimes they’re kind of hard to discern, or hard to define. We have a motto, which you actually almost never see in the museum, but it’s “Un translatio nature,” which means “nature as metaphor.” That doesn’t really sum things up so much, but it actually is meaningful to us, because the kinds of things we like to put in the museum tend to be either natural phenomena or man-made—which, you know, there’s no real distinction between what’s man-made and what’s natural, because humankind is pretty natural as far as I can tell. We find ourselves gravitating toward material and phenomena that have meaning in and of themselves, and that also suggest other levels of meaning—kind of radiating spheres of meaning.

It’s interesting what you said about the line between man-made and the natural world being sort of blurry. To many people—and I always kind of thought this until I went to your museum—science and art are mutually exclusive. Some say it’s science’s job to tell humans that we’re not important and art’s job to declare that we are. How do you make them work together?

Essentially it goes back to a 17th-century or even earlier designation of artificialia and naturalia—what is artificial and what’s natural. It’s kind of an act of hubris or pride, I think, to think things that are made by humankind are in some way out of the natural order. We’re certainly, absolutely, profoundly part of the great glittering chain of being. I mean, look at birds’ nests—are they artificialia or are they naturalia? A bird makes this gorgeous nest, and that’s considered a natural artifact—so why is that different for humans?

I read that you had this sort of epiphany in your late teens...

There was a moment when I was probably just turning 19—and it was through nothing I did, there just kind of came to me an opening of my mind and my understanding. It was inexplicable, but it gave a level of meaning to my understanding of life that I had never had previously. That experience lasted over a period of days. Towards the end of it, I became afraid that... I was just very concerned to not lose the understanding that came as part of that experience. And really, that moment has had a profound effect on how I spent the rest of my life and spent the whole of my life’s energy.

Do you feel like you’ve done justice to that realization?

I don’t know that you can ever do justice, but I think I’ve spent the rest of my life kind of dancing around those understandings, because those understandings are really... I don’t know how to describe it other than a sense of... meaning. That kind of understanding that things were exactly as they should be, and that there was infinite and intricate meaning in the order of things. It’s really utterly incomprehensible. That doesn’t really help. I don’t know how else to describe it.

I think that in itself says enough, the fact that it is indescribable. What were you like as a teenager? What were the biggest influences for you at that time?

After that [epiphany], there was a certain change in my external demeanor. Prior to that, I had been somewhat introverted, but I still had a pretty active social life. But after that experience I became more introverted and spent a great deal more time reading and trying to delve into areas of human activity or natural phenomena that reflected the kind of understanding that had come to me. I began to read Eastern philosophy—and this was not too easy to find at the time, in 1965; the culture has changed enormously since then. I also became interested in medieval times. I felt that... [Tavi’s dog won’t stop barking] Who is your dog?

I know, I’ve been quietly typing all-caps emails to my dad asking if he can let her

in—

[Laughs] No, it’s nice!

It’s driving me crazy! I’m upstairs and she’s right outside by my window, and I’ve been trying to quietly ask my dad—

You don’t have to quietly do anything! You can go tell him if you want to!

I think I will if you don’t mind; really quickly I’ll go let the dog in!

Take your time!

[A few minutes pass.]

Problem solved. I’m sorry about that.

[Laughs] Do you live in Chicago?

I live in a suburb just outside, Oak Park. So what do you? Is this your full-time occupation, doing Rookie?

I mean, I’m 16 and I go to high school, but yeah, I mostly work on Rookie.

Is there an economic reality to it?

[Laughs] Unfortunately, yes!

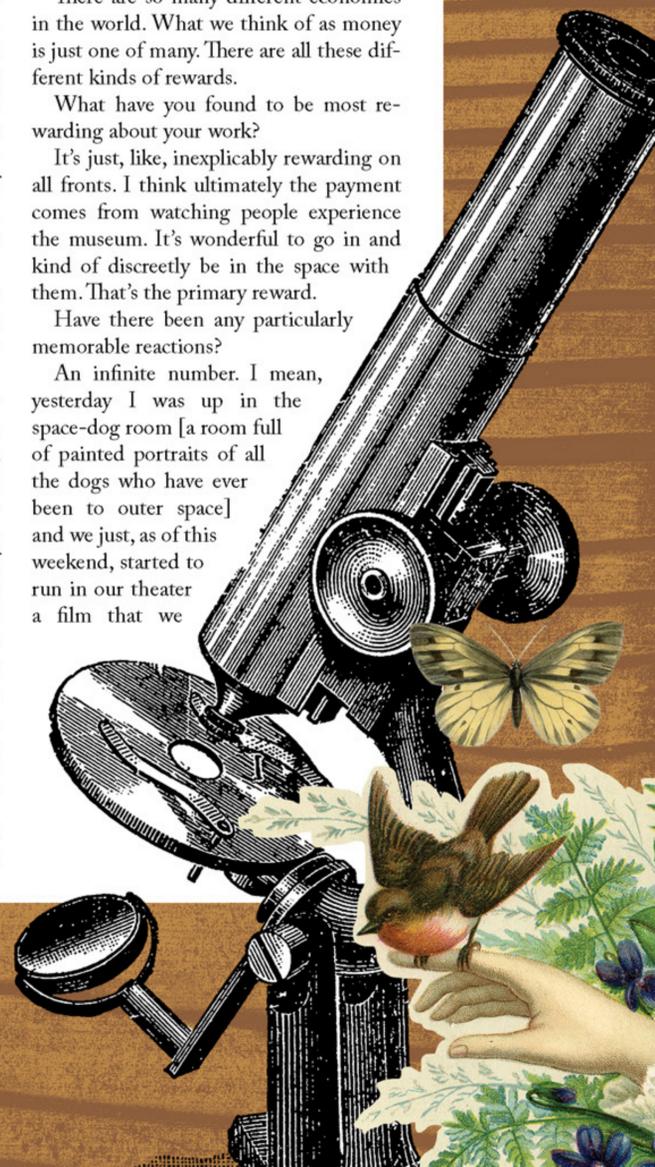
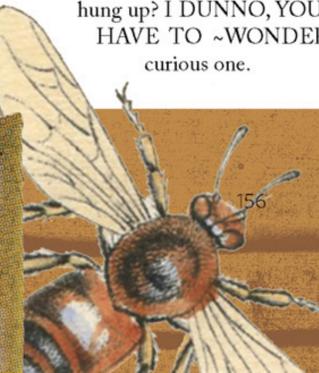
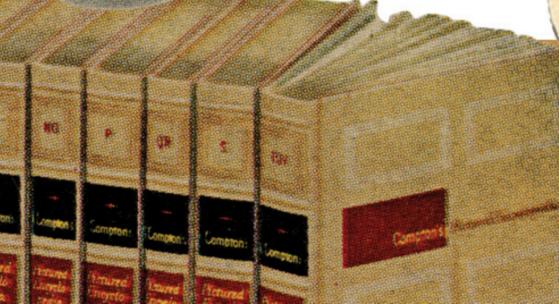
There are so many different economies in the world. What we think of as money is just one of many. There are all these different kinds of rewards.

What have you found to be most rewarding about your work?

It’s just, like, inexplicably rewarding on all fronts. I think ultimately the payment comes from watching people experience the museum. It’s wonderful to go in and kind of discreetly be in the space with them. That’s the primary reward.

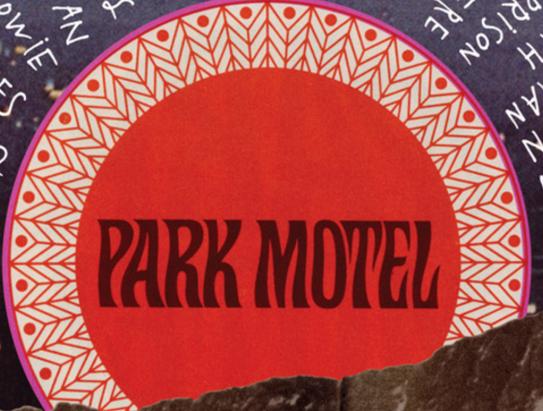
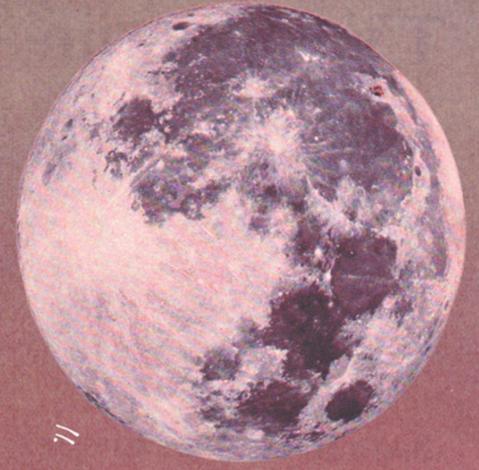
Have there been any particularly memorable reactions?

An infinite number. I mean, yesterday I was up in the space-dog room [a room full of painted portraits of all the dogs who have ever been to outer space] and we just, as of this weekend, started to run in our theater a film that we



→ WAY OUT WEST
By DYLAN

1. FREE & EASY, TAKE 2 - the BRIAN JONES TOWN MASSACRE
2. DANNY SAYG - The RAMONES
3. SWEET HEAD - DAVID BOWIE
4. OBVIOUSLY FIVE BELIEVERS - BOB DYLAN
5. TO BE YOUNG (IS TO BE SAD, IS TO BE HIGH) - RYAN ADAMS
6. GREENFUZZ - The CRAMPS 7. WAY OUT WEST - BIG STAR
8. RIDE INTO THE SUN - The Velvet UNDERGROUND
9. A SILVER SONG - CONSPIRACY OF OWLS
10. CALIFORNIA STARS - BILLY BRAGG & WILCO
11. Lodi! - NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE
12. EVERYBODY KNOWS THIS IS GEORGE HARRISON
13. IF NOT FOR YOU - ELLIOTT SMITH
14. HAPPINESS/the GONDOLA MANSION - VAN MORRISON
15. EVERYONE - the HAUNTED MANSION
16. WEST COAST CALAMITIES - ARIEL PINK'S HAUNTED MANSION
16. WEST COAST CALAMITIES - ARIEL PINK'S HAUNTED MANSION



AUGUST 2012: *On the ROAD*

When I left for the Rookie Road Trip in June, I expected our van to be filled with bearded musicians from the '70s, and for all billboards to suddenly show classily designed Coke ads instead of any for Attorney Peter Francis Geraci. Imagine my surprise when I realized that not everything looks like an old movie!

Of course, the scenery did end up being beautiful, and my fellow road-trippers were much better companions than any of the dudes from Almost Famous would've been, and I kind of got used to ignoring the billboards. But the memories that are most prominent to me now, the moments that most strongly satisfied the curiosity with which we faced this GREAT NATION OF OURS, are the ones that were just about the folks we came across every day—be they kindred spirits, or people with lives very different from our own, or dogs. (The dogs were SO CUTE.) Staying with Olivia's boyfriend's family in Portland, with Joey and Mark in Omaha, and with Ira's sister Randi in San Francisco; having dinner at Dylan's mom's house in Seattle, and with a family in Big Sur; a woman at a restaurant in northern California talking about the tiger she was planning to purchase and train; the family at a gas station in Nebraska that played a prank on Petra's boyfriend; and obviously, all our meetups with our readers. It was comforting to find that no matter where we were in the country, there were people who made it feel like home, and that no matter how far we'd traveled and how many people we talked to, there were always people unlike any I'd encountered thus far. The country is very big and very small at the same time, and scary in all the right ways.

In that sense, this month isn't really about being physically on the road; it's about meeting strangers and hearing their stories, about memories and keepsakes, and about the kinds of secret discoveries that lie along the way to a final goal or destination. I couldn't wait to get to California, but there were pockets of beauty and weirdness along the way that I found myself thankful we sought out.

I'm taking this chunk of space in my own damn editor's letter to thank those who could make it to our events. Thanks to Urban Outfitters and Space 15 Twenty for their collaboration, for supporting our vision for the meetups and the teen-bedroom replica we created in their gallery, for understanding why we needed a whole collection of Sweet Valley High books for the installation, and for miraculously finding them. During this summer's events, Rookie felt like a real presence in the world, not just in a corner of the internet. And that whole humans-connecting thing? That happened! Thank you again.

Oh, and we'll be using this month to prepare for school starting again. Positive thinking and stuff.

LOVE,
Tavi



