Revolution gURL Style NOW!

Collaging a Feminist Web for the New Generation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor in Arts With Specialized Honors in Media & Communications

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ABSTRACT

From suffragist pamphlets to riot grrrl lyrics, the independent zine has empowered young women to create and communicate against political oppression for decades. When the Internet went public, teenage girls began collaging amateur code and dedicating homepages to gender defiance. These ‘gURL zines’ were at the intersection of online art and in-person activism, built from eager femme participants otherwise virtually excluded. As most eroded under the pressures of an increasingly commercialized web, said projects have faded into obscurity.

Both technologically novel and historically adapted, their methods of cultural subversion were highly effective. Carving space for girls online is still a critical mission. This thesis, founded on historical contextualizing of the World Web evolution, concludes in the creation of a contemporary gURL zine known as *TodaygURL*. The multimedia publication acts as both a tribute and intervention to predecessor media practices, generating a modern gURL community devoted to intersectionality and empathy, art and activism.

Keywords: feminism, internet history, zines, girlhood

This thesis was written and published in Times New Roman. Published in 1932, the typeface was primarily drafted by young women working at the Type Drawing Office. Each character had to be drawn with mathematical precision for proper hot-metal reproduction (Pennington, 2024).

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This thesis is dedicated to WoCo, the Women's Concerns house.

You all are emblematic of the gURL experiment.

INTRODUCTION

Towards the tail-end of 1992, just a year beyond the World Wide Web's public debut, the e-zine Dead Jackie Susann Quarterly launches off a harddrive south of Prospect Park. Named for the mid-century novelist Jacqueline Susann, Dead Jackie is a treasure trove of vivid prose on the feminine crucible. Editor Tania '74 puts forth an essential question in the #f8dd85 forward. "Where can a girl go to experiment with words, ideas, bad art, and graffiti?" she types. "Not a whole lot of places."

The physical components of Dead Jackie–a publisher address, a subscription service–have expired. What remains is a literary listserv archive, emblematic of an emergent online movement posthumously known as the 'gURLs'. A proto-gURL project, Dead Jackie preceded the movement's peak. Nonetheless, its unabashed provocation and editorial matriarchy laid the foundation for a litany of kindred fem-focused amateur sites. The 'gURLs', a cybernetic fusion of girl and URL, deployed the World Wide Web as an instrument for creative comradery. Taking cues from their political predecessors a la suffragette pamphleteering and riot grrrl zine-making, the gURLs recontextualized the handmade publishing tradition within this novel digital medium. The tools inherent were closely related to material mediums. Coding terms and hyperlinked documents could be easily applied on an amateur structure, molded by non-programmers on a still-mysterious Internet.

Unfortunately, their fledging autonomy eroded beneath rapid commercialization. The Internet proved extremely profitable, especially in the social networking sphere. Monopolies developed from outsized advertising algorithms (Shepard 2022). Personal sites were deemed financially useless and deleted by their administrative hosts en masse. Even when given eviction notice, many websites were difficult to properly preserve due to an inherent impermanence.

Uniquely digital abilities, such as hyperlinks and embedded MIDI players, also escalated project fragility. Now only a few decades beyond, all but a select few gURL zines remain online.

Virtual life is inextricably integrated with material life. The lines have blurred further than any market imagined, with the global majority heavily relying on digital communication for companionship and community. Overreliance on conglomerate platforms has only intensified whereas user authority has further degraded. This thesis offers an defensive intervention for reclaiming digital sovereignty founded on the reexamination amateur gURL ambitions. The projects and passions began by young women online deserve thorough academic evaluation not merely as historical artifacts of digipolitical infancy, but also as guides for a modern handmade web. By closely examining early e-zines, I cultivate a contemporary reinvention of their extinct ecosystem.

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on historical analysis. The socioeconomic context of late-20th century America was dominated by trickle-down politics and binary ideologies. This cocktail of repressive regression provided the necessary conditions for an oppositional anarchist zine culture. One prominent subgroup were the riot grrrls, a cross-country punk movement calling ‘girls to the front’ of otherwise male-dominated mediums (Marcus 2010). While not explicitly affiliated, riot grrrl methodologies and motivations demonstrate a significant overlap with the gURLs. Both were ambitious political movements with bases primarily made up by young Western women. Against a backdrop of globalization and increasing economic mobility, girls distributed creative and critical writings. Zines, amateur publications, and makeshift music proliferated the United States through intimate word-of-mouth and protectively small print distribution. Hand-making works rebuking the gender binary - poetry, political manifesto - gave

girls agency over their cultural image for the first time. Art authorized a new expanse of personal expression.

When the World Wide Web was released in 1991, general access to digital resources exploded at an unprecedented scale. Personal computers quickly populated homes, distributing agency over expression to girls everywhere (those who could afford it). Many users found joy and community in web mastering. Young women discovered the connections between a handmade, or handcoded, website and material zine creation, transcribing the physical aesthetics of print into rudimentary code and experimenting with interactive elements otherwise impossible in paper reality. Some self-published e-zines contained personal essays and expositions of political views. Others built off an increasingly populous forum culture, letting users direct the conversation completely through immediate interaction. Rather than restrict authorship to a chosen few, the medium accessibility made starting a site - becoming a gURL - as simple as taking space. Collectives eagerly carved independent spaces for femme-identifying Internet explorers.

Chapter One highlights several specific sites, the recurrent being *gURL.com, chickclick.com*, and *cybergrrlz.com*. Each provides a concrete example of the common scaffolds and value systems found in popular gURL projects. Alongside many sister sites, these 'digital bedrooms' were critical tools for gathering information and growing solidarity. Since most have been defunct for several years, I access these primary sources predominantly through the Wayback Machine. The Wayback Machine, subsidiary of the Internet Archive, compiles millions of time-stamped screenshots specific to certain URLs.[1] Users explore the historical evolution of particular sites through this open-access tool. Its unreliable loading speeds made my research

[1] The automatic web crawler utilized to sustain the archive is, as of April 2026, blocked by 23 major news sites (Lovejoy).

more similar to a material, bibliographic venture. Although many elements have been lost to time, the Machine is an essential archive of Internet history. By using the Wayback Machine, I have experienced my cited artifacts as if they existed contemporaneously.

Chapter Two tracks my case studies into the new millennium. I expand on how the early Internet eroded into a neoliberal instrument, and identify spaces where the quick cultural shift negatively impacted gURL survival. As is typical with new technology, interest surrounding 'dot-com' investments quickly ballooned and burst rapidly. The resulting plummet of stock prices bulldozed majority of the early Internet (Caffery 2022). The sites left behind in the aftermath were either abandoned or absorbed into larger entities. Dominant corporations - *Seventeen, IGN* - co-opted gURL culture as power funneled to the few. The web we know was founded on misogynistic intentions and bigoted technologization. Minimal resources are offered to web-curious young women. Those available are explicitly business-oriented or buried by bought-out search engines. By linking past analysis to our present context, the tumultuous state of cybergirl identity is evaluated.

Chapter Three chronicles my efforts to synthesize these themes in *todaygURL.org*, an interdisciplinary call-to-action. Dually zine and research artifact, my personal hand-coded site seeks to center femme perspectives of a new generation. Uncontaminated by commercial influence, TodaygURL refuses to engage in the harmful negotiations of modern Internet expression. By combining their iconography with my artistic process, TodaygURL introduces the uninitiated to gURL methodology. I borrow attributes previously identified (logos, color palettes, lines of code). Recontextualizing their aesthetics pays tribute to original gURL intentions while generating an wholly new digital environment. Majority is self-produced; references are incorporated when necessary as an intentional footnote to the project ancestors. TodaygURL

transcribes for gURL's chronically online descendants. The website acts as a womb, encouraging communal politics and optimistic creativity. This thesis concludes itself in a personal guide for future feminist projects, elaborating on a desired longevity and effect of the thesis overall.

History is not inert. My aim is to provide perspective on a period of feminist movement otherwise underrepresented in cultural and academic media analysis. Young women have returned to zine-making and alternative presses in droves, seeking safe collaboration in response to our increasingly hostile nationstate. Physical creation is critical. However, the World Wide Web is an unavoidable appendage of current reality. We are inching closer to cyborg status everyday; we must engage the complex impact of autocracy on a once optimistic instrument. Site creation is an effective tactic in deradicalizing an otherwise uninhabitable digital space. By seizing autonomy over our main modes of interpersonal connection, policy change and stable freedoms are more obtainable. Both print material and photo monitor can encourage self-made empowerment. This thesis exists within the context of all preexisting feminist efforts. Recognizing the past - technological, sociopolitical - will empower a new generation of girls to get rendered and get real.

CHAPTER ONE: GRRRL ON GURL

The birth of 'girl' as a denomination, obscurely pinned to 14th-century Germanic vernacular, has simultaneously plagued and pedestaled those labeled as such for centuries. While the term's negative connotations may never be fully erased, the necessity to resist is paramount. Recent history has America reevaluating the profit possibilities of 'girl' as a demographic. When the country propelled into post-war prosperity, shift jobs and allowances became commonplace for young adults previously cashless. Providing disposable income to teenagers cultivated an unprecedented consumer category, one unburdened by utility bills or loan payments. The Reaganomic market of late-80s America found great prosperity in reusing scraps from the feminist second wave. Retailers began promoting a vacant 'girlpower' message, encouraging their female audience to purchase rather than pursue agency. Simultaneously, women were increasingly represented in an official political capacity. The so-called 'Year of the Woman' saw 27 women elected to congressional positions in 1992. Whilst a third wave of feminists more aligned with systemic integration built steam, younger women were being routinely suppressed.

Scholar Anita Harris cites 'girlpower' as an authoritarian weapon; teenage girls "have always contended with forms of regulatory surveillance that limit and appropriate their expression", pseudo-feminist promotion being a primary late-millenium example. By limiting available information systems "through invitation to speech", corporate entities accrued both economic benefit and cultural control (2003: 41). On the surface, encouraging open communication appears benign. But financial incentive eclipses actual progress: "the current enthusiasm…dovetails with forces that educe tales of pain without interrogating the social conditions that underpin them" (44). Products proliferated, 'girlpower' going so far as the Oxford English Dictionary. Reaching phenomena status only expedited its political flattening.

Lacking independent modes of communication, attentions were monopolized by drugstore publications like *Teen Vogue* and *Seventeen*. 'Girls' magazines', a subgenre of the more infamous 'women's magazines', reduced their audience to banal fodder about celebrity culture. There was no room for critical conversation or self-discovery. Girls were dually represented and restricted by the mainstream at an unprecedented level. The Spice Girls are a ubiquitous example. Five women were packaged as a set of female archetypes - Baby, Sporty - and proceeded to mint $300 million off endorsement deals (1997: BBC).

For some, the superficiality was not appreciated. A disseminated collective of young women began organizing in opposition, eschewing restrictive 'girl' definitions imposed by authority and academics. The 'riot grrrls' were a "loose network of young women…attempting to forge new communities" (Harris 45) through distributing amateur publications, "aim[ing] to share information and build and politicize a community" of otherwise disparate participants (46). They replaced *i* with *rr* and hijacked their genus with growls. Teenagers turned towards demolishing gender convention through an arsenal of art and anger. The rallying 'GRRRL PoWeR' cry operated in direct contrast to its consumer-friendly shadow self, declaring girls to be unmediated agents of their personal identities. Through radical reclamation, as highlighted by Michelle Comstock in her comprehensive article "Grrrl Zine Networks", riot grrrls acted not only as contrarians but also "....as rhetoricians engaged in the important political processes of re-envisioning and revising "feminism" and "girlhood" in the contemporary United States" (384). One manifesto - among many - proposed that "GRRRL PoWeR iS: feeling okay about being a girl: Be proud! We ROCK!"

The grrrls were prolific zinesters. Although my introduction provided a brief description, further elaboration is necessary. Zines - short for 'magazine' - are amateur publications "outside of dominant culture", varied contexts related through a nucleus of "critical social commentary" and independent production (Harris 47). Writing was essential to reclaiming 'girl' as a site of self-determination. Riot grrrls adopted the anarchist spirit of previous alternative publishing spaces, creating and distributing through communal authorship. Grrrlzines existed beyond both 'girls' magazines' and historically misogynist alternative writing spaces.[2] Prior to the riot grrrl revolution, anarchist art collectives tended towards a heavy gender bias. Instead of submitting to the rules and regulations of any pre-existing system, the grrrls created their own. An inclusive scaffolding was materially enacted using collaged images and collaborative prose, destabilizing mainstream distinctions of reader and writer. These tactics added a protective layer of illegibility to the project.[3] The riot grrrls embodied a Frankenstein-ed feminism "founded on difference, individuality, and a continuing effort to define the loose cultural and political spaces of grrrl power and sisterhood" (Comstock 386), their grrrlzines facilitating "a new forum for grrrl solidarity" (391).

The first edition of Toronto-based *Femzine* includes a preface explicitly aligned with revolutionary dogma. Editor Melanya Aguila explains that she "asked each contributor to do a write-up about themselves…because they are representing themselves and not ALL wymyn" (1991: 5). She extends her self-possession ethos to interviews that were conducted with a variety of female-led bands, sending them drafts so "the interviewer (that's me!) is put on a more equal

[2] The riot grrl movement was directly affiliated with alternative music scenes, often overlapping punk specifically. Punk is an infamously misogynist genre. To combat the fraught experience of existing as a femme, young women intentionally took on movement iconography - zine-making, lyrical format - in order to then rebel against this architecture. See Janice Radway's 2016 dissection *Girl Zine Networks, Underground Itineraries, and Riot Grrrl History* on a more detailed explanation.

[3] For a storied explanation of zine culture and its sociopolitical impact, see Stephen Duncombe's 1997 work *Notes From the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*.

level to those being interviewed…I'm trying to evoke fair representation and portrayal of wymyn" (6). Each girl actively participates in her presentation, contributing to a deliberately incoherent aesthetic that embraces rather than eradicates their individuality. Pushed to the margins by a dominant patriarchy, the riot grrrl solution was purposeful occupation "outside surveillance, silencing and appropriation" (Harris 46).

Despite being relatively short-lived, the riot grrrls reached a staggering scope of influence on cultural iconography and political reform. Their 'GRRRL PoWeR' mission statement was potent and adaptable. The intentional incoherence gave grrrls a unique freedom. Their liminality enabled a variety of expression across representing diverse geographic and demographic identities. Unfortunately, disorganization also crippled the potential for long-term stability. 'Girls' magazines' quickly adapted their output to better suit their radicalized audience.

Sassy, advertised as an alterative to teenybopper publications, began featuring a section titled 'Zine Corner', later 'Zine of the Month' (Aronsohon 2023). Punk-adjacent grrrl bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile fell out of popular favor in ramification for their broadband refusal to sanitize the music and messaging. Their calls for media protest were punished by mainstream exclusion and their reach became demonstrably limited. Fallacies leftover from the feminist second wave were unconsciously perpetuated. When the ability to identify movement leadership is eliminated, even - especially - when done deliberately, authority defaults to women already in public-facing positions. Rather than guarantee equitable representation for all persons beneath the femme umbrella, grrrls lost out on lasting cultural authority to the exact market feminisms they had so vehemently rebuked (Freeman 1971).[4]

[4] Progressive political movements must routinely rebuke commercial appropriation. The anarchist approach requires a 'structurelessness' that is easily soured. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" is a seminal Second-Wave-era essay penned by feminist Jo Freeman wherein she dissects the difficult balancing act.

The transition between in-person rioting to digital revolution was not a linear process. Although there is demonstrated overlap in vocabulary and visual aesthetic, the gURL movement curated a unique canon. By the latter half of the 1990s, nearly half of American households owned a computer. Widespread Internet access had managed to completely overhaul previously analog cultural cornerstones in less than a decade: the encyclopedia, the yellow pages, the newspaper all transmuted denizens of an emergent Net. Activities outside the established media were equally impacted, and artistic production performed a mass migration onto the Web. Ordinary users could access incredible programming tools through a couple clicks. Among the approximate three million personal sites embarked on by 1999, many webmasters were young women. The open-source codeworks whirred with feminist potential. Techno-focused feminisms often appeared as 'cyberfeminism'. The release of theorist Donna Haraway's 1985 *Cyborg Manifesto* triggered an avalanche of older, academically trained femme computerists incorporating gender-curious code. The gURL movement was not cyberfeminist in name, but often in practice.[5] As put by Dr. Pamela Takayoshi in her comprehensive study *No Boys Allowed: The World Wide Web as a Clubhouse for Girls*, "girls online…established a world-wide Grrrl Power club" (90).

While justification for the move is difficult to strictly define, gURL projects were broadly considered as a counterattack on burgeoning digital gender barriers. Women have been stereotyped as holding technophobic attitudes since the days of Gutenberg. *Surfergrrrls*, a riot-enfused how-to guide by Laurel Gilbert and Crystal Kile, explicitly outlined its purpose "to demystify the Internet for women…to show the world once and for all that women are an

[5] Mindy Seu's immense *The Cyberfeminism Index* is both an updated digital bibliography and printed encyclopedia. The index provides a thorough history of cyberfeminist practices across a wide berth of mediums. Incredible resource and incredible doorstopper.

ass-kicking, amazing, important part of Internet culture" (1996: 4).[6] Esther Drill, one of three *gURL.com* founders, cited a similar motivation during a then-contemporary chat-based interview. Drill explains "there wasn't much for teenage girls on the web" at the time, a deceivingly simple justification for a drastic gap in constructive media (1999: CNN LiveChat).[7] The misogynistic exclusion of women from developing Internet spheres was the same structural obstacle which drove the riot grrrls to construct their independent communication pathways in material reality.

The World Wide Web enabled organic pathways of personal, communal expression. A self-coded 'home page' was subversive, not a practice explicitly encouraged by its providers. Net artist and academic Olia Lialina acknowledges the critical position of webmaster as hijacker, placing creators in an anarchist context. In other words, the medium is the message (2019: Lialina).[8] Hypertext wove information in a "multivocal and nonlinear format", further extending the interpersonal dynamism of physical zine production (Comstock 398). Taking personal stake through the World Wide Web was a method not yet compromised by institutional surveillance. Borders were easily manipulated "to manage expression without exploitation" by leveraging digital contradiction to manifest an open environment for personal/political negotiation (Harris 47). The medium was simultaneously familiar and foreign, adapting preexisting print structures - text 'documents', copying and pasting materials - whilst providing opportunity for novel interactivity - operating forums, rapid responsitivity. Computer programming proved useful as a active, feminist tool in a similar vein to the semi-contemporaneous riot grrrls or the 1970s

[6] Many gURL projects eventually turned out a physical iteration. Revolutionary texts were printed by traditional presses; *Sufergrrrls: Look Ethel! An Internet Guide for Us!* was published and cataloged in the Library of Congress.
[7] The CNN interview was conducted as promotional material for a newly released *gurl.com* book. *Deal With It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain, and Life as a gURL* expanded gURL methodology into the realm of physical archive, fast becoming a fast bestseller. The site aesthetic was materially transcribed - from print to monitor to print once more.
[8] Olia Lialina has been around since the beginning. Her critical work as a GeoCities archivist has radically changed the way digital works are catalogued and preserved. I go further into *From My to Me* (the article referred to here) in my third chapter.

Second Wave, all equally critical "publication tools for creating awareness and connectivity tools for bringing girls together" (Takayoshi 97). [9]

We will be defiant, challenging, probing, non-conformists, and open minded to many different opinions. In other words, don't bother submitting recipes or knitting tips – they won't be printed. Controversy is not a dirty word. Hateful thoughts will, however, not be permitted. Humor and fun will be constants. Cyber-Grrlz Mission Statement, 1999

Although the topics covered by girl-centric websites were varied and often idiomatic, published writing roughly coalesced into two distinct categories: moderated articles and user-submitted forum posts. Both compositional structures are inherited from zine-making pedagogy, an ethos which compels projects to be "less an act of authorship…than an act of critical editorship" (Comstock 394). The familiar print dynamic was most directly recreated through email, where conversation could be exchanged separate from site eyes akin to a snail mailing list. As gURL ezines began acclimating to the ever-evolving ecosystem of static site creation, the standard models of mailed, time-delayed engagement were rendered obsolete. Internet forums gathered steam as the premiere system for user interactivity as the software required was basic and the barrier-to-entry nearly nonexistent. gURLs integrated forum structures with their websites, allowing readers to post responses seamlessly.

The permeable nature of producer and consumer was only amplified by an equally underdefined digital ecosystem. So early in its development, the World Wide Web was still a primarily open-source platform. Anyone could mold code to their image. As Harris explains,

[9] Riot grrl extended into academia as well. Pamela Takayoshi approached her article "No Boys Allowed: The World Wide Web as a Clubhouse for Girls" by injecting a little anarchy in the form of her two step-daughters, Emily and Meghan. Takayoshi critically analyzes the tween input, elevating their experiences to a scholarly realm, and lists them as co-authors.

“the Internet is a liminal, that is, an 'inbetween' space that allows [girls] to negotiate…with a greater capacity for political efficacy than is achieved in a bedroom, but with less risk of surveillance and appropriation by adults than is afforded by more traditional and regulated public sites” (47). The malleable boundaries inherent to virtual reality emboldened the revolutionary ambitions of many gURL publications, who took advantage to push back against both gendered expectations and publication standards. Online forums allowed for near-instant connectivity and expression. In her master’s thesis, Krista Scott phrases the benefit plainly: “Self-publication lends itself to a perception of immediacy…” with girls feeling “that they can interact with ezine creators whose thoughts are laid bare”, ezines accessible “by anyone with a computer” (1998).

A clear example were the live chat-room sessions hosted by *cybergrrlz.com*. Based on a provided schedule, participants could discern the moderators and topics prepared for a given week. Embedded JavaScript (provided by a third-party host) opened a pop-up window for users every Monday and Thursday, with a secondary permanent chat room when not explicitly projecting a discussion. Audience and dialogue could not be predetermined. The userbase intermingled with zine contributors. An asterisk clarified that “moderators make every effort to be here on the time posted”, despite no moderators being listed in the offered week’s schedule. While it is impossible to fully know whether debates were fully-regulated, more often than not, the lack of a regulatory body on the archived site is worth noting. There is only the implication of an actual moderator. Thus, chat attendees would debate uninhibited by parameter or punishment. Compared to its print relatives, limited by word-of-mouth and stamp cost, the World Wide Web projects to a much larger demographic. Said demographic was only lightly controlled by the online chat structure. A certain layer of anonymity was inherent. Thus, girls could communicate openly without necessarily creating a “public face” or leaving the “underground”

(Harris 52). Chats were often chaotic and off-topic. They were also often a first introduction to political debate. Considering their audience maintained a female majority, the frank access to culturally 'masculine' spaces like politics - or, more broadly, expressed passion - was revolutionary. Highlighted in the footer was an explicit encouragement for audience participation, regardless of experience: "If you're quiet for more than ten minutes, you'll be thrown out of the room (and sent to bed without supper) -- in other words, participate!"

Please read our ***Chat Room Schedule*** and ***Chat Tips*** before you scroll down and join our chat room.

Chat Room Schedule

Date	Start Time (1)	Duration(2)	Moderator(3)	Topic
Every Monday	7PM EST (4PM PST)	1 hour	None	Join us for this scheduled chat session. Many of our contributors do drop in often. Com
Every Thursday	9PM EST (6PM PST)	1 hour	None	Join us for this scheduled chat session. Many of our contributors do drop in often. Com
Everyday	All day	All day	None	Our Chat Room is always open but often empty (kinda like Rush Limbaugh's brain).

(1) If you're not sure how the above times convert to your time zone, try this time zone converter or this one.
(2) Duration may vary depending on a lot of factor. In any case, visitors are welcome to stay past the stated duration.
(3) Moderators make every effort to be here on the time posted on the above Chat Schedule, however, the Net being what it is, many factors may prevent the Moderator from making it on time or at all. If th
words of Linda Richman: "Talk amongst yourselves."

cybergrrlz.com/cg-chatroom, archived 02/22/99.

In some cases, the sites also utilized application forms for visitors to host a personal page beneath the parent web address. The new digital method gave "girls avenues for communicating with one another…bringing girls together" in an expressly political fashion (Takayoshi 102). *gURL.com*, a web-zine founded by NYU graduate students, frequently promoted their 'gURL connection' infrastructure as an option for further immersion into the site's contents. The membership program allowed users to register their emails for access to free personal homepages hosted on the *gURL.com* domain. Joining 'the gURL connection' also allowed girls to publish their writings and visual pieces in a group-specific zine, another element of engagement otherwise inaccessible to unaffiliated visitors. If not a part of 'the gURL connection', one would be confronted with deadends, utilizing the Internet as a liminal space where "girls' voices can appear and disappear at their own behest" (Harris 49). On the homepage of *gURL.com*, select

members would be highlighted for their web prowess under a prominent side column. Though there existed a plethora of domain-hosting resources for girls, common digital spaces were often unwelcoming. 'The gURL connection' provided community-building and basic coding skills. Instead of questioning the quality of the girl, exclusive spaces such as these asked whether the viewer was worthy (Harris 53).

gurl.com/connection, archived 12/08/98.

Teengrrl.com employed a more traditional framework. Peer-reviewed articles were published regularly by an experienced editorial board, siloing reader input to designated spaces. A masthead page titled 'MEET THE TEENGRRLS' identified nine 16-18-year-old girls by a headshot and brief description, all simultaneously programmer and publisher for the project. Three were denoted only by respective name and age. The remaining provided a short, authorial statement about their personal backgrounds and public affiliation with *teengrrl.com*. While two were explicitly Canadian, the rest were American. Their origins ranged as broadly as Southern

California to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Nearly half the staff noted their involvement in a second writing project, whether that be a school newspaper or self-published zine. Superficially disparate, the girls had been brought together by their shared passions for writing and feminism. Internet connectivity allowed the nine to combine. Two subpages featured on the site menu titled 'MESSAGES' and 'FORUMS', unfortunately unarchived, hint that *teengrrl.com* applied a variety of original sources to their zine-making. The absence of regulatory bodies within the e-zine community encouraged girls to experiment with novel combinations of traditional and unconventional publishing structures.

teengrrl.com/masthead, archived 02/29/00.

A structural similarity to traditional mass media was the frequent inclusion of a 'Dear Abby'-esque advice column. 'Dear Abby', originally syndicated across American newspapers, is an advice column primarily oriented to a female audience. Frequently published in women' s magazines, 'Dear Abby' and its ilk have unprecedented access to the belief systems of a national readership. Punk-ified and digitalized, gURL advice columns toed the line between skeptic satire and genuine participation. Users were invited to submit problems through emails to an older

member of the editorial board. *gURL.com* began featuring a "Help Me Heather" page in late 1999, identified by the same green-faced, panicking character previously used for their "Deal with It!" column.

A descendant of that broader category, "Help Me Heather" focused on helping readers 'deal' with their various troubles. 'Heather' was a reference to site founder Heather McDonald. In a preface for the page, Heather admitted that while she is "a big fan of various advice columnists" she has no experience in professional advice-giving, "except for just living my own life and trying to think clearly about all the choices that I make" (2000). Questions were delegated into catchy categories like 'Sucky Emotions' and 'Being Different', weaving commonalities between users who might have otherwise felt isolated. Her friendly transparency subverted the typical detachment of an traditional advice columnist; by mimicking the institutional dynamic, "Help Me Heather" deconstructed the potential harms that emerge from alienated article-writing and reaffirmed the gURL ambition through an honest, open dialogue with her audience. Although an advice column - especially as prominently featured as 'Help Me Heather' - does support scholar Martina Ladendorf's critical observation that "the Net is a site that is not freed from old genres or conventions…", there is promise. In developing "new and more subversive ways" of approaching traditional hierarchies, girls were able to affectionately tribute whilst staying above structural pitfalls (140).

Heather wanted her advice column to be an equal environment, one where her readers are fully aware of the relationship. This was evident in how she phrased responses. When replying to a submission from a girl nervous about crying too frequently, Heather promised "crying doesn't hurt anyone and it is a useful way to express yourself…" then revealed "I was and am a pretty big crier so I am not sure if I am being totally impartial, but I am pretty sure that I am" (2000).

By clearly stating her comprised position, Heather acknowledged the inherent power imbalance and made clear how little she wants to engage with that dynamic. She did not pretend to be preternaturally mature. She distributed advice from an equalized position, her vulnerability encouraging other girls to do the same amongst themselves. Another example of a gURL-tinged advice columnist was Aunt Crabby. Unlike Heather, Crabby intentionally underlined the age difference between advice receiver and giver. Aunt Crabby, hosted by *cybergrrlz.com*, was a hyperbolic character who described herself as "a 99-year-old, seen-it-all, 'don't waste my time' kinda woman" (1999). Evidently, she was portrayed by a gURL. Crabby provided succinct, satirical answers in an exaggerated dialect. Her lack of filter stood in direct contrast to ageist stereotypes against older women prizing decorum. When asked of her opinion on the phrase 'ignorance is a voluntary misfortune', Crabby replies that she "thinks 80 million poverty-beyond-belief stricken folks from Bangladesh never once volunteered to be ignorant" (1999). The hyperbolic language surrounding explicit political discussion is both a character trait and frequent gURL tactic.

Advice was not always distributed within the pretense of a column or character. Girls maintained an interpersonal dialogue across sites. Most discussed and dissected through gURL zines were articles bemoaning the perils of puberty. Self-esteem, body issues, boy troubles - all material previous decades of traditional 'girls' magazines' had attempted to tackle. Written from the genuine perspective of teenage girls, with identities spanning demographic and geographic differences, gURL took on a completely different tone when discussing identical subjects. Their novel conversational approach set both writer and reader free to find comradery in the discomfort of aging. gURLs did not avoid emphasizing the abject and absurd nature of their life stage. By subverting standard talking points, girls upended "the culturally-defined image of girls and take

charge of the act of defining" (Tayakoshi 97). They reveled in the body's various grossities, from hormones to homecoming, resisting dominant narratives about girls' interior lives (Harris 49).

In a section labelled "The Boob Files", *gurl.com* encouraged readers to submit personal, cleavage-centric stories. All essays were accessible via a cartoon drawing of breasts on a dinner plate, the attributes of each based specifically on its respective essay. "Basketboobs", for example, is an essay about the awkwardness of trying to play team sports with a larger chest. The associated drawing featured two basketballs instead of 'realistic' breasts. Parody highlighted the "distance from the ideals of beauty and bodies", "destabilizing identity politics" and encouraging readers to self-determine gender identity and visibility (Ladendorf 139). Girls felt comfortable to read material considered taboo within traditional media and commiserate over shared experience. After all, "for many adolescent girls the act of speaking out can be political" (Tayakoshi 100).

gurl.com/showoff/stories, *archived 03/03/05*.

Rather than promote “perfect women that may foster feelings of inadequacy” *gURL* caricatured cultural beauty standards to send “the message that women are good enough as they are”, disabling “gender stereotypes” through satirization and “encoura[ing] self-confidence in their female readers” (Ladendorf 124). Breasts have been so culturally sexualized that their mere appearance induces discomfort for general readership. *gURL* pushed beyond awkward into abject, presenting breasts as plates of inedible food. Lisa Gerrard explains this tactic of battling digital objectification by describing it as an practiced “inversion” of "disparaging images”, where images with sensual connotations are undermined by unaesthetic reality (42). Candid conversations about navigating unfamiliar bodily changes were rare and at best ridiculed. Through compassionate confession, *gURL* encouraged a more accepting perspective of what a ‘girl’ means. Parody freed the publication from binary expectation.

Recognizing that physical experience is intrinsically connected with creative output, gURLs openly embraced an innate context “of the traumatized girl body. The grrrl body, the girl writer, like any other authorial position, is a site of gender, racial, and sexual struggle” (Comstock 389). Creators strived to reframe the body in a variety of contexts - disembodied boobs, recovery comradery. Online gURL spaces rebuked silence by constructing an infinite amount of cyberspace to speak without fear. Published in the same column as Help Me Heather, *gURL* featured a separate page entirely devoted to “gURL sexuality”. Offered projects ranged from an article about identifying vaginal discharge –“it may sound like a disease, but it’s just business as usual!”– to an interactive point-and-click game about dealing with sexual harassment from strangers on the street (2005).[10] Out of every gURL project observed, a vast majority

[10] Although the link was archived in 2005, *gURL’s* ‘Street Hassle’ game was published well before that. As the publication took on a more commercial model, their ‘games’ were less satirical subversion and more oriented towards product and pleasure. ‘Street Hassle’ remained on the site as an emblem of its political prototype.

provided some amount of sexual education to their readership. Over on *ChickClick*,[11] writer Mariel Garzia published an advice article about being pressured to have sex. She bravely began with a personal anecdote, admitting that "I finally just let him touch me, even though I didn't like it…it didn't occur to me until much later that I could have just said no - and meant it" (2001).

Garzia's article took on a distinctly academic tone. By citing various authors and educators throughout the essay, Garzia hosted space both for self-input and serious, peer-reviewed resource provision. Her assumed audience was primarily composed of young girls. Instead of simplifying her argument for palatability, Garzia respected her readers enough to walk them through difficult, critical analysis. The tact she exhibited in discussing such a serious subject is admirable. Garzia elaborated that "saying no to unwanted sexual advances gets tougher when you're constantly hit with images of sex…you have to know exactly what you want - or don't want - to do sexually" as opposed to pushing a generalized abstinence or 'just say no' message, then typical in conventional education on taboo topics (2001). According to Garzia, the masked villain of sexual assault is a culture that both restricts female sexuality and expects easy sex. Her gURL solution: "...tap into your power…your personal power. The power to say and mean yes or no, and to control your own body…most importantly, the power that girls would have if they would just band together and not accept sexual aggression from boys or slam on each other as sluts."

The article acted as an introduction to a broader discussion of the topic with further pages of user-based responses on their personal experiences following after. Readers built off Garzia's nuanced base and were able to engage with oft-forbidden ideas. As Comstock observes, "school literacies rarely provide the tools and knowledges for constructing [a forum], especially as it

[11] The article was specifically published in *MissClick*, *ChickClick*'s section intended for a younger audience.

relates to violence and sexuality" (390). The havens gURLs coded online filled a critical hole left open by mainstream sources.

The body politic extended heavily into the realm of disordered eating. GrrlzHealth, a subpage on *cybergrrlz.com*, called users to submit "health related" articles (2000). On April 7, 2000, a 14-year-old American girl named Tory published an essay titled 'A look in the mirror'. The essay tracked the rapid progression of her restrictive diet inspired by "something as small as" looking in the mirror. Tory heavily reduced her caloric intake as a play for emotional control; in the end, "the 'diet' I was on made me so much sadder than before I started". She ended with a call-to-action for her fellow readers, urging girls to not follow in her footsteps. "You think you are making yourself happy by starving yourself, but really you are just losing yourself", an intuitive remark atypical from the expected stereotypical teenage girl.

The next week, another 14-year-old - Katie - responded. "I read this past week's essay on anorexia and I wanted to share my story… I saw these 'popular' girls in 8th grade. They were all thin and gorgeous and dressed at Abercrombie…" As the article continued, Katie further dissected her intense bodily insecurities. Her constant comparing led her down a dark path, a path closely resembling Tory's prior article. Katie concluded with a plea to not "get caught up in shallow expectations. Popularity only lasts for a breif [sic] time" (2000). Neither knew the other offline. Nor did they actually engage in any public conversation; the two essays could be considered digital bathroom scrawl of one girl reaching out to another, the Net dimension allowing for conversation to be nonsequential and unending. Tory's public ownership of her struggles with insecurity opened the door for Katie - and presumably many others - to air her own experiences in a similar manner. Their interaction is an example of "collective textual action", a radical tactic Jaqueline Rhodes argues computers have a unique potential to promote.

GrrlzHealth "demand[s] some action" by requesting reader-written articles as "a political imperative", one where girls will commune on ideas and ruminate on gendered restrictions (129).[12]

smileandactnice.com/news, archived 04/29/2001.

Sometimes, this political imperative was more explicit. *Smileandactnice.com*, a gURL zine with the motto 'in girls we trust', published a 2000 article titled "ELIZABETH DOLE FOR PRESIDENT: It's a woman thing". Louisa C. Brinsmade pled her case by arguing that despite her Democrat status she's "converting for this one race…going to contribute to the cause…" of electing a female president regardless of her political affiliation. Brinsmade struck a balanced approach between satire and serious deliberation, honestly dissecting the puppet-theater display of early-millenium American politics. Her rage over gender restrictions led her to a personally

[12] When *cybergrrlz* moved production to *purplepjs* circa 2001, the GrrlzHealth page was replaced with a section titled 'Health Nut'. Edited by a 13-year-old Alberta-native named Bunny, the page's overall health promotion was much less balanced. Users began submitting single paragraph questions to be responded to by the page editor rather than independently posting source-backed articles. Majority of said questions were about whether the user was a healthy weight for their age and height.

impactful party shift in preparation for the 2000 election; Elizabeth Dole, contrasted by the much coyer Hillary Clinton, reflected that anger in her policy action. Brinsmade tributed Dole's polarizing figure whilst parodying her, actively negotiating the inherent contradictions to gURL authorship. Said authorship "oozes over the boundaries" of appropriate political discourse and expected voter reasoning, instead appreciating "a contradictory body out of control" (Comstock 389). As Brinsmade closed out the essay, "I really, really love Liddy's rise to the year 2000 challenge…all the bad people will be dragged before the public and tortured slowly one by delicious one. Now that's what I call a good war" (2000). The "bobbing-and-weaving", cutting from argument to rebuke to an in-person conversation, was an essential element to the "literacies made available by Web technology" - an "in-your-face attention to politics and textual form" uniquely digital (Rhodes 129).

To the left of Brinsmade's article was an advertisement for the in-site chat forum, where readers could submit responses as to whether Brinsmade's appeal worked. Listed directly below were the results from a 'DOLE POLL', where 58% of site visitors said they would vote for Dole.[13] The collective was prioritized over singular positioning. The publication actively promoted a nuanced dialogue about American politics, their motivation being education rather than affirmation. The open-source dynamic is completely different from traditional publications, in which academic and experience barriers typically remove teenage girls from the debate stage. *Smileandactnice* understood that effective political education cannot take occur without audience investment. As Comstock writes, "…in their infiltration of a mostly male World Wide Web, grrrl writers and designers teach us that authorship is not a fixed or completely predetermined category but a site of collective struggle and interactivity" (388).

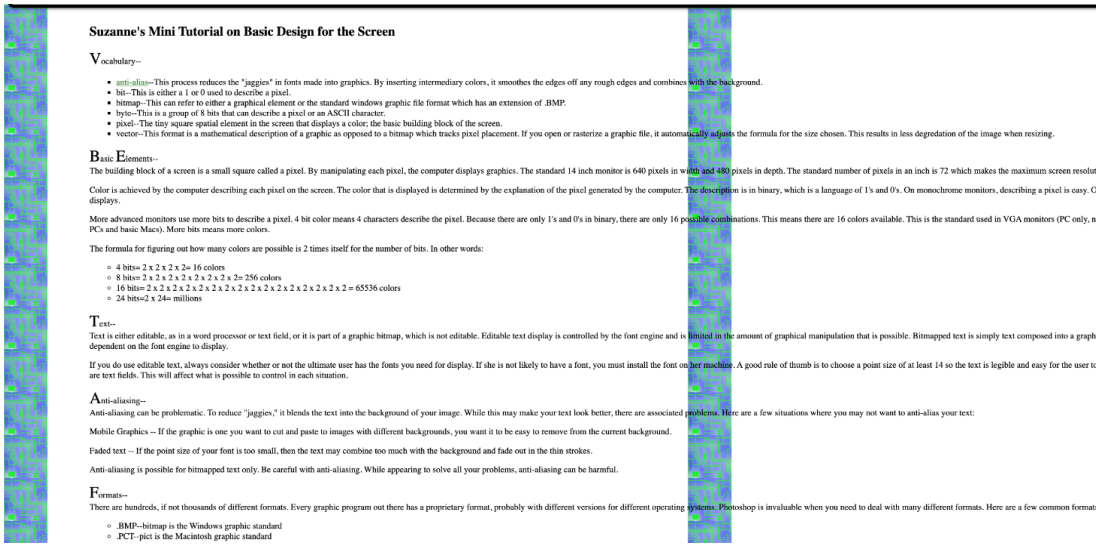
[13] Elizabeth Dole dropped out of the 2000 presidential race fairly early on due to a lack of support. It is difficult to discern whether or not a majority of this 58% was ironic.

"Girls connecting across geographic boundaries to build coalitions" is a recurring theme, with "female political solitary" critical to accomplishing the gURL mission (Takayoshi 104). As with the live discussions hosted by *cybergrrlz*, gURL sites were often where a user first engaged with politics. For *teengrrl.com*, high school senior Jessica Bopp provided a hyperlink list of political resources. Their minimalist layout placed this routine political column at the top. Bopp advocated for "plain janes" to become "political activists" by way of self-directed, virtual research. The article covered a variety of sources, including government affiliated links to, for example, the U.S. House of Representatives. Bopp also highlighted personal favorites, coloring a listicle tone with internal preference. All were non-profit, bipartisan organizations. Like Brinsmade, Bopp used her positions as a peer to promote political intervention. She approached her audience amicably and refrained from putting down their potential anxieties through openly admitting that "many girls avoid political discussions…I know I often do". Her friendly perspective made palatable a message that, as she self-identified, is otherwise avoided "like the plague". The article functions similarly to a second-wave feminist document due to its relative "urgency - the feeling…because *somebody* [sic] had to do it" (Rhodes 129). This is accomplished by combining "a resource site…with the ever-changing association of hypertext links [and] visitors" (129). Bopp might have provided a list of predetermined resources, but the article was no way comprehensive. There remained an implication that users should search out political information on their own terms, urged on by Bopp's affirmation that "it is OUR world, no matter how screwed up it seems sometimes." (2000).

The content featured by these e-zines and their varied contributors manifested multidisciplinary feminist ideals. Taking their talk online, girls were able to subvert the male-dominated fields of industrialized technology and publication. The structure of a zine -

self-made, self-moderated - allowed “...young women to have a space to themselves…” providing “...an excellent alternative to the artificial or external creation of a physical space for young people to 'get together', where they can in fact be watched and monitored” (Harris 48). Through the Internet, community was as accessible as ever. Girls began to generate personal sites off the backs of larger e-feminist URLs. Separatist spaces were easy to access and augment. Many gURL sites included a beginner guide to web-mastering.

Simultaneously a manual and a “textual invocation of identity and purpose” (Rhodes 133), the basic HTML/CSS enabled wholly independent self-production. “A gURL Guide to HTML” took users step-by-step through the craft and customization of a personal site. After taking a tour through font styles, link attributes, and basic formatting tips, gURL asks their reader to “sit back and appreciate [your work] for a moment. Consider its impact, meditate upon its impact” (2000). Nowhere did the guide treat its reader like an experienced programmer; the barrier-to-entry was non-existent. Rather than perpetuate harmful stereotypes about gender-based technophobia, gURL projects actively encouraged girls to “be involved in making decisions about technology, both for their sake and for the sake of technology” (Takayoshi 95).



Suzanne's Mini Tutorial on Basic Design for the Screen

Vocabulary--

- anti-alias--This process reduces the "jaggies" in fonts made into graphics. By inserting intermediary colors, it smoothes the edges off any rough edges and combines with the background.
- bit--This is either a 1 or 0 used to describe a pixel.
- bitmap--This can refer to either a graphical element or the standard windows graphic file format which has an extension of .BMP.
- byte--This is a group of 8 bits that can describe a pixel or an ASCII character.
- pixel--The tiny square spatial element in the screen that displays a color; the basic building block of the screen.
- vector--This format is a mathematical description of a graphic as opposed to a bitmap which tracks pixel placement. If you open or rasterize a graphic file, it automatically adjusts the formula for the size chosen. This results in less degredation of the image when resizing.

Basic Elements--

The building block of a screen is a small square called a pixel. By manipulating each pixel, the computer displays graphics. The standard 14 inch monitor is 640 pixels in width and 480 pixels in depth. The standard number of pixels in an inch is 72 which makes the maximum screen resolut

Color is achieved by the computer describing each pixel on the screen. The color that is displayed is determined by the explanation of the pixel generated by the computer. The description is in binary, which is a language of 1's and 0's. On monochrome monitors, describing a pixel is easy. C displays.

More advanced monitors use more bits to describe a pixel. 4 bit color means 4 characters describe the pixel. Because there are only 1's and 0's in binary, there are only 16 possible combinations. This means there are 16 colors available. This is the standard used in VGA monitors (PC only, n PCs and basic Macs). More bits means more colors.

The formula for figuring out how many colors are possible is 2 times itself for the number of bits. In other words:

- 4 bits= 2 x 2 x 2 x 2= 16 colors
- 8 bits= 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2= 256 colors
- 16 bits= 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 = 65536 colors
- 24 bits=2 x 24= millions

Text--

Text is either editable, as in a word processor or text field, or it is part of a graphic bitmap, which is not editable. Editable text display is controlled by the font engine and is limited in the amount of graphical manipulation that is possible. Bitmapped text is simply text composed into a graph dependent on the font engine to display.

If you do use editable text, always consider whether or not the ultimate user has the fonts you need for display. If she is not likely to have a font, you must install the font on her machine. A good rule of thumb is to choose a point size of at least 14 so the text is legible and easy for the user to are text fields. This will affect what is possible to control in each situation.

Anti-aliasing--

Anti-aliasing can be problematic. To reduce "jaggies," it blends the text into the background of your image. While this may make your text look better, there are associated problems. Here are a few situations where you may not want to anti-alias your text:

Mobile Graphics -- If the graphic is one you want to cut and paste to images with different backgrounds, you want it to be easy to remove from the current background.

Faded text -- If the point size of your font is too small, then the text may combine too much with the background and fade out in the thin strokes.

Anti-aliasing is possible for bitmapped text only. Be careful with anti-aliasing. While appearing to solve all your problems, anti-aliasing can be harmful.

Formats--

There are hundreds, if not thousands of different formats. Every graphic program out there has a proprietary format, probably with different versions for different operating systems. Photoshop is invaluable when you need to deal with many different formats. Here are a few common formats

- .BMP--bitmap is the Windows graphic standard
- .PCT--pict is the Macintosh graphic standard

geekgirl.com, archived 02/21/99.

The methods by which gURLs avoided third-party interference ebbed and flowed. They were "...constantly evading the state's attempt to take over their spaces in the interests of incorporating them into traditional notions of active citizenship…", akin to the riot grrrls escaping mass-market publication through the affiliation with 'womens' magazines. In order to preserve their spaces there was "...a constant to and fro between trying to open up their underground or virtual sites for other young women and trying to keep them safe from surveillance", evidenced by various ezines promoting 'members-only' spaces or email registration (Harris 48).

Coded language was a common preventative tactic against unwanted audience members. Unlike zine distribution, the Internet is universal; next to password-locking a personal site, gURLs had to get creative. Young women performed a similar surgery to the riot grrrls by exchanging 'girl' for 'gURL'. The second letter is subverted "to filter out those seeking to buy young women as schoolgirl pornography" (48). It didn't hurt that URL was also the abbreviation for Uniform Resource Locator, or a standardized web address. The term quickly gained in popularity due to its colloquially digital double-meaning. Some inherited the orthographic 'grrrl' or the intentionally-shortened 'grrl'.[14]

More explicitly defamatory language was also frequently subverted. Australian artist Rosie Cross coined her alias 'geekgirl' in the early 1990s, canceling out a double negative connotation by combining both (2004). Geekgirl Global grew from a self-made site into a global conference for femme-identifying computer nerds, and Cross's impact crossed between material

[14] As put by Marcia of *grrl.com*: "I'm missing that extra 'r' for a reason sister. I don't feel like having this site be grouped with any political and sociological thang that gets on the cover of Newsweek" (1996).

boundaries. Regardless of grammatical fluctuations, varying 'girl' versions were all attempts to usurp "the culturally-defined images of girls and take charge of the act of defining…avoiding belittling representations of what it means to be female…" (Takayoshi 97). Another form of avoiding supervision - and an incredible movement in the digital art space - was intentional visual aesthetic decision.

Given the amount of previous example graphics, the general gURL aesthetic might have already caught some notice. To be clear: each document exists as an independent artwork based on specific design decisions. The underlying political ideology perpetuated by gURL projects is what places them in direct comparison and contrast. Devoting thorough analysis to common iconography is necessary not only for archival purposes but for the aforementioned integral connection between message and medium.[15]

A multilayer language began to develop between gURLs. The outer crust layer comprised more general Net trends, a period of play characterized by Olia Lialina as a 'Vernacular Web'.[16] Internet users coalesced around certain dialectic signifiers, universal beyond site topic or programmer affiliation. GIFs, for instance, proliferated virtual reality; gURL sites regularly deployed them as category icons or in editorial introductions. The only surviving visual element of *Skirt! Magazine* is their .gif logo, where the title was turned into a long-lashed, winking eye (1999).

[15] As previously referenced, net artist Olia Lialina published a critical essay on the subversive nature of site creation in 2019. "From My to Me" originates in her personal work as a digital archivist, reviving thousands of Geocities home pages for the sake of proper documentation.
[16] Lialina delves further in a three-part lecture series of the same title. She identifies specific elements (ex. construction-oriented GIFS) and dissects their sociocultural meaning in both a past and present context.

Structurally speaking, frame and table attributes were popular organizational tools. Largely considered obsolete by contemporary coders,[17] the HTML <iframe> tag enabled scrolling for certain elements whilst keeping others static. The *Disgruntled Housewife* landing page is divided into two separate windows of writing and site directory. Both can be scrolled independently, allowing a user to peruse site offerings whilst automatically engaging with their latest post (1998). The <table> element could be divided into infinite column and row combinations, lending an easy skeleton for amateurs to build upon. The majority of gURL sites utilized this scaffolding and separated content into either two or three columns. Using *chickclick.com* as a primary example, the zine siphoned new posts to the right and promoted fellow e-zines on the left. Considering *chickclick* is more of an aggregate than wholly separate publication, the rudimentary rectangular system accommodates for faster, instantly accessible updates. Subpages were often identically formatted; link accessibility was prized over aesthetic experimentation.

[17] HTML 5, the latest and last version of markup-language accepted by major web platforms, does not support the <frame> tag. While the element still works where previously implemented, it is on the verge of extinction.

chickclick.com, archived 12/06/1998.

Not all gURLs opted into the standard HTML structure. Prior to their 2000 redesign, *gurl.com* released each 'issue' as a borderless cluster of hand-drawn GIFs. A bubble-lettered 'CONTENTS' label was the sun around which all other subcategories rotated. This format extended into each section, where said contents were displayed in a similarly non-linear fashion. Unlike a physical zine, consumed by flipping chronological pages, *gurl.com* embraced Net liminality and presented each publication as a muscular system open for anatomical study. Referring to site updates as 'issue releases' was intentionally ironic. Irony has demonstrated a history as a critical tool for feminist rebuke. As Martina Ladendorf relates the concept to gURL practices, irony "puts an issue to question without openly challenging" (136). Despite relying on print terminology, *gURL* balked at every opportunity to visually conform. The rejection of visual standardization work to expand the definitions of a previously restrictive medium.

gurl.com/GURL3, archived 01/19/97.

The section headers themselves - similar to *Skirt! Magazine* - were hand-drawn, animated images. Each thematically resonated with the category content and remained unchanged between issues. The images referenced common girl-oriented iconography in a simultaneous embrace of familiar associations and re-engineering of stereotypical connotations. The column "Looks Aren't Everything" - subheaded by "a love/hate look at beauty culture" - was accessible by a .gif of a mascara-ed eye within a handheld mirror. The single eye winked back at the reader, possessing an otherwise inanimate object. The playful animation acknowledged the structural insecurities of self-reflection. Anita Harris, returning to her concept of girl websites as their pseudo 'e-bedrooms', clarifies the cutesy connotations are intentional. Often "... young women themselves try to disguise their spaces…sometimes playing this up by using the language of

girls' private play and the intimate world of girlhood that (hopefully) is of no consequence or interest to the state or advertisers" (48).

Each hypertext document was embedded in a purposeful playset of girl-adjacent imagery, toeing the line between abject satirization and affectionate mimicry. One offer from "Looks Aren't Everything" was a 'virtual makeover' section where users submitted photos of themselves to be "mangled" by gURL editors. Not "to make the girls better looking" but to recontextualize style "around fantasy and playfulness instead of necessity" (Ladendorf 133). Another titled 'Paper Doll Psychology' analyzed a reader's mental state based off their digital outfit choices. Although paper dolls have existed for centuries, their contemporary iteration most often comes in the form of advertising material or magazine cut-out. Paper dolls are frequently featured in 'girls' magazines' as a method for girls to imagine themselves in an idealized body. *gURL* continued their print subversion through the reference, peeling back layers of a common toy to examine its deeper, gendered implications. "You don't think you wear those clothes just because you LIKE them, do you?" ask Rebecca and Esther, two gURL editors, when introducing the interactive game. "If clothes don't make up the girl, they at least make up a little bit of what people think about her" (1997).

Another commonly hand-drawn element of gURL publications were their logos. An essential distinction: gURL logos were not (at first) commercial entities. Instead, these distinct images sought to encompass all aspects of the site, furthering visibility. Many featured the logos of sister sites on their homepages akin to a membership badge. The *cybergrrlz* logo is the only .png to last through a decade of site updates. The zine maintained a minimalist aesthetic and expressed itself through the singular design. It is a crudely drawn image of a girl laying in front of her monitor, legs kicked up behind her. Girl and monitor are at the same level as one another.

She surfs in a position that evokes journaling or a practice similarly self-oriented. She feels no need to perform. Returning to Gerrard: the *cybergrrl*, emblematic of the project as a whole, does not offer herself as "an aesthetic or sexual spectacle" (43).

cybergrrlz.com logo, archived 06/10/00.

Missclick, the teen-specific *chickclick* subpage, featured explicitly figure-based mascots. At the top left, a school-aged character waves to her audience. Her face is impish and her posture relaxed, implying she and the reader are on a similar level of insider knowledge. An ordinary girl, barrettes and backpack included. Although not explicitly labeled, the character is clearly the personification of Miss Click herself. Her bottom half is pictured on the site's right side. She is bent at the knees, anticipating quick movement. The racial ambiguity of Miss Click distinguishes her from a majority of gURL drawn characters. Although some sites (*gurl.com*) intentionally tried to depict a broad range of girl-adjacent identities, non-white audiences were left visually bereft. ChickClick was a collective vehicle of girls reading and writing; by opting to not identify editors and instead associating all underneath the same 'mascot', the site succeeds in unique usership fusion.

ChickClick missclick header, archived 01/18/01.

For sites that did choose to feature a general 'masthead' or 'editor's page', publishing personal photographs was common practice. Real pictures were rarely uploaded other than in this specific context. How permanent an Internet footprint could be was not yet common knowledge. Naivety aside, the general 'unprofessionalism' of most headshots should be considered as another example of print subversion. Akin to the editorial board of *teengrrl.com* discussed previously, *riotgrrl.com* provided similar background for each site contributor. Such a typical introduction contrasts the general "ideological resistance to the logic of primacy and coherence", providing a standardized biography typically required from traditional publications (Rhodes 135). As displayed in the image below, the *riotgrrl* biographies were mainly self-promotion. Hyperlinks directed back to the editor's independent product rather than an outer web of knowledge. Striking a balance between "the politics of anti-commercial feminist movements..with the pro-technology, capitalist ideologies of the Web" required gURL writers to uphold both private and public requisites for maintaining a sustainable web space (Comstock 403). For *riotgrrl*, this meant breaking down the barrier between columnist and reader through an 'interact' interface: a forum where all would engage in equal discussion (1999). [18]

[18] Out of all provided gURL examples, *riotgrrl.com* was arguably the most commercially motivated. Some site aspects, such as their 'riot grrl' resource guide, fully embodies their anti-establishment roots. The tension between riot grrl as a movement and riot grrl as a trademark of Last Resort Designs (listed in the site footer) complicates the masthead further. Eventually, the site devolved into affiliate marketing links.

riotgrrl.com, archived 04/28/99.

Although gURLs approached site creation in a variety of different ways, the underlining mission - to make safe digital spaces for young women - stayed constant. Within the short span of a decade, thousands of teenage girls took to the Internet. They acted as web developer, reporter, editor, and artist. They forged international communities based on a mutual optimism for ambitious digital and gender liberation.

But the Internet is a complicated, commercial environment. This first chapter has detailed at length the various revolutionary modes of communication introduced by the World Wide Web. The next chapter will delve further into its shadow side. As gURLs continued to tightrope between activism and advertisement, their original intentions - and the Internet itself - completely deteriorated.

CHAPTER TWO: GURLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN(DING)

In 2009, after purchasing GeoCities for $4.6 billion a decade prior, parent company Yahoo! terminated the wildly popular web server overnight. An estimated 3.5 million sites were lost within seconds (Scott 2009). Although GeoCities comprised only a small portion of the self-made Internet, its abrupt closure was a microcosm for wider trends toward total deletion.

When comparing the gURLs to past counter-culture movements, their surrender under economic pressure seems inevitable. The riot grrrls, their closest relatives, experienced a similar erosion. However, gURL sites were not the sole targets of a gender-based backlash. As the World Wide Web conformed to a commercial infrastructure, an entire amateur environment was deforested. Academic retrospectives commonly refer to this event as 'Web 1.0' becoming 'Web 2.0', the former being a static text-based system and the latter a social one. The terminology is reductive. 'Web 2.0' did not invent novel social pathways. So-called 'Web 1.0' was exceptionally collaborative, as evidenced by the expansive gURL neural networks. Freely accessible examples of positive personalization encouraged a generation to hyperlink their own experiences back and forth across the Net.

Comradery is core to zine production, a foundational layer for Web 1.0 as a productive ecosystem. The optimism of automatic publication and novel interactivity also injured gURL longevity. Then-fledging Silicon Valley start-ups caught wind of the profit potential from communicating online. Jacqueline Rhodes mentions this shift as early as 2002 when acknowledging that while "internet technology lends itself to temporary literacies…increasing commodification, copyright legislation, and anti-content laws, suggest that the network may soon become inimical to social activism" (135). Methods previously unmonetized were packaged and promoted as a simpler "way to share" without having to "spend [your] time customizing [your]

own page" so the pitch reads, laid plain by Yahoo! 'technological evangelist' Tom Hughes-Croucher following Geocities' demolition (Grabham 2009). That a user should have substantial agency over their own online presence seemed ludicrous. The "slow poisoning of the public Internet", in the words of tech journalist Parminder Jeet Singh, went unchecked for too long (2010: 18). Ambivalent government agencies released legal parameters for the glory of a 'free market', not acknowledging that a non-neutral Internet actively suppresses innovation.[19] Distribution limitations emerged as a result of increasingly sponsored search engines, an artificial barrier in contrast to the natural hindrances of circulating print publications. The industry dogma 'move fast and break things' is emblematic of a general antagonism towards sustainable development and, conversely, a callous motive for social Internet. Interestingly, the motto originated within a fetal Facebook - arguably the most infamous 'social network'.[20]

A climate check on the current Internet exposes that since the sunsetting of so-called 'Web 1.0', digital oppression has been systematically scaffolded into its social infrastructure. Social networking opportunities are restricted to a dubious coalition of applications who demand payment in exchange for free communication. Over the course of the past two decades, personal websites have been recategorized as career development tools. Site builders like Wix and Squarespace advertise a frictionless construction process, wherein all back-end labor is obscured - unknown - to users. Vague aspirations towards kinship are less rule, more ruse. Meta, a tech company valued at over $1.5 trillion dollars, purports to "build the future of human connection", tracing its virtues all the way back to their 2004 launch of Facebook, claiming to have "changed the way people

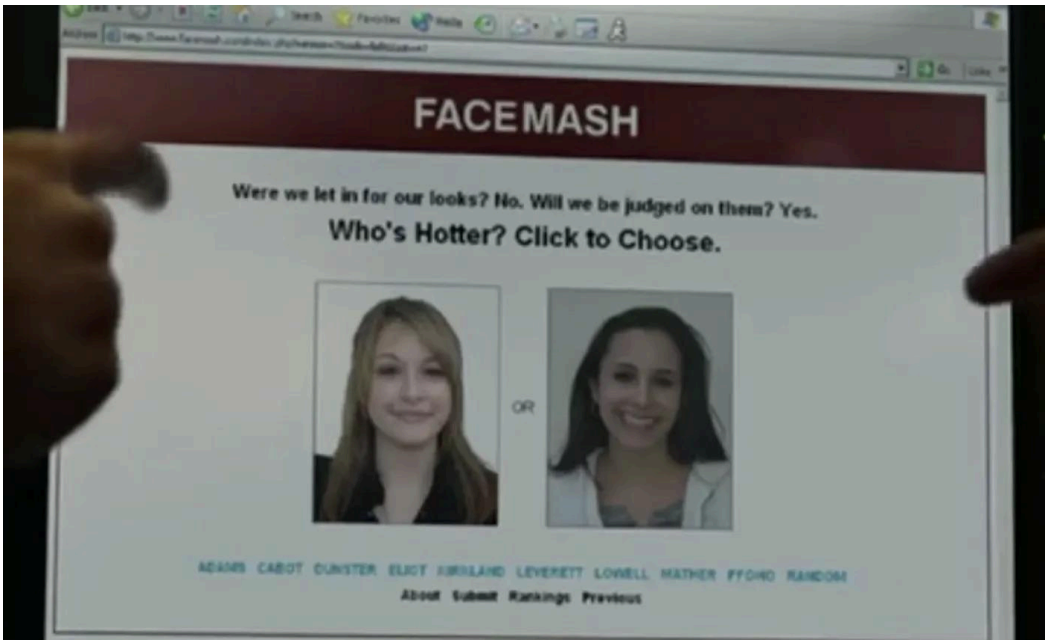
[19] In 2017, the FCC rolled back Obama-era net regulations and demoted jurisdiction to the state-level. As of 2026, any reintroduced policies have been overturned.I was thirteen at the time; the demolition of our Net Neutrality Act radicalized me.

[20] Later on, a screenshot from the 2010 film *The Social Network* is featured as evidence of FaceMash's existence. *The Social Network* tells a semi-fictionalized account of Mark Zuckerberg's rise to infamy. Said film provides the only visual example of what/how FaceMash looked; there is no actual proof of its architecture still publicly accessible.

connect" (Meta 2025). Their boast is not incorrect; the social network *did* change the way people connected, specifically by restructuring online engagement into an obstacle course.

Facebook was predated by its less ethical sibling Facemash, a website that featured "photos compiled from the online facebooks of nine [Harvard] houses, placing two next to each other at a time and asking users to choose the 'hotter' person" (Kaplan 2003). Zuckerberg was a college undergraduate at the time. Recall that the gURL founders were also university students. All had access to the same technologies, yet their inventions drastically differ from one another. Both purported to be social networks. Out of the two, Facebook is the one who took advantage of a user's private information - quite literally their facial profile - for profit.[21] Although Meta has since sterilized this origin story, both Facebook and Facemash are inarguably the bastard brainchildren of CEO Mark Zuckerberg. Modern Meta products are not independent of their forebearers. The company continues to prioritize its inherited sexist infrastructure, eliminating content moderation and internal diversity programs (Duffy 2025).

[21] At the origin. By the time gURL was bought by Seventeen Magazine and reduced to data collection, its three founders had long-since left.



A fictionalized depiction of the *Facemash* homepage (The Social Network, 2010).

Social networks subsist on a standard userbase, facilitated both structurally and visually. As 'girls' magazines' were to Riotgrrrl zines, social networks are highly controlled environments in comparison to self-made websites. Each maintains a uniform aesthetic code. Think of Instagram, a Meta application, with its tri-cube structure and limited orientation formats. Think of X (formerly Twitter), with its character restrictions and minimal customization. That X, once considered a vital news source, has now become a hub for political violence and conspiracy should caution online citizens against overreliance on manufactured social platforms. After technocapitalist Elon Musk purchased the company in 2022, the recognized atmosphere and ambition transformed almost instantly. The majority of its users were caught off-guard by the relative ease of his deconstruction, losing their primary tool of communication - and, for some, financial stability - without a breath of retribution. Unfortunately, Musk converting X from social network to soapbox was inevitable. Without tangible agency over the online lands we inhabit, colonization is to be expected. The rigidity inherent to social networking sites, in the words of

Kim Barker and Olga Jurasz, "acts as an echo chamber for those with anti-feminist agendas…encourag[ing] ideas that are acceptable only to those who 'shout the loudest'" (98 2019).

The main rot root is subtler than explicit misogyny. Hegemonic culture promotes routine self-discipline, and social sites only amplify this harmful dynamic. Akane Kanai identifies the progression from Girl Power to an individualistic focus on upward mobility as through a "mutual surveillance…within which identity is practiced" enforced by the exclusionary scaffolding of most social medias (91). Third-party tools that request/require intense user interactivity reinforce neo-liberal concepts like self commodification, as an individual must perform for an audience of unknown number or origin (96).

It is unsurprising that general antagonism towards female-centric virtual spaces has only intensified. Simultaneously, so has the need for such spaces. There are few options for a female user seeking comradery and creative freedom. When considering contemporary attempts, projects lean in two directions: career-focused or creative-focused. Both attempt to build coalition. Both embrace the visual 'DIY' qualities of past gURL webzines. The majority focus on the economic and demographic benefits that are generated when young femmes connect with computers.

A primary example is Girls Who Code, an international non-profit organization, that functions as an auxiliary computer science course for communities otherwise unreached. While increasing diversity in the workplace is a necessary ambition, Girls Who Code is nowhere near embracing the self-made and spontaneous ethos of past gURL sites. Their intention is not a pure introduction to the emancipating powers of programming. GWC makes clear they are

career-centric. Their ‘About Us’ page identifies three core values, the last being activism; GWC describes this as “not just preparing our girls to enter the workforce - we’re preparing them to lead it” (GWC). Career development is not the sole solution to deconstructing coded oppression. The companies have immense jurisdiction over web action. Being a woman and going to work for one of them will not solve deeply systemic and systematic issues.

Girls Who Code promotional materials communicate through an old-net aesthetic, embracing the collage tactics of earlier gURL projects but leaving the politics behind. The contradictory dynamic between their industrial focus and their chosen visual language further underlines the gaping gURL-shaped hole in the contemporary web. To celebrate the organization’s ten-year anniversary, Girls Who Code hosted a three-day ‘Codefair’ in March 2024. The event homepage features bright, eccentric web-safe colors and pixel art, haphazardly placed to mimic the unregulated design of a past Net. Even the cursor is costumed. The Codefair schedule leaves little room for non-commercial creative development. Some activities offered include “The NFT Art Studio” sponsored by the banking platform Synchrony and “Color Code Your Vibe”, where girls can “get a unique digital color palette” to “apply to your personal brand, or choose your next nail color” (2024). The ‘girl-ification’ of tech conference standards pedestals stereotypically femme interests while eliminating any nuance or critical engagement. Finally, the girl coder is hollowed out into girl consumer. Maintaining a healthy relationship with daily technology is not an autonomous goal but a potential byproduct of becoming an ideal worker.

Marketing tie-ins and motivated sponsors proliferate the Girls Who Code site. The blatant economic backing is not unusual. As Web 2.0 took hold, final-stage gURL sites deteriorated into ad pages. Many were absorbed into institutional strongholds years before the death of Geocities heralded a new era of Internet. In fact, there reveals arguable lineage between the two

girl-focused digital communities: a profit motive. The main neutralizing agent was internal site-creation. gURLs had become eager teachers for movement proliferation, often featuring intersite how-tos and margin design tips. A user guide published to *gURL.com* opens with an appealing scenario: "So you just read through all the new stuff on the site and now you want to post a shout out to the folks at gURL" (1999). By publishing accessible HTML guides, *gURL* encouraged both open-source information and user interactivity. With the introduction of 'the gURL connection', the site began prioritizing audience integration as opposed to independent, off-shoot creation. *ChickClick* and *gURL.com* both featured heavy promotion of their respective containment features through which "...girls [could] easily join a wide-reaching and vibrant online community" by removing technical and social barriers-to-entry. Although the sites maintained "a resistant kind of writing", contradictory advertising and content ownership guidelines simultaneously perpetuated "certain forms of anti-feminist ideology".

On *gURL.com*, users were confronted with "advertising every step of the way", from hotel discounts to menstrual products (Duncan & Leander, 2000). As early as 1998, two years beyond its initialization, the *gURL.com* homepage devoted a significant amount of screen space to affiliate links. The site had been purchased by clothing retailer Delia's years before, inevitably evolving into a pseudo-circular (Ryan, 1999). Terminology once utilized as a bulwark became a battering ram, targeting "women as consumers instead of as agents of social change" (Rhodes 131). *Cybergrrl* promoted itself as a proprietor of femme solidarity. In reality, the site openly admitted to curating traffic for advertising purposes primarily; "Clients have the opportunity for broad exposure in our wide range of online ventures with features like chat, forums, webcasting…" (1999). Previous corporate sponsorships included deals with shady cosmetic

schemer Avon and Chase Online.[22] Creating a site on 'the gURL connection' was free and one could click *gURL.org* without spending a cent. All the while, user data was being unconsciously traded. That kind of currency is common now. But the gURLs, preaching political freedom and self-expression, were taking advantage of the structural harms they purported to deconstruct. Sites became "spaces of both resistance and conformity" accumulating "contrived interpretations…that mediate behavior and…inform participants' outlooks" rather than encourage autonomous identity development (Duncan & Leander 2000). For the small fee of surveillance, girls could access what they could code independently. In other words, the pigs began to look a lot more like people. *gURL.com* now automatically redirects to *Seventeen Magazine.* That alone is evidence enough.

The desire for a girl-centric digital space never disappeared. Women were coding to revive the movement even before its last breath. *Slackgirls*, a digital zine spear-headed by two college-aged women, despairs over "the whole *'grrl site that's also a really friendly tampon company'* invasion" on their 'about' page (2000). The relief inspired by their frank recognition of gURL commercialization quickly dissipates upon realizing that *Slackgirls* vanishes from the net less than a year afterwards. The e-zine demonstrates a common pitfall of amateur projects: abandonment. Without sustenance from a broader, thriving community, self-made sites are often finite.

Unfortunately, recent attempts to revive this modality are sparse. A rudimentary search through Neocities, a Geocities descendant that hosts approximately 1.5 million static sites (Belanger, 2026), dredges meager results. To be located in the database, creators must tag their sites with relevant keywords. As of January 2026, 20 sites internally identify as 'riotgrrrl'. The

[22] Surprisingly, Chase Bank seems to be the only financial institution who did *not* sponsor the Girls Who Code 2024 conference.

majority are largely incomplete or entirely abandoned. One with considerable code appears to be a historical timeline rather than a movement work itself. ‘Girl’ and ‘girls’ contain within their results a plethora of sites dedicated to artificially-generated or anime pornography. The polarity recalls Dr. Pamela Takayoshi’s point, when she observed in 1999 that “the result of using the girl search term is a representation of the Web as a male domain where girls exist only as objects for men to consume” (97).

Two decades later, conditions have not improved. This depressing exercise is only escalated when taken to externally-based search engines. Google is flooded by commercial sites whose product promotion leans on popular slang terms like ‘that girl’ or ‘it girl’ to successfully engage the algorithm. The top result for ‘grrrl websites’ is a sportswear brand (GRRRL Clothing). ‘Career-driven women’ and ‘girly-girls’ can page through site after site of guides centered on pop culture and consumption. The “consumerist society immersed in complex youth advertising campaigns”, as warned of by Duncan and Leander, has completely subsumed any ‘girl’ subversions (2000). ‘Girl’ itself has abandoned all cultural specificity. Trendy hashtag names like ‘girl dinner’ and ‘girl math’ begin as attempts at reclamation but quickly give into furthering an etymological degradation. ‘Girl dinner’, for example, originated in young women posting meals made for one. Filling despite being aesthetically unpleasant, ‘girl dinner’ stood contradictory to assumptions about women and their place behind a kitchen stove. The hashtag quickly devolved into a viral method for promoting barren snack plates as full fuel replacements; to be a girl is to eat little or nothing at all.

Actual spaces for the emotional and artistic development of *girls* have been replaced by listicles with an audience of *women*. Sites that purport to focus on a younger audience are often STEM-related, like the previously analyzed Girls Who Code organization. Non-profits in this

category are akin to educational reservoirs, intended as a supplement for school and study. The manufactured distance of academic knowledge required to enjoy computer programming has similarly distanced any girl-centric project from embracing the awkward, curious aspects of youth. Industry-focused initiatives are remnants of what is now referred to as 'girlboss culture', a period in the early 21st century when popular feminism pushed for strict adherence to capital as an effective escape from oppression. Rather than demonstrably alter the system or propose one wholly new, girls were encouraged to enter male-dominated workfields in order to balance the demographics - computer science specifically. Unfortunately, retaining an oppressive economic structure did not revolutionize the way women are treated in the workforce.

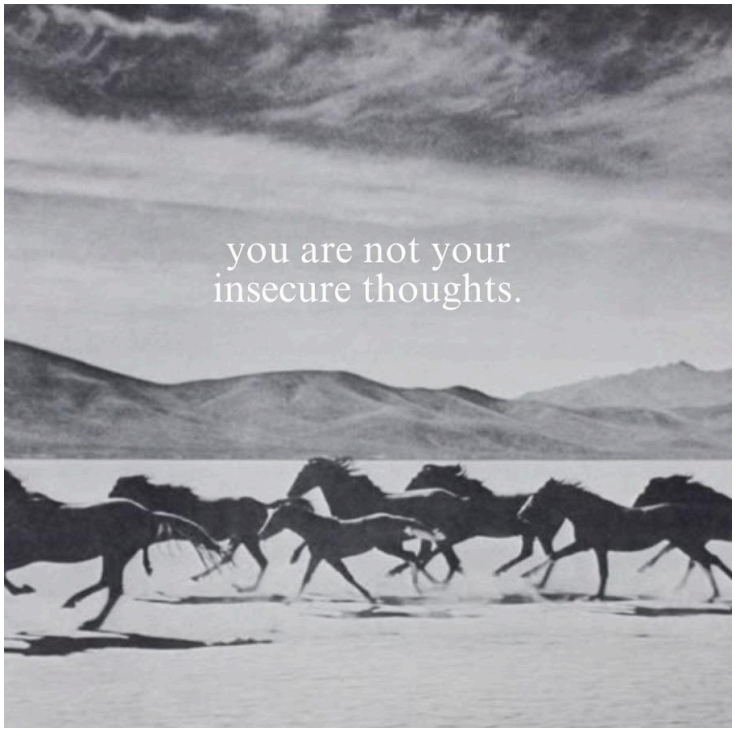
Amidst increasing surveillance and social sterilization, there is an emerging counterculture rallying for a better Internet. Although a myriad of smaller subgroups exist to claim allegiance to, the best-defined community is the 'Indie Web Revivalists'. The project takes its name from the 'Folk Revival' of 1960s America, when musicians returned to raw instrumentation and class-conscious lyricism in the face of heavy technologization. Web Revivalists do not strictly rely on mimicry of past Internet aesthetics. They approach the modern Net with a fresh optimism, combining new and used techniques to reclaim virtual reality (Melon King, 2023). As defined by the database *Indieweb.org*, the movement is "a community of independent and personal websites based on the principles of: owning your domain and using it as your primary online identity, publishing on your own site first, and owning your content" (2024). The mantra itself is a hyperlink amalgam, each statement leading to its own extensive subpage. The statement stretches beyond a singular border, textually and structurally embodying the movement ethos through compilation of various community-generated links.

Melon King is the alias of an Ireland-based net artist named Daniel. Melonking.net, his primary site, is an altar to old net aesthetics. He lists eight core tenets of the Web Revivalist movement, including “Creativity is First”, “The Internet is Fun/The Web is Friendly”, and “Corporations are Boring”. He elaborates that “most [web revivalists] see the ability to design, decorate and graffiti digital spaces as essential and powerful…most want the Web to be a playground that’s free to explore and enjoy” (2023). The site also features an extensive database of similarly-minded web projects. The two lists are equally important; materially enacting a thesis, as demonstrated here, is essential to successful argument. King’s summarization recalls similar words coded by past gURL projects.

There are a few significant examples of contemporary girl-oriented action. None directly identify lineage from the gURL projects. Despite the citational gap, their contributions to digital femme existence deserve recognition. The following case studies were uncovered through use of both external and internal search engines. The first, *Valerie Zine*, is hosted on a free .neocities domain. The *Valerie* logo features letters stylized to appear as if cut from a magazine. By leaning on a familiar collage aesthetic, the zine automatically aligns itself with a grassroot feminist past. Dually physical and digital, *Valerie* publishes themed zines in a PDF format. An issue can be downloaded based on a tipping system, allowing users to choose what - or if - to pay. The creator is physically located in New Zealand, but its contributors are international. A specific highlight is the ‘Resources’ subtab. When clicked, a user is redirected to a hypertext page categorized under headers like “Cybersecurity” and “Anti-Sexual Exploitation Resources” (2025). The breadth of topics recalls the explicit messaging of many gURL publications, demonstrating a particular resilience against censorship and gender-based suppression. The similarities are undercut by a fairly barren site structure. The zine is restricted to a printable format, removing possibility for

interlinked articles or immediate call-and-response. *Valerie* also prominently advertises their social accounts on Instagram and Tumblr. Both are pseudo-artistic, having initially prioritized user expression and steadily eliminated freedoms in the following years. The zine is one of many current mixed-media publications exploring secondary options to the typical web. *Valerie* leans in a more material, 'grrrl zine' direction.

Moving further down the gURL evolutionary timeline is Girlhood. Hosted as *thegirlhood.org*, the site exemplifies the collaborative blog and message board for young women. The site embraces amateur visual aesthetics, with images and text code-collaged atop one another. Scrolling down their homepage supplies a slew of cartoons and newspaper clippings. The clippings are often references to promotional articles published about Girlhood. One headline refers to the site as a "viral agony aunt", a magazine archetype essential to original gURL publications. Although the cartoons are charming, the girls depicted are of a specific type. Rather than lean on abstract, animated figures like *gurl.com* or create diverse clipart like *chickclick.com*, the figures on Girlhood are all white, skinny, and well-dressed. There is a clear emphasis on material reference; high heels and lipstick litters the site, leaning into superficial girlish stereotypes. Although Girlhood plays with the concept of collage, the site structure and format is overall more streamlined than the idiosyncratic *gURL*. By standardizing the format of each blog, regulating each piece to the same visual language regardless of origin or author identity, smothers their "every girl" goal (2025).



you are not your insecure thoughts. Sophia Rundle, thegirlhood.org.

Both the blogs and the message boards are largely user-submitted. Girlhood boasts about a hundred volunteers, all of whom identify as high-school-aged young women, who shift through submitted drafts and perform routine maintenance. The blogs are contained briefs on various age-related issues, often seeking or giving reassurance to readers. Writing featured under the 'Our Team's Blogs' category feature titles like 'The Unheard Melody of Self Love' and 'What I Wish I Had Known at 13'. User-submitted blogs are less editorial, detailing personal stories about struggling with sexual identity and toxic best friends. The sheer volume of writing featured demonstrates there is a definitive audience for contemporary girl-centric sites. The topics addressed above are written about in a near identical fashion to previous gURL sites. For example, a Girlhood essay titled *you are not your insecure thoughts* petitions its readership to spend less attention on their insecurities and more on their personhood. "Growing up surrounded by social media…has damaged millions of girls…." author Sophia Rundle writes, "you are not

your insecure thoughts…you are your mind's endless capacity to love and to be kind. To seek laughter and experience all that life has to offer" (2025). *Curvy & Proud*, a *gURL* essay published in December 2000, expresses almost the exact same thought: "I was fucked up. Developing a healthy body image in our society is tough when you're growing up female…" (Emily, 2000). Another essay, *AFRO*, featured alongside echos Rundle's second sentiment by concluding that once the author "stopped seeking approval, [she] got more than [she] sought." Having let go of physical insecurities, her "identity's no longer rooted in [her] hair" (Adrienne, 2000). 25 years in between, girls are picking up where the gURLs left off. The Internet, embedded with a dynamic timelessness, is uniquely suited as a medium for supporting this intergenerational dialogue.

The volunteers are also responsible for monitoring the embedded 'Girl Chat' forum page. A bold red header encourages users to "ask advice, give advice" (2026). As of January 2026, 14,688 comments have been posted to said page. Many posts have been supported by a barrage of comments from other young women. Names begin to appear at a greater frequency than others, evidence of a regular userbase who return to the chat often for advice and companionship. Although a majority are about classroom crushes or relationship issues, some are jarringly serious. User 'Faith' writes: "So I am under 18 and my parents got divorced…it's just a lot feeling…I just started middle school and I don't really fit in with the other girls because they are skinny and I am fat…I'm like a weird kid in school and I just need some help". An empathetic 'sakura' replies "I'm really sorry that you have to go through so much all at once. First of all, your body is perfect the way it is. You're still growing and your body is going through a lot of changes…I have bad social anxiety, too, and it's so exhausting…so yeah, you are not alone". The interaction was uploaded a week from research date, and 'Faith' does not appear to directly

respond. While the comradery is evident, the lack of systemic support for nuanced discussion of more intense issues - like dealing with divorce - leaves ‘Faith’ with few options to continue. The blogs published by Girlhood are heavily focused on body image and ‘mindset’ support, rather than concrete advice for girls in difficult, uncontrollable situations. Being a girl is not only pink - often, it’s red.

Without the preceding example set by Web Revivalists, TodaygURL would not have succeeded. The current Internet is an insular funnel; regardless of where on the feminist spectrum these inspiring amateur sites would place, their sheer precedence has enabled a new revolution. While organizations like Girlhood are providing young women space to discuss, and Girls Who Code space to study, neither fully embraces the amateur, anarchist ethos of the gURL movement. There is no room online for girls to play with code and creativity. There is no ability for girls to curate their own publications rather than rely on older, more institutionalized companies to supply content.

The previous chapter identified the various generative traits unique to gURL projects. In closing this chapter, the negative effect such an absence has wrought on the contemporary digital landscape is obvious and unsustainable. Current computer science leadership promises a century of suppression and surveillance. What the gURLs left behind conceal lessons on a more optimistic perspective. Through fully embracing a handmade web, Internet users can reclaim their stolen selfhoods. The next chapter will act as a secondary introduction, not to the thesis scaffolding but to the thesis culmination: an introduction to todaygurl.org.

CHAPTER 3: A GURL FOR TODAY

When *gURL* author Esther Drill was asked to explain her desire for creating a feminist website, she kept it short and sweet: "there wasn't much for teenage girls on the Web at the time" (1999). After fingering the pulse of our contemporary Net in the previous chapter, conditions have proven parallel. Worse, even. Compared to the immense creative output from users in the heyday 1990s - as Chapter One details - this so-called superhighway has rapidly degraded to dump status. Once high-traffic locales, now ghost towns. Where have all the good gURLs gone?

This is a manual manifesto. Handcoding digital space radically reclaims a craft practice long-lost to neoliberal machines and machinations. The prefix of 'hand-' roots an immaterial process in a storied material history. I have peppered this terminology throughout. TLDR; In 2015, net artist J.R. Carpenter published a manifesto urging human emphasis as a combat against corporatization. Creating "provisional…temporary" pages "to draw attention to the human body…to suggest slowness and smallness as forms of resistance…" frees 'users' from the crutch of usership (2015). We are tangibly engaged in implicit infrastructures. The 'handmade web' makes explicit that bone-deep connection between print and digital. It is deeper than our mutual dialect, more than 'document'. It is integral to the computer itself. As is femme history - but I tread carefully against a sex-based barrier. TodaygURL is for girls. I began this thesis ruminating on its misty etymological origins. Notably, 'girl' is considered to have been a diminutive term for "all kinds of creatures considered immature, worthless, or past their prime" (Etymonline). In our contemporary virtual reality, that definition can (will) stretch. Especially the last descriptor; what could be more 'past its prime' than the infant Internet?

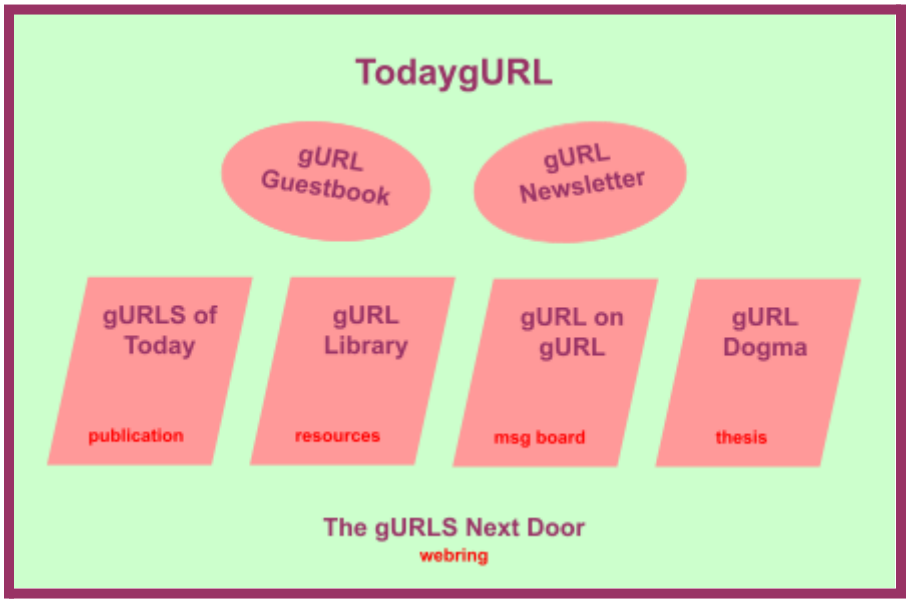
Tim Berners-Lee, father of the World Wide Web, often claims the Internet for everybody. Still, the message has yet to make an impact (Berners-Lee, 2025). My most frequent tools -

feminism and computer programming - are fields steeped in exclusion. Often built directly upon, as I've extrapolated. I discovered *The Cyberfeminism Index* my sophomore year of college while taking Digital Studio. Dually print encyclopedia and online archive, the project curates all cyberfeminist actions in a single list for the first time. Mindy Sue, artist and academic behind *The Index*, describes it as a "forever institution" where activism occurs within as "workers reflect…often at the cost of creating and dispersing a productive tension with someone higher up at the institution" (Ryan, 2024). TodaygURL is a direct example of inter-institutional revolution. I am actively rebelling within two institutions: The Internet and The University. This is not an unmediated ramble; this is a senior thesis. Even its source material is complicit. Digital Studio is an advanced studio course split in two self-motivated projects. For my first, I hand-coded a site - and christened it 'Today Girl'.

The Cyberfeminism Index led me down a rabbithole of femme-centric interventions. I went searching for a way out and stumbled upon *gURL.com*. The site began in 1996 as a graduate school project; the first full gURL URL was "http://www.tsoa.nyu.edu/gURL/.html", as in New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Three young women my age, perhaps a year behind, cracked their knuckles and dedicated a hand-coded site to systemically dismantling the rapid misrepresentations of how tween/teen girls did/did not surf the web. The most revolutionary act a person can do is exist without compromise. I might be a mere undergrad purporting to program a universe, but so was Mark Zuckerberg.

Reconstructing the past with present technologies requires tact. Not only has web dev dogma been broadband sterilized, but the machinery has as well. Modern websites would be unrecognizable to an early-netizen. 'Making a website' now brings to mind a myriad of 'site builders' like SquareSpace or Wix. Their interfaces are little more than a point-and-click and

their monthly subscription rates are through the roof. Not all is doom and gloom. Now, sites can stream 4K without skipping a beat. Your eyeballs will never have to be alone again. Clearly, the possibilities are exciting and the potential pitfalls innumerable. I have chosen to house TodaygURL on NeoCities, the open-source platform previously cited in Chapter Two. As a frequent contributor to 'Indie Web' projects, NeoCities comes with a dedicated base of netizens eager to collaborate and constructively critique fellow developers. Each site is accompanied by a personal message board. There is a neighborly feel to living in NeoCities. A friend leaves me a song recommendation they feel is related to the TodaygURL ethos. We have and never will meet in-person. Here, the Internet is a commune. The alternative would be getting lost in a solitary feedback loop, abandoned by search engines to stumble alone through Dark Forests. It's a grim image. [23]



My first TodaygURL draft (2025).

[23] The 'Dark Forest Internet' theory is a reference to the 'Dark Forest Universe' introduced by Liu Cixin's novel *The Three Body Problem*. Programmer and writer Yancey Strickler adapted the concept onto a strictly digital skeleton. As our contemporary Internet further floods with spam and artificial content, actual humans are retreating into deeper, privatized corners. The surface Internet is considered inhabitable; we have built ourselves bunkers for basic survival (2019: Strickler).

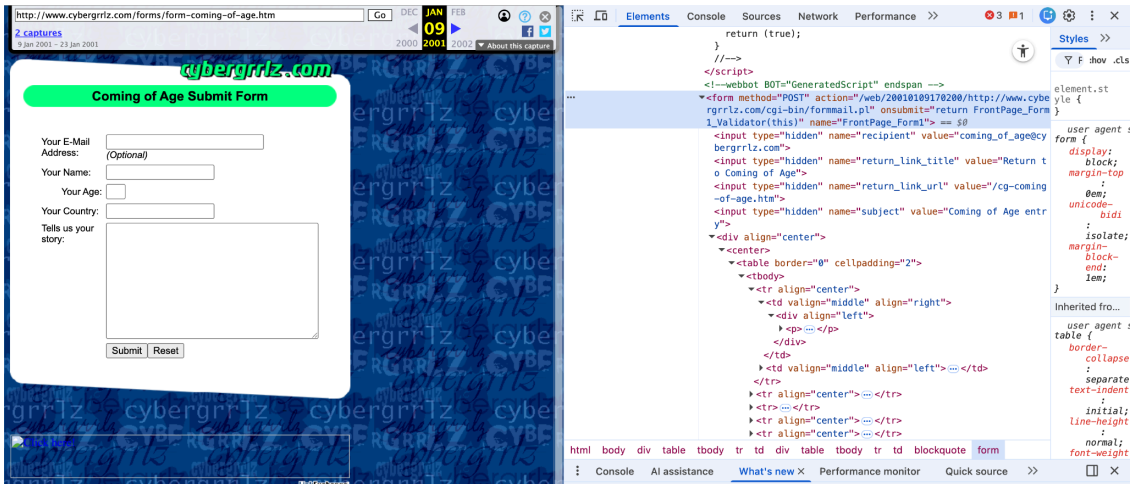
As evidenced, the first draft included TodaygURL message board. Centrally locating a message board on a static site is impossible. The 'rudimentary' infrastructure could not support the database required to store user input. I cycled through a few third-party hosts. After all, majority of gURL sites with live chats used plug-ins (think of *Cybergrrlz*'s separate dialogue window). None felt comfortable. Most cost money. If they were free, their compensation could easily come at the cost of my readership. That is the exact dynamic I am seeking to avoid. Although all purported to focus solely on streamlining conversation, not collecting advertising data, there is an insidiousness festering below modern forum platforms. TodaygURL does not ask anything of its readerbase other than their attention. That is, the site does not track users' names, emails, addresses, etc. Collecting data for communication is a slippery slope to collecting information on "consumer habits" (Duncan & Leander, 2000).

What are other ways of breaking down the superficial boundary between reader and writer? Again, I took a cue from the *Cybergrrlz* blueprint. Their chatboards were constructed through email submissions, with an editor respective to each section. Further on, they did begin promoting specific submission forms that eliminated any non-native interaction. I attempted to direct-copy their JavaScript code onto TodaygURL. The skeleton exists easily. Unfortunately, there was still the issue of where the user-submitted information would end up. Without blood, the body cannot live. Neocities does not allow data files. *Cybergrrlz* employed a .pi file for collection purposes.[24]

Often, I found the most popular work-around to be embedding a Google Form. A .css file can easily disguise the otherwise ugly architecture of the archetype, taking in user information and adding it to a Drive-based Sheets file. Either this, or revert to a snail mail email-based

[24] Confusingly, a .pi file is for storing a user's Pi calculations. All sources say it is an unusual file type for this situation.

exchange. Inevitably, I had to involve Google as a mediator. Both methods bed the conglomerate. However, the latter does not rely on a spreadsheet full of critical user information. The idea of that existing on my computer - on my 'drive' - twists my stomach. So, I went with email - the blue pill.



Backend of *cybergrrlz.com/form/coming-of-age*, archived 01/09/01.

Despite the built-in barriers, I consider static site-hosting to be a crucial scaffold for TodaygURL. Static sites are 'prebuilt' sites, meaning the browser keeps a version stored without user interference. The early net knew nothing but static sites. Dynamic sites only rose in popularity following the 'dot-com bubble' burst, relying on server-side scripting to create personalized versions for each reader or reload. This 'on demand' model projects an air of cocky capability, a ploy to press as hard on the pedal as you want. Beneath the allure of customization is a frayed network of anti-commune and anti-eco code. First, dynamic sites run up against collaborative ambitions because they are active contributors to what Eli Pariser calls the 'filter bubble'. Our content deluge has led us to solely rely on software-based curators - the mythic *algorithm* - for advice on consumption rather than exploring independently (2011). Second, dynamic sites are absolute resource drains. Adjacent to the 'Indie Web' is a burgeoning 'Sustainable Web' movement. Developers are eager to close carbon leaks and slow Internet

consumption to a more contemplative pace. Static sites are one in an arsenal of environmentally-focused tools (LACMA 2025).

TodaygURL is static but by no means fixed. The project is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Though animations and colorful imagery, a rainbow range of file types, might somewhat contradict the sustainable approach, their inclusion is necessary. TodaygURL tributes past projects whilst avoiding clearcut nostalgia. By combining past images with present, I pedestal this tension. This tension is what makes TodaygURL uniquely suited for our contemporary Internet. Specific elements of TodaygURL deserve explanation. As we delve further into creative dissection, it is necessary to restate that this project is ongoing and *unfinished*. TodaygURL will continue to evolve; this chapter is a progress report, not a final reflection. Its liminal, ill-defined existence is the direct impact of gURL agency.

THE SPICE GIRLS

There is a promotional photograph of the Spice Girls prominently featured on the front page. It has been included in some form or filter since my fledging first site. On May 14th, 1997, the girls dropped by AOL's Manhattan headquarters to participate in a live web-chat with fans (Tumblr). The picture was taken by professional David Corio.[25] The five are posed in front of three oversized computer monitors, gripping each other affectionately and grinning broadly at the camera.

The Spice Girls and the grrrls/gURLs had a complex relationship. Their tense dynamic was domineered by an overhead pressure to commercialize and commodify. Jo Freeman diagnoses this with her Second-Wave text "The Tyranny of Structurelessness". I briefly cited

[25] David Corio is a well-known cultural photographer. Most frequently, of musicians: James Brown, DJ Prince Hammer, Run DMC. Why he followed the Spice Girls to NYC is unclear. Nonetheless, the footage is appreciated.

Freeman in the first chapter; “The public is conditioned to look for spokespeople…whether they want to or not, whether the movement likes it or not, women of public note are put in the role of spokespeople by default” (1972). The Spice Girls never claimed sole responsibility for shouldering the survival of a modern-day feminist movement. By the time their first album was released, no member was more than 25 years-old. Barely adults, they sky-rocketed to a level of international fame then completely unprecedented. Simultaneously lauded and criticized for their pop sound and bare midriffs, the band continues to earn political scorn from more radical feminists - despite having disbanded in 2000.

The Spice Girls deserve to be interpreted as individuals, not thought leaders. My relationship to them is complex but ultimately forgiving. I think this photograph - five good girl friends having fun online - is an accurate representation of what TodaygURL should aspire to. I return continuously to a *The Face* cover story written early on in their musical careers. British journalist Miranda Sawyer followed their antics around London. When watching Geri Halliwell sign autographs, Sawyer observes that “she says little slogans to them, like ‘Girl Power!’ and ‘Be who you wanna be!’.” After the younger girls leave, Geri admits “I always bang on about Girl Power and half the time I wonder if they know what I mean” (1996). But they did; they do.

Pamela Tayakoshi mentions the Spice Girls in her article interviewing femme tweens about their experiences online. Girls often dedicated digital elegies to their favorite spice-esses. Regardless of “however problematic the Spice Girls seem to adults…the phenomenon…may indicate how hungry young girls are for affirmation that they are powerful” (98). Diminishing the Spice Girls for being complex individuals is a waste of time. Instead, let’s consider *why* they were so popular. Clearly, girls were - and still are - hungry for representation of unabashed, unapologetic women.

THE GUESTBOOK

Guest books are traditional features of hotels, weddings - any private institution routinely open to the public. Guestbooks are pseudo-replications of a printed ledger. Early-net websites often featured guestbooks as the primary way for user feedback and interactivity. Considering a majority of other input-based services are not available on static sites (ex. forum hosting), the guestbook is an essential element of any collaborative cyberwork. In a particularly feminist context, Jacqueline Rhodes highlights guestbooks as prime location for "reader-construction textualities" to "realize their radical potential" (133). Users are encouraged to interact with a multivocal structure without hierarchy. Readers reply to one another or promote their personal pages. On TodaygURL, the guestbook has already been a site for constructive feedback. One user enters their URL as their name - *yepyep.neocities.org* - and writes "the spirit this site embues…reminds me of the articles I edited for high school journalism". Given my primary audience is teenagers/young adults, this comment is highly motivating. Especially interesting is the reference to their older Internet-based work; clearly, the guestbook conjures both nostalgia and novel conversation. As TodaygURL ages, its guestbook persists. Even if I cease to exist as its primary editor, the guestbook will "continue to be read and written…making the Web site itself a truly generative text" (134).

HYPERTEXT AND THE RESOURCE PAGE

I approach hypertext documents based upon Laura Sullivan's feminist theorization of the medium. Her 1999 essay analyzed then-contemporary anecdotes on the potential benefits and harms a link-loaded dialogue might incur on textual production. From *Wired Women Writing* I take three key concepts. One: that hypertext transcends binaristic thinking (33). Two: that

hypertext connects writing to the material that prompted response, peeling away the boundary of coherence expected from traditional narrative structure (36). Three: that hypertext admits subjectivity and rebukes any claim to expertise (39). Although Sullivan directed her study towards hypertext works more adjacent to memoir, my writings for TodaygURL are equally impacted by my personal beliefs and experiences. Hypertext comes automatically when coding with HTML; as the acronym for Hypertext Markup Language, it's in the name. However, my utilization is an intentional, political decision. In "HACKTIVISM", an article intended as an civilian introduction to technological activism, the hypertext is dually a bibliography and a mind map. I quote Michael Roszak, VP of finance at Google, from an internal document released as evidence during the company's 2023-24 antitrust trial. Rather than opt for standard MLA in-text citation, I link the words "court-released document" to a PDF copy of the document. I have bridged reader and researcher; the article "allows readers to compare these versions of reality for themselves" by democratizing context (39). As for the mind map, I also use hypertext in a multivocal fashion. The article opens with a reference taken originally from Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* in which a character justifies his going bankrupt as "gradually, then suddenly". Instead of linking the quote back to Hemingway, my hypertext takes a reader to a .jpg of Elizabeth Wurtzel. The text beside her is taken from her 1994 memoir *Prozac Nation*. She turns the reference inward. Suddenly, the quote origin is layered and distorted. Both novels (*Prozac* and *The Sun*) were criticized for their explicitness. Only one has entered the so-called American Canon. By linking to Wurtzel, I am referencing a legacy of obscurant quotation.[26]

[26] Interestingly, the exact passage of *Prozac* in which the Hemingway quote appears does not seem agreed upon. Wertzel introduces it identically but how she connects it to her personal situation changes. In the .jpg I hyperlink, she concludes with "when someone asks how I lost my mind, that's all I can say." On Goodreads, the quote is instead followed by "that's how depression hits. You wake up one morning, afraid that you're gonna live."

“Multiple connections are possible simultaneously” as opposed to an expected binary obfuscation (33).

As for the resource page - otherwise known as the TodaygURL Library - links are not explicitly relational. A crucial component of most gURL projects was open-source information. Tools considered useful have been sorted into three categories: pizzazz (visual attributes), people (significant Internet persons/publications), and papers (key cyber-centric texts). Each is represented by a Windows 95-inspired folder ‘rollovers’. When a user rolls their mouse over a category, the folder reveals a related object. For example, the ‘pizzazz’ folder opens to reveal a paint brush and roller. ‘Rollovers’ were frequent implemented for subversion and satire by gURLs. The e-zine *Disgruntled Housewife* linked to each of its published sections via a shape-shifting icon: ‘Confessions’ changed from angel to devil, and ‘Naked Ladies’ removes the bra of a headless torso (2000). My rollovers are not as provocative. Still, “the second image brings something new to the first” (Ladendorf 134). The folders are meant to abstractly represent what interesting pathways might be followed through the resources contained within.

THE TODAYGURL GALLERY

Beside the more specific citations is a subpage devoted to “The TodaygURL Gallery”. The gallery is a visual bibliography of every archived webpage I have explored for this project. Highlighting the unique aesthetics of each previous gURL project, a plethora of possibilities are opened. The user is not restricted to my independent expression. I have not removed TodaygURL from the context of its genealogical history. Instead, the gallery allows a user to peruse these now-defunct sites at their leisure. The lauded position of researcher is made communal; the past is made present.

THE PUBLICATION

TodaygURL is split into four categories: Pop Off, Pop Culture, PopLitics, and Pop Corn. The kitchy, alliterative titles are meant to satirize/tribute typically 'girl-ified' journalism. Majority of gURL projects textually aligned each section. *Riotgrrl* frequently incorporated 'riot': 'MediaRiot' for their film reviews, 'TrueRiot' for their embarrassing personal stories , 'X-Riot' for their explicit personal stories (1997). *Teengrrl* implemented a similar pattern with 'grrl': 'Grrl Politico' for politics, 'That Grrl' for editor Carol's "unique observations" (1999).

Pop Off is a rage room. Pop Culture is for fangirling. PopLitics is a briefing room. Pop Corn is my *senatus consultum*. The header designs of each pay tribute to the webring icon that housed a majority of gURL projects. Webrings were the friendship bracelets of the early net. Sites could link together despite disparate creators and ambitions, rallied behind the gURL banner. At the height of gURL, search engines were still in their infancy. Webrings would promote other sites with 'next' and 'last' hyperlinks, a JavaScript tying each together (2015: Ray). They were volatile algorithms based off personal affirmation and decided solidarities. The gURLnet webring provided "temporary stability of identification" in a community otherwise intentionally ill-defined, simultaneously challenging and complying with anarchist print incoherence (Rhodes 128). In the future, I plan to create a gURL-focused webring. For now, its memory lives on in the section icons.

The 'Pop Litics' header icon compared to the *gurlnet* webring icon (2026, 1998).

Pop Off

The meaning of 'pop off' is slippery. Recently, our cultural lexicon has turned towards using it to describe the moment when someone is incensed or passionate enough to rant about a particular topic. Popping off, more often than not, does not ask for critical thought. The rise of rage-baiting clearly demonstrates how profitable an angry ramble can be. By titling the section 'Pop Off', I reference the slang term without submitting to expected affectation. I am angry; I am also an author. The premiere article is adapted from a print zine I made about 'hacktivism'. Hacktivism, or hack activism, is when a person disrupts computer systems to achieve a specific political or social action. The term often carries a negative connotation, as it has become associated with mass data leaks that wound everyday users more than any elite. I believe original hacktivism is a complimentary practice to the handmade web. A hand-coded site like TodaygURL recontextualizes everyday machinery; it is a form of hacktivism. Discussing the practice in Pop Off's first entry felt native to my overall ethos. The site itself is a direct rebuke against constructed social networks and barriered Internet existence. A full break from our current trajectory requires subversion of these so-called casual dynamics, transgressions that can come from programming or protest (or, best: both combined). The resulting zine is half-explanation and half-how-to. Readers are provided brief historical context as to the *how* and *why* of our moment, justified with specific examples of ways to rebuke technocracy. The first part resembles a TLDR of the second chapter, acting as an extension/introduction into more rigorous exploration. The second narrows in on the particular characteristics of our contemporary moment. I tried to reference touchpoints any range of viewers would recognize.

Pop Off will be a place for discussion about tech-infused sociopolitical issues. Given that this publication *is* digital and *is* political, there is no reason why not to have a category singularly devoted.

PopLitics

Political discourse is the most crucial feature of a gURL production. The first article focuses on cyberfeminism, a movement largely disparate from the gURLs. Although they were contemporaries, the groups moved asynchronously through the developing online space. The former has garnered its own encyclopedic archival project. The latter, as I have elaborated on in-depth, has been larger forgotten. Is this because the gURLs were young women discussing topics important to young women and thus considered less academically valuable? Uh, duh. While the thesis itself will hopefully increase their visibility in the feminist canon, a combination of the two branches for a TodaygURL audience can't hurt. Their commonalities are more apparent than their dissimilarities. Especially now, as feminism on a general scale once again faces a drastic cultural backlash.

The term 'cyberfeminism' was originated by theorist Sadie Plant in 1994, although its core concepts date back a few years prior (2012: Consalvo). Donna Haraway's aforementioned *Cyborg Manifesto* urged women to integrate with "informatics of domination", disassembling and reassembling their sociocultural positions in "polymorphous ways" via computer systems (1991: Haraway, 163). Virtual reality could free women from physical gender binaries; new technologies could translate "a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears" (164). Plant took the concept a step further by arguing that computers were essentially female given in part to its emergence from "the history of weaving, the process so

often said to be the quintessence of women's work. The loom is the vanguard of software development" (1995: 46). [27]Since then, cyberfeminism has split into a multitude of offshoots, predominantly separated by their stance on binary gender theory. I am not interested in perpetuating mythology about male/female archetypes. What I am interested in is technological liberation; this, above all else, is what lies at the core of cyberfeminism.

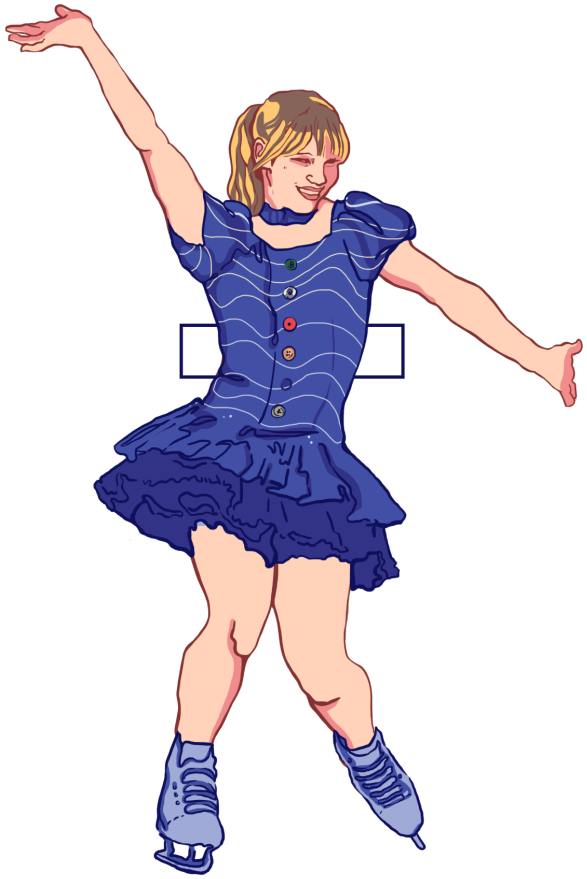
Pop Culture

gURL.com featured 'Paper Doll Psychology' on their site for at least a decade. Although it was subject to the same serialization/sanitization as the rest, the original column was incredibly subversive. I briefly cite it as an example in my first chapter. By the end of its lifespan, 'Paper Doll Psychology' was more focused on reaffirming "relentless self-scrutiny" through cheeky, celebrity-mobbed armchair therapy than acknowledging "being regarded…as a sight causes other psychological damage" (Gerrard 38). For my own paper doll, I tried to remedy this commodification through combining both approaches. Rather than mentally analyze the reader, the paper doll is intended as a call to action.

I hand-drew a pocket copy of Alysa Liu. Liu is a twenty-year-old figure skating phenomenon. After winning gold at the 2026 Winter Olympics, her notoriety exploded. Specifically, her public persona as an alternative, unapologetic young woman. Not only does Liu subvert the traditional expectations of her sport, but of her demographic identity. She wears her hair racoon-style, bleach streaks running up against a more natural dark. She speaks out against the restrictive expectations placed on women in her position. "Things gotta change, 100 percent.

[27] Another element of Plant's argument is the historical erasure of 'computers', as in the female programmers responsible for early computer software development. Computers spent hours at room-sized machinery inputting code and mathematical equations, teaching computers the methodologies necessary for a proceeding public Internet. Jennifer Light elaborates on this ill-remembered period in her 1999 essay *When Computers Were Women.*

I think the whole system's got to scrap it and start over," Liu declared in a New York Times article, unabashed about her opinions (2026). Figure skating is notably restrictive and penalizing; as its new international spokesperson, Liu is drastically changing its cultural perception. Using her likeness aligns the paper doll with its later gURL iterations whilst maintaining a subversion of its traditionally commercial applications.



Alysa Liu from the 2026 Figure Skating Olympic Gala, drawn by me (2026).

Pop Corn

Pop Corn serves as the primary opportunity for reader input. The title meaning is two-fold, one public and one private. Privately, popcorn is one of my favorite snacks.

Specifically, because it is better shared. My sophomore year of college, we shared a popcorn maker that sat on the floor and distributed near perfect poppage. Six hands to a single bowl. Since stovetop popcorn is not a singular commodity, like a chip bag or pack of cookies, more can always be made. I also spent a few summers working the counter of a big-box chain movie theater. Everything I owned smelled like popcorn. As employees, we were allowed as much as we could hold. Closing shifts were my favorite. Then, I would win the greatest reward for performing eight hours of customer service: getting to take home excess popcorn from the case. Others threw it away. I would drive home with the trash bag buckled in my passenger seat, eager to share with my friends. 'Popcorn' is also a popular comprehension game in educational settings. When reading aloud as a class, students who reach the end of their section say 'Popcorn' and toss responsibility to another. The active listening component requires each student to pay rapt attention, allowing for better absorption. In the context of TodaygURL, Pop Corn bounces the conversation from reader to reader. It features a simple submission form where anyone can input a response. The responses are then handwritten onto a .png of a popcorn kernel. As the page currently exists, a sea of unpopped kernels lie in wait at the bottom. With each input one will pop and display the message. This is not an animated or automatic process; I will be responsible for sorting through reader responses. I will pop the corn. As mentioned previously, the rapid dynamic now common to Internet forums can easily turn conversation to commodity. My role as mediator prevents what Shelia Liming describes as "fragments of complicity" in her lauded text on zine culture *Of Anarchy and Anarchism* (2010: 123). The friction from employing capitalist technologies in anticapitalist action must be acknowledged, if we are ever to salvage our online environment. An increasingly populous discussion board creates a feedback loop of

beautifully cacophonic dialogue. The relevant ease and deregulation invites participation from a userbase who might be otherwise uninterested in contributing a whole article or artwork.

EPILOGUE

This thesis revives the story of an oft-forgotten movement through familiar song and dance: primary sources, secondary theories, long-winded footnotes. The media artifacts exhibited here maintain their cult value, despite the so-called 'mechanical reproduction' inherent to a digital archive. More than lithography, more than Xerox print, a website can be reproduced. Superficially, the gURLs exist now as half-dead links and 'not-found' .pngs. Every time a URL is clicked, an angel gets its wings.

But their efforts and ecosystem live on. Their "unique existence", as phrased by theorist Walter Benjamin. TodaygURL is not a copy-and-paste of past experiences. My site reorients "the mass" from matrix to 'matrix', as in the womb (Benjamin 17). Our current Internet is rigid with artificiality. On conventional platforms, our collective means of expression have been whittled down to bare bones: aesthetic as a political distraction. Discourse as sound-proofing rather than soap-boxing. The gURLs encouraged discord. They actively generated it through the obscuration of authorship and the avoidance of structural surveillance. There is still space for laughter online. Once, we knew the means of production intimately. We knew what a computer was and was not. We knew where they were in material reality. Now, these basic rights have been revoked. Through craft, there can be a return to technological power. The Internet is for all of us.

Where can a girl go to experiment with ideas and bad art? Here is a blinking cursor - write the revolution in your own words.

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