The Eye, the Heart, and the Network: the Humanistic Blogging of Tumblr's Webweaving
Community

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ABSTRACT

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Amelle Margaron

Webweaving is a networked, creative archival practice hosted on the social blogging platform Tumblr. Weavers combine text, images, and other media elements and compile them into posts reflecting personal or intimate themes which fellow users can then share and recreate. The creative process of weaving reflects the values and ethics of Web 1.0 (connectivity, expression, dehiearchized content) and as such does not follow conventional trajectories of platform presence and art consumption of the contemporary digital landscape. Employing network ethnography and research-creation, this thesis answers three major questions. First: what is webweaving? Second: what does webweaving reveal about cultural production and digital life on Tumblr? Third: how do Tumblr users use webweaving to create humanistic meaning and connection online in an increasingly corporate platform landscape?

Operating at the intersection of platform studies and digital art history, this thesis documents an understudied and uniquely 'born digital' creative phenomenon. Drawing from theoretical frameworks like Jennifer Pybus' work on platforms as archives of feelings, we build on existing platform theory to study the symbiotic relationship between art and community. Finally, we fill a research gap in the paradoxical nature of the Tumblr user experience in 2024, as weavers participate in thriving and irreplicable digital life on a platform that is considered long past its prime.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

Is Tumblr dying? Is it dead already? You'd think so, based on the news headlines addressing the social media blogging platform in the last few years. The mainstream media narrative around Tumblr has always been a bit offbeat, partly because for a long time, Tumblr was somewhat of a niche platform, with the internet caché of being the "cool, more indie alternative to WordPress or Blogger", while in reality also acting as a real digital haven for socially, culturally and disenfranchised youth looking to connect and express themselves online (Minkel, 2023). Tumblr is also infamous for its influential role in the development of 2010s internet culture, notably participating in the development of social justice 'culture wars' that characterize a lot of online discourse today. But to many, the site is long past its heyday, with peak Tumblr "dying" around 2018 (Cho, 2022). This timeline is echoed by real-life reactions I receive when discussing my thesis with peers, friends, or strangers. Those who recognize the name 'Tumblr' have similar reactions: a nostalgic crinkling of the eyes, an exclamation of *Oh! Tumblr!* and an ensuing conversation about their time on the platform, what it was like to code their blog, past online friends and follower drama, what they liked to blog about and how it reflected on their younger selves, and so on. There is a genuine fondness–and for those who are no longer on Tumblr, nostalgia–for the platform. It's this enthusiasm and passion not necessarily for the platform itself but for what it represented to its many users that makes it so valuable, even today.

Of course, the last five years (2018-2023) have been tumultuous for the platform, as Tumblr was fumbled from ownership group to ownership like a hot potato. Monetization strategies ranged from chaotic to illogical and participated in a cultural clash between ownership and users, who by this time had very different ideas for the direction and values of the platform. As writes Elizabeth Minkel for *Wired*, perhaps the reason why Tumblr is "always dying" can be explained by this tension. Indeed, it is "ironic (or maybe prophetic) that a site whose users cheers over the previous users losing a ton of money would proceed to lose the next owners a ton of money" (2023). Even over the course of this thesis, Tumblr, in its bleaker, more mature "post-peak-Tumblr" form, continued to be a stage for this push and pull of platform interest vs user activity (Cho, 2022). In the time it took me to write these 30 000+ words, many 'events' marked the platform. In 2022, there was the arrival of swaths of former Reddit and Twitter users, fleeing the dropping quality of life on both platforms and the following clashes in expectations of site etiquette–*this wasn't how things were run on Tumblr!* Then, there was *Goncharov*, the fake Martin Scorsese film meme that snowballed into a viral sensation, prompting debates about truth and collective storytelling on social media. In 2023, Tumblr implemented the live-streaming tool 'Tumblr Live', which, after being faced with raging unpopularity from users, was quickly disabled. In 2024, leaked staff memos hinted that Tumblr would be run on a skeleton staff in the near future, due to monetization issues of parent company Automattic, and CEO Matt Mullenwegg publicly spatted with trans users of the site in a very public and embarrassing outburst that bled onto other social media.

Tumblr users employ the phrase "welcome to our hellsite" to describe the dual feelings of frustration and joy they feel when scrolling through the website, which has, for many, been a digital home for decades. As we'll discuss in Chapter 2, these tensions are what make Tumblr 'Tumblr', and in some way, are a sign of health for the platform. But they are also symptomatic of a broader issue that this thesis is interested in. In its earliest conception, the Internet was imagined as a tool that would "serve humanity" by supporting a web-like network of connected users (Berners-Lee,

1999). This idealistic vision emphasized values such as freedom, expression, and decentralization. But Web 1.0 was a different dream, and it would also prove to be utopic–as we've entered Web 2.0 and embraced platformization, these values are now more than contested. Indeed, in 2024, the Internet is more corporate than ever. Gia Tolentino describes our platformed presence, which for many is inseparable from labor, and livelihood, as having the effect of making us feel "less human" than ever (2021). If the Internet could initially be considered as a tool used for personal expression and connection, the current user is hindered by daily challenges such as platform content moderation, algorithmic curation, and the necessity for increasing amounts of self-monitoring and self-promotion. Thus, it becomes necessary to ask: when our online spaces are increasingly corporate and depersonalizing, how do we keep creating meaningful forms of expression and connection online?

Tumblr is plagued with these concerns because its existence also sometimes feels absurd. It's a space that feels impossible, in this current iteration of the platform age. It has Web 1.0 aspirations and has created a uniquely invested and discursive public that is in part responsible for the site's past and ongoing relevance. Minkel, again: "A decade and a half into its existence, Tumblr has a unique way of operating that can seem opaque to the outside world" (2023). As we'll discuss in Chapter 4, Tumblr doesn't just attract and keep users, it produces "sticky media" that not only generates but preserves the connection between users, ideas, and digital objects (Ahmed, 2010, cited in Pybus, 2015, p.31). Tumblr generates culture, and that culture can't be found anywhere else but on Tumblr.

This culture is visible through a type of blogging, or of posting on the website called 'webweaving' by its practitioners. Webweaving (Fig. 1, Fig. 2) is a creative, transformative form of archival practice through which users combine text, images, and other media elements and compile them into poetic, collage-like posts that reflect particular themes. Common themes include feelings, such as love, nostalgia, isolation, or other universal subjects such as death and relationships, with an abundance of subcategories blooming under this broad umbrella. By selecting pieces of media, weavers emphasize the connection between the different forms, and as such weave their consumption and curation of media into personal narratives/personal connection to the material.

Fig. 1
Excerpt from a weave created as part of this project's research-creation component
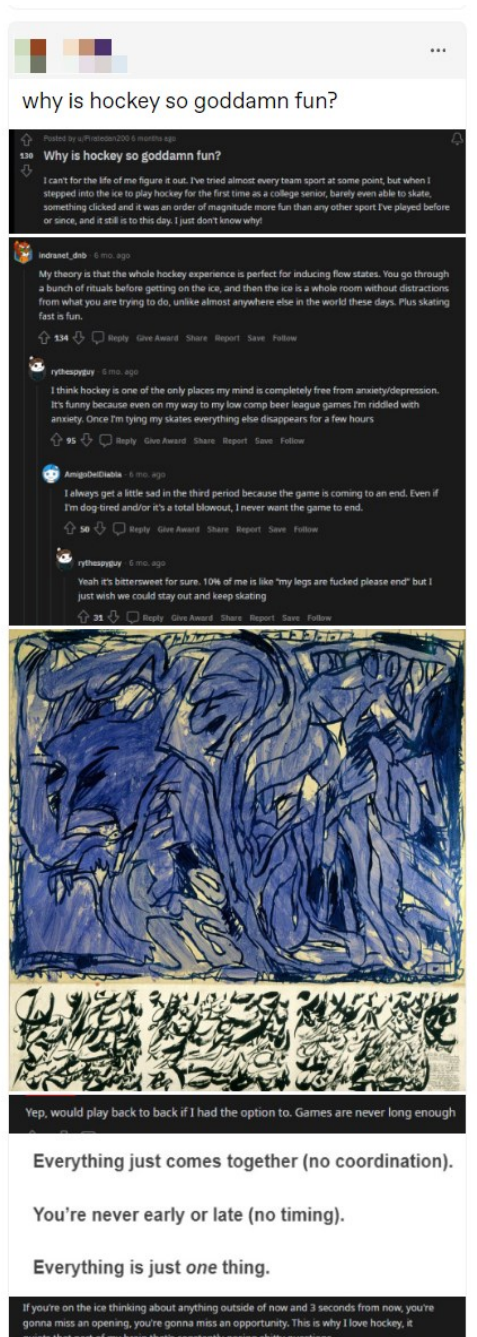
Note: This webweave asks a question in its title ("why is hockey so fun?") and answers through the weave, which is a collection of over a dozen images thematically responding to the question.

Fig. 2
Separate excerpt from a weave created as part of this project's research-creation component
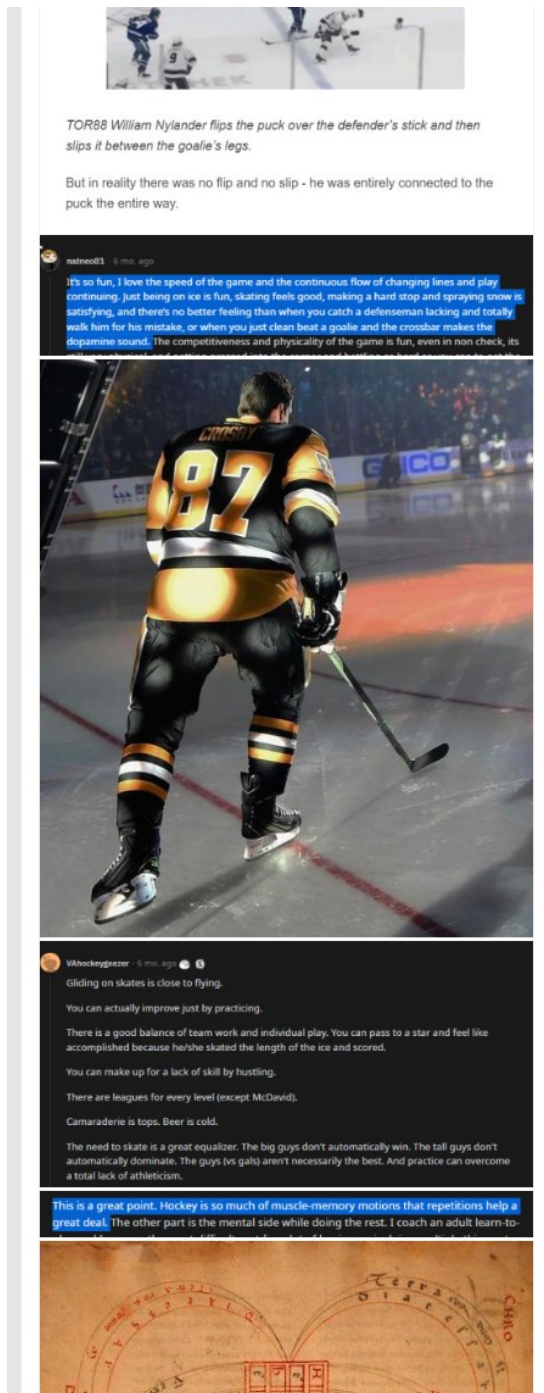
Why study webweaving? It's a fascinating case study wherein the creative process of weaving reflects the values and ethics of Web 1.0 (connectivity, expression, dehiearchized content) and as such does not follow conventional trajectories of platform presence/art consumption of the

contemporary digital landscape. I hope that the impact of this thesis will be two-fold. Firstly, I am documenting an understudied phenomenon at the intersection of art history, media studies, and research-creation. Due to a lack of formal/academic documentation, webweaving is currently an underexplored form of media. Secondly, I hope to create conversation or participate in a shift in perspective around the way that digital cultural expression and consumption exist in our quotidian. Instead of a technologically deterministic perspective focused on the Internet and associated platforms as stifling social structures that feel lacking in humanity, we will use this case study of Tumblr's webweaving environment as an optimistic example of a symbiotic relationship between art, community, and platform. My areas of inquiry are antecedents of the webweaving motif in digital art, cultural production on platforms, and digital girlhood studies. As such, my research in this thesis turns to a combination of media studies and art history and aims to fill a gap in the user experience and creative process of posting on the platform.

This thesis is driven by my own experience on the periphery of these fringe webweaving communities. As a longtime Tumblr user, I have witnessed the emergence of the genre and have been interacting with webweaving posts for years, while never having created any myself. I find the form fascinating both as a way of engaging with and sharing culture–webweaving is a very real way for users to discover new films, poetry, or music–but also of articulating the complicated nuances of the 'born digital' existence, which I fall under.

While the theoretical and analytical aspects of this project are unmistakably vital, it would be impossible to explore the hydra-like nature of webweaving in a linear, written thesis. Indeed, webweaving is a genre of creation that is as dependent on images as it is on words. It is both a mode of private, introspective archiving and an extremely rich and ever-evolving digital tapestry, a collective expressive form that mutates every day and grows with its many user-creator artists. Any authentic ethnographic dive into webweaving needs to grapple with the multiplicitous and sometimes even contradictory aspects of the phenomenon, which must be investigated not only in terms of content but also in terms of form.

Through ethnographic analysis, content analysis, and research-creation, this thesis will answer questions such as:

1) What is webweaving?
2) How does webweaving as a metaphor and active process teach us about connection and community on Tumblr?
3) What does it mean to create humanistic meaning online in a platformed, connected landscape?

The theoretical frameworks I am handling in this project emerge from platform studies and art history. Through my research, I am situating webweaving as a form of (platformed) sociality and cultural creation. I am interested in analyzing how these processes occur through Jennifer Pybus' interpretation of platforms as "archives of feeling" that vehicle affect and enable or discourage social connectivity (2015). Pybus' framework is developed out of danah boyd's vision of platforms as networked publics that share platform-specific practices, perspectives, and habits (such as, I argue, webweaving) (Boyd in Papacharissi, 2011).

My research sub-questions are divided into three categories:

1) *Definitional/genre questions:*
   How do we define webweaving as a creative form? Who is a web weaver? What are the recurring themes of webweaving?
2) *Questions about process:*
   Why do web weavers choose this form of content as opposed to other forms? What does webweaving allow them to express? How does Tumblr as a platform enhance or disrupt webweaving?
3) *Broader conclusions:*
   What can webweaving as a metaphor and active process teach us about connection and community?

To answer these questions, this thesis follows a four-chapter structure. In Chapter 1, I contextualize webweaving, tracing a selective history of artistic and cultural production on the Internet from the 80s onwards. In Chapter 2, I take a look at Tumblr's history, culture, and principal features to understand the digital lifestyles of users on the platform. In Chapter 3, I present the results of my ethnographic and personal research-creation work, as well as some findings and conclusions regarding how webweaving functions socially, culturally, and aesthetically, and what it means to its creators. In Chapter 4, we continue to discuss the particularities of webweaving as a media genre, notably touching on how the form combines 'high' and 'low' brow culture, and how it has generated its own artistic 'canon'. In Chapter 5, we analyze the affective dimension of webweaving, and how it becomes a tool for its users to find humanistic value in their everyday lives.

A note on style

To capture the spirit of webweaving in a way that cannot be done through data collection alone, this thesis purposefully utilizes a non-linear, collage-like writing style, particularly in the latter chapters. You will find that data and analysis are merged with more subjective personal commentary, that academic writing is combined with popular writing by authors such as Anne Carson or Joan Didion. This writing style has similarities to the 'braided essay', a creative non-fiction genre that weaves 'threads' written from different perspectives to capture the full thematic width of a particular subject.

Methodology & Process

Selection of methods

My methodology combines network ethnography with a research-creation component through which I produced weaves to gather data on the production process. These methods were employed sequentially. Network ethnography is a synergistic method that melds ethnographic elements with social network analysis (SNA), an information science method used to study social structures through the use of graph theory and networks (Otte & Rousseau, 2002). Coined by sociologist Philip Howard, this method aimed to bridge a methodological gap between computer science, social sciences, and media studies to study new, internet-based communications networks

in the early 2000s. It was first applied to study the 'e-politics' community of the 2000 American electoral season, allowing individual community members to be socially contextualized in relation to political actors (including parties, lobbyists), and media.

This fusion combines the strengths and mitigates the weaknesses of each method. Indeed, qualitative methods, such as ethnography, render rich descriptions of human interaction but are ill-suited to large, networked clusters of information in terms of scope. On the other hand, quantitative analysis methods such as SNA, which identifies the "relative positioning of members and subgroups" in a mediated network, do permit an "overarching sketch of interaction" (Howard, 2002, p.550). While the weakness of SNA can be a lack of detail and nuance in analysis, this is solved through ethnographic inquiry, which helps determine why group positions and partitions are socially and culturally significant (Howard, 2002, p551).

Moving forward two decades, the world is irreparably networked, and researchers have become increasingly interested in studying online life. The value of network ethnography has thus increased in parallel–indeed, the method is useful in working with communities or organizations "extended" by the use of new media technology in contexts where data is transmitted at high speed, in large amounts, and sometimes even through decentralized networks. Striking a balance between qualitative and quantitative analysis, network ethnography allows us to study both macro-structure (platform affordances) and cultural micro-agents (organic user intent). As such, network ethnography was the starting method of the project, as it was used to define nodes and map out a general sense of where, how, and who to look at to define webweaving as a cultural, creative genre.

SNA - breakdown of web weaver selection

Network ethnography uses ethnographic field methods on sites chosen through SNA. Field sites are not geographical nor territorial, instead consisting of a virtual perceived community whose most important nodes are the desired 'cases' of study. Consequently, the first step in applying network ethnography is to select, research, and enter a field site, until the researcher can roughly make sense of the community's shape and boundaries (Howard, 2002, p.561). In my case, I studied a perceived 'webweaver community' and considered major (i.e. popular) weavers as nodes. These accounts would have the most followers and as such, impact on the genre. Between January 10th and 27th, 2023, I searched through Tumblr's "webweaving" tag for posts that had the most notes (>10k notes) and then checked the user account for more information. Was this user a frequent weaver or was their popular weave I had found a one-time hit? Was the user profile public, or was it private, not meant to be seen by audiences outside the platform? In most cases, popular weaves were created by popular weavers, who also helpfully had additional information about their practice, resources, and thought process when weaving on their accounts.

Once I was happy with the selection of the node/weaver, I selected one of their most popular weaves to study in my 'observational analysis' phase. I examined 30 nodes to allow for diversity in the data set and the possibility of identifying real trends. By the time I had decided to expand my initial node set from 20 to 30, I was also selecting posts by authors who were appearing on my feed–these were still popular posts with >10k notes. I ultimately also chose a handful of nodes that I thought would be interesting to talk about, such as the one posted by the (official) Netflix account or smaller accounts with particular 'styles' that I thought would bring diversity to

the dataset, and allow me to talk about formal variation in webweaving, even though these posts had a lot fewer notes. For this final handful, I tried to avoid themes, symbols, and imagery that I had already seen in previous nodes (e.g. if I had a >10k post about eating clementines, I purposefully avoided that theme in this last set).

Through this selection process, I ended up browsing a lot of blogs and collecting lots of contextual/peripheral information about popular themes, symbols, and imagery through webweaving, which I'll touch on later in Chapter 3.

Data collection and analysis

Once the weaves were selected, it was time to move in an ethnographic direction. My goal here was to study the weaves for artistic and cultural references, and also to gain insight into the weavers as a demographic. To achieve this, I developed a questionnaire that I would answer for each 'node' that I looked at. Here is my questionnaire, which I filled out for 30 weaves posted by 30 different accounts.

Analysis questionnaire:

   1. *When was the weave posted? Who posted it?*
I began by looking at the date of the post and the name of the account. Through context clues, I identified whether the blog was a main blog or a side blog dedicated to webweaving or a related subject. I checked if the account was public or private, as I wanted to use only publicly visible accounts in my research.

   2. *What is the weave about?*
Next, I looked at the weave directly. Sometimes the subject of the weave was articulated explicitly through a sentence or phrase in the caption or user tags. If the subject of the weave was not made clear in this fashion, then I inferred based on the images used in the weave.

   3. *What is included in the weave? Is there anything particular about the structure?*
Still looking at the weave directly, I took note of anything that stood out to me in the construction of the weave. I looked at visual details such as how many and what types of images had been used, what the text-to-visual ratio was in the post, and what sort of visual organization had been prioritized. I also looked for particular weavers' 'styles' by searching for personal touches in editing or assembly, recurring imagery or weave structures, and more. I looked at the length of the caption and notes as well. Putting all of this together, I established a comparison to other posts I was viewing for this research (as well as my background knowledge of web weaves) to determine what aspects of the weave were emulating or reminiscent of pre-existing weaves, and what aspects were unique to the particular weaver. Finally, putting these elements together, I also interpreted how I thought the weaver meant for the post to be read, and kept track of how 'legible' the posts were. Was it easy to understand? Was this because many elements were familiar, or because it was just well-constructed?

   4. *How many notes does it have?*
I checked the number of notes on webweave posts. Notes include likes, reblogs, and comments.

5.   What are people saying about it in the tags and replies? How is it being received?
I opened the tags on the webweave posts to see what other users were commenting on when reblogging. I watched out for what sort of language was being used, and for repeated comments that could let me infer what the general interpretation of a weave might be.

6.   What are blog demographics? (Age, defining features/intro, gender)
In line with Question 1 (who posted the weave and when), I searched the weaver's blog for more in-depth, publicly visible information. To do so, I scrolled through the blog, looking for personal text posts more specifically (i.e. blogging about daily life and thoughts). I also looked for information located in the blog's bio, usually age, gender, basic interests or general details, as well as 'about me' pages that tended to contain similar information.

7.   Does this person call themselves a weaver? Does their blog contain any other references to weaving terminology or processes?
I checked the tags on the initial post: often weavers use a personal tag to categorize their own posts (eg: 'my weaves', 'mine', etc.). If the blog had a tag like this, I identified whether the weaver used language relating to directly webs or weaving, or if they had their own, alternative terminology. I also looked for more information vis-a-vis a personal artistic style that might emerge through the weaves in this tag.

8.   Is the user on any other platforms?
I looked through the blog's 'about me' page and bio for links or references to other platforms. If this was the case, I identified whether their Tumblr persona and weaving practice extended through all platforms or if it was unique to Tumblr.

9.   Are they active on Tumblr? How long has their blog existed?
I checked blogs to see if they were active and to make sure I wasn't working with weaves that had been posted years ago so my information would be up to date. Even though I initially decided I would consider 'active' blogs to post every 2-3 days, most blogs I visited at minimum 2-3 times daily and as such were daily users. To check how long users had been on the platform, I looked for context clues in the bio or 'about' page but often defaulted to checking archives to find the oldest   recorded   post   by   day,   month,   and   year   on   the   blog.

Through the questionnaire, I ended up drawing results about the demographic of weavers, weavers' relationship to the genre, and different processes and styles of webweaving. The broad questions that I sought to answer were: 1. What was the relationship between the users, the platform, and the content/art? 2. What did the weaving process look like, and what did the weaves look like? In a nutshell: these questions allowed me to ascertain the 'who, what, when, why, and how' of the webweaver's process as well as look into reactions from other Tumblr users.

Ethics and privacy

Privacy and intimacy are central themes of this project. When conducting observational analysis, most of my referencing is indirect, and when it does directly quote from a user's blog or

tags, it is sourced from publicly visible blogs. As opposed to private blogs, which are locked to anyone but fellow Tumblr users, public blogs are viewable by anyone with their URL. This does not mean that they are meant to be viewed by the wider public, of course. These bloggers operate with the assumption that only their followers are viewing their work, and this informs a potential delivery of intimate information. As per the Association of Internet Researchers' Ethical Guidelines for Internet Research, I decided to respect these expectations and protect these users by anonymizing the blog names (franzke et al., 2020, p.7). The usernames of the webweavers are not necessary to understand the data, and as such, the same amount of informational friction that exists online is present in the project, whether or not the real usernames are used. The full (anonymized) list of referenced weavers can be found in Appendix A.

Furthermore, the unfortunate reality of working with digital content is that this material is ephemeral. Posts are subject to be modified through further editing by their creators or even deleted over time. This issue was already present during my data collection in January 2023. If users changed usernames, which is common practice on Tumblr when changing the appearance of one's blog, the URLs referring to the previous blog name no longer worked, even if none of the work had been deleted. Sometimes, weaves that garnered too much attention and went 'too viral' were also deleted by their creator (often the case with smaller accounts who don't want excessive attention). As such, anonymizing the work of these weavers allows for the material to stand for itself while also protecting the weavers and their expectations with regards to the visibility of their work.

Philosophy and evolution of the research-creation component

Philosopher and research-creation practitioner Erin Manning posits that research-creation acknowledges that normative modes of "inquiry and containment" may be incapable of evaluating value, forms of research that may be academically unformalized but important in exploring "extra-linguistic" forms of knowledge such as pedagogy, practice, and collective experimentation (2016). "Consider that making is a thinking in its own right," Erin Manning asks of us (2016, p.134).

I don't think that research-creation, as a strategy, is disparate from the process of webweavers, albeit they are working in a different context. In Ancient Greek philosophy, techne, meaning 'art' or 'craft', is a philosophical concept that refers to learned skills that are materially applied as a form of knowledge, it is concerned with the application of expertise (making or doing) as opposed to a passive, reflective understanding (Honderich, 1995). Technai could be used to reference daily, practical rationality, but also was meant to be a metaphor that guided one through life, to enact a particular 'art of living'. The root of the word derives from the proto-Indo-European root 'teks' meaning 'to fabricate', but also 'to weave' and is found in words like 'architect', 'context', 'technology', and 'textile' today (Etymonline, 2023). As articulated in the next chapter, the history of the web is imbricated with this notion of making, tinkering, and weaving to generate connection and knowledge–and the metaphor extends into the research-creation, or at least the conceptualization of it as I entered this project. These are the core themes of this project: art, craft, technology.

In *How to Make Art at the End of the World,* Canadian artist and research-creation practitioner Nathalie Loveless posits that we live in "compromised times" that cultivate fantasies of the self as "isolationist, privileged, and dangerous" (Shotwell through Loveless, 2016 and 2019, p.16). The power of the arts, often overlooked in academia for their supposed lack of rigor and accountability in terms of quantitative benchmarks, is one of "sensuous, aesthetic attunement" wherein art becomes a tool to "focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape cultural imaginaries". If the distinction between "the philosopher knows and the artist makes" in academia is important, it is perhaps because research-creation allows us to ask the vital, ecologically urgent question: "How might the world be organized differently?" (2019, p.29 & p.16)

I found that the question of reframing the world was incredibly pertinent to how weavers were essentially creating digital, networked art to romanticize or narrativize the world around them (see Chapter 5). Struck by this, I decided to explore research-creation as a method in my project.

Initially, I meant to employ a "creative presentation of research" mode of research-creation (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012). Inspired by Internet artists like avocado_ibruprofen who use mixed media zine-making to capture the nuances of post-digital life and my own experience in arts publishing, I planned to create a zine to present my findings. The concept of the zine was *A Web Weaver's Field Guide* and would reflect on the core concepts or traits of webweaving and explain what we can take away from the genre and apply as guiding creative directives in other artistic applications. To bring this tenet into the field of digital art: as net-artist Kevin Bewersdorf explains in his essay *Spirit Surfing,* which is about navigating the Internet in the 90s, I surfed and scrolled to begin a creative process of finding. I also looked to Anne Carson's *Float*, a collection of twelve individual chapbooks. The effect is a sense of controlled chaos that allows important themes to "float" to the surface. *Float* employs a non-linear and mixed-media approach, with the chapbooks allowing for reading in any order. Although she is not a network/digital artist, Carson was one of the original inspirations behind this thesis. Outside of being a Tumblr/webweaver 'fan favorite' for her beautiful writing (see Chapter 4 for a list of commonly referenced artists in web weaves), I believe her enthusiastic approach to metaphorization, her mixing of poetic voices, time periods, and poetic structures, and her esoteric imagery make her a strong influence on webweaving culture (for more discussion on webweaving and poetic forms, see the tail end of Chapter 3).

Webweaving: a personal account

As it developed, my project became more in alignment with a "research-from-creation" approach, which takes the process of creation as a data gathering method for research (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012). Having removed a component of my project where I had planned to interview weavers and hear about their process in their own thoughts, I settled on creating my own weaves to learn more about what making weaves feels like.

I have been on Tumblr for years and run several blogs–one of them I use to blog and wax poetic about sports and sports culture. As such, I experimented with hockey weaves, somewhat strategically, because a) I would already have a clear subject to follow to make weaves about b) I had a built-in audience on that blog that I knew would react fairly well or expected this type of content from my blog (i.e. variations on 'waxing poetic') and c) I already had a stock of 'content'

(screenshots, images, even just thinking about sports culturally) to work with, so I would not have to start from scratch. It was also hockey season. Fans of this sport were active and there would be a lot of new, active 'content' to work from. Following a process that we will discuss step-by-step in Chapter 3 (see page 46), I made a handful of weaves that reached a small but enthusiastic audience. The most popular weave has around 250 notes and is about the somewhat spiritual 'beauty' of watching hockey and the graceful movements of ice skating (see Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

In terms of the process, as I mentioned, webweaving felt like a natural extension of my thinking process. I stockpiled references and connected them, not necessarily in a way that makes 'logical' sense, but emotional sense–themes emerged. As I followed the hockey season, I stockpiled more content than usual, saving resources on my computer, via a personal organization system of folders in folders in folders (Fig. 3), but also in the Tumblr 'drafts' section–who knew when I would use this picture of these two players fighting, blood on their faces, or this shot of arena, lights low, ice gleaming? This was interesting because it also revealed a capacity for Tumblr to be a sort of personal archive–not only in terms of posted, publicly visible content but also for personal, diary-like quick notes or entries (Fig. 4). At any given time, my drafts would consist of anything from grocery lists to ideas for posts, to make webweaves.

Fig. 3
Screen shot of my hockey webweave folders

| assorted canucks | assorted sports poetry | beauty of skating poetry | dramatic expressions | goalie isolated | in-game screenshots |

| mentorship | odd | other teams | poignant socmed commentary | sick pics |
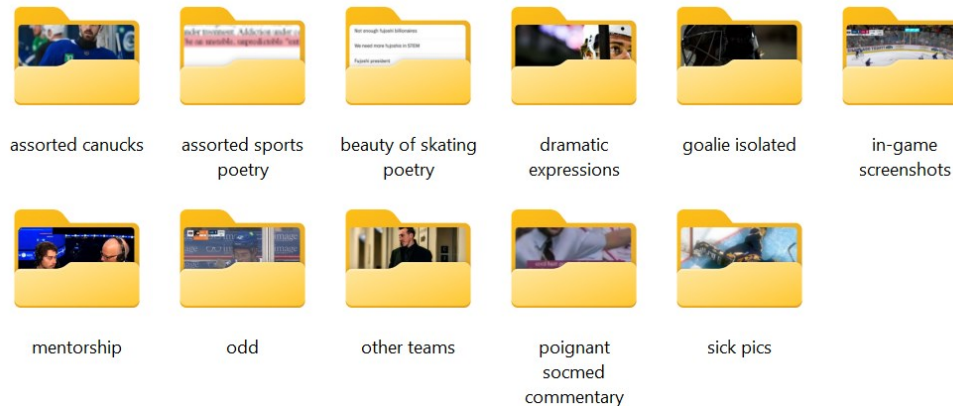
Note: Folders are used to separate screenshots and downloaded images into organized themes.

Returning to the creation of posts: all of a sudden I was listening to coaches' interviews, I was watching backstage footage, and reading seasonal analyses, I was struck with the desire to 'understand'. Without really wanting to delve into psychoanalysis, this desire reminded me of Loveless' work with the Lacanian petit a, the "object-cause of desire", or the "pedagogical lure" in *How to Make Art at the End of the World*, which she evokes to define the 'drive' or 'gaze' of sorts behind research-creation, the curiosity or need for epistemological fulfillment that "grasps us

as much if not more than we grasp it" (2019, p.32). I pushed even further, almost without realizing it. For example, to make a post about the 'doomed nature' of the Vancouver Canucks, I found myself at the library, rereading Jean Genet and Jean-Luc Lagarce for quotes about existential despair. To make a post about Edmonton Oilers captain Connor McDavid, I read news articles about the Alberta oil sands industry and even bought Kate Beaton's *Two Years in the Oil Sands*.

Fig. 4
Webweave under construction from my unposted Tumblr 'drafts'
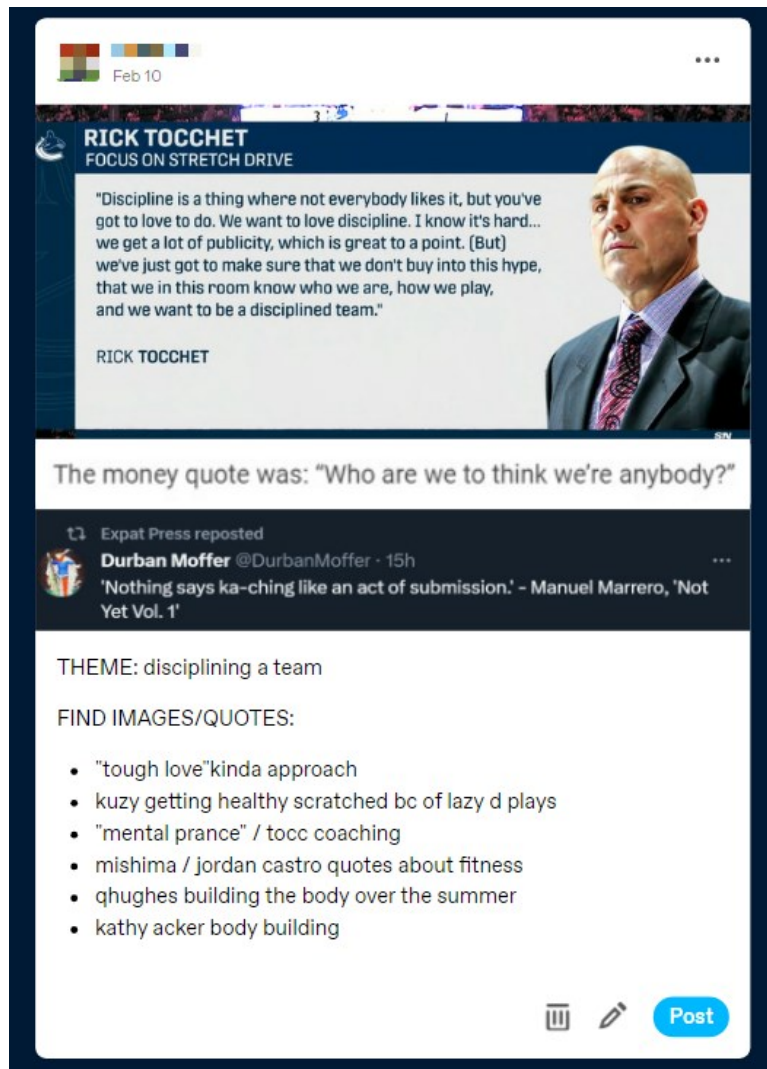
Note: This depicts a drafted post, assembled from quotes and images that I know I want to center in the weave that I'm making, as well as some personal notes on themes and what kind of visual material I am looking for to complete the post.

Again, the posts, the creation, were an extension of the curiosity–an end that justifies the means. It was a desire not to 'fill out the post' or simply to make content but a desire to 'know more' so that I could articulate the heart of the issue adequately. I will speak about the reception

of my posts in a later section. Some of these ideas were precursors to, or rather, echoed other conclusions I would draw in my data analysis. Indeed, the use of research-creation as a method here was a sort of proxy for interviewing the weavers (which was outside of the scope of this thesis). It lent insight into how to shape my ethnographic questionnaire, as well as what compositional and visual elements to look out for during my observation analysis.

We will continue to discuss some of these ideas–the distinction between types of weaves and their patterns of circulation, tagged reaction, influences, and crediting throughout the rest of this thesis. For now, we move on to Chapter 1, in which I contextualize webweaving, tracing a selective history of artistic and cultural production on the Internet from the 80s onwards.

Chapter 1:

Contextualization: artistic and cultural production in the age of platforms

Web 1.0 was a different dream. It still exists—like any dream, it persists, hazy and idealistic, in tendrils and features and thesis chapters. But in the real world, it will have proven to be utopic, if extinct. Nevertheless, the roots of this thesis are firmly tethered to a man called Tim Berners-Lee, an invention called the Internet, and the bloom of social, cultural, and artistic possibilities that emerged alongside it. In this chapter, you will find both a literature review and a contextualization of my thesis' case study. If, currently, your hand is still scratching your scalp and wondering: 'What is webweaving?', then you will find the response in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I explain some of the 'why and how' of webweaving. I recount the (thematically relevant) transition of the web from its 'Wild West', read-only state (1.0) to the actual, platformed, interactive state in which we find it today (2.0). This will include an explanation of platforms and the publics, networked as they are, that use them. We'll take a gander at what sorts of arts expanded with the evolution of the digital age, and how their core characteristics–networked, decentralized, replicative–have informed the canon of art history and future generations of creators. We'll find that discussing art will also mean discussing the digital structures that host art online.

1.1: The utopic vision of the early Web

Arachne and Athena

Let's start at the beginning. From ancient Greek: techne, which would be adapted into words like, 'technology' and 'technocratia', originally refers to 'techne' craft. In Arachne's story, there is technology–the loom, the wool–and the story. The story is so well-crafted that it reaches the ears of Mount Olympus. Arachne, the young woman in ancient Greece, boasting that her weaving talent was better than a goddess's? Impossible. Hubristic. Athena, goddess of wisdom, and fellow weaver, is struck by the slander, and skipping aside several events in the story, transforms Arachne into a spider to weave for all her life. This legend is a tale with a moral: artists, as great as they may be, must maintain at least the illusion of humility, or suffer disastrous consequences. Usually, the story ends here, but what if we continued to spin the yarn? What if Arachne's story continued, happy as ever, even once she had become a powerless and pitiable spider? What if from the safety of the ground, secure in her black, eight-legged carapace, her eight shining eyes reflecting the sun and the Olympian shadow of Athena above her, Arachne was happier now, now that she had a singular, unique, and clear purpose–the webs she weaved purer, stronger, sleeker, shinier than ever? The whole of her web, her creation stretched out before her, through which she could feel every twinge of movement, and which, in some ways, when bleached with the bright white light of the sun, felt like the entire world was hers. So, in the beginning, there was Arachne. There was a seed and a sprout, and a spider, who tentatively and carefully crawled towards it. There was a web. There was a god, then a machine, and then craft, but in the beginning, there was Arachne. Somewhere in the nuanced waves of human nature, there was a need for connection, a need to listen and listen to, and nothing could stop it, not even the forces of the machine of heaven. It was an unstoppable and uncompromisable wave of feeling.

But in the beginning, there was a web.

The Web by Tim Berners-Lee, 1989

> *Inventing the World Wide Web involved my growing realization that there was a power in arranging ideas in an unconstrained, weblike way. And that awareness came to me through precisely that kind of process. The Web arose as the answer to an open challenge, through the swirling together of influences, ideas, and realizations from many sides, until, by the wondrous offices of the human mind, a new concept jelled. It was a process of accretion, not the linear solving of one well-defined problem after another. [...] A computer typically keeps information in rigid hierarchies and matrices, whereas the human mind has the special ability to link random bits of data. When I smell coffee, strong and stale, I may find myself again in a small room over a corner coffeehouse in Oxford. My brain makes a link and instantly transports me there.* (Berners-Lee, 1999, p. 3)

In 1980, Tim Berners-Lee, son of mathematicians and father of the Internet, found himself in a bit of a tough spot. He's been hired by CERN–otherwise unabbreviated as the European Organization for Nuclear Research–as a freelance software consultant. While he is familiar with the tasks asked of him, the sheer number of projects helmed by his new colleagues, their colleagues, his bosses, coworkers, and acquaintances, and the connections between them are daunting and overwhelming. In his free time, Berners-Lee spends his hours writing a program that will allow him to find not only their names, positions, and projects. In his head, the idea is crystal clear. "Suppose all the information stored on computers everywhere were linked. Suppose I could program my computer to create a space in which anything could be linked to anything" (Berners-Lee, 1999, p.4). The foreword of Berner-Lee's memoir, *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web by Its Inventor*, is penned by former MIT Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS), IT pioneer, and friend of Berners-Lee, Michael Dertouzos. Dertouzos writes that his first meeting with Berners-Lee already separated his vision from that of "technologists and entrepreneurs [who] were launching or merging companies to exploit the web". Instead of asking "How can I make the Web mine?" Berners-Lee's acting directive was: "How can I make the Web yours?" (Berners-Lee, 1999, p.viii). While slightly quaint (expected for the introduction to Berners-Lee's memoir), this anecdote foreshadows the tension that will follow in the development of the web–and the development of any technology. We will see it affect the future CEO of Tumblr, David Karp, as well as members of the community of web weavers this thesis is written about. The tension between innovators, pedagogists, amateurs and the corpo-professional realm, funding, surviving, and selling out.

As such, Berners-Lee used the time in his off-hours to write Enquire, the program that would eventually become the Web. Enquire stored information without matrices or trees, which you might expect to find in these sorts of programs. Instead, it worked by storing information via 'connections'–or hypertexts. Indeed, expanding Enquire required a "vigilant focus" on input connections to make sure they made humanly logical sense and new knowledge entries could only be added if Berners-Lee could add them as an *attached connection* to a previous entry (1999, p.10). For semantic and historical clarity, let's remind ourselves that while Berners-Lee is working on the Web, the Internet has almost already been invented. Funded by the US Department of Defense

Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), 'ARPANET' emerged in the 1970s as a decentralized server-to-server communications project. It would evolve into a public network, still principally used by military, academic, and other research institutions, but that tied together 'host devices' to one another using 'protocols', allowing the disparate units to exchange information (Ryan, 2010, p.31-33). What Berners-Lee brings to the equation and what would become the 'Web' is a construct that allows a collection of pages, limited at the time, but existing nonetheless, that would be available online on the Internet. Still, Enquire did not run on the Internet, and would not for years. Some of the fundamental pieces that Berners-Lee incorporated into his design include:

1. HyperText Markup Language, or HTML, is the formatting language that would be employed for the Web.
1. Uniform Resource Identifier (i.e. URI, later known as Uniform Resource Locators, i.e. URLs) that provided 'addresses' connected to resources.
2. Hypertext Transfer Protocole (HTTP) – Protocol that allows for retrieval of linked resources through Web. (Berners-Lee, 1999).

Figure 5
Cover page image of Berner-Lee's proposal for the World Wide Web (1989, through CERN, 2014)
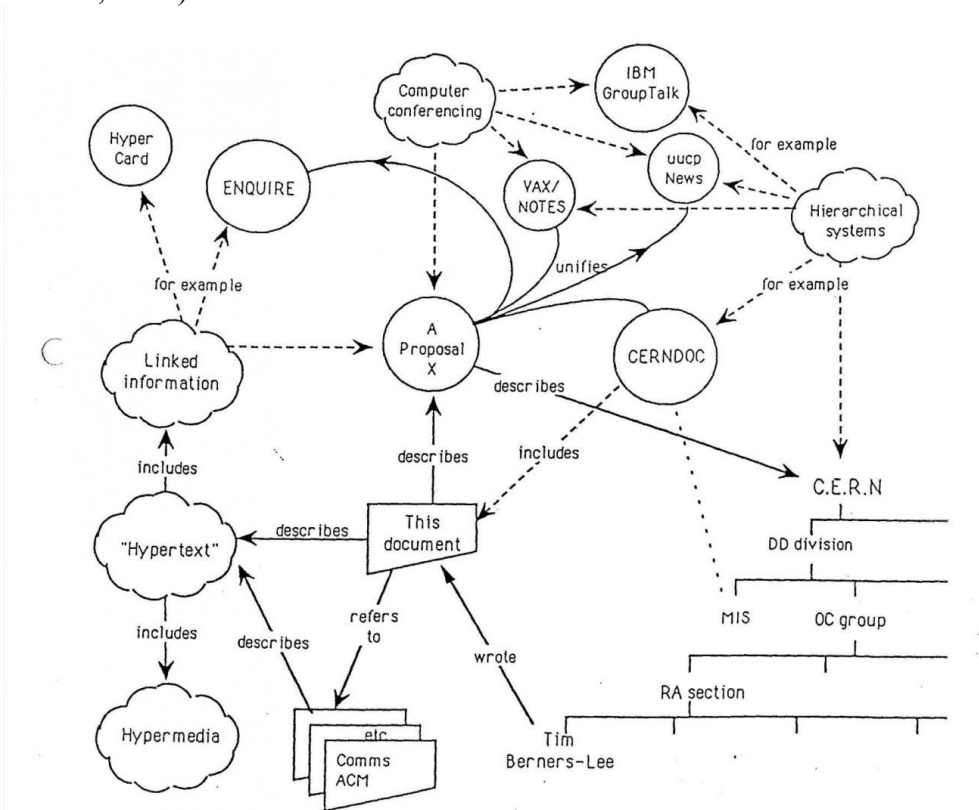
Note. This diagram displays the connected, hyper-linked nature of information in Berners-Lee's vision for the Web.

Digital Utopianism

Berners-Lee's vision emerged out of the proto-tech movement, which is very different from the Silicon Valley conception of tech and progress we recognize today. We find Berners-Lee's name among, for example, thinkers like Stewart Brand, steward of the countercultural magazine *Whole Earth Catalog* that focused on 'alternative education', a DIY, maker-centric approach to technology that was harmoniously ecological and holistic. This was web pioneer work–years later Steve Jobs would directly compare the *Catalog* to Google at his 2005 Standford University commencement speech, calling it one of the "bibles" of his time, a massively influential work that was "idealistic and overflowing with neat tools and great notions", like "Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along (Stanford, 2008).[1] Similarly, in 1972, an early tech collective called the People's Computer Company gained traction–their manifesto read that "computers are mostly used against people instead of for people; used to control people instead of to free them; time for change [...] a People's Computer Company" (Ryan, 2010, p. 56).

Indeed, Berners-Lee, the People's Computer Company, and Brand may not have been directly related, but they were part of the same digital utopianism movement that form the 1960s-80s joined 'counter-culture' to 'cyberculture'. Many of these thinkers were located in the California Bay area which was a simultaneous foyer for "burgeoning counterculture" (note: Civil Rights movement, ecology, New Communalism) and technological "centers of computer research" (Turner, 2006). General traits of the proto-tech movement were a deep curiosity not only about the technological world, but also the organic world, which manifested in the use of symbolism and imagery like mushrooms, webs, etc., a belief in shared and collective education, and a critical eye towards conventional normative hierarchies. These beliefs were of course also influenced by the nearly necessarily collectivistic nature of early tech work, still incredibly amateurish and hobbyistic, working together to experiment on decentralized web protocols from different servers (Ryan, 2010, p. 31).

Whilst working on Enquire, Berners-Lee was working with technological precedents and co-creators. Vannevar Bush, former MIT dean of engineering and World War II head of the US Offense of Scientific Research and Development, wrote about a "photo-electromechanical machine" called the Memex which could "make and follow cross-references among microfilm documents" by a "process of binary coding, photocells, and instant photography" (1999, p.5). Berners-Lee also heavily emphasized Ted Nelson as an inspiration, a "professional visionary" and author of the 1965 text *Literary Machines,* wherein he develops a fictional project called 'Xanadu' in which all information in the world is connected by hypertext (nonsequential, machine-readable text in which the 'reader' can jump from link to link, from connection to connection). Finally, Stanford's Doug Engelbart, who envisioned homemade computer mice that allowed users to steer the computer cursor through links, email, and hypertext with ease (this was incredibly impressive, at the time), argued for organic and natural-feeling human-computer alignment in software design (1999, p.6). All these references, argues Berners-Lee in his memoir, were ahead of their time. "I happened to come along with the time, and the right interest and inclination, after hypertext and the Internet had come of age. The task left for me was to marry them together." (1999, p.6).

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[1] Visit the *Whole Earth Index*, a recently completed project by archivist and digital media artist Mindy Seu, which presents an incredible digital near-complete archive of Whole Earth publications, made available for scholarship and research purposes.

But if we linger on Berners-Lee as the 'inventor' of the Web today, it is also because of the ongoing relevance of his conceptual vision. He remains not only the figurehead for this era of the Web but also the ideas that it pioneered. It was about infinite potential connections, a vision that encompassed more than just a tool for research or a "vein of information to be mined, it was a true socio-logical endeavor, created in the name of "decentralized and organic growth of ideas, technology, and society" (1999, p.1). Freedom, expression, and connection were at the very heart of this invention, which was meant, above all, to "serve humanity". In a premonitory perspective, Berners-Lee says: "we clump into families, associations, and companies. We develop trust across the miles and distrust around the corner. What we believe, endorse, agree with, and depend on is representable, and increasingly, representable on the Web. We all have to ensure that the society we build with the Web is of the sort we intend." (1999, p.123)

As such, the original 'Web 1.0', as defined by Berners-Lee, might look quite simple today. It only had a handful of features, was built on static HTML, and was monodirectional. Web 1.0 was a largely 'read-only' project, with the goal of website owners publishing information, again, like one might view on a bulletin board, in a newspaper, or even on television (Aghaei, Nematbakhsh, & Farsani, 2012, p.2-3). Berners-Lee describes early Web developments as being driven by sheer passion and excitement, the joy and adrenaline of creating something new–and it working. But by the last few years of the 20th century, the Web became not just an experimental tool, but a common household object and veritable, marketable product. Through this, it became a "battleground" for corporations and government interests, and certain political or religious groups called for censorship of online content (1999, p.124).

The era of personal computing - from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

The 1980s: the future picking up speed, free market politics, disposable income, and a sense of optimism about the future. By the 1980s, the personal computer, which had previously been largely rare outside of "large corporate headquarters and elite government research facilities," was now finally within the grasp of the common man. A pivotal point in this development came with the release of the 'Altair 8800' in 1975. The Altair was the first personal computer, built on the Intel 4004 processor, and would lead to a veritable "tide" of other processors, microprocessors, and personal computers on the market as supply would rise to meet demand. As per the creator of the Altair, Ed Roberts: "[we built] a computer for the masses. Something that would eliminate the Computer Priesthood once and for all [...] and it would be so cheap that no one could afford to not buy it" (via Ryan, 2010, p. 54). In 1984, personal computers, which "were almost unheard of only eight years ago" would overtake sales of mainframe computers (New York Times via Ryan, 2010, p.61). In 2008, a quarter-century later, the number of personal computers in use had reached one billion worldwide. The web had become global–computers were fast, cheap, and efficient and households either had one or wanted one.

With the emergence of the personal computer, the average consumer's online agency increased, and with it, came the ushering in of a new 'age' of the web. If Web 1.0 was the 'read-only', unilateral web, then Web 2.0 was the 'read-write' web. Gradual technological shifts continued to emphasize accessibility, ease of use, bi-directionality, and participatory culture. To note: the term Web 2.0 is a marketable buzzword that piggybacks off the idea of a singular moment

of 'revolution' that would push the Web from one state to another for the sake of a tech hype boom. But it's useful to employ in discussions about the digital environment of the 2000s, which, thanks to an umbrella of newly available technical means, enabled Internet users to "participate, exchange, link, map, upload, post, edit and comment–all in all, to engage with social creation online" (Goriunova, 2012, p.10).

Web 2.0 and blogging

With Web 2.0, there was also a transition in terms of content that was available on the web. The broad idea of democratized cultural production where users would at once be able to watch and be watched–to express themselves and read/watch/listen to others emerged. This is known as participatory culture. Indeed, by bypassing "traditional gatekeepers of legacy media organizations" creators were able to join in the cultural industry without the same amount of legitimacy and money (Duffy, Nieberg, Poell, 2022, p.16). One digital form that embodied the theme of participatory culture was blogs, (originally called weblogs) (Aghaei et al., 2012, p.3). Blogs were web pages composed of posts and welcomed digital visitors, who would comment on entries, and entries could be categorized through tagging systems.

Fig. 6, 7
Screenshots of two GeoCities blog home pages
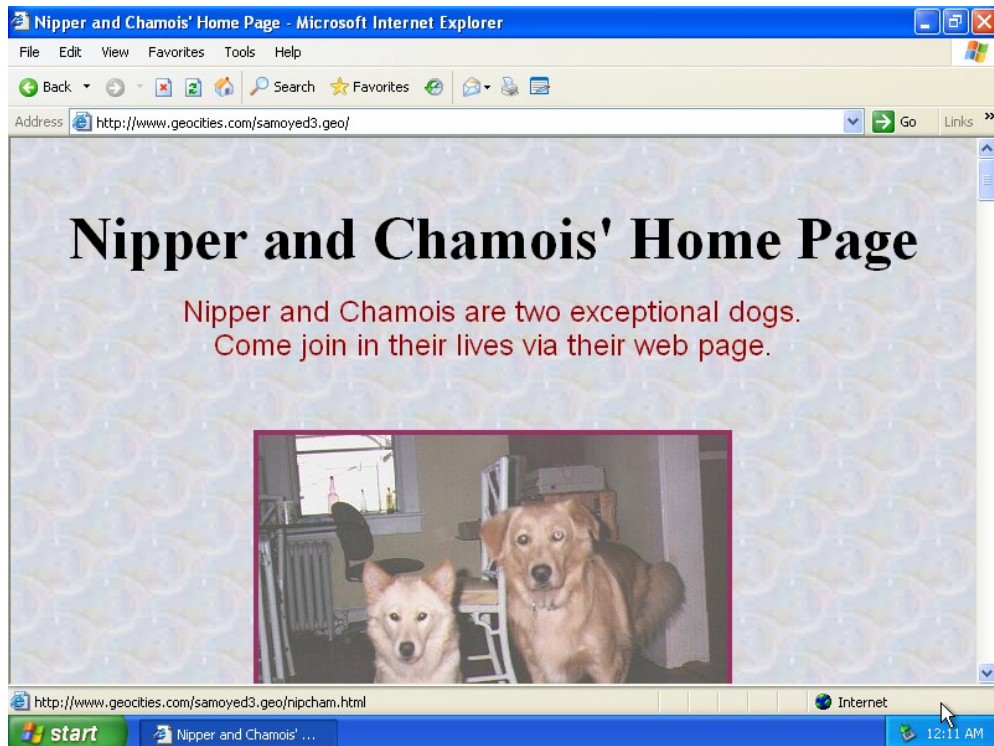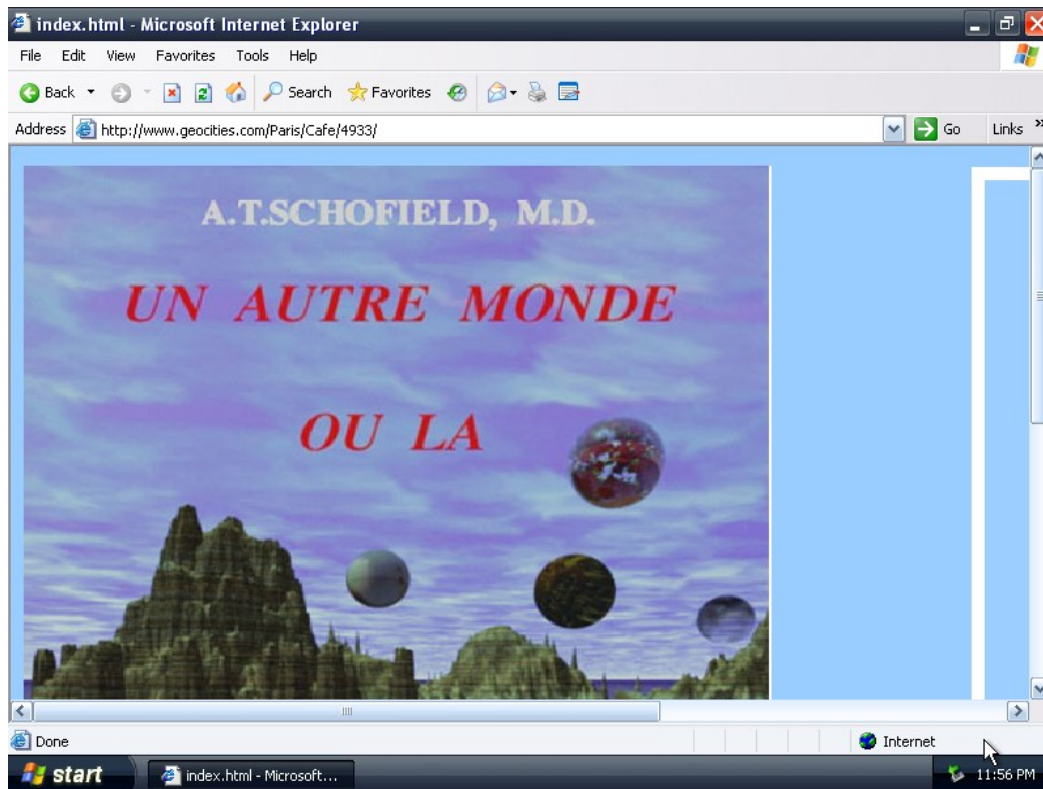
Note. Screenshots shared by *One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age Photo Op*, a Tumblr blog dedicated to archiving old GeoCities home pages.

Notably, Geocities was one of the first big "ventures built on what is now hailed as the defining feature of the Web 2.0 boom–user-generated content" (Manjoo, 2009). It was known for bright, loud, and hyperlink-heavy blogs that users customized as journals or as temples to unique hobbies or interests. Due to the interface of Geocities, it was overwhelmingly simple to add music, change the colors, fonts, and general designs of one's blogs, and seeing users' uniquely customized designs was a core appeal of the platform. At the time of its purchase by Yahoo in 1999, GeoCities was the third-most visited site on the Internet (Manjoo, 2009). The incoming wave of platforms and social media would render GeoCities 'cringe': too personal, too "garish", and not as efficient or sleek as social media would become. Perhaps even more damning, GeoCities let users explore their creativity, but it would fail at a core feature on which sites like Facebook thrived–ensuring that users would find audiences. This too was representative of the shift towards platforms. Per O'Reilly Media circa 2004: "Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as *platform*, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform" (Goriunova, 2012, p.10). Indeed, by 2006, Google, Facebook, and Twitter were all active. Social media would take over the blogosphere and would influence not only online but in-person dynamics forever–at the heart of users' lives.

Platformed publics

Since then, young users have notably turned to the Internet, platforms, and social media to spend their time. This allows them to express themselves, communicate with friends, and engage with the "broader public sphere" (McCracken, 2017, p.152). McCracken argues that this is

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especially important for youths, for whom access to the traditional public sphere has decreased over these same decades, "while surveillance by parents and institutional authorities has greatly increased" (p.152). Referencing Mizuki Ito, danah boyd uses the notion of "networked publics" to describe a "linked set of social, cultural and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media" (Ito through boyd, 2008 in 2011, p.2). boyd notes that these publics are simultaneously a space and a collective of people who virtually inhabit that space, who are shaped as a public by the structure of the platform, the people around them in that space, and their particular practices within it. This draws from Haberstam's idea of 'publics' as audiences and participators in social life, indeed, people in the same public share "a common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness and a consensus regarding the collective interest" (Livingstone through boyd, 2005 in 2011, p.9).

These new, networked publics are shaped by certain affordances, such as persistent online records, extreme replicability of content, high scalability, and searchability (2011, p.7). Their audiences also share characteristics, like: 'invisibility' i.e. not necessarily simultaneous co-presence across space, collapsed presence due to "the lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries" making it difficult to fully ever separate social contexts (2011, p.10). As such, not only are the public and private lives of networked publics increasingly blurred as technology allows physical and digital realms to become increasingly imbricated, but the ideal of authenticity is also at stake–if images of the real world can be staged, Photoshopped, artificially generated, then what is 'real'? Of course, it's worth noting that this argument about authenticity being sacrificed via media representation tends to be recycled by alarmists and critics alike with every cycle of new technology. Or, at the very least, since the invention of photography. For example, this argument appears in *In the Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* with cultural theorist Walter Benjamin's industrial age concept of analog works having unique and irreplicable 'auras' generated by a work's unique presence in physical space (boyd 2011, p.220). According to Benjamin, reproductions (such as photographs of paintings) diminish a work's aura and as such lose its authenticity.

As such: the development of the Web and its associated technology has also produced this particular public/subject position, that of the networked user. This user notably finds themself, actively fighting at worst and subconsciously hindered at best, by daily challenges of the platformed existence. These include content moderation, algorithmic curation, and the necessity for increasing amounts of self-monitoring and self-promotion. Jia Tolentino, Internet-age critic, and New Yorker writer writes that when these forces that act on us are simultaneously hypervisible (ex: Elon Musk's now unavoidable presence on X as 'overlord' of the platform) and invisible (surreptitious data collection in our everyday lives), it has the effect of making us "feel less than ever", unable to parse a tangible difference between life and labor, between physical and digital. Individuals find personal ways to handle these feelings, and, for this thesis, the one that interests us the most is art-making.

1.2 The emergence of networked (artistic) culture

So far in this chapter, we've contextualized the term 'platform', and the transition from the utopic dreams of 70s dream-hackers to the user-friendly, read-write Web that much more closely resembles the one we use today. Art has been present at all points of the Web, including, as is most relevant to our analysis, from the mid-2000s onwards. Art and technology have always intersected–the etymological origin of the term 'technology', as I mentioned, refers to the Greek word *techne,* meaning craft. To digital artists, the Web is not only the tool that allows the sourcing, publishing, and sharing of art, but the Web is also the principal motif and subject of the art itself– how can digital art not be about the digital human experience? As an example, Mark Napier's *Riot* (Fig. 8 & 9) created in 1999, is an experimental browser that blended websites as users surfed through them. *Riot* questioned the 'soft' boundaries of the web and how the boundaries between sites, domains, and services are enforced. As a secondary example, *Alpha 3.4* (Fig. 10) by Charles Lim Li Yong and Woon Tien Wei of Tsunamii.net interrogates the materiality (or perceived lack thereof) of the Internet by documenting the artists' 86-hour trek from the *Documenta* exhibition site (Kassel, Germany) to the location of the exhibition website's server site (Kiel, Germany).

It is impossible to discuss the tangled history of net art and Web services without mentioning the foundational Rhizome, self-described "home of born-digital art since 1996" (Rhizome, 2024). Initially launched as a newsletter by Berlin-based artist and curator Mark Tribe– who, at new media conference Ars Electronica, was invigorated by meeting like-minded individuals bridging contemporary art and emerging technologies, particularly digital and networking technologies. To Tribe's eyes, this was a new media crowd composed of a tremendously vibrant scene, with overlap into the youth club and techno 'trends'. Excitement and collaboration abounded and were electric–Tribe recalls, for example, the impromptu beauty and thrill of "piling into a van with a bunch of artists and driving from Berlin to Linz, Austria, for Ars Electronica" (Ptak, 2010). This would be a radical shift for the art world (Ptak, 2010). As Tribe explains succinctly in an interview:

> *The barriers to entry were falling for a lot of artists which had to do in part with a kind of tipping point in information technology in terms of the accessibility, capability, and ubiquity of personal computers. [...] The Internet started to go mainstream, and suddenly we were waking up to the possibility that we could all be connected in a different way. [...] We could create our own art world that was more egalitarian, more open, perhaps more of a meritocracy. And as a young artist who was really just starting to find his way in the big art world, that had a lot of appeal. [...] Because I was on the outside of a lot of those barriers. (Ptak, 2010).*

As we saw earlier in the chapter, the frothing newness of the Web, which was now, in the late 90s, accessible to artists through personal computers, encouraged intrepid spirits to experiment and share discoveries. There was an energy, passion, and amateurish interest that was reflected in the art that was shared on Rhizome. It was impossible for this art not to be somewhat amateur, as everyone was simultaneously experiencing the novelty of the technology–even experts were not experts. On the business end of affairs, terms like "disintermediate economies" were thrown around by venture capitalists and curators alike to represent the idea that artists would be able to

communicate with audiences directly, without the "middleman" of "gallerists, dealers, curators, and magazines" (2010).

Buoyed by this pioneering spirit and enthusiasm, Rhizome expanded by adding components: a website, an online art archive called Art Basel gaining formal non-profit status in 1998, even becoming an eventual affiliate in residence at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (physical gallery) in 2003, plus a formal preservation program in 2010 (Kaplan, 2021). Through residencies, programs, opportunities, commissions programs, and also the very vital preservation of digital art, Rhizome is active in the realm of digital art to this day. More importantly, still, the existence of Rhizome, whether in its proto-state newsletter form or through the multi-pronged organization as we know it today, provides a sort of 'gathering point' for artists and their works in a decentralized, chaotic internet.

The early net art shared by Rhizome in the 1990s had conceptual, structural, and aesthetic points. In the same way that the Rhizome website/organization provided a bold and radical new path that separated, in some ways, the future of art from its expected path, digital art also opened the possibility of what art could look and feel like. Between 1994 and 1998, the Internet fostered a gregarious online community of net artists, full of zeal and excited to "talk independently of any bureaucracy or art-world institution" (Greene, 2000). Reading net art theory, a recurring idea is that of virality, of ideas, works, and enthusiasm for this kind of art spreading like a virus– inevitable, surprising, and somewhat random. In a way that may once again remind us of utopic digitalists working in the 1970s Bay area, these new artists "had from the beginning a penchant for publishing manifestos and firing off polemics" and often metaphorically about navigating a digital space as it was being commercialized before their eyes. These artists also purposefully sought out the contingent characteristics of the Internet, like "immediacy and immateriality", and other themes like a technological failure, represented through glitch aesthetics, were integrated into their work (Greene, 2000). As penned in the famous essay *In Defense of the Poor Image*, low-resolution images may have been produced in poor quality online, but that quality is in part what allowed them to circulate so widely and quickly across the globe (Steyerl, 2009). A poetics of hypertext/cybertext also emerged, counting on the agential, interactive nature of emergent Web technologies to combine into immersive textual and visual works.

Fig. 8, 9
Screenshots of Riot by Mark Napier (1999)
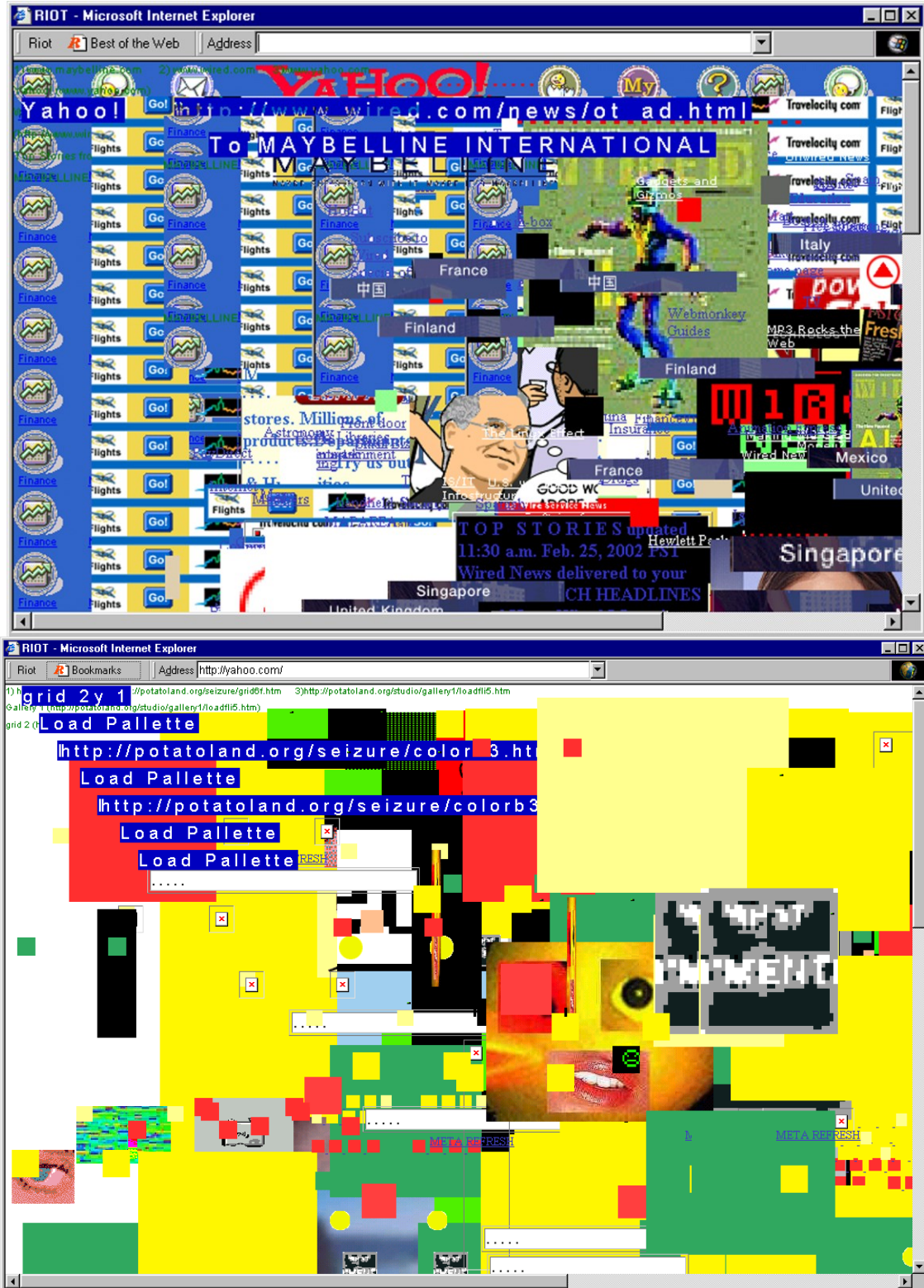
Fig. 10
Alpha 3.4 by Charles Lim Li Yong and Woon Tien Wei of Tsunamii.net (2002)
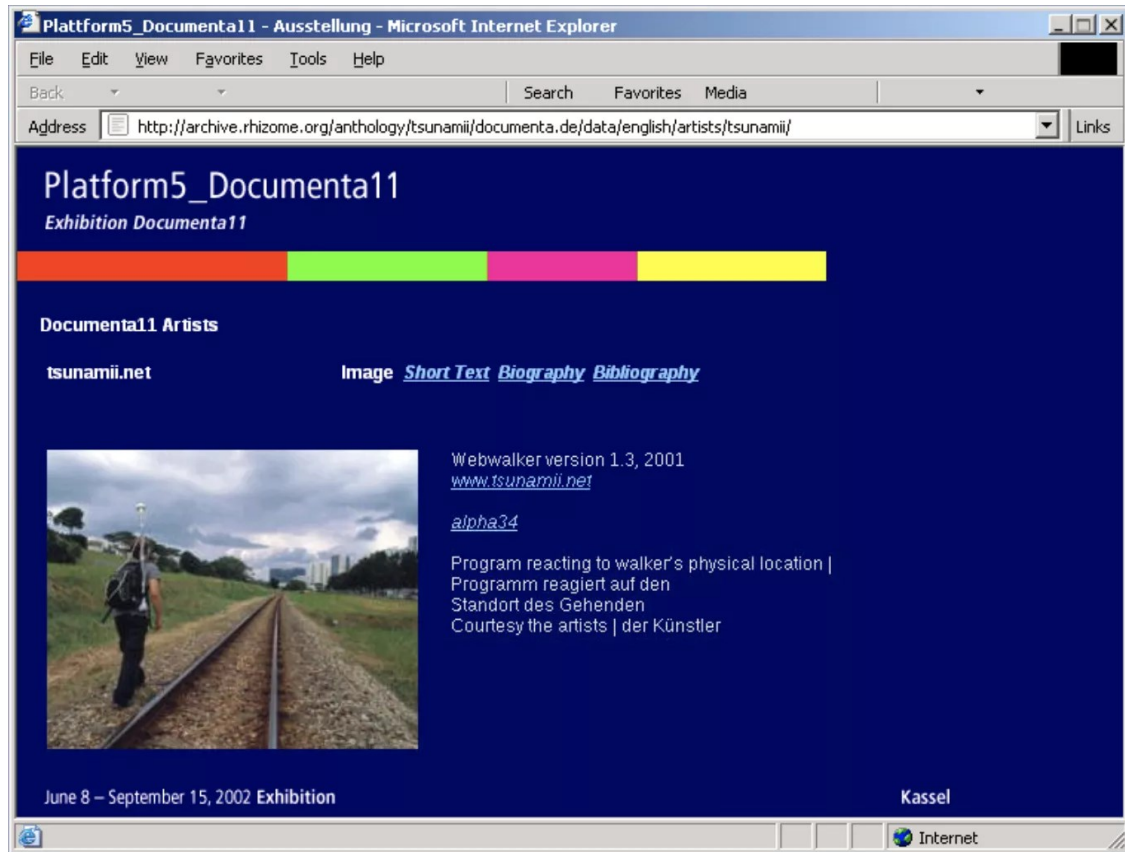
If there was one word to describe net art or digital art emerging at this time, it was the word *rhizome*. Originally holding an organic, botanical connotation, the word refers to a root that grows continually underground and "puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals" (Oxford Languages). In the realm of organic metaphors applied to technology, it may notably be used in contrast to a 'tree' structure of information where branches derive from 'energy' and grow from a central trunk. The rhizome will find its way through us through media theory, by way of psychotherapy. In *Dreams, Reflections*, psychologist Carl Jung is interested in the 'rooted', i.e. to him, hydra-like aspect of the rhizome: "Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome.[...] A sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains." (Jung through Gartler, 2004). Indeed, the 'death-proof', eternally enduring, and replicative qualities of the rhizome were appealing to late 20th-century philosophers, notably Deleuze and Guattari, who began to use the term in their writing and popularized it in our field. They expand the definition of 'rhizome' from botanical to animal ("rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion and breakout") to epistemological (Deleuze and Guattari through Gartler, 2004). The rhizome is a structure without a beginning, an end, or a center, which is what grants it structural strength–a mode of organization made up of

interchangeable, but unique nodes. It is "non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, multiplicitous and acentered" (Gartler, 2004). This subverts conventional notions of hierarchies and even deterritorializes users, as the global, synchronized whole is generated from local action. By the 90s, this concept was vital in internet theory, being used, notably as a metaphorical parallel for the functioning of hypertext, networks, and online populations from blogger groups to Al Quaeda, to the Web itself. By the end of the 20th century, net art had obtained enough of a cachet to find itself in museums, which both affirmed its status as art but also exposed artists to the neutering effect of commercialization and institutionalization. Most net art could still be found online, both transforming websites it was hosted on into passive 'backgrounds' or virtual gallery walls. At the same time, these host websites were imbued with an active status, gaining the power of "museological aesthetics" through their ability to host this digital art (Bosma & CONT3XT, 2011). Meanwhile, the symbol of the rhizome continued to aptly describe many different forms of online life, including social media, platforms, and blogging, as we will see in this next section.

Blogging as weaving

Blogging can be a form of art, as we hinted at when faced with the high customizability and creativity of Geocities' early blogging. Australian artist and academic Lucas Ihlein writes about blogging as art and art as research. His artistic method consists of blogging as experiential documentation of social encounters but also of transforming the experiences "leading to a deepening of the relationship between researcher and subject". Blogging was not only *documenting* art, but it was also "*doing* art", contributing to a "cycle of action, reflection, discussion, documented and instrumentalized through the public sphere, created by the blog itself". Ihlein compares blogging to former movements: "conceptual art, performance art, Happenings, Fluxus events, and Expanded Cinema" which Ihlein posits we only have real access to through fragmentary archives ("photographs, videotapes, artists' statements" (2014, p.39-40)). Relational aesthetics are what French curator Nicolas Bourriaud describes as a "set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (Tate Museum). The power of blogging is thus in its relationality. Bourriaud affirmed that the role of an artist was not only to make but also to generate social relation, to exchange information between artist and viewer–the artist, in this sense, is meant to give audiences access to power and the means to change the world through inter-relational means. In Chapter 4, we will further expand on this idea of blogging as a form of process-based, relational aesthetics and on the affordances of the 'blogger gaze'.

Chapter 2:
A Tumblr explainer: history, culture, features, affordances

2.1 Tumblr Studies

Through the course of the previous chapter, we've developed a timeline for the 'evolution of internet history', at least in the limited scope through which it relates to this thesis and its focus on art, culture, and platformed publics. In Chapter 2, we zoom in on the digital map to the site of our case study: the blogging platform Tumblr, its environment, culture, affordances, and its love-hate relationship with its users. We will trace a swift history of the platform and explore Tumblr's site-specific vernacular and central affordances. In short: what is Tumblr, and what makes it Tumblr? This section references a plethora of sources, featuring news articles from various outlets ranging from *Business Insider* to *Polygon*, and notably pulls strongly from two academic sources: *tumblr* (2021, Tiidenberg, Hendry, Abidin) and *a tumblr book: platform and cultures* (2020, McCracken, Cho, Stein, Hoch).

As affirmed by Tiidenberg et al., Tumblr occupies something of a 'sleeper' role in the broader platformed landscape. Indeed, Tumblr is eclipsed in popularity by larger "social graph" platforms like Facebook or Twitter. Understandably, these larger platforms also dominate platform studies scholarships. Until fairly recently (cf. publication dates of the two aforementioned books), Tumblr's user culture, governance, and functionalities were somewhat obscure from lack of academic attention, or assumed to be similar to that of the popular "social graph" platforms, despite Tumblr being a pseudonymous blogging platform (2021, p.12). But by no means is this a complete dearth of information. Over the last decade–and with a sharp uptick around 2020, scholars perhaps motivated, or reassured, by Tumblr's turtle-like longevity. Central avenues into the Tumblr-related academic inquiry include youth culture, specifically queer youth culture (Byron et al., 2019; McCracken, 2017), particular technical blogging features like the tagging system (Brett & Maslen, 2023; Bourlai, 2018; Bussoletti, 2023), sexuality, race, gender, and platform censorship (Paasonen & Pilipets, 2022; Addie, 2020; Jones 2021), fandom studies (Anselmo, 2018; Mecklenburg, 2022, Kunert, 2021) and 2010s online culture wars and (and particularly the 2014 Gamergate Tumblr-4chan raids (Nagle, 2017; Hagen, 2023). My research in this thesis aims to fill a gap in the user experience and creative process of posting on the platform. As such, it seems like the available research mirrors the evolution of Tumblr's cultural status from a niche platform to an enduring mainstay of 2010-20s internet culture. Furthermore, I hypothesize that we will see these research inquiries into Tumblr continue to multiply, especially as users who grew up on Tumblr notably age into the professional academic market–users like Tiidernberg, Hendry, Abidin, and even myself, former 'Tumblr teens' who find ourselves in research/teaching/publishing opportunities. Of course, this wasn't always the case, and as we shall see, Tumblr's origins were far from steady.

2.2 History
Early Days

In 2007, shaggy-haired 21-year-old CEO David Karp–autodidact high school dropout, tech wunderkind–celebrated the official launch of Tumblr. Or, as he calls it, "microblogging done right" (Lowenshown through Tiidenberg et al., 2021, p.2). Indeed, the original design intends for

Tumblr to be a clean, and easy-to-use multimedia platform. It is sold to investors on three factors: simplicity, customizability & self-expression, and interest-driven community. With a small dozen employees and headquarters in NYC, Karp embraced the "countercultural, youthful ethos" that hangs in the air in Tumblr's design and ethics–this was, as Karp would be quite adamant about, *not* a Silicon Valley product (McCraken et al., 2020, p.12). Around this time, Karp was also publicly slandering Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, citing that "social-graph driven platforms" were not "tools for creative expression" and that "nobody is proud of their identity on Facebook" (Schonfeld, through Tiidenberg, 2021, p.5). Independent Tumblr was considered 'progressive' for a public platform, both in its lax restrictions around explicit, sexual material, and its lack of ad monetization. Two early dominoes in a long and chaotic chain, two facets that would prove difficult issues later, when attempting to transform Tumblr into a platform that 'makes money'.

But in the meantime, this version of Tumblr felt like a breath of fresh air. By 2012, Tumblr had 147 million "passionate, liberal, and young" users, quadrupling to 594 million by 2017 and eventually 624 million by 2018 (Roser et al. through Tiidenberg, Abidin and Hendry, 2021). Tumblr was "a central hub of what is nebulously known as "internet culture" sparking memes-of-the-month like popcorn, in essence popularizing the use of the reaction GIF and producing, perhaps most influentially, the "concept of The Discourse, the internet-wide conversation happening all at once", which was become omnipresent today, in the 2020s (Feldman, 2019).

Golden Age

And so, in 2013, Tumblr was a popular but still burgeoning 'Wild West' of a platform, a tempting investment for companies like Yahoo. Karp sold for a staggering $1.1 billion, and in their public exchange, Yahoo CEO Marissa Meyer notoriously and ominously promises to "not screw up". For about four years, there was little visible change made to the Tumblr culture. Despite continued struggles to monetize, the site thrived. Tumblr continued to grow in users and influence. The "random nature" of ads and their ineffectual targeting "was a regular source of humor to users", who had perceived the Yahoo sale as 'selling out' and their new 'overlords' as untrustworthy (McCracken et al., 2020, p.8) Tumblr's 'socially-conscious' branding continued to develop, notably partnering with GLAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and with MTV, via parent company Viacom. It became a home for the "socially and politically disenfranchised": youth, members of the LGBTQ+ community, activists, and more (McCracken et al., 2020, p.2). It also boasted a user base nearly the size of Instagram's and incredible engagement rates (85% of blogs updated regularly, high 'time spent' metrics) (Feldman 2017; Dannen, Perez, and Ratcliff in Tiidenberg et al., p.2).

Porn Ban and… the end of Tumblr?

> *Nobody at Yahoo ever understood what they bought and what Tumblr was. That fundamental issue is the core of lots of problems. If you don't understand something, how can you sell it? (Digiday, 2017)*

In 2017, Yahoo was purchased by communications company Verizon, and Tumblr became part of their digital content umbrella. As attempts at turning Tumblr's "large userbase into ad dollars" continued to fail, the chaos extended within the company–reporting from a former

executive documents an outrageously utopic $100 million sales plan ("not even remotely close to attainable"), confusing staff reorganizations, and constant turnovers (Digiday, 2017). The 'end of the independent era' shuttered close with the resignation of Karp and the firing/resignation of a large portion of associate staff in 2017. Karp's departure was premonitory of more 'out of character changes' to come. In 2018, Verizon mandated a crackdown on Tumblr's adult content, due to an incident where platform moderators failed to police an instance of child porn—and Tumblr was temporarily removed from the Apple Store. New guidelines for *A better, more positive Tumblr*, as penned by CEO Jeff D'Onofrio in a Community Guidelines post, determined that as there was "no shortage of sites [...] that feature adult content", Tumblr would "leave them to it", banning any nudity or pornography, including the display of "female-presenting nipples" from the platform (2018). Tumblr had been a "desperately vital" shelter for women and marginalized folk who found themselves shunned or patronized by normative mainstream porn, and so the ban affected all sorts of blogs from queer artists to amateur erotica writers, to sex workers (Ashley in Leskin, 2019). But the ban also affected users outside of NSFW circles. Because of Tumblr's siloed structures and tightly intersecting communities, the ban also affected users outside of NSFW circles–fatalists would say that "when the porn disappears, so does the community" (Leskin, 2019). Globally, the Tumblr userbase perceived this update as an ideological betrayal and direct infringement of the values of the platform (self-expression, progressive politics). Within the first month of the ban, users plummeted by 30% from over 600 million to under 400 million (Armstrong through Tiidenberg et al., 2021 p.3). In reality, many users did stay. For all that the new guidelines were restrictive, embarrassingly transparent in their commercial interest, and barely functional, there was no alternative to Tumblr and still isn't. But the porn ban broke trust in the platform and created a critical, anti-owners perspective that persists fairly vehemently on the platform to this day, as we will discuss in Chapter 4.

An "odd sort of purgatory" (Feldman, 2017)

Fig. 11
Textpost reflecting Tumblr user sentiment

just to be clear, I'm staying here as long as this site functions. I have 0 intentions of deleting this blog, I will go down with this ship if only to see exactly how bad it gets

#i will look at pillowfort though   #i'm curious about it

330 488 notes   Déc 3rd, 2018

Note. While dates from 2018 (porn ban era Tumblr) but its sentiment still holds for users today.

Having been unable to successfully monetize the platform, Verizon would sell Tumblr to WordPress parent company Automattic for under $3 million. An enormous financial failure, considering the $1.1billion initial cost of the company (Leskin, 2019). While Auttomatic initially continued Verizon's porn ban ("adult content is not our forte either" wrote CEO Matt Mullenweg

shortly after purchase), four years later the platform reversed the regulations to include "content depicting the human form (yes, that includes the naked human form)" (Leskin, 2019; Tumblr Staff, 2022). Meanwhile, the media perception of Tumblr is in a dead-undead state, having been through enough 'Tumblr is dying' crises that while researching, I would find waves of fear-mongering articles, published every few years, reiterating the same interventions–Tumblr Staff introduces an obtuse, cash-grabby feature, users panic about fleeing the site, rinse and repeat.

The reality is that "Tumblr is always dying," and this ongoing state of decay has lasted for so long that it has become its own, self-referential meme, on and off the platform–even with over 572 million blogs on the platform and 135 million monthly active users (Minkel, 2023; Demandsage 2023). These numbers are on the rise from 2020 (496 million users) due in part, I suspect, to factors like the pandemic increasing overall digital activity, and decreasing liveability on sites like Twitter and Reddit[2] (Demandsage 2023). The reality is that as long as there is no viable alternative to Tumblr, its long-suffering users will remain on the platform. What makes Tumblr so unique that users have been Stockholm Syndromed into setting up a permanent camp? What makes web weavers so attached to Tumblr that they spread their works here instead of another, more popular platform like Instagram or Twitter?

2.3 Features and Affordances of Tumblr

Notes on Tumblr environment and affordances

To answer these questions, we must look at Tumblr's affordances. Bucher and Helmond describe platform affordances as "possibilities of action" that determine how users engage with the media technology (2017 in Tiidenberg, Abidin, and Hendry, p.43). Every platform has its own set of affordances, which determines the content that users create and engage with, and also enables a particular ambient and platform-specific vernacular and culture. In this section, I pull principally from Tiidenberg, Abidin, and Hendry's *tumblr* to introduce several key notions regarding Tumblr's environment and features that will be drawn on repeatedly in this chapter and the next. I will also illustrate how Tumblr's core features enable the genre form that is webweaving–visual, non-linear, vertical, to emerge. Due to the scope constraints of this project, we will be studying the desktop version of Tumblr and not mobile.

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[2] Two different cases of 'platform exiles arriving in waves on Tumblr. First: November 2022 on Twitter (now X), following Elon Musk's takeover (Fishbein, 2022). Then, on Reddit in April 2023, users abandoned the site in protest of Reddit monetizing their Application Programming Interface (API) – a set of Web protocols that users had previously been able to use to moderate discussion on Reddit messageboards called subreddits. Both exiles are the result of a perceived 'enshittification' of their respective platforms, i.e. a decrease in platform quality of life in favor of higher corporate profits.

Feature #1 - Dashboard

Fig. 12
Tumblr dashboard circa 2012-2014
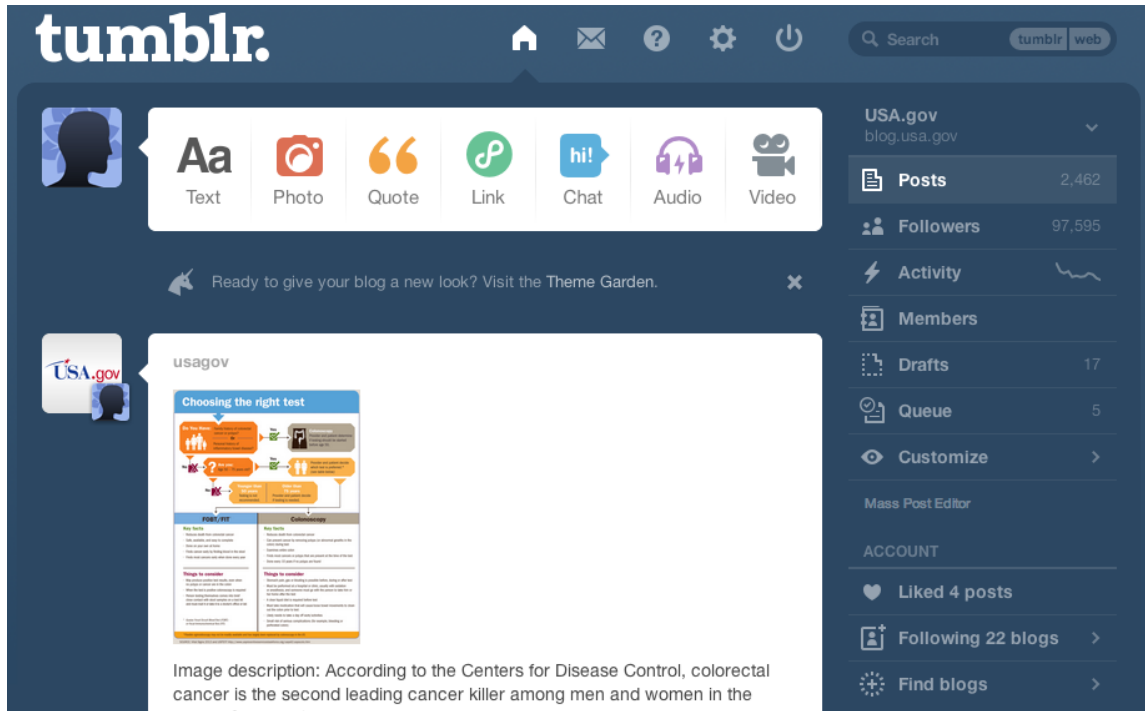
Note. The wide post-to-setting columns ratio is great for displaying large, detailed images and art.

Fig. 13
X's For You tab, circa late 2023
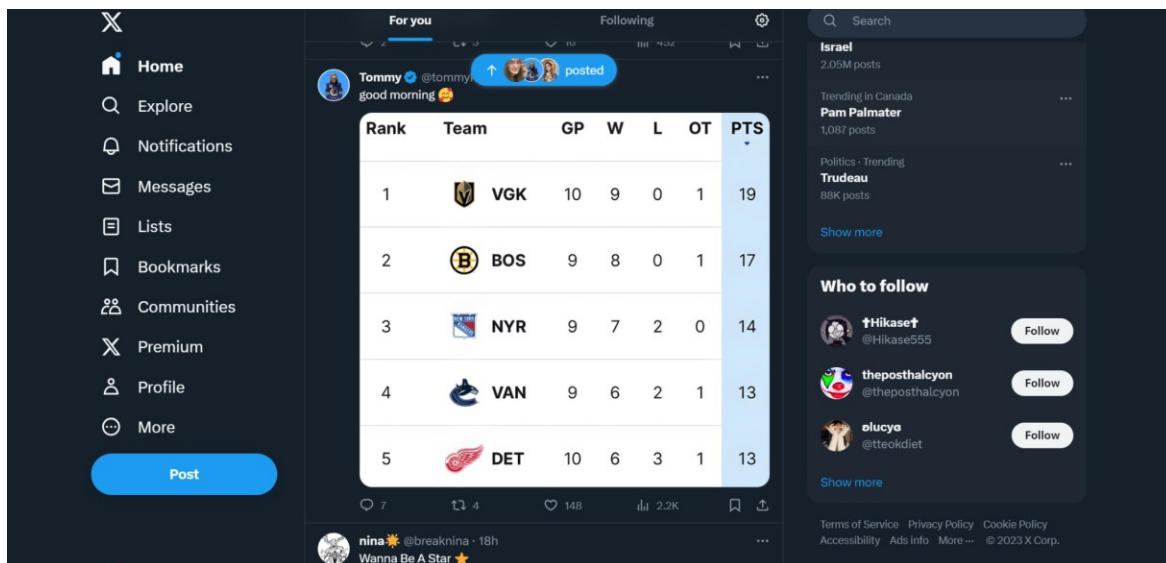
Fig. 14
Screenshot of Tumblr dashboard circa late 2023
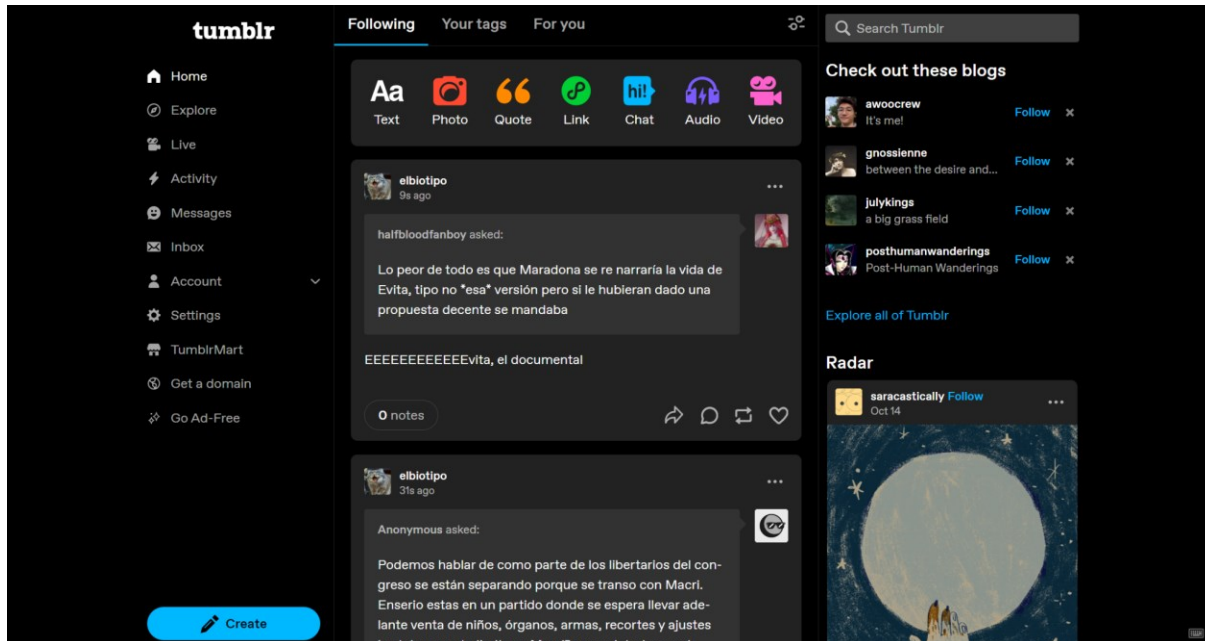
Note. The 2023 Tumblr dashboard features more similarities in column structure and listing of features to the left and right of the interface (home, explore, notifications, etc.) to X's current design than to the previous design of the Tumblr dashboard (Fig. 12).

Our first feature is the dashboard (i.e. dash), the 'homepage' of Tumblr. When a user logs into their account, this is the interface they land on. From the dashboard, users can access their own blogs on a separate page, modify site settings, and, most importantly, create posts and scroll linearly through the posts of the blogs they follow, which are displayed (in 2023) in the center of the page. The experience is not unlike scrolling through an image-heavy newspaper, especially due to the infinite scroll nature of the dash. For users who are familiar with their 'mutuals' (i.e. mutual following situation, which can lead to friendship or at the minimum, feelings of intimacy and connection forming gradually over time), scrolling through the dash and 'catching up' with the posts of mutuals is similar to the way one might scroll through Instagram or previously Facebook to catch up with real-life friends.

As pictured above, the 'create' tab at the top of the dash allows users to create text, audio, photo, video, link, chat, and quote posts. Comparing a screenshot of the Tumblr dash in 2012 to the dash's current appearance, we can see that the design direction of the dash is influenced by the layout of X, formerly known as Twitter. Changes include a reduced post display width, a 'who to follow' panel, and a reorganization of the setting parameters panel modeled after Twitter. This standardization is indicative of the 'personality crisis' that is being undergone by the site and its management team. The choice to replicate X's design choices in particular may indicate that Tumblr is trying to appeal to users in the same way as X, so in other words possibly looking to emulate design features that would stimulate short, quick 'thought-length' communication, instead of the longer-form, slower blogging style the site is known for. At the very least we must recognize that Tumblr is trying to replicate some kind of X user experience, prioritizing design features

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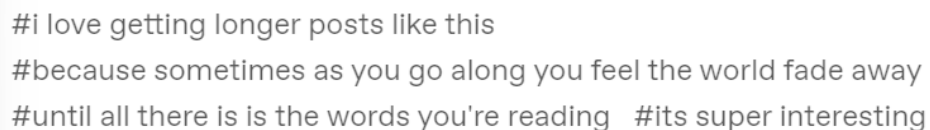perhaps deemed more monetizable as an alternative to Tumblr's initial design strategy, though this is not officially recognized by Tumblr and the amount of information we have here is quite slim. In a bid to increase user engagement and ad visibility, and in general, make the platform more financially viable, Tumblr's management solutions include lifting design ideas straight from other social platforms.

One last point: in opposition to competitor platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, the Tumblr dashboard is not organized through 'algorithmically' suggested posts, but chronologically, with the last posts reblogged by followed blogs showing up first on the dash. This temporality is an affordance traditionally at the heart of Tumblr's appeal, as it makes the Tumblr algorithm feel 'non-interventionist', so to speak, and makes the dash feel extremely customizable– the user only sees content from blogs that they've purposefully followed. Again, to evolve features, Tumblr has added in 2023 a togglable 'suggested posts' feature that resembles X/Instagram/Facebook, but this can be turned off. As such, many users still see their dashboards entirely chronologically, meaning that weavers depend on their followers and mutuals to spread their content. This also means that it is common to see posts multiple times as they are shared across networks of blogs that one follows and that follow each other, and thus share each others' content, making it a very good feature for creative collaborative work.

In opposition–algorithmically determined content like on Facebook can make posts seem more isolated–users may have to piece together the order of discourse or progression of posts "like a puzzle" (Feldman, 2017). As a consequence, posts stay in circulation for a long time, or as long as people keep sharing (i.e. reblogging) them. There are jokes about "heritage posts" which have been cycling through Tumblr for years and years and have amassed hundreds of thousands of notes. This nonlinearity of post display results in a user sentiment that Tumblr feels less concentrated on new and immediate content, but on cyclical trends over longer periods organically generated and shared by its users. Lastly, webweaving posts are often long, image-heavy posts and fit the verticality and large image display of the dash scrolling experience perfectly. The appeal of this type of long post is evoked in the example below, which compares the immersive experience of scrolling through one's dash to the sensation of the world fading away.

Fig. 15
Screenshot of tags written on a 'long' post

#i love getting longer posts like this

#because sometimes as you go along you feel the world fade away

#until all there is is the words you're reading   #its super interesting

Reblog   View post

Feature(s) #2 - Engagement functionalities

To engage with a post on Tumblr, the user can choose to like, reblog, or comment on it. Each action has its purpose, and together they offer the user some nuance in how to respond to content, such as webweaves, that they find on the site.

Likes: Save the post to the user's 'likes' page, which can be public or private. Some use likes as a bookmarking feature, while others don't, and instead 'like' posts as a means of encouragement or to express that they enjoyed the post.

Replies: Though there is a reply function on Tumblr, it is not used as often as the reblogs. Historically, the founder of Tumblr David Karp has been vocal about "replies bringing out the worst in people" (Walker 2012 in Tiidenberg, Hendry and Abidin, p.29), and the feature was omitted in favor of reblogs. Replies were brought back, discontinued, and then brought back in 2016. They can be disabled. Replies are often used instead of commenting when a user wants to communicate directly with the original creator of the post.

Reblogs: Users can share posts they see on their dash through 'reblogs', and the posts show up in turn on their followers' dashes. When users reblog posts, they can attach text comments or other media, though low-quality additions are frowned upon in conventional Tumblr etiquette. Wired describes the emerging chains of reblogs as a "yes, and" improv space, with users appending anecdotes and elements to previous reblogs (2023).

Likes, reblogs and comments comprise the palette of possible engagement options by Tumblr users. As mentioned previously, reblogs are central to the circulation of posts around the website. There is no discussion without reblogs, and it is considered good practice to reblog enjoyable posts so more users can see them. Likes are a more flexible form of showing appreciation for a post or of saving them for future reference, and comments are a way of interfacing directly with the original poster. Altogether, these options provide users with a variety of ways in which to respond to site content–even though the reblog functionality may be most important in terms of both encouraging posters and creating a sense of community via shared posts.

Fig. 16
Screenshot of a Tumblr reblog graph

Note. This reblog graph accompanied a 4500+ note/2200+ reblog post. The larger dots represent the blogs that act as central nodes for the spread of the post.

Feature #3 - Tags

Fig. 17
Example of tags on a webweave post

#words #quotes #web weaving #webweaving
#poetry compilation #on love #poetry #web weave #poem
#on devotion #on friendship #female friendship #on girlhood
#girlhood #we were girls together #lorde #boygenius #true blue
#best friends #it feels good to be known so well

Tumblr uses keyword tags to increase post searchability. These tags are user-generated and manually added, but machine-readable (i.e. legible to Tumblr). However, this tagging system has been creatively exploited by users, who have learned to use tags for personal and social discourse

functions (Berlai, 2018). Indeed, Tumblr tags support all non-comma punctuation, i.e. question and exclamation marks and colons, plus spaces, meaning that it is possible to write up to 140 character sentences per tag. Tumblr will recognize up to 20 tags, meaning that real 'paragraphs' of text can be added if users wish. As such, users use both descriptive tags and personal, expressive tags when labeling posts, which adds to the ambient intimacy of the platforms–scrolling through posts on your dash also means reading through thoughts of the blogs you follow. See Fig. 18 for a visual example: the user uses both descriptive (#web weaves) and expressive (#[...] an addition: a spinal bone of a mola mola my mom found buried in a sand at the beach). As per Berlai, the culture of Tumblr does favor adding commentary in tags rather than reblogs, which are sometimes frowned upon for their perceived obstrusiveness[3].

Fig. 18
A user's tags on a webweave post

#ohhh i love love love this

#an addition: a spinal bone of a mola mola my mom found buried in
a sand at the beach

#there were tiny little holes in it. some had tiny pieces of sand
engrained in them. i could not stop looking at it during the car ride
home

#my hands smelt like rot after that even though it had surely been
lying in the sand for months

#web weaves

Descriptive tags might include the contents of the post. A webweave featuring excerpts of Emily Dickinson's poetry might be tagged "#emily dickinson" or #webweave. Sometimes, descriptive tags are used to add posts to internal, blog-specific indexing systems (these will not be viewed in the central Tumblr 'search' feature). For example, if a web weaver wants to categorize all the posts they make so that they can find them again on their own blogs, they can employ the tag #mine or #my webweaving. Indeed, for all that I affirm that weaves are a form of personal and intimate 'diary' journaling, this at the very least is proof that weavers have an awareness of the gaze of others, and want their work to be read in a certain way. Tags are viewable to others through Tumblr's 'View Post' option but otherwise obscured to anyone but direct followers. Tags on posts are used to express opinions, reactions, and asides–in other words serve a discursive function (Bourlai, 2018). Taking a look at the tags of a particular weave from my data collection for example, I have noticed and cataloged a wide variety in tag use, a plethora of which are explored below. Please note especially the last category, i.e. diary-like intimate expression, as this will be

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[3] Of course there are other motivations to reblog, which include visibility (weavers may #self-reblog, or share their own content later to make sure their content is seen by followers in other time zones). Sometimes, weavers will also reblog their own posts with a specific or general response to tags.

relevant to our discussion about the circulation of affect later this chapter. The selected weave was created by User A and depicted the motif of holes and the void in media.

1. **Tag for content**: to be able to find the post again on their blogs (#inspo, #disco elysium [one of the pieces of media repeated through the weave], #webweaving, #hole theory).[4]
2. **Expressing reactions**:
   a. #WAHHHH
   b. #GOD #love this
3. **Providing feedback or reactions** to the original poster:
   a. #the endless nature if [user typo] this post really adds something #was crying by the end! Crazy.
   b. #this is how you weave webs #make me feel something.
4. **Jokes, memes** (see the repeated "wow, a post about me" hole jokes).
5. **Suggesting material** they think fits in with the weave:
   a. #the fact that annihilation (2018) isn't on this post
   b. #rear window's glasshole essay by lee edelman..
6. **Extending the metaphor,** their own interpretations of the material: #a house is useful not for the walls but the SPACE between them
7. **Diary/personal expression**:
   a. #been thinking about this #i measure you by the space surrounding you what feels raw and exposed when you're gone #i measure you by the impact ou leave and the pain of your absence #etc #anyway I've been writing poetry again.
   b. #i need to look at this when I'm sober and see if it has the same impact on me. #i am glad for Tumblr #for it shows #without a shadow on the cave of the world #that there are people here #infected with the same sorts of psyche as me
   c. #anyways #i feel like an open wound
   d. #one of the best conversations me and my philosopher ex had was about this #prob one of the only times we were both able to truly share and be heard #a nice memory and a sad one

'Feature #4' - Silosociality

Tumblr being an interest and affinity-based platform was an integral part of Karp's pitch for the project to investors. Today still, users flock to Tumblr in search of specific pockets of niche communities. Tiidernberg et al., refer to the term 'sociality' to describe Tumblr, and describe its users as grouped not exactly in communities, but sharing a slightly looser "communal sensation" within specific silos they occupy (2021, p.58). Indeed silosociality "looks inwards rather than outwards", and focuses on "consolidating content and practices" rather than on distribution—the shared topical interest of the siloed audience is both what brings together the audience and erects a division between their silo and others. Silos are not hermetically sealed (after all, users can access any other users' blogs unless blocked). However, it takes invested effort to learn the codes and culture of a silo, which is necessary for integration (2021, p.54). As such, due to the necessity of

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[4] This can also allow the users the possibility of giving content warnings, #long post, (or #gore #facelessness,#trypophobia) which allow this to be blocked by people who don't want to see long posts.

this investment, silos are resistant to external visitors and can be fairly resistant to being 'marketed to', which are issues that may plague larger social communities on platforms like Facebook or Instagram (2021, p.57). Posts that gain enough popularity to 'breach containment' and enter another silo can engender "denigration at being misunderstood" from the original poster (2021, p.56), and in general, users tend to be quite defensive of perceived breaches. Compare, for example, the role of celebrities on a platform like Instagram where they are central to the attention economy of the platform, versus Tumblr, where celebrity integrations/promotional accounts of the type are routinely mocked and 'bullied' off the platform. If users are so defensive of their silos, it is because they feel that they serve as spaces that allow them to truly be personal, intimate escapist digital spaces. Strong bonds form between users and the platform itself.

As such, Tumblr provides a sequestered yet affective user experience, public yet private, reminiscent of an earlier, smaller Internet, virtual life. And of course, there are still posts that go viral on Tumblr that defy the siloed structure because they manage to tease at a communal Tumblr sense of humor or experience that means that all users will share it (see Chapter 4 Section A: *Tumblr's Participatory, Taste-Making Culture*, and the example of the viral meme *Goncharov*).

'Feature' #5: the Tumblr culture and vernacular

An important part of Tumblr's culture is how users communicate with each other. In other words, what vernacular they use. In discussing tagging in the previous section, we noticed that Tumblr tags are polyvalent and allow users to express themselves flexibly through text. Thus, looking at tags can give us insight into the tone and feel of Tumblr's vernacular, and, more globally, insight into the broader culture on the platform.

Above all, and as we will revisit multiple times over the rest of this thesis, Tumblr's vernacular is *personal and intimate*. Indeed, Tumblr's "queer affect, nongendered labeling, and imagined intimacy" make it attractive for a queer, non-normative youth audience, and the tone of the website reflects that demographic (Tiidenberg, Hendry, Abidin, 2021, p.43). In the tags above, we might remark on the omnipresence of "post hole/posting hole on main" type jokes that reference a gay, online meme. Alison McCracken explains that because the Tumblr vernacular foregrounds relationships of "affect, identity, social justice", users share a passionate interest in "the political significance of representation, shared and singular lived experiences of media, leveling of cultural hierarchies and deinstitutionalized educational practices" (2017, p.161). Finally, the Tumblr vernacular is referential, curatorial, and media-literate, with users engaging with "ideas and content through extremely close reading of cultural texts" (Tiidenberg et al., 2021, p.47). For many users, the platform is an "alternative, tuition-free classroom", a foyer for "youth media literacy, identity formation, and political awareness that often reproduces cultural studies methods of media analysis", and a space for them to evolve into sophisticated media prosumers– online individuals who were capable of both producing and consuming media (McCracken, 2017, p.152).

In conclusion, the first and second chapters of this thesis detail the journey between the beginnings of the Web and its use, almost forty years later, by bloggers such as Tumblr web weavers. Along the way, we touched on the affordances and symbolic inclinations of art in digital contexts and contextualized webweaving by providing a description of its host platform Tumblr's

history, central features, and culture. In the next chapter, I expound on the results of my data analysis to better understand webweaving as a genre, explaining the 'who, what, where, and why' of webweaving based on observational analysis.

Chapter 3:
Ethnographic and research-creation results

<u>**Results of data observation: the 'Who, What, Where, Why and How' of Webweaving on Tumblr**</u>

How long have web weavers been on Tumblr?

Was webweaving singular to the platform or did variations exist as users hopped from one platform to another? From personal experience on the platform, I knew that an important part of the Tumblr population has been on the site for years, if not a decade. The 'you'll be here forever' or 'Tumblr as hell/home' are repeated Tumblr in-jokes. Were weavers among the jokers? Though the answer was a resounding yes, 4 subcategories of users emerged in the 30 web users I surveyed:

1. *'Golden-age' Tumblr lifers*

A majority of the weavers had been on Tumblr as early as 2014-15. This era is dubbed colloquially the Golden Age of the site, wherein major features and the flow of the interface as 'we know it today' were developed, and there was a peak of users before the 2016 Verizon buyout. The eventual 2018 porn ban would force out almost a third of the users. Being on this platform for more than eight years means that these users had been on the platform since their teen years and were now in their mid to late twenties–Tumblr was a formative influence in their current perspectives on life and for many, was their central social media. Ironically the Netflix Tumblr account also counts in this category as it was created in 2015 to promote the series *Orange is the New Black,* which was airing at the time and would be highly relatable and beloved by Tumblr users, due in particular to diverse representation.

2. *2018-9 to 2020: Tumblr 'regulars'*

These users joined Tumblr before the 'new wave' of users flowing in from TikTok or Twitter in the last couple of years, but show no sign of being on Tumblr before this time. While this may be anecdotal evidence, all blogs in my findings for this category are 'aesthetic' blogs that prioritize design, aesthetics, and style in their posts–the specific visual affordances of the site are what keep them on it.

3. *2020-21 to present: New accounts*

These users are young adults or children who may have joined Tumblr during the pandemic or with a declining quality of life on sites like Instagram or Twitter. The use of the site by these users visibly differs from the other two categories of (older) users. They use social moeurs present on sites like X: this includes links to external 'carrds' that present information about the blog including interests, age, race, 'do not interacts', instead of using an 'about page'.

4. *Cannot be Determined*

This final category included sideblogs that I was unable to trace back to an original blog, private blogs, or public blogs that transitioned to private at the time of data collection (this prevented me from viewing archives and seeing what month and year the blog was launched). This also includes blogs that were created after 2021 but were clearly instances of an older user 'remaking' their

blogs, as early posts already referenced this explicitly or captured a fluency in the platform that suggested prior use.

To expand on this quickly, older users creating or 'remaking' new blogs might be a testament to Tumblr's ongoing appeal as a platform–as we've previously mentioned in Chapter 2, even today, years past Tumblr's expiration date. Indeed, Tumblr provides a unique blogging experience and hosts enough active and engaging communities that users who have quit it once may return, unable to find any alternative platforms that suit their digital lifestyles.

How often are weavers on the platform?

Almost all accounts in my dataset were daily users, some posting once a day, some posting almost once an hour, indicating that this might be their principal social media platform, as much a part of their quotidian as the 'big' platforms like Facebook/X/Instagram. At the same time, this is not unexpected–active blogs share posts made by other active blogs that appear on their dashboards instead of older archive blogs most of the time. Some blogs did express having 'hiatuses', which was especially true for older blogs (2014/2015/2016) which might have been less active for a few years before returning in full force during the pandemic. These users were used to the culture and digital lifestyle of Tumblr because of their presence on the site in their teens and decided to return to it with abundant amounts of time and a need for connection during the isolating circumstances of the pandemic.

What draws web weavers to the genre/platform?

Something that jumps out in the profiles I looked at is the creators' references to film, poetry, writing, and other forms of art. It's in their bios, the way they write about the media they consume, and in the very URLs of their blog, which constantly reference film, and literature. In Omar Kholeif's *Goodbye, World! Looking at Art in the Digital Age*, a recurring perspective is that of the 'born digital' creator–artists who have grown up with the Internet and use it as a principal means of exploring and interfacing with all forms of art culture, both analog and digital. In the work of the born-digital creator, there is an indelible and shared "Internet awareness" that can facilitate community building with those who share this same sense of awareness (2018, p.115) In *Never Alone, Except for Now*, Kris Cohen echoes this thinking, speculating that there is a discernible philosophy to contemporary 'post-digital' art, as caused by the existential tension of existing between spaces, analog, digital, and even "between existing as a set of data points and as individuals newly empowered to create their online communities" (2017). Indeed, this looseness and flexible approach to media creates a particular, democratizing form of media awareness–as we'll see later, one that allows creators to seamlessly combine high and low forms of media into their own world vision in which there is never a real separation between the two. It's not rare to hear born-digitals say they get their taste from the Internet. This freedom and perspective are echoed in de Kosnik's definition of a 'rogueish' new media literacy that could certainly apply to born-digital creators (2016). This includes the interest and ability to tinker with others' work and ideas to improve one's practice. Media literacy "involves a perspective on culture as a set of shared resources" that each user feels like she owns. This transforms the role of the user–no longer just a consumer but also someone who can "plunder" and "use" the content for their own means (de Kosnik, 2016, p.292). Indeed, part of what attracts Tumblr users to the platform is that it reflects

a versatile 'born digital' engagement style that looks to borrowing and recycling as sub-actions of creating.

Do web weavers *actually* identify with the term weaver? What are their motivations and expressive goals?

1. Who identifies as a web weaver?

"Webweaving" is the most popular term, but there is no formal unanimity over this term. In tags people express flexibility and other terms exist: comparatives, compilations, parallels, stacks. What term the tagger uses showcases what they value about the form. "Stacks" for example is inspired by the idea of stacks in a library. "Parallels" are about repeated media across different works. The question of 'is this a web weave?' and 'am I a web weaver?' is also one that is found in tags fairly commonly when webweaving posts stray a bit from the conventional format, indicating again the hazy boundaries around what qualifies as a weave and who qualifies as a weaver.

Sometimes euphemisms are employed as well: User 3 calls their webweaving sideblog a "place to collect words". User F doesn't self-describe as a webweaver but says that "every day [they] login and [compile] my silly little quotes". User E collects "parallels" and explains that their blog is about "the overwhelming beauty and fathomless ugliness of human experience". User M's bio expounds: "weaving webs to build a home". The full breadth of vocabulary is displayed by accounts like User I who maximize their use of tags in the hope of reaching a maximum of viewers: #webweaving, #webweaving, #web weave, #poetry, [tags of individual media included in the weaves], #intertextuality, #intertext, #parallel, #parallelism, #on [theme]", #comparative, #quotes, #words, #literature, #poetry, #dark academia, #aesthetics, #poems on tumblr.

In contrast, blogs that don't weave often and don't have the habit or interest in doing so will often stick to the single and most popular 'webweaving' tag. For blogs like User L, their blog is mostly used for memes and joking with friends–it just so happens that their one, single web weave got popular. As a consequence, their tagging may read as uncertain ('is this webweaving') and does not share the confidence we see in bigger weaving blogs. Multiple users use webweaving as a way to "think about" a particular subject or theme. The central idea of the weave can be "something to think about and exorcise" instead of "going insane". Indeed, webweaving can be charged with an emotionally cathartic dimension, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Some blogs view webweaving as an expression of particular creative practices. For users like User B, who uses a "my poetry" tag for both weaves and actual poetry and links these posts to a larger Tumblr writing community by adding #poetbly and #writeblr tags to posts, webweaving almost counts as a subcategory of poetry. The interpretation is shared by User B's followers, who receive the posts as poetry as well and tag for #poetry. In the sampled blogs' 'about' pages and bios, many used references like being a 'writer' and 'poet'.

For others, webweaving is a diary-like, journalistic practice. User D (see Appendix A for more information) is a bigger blog that publicly discusses the use of Tumblr as a diary, explaining

that there is "no audience [she] is performing for" and tells her followers to "unfollow me if you don't like it, [she] is not a carefully crafted persona, [she is] a real person" (fig. 14)

Fig. 19
Tumblr textpost by User D

people are so used to online content being curated for *their* consumption that they forget tumblr isn't like that... this is my diary. I don't post for other people. if you find the stuff I post depressing or annoying or too much or u don't agree or whatever whatever.... that's fine it's not For You? it's for me. there is no audience I'm performing for. feel free to unfollow me if u don't like, I'm not a carefully crafted online persona I'm a real person

#web weaving

Other weavers make the relationship between their works and their personal lives clear. The subject matter overlaps, like for User C, who makes weaves about age gap relationships in shows she enjoys and tags, comedically in the tags: "is this a cry for help"? This conception of weave as an extension of personal life instead of pure fiction is shared by User C's followers, from who User C then needed to defend herself from accusations that her posts were not critical engagements with the theme of (*Lolita*-style) extreme age gap relationships but endorsements of those relationship dynamics in real life.

To summarize, while the term "webweaving" is fairly unanimous and used very flexibly, there are some slight differences in terminology. These differences are reflective either of users adopting the practice before the term "webweaving" became popularized to the extent that it is now in 2024, or of users adopting terms that fit their personal preference or practices better than "webweaving". For example, someone who uses a lot of text in their weaves may feel more drawn to a term like "stacks" than someone who draws heavily from cinema.

Did they have other social media i.e. would I be able to view their work on other platforms?

The goal of this question was to assess how unique weaving is to Tumblr and to see if I could find more instances of the users' weaving across other platforms, perhaps even seeing some sort of evolution in their work.

a) Overwhelmingly: users either don't have other social accounts (or don't connect them, because that would defeat the point of private, journal-like blogs, functioning essentially like public-private diaries). Some people are more anonymous than others. This might be linked to popularity–like bigger blogs might put where they live, how old they are etc. because this is a frequent question they might get from their followers, to the point of

creating personal FAQs. Meanwhile, private, journalistic blogs might have a name or pronouns, age, and some other facts listed in a bio or an about page, but not always. While this doesn't count as another platform, users will offer the links to their sideblogs instead. This serves a similar purpose: a poetry blog, a sports blog, an art blog, a blog that reflects another center of interest that can be shared with the followers of a main blog.

b) Creative accounts (writing, poetry, fanfiction, graphic design work) sometimes linked to other social media accounts on which they posted similar content–this was *Instagram or Twitter*, or even mood playlists on *Spotify*–but not personal 'real life' accounts where, for example, one would display images of friends, families, or daily events). We can infer that sharing these accounts was a way for users to extend their 'creative' personas or creative universes, not necessarily to draw their followers into their real lives.

c) As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4, some bigger blogs might be attaching ko-fis, Patreons, Substacks, or newsletters that let their followers buy them a coffee, tip their work with a one-time donation, or follow their work more broadly. Other times, Goodreads (a social platform for logging and discussing books and literature) or Letterboxd (a social platform for logging and discussing films) may be attached, in the spirit perhaps of offering more recommendations to followers. This was exclusive to 'big' blogs and professional accounts who were able to collate enough of an individual branding and site presence that they were able to create secondary profiles based on Tumblr presence–no 'amateurish' webweavers or private/journal accounts participated in this.

Breaking down the webweaving process

From drawing inspiration to posting the weave, the process of webweaving can be broken into more or less seven steps. In this section I articulate these steps and expand on particular design or conceptual choices weavers can make at each step.

Step 1: Themes and Inspiration

All posts must start with an idea. For some, webweaving is a process that accompanies otherwise reading, writing, and consuming media. User J, for example, regularly makes webweaves that draw from the comic books that they follow that update weekly. Transforming panels into weaves is a way of engaging with the material as a fan of the comic book series they follow. Similarly, User Z uses their account to engage with their current media obsession, the HBO television series *Succession*, and their posts read like iterations of continuing thought and personal analysis. For other blogs that have amassed a substantial amount of followers–or followers who follow closely enough to send the weaver 'asks' (publicly publishable messages), they may receive requests to make weaves about certain specific subjects. This is not a typical practice and is fostered mainly, again, with blogs with sizeable follower counts, as they have more interaction with their followers. The User I, for example, makes the possibility of requesting from them clear by noting "webweaving requests welcome" in their description. In the past month (October 2023) they have posted requests for weaves about "suffocating relationships", "loneliness and feeling detached" and "awful truths".

Finally, this is a case tied to how often accounts post a single webweave and no others, so this creative process is something they are unaccustomed to, perhaps, or more likely, that the weave

is triggered by one, pertinent incident. This is the case of the blog of User U, for example, which has put this one single tag under their "webweaving" category about the death of Terry Pratchett. The weave, in this case, is an expression of grief and a way to say goodbye to the beloved author. As it gets circulated through the website, it becomes a collective expression of grief.

Step 2: Collecting

Once an event precipitates the creation of the weave or enough of an idea has begun to germinate, it is time to begin assembling the weave. This can be done in different time frames. User K, for example, notes that one of their weaves, about two characters from the Showtime television series *Shameless* "[made] this in less than 12 hours when I [had writing] that [had] been sitting untouched for months". At the same time, for others, there is something to a daily routine about the collection and assembly process, like for User F who makes a joke out of it "everyday i log into this silly little app and i compile my silly little quotes". There is an ongoing, repetitive, and habitual action here–User W collects "bits of writing and art" as they come across them. As answered in an anonymous ask question, User J says that they "manage an extensive collection of quotes, poems, and excerpts" and have a cataloging system they try their best to follow. This includes multiple folders and subfolders in which they save images and screenshots associated with certain themes. For things like TV show screenshots, that are hard to look through for quotes because the image stays the same, User J also stores them apart.

But then, making the weave isn't as simple as emptying out the contents of one of these folders and posting its contents. User J says this has only happened to them once when they got a request that happened to match a folder with quotes they'd been saving for personal reasons/relating to personal issues for a while, "and i figured i might as be well making something with what I felt–it felt less vulnerable sharing it that way, like it was somebody else's feelings." Typically, however, weavers must look through their collection to find the perfect puzzle pieces. Big weaving blog User I says it can be hard at first to find resources, if you're not used to the process of saving images, looking for them, repeating. It's helpful to have full collections. In an ask by a user who was starting to weave and asking for help with this topic, User I answers that they can find paintings and artworks from the Saatchi Digital Art Collection, or in other peoples' weaves and that "one of the great things about this website is being exposed to many different artists and different mediums and genres". For quotes and reading, User I recommends taking a look through other users' Tumblr tags for heaps of good quotes, using the website Genius for song lyrics, and the Poetry Foundation and Offing for poetry. But above all, the most important part is not to feel burdened by finding the perfect piece or getting stuck, User I's advice for beginners is "to jump in and go for it".

Step 3 (optional) - Image modification

Weavers are like visual artists and each has a personal style. After brainstorming their weave and collecting their images, some weavers also edit their images. Some users collage images together to create visual harmony before even ordering their images in the post. Some users may superimpose text on images, some may crop and play with the size of images, turn color images into black and white, or perform any other color modifications. If text extracts are used, attention is paid to spotlighting the most important quotes with a highlighter tool.

Step 4: Assembly

Next, one must open Tumblr's post editor and upload their images. Tumblr shows images in feeds at a 500x750 pixel ratio, and if images of various sizes are being used, then Tumblr might reorder them automatically, like putting two smaller images on one line. One can manually drag them into order. Tumblr has a history of being a struggle to work with and compresses images. For a certain time, images deemed Not Safe For Work would also be flagged and rendered not visible to other users. Incomplete posts can also be saved as drafts and revisited. That way, users can start posts in their drafts, and add more images and content as they find it. As will be discussed later, the order of the post is important as it structures the way the information is delivered.

Step 5: Captioning

Once the post is created, it is contextualized–a caption is added to the post. Users can add a written caption, a 'Read More' i.e. a line break will allow them to conceal their caption/extra written information unless another user clicks it open. Usually, long blocks of text are what is hidden under the Read More. Like the actual contents of the post, the style differs from poster to poster here. Some weavers painstakingly write out the source of the images, the title, author, and year, and even provide hyperlinks in the text to link to digital sources. Others, more simply, will use the title of the work and author, and some will not credit at all. If any important information is to be conveyed at this point it might be a sentence or short paragraph explaining the weave.

Step 6: Tagging

As the final step before posting, Tumblr users can add tags to their posts. Tags theoretically allow other users to find the post through the general Tumblr search bar, but the use of tags has evolved to include personal statements and descriptions that the author of the post will want to hide from all but their immediate followers who will see and reblog the post, as tags on original posts are only visible to immediate followers. As such, the user will start by tagging whatever they think will allow their post to circulate, if that is of interest. Here we see the application of tags like #webweaving but also #literature, and then tags like the names of individual authors included in the post. Next, users tag according to their personal tagging system, so they (and their followers) can find the post again on their own blogs. Tags like this look like #my tags or #mine or with more specificity #mine: love. Finally, descriptive tags are added, often less formal, or more personalized than the 'cleaner' web weave and usually including 'production notes', so to speak. User I, on a weave about getting back up, writes that #my favorite thing about myself is how i always pick myself back up and make things better. These tags contextualize why User M made that post and insight into their feelings and thoughts.

As forms of data, tags were extremely useful in obtaining contextual and affective information about the reception of the weaves by other users as they circulated. Most often tags were indicative of a straightforward emotional response. If a user found a weave touching, or related to the subject, or found it beautiful or awe-striking, then this sentiment would be expressed in tags. However, as we mentioned when discussing tags as an important feature of Tumblr as a platform earlier in the thesis, the polyvalence of tags also meant that it was possible to get other forms of information. For example: indexical tags facilitate my work of sorting and identifying the

subject of weaves (users tag common themes and situations, ex: #hole theory for any weaves relating to voids, space, and more).

Step 7: Posting

Users will open their drafts, find their weave, and finalize by posting. Users can also reblog their posts to increase visibility, as certain portions of their followers might be online during differing parts of the day or according to different time zones. Once the weave is posted, the weaver can return to the post and continue to edit. User J, for example, returns to edit their weaves, citing in one case that they had initially found their work unfocused. As such, while this is not common, weaves can continue to evolve even once posted.

Content and structure of complete weaves

"Organizational aesthetics is a process of emergence and a mode of inquiry that gives us a way to understand a digital object, process, or body. It is not only a way of looking, but also a dynamic of assembling and coming up with such a body" (Goriunova, 2012, p.17). As such, to understand the meaning of a weave we must look at its "body" and the organizational aesthetics that compose it. The construction of a weave meaningfully guides the viewer's eye through the composition, informing the way that the information is read.

Weaves are composed of other pieces of media: images of art, lyrics, poetry, and work both created or 'scrapbooked' from other creators. Poet Kate Eichorn compares blogging to Renaissance-era commonplace books, and cites both as "rich storehouses" for personal compositions, arguing that both are products of collecting and ordering found content. As such archival genres have a deep history and include what Eicorn calls "everyday textual practices" including scrapbooking, blogging, and social networking (2008, 275). Weaves resemble what Kate Eichorn categorizes as "archival genres": a type of cultural production that appropriate images and texts culled from other sources. As with other forms of creative expression, the medium must support the message. As such, weavers have to think about the best way in which their weaves will be read by others. As we mentioned, contextualization can occur in the way that a caption will be written, whether there will be a caption at all, whether it includes a quote, or just a word, a description. Clarity is important. People will not reblog if the point of the weave isn't clear and if the weave is not 'relatable'. The sentiment of the weave must be accurately transcribed. The weaves that do well are the most omnisciently relatable.

There are also a few different main 'structures' that the weaves can take the form of. These structures have a different text-to-image ratio, notably. They draw the eye differently and users 'read' them differently. In general, the artistic background of the weaver informs the weave–the cinema student used a lot of movie shots, the TikTok user used TikTok screenshots, and the poet used their poetry.

'Essay' weaves are heavily text-centric, require the weaver to manually highlight passages or crop intensely to lead readers' eyes through the dense text, and more generally cut large swaths of texts down into something 'post-like' apt for social media, easily digestible. These posts feature an obviously linear presentation of ideas that may resemble an almost argumentative fashion.

Again, heavily text-based with the inclusion of theory and articles that may range from commercial to academic, as opposed to other styles of weaves that rely more commonly on lyrics or poetry. Images often serve an illustrative purpose. For example, User C's *looking back*, pictured below in Fig. 20, scenes from topically relevant media (stills from Celine Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and Fiona Apple's *Criminal* music video, Auguste Toulmouche's *Reluctant Bride*) come to act as visual support for the textual argumentation about the feminist gesture of refusing and returning the male gaze in visual media.

Fig. 20
Webweave by User C: 'looking back'

swiftiefem Follow
Jan 11, 2022
...

The first feminist gesture is to say:
"OK, they're looking at me. But I'm
looking at them." The act of deciding
to look, of deciding that the world is
not defined by how people see me, but
how I see them.

I never turned anyone into a pig.

Some people are pigs; I make them

Look like pigs.

We're uncomfortable and Apple knows it—
she's engineered it to be this way. She
snaps a photo of the viewer at the very
start of the music video: We see her, watch
her, consume her—but she sees us too.

object.[35] Scholar Susan Bower's 1990 piece "Medusa and the Female Gaze" more deeply examines this phenomenon, which begins when the woman who sees that she is being seen (by the male gaze) deconstructs and rejects her own objectification.[35] A crucial aspect of the male gaze appears to be its subdued, unquestioned existence, which the female gaze disrupts as women acknowledge themselves as the object and refuse to accept this position by returning an equally objectifying gaze.[35]

they paint women as they are: thinking humans who are as capable of scrutinising the world as the world is of scrutinising them. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*'s Héloïse knows the score. "If you look at me, who do I look at?" she asks Marianne during a sitting, in a sly question that's really more of a statement.

What do you sing on your drive home?
Do you see my face in the neighbor's lawn?
Does she smile?
Or does she mouth, "Fuck you forever"?

1. agnès varda // 2. circe's power, louise glück // 3. criminal (mv),
fiona apple // 4. 'lessons from fiona apple's "criminal,"' emily moon
// 5. 'male gaze,' wikipedia // 6. portrait of a lady on fire (2019) // 7.
'portrait of a lady on fire review – mesmerised by the female gaze,'
mark kemode // 8. mad woman, taylor swift // 9. the reluctant bride
(1866), auguste toulmouche

~ looking back

#web weaving #parallels #quotes #lyrics #art #connections
#feminism #feminist #male gaze #female gaze
#radical feminism #feminist theory #feminist thought
#louise glück #fiona apple #medusa #portrait of a lady ... See all

Note: For more information on User C, visit Appendix A. Weave was accessed January 23rd, 2023.

'Photography' weaves, in contrast, are strongly image-based. More work may go into editing photos: cropping, changing the coloring to coordinate them, and there might be a 'unifying' caption to explain the theme of the weave. We are looking for visual symmetry or, in the inverse, visual dissonance, as a way to evoke theme. In User L's *labs that are also churches. to me,* (see below in Fig. 21) the weaver highlights the cathedral-like patterns in the structure of laboratory environments via the inclusion of an evocative Annie Dillard quote. In doing so, the weaver highlights the beauty of these engineering marvels, but also compares the drive of scientific curiosity to a spiritual devotion.

Fig. 21
Webweave by User L : "labs that are also churches. to me"

louisegluckpdf Follow
Jun 8, 2023

"What is the difference between a cathedral and a physics lab? Are not they both saying: Hello? We spy on whales and on interstellar radio objects; we starve ourselves and pray till we're blue."

labs that are also churches. to me

(1. annie dillard, *teaching a stone to talk* 2. the deep underground neutrino experiment, a.k.a. DUNE 3. the large hadron collider 4. the sudbury neutrino observatory)

#parallels #lhcposting #web weaving

Note: For more information on User L, visit Appendix A.
Weave accessed January 23, 2023.

'Poetry' weaves include lyrical elements, short quotes, or poetry intermixed with tonal (as opposed to illustrative) images. But as opposed to the essay types of web weaves, these are simple,

accessible pieces of writing that emphasize emotional resonance and impact. For example, User H's *LET YOUR FATHER DIE ENERGY DRINK* (pictured below in Fig. 22) juxtaposes the user's own poetry about the Greek tragic heroine Elektra with different visual scenes of Elektra's legends from different artists and periods. In doing so, User H emphasizes the eternally relevant nature of Elektra's myth (and of mythological storytelling in general) while showcasing the different aesthetic interpretations of the character.

Fig. 22
Webweave by User H : LET YOUR FATHER DIE ENERGY DRINK

LET YOUR DAD DIE: IT'S FINE

IT'S FINE

IT'S WHAT HE DID TO HIS DAD

IT'S WHAT HE WOULD DO FOR YOU

IT'S AN ACQUIRED TASTE

BUT YOU PROBABLY ALREADY HAVE IT

YOU'VE ALREADY INHERITED A LOT OF

THINGS.

BUT DON'T GET ANY BRIGHT IDEAS
ABOUT TRYING TO DO IT YOURSELF.
HE'LL SEE IT COMING. YOU'RE ONLY
ALIVE AND IN THIS WORLD BECAUSE HE
ANTICIPATED YOU. YOUR DAD'S DEATH
BELONGS TO SOMEONE HIS OWN SIZE
AND YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO MAKE
WEIGHT

JUST LET HIM GO INTO THAT GOOD
NIGHT WHENEVER THE TIME COMES

WE HEAR IT'S ACTUALLY PRETTY
GENTLE

LET YOUR FATHER DIE ENERGY DRINK by Daniel Lavery and Cecilia
Corrigan / Electra at the Tomb of Agememnon by Frederic Leighton
(1869) / Kristin Scott Thomas as Electra (2014) / Ilektra (1962) /
Electra at the Tomb of Agememnon by William Blake Richmond (1874)
/ Electra by Hermann Wilhelm Bissen / Clytemnestra by John Collier
(1882) / Clytemnestra Hesitates Before Killing the Sleeping
Agememnon by Pierre Narcisse Guérin (1822)

#i am once again forcing you all to think about electra   #electra
#the elektra complex   #the oresteia   #poetry   #to evoke
#in the beginning   #this haunting is hereditary   #tcp
#the fault in the father

Note: For more information on User H, visit Appendix A.
Weave accessed January 23, 2023.

As such, these are a handful of structures that webweaves may take the form of. While the social media context of webweaving is quite distant from the academic context that the "creative presentations of research" strategies may be formally connected to, I was nevertheless reminded of the research-creation term here. Indeed, these weaves are a creative inquiry that combines 1. Technology (Tumblr features including drafts, sharing, and posting mechanisms) 2. Creative 'research' inquiry (the question or subject at the heart of the post) and 3. Particular creative vision is typically concerned with an evocative style and an interest in replicating "media poetics" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012, p.18). Each one presents information in a particular way.

An 'alternative' case of weaving

To linger on a rare but interesting study that makes use of reblogging + the addition of content, one of the weaves in my data collection was co-created through this means. While weaves are typically created by a single weaver, this one was 'collaboratively' created by three users. User Q, the first user, created a post with nine images of computer wiring in pinks, reds, and blues with the caption "they're like angels" on September 1st, 2022. Three months later, user User S reblogs the post and adds three images about the organic, synaptic, and even human nature of computer technology. Finally, four months later, in March of 2023, User T reblogs the post again, with a screenshot to the Wikipedia page for "link rot", a phenomenon wherein hyperlinks cease to lead to their original file destinations. All in all a collaborative weave illustrates the way the co-reblogs can add new information and beautifully recontextualize a post. Also interesting is the fact that

users (not those adding content to posts but others, like me, passive spectators) can encounter a weave at different stages or forms.

Chapter 4:
Affordances and economy of webweaving as a genre

Thus far, this project has provided a contextual backdrop to the cultural phenomenon of webweaving, as well as genre definition by way of identifying the core attributes, themes, and structures of weaves and the motivations and habits of their creators. With this functional understanding, we can now pursue a broader media and cultural analysis. Across the next two chapters, I continue to draw from platform and media scholars like de Kosnik and particularly from the work of Tumblr scholars Tiidenberg et al., and McCracken et al., but will also pull from less formal academic sources. The reasoning behind this follows the data from the last chapter: if certain weavers felt that their work could be uniquely defined as 'weaving' both in terminology but also in form, structure, etc., other weavers linked their craft to poetry or journaling. As such, we can draw from analysis of these creative forms as well to obtain insight into the meaning that webweaving holds for its creators, particularly in the absence of pre-existing literature vis-a-vis webweaving.

This chapter hosts three major points. First, drawing on the background on the culture of Tumblr explored in the first chapter, I continue to define the 'curatorial culture' of Tumblr that allows for the ambient expectation of media creation, analysis, and sharing on the platform. Then, I touch on certain 'disruptive' elements of webweaving as a genre that essentially cross-pollinates low art and high art expectations. Finally, following the trail of 'capital', I touch on issues of labor and monetization that arise in the webweaving community.

4.1 Fandom, art, chaos: Tumblr's participatory, taste-making culture

First, let us define and review the particularities of Tumblr's taste-making culture, which, as we've mentioned in Chapter 1 is in part responsible for Tumblr's long standing impact on digital culture. Tumblr functions not only as a hub for sharing and archival discussions of media and cultural objects, ranging from archives of 90s band photography to site-wide discussions of the most recent episodes of popular TV shows. As per Tumblr's app store tagline, "fandom, art, chaos", media fandom is also an important part of the platform's content ecosystem. The presence of fandom on Tumblr dates back to the site's earliest days: in 2007, content bans and user purges on the Internet forum Livejournal would drive an important chunk of its creative, fandom userbase, in search of a new home, to Tumblr (Radulovic, 2018). As we saw in Chapter 3, for many users, Tumblr's media-obsessed users are not only making content and responding, via discussion, to the media they consume, but also engaging critically with the media zeitgeist, be it through fannish analysis of content (predictions, thematic analysis) but also broader discussions linked to, amongst other topics, sexuality, gender, and social justice. Indeed, Tumblr was (and still is) for many an "alternative, tuition-free classroom", a foyer for media analysis, and a space for young users to evolve from consumers into more sophisticated media prosumers (McCracken, 2017, p.152).

At the same time, this plentitude of media content and discussion allows for the development of what we can call a curatorial practice on Tumblr–a shared user concern with aesthetics, with the linking of one type of media to another, the linking of media to real, off-line life. Tiidenberg et al., believe that this shared platform vernacular notably allows users to "jailbreak pre-existing frames, invent new points of departure, create allegiances against social

ills, renew one's own subjectivity, do politics, and maintain community" (2021, p.47). Tumblr users perceive their blogs as customizable extensions of their interests and as such, of themselves, and engage with the platform that hosts these blogs in a curatorial fashion. Faced with the never-ending flow of posts on their homepage, the reblogging (sharing) of posts creates "psycho-aesthetic" points that, through the collaboration of users "calibrate and continuously stylize" platform discourse (Munteanu via Tiidenberg et al., 201, p.47).

This collaborative curation can be seen in two recent media events on the platform: *Dracula Daily,* and *Goncharov. Dracula Daily* is the more typical case of a very popular (and thus very trackable) 'cross-silo' media fandom. In the summer of 2023, it was *the* trending topic of Tumblr–a daily Substack newsletter that posted daily excerpts of the classic Anne Rice gothic literature novel. As such, users received excerpts in their mailboxes and then turned to Tumblr to discuss, share, and laugh, commenting on the development of the story, and on the iconic characters, in effect dissecting this classic novel and anticipating future narrative developments via Tumblr community. The #dracula daily tag contains memes, text posts, fanart, and other content in the tens of thousands of notes, displaying the power and energy of an instance of energetic Tumblr fandom and its iterative, creative posts, able to circulate quickly through the platform architecture.

Our second example, *Goncharov*, is more tongue-in-cheek. In November 2022, an image circulated of a pair of boots, ostensible merchandise of a film called *Goncharov*–a Martin Scorsese gangster film that, for some reason, did not appear in his real filmography anywhere other than Tumblr… As the post circulated, users added layer upon layer of information that it seemed they could remember about the plot, the actors, and the posters of a film, even though *Goncharov* technically, did not exist. The fun was contagious: *Goncharov* became a site-wide viral meme with an elaborate, iterative fictionalized mythology, and users were getting hundreds of thousands of notes of text posts, fake posters, fake gifsets and more only encouraging them to generate more content. Users would even make webweaves, weaving bits of the *Goncharov* script or film (in reality, screenshots from other films that users thought resembled a Scorsese gangster film, and pieces of their own writing) into the usual structures.

Fig. 23
User 6's Goncharov webweave

The tragic hero is complete. You can call him unhappy (miserable, utterly broken) even before he is dead. For an instant he is something like divine. And then he dies, because there's nothing left to do. The center of every tragedy is the image of a human being who has already died but keeps talking, someone whose face is a mask.

annevbonny

tragedies will be like [clock ticking]

goncharov (1973) dir. martin scorsese // *h of h playbook* - anne carson // @/orpheuslament (x) // *wolf in white van* - john darnielle // "the gods show up" - michael kinnucan (x) // @/annevbonny (x)

Note. For more information on User 6, visit Appendix A.
Weave accessed on August 18th, 2024.

The meme would surpass the site's scope, spreading to other sites like Twitter, and garnering so much attention that news publications like *The Guardian,* and the *New York Times* were publishing articles asking *What Is Goncharov?* The joke would even reach Scorsese himself, who commented to *Variety* that he had made the film "years ago" (Panaligan, 2022).

So, through the examples of *Daily Dracula* and Goncharov, we see that Tumblr is 'built' for this creation, discussion, and consumption of media. Tumblr users have real energy and earnest passion for the media they consume, a passion that can be channeled into community, expression, and more via the platform affordances of Tumblr. As such, Tumblr users are avid, consistent media consumers, who are often looking for new recommendations and suggestions for what to read, watch, and listen to. As Tumblr is the principal platform through which these users direct their fandom energy, it stands to reason that Tumblr is also a hub for recommendation–what better place to get ideas on what TV show to watch next than from the blog one trusts and connects with,

individuals who share the same digital quotidian, and a proven shared taste in media? This 'system' of suggestion and recommendation can be purposeful–for example, in sports fandoms, users may make 'propaganda gifs' of cool-looking moments of their sports teams to draw the attention of new fans, but recommendations can also be implicit and even subconscious; see the post of beautiful *True Detective* shots enough times, and you may just find yourself looking for the new season on Crave. Webweaves, which are often instances of 'extreme' curation, in the sense that the composition of a weave is a deliberate selection of the most interesting/thematically relevant/beautiful shots, lines, quotes, and excerpts, thus circulate not only as expressive, artistic cultural objects but also as instruments of recommendations for all sorts of media.

Indeed, weaves function as what de Kosnik calls "emotional maps", objects that help users sort through the enormous, even excessive amounts of media that are available to them in the age of the attention economy and determine which is most interesting to them based not only on taste but also on "performance" of self, in seeking emotionally resonant pieces of media that will not just kill time but also add on to dense nets of technological/media/self entanglements (2016, p.277). As discussed in the previous chapter, for users who have been on the site since their early teens, this emotional mapping and personal 'performance' is formative, allowing not only for a personal record of cultural touchstones and references, but also nurturing a critical perspective that surpasses Tumblr and becomes a skill and perspective applicable to other parts of life.

As such a cycle develops as web weave posts virally cycle through Tumblr; users see these posts on their dashes and receive intentional or unintentional recommendations, end up incorporating parts of the media in new weaves and other content based on this media, and as they share their weaves on Tumblr, the media continues to 'be shared and promoted' through this internal network to new and pre-existing fans. We can even determine a 'Tumblr canon', a term which I have used to dub a very incomplete and unofficial list of popular media that is very strongly represented in web weaves (see below). This canon includes texts that are so well known that users can recite them, and the texts become meme-able in-jokes. For example, the 'Poetry Smackdown' competition that ran in 2023, in which a user pitted "very Tumblr" poems, i.e. poems that were widely circulated on the platform against each other to see which would be the most popular (Poetry Smackdown, 2023).

Why is this type of content important and meaningful today? As per McCraken, we are in an era in which traditional education institutions have faced the narrowing of their curriculum in the areas of "critical thinking, arts, sex education, and progressive politics, it is in social media's spaces of community and contestation that many young people develop their critical skills, engage in creative work and construct a sense of themselves as desiring individuals and social actors" (McCracken, 2017, p.153). Returning to the idea of de Kosnik's "emotional maps", we see from the weaves analyzed for this project that themes like familial relationships, growing up, growing pains of adulthood feature heavily. As such, these are ideas that both interpellate but also define Tumblr users.

Lastly, it's worth mentioning that this curatorial practice and the 'canon' created by it can also be quite insular and repetitive. When images and texts resonate with many individuals they become popular and used in many weaves, where they are circulated so often and widely that they become clichés. This causes them to lose their original freshness and poignancy. The flip side to

the idea that webweaving is a 'democratic' form, in which anyone can use whatever extracts and connect them to whatever personal interpretations they may have, is revealed when the same associations are recreated, over and over again, because they are quick, extremely legible and thus shareable 'shorthands' for clichéd messages and thoughts.

At the same time, even if the images are clichéd, there is still value to be found in the active *practice* of weaving these images together. A prominent webweaving blog writes that they have:

> *seen a lot of posts about food as love since starting this blog, and made a lot of them too. honestly it's easy [...] i don't mean it's effortless. it's more that they're pleasant to make– it's nearly always a better experience to make something about love than it is to make something about hate or grief or pain no matter how necessary or cathartic it might be. i've read so much about love expressed through food, within food, making food, sharing food, eating food that i find myself aware of it in my life now [...]*

Indeed the theme of food is popular and recurrent to the point that certain symbols–oranges being cut into segments and shared with friends, family, or lovers, for example–are a webweave staple with endless variations posted. At the same time, creating a quality hierarchy that distinguishes between clichéd versus original posts goes against the high & low culture ethos that is integral to the form of webweaving (more on this in Chapter 5). As the webweaver above reminds us, instead of operating with a scarcity mindset in which only a certain amount of people are allowed to use particular images or references, themes like food and love are a large part of many people's lives and as such are reflected in their work. The appeal of webweaving isn't in being recognized as original or ingenious according to traditional art norms, but in finding new ways to connect with others and with one's daily life (more on this in Chapter 5).

Common excerpts and inclusions in 'the (incomplete) Tumblr canon' / i.e. content of weaves

Outside of the 30 weaves I analyzed directly, I processed over a hundred weaves. Combined with my long-term use of the platform, I was able to define a (preliminary and incomplete) Tumblr canon of authors, artists, films, and television that appear frequently in webweaves. In general, these tend to come from contemporary (20th & 21st century) media, in the case of films, television, and books, tend to come from anglophone sources. There is a strong lean towards women: women singers, women as characters in films and TV, women authors, no doubt linked to Tumblr's userbase which features many women (Ashley in Leskin, 2019).

Table 1
Commonly woven authors, artists, music, and TV

Authors:	Artists:	Music & musicals	TV
Anne Carson Ada Limon bell hooks Chen Chen Danez Smith	Edward Hopper Marina Abramovich Louise Bourgeois Vincent Van Gogh	Florence and the Machine The Mountain Goats Lorde Mitski	*Hannibal* (NBC) *Succession* (HBO) *The Bear* (FX)

Franz Kafka Ilya Kaminsky Jeanette Winterson Jenny Slate Maggie Nelson Margaret Atwood Mary Oliver Ocean Vuong Richard Siken Virginia Woolf		Phoebe Bridgers Boy Genius Lana del Rey Alex G Taylor Swift Hozier	

Furthermore, the subject and themes of the weaves typically fell under one of these categories, listed below with some related popular subthemes. As you can see, there is quite a poetic, existential lean–many weaves are directly or indirectly about, in a very broad sense, what it is to live life as a human being, what it is that makes life worth living, and what it means to experience the human condition.

Common themes

1. **Home**
   This theme centers the relationship between the individual and their home or lack thereof. A popular idea is that of the metaphorical 'haunted house' or 'architectural haunting' wherein the physical structure one lives in no longer feels quite their own. Usually, this is linked to themes of trauma, coming-of-age, or coming to terms with past events.
1. **Love**
   This theme includes all forms of love and heartbreak or separation: familial, platonic, and romantic. I would even expand this to include weaves about a romantic outlook on life–weaves that are interested in connection, like weaves about ecological or holistic love, weaves about spiritualism, and religion.
2. **Alienation**
   On the opposite end of this spectrum, this theme allows users to reflect on more introspective, existential questions. It can lead to a social critique of, for example, alienation as a consequence of life under capitalism. Or, it can also remain in more philosophical territory, exploring feelings such as the mortifying ordeal of being known[5].
3. **Time**
   This theme reflects the passage of time, reflects on broad portions of life like childhood, adulthood, or old age, and relational distance as a consequence of the passage of time (i.e. losing friends). There are also many weaves made for particular seasons (ex: winter as represented in literature, a webweave about July, etc.) that I would classify under this theme as well.

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[5] Originally a Tim Kreider quote, this phrase has taken a life of its own and become a bit of a meme because of how often it is used on the website. Indeed, the tension between wanting to be understood by others but refusing to be vulnerable in front of them is relevant to Tumblr's marginalized, alternative public.

4. **Family**
   Very frequent also are weaves about particular family dynamics: mother-daughter, father-daughter, sibling-sibling, creating found families, and more. Often weavers reference various characters from film, literature, and more to illustrate these weaves, which at times combine character/media analysis with more personal introspection from the weavers.
5. **Girlhood & queerness**
   This theme reflects the feminine experience. It plays on ideas like the male gaze, the female gaze, refusing to play to the gaze of others, the purposeful gendering or ungendering of oneself, and generally more metaphors that connect to alternative subjectivities, or feeling abnormal relative to social norms.
6. **Animals**
   It turns out that there are a lot of poems about dogs! This theme finds elements of the human condition reflected in animal symbolism (dogs *are* extremely common but birds, wolves, cats, and more feature as well): obedience, control, violence, and loyalty.
7. **Space**
   I see this theme as connected to those of love, and alienation, but many weaves are made about the imagery of space, the voids, black holes, and more. Often it is a conduit for a more metaphorical investigation into the great mystery of life, or to express a sentiment of awe or alienation among others.

These recurring themes offer insight into the driving questions that motivate the weavers. They reflect important questions about self-discovery, the discovery of others, and the discovery of the world that animate Tumblr's mostly late teen-early adult weavers who are still trying to fully make sense of their lives. We will touch further on the deeply personal nature of web weaving in Chapter 5.

4.2 High and low culture

One of the effects of this 'canon' being formed is a sort of cultural collapse between works conventionally considered to be 'high' art and those considered to be 'low' art. All sorts of media are put on the same pedestal–reality TV, to these users and weavers, has a similar if not equivocal emotional resonance as classic theatre. Some examples I came across while collecting weaves from my previous chapter include User B's 'funeral march' post in which the Disney kids film High School Musical, American oil painter Edward Hopper, and French poet Rimbaud coexist. This weave is about the joy and melancholy of becoming an adult, and proves that this theme is universal–a sentiment that has existed and will continue through time, people, and different movements of art and content. When presented through a single post, these different works are put on an equal cultural playing field, and I would argue, not only contextualize the weave's message but 'recontextualize' each other, allowing for their similarities to bleed into one single *affective* sentiment. Indeed, drawing from Sara Ahmed's research, affect in this thesis refers to an immaterial relational process generated inside the body, that then moves outside of the individual, connecting them, in turn, to the bodies of others (Ahmed 2004 p.119 cited in Pybus, 2015). In doing so, bodies are propelled into action, turning subjective experience into interpersonal connection.

As a second example, we can look to user User H, who combines visual scenes of the Oresteia, recreated by different artists, with her own Oresteia-themed poetry. "i am once again forcing you all to think about electra,", read User H's tags, reflecting intentionality and self-awareness as the weaver combines her own voice to the polyphony of artists who came before her, thus furthering, one post at a time, the ancient oral tale of Elektra. A glance at her work will reveal a sort of 'shocking' anachronistic juxtaposition between classical and very contemporary materials, thus accentuating the pathos and drama of an ancient Greek tragedy manifested in the purposefully abrasive weaving of this Tumblr user. Posts like these are a testament to the enduring character of art; as we scroll through each version of Elektra, we are reminded of the countless times this tale must have been shared and transmitted, and that this is but a single instance of it, and that it will continue to be shared and recontextualized, and that even in its ancient state, it remains relevant to the experiences of contemporary young adults.

4.3 Analysis of labor & value of weaving

This collapse of high and low media, the boundaries of which are somewhat brazenly ignored by weavers, is of course symptomatic of a "born digital" Web 2.0 mode of engagement. Indeed, facilitated by the democratizing nature of social media and new platforms, many boundaries associated with older, more traditional media can be broken–consumers are producers, and the audience is also the spectator. Millions of users now participate in what media scholar Henry Jenkins called "media convergence" (2006). Jenkins highlights that this blurring of the lines between consumption and production is accompanied by a blurring of the lines between leisure and labor online. Webweavers, for example, create and share their works as a desire for community and a desire to express themselves, without any real expectation of monetization. But even if weaves are labors of love, they are still instances of consumer behavior, ultimately and mostly tied to reflecting on media consumption. Inevitably, weaves add promotional and reputational value to the media in question, without any expectation of payment from the weaver. And of course, by generating and posting content on Tumblr, users generate activity and engagement, thus racking up value for the platform itself.

There are also interpersonal or inter-community issues that emerge around webweaving and its value. As Tumblr is a social site, users who enjoy certain weaves can follow the weavers' blogs and see their content/reblogs on home dash. This means that popular weavers, as on any social media site, benefit from more visibility, concretizing larger audiences and theoretically exponential growth. On Tumblr, these blogs become real hubs for knowledge of poetry, art, fandom, and culture, particularly for users interested in web weaves and the specific poetic affect that comes with this form of creation. When collecting data, I observed that bigger web weave blogs, not only post content, but also regularly answer questions about poetry, art, and film recommendations, about reading and interpreting these types of works, and about handling life's everyday conflicts and situations. As such, these blogs are, to some of their followers, not only sources of content, but also references for media recommendations, banks of media knowledge, and even advice columns. It is not difficult to see where the line between leisure and labor, in this case, becomes blurred.

For some of these accounts 'being' a weaver is more than a description of a type of blogging, it becomes a marketable brand, likely responding to a parasocial pressure already exerted by followers, who already 'perceive' the blogs as a single, determined entity, as certain very

popular weavers seek to be recompensed for their extensive leisure-labor. Some accounts, as we mentioned in Chapter 3, may even launch a ko-fis, Substack, or Patreon. The sums they receive from their followers are small–often the price of a coffee, or a one-time donation, but a gesture of appreciation than sums of money that would allow weavers to come anywhere close to living off their work. Still, receiving even these small sums is only possible for accounts that have already constructed a public-facing persona that they can extend to other platforms.

To complicate this further, many weaves are, by nature of being digital works, referential and iterative. For a cross-platform example, it isn't rare to find X posts screenshotted and included in webweaving compositions–some may be popular posts, already viral across more than X, but sometimes, weavers include content from smaller, more 'X-local' and more private accounts. This can lead to situations where the labor of the weaver also swallows notions of privacy, and even copyright, which can become dicey if the web weaves viralize and draw lots of attention. For example, I have come across multiple weaves with 'apologies' baked into their captions. The weavers apologize for having used a personal text post, or in another case, another Tumblr user's sketches, without permission. It is not a question of malicious theft but a question of weavers blindly saving 'content' into their saved/inspiration folders without actively thinking about the creators of this work. For quotes by big authors like Anne Carson or Sheila Heti, this doesn't matter as much–the authors are famous, the quotes are already omnipresent in digital space, and are easy to track down. But using posts by other Tumblr users, who perhaps wish to remain private or simply wish to keep creative control over their own art, circumstances can be murkier. In both cases, the weavers removed the other users' images from their weaves and added an apology to the caption.

I also believe that popular webweaver accounts are burdened creatively by their 'brands', and more importantly, the expectations that their followers have for them in terms of production. It's interesting to see blogs, for example, take requests for themes, or provide web weaves sort of 'on demand'–in this case, webweaving comes less from a personal desire to engage with a theme and more from a desire to respond to a value demand. It makes sense to me that clichés and repetitive work would emerge at this intersection as well, when the focus on the weaver is set on 'completing' the work, motivated by affective labor, rather than researching and following almost an intuitive creative process of weaving.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the evolution of the 'prosumer' born-digital role is not sequestered to social media, but has extended into the real world, notably, in our case, to heritage cultural sites, such as museums, that want to capitalize on and attract younger audiences. Museums lean into digital implementation strategies to enter and participate in the digital conversation and connect with audiences on platforms like Instagram, and YouTube. This includes catering to 'hybrid' online/offline experientially–for example, the MoMA's *In the Making* courses encourage young people to pose for museum photoshoots, generate pictures, and then turn them into GIFs. The traditional one-sided quality of the museum opens into a two-way dialogue, where the audience is now invited to participate and share, like, etc. (Fois, 2015). MoMA Teens, launched in 2013, was a project landing between "a traditional website and a Tumblr page", aiming to "create a vivid new experience, and to create an environment like Tumblr, where many teens are already active and feel at home" (Zwicky, 2013 via Fois 2015). Here we see another instance of media convergence and of blurring the lines between labor and leisure, directly inspired by Tumblr.

Institutions like the MoMA recognize the power of affective investment created through this sort of platform and seek to reproduce them in their own business models. Some museums, like the London Institute of Contemporary Art, even have their own designated 'microsite' (read: blog) that operates as a diary and point of distribution "presenting online commissions, alongside contextual information such as interviews, texts, video works [...]" (2014, via Fois, 2015)

In conclusion, in this chapter, we addressed various affordances and facets of the webweaving economy as a genre. We defined Tumblr's participatory, taste-making culture, and discussed some genre and monetization issues as well. Continuing to reference the weaves from my data collection, we will follow this line of thought in Chapter 5 by discussing how platforms can act as networks of feelings.

Chapter 5:
Affect and networks of feelings

We have spent the four previous chapters defining the 'genre identity' of webweaving. By providing contextual background and analysis of content, we can understand the interconnected and yet deeply personal nature of webweaving, and how these two qualities inevitably intersect in ways that both enrich the experience and come to trouble it, as noted when we touched on the issue of labor in the previous chapter. This final chapter continues this analysis of the affective dimension of webweaving. To do so, we touch on three key ideas. Building off of Cvekovitch's popular idea of media platforms as "archives of feelings," we examine how these forms of personal affect are shared. We also study how webweaving can 'train the eye' of its weavers, in a manner that resembles note-keeping or journaling, but also, the iterative and experimental nature of research-creation. Drawing from Ihlein's work on the creative process of blogging and Loveless' research creation inquiries, we look at how webweaving also 'trains the heart', and how that allows for weaves to function as humanistic objects in the current solipsistic landscape

5.1: Archives of feelings

As has been well-established at this point in the project, webweaving functions as a form of networked cultural curation. The networked aspect of the weaving is notably encouraged via some of Tumblr's features. It's fair to say that the 'reblog' feature, which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, allows users to share content on their blogs, is vital to this curatorial style of engagement that Tumblr users employ. Lots of other social media platforms share a central 'reposting' mechanism that allows for users' posts to transcend their own accounts. But on Tumblr, there is a specific aesthetic concern for the type of post shared, the order in which the posts are reblogged and as such appear on the blog, and so on. From the very inception of the platform, users were encouraged to view their blogs as extensions of self. As mentioned in Chapter 2, customizability was at the core of then-CEO David Karp's mission statement when branding the platform, and he viewed Tumblr as a literal "tool for self-expression" in comparison to other social platforms, like Facebook, where "nobody was proud of their identity" (Schonfeld, through Tiidenberg, 2021, p.5). Even today, users take pride in their blogs' appearance, which they can control in minute detail through their page's HTML code, readily available if they wish. Moreover, as we talked about in Chapter 4, Tumblr users display an appreciation of and interest in various forms of media. As such, the reblog mechanism, outside of allowing posts to circulate through the site's various siloes, is also fundamentally an act of curatorial co-signing. It is a "demarcation of quality" necessary to separate posts that are reblogged by users from those that are simply 'liked' (Tiidenberg, Hendry, Abidin, 2018, p.26). This demarcation of quality can be visual, but can also be encouraged by all sorts of affective investments–anything from political allyship to inside jokes, to riffing on pre-established ideals as in any type of semi-private conversational setting. To touch on another idea from Chapter 4, when we see Tumblr users denigrate or ignore conventional hierarchies of quality (for example, a Tumblr user reblogging Snoopy comic strips and Caravaggio paintings in the same breadth) as part of their mode of interaction of the site, it means that they are prioritizing personal–but also, I argue, communal cultural affective codes.

As a reminder, the term 'affect' in this thesis borrows from Sara Ahmed's. It refers to an immaterial relational process generated inside the body, that then moves outside of the individual, connecting them, in turn, to the bodies of others (Ahmed 2004 p.119 cited in Pybus, 2015). In

doing so, bodies are propelled into action, turning subjective experience into interpersonal connection. This definition helps explain the way that bodies move not only through physical space but in psycho-social spaces as well. In 2011, boyd noted that networked publics are a new form of digitally mediated public, with a common "understanding of the world, a shared identity, claims to inclusiveness, and a consensus regarding the collective interest" (Livingstone through boyd, 2005 in 2011, p.9). As such, when thinking of these digital spaces, despite their immateriality we find that they are imbued with what Ahmed calls a layer of "stickiness" which "sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects" (2010, p.31 cited in Pybus, 2015).

It's almost as if affect becomes trapped in this stickiness, collecting and collating on platforms and the virtual media objects, such as webweaving, that are generated on them and that collect affect like pollen as they circulate through the rhizomatic hive that is the platform. Even in virtual spaces like Tumblr, bodies still take on normative, 'real world' social alignments, with individual attachments inevitably expanding into ontologically-aligned groups and communities that share particular social, cultural, political, or even economic discourses. These communities are, as such, notably upheld by an affective 'sense of belonging' generated via the interactivity of the platform, and this sense of belonging allows these publics to operate almost in private confidence, at a halfway point between private journal and friendship club.

What does this affective expression look like? For points of reference, all we need to do is look at the tags appended to any reblogged posts. Users often 'free-write' in these tags, allowing them to surpass their classificatory nature and allowing users to articulate expressions of intimacy, or strong expressions conventionally relegated to the private sphere. In a weave about the theme of the void, a weaver details that their process "started out as a pure disco elysium [video game] post and then [...] escalated" and that they were "consumed by HOLE". These hyperbolic expressions of emotion are present not only in the original tags but also in the tags of the users who reblogged this weave at any point in time: "#ive liked this MONTHS ago but it's making me CRAZY now", "#screaming and howling", "#oh i'm insane again actually". Of course, like a lot of digital vernacular, these statements are hyperbolic–much like users who frequently use 'lol' and are not actually 'laughing out loud', users who 'are going insane' when reblogging weaves about voids are using this excessive language to convey that the post is resonant and extremely relatable, funny, or emotionally appealing.

As such, posts that circulate on the site and collect these kinds of tags not only generate but also cumulatively collect affect. Webweaves, which are designed to effectively but artistically communicate emotionally resonant concepts, are prime examples of sticky media, collecting affect as they cycle through Tumblr ecosystems and then back again. Indeed, Cvetkovich posits that "archives of feelings" are predicated on explorations of cultural texts "as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p.7 through Pybus). Pybus writes that for "born digitals" who have grown up with the Internet, posting is an inevitable means of maintaining any sort of social intimacy, meaning that networks become a mediator of human-to-human connection. Affect accumulates within user profiles, moves and circulates through the digital space, and in doing so also produces social value–friends will move wherever their friends are (Boyd 2006 in Pybus 2015). While Pybus principally writes about Facebook, this applies to Tumblr as well, despite the relative anonymity granted by the platform. Indeed, people do not log

in to social networks to live fully public, identifiable lives, but Tumblr is not a fully anonymous forum either. Tumblr users live out what Zhao and colleagues refer to as "nonymous" or "semi-public lives", in a way elaborating real, personal truths, from somewhat fictionalized accounts (Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin 2008 cited in Pybus).

Considering these 'nonymous' user profiles as archives allows us to think about how we "write ourselves into being" (Sunden 2009 cited in Pybus). In a Foucauldian sense, the archive produces sociality, binding and cohering relations based on the circulation of data. Indeed, digital feminist scholar Akane Kanai says, regarding affect and Tumblr, that affect centers social patterns through which it appears and is negotiated–as opposed to feelings being 'purely' and individually experienced (2019, p.13). As such, affect creates sociality on sites like Tumblr. Relatable artefacts, i.e. posts understood by others, like weaves, are a direct part of this, and there is a social system of meaning underpinning the affect circulating through these artefacts, not divorced from the images and words in them. As per Kanai, these types of posts circulate precisely because they communicate affective meaning "presumed to be 'decodable'" (2009, p.14).

For example, here is a testimony from a message sent to a popular webweaving blog: "Not a request but thank you. Some of your findings have changed me. They still linger in my thoughts months after reading them. I've cried so much. I guess I never thought my deepest, more secret feelings could be so beautifully written when I myself can't find the words [...]" The response: "one of my favorite things about webweaving is finding out just how many people have felt things i've felt. I feel much less alone than i did a few years ago and i'm beyond honored that i can help people feel a little more connected and understood through my weaves as well." Indeed, the crux of webweaving is this sharing or exchange of sentiment, this affective generation around these posts that has the power to 'move' individuals, creating emotional and somatic responses even through virtual communication.

5.2 Learning how to see: how does webweaving train us to see the world?

Journaling and aesthetic engagement with daily life

As part of my data collection, I investigated what type of creative work webweavers considered their weaves to fall under. As we may recall from Chapter 3, while most users do identify the term 'webweaver' and recognize it as its genre, many see webweaving as connected to the poetic process. As such, you will find the term 'poetry' used in this chapter, both as a reference point and also as a shortcut to refer to works like poems but also weaves. In Chapter 3, we also saw that Tumblr users weave 'poetically' but also do so in a way that is not dissimilar from keeping a personal journal or a diary. Posts are released nonchalantly, amidst other personal writing, memes, and other content. Weaves are a way for users not only to track what media they are consuming at the moment, but also their thoughts or interpretation of the media, or how they connect emotionally to it, i.e. how they connect to their inner lives. I would even argue that insofar as many users use their blogs as 'personal diaries', for some, even just reblogging the weaves or sharing them (instead of creating them) is a way of keeping a personal record.

In *On Keeping a Notebook,* originally published in Vogue magazine, in 1969, American writer and journalist Joan Didion muses about the journaling process–described in the essay as

'notekeeping'. If note-keeping serves the purpose of maintaining factual and organizational memory, this function is "accidentally, only secondarily useful, in the way that any compulsion tries to justify itself" (1969). The truths of life, as they are carried in Didion's notebook, are embodied less in the precise and factual record of events, and more so in the descriptions of 'how the world *felt*' that accompanied them. The "common denominator of all we see", Didion insists, whether that be friends, work, meetings, family, lovers, "is always, transparently, shamelessly, the implacable I". As such the notebook becomes the foyer to this "implacable I" and, unbound by the expectation of external readers, is the perfect foyer for genuinely any sort of thought: the earnest, the shameful, the erratic, the confused. Especially for artists or writers like Didion, who feel the weight of others' gaze applies to any public writings, the notebook protects "bits of the mind's string too short to use" (1969). Even more importantly, Didion argues, quite metaphorically, note-keeping allows us to keep the line to our past selves open, preventing us from their "haunting" that would have ensued, had they been unresolved and beckoning for attention, untranslated onto the page or anywhere at all. Didion pictures herself, in this essay, with the ghost of a younger self looming over her shoulder, uneasy and unable to understand this younger persona, not having the written trace of who this person was, and more importantly, how she felt.

Blogging as research-creation

If note-keeping is the perfect, private space for exploration and record of self, then pseudonymous blogging, in its semi-private state, employs some of the same principles. But what else does blogging as a form bring its users? Australian artist Lucas Ihlein refers to blogging as a form of "process-based aesthetics" (2014, p.38). In other words, blogging is a form that documents its own making, where social and conceptual encounters are inevitably commented upon in the blog itself, which allows for transparency vis-a-vis the thoughts of the writer to any readers. As such, blogging is an example of 'relational' aesthetics, but not only–the writer gleans a deeper understanding of their thoughts through the iterative process of note-keeping/journaling/weaving. In effect, this is what prevents the 'haunting', I think, that Didion finds herself wary of. So not only does blogging "function as a means of documenting experience" it also "transforms the experiences themselves–leading to a deepening of the relationship between researcher and subject matter" (2014, p.38). Ihlein describes the process-based "life cycle" of blogging as: "action → publication → dialogue → action → publication → dialogue → action [..]" which I find similar to the way that a weave is generated, will circulate and then add to the metanarrative of a certain theme, generating new weaves that encompass this metanarrative (2014, p.39). For Ihlein, blogging is a relational tool that can be used to reflect on everyday life and its everyday emotions–which, paradoxically, may be both banal and deeply intense. Ihlein builds on the work of philosophers of aesthetic like Arto Haapala and Maurice Blanchot, who describe the everyday as "inexhaustible, irrecusable, constantly unfinished", and having a slippery quality that "always escapes forms or structures" (2014, p. 41). By focusing an intense creative focus on very specific visual or aesthetic features, webweaving decontextualizes emotional moments of the everyday, thereby

increasing a sort of affective sensitivity. Weaving encourages us to 'look at' instead of 'see through' media objects, but also moments of our everyday lives. Through this process of defamiliarization, which permits both weavers and rebloggers to analyze and empathize with 'fresh eyes', these individuals "strengthen their attachment with the world" around them (2014, p.41). In a way, these relational, aesthetic processes 're–teach' us how to see.

Refusing the culture of technological novelty

But could this 'defamiliarization' effect be baked not only into the content posted on Tumblr but in the structure and space of the platform itself? To answer this question, let us look at feminist scholars like Sara Sharma and Alexander Cho, and their queer and feminist perspectives on engaging with technology while also refuting normative, exploitative, and accelerationist perspectives.

In her talk *BROKEN MACHINES: Towards a Techno-Feminist Refusal* at Concordia University in September 2023, Sara Sharma explained that media platforms, by inherently structuring the act of seeing, can sometimes obscure sight of what they do. Sharma proposes a stance of feminist refusal to see, and instead, in a manner that reminds me of the previously mentioned defamiliarization, sees herself as a technology. Sharma herself is a scanner, in constant negotiation, 'always scanning' her physical and digital everyday life for initially 'invisible' everyday elements.

As we saw in Chapter 3, weaving, especially in its pseudonymous state, is a way to talk about gender and gendered existence in 'public' while still maintaining a sense of private safety. While this might read as a tad grandiose, or hyperbolic, this idea of safety is vital and inevitably leads to extreme kinship with other users and the platform. In his chapter of *The Routledge Companion to Affect and Gender,* which acts as a "eulogy" of "peak Tumblr", Alexander Cho describes this phenomenon (2022, p.269). Despite all social media being "affect machines" that both create and capture "affect, for profit," Cho maintains that there was something special about Tumblr. He describes Tumblr as a place for culture, intersectionality, and "well-articulated politics of social justice that intertwined with evocative, poetic, self-expression" (2022, p.269). Affect here is "the urge, the intensity, the force that compels the user to feel a certain way about what they see, compels them to persistence and action on the platform, the need to interact" and engage (2022, p.240). And for Cho, affect on Tumblr circulated "queerly", which is to say in "non-linear fashions–kinks, reverberations, voids–that resisted state pressures of capital, smooth instead of striated, haptic instead of panoptic" (2022, p.273). In a deep, structural sense, Tumblr seemed "less amenable to the affect-monetization mechanics of platform capitalism, [and was] a space that did not conform to the grid-like apparatus of the marketplace of neoliberal capital grafted onto social media" (p.275). On Tumblr, social dynamics were allowed to be different, askew, or non-normative.

Cho writes from a very nostalgic, perhaps even fatalistic perspective, but this is understandable. At the time of writing of Cho's chapter, the US Capitol had just been hit with an alt-right insurrection juiced in part by extremist social media rhetoric, and COVID-19 has revealed the hold that disinformation maintains on even the most neutral individuals. In 2023, platforms and life itself move "like bullet trains" (2022, p.276). Life is seemingly unstoppable and

technology makes it even faster, at the expense of our comfort, safety, and values. In her New Yorker article *Picturing the Humanity and Dread of the Infinite Scroll,* tech writer Jia Tolentino poignantly comments on the accelerationist trap of technology, which, in the guise of improving human connection, knowledge, etc, also numbs the spirit:

It is already difficult for me to imagine anything other than this–anything other than grabbing the pocket-sized Internet to assume the vantage points of a god and a serf, simultaneously, anything other than constant confrontation with the systems that both demand our action and dwarf us into utter inconsequence. [...] I find it hard to remember, some days, that I am capable of accessing a myriad of emotional textures aside from the one I fall into almost every time my fingertips are moving across a phone screen–numb exhaustion, dull anxiety, near-automated desire (Tolentino, 2021).

So what now? To return to Sharma, it is possible to map out feminist possibilities for a technological future, even if it seems steeped in an ongoing tech narrative of accelerationist progress and neoliberal 'betterment'. Along the way, Sharma critiques two dominant tech schools of thought: 'data bro theory' à la Bezos or Musk, but also 'big data feminism' that neuter and cannibalize feminist politics. What are the alternatives to these theories? Sharma affirms that to understand media is to understand that everything is not and should not always be possible, despite the all-encompassing logics of 'technocapitalist machism'. The feminist position is one of refusal– broken records, broken software, clinging onto old blogging platforms, and writing inefficient and woefully repetitive love poetry to share with our online friends. Tech should make life easier, Sharma affirms, but shouldn't it also make us better people? Shouldn't it encourage us in our capacity, as Tolentino puts it, to access a "myriad of emotional textures", instead of numbing us to the experience of our own lives (2021)?

As New York culture writer Hannah Baer articulates in her article *How to Walk in a Nightclub*, "the premise of mass culture is linear movement–new technologies, new political leaders, [...] new models, new apps [...] new artists, new poets, new venues [...]" (2023). Baer accuses this accelerationist obsession with "the new" of pervading subculture, wherein "you have to say you're doing something different. What came before has to be 'less than' to justify what is new'. While Baer's specific words that I use here reference an academic situation, this happens in broader culture too–the disposability of cultural work is only ever increasing, redacted by shorter, leaner attention spans. What do we do about this? Instead of ceding the world to "abstraction, consumption, and misuse," we can prioritize mediated relationships that encourage us to, as Baer would put it, refuse technologically deterministic evolution and encourage us to learn to "walk" in the opposite direction instead. Working in trans/queer studies, Baer rejects the "false ladder of evolution". This is no small task, refusing to engage as this ladder "heaves and shudders and branches out and doubles back on itself, spiraling" (2023).

Tumblr's silosociality at the core of the platform, which was so different from what other contemporary platforms had to offer when it first launched, shaped so much of its culture and allowed for this 'queer' circulation of affect. As per Tiidenberg et al.: "silosociality looks inwards rather than outwards, it is about consolidating content and practices rather than focusing on distribution" (2021, p.57).

As such, by embracing a platform structure that reminds us of earlier Web 1.0 design and user expectations, Tumblr inadvertently embraces what Baer might describe "reverse developmental experience of disassociation", entering into a logic of feminist refusal (2023). This refusal of technopatriarchal ideas of 'betterment' and 'progress', however, made Tumblr an appealing place for anyone interested in a 'non-normative' space: queer people, women, activists, sex workers, and more. Perhaps this is why, as discussed in Chapter 2, Tumblr is 'always dying': due to this internally-focused structure, it is basically impossible for Tumblr to adapt into a social media site that needs to grow exponentially to meet the goals of contemporary economic viability.

Materiality in the digital creative process

Circling back to Ihlein's work, interpreting blogging as process-based work allows us to engage also with the embodied materiality of the work–drawing attention to its recording of the encounters that formed it, and as such, drawing a self-referentiality to the user. This loose definition of 'the work' echoes Katherine Hayles' vision of 'the text' in digital media, which she defines not as self-contained or closed, but rather as always in the state of becoming–"a process, an event brought into existence when the program runs" (in Carpenter, 2019). Hayles' work appears in a chapter of JL Carpenter, titled *Writing: The Process of Becoming Something Else*, which reckons with the evolving role of writing, as a 'traditional' method in a now extremely digital context. I evoke this chapter because of the discussion of poetry and writing, which, as we mentioned in Chapter 3 is not distant from how certain webweavers view their own work. This chapter emphasizes that writing is "an event, not an entity". For digital texts to be able to 'appear' which is to say to 'be performed' across various platforms, browsers, and services, a digital writer must be able to incorporate "variability, instability, transformation, and change" into their compositional process. At the very root of the topic, writing with a computer program implies that the writer is creating a text "that will only ever be read by humans in translation through a browser"–the writing "always about to leave to become something else" (Carpenter, 2019). If a very generously poetic vision of digital craft, this echoes Ihlein's point about self-awareness with regards to the environment when working with digital material that adds a sort of metatextual component to the 'traditional' craft of writing, making, or creating.

The idea that a work is always 'becoming' or being performed (Carpenter uses the term 'performance writer' at times to refer to the digital writer, to capture the 'space' between the performance of the text by its device and the text itself) is one that de Kosnik, who herself draws from Theatre and Performance Studies, has baked into her notion of archontic production. Drawing from a similarly theatrical lexical field, de Kosnik's work centers on 'rogue', i.e. informal, amateurish, non-commercial forms of archive; a definition that includes Tumblr blogs and weaves. De Kosnik writes that these archives are dependent on 'repertoire', the set of actions that compose archiving. De Kosnik references fan archives, for example, which must be maintained through 'caretaking', she uses this terminology not necessarily to feminize the archivist but to highlight the fragility and frequent loss located especially in online data handling. The repertoire includes actions like the downloading, uploading, and sharing of images–this repertoire must be maintained and repeatedly performed. When the performance ends and labor ends, the sites of archival practice stagnate or may even be shut down. Furthermore, de Kosnik affirms that once, inevitably, the archives end, the "methods and means that rogue archivists have developed for assembling [...] idiosyncratic archives will survive" and in fact that "the methods (repertoire) will outlive the

archive" itself (2016, p.7). This is an embodied methodology for de Kosnik, who notes the ways that hands may touch the keyboard and mouse, but also more broadly evokes the characterization of the human body as a "playback machine" that record what they see and hear (i.e. memories, stories) and then play those experiences back "transforming them in the process" (2016, p.7) In de Kosnik's example, a child who reads superhero comics may pretend to be a superhero. In the case of webweaving, we are shown not only how life is, but how to think about it. So for example, weaves that thread together poetry and pieces of media that feature heightened or romantic states of mind generate a romantic or emotionally heightened mental mindset in the weaver. Weaving as the practice encourages this poetic and critical mindset, opening the weaver to view the world around them in different ways and allowing them to develop their artistic, feminist senses.

5.3 Feminist interjections and narrativization

Alternative, feminist subjects

As such, webweaving can re(teach) us ways in which to see and engage with the world around us in 'non-normative' ways. In this section, we continue to observe webweaving from another critical feminist angle, exploring the thematic 'reframing' of the webweaving process and how it allows for deviation from 'normative' stories. From the collected data from Chapter 3, we learned that one of the motivations driving webweavers is a desire to reprocess the 'best parts' of their media with an intense focus and leave the rest behind. We could almost describe this desire as utopic, as it seeks to implement a vision of the initial piece of media, or its plot, characters, or message, not as what they are, but what they could (or should) have been. With Tumblr's webweaving (and overarching) userbase skewing young, queer, and feminist (amongst other traits), their readings of what texts 'should have been' reflect this vision. Oftentimes, this speculative lens extends to queer relationships or female characters–fleshing out flat personalities, adding depth to side characters ignored by the narrative.

In Chapter 2, for example, we discussed the case of the weave created about *Succession* character Shiv Roy, the cutthroat daughter of media magnate Logan Roy, who despite having ambitions for her father's position, ends up maligned in favor of her brothers as her gendered status becomes more and more of a liability through the show's three seasons. The specific weave I reference offered an almost psychoanalytic interpretation of the character, collaging screenshots from moments between Shiv and her family with excerpts of Freudian family dynamic theory. While that weave is very specific in its content, Shiv Roy is a more generally popular 'subject' of weaves, or at least features in them often–this is unsurprising due to the overwhelming presence of *Succession* in the (Tumblr and non-Tumblr) zeitgeist. She represents a character that weavers can not only empathize with and relate to but also acts as a thematic springboard to create weaves about women's roles in the family, in the workplace, relating to their partners, and more.

Sometimes, the fashion in which weavers end up reappropriating elements from other media goes so far as to render them unrecognizable, meaning that there is a part of projection that comes straight from the mind of the weavers–rendering them exercises in imagination rather than interpretation. For example, in a weave about pop stars like Taylor Swift or Fiona Apple being subject to the male gaze of critics, a commenter laments that the weave made them "look up that emily moon fiona apple article and damn that was disappointing". This is echoed in the tags: "the

most interesting articles always end up being like a 5-minute read that doesn't say nearly as much as you wish it would". I think this is interesting as it speaks to the generative power of these weaves–they are not just forms of archiving but can also generate entirely new 'meanings' that recontextualize the elements they are composed of. The case of these examples, for instance, reveals that the weavers extrapolate the sharpest, or most impactful lines from otherwise perhaps less interesting articles, sort of portraying the articles in a way that allows for weavers to at times very generously project their interpretations onto whatever the original writing was.

This process is reminiscent of what de Kosnik describes as 'archontic production', the "purposeful reframing" of mass-produced and mass-distributed texts. De Kosnik directs her analysis to fandom studies, and affirms that fans "select the desirable parts" of these commodities as "raw material for their own revisions and variations" (2016, p.277). The fans' goal is to create more satisfying or interesting content and stories, generating resonant texts that circulate within fan communities, which also creates a counterbalance to the control/power exercised on the consumer by culture industries. Instead of creating derivative copies of the source, this 'remixing' allows fans to develop the works. In doing so they unlock the "potentiality" of works that would otherwise "lie dormant, unused in the source" (2016, p.280). Additionally, fans disengage from a passive cycle of consumption, where 'receiving' whatever media they consume encourages them to become creators. Audiences, as affirms de Kosnik, are no longer "dupes of mass culture" but are instead "users" who take from their favorite texts what is most valuable to them (2016, p.39). McCraken develops a similar argument when writing about the fannish instinct to pick out the best parts of media and transform the rest, which is pertinent when it comes, for example to material that does not "offer developed minority representation" (2017, p.160). Indeed, in a way, Tumblr users 'create' this representation, generating "queer readings of texts in character art, GIF sets, or through fan fiction; thus, Captain America Steve Rogers of the *Marvel* universe is considered bisexual because that's how Tumblr users largely read and portray him (2017).

While not in the scope of this media studies thesis, it would be fascinating to engage with this specific angle of webweaving, where weavers connect with media 'characters', celebrities, or creators, from a marketing perspective. Analyzing the relationship, for example, between pop stars and their fans, Derbaix et al. find that "through the consumer's investment of energy (labor) in the products they create, these products–or the people for whom these products are specifically created as idols––can become projections or representations of the self"–which is exactly what happens in webweaving as well (2023, p.6). This specific paper also finds that most fans who create derivative work do not register any sort of 'exploitation' by the music industry, even though they were essentially doing free marketing/promotional labor. Instead, fans registered value in what their work brought to other fans–value was found in the building of offline and online communities (2023, Derbaix et al, p.12). Other scholars, such as Rahma Sugihartati, writing about Indonesian fans of *The Mortal Instruments* young adult fiction series, critique this phenomenon more strongly, citing that it traps fans as 'free laborers', subject to the global culture industry–not a form of resistance, or, better explained, that even forms of resistance, such as these 'feminist, alternative retellings', are subsumed by the system (2017, Sugiharat). Both perspectives add nuance to my central argument that webweaving is an entirely emancipatory, revelatory tool for the future.

Normativity in the archive of feelings

It's also worth noting in the vein of Tumblr scholar Akane Kanai, that digital publics do align with real-life conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and other parameters. Indeed, if in our analysis, we choose to center the conceptualization of the platform-public as an affective, almost sentient center that is the "archive of feelings", then it is worth noting that these real-world biases also come into play in this circulatory affect. Raced and classed notions of "vulnerability, publicity, and privacy", Kanai tells us, "cannot be simply corrected by reference to the invocation of an a-contextual agential girl-subject that is always rational and discerning, in control of digital technology" (2019, p.16).

In other words, the affect circulating on Tumblr reproduces a fairly white, middle-class, North American subjectivity. It would be flawed logic to consider that everyone neatly fits into–and would want to fit into–this perspective. Indeed, in the same way, that Wendy Chun's definition of leaky media forces us to reckon with the inherently flawed and permeable nature of the media we consider to 'safekeep' our data privacy, we must recognize that affect is "both subject to contingent emotional regimes" and that while some "may attempt to gain mastery over" it, that this is not possible (Kanai, 2019, p.16). I found that the generalized assumption that everyone interested in weaves carries the same subjectivity can generate tension even within the community. For example, in a now-deleted post by a popular webweaver, they respond to an anonymous follower indirectly requesting a weave about some sort of toxic or abusive relationship by quite staunchly refusing to make the weave (rare and worded in a way that is tonally out of character for them), elaborating that they interpreted this request as making a weave in a way that would portray women as being inferior to men. The weaver said that they did not seek out, consume, or enjoy this sort of media, and would not want to put in the energy of searching for material for a theme they so flagrantly did not align with.

Flexibility of creation in the digital age

As a last point on the subject of weaves as a method of 'transformation' or 'retelling', let us touch on the theme of Internet grey zones from a broader perspective. Here I'd like to draw from the work of JR Carpenter, who in *Writing on the Cusp of Becoming Something Else,* explores what it means for the craft of writing to evolve in parallel with the omnipresence of platformed content production cycle of the 2010s. Writing and art have never been more mediated by others, and yet at the same time, we exist in a situation of saturation. Even if the 'rules' around creating art are changing, Carpenter reminds us that these writers have always thought about their work in an almost conditional way–as per the title, the work is always 'on the cusp of becoming something else'. And so we must adapt some of the foundational ideas we may have about writing. For example, the idea of 'plagiarism', forbidden in traditional contexts, becomes a quotidian banality in an age where posts are circulated, copied, and miscopied over and over again. Carpenter also expands on theoretical strategies of digital writing, including two in particular that relate to this chapter: détournement, and iteration, both of which apply pressure on the idea of a fixed 'authorship'. But in a world where writing "leads us astray" through multiple tabs, browsers, and platforms, and turns us into "humans in translation", working through these various digital environments, why would the role of the author need to be fixed (2019)? These two rhetorical strategies (détournement and iteration) are very obviously present in webweaving, which

incorporate "cultural materials of the past into new contexts of reading and writing" as an "ongoing, compositional" process not only between original authors and weavers, but also rebloggers of weaves, and weavers inspired by other weavers (Carpenter 2019).

This amalgamating perspective reflects the born-digital experience and sensibility, as we mentioned in Chapter 3. Indeed, users (and creators, artists, etc.) who have grown up on and are exposed to the Internet develop what art theorist Omar Kholeif calls a creative "Internet awareness" (2018, p.115). A part of this awareness is a democratization of images, or what Hito Steyerl calls an exposure to "poor images" or "copies in motion" (2009). To be born digital is to be hungry for more–more information, more sources, more of everything at the surface of where the device meets fingertips. This intertextuality and ease of 'context switching' was extremely present in our data collection. We observed that weavers were not only fluent in the use of Tumblr as a platform but also in other digital tools–text readers, editing software, moving from phone to computer, to phone again, and incorporating content from all sorts of platforms (TikTok, X, Tumblr) into their posts. We look at the contents of these users' phones, their screenshot galleries, but also the inside of their heads–and as Didion would put it, their hearts. Carpenter explains that internet-based works like webweaving "emerge from [...] the complex net of the internet itself", and in doing so, how could they be expected to be "fixed, closed-system objects" (2019)?

Carpenter harps on the idea of the traditional publishing system that still expects texts to be "content rather than writing". Unlike content, writing is an art, a "compositional, dialogic process", and digital 'writing' especially–as I argue webweaving falls under– "make the fullest use of the creative possibility of web-hosted content". Some may argue that digital writing is not writing. That webweaving perhaps is not art but content. But, as Carpenter affirms, the web browser as we know it has existed for less than 30 years, and it took more time than that for film to stop being talked about in terms of theatre, for photography to stop being talked about in terms of painting. No one knows quite what they're writing just yet. And anyway, what differentiates art and content? Art, like Carpenter writes about writing, is evaluated, or 'read' for its progress, content is consumed as a product. "Writing becomes content when seen at a remove from a contextual awareness of the compositional process." Writing about art platforms, Goriunova refuses to distinguish between culture and art, instead relishing in the "grey zones" where one becomes the other (2012, p.11). Culture and art can be interchangeable–the breaking down of high art and low art is one of the effects of the development of our digital landscape. Beyond this, we can speak about the emotions of art–where and what does it move?

5.4 The Beauty in All Things

I want to touch again on an idea from the previous chapter, about the blurring of high and low culture in webweaving. If the blurring of the lines is perhaps not a purposeful act, it is a testament to the interpretative flexibility of those that apply it, which feels like less of a 'divide' between high and low culture and more a romanticizing instinct that connects the eye to the heart. Permitting a return to personal testimony here, this was something I thought about describing often… As I made my weaves, they were accompanied by a niggling, almost indescribable feeling that I struggle to make sense of even now, even a few thousand words into this thesis. What does

webweaving feel like? Or: how does it feel, to be webweaving? Maybe like collecting puzzle pieces, but instead of having the picture of the puzzle on the back of the box, there is no real box. You provide a solution to your own puzzle in a way, and yet completing it still feels like peeling back some great secret of the world. Someone before you had thought the same way, and you could use their poetry, and the people in your notes, who related enough to your posts to share it, maybe they even connected. There would be no great scientific understandings or advancements of knowledge, nothing that could be proven, or put into real numbers, but instead, these small, sharp instances of connection, a recognition of the other through the self, a reckoning with the net of the world getting larger, one fiber at a time, through empathetic, curious revelations. Loveless describes her research-creation work as a "manifesto-from-the-heart" (2019, p.100). This trust, care, and responsibility are affective strands that are vital to the expressive dimension of webweaving and permit it to gain a collective, almost mythical aspect across silos of Tumblr. But the heart must be open. In her poetry collection *Men in the Off Hours,* Anne Carson writes about the mental event of the metaphor:

> *In what does the freshness of metaphor consist?*
> *Aristotle says that metaphor causes the mind to experience itself*
> *In the act of making a mistake [...]*
> *He pictures the mind moving along a plane surface*
> *of ordinary language*
> *when suddenly*
> *that surface breaks or complicates.*
> *Unexpectedness emerges.*

So according to Anne Carson, metaphor teaches the mind to enjoy error, to say 'How true! And yet I mistook it!'. Is this not the great empathetic power of art and creation, and as such does this definition not include webweaving? Suddenly, it isn't impossible to think that we are all connected, part of one, large networked body. This is of course not a recent idea. In *The Internet is Older than We Think*, J.E.H. Smith expounds on this theme of 'the interconnectedness of the body', tracing a theoretical lineage to Ancient Greek texts. Even the Hippocratic motto, *Sympanoia panton*, translates variously to "the conspiration of all things", and depending on one's interpretation of 'conspiring' even: "the breathing together of all things" (Smith, 2022). Stoic philosophers would continue to extend this idea of physiology in a metaphorical sense. Marcus Aurelius would also employ the idea of weaving, asking us to "think of the universe as a single living being, observing "how intertwined in the fabric is the thread and how closely woven the web" (2022).

In *Speaking into the Air: a History of the Idea of Communication,* John Durham Peters notes that the term solipsism emerged in the 19th century as a sort of diagnosis of the paradoxical condition of communication, a reflection of "an individualist culture in which the walls surrounding the mind were a problem" whether thick or thin and where the term 'communication' "simultaneously called up the dream of instantaneous access and the nightmare of the labyrinth of solitude" (1999, p.13). In the 21st century, solipsism has developed and now has not only continued to be present in social relations but also economically viable, with platforms centering their business models on increasing engagement in concordance with increasing levels of sociocultural polarization. The more pessimistic among us may identify with James Bridle's conception of a "new dark age", in which individual users are so overwhelmed by the breadth and

width of available information that they become unable to enforce true personal agency in their digital lives, leading to a sort of pseudo-refeudalization on platforms as our lives become profitable data (2018). But practices like webweaving, in their earnestness, search for empathy and understanding, and inherent desire for connection, encourage us to view the Internet or a platform like Tumblr not only as "lifeless artifact, contraption, gadget, or mere tool" but also a "living system" (Smith, 2022). To conclude: webweaving allows for a romantic instinct, a connection between the logical and connection that facilitates human connection even via digital means.

Conclusion

Over the course of this project, we discovered the genre of posting called webweaving. We began the project by covering several research questions:

1. What is webweaving?
2. How does webweaving as a metaphor and active process teach us about connection and community on Tumblr?
3. What does it mean to create humanistic meaning online in a platformed, connected landscape?

In Chapter 1, we defined webweaving via contextualization. We connected the weaving process to a broader history of creation and making art online, notably drawing a line between webweaving and its ideological antecedents in early web development and the 90s internet art world. We observed that while technology allows for freedom and innovation in methods of connection and expression, the idealism of burgeoning creative countercultural scenes ends up layered with concerns relating to access and monetization.

In Chapter 2, we analyzed Tumblr's history, culture, features, and affordances. In providing this background, we defined 'peak Tumblr' as a haven for marginalized and non-normative individuals who were drawn to its liberal culture, initial lack of censorship against explicit content, and silosocial structure that allowed for small communities of users to communicate intimately while remaining plugged into a broader Tumblr culture. We also discussed features that are central to webweaving, like the 'reblog' functionality that allows users to share each others' work, as well as Tumblr's nuanced tagging system that allows users to respond to posts without commenting directly.

In Chapter 3, we directly analyzed my data collection questionnaire and answered definitional questions about webweaving as a genre: the who, what, how, when, and where. Among our observations, we discerned that webweaving as a genre *is* specific to Tumblr's culture and users that reflects a versatile 'born digital' engagement style that plays and borrows from various sources. Webweaving is a peculiar hybrid between other creative forms (like poetry or collage) and a more digital, networked media diary. Differences in form or content are to be expected, as the weaves are informed by the weavers' other creative interests. We also observed that prominent webweavers could begin to build brands and act as community resources.

In Chapters 4 and 5, we explored the sociocultural context and affective potential of webweaving. We noted that the hybrid nature of webweaving allows it to function uniquely as a bridge between high and low culture contexts, while also generating new cliches and 'canons' linked to the webweaving genre itself. We touched on the emergent economy around the creation, production, and media recommendation functionalities inadvertently baked into weaves. We also noted that weaves function as archives of feeling, and have an immaterial, networked emotional dimension that allows them to function as expressive, diary-like recordings of daily life and identity development via aesthetic engagement. But the weaves also function as "sticky media", as collective, romantic archives that bind compassionate users across the ether, fostering

community, sharing, and connection (Ahmed 2004 p.119 cited in Pybus, 2015). In doing so, webweaving becomes a critical, poetic tool of feminist refusal, engaging with the world in a way that values connection and experiential, aesthetic language and art, and an 'opening' of the mind in a way that combats alienation and solipsism.

In Chapter 1, we evoked the figure of Stewart Brand and his countercultural *Whole Earth Catalog*, a Google-before-Google magazine that compiled information from anything from computing to gardening to geography. Indeed, the computer revolution of the 1980s was a time not only of technological change but also of epistemological change. Brand and many other web pioneers viewed new digital technology as a way to satisfy their curiosity and to help them answer deep-set questions about the real world and human experience. As technology–and the world–continued to evolve, the *Whole Earth Catalog* would eventually become defunct, replaced by wikis, websites, forums, and blogs. The back cover of the final issue features a photograph of a dirt road bathed in early morning sun, superimposed onto a dark, night sky. Brand and his team sign off with a final message to their readers: *Stay hungry. Stay foolish.*

Fig. 24
Back cover of the final issue of the Whole Earth Catalog (1972)
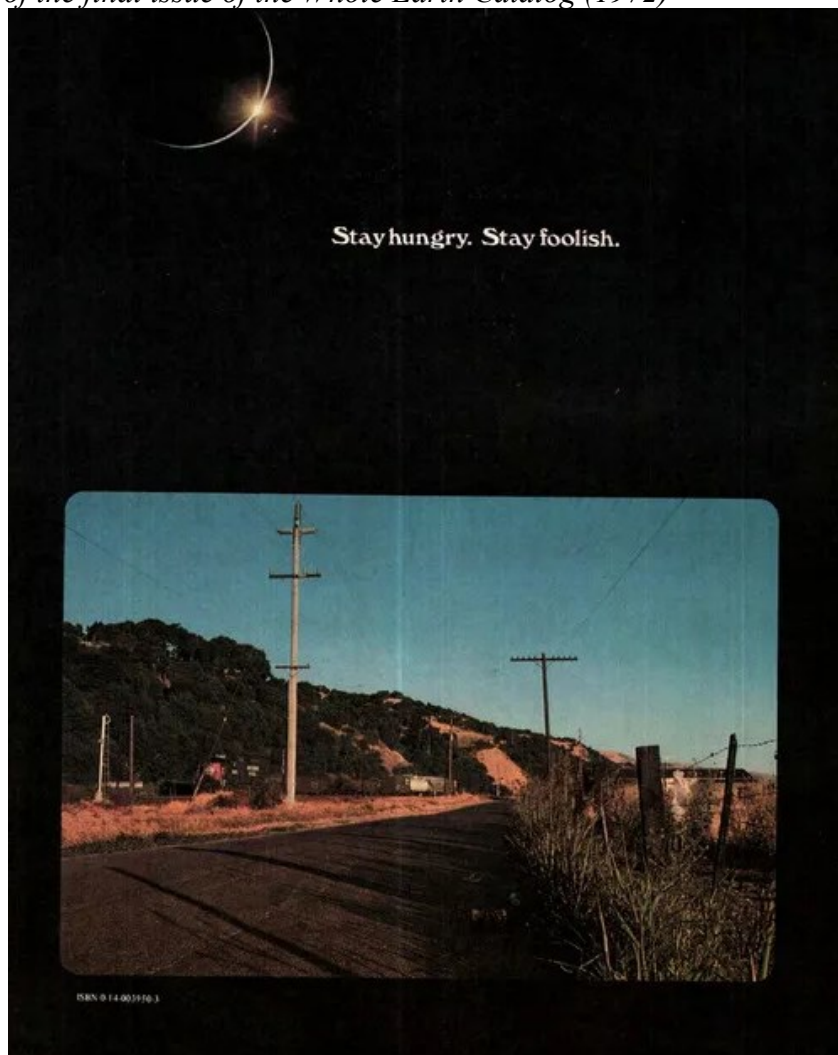
The platform that webweaves are hosted on also seems to be always on the verge of collapse, if you believe the hype. Of course, a platform requires technical and material support to run. Only about 0.2 percent of Tumblr's 111.5 million monthly active users have become paid supporters–that makes just about 30 000. If that number could rise to 10% or 20%, CEO Matt Mullenweg tells us, "we could run the site forever" (Minkel, 2023). But the contrast between Tumblr's eternal state of decay and the lush, rich ecosystem of its users and their blogging highlights some of the tensions that exist today for all of us who spend any time at all on social media platforms. Users are not only limited to just participating: clicking, following, and posting content, but they are also, as we have seen through this thesis, emotional networked beings with libidinal attachments and investments in not only their content but the platform that hosts it. And in the case of a platform like Tumblr, they might even be asked to support the platform financially. Regarding this point, I would like to close by referencing artist and theorist Hito Steyerl's work *Free Plots,* which is a series of neon-lit wooden planters, built in the shape of freeports.

Fig. 25
Hito Steyerl's *Free Plots*

As Steyerl has explained in interviews, *Free Plots* is an installation that embodies a symbolic countermodel of free information and access, one that has been "betrayed many times" by the platforms on which this information subsists (2019). The garden at the center of the installation is a space that is less about growing vegetables, and more about the space itself as an opportunity for gathering and discussion. I find this work to be an apt metaphor for the ever-

ongoing tensions between users and platforms, one that is a real throughline, a real shadow through the writing and development of this thesis. While I can talk about the affordances of the platform and how it has helped generate this posting style we are analyzing, at the end of the day, it's the users that make the platform, that fill the 'garden' with rich, interesting, and entertaining texts. Of course, this is a very humanistic perspective, one that asks us to consider users as humans first and capital-per-click second, one that sees technology as an extension of human potential and not a form of control, capping, or economic exploitation.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Anonymized list of webweavers included in data collection (January 10th and 27th, 2023).

1. User A - Popular weaver and media blogger who often expressed their emotions in the tags. The viral weave I chose had over 20 000 notes and was about the concept of holes in daily life.

2. User B - Popular weaver with extensive documentation of their webweaving process. The viral weave I chose had over 10 000 notes and using images and quotes from their favorite films and books, illustrated the bittersweet feeling of entering adulthood.

3. User C - Weaver who often focused on pop stars, female empowerment, and the effects of fame. User C was a Taylor Swift and Fiona Apple fan. Their weave had over 3 000 notes and focused on female pop stars rejecting the male gaze.

4. User D - Popular weaver with an extensively documented web weaving process. Many asks (questions) are asked by followers. Resources and 'Q&A' sections available on their blog. The viral weave I chose had over 60 000 notes and was about the tenderness of sharing fruit with loved ones.

5. User E - Popular weaver and poetry blog with an extensive tagging system and many asks posed by followers. The viral weave I chose had over 10 000 notes and focused on the idea of the color blue as a symbol of melancholy.

6. User F - Popular weaver that added DIY/analog collage elements (scanned and uploaded) to their weaves. User F was emotionally expressive in tags, and their viral weave had over 16 000 notes, focusing on friendships degrading over time.

7. User G - Popular hockey blog. The weave I selected was about the precarious position of being a third-string goalie. I selected it for the esoteric nature of the subject, and to observe how a weave would circulate amidst a small, niche community on Tumblr. The weave had just under 500 notes.

8. User H - Popular weaver, poet, and since the beginning of this thesis, published author. User H had a well-documented creative process and many follower interactions around not only their weaving but also separate written work. Their viral weave combined their own poetry with visual representations of Greek mythology, and the post I selected had over 10 000 notes.

9. User I - Popular weaver who welcomed weaving requests from followers. Many follower interactions, questions, and posted new work very frequently. The post I selected had over 10 000 notes and was about loving one's inner child.

10. User J - Popular weaver who welcomed weaving requests from followers. User J had a 'weaving Q&A' page on their blogs and instructions for new weavers. Many follower interactions and a very active user. Their viral weave had over 20 000 notes and was about semantic loss occurring during translation efforts. This user called their entire blog their "web".

11. User K - Weaver whose principal source of material was screenshots from posts made on other social media. The post I selected was a viral weave (30 000 notes) about a poem that went viral on multiple platforms in 2023 (Rudy Francico's *Mercy)* about showing mercy to lesser beings, such as spiders.

12. User L - Weaver with extensive emotional expressiveness depicted in their tags. The selected viral post had over 60 000 notes and was about beauty in scientific laboratories.

13. User M - Popular weaver and fanfiction writer who sometimes took requests from followers. The weave I selected had over 130 000 notes and was about self-motivation in the face of adversity.

14. User N - Weaver and visual artist who mostly made weaves about comic books. Their selected weave had over 5000 notes and was about the quiet horror of suburbia.

15. User O - Popular weaver with a tendency to modify and delete their posts. Extensive tagging system and interaction with followers. Selected weave had over 10 000 notes and was about the concept of time as a flat circle.

16. User P - Average blogger with interests in zoology. Selected weaven had just over 4000 notes and was chosen because of the particular subject (endlings – a term used to describe the last surviving individual of an animal species).

17. Users Q, R, and S - Participated in a three-person webweave, with each user adding on elements via reblog. The weave had over 60 000 notes and was about the inner workings of machines.

18. User T - Popular weaver who frequently changed usernames and deleted posts. Their selected weave had over 10 000 notes and was about dog-like loyalty in unequal human friendships.

19. User U - Media blogger and occasional webweavver. I selected a viral weave (over 20 000 notes) that was made to mourn the death of author Terry Pratchett.

20. User V - Popular webweaver with a strong tagging system. Selected weave had over 20 000 notes and was about dogma and unfounded belief in cosmology.

21. User W - Popular webweaver with expressive tags. Selected weave had over 45 000 notes and was about depression in the face of an uncaring universe.

22. User X - Blogger with one viral weave with over 90 000 notes. I selected this weave because of the expressive nature of the tags, in which the user apologizes for not knowing how to make a weave. The weave is about saying absurd statements out loud for the fun of it.

23. User Y - Popular weaver and media blogger who often made weaves about lesbian culture. The selected viral weave was about butch representation and had over 25 000 notes.

24. User Z - Popular media blogger and occasional weaver. This selected weave only had about 500 notes, but it was interesting in terms of its subject (an analysis of a *Succession* character through the lens of Freudian trauma theory). A well-documented weaving process on blog, and many interactions (and discourse with) followers.

25. User 0 - Media blogger and visual artist interested in video games. I selected a weave that explored the theme of childhood nostalgia via an exploration of 'household home' spaces in popular video games. This weave had over 4000 notes.

26. User 1 - Poet, writer, and occasional weaver. I selected a weave with 8000 notes about organic heart shapes occurring in nature, illustrating a popular Emily Dickinson quotation about the Earth being made for lovers.

27. User 2 - Weaver and visual artist interested in contemporary art. The weave I selected had over 2000 notes and featured the motif of dead or dying deer in art.

28. User 3 - (At the time) budding weaver who was active but received fairly low note counts on posts. Very long weaves comprised of dozens of images. Selected weaves had under 1000 notes and expressed the summer lightness of July.

29. User 4 - Weaver and media blogger. Selected weave had over 10 000 notes and was about break-ups that happen because of external pressures instead of a loss of romance.

30. User 5 - Official Netflix promotional account. I selected a three-image weave made to promote their 2023 short film *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, which had over 2 000 notes.

31. User 6 - Weave not part of the original 30 weave collection and is instead used to demonstrate the expansive nature of the *Goncharov* meme in Chapter 4. The weave has over 28 000 notes and parodies webweaving conventions via its structure and poetic inclusions as part of the viral *Goncharov* meme. The user is a webweaver and writer, and this is their most popular post.