

Weaving Error: Imperfection as Resistance in Material Practice

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Abstract: This essay examines weaving as a practice that foregrounds imperfection and irregularity, positioning these qualities as both material traces and critical tools. By focusing on mistakes, glitches and uneven rhythms in woven cloth, it proposes that such moments of error act as resistance to industrial ideals of perfection, efficiency and mass uniformity. Drawing on architectural theory, including tectonics, Gothic traditions and Bauhaus thought, the paper situates weaving within broader systemic structures, where the grid of cloth becomes a pliable field for experimenting with order, failure and care. Through the lens of the personal and the embodied, weaving is framed as a counter-production process that elevates irregularity, reclaims the presence of the maker and offers speculative possibilities for rethinking how value, knowledge and labour are woven into material and social systems.

1. Introduction: Weaving Error

A hand weaver sits at the loom and passes the shuttle through a field of possibility. Something tiny happens: a weft floats where it should have sunk; a slub pushes itself through like a blemish; the selvedge wavers, pulled a little too tightly for a beat. In one logic, these appear as errors—signs of insufficient skill, material quality, or refinement. In another, they announce: someone was here. This essay argues that such deviations are neither grounds for rejection nor merely tolerable; they are material acts of resistance that keep labour perceptible, make time legible, and open designed artefacts to ethical relation.

This essay reflects on three intertwined endeavours: my doctoral research, my fashion and textile practice, and my university teaching. In my PhD, *Narrating Textile Construction: Amplifying Traces of Making in Hand-Woven Cloth*, I asked how woven structures can carry spatial, temporal and personal traces, and how those traces might be intentionally composed, amplified and read (Priemus 2021). The research led to a series of woven cloth samplers that—often inadvertently—use error as a narrative resource for learning how something was made. My research overlapped with my socially and ecologically conscious fashion label Bhalo (2008–2019), where clothing was hand-woven, embellished and constructed in Thanapara, rural Bangladesh. There I learned how quickly provenance disappears inside the commodity image, and how stubbornly it remains in the cloth itself, where dust, knots and slight misalignments insist on being seen. Finally, I reflect on studio teaching in Interior Architecture and the challenge of carving out space for risk, mistakes, and even failure within a design-studio environment.

Overlapping practice, pedagogy and policy, I explore the conditions under which the design studio, educational institutions and product markets might reward, rather than suppress, legible traces of construction. I establish the theoretical and material grounds for this through the Gothic (Ruskin; Spuybroek), architectural tectonics (Frampton), embodied knowledge (Nimkulrat; Marks; Pallasmaa), and material agency, care and feminist ethics (Bennett; Barad). The essay looks toward what may be required to cultivate a culture in which error is acknowledged and respected as part of design, and in which traces of making are accorded value.

2. Imperfection as Freedom; or the Refusal of Smoothness

John Ruskin dignified imperfection. In his text *The Nature of Gothic*, he posits that the vitality of the work and the freedom of the worker require visible departures from mechanical exactitude: you must either make a tool of the creature, or a person, you cannot make both (Ruskin 1853). The Gothic stone that bears a mason's traces is alive to Ruskin, and the flawlessly polished surface is morally suspect. This is not intended as nostalgia, a romanticisation for human labour, or a Luddite-style adherence to the handcrafted. Here, it represents imperfection as the index of personhood.

Kenneth Frampton extends the point to architecture. His critical regionalism privileges tactility, climate, joinery and material honesty as resistance to homogenising systems (Frampton 1995). Brick that grips, timber that yields, details that disclose force paths: these are invitations for the body to know. The analogy to textiles is immediate; a selvedge is a tectonic joint, the turn where force is negotiated. In my woven studies the selvedge carries the tempo of the hand—its skill, fatigue and mood (Fig. 1). To “correct” it to industrial regularity is to mute testimony.



Figure 1: Selvedge on hand-woven cloth sample produced at Thanapara. The selvedge (edges) of handwoven cloth are often indicators of a weaver's skill level as it is tacit knowledge – controlled by 'feel' and learned through experience (Yarwood 2020)

Industrial modernity hides how things are made. Lefebvre notes that once construction is complete, scaffolding is removed and labour erased (Lefebvre 1991). In textiles, raw edges are turned in, loose threads clipped, densities standardised. In *Bhalo*, even with ethical intent, we leaned on tags and photos because garments had been designed to conceal their construction. I argue for counter-production: producing to reveal labour rather than erase it. Lars Spuybroek, reading Ruskin for a digital age, argues that variation is not failure but the life of order (Spuybroek 2011). The goal is not to mimic the Gothic but to restore its ethic of changefulness. Weaving already lives there: the grid need not be a final plan, but rather a living constraint through which rhythm and deviation may speak.

3. The Negotiated Grid: Rhythm, Interruption, Repair

Every weave begins with the promise of order: warps aligned, tensions set, a rational grid ready for repetition. Modernism treated the grid as the herald of objectivity (Krauss 1979); mechanised production perfected that ideal in cloth that appears frictionless. Yet in hand weaving the grid negotiates rather than dictates. A mid-weave conversation slips a count, or, returning from a tea break, the weaver beats more firmly and a denser stripe registers in the cloth.

In *Time Fabric*, woven at Thanapara Swallows (Bangladesh), time at the loom—including stops and starts—was recorded chromatically (Fig. 2&3). The coloured bands, often read as decoration, operate as temporal inscriptions. This aligns with Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, in which social time is sensed through bodily rhythms rather than clock abstraction (Lefebvre 2004). A textile made under pressure toward sameness suppresses these rhythms; a textile that permits deviation reveals them.



Figure 2&3: (L) Mst. Shuily Khatun creating the *Time Fabric* on the loom at Thanapara Swallows (Santo 2015); and (R) showing rhythms of working amplified through the *Time Fabric*, embedded as stripes (Priemus 2015)

If the grid is order, error is possibility. In the *Skill Sampler*, below, I rendered the mistake-event materially legible by using dye-filled sponge fingertip gloves: each time I miscounted, mis-threaded, or unpicked, I marked my fingertips and executed the correction, leaving a permanent trace of undoing in the cloth (Fig. 4). The sampler employs a 2/1 twill with a pattern reversal about every eight rows, demanding simultaneous attention to count and heddle rotation—conditions that increased error frequency and produced an intentionally irregular zig-zag twill (Fig. 5).

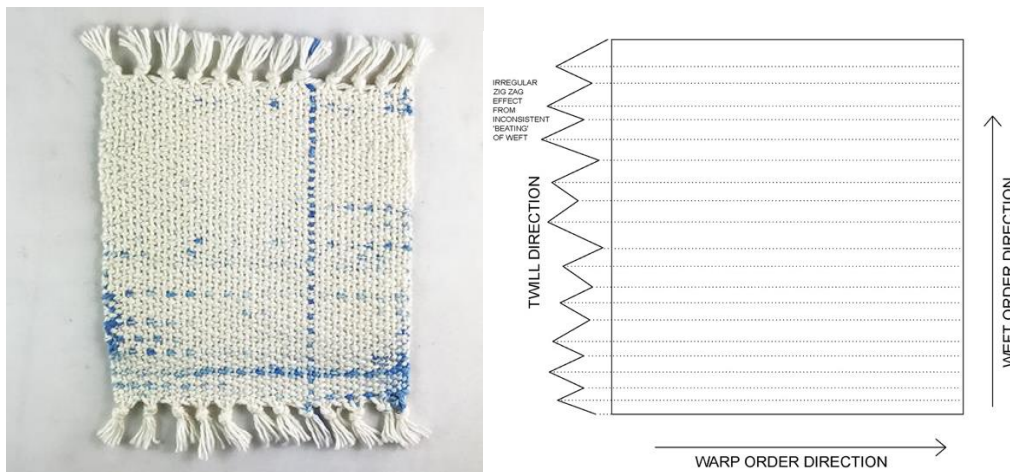


Figure 4&5: (L) Woven *Skill Sampler* and (R) *Skill Sampler* diagram, mapping the inconsistent beating of the weft, and miscounting wefts so that the twill 'zig zag' effect appears irregular.

A single blue weft indicates where a missed warp during heddle threading was inserted after the cloth came off the loom, making visible not only the lapse but the repair. As Jackson argues, breakdown and repair are generative conditions through which systems become knowable; undoing and re-doing render infrastructure legible (Jackson 2014). Here, time lost to unravelling is recoded as knowledge gained and inscribed in structure: the grid remains, but it carries the history of its own disruption.

4. Material Agency

Seeing error only as transgression misses the agency of matter. Jane Bennett writes of ‘vibrant matter’- the subtle liveliness of things that resist capture by will (Bennett 2010). In weaving, this is the slub that refuses to sit flat, the fibre that swells at humidity’s cue, the warp that whispers “enough tension”. Karen Barad’s notion of intra-action sharpens this: maker and material co-emerge through practice, and agency is distributed (Barad 2007). In this light, a so-called error is not merely deviation from plan but a negotiation where bodies and materials reconfigure one another in time.

Carolyn Tronto describes care as attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Tronto 1993). To work slowly enough for error to appear, and to meet it with mending, tolerance or amplification, is a care practice. Sara Ahmed reminds us that orientation is political: to lean toward texture, irregularity and time is already to diverge from institutional preference for smoothness (Ahmed 2017). Rozsika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch* makes visible how textile skill has been feminised and erased even as it encoded dissent (Parker 2010 [1984]). A wavering selvedge or visible snag is not only material testimony, but gendered testimony that refuses disappearance.

While weaving cloth at Thanapara Swallows in Bangladesh, fly (stray fibres) and dust frequently lodged within the structure. At regular viewing distance this reads as a nondescript speck (Fig. 6); under magnification it appears as an irregular interlacing of fibres and detritus (Fig. 7), evidence that each textile in the workshop is materially intra-acting with others and with its environment (Priemus 2021). In this sense the cloth is not a passive carrier of marks but an active participant in their formation: it gathers, holds, and rearticulates the air, the room, the hands, and neighbouring fibres (Fig. 8). To treat these inclusions simply as contamination is to miss the material’s capacity to record and compose its own biography.



Figure 6: Specks of ‘dust’ stuck in woven cotton cloth produced for Bhalo by Thanapara. This cloth was rejected by another buyer (Yarwood 2020)

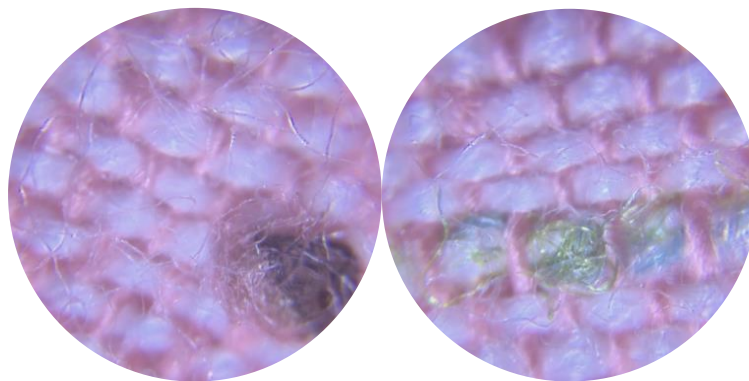


Figure 7: Dust caught in cloth, then caught under the microscope (Priemus 2014)

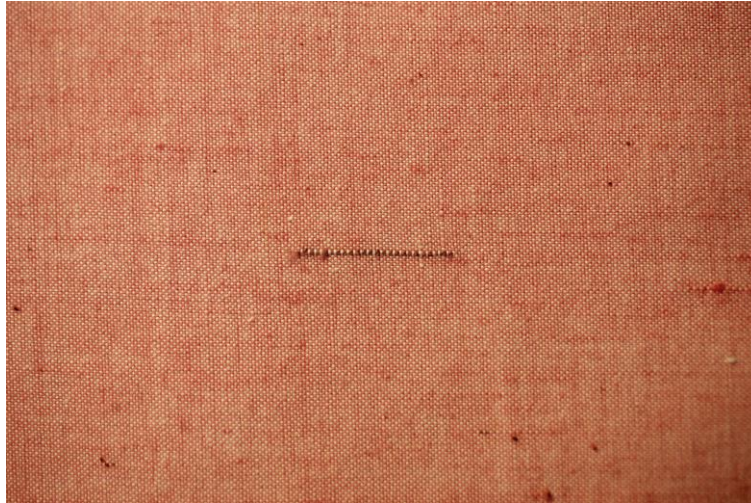


Figure 8: A stray piece of yarn has become stuck and woven into cloth (Yarwood 2020)

In finished garments, agency is often concealed by conventions of construction: right sides turned inward, edges seamed, irregularities disciplined. Yet at the moment of cutting from the loom or during pattern making, the textile asserts itself again through unbecoming. Threads unspool at the edge (Fig. 9), and an unravelling weft becomes a serpentine line that traces its journey (Albers 1959) through the structure, a line that both reveals and is made by the cloth's own behaviour. What is usually hidden becomes legible as the fabric's self-inscription: matter not only bearing history, but actively writing it.



Figure 9: An unravelling weft yarn indicates the journey of a thread (Yarwood 2020).

5. Embodied Knowledge: Knowing by Doing (and Deviating)

Nithikul Nimkulrat states that craft knowledge is made legible through making, and that artefacts disclose decisions, hesitations and insights (Nimkulrat 2012). In weaving logs created for my PhD research, calculations sit beside notes of fatigue, childcare interruptions, heat and conversation—conditions that are woven, not merely recorded. Participant interviews confirmed that readers of cloth often begin with touch, tracing threads and following loose ends, feeling tension shifts and inferring duration (Priemus 2021). Film theorist Laura Marks' "haptic visuality" is useful here: touch, or the suggestion of touch, becomes a mode of seeing (Marks 2000). As Juhani Pallasmaa writes, the door handle is the handshake of a building; in textiles, a selvage thread or loop is the handshake of the weave, a tactile joint that reveals its making (Pallasmaa 2005).

Pedagogically, allowing and discussing error shifts attention from product to process. The critique question becomes: what happened here, and what did it teach you? Tim Ingold offers a vocabulary for this shift: making is a correspondence, not the imposition of form onto matter (Ingold 2013). When something goes wrong, the correspondence becomes visible. If we conceal it, we lose both a teaching moment and a knowledge trace.

Building on this, my weaving logs formalised the fabric’s self-inscription as a research instrument, capturing quantitative and qualitative dimensions across structure, origin, tools, material quantity, order, skill, material qualities, duration, and what I termed process pattern—the maker’s rhythm and interruptions. Following design-research guidance that practice recordings can gather rich contextual information for reflection (Mäkelä and Nimkulrat 2018; Evans 2010), I logged not only counts and lengths but also what I was doing while weaving and when I stopped. The entries trace how multiple rhythms and events modulated the cloth: pauses to re-wind a bobbin; deliberate breaks in *Time Fabric* at Thanapara; and, more disruptively, the temporal dislocations of early parenting, which reoriented work into fragmented intervals that the small table loom made materially legible (Priemus 2021).

If mechanised production “regards the very terms of our bodily experience as burdensome” (Solnit 2003, p. 11), the hand-loom accommodates and translates bodily time into density shifts, colour changes and tension variation. Publishing these private timings of baby feeding, sleeping, and weaving follows a practice-led ethics of making one’s private design discourses public for knowledge formation (Pedgley 2007, p. 464). In the resulting *Rhythm Samplers* (Fig. 10), the textile does more than bear marks; it co-authors them, folding life’s contingencies into structure so that the weave reads as a negotiated score of body, material and duration (Fig. 11) (Priemus 2021).

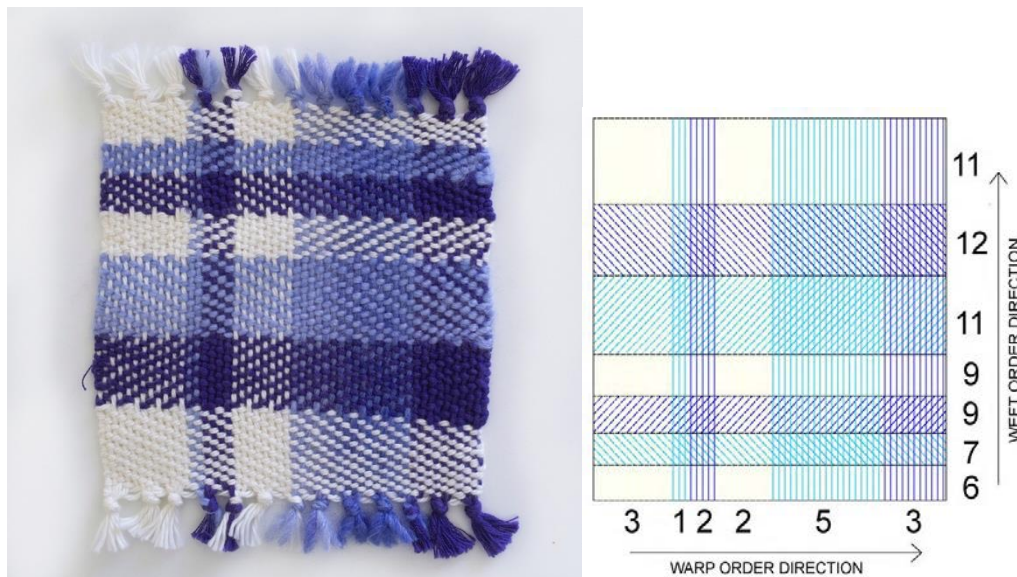


Figure 10&11: (L) *Rhythm Sampler* (Yarwood 2020) and (R) *Rhythm Sampler* diagram analysing patterns of working, represented through the grid (Priemus 2017)

5. Narrative Cloth and Speculative Futures

A reader of textiles will tell you: a flaw is a plot point. It invites inference: who paused, what interrupted. My PhD treated cloth as a self-narrating changescape, able to carry time, place and person. Elizabeth Grosz reminds us that body and building provoke one another into form (Grosz 1999). When dust remains in a weave, or unravelling shows thread journeys, fabric becomes a living archive.

This philosophy has possibilities to travel across industries and disciplines. Through a construction-amplifying aesthetic we can make learning, buildings, and cloth disclose how they come together. In education, this means assignments and assessment that keep process visible (drafts, deviation diaries, documented repairs) so students learn to read and value the labour of making. In architecture, it means tectonic disclosure—details and joints that register assembly and force paths—so structure is legible as work (Frampton 1995). In textiles, it means visible selvages and traceable thread journeys, allowing the weave to testify to its own construction (Albers 1959).

The experiments in making space for error inevitably crept in through my teaching work. In my third year Curtin Interior Architecture unit *Context and Trajectories* (2015–2016), students were required to intentionally leave traces, imperfections or push materials to the edge of failure. Through *Kami Partition Screen*, by Negar Bahrami, Alexandra Heath, and Teah Read, a partition screen formed by ink-stained hands left the artisan’s fingerprint

stamped into origami folds (Fig. 12). *Temporal Concrete Study* by Kartika Ahmad explored the ephemeral and fleeting nature of bubbles by inserting them into a traditionally solid material, weakening concrete and instigating material failure (Fig. 13). The method scales: safe-to-fail probes, deviation diaries, assessment that credits inquiry and repair, critique that reads traces rather than punishes them. Through a pedagogy of deviation, we could teach through curated error, so students learn to read material or system feedback and to reflect through making (Nimkulrat 2012; Ingold 2013; Ahmed 2017).

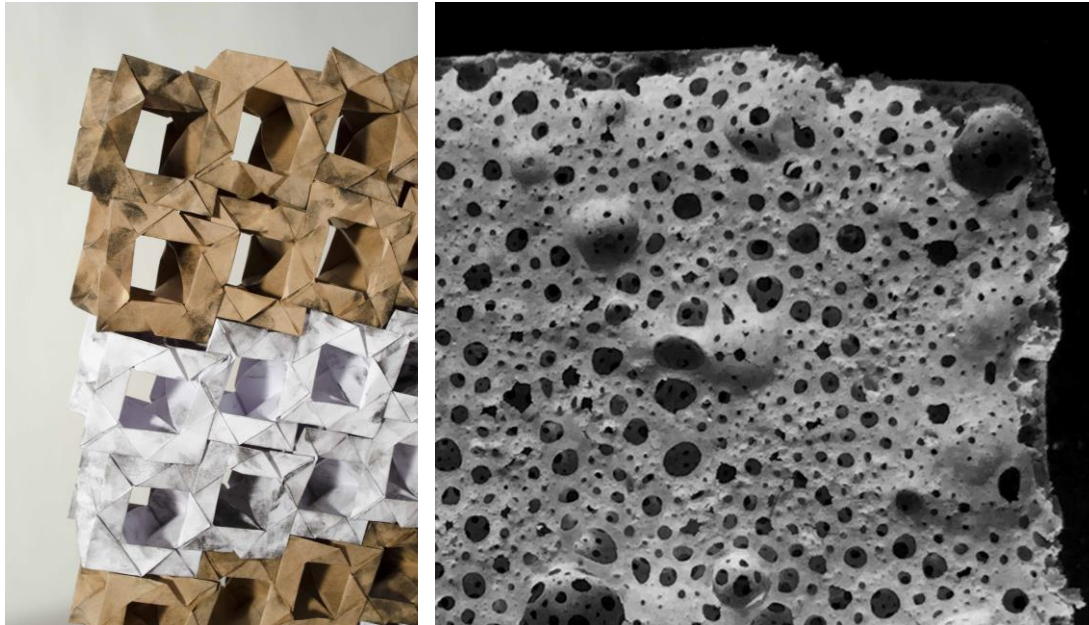


Figure 12&13: (L) *Kami Partition Screen* (Bahrami, Heath, and Read 2015), and (R) *Temporal Concrete Study* (Ahmad 2016)

However, it is not enough that I find beauty within incorrectly cured concrete, or specks caught in cloth. At Thanapara Swallows in Bangladesh it was clear that livelihoods are governed by quality regimes demanding spotless production; weavers cannot afford mistakes. Likewise, failure in education can carry disproportionate consequences, especially for disadvantaged students or those whose visa status depends on uninterrupted progress. A just pedagogy builds support into briefs and assessment: resource and time buffers, credit for repair, and explicit consent-to-fail language, bringing Tronto's attentiveness and responsibility into the structure of teaching (Tronto 1993) and extending Ahmed on political orientation (Ahmed 2017). If imperfection is to matter ethically, we must change how value is assigned—so that specified irregularities and traces of labour are recognised rather than penalised. Only then can narrative traces translate into dignity and agency for those who create them.

6. Conclusion: Error as Method, Cloth as Agent, Design as Care

If the grid offers order, error offers responsive difference. Across the essay I have argued that deviations in weaving are not private quirks of craft but conditions through which materials act, time thickens, and labour remains perceptible. Read this way, the so-called mistake is a scene of negotiation: body, context and fibre reconfigure one another, and the textile does not merely bear history but writes it.

This stance carries consequences across three linked domains. In textiles, visible selvages, traceable thread journeys and deliberate temporal inscriptions (*Rhythm Sampler; Time Fabric*) turn construction into knowledge rather than something to be hidden. In architecture, tectonic disclosure—the detail, joint and board mark—keeps assembly legible as work, aligning structure with the ethics of care rather than the aesthetics of erasure. In education, a pedagogy of deviation reframes assessment around process: deviation diaries, documented repairs and explicit readings of trace convert missteps into learning, so students are taught to recognise material feedback and to respond competently.

Because risk is unevenly distributed, a culture of error cannot rely on individual bravery. It requires institutional design. Studios and classrooms must resource safe-to-fail exploration with materials bursaries and criteria that

credit inquiry and repair. Cultural institutions might exhibit reverse views, process notes and controlled irregularities as primary content, recalibrating taste toward narrative density rather than surface smoothness. Markets and procurement could employ parallel reform: tolerance bands that admit specified irregularities where structurally sound, trace-bearing grades with price recognition for documented provenance and visible labour, and labels or catalogues that teach audiences how to read construction. Without these adjustments, the narrative accrues to discourse while the economic risk remains with makers.

Taken together, these shifts reframe design as an ethic of attentiveness and response. They insist that materials have trajectories and voices, that bodies leave necessary marks, and that the work of making should remain legible in the work made. A tiny slippage, a wavering selvedge, dust held in the weave—these are not defects to be tidied away, but indices of life in structure. When studios cultivate them as learning, when buildings declare them as joining, and when garments display them as testimony, error becomes more than resistance. It becomes a method for practicing care, for keeping labour in view, and for designing in concert with the agency of cloth, context and time.

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