

# The History and Aesthetics of GeoCities

**GeoCities** was one of the pioneering web hosting services of the 1990s, enabling millions of users to create free personal websites and shaping early web culture. Launched in 1994 and eventually shutting down in 2009, GeoCities left a lasting legacy on web design, online communities, and digital nostalgia. This report provides a structured overview of GeoCities' history, technical context, signature aesthetics, cultural impact, notable sites, and its enduring influence on today's web.

## Timeline of Major Milestones

- **1994:** GeoCities is founded (as *Beverly Hills Internet*, BHI) by David Bohnett and John Reznar in California <sup>1</sup>. Initially a small web hosting company, BHI soon envisions offering free personal "homesteads" on the web.
- **Mid-1995:** BHI launches *GeoCities* as a free web page hosting service with an innovative "virtual city" structure <sup>2</sup>. The site opens with six themed "*neighborhoods*" – e.g. **Hollywood** for entertainment, **WestHollywood** for LGBT communities, **RodeoDrive** for shopping, **SunsetStrip** for music, **WallStreet** for business, and **Colosseum** for sports <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>. New users (called "Homesteaders") receive 2 MB of free space and a unique URL (combining neighborhood name and a numbered "street address") for their personal site <sup>5</sup>. Community features like chat rooms and bulletin boards are added to foster social interaction <sup>6</sup>.
- **Late 1995:** GeoCities experiences rapid growth. Additional neighborhoods are introduced (e.g. SiliconValley for tech, CapitolHill for politics, Paris for arts, Tokyo for anime/culture) <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>. By December 1995, the company is registering thousands of new Homesteaders per day and exceeds 6 million monthly page views <sup>9</sup>. On December 15, 1995, BHI officially renames itself **GeoCities** to match its virtual city motif <sup>10</sup>.
- **1997:** GeoCities introduces on-page **advertising** (banner ads) in May 1997 as a revenue model <sup>11</sup>. Despite initial user backlash, the user base continues to grow. By mid-1997 GeoCities becomes the **5th most popular website** worldwide, outpacing rival free hosts like Tripod and Angelfire <sup>12</sup>. (By late 1997 GeoCities registers its millionth Homesteader, reflecting explosive adoption <sup>13</sup>.)
- **1998:** In August 1998 GeoCities launches an IPO on the NASDAQ (ticker GCTY). The stock price soars from an initial \$17 to over \$100 at peak, amid dot-com era optimism <sup>14</sup>. By 1999, GeoCities is the **third-most visited site on the Web**, behind only AOL and Yahoo <sup>14</sup>. GeoCities also experiments with a floating watermark logo on pages in mid-1998 to boost branding, but this transparent GIF overlay proves unpopular and is eventually scrapped due to user complaints <sup>15</sup>.
- **January 1999:** At the height of the dot-com boom, **Yahoo! acquires GeoCities** for approximately \$3.6 billion in stock <sup>16</sup>. At acquisition, GeoCities boasts 38 million users/pages and a massive online community <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup>. The merger is rocky: Yahoo's initial Terms of Service claimed ownership over

GeoCities user content, prompting a furious user exodus until Yahoo reversed that policy days later <sup>16</sup> .

- **Mid-1999:** Yahoo begins integrating GeoCities into its ecosystem. In July 1999, the original neighborhood-based URLs are phased out in favor of “vanity” URLs based on Yahoo usernames (e.g. `geocities.com/YourName`) <sup>19</sup> . This marked the end of the neighborhood address system for new sites.
- **2001:** Facing profitability challenges, Yahoo introduces **premium hosting** plans for GeoCities and imposes tighter limits on free accounts. Free GeoCities sites are now subject to data transfer (bandwidth) caps (roughly 3 GB/month, or about 4.2 MB/hour) unless users upgrade <sup>20</sup> . This change, along with the rise of new social platforms, slows the growth of GeoCities. Rumors of GeoCities’ shutdown circulate in 2001 but are denied at the time <sup>21</sup> .
- **April 23, 2009:** Yahoo announces it will shut down GeoCities’ U.S. services by the end of 2009 <sup>22</sup> . New account registrations are closed, signaling the end of an era. GeoCities’ traffic had been declining (dropping from 15.1 million U.S. unique visitors in early 2008 to 11.5 million by early 2009) <sup>23</sup> , partly due to competition from modern social networks.
- **October 26, 2009: GeoCities is officially closed** in the United States – all GeoCities websites are taken offline at once <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> . An estimated 7 million personal websites (comprising at least 38 million individual pages) go dark <sup>26</sup> <sup>18</sup> , with users given no public archive by Yahoo. This abrupt closure is widely lamented as “the end of an era” for the early Web <sup>27</sup> .
- **2010s:** GeoCities continues to operate in Japan for nearly a decade longer. Yahoo Japan finally discontinues GeoCities Japan on March 31, 2019, marking the true end of the GeoCities platform <sup>28</sup> . In the meantime, extensive **archival efforts** emerge (see below) to preserve GeoCities content. The legacy of GeoCities lives on through mirrors, archives, and nostalgia projects even after its official demise.

## Technical and Infrastructural Context

**GeoCities’ Architecture:** GeoCities distinguished itself through a unique metaphor of **themed “neighborhoods”** that organized websites by subject matter. When users signed up, they chose a neighborhood matching their site’s intended theme or community (e.g. “Hollywood” for movies/TV, “SiliconValley” for tech, “Area51” for sci-fi, etc.) <sup>4</sup> . The user’s web address incorporated this neighborhood name along with a numeric “street address” (e.g. `geocities.com/Area51/1234`), emphasizing the feeling of a digital city <sup>5</sup> . This approach made browsing GeoCities feel like strolling through a virtual town – one could explore sites “near” one another in the same neighborhood or interest area.

**Free Hosting Model:** GeoCities was a **free web hosting service** at its core, lowering the barrier to entry for web publishing. In the mid-1990s, most internet users consumed content rather than created it, as creating a website required HTML knowledge and paid hosting <sup>29</sup> . GeoCities changed that by giving anyone 2 MB (later expanded to 5 MB, then ~15 MB by the late ‘90s <sup>30</sup> ) of server space to create a personal site at no cost. This was “downright lavish” by 1990s standards <sup>31</sup> , when hosting was often limited or expensive. As

one early user put it, GeoCities provided “*a home on the Internet*” – a personal slice of cyberspace that users could claim and customize <sup>32</sup> .

**Site Building Tools:** Crucially, GeoCities also provided tools to help non-technical users build pages. Early on, a web-based **Personal GeoPage Generator** allowed users to fill out forms and choose from pre-made graphics (icons, dividers, etc.) to instantly generate a simple homepage <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> . This templated approach meant even users with “no knowledge of HTML” could get started <sup>35</sup> . The default template included common elements like “Under Construction” signs and a “Links” section pre-populated with sample link banners <sup>36</sup> . Over time, GeoCities introduced more advanced site-building aids, including **easy-to-use site templates and later a drag-and-drop PageBuilder** tool, further simplifying the process <sup>37</sup> . Users who knew HTML could hand-code and upload their pages (via browser upload or FTP), but many beginners relied on these built-in editors and menus.

**Infrastructure and Features:** GeoCities sites were hosted on GeoCities’ servers and accessible under the GeoCities domain. In the 90s, typical pages were static HTML files with GIF/JPEG images and maybe JavaScript or Java applets. GeoCities did not offer full databases or complex server-side scripting to free users, but it did support basic **CGI scripts** for certain features (e.g. guestbooks or form processing) through standardized tools. GeoCities also provided community and communication features: each neighborhood had its own forums or bulletin boards, chat rooms, and a neighborhood directory listing all member sites <sup>6</sup> . These features helped cultivate a sense of community among users with similar interests.

**Distinctives vs Other Hosts:** In the late 1990s, GeoCities’ main competitors were services like Tripod and Angelfire, which also offered free personal web pages. GeoCities set itself apart with its **city/neighborhood theme** and strong emphasis on community structure, whereas rivals often used more conventional categorization or just user directories. GeoCities was also one of the largest and earliest services of its kind – by 1997 it surpassed its competitors to become a top-five web destination <sup>12</sup> . Its rapid growth and the “GeoCity” concept attracted significant media and investor attention, culminating in its high-profile Yahoo acquisition.

Another technical distinction was how **GeoCities injected content** into user pages for branding or monetization. For example, in 1998 GeoCities briefly added a floating watermark logo (a translucent GeoCities watermark fixed to the bottom corner of every page via JavaScript) <sup>15</sup> . This script-based approach was ahead of its time but interfered with page layouts and angered many site owners, illustrating the tension between user creativity and corporate control. Later, under Yahoo, GeoCities inserted banner ads at the top of pages (unless users paid for an ad-free premium account). These insertions sometimes broke page layouts or slowed load times, as noted by users of popular sites (one Monty Python fan site owner protested that the GeoCities ad banner and watermark were slowing his page and ruining the design) <sup>38</sup> .

**Resource Limits:** As GeoCities grew, it faced technical challenges in hosting millions of sites. Yahoo’s 2001 imposition of **bandwidth limits** on free pages was a direct result of heavy traffic straining servers <sup>20</sup> . Popular sites that exceeded about 4 MB of data transfer in an hour would be temporarily suspended (displaying a “Sorry, GeoCities page is unavailable right now” message), a frustration to both webmasters and visitors. This measure helped control costs but also drove some users away or toward paid plans.

In summary, GeoCities’ infrastructure democratized web publishing: it abstracted away the complexities of hosting and coding just enough to let everyday people stake out a presence online. By combining free

hosting, ready-made tools, and a built-in community framework, GeoCities offered a one-stop entry into the World Wide Web for an entire generation of new web users.

## Aesthetic Characteristics of GeoCities Pages

One of GeoCities' most enduring legacies is its **distinct visual and design aesthetic**, often affectionately remembered as the epitome of "Web 1.0" style. GeoCities pages – especially in the late 90s – were known for being colorful, chaotic, and unapologetically amateur in design. Common design patterns and visual tropes included:

- **Bright Backgrounds and Eye-Popping Colors:** Many GeoCities sites featured garish background images or neon-bright background colors with contrasting (sometimes clashing) text. Repeating tiled images (from starry skies to marble textures) were popular as backgrounds. There was little concern for modern design norms like readability or color harmony – often resulting in “*eye-searing*” pages with bold, multicolored elements <sup>39</sup> .
- **Animated GIFs Everywhere:** GeoCities emerged in the age of the animated GIF, and users eagerly decorated their pages with moving graphics. Spinning globes, rotating “New” icons, bouncing cartoon characters, and decorative divider bars all added life to otherwise static pages. Iconic among these were the ubiquitous “**Under Construction**” GIFs – usually depicting a little man digging or flashing construction barricades – to signal that a page was still being built or updated <sup>40</sup> <sup>36</sup> . These animations gave GeoCities pages a dynamic (if often cluttered) feel.
- **Flashy Text and Fonts:** Early HTML allowed for novelty text effects that GeoCities users loved. The `<blink>` tag (in Netscape) would make text blink on and off, and the `<marquee>` tag (in Internet Explorer) would scroll text across the screen. It was common to see scrolling marquees announcing site updates or welcome messages, and blinking text highlighting important points. Unusual fonts and rainbow text effects were also frequent, even if they only worked on certain browsers. This, combined with multi-colored headings or quirky “*cartoon*” fonts, contributed to a lively but often visually “*over-the-top*” layout <sup>41</sup> .
- **Page Counters and Badges:** In the era before real-time analytics, GeoCities users displayed **visitor counters** on their pages to show off how many people had stopped by. These counters were typically small digital odometers or flip-number displays that incremented on each visit. A line like “You are visitor number [1234] since March 1997” was a point of pride for site owners <sup>42</sup> . Many pages also sported small badges and buttons: for example, “**GeoCities Featured Page**” awards, **Webring** membership badges (if the site was part of a themed webring), or the iconic “Best viewed in Netscape/IE” labels (complete with browser logos and recommended screen resolution). Collectively, these gave pages a scrapbook-like collage of graphics.
- **Embedded Music and Media:** Another hallmark of 90s web design (embraced by GeoCities users) was **autoplaying background music**. With a single HTML tag, a site could automatically play a MIDI music file or looping WAV clip when someone visited. Everything from pop song MIDI renditions to TV theme songs to noisy auto-start WAV greetings could surprise visitors. By the late 90s, embedding background music was still novel enough to delight some and annoy others <sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup> . Personal pages might have a theme song or a random audio clip playing on loop, contributing to the “multimedia”

flair of GeoCities (and sometimes to the *cacophony* of having multiple pages open). Similarly, some users embedded Java applets or Flash introductions once those technologies emerged, adding to the mix of media (one archived GeoCities page even had a Flash intro animation – a sign of the late-90s transition to Flash content) <sup>45</sup> .

- **Layouts: Crowded but Creative:** Layout-wise, many GeoCities pages did not follow a polished or minimalist approach. Users often threw everything they liked onto their homepage – long vertical pages filled with centered text, blinking headings, multiple sections of content, and perhaps experimental use of frames or tables. The concept of white space was frequently ignored. Instead, pages felt like personal collages. For example, a typical fan page might have a giant title image at top, a centered paragraph of welcome text, a few animated clip-art GIFs inline, a section of “favorite links” (often with “Cool Site of the Day” blinkies or awards), a guestbook sign-in link, and perhaps a dozen “award” icons the site had won from fellow users. The aesthetic was homely and “amateurish” by professional standards <sup>46</sup> <sup>41</sup> , but it exuded personality and authenticity. In fact, the hodgepodge, “kitsch” look of GeoCities pages has become a defining feature remembered with both fondness and humor – people might say a garish modern page has been “Geocities-ized” as shorthand for being cluttered with glittery, tacky graphics <sup>41</sup> .

*Example of a classic GeoCities personal homepage (circa late 1990s), showing typical design elements: a bright patterned background, eclectic images and clipart, a visitor counter, and an “under construction” graphic at the bottom. Such pages, often assembled with the GeoCities PageBuilder, reflected the DIY aesthetic of the era.*

- **Guestbooks and Social Features:** Many GeoCities sites included a link to a **guestbook** – a simple comment page where visitors could “sign” their name and leave feedback. Guestbooks were an early social media feature, allowing interaction between the webmaster and viewers. A GeoCities page often proudly displayed a “Sign My Guestbook” button (and a “View Guestbook” link to read others’ comments), sometimes stylized as a graphic of an actual guestbook or a mailbox icon. These guestbooks, along with email links (mailto:) and webring memberships, created a sense that the page was a node in a larger social network of personal sites.
- **“Homemade” Graphics and Themes:** Because many users were beginners, they often made do with copy-pasting graphics from elsewhere or using default content. Olia Lialina, a researcher of early web culture, observed that many mid-90s GeoCities pages shared the same small set of icons and graphical elements – thanks to GeoCities’ **site templates and clip-art libraries**. Early pages commonly had an “Under Construction” sign, a “Cool Links” banner, red horizontal rules or bullets, and a set of icons (like tiny flags, cartoon characters, or a globe) provided by GeoCities’ page generator <sup>36</sup> <sup>34</sup> . These design elements became *vernacular* to GeoCities. As users grew more confident, they customized beyond the template, but the prevalence of these shared graphics gave GeoCities a coherent visual culture. It was a folk art of web design – created by amateurs copying, remixing, and personalizing common assets.

The overall **amateur web design ethos** of GeoCities was one of creativity over consistency. Pages were not polished or standardized; instead, they were “**exploding with creativity**” in all directions <sup>47</sup> . The lack of professional constraint meant people felt free to express themselves – “*even if it was garish... especially if it was garish,*” as one commentator noted in hindsight <sup>48</sup> . This aesthetic of self-taught, trial-and-error design – bright, rich, personal, and proudly unrefined – has become synonymous with the late-90s web. It is remembered with a mix of nostalgia and mockery: at the time, these pages nearly “*induced epileptic fits*”

with their blinking text and vibrating colors <sup>40</sup>, yet they also evoke a charm as a **“largest self-created folk-art collection in the history of the world”**, as digital archivist Jason Scott described GeoCities pages <sup>49</sup>.

## Cultural and Social Impact

GeoCities’ cultural impact on the internet was profound. It **democratized web publishing**, giving ordinary people across the world the ability to create and share content online for the first time on a massive scale. In the mid-1990s, building a website had been the domain of tech enthusiasts and organizations – GeoCities changed that paradigm. By letting users *“claim virtual real estate and settle in”* for free <sup>50</sup>, it invited a new population of “homesteaders” onto the web. This easy access meant that millions who would have been mere consumers of web content became *creators*, publishing personal stories, fan pages, opinions, and experiments online. As Time magazine noted, GeoCities was *“one of the first to offer home pages to the masses”*, essentially a beginner-friendly outlet for personal expression on the Web <sup>51</sup>.

**Fostering Online Communities:** GeoCities didn’t just host isolated personal pages – it fostered *communities* of users by interest, foreshadowing the social groupings of later social media. The neighborhood system meant that if you made a Star Trek fan page in the Area51 neighborhood, you were listed alongside other sci-fi enthusiasts; if you made a parenting blog in Heartland, your “neighbors” were other families and hobbyists. This structure nurtured organic communities. People in the same neighborhood often surfed local directories to find like-minded pages or joined neighborhood webring. GeoCities also actively linked related content: *“If you enjoyed a person’s Persian cat tribute site or the hearse collectors of New Zealand, GeoCities could guide you to several other pages you might like,”* one account recalled <sup>52</sup>. In an era before robust search engines and social networks, these curated rings of links were invaluable for discovery and camaraderie. Users built **web rings**, joined **discussion boards**, and sometimes even collaborated on communal pages or neighborhood newsletters.

Importantly, GeoCities provided space for **marginalized or niche communities** that might not have had other online homes in the 90s. For example, the *WestHollywood* neighborhood became a hub for gay and lesbian users (named after West Hollywood, a center of LGBTQ culture) <sup>4</sup> <sup>53</sup>. This was quite pioneering – in the mid-90s, LGBTQ forums and sites were scarce, and GeoCities gave that community an early platform to connect and share experiences. Likewise, there were neighborhoods or subsections that attracted various subcultures: Area51 drew conspiracy theorists and sci-fi geeks, Coliseum drew sports buffs, Heartland drew crafters and family bloggers, etc. GeoCities demonstrated the internet’s potential to bring together people with *very specific interests* across geographical boundaries, whether it was a support group for an obscure illness or an international fan club for a cult TV show <sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup>. It exemplified the motto “Internet as community.”

**Personal Expression and “Net Culture”:** The ethos of GeoCities was that *everyone deserves a front porch on the Web* <sup>48</sup>. The founders and early adopters believed deeply in personal expression. Websites on GeoCities often functioned as **personal diaries or “scrapbooks”** made public <sup>56</sup>. People shared about their pets, posted family photos, wrote about their hometowns, curated lists of favorite links or “blinkies,” and even built memorial pages for lost loved ones <sup>56</sup>. In doing so, they were *establishing their own net culture* <sup>57</sup> – collectively, these millions of micro-sites formed a tapestry of early internet culture built from the ground up by users rather than corporations. As one writer described, it was as if everyone’s **sticker-covered Trapper Keeper** had been put online for all to see <sup>58</sup> – a deeply personal and eclectic form of expression that defined the late-90s web aesthetic and tone.

GeoCities also instilled a sense of **digital citizenship** in its users. Calling users “Homesteaders” and using the city metaphor gave people *pride of ownership* in their pages and neighborhoods. Users often formed friendships and friendly rivalries; they’d leave messages in each other’s guestbooks, or collaborate via web rings and webring hubs. There was even a system of **GeoCities GeoAwards/GeoPoints** for active members at one point (in 1999, users could earn “GeoPoints” for activities and redeem them in a GeoCities marketplace) <sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> – an early gamification of community contribution.

**Influence on Early Internet Culture:** At its peak, GeoCities was not just a host but a *cultural phenomenon*. It was the third most visited website in the world in the late 90s <sup>14</sup>, meaning a huge portion of internet traffic flowed through personal GeoCities pages. This had several effects on internet culture:

- **Lowering the Bar for Content Creation:** GeoCities showed average people that **they could be content creators**, not just consumers. It trained a generation in basic HTML and web design. Many who built their first webpage on GeoCities went on to become bloggers, developers, or digital creators. For instance, Brandon Stanton (creator of “Humans of New York”) reminisced that his first site was on GeoCities in 1996 <sup>61</sup>. Countless others had similar “first website” stories.
- **Diversity of Content:** Because pages were user-created, the content on GeoCities was incredibly diverse and quirky. There were fan fiction archives, UFO and conspiracy theory hubs, anime fan pages, “John’s JavaScript Tutorial” pages, church group pages, political rants, comedy pages – you name it. This user-generated content model was a precursor to what platforms like YouTube and Facebook would later achieve, albeit in a much simpler form. It made the Web a more *personal* space. Scholars and archivists have since pointed out that GeoCities pages constitute a valuable snapshot of **everyday life in the late 20th century** – a grassroots history of the early web era <sup>62</sup> <sup>63</sup>.
- **Emergence of Memes and Viral Content:** Some of the internet’s earliest *memes* and virally shared content started on GeoCities. For example, **The Hamster Dance** (a 1998 page with rows of animated hamsters dancing to a looping song) was created on GeoCities and became one of the first viral hits on the web <sup>43</sup>. Likewise, the humorous **“Mr. T Ate My Balls”** meme (and a series of “Ate My Balls” pages where various characters “ate” meatballs) proliferated on GeoCities in 1996–1997, spreading a silly trend across dozens of user pages <sup>64</sup>. These early viral phenomena demonstrated the power of amateur webmasters and GeoCities’ role as an incubator of internet pop culture.
- **Challenges and Lessons:** GeoCities also taught early lessons about the ephemeral nature of online content and corporate control. The controversial terms-of-service change by Yahoo in 1999 – briefly claiming ownership of user content – galvanized users to demand rights and led Yahoo to backtrack <sup>16</sup> <sup>65</sup>. It was an early example of user pushback in an online community. And when GeoCities shut down in 2009, the collective sense of loss (described by one editor as losing “*not just the amateurish, barely visited trash pages... [but] entire photo albums, fanfic communities, and personal histories*”) was a wake-up call about digital preservation <sup>25</sup>. This event arguably kick-started greater awareness of archiving and backing up user-generated content (it was the impetus for Archive Team’s first major preservation effort) <sup>25</sup> <sup>66</sup>.

In essence, GeoCities’ cultural impact lies in how it **empowered millions of people to shape web culture** in the 1990s. It turned passive surfers into homesteaders who built the quirky, passionate, and chaotic “neighborhoods” of the early Web. The legacy of that era – the idea that the internet can be a place for

anyone to express themselves and find community – is very much alive today, even as the medium and platforms have evolved.

## Examples of Notable (and Preserved) GeoCities Sites

During its 15-year run, GeoCities hosted an incredible variety of websites. While most were humble personal pages, a few stood out for their popularity, cultural significance, or enduring legacy. Here are some notable examples, as well as efforts to preserve GeoCities content:

### Famous GeoCities Pages and Memes:

- **The Hamster Dance (1998):** A lighthearted page created by Canadian student Deidre LaCarte featuring rows of animated hamster GIFs dancing to a sped-up Disney song. This GeoCities page, officially titled “Hampton Hamster’s Hamster House,” became one of the web’s first viral memes <sup>43</sup>. Its goofy charm (endless dancing GIFs and a looping 9-second audio clip) spread via email and word-of-mouth, eventually garnering millions of hits and even spawning a commercial song. The Hamster Dance demonstrated how a single GeoCities page could capture the world’s attention from a college dorm room.
- **“Ate My Balls” Pages (1996–1997):** An early internet meme where creators made absurd pages claiming that a certain celebrity or character “ate my balls” (accompanied by MS Paint-style images). The trend began with **Mr. T Ate My Balls** and quickly spread; enthusiasts created dozens of offshoot pages on GeoCities (e.g. “Spider-Man Ate My Balls,” “Pokémon Ate My Balls”). These sites were short on polish but high on comedic originality. They circulated via webrings and link pages on GeoCities, illustrating the platform’s role in meme culture. (Many “Ate My Balls” pages disappeared with GeoCities’ shutdown, but some have been mirrored on archive sites <sup>64</sup>.)
- **Monty Python Fan Pages:** GeoCities was home to countless fan sites for movies, TV shows, and bands. One notable example was an early **Monty Python fan site** run by Rich “Lore” Brown. It became highly popular among Python aficionados in the late 90s. The site is remembered not just for its content but for the webmaster’s vocal criticism of GeoCities’ mid-1998 watermark and ad policies – he objected that the intrusive floating logo and slow-loading ads were spoiling the user experience <sup>38</sup>. His outcry represented many hobbyist webmasters’ feelings and even got media attention, exemplifying how dedicated users could influence the platform.
- **Personal Blogs and “Online Diaries”:** Before the word “blog” existed, some GeoCities users treated their sites as regularly updated journals. For example, in GeoCities’ **Heartland** neighborhood (focused on families and personal journaling) one could find early diary-style pages where users posted entries about daily life. While specific ones didn’t become famous in the way modern blogs do, they have been preserved in archives and studied as precursors to the blogging era. The collective phenomenon of these personal diary pages on GeoCities is notable for anticipating the rise of platforms like LiveJournal and Blogger a few years later.
- **Kylie’s Photo Page:** Among the heartwarming sites often cited by archivists is “*Kylie’s Home-Dog Page*,” a website by a young girl named Kylie about her pet dog, complete with background music (“bark.wav”), cute dog photos, and child-like page decorations. It began on GeoCities (Heartland/

Hills) and grew so popular it eventually got its own domain <sup>67</sup>. Kylie's page, which remained online for many years (even after Kylie's passing in 2009), became a symbol of the personal and poignant stories hidden in GeoCities. It was heavily shared on the One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age project for its nostalgic value <sup>68</sup>.

### Preservation Efforts and Archive Projects:

- **Internet Archive's GeoCities Collection:** Anticipating GeoCities' 2009 shutdown, the Internet Archive and others started crawling GeoCities pages to save them. The Internet Archive announced GeoCities had been "*an important outlet for personal expression on the Web for almost 15 years*" and set out to archive it thoroughly <sup>69</sup>. The Archive's Wayback Machine now houses huge swaths of GeoCities sites (though not everything). In 2010, on GeoCities' first post-mortem anniversary, an independent group called **Archive Team** released a torrent of the entire GeoCities archive they managed to save – roughly **900 GB of data (641 GB compressed)** encompassing millions of pages <sup>70</sup>. This massive effort, led by archivist Jason Scott, ensured that GeoCities would live on in some form even after Yahoo pulled the plug.
- **ReoCities, Oocities, and GeoCities Mirrors:** Individual enthusiasts also created mirror sites. **ReoCities** (play on "Reocities") and **OoCities** are two examples of volunteer-driven projects that copied as much GeoCities content as possible before shutdown, and now host it for public browsing <sup>60</sup>. These mirrors often slightly altered the URLs (e.g. `oocities.org/neighborhood/1234` corresponds to an old GeoCities page) but preserve the original HTML and imagery. Another site, **Geocities.ws**, similarly archived numerous GeoCities sites and even allowed users to continue hosting pages there after 2009 <sup>71</sup>. While none of these archives is 100% complete, together they saved millions of pages that would have been lost.
- **One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age (GeoCities Research Institute):** This is an ongoing artistic and research project by net artists Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenschied. They obtained the GeoCities dataset and have been systematically surfacing screenshots and data from it. Notably, they run a Tumblr blog that posts screenshots of GeoCities pages (in original vintage browsers) in chronological order of last update <sup>72</sup>. Over 230,000 screenshots have been shared, bringing renewed attention to the creativity of GeoCities users <sup>73</sup>. The project highlights design patterns, personal stories, and even broken oddities from GeoCities, serving as a living museum of the early web. Lialina's team also restored some pages to live functionality and have written essays analyzing the "*vernacular web*" of the 90s.
- **Cameron's World (2015):** A notable piece of **net art** created by designer Cameron Askin, *Cameron's World* is a web-collage composed entirely of imagery and text sourced from GeoCities archives. The site presents as a single, scrolling patchwork of hundreds of animated GIFs, clashing backgrounds, and snippets of text, arranged in a colorful tribute to 90s web culture <sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup>. Askin created it after discovering the GeoCities archives and being inspired by their unbridled creativity <sup>76</sup>. Cameron's World garnered a lot of attention and introduced a new generation to GeoCities aesthetics, underscoring how the bizarre and gaudy design of old personal pages could be seen as art. It stands as an example of *digital nostalgia manifesting as interactive art*.
- **GifCities (the GeoCities GIF Search Engine):** As a 20th anniversary project, the Internet Archive launched **GifCities** in 2016 – a special search engine for the millions of animated GIFs extracted from

archived GeoCities pages <sup>77</sup>. This allows users, artists, and designers to easily find vintage web graphics (spinning icons, flaming skulls, etc.) that were once ubiquitous on GeoCities. It is both a tribute and a practical archive of the visual artifacts of 90s web design. GifCities embodies the idea that even the smallest elements of GeoCities pages (like a dancing baby GIF or a “Welcome” sign) are worth preserving and remain culturally interesting.

Through these examples and preservation initiatives, the spirit and content of GeoCities continue to survive. Curious users today can visit mirror sites or projects like the **GeoCities Gallery** (which presents restored GeoCities sites sorted by neighborhood) and actually browse the “*time capsule*” of late-90s web life <sup>78</sup>. Notable pages like Hampster Dance have dedicated recreations online, and some original GeoCities pages that later got their own domains (such as **Anime Web Turnpike**, an anime directory born on GeoCities, or Kylie’s dog site) remain accessible on the wider web <sup>79</sup>. In this way, GeoCities’ most interesting content has not been entirely lost to history.

## Legacy and Influence on the Modern Web

Although GeoCities is gone as a service, its legacy pervades the modern internet in multiple ways – from the evolution of social media to the resurgence of retro web design and the ethos of personal web creation.

**Foreshadowing Social Networks:** GeoCities can be seen as a precursor to today’s social media and user-generated content platforms. It gave everyone a voice and a space, much as Facebook, MySpace, or Tumblr would later do, albeit in a more decentralized and user-controlled fashion. In fact, Yahoo’s own analysis when closing GeoCities noted that by 2009 the web had shifted to social networks “*an evolution of the very idea GeoCities had helped to create*” <sup>46</sup>. The concept of providing free online profiles/pages, supported by advertising, and building communities around interests is fundamental to Web 2.0 giants. “*GeoCities created places where humans could connect with each other through their creativity; a thread that can be seen through all the big social media sites that followed, from MySpace to TikTok,*” as one writer observed <sup>80</sup>. Features like profile customization, friend lists (analogous to neighborhoods), and even the bulletin-board style interactions of early social sites all have roots in what GeoCities users were organically doing in the 90s.

However, where modern social networks emphasize uniformity and algorithmic feeds, GeoCities was all about *individual creativity and diversity of design*. In that sense, it stands as a *counter-model* to the template-driven profiles of MySpace/Facebook. Users often reminisce that while Facebook gives you a sterile profile, GeoCities let you **build a “home”** with its own look and feel <sup>81</sup>. This idea of the web as a collection of *personal spaces* rather than corporate silos is part of GeoCities’ legacy that many digital activists and web veterans seek to revive.

**Inspiration for the Indie Web & Web Nostalgia:** In recent years, there has been a blossoming “*old web*” revival movement – a yearning for the creativity and freedom of the early web. GeoCities is often at the center of this nostalgia. For instance, **Neocities**, founded in 2013, is a web hosting platform explicitly inspired by GeoCities (the name is an homage). Neocities offers free static website hosting with an “*anything goes*” approach to design, encouraging users to hand-code pages and create without the constraints of modern social media <sup>82</sup>. It markets itself as bringing back the “*eye-bleeding spirit of GeoCities*” in a positive way <sup>82</sup> – meaning encouraging personal art, experimentation, and unconventional designs. Neocities has grown to host hundreds of thousands of sites, indicating a genuine interest in the *independent web* ethos.

There have also been events like the **Web 1.0 Conference** (Portland, 2019) dedicated to GeoCities-style web development, where enthusiasts celebrate vintage HTML and graphics <sup>83</sup>. The mere existence of such a conference shows how GeoCities has gone from outdated to *retro-cool*. Similarly, design blogs and even mainstream outlets have noted a trend of “**Retro 90s**” web design cropping up – intentionally using pixelated graphics, bright backgrounds, and other old-school elements for artistic effect <sup>84</sup>. The New York Times ran a piece about modern websites designed to look like it’s 1996 again <sup>84</sup>, and numerous creative projects (from music videos to personal portfolios) have adopted a *Neo-Geocities* aesthetic to stand out in an age of polished templates.

This nostalgia is not simply sentimentality; it’s also a critique of how the web has changed. A Recode article argued that “*the Internet has become boring*” and overly homogenized, and that we need to make it fun and weird again – championing efforts like Neocities as “*the independent web movement*” carrying GeoCities’ torch <sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup>. In that sense, GeoCities’ influence is fueling a push for an alternative vision of the web’s future: one that values **user creativity, individuality, and direct control** over content, as opposed to algorithm-driven feeds and walled gardens.

**Net Art and Cultural Memory:** GeoCities is now frequently cited in academic and art circles as a significant cultural artifact. The term “**vernacular web**” has been used (notably by Olia Lialina) to describe the grassroots, folk art style of GeoCities pages – a style now studied and celebrated in digital art exhibitions <sup>36</sup>. The preservation of GeoCities is seen as preserving an important chapter of digital history. Museums and libraries have shown interest in archived GeoCities content as a window into the late 20th century digital society – akin to preserving early films or folk songs. For example, the **Computer History Museum** and similar institutions have included GeoCities in discussions of how the web evolved, and scholars have written papers on GeoCities community structures and aesthetics.

Artists have also directly referenced GeoCities in contemporary works. Aside from Cameron’s World mentioned above, there are interactive poems, zines, and even video games that incorporate GeoCities-era visuals and concepts (for instance, the game “Hypnospace Outlaw” released in 2019 is set in an alternate 1999 internet and clearly channels GeoCities vibes). These creative works highlight how the memory of GeoCities – once dismissed as “ugly” – has transformed into a source of *inspiration* and *affection*. As one journalist quipped, “*while we remember GeoCities today primarily as a kitschy artifact from the weird and wild early days of the web, many of the seeds of what would become essential to the modern internet sprouted there*” <sup>80</sup>.

**Lessons in Digital Impermanence:** Lastly, GeoCities’ shutdown and the scramble to archive it left a broader legacy regarding digital preservation. The event was a rallying point for archivists (e.g., Archive Team’s first major project was GeoCities) and raised awareness that user-generated content can disappear if not proactively saved. This mindset carries on in efforts to archive social media, YouTube videos, and other user content today. The phrase “*Never Forget GeoCities*” is sometimes evoked in web communities as a reminder that even the biggest platforms can vanish, taking data with them, so we must value and preserve internet history.

In conclusion, GeoCities’ influence can be seen in the very fabric of the modern web: in how we create personal content, how we form online communities, and how we appreciate (and archive) the aesthetics of the past. It serves as both a nostalgic memory and a blueprint for a more creative, user-driven internet. As the editor of ZDNet said at GeoCities’ closure, it was “*the first proof that you could have something really popular and still not make any money on the internet*” <sup>27</sup> – a sober lesson for dot-com businesses – but for

millions of users, GeoCities proved something far more important: that **the web could belong to everyone**, not just the technical or the corporate. It turned average people into web *homesteaders*, and that democratic spirit remains GeoCities' most enduring legacy.

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