

The introduction to *The Internet Does Not Exist* is more ambivalent than its title suggests. The operative word in its opening sentence is 'maybe': 'Maybe it did exist only a short time ago, but now it only remains as a blur, a cloud, a friend, a deadline, a redirect, or a 404.' Aranda, Wood and Vidokle are not denying the internet ever existed. They are describing a transition, something that once had an infrastructural base becoming diffuse, commercial, and finally atmospheric. The argument is less a flat negation than a periodisation: the internet as a place is over; what remains is a planetary network that harvests attention and reformats consciousness. The prose enacts this formally. It is aphoristic and vertiginous, moving quickly between Latour, ARPANET, and Warhol without settling anywhere. The writing performs the condition it describes. But this has a political consequence: when the rhetoric refuses to slow down, specific experiences of specific people in specific platforms become impossible to name. The introduction speaks of 'we' throughout – 'we are still trying to climb onboard,' 'we are being faced with more and more' (Aranda, Wood and Vidokle, 2015) – but this 'we' is unexamined. It assumes a subject who relates to the internet as a medium through which other things happen, not as a place that was genuinely inhabited.

The text does concede, briefly, that there was 'something we used to call the internet that had an infrastructural base' – and then moves on. That single sentence is where my project begins. The introduction's imaginary of internet culture is constituted by legible figures: the artist, the dissident, the journalist. The girl making WeHeartIt moodboards is not legible in those terms, even though, as Freider argues in *I'm Like a PDF But a Girl* (Femme-social Press), what she was doing constituted a genuine nomadic pedagogy – learning, forming, becoming, across platforms that no longer load. The analytical distance is enacted formally: the introduction moves between Latour, ARPANET, and Warhol in the space of a paragraph, assuming a reader already fluent in critical theory. It is not written for the girl who was on the internet; it is written about the internet for people who studied it. What it cannot accommodate as a result is testimony: the firsthand account of someone for whom the early internet was not a medium to theorise but a place to grow up in. Walsh's observation in *Girl Online* – that women's active, identity-forming use of digital space routinely goes untheorised (Walsh, 2022) – holds here too.

A Girl is A Spider is not a refutation of this introduction. I do not disagree with its account of what the internet became. The transition it describes is real, and I felt it happen. My project is a supplement: a first-person testimony the introduction has no room for. I am writing as someone who grew up on these platforms between roughly 2005 and 2013 – the window between the early internet’s horizontal network structure and the shift to the algorithmically optimised, metric-driven feed. For girls in that period specifically, platforms like Club Penguin, Tamatown, Tumblr, and other personal blogs, were spaces of identity formation that operated without visibility as a goal: you decorated, you posted, you linked, without knowing how many people were watching or being asked to grow that number. That experience is what the introduction’s periodisation cannot hold, and what a graphic design audience – trained to think about how visual communication shapes and is shaped by its context – is well placed to reckon with. The ‘cut the web’ button enacts this precisely: not only a critique of the algorithmic feed but an act of mourning. The button’s violence only lands if you believe, for a moment, that the web was real. The introduction cannot produce that belief. My project is built to.

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## References

Aranda, J., Wood, B.K. and Vidokle, A. (eds.) (2015) ‘Introduction’, *The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Freider, E. (2022) ‘I’m Like a PDF But a Girl: Girlblogging as Nomadic Pedagogy’. Available at: <https://www.are.na/block/20684314>

Walsh, J. (2022) *Girl Online: User Manual*. London: And Other Stories.

Cameron's World is a scrolling web collage assembled from text and images recovered from GeoCities pages before Yahoo permanently deleted the platform in 2009. GeoCities allowed ordinary users (not developers or institutions) to build their own pages using whatever visual language they could access: tiling backgrounds, animated GIFs, glitter text, visitor counters. Yahoo's deletion of the platform, without warning and without an official archive, destroyed approximately 38 million user-created pages. (Tiffany, 2021) Cameron Askin's project recovers what could be recovered, assembling it into a single scrolling webpage that functions simultaneously as memorial, archive, and aesthetic argument: that these pages were not the embarrassing underside of early web culture but something extraordinary, and that their loss was a cultural event worth grieving.

The formal qualities of Cameron's World are inseparable from its argument. The project does not describe or analyse GeoCities aesthetics; it reproduces and accumulates them. The scroll is continuous and vertiginous, with no chapter break or pause for critical reflection. Images and text fragments overlap and interrupt each other, recreating the experience of navigating GeoCities itself: abundance tipping toward overwhelm, personality layered upon personality. Askin refuses any distancing frame — no curatorial voice, no explanatory introduction. The project simply is what it preserves. The form is the argument. This is a significant challenge to design history's tendency to narrate the web's visual evolution as a story of progress, from cluttered amateur pages toward clean professional interfaces. Cameron's World insists that the visual language it recovers was not a failed attempt at good design but a different kind of design entirely — organised around self-expression and affect rather than legibility and hierarchy. Santiago Cortés' argument in 'The Hyperlinked Hyperfeminine' (Lux Magazine, 2021) deepens this: that the pastel palettes, decorative excess, and softness visible throughout GeoCities and early Tumblr constituted a coherent visual grammar, one that mainstream design culture — from contemporary brand identity to UX aesthetics — has since absorbed and monetised without credit or acknowledgement of where it came from.

The relationship between Cameron's World and A Girl is A Spider is one of shared material and divergent methodology. Both use images recovered from early internet archives; both treat the visual language of early internet girlhood as worthy of serious attention. But where Cameron's World

is a memorial – its purpose is preservation, accumulation, the refusal to let things be forgotten – *A Girl is A Spider* is an argument. I am not trying to recover everything. I am selecting and curating from a specific body of material: Wayback Machine image searches driven by hashtags generated through Percec-style memory writing about particular platforms – Club Penguin, Tamatown, WeHeartIt, early Tumblr. The hashtags come first, the images come second, and the gap between what the writing anticipates and what the archive actually returns is part of the content. Cameron’s World has no equivalent gap – it presents the archive as the thing itself. My project insists that the archive and the memory are different objects, and that the distance between them is precisely Percec’s threefold ageing: the place, the memory of the place, and the writing about both. Askin’s project also clarified a formal risk in my own: that working with this material, the project collapses into pure nostalgia. Askin manages it through accumulation – so much material that no single page becomes precious. My project is more exposed because it is personal and selective. Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is the answer: a restorative project would try to rebuild the early internet faithfully and fail, because the infrastructure is gone. A reflective project dwells in the longing itself, keeps the damage visible, and treats the archive’s imperfections as the only honest version of the past available.

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## References

Askin, C. (2015) *Cameron’s World*. Available at: [cameronsworld.net](http://cameronsworld.net).

Santiago Cortés, M. (2021) ‘The Hyperlinked Hyperfeminine’. *Lux Magazine*.

Tiffany, K. (2021) ‘Yahoo, the Destroyer’, *The Atlantic*, 25 April. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2021/04/how-yahoo-became-internet-villain/618681/>