



## The Lure of the Loom

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We weave in and out of traffic or weave our way through a crowd. We weave tales or great stories, weave bits of humor into our speech, ribbons into our hair

Everybody talks about weaving, uses the word, but only a few know what a loom is. Fewer still have experienced the rhythm, the beat, the movement of weaver and loom as they work in the age-old process known broadly as weaving.

There are many kinds of looms, many kinds of weaving, even off-loom weaving. Kids weave twigs together, reeds are formed into baskets, a weaver bird builds her nest that way, spiders weave webs. More cloth and more clothing is woven than not.

In this modern age, weaving is produced by a highly mechanized process, a factory experience. Yet some of us are drawn to the hand-loom, a foot-powered loom, where the weaver sits up to it, becomes involved in it, truly weaves with the loom, producing a cloth.

Weaving, for hand-weavers, then, is physical motion, involvement, doing, throwing a shuttle across its width, time after time after time, making the motions of weaving the cloth. Yet there is more. Whatever the mystery, every hand-weaver knows that the movement of weaving captures the weaver, draws him or her right into the process. Weaver becomes one with the weaving.

Weaving is *techne* in the sense of art and craft. It brings something into being. Through using the tools a product is born, yet the process goes on. The pulse of creativity beats slowly, is created over long periods of time, tempered by patience, caught in the product. Commonly, technique is learned, art is in the design, the creation. What is the weaving experience from which a product is born?

Seldom do we ponder the creation of cloth. Is it made by huge production machine or hand-loomed in someone's living room? Why would one weave it by hand anyway? How is the weaving process different than machine operation? The loom is a tool, a machine made of wood, but when the weaver sits up to it, it becomes a world of its own. Here the weaver is not to be interrupted. How is it home, a space not to be invaded? There must be some pleasure that draws the weaver to the

loom; and later, that draws him or her to continue. Once there, why remain?

### **Movement**

Martin (1988) suggests that the reason for weaving is found in its rhythm, and in the relaxation found in the rhythm.

We are weavers because we enjoy the physical act of weaving. We like the combination of control and freedom: control in throwing the shuttle with regularity and economy; freedom in choosing color, pattern and design. There are the rhythm and harmony of pressing treadles while remembering the pattern. (p. 91)

The physicalness of weaving embodies the rhythm, fosters relaxation, yet demands an alertness that creates a tension of doing, a building, crescendo that lasts through the weaving. Through its rhythm of doing, as the body moves with the rhythm, a tension is created, beyond relaxation, yet somehow relaxing. "All weavers I have met share this enthusiasm for our craft or, more precisely, we share a joy in the physical production of weaving and find time for treading" (p. 91).

### **Eyes**

My eyes watch the pattern, observe color changes, take in the movements, register difference and change. They note without seeing the edges (selvedge) as part of the rhythm, the movement of yarn, the design as it grows. They notice the rhythm as pattern develops, repetition, repeating in regular ways. The eye does not see that the pattern is this one or that one, will not name it, though it registers pattern as the design moves in its building, as one would look at a seashell, see the spirals as movement, and notice pattern as whole built into the shell.

If the movement is rhythmic, soft left-right-and-back, if the yarns lie in gently, the weaving continues, the edges fall lightly. But if through a glitch in the smoothness, inadvertent perhaps, the shuttle is thrown in a movement off rhythm, the eye will take in the error, though the hands may continue in movement. It may be that after several shots have been thrown the eye slides into knowing something is amiss, and gently this knowing directs the weaving to stop, a slow-motion response, a reflex in doing the knowing. Or it may end with a jerk.

The eyes take in the landscape of weaving progressing. They are the perspective, "the concretion of a universal visibility, of a unique space which separates and reunites" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 187). They guide the union of planned action with the movement of weaving the cloth.

This joined set of movements is interrupted every few minutes with the need to move the warp forward. The foot reaches over to press the brake release pedal and breaks the rhythm of weaving which may be hard to get back to. In the moving forward of warp, the hands take a swing off to the side, and the eyes take a moment to look at the warp. It is here that the

weaver is most likely to pause and lose rhythm, the weaving in jeopardy of being abandoned. The suspense is relieved when the warp is seen as correct and the shuttle is thrown once again, beginning the rhythmic pattern of weaving, becoming a weaver again.

### Hands

Hands handle the yarns and the tools, touch them and set them in appropriate space. The hands work in tandem, throw shuttles and catch them, reach for new yarns, and move the warp forward onto the beam. The tools are caressed. The touch of the textures of wood, wool, and fibers are home to the hands of a weaver.

Long use of a shuttle gives it a smooth waxy finish from the moisture on the hands, and is all the more precious for it. Most weavers of experience have one or two very favorite shuttles preferred over all others. (Wonnacott, 1982, p. 12)

Equipment becomes smoothed, polished through use, and in its use becomes part of the weaver.

Touching is the discovery of our real existence in its own limitation. It reveals at the same time the physical self as touched, moved, and something that is touched by our self-movement. Touching is the most original mode of the experience of participation and feeling. (Buytendijk, 1970, p. 163)

Just so, the tools and the process of weaving touch the weaver more deeply

touched by our self-movement intentionally involved in an anticipated developing situation, a functional circle of movement and being moved, in which the *Gestalt* is developed, the act of feeling a closed reciprocal relation between the subject and its intentional object. (p. 163)

The hands guide this physical touching that joins weaver to cloth, and to the weaving.

There is a caress as the hands feel the textures of yarns and the smoothness of woods. The movement of working joins the weaver to his or her work. Through the hands and the movement of body, the visual, the tactile, the rhythm of weaving, the weaver joins "in the landscape, taken up and dissolved into it, a part of it. He must have time when he abandons himself to such a path. He must stop to enjoy the view" (Bollnow, 1961, p. 36). The intimate touch of the hands of the cloth as it is created, is born, draws the weaver to stop sometimes just to caress it, expressing overtly or abstractly the loving connection of weaver to weaving, communication and participation. "Nogue compared this activity of the caressing hand to the subtle movement which the violinist imparts to the bow in order to provoke the living tonality of an 'architecture temporelle'" (Buytendijk, 1970, p. 116). The caressing movement is integral to the process, as it is in making pottery though with the coarser,

grainy, and clinging texture of clay it is a different experience for the potter, a different quality of surface and consistency. The rhythm of weaving is relaxed enjoyment, but through the touch of tools, fibers, and process the joining of weaver to cloth is completed. The hands reach out to do the connecting.

The connection can be verified when an object is grasped—the notion of space cannot be felt, but can be perceived, The groping human hand unlocks the access to the perceived reality of things. This is, as of old, the experience of daily life. (Buytendijk, 1970, pp. 106-107)

The weaver is touched by the weaving, and by this attempt to translate what his or her daily life means in an essential way, in its essence. Yet, as it is a struggle to connect, to join the worlds of the weaver and the weaving, the movement touches deep within our soul, a connection to life, and the movements of life, a notion of meaning not quite reached by the weaving. No weaving, or art piece, is complete in itself.

The hands learn and direct, lead the pattern of movements. “What power I exercised whenever my hands made contact with a shuttle” (West, 1988, p. 55). The shuttle is cradled, the yarn is unwrapped, arched in the shed so the edges have leeway. The hands notice this movement: is it smooth or need be aborted. They notice the texture of the yarn, the space between threads, the size of the shed, and the density of the thread bed. They are relaxed in the rhythm of weaving when the weaving produced is a soft one.

From shuttle to beater, the hands direct the softness intent. When the cloth to be made is to be softness expressed, the yarn is pressed into place adjacent, not touching. The hands lead the movement of hands, arms, shoulders, legs, and feet blending together, softly and slowly, relaxed into the flow, the beat and the movement.

When the weave is to be solid, with weft laid closely together, the hands direct a movement that is tense and abrupt, the body is in a high, directed tension, erect and alert. The beater becomes as a hammer for the yarn is now pushed solidly against the one before. The body is jerked as the hand grabs and pulls on the beater. The movement is a banging much more than a pressing, the yarn pounded closely, jammed right up against the one laid before. The furthest extreme is a movement of body, hands and feet that sends excruciating pain to the head and the temples, through tension repeated, sustained, repeating the beat. The hand leads this dance through a pounding of yarn into cloth.

When we weave on a floor loom we know the movement of shuttle passed hand to hand, but we may choose other movements using yarns laid in one by one. McCrosky (1988) remembers adroit finger movements as “tapestries are woven on upright looms, and no tools are used. The weft is inserted by hand and packed down with the fingers” (p. 41). The hands

choose their direction, direct the choosing that happened in planning the weaving to be done.

### **Feet**

My feet follow the rhythm led by the hands, step on the treadles, lifting the harnesses making the pattern sheds for the shuttle to pass through. In moving from left to right, next left, and next right, the feet lead the body in a side-to-side motion that may include reaching far out to each side sometimes, rocking close to the center at other times. As one foot slides forward, the other glides back. The movement of feet is illusion not thought of, becomes pattern remembered, led by the hands, in turn leading the body, reaching back through the arms to unite in a movement that comes to include thinking, alertness and caring, but lulled into rhythm where time, space, and doing are blended into one motion of weaving. Weaving is not remote. It is a physical touching, involvement, like walking. It is walking the treadles. It is walking a path that has no destination but rests in itself. It invites leisure and loitering, stepping back to an almost prehistoric state where we can freely enjoy the pure present. (Bollnow, 1961).

### **Head**

The head remembers the pattern, gets lost in the rhythm. The thinking that happens is part of the movement of weaver and loom as the yarn reaches from side to side of the cloth. The head leads in the choosing of colors and yarns, but the thinking involved is not part of a plan. The time of the weaving is time for reflection, time for daydreaming, thinking of this cloth and the next. Yet it is time for not thinking, for just being absorbed in the making of rhythm as cloth unfolds. Relaxed now but wary, enjoying the fun, the mind is alert to the changes, keeps track of what's happening.

In sewing, the body is less into the movement, but the mind is engaged just as surely, though in ways that must picture the pieces as part of the whole that is envisioned. The creative aspect is putting pieces together. In weaving, the cloth is being built thread by thread, a unity created in the doing, a movement both more linear and more integral, the body a part of the movement of weaving. As in sewing and knitting, the pattern decisions are most often made at the beginning, but in weaving the process builds thread on thread and the weaving is really a rhythmic execution of pattern envisioned, set up, and forgotten. There is no need to remember how the pieces will fit; the loom has been set so the feet know the pattern; the pattern is repeated so the body, too, learns it, and weaving becomes a continuous process of doing and doing again and again. There is rhythm and harmony in pressing the treadles while remembering the pattern. As in knitting, the feet (or fingers) take on memory's task by themselves and the conscious mind relaxes (Martin, 1988). The body remembers, and the mind relaxes, the cloth being woven as rhythmic unfolding.

The process described here is weaving yards of cloth, and of course, other weavers choose other projects for weaving, and may need to stop often to make changes they envisioned, or “saw” as the weaving progressed. It is always, however, a movement through from beginning to end of the warp as set out, the changes most likely in weft yarn changes (of color, texture), or perhaps a change in technique. The weaver would pause at the change, as in moving the warp forward, and adjust to relearn the new pattern or yarn used. The weaving would then continue for a time, until the next change, new forward movement. The difference to note is the total involvement of weaver and loom united in the weaving space and intention, a plan moving graciously through from beginning to end.

### **Torso**

“It is true that, when the body is comfortably centered at the loom and the physical movements have merged in consummate balletic rhythm, the situation is ripe for creativity” (West, 1988, p. 56).

My body moves with the rhythm of the shuttle gently thrown from one hand, caught on the other, the movement of beater brought toward and back, while the pedals are pressed in a rhythm my feet know. My thoughts follow the pattern if it is complex, but do not need to if it is easy enough to be automatic, rhythmically remembered. Memory, here, is a movement of rhythm expressed by the movement of body together, united in movement.

The whole upper part of the body, including the head, [rocks] forward as though hinged at the hips ... [leans] back when the beater is brought forward in anticipation of the next beat. At the same moment that the body leans back, the knees are slightly raised from their treading position, just high enough to raise the feet so that they clear the pedals and can move directly to the next position. (Brostoff, 1982, p. 41)

After long hours the seat becomes harder as buttocks are rocked and leg movements jostle. The movements of weaving are no longer easy. As soon as there is a break in the weaving the aches and the pains leap into awareness, and the weaver reluctantly leaves the space of the loom.

### **Body Together**

The hands and the feet foster side-to-side “walking” and the body joins with the beater in forward and back. So the movement is constant, a changing and giving, a movement that joins with the loom, not extension, but part of the workings of doing and weaving the cloth. The sense of together, of wholeness, and oneness, of being with loom in the process of weaving, brings the weaver to lose all sense of the world outside the loom. The cloth is being built thread by thread, and the cloth wound around the front beam as it is woven, but the weaver herself or himself is unaware of the clothmaking, only the weaving is noticed until it is done. The moving of cloth and finding the end of the warp is a jolt to the weaver absorbed in

the process of weaving. The cloth and the weaver have become one and it is a jolt to reenter the world and see that it is done.

As in reading a novel, absorbed in its story, unable to wait to find out the ending, the reader is jolted and disappointed to come to the end. And as with different kinds of reading, the feeling is different as to which product you are weaving. Rugs and tapestry could be leisurely in design but heavy in beat. Soft, fluffy afghans require a soft, gentle beat. Each weaving project is different, but each holds a quality of suspense that remains through the weaving, a suspense that starts intensely with intrigue that wonders just what it will look like, then settles into a smooth and sustained feeling of captured attention, until at the end there is a letdown that it is finished, though an excitement arises then to see what the product will look like now that it is completed, a whole.

### Time and Progress

Time in the weaving of cloth is not there. It becomes lost in the doing. The only reminders of time come from the body—when it starts to ache or the tension becomes too great. There is a tension to keeping the weaving a movement that is consistent, relaxed, that does not intensify. It could start out languid, relaxed and relaxing, but with undercurrents of excitement. Then the weaver gets caught in the movement of weaving for weaving's sake. The increase in tension becomes increase in tempo and soon relaxation is gone. It is then that the body will become aware of itself, be aware of the need for a change, and the weaver may choose a conscious return to relaxation, take a deep breath or a break.

During the time of the weaving, the feeling of time changes as the weaving progresses. The sense of *finished* is a changed sense of time. The classic (a classic is timeless), Homer's *Odyssey*, introduces us to a weaver who tried to stop the time of the weaving. The story of Penelope is the story of the deception of time, the deception of progress, the ambiguity of time and progress. She eluded marriage by undoing by night what she wove in the day.

And Penelope replied:

Sons of the noblest families on the islands ...  
are here to court me,  
against my wish; and they consume this house ...  
Ruses served my turn  
to draw the time out—first a close-grained web  
I had the happy thought to set up weaving  
on my big loom in hall. I said, that day:  
“Young men—my suitors, now my lord is dead,  
let me finish my weaving before I marry,  
or else my thread will have been spun in vain.  
It is a shroud I weave for Lord Laertes  
when cold Death comes to lay him on his bier.  
The country wives would hold me in dishonor

if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.”  
I reached their hearts that way, and they agreed.  
So every day I wove on the great loom,  
but every night by torchlight I unwove it;  
and so for three years I deceived the Akhaians.  
But when the seasons brought a fourth year on,  
as long months waned, and the long days were spent,  
through impudent folly in the slinking maids  
they caught me—clamored up to me at night;  
I had no choice then but to finish it.  
And now, as matters stand at last,  
I have no strength left to evade a marriage,  
cannot find any further way. (Homer, 1963, pp. 357-358)

Penelope weaves it in and then takes it out for reasons more pressing than doing the task; she weaves for her life. There is a sense too of the importance of weaving. In appealing to the “country wives” and her “honor,” Penelope illustrates for us the timelessness and universal acceptance of weaving as integral and important to the lives of all people. So it is with today’s weavers that through the pressure of deadlines, or of matters quite outside the weaving itself, the sense of time as tranquility may be altered through pressure.

More importantly, over the past few years I have learned about a special quality of time that is bestowed on weavers and others keeping old crafts alive. From weaving we learn the patience of earlier craftsmen and women. I like the passage from *The Weaving Roses*, quoted from an 1891 book: “and the weaver, pale and silent, laboriously weaving his slow-growing web with a patience of past ages of workers, a patience so foreign to our present” (p. 11). Even 100 years ago, weavers were recognized to have a special sense of time out of step with “normal” schedules

I now will pull out the old scrap of coverlet with its handspun cotton and wool and admire the patience of the weaver who took the time to create beauty in an object of daily use. I think of Chilkat weavers taking six months to finish one dancing blanket. (Martin, 1988, p. 91)

When you are doing what you truly enjoy, time should be of no concern. The weaver’s work is the fabric. It is there forever, and a part of her life has become incorporated into its physical actuality. Time allows the subconscious to function, ideas to settle in, the inner reservoirs of the mind to refill, and the soul to be nourished. Call it daydreaming, if you wish. (West, 1988, p. 55)

The challenge of weaving with rhythm, enjoyment, is held in the body, the way the body is held. It is hard to imagine, a challenge to execute, smooth rhythmic movements that lull you, give illusion of unhurried serenity, yet needing the tension, excitement that holds it together, sets boundaries, becomes one with the weaver, a tension that is needed to sustain the effort, to hold the tension, attention, of weaver and body as they move through the movements.

## Patience

Grounded in rhythm, in the tension of doing, time becomes timeless, and progress not noticed. The sense of time and timeless movement of time are caught in the notion of what patience is. Fujita (1985) explores modes of waiting and Bollnow's three contexts of patience: (a) in relation to work, (b) in relation to other people, and (c) in relation to life in general.

In relation to work, patience lies in the harmony between doing and done, between present and future. Without rushing over the present into wished-for or longing, or ruing the past, the action of doing is enough in itself. In weaving, the sense of the patience of work changes as the project progresses. Initially, the product takes precedence in the planning. Then, in the weaving, the product moves into the present. The action of doing the weaving is one with itself. There is need for no more. This sense of patience is full of enoughness. It is enough to be doing the work. Time comes into harmony with what the weaver is doing, and he or she is able to forget it. This classic weaving poem shows the sense of patience that truly pervades all weaving endeavor.

*If*

If you can wind a warp  
And never miss the cross,  
If you can thread the heddles one by one  
And never suffer loss,  
If you can reed the threads  
And never miss a dent,  
And smilingly repeat your pattern  
And never once resent  
An interruption or a muttered curse  
From workers by your side,  
If you can start to weave  
And find the threads you thought were tied  
Are loose; if you can cheerfully retrace  
Your steps and do it all again,  
Then call yourself a weaver, friend;  
Your patience has no end. (Anon.)

It is this sort of patience displayed by all weavers that Penelope exemplifies with her ambiguity of progress. It is the patience to wait out the time, to work in the process, without ever ending it. Weavers draw on this patience in all stages of weaving. It is what makes a weaver, it seems.

In relation to other people, patience emotes a sense of gentle awareness, a state of being that allows others to be there, with no expectation, trusting the future (Fujita, 1985). Patience in weaving extends into (and within) the community of weavers, though it may simply be a sense that others, family members and friends, can see and allow when the weaver is at the loom. The patience, found inward, extends to the community, a sense of trust that someday *they* will understand.

Martin decries her inability to communicate her old-fashioned sense of patience and time: "And when a friend asks for one of my specially patterned handspun caps to be made in a week's time, I only say I'll try. After all, we cannot tell those caught up in the throwaway society about patience and explain how handcrafts use a special sort of time" (Martin, 1988, p. 91). It is no secret: machines do not need patience to run.

In relation to life in general, patience is a result of feeling supported by a more extensive, inclusive meaning of being, more than mere perseverance (Bollnow, in Fujita, 1985). It is an old sense of patience, one not understood by the throwaway society, yet one that draws weavers to weaving at a deep level of knowing oneself as Weaver. Weaving is not a matter of perseverance; that would not work as weaving is done.

That sort of time comes when the weaving is hardship, when the weaving causes physical pain. In beating the weaving so hard that it hurts, when ribs are found twisted, and whiplash results, the physical hardship becomes mental fatigue. The pain only comes to awareness when we stop or pause to reflect.

The simple fact of being painless reminds us that the condition of undergoing the sensation of pain is to be with ourselves, means to be conscious of our existence. Pain is not a feeling (act) but an emotional sensation only possible in the intentional experience of existence. (Buytendijk, 1950, p. 164).

When a project is torture in the most gruesome of ways time never ends, becomes a wondering when or if it can ever come to an end. It brings a sense that time spent at the loom does not move, that the half-hour weaving is centuries long.

The patience of weaving is not unlike that of spinning where the rhythm sets you to relaxing so much in the movement that all is forgotten. Attention in spinning is done simply through the eyes to the movement of hands as they swing in toward the wheel and out past the body. The feet of a spinner are engaged in a completely continuous rhythm of forward and back as the wheel mesmerizes in motion, going round and round. The spinner is drawn into the wheel almost one with the fiber that is twisted as it goes into the orifice. All thought is forgotten as complete concentration is laid easily onto the triangular space where the fiber is twisted into yarn. Spinning is done easily, demands little overt attention, continuous motion the same from beginning to end. Time is lost in the mesmerized movement, patience becomes timelessness found in the rhythm.

In weaving, the patience includes more involvement: a need to keep all together, connection of mind with the pattern, the loom, and the weaving of cloth. "Relaxing is something you do to prepare to weave" (Ligon, 1987, p. 99), yet "inner relaxation is one of the basic keys to weaving" (Brostoff, 1982, p. 41). The motions of throwing and catching, stretching and reaching need in their movement relaxation and tension so that

smoothness and rhythm give pleasure and satisfying product. Weaving envelopes the notion of patience, yet leads beyond patience to knowing yourself as a weaver. The patience is tempered with connection to self.

### Finding Self

There are many kinds of weavers, though the difference is perhaps simply in degree of involvement. A casual weaver making one shawl a year may never become drawn into the doing so that weaving itself can weave his or her life. Such a weaver may continue with weaving on a casual basis simply because he or she has not felt the pull at his or her heartstrings, the pull that says: I must weave. He or she may allow other pressures to push weaving aside.

The weaver who allows weaving to draw him or her into the weaving knows the torment of fear that the other demands of his or her life will push weaving aside. Steege (1988) acknowledges this fear, while simultaneously recognizing how as a weaver she became part of the weaving. The birth of a weaving was essentially birth of her self. Her poem brings cloth and self into being.

#### *The Weaver*

fear she will like many  
knot her heart to hear another's  
—perhaps her children's—  
and move outward  
forgetting how her own once  
thudded behind the loom  
when towards herself pulled its cradle crashing,  
how each rim of colour snuggled  
against its newborn body,  
how she the weaver of cloth  
knew no part of this birth  
could be absent. (Steege, p. 7)

Once allowed to play its magic, weaving will surely draw the weaver's life together to where the weaver can begin to find himself or herself as one with the weaving, one with the world. The body comes to know its individual parts (arms, legs, and body) as joined to the whole, secured to the center of the feeling of self. Weaving is one way to get to know self.

There is a hypnotic rhythm to learning to weave. It draws you into the world, yet sets you apart from the world. In learning to weave, I was drawn to the physicalness of my being. Through sensations of moving hands, feet, and body together, I became tied to the rhythm of weaving the cloth, a togetherness of actions and feelings, a oneness away from the trials of my life. Once at my loom I could forget the pressures, center my thoughts with my body as one. I had purpose, a reason for being with me as a person, apart from the world. There was a wonderful, creative aloneness, a sense of being alone. No one knew what I was doing; no one cared. Yet through the books and magazines, and surely through the

community of weavers, the aloneness became a connection with *me* through to *them* as I found others like me. Like Steege in her poem, I gave birth to a part of my self that was previously unknown to me. I found a peace with the person I was as a weaver, a communal member of the weaving community. I was like them, though I worked alone still. I lived alone in my weaving world untouched for that time by the trials of the rest of my world. I was led to discover that I was important, that I had a place, could make important decisions. I found a sense of me as worthwhile—a curious ambiguity of knowing, tied to the world through creating cloth.

Weaving was a time for me, a time of experiencing, a hypnotic rhythm, a dance with my self. It was a way to withdraw from the world. I was allowed this withdrawal because, like Penelope, it was seen that I was working, making cloth (clothing, in the ancient sense). What a wondrous denial of what work really is! True, I was producing, in my secret place, making both worldly weavings and making my self, becoming me. My work was a dance with myself!

### Loom Space

Withdrawing to a weaving place is movement into loom space, a movement of homecoming and love. The peace and love that creeps into a home set for weaving, comfortable, sweet-smelling, is shown by Grant's (1962) weaver who sings in her sweet voice, weaving with her heart.

### Heart

Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing  
Scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke  
And smoke of thyme; and singing high and low  
In her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving,  
She passed her golden shuttle to and fro. (p. 63)

A home is created, where one's roots are touched down. A weaver will speak of being inside the loom, separate and distinct but part of it as he or she sorts the threads through its complexities and parts. I join with the loom as I touch its wood with reverence, languish in the beauty of rich maple polished, softly shining. As I sort through the yarns laid across the loom parts, we can look at the loom, get into it physically, sit beneath its castle, threading the harnesses, feeling at peace. There is no feeling of hurry; it is a job that is unhurried. The section divided may take several sittings, conscious to do it without threading error, with tension in sitting in positions restrained, and my back soon begins to argue, to say it is uncomfortable, soon aches enough that I have to leave the loom alone just for now. But the lure of the pattern, unfinished threading, unfinished doing draws me back quickly to finish it up. The nearer to finished and the more effort I have put into it, the more quickly I return to finish the job (as in reading the novel). Yet as soon as it is threaded I have to tie on and get to the weaving as quickly as I can. The languor that is there in the

threading is quickly exchanged for the tension of getting to *it*—the real thing, the weaving itself.

The compelling motion is not like that in knitting where only fingers and arm movements are involved. In weaving, the body reclines, relaxes apart. We tend to surrender the way of living to weaving the way that the space is arranged to accommodate the physicalness of it, the tactile experience of wool, fiber and wood.

[One weaver's] commitment to weaving as an important part of [her] life-style was evidenced by moving her looms from an upper room to the dining room, right in the heart of the home between kitchen, family room and the living room. Her looms and tools are beautiful, fine furniture woods; the yarns, bulletin wall, shelves of fascinating objects, along with "something" always on the big loom, make a fine focal point. (Wilson, 1981, p. 30)

It is love of the weaving that creates the need for a space. In creating the space, we acknowledge our love: of weaving, of process, of being, that never ends. The space for the loom is part of the home, and becomes the home to the weaver who loves it. Some looms may be tucked in a back bedroom, perhaps, but a weaver who sees weaving as essential to his or her being will move the loom to the center of the home, or will move his or her center to be with the loom. The place for the loom of a lover of weaving is visible and tactile, a nice place to be. Yet the wonder of the weaving place is secret to those who are not weavers.

In another way, the loom is a secret, one to be uncovered, suspense when it is not being used. An empty loom sits at a distance, a visual space, seen in reflection across the room. When a weaving is finished, the loom may sit empty, unneeded for now. This loom takes a place that is distant but beckons. Weavers joke, "You have to be warped to weave." The loom calls you. It asks you, "What next?" You look at the loom. It is empty, loitering off in its corner, resting, alone. It will not likely stand empty long. It only shines when it is being used. The weaver is drawn back into its arms, a home in the sense of knowing its safety as arms that envelope and nurture, that beckon and call, invite you back in.

The weaver content in the world of her or his loom has found one sense of home, being where weaving is. "It remains the spatial center of the life of the individual" (Bollnow, 1961, p. 33). Looms find themselves in the very heart of the house, in the dining room, living room, a special corner set apart from the rest of the weaver's world, or staked in part of the personal outdoors if the weaver is Navajo. Going into the loom space is reaching a sanctuary where interruptions from the outside are never welcome. The weaver is absorbed in the weaving, sets the world aside for that time. The boundary of the loom space may be set solely by the weaving activity, a space that is recognized as sacred, not to be entered unless by the weaver, a place where the weaver is not to be bothered. The loom becomes the center of a space into which the weaver can withdraw in order to return to himself or herself.

In every case the first step is to carve out of chaotic space a definite area set apart from the rest of the world as a holy precinct. Casirer stressed it a generation ago in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. "The consecration begins when a certain area is taken out of the rest of space, distinguished from other places and in a certain degree religiously fenced off" (Bollnow, 1961, p. 34).

A loom is large. In the physical sense it takes up a lot of space but the space it takes up is important. A weaver may assess a room according to its division of space. Is there room set aside for the loom? Is other equipment standing nearby waiting to be used? Is the space created where you feel you could stay with light, and with comfort of homeyness? Weaving is not an activity to be set aside but one that is one with your being in life, one that absorbs you as you are absorbed in it. The environment becomes one with the loom. One could not consider weaving where there was turmoil. Sunshine, however, might invite a weaver to take a small loom outdoors, a beautiful space to be weaving.

### Soul Space

In the patience, in the loom-space, in the weaving is a rhythm of time, a rhythm of space, and a certain soul rhythm that is known to the weaver. What is a rhythm that touches the soul? As the weaving is happening, the weaver is one with it; one with the space, the time, and the creation, the birth of a product that happens to be called a weaving. The product itself may seem like the purpose, yet doing is what draws the weaver to weave. The rhythm of doing sets out for the weaver a space and a place where the body becomes part of the space, where the mind and the body are joined as one with the weaving, the creation of something born out of the weaver and loom.

We speak of "inspiration," and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted. It is said that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible, inside the mother's body, becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us. The painter's vision is a continued birth. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 167-168)

The birth of a weaving is like that of a painting though the process involves more physical movement of weaver and loom, in a process of oneness.

"Weaving rapidly and smoothly is rhythmic almost like dancing, and like dancing it is relaxing and pleasant" (Wonnacott, 1982, p. 12). Weaving, like dance, depends on tempo, but loses sense of time. Rhythm in music is the same and yet different. In music the rhythm is felt as a beat, repeated, repeated, loosely called "time." Music could be one part of the weaving, as listening mode, or as a design motive. "Music uses a lot of

repetition. Classical music makes heavy use of variations on a theme. Here the basic pattern or motif is repeated with enough similarity to be recognizable, but enough change to be interesting” (Liebler, 1985, p. 92), one kind of repetition that is useful in visual designing. But the weaver is using the rhythm of weaving in one continuous movement from creation to completion. In weaving the rhythm is in the production, in the creation, in the design, in the movement of weaver.

Different kinds of existential spatialities exist in relation to different modalities of being-in-the-world. For example, *the space of dancing* [is] an aimless and unoriented space, where the movements of the body are an end in themselves and have an emblematic value. (Spurling, 1977, p. 36)

[Dancing] is an undirected space in which the movement of the dance back and forth and around a point of origin on a restricted surface can still be executed without a feeling of being hemmed in. In it movement takes place which rests in itself and is joy-giving through itself. (Bollnow, 1961, p. 38)

Weaving too is space-making, joy-giving but moves in a rhythm that gives direction, a purpose, while the weaver becomes lost in the present and may forget about future.

There is in the movement a rhythmic connection to balance between the loom and the weaver, the weaver and tools. “Weaving speedily and efficiently is a careful balance between the size and smoothness of the warp, the tightness of the warp at the time of putting the shuttle through the shed, the size and smoothness of the weft, freedom of unrolling of the weft off the bobbin, and timing and control of beat. (Wonnacott, 1982, p. 12)

Thus, in the practice, going through the various moves and acts many times, the weaver’s body becomes knowing, “habituated in the performance of moves and acts while enabling them to function harmoniously and efficiently” (Weiss, 1979, p. 190), enabling the process of weaving to become smooth and rhythmic.

Weaving is rhythm. That is what it is. The rhythm of weaving, its beauty and grace, is its lure for me. I did not choose weaving, weaving chose me. Koopman (1983) captures the woven connection of weavers to the cloth, loom, community, and self. Through it we can see how weaving wove my life.

### *Celebrations of Life*

I did not choose fibers, fibers chose me.

Maybe we were already connected in a previous life ... ?

My life and my work are closely related. Warps, strands of life ...

Weft, the stories we weave into the warp, the stories of our lives.

Slowly the picture begins to unfold; every row of weft adding a little more to life’s story.

Changes and constants.

We can change the color of the weft, add some texture, change the whole design if we so desire, just as we can make changes in our lives.

But the warp remains constant.

Its threads keep running through the entire piece, connecting past with present and the future.

Strands of fiber, strands of life, woven together into an integrated piece, a fabric of life.

These fabrics are my stories; cries of pain and songs of joy and hope.

My life, my song.

I am alive!

I am part of this world and I am myself.

I can step out of this world and step into the world of dreams and imagination.

That is where I create—Celebrations of Life.

I give my song to others and it continues when people wear the fabric I have woven.

There is a transformation; the fibers come alive.

The fabric moves with the body, color changes, another human spirit is added and a new design, a new song is born.

*Albertje* (Koopman, 1983, p. 59)

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