

Unraveling Narratives: Animated Documentary as Embodied Knowledge



Introduction

UNraveling Narratives explores how animated documentary can emerge not from representation, but from relation. Rooted in the collaborative installation [UNravel](#), developed with the [Women's Skills Development Organization in Nepal \(WSDO\)](#), [Studio Film 9](#) and [Kim Noce](#), reflects on how stories can be woven, not told; how knowledge can be gestural, material, and shared.

Through tapestry, augmented reality, and music and interviews, [UNravel](#) opens a space for situated knowing that resists smoothness, celebrates fragmentation, and honours the labour of hands, memory, and unfinishedness.

Grounded in feminist, decolonial, and ecological thinking, this is not a report on a project — it is the project thinking through itself.

Knowledge is not something we extract, own, or archive. It is something we participate in, shape, and are shaped by, again and again, in each small act of care, each story told, each thread woven.

"Participation is not a choice but a condition of existence."
Barad (2007, p. 392)

Content

1. Ways of Being

[1A. We Begin with a Thread](#)
(The Fabric of Making)

[1B. Images That Don't Explain](#)
(The Form of the Image)

[1C. Knowledge Has Hands](#)
(The Practice of Witnessing)

2. Ways of Perceiving

[2A. The Loom is Not Neutral](#)
(The Fabric of Making)

[2B. This Carpet is a Score](#)
(The Form of the Image)

[2C. Resisting Smoothness](#)
(The Practice of Witnessing)

3. Ways of Growing

[3A. Weaving is Listening](#)
(The Fabric of Making)

[3B. Memory Wears Through the Skin](#)
(The Form of the Image)

[3C. The Story Is Not the Ending](#)
(The Practice of Witnessing)

Anagram

This piece draws its structure from Maya Deren's *An Anagram of Ideas* on Art, Form and Film. Each of the nine entries forms a node in a larger conceptual weave, corresponding to three overarching themes (1, 2, 3) and three modes of attention (A, B, C) to map tapestry, animation, and documentary as embodied knowledge.

The process:

1. **Ways of Being:** How we begin, relate, and make kin.
2. **Ways of Perceiving:** How knowledge is shaped through visual, material, and sensorial forms.
3. **Ways of Growing:** How making unfolds in unfinished, entangled futures.

The Mediums of practice:

- A. **The Fabric of Making** (Tapestry): Touch, tension, repetition, and rhythm.
- B. **The Form of the Image** (Animation): Fragmentation, gesture, atmosphere, and screen.
- C. **The Practice of Witnessing** (Documentary): Situated knowledge, imperfection, and relational truth.

Each section is written as a reflection that can stand alone or be read in any order. The logic is not progression, but constellation.

1. Ways of Being

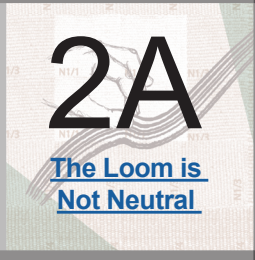
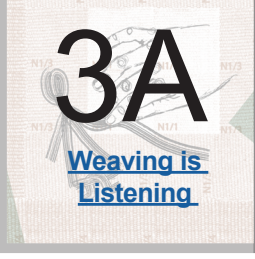
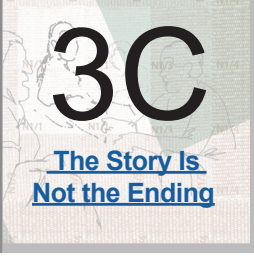
2. Ways of Perceiving

3. Ways of Growing

A. The Fabric of Making

B. The Form of the Image

C. The Form of the Image

 1A <u>We Begin with a Thread</u>	 1B <u>Images That Don't Explain</u>	 1C <u>Knowledge Has Hands</u>
 2A <u>The Loom is Not Neutral</u>	 2B <u>This Carpet is a Score</u>	 2C <u>Resisting Smoothness</u>
 3A <u>Weaving is Listening</u>	 3B <u>Memory Wears Through the Skin</u>	 3C <u>The Story Is Not the Ending</u>

1A. We Begin with a Thread

[UNravel](#) began not with a concept, but with circumstance: I found myself unexpectedly in Nepal during lockdown, in a moment between plans, in a place I hadn't intended to be. This in-between became an opening. In Pokhara, I met the [Women's Skills Development Organization in Nepal \(WSDO\)](#), and from the first shared cup of tea, something held — an invitation, a thread.

It was not a project then. It was listening.

It was [Ramkali Khadka](#) speaking of lives rewoven after trauma through the rhythm of a back-strap loom. It was the quiet labour of hands and time. I did not know what we were making. I only knew that I was being asked to sit with stories — to wait, to learn by proximity. That is how UNravel began: not by formulating a research question, but by unravelling the idea that one must begin with answers.

Donna Haraway writes, “Kin is an assembling sort of enduring fabric” (Haraway, 2016, p. 103). This kind of kinship is what grew between us — weavers, animators, sound artists, and technologies — not through definition, but through repetition, through weaving and being woven into each other's methods. We made-with, across practice, language, and tradition.

Knowledge, in this project, was not extracted. It emerged — from the warp and weft of relation, and from the decision to follow the thread where it wanted to go.



1B. Images That Don't Explain

In UNravel, animation is not deployed to illustrate or explain. The images do not resolve. They drift, pulse, disappear. They are echoes of gestures, not reconstructions of events. They are not factual; they are atmospheric. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “There is no story that is not fragmented” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 145). In the fragmented image, we invite viewers not to grasp, but to dwell.

The AR sequences embedded in each tapestry are not fixed translations of narrative content — they are sensorial, partial, and embodied extensions. The animated form hovers over the material, resists finality, and returns to the body what the body remembers.

Here I am guided by Maya Deren’s insistence that the image in film is not bound to description, but to rhythm, to duration, to motion that is meaningful beyond syntax. William Burroughs’ cut-up logic, too, has haunted this process — a nonlinear stitching that breaks language into flesh. And Barad reminds us: “Participation is not a choice but a condition of existence” (Barad, 2007, p. 392).

These images do not tell; they activate. They are not evidence, but invocation.



1C. Knowledge Has Hands

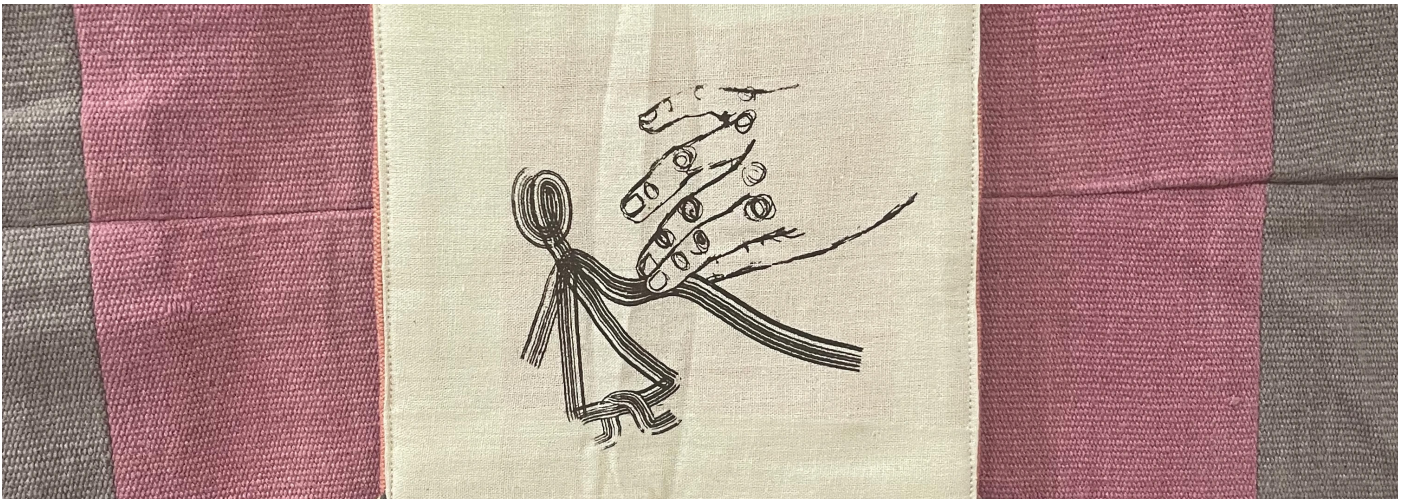
Knowledge in UNravel does not float above the process. It is in the process. It is in the fingertips calloused by years of loom tension. It is in the repetitive gesture, in the slow return, in the posture held for hours. It is in the soft refusal to separate thought from motion, reflection from labour.

This is not accidental. It is epistemology grounded in touch. Lilly Irani, writing on design labour, notes how innovation often hides the very hands that build it, erasing the relational knowledge systems embedded in making (Irani, 2019, p. 11). In UNravel, there is no such disavowal. The hands are not illustrative — they are central.

When we embedded AR into woven symbols, we were not adding layers of information. We were responding to what was already there. The technology did not lead. It followed. It followed the shape of the thread, the rhythm of the loom, the memory stored in gesture.

Sara Ahmed writes, “The work you do to know is part of the knowledge” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 27). This holds true here. Knowing was in the collaborative building, in the daily adjustment, in the tension between old and new, cloth and code, silence and sound. We did not document a truth. We wove one.

To work this way is to accept that clarity may not come in declarative sentences, but in collective acts. Acts that do not stand apart from theory, but are theory made tangible.



2A. The Loom is Not Neutral

The back-strap loom is a political site. It is a tool, yes — a method for weaving — but it is also a structure of memory, of lineage, and of survival. In the hands of the women at WSDO, it becomes something more: a refusal. A soft, continuous defiance against the erasures of extractive economies, colonial infrastructures, and developmental narratives that often frame making as backwards, or value only the output, not the practice.

Every woven line in UNravel is a gesture toward what Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes as “the right to tell our own stories, in our own ways” (Smith, 2012, p. 143). This is not a loom of neutrality; it is dense with intention, tradition, resistance.

Materials in this context are not passive. They carry. They insist. Jane Bennett calls this the “vibrant matter” of things — the capacity of materials to participate in meaning-making (Bennett, 2010, p. 17). The loom is not only used; it co-directs. The fibre has memory, tension, and resistance. It shapes the hand as much as the hand shapes it.

And so, the loom in UNravel becomes not simply a device for producing cloth, but an epistemological partner. It is where women who had once been silenced spoke — not necessarily with words, but through pattern, repetition, and the embodied discipline of weaving.



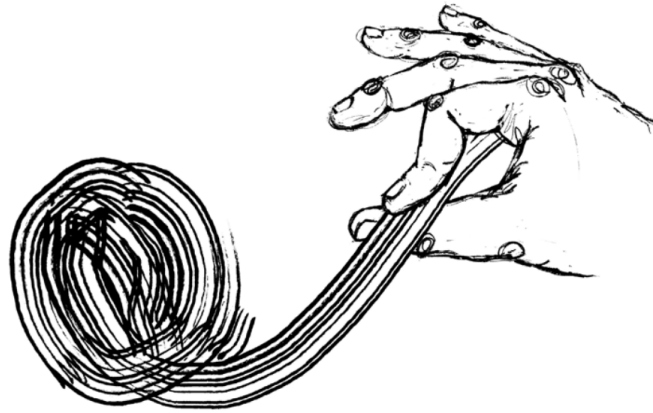
2B. This Carpet is a Score



1. **Install** the Artive app



2. **View** the artwork through your smartphone



[Animation AR Showcase Link](#)

2C. Resisting Smoothness

There is a tendency in digital culture — particularly within design and animation — to celebrate seamlessness. Smooth transitions. Polished surfaces. Optimised flow. But UNravel resists this aesthetic. It holds onto the friction. It makes room for the bump, the scratch, the misalignment.

Karen Barad's quantum theory of entanglement tells us that the boundaries we perceive — between body and object, self and other, material and digital — are not fixed but enacted. "Boundaries do not sit still," she writes. "They are not unchanging fixtures but iterative reconfigurings of spatiality and temporality" (Barad, 2007, p. 137).

In the AR layers of UNravel, we did not correct the irregularities of thread or polish the drawings into digital perfection. We allowed the grain of the textile to interrupt the scan. We left the animations porous. The experience is not cinematic — it is relational, partial, and occasionally glitchy. And in that glitch, a new kind of truth is made visible.

This is what Sheena Wilson might call "ecological thinking" — not only in terms of sustainability, but in recognising interdependence, fragility, and situatedness as knowledge systems (Wilson et al., 2017, p. 5). The work resists flattening. It holds the crease.

Smoothness might be beautiful. But friction is honest.



3A. Weaving is Listening

In the space of weaving, something quieter than speech takes place. Sitting beside the women at WSDO, what I learned was not primarily verbal. It was rhythm, gesture, pause. Weaving, in this project, was never background activity. It was the conversation. A movement of time held in tension and repetition — a space where listening does not always mean hearing.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that storytelling is a decolonial method not because it speaks louder, but because it listens differently (Smith, 2012, p. 146). What emerged through UNravel was not simply story, but relation — the sense of co-habiting a space of making where translation was incomplete, but intimacy was not.

Weaving, like storytelling, is not linear. It overlaps, returns, skips, stretches. It is in this form — unfinished, looping — that the women's stories emerged. And it is in this way that they were animated: not fixed in narrative, but suspended in gesture.

As Diana Taylor writes, “Embodied memory, because it is performed, is also vulnerable to change and forgetting” (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). In this vulnerability lies the power of weaving — not to archive, but to recall through the body. To make remembering an action, not a possession.



3B. Memory Wears Through the Skin

Touch leaves a trace — not always visible, but always felt. In UNravel, memory is not stored in archives or indexes; it is held in cloth, in fibres that stretch and soften over time. The animated image overlays the textile, but never erases it. It is skin upon skin.

This is not metaphor. As Sara Ahmed reminds us, “The skin remembers; it is a memory that is lived” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 22). The stories shared by the women of WSDO do not sit on the surface of these works — they are part of the weave, part of the wear.

What we call ‘augmented reality’ in UNravel is less an addition and more a pressure — a soft insistence that memory lives in material, and that seeing is never separate from feeling.

These tapestries are not static. They have been carried, sewn, scanned, touched by hundreds of hands. The digital layer is fleeting, but the cloth endures. That endurance is the body’s own kind of memory — performative, fallible, and sensuous.

Ahmed goes further: “To live a feminist life is to turn toward what is difficult” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 27). In this project, the cloth holds that difficulty, without smoothing it away. Memory here is not just kept — it is borne



3C. The Story Is Not the Ending

To call UNravel a finished work would be to miss its point. The project is a practice, a process, a proposal — one that is still unfolding. It continues to evolve through exhibitions, community dialogues, and new translations of its AR layers. Each time it is shared, it changes.

This fluidity is not a lack of definition. It is a choice. As Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “A story that is told never finishes” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 148). In UNravel, the stories of the women weavers are not captured and concluded. They remain open — present as vibration, as breath, as texture.

What we wove together is not a testimony, but a terrain. A landscape where gestures are knowledge, where every viewer enters differently, and where endings are always beginning something else.

Donna Haraway invites us to “stay with the trouble” — to remain with the complexity, to hold the messy tangle of histories and futures in one hand without trying to cut through it (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). UNravel does not resolve. It offers a space where knowing is never complete, and where unfinishedness becomes a form of ethical relation.

This, perhaps, is the story’s work: not to deliver meaning, but to make space for meaning to continue.



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