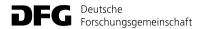# Tacit Cinematic Knowledge: Approaches and Practices

edited by Rebecca Boguska, Guilherme Machado, Rebecca Puchta, and Marin Reljić

KÕNFIGU RATIONEN DES FILMS

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Contents

Crafty Cinephilia: The Scrapbook and Film History as Media Anamorphosis

Andrea Mariani

This essay focuses on a collection of scrapbooks of a cinemagoer from Udine, Italy, who recorded and collected visual materials about every screening he attended from 1926 to 1999, day by day. I will discuss the scrapbook as a place where the materiality of film is re-configured in a complex way, arguing that the scrapbook is not just a mere "archive" but a potentially "active" cultural object where non-explicit cinematic knowledge is passed on through interactions with and among the layers of material accumulated on each page. On the one hand, I will excavate the scrapbook not just as a product of social and cultural practice but also as an object that informs and shapes a

particular cinematic knowledge (of film). On the other hand, I want to question how the gestures of the scrapbook maker incorporate a peculiar form of cinematic technicity.

This essay analyzes how films are reconfigured in scrapbooks, stressing how the media's materiality elicits forms of reflexive performativity through these objects. My observations bear on a twofold and intertwined inspiration: on the one hand, they are rooted in some elements of Dieter Mersch's negative media theory (2013; 2015), and, on the other hand, they take up a dialectic proposed by Michael Polanyi in his theory of the tacit dimension of knowledge: the *proximal* and the *distal* (2009, 10).[1] Scrapbooks and scrapbooking, as objects and as a mediating process informed by specific technological operations, respectively, allow me to discuss how films and filmic knowledge are passed on through forms of *apperception* that go beyond the mere memory of viewing or experiencing a film.

Relying on Mersch's (2016) emphasis on the *medial* (ger. *das Mediale*), as a "structure" that "shows what 'media' create, represent, transfer or mediate" (Mersch 2013, 208), I will contend that attending to the materiality underlying the functions and operations of a given media object undermines clear-cut formulations of media boundaries and media concepts. Furthermore, the shift in perspective that I propose here aims to overcome exclusive discourse-driven approaches to media cultures and practices by offering a more nuanced and, at the same time, more radical understanding of what a media process can really "do,"

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1   Polanyi defines these terms in the following passage: "The two terms of tacit knowing, the proximal, which includes the particulars, and the distal, which is their comprehensive meaning, would then be seen as two levels of reality, controlled by distinctive principles. The upper one relies for its operations on the laws governing the elements of the lower one in themselves, but these operations of it are not explicable by the laws of the lower level" (2009, 34).

albeit tacitly. To do that, I look at minor media formations and the elemental structures of objects operating according to techno-logics that refer to a major and broader media system. Ephemeral film-related/film objects open an extraordinary field of inquiry and theoretical speculation that has yet to be fully explored.

Ephemera and scrapbooks have already received attention in cultural studies and recent histories of cinema. Todd Gernes defines the scrapbook as "a popular medium of expression shaped by the human impulse to collect material objects and invest them with meaning, producing, in many cases, what Krzysztof Pomian has called a 'semiosphere' " (2001, 109). His account is part of a significant literature about scrapbooks that stresses their discursive value as a practice and a technology of cultural memory (Anselmo 2019; Gruber Garvey 2003; Wickham 2010). The symbolic, discursive, declarative, and signifying modes dominate cultural histories of these objects and related practices. These characteristics are undeniably crucial features of scrapbooks. Nevertheless, this essay will instead insist on the nature of the "medial"[2] (Mersch 2016) in the scrapbook, inves-tigating the "underlying materialities, dispositives and perform-ances that accompany medial processes" (Mersch 2013, 208). To emphasize the "medial" in scrapbooks requires us to understand such objects as *not yet* media proper, but, instead, as material formations where cultural practices and technological operations transition from one media configuration (film)[3] to what we could identify as an *ur*-medium where film's material remains are reconfigured as (potentially) endless circulation of data).

With such a definition, I insist on an open, transitory state of media and implicitly draw upon Niklas Luhmann's (1995) notion

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2   Mersch argues that the "medial" allows for a different mode of reflection, distinguishing the material from the symbolic (2013, 208–09).

3   The term *configuration* recalls the state of cinema as a medium "in per-manent transformation," as formulated by Vinzenz Hediger and Miriam De Rosa (2017).

of *form*[4] and Fritz Heider's (1927) differentiation between medium and thing. More precisely, in the scrapbook, I highlight the co-presence of a definite formal configuration (the structure and functionality of the album, the order and distribution of the clippings) and an environment in which the film's dispersed remains (material and technological) are conveyed and actively transformed. In particular, I show how multiple materialities—the film's, the paper album's, or the makers' gestures—are drawn into specific knowledge performances: an epistemology informed by a sub-conceptual integration of cinematic technicity. As Katerina Krtilova writes: "Mersch stresses … [that] materiality cannot and must not be described as something situated *in* the symbolic order, forced into a discourse, logic, or reasonable order of things, forced to mean something" (2015, 36). Accordingly, I will discuss media reflexivity that proceeds "across" the opposition of symbolic/material (Krtilova 2015, 39). In doing so, this essay will interrogate the performative mode of the materiality of the scrapbook, against or across the discursive strategies implemented through it, as a tacit, non-explicit (non-discursive) dimension of a particular cinematic knowledge (of the film). To do so, I will excavate the scrapbooks crafted by an Italian film fan who connoted his albums with a sophisticated historiographical and encyclopedic character.

Framedness

The scrapbooks I will discuss here show a complex relationship between the film and the spectators'/scrapbook maker's gestures. The scrapbook maker's gestures take part in the process of disassembling the film and its *dispositif* by retaining parts of its remains, whether in the form of a visual trace (i.e., a still or a film-related picture), or in the form of material detritus or remediation of a technical element of the cinematic apparatus (i.e., the

4   Contrary to Luhmann's conception of *form* as purely structural and systemic, I will focus on the role of matter and materiality in shaping the medial.

framing, the projection). In the next section, I will detail these dynamics as forms of participation in tacit cinematic knowledge. However, before doing that, I will reflect on the quality of framedness of these scrapbooks.

I understand framedness as the quintessential material quality of the scrapbook and divide it into three operative stages: the *mark*, the *erasure,* and the *increase*. The *mark* stands for a chain of gestures that isolate the clipping from the source (by cutting it out), transfer its profile into an *unmarked space* (by pasting it into the album's folio), trace its contours (often using a color pastel as a re-marker), and differentiate between that clipping and the rest of the empty page (or other clippings) by creating physical distance.[5]

The second operative stage, the *erasure,* is structurally linked to the *mark,* although it opens itself up to a complex medial state. The clipping into the scrapbook page is obtained by eliminating everything beyond the figure's outline (the background). This action privileges the detail—the one, single element—and opens it to fundamentally new combinations in the scrapbook. As we will see, the erasure strongly impacts the definition of tacit knowledge of film and creates the most controversial intermedial effects with cinema. In fact, on the one hand, the rotogravure technique that produces most film magazines—the source of the clippings—allows for sensory continuity with the screened film frame (Beegan 2017). It facilitates *an effect of transientness*, as to say traces of the transition of film material elements into the paper: this results in a materialization of debris from the dis-assemblage of the film as a medium (i.e., a "grain effect" or the persistence of halftone colours). On the other hand, this process erases the link to the film source to which the clipping refers. The clipping does not *automatically* refer to the original film. Hence, the clipping is often self-evident with regards to what

5   This feature is the closest to the elementary operations that shape a *form* in George Spencer-Brown's (2008) and Luhmann's (1993) writings.

it represents but it is "mute" in relation to its origins. As I will discuss below, taking the memory of a film for granted is misleading. This is because the implicit cinematic knowledge captured in the scrapbook is primarily produced through the removal of the film's medial and narrative specificity.

The *increase* is mainly related to the gesture of pasting and accumulating clippings into the scrapbook folio. Nevertheless, the *increase* is not the same as montage. The *increase* still pertains to the framedness of the scrapbook: it is three-dimensional and vertical rather than sequential and linear; it is material rather than narrative. The increase enhances the frame's appearance and its three-dimensionality; it elucidates the frame as a transitional infrastructure characterized by the juxtaposition of clippings over the same spot or their distribution over the surface of the same folio. There is no temporal progression in the increase; there is only spatial growth. The increase is a scrapbook-specific feature that builds upon the gesture of marking and the erasure of the source. Accordingly, it expands the combinatory potentialities of the scrapbook as an environment for reassembling and transforming the medium of film and *grounds* the scrapbooks medial process. In the next section, I will examine the case of an Italian fan's scrapbooks, stressing how these features inform film-related knowledge. Specifically, this case study will help me discuss how tacit cinematic knowledge of film captured in the scrapbook impacts the film spectator's understanding of cinema history and mediality on an epistemic level.

Limits of the Discourse

Walter Faglioni was an Italian cinephile and a film lover. From 1926 to 1999, across 35 diaries, he took note of every film he watched in movie theatres, cine clubs, or on television. In the 1980s, he started organizing these data and related ephemera into six scrapbooks, in which, over decades and decades, he accumulated

layers on layers of clippings. He produced albums one after the other and continuously overwrote them while articulating increasingly sophisticated critical and self-referential conceptions of his viewing and scrapbooking work.

Within this expressive domain, I can distinguish several discursive and generic regimes:

1) Chronicle. Every album is organized by decade and follows a linear chronology. Every screening is reported chronologically year by year, day by day, and some albums are even organized in alphabetical order, title by title, year by year. He also articulated a symbolic order within this literary regime, choosing different colors to indicate repeat viewings and to underline favorites or uncertain pleasures. He even specified the screening locations: cinema theatres, cine clubs, or television.

2) Insights into film history: handwritten notes about film genres, actors, and trivia, as well as academic sources of inspiration.

3) Personal memories. He includes handwritten pages describing memories of his own cinemagoing experience that also work retrospectively. For example, he attempts to re-contextualize some film screenings which he attended during the fascist period by overwriting the earlier albums.

4) Criticism. Alternating his own handwritten essays with clippings from professional film critics that he disputed with or approved of, he tried his hand at film criticism.[6]

These rationalizing efforts form an all-encompassing order. We could even speak of a *panoramic knowledge*, which strives to grasp and control a broad field—spanning more than 70 years—putting what Christian Keathley calls a "panoramic perception" (2006,

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6   These discursive regimes have been extensively discussed from a cultural history perspective in Bernabei and Mariani (2022).

30) of each picture[7] into a productive discursive relation with an all-encompassing understanding of film history. Accordingly, *montage* has a crucial function within this discursive operation: it puts a series of fragments into a meaningful sequence, embracing decades upon decades of major film directors' filmographies, actors' performances, and trivia. It creates "a sequential viewing experience" (Levin 1993, 75) that is also open to a film historiography both bespoke (relying on Faglioni's own cinema viewing experience) and perfected (according to Faglioni's personal critical opinions).[8] In scrapbook after scrapbook, temporality is meticulously and obsessively punctuated and recorded through expressive and informative writing and a montage of clippings. To a certain extent, these scrapbooks' discursive and symbolic fluctuations tend to the pole of the *distal* in Polanyi's dialectics of tacit knowledge (2009, 10).

Discursive strategies operate as a constant, an *all-embracing background, fostering* unity, coherence, and evolution. Through forms of discursive montage, Faglioni creates recursive "jumps" that connect contemporary screenings to memories of past viewing experiences of the same film (merging decades into one fragment) and relate a single film fragment to a film director's entire oeuvre or to a film genre (situating a film into a chronological sequence that intended to demonstrate artistic progression or decay). He also shows how his personal critical viewpoint has changed over time and re-connects it to a period in the past or, for instance, when he connects a picture of Louise Brooks in *Pandora's Box (Pabst 1929)* to her portrait at the age of 83 (scrapbook no. 1). Thus, montage dominates the scrapbook's composition from this discursive perspective. Forming a distant lens ordering each fragment into a temporal sequence, it embodies

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7   The cinephile's "defining mode of vision" *scrutinizes* the surface of the magnified fragment as she or he layers it onto the scrapbook's folio.

8   In a certain way, this is also a form of "utopian" film history, based on a complex balance between an institutional canon (attested by the film criticism Faglioni explicitly mentions) and his personal taste.

what Polanyi calls the second term of a tacit knowledge, the *distal,* in the context of film.

Materiality

With regard to their representational content, clippings are directly related to the discursive laws that the cinephile tries to regulate: they are *illustrative*, serving to represent the film references. Nevertheless, the materiality of the scrapbook, suggests a new perspective on the logic underpinning the process of cutting-out the clippings and the way they are pasted in. However, even speaking of "logic" threatens to take us back to a discursive impulse. On the contrary, it is the material side of these clippings that I want to emphasize by focusing on the principles of framedness discussed above. First of all, these pictures have *already been experienced* by the gaze of the cinephile. They have already been seen (every fragment derives from an *already-watched* film), and they have already been printed (in film and later paper, usually through rotogravure). This peculiar redundancy accentuates the *mark* of the fragment and—according to Mersch—is a condition for the "perception of a frame" (2015, 3). It turns the fragment into an actual *iconic* element.[9] In Mersch's words, these fragments "are not so much disposed to impart something to the observer, instead, they rather *show*" (2015, 2); they "epitomize an act of exhibition,"[10] indicating a way to view, and so make patent the visual *per se,*

9   I rely here on Mersch's definition of the "iconic": "It is, however, the framing dispositif that initially turns the image-like into an image and produces the duplicity of 'viewing something as an image' and 'observing something in the image.' Every border is marked with a difference, and it constitutes itself along this difference. Here, it can be designated as 'iconic'" (2015, 3).

10   I often refer to this expression by Francesco Casetti and Andrea Pinotti, used to question Vilem Flusser's technical images. I am stressing a pre-cursive affinity between technical images as "mosaics assembled from particles" (Flusser 2011, 31), and the material quality of the scrapbook's framedness: accordingly, technical images, as the scrapbook's framedness, "literally 'design' our sensibility and our action" (Casetti and Pinotti 2020, 197).

[Figure 1] Spread folio from Scrapbook no. 1 (Source: Faglioni ca. 1980, courtesy of Centro Espressioni Cinematografiche, Udine–Walter Faglioni Collection)

rather than making (other) things visible. Stressing the materiality and mediality of clipping means that one perceives not just the things shown within the fragment (a visible reminder of a film or an isolated reference to an actor/actress) but instead sees the fragment "as" an image or, better, as a thing "that makes 'something' visible" (Mersch 2015, 2).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning here how the simultaneous juxtaposition of clippings of multiple, different scales (even when pasted on different layers) make each fragment's content—often redundant and sometimes lost in vagueness without explicit captions or discursive contexts provided by Faglioni—*excessive.* For example, certain spreads—often without any explicit verbal statement—foreground the *mark* and the multi-scale format of the frames as *dispositifs* or "open windows": they manifest a substantial similarity with computer desktop boxes and windows while recalling an operational toolset where each single "window" discloses a potential for hyper-expansion (see fig. 1).

Accordingly, this first material feature of framedness opens a complex relationship with the cinematic apparatus. The clipping's operations resonate with Vilem Flusser's definition of *technical images*, which are "not mirrors but projectors" (2011, 51). More than expressions of content, these clippings or cut-ups are exhibitions of media operations: material displays of a

disassembled, re-mediated cinematic medium. This is the first feature of the scrapbook's tacit cinematic power.

The fragments *do not automatically* refer to the film they originated from or recover a particular film experience. This is the second material feature of framedness. Suppose we stop thinking about these fragments discursively and try to let them speak as material formations. In that case, we realize, in Mersch's words, that they do not refer to "that thing which surrounds the image and separates its interior from the exterior" (2015, 3). This is where the *erasure* operates: the *mark* intensifies the vacuum around the fragment (the erasure of the graphic background) and the void of the film it derives from. From this material perspective, the framedness of the scrapbook is working *against* the memory of film, *stricto sensu.*

Nevertheless, this effect does not depend on the presence or absence of a given caption or other explicit references to the film in question: it is not just the lack of a description that blurs the fragment's reference to the film it originated from. Roland Barthes stressed this characteristic in his tentative theory of the film still. His well-known text concerning "obtuse meaning" (1977) is based on an in-depth analysis of film fragments from Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944). Not surprisingly, he opens his argument by declaring his absolute disregard for the exact memory of a film, whether discursively—"it matters little if I am unable to remember the details of the story exactly" (Barthes 1977, 52)—or materially, when he refers not to excerpts of the film directly but to stills reproduced in the *Cahiers du cinéma* (they were taken from magazines, precisely like the scrapbook's fragments). Even more radically, Barthes assumes that framing has an infrastructural function, explaining the nexus between a film still and the film it comes from in terms of a palimpsest. The erasure is so radical that it defers the reference of the fragment towards a film that "has still to be born theoretically" (Barthes 1977, 67).

[Figure 2] Single folio from Scrapbook no. 3 (Source: Faglioni ca. 1980, courtesy of Centro Espressioni Cinematografiche, Udine–Walter Faglioni Collection).

The scrapbook's framedness relies on this same principle: the erasure accentuates the iconic value of the fragment, and, as Barthes was right to argue radically, it makes evident the infra-structural function of the frame, opening the door to a potentially infinite re-assemblage of the film. In an eloquent passage from the scrapbook Faglioni dedicated to the 1950s (Scrapbook no. 3), the cinephile assembled a multi-layered folio focused on Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) (see fig. 2). In this folio, one may distinguish among three overlapping layers. The first, on the outer surface, is a scene (a photogram) from the film, portraying Marilyn Monroe and Tom Ewell in a hilarious and seductive moment when she fell off of a piano bench; the second one, at a medium depth, is the iconic photograph of Monroe standing above a subway grate with her famous white "flying

skirt" (a promotional image derived from the shot of a street photographer); the third layer—the deepest and the largest one, covering the entire background of the folio—is a "modern" advertisement from the 1980s in which a model is mimicking Marylin's iconic gesture, with a red dress and false blond hair (with brown eyebrows).

The reference to *The Seven Year Itch* is explicit (and even verbalized in the form of a caption). Nevertheless, the erasure operates progressively and profoundly towards a material betrayal of the original reference: the first layer is a black and white reproduction printed on low-cost newsprint paper (while the film was shot in Technicolor and with a CinemaScope lens). Thus, the effect of material transientness that rotogravure would have allowed for is missing. The second fragment does not even belong to the film: as we know, the subway's "delicious breeze" scene is astutely edited, alternating a low shot of Marylin's feet and legs (at knee height) and close-ups of Ewell's and Monroe's faces. That total shot is never shown in the film; finally, the last layer represents the absolute material detachment from the bodily presence of Marylin Monroe: the iconic value is trans-ferred—for its formal function—and transubstantiated onto another body.

The third material feature of framedness relates to montage. In a pioneering text about the cultural value of the scrapbook, Maud Levin sees in the montage an integral *mechanism* that defines the scrapbook, and it even informs an intermedial relation with the cinematic medium: "the [scrap]book as a whole functions as a montage as well. As a sequential viewing experience, it could even be called filmic. Turning the pages, 'reading' the book, intro-duced the element of time" (Levin 1993, 75). I would call Levin's account of montage "discursive." On the one hand, temporality in the scrapbook is shaped by montage; therefore, as I discussed earlier, montage informs the "*distal*" level of tacit knowledge of film. On the other hand, I suggest that the *increase* is structurally

[Figure 3] Single folio from Scrapbook no. 2 (Source: Faglioni ca. 1980, courtesy of Centro Espressioni Cinematografiche, Udine–Walter Faglioni Collection).

linked to Polanyi's first term, or the *proximal* level of tacit cinematic knowledge.

As I wrote above, the increase is served by the mark and serves the erasure. The increase as a vertical, additive, spatial growth of the folio does not create explicit associations or temporal connections. It rather enhances the outline of the fragment within the space—that is, it enhances its *presentness* both in terms of a temporal break and in terms of an image that "ceases to be a re-presentation of a reality it refers to …, presenting itself directly as reality in the flesh" (Casetti and Pinotti 2020, 204). The increase shapes an environment where modes of visual apperception governed by material elements, such apertures and projections defined by the gestures of the mark that I have previously described, are revealed, and the material remains of the cinema

apparatus, more profoundly and subtly than the those described by Levin, are incorporated. Accordingly, the increase reveals the epistemic "tacit power" of the fragment.

Some of the most audacious, multi-layered folios of Faglioni's scrapbooks (see fig. 3) render visible the erasure of the source (the original films disappear in a "mute" iconic pulp of partial frames and picture fragments), and, simultaneously, they allow the film's transformations across media to survive in residual material formations, wherein framedness opens to immersion as a technical illusion and a way to access a form of non-symbolic, non-expressive knowledge.

What Knowledge?

In these scrapbooks, the materiality of the cut-outs uncovers epistemic frictions that conjoin the symbolic and discursive structure of these cultural objects. Materiality puts forward the detail, the fetishization of a particle. The *proximal*, which is a magnified mode of viewing an ensemble of particularities, cannot be bound by the laws and principles of the comprehensive entity it originates from; that is, the detail cannot be governed by the discourse of the film. Rather, what is primarily emerging here is the framing of the particular. Moreover, the framing first refers to the *dispositif*—the system of material and non-material conditions that mark a "border." Framing, as Mersch writes, "evolves into a principle of reflexivity that draws attention to something which is at the same time veiled by the image: the scene of its visualization" (2015, 5).

Through the materiality of the clippings and the particularities emerging through framedness, the scrapbook draws attention to the *mediality* of film, and cinema as a medium in permanent transformation. By focusing on framedness, the distal disappears: the film's discursive aspects dissolve in the incompressible tangle of lines and angles in which any specific references to the film are erased. The "comprehensive entity" is negated,

218 as Mersch argues; instead, the pictorial and the iconic mark the peculiar material experience of the scrapbooks. He proposes the artistic technique of "anamorphosis," originating in the Renaissance, as a metaphor for such a material and speculative approach to the medial. Anamorphic techniques of representation "intervene in the construction of illusion by simultaneously revealing and confirming the secrets of their production" (Mersch 2013, 213), and again:

> [Anamorphosis] provides no recognisable representation; rather, it erases that which is represented and dissolves the figure in order to have it emerge in another place, namely at an extreme angle of almost 180° … The picture has to be negated, it has to be dissolved in an incomprehensible tangle of lines, in order to create a puzzle that the observer can experience, the solution to which he can only discover if he looks at it from the side. (Mersch 2013, 214)

And therefore, "[i]n this way anamorphosis creates a paradoxical figurality that by appearing to show nothing, shows the mediality of image construction" (Mersch 2013, 215). Accordingly, I argue that the materiality of the scrapbooks, their tacit cinematic dimension, opens up a similar paradox based on a rupture between the discursive and formal representation of film history and experience and a means to experience the history and materiality of the film by virtue of their deliberate material construction.

A *media anamorphosis* operates here. Structuring knowledge through the incorporation of cinema's material remains, the tacit cinematic knowledge materialized in these scrapbooks produces an implicit destabilization of the gaze that intersects with the discursive knowledge of film, producing a view "from the side."

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