

Chapter 3

Unboxed

Unboxed: On Media, Memory, and the Material Archive

Angelica Fenner

University of Toronto

Angelica Fenner is Associate Professor of German and Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto, an institution located on the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Her research interests encompass women's film authorship in German and European cinema, diaspora and migration, feminist and queer theory, affect and material culture, and first-person, autobiographical documentary and memoir. She is the author of *Race under Reconstruction in German Cinema* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), co-editor of the volumes *Fascism and Neo-fascism: Critical Writings on the Radical Right* (2004) and *The Autobiographical Turn in Germanophone Documentary and Experimental Film* (2014), and guest co-editor of special issues for the journals *Transit*, *Camera Obscura*, and *Feminist German Studies*.

Since we moved to a new house three years ago, many is the time I've fretted to myself or to my spouse, "There's just too much stuff here!" I honestly don't understand how a three-bedroom bungalow in Toronto's East End has come to feel more cluttered than the two-bedroom attic of the turn-of-the-century house I previously occupied downtown for a decade, even if our move did entail merging two households. I've worked hard to become reasonably minimalist over the course of my academic career, while still conceding how much space a scholar has to occupy just in the form of bookshelves and filing cabinets. Most of

us have racked up more than our share of moves and relocations during the itinerant years of graduate study, but also amid the appointments, temporary or permanent, associated with this vocation. If we manage to settle in one place for an extended time, there's still the odd research stay or residency that involves even a temporary reconstruction of infrastructure. As a result, I've become cognizant of the need to live lightly, but I haven't always succeeded.

Frankly, it's not easy when you're in the reading business. Stuff accumulates, and much of it in the form of printed matter: books, photocopied articles, and a multitude of paperwork somehow perpetually in progress and not quite dispensable yet. Every couple of years, I'm confronted anew with the reality that paper stacks have colonized every available surface of my expansive desk, even as I stubbornly persist in gazing past them to the alluring contents on my computer screen. Once I've reached that threshold where I really can't stand the clutter anymore, I'm forced to intervene, shoveling my way through the cumulative force of recent history, reviewing each document in order to relegate what's expired in relevancy to the recycling bin and assign what's worthy of preservation a long-term resting place in my provisional and ever-evolving filing system. I never manage to fully obliterate that unwieldy third category of paperwork *in progress*, resigned instead to repeat the cycle of sorting at a later point.

But what I've resisted tackling far, far longer are twelve cartons that movers were instructed three years ago to tuck away downstairs in a back closet in the lower level of our home. Here they rested for two further years while we were in shock from the relocation and figuring out our renovation strategy. Those boxes have been accumulating since I started my MA in German back in Massachusetts over thirty years ago. Initially, they contained spiral-bound folders filled with copious class notes—materials I apparently thought I would revisit when I enrolled at the University of Minnesota. Across the years and then, decades, some boxes remained sealed shut, only to be joined by new ones filled with the growing stock of 3-ring binders I assembled for every course, fastidiously punching in the printed syllabus, a multitude of handouts, and the odd article or other relevant paperwork. My ambition in stowing these was aspirational, thinking one or another insight or epiphany buried in there might be useful someday, assuming I could recall what it was or where to locate it. With time, other artifacts hailing from the full decade spent in the Twin Cities also gathered there because I just wasn't ready to part with them.

When I first arrived at the University of Toronto seventeen years ago, I was hurtled into overdrive with a new teaching post and surviving in a perpetual present of deadlines met just in the nick of time. The cartons receded from sight, tucked in the storage unit allocated to me in the basement of my building. I felt secure knowing my link with the past wasn't really severed; it was simply contained and displaced. But since I didn't really get to downshift much post-tenure, instead reaching for fifth gear as I took on administrative responsibilities, those boxes just settled into a deep freeze. Life, it seems—whether intensified by new ambitions, by illness or loss, or by happy distractions—has a way of sweeping us along, and there's always something more compelling to tackle than sorting through cartons in the cramped windowless depths of an old building. But the moment of reckoning approached last year when my spouse, Roberto, decided to renovate the garden-level bedroom of our new home to create an open-concept space, pointedly reminding me that *those boxes* need to go elsewhere. Which they did: to the adjacent guest bathroom, stacked to the ceiling three stacks deep, including in the bathtub, and thereby impeding access to other designated uses of that room. That was fine for six months, since we have another bathroom, but as he eventually pointed out, this simply could not be a long-term solution.

This is how, one Saturday morning in Spring 2019, with the academic year winding down and large swaths of time for domestic tasks looming imminent, at least in my imagination, I found myself deciding—quite virtuously, I think—to tackle at least one box. Just to get my feet wet, or at least my hands a little dusty, and thereby prove to Roberto my good will in soon making good on my vow to pare down their contents to the bare essentials. Squeezing first past the bathroom door, which opens only partially because it's blocked by the contents behind it, and then past the first stack, I find just enough space to position both legs so as to gain the leverage needed to wrestle one heavy box from the pile in the bathtub and set it down on the closed toilet seat. I easily rip through the brittle plastic packing tape that miraculously remained attached for more than a quarter of a century and pull back the flaps to reveal some truly ancient file folders from teaching beginning German at the University of Massachusetts.

I can't seem to get past those papers. They are on mimeographed paper, and one includes charming stick figures drawn to identify body parts for basic anatomy in German. I have no idea who made the worksheet—my memory can't seem to reach that far back to that era of

distributed TA labor—but holding even that one worksheet in my hands, I’m enchanted by the dedicated attention that must have gone just into creating it. I’m also struck by the alluring simplicity of the information captured throughout the entire stack of handouts in folders with hand-scrawled labels identifying such categories as “Passive Voice,” “Dative Verbs,” “Travel”: in short, linguistic communication reduced to an illusory series of seemingly straightforward syntactical rules, universal transactions, and easy equivalencies between the sign in one language and that in another. There now appears something extraordinarily comforting in the thick purple print that the mimeograph machine creates, something emphatic and committed, unlike the endless digital text we now generate and circulate electronically, ready to revise or delete at a moment’s notice. Still clutching one of the folders, I’m transported into the past, to the cramped mailroom where the mimeograph machine was housed, first the one in Herter Hall on the Amherst campus, and then the one in Folwell Hall in Minneapolis. I can hear the soft thudding sound made with each turn of the crank, faintly audible even through closed doors, as the paper was fed through the machine and emerged slightly damp and exuding that distinctive chemical aroma of fresh ink.

On a media archaeological timeline, my graduate studies were situated at the cusp between the mimeograph and the Macintosh, coinciding with the nascent proliferation of consumer-oriented digital technology. Indeed, the very first PowerBook 100 laptop series was issued the year I enrolled in the PhD program at the University of Minnesota. I recall purchasing one, my first computer ever, and thinking it was the weightiest purchase I’d ever made, one significantly more expensive than the second-hand \$300 Nissan Sentra I’d purchased back in Massachusetts for the cross-country move. As I excavate the remainders of that era in these increasingly fragile boxes, I find myself wondering whether the dizzying spatio-temporal transformations the digital era augured may have had a hand in my sustained compulsion to memorialize the past in material artifacts—artifacts I now find mediating my sense of previous and present selves. These paper-based teaching materials I’m sifting through contrast dramatically with my contemporary classroom, where everything is posted electronically, and students read on their tablets and laptops. I’m disoriented by the recollection of an earlier version of myself in another epoch, one who enjoyed discovering the magic of teaching German, her once native tongue, even as English reigned supreme in everyday life. Now, I wrestle

with the opacity of discourse, with multivalent philosophical concepts, with the nuances that each thinker we tackle in the classroom brings to the discussion. The stakes are different, and I often feel only the most provisional sense of comprehension and clarity, as everything remains open to contestation and must be proven anew through nimble reasoning. And my curriculum is changing too quickly from year to year for me to linger long on solid ground or step into the same river twice.

Endeavoring to mentally toggle between the younger persona who once occupied my body and the one who does today, I have to concede that, while life back then felt cumbersome and confusing, I could not have anticipated how complex things could still become and how much more responsibility, loss, and hard-earned wisdom would be still heaped upon a set of human shoulders. Is this how nostalgia feels—a yearning for a purportedly simpler era? It's going to be a more arduous task to sort through these boxes than I had thought, for opening just one has confronted me with why I've retained them over the years, even unopened. Perhaps there really is a justifiable logic to this cathected relationship, for these cartons offer a portal into my past and access to various chambers of my psyche. Tactile engagement with them brings alive the past, enabling a form of time travel that reanimates my affective attachments to people, places, and events from multiple compacted micro-eras of my biography. Yet all the while, these waves of memory are also filtered through a consciousness anchored in the present, enabling a degree of critical detachment.

A week later, we receive word of a houseguest to arrive shortly as the first occupant of our newly renovated space. Roberto unceremoniously moves the boxes to the utility room across the hall but can't refrain from mentioning that they will now be usurping space he needs for his power tools. I assure him with a measure of irritation that I'll be tackling them soon (the cartons, not his tools—God forbid), and then he'll have all the *Lebensraum* he desires. When I next head downstairs to load the washing machine, I eye the reassembled stacks guiltily and try not to think about the impending foreclosure of my long enduring state of denial. The following day, I'm headed out the front door in a mad rush to reach campus early enough to print my lecture notes when Roberto mentions casually over his coffee that, after he paints the study in the afternoon, he'll be moving the boxes from the utility room into our garage. Pausing momentarily before I cross the threshold, I airily reply "Okay! See you later!" as I pull the door shut behind me and flee down the steps and into the street, sprinting to the bus stop.

That same evening, while retrieving clothes from the dryer, I notice that half the cartons have already been evacuated, like refugees in transit. One stack remains, leaning precariously at shoulder height against the foundation wall. Peering dubiously at the topmost carton, I realize it's actually one I've been seeking since our move, nagged by the anxious feeling it might have gone missing in the shuffle. Among the motley collection, it is likely most irreplaceable. I had intended to shift its contents into some easily identifiable spanking new plastic container in a brilliant color (neon pink, perhaps?) for easy visibility prior to the move, but simply never got to it. And now here it is, the carton's top flaps only partially interlocked following their turbulent passage across the decades. Crumbs of plaster and dust have fallen onto and between the flaps, having filtered through the floorboards from the room above, where the week prior, Roberto had to rip out sodden sheetrock damaged by a leaky skylight during a heavy rainstorm. I gingerly brush away the debris, peeking underneath one flap to glimpse the telltale glossy envelopes familiar from commercial photo finishing, back when people used to develop their negatives at cvs or Walmart instead of downloading files from phone to computer or directly posting them on social media. That one glimpse suffices to reassure me that thirty-plus years of photos are still there. Not that I want to or need to look at them anytime soon, but at least one material surrogate for my fading memory is still in place. Brushing the dust off my hands, I turn back to the washer, press *on*, and hurtle back upstairs.

The academic year soon winds down, and on its heels, I'm hosting a three-day conference on women's film authorship during a spate of gorgeous May weather. Too thoroughly distracted to devote further thought to the boxes, I still assure Roberto repeatedly that I'll tackle them "soon, very soon." I shudder to think of all that paper moldering in our uninsulated garage over the next Ontario winter, but am too caught up in overseeing a dizzying storm of catering arrangements, program assembly, and AV requirements to let my thoughts linger there. Regardless, the day quickly arrives when Roberto triumphantly raises the garage door open to display his handiwork. The towering piles now rest along one wall in the company of a discarded hot water heater, the lawn mower, our bicycles, and about thirty-five stacked, empty egg cartons awaiting recirculation at an Ontario family farm. It's time to get serious, I ruefully concede aloud as I scrutinize his recent efforts. And time to change storage media, he adds, helpfully noting that he spied a sale on plastic bins at Home Depot.

Pushing past my inner resistance, I target a date in my calendar and head out to the garage on an auspicious summer day, when poking around in a darkened interior won't seem quite so punishing, especially with the birdsong of robins, cardinals, and twittering sparrows offering moral encouragement. Slapping on work gloves to show I mean business, I heave open again our antiquated garage door with its weighted pulley system, letting the sunshine and warmth flood into the cool shadows. As I wrestle down a box and laboriously set it on the hot pavement of the driveway, it strikes me that this archive has so much more to tell me than is revealed in its contents: even the scraggly assortment of cartons themselves bespeak the past, many of them displaying sagging, dog-eared corners, or a crack here and there. They are cardboard, not least because in graduate school I could not have afforded those big Rubbermaid tubs that are otherwise a household standard. Instead, many of the boxes are from liquor stores, a useful source because their original bottled contents kept the interior uncontaminated and the construction was necessarily sturdy.

A more capacious box has a sheet of astro-bright green office paper still glued on one side with "UMN Press D" (defective press books?) boldly printed on it and a top flap displaying a shipping address of Washington Avenue, presumably the university bookstore in Coffman Memorial Union. Others bear the defunct Kinkos Copies logo, having in a previous life housed reams of copy paper proffering the perfect dimensions for my file folders. Proving a veritable palimpsest both of my sustained indigency and my itinerancy, most have accumulated multiple labels: one identifying contents, mostly packed in the 1990s and early 2000s (i.e., "Books: Modern German Drama"; "Dissertation Materials"; "CSCL Teaching"; "Video Cassettes"); another in the form of an assigned number the Mayflower movers required for their itemized inventory when I packed for Toronto; and finally, a locational designation, e.g., *basement*, later required by the more recent Rent-a-Son lads who hauled these to the East End.

One label catches my eye: the coloring differs from the others, and after staring in bafflement at an unfamiliar mailing address on Grand Avenue scrawled in florid blue cursive on pale purple paper, I remember that it's that of a friend from childhood who moved to the Twin Cities a few short years before I did. Alice K and I were playmates in elementary school until her family moved to a neighboring town. Unbeknownst to me, she later trained as a librarian and landed in St. Paul—a serendipity my mother animatedly relayed to me upon

bumping into Alice's mother one day at the local supermarket only months prior to my own relocation. The reconnection proved fortuitous, and Alice permitted me to ship her several boxes of books, while I temerarily steered my remaining worldly goods across the Plains in my covered (Nissan station) wagon. What a daunting decision it was for me to relocate my life to a city I had never visited before and knowing not a single soul other than Alice!

Scrutinizing the other cartons, I realize the one with the Grand Ave shipping address may be among the last that still hails from that early era, the others presumably disposed of over time. I resolve to keep using it as storage, for sentimental reasons—at least for now, I bargain with myself—knowing full well that it's not a practical choice (even if I'm actually quite impressed with the shelf life of cardboard). Evinced the ravages that everything earthly undergoes, these boxes effectively bear an indexical relationship both to that past and its very passage. Indeed, they are evidence that I ever HAD a history, stemming from an era when my days weren't so consumed with the daily ephemera of email correspondence and committee meetings to the point of having only a shred of a claim on a private life or of nurturing sustained intelligible thoughts of my own.

Today, by contrast, all the photo-worthy (if not necessarily photogenic) moments of my more recent past are captured on a series of digital cameras, their JPGs downloaded onto a computer or laptop, or currently still stored on my iPhone. Sure, they're readily available to review at any time (even if I never do), but I'm not sure I'll ever gaze upon them with the same twinge of loss and longing that a paper-based photograph seems to trigger in me, its indices of age, deducible from the type of photographic paper and tinting, reminiscent of those born on my own body over time. Original and copy have proven equally vulnerable to decomposition. The digital photograph, by contrast, remains comparatively ageless and timeless, even if my luminous HD Retina screen seems destined to be supplanted by ever closer approximations of an impossibly vivid human vision.

I realize that the source of my attachment is as much the materiality of this cargo as its intellectual content when I peruse more closely the spiral-bound notebooks filled with class notes, extensive research observations, and citations gathered while writing term papers. Tactile engagement with these brings into crystalline focus insights about my relationship to textuality, understood in the most literal sense of the *hard copy*, the yellowing cellulose densely inscribed with line upon line

of my careful, if inelegant cursive script, often color-coded to painstakingly distinguish quotations (blue) from my own earnest insights (black). Via handwriting that alternates from confident and curvaceous, to self-consciously deliberate and stiff, to clumsily jotted in haste or fatigue, these earlier efforts to record or document knowledge betray in equal measure the affective states that accompanied them. These scrawls and scribbles are the only remaining witnesses I have of the immaterial labors that transpired in ephemeral classroom discussions between interlocutors no longer attributable. They index mental connections, epiphanies, and at times, rote recording in the face of my own numb incomprehension. As I now pore through ream upon ream of notebooks, it humbles me to witness my earlier unknowingness, not least of events to come and revealed in due time; what I now read in these carefully notated chunks of discourse bespeaks a stolid faith in just carrying on, conceding that the future will unfold whether welcomed or not. My notetaking furthermore captures a learning process that is cumulative and progresses page by page. It stands in contrast to the endless lists of data files on my computer's desktop, ordered alphabetically and nested within folders, each more specialized in subcategory than the previous, yet capable of being resorted with just a few mouse clicks.

Thumbing through the pile further, I'm fascinated to discover that each colorful folder I assembled for every research or conference paper written in those years essentially constitutes a scrapbook: many contain programs from conferences, or flyers from the Guthrie Theatre and Walker Art Center for a special screening or installation. Others include an image of a new publication in a press catalogue cut out and saved as a potential lead, or cards and letters exchanged with key contacts in an era when people still relied on the postal system as a means of epistolary exchange. I even find occasional paper scraps on which I had hastily jotted an important thought or connection that came to me in the moment, retained for potential later integration into the writing process (and all too often simply forgotten or overlooked). What emerges is a collage of insights and epiphanies that fed into the project, recapitulating the whole research endeavor as tactile, filled with hues, textures, and graphical images, and marked by providential encounters with fellow travelers and inspiring source materials. What a contrast to my current solitary explorations in virtual space, haphazard associative clicks through a labyrinthine internet leaving little to no memorable trace, even as Google tracks my attention and calibrates algorithms from the

data it harvests! Not all my research today necessarily assumes such an ephemeral form, but these days little evidence lingers of the journeys I've navigated, beyond, of course, the occasional published article, which admittedly ought to suffice and is the point of the whole endeavor.

These colorful, if mildly musty folders, many seeing the light of day for the first time since their initial packing, pose a striking contrast to the digital desktop of my current iMac with its Intel Core i5 processor and 27-inch Retina display. The latter surface exudes a smooth sleekness that belies the textured, often tumultuous inner experience that grappling with language, discourse, and the formulation of phrases actually poses. Under the guise of uniform digital typeface generated as one taps away feverishly at the laptop or computer, the illusion of an informational monoculture emerges, an equivalency in priorities and affects save for the occasional color coding or red flag assigned—often in vain—to signal greater urgency or importance to specific files, which otherwise disappear into neat rows of indiscriminate electronic icons. From an archival point of view, it all becomes immaterial data *located* on a growing accumulation of hard drives amid nagging concern for the latter's imminent incompatibility in the face of continuing software updates and hardware redesign. Will I reopen old electronic files with the same nostalgia I currently bring to these notebooks? I doubt it. Projecting fifteen years into the future, I don't even know if I'll still be in possession of the by-then obsolete technology with which the files can be opened and read. In this regard, the turn to the digital archive recalls Karl Marx's earlier characterization of modernity as an experience in which "all that is solid melts into air"—or more recently, into pixelated ones and zeros.

Opening a carton labelled "Thesis Materials," I find a variety of documents that retrace a trail of research interests that I was contemplating while teaching English at the Humboldt-Universität-Berlin after passing my comprehensive exams. It appears I was stalking various film distributors and archives in search of videotapes of Fassbinder films and lesser-known titles of minority directors—films that were not in commercial distribution at that time. Each letter I composed had been painstakingly printed and retained to prompt my memory; when a lettered reply was received, it was filed for future reference as needed. There was no systematic method for tracking down film titles back then; it required a combination of tenacity, diplomacy, and just knowing the right people or hitting the right tone with those one did manage to encounter. When bootleg copies circulated among

classmates and colleagues near and far, the tales of how they were obtained became increasingly embellished with each generation of copy. By contrast, over this past decade, all Fassbinder's films have been remastered and digitized under the aegis of the Fassbinder Foundation, and many lesser-known German films have similarly appeared on DVD. The collection of sundry VHS tapes I've just unearthed in my own modest collection, now mostly available in holdings of the Media Commons at the University of Toronto, leave me feeling somewhat foolish, as if I'd squandered precious months, if not years, of my earlier graduate career chasing windmills.

Forging ahead with my excavations, I stumble upon a folder from a course on German feminist filmmakers that I enrolled with one of my thesis co-advisors, Professor Rick McCormick, who graciously signed on for that role along with Professor Arlene Teraoka. Tucked in there is a term paper I wrote, "Terms of Dismemberment in Valie Export's *Invisible Adversaries*," that registered my newfound interest in feminist film theory. I try to retroactively forgive myself the paper's burdensome loquaciousness while noting with curiosity that the ragged edged paper must have been issued on a dot-matrix printer. But what really catches my eye are Rick's comments, written in red felt-tip pen—yes, red and no, not ballpoint. I'm overcome anew with gratitude for his kind and generous feedback and find peculiar comfort in his notes in the margins and at document's end, which bespeak his own tactile engagement with these pages, resulting in an intersection of indexical traces between interlocutors. These, by turn, call to mind the countless times I knocked on his office door to find him seated at his desk, probably interrupted for the umpteenth time in the course of an afternoon while trying to mark papers with whatever provisional writing utensil happened to be on hand (evidently, a red felt-tip pen) or prepare for class with a mountain of books and articles surrounding him.

Today, I read my students' papers on the Quercus virtual learning platform and type my feedback in comment boxes that appear in the margins; anywhere there's Internet access, I could be reading their papers as could they be accessing my comments. Will they stumble across these electronic files some day in future and think nostalgically back upon their graduate career? I won't even "go there" (to use a phrase I can still hear Rick oft invoking) with regard to whether my classes will even be recalled at all. Indeed, students seldom stop by my office, since they know I will respond to their every electronic missive with much greater alacrity than would be feasible when arranging a meeting in real

time and space. Term papers, in turn, may very well just disappear into digital oblivion as the future sweeps our protégé(e)s forward in an electronic sea of discursivity, one in which the human mediators of knowledge swiftly recede into oblivion.

Digging up a three-ring binder with cardboard covers of a light azure hue that reminds me of the Minnesota sky on a sunny winter day, a harmonious feeling washes over me; this particular shade of blue is among my favorites. Inside, I find materials relating to another graduate seminar, Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists, taught by Professor Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres; these include a reaction paper I wrote, bearing her miniature but perfectly cursive handwriting carefully pencilled in the margins, offering words of encouragement, counsel, or further observations. Even while leaning towards a future dissertation on German cinema, I was captivated by the analytics set into motion in that course, which examined gendered authorship and historicized methods of reading and valuing literary forms. As I skim through an old term paper on the personal narrative form in Hedwig Dohm's *Schicksal einer Seele* it dawns on me that this course must have been one of the original sources for my later fascination with the first-person, autobiographical voice, eventually inspiring a symposium on first-person documentary, a series of scholarly articles, and an edited volume. Ruth-Ellen's persona, her personable manner of listening attentively while nodding and flashing an occasional bemused smile, was so affirming of the legitimacy of embodied knowledge gleaned through everyday experience. Her sustained engagement with women's writing through the centuries helped me to understand how, in a phrase I can still hear her uttering in her own unique cadence, "language, too, is a place of struggle," evidenced in specific forms and genres that have served across cross-sections of literary history as a means for the socially marginalized, including women, to safely explore an authorial voice under camouflage. Reading between the lines of those nineteenth century novellas, it was revelatory for me to discern how the subtle distancing between author, narrator, and protagonist afforded women writers permission to speak their mind from a place on the margins and to integrate observations gained through careful attention to the quotidian. In writing about one's own life *under separate cover*, as it were, one assumes the status of agent of and in history, not least one's own, rather than mere witness to or recipient of tropes assigned by others.

I ultimately spend several, progressively hotter and muggier afternoons faithfully returning to the garage to sit cross-legged outside on

the asphalt pavement, poring through papers while surrounded by open boxes and myriad accordion-style file folders. On one such day our friendly neighbor, David, with whom we share a mutual driveway, steps out of his house on an errand with his three small children in tow. Glancing in my direction after tucking the kids into the backseat of his SUV, he pauses to chide me sympathetically before sliding behind the steering wheel: “If you read every page, you’ll be there for weeks.” I stare thoughtfully in the direction of his white Ford as it backs out of the driveway, its reverse motion inducing in me a fleeting sensation of vection as if I’m the one moving away while looking back at the vehicle, which now pauses momentarily to shift out of reverse, wheels turning sideways to then surge forward out of our residential crescent. This uncanny admixture of stasis and movement brings to mind the mono-print *Angelus Novus* by Swiss German artist Paul Klee. It was purchased back in 1921 by cultural theorist Walter Benjamin: he read Klee’s figure as avatar of the so-called “angel of history,” swept forward by a storm blowing from paradise (whatever direction that hails from) even as his gaze was directed back upon the cumulative wreckage of the past receding from view. Benjamin’s angel at least had the forbearance to let the rubble of history settle behind him rather than try to somehow haul it along. If I’m downright obsessive-compulsive by comparison, I still share remnants of the same elegiac gaze.

In defense of my recent adventure in unboxing the past, since then completed, there’s something to be said for narrativized reflection on the whole archaeological endeavor. The domestic autoethnography it has precipitated in these pages differs from the “embalming” of the image that French critic André Bazin attributed to the process of photographic emulsion, one he understood as maintaining an indexical relation to a preserved moment in time-space. Instead, via writing, a fossilization has taken place in the resin of discourse, triggered by tactile engagement with remnants of a lived past. It has entailed thoughtful scrutiny of the memories thereby activated and my own haptic responses to these, and ensuing effort to pin down their significance from the perspective of the present. Now, viewing the nine blue Rubbermaid bins neatly stacked and newly labelled in a dedicated shelf along one side of our garage fills me with a provisional, perhaps illusory, sense that this past has been secured (at very least, from the encroachment of damp and mildew).

I trust this won’t be my final reckoning with the remaining debris of my itinerant biography, nor my final house move during this lifetime.

All the same, reflecting upon this particular stage of doing so has brought into focus how much I've already internalized that was mediated via all this accumulated parchment. Should I be compelled by circumstance to surrender my hold on these cartons in the future, I feel more assured that I have, in fact, retained at least some measure of what their contents were originally intended to inspire: namely, a certain nagging hunger for knowledge, for a philosophical, psychological, and somatic understanding of the ongoing mystery, wonder, and burden of Being, both mine and that of other sentient matter in complex cohabitation. This my many professors in graduate school imparted with dedication and each with their own unique charisma; this has stuck with me, and I don't necessarily need the contents of those boxes to convince me of that anymore (although I may need reminding). Revisiting them has nonetheless renewed my gratitude to so many people, including Dr. Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, whose engaging teaching and scholarship have planted seeds of inspiration that continue to germinate in unexpected places, as they did in me.

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