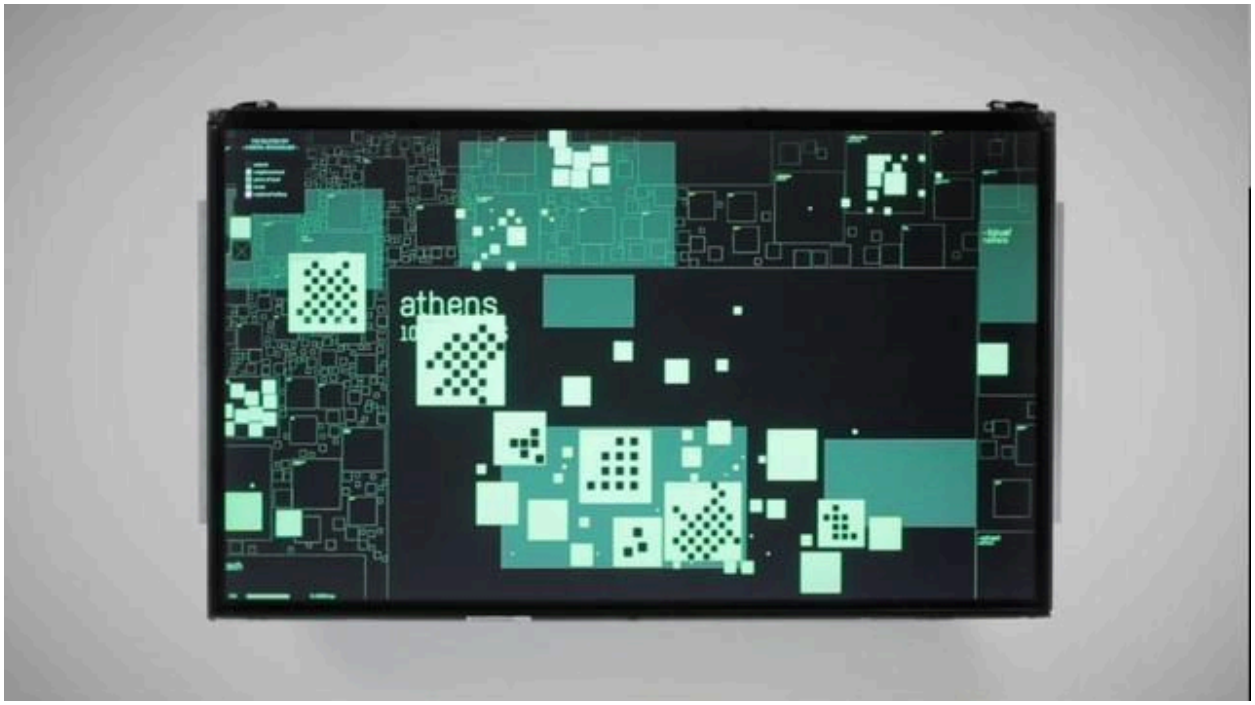
FORBES

Resurrecting 'The Deleted City' Of The Internet's Early Pioneers

Published: 2011-09-30 · **Project:** The Deleted City
Original URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/matthewnewton/2011/09/30/resurrecting-the-deleted-city-of-the-internets-early-pioneers/
Archived copy (17-04-2025): http://web.archive.org/web/20250417052443/https://www.forbes.com/sites/matthewnewton/2011/09/30/resurrecting-the-deleted-city-of-the-internets-early-pioneers/



When the Internet was young, before Blogger, WordPress, and Movable Type enabled the public to easily publish volumes of information to the world, sites like GeoCities provided a free home. Like so many services that were free in the early days of the Internet, annoyances such as endless pop-up ads and poor design were often unavoidable. But even with the small space that GeoCities provided a user, some ambitious pages were built.

For a new project titled "The Deleted City" (see above), GeoCities has been visualized as a massive city with street-like grids and exploded views. It's an interesting way to look back at the early days of digital culture, those that preceded social media. Background on The Deleted City:

> The Deleted City is a digital archaeology of the world wide web as it exploded into the 21st century. At that time the web was often described as an enormous digital library that you could visit or contribute to by building a *homepage*. The early citizens of the net (or netizens) took their netizenship serious, and built homepages about themselves and subjects they were experts in. These pioneers found their brave new world at *Geocities*, a free webhosting provider that was modeled after a city and where you could get a free "piece of land" to build your digital home in a certain neighbourhood based on the subject of your homepage. *Heartland* was – as a neigbourhood for all things rural –

> by far the largest, but there were neighbourhoods for fashion, arts and *far east related topics* to name just a few.
>
> Around the turn of the century, Geocities had tens of millions of "homesteaders" as the digital tenants were called and was bought by *Yahoo!* for three and a half billion dollars. Ten years later in 2009, as other metaphors of the internet (such as the social network) had taken over, and the homesteaders had left their properties vacant after migrating to *Facebook*, Geocities was shutdown and deleted. In an heroic effort to preserve 10 years of collaborative work by 35 million people, the *Archive Team* made a backup of the site just before it shut down. The resulting 650 Gigabyte bittorrent file is the digital Pompeii that is the subject of an interactive excavation that allows you to wander through an episode of recent online history.

After watching the video (above), or visiting the project site, it's hard to know if or when the 650 gigabyte GeoCities file will be made available to the public. But maybe projects like this mark the next phase of Internet fanaticism: Digital archeology.

Email me. Follow me on Twitter. Visit my personal blog.