

Yes darling,
you are a real woman

Rosita Kær

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Preface. A Woven Line

In a woven piece of fabric – one thread, the weft, is moving from one side to the other, crossing the warp threads, left to right, over and under, right to left, over and under. The weft moving back and forth, over and under, is connecting the otherwise separate warp threads. Weaving is a slow process that requires a lot of patience. By repeating the same movements again and again, back and forth, a piece of textile will eventually emerge.

Perhaps writing is a bit like weaving. Linking words to thoughts, back and forth, ideas to words, over and under, words into one piece of text, like a weaver is connecting individual threads into one piece of textile. In a woven piece of fabric only half the material is visible, the rest is covered by crossing threads. I think the same applies to most writing, the material always half-seen, half-unseen. If you turn a piece of woven fabric over, the other half of the crossing threads become visible. It looks similar, yet slightly different, the order of things inverted, like someone else telling the same story.

Before the weaving can begin, the threads have to be spun, and even before that, the wool has to be shorn from the sheep, teased
5 and carded. Although I am the one writing

this text, the fibres that make up the threads 6
that I'm weaving with, have been shorn,
teased, carded and spun either by or together
with others. Two women have played a crucial
part in this process – my grand-mother,
Karen-Hanne, and a young woman born
approximately 3,300 years ago.

I'm neither a weaver nor a writer. I don't
know a lot about weaving and I have never
woven anything. But as the starting point of
this text came to be a woven piece of fabric,
I found it relevant to look into the basic concepts
of weaving. In doing so I was presented
with a completely unfamiliar vocabulary,
warp, weft, loom, heddle, reed, an end, a pick,
picking, shedding, beating-up...

The text that follows moves in between different
thoughts, ideas and voices. Weaving
and unweaving them together and/or apart.
It's a text full of holes, gaps, missing, intertwined
and entangled threads.

Introducing an Old T-shirt

A photograph of a dark long sleeve blouse is lying on the table. At first glance, it looks like a contemporary, but used and rather worn-out long sleeve T-shirt. There's an elongated hole in the middle of the blouse and this sudden lack of material catches my attention. The hole makes the blouse simultaneously mysterious and familiar, and it gives the image a more material dimension. I get the feeling that I could have worn this blouse, it looks soft and the color seems to have faded after years of use, like my own heavily used pale purple T-shirt.

The photograph of the blouse belongs to my grandmother. It is a part of her collection, which consists mainly of textile and weaving related objects, collected throughout her life. Some objects are stored in boxes, cupboards etc., but a big part of them are placed around the house, on shelves, tables, walls, floor etc. One way my grandmother is dealing with memories of places, people, techniques and knowledge, is through her collection. Every time I visit her, parts of the collection have been moved around, rearranged, as she is actively using the objects to explain things, to tell stories. It can be difficult to know whether an object is part of the collection
7 or not, since my grandmother almost never

throws anything away. Still I was surprised ⁸ when I saw the photograph of the blouse, why would she keep an image of a worn-out T-shirt?

Before my grandmother showed me the photograph, I had already been thinking about worn-out T-shirts for quite some time. It started with a pale purple T-shirt, that I stopped wearing but couldn't throw out. I think a T-shirt can reach a point of worn-outness that makes it feel almost too private to wear it in front of others. Its holes, yellowish armpits, and faded color are all traces left by the person wearing it, a document of time. It functions temporarily as a second skin and maybe that's why they can be so difficult to get rid of. What I was not aware of at this point, was that the blouse in the photograph wasn't a worn-out T-shirt, but a more than 3,300 year old woollen blouse.

Approximately 3,300 years ago a young woman around the age of 18 died of for us unknown causes. In 1935 her body was discovered by a team of archaeologists in a burial mound in a small town called Skrydstrup in Denmark. Parts of her body and her woollen garments (the blouse being one of them) were very well preserved when her grave was excavated. The way the burial mound was constructed, combined with the acidity of the

soil used to construct it, created ideal conditions for preserving the woollen garments.

“It was slow to get the hoe through the dry and gravel mixed soil in the burial mound, but at 2 metres depth the character of the soil changed. It became black and moist and with stripes of compressed plant residue and turf. After another metre of digging, a 3 metre long and 1 metre wide oval heap of stones became visible in the centre of the mound... And while I was lying down, removing soil from between the stones, the digging tool fell into a cavity between two stones. I heard a sound and when I lifted one of the stones, I saw, that the grave was filled with water. The layer of stones that originally covered the chest, had sunken a bit, and the oak chest had almost rotted away... Of course the excitement and anticipation was at its highest. Would there be anything left from the remains of the chest down there underneath the stones? A hand slid down slowly, and yes something was there, clothes. It couldn't be anything else.”¹

Of course I have heard about some of the prehistoric bodies found and excavated in

1. The director of the archaeological museum performing the excavation, C.M. Lund, describes the excavation in an article from 1936. Extract printed in: K-H. Nielsen, Kvindedragten fra Skrydstrup: beretning om en ny rekonstruktion af en 3000 år gammel dragt, Haderslev, Haderslev museum, 1979, P. 5. Own translation from danish.

Denmark, in ponds and burial mounds. But it 10
never really caught my attention, I didn't
know how to relate to these coincidentally pre-
served bodies. These people lived so long ago
that I've always felt very distant from them.
This changed quite drastically when my
grandmother showed me the photograph of
the blouse, and told me about how she spent
several years in the 1970's making a recon-
struction of the original blouse. For a brief
moment it was almost like the borders of my
body ceased to exist and I felt like I just as
well could have been this woman that lived
thousands of years ago. The amount of time
between her lifetime and mine, that previ-
ously appeared to be so vast and abstract,
suddenly seemed to not matter at all. It was
as if time was a huge piece of fabric folding
– one side slowly falling, catching some air on
the way, creating a wave in the textile, before
descending on top of an otherwise remote
part of the same fabric. At the same time,
it made me feel a strong affinity with my
grandmother. I could see her clearly for the
first time, not only as a familiar stranger and
the mother of my mother, but as a person,
a woman. Born in a different time I might
have been the one who reconstructed the
blouse, I might have been the one who wore
it. I could have been this woman. Our exist-
ences briefly aligned.

Karen-Hanne

You can just continue to ask questions.

Rosita

Well, I would really like to know more about the blouse.

Karen-Hanne

Is that your main objective with our conversation? The blouse, the reconstruction? Or are you more interested in the exciting things, such as the detail with the sleeve I just told you about?

Rosita

Hmm... I guess the thing I find the most interesting is that you chose not just to make a visual reconstruction, but that you spent a long time trying to understand...

Karen-Hanne

How they worked, the weavers.

Rosita

Yes exactly. For me there's a big difference between making a copy that looks

like the something, and in really trying to understand and use the methods that were available at the time the original blouse was made.

Karen-Hanne

I'm glad you say that, because it has caused a lot of confusion over the years. People asking "What is a copy?", "What is a reconstruction?", and it's also two difficult words. I think it was a reconstruction rather than a copy we tried to make. Often museums are happy with a copy that illustrates how something looked like, then they don't care so much about how it was made. But through this process, we really gained an insight into how they worked, and how long it took to produce the blouse 3,300 years ago.

Forever Young

In her novel, *The Lover*, Marguerite Duras describes how she aged prematurely. Already at the age of 18 she had the face of an old woman. Her ageing did not happen as a gradual process, instead it happened instantaneously, from one moment to the next.

“I grew old at eighteen. I don’t know if it’s the same for everyone, I’ve never asked. But I believe I’ve heard of the way time can suddenly accelerate on people when they’re going through even the most youthful and highly esteemed stages of life. My ageing was very sudden.”²

Although the woman found in the burial mound is very old, she still has the face of a young woman. She is and will probably always be simultaneously extremely old and forever young. It’s rare that parts of a human body are preserved for as long as the woman in the burial mound, in fact the human body is quite transient, and much more ephemeral than most material objects. The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s heart was worn out at the age of fifty, but due to modern technology, doctors were able to preserve and prolong his life. In the text *L’Intrus* he describes

how he after his heart transplant, has come 14
to embody multiple temporalities at the same
time;

“My heart is twenty years younger than I am,
and the rest of my body (at least) a dozen
years older. So having at the same time
become younger and older, I no longer have
an age proper, just as properly speaking, I am
no longer my own age.”³

Directly following the excavation of the
woman in 1935, a copy of the approximately
3,300 year old blouse was made for a small
archaeological museum in Denmark. It was
showcased on a mannequin, that was covered
in glue, so the garments wouldn't fall off.
Within a few decades the copy was destroyed
by sunlight and the harsh glue – it was worn
out without ever having been worn by a
human body. In the 1970's the museum hired
Karen-Hanne to make a new reconstruction
of the blouse together with three other
women: a weaver, a spinner and an expert in
embroidery and sewing, they reconstructed
the blouse and other parts of the young
woman's outfit. The four women decided
that they were going to use working methods
and tools assumed to have been available at
the time the original outfit was constructed,

3. J-L. Nancy, *L'Intrus*, trans. S. Hanson, Michigan, Michigan
State University.

they chose to engage with the past in this very material way, by re-enacting the process of weaving in the Bronze Age. They were hoping to find out new things about the life of their prehistoric ancestors.⁴ With patient persistence, they spent two years spinning, weaving and sewing the garments of the young woman. In order to remake the blouse, they studied a print of a high resolution photograph of the original blouse. They meticulously counted how many times the horizontal thread, the weft, was crossing the vertical threads, the warp. Through this study, they found out that the fabric for the blouse had been woven on a warp-weighted loom, which was one of the first types of looms in use, thousands of years ago. In order to reconstruct the blouse, my grandmother and her team, built a warp-weighted loom, whereas the previous copy had been woven on a mechanical loom. The warp-weighted loom is a quite simple loom where the person weaving is most likely to stand up while working. The warp is weighed down, so that tension is created, by tying weights, made from stone, ceramics or metal, to the warp threads. In many cases the loom weights have outlived the textiles they were a part of producing. These pieces of metal, ceramic and

4. K-H. Nielsen, *Kvindedragten fra Skrydstrup: beretning om en ny rekonstruktion af en 3000 år gammel dragt*, Haderslev, Haderslev museum, 1979, P. 9.

stone remain as a physical evidence of something else once there.⁵ 16

In western societies objects from the past are often studied with great caution and treated almost like forensic evidence and exhibited behind glass vitrines in museums. In an attempt to avoid misinterpretation, the objects are often left in the condition in which they were found or at least restored in a reversible way, without destroying the original material. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London deals with preservation and conservation of material culture on a daily basis. They house a collection of more than 2.3 million objects spanning over 5,000 years, trying their best to keep the artefacts safe from the damaging effects of time.⁶ Brendan Cormier, a curator at the V&A, writes in an essay⁷, how he often tells a potential donor of the museum “We will keep this forever.”, when trying to negotiate a new acquisition. However he has mixed feelings about his promise of ‘forever’ and what this really means;

“A funny thing happens though when you consider a thousand years. You start to think

5. K-H. S. Nielsen, *Kirkes Væv: Opstadvævens historie og nutidige brug*, Lejre, Historisk-Arkæologisk Forsøgscenter Lejre, 1999, P. 37-48.

6. V&A, *About Us*, [website], <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/about-us/>, (accessed 20 December 2017).

7. B. Cormier and D. Thom (ed.), *A World of Fragile Parts*, London, the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016, P. 17-24.

just how fragile things really are. The truth is, nothing lasts forever. Textiles and works on paper, for instance, are doomed to gradually fade away simply from the presence of light.”⁸

Otsuka Museum of Art in Japan has dedicated their entire museum to replicas of famous western artworks printed on to ceramic boards. They call it ‘Ceramic board masterpiece art museum’. On their website they write:

“[...] while the original masterpieces cannot escape the damaging effects of today’s pollution, earthquakes and fire, the ceramic reproductions can maintain their color and shape for over 2,000 years, and this is a large contribution in the nature of preserving the history of cultural treasures.”⁹

From the text on the museums website it seems like their main objective is to make sure that the chosen artworks are preserved for future generations. But what will be preserved is not the actual artworks, but rather a print of a photograph of an artwork, printed on a surface very different from the original. The materiality and also ephemerality of the original artworks, will not be present in the

8. Ibid. P. 17.

9. I. Otsuka, Over 1,000 pieces of powerful works of Western art that will last for more than 2,000 years!, [website], http://o-museum.or.jp/english/publics/index/16/&anchor_link=page16#page16, (accessed 5 December 2017).

ceramic reproductions, but they will probably last for a very long time. 18

But there are many other ways of dealing with preservation, than trying to keep original artefacts safe in a glass vitrine or a perfectly conditioned room in a depot, or reproducing them in ceramic. The shrine buildings Naiku and Geku in Ise, also in Japan, exemplify a quite different approach to preservation of material culture, than what is seen in most museums. The two “identical” shrine buildings, date back more than a thousand years, but every 20 years one of them is torn down, and then rebuilt to look like the one remaining. Instead of trying to preserve a historic site or building, what is preserved in this case is the craft. It’s given on from one generation to the next, which makes the shrines much more resilient than most other ancient sites. Even though the shrines were to be destroyed, the knowledge of how to rebuild them would still exist within the community.

The focus on preserving the craft, found in the continuous reconstruction of the shrine buildings, reminds me of the way Karen-Hanne and her colleagues decided to tackle the assignment from the archaeological museum. In the process of reconstructing the blouse, they found it more important to understand how it was made thousands of

years ago, and to revisit a weaving method practically not in use any more, than to make a copy that could serve as an illustration of what women in the Bronze Age were wearing.

“We do have a future and a past, but the future takes the form of a circle expanding in all directions, and the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled. Elements that appear remote as we follow the spiral may turn out to be quite nearby if we compare loops.”¹⁰

The Gwion Gwion paintings in North Western Australia, are a group of rock paintings, at least 40,000 years old (potentially much older). Despite their age the paintings still have a vibrant reddish color. In 2010 researchers sought to find out how that was possible. What they found was that the rock carvings are colonised by pigmented living bacteria and fungi. The micro-organisms are slowly etching themselves deeper into the lines of the drawings, continuously preserving the prehistoric carvings. “The Gwion Gwion exhibit a different version of the contemporary: a warped timeline, delimited by identical pasts and futures, eating and secreting

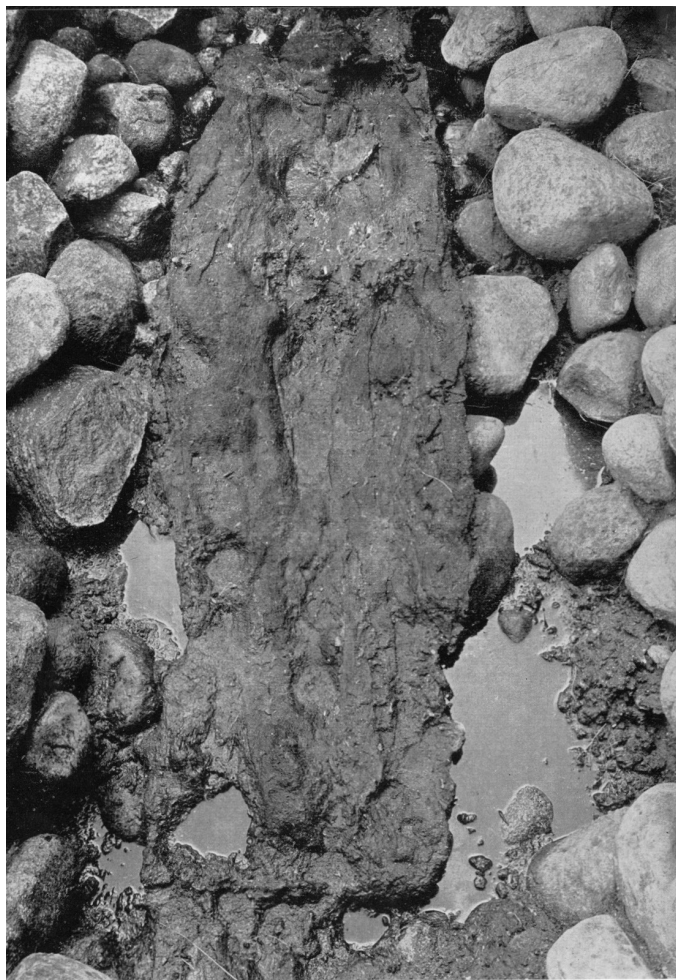
itself.”¹¹ These contemporary prehistoric paintings, still in a process of becoming, connect a distant past with the present and challenge the concept of historic sites/artefacts as something static and dead. 20

Seeing the photograph of the prehistoric blouse and then hearing about how my grand-mother reconstructed it, led to a folding of my otherwise more linear perception of time. In similar ways the shrine buildings and the rock carvings challenge a perception of time where past – present – future follow each other along a straight line.

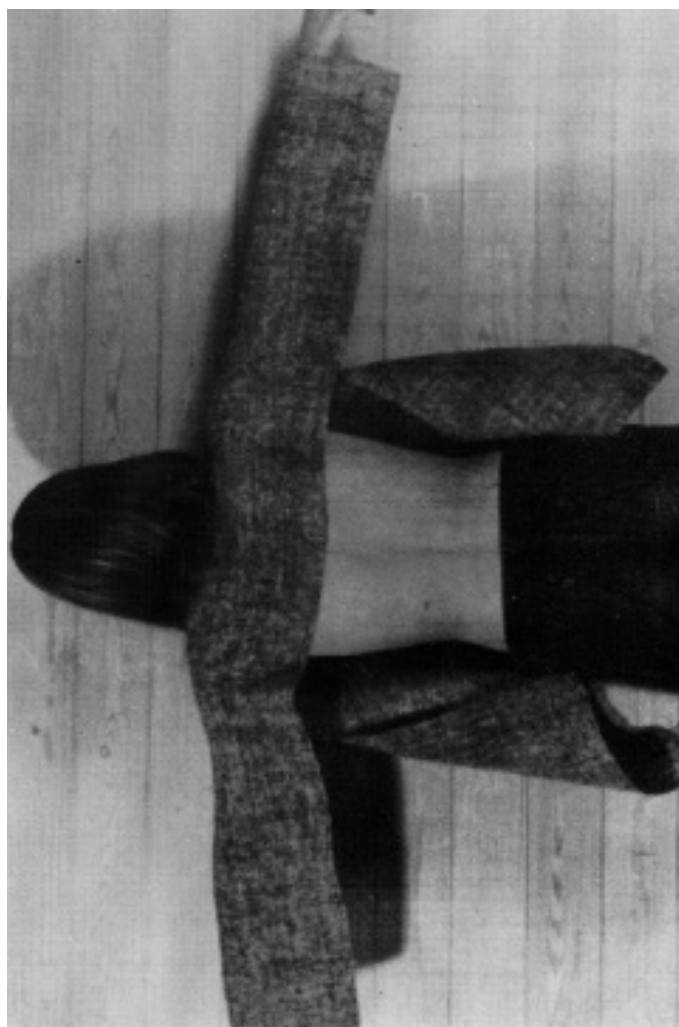
“After the failed productive-progressivism of modernity, we’re dealing with the fact that then and now and later aren’t proceeding along a flat line; they’re unpredictably and disobediently tangled up with each other.”¹²

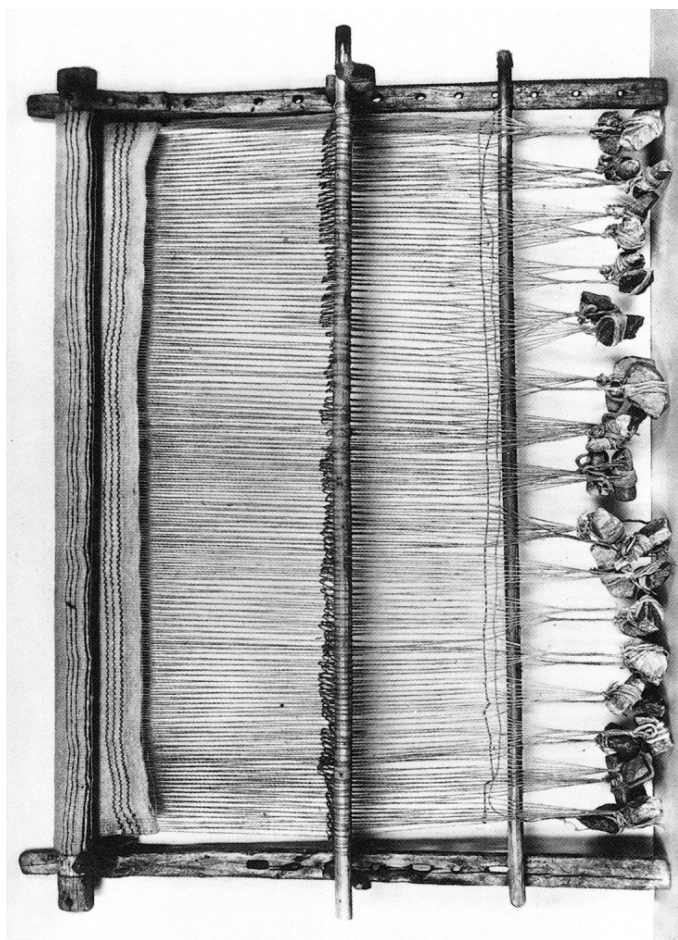
11. M. Mircan and V. W.J. van Gerven Oei (ed.), *Allegory of the Cave Painting*, Milan, Mousse Publishing, 2015, P. 19.

12. J.L. Borges, *A New Refutation of Time*, in A. Groom (ed.), *Time: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London/Cambridge, Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2013, P. 151.

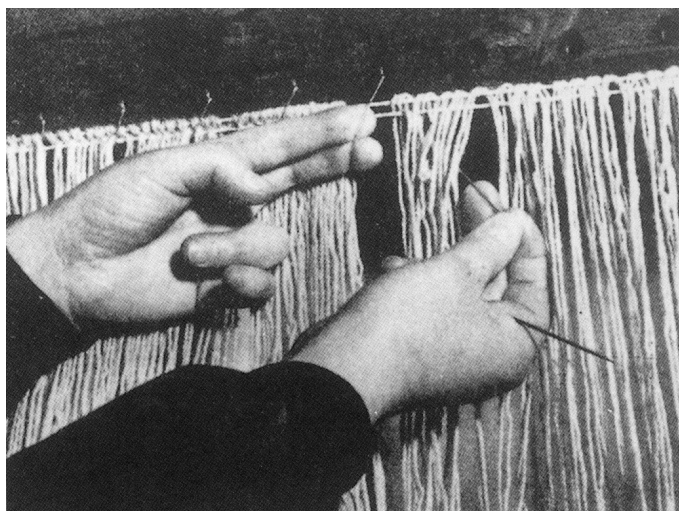










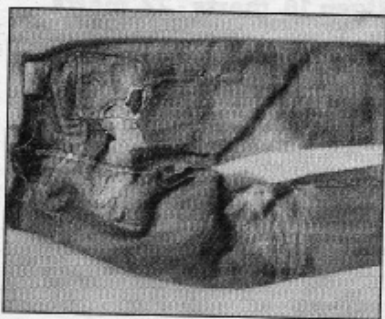




Søndapavsen 16.3.97

Et par Levis til 150.000 kroner

USA - Levis Strauss & Co. er med rette stolte over deres jeans' holdbarhed. Der findes to par Levis, som beviseligt opfylder antikvitetskravet på 100 år. Det ene par blev fundet i en forladt mine i USA i november 1996. Nu er de sat på auktion. Selvom den heldige køber skulle passe de gamle bukser, er det næppe en god idé at gå til vilde fester i dem. Prisen er nemlig sat til 150.000 kroner. Nordfoto



Pol. 1. sept. 2013

Norsk dragt lå nedfrosset i 1.700 år

ARKÆOLOGI. En kjortel fra jernalderen er dukket frem under smeltet is fra gletsjeren Lendbreen i Breheimen Nationalpark i Norge. Her har den ligget nedfrosset, siden den blev efterladt for 1.700 år siden i det barske fjeldområde. Kjortlen er blandt kun en håndfuld velbevarede tøjstykker fra perioden i Europa, skriver forskere fra Oslo Universitet i tidsskriftet *Journal Antiquity*. Ifølge forskerne har den været brugt flittigt. Den er slidt, solbleget og lappet to gange. Det er Norges ældste kendte klædestykke, og kjortlen er fremstillet af fåreuld.

morten.gandersen@pol.uk



Foto: Oslo Universitet/M. Hestler

Yes Darling, You are a Real Woman

When I asked my grandmother how she had gotten interested in weaving in the first place, she told me that after graduating high school her dream had been to study archaeology. Her mum told her that it would be too tough, that she wasn't cut out for it, that it was a mans world. Her second choice was to do something with color, so together with her mum, they decided that weaving was a more appropriate choice. Later in her life, as a trained weaver and after having given birth to four children, my grandmother decided to defy her mothers words and study archaeology. It went well for her during her studies, she explained to me how after her first exam one of her male teachers had said; "Well, You can think for yourself!", "and that was actually quite nice to hear", she told me.

I recently watched a TV program about Denmark in the Bronze Age.¹³ Half way through, an actor appeared on the screen, dressed up like the woman buried in the blouse 3,300 years ago. Three women were braiding her long hair, finishing off the intricate hairdo by covering the hair with a finely meshed net

13. Historien om Danmark: Metallernes tid, [online video], 2017, <https://www.dr.dk/tv/se/historien-om-danmark-tv/-/historien-om-danmark-metallernes-tid#!/>, (accessed 2 November 2017).

made from horse hair. It was strange to watch 30
this re-enactment, both because it was the
first time I saw a version of the blouse on
a living moving body, but especially because
I know the woman wearing it. She is an old
friend I used to go to school with. It brought
the 3,300 year old woman even closer. She is
here and now, close and far, myself, my friend,
my grandmother, old, ancient and newborn.

The remains of a person from the Viking
time found in a grave in Sweden, was recently
reexamined. Since the excavation in 1889
it has generally been assumed that it was the
body of a male Viking warrior. Besides the
body, a sword, an axe, a spear, armour-
piercing arrows, a battle knife, two shields
and two horses were found in the grave.
All of these objects indicates that it must
have been the grave of a professional warrior.
An osteological analysis made in the 1970's
pointed towards the warrior being female,
but that was disregarded due to the nature
of the grave goods – surely a Viking warrior
could only be a man. But recent analysis'
based on new technology show that it was
in fact a woman buried in the grave. In a
report presenting the new findings the
researchers that conducted the new analysis'
highlight that "The results call for caution
against generalisations regarding social
orders in past societies." ¹⁴

This example is not only a story about one female warrior, it shows how harmful and wrong assumptions about gender in past societies can be. Due to rigid gender roles and presentist assumptions, cementing the roles further, women have a much less prominent place in archaeological records, in history and sadly also now.

“These types of assumptions hurt the scientific endeavour of archaeology. Assumptions regarding gender roles do not just render women invisible in the archaeological record, assumptions regarding gender roles dilute our understanding of past societies and the enormous complexity of human achievements and activities. Not only are women invisible, but men are deterministic, and all of human history is nasty, brutish, and short.”¹⁵

In her book, *Gender Archaeology*, Archaeologist Marie Louise Stig Sørensen describes how one of the dangers for the field of archaeology is to interpret the past according to present-day attitudes. She explains how early generations of archaeologists applied their

14. C. Hedenstierna-Jonson, et al., A Female Viking Warrior confirmed by Genomics, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, vol. 164, issue 4, 2017. Available on Wiley Online Library, (accessed 15 December 2017).

15. H. Norton, How the female Viking warrior was written out of history, *The Guardian*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/sep/15/how-the-female-viking-warrior-was-written-out-of-history>, (accessed 2 January 2018).

own familiar gender experiences to their 32
interpretations of past societies, and how this
continues to be something to be wary
of.¹⁶ The example of the Viking warrior shows
how objects are never neutral, how they are
always engraved with specific meanings, and
also often gendered. Sørensen writes:

“Material culture plays a special role in such
social reproduction, since objects link gener-
ations and are fundamental for mediating
tradition. Members of society inhabit historic
structures coded with meaning, and links
are made both from objects to symbols and
from symbols to values. In this chain material
culture comes to carry socially negotiated
meaning; it transforms modes of expression
and serves as a bridge between generations
and events. Through these linkages material
culture participates in assigning gender to
individuals and in presenting and preserving
gender ideologies [...]”¹⁷

Until recently it was assumed that the woman
wearing the blouse 3,300 years ago was born
and raised in Denmark. Together with a team,
senior researcher Karin Margarita Frei, has
run new tests on the remains of the woman,
alongside other preserved bodies of women
from the Bronze Age. She has developed new

16. M. L. S. Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology*, Cambridge, Polity
Press, 2000, P. 27.

17. *Ibid* P. 16.

techniques to map the mobility of these women. It's based mainly on analysis' of the element strontium, which exist in earth, plants and rocks. We ingest strontium through food and water, and therefore it can be traced in human hair, bones and teeth. The research shows that the woman wearing the blouse wasn't born in Denmark as previously assumed. She only lived there a short period of time before she died, and it looks like she might have been born in or around what is currently known as the Czech Republic. The remains of another well preserved female body from around the same time, also reveal that she emigrated to Denmark. It turns out that she had travelled long distances to very different places before arriving in Denmark, where she died.¹⁸

This disproves the general assumption, that these women had been born and lived their whole lives in Denmark and that women in the Bronze Age didn't travel far. It made me realise how the past is always interpreted according to the present, and how history and archaeology are always constructed. They are part of the stories we tell ourselves and each other in order to try and understand who we are and where we are coming from, as when my great grandmother told my grand-

mother that she was not cut out for studying 34
archaeology. Assumptions, about what women
are capable of for instance, can travel through
time. Like objects, ideas, knowledge and gen-
der roles are also preserved and given on
from one generation to the next.

“Stories guide action [...]people construct
identities (however mul-tiple and changing)
by locating themselves or being located
within a repertoire of emplotted stories: that
“experience” is constituted through narra-
tives; that people make sense of what is hap-
pening to them by attempting to assemble or
in some way to integrate within one or more
narratives; and that people are guided to act
in certain ways, and not others, on the basis
of the projections, expectations, and memo-
ries derived from a multiplicity but ulti-
mately limited repertoire of available, social,
public and cultural narratives.” 19

19. M.R. Somers and G.D. Gibson, *Reclaiming the Epistemolog-
ical ‘Other’: Nar-rative and the social constitution of identity*,
in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*,
Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1994, p. 38-39.

Rosita

Can you briefly describe your collection?

Karen-Hanne

Well, that will be a bit tricky. I think I will describe it as a collection of textiles, that are made using one or more techniques, that are not seen everywhere, something that intrigues me. It can be the way a sleeve is connected to a blouse for instance. But the collection is not only including textiles, a lot of different objects, that I somehow find relevant, are also part of the collection. I use the objects as a way of remembering, and as a way of linking things together. But since I probably don't have so many years left alive, I started giving some of the objects away. So, if I want to explain something to someone, I might miss some things that are no longer part of the collection. That can make me a bit nervous.

Rosita

When did you start to collect?

Karen-Hanne

Hmm... maybe it was around 68 when I started studying archaeology... But actually, I guess I've always collected. I must have gotten it from my mum, because she never threw anything away. "You never know when it can be useful", she said. I guess I'm a bit the same when it comes to keeping things.

You have to ask more concrete questions.

Rosita

Well, as I understand it, it's often details that catch your attention, when you pick out an object for your collection?

Karen-Hanne

Yes, or a mistake.

More often it's mistakes that I'm interested in. Because that's actually where you learn the most, when you have an eye for the mistakes. The person weaving, who makes a mistake, if she notices it herself, then she has to find a way to move on. The way she does this, says a lot about thought, of ways of

thinking. Then one starts to think how she corrected the mistake and avoided making it again.

Karen-Hanne leaves the room.

A few minutes later she returns with a small box in her hand.

Karen-Hanne

This is a small piece of cloth I would like to show you. Can you find the magnifying glass?

My grandmother's collection will outlive her. It is connected, created and narrated by her – it is her private collection. To keep track of the objects in her collection, she eventually started archiving them, by giving each object a small tag with a number on. A corresponding number can be found in her archival book, accompanied by information about the given object; what it is, where it's from, when it's from, who gave it to her or where she bought it, and for how much. 906 objects are archived in her book. But she has already started to give away objects from the collection, and her plan is to get rid of everything in the coming year. She is planning an exhibition of her collection in a local gallery space in the small town she's living in. The exhibition will be open to the public and all the objects will be for sale. This means that the collection will be divided, broken, disintegrated. The small tags with numbers on will be taken off. The archival book will refer to things no longer there, or at least not within a close proximity. Some objects will get new homes, become part of new collections, of new stories. Others will eventually end up in the landfill. Maybe only a small part of an object will remain. Like a tiny piece of cloth from the Bronze Age, my grandmother 'borrowed' from the National

Museum of Denmark, and that I am now holding in my hand.

When I visited Karen-Hanne to talk about the woollen blouse and the reconstruction, she would actively use her collection to describe the process. One object led her to the next that led her to the next... and so on. More often than not, our conversation would end off topic, neither of us remembering where it had started. What I find interesting about her collection is that it seems to always be in process, objects move in and out of the collection, and the stories are never quite the same.

“If you think about the narrative that collections or assemblages of things make, the interesting thing is that there are always at least two possible stories: one is the story that the narrator, in this case the artist, thinks she’s telling – the story-tellers story – and the other is the story that the listener is understanding, or hearing, or imagining on the basis of the same objects. And there would be always at least these two versions of whatever story was being told.”²⁰

Perhaps remains from the past are the most 40
intriguing when not preserved in their
entirety; broken, disintegrated, only a part
left behind. Then we are left to (re)interpret
the past these remnants were once part of.
Over time and in different contexts the
remains will not remain the same, they will
shift, come to embody different meanings,
become part of different stories. I think there
is a creative potential in this process, at the
same time there's also a danger in trying to
create coherent stories from scattered
remainders, especially when these stories
become part of history. Archaeologists are
constantly faced with the dilemma of how
much can be concluded based solely on
material culture preserved from a different
time, and often not preserved in its entirety.
They have to decide how many gaps to fill
out.

Rosita

How do you feel about your collection being dispersed?

Karen-Hanne

It is well thought through by now. I've had the collection for so long and used it in many different contexts – from you coming to borrow something, to using it in exhibitions or for lectures etc. Now I think it has completed its role, and then I would rather be there to experience giving it on to someone who might find it interesting.

After September next year, when we are having the exhibition, I would really like to avoid having to put anything back in the cupboards. So, I hope as many as possible will take part in giving it new homes. But we have to remember that there are a lot of different opinions, just within the family, when it comes to putting a price on the objects. I would prefer a reasonable price, and then just get rid of everything. Otherwise you (the family) just have to deal with it when I'm dead. In the end it's just dead objects. That's how I see it. It's great to have and they can tell a lot of things, but it

shouldn't set us apart as a family.
And none of it is that valuable.
Or I have to say, the red blanket over
there and the long pillow in the sofa
downstairs, and the red carpet that
used to be under the dinner table,
they are all very valuable, and I think
they should have a proper price. But some
stuff should only cost one Krone.

I really had a lot of sleepless nights
thinking about how it's going to be.
I'm afraid that we are going to have
a lot of stuff left that no one is inter-
ested in. And what to do then?
It doesn't really fit in a charity shop,
even though there is a big and nice
one here in town. It will probably end
in the landfill.

Rosita

I have one other question. Do you know why there are two big holes going through the blouse, when the rest of it is intact? And when do you think they emerged?

Karen-Hanne

The big, slightly elongated holes in the blouse are without a doubt caused by liquids exiting the deteriorating body decomposing the textile in this specific area.

One time at my school's library, the librarian, an otherwise neatly dressed woman in her sixties, was wearing a time-worn T-shirt, falling out of shape. Once black, it was now a patched pale grey, the fabric thin and soft from wear. It was like she was inviting me into a more intimate sphere, her private room. For a moment I thought I knew her. I think any T-shirt can reach a point of becoming almost too private to wear in front of others. The holes, stains and the ingrown smell of the body begin to reveal perhaps a little too much about the body it's covering. A sweaty crispy crust, the smell of the body no longer able to be washed out. The shape of the body etched into the fabric.

Holes destroy the continuity of a fabric, and preserve memories of past events. Although the woollen blouse is relatively well preserved, there are two big holes going through both the back and the front of the blouse. Body liquids exceeded the boundaries of the young woman's skin, and what at first must have been a stain, eventually became a hole.

My friend recently taught me how to fix holes in clothes by making a tiny loom in the existing garment and then weaving back and forth until the hole isn't visible any longer. I was

quite impressed by this technique. On the first Sunday after she taught me, I spent the whole day fixing holes. I told everyone I met about this incredible technique – proclaiming: “I can fix your hole.” Well, according to my grandmother it used to be common knowledge. Today holes are fetishized in fashion and the fashion industry produces holes on purpose. A lot of the jeans I see on people are made to look more worn than they actually are – thin faded denim, holes and threads hanging from torn edges. Holes in fashion can be very expensive. Rei Kawakubo designed a knitted sweater full of holes and irregularities for COMME des GARÇONS in the 1980’s. By loosening screws in knitting machines, she created irregularities and intentional but random errors in the woollen garments.²¹ Making each piece into a unique (and expensive) woollen blouse that looks like it is about to fall apart. A much faster way of making the garments look worn than having people wearing them. I have a pair of fake jeans lying on my table at the moment. A photograph of a pair of worn-out jeans full of holes is printed onto a pair of synthetic stretchy leggings. So the holes are not actual holes, but images of holes. Fake holes. I guess this technique can be used as a way of pre-

21. 1stdibs, [website], https://www.1stdibs.com/fashion/clothing/sweaters/comme-des-garcons-oversized-sweater-decorated-holes-circa-1982/id-v_1865493/, (accessed 5th of November 2017).

serving a pair of beloved but frazzled jeans. 46
The look is quite different though, smooth shiny skinny new old authentic fake jeans. When I last visited my grandmother, she pulled out a plastic folder full of cut-outs from newspapers and magazines. One of them from 1997 shows a pair of Levis jeans found in a mine in USA in 1996, 100 years old at the time. They were sold for 20.000 Euros.

I'm counting the holes in my faded purple T-shirt, like my grandmother was counting the amount of times the threads were crossing each other in the blouse on the photograph. I count 137 holes. Some are tiny, others big. Some holes are far from each other, solitary. Other holes are collected in clusters. If worn again, the borders separating these holes might break, letting several holes become one. Looking at the holes, the familiarity of the T-shirt becomes strange, unfamiliar. The seemingly mundane becomes mysterious.

The holes in my T-shirt and in the 3,300 year old blouse are not deep or infinite, I can stick my finger through and see it come out on the other side, still they have the potential of linking me with a distant past, weaving past events into the fabric of now. These disruptions in the continuity of the fabric, of my own heavily used T-shirt and the blouse worn

by a young woman 3,300 years ago, remind me that there is no such thing as linear progression, that there's always gaps, holes, cavities, that disturb the continuity of time.

Karen-Hanne

Look, the part under the arms of the blouse are pressed together due to movements of the body. The threads are entangled, and in some places very close together, other places far apart. I don't exactly remember, but I'm quite sure that a small piece of fabric was sown unto one of the sleeves, probably too repair it.

Epilogue. Missing Threads

“The story of my life doesn’t exist. Does not exist. There’s never any center to it, No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it’s not true, there was no one.”²²

A lot is still uncertain. Who was this young woman living thousands of years ago? Her story has changed over the years and although new research has revealed more details about her life, there are still a lot of threads missing. She is continuously in a process of becoming – she is here and now, close and far, myself, my friend, my grandmother, old, ancient and newborn, a woman and a warrior. The other day I went to see her for the first time. She is lying in the remains of her oak coffin, behind glass, in a dimly lit room at the National Museum of Denmark. The blouse was much more broken than on the photograph in Karen-Hanne’s collection. Time, even in a well conditioned glass box in a big museum, seemed to have left its mark.

At first glance, it looked like a contemporary, but used and rather worn-out long sleeve T-shirt. The two big holes going through both the front and the back of the blouse, were presumably created by liquids escaping a young woman’s body.

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