

She wouldn't want to become the object of my work, says my mother. But I say, the very peculiarity of *Mother* already exists in the fact that she could never completely become my object.

My mother would say something stereotypical about East Germany: that you just had to hold on to everything because it might be repurposed some day; that these items just happen to be there. Printing such a conversation would just double the images.

"You reproaching me for not holding on to anything, that's way too simple," says my mother. "I always discussed that with you. For example, when you sold those Duplo building blocks by the dozen from a woolen blanket in front of the corner store, Mrs. Schneidereit called me in a state of shock saying her son had just bought toys from my children at giveaway prices and that it was an outrage; that we as parents should forbid it. I tried to explain to you that you might one day have children of your own and want to give them your old Duplos to play with. But a ten-year-old girl probably has no conception of the future in those sorts of terms."

I hold on to things because they somehow reaffirm my own history. As if you could identify yourself with these objects.

Or do they even tell you your story? Are they your witnesses?

Yes, but there are actually two categories: useful things that you can (maybe) use once again. And useless ones that are souvenirs, evidence of having lived. Keeping the latter is like a compulsion. Some I would like to part with, but simply cannot. Maybe there's some correspondence? Just as one is never quite sure whether a thing will only be on the market once and one therefore sets it aside just in case, things assume an importance as unique as my own life. As if I were throwing myself and my life away. For you, things may not have so much significance because you could and can still simply buy them anew. For me, throwing things away is not an option.

If one systematizes so strictly, one might not do justice to the complexity of it all. But the West's relative prosperity in general, and that of my mother, may be playing a role.

"You should perhaps consider that my mother was a refugee," says my mother. "One of the family watchwords was: 'Don't get attached to things, you might lose them at any time. Everything you need is in your head.' Right? But I also remember very well all the buying and collecting my parents did in the '60s: Grandma collected porcelain with a vengeance and my father was always wandering around Hamburg's Schanzenviertel district buying books and cameras from bric-a-brac shops."

My mother gets teary-eyed when I nonetheless ask why she displays souvenirs all around the house instead of just putting them in the attic. She might as well just throw them away, then, she says. Putting them in storage would be equivalent to permanently disposing of them.

I can even understand that, although I throw away so much myself. Arrangements of memorabilia, however, have the same effect on me as does life storage. Attics and arrangements are equally lifeless, as far as I'm concerned. Remembering is forgetting, says Schlingensief, which resonates with me. Such arrangements of things often stand for the fact that they're no longer required and at best indicate that the life, the day, the movie theater visit for which they were significant, no longer exists. Such things, one might say, are more construction than expression. Being around arranged things makes me feel buried—it's hard to bear.

Perhaps this feeling even corresponds to that of Mother crying at the thought of things being disposed of: suffering at the hand of passing time.



Fig. 1



Fig. 4



Fig. 7

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Fig. 2



Fig. 5



Fig. 3



Fig. 6



Fig. 8

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| Fig. 1 | Silhouette pictures | gift from Doris Engelmann (homemade) | ca. 1983 |
| | Teddy bear with heart | claw crane prize from the local festival in Neukieritzsch | 2002 |
| | Lamp | gift from Grandma Ursula and Grandpa Manfred, from Neukieritzsch department store | 1978 |
| | Polar teddy bear | honeymoon souvenir from Rempendorf | 1976 |
| | Dalmatian stuffed animal | from Santa at Neukieritzsch town square | ca. 2002 |
| | Collector's item doll | bought via TV home shopping | ca. 2001 |
| | Pillow (wool) | birthday present from Grandma Martha | ca. 1980 |
| Fig. 2 | Bell mobile | souvenir from Kulmbach, Hanchen's (Little John's) birthday visit | 1987 |
| | Barometer-Thermometer-Hygrometer | gift from Grandma Ursula and Grandpa Manfred | ca. 1984 |
| | Wall clock | bought by Volkmar | ca. 1993 |
| | Dried flower arrangement | birthday present from Irmgard | ca. 2001 |
| | Weather station | bought by Volkmar at Neukieritzsch weekly market | ca. 1993 |
| | Dog (air freshener) | from Dieter, from company apartment liquidation, Dachau | 1991 |
| | Glass bowl | souvenir from Avsallar/Alanya (Turkey) | 2005 |
| | Crocheted doilies | gift from Grandma Martha | ca. 1980 |
| Fig. 3 | Clock | Grandpa Manfred's souvenir from Kulmbach for Hanchen's (Little John's) birthday visit | 1985 |
| | Miners' schnapps | birthday present from Anita | ca. 1998 |
| | Capodimonte flower basket | bought via home shopping | ca. 2001 |
| | Porcelain figure | birthday present from Volkmar | 1995 |
| | Vase (blue) | purchased from sales rep | 1991 |
| | Turtles | souvenirs from Lloret de Mar (Spain) | 1993 |
| | Vase | souvenir of Mirko's from Czechoslovakia, vacation in Johannegeorgenstadt | ca. 1992 |
| | Bird pair, flower bowl, bird (Capodimonte) | bought via TV home shopping | ca. 2002 |
| | Liqueur decanter, glasses | housewarming gift from Grandma Ursula and Grandpa Manfred | 1977 |
| | Rose, candlestick, pair of birds (Capodimonte) | bought via TV home shopping | ca. 2002 |
| | Hare | souvenir of Mirko's from Costinesti (Romania) | 1989 |
| | Turtle | souvenir from Istanbul | 1996 |
| | Juice jug, glasses | inherited from Grandma Kamilla | 1974 |
| | Vase | souvenir from Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, vacation in the Ore Mountain Range | 1989 |
| | Glass bowl (yellow), swan | bought through Polish colleagues | ca. 1982 |
| | Cup (lying) | baptism gift | 1955 |
| | Porcelain figures | birthday present from Irmgard | ca. 1997 |
| | Mug | souvenir from Odessa of Grandmother Ursula and Grandfather Manfred (trip on Friendship Train in Soviet Union) | 1980 |
| | Cup | birthday present from Mirko | 1999 |
| | Dog (left) | bought | 1999 |
| | Dog (right, chocolate decoration) | birthday present to Volkmar | 1999 |
| | Apple | inherited from Grandma Kamilla | 1974 |
| Fig. 4 | Mushroom (tiddlywinks) | bought in Neukieritzsch department store | 1977 |
| | Wooden figure | woodturning remnant from Mr. Häßler, painted and varnished | 1987 |
| | Dwarves | given by Anita | 2002 |
| | Cachepot with chicks | catalog order with Anita | 1998 |
| Fig. 5 | Wall clock | bought at Ikea | 2014 |
| | Electric kettle | internet purchase | 2018 |
| | Bread box | purchased at Wäscherei furniture store, Hamburg-Barmbek | 2014 |
| | Crispbread tin | Christmas gift from Nora | 2019 |
| | Wooden bowl | Christmas gift from Lennart | 2017 |
| | Egg cup | souvenir of Lennart's from South Africa | 2016 |
| | Further kitchen utensils | bought in the Eimsbüttel and Altona quarters of Hamburg | 2014 – 2020 |
| Fig. 6 | Lanterns | Christmas gift from Anne | 2013 |
| | Wooden shelf | purchased at Dänisches Bettenlager | 2006 |
| | Wooden object <i>Traveler</i> | homemade birthday present from Gerhard | 2020 |
| | Fragment of a church window from Chartres (fundraiser for cathedral) | gift from Dorothea | ca. 2007 |
| | Brass candlestick | souvenir from Berlin | 2017 |
| Fig. 7 | Photographs of the Ohof-Zendo | taken by self | 2010 |
| | Meditation cushion | bought at Bosiki's in Postfeld | 2017 |
| | Quotation (framed) | free gift from the Ohof Zendo | 1998 |
| | Ash bowl for incense sticks | gift on changing posts | 2003 |
| | Singing bowl | bought at Klang & Stille (Sound & Silence, internet) | 2005 |
| | Glass ball <i>Perfection and Brokenness</i> | gift from Gundula | ca. 2006 |
| Fig. 8 | Attic box | | |
| | Salary receipt | delivered by postal worker | 1945 |
| | Mother's Day card | hand-written by daughter | 1965 |
| | Bible | heirloom from father (calked by him for at-sea protection) | ca. 1915 |
| | Notebook with copied poems | | 1945 – 1949 |
| | Remaining saucer from favorite service, last used as teapot lid | bought in Hamburg | ca. 1960 |
| | Tea towel | woven by Aunt Frida | ca. 1930 |
| | Electric alarm clock | bought at Hamburg-Mönckebergstraße's Karstadt department store | ca. 1970s |
| | Pocket calendar | purchase unknown | 1945 |
| | Straw stars | homemade with/by daughters | ca. 1965 |
| | Needle holder | homemade by daughter | 1960 |
| | Durable games box (Skip-Bo) | homemade (circa 2008) from the packaging of an electric razor purchased at Hamburg-Mönckebergstraße's Karstadt department store | 1977 |
| | Last letters and obituary of brother Ulrich | | 1949 |
| | Notebook (blank) | gift from Nephew Christian, 1999, self-penned memoirs | 2000 |
| | Photavit camera | gift to daughter | 1964 |
| | Protestant hymnal with notes | | 1963 – 2020 |