

Confessions of a Net surfer: Net chick and grrrls on the Web.

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## Confessions of a Net surfer: Net chick and grrrls on the Web

Carina Yervasi

Postmodern Culture

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

### **Confessions of a Net Surfer: *Net Chick and Grrrls on the Web***

*Carina Yervasi*

Carla Sinclair, *Net Chick: A Smart-Girl Guide to the Wired World*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

## “An Ironic Dream of a Common Address”

Not since reading Donna Haraway’s 1985 “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” have I thought so much about gender and machines, or more accurately, about women and computers, modems, and network connections. Harking back to the “Manifesto,” we might consider that the day has arrived when part woman, part machine working in/on the Net may be staging that perfect “coupling.” Or, this is at least one image of women and the Net evoked by Web Guide guru Carla Sinclair in *Net Chick: A Smart-Girl Guide to the Wired World*. Taking up the challenge to see where technology and gender intersect on the Web, Sinclair offers an abundantly informative (and by no means exhaustive, as she herself acknowledges) Internet guide and e-dress book for “cyberchicks.” In the introduction Sinclair initially sets out to dispel two popular notions: that the cybercareer world is male-dominated and that the Web is an all-“boyz” club. Throughout the rest of the book, she interviews women who have successful careers using the Internet, gives advice on necessary software and hardware (e.g. ergonomic chairs) and, finally, reviews important Websites (mostly created by women) and newsgroups, which Sinclair believes are especially useful to women.

That *Net Chick* should arrive when it did into the print and paper publishing world of the Internet guidebook “genre” is worthy of mention. Fortunately, Sinclair, co-editor of ‘80s zine *bOing!bOing!* and co-author of *The Happy Mutant Handbook*, still believes in introductory accessibility. As Internet guidebooks go, way too many uninspiring and corporate-centered tomes have appeared in the past two years. *Net Chick*, however, is the first non-corporate, and intensely personal Internet guide to combine photographs, cartoons, history, interviews—as well as the main attraction; URLs and online newsgroup addresses. Sinclair’s book is very different from the commercially generated “Internet guides.” They often tend to look and feel (hefty) like the Manhattan Yellow Pages, positioning paid-for ads in between large (expensive) or small (cheaper) directory entries (cf. *The Internet Yellow Pages*; *Microsoft*

*Bookshelf Internet Directory; New Riders' Official World Wide Web Yellow Pages*). Most of the Websites discussed in *Net Chick* are Personal Home Pages. Not that Sinclair has anything against commercial sites (“merch sites”), but she is more interested in the independent sites because they “are created by individuals who want to share and show off ideas, information, and art” (10) and presumably don’t share a commercial concern for profit margin.

*Net Chick* is a sort of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for the ‘90s computer grrrl generation, for the “cyberchick”: the “female Internet explorer” (234). This book may not read as a manifesto for technocratic or Webworld subject/object relations, but it is and will prove to be invaluable for a variety of Net surfing publics. As a guide and resource, its target audience is specifically women. It is an indispensable tool for those who teach women’s studies or contemporary culture and want to integrate more electronic media into their courses. Moreover, it has especially inspiring e-dresses for those who are simply seeking a grrrl-related beauty, health, or spiritual tip while surfing the Web. In other words, this guide is part fluff and part real stuff.

So wait not, fair grrrlie: hie thee to a modem connection and get thine ass online!

—Kristin Spence, Foreword

And what is a Net Chick or a Net Grrrl anyway? Being a Net Chick for Sinclair means “having a modem,” using a keyboard “to navigate through...cyberspace,” and, ultimately, “becoming empowered by...access to and knowledge of the Internet” (6). Sinclair’s “grrrl” is the “same as chick, except grrrls can be even tougher” (235). I imagine that a Net Grrrl is a combination of Tank Girl, Roseanne, and Valerie Solanas, whereas a Net Chick throws a bit of Barbie/Cindy Crawford into the mix. Cybergrrrls (with apologies to Aliza Sherman whose “cybergrrl” is a regular feature in her Website: <http://www.cybergrrl...>



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