Video Essay Transcript

Link to video essay: https://vimeo.com/1088943635

The threads that run through my explorations are fibres that await the soft structure of the loom.

I guess I started by thinking about weaving and language. Weaving as language, language as weaving.

"A line associated with other lines"

Vicuña, C. (1996) *Word and Thread*. Edinburgh: Morning Star Publications

This is my warp, the conceptual framework underpinning my enquiry.

My weft, the fibres that are interwoven with my warp, are disparate at first but (will) soon interlace to become a fabric of ideas and processes.

I begin this tapestry by looking at Joseph Jacquard. Specifically, the application of his punch cards for mechanised weaving.

Ephemeral and tactile in nature, punch cards are a primitive example of data storage, compression and organisation. A time-saving efficiency device: weaving by numbers,

or,

holes.

I punched holes in 100 sheets of paper, using Anni Albers' *On Weaving* as my pattern, as a meditation on this.

But, it sort of didn't mean anything, so I tried to make it mean something.

Holes are a type of binary. Hole = 1, no hole = 0. I translated this code through other logic systems, forming language from the absence of it.

"Computer code, made up of numbers—1s and 0s— can't possibly have any literary or aesthetic value.

Or can it?" Goldsmith, K. (2011) Uncreative Writing

Or can it?

Lines of binary code translated into latin characters and haphazard punctation marks appear as concrete poetry on the screen. What do the holes sound like as morse code? And what is the literary substance of the punched holes themselves?

These translations were meaningless and yet laborious. Hours applied to the keyboard on my computer. Translations that are of my hand, but rendered through a digital apparatus.

digital (adj)
borrowed from the Latin ***digitalis,*** from ***digitus,***
meaning ***"finger or toe"***.

Hoad, T. F., (1996) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*

So, in essence the human condition is to embody the

digital which “indicates the systematic ability to impose structure” (Tenen, D. 2017) on any medium, object or method.

“We have always been digital”

Tenen, D., (2017) *Literature Down to a Pixel.* Stanford University Press: California.

Thus weaving is digital, and so it is generative. The hand works within a system to create an outcome made up of discrete units. In this way, letterpress printing is also generative, and inherently digital.

Yarn and metal type are basic units of communication within these systems: they are the bits that knit together to form a whole. These processes are modes of translation; fibre into fabric, and prose into print.

bit (noun)
[computing]

unit of information in a computer that is either 0 or 1.

Oxford English Dictionary (2025)

I see these systems as informative of one another. I started by thinking about weaving as language; a dialogue between warp and weft, with sentences embodied as threads. But it also depends on language to exist.

If weaving is language, then what are the words behind the yarn? What is the syntax underpinning the threads?

Let's talk about draft notation for textile production.

Draft notation is a system of pattern making for textile work. Usually, a grid like structure contains lines of arranged symbols that the maker can follow to create a textile design. This could be for weaving, cross stitch, knitting, etcetera.

It is, essentially, an algorithm.

algorithm (noun)
a process or set of rules to be followed in problem-solving operations, especially by a computer.

Oxford English Dictionary (2025)

The *bittiness* or modularity of letterpress is akin to these grids, as Anthony Froshaug's book explores.

Froshaug, A. (1964) ***Typographic Norms***. Birmingham: The Kynoch Press

So letterpress becomes a method for data visualisation, a pattern processor, that can be endlessly re-interpreted and translated into fibre.

"…the Analytical Engine weaves algebraical patterns just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves"

Lovelace, A. & Babbage, C (1843) *Note A* in *Sketch of The Analytical Engine Invented by Charles Babbage*

But what is the data I am visualising? And, firstly, how does the data become visual?

The Veranda of Floating Threads, by Christel Vesters and RNDR, visualises a set of essays [i.e. data] about traditional Ghanaian Kente cloth as binary coded patterns using the Huffman Coding system.

Vesters, C. & RNDR (2021) ***The Veranda of Floating Threads***. Amsterdam: The Palace of Typographic Masonry.

The what??
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??

The Huffman Coding system is a **lossless compression technique** that assesses the frequency of **reoccurring characters in a string**, and assigns code values accordingly.

BBC Bitesize (2025) *Huffman Coding and Huffman Trees*

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It allows for the assignment of a **value** [binary, images or symbols] to characters in a set of text, according to how many times that character occurs.

BBC Bitesize (2025) *Huffman Coding and Huffman Trees*

OK.....

The code values are formulated through the construction of a **Huffman Tree**, which visualises the data set as component parts according to their frequency.

BBC Bitesize (2025) *Huffman Coding and Huffman Trees*

So, after you have built the tree and assigned values to each character, you have an encoded alphabet that is ready for digital processing.

The code in The Veranda of Floating Threads looks familiar to me…

Draft Notation for weaving, Anni Albers (2018) from *On Weaving*

By processing text in this way, I can effectively create a pattern for textile work by becoming a human computer. I can work generatively; intaking data, processing it and translating it into an outcome through the work of the hand.

So again, to rewind, what is the data I am visualising?

Cecilia Vicuña's work Word and Thread (1996) is a poetic interpretation of weaving practice and its interrelation with language.

Vicuña, C. (1996) *Word and Thread*. Edinburgh: Morning Star Publications

Could I translate this using the Huffman Coding system in order to create a pattern that can then be woven from, thus forming a cyclical relationship between text, code and weaving?

Yes!!!

Then bits become type…

And type becomes pattern…

From which tapestry can be made.

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