

*Weaving bridges:
Understanding the
self, family, and
tradition through
textile art*



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is coincidental.

To my mother, my grandmothers,
and the women before them.

Preface

In writing a thesis for a bachelors degree in art, the choice of narrative form is often as crucial as the subject matter itself. In writing my thesis, I decided to depart from the conventional academic style, and opted for storytelling. Let me try to explain why, by sharing a story.

Two years ago, while engrossed in my project titled "Sexism Diary," a collaborative endeavour involving 20 participants who documented instances of sexism over a two-week period, I faced a probing question from a professor: "Why you? Why should you be the one addressing this subject?" The question got me by surprise. I felt like I needed to explain, maybe defend myself, and I was resistant in doing so.

As I grappled with these feelings, the question persisted. I needed to find an answer, but mostly for myself now. To do so, I delved into personal and familial narratives,

discovering stories from my past, some more revealing than others.

This process of discovering stories provided some insights: 1. Stories are powerful tools for understanding oneself and artistic inclinations. 2. My artwork is a part of me since it draws from my personal experiences and the compilation of stories that tie my human experience together. 3. To keep unveiling these stories is integral to my self-understanding and artistic expression. Approaching my graduation year, a time demanding a clear articulation of my artistic motivations, storytelling felt not only right but essential.

But beyond serving as a tool for personal exploration, I believe stories possess the power to stir the reader's inner life, too. My goal is not mere persuasion; to simply list my ideas and try to convince the reader about them. But to let them empathise with the human context from which they arise - the emotions, the struggles, and the realities that form the core of those narratives.

The story you find in this book is not a strict autobiography, it is not about me, neither is it a literal

account of anyone's else story. It is a work of fiction, yet it is infused with my memories and insights. It explores the feminine lineage of a family, and some ideas I have about feminism, hidden and unofficial knowledge, art, and craft. The protagonist inherits her grandmother's house and unearths family history through the lens of textile processes. This narrative mirrors my own journey as a 10-year immigrant, who seeks her roots and tries to connect with the women who preceded me through art.

Creating this fictional narrative provided the freedom to explore my interests intuitively and influenced my artistic approach. Rather than starting with a concept, I embraced a body-first movement, allowing material exploration to precede conceptual analysis. This perspective helped me increase my trust in my practice and let it unfold as an experiential journey informed by my overall human experience, stories and quests.

Introduction

In this thesis, theoretical discourse is interwoven with a fictional narrative, creating a blend of scholarly analysis and creative storytelling. This exploration seeks to navigate the intersection between abstract theoretical concepts and the emotional intricacies, the realities and situations of a fictional character and a fictional world.

Departing from traditional academic frameworks, the following pages experiment with a discourse that combines discursive narrative with fictional storytelling to offer a unique perspective on the subjects it deals with.

As the narrative unfolds, readers are guided through a parallel reality where theoretical frameworks serve as both analytical tools and interpretive lenses for understanding the characters' experiences and emotions.

The intent is to foster a symbiotic relationship between discursive and fictional elements, shedding light on theoretical concepts while grounding them in relatable human stories. This approach aims to utilize the narrative

form to humanize and elucidate theoretical ideas, providing an alternative lens through which to examine the complex interplay between intellectual inquiry and imaginative expression.

As we embark on this exploration, the conventional boundaries between theory and fiction are deliberately blurred, inviting readers to engage with ideas in a manner that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant. In line with Barthes' view on text and his idea that the pleasure of the text arises not solely from understanding, but from the continual active engagement with it, that goes beyond interpretation.

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Chapter 1: The inheritance

I woke up with a terrible headache, the restless throb in my temples urging me to seek relief. By reflex, I raised a hand to my aching head.

“Touch can ease the pain a little bit”, Marika, my grandmother used to say; a distant memory, a fragile thread.

Though I hardly believed in its curative power, I cherished the moments I was wrapped into her care. Besides, they were rare.

Turning to my side, I hoped for some extra sleep to avoid having to resort to chemistry. But the morning light and the chorus of village life bursting in through the broken shutter wouldn't make it easy.

Amidst the recent madness of the funeral preparations, I hadn't had the time to repair it yet. But, as it seemed, this house - which I knew till now as my grandmother's house - was now mine to tend to.

My grandmother passed away two weeks ago, peacefully in her sleep on a Saturday. Determined not to be an inconvenience, not even in her death, she left as quietly as possible - no hospitals, no weekdays, no big fuss. My aunt, who had been living with her for the past year, found her; peacefully at rest, her hands crossed.

I couldn't help but wonder if she had been dreaming of holding someone else's hand when she died.

The aftermath had unfolded with mechanical precision. My family and I made sure the news were sufficiently spread among the rest of the family, packed a few essentials and embarked on the long journey to Marika's remote village in the northern

reaches of Greece. A place situated some forty miles from the nearest city and an eight-hour drive from Athens.

Little wonder our visits during my childhood were so sparse. Marika herself would brave the bus trip only in special occasions or absolute emergencies, never concealing her disdain for long bus rides.

Yet, she would still be there. You see, she was a caregiver, a commitment she had undertaken very young through an arranged marriage with my grandfather - long gone, I 'd never met him.

She had six children in total, the first two didn't make it to their second year. Events she often narrated with certain detachment, I felt, as though describing scenes of a distant play. She always gave me the impression of someone very pragmatic, responsible and true to her obligations, yet emotionally reserved and distant.

All her four living children were present at the funeral, together with the rest of her kin - about a hundred people coming together for a bittersweet ceremony.

She was buried in her favourite knitted cardigan, woven from her own hands, wore on special occasions. A fitting choice, since knitted cloth, unlike woven, can mould and take many shapes¹, can be stretched to the body's curves and in this case to the body's swelling. A fabric synonymous with comfort and ease to accompany her in the last journey.

After all, knitting had been her daily companion. Being easy to put down and pick up, she would carry her little bag of knitting tools everywhere, and with

¹ Goett, S. (2010). Linking threads of experience and lines of thought: everyday textiles in the narration of the self.

the first opportunity she would unravel the endlessly continuous yarn and knit the infinity².

As a child, I cherished many objects handcrafted by her. Knitted dolls, scarfs, jumpers, a big red woollen sock I would hang by the fireplace on Christmas Eve.

But my favourite was a blue woollen knitted blanket and the secret refuge I would find under it, counting the endless twists and turns. I would let it fall heavy on my face, its soft touch on my nose, the bedroom light escaping through the tiny loops forming stars on this engulfing dark sky. And then I would lift the blanket up with my hands, lifting the whole sky like another Atlas, when the world was lightweight and warm. When every loop was a star and every star was a fragment of me and my people around me, my whole universe intersecting and connecting on that blue knitted surface.

² Kraft, Kerstin, 2004. Textile patterns and their epistemological functions. *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 2 (3), pp. 274 – 289, page 7.

They say knitting has therapeutic properties- a remedy to the wear and tear of the fabric of time and the pressure that comes with it, a source of well-being³.

Similarly, crocheting, with its interlocking loops transcends handiwork and emerges as a metaphor to forming connections - both with oneself and with others. The single hoop of crocheting, in particular, allowed this technique to extend even beyond art and esotericism and reach mathematical abstraction.

When I was studying hyperbolic geometry, our professor at the time shared a TEDx talk by Daina Taimina, who unveiled the synergy between needlework, and specifically crochet, and the visualisation of hyperbolic space, which had been an enigma to the whole mathematician's community for a

³ Büsch, O. (2013). Zen and the Abstract Machine of Knitting. *Textile-the Journal of Cloth & Culture*, 11(1), 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175183513x13588738654774>

whole century. As hyperbolic space stretches outwards, its lines defy their initial distance, as the place curves and increases and curves again⁴.

It is fascinating how needlework proved to be an embodied way of knowing that little piece of the world, and how such a conceptual complexity has been practiced for hundreds of years by illiterate grandmas like mine before the connection between the two was discovered.

To the point of Haraway, there are “knowledges ruled by partial sight and limited voice” that make unexpected connections and openings possible. Knowledges situated within a community that are not

⁴ Wertheim, Margaret, 2004. Crocheting the hyperbolic plane: an interview with David Henderson and Daina Taimina. Cabinet: A Quarterly of Art and Culture [ONLINE] Winter 2004/5 16. Available at: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/16/crocheting.php>

necessarily acknowledged by the scientific epistemology, or just not yet⁵.

It was so unexpected; her death, the funeral, the will.

I didn't have the time to process my emotions, sliding down a hyperbolic crochet surface. Would I actually miss her?

Her sudden absence pushed repressed and unuttered thoughts to the surface. Had her affections ever been anything more than mere obligation? A doubt that wouldn't let me mourn her loss. A feeling that I never got to know her true essence, hidden behind a veil of deliberate obscurity.

Whenever I had asked about her life or simply her perspective on things, she would mutter something

⁵ Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>

vague and diverted to ordinary subjects, like a recipe or my dietary habits.



The neighbour's agitated cow mirrored my own mood, I thought, as I finally crawled out of bed and got down the creaky wooden stairs.

This marked the first night I had spent in the house alone since my arrival for the funeral. Though the house was now technically mine, it still didn't feel as such. I was a stranger here, a transient guest. Marika's presence lingered in every corner, a spectral tapestry interwoven with memories.

Yet, there was no other place right now I could truly call "home."

I had left my parents' house at seventeen to study abroad, driven by the notion that the farther I would

go, the better it would be. Although the academic path I managed to secure in Economics diverted from my aspiration of Physics, it sufficed for its pragmatic purpose - to grant me my independence, which was my one and only metrics for personal success at the time.

So, I had moved to the new city, rented an apartment with a fellow student, and got me a part time job in a local cafe. My parents had been covering the rent in the beginning, but I needed to be as self-sufficient as possible.

It actually had been fun for a couple of years, until I found out that piling up information you couldn't care less for could actually turn into a burden. The job got intense too, with an entitled manager and casually sexist clients. Each Monday I wanted to resign, yet I never did.

By the time I had finally graduated, I had grown to despise economics with every fibre of my being, hated

being an employee, and regretted my persistence on choices that didn't make me happy.

A week later, I moved back to Athens. After all those years of trying so hard not to fail, sleeping at my parents' couch with no clear prospects ahead, a pile of regrets, anger, and no money, felt exactly like one big and heavy disappointing failure.

Two weeks after that, my grandmother's death was added to the heap.

So, yeah, staying at her house - or, well, my house now - seemed like the best option at that moment.

Chapter 2: Echoes

As I entered the kitchen, memories of the past came rushing back and interweaving.

My mother standing by the kitchen window, a few days ago, heavy hearted and mourning. I walked towards her and pulled the curtains. “I never made up with her”, she had said and kept staring outside the window.

I turned to look at her but she had already vanished. Now, the two of them were sitting at the kitchen table sipping their morning black coffee, each one so absorbed in their own occupation, my mother in her laptop, my grandma in her embroidery.

Subsumed in silence, acknowledging each other's existence while flowing through their own unique separate channels, two parallel lines.

Will they ever meet?

From my point of view, this doesn't seem likely. But if space is indeed hyperbolic, shouldn't they?

This mother and her daughter across the dinner table, two worlds apart, reflections of two contrasting generations.

The mother, a caregiver. Devoted to her family, to the significant others. A nurturing figure, constantly engaging in acts of service. Yet, only in a practical and pragmatic way. A bit detached, a little aloof.

The daughter, an independent, career and success driven woman. Determined to flip patriarchy 180 degrees, she studied and earned her equal position in a male-dominated industry. Thriving in social occasions, the world has been her show stage.

De Beauvoir's discourse⁶ offered a prism to understand both of them through, the shared narratives of women from the first and second wave of feminism.

The first being historically oppressed, treated as the "other" in patriarchal societies. I could see those in Marika's face. The pre-arranged marriage, the suppression of a maternal grief in the face of duty, the relentless domestic toil, limited educational opportunities, limited opportunities whatsoever. Their vital struggle had meant legal reforms and securing rights, paving the way for their daughters to reclaim their subjectivity and assert their own narratives. Those who would deconstruct traditional roles for the first time and challenge patriarchal systems to their core. I could see those in my mother's face. The assertiveness, the leadership position.

⁶ De Beauvoir, S., & Parshley, H. M. (1949). The second sex. <https://cds.cern.ch/record/2728998>

And then is me, the third generation - or even maybe fourth. Standing at an equal distance from both. Will I spiral out?⁷

I am not simply an observer. A distant and detached viewer of their characters and lives. I carry them both. My mother's absence and her words. My grandmother's silence and her gestures. What was our relationship like? A loose thread in the tapestry of my life. One I would occasionally tuck in a lax loop, but with movement it would soon unfasten once again. It had a gritty feeling like raw, unprepared canvas, leaving me lonely and confused.

They both had agreed to their in-between distance, to keep floating on this surface. But I hadn't. No, I had not agreed.

⁷ Reference to the the logarithmic ratio that is based on the golden isosceles triangle. Wikipedia contributors. (2023, August 31). *Golden triangle (mathematics)*. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_triangle_\(mathematics\)#:~:text=The%20golden%20triangle%20is%20uniquely,72%C2%B0%2C%2072%C2%B0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_triangle_(mathematics)#:~:text=The%20golden%20triangle%20is%20uniquely,72%C2%B0%2C%2072%C2%B0)).

I hurried towards the table to shout it out to their ears, to let them hear me out loud and clear that I do not consent to this silence.

As my hand landed forcefully on the wooden surface with a thump, I was met with a deep hush and they had both disappeared. I kept standing there for one long moment, in the “between” space.

Hanging like window sheer drapes, grasping its edges but not framing it. Letting all their ideas go in and through, go in and out. Moving with the wind, shining through. Stood there for a long moment, at the crossroads of heritage.

Suddenly the room felt stifling and dim, and a morning stroll in search of coffee and food seemed a great idea. Outside, the sun had already risen, the perfect excuse to hide behind a pair of dark sunglasses.



The village's sole bakery, a mere 400 meters away, summoned me with the aromas of freshly baked sourdough bread and pastries. I ordered coffee and a simple koulouri; my stomach was not yet ready for complexity.

Mrs Toula, the master chef of this bakery, persisted in her duties despite her probably being up and running since the very early morning hours.

"I was hoping you 'd come by, Zoe. Good morning. Otherwise I would have come by the house later to bring you those", she seemed quite edgy I thought. So, I wasn't the only one this morning. She handed me a cloth bag with several objects, pretty random at first glance.

"Some incense, an incense burner, a lighter, some candles, and a bag of sand". I guess she noticed my confusion cause she went on explaining.

"It's for your grandmother's resting place. Behind every grave, there is a little door, you can simply place

them there for now. Your aunt will know what to do with those in her next visit. You know, it's good for the dead's soul to light a candle a bit more often. Especially in the beginning, until they make peace with the new situation."

I guess I could figure out myself what to do with a lighter and a candle. It used to bother me when older people treated me as an ignorant child, but not this morning. I was just glad for her clear instructions; if only she could tell me what to do with my life too.

"I understand. Thank you Mrs Toula, I'll see to it that a candle is lit at grandma's grave."

I was out the door before she started chattering.

Although in the opposite direction of the house, I was walking with purpose down the road leading out of the village. Yes, I had promised to light a candle in Marika's grave, but not immediately. Yet, given my proximity to the site, "I suppose now is a good time".

The cemetery lay at the end of a pathway that diverged from the main road, twisted and turned through wheat fields. At this season, the wheats reached my waist and snakes were pretty common, I was pacing lightly and slowly, a cautious stride. It was a peaceful Sunday morning, even snakes are probably lazy today.

The cemetery itself was pretty small, around 50 graves, all oriented towards the sun. Marika's and her husband's were the only ones residing beneath the pine tree; its cool shade was very useful at the moment. Their common grave, a striking marble structure with an elegant brass cross in the middle.

Her photo wasn't that flattering really, but she looked content wearing a big smile in her wrinkled face, her long black dress, a black and white scarf in the head - it must have been a Sunday, a church day, like today -, hunching forward and leaning on her crook. I wondered what had happened after the photo

was taken - how long did the smile last and when did the pain in her knees raise a comment?

I found that small door Mrs Toula had described at the back of the grave, spread the sand at the bottom of the cabinet, then lit a candle and affixed it to this sand bed.

To ensure the task was done, I lit up some essence and let it burn slowly in the essence burner. I thought I 'd wait for it to burn completely while I'd have my coffee and breakfast. Seated beneath the tree, I rested my head heavy on its trunk.

There was a light breeze making the fields around move in a slow dance, like seaweed in an underwater wave. I was standing in front of Marika's grave with a big sewing needle in my right hand and a fish hovering a few inches above the ground next to me, tied to my left hand's small finger with a golden thread. I bent over to get a silk thread from the fish's mouth, *did it cut it from the field?*, and got it through the

needle hole. Then fell on my knees and started mending a little crack on grandma's marble grave. When I finished the patch I made a little knot and the fish cut the remaining thread with its mouth. I couldn't leave the knot like that, though, it would be an ugly finishing to my needle work. I used the lighter to burn the knot, and the whole thread melted into a river of gold.



I must have slept for quite some time cause the sun was now up high, the coffee was cold and the bread roll has fallen pray to a bird and an army of ants. I made sure nothing was burning any more, tucked it all carefully in the little cabinet and went back home.

After opening all windows and doors to let some fresh air break into the interior's stuffy atmosphere, I

rolled up my sleeves and put some pasta to boil. I was starving.

Marika had tons of homemade noodles in the cupboards, together with jars of tomato sauce, flour, lentils and beans. Her kitchen was fully equipped, she was absolutely active until her last day. Onions, garlic, potatoes, different spices and dried herbs, including cloves, cardamon, oregano, thyme.

I kept opening and closing the cupboards one after the other.

Every cabinet and every drawer a portal to Marika's life, to her thoughts and experiences. Every piece collected, a fragment of her reality. The ribbon drawer with all kinds of residual pieces to be potentially used in a future event. The silk towel drawer to be opened only in special occasions. The kitchen cloth drawer, probably the most frequently visited drawer on the kitchen cabinetry. The junk drawer - quite a familiar one - a place for all those

objects that didn't exactly fit anywhere else. A drawer-station, where things come and go, their purpose undecided.

Collecting and organising objects is a window into the world, a way to perceive it and gather its floating meanings, juxtaposing them to potentially form a new, unique narrative, make associations, make sense. A way to distort reality by grasping things out of their conventional settings and their customary connections⁸. The space where objects valued, desired, remnants of a memory, objects to be used later in an unforeseen future - all piled together.

But it's also an endeavour to deal with time, maybe try to stop its passing. The drawer takes the role of the gatekeeper of time, granting access to the past, suspending the present and protecting the future. By

⁸ Benjamin, Walter. Unpacking my library. In: Arendt, Hannah ed., 1999. Illuminations. Translated from German by Harry Zorn, London: Pimlico, pp. 61 – 69.

opening a drawer, memory becomes tangible, past experience is relived⁹.

Lifting the kettle from the stove, I drained the pasta, setting aside two cups of the cooking water. Chopped some fresh parsley from the garden, an onion, a slice of garlic and threw them in the pan to frizzle. Added the fresh tomato sauce from the jar, gave it a minute, then added the pasta water, salt, pepper and oregano. Let it cook for a moment.

It was remarkable how stuffed this place was. All those furniture with so many objects in, on and around them. What was I supposed to do with all that? A week had passed already since the funeral and I had only managed a tiny portion of the amount of work needed to be done here. I had cleaned and organised the stable, readied the farming tools for sale, but kept the ones useful for the garden. I had emptied and

⁹ Bergson, H. (1896). *Matter and memory*. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA76430882>

boxed the closets too, prepared all Marika's clothes to be donated. Next on the list was the storage space upstairs, the cabinets and the attic.

I hurriedly searched for a tablecloth as the food was almost ready to be served. But instead I found something else among the neatly stacked linen inside the old chest.

It was a book!

Probably an antique, its hardcover aged to a greenish-black hue, adorned with a striking gold stitch along its spine. It bore the unmistakable air of a novel from another century, maybe the 1800s. I was thrilled! Books usually had that impression on me, but really old books gave me chills. I closed my eyes trying to picture the inside and made a silent wager with myself that the typeface would certainly be tiny. To my astonishment, when I cracked it open, the book fell wide apart into two halves. And in the centre- an unexpected revelation; a hollow void in the heart of

the book! A substantial cut through the middle of the tome, a secret hole. Concealing a stash of money.

My first impulsive thought was that this was an act of vandalism, a reckless damage of a sacred vessel of knowledge, of the embodiment of human intellect, of the portal of collective wisdom for generations. How could anyone do this?

Yet, it felt more complex than that, layered with meanings and associations.

What if this was a statement? An act of rebellion against established forms and sources of knowledge¹⁰. Against the status quo that deems certain forms of knowledge superior to others. A silent subversion to traditional and old narratives orchestrated by the perfect perpetrator, the illiterate grandma. One of the most unseen, vulnerable and often marginalised in society, due to the compounded effects of age, gender

¹⁰ Goett, S. (2010). Linking threads of experience and lines of thought: everyday textiles in the narration of the self

and illiteracy. Economically dependent and susceptible to neglect.

But neither of the factors that lead to her potential marginalisation are inherent weaknesses, regardless of how much we were wired to believe, but systemic injustices that perpetuate certain people's vulnerability. Till her last days, Marika was supported solely by family and friends, living out of the meagre farmer's pension. "I am just an illiterate grandma, what would I need more money for? These are enough".

"Illiterate", a label carrying connotations of being uneducated and uncultured. A diminishing label, lessening someone's worth as measured by someone's spectrum of knowledge.

And what is that notion of knowledge, anyway? A social construct, dynamic and multifaceted, intrinsically tied to the social and cultural context from

which it emerges, Haraway suggests¹¹. And with that standing opposite Russell or Nagel who believed in the idea of detached and objective knowledge as true knowledge. An idea that validates scientific knowledge, being objective, empirical and logical, as the most well-founded form of knowledge. Emerging from scientific methods that ensure its detachment from personal and cultural influences.

But absolute objectivity is a myth¹². Knowledge is shaped in specific historical contexts and influenced by the position and the perspective of the knower. Especially since knowledge production is being funded, it serves specific interests and biases. It has also been historically male-dominant, leading to many

¹¹ Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>

¹² Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>

theories, concepts and methods to be influenced by male-centric perspectives, which apart from ignoring the perspectives of any other non-male and further marginalising those, it creates and perpetuates over generations a distorted and incomplete understanding of the world¹³.

Fricker defined this as epistemic injustice, referring to how marginalised groups' perspectives have been excluded from knowledge production, either because their testimonies are not believed due to their identity, or because their experiences are misunderstood or not recognised¹⁴.

In this context, an illiterate person's, and more so an old, female, illiterate person's experiences and views are either addressed with some ephemeral and

¹³ Harding, S. (2016). *Whose science? whose knowledge?* <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501712951>

¹⁴ Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

shallow interest when randomly and accidentally encountered or entirely discarded and forgotten. Their views are considered “less” and they themselves ignorant, technologically incompetent, outdated, irrelevant, without critical thinking. Unless they are “old and wise” of course, when their views somehow resonate with the recipient’s perspective.

When exposed from this point of view, illiteracy is a product of a system that simply doesn’t acknowledge experiences and understandings that are different from its own, different from those understandings formulated in a western world lab by males¹⁵.

And the main tool to hold and transfer this knowledge, from which illiterate people are by definition excluded, are books. Being unable to read or write, the enclosed meanings within the text lines of the book remain unapproachable to them. All is left

¹⁵ Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum, New York

then is the book's mere physicality. Material undergone great craftsmanship to get to this current shape. Traditionally made from plant fabrics and animal skin, books are almost textile objects. Text and textile at the same time.

Text and textile have the same etymological root. The word "text" comes from the Latin word "textus" which is the past participle of "taxere" (to weave). The word "textile" is derived from the Latin "textilis" which means woven or fabric; both words tracing their origins to the idea of weaving and construction.

But they are more than linguistic parallels. The two concepts highlight the interconnectedness between language, narration and storytelling and the tangible world, craftsmanship and creativity.

Barthes, in "The pleasure of the text", invites us to explore this multifaceted nature of textuality, where the act of weaving extends beyond the literal to encompass the weaving of narratives and the

construction of meaning. In the patterns of language, we discover a parallel with the craftsmanship inherent in textiles¹⁶.

Barthes argues that the pleasure derived from the text is not solely in the transmission of information but in the sensual engagement with the text, much like the tactile experience of interacting with woven fabric. Just as a skilled weaver creates a textile masterpiece, the author, according to Barthes, crafts a textual creation that invites the reader to engage actively, to seek pleasure beyond mere interpretation.

Even though text has been established as the mainstream form of communication, textile was actually the first form of storing and transferring information and knowledge. In the pre-palaeolithic era, knots on ropes were used for remembering something,

¹⁶ Barthes, R. (1973). *The pleasure of the text*. <http://emberilmu.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/roland-barthes-the-pleasure-of-the-text.pdf>

constituting the first form of encoding, of forming an abstract code on material¹⁷.

Another example is the Inka's quipu (=knot) system, the oldest database, which is a method of calculation and social organisation based on knots. A non-alphabetic writing system that has not been deciphered yet, regardless of the advanced mathematical and statistical analyses available¹⁸. That is also a great proof that mathematical genius does exist beyond numerical literacy. People had to understand patterns, symmetry, and logarithms but they were probably not able to count to 10¹⁹.

¹⁷ Langlois, Ganaële (2017). Textiles as anti-media. Artist's talk in the symposium "Moment of Truth: for a Reasonable Ecology between the Media" organised by West den Haag. <https://www.westdenhaag.nl/thuistezien/91>

¹⁸ Day, C. L. (1967) Quipus and Witches' Knots: The Role of the Knot in Primitive and Ancient Cultures. Kansas Open Books.

¹⁹ Fricker, M. (2007). Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Later on, a global communication system was formed around the exchange of goods, such as silk and wool. Silk flowing from the east to the west, and wool moving the other way around. The Silk Route was a global and complex web of interconnected routes across Eurasia, facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, art, knowledge and culture.

Also, numerous cultures had used narrative textiles; that is textiles that convey a historical or mythological narrative, like the kuba cloth (Congo). Mary Nooter Roberts wrote about the storytelling aspects of Kuba textiles²⁰. Or the Bayeux Tapestry, an 11th century embroidery telling the story of the

²⁰ Roberts, M. N. (2017). The Inner Eye: vision and transcendence in African arts. *African Arts*, 50(1), 60–79. https://doi.org/10.1162/afar_a_00332

Norman conquest of England in 1066²¹. Or the Navajo weavings, the stories of which Whitherspoon and others tried to study²². The African American story quilts that tell everyday stories and studied by Eli Leon²³. The Hmong story cloths (Southeast Asia) used to tell the history of the Hmong people²⁴. The Indian Pichvais, a means of conveying hindu narratives in India.

These are but a few examples of how textiles have facilitated and served as a medium for communication within diverse social, historical and cultural contexts.

²¹ *Bayeux Tapestry - Visit of the Bayeux Tapestry - Bayeux Museum*. (2023, October 17). Bayeux Museum. <https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/en/the-bayeux-tapestry/>

²² Brady, M. K., & Witherspoon, G. (1981). Language and art in the Navajo Universe. *Ethno-musicology*, 25(1), 136. <https://doi.org/10.2307/850982>

²³ Wikipedia contributors. (2022, August 17). *Eli Leon*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eli_Leon

²⁴ Wikipedia contributors. (2023, October 23). *Hmong textile art*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hmong_textile_art

Which made me think of my grandmother, her academic illiteracy and her genius for embroidery, knitting, sewing and weaving. Proficiencies spanning a spectrum of textile processes.

Could this be her own way of storing and passing on her experiences and her knowledge, a tangible depository of memories - her own form of a diary?



Later in the evening my mother called to ask about the house's progress, but mostly to complain about her exhausting work day. Suddenly she paused, drew a deep breath, as if reaching a silent decision.

"Have you visited your grandma's attic yet?" she asked.

"No, not yet. In the coming days. Why?"

"Well", she finally exhaled, "I spoke with the lawyer this morning. She found an addition we missed

during the initial reading of the will. It reads *“The house goes to Zoe, the attic goes to Soul”*, with capital ‘S’.

“Hm, is Soul a person?”

“That’s the complication. If Soul is indeed a real person, then for the sake of legality we shouldn’t interfere with the attic at all, as it now belongs to them.”

“Did you ask aunt Stella about this?”

“I spoke with all of them but nobody knows. Your uncle believes it was your grandma’s dementia speaking.”

“When was this addition made?” I inquired further.

“Sometime during the past year,” my mother replied.

“Well, during the past year, grandma had already been diagnosed,” I noted.

“Yes, indeed. Most likely she was confused. Besides, Soul is not a common name and if it is a

nickname it could refer to anyone. Unless we have concrete evidence, either witnesses or written proof, that a specific physical person was known to your grandma as Soul, then this part of the will should be discarded and the attic reverts to the owner of the broader space in which it belongs, meaning yourself.”

“Okay, then. We have no way of knowing. I’ll check the attic tomorrow. Perhaps ‘Soul’ reveals itself? Maybe I find some written proof.”

“Good, alright. By the way, my dear, are you doing okay?”

“Yes mom, I’m fine.”

“Good, that’s what I wanted to hear. I’m turning in now; I have a busy day at court tomorrow.”

“Okay mom, sleep well.”

“Thank you honey, goodnight.”

Who on earth is Soul?

Chapter 3: A discovery

I was seated in a cross-legged position in a room that appeared disproportionately small, creating an illusion that I could easily reach the ceiling with my outstretched hands, had I raised them.

Maybe later, I thought, since I couldn't bring myself to release what I clenched so dearly- it felt precious, something I needed to protect. I gazed downward to find out that what I was holding was a fragment of cloud; resting heavily within my palms, as if on the verge of releasing a waterfall of rain.

I wasn't alone in the room.

Opposite me, where the room opened into a clearing, there was a girl working intently on a loom. It

was quite odd, the threads she wove- they were saturated with water, droplets tracing their path.

One of those extended from my side, connecting my cloud to her work. My gaze followed the rest of the threads as they extended outside the window.

Were they linked to clouds as well?

The sound of rainwater dripping through the broken shutter roused me from my sleep. Probably the remnants of a light summer storm, now fading away.

I turned over to escape the morning light.

My phone said it was only 7am, so I returned it to the nightstand, thinking I could sleep for one more hour. *Wait, was that box there last night? It had definitely skipped my attention.*

Still cocooned in the comfort of the bed, I took the tiny box in my hands, its size easily fitting within my open palm. It bore the marks of age, its tin exterior slightly rusted around the hinges, which emitted a

faint creak when I attempted to open it. It was a travel-sized sewing kit, complete with a couple of spools in basic colours -black and white-, and an assortment of needles in varying sizes.

I held my breath for a moment, trying to stay still.

I was around seven, wearing a pair of jeans, a pink shirt, a green woollen buttoned vest, and a neatly braided hairdo. We were preparing for an outing, though I can't remember where. But it must have been a special occasion, if I had been wearing that vest. To my young mind, that vest was synonymous to special occasions, making an appearance with it every time we ventured to the cinema. And every cinema visit was indeed extraordinary to me.

But as I buttoned it up that day, a button broke free sending me into a minor panic, fearing the loss of the beloved vest. Marika seized my hand and without saying a word she bade me to stand still as the

furniture. I obeyed, my eyes shifting awkwardly left to right as she extracted her sewing kit from her bag.

She sat in a small stool in front of me and with a few purposeful stitches she secured the button back to its place.

A seemingly trivial amount of stitches that was capable of instantly repairing my mood. In that moment, she fixed more than just a button on a shirt, confirming the thing's power.

It was worth mending²⁵ ²⁶.

A transformative interaction with the material, one that changes them and changes us, changes our views.

Mending is an act of care²⁷.

²⁵ Middleton, Jonnet (2012): 'Long Live the Thing! Temporal Ubiquity in a Smart Vintage Wardrobe' Ubiquity: The Journal of Pervasive Media, 1:1, 7-22.

²⁶ König, Anna (2013) "A Stitch in Time", *Culture Unbound*, Volume 5: 569–585.

²⁷ Goett, S. (2010). Linking threads of experience and lines of thought: everyday textiles in the narration of the self.

In a very physical experience of the notion.

By being time-consuming, focus-requiring and back-hurting.

What do I care for now? And how?

I was still disappointed at her for her emotional reserve, but memories like this one allowed me to perceive her in a new light.



I stood by the kitchen's open window, my gaze drawn to the vast meadow stretching out, crowned by rolling hills and mountains in the distance. Vibrant blues and greens bathed in the gentle light shyly emerging from behind the clouds. I inhaled deeply, all the earthly fragrance.

The morning coffee was brewing slowly on the stove, a slow and meditative process. It requires constant attention so to be removed right before it

starts boiling. As it now started to heat, the froth rose slowly to the top of the brick, signalling the coffee is almost ready. A few more moments and I'd remove it from the heat and into the serving cup.

The slowness of this place had started to grow on me and with every day passing by I was waking up earlier to enjoy a longer morning.

I'd have the coffee at the terrace on the living room side today, looking east, which was considered to be the backyard of the house.

The house itself had a simple layout, with a ground floor, an additional level and an attic. The kitchen and the living room coexisted in the ground floor, a small opening -once must have been a sliding door there - in between them.

The staircase leading upstairs was at the kitchen area, and tucked right behind it was a slightly detached bathroom, an addition made in later years. Upstairs were three rooms, two bedrooms and a

storage. The master bedroom had a balcony overlooking the surroundings, while the second served as the children's room.

Access to the attic, though, was a bit more adventurous, as the foldable stairs required a careful unfolding and descent using a rope. A somewhat dangerous endeavour, especially for a woman my grandma's age, which made me wonder what was the last time she actually got up there.

I was getting increasingly curious about what I was going to find in the attic, and what or who was this mysterious "Soul" to whom it supposedly belonged?



A couple of hours later I was climbing that wobbly, foldable staircase up the attic and got immediately struck by the unexpected size of the space.

It extended in a long, rectangular shape, appearing far more expansive than I had imagined. The attic was shrouded in dust and filled with a labyrinth of old boxes and forgotten treasures.

At the far end, a window with its external shutter tightly closed hinted at years of isolation from the outside world. I couldn't find an electric switch in the dimness, so I turned to the window. As I pushed it open, it squealed and creaked, as if protesting its awakening from a long sleep.

The first thing to be bathed in light was a loom, one that I had never known my grandmother to possess. Its wooden frame stood proudly, and intricate, yet the spindle was bare of threads, forgotten. A silent guard of creativity long gone, its once-busy shuttle now motionless and idle.

It seemed that apart from a farmer, Marika was a weaver too. Weaving is a practice that demands time and meticulous planning.

And much like agriculture, weaving is a testament of a culture of permanence and stability. Unlike nomads, who are the typical example of felt creators²⁸. Felt requires no tools for its making, besides a very physical, almost primitive process of beating, rolling, rubbing and throwing- a stark departure from the orderly processes of weaving, knitting or stitching.

Weaving is a representation of the Western tradition of writing, unfolding from left to right, row by row. A tradition of telling stories and preserving knowledge, recording the ebb and flow of time.

Nomadic cultures, on the other hand, lacked such reliance on the written word; their stories were fluid, spoken, and transient, embracing the impermanence of existence.

It was European arrogance that had equated the act of writing with history itself, overlooking the rich

²⁸ Kraft, Kerstin, 2004. Textile patterns and their epistemological functions. *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 2 (3), pp. 274 – 289.

and diverse narratives that existed outside the confines of the written word.

Yet, history, culture and wisdom find expression in a myriad ways and forms, each tradition deserving acknowledgement and respect.

Next to the loom, and throughout the attic, lay unsealed cardboard boxes, each housing a treasure trove of my grandmother's textile creations. As I opened them one by one, an intricate world unfolded before me.

A handwoven rug, measuring approximately two meters in length, now covered the space. With a vivid red background playing host to a majestic tree that dominated the centre, sided symmetrically by two birds amid a tapestry of blossoms. Upon closer inspection, the top and bottom edges revealed rows of meticulous decorative motifs; geometric patterns resembling delicate flowers.

Another discovery was a long brown rug, probably meant to grace a hallway. A black border was framing the piece, while in the centre there were three rows of black, egg-shaped circles. Each circle enclosed a repeating motif: a branch holding three round-shaped flowers -or were they fruits? The branches were consistently painted in a lush green hue, but the fruits/flowers exhibited a diverse array of colours, adding an enchanting dimension to each individual motif.

Hidden behind a stack of boxes, under a layer of thick dust, there was an ancient sewing machine. I hoped it wasn't that late for her- perhaps some fresh oil in her engine would bring her back to life. And let its needle dance again in crazy speed, stitches ceaselessly moving forward to weave together fragments of fabric, threads of lives. Occasionally, a deliberate backstitch to secure the journey, a

momentary step backward, a glance into the past, strengthening the bonds that held everything together.

Needlework and women had historically participated in a complex relationship, with the needle seen as both a tool of oppression and one of liberation. When the sewing machine arrived, during the industrial revolution, it granted women the agency to use their skills to make a living.

Once solely a domestic obligation, the needle now transcended into a multifaceted engagement- a household duty, a professional pursuit, and a past-time activity.

Both a prison and an escape.

For many a necessity, for some leisure, for most both. But it had always been considered a “women’s work”, and women’s work as an ideological concept

has been associated with the realm of the mundane, the boring, and all tasks beneath the man's dignity²⁹.

And, therefore, disdained.

But embroidery, and needlework in general, served as the unwritten language for many who lacked access to pen and paper. It became a medium for self-expression and communication, thriving within social circles as a means to connect with oneself and other women.

According to Goggin, needlework constitutes a complete semasiographic system, featuring patterns and symbols, each imbued with unique qualities, characteristics, and meanings. She views the needle as a potent rhetorical tool capable of unveiling hidden meanings. A covert communication though, accessible only to those skilled in deciphering its nuances.

²⁹ Goggin, M.D. (2002). An essamplaire essai on the rhetoricity of needlework sampler-making: a contribution to theorizing and historicising rhetorical praxis. *Rhetoric Review*, 21 (4), pp. 309-338

Sometimes, this power had consequences, as exemplified in the case of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. After 18 years of being Elizabeth I's prisoner, Mary was executed for treason against the English crown, because her embroideries were believed to convey concealed messages that fuelled the revolution against England.

Might there be concealed messages into Marika's embroidery, too?

What I was looking at seemed merely depictions of a simple, rural life: animals, birds, trees and flowers. In my inexperienced eyes, they could mean anything or nothing at all. But I couldn't stop wondering whether there was more to it.

Take for example those strange fantastical birds rising next to suns. The image of the sun has been in many cultures a symbol of the ultimate cosmic power, the epicentre of the world, the nexus of visionary

awareness³⁰. Or those flowers and fruits adorned by silkworms, capturing the essence of fertility and continuity of life amidst the backdrop of mortality and decay. That flourishing grapevine embodying passion and vitality, next to its wild counterpart, a symbol of transgression and infidelity.

Two bees enclosing the queen bee during her egg-laying, illustrating parthenogenesis, the archetype of great mother and purity.

A vase containing a cross-shaped flower, a representation of the cosmic human with a vertical, intellectual and dynamic extension, as well as a horizontal, logical and passive side. A convergence of opposites, and the potential for boundless expansion in every direction.

Churches and pine trees, protectors from decay.

³⁰ Cooper, J.C. (1978) An illustrated encyclopaedia of traditional symbols. Thames and Hudson Ltd., London.

Two hoopoes embracing their offspring while facing each other, symbols of pride, superiority and courage.

A big eye, a symbol of enlightenment and protection against evil, an emblem of intuitive vision and healing³¹.

Each stitch weaving a narrative rich with symbolism and meaning, in a process of self-expression and meditation.

Liu describes the needle itself as a symbol, as a tool and as a weapon. An object that pierces through, can damage severely. But also an object linked to healing the skin and mending the cloth, as well as relationships and the whole society³². Because of its

³¹ Cooper, J.C. (1978) An illustrated encyclopaedia of traditional symbols. Thames and Hudson Ltd., London.

³² StitchedVoices. (2019, July 1). *The Needle as the Pen. Part 2: The Magic Power of the Needle*. Stitched Voices. <https://stitchedvoices.wordpress.com/2019/06/25/the-needle-as-the-pen-part-2-the-magic-power-of-the-needle/>

slow, repetitive and cyclic application, needlework can be a meditative process too, healing the mind, resonating with the notion of seeking solace and catharsis.

In between all those meticulously crafted textiles and my spiralling thoughts, there was the most unexpected discovery of them all.

Within a carton box, wrapped in a layer of plastic and carefully sealed, a rather messy and chaotic creation. It was a mixed-technique piece: embroidered textiles stitched together with woven fabric, some threads knotted macrame-style, while others meandered loose, entangling into what looked like a voluminous ball of yarn, too big to carry on my own. It had that lingering essence of green soap that prompted me to investigate further. Upon closer inspection, fragments of felted wool emerged between the tangled threads and revealed the source of the soapy fragrance.



I manoeuvred the thread ball down the attic stairs and dragged it all the way to the kitchen table before trying to untangle the labyrinth that it was.

An hour later, a spectacle spanned across the whole kitchen table at a 2 -meter length. Threads were crawling down to the floor, their lengths varied, some extending so long that I had to wind them onto spools to prevent further entanglement.

Stepping back, I took a moment to just look at this tableau—it was still a work in progress.

Was it intentional or born out of necessity?

Certain fragments seemed like they were cut out from a larger fabric, perhaps a garment, maybe a coat. And what of the white lace? And the cheese cloth? It appeared more like a curated collection of garments, each chosen with care and diligently assembled. Perhaps each piece carried its own narrative, yet there

was an intriguing aspect in their juxtaposition and layering, too.

The white lace delicately overlaid on black felted wool, sewn together with vibrant red silk thread, while a woven segment, featuring tones of brown and black, wove a pattern of stripes interspersed with rows of flowers and trees. Some stitches traced a straight, back-and-forth path, others zig-zagged, and yet others mimicked embroidery by meandering in every direction, forming irregular shapes. Some stitches acted as fillings, weaving a narrative within one of these unique, irregular forms.

Numerous sections were intricately bound together by knots.

From a topological perspective, a knot is described as "a one-dimensional curve situated in ordinary three-dimensional space so that it begins and ends at the same point and does not intersect itself." However, Fuller takes a departure from the physical and

mathematical interpretation of knots, stating that "the knot is a structural principle of the intellectual order"³³.

According to Fuller, a knot transcends being merely a physical entanglement—"the knot is not the rope, it is a weightless, mathematical, geometric, and metaphysically conceptual manifestation", forming a pattern that is momentarily connected to the rope by the knot-conceiving, weightless mind of the human conceiver — the knot-former³⁴.

For Fuller, a knot stands foremost as a metaphor for intricate processes unfolding in time, abruptly "frozen" in space to become visible and tangible. He extends this metaphor to encompass various manifestations and embodiments of the knot principle

³³ Kozlov, D. (2018). Knots as a principle of form in modern art and architecture. *www.academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/80752955/Knots_as_a_Principle_of_Form_in_Modern_Art_and_Architecture

³⁴ Fuller, R., B (1982). *Synergetics*, New York: Macmillan.

in different physical processes over time, such as flows, currents, waves, cycles, including human beings³⁵.

For Fuller, knot has a metaphysical nature that cannot be reduced to any material embodiment.

Knots have served as powerful symbols for millennia, too, transcending cultural boundaries with diverse meanings.

Among the Tchokwe people, they represent wisdom, as illustrated in their ancient drawings³⁶. In the artistic expressions of Tamil women from South India, knots adorn front doors as a symbol of protection, designed to ward off malevolent forces³⁷.

³⁵ Kozlov, D. (2018). Knots as a principle of form in modern art and architecture. *www.academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/80752955/Knots_as_a_Principle_of_Form_in_Modern_Art_and_Architecture

³⁶ Jablan, S., Radovic, L., Sazdanovic, R., & Zekovic, A. (2012). Knots in Art. *Symmetry*, 4(2), 302–328. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym4020302>

³⁷ Jablan, S., Radovic, L., Sazdanovic, R., & Zekovic, A. (2012). Knots in Art. *Symmetry*, 4(2), 302–328. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym4020302>

Across Celtic cultures, Christian Orthodox traditions, and Native American customs, knots embody spirituality, fostering a connection with ancestors and providing a safeguard against evil forces^{38 39 40}.

In the realm of love and commitment, knots play a central role. Celtic and Hindi wedding rituals encapsulate this symbolism in the phrase "tying the knot." During marriage ceremonies, couples often have their hands bound with a cloth or have their garments

³⁸ Day, C. L. (1967) *Quipus and Witches' Knots: The Role of the Knot in Primitive and Ancient Cultures*. Kansas Open Books.

³⁹ Fisher, G., & Mellor, B. (2004, July). On the topology of Celtic knot designs. In *Bridges: Mathematical Connections in Art, Music, and Science* (pp. 37-44).

⁴⁰ *Lakota Crafts: Significance of Dream Catchers and Prayer Ties*. (2013, November 21). Indigenous Religious Traditions. <https://sites.coloradocollege.edu/indigenoustraditions/6-%E2%80%A2-independent-projects/lakota-crafts-significance-of-dream-catchers-and-prayer-ties/>

interlinked, symbolising the unity and commitment inherent in the marital bond (13, p.42)⁴¹.

I was wondering how could the knots be interpreted in this art work?

It was a multifaceted piece, a rich tapestry of narrative, each layer full of meaning. Stories were crawling out of the threads, unraveling in different directions, creating a complex and intricate mosaic.

I took a step back again and sat heavy on the kitchen's sofa. Overwhelmed and mesmerised, trying to fathom the depths of the artwork laying on the table before me. My thoughts and emotions interweaving into a vibrant and textured network of possibilities, histories and futures.

I pictured my grandma seated at the kitchen table then, weaving with her own hands, without the aid of

⁴¹ Metzner, R. (1985). Knots, ties, nets and bonds in relationships. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, p.42

loom, her rhythmic motions animating the fabric. In her place was now a young girl, the girl from my dream. She was wearing the same grey dress and a woven brown vest, her long dark hair rippling as if caressed by a light breeze, moving in slow motion as though submerged underwater. The floor was flooded, with the water rising some 20-30 centimetres. Her feet were in the water, but she didn't seem to notice. A big fish beside her, circling the chair she was using. Her focus remained steadfast on her craft and she kept swaying to and fro, while a soft, indiscernible hum was escaping her lips.

I closed my eyes, then opened them again, returning to the present moment. In that instance, I realised I would be the one to complete this piece. I had no clue how, since my only experience in textile work was a few embroidery classes I took as a child.

Yet, there was a sense of purpose within me that I couldn't deny.

Chapter 4 :

Weaving a new connection

I spent the following week dusting, washing floors, doing laundry, and overall reorganising the entire house.

With the assistance of my aunt, neighbours and family friends, soon the whole place started shining again. The true colours of the furniture surfaces shone bright, the doors regained their silent composure, the windows shed the misty filter that veiled the world, and Marika's textile creations, now cleaned, found sanctuary within the closets.

The attic got special attention, destined to be transformed into my workspace for the coming days, weeks, months. However many it would take to complete my grandma's unfinished business.

I revived the sewing machine, and cleared away the dust from the loom. I recycled the old boxes, scrubbed the floor, and added a touch of inspiration by draping it with one of her creations - a handwoven rug. It featured a green background with a series of geometrical trees, embellished with flowers and crosses.

I fixed the table's wobbly leg, cleaned and opened the window for fresh air. The single dim, electrical light source in the ceiling signalled that my work had to be confined to the daylight hours. The stage was now set.

A week and almost a new house later, on a sunny morning, I got up the wobbly staircase to the attic and laid the unfinished piece on the table. After several

hours of staring at it, I suddenly sat down in front of it ready to breathe life into the dormant threads.

I worked with the material spread before me, the straight-lined threads.

Bending and crossing them over, I tied a knot, then another. The threads were now deformed, a little lump; a malfunction, an inflammation.

I grasped one end, bent it and crossed it over repeatedly on the same direction. The inflammation was now growing to take over the whole flat line.

As I looped this bending, crossing and knotting, absorbed in this rhythmic interplay, my mind started wandering. I had entirely forgotten about the flat line, and as imagination took hold, I was making up designs that I had never seen before, unveiling a fresh surface. A new terrain for me to form new patterns and figures, a certain kind of liberation.

As each knot found its place, I was drawn nearer, and with every knot untied, I found a quiet release. My body mimicking her gestures, the back-hurting bent over the fabric, the restless movement of the fingers, the silence in my thoughts. My eyes fixed on a spot, watching it unfold to its destination.

The girl from the dream was me now. She lived within me, moving through me. A seed taking root deep inside my belly slowly growing to consume me. When she birthed my mother, she also birthed me. Now, in an inevitable cycle, I could feel her forming within me- a new life about to emerge as I prepared to deliver her existence.

It fascinates me to consider how textiles carry us from our birth to our final moments. A material intimately close to our skin. Maybe a second skin even.

They say silk was adorned because its warm and soft touch resembles human contact⁴².

From the very start, we're enveloped in textiles, swathed even before we feel the embrace of our mother's touch. Throughout each passing day, we're cocooned in fabric, and even in death, we are covered in textile too.

Every textile process is a parallel to life itself.

I picked up a needle and a thread and embroidered a fish into existence. I heard the sewing machine growling for days. Back and forth, from the past to the future, from the future to the past. A series of stitches to generate complex formations- an eye, a flower, a sprawling landscape. A succession of stitches to fill the void, add colour to the terrain, bridge the gap and occupy the space.

⁴² Langlois, Ganaële (2017). Textiles as anti-media. Artist's talk in the symposium "Moment of Truth: for a Reasonable Ecology between the Media" organised by West den Haag. <https://www.westdenhaag.nl/thuistezien/91>

Aligned with the loom, my body swayed. Threads alternating up and down and through, the sound of wood striking against them reverberating towards my chest. A vibration reaching my heart pressing the newborn textile's soul through and out of me. Every hit was a new crossing, a ghost passing through me.



A couple of weeks later I was sitting at the backyard, knitting a white part of the piece. It was a crisp summer morning but my legs felt warm under the work that was covering me like a blanket.

I was forming rows of chains one next to the other, like those that tie my blood together, my bloodline. I was making braids with the white hair, Marika's younger self sitting on my knees patiently.

I was lost in my practice when the doorbell rang.

A woman was standing on the other side of the door. Old but well-preserved. She had an upright posture, her face wrinkled but bright. She was elegantly dressed, with a long black dress, a dark red cardigan and a black-and-white shawl over her shoulders; her hair tied back in a neat bow. She was wearing a light smile, but her gaze was distant.

“May I help you”, I offered.

“If you are Zoe, yes”.

“That’s me.”

“My name is Tasía, I am an old friend of your grandmother. I heard of her passing while I was in town, and came by to offer my condolences.”

“That’s kind of you, thank you. Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?”

Her face brightened at the proposal.

“I’d love to”, she replied and stepped inside. “You know, it was our secret ritual. Your grandmother and I would have a cup of coffee together once a year

whenever I visited town. There was no specific date but it was always towards the end of summer, the time of the anniversary of my old brother's birthday."

"Oh, did your brother join in as well?"

"Ah, no my dear. He is long gone. He left us very young."

"I am sorry to hear that. But were you all old friends then? You, your brother and my grandma?"

"You can say that. Make me a double black, no sugar, and bring it to the backyard. I'll tell you our story".

Tasía was 83 years old, seven years younger than my grandma. The two grew up together coming from the same neighbourhood.

When a teenager, along with her older brother Spyros and Marika, Tasía moved to Athens. Marika and Spyros were a young couple at the time, but very serious about their relationship. Moving to Athens was

a way for them to raise enough money so they could return to the village, buy their own land and start a family.

Tasía's parents had second thoughts about her moving away so young, but they recognised the educational opportunities in Athens and they trusted Marika to take good care of her.

And so, the three embarked on their journey to the capital.

They initially stayed with Tasía's and Spyro's uncle in Pagkrati. Their whole family had migrated from Minor Asia when Spyros was an infant. While everyone initially settled in Athens, their parents later moved north to embrace a life closer to the land. However, their uncle and some other family members remained in Athens.

Their presence there made Athens a less scary place.

After half a year, they moved to a two-bedroom apartment in Kaisariani, an area that was a refugee settlement at the time, where most houses were extremely low cost.

Spyros transitioned from the job his uncle had secured for him at the train station to become an assistant at a typography, driven by his love of reading and writing.

Meanwhile, Marika was working at a bakery, but she had also brought along her sewing machine. Upon settling into the new home, she transformed the living room into a secret clothing repair store. Evenings saw a stream of women looking to fix a zipper, shorten or lengthen a dress, widen or tighten a skirt. Everything was entirely illegal, with no taxes involved, which provided a significant boost to their financial stability.

Soon, they upgraded to an even more spacious apartment, granting Marika an entire room for her

repair services. Spyros got promoted at work too, marking an upturn in their finances.

They both couldn't wait to return to the village and officially start their life together as a family. And at this point they were financially ready to do so, but leaving Tasía in Athens alone was not an option. And Spyros valued education too deeply to deny his sister this opportunity. Despite not having the time to attend school himself, he devoted any free moments he had at work to reading books, driven by a thirst for new perspectives and ideas, especially those related to the freedom of his country.

It was in the typography that he became affiliated with EAM: the left-wing national liberation front with ELLAS as its military arm. Formed in 1941, it emerged as an armed resistance movement against the German

and Italian forces of Greece's occupation⁴³ ⁴⁴. They played a pivotal role in Greece's liberation, but they faced violent persecution later.

According to Tasía, Spyros never took the guns, but he actively engaged in propaganda, printing leaflets, and even producing money for EAM's operations. All under the watchful eye of the German military. This involvement led to his inclusion to the map that marked him and many others among the enemies of the right-wing, non-state, armed actors that

⁴³ Stavrianos, L. S. (1952). The Greek National Liberation Front (EAM): A study in Resistance Organization and Administration. *The Journal of Modern History*, 24(1), 42–55. <https://doi.org/10.1086/237474>

⁴⁴ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "EAM-ELAS". Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 Mar. 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/EAM-ELAS>. Accessed 17 December 2023.

operated during the White Terror post-1945⁴⁵ ⁴⁶. This period saw illegal arrests, tortures and even murders targeting individuals associated with EAM or perceived as potential informants. Spyros was one of those.

Following Spyros's death, Marika, devastated returned to the village, seeking solace in her parents' home. Time went by, and even though she always wanted to get closer to Tasía once again, pain and guilt for not being able to prevent Spyros' death and for leaving her behind kept her at a distance. Tasía got indeed into university, became a teacher, and settled in

⁴⁵ *Οι προσφυγικοί συνοικισμοί στην Αντίσταση*. (n.d.). ARCHETYPE. <https://www.archetype.gr/blog/arthro/i-prosfigiki-sinikismi-stin-antitasi-1941-1944-kai-i-ekfrasi-tous-stin-astiki-laiki-mousiki-kai-to-rempetiko1>

⁴⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Terror_\(Greece\)#:~:text=White%20Terror%20\(Greek%3A%20%CE%9B%CE%B5%CF%85%CE%BA%CE%AE%20%CE%A4%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1,1945%E2%80%9346%2C%20prior%20to%20the](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Terror_(Greece)#:~:text=White%20Terror%20(Greek%3A%20%CE%9B%CE%B5%CF%85%CE%BA%CE%AE%20%CE%A4%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1,1945%E2%80%9346%2C%20prior%20to%20the)

Athens. Years later, my grandmother married my grandfather.

The two women met accidentally again two decades ago when Tasía visited the village to sell her parents' house.

Since then, a ritual evolved. Sharing a cup of coffee this time of the year, exchanging stories from recent and distant lives. Memories of the past, almost as if from another lifetime. They would laugh and they would cry. And as the coffee mug dried up, they would part with a warm hug, like the two sisters they were meant to be.



When Tasía finished her story, I realised I had been holding my breath. In a mere fifteen minutes, I felt curious, surprised, shocked, happy, worried, sad, angry, melancholic. But, above all, I felt relief. Finally, I

could get a glimpse beyond the veil my grandmother wore her whole life and see her. See the woman behind the mask, the human behind the role, the story behind the distance, and the reasons behind the silence.

All the thoughts and feelings during the past months in Marika's house now materialised, took shape and form in space and time. They transformed into a tangible moment in history, events that had shaped a woman's life, and one I can finally grasp and comprehend. The Soul in the attic, the woven stories, the unfinished tale.

That night I dreamt of the same girl who had appeared weaving and knitting in my sleep before. She was sitting on her knees next to a shallow paddle of water. She was holding a piece of wet cloth on top of the paddle, squeezing and turning it, over and over, trying to fill the paddle with water. In the middle of the paddle lay a fish, awkwardly confined by its size, with just enough water to keep its head submerged.

Soon, the paddle would dry up and the fish would die. I tried to speak to her but she wouldn't hear me.

Then, she suddenly stopped and did the most peculiar thing. She wrapped the cloth around the fish and tied a knot. Unexpectedly, the paddle began to fill, expanding until it covered us both. Swept away by the current it created, we kept swimming to stay afloat. Reaching the shore, I crawled out, only to find that she had disappeared. The night was now dark, covering everything with its blackness.



In the following month, I devoted myself to finishing the textile art piece my grandmother had started, carefully weaving together the threads of her legacy and my newfound understanding of our family's story.

As I placed the final stitch, I sensed a transformation within the living room. The completed artwork, now occupying the centre of the space, radiating not only with the colours and patterns of its fabric but with the stories embedded in every thread and knot.

A visual testament to the history residing within the walls of this house.

A history that was too overwhelming for a single person to hold.

I made a decision then- a commitment to repurpose this building from a house into a dynamic centre for arts and crafts. A space where individuals from all ages and backgrounds could come together and immerse themselves into the world of textile processes. It would be more than a static museum, evolving into an arena for discourse, exchange of creative ideas, and a continuous learning journey.

The house, once a silent witness to the familial narratives, it had become a vibrant hum of collective exploration and shared creativity, a nexus for the community's artistic endeavours.

In the middle of all these changes, I, too, went through a transformation. The act of completing my grandma's masterpiece became a mirror to reflect not only the artistry of my hands but also the resilience of my spirit.

I discovered a new depth within me, realising my purpose extended beyond familial connections. With the repurposed house as my canvas, I could imagine a new role for myself- one of a facilitator, nurturing creativity and fostering connections among diverse souls somehow drawn to this realm of art. This new discovery could only propel me forward and I took the step beyond the shadows of the past and into a journey of community, self-discovery, and shared creativity.

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