

AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY REFLECTION ON WEAIVING: A PHILOSOPHICAL ACCOUNT OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Hand-weaving is often perceived as time-consuming and tedious due to its labour-intensive preparatory processes, leading to declining interest in the practice. However, weaving offers insights that extend beyond technical execution, providing profound opportunities for philosophical reflection and self-realisation. This auto-ethnographic, studio-based study explores weaving as a metaphor for human experience, drawing connections between the preparatory stages of weaving and the shaping of personal growth. The findings reveal that hand-weaving transcends the physical interlacement of warp and weft, embodying a process of self-development, resilience, and reflective practice. While acknowledging the challenges associated with manual weaving, the study argues for its continued relevance, not merely as a fabric manufacturing technique, but as a medium for cultivating self-awareness and creativity. It recommends that weaving education should emphasise experiential engagement and self-discovery, rather than focusing solely on technical proficiency or theoretical instruction

Keywords: Hand-weaving; yarn breakages; artist; reflective practice, philosophy

1. Introduction

Weaving is far more than just interlacing threads; it is an act of creation, a rhythm of sound and motion that echoes through centuries of human history. The rhythmic clack of the shuttle and the practised coordination of hand and loom have long connected humanity to a deeper, more reflective space. It is an ancient art and continues to form the foundation of textile production (Tursinbaeva and Turdambetova, 2022). Across cultures, woven fabrics carried significance beyond utility: in Andean societies, textiles were valued above gold or silver and often served as offerings to the sun, the most revered celestial power (Stone-Miller, 1992). In Europe and the Near East, archaeological findings from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages confirm weaving as both a culturally significant and time-intensive practice (Harris, 1993). Technically, weaving involves interlacing warp and weft yarns at right angles to create a fabric. Yet as Gandhi (2020) observes, preparatory

processes, especially warp preparation, are not only laborious but essential, since the success of weaving depends on precise coordination of operations. These material demands, however, also open a space for reflection, where the act of weaving becomes both a craft and a philosophical engagement.

Weaving has long been recognised as a metaphor for meaning-making, storytelling, and identity. Moorman (1975) identifies weaving as a symbolic interplay between materiality and ideality in literature, while Veloso de Abreu (2013) highlights Penelope's weaving in *The Odyssey* as a metaphor for narrative creation. Extending this tradition, Mueller (2010) interprets Judy Malloy's hyperfiction *its name was Penelope* as a digital reworking of weaving as an artistic and identity-forming practice. The etymological link between "text" and "textile" further illustrates weaving's ability to mirror narrative coherence and structure (Guha Bakshi, 2024). Contemporary artists and scholars continue this line of thought: Shoichet (2007) analyses Theo Moorman's methods as balancing execution and expression, while Alemán Ramos et al. (2022) and Winchester (2018) demonstrate weaving's role in externalising memory, grief, and perception. Collectively, these interpretations frame weaving as both a technical process and a symbolic act, underscoring its enduring relevance as a medium of narrative and emotional expression.

My journey with the loom provides the central lens for this inquiry. As an auto-ethnographic account, this study situates handweaving at the intersection of history, philosophy, and contemporary practice by grounding its analysis in lived experience. My reflections on the material demands and creative process of weaving will serve as the empirical basis for exploring how this ancient art functions as a pragmatic philosophy, where knowledge is not just an abstract idea but something that is continually shaped and tested by the actions of our hands and the lived reality of our lives.

2. Literature Review

In current practice, weaving extends into domains of sustainability, identity, and innovation. Aydin (2022) views weaving as a means of self-knowledge in artistic installations, while designers such as Celia Esteves of GUR transform

recycled textiles into handloom rugs that combine ecological responsibility with creativity. Experimental approaches also broaden material horizons: Lee (2023) explores upcycling paperboard and denim waste, Mantyi-Ncube and Juba (2020) experiment with 3D virtual woven textiles, and Talman (2018) reframes discarded materials as expressive artefacts. Alongside ecological concerns, weaving has been embraced for its therapeutic and cultural functions. Victoria Manganiello's abstract canvases present weaving as a meditative practice, fostering mindfulness and introspection, a claim supported by Wulandari et al. (2022), who find that weaving reduces stress through rhythmic concentration. Diedrick Brackens employs weaving to narrate histories of slavery and resilience, dyeing cotton yarns with substances such as wine and tea, while Pereira (2015) recalls "Ashley's Sack" as an artefact of generational memory and survival. These diverse practices highlight weaving's adaptability, enabling it to serve simultaneously as an ecological intervention, therapeutic method, and cultural testimony. Figure 1 exhibits works of Celia Esteves of GUR, Victoria Manganiello, and Diedrick Brackens.

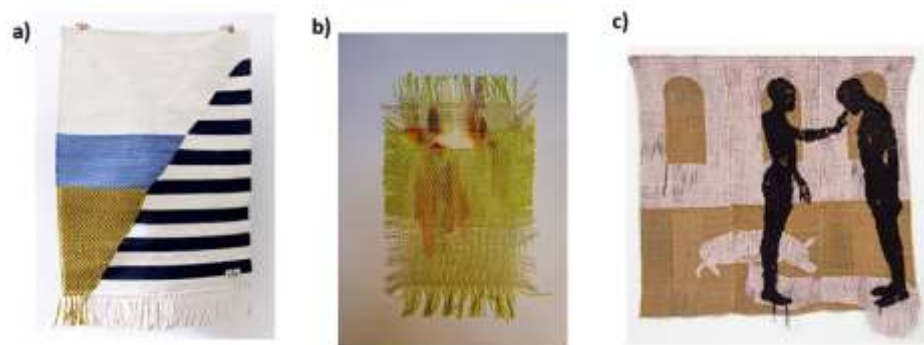


Figure 1. a) Recycled Handloom rugs; Celia Esteves of GUR, b) Abstract woven canvas; Victoria Manganiello, c) Transatlantic slave trade; Diedrick Brackens
[Photo: Jurgens (2016) and Wolkoff (2019)]

Philosophically, weaving can be understood as a reflective practice that unites material process with wisdom-seeking. Philosophy, as the *love of wisdom*, interrogates meaning, existence, and relationality. Within this frame, Peng (2024) situates weaving in the "epistemological turn," where reflective practice bridges thinking and being. Winchester (2018) shows how weaving externalises emotional states, while artists such as Anna Olson, Anni Albers and Sheila Hicks demonstrate weaving's capacity to carry grief, experimentation, and contemplation, further expanding weaving as a site of inquiry into material and cultural meaning.

Nimkulrat (2010) adds that weaving encompasses both physical and conceptual dimensions, where technical mastery enables expressive exploration. Culturally, this philosophical resonance is equally strong: Chacón (2020) documents how Mayan weavers describe their textiles as “books colonisation couldn’t destroy,” signalling weaving’s role as an act of narrative preservation and resistance to erasure.

Education in weaving extends this philosophical potential into pedagogy. Fedeli and Deluigi (2023) demonstrate how auto-ethnographic methods within studio-based learning connect personal experience with academic inquiry, while Hameed and Mimirinis (2023) distinguish between studio-based and practice-based learning as pathways to innovation in textile expression. Beaumont (2022) argues that reflective practice sharpens critical thinking, equipping students to evaluate actions and refine decisions, while Yeo (2012) emphasises the sensory and tactile aspects of design reflection. Applied to weaving, these insights suggest that the loom is not only a tool of production but also a pedagogical instrument for cultivating patience, attentiveness, and creativity.

These diverse perspectives demonstrate that handweaving is not merely a technical process but a multifaceted practice, a craft, a metaphorical medium, and a site of therapeutic, cultural, and pedagogical reflection. While significant scholarship explores these dimensions, what remains underexplored is an articulation of weaving as a pragmatic philosophy, a way of understanding and embodying wisdom through practice. This study fills that gap by advancing the view that weaving is not only a technical act but a reflective process that cultivates critical inquiry, personal growth, and cultural continuity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a practice-based research approach within the broader qualitative paradigm. Practice-based research advances knowledge through creative processes in which the artefact itself embodies a significant portion of the resultant insights (Candy, 2006; Nimkulrat, 2012). According to de Freitas (2007), this often takes the form of the *artefact–exegesis model*, where the artefact is accompanied by

a reflective written account that contextualises and interprets the insights it embodies.

Within this framework, artefacts are not merely outcomes but integral to the research process. They embody knowledge generated through creative practice and function as media for both argumentation and the exploration of research questions (Mäkelä, 2005; Nimkulrat, 2012). Case studies such as Mäkelä's *Seeing Paper* and *Paper World* demonstrate how artefacts can act simultaneously as inputs and outputs in research, providing both data for analysis and a vehicle for communicating findings. Similarly, Nimkulrat (2009) highlights how textiles, through their making, can serve as both sites of knowledge generation and forms of scholarly argumentation.

In alignment with this approach, the woven samples produced in this study were not only the results of technical exploration but also the primary sites of reflective inquiry into materiality, process, technique, and design innovation.

3.2 Research Site

The research was conducted in the Textile Weaving Studio of the Department of Industrial Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana. The studio environment provided controlled access to looms, tools, and weaving materials, enabling systematic experimentation and reflection on weaving processes.

3.3 Materials

Conventional and unconventional yarns were selected purposively as warp and weft yarns, aimed at exploring material adaptability, durability, and aesthetic potential in weaving. Standard weaving equipment was utilised, including a four-shaft broadloom, shuttles, bobbins, and other preparatory accessories necessary for warping, beaming, heddlings, and denting.

3.4 Yarn Preparations

The preparation of yarns formed the foundation of the weaving process. For the warp, the weaver first calculated the total number of ends required for the woven fabric. The calculated results guided the milling and chaining, which was followed sequentially by raddling and beaming. After these stages, the warp yarns were heddlled and dented, then tied securely to the apron stick of the cloth beam

under uniform surface tension. Achieving even warp tension at this stage is crucial, as irregularities often result in fabric faults that compromise structural quality and aesthetic outcome. Figure 3 shows the warp preparatory processes.



Figure 2. a) Milling, b) Chaining, c) Raddling, d) Beaming (Completed), e) Heddlng, f) Denting/Reeding, g) Shaft-treadle tie-up, h) Warp ends-cloth beam tie-up

The weft yarns were prepared by winding them onto bobbins from their original packages. These bobbins were then inserted into the shuttle, enabling their transverse motion across the warp during interlacement. The warp generally constitutes the stronger set in a woven fabric, as it must withstand continuous tension from the heddles throughout weaving. In contrast, the filling yarn, which travels through the shed and across the warp, is subjected to relatively less tension.

Nevertheless, yarn breakage remains a recurring technical challenge in weaving. Breakages may result from sagging warp yarns, inefficient shedding mechanisms, low-count yarns with poor tenacity, excessive beat-up motion, or disproportionate warp tension. Cioară et al. (2004) affirm that yarn breakage is a critical factor affecting both weaving efficiency and fabric quality, with contributing variables including yarn strength, tension, and evenness.

3.5 Weaving Process

During weaving, the weaver had to synchronise multiple physical and cognitive functions to achieve the primary motions of the process. The eyes monitored the shuttle, guided by the hand; the foot depressed the treadle to operate the shafts; the hands executed the beat-up; and the mind maintained focus on the stepping sequence. The posture of the body, slightly bent forward, further assisted

the coordination of shuttle throw, treadling, and beat-up. This integrated bodily engagement demonstrates the tacit knowledge inherent in weaving practice (Nimkulrat, 2012).

In addition, the secondary motions of weaving, let-off and take-up were employed whenever the weaving area became exhausted and fresh lengths of warp were required to continue the process. While essential, the simultaneous execution of these motions proved physically and mentally demanding. The process was further complicated by technical challenges such as poor shedding, uneven warp tension, and yarn breakages, particularly when inconsistencies arose during beaming or when attaching the warp to the apron stick. These cumulative difficulties underscored the demanding and labour-intensive nature of weaving within the studio context, highlighting the interplay between technical precision and bodily engagement in textile production.

3.6 Documentation and Reflection

Throughout the process, participant observation was maintained to capture procedural steps, material behaviours, and technical challenges. These records formed the basis of reflective analysis, allowing iterative refinements to the technique and the generation of practice-derived insights. The woven artefacts themselves functioned as both outcomes and research data, embodying the knowledge generated through the study.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Body of Exegesis

Despite its many technical demands, weaving remains one of the most enduring and widely utilised fabric production techniques. Across civilisations, it has produced fabrics in strips or wider widths, reflecting both cultural significance and practical functionality. In Ghana, for instance, strip-woven fabrics such as kente and kete hold deep cultural meaning. Afriyie et al. (2021) observe that these textiles, once reserved for royals, now symbolise cultural heritage and identity. Beyond status, weaving has long fulfilled practical purposes. Phillips (2020) notes that in prehistoric Europe, textiles served as clothing, swaddling, bandages, and sails, highlighting their essential role in survival and economy.

Weaving is more than a physical act; it embodies implicit philosophies that emerge through engagement with both process and artefact. Keune (2021) explains that weaving is intertwined with philosophical thought, drawing on Plato's writings where weaving is likened to writing and thinking, reflecting embodied experiences of ancient cultures. Practitioners also describe weaving as an intimate journey through the "soul of an image," where the weaver arranges colour, tonal value, and texture while immersing physically in design (Thompson & Barton, 2004). Adelson (1994) expands that the tactile intimacy, hands inside warp and weft, eyes following the shuttle, feet depressing treadles, creates a resonance that is both deeply personal and universally human, evident in historical and contemporary tapestries.

The structural logic of weaving functions as a binary system: warp (lengthwise threads) and weft (crosswise threads) interlace so that each thread is either "up" (visible) or "down" (hidden). This logic enables layers of meaning and complex visual narratives (Xing et al., 2011). Such duality carries metaphorical weight, as expressed in the term *subtelix* ("beneath the weave"), which underscores the interplay between visible and hidden, surface and depth (Spantidaki, 2017). Each warp thus becomes an opportunity to explore design principles, geometry, symmetry, and topology, while also engaging with material behaviour, tension, and the rhythmic coordination of shuttle, treadle, and beat-up motions. These primary motions, alongside secondary ones such as let-off and take-up, require integrated use of eyes, hands, feet, and mind. In handweaving practice, this embodied coordination demonstrates how knowledge is generated directly through material engagement, aligning with the principles of practice-based research.

Technical challenges such as yarn breakage, uneven tension, or poor shedding are not merely mechanical interruptions but reflective prompts. They shape decisions about technique, pattern, and design, requiring constant negotiation between material constraint and creative intent (Nowicki, 2019). In this study, such challenges within the weaving process became catalysts for innovation, guiding experimental warp arrangements and new pattern structures. This exemplifies how weaving simultaneously produces skill, insight, and knowledge, echoing Candy

(2006) and Nimkulrat (2012), who argue that the artefact itself is a site of inquiry in practice-based research.

The reflective and philosophical dimensions of weaving are therefore inseparable from its technical practice. Each interlacement embodies a tension between control and unpredictability, precision and intuition. Storytelling emerges through material choices and design decisions: the woven object becomes a narrative artefact, carrying memory, cultural reference, and personal expression (Priemus, 2020). The loom thus functions not only as a site of fabric production but as a platform for knowledge generation, reflective inquiry, and creative experimentation (Huntley et al., 2023).

Ultimately, handweaving synthesises technical mastery, philosophical reflection, and creative exploration. The coordination of body and loom, eyes, hands, feet, and mind with warp and weft, illustrates how embodied practice produces knowledge inseparable from the artefact itself. Through these processes, weaving mediates between personal insight, artistic expression, and cultural continuity, reinforcing its significance as both craft and reflective practice within the qualitative, practice-based research framework.

4.2. The Researcher's Practice of Hand Weaving

The most sensitive element in weaving is yarn. While the loom and its accessories are essential for facilitating the process and formation of fabric, the absence of yarn renders weaving futile. Without yarns, the interlacing definition of weaving loses its very foundation. In selecting yarns for weaving, one must prioritise those with higher tenacity to minimise breakages. This consideration is particularly crucial for warp yarns, given the numerous operations they undergo. In some cases, warp yarns are sized to enhance their strength so they can withstand the strains and stresses of weaving. In contrast, weft yarns do not require the same degree of tenacity, although they must possess sufficient strength to be wound onto bobbins and withstand the repeated action of interlacing.

In hand weaving, spun yarns are commonly utilised because of their relatively higher tensile strength. Nevertheless, yarn breakages remain inevitable. Even with meticulous handling, achieving a perfectly “neat” fabric free of broken

yarns is nearly impossible, as breakages occur even in industrial weaving (Stankard, 2010). This suggests that weaving, whether industrial or artisanal, is inherently accompanied by technical challenges such as poor shedding, differential tension, and irregular picking. As Humphrey et al. (2023) argue, weaving should be understood not merely as a process but as an embodied and relational practice that holds symbolic, material, and experiential significance.

As a weaver, I experiment with different yarns, nylon, fancy yarns, and conventionally spun yarns, each with distinct textures, counts, twists, and tensile properties. These choices extend beyond technical considerations: they serve to enhance the tactile and aesthetic qualities of the fabric, while also provoking a reflective engagement with my strengths and weaknesses as a practitioner. Examples of different yarns used in my works are shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. (a - d) Different yarn types used in my hand weaving (2025)
[Photo credit: Edward Apau]

In this sense, weaving becomes an act of "storying" (Phillips & Bunda, 2018), where materials themselves narrate experience, mediating between intention and outcome. This experiential approach resonates with Hof Blinks' emphasis on material experimentation, which reveals new insights into both craft and tradition (Hof Blinks, cited in Bodman & Garista, 2023).

Inevitably, yarn breakages occur in my practice, but rather than deterring me, they serve as moments of reflection. Each repair of a broken yarn is a negotiation

between patience and persistence, teaching tolerance, endurance, and control. As I weave, I engage with what Bodman and Garista (2023) describe as sensorial, art-based methods of inquiry, practices that discipline the senses while transforming them through creative expression. For me, weaving is not solely about producing fabric but about becoming through the process: discovering who I am and who I am becoming.

In practice, the unavoidable breakages and inconsistencies do not deter me; rather, they form part of the experiential process. Weaving demands the simultaneous engagement of subjective and objective selves. Every step, from warp preparation to weft insertion, requires discipline, patience, and commitment, for there are no shortcuts in this craft. The choice of diverse yarns highlights both the weaver's strengths and vulnerabilities, and each repair or adjustment becomes a metaphor for resilience. What matters is not only the technical procedure but the transformation of the self through the woven outcome. As an artist, the objective extends beyond creating a functional or aesthetic artefact; it becomes a platform for self-expression and the revelation of inner thought.

Self-expression and creativity, as universal human functions, enable art to serve as both a cognitive and evaluative lens through which reality is interpreted. Art possesses an indispensable communicative role: it conveys emotions, thoughts, and experiences in ways that transcend words, whether through colours, textures, structures, or rhythms. In weaving, the fabric itself becomes a narrative medium, mediating the intimate dialogue between artist and viewer.



Figure 4. Woven Samples - a) plain weave, check effect (normal spun yarn, and flash yarn), b) hand-picking effect (knit yarn and normal spun yarn), c) simple twill weave, and *akyem* design effect (flash yarn, metallic yarn and normal spun yarn), d) plain weave and handpicking effect (knit yarn and normal spun yarn), e) Basket weave effect, (nylon cord and normal spun yarn), f) plain

weave check and handpicking effect (knit yarn and normal spun yarn), g) complex twill weave effect (nylon cord and normal spun yarn), h) *akyem* and *babadua* weave effect (flash yarn and normal spun yarn) (2025) [Photo: Edward Apau]

An artist's statement is a written expression that communicates the motivations, ideas, and intentions behind a body of work. For instance, Kyunghwa Baek describes her work as a reflection of her internal world, presenting surreal interpretations of her thoughts and emotions, thus offering a personal narrative through her art (Fanberg, 2010). It is not merely a descriptive note but a bridge between the artist and the audience, offering insight into their creative journey. For example, in 2019, Roberts discusses how her work challenges societal perceptions of beauty and identity, particularly for African American women, using her statement to engage audiences in a dialogue about inclusion and representation.

The woven samples in Figure 4 produced during this study reflect the researcher's perception and understanding of handweaving as more than a craft; it is a philosophy. While artworks may serve aesthetic and functional purposes, these woven pieces embody the relationship between the artist and the process, where meaning transcends material form. Artistic research is felt to be meaningful when it focuses on research questions that are considered important (Guntur, 2020). In essence, weaving is more than the act of interlacing warp and weft threads; it is a discipline of self-understanding. This philosophy is encapsulated in the researcher's artist statement:

Weaving to Understand: The Yarns Speak

It is good to know, but better to understand what one knows.

To me, weaving is a way of understanding the self. Though laborious and time-consuming, it is an activity that disciplines the human subject. Each yarn chosen, whether fragile or strong, becomes a mirror of my conscious and unconscious states. The process of engaging with these yarns trains and transforms the senses through creative encounter.

The behaviour of yarns under pressure, whether breaking, sagging, or resisting strain, teaches lessons in patience, endurance, tolerance, persistence, and self-control. Just as yarns respond to stresses and imperfections on the loom, so too does the individual navigate the imperfections of social life. Overcoming challenges during weaving mirrors the possibility of refining personal flaws in daily existence.

For me, the value of weaving lies not merely in the beauty or functionality of the finished fabric, but in the personal transformation that each woven piece engenders. The loom

becomes a site of becoming, where artistic creation and self-reflection are woven inseparably together.

Thus, the woven samples I create embody both technical skill and philosophical reflection. Their value goes beyond mere aesthetics or function; they communicate the evolving relationship between the artist and their practice. As I state in my artist's statement, *Weaving to Understand: The Yarns Speak*, weaving engages not only the hands but also the self. The warp and weft threads, subjected to tension and resistance, mirror the struggles and imperfections of human life. Overcoming yarn breakages, uneven tensions, and poor shedding parallels the ability to address and transform one's own flaws. In this way, weaving acts as a metaphor for life, embodying what Humphrey et al. (2023) call an embodied epistemology, a way of knowing through making. For me, the true value of weaving lies not simply in the beauty or quality of the fabric, but in the transformation of the self each time the practice is undertaken. Weaving is therefore both a technical process and a profoundly human act, a medium through which creativity, resilience, and self-understanding are continually rewoven.

5. Conclusion

This auto-ethnographic reflection has illuminated weaving as more than a fabric-making technique; it is a deeply embodied practice that integrates material, process, and philosophy. From the preparatory tensions of warp setting to the rhythmic interlacement of weft, weaving emerges as a site where technical mastery and reflective inquiry converge. Through practice-based research, the woven artefacts functioned not only as material outcomes but also as vessels of meaning, narrative, and self-discovery.

The study underscores that weaving embodies implicit philosophies. Each yarn, with its strengths and vulnerabilities, mirrors the human condition, frailty, endurance, and the constant negotiation between order and disruption. Yarn breakages, uneven tensions, and technical imperfections cease to be mere challenges; instead, they become metaphors for persistence, patience, and resilience. Thus, weaving becomes an act of understanding the self within process,

positioning the loom as both a technical instrument and a medium for philosophical engagement.

Culturally and educationally, the reflections align weaving with broader contexts of knowledge-making. Across civilisations, woven fabrics have carried stories, identities, and values. In the studio, the researcher's practice similarly translated weaving into a pedagogical tool for cultivating discipline, creativity, and critical reflection. This reaffirms the position of weaving not only as an artistic craft but also as a method of inquiry that bridges theory and practice, mind and body, thought and action.

Importantly, this reflection contributes to ongoing discourse in practice-based research by demonstrating how auto-ethnographic engagement can generate knowledge that is at once personal, cultural, and transferable. By situating weaving as a philosophical, pedagogical, and narrative practice, the study expands how textiles can be understood, beyond aesthetics or functionality, towards their role as carriers of wisdom, cultural continuity, and self-realisation.

Looking ahead, weaving as a reflective practice invites further exploration in both academic and practical domains. Future studies could examine how handweaving fosters mindfulness in contemporary life, supports resilience in education, or contributes to sustainable material innovation. For practitioners, weaving remains an ever-evolving dialogue between hands, materials, and meaning. For researchers, it continues to offer a fertile ground for inquiry, where artefacts embody knowledge and practice become philosophy in action.

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