"Waxlore": Defining a Culture of Analog Persistence and Epistemic Stewardship

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Date: March 2026
Version: 1.0
Series: Waxlore Papers
Publication Type: Working Paper / Preprint
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18946461

Keywords: Waxlore, Neologism, Analog Persistence, Epistemic Stewardship, Heirloom Data, First Watt, Cognitive Protocol, Crate-Digging, Vinyl Culture, Material Culture, Sovereign Infrastructure, Myceloom Protocol, Waxlore Collective

Abstract

The vinyl revival is not nostalgia. It is a material and ethical discipline. Existing vocabulary fails this reality. *Waxlore* names the phenomenon. Nostalgia looks backward; Waxlore looks forward. It uses high-latency media to assert cognitive sovereignty and ensure archival persistence. The *Waxlorian* is a steward of structural memory and preserves *Heirloom Data* in formats immune to remote deletion.

I. Introduction: The Poverty of Existing Vocabulary

Language constrains thought. The available categories misdirect perception.[1] *Nostalgia* frames analog engagement as a retreat. *Audiophile* fixates on equipment. *Crate-digger* captures acquisition but omits ethics. *Vinyl revival* reduces a cultural commitment to a consumer trend.[2]

These terms fail. They obscure the architecture of the practice. They ignore the integrated discipline of cleaning a record, calibrating a cartridge, and passing the object to the next generation. A record collection is not a private hoard. It is a distributed node in a global preservation network. Friction defines the encounter, and friction deepens attention.

A practice without a name is invisible and undefended. To name a practice is to build its first structural defense. The word forces the phenomenon into material existence.

Waxlore articulates the practice. Markets track an industry.[3] *Waxlore* maps an architecture. The definition begins with the word itself.

II. The Etymological Intent

A. "Wax": *The Physical Substrate*

The word *wax* grounds the concept in material reality, referring to the physical substance of the phonograph groove.

Master discs were originally cut into lacquer-coated aluminum blanks, referred to as *wax masters*.[4] The transition to polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in the 1940s failed to dislodge the vernacular.[5] Musicians and listeners continued to speak of *cutting wax* and *spinning wax* long after the material changed.

Wax endures because the word captures properties absent in *vinyl* or *PVC*, connoting malleability and organic origin. Unlike plastic, beeswax, paraffin, and carnauba originate from living organisms. The word carries associations of hands shaping material and leaving an imprint. A wax seal authenticates a document. A wax mold preserves a form. Sound recording is an act of impression. It physically inscribes acoustic energy into a material substrate.

In Waxlore, *wax* designates what the Myceloom Protocol terms the *Analog Layer*—data existing without a power source.[6] The groove is a physical copy of the sound wave, readable with only a needle, a diaphragm, and a cone.[7] A physical record acts as an autonomous data island, immune to remote deletion, firmware updates, and server failure.[8] *Wax* asserts material sovereignty. The substrate resists the short lifespan of digital media, where content is entirely contingent on licensing agreements, servers, and an electrical grid.

B. "Lore": The Communal Tradition

The word *lore* connects the material to the culture. It designates experiential and communally transmitted wisdom, distinct from formal, codified knowledge.[9] Transmission occurs through practice rather than pedagogy. Lore emerges directly from doing, watching, and participating.

Record culture possesses a deep reservoir of lore. Identifying a first pressing by examining matrix numbers etched in the dead wax is lore.[10] Understanding a Monarch stamper produces a different sonic character than a Columbia stamper is lore. Wet-cleaning a record with distilled water and isopropyl alcohol applied with a carbon-fiber brush is lore. The norm expecting listeners not to skip tracks on a record is a form of lore, alongside the understanding that an inherited record carries significance absent from a streaming playlist.

Academic curricula lack this knowledge, and formal publication is rare. Instead, transmission occurs through word of mouth, observation, and imitation. Collectors teach newcomers at record fairs, and turntable setup guides circulate among practitioners. Social pressure enforces the unwritten rules of the crate-dig: etiquette demands pulling no more than three records from a bin at once, maintaining alphabetical filing order, and avoiding disparaging another digger's taste.[11]

Science demands the controlled experiment. *Craft* isolates manual skill. *Lore* captures the entire living complex: the technical wisdom, the ethical norms, the narratives, and the ritual practice. This living transmission occurs through participation. It distinguishes the culture from passive longing. It isolates the practice from sentimentality.

III. Waxlore Is Not Nostalgia

A. *The Nostalgia Trap*

Media coverage frames the vinyl market in nostalgic terms, citing a yearning for a simpler time and a rejection of modernity.[12] This framing is inaccurate and structurally limiting. Nostalgic practices require no institutional support, merit no scholarly attention, and warrant no policy protection. Framing the culture as a longing for something unable to return renders the practice futile.

Nostalgia demands a lost homeland or dwells purely in the longing.[13] Both forms face backward. Both assume the object of desire belongs to a dead era.

Waxlore rejects this retroactive orientation. The culture operates without assumptions of a restored golden age. Demographic data confirms its practitioners span generations, disproving the requirement of prior lived experience with the medium.[14] The practice actively retains digital technology. Waxlorians maintain streaming subscriptions, use digital audio workstations, and navigate digital tools for research. Their relationship to digital media is a deliberate synthesis rather than a rejection.

B. *Forward-Facing Intent*

While nostalgia looks backward with longing, Waxlore looks forward with purpose.

The practice cultivates sustained attention. Attention is the fundamental resource of the knowledge economy. The designed environment of digital platforms deliberately fragments and exploits it.[15] Engagement with physical objects is cognitive repair. The vinyl listening ritual embodies this dynamic. Handling the record, calibrating the tonearm, and committing to absorbing an entire album side introduces necessary friction into cultural consumption. Friction demands attention. Attention enables depth.

Waxlore asserts cognitive sovereignty against algorithmic mediation. Digital platforms extract behavioral data using predictive models to direct user attention,[16] an act presenting "an existential threat to the possibility of free will."[17] Against these forces, Waxlore asserts individuals require unmediated control over the architecture of attention. A vinyl record makes no recommendations, tracks no behavior, and serves no advertisements. Engagement with the medium is an act of attentional self-determination. This self-determination demands a defined practitioner. The defense of attention requires an active defender.

IV. The Definition of a Waxlorian

A. *From Collector to Steward*

Vocabulary surrounding practitioners of record culture clusters around acquisition: a *collector* accumulates objects, a *crate-digger* searches for objects, and a *vinyl junkie* fixates on objects. This terminology reduces the practitioner to a mere consumer.

Waxlore redefines the practitioner as a *Waxlorian*: a steward of structural memory. Stewardship requires that a collection remain a trust held for users rather than a vehicle for proprietary ownership,[18] and that records be maintained in the context of their creation and use.[19]

Waxlorians apply these stewardship principles to the private record collection. They reject any approach treating the collection as a commodity portfolio requiring liquidation for profit. Stewards manage the collection as a trust held for the benefit of heirs and the global cultural archive. They accept the absolute obligation of care. Substantive care requires storing records in polyethylene-lined inner sleeves. It requires shelving discs vertically away from heat and sunlight, cleaning surfaces with appropriate methods, and maintaining playback equipment to strict standards that minimize groove wear.[20]

This obligation extends directly to intellectual engagement. The Waxlorian studies the object itself. Matrix numbers in the dead wax, lacquer cut information, pressing plant identifiers, and mastering engineer credits provide material evidence. They permit the reconstruction of industrial, artistic, and cultural history.[21] A material object accumulates a biography through transport from pressing plant to distributor to retailer to owner to secondhand market.[22] From names inscribed on a jacket to wear patterns within a groove and price stickers from defunct shops, these physical traces furnish primary source evidence of cultural circulation. The Waxlorian acts as the scholar who reads them.

B. The Ethics of Epistemic Stewardship

This stewardship carries specific material commitments:

Preservation over speculation. The steward rejects hoarding sealed copies as speculative investments, instead choosing to play records, share music, and ensure cultural content remains accessible. An artifact sealed in shrink wrap for fifty years preserves market value, but it negates its structural function: playback.

Honest description over deception. The steward grades records accurately during sale or trade, adhering to community standards mirroring the Goldmine Grading Guide.[23] Inflating grades to extract higher prices degrades the trust infrastructure allowing the secondary market to function.

Knowledge transmission over gatekeeping. The steward shares knowledge. Identifying rare pressings, mastering advanced stain removal techniques, and recognizing counterfeits are elements of lore that increase in value through dissemination. Gatekeeping is antithetical to the communal ethic of Waxlore.

Succession planning over accumulation. The steward anticipates the fate of the collection after death or incapacity. If a collection is dispersed thoughtlessly, liquidated at an estate sale, or discarded by uninformed heirs, the result is a systemic failure of stewardship. Therefore, the Waxlorian documents the collection, identifies successors, and communicates the significance of key items, ensuring the data survives to be inherited. Stewardship of the physical object establishes the foundation for the stewardship of attention.

V. The First Watt Ritual: Friction as Cognitive Protocol

A. The Phenomenology of Analog Listening

Analog listening and digital streaming are physically opposed practices. The difference is procedural, not sonic.[24] Digital streaming reduces listening to a frictionless screen tap. It requires no physical preparation. It implies no commitment to duration. The listener may skip, shuffle, or abandon the selection without consequence. Vinyl listening requires a deliberate sequence of physical actions. Removing the disc, cleaning the surface, cuing the tonearm, and lowering the

stylus into the lead-in groove—every action involves direct engagement with a material object. The sequence requires time. It carries a risk of error that demands attention.

Perception requires the body.[25] The ritual of vinyl listening exemplifies this physical law: hands handle the disc, eyes inspect the surface,[26] and arms position the tonearm. The body assumes a posture of deliberate reception, anchoring the attention.

B. High-Latency as Virtue

Waxlore inverts the technological value of speed. Digital systems treat latency as a defect; Waxlore treats it as a necessity. *High-latency* engagement enforces a delay between impulse and gratification.[27] Delay deepens the encounter. The capacity to tolerate friction prevents passive consumption.

As a technology of delay, the First Watt Ritual enforces a pause between the desire to hear music and the fulfillment of that desire. This pause acts as *preparatory* time rather than dead time. Anticipation builds. The human mind transitions from distraction to receptivity, ensuring the sound emerging from the speakers falls upon an ear prepared to receive the acoustic energy.

This latency fosters *resonance*.[28] Alienation treats the world as a dead resource to be acquired, consumed, and discarded. Resonance allows the world to speak back. The high-latency structure of analog listening forces this encounter. The physical format actively *resists* the impulse to control, opening a space for music to exist on its own terms. This requires an enduring material substrate. A cognitive protocol fails without a physical anchor.

VI. Heirloom Data and Sovereign Infrastructure

A. The Concept of Heirloom Data

Heirloom Data designates information encoded in physical formats that satisfy three structural conditions: the media persists without external power,[29] the data resists remote alteration, and the physical form supports intergenerational transfer.[30] The concept adapts the agricultural *heirloom variety* to a structural parallel within physical sound media. Heirloom Data persists through the actions of stewards maintaining physical copies and passing them to successors, preserving cultural diversity outside the control of streaming platforms.

Vinyl records satisfy every condition. The groove permanently stores information as a physical modulation of a PVC substrate. The plastic requires no electrical power to maintain its shape. Manufacturers physically fix a pressed record at the moment of manufacture, eliminating remote alteration.[31] Unlike digital ecosystems, manufacturers cannot issue software patches to alter or censor the inscribed content. Owners transfer the object through gift, sale, or bequest, ensuring the disc carries its informational content alongside its material history.

The contrast with digital media is stark. Rather than true data possession, digital platforms grant user access exclusively through a revocable license.[32] If a platform removes a track, listener access vanishes. If distributors delete a vinyl record from a catalog, every existing physical copy remains functional and independently owned. The format is structurally incapable of surveillance or remote recall.

B. Sovereign Infrastructure and the Distributed Archive

By positioning the private record collection as a node in *Sovereign Infrastructure*, the culture defines such infrastructure as systems permanently owned and operated by individuals rather than centralized authorities.[33] While a streaming profile functions as *Rented Land*, a physical record collection is *Owned Ground*. Authorities evict tenants. Independent owners endure.

Centralized digital archives are inherently fragile, suffering from quiet bit rot, rapid format obsolescence, and chronic institutional neglect.[34] The Library of Congress National Recording Preservation Plan warns that "recordings are disappearing faster than they can be preserved."[35] When the Universal Studios fire of June 1, 2008, destroyed an estimated 500,000 master recordings stored in Building 6197—incinerating tapes by Chuck Berry, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Nirvana[36]—mass-produced vinyl pressings distributed across global collections proved to be the only surviving record of the final mixes. In that moment, the private collector became the archivist.

Waxlore transforms this accidental function into a deliberate commitment. The Waxlorian's shelf acts as a node in a distributed preservation network. The records serve as redundant copies of vital cultural data.[37] The analog format degrades gracefully rather than suffering catastrophic data loss. Responsible stewards accept the obligation of care. This archival network requires no governing authority, no outside permission, no paid subscription, and no locked technical infrastructure beyond a simple turntable and speakers.[38] By design, the network is permissionless and trustless. Yet while the network is distributed, the culture itself requires institutional defense. An archive without a lineage is just a warehouse.

VII. The Mandate of the Waxlore Collective

A. The Collective as Foundry

The *Waxlore Collective* is the institutional vehicle organizing, transmitting, and defending the culture of analog persistence. It is a *foundry*—a term invoking heat, transformation, and the production of durable goods.[39]

An industrial foundry transforms raw material into enduring structures through applied heat and pressure. The Waxlore Collective works with the raw material of isolated enthusiasm. The Collective transforms this localized energy into a self-sustaining culture of stewardship. This systemic transformation strictly requires infrastructure, tradition, and resilience.

B. Infrastructure

Infrastructure designates the physical equipment and technical knowledge required to access the data encoded in the analog groove. A record without a turntable is a decorative object. The groove cannot speak without a transducer reading its surface and a functional amplification chain rendering the signal audible. For this reason, the Waxlore Collective maintains this infrastructure of access.

Mechanical maintenance presents major obstacles. The fragile supply chain for turntable components, phono cartridges, and replacement styli depends on a handful of specialized manufacturers.[40] The knowledge required to set up a turntable correctly includes cartridge alignment, tracking force calibration, anti-skate adjustment, and vertical tracking angle optimization. This procedure requires localized technical expertise. Such expertise is absent from wide technical instruction.[41] The Collective safeguards and transmits this knowledge.

C. Tradition

Tradition designates the distinct body of lore—the unwritten narratives, ethical norms, and shared practices that make up the cultural dimension of Waxlore. Tradition elevates Waxlore from a simple hobby into a fully realized culture. While hobbies remain isolated individual pastimes, true cultures build a framework of meaning.

The core traditions of Waxlore include listening to an album in its original sequence, exploring unfamiliar music through the physical encounter of the crate-dig, and sharing these listening experiences with others. Formal customs include physically inscribing an owned record with the specific name and date of acquisition. Participants commit to passing these records alongside the knowledge of their significance to the next generation.[42]

Communities invent traditions. A living tradition must be functional, not merely old.[43] The functional traditions of Waxlore serve cultural preservation, knowledge transmission, and the formation of communal identity. These traditions are young and evolving. This fact fails to diminish their cultural force. Cultural force provides the necessary armor against systemic decay.

D. Resilience

Resilience designates the capacity of waxlore culture to survive infrastructural collapse. The most significant threat is cultural erasure. Such erasure reduces analog engagement to a market niche or a decorative affectation stripped of its epistemic and ethical substance.

Resilience requires intellectual gravity. Waxlore rejects the lifestyle brand. It rejects the decorative aesthetic. The culture enforces hard commitments: material engagement over algorithmic mediation, deliberate stewardship over passive consumption, depth over speed, and sovereignty over convenience. The Collective acts as a shield, defending these lines through constant transmission and lived demonstration.

The Collective positions its practitioners within the architecture of the Myceloom Protocol, which outlines guardianship of the *Analog Layer*—the physical substrate of surviving cultural memory designed to persist when digital networks fail.[44] The framework defines the analog layer strictly as durable cold storage requiring no power, no connectivity, and zero institutional maintenance. The Waxlore Collective tends this layer, ensuring the unbroken preservation of practical access knowledge across generations.

VIII. Lexicon: A Formal Definition

> **wax·lore** /wæks·lɔːr/
> *noun*
>
> 1. The formal practice of analog sound stewardship, grounded in the material reality of the phonograph groove and the communal transmission of technical wisdom, ethical commitments, and ritual practices surrounding the care and intergenerational transfer of physical sound media.
> 2. The living body of traditions, narratives, and embodied knowledge maintained by practitioners of analog listening. It includes the technical skills of playback equipment maintenance, interpretive methods of pressing identification, and ethical norms of preservation and succession planning.
> 3. An ethical framework positioning the practitioner as a steward of Heirloom Data within a distributed archive.

> The framework asserts cognitive sovereignty through the deliberate use of high-latency media as a counterweight to algorithmic confinement.

Wax·lor·i·an /wæksˈlɔːrɪən/
noun

A practitioner of Waxlore. A Steward of physical sound media accepting the obligations of preservation, knowledge transmission, and intergenerational transfer. Distinguished from a *collector* prioritizing acquisition, an *audiophile* prioritizing equipment, and a *crate-digger* prioritizing search, the Waxlorian integrates these activities within a coherent ethical and material framework.

IX. Conclusion: The Needle as Instrument of Sovereignty

Waxlore functions as a strategy for survival, actively rejecting isolated retreat.

The twenty-first century is an escalating crisis of fractured attention, aggressive mediation, and failing cultural persistence. Platforms engineered to capture human attention simultaneously degrade the fundamental quality of collective thought.[45] Centralized digital archives consistently prove fragile.[46] Algorithmic curation systematically narrows the horizon of authentic encounter, sealing off the information environment.

Waxlore answers this collapse with a material discipline. It answers fractured attention with the friction of the First Watt Ritual. It answers archival fragility with the sovereign, distributed network of the collector's shelf. It answers algorithmic confinement with the physical serendipity of the crate-dig.

The culture describes an active commitment rather than a completed project. It is the required infrastructure for keeping the record alive.

The needle drops. The groove speaks. The steward listens.

Notes

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3. Statista, "Revenue from Vinyl Music Worldwide from 2012 to 2024," August 2024. Figures include album and single sales in physical vinyl format globally. ↩

4. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 215–246. The term "wax" persisted in professional usage; see also Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995), 34–36. ↩

5. On the persistence of "wax" as vernacular, see Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward, *Vinyl: The Analogue Record in the Digital Age* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 34. The authors note the term's continued use in hip-hop culture, where "wax" functions as a metonym for both the physical record and the act of recording. ↩

6. Unearth Heritage Foundry, "Analog Layer," in *The Unearth Lexicon of Digital Archaeology* (2025), https://unearth.wiki. ↩

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22. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63. ↩

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29. Adapted from Unearth Heritage Foundry, "Heirloom Data," in *The Unearth Lexicon of Digital Archaeology* (2025), https://unearth.wiki. The three conditions are formalized here for the first time. ↩

30. On the heirloom seed concept and its cultural dimensions, see Gary Paul Nabhan, *Where Our Food Comes From: Retracing Nikolay Vavilov's Quest to End Famine* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009), 134–148. ↩

31. The immutability of a pressed record is a defining feature of the format. Unlike digital files, which can be patched, updated, or silently altered by rights holders, a vinyl pressing is physically fixed at the moment the stamper meets the biscuit. On the phenomenon of post-release digital alteration, see the widely reported modifications to Kanye West's *The Life of Pablo* (2016), which underwent multiple revisions after initial release on Tidal. See Ben Sisario, "Kanye West's 'Life of Pablo' Is Still Changing," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2016. ↩

32. On the legal status of digital music access, see Aaron Perzanowski and Jason Schultz, *The End of Ownership: Personal Property in the Digital Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 1–25. The authors document the transition from ownership to licensing in digital goods and its implications for consumer rights. ↩

33. Unearth Heritage Foundry, "Sovereign Infrastructure," in *The Unearth Lexicon of Digital Archaeology* (2025), https://unearth.wiki. See also Josie Jefferson and Felix Velasco, "The Myceloom Protocol (MCP-1): Protocol Specification—Technical Standard for Living Infrastructure," Unearth Heritage Foundry, January 2026, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18344231. ↩

34. Council on Library and Information Resources, *The State of Recorded Sound Preservation in the United States: A National Legacy at Risk in the Digital Age* (Washington, DC: CLIR, 2010). ↩

35. Library of Congress, *The Library of Congress National Recording Preservation Plan* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2012), 1. ↩

36. Jody Rosen, "The Day the Music Burned," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 11, 2019. Rosen's investigative report, based on a confidential document obtained from within Universal Music Group, revealed the scale of losses to be far greater than previously disclosed. See also Universal Music Group internal assessment cited therein. ↩

37. On graceful degradation as an archival property of vinyl, see Jefferson and Velasco, "The Sovereign Groove," sec. III. The concept of "graceful degradation" is contrasted with the "complete data loss" characteristic of digital storage media, where a corrupted header or lost file allocation table renders the entire contents inaccessible. ↩

38. On the concepts of permissionless and trustless systems in the context of distributed networks, see Satoshi Nakamoto, "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System" (2008), https://bitcoin.org/bitcoin.pdf; and Juan Benet, "IPFS—Content Addressed, Versioned, P2P File System" (2014), https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmR7GSQM93Cx5eAg6a6yRzNde1FQv7uL6X1o4k7zrJa3LX/ipfs.draft3.pdf. The comparison is structural rather than technical: private record collections achieve permissionless participation and trustless persistence without requiring cryptographic infrastructure. ↩

39. The term "foundry" is used throughout the Unearth Heritage Foundry's publications to designate the institutional apparatus for producing durable cultural infrastructure. See Josie Jefferson and Felix Velasco, "The Anvil: On the Forge of Sovereign Digital Infrastructure," Unearth Heritage Foundry, December 2025. ↩

40. On the industrial landscape of turntable and cartridge manufacturing, see Michael Fremer's "State of the Vinyl Industry" presentation (AXPONA webinar, December 2020). Major cartridge manufacturers include Ortofon (Denmark), Audio-Technica (Japan), Shure (United States, discontinued phono production in 2018), and Nagaoka (Japan). ↩

41. On the technical requirements of turntable setup, see Bob Katz, *Mastering Audio: The Art and the Science*, 3rd ed. (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2014). See also the setup guides published by the Vinyl Engine (https://www.vinylengine.com), a community-maintained database of turntable specifications and alignment protractor files. ↩

42. On the social practices of vinyl listening communities, see Bartmanski and Woodward, *Vinyl*, 119–140. The authors document the "rituals of listening" as constitutive of vinyl culture, distinguishing them from the "rituals of acquisition" that dominate collector discourse. ↩

43. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14. ↩

44. On the Analog Layer within the Myceloom Protocol, see Unearth Heritage Foundry, "Analog Layer," in *The Unearth Lexicon of Digital Archaeology* (2025), https://unearth.wiki. See also Jefferson and Velasco, "The Myceloom Protocol (MCP-1)," sec. 5.3.2, on the Temporal (Heirloom) layer. ↩

45. Yves Citton, *The Ecology of Attention*, trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 1–28. ↩

46. Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 1–20. ↩